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Research article

# Representations of women and their role within society in the past in Flemish and Hungarian history textbooks

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## Abstract

This article analyses the historical representations of women, as individuals and as groups, in the past (from 1750 to the present) in currently (2023) used secondary school history textbooks in Hungary and Flanders. This international comparative perspective has been chosen as both countries, at least partly, share a common history and present. At the same time, there are also differences to be discerned, such as the liberal tradition versus post-socialism in society at large. Two main research questions guide the analysis. The first one is how women in the past are represented in chapters about the Hungarian and (pre-)Belgian national past, and about the past in general, since 1750. Specific attention is paid to the representation of the three consecutive waves of feminism. The second research question concerns the presence or absence of underlying patterns in the history textbook accounts with regard to the representation of women's position and role in the past. For instance, do textbooks take a gender perspective, or rather give the impression of having added some women's history to an existing storyline? The analysis is based

on current history textbooks being used in Grades 10, 11 and 12 of secondary school history education. The analysis draws mostly on a qualitative content analysis. Results show similarities (for example, few mentions of women as individuals and as groups; close alliance to popular historical culture, not to academic historiography) as well as differences (in terms of recognising the importance of including women in textbook accounts of the past, and underlying storylines).

**Keywords** Hungary; Flanders; history education; social representations; women's history; gender history; feminist waves; history textbook research

## Introduction

In September 2013, in the first week of the academic year at the University of Leuven, Belgium, 107 newly started first-year undergraduate students in history were asked to write an essay about the national past. This assignment was part of a research project that examined which historical accounts of the national past young people constructed, and what reference knowledge they had about national history. Of the participating students, 42 were female and 65 were male. The analysis, among other things, focused on the individuals that were mentioned in the essays and the agency they were ascribed. The concept of agency addresses the question of who has the individual or social potential to act purposefully and to effectuate change in society. In total, 104 individual persons were named; 90 of them were male, and 14 were female. Of those 14, 13 were Belgian or foreign royal family members. The other one was Tia Hellebaut, a gold medal-winning athlete in the 2008 Olympic Games. Moreover, the women mentioned were hardly attributed any agency. They were mostly mentioned as passive entities and described in terms of being the wife, the daughter or the mother of someone. One woman was even explicitly approached with a kind of deficit thinking: of Queen Fabiola, it was mentioned that she was not able to get pregnant and give birth to an heir apparent. No differences were to be discerned in the essays according to the gender of their authors (Van Havere et al., 2017).

These results can make us wonder about the origin, within historical culture, of such historical representations of women and their role within society in the past. In search of an answer to this question, history education comes into the picture, because history education is an important locus in terms of the dissemination of historical knowledge and understanding. Research has shown that in the history classroom, textbooks play an important role, as they constitute a major source of information for teachers to design their lesson plans (Kropman et al., 2021). Furthermore, textbooks can be considered to be cultural artefacts, which to a certain extent can be considered as a meeting place between young people's learning, the way in which a society wishes to represent itself and its past, and the knowledge that a society considers important to pass on in a specific way (Klerides, 2010).

The aim of this study is to analyse the historical representations of women (as individuals and in groups) in the past (from 1750 to the present) in currently used secondary school history textbooks (up to 2023 – new textbooks according to new history standards in Flanders are under development, and they cannot be analysed yet). The focus is both on chapters about the past since 1750 to the present in general, and about the national past in particular. Specific attention is paid to the representation of the three consecutive waves of feminism in history textbooks: for instance, do they constitute a separate chapter, or are they included in general chapters? And are they considered in a national or rather an international dimension and approach? This will help to analyse what underlying patterns can(not) be discerned in the history textbook accounts with regard to the representation of women's position and role in the past. For instance, do textbooks take a gender perspective, or rather give the impression to have added some women's history to an existing storyline? Is the representation of women in the textbooks to be seen in an underlying storyline of liberal progress, or rather of conservatism?

This analysis is carried out in an international comparative perspective, between Hungary and Flanders, the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, which has its own educational system (apart from the other parts of federal Belgium) for which it is autonomously responsible. These countries have been selected because they share, at least partly, a common history and present. The territory of both current countries was part of the Habsburg Empire in the eighteenth century. Both countries are member states of the European Union – Hungary since 2002, Belgium (including Flanders) from the start

in 1951 within the European Coal and Steel Community. Moreover, both countries can be considered as 'small nations', and they are characterised by secularisation. At the same time, of course, Flanders and Hungary also testify to a number of differences. Parts of their history were very different: while Belgium was established in 1830 as an independent state, developed as a liberal nation state throughout the nineteenth century and came to belong to the Western bloc during the Cold War, Hungary only gained independence after the First World War, yet was soon placed under communist rule (after a short period during which a multiparty system was in place after the Second World War), only to gain independence again after 1989. The differences within the (evolving) societal context in both countries will also be taken into account in this respect. Flanders, for instance, has a liberal tradition. Freedom (of education, of press, of religion, of expression and so on) was an important principle that was inscribed in the Belgian constitution from 1830. This allowed for the development of a civil society that played and plays an important role in society, somewhat limiting the role of government in a number of areas and policies (such as in education). Hungary at present testifies to post-socialism. From 2010 onwards, when the right-wing FIDESZ-led government acquired a two-thirds constitutional majority, providing the possibility to change the political system, Hungary gradually turned into a so-called illiberal democracy (Pap, 2017). Part of this transformation constituted drastic changes in the Hungarian educational system and curricula. The government decided on them without consulting or debating with experts, or with representatives of teachers' trade unions and professional associations. In 2012, the public education system was centralised. While before, the municipalities were, in most cases, responsible for elementary and secondary schools, from 2012 onwards, a new national governmental office and its local offices controlled them.

## State of the art: research on the representation of women and women's history in history education

Much has been written about the position of history education in academic historiography (disciplinary practice) and popular historical culture (collective memories and practical dealings with the past) (Seixas, 2018). Historical representations within history education are informed by both worlds, although often a lack of genuine interest in prioritising the alignment of history as a school subject to academic perspectives has been discerned. In this respect, Tyack and Tobin (1994) referred to 'the grammar of schooling' to explain why textbooks often continue narratives and outlooks from previous editions, instead of aligning with recent academic understandings. Educationalist and curriculum theorist Thomas Popkewitz (2004) introduced the concept of 'alchemy' to describe the fundamental changes characterising the process through which disciplinary knowledge is transferred to schools, notably through curricula, textbooks and classroom practices. He explains these changes by arguing that the primary aim of schooling is not to nurture disciplinary understandings, but to normalise and govern students' behaviour, social conduct and communication. The latter process had earlier been labelled as educationalisation by Depaepe (1998).

Research shows that the process of 'alchemy' as described by Popkewitz (2004) is also applicable to history textbooks. Much research points to the gap between academic historiography and history textbook accounts (see various chapters in Fuchs and Bock, 2018; for a concrete example regarding textbook accounts of the modern imperial past in many countries in the world, see Van Nieuwenhuyse and Pires Valentim, 2018). In this respect, Christophe and Schwedes (2015) consider history textbooks as palimpsests: they copy a lot from previous versions, and they often make only minor changes to their account in new versions. As a result, textbooks continuously reproduce existing narratives instead of aligning their account with recent historiography.

To understand the historical representations being presented in textbook accounts, it is therefore necessary to build a view of how women in the past are represented within both academic historiography and popular historical culture. At the same time, it is also mandatory to gain an understanding of how history education, and particularly history textbooks, are given shape, for the latter have their own 'grammar' (Fuchs and Otto, 2013; Klerides, 2010; Roldán Vera, 2018).

In academic historiography in both Belgium and Hungary, three stages can be discerned (De Weerd, 1980; Gubin and Perrot, 2007; Heyrman and Van Molle, 2001; Van Rokeghem et al., 2006). In a first stage, when academic historiography was established as an autonomous genre, women were hardly (Belgium) or not at all (Hungary) included in historiography. Historians constructed a past mostly

without women. While in the inter-war period some academic work was published on women's history (for example, Ida Bobula's *Women in 18th Century Hungarian Society*, published in 1933), only in the 1960s, parallel to the second feminist wave, did historians in both countries start to pay more attention to the role of women in the past. The historiographical attention to the role of women in the past increased significantly in the 1990s, when a third stage started. Gradually, a shift was made to gender history, analysing the past from a gender perspective. This examines, for instance, interpretations of masculinity and femininity throughout the past, the different impact of historical events and developments (in religion, politics, economy, education and so on) on men and women, and the evolving expected norms of behaviour for those labelled male or female, embedded in a broader social, economic, cultural and political context. At the same time, it should be noted that in this third stage, gender history remains to a certain extent a difficult issue, particularly in Hungary, where its position is not obvious. The first modern monograph on Hungarian historiography, for instance, entitled *Under the Enchantment of Clio: Hungarian history writing in the 19th to 20th century with an international overview*, published in 2011, contained only one paragraph about gender history as a new topic of European historiography (Romsics, 2011); Hungarian female historians and Hungarian monographs about gender history were omitted. Moreover, gender history has not become very popular in Hungary. Only a few articles and books have been published about gender history, and the institutionalisation of this research area remains weak. For instance, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences organised a Women's History Working Committee, but there is no gender or gender history working committee; in 2018, a government decree removed gender studies from a list of approved master's programmes (Pető, 2020). At the same time, however, as an exception, in 2017 the Doctoral School of Literary Studies at Eötvös Loránd University established a 'Gender in English and American Literature and Culture' doctoral programme (although originally it was meant to be a 'gender in literature' programme, with a more comprehensive curriculum).

In popular historical culture, a different image appears, when compared to academic historiography. From the late eighteenth century onwards, attention was paid to women, certainly in representations of the national past (Verschaffel, 2001). This stemmed from the idea that not only men, but also women, had to be confronted with their national responsibility and needed to be provided with stories of women in which they could take pride and which could serve as an example. When looking at the overall popular representation of women in the national past, some findings stand out. First, women were not that numerous; all in all, only a few women were mentioned; the national pantheon remained predominantly male. Second, mainly two types of women were portrayed. There was the queen type: some queens were labelled as good (such as Archduchess Isabella in the seventeenth century, and Empress Maria Theresa in the eighteenth century), others as bad; 'black legends' arose around the latter. The descriptions of those women contained very stereotypical ideas of men and women. For example, power was linked to governance, and 'therefore' to masculinity. Good queens were presented as being characterised by a masculine nature. Bad queens were attributed characteristics, such as being manipulative and dishonest, which were suggested to be 'typically' feminine. The bottom line was that women were not actually fit to exercise power. A second type was that of heroines in war. These were women who stepped out of their caring role and took responsibility for defending their homeland and countrymen, as the circumstances required. Again, underlying this was nevertheless the suggestion that courage, fighting for the fatherland and self-sacrifice were mostly male characteristics. These representations continued in Belgium throughout a large part of the twentieth century, although it must be noted that after the Second World War, the national past within popular historical culture was paid increasingly less attention due to the fact that the memory of the Second World War was becoming ideologically charged and communitarian (Rosoux and Van Ypersele, 2012). Hungarian popular historical culture underwent a shift during the twentieth century. In the inter-war period, women's role in contemporary history was given attention, related to the foundation of the biggest female 'counter-revolutionary' organisation (MANSZ) against the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. During the communist period in Hungary, the counter-revolutionary women disappeared and were replaced by national heroines such as Ilona Zrínyi and Zsuzsanna Lórántffy, by heroines within the labourers' movement and by left-wing, progressive female artists and scientists, such as Vilma Hugonnai (1847–1922), the first graduate female physician in Hungary, and Zsuzsanna Kossuth (1817–54), who was appointed the chief nurse of all the military hospitals in Hungary in 1849. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the national pantheon of heroines (just as that of heroes) was reshaped again, and 'new' female persons appeared again, such as Cécile Tormay (to whom a statue has been erected), Ilona Edelsheim-Gyulai (the widow of the Deputy Governor of 1942, who was made an honorary citizen of two municipalities)

and Ilona Tóth (the heroine of the 1956 revolution) (Holló, 1996; Sárközy, 2018). Overall, however, women do not seem to have played a significant role in Hungarian popular historical culture. According to an article published in 2018, for instance, 1,173 statues and plaques exist in Budapest, of which only 35 sculptures depict women from the past, while 618 sculptures are of famous men (Kőműves and Bátor, 2018). The 'History of Hungary' permanent exhibition of the Hungarian National Museum confirms this finding: women are scarcely mentioned. In Belgium, by contrast, parallel to evolutions in academic historiography paying more attention to gender history, attention to the position and role of women in the past increased gradually within popular historical culture. This attention was not connected to the national past in particular: a national memory culture remains for a large part absent within popular historical culture (Van Nieuwenhuysse and Bouhon, 2021). Initiatives were taken to dedicate more statues and street names to women (see, for example, Lemaire, 2020). At the same time, this finding needs to be nuanced: a gender perspective nevertheless remains to a large extent absent in popular historical culture in Belgium.

Regarding the position of women in school textbooks, including those of history, Chisholm (2018), in an overview contribution based on a review of studies conducted in many countries, concluded that women are under-represented, negatively represented and misrepresented compared to men. Moreover, a gender perspective is often absent. Houwen (2023) came to similar conclusions in her research on Dutch history textbooks: women as well as gender-related issues are hardly given attention. Osler (1994) concluded from her analysis of 36 English history textbooks linked to the 1991 national curriculum that textbooks apply five orientations to deal with women's history and a gender perspective: (1) adding women on to existing content within conventional paradigms (conforming approaches); (2) acknowledging the problematic character of existing approaches, yet continuing to work within existing and dominant paradigms (reforming approaches); (3) developing a perspective of the powerless – hence, considering women as disadvantaged (affirming orientations); (4) considering gender as a dynamic of history and category of analysis (challenging approaches); and (5) including gender-balanced accounts (transforming approaches). Overall, the conforming, reforming and affirming approaches predominated in the textbooks under study. History textbook research in several other countries came to similar conclusions.

For Flemish history education, almost no studies have been conducted on women's and gender history in textbooks; the few existing studies are, moreover, very limited in their scope (Timmerman and Timmerman, 2007). Nevertheless, other studies focusing on representations of the Cold War and of modern imperialism in history textbooks offer a glimpse of the position of women and the gender dimension in history textbooks. They show that women are almost not mentioned, are attributed almost no agency and that a gender perspective is completely absent (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2018, 2019a). In general, these studies also indicate that agency is mostly attributed to non-human agents (for example, capitalism or the state) and great men (political, religious or military leaders). Furthermore, they show that the accounts are characterised by a social sciences structural approach, and that textbook accounts, parallel to evolutions in popular historical culture, do not pay much attention to the national past, yet rather testify to a Eurocentric approach to the past.

In Hungary, few textbook analysis studies have been conducted with regard to the representation of women in textbooks (Molnár-Kovács, 2011; Szabó, 2015, 2016; Ventilla, 2012). Although there is a textbook dealing more particularly with the history of women (Pető, 2008) in Grades 11 and 12, its content and use in public education has not yet been studied. This might be related to the fact that this textbook is currently not on the list of recommended textbooks. The same finding applies to a teachers' handbook with a focus on women's history (Tudor, 2000): no data are available on the range of its users. Regarding primary school history, there is a comprehensive, thorough analysis of the history textbooks for primary schools (Szabó, 2015, 2016). It reveals that women in general and women's history are under-represented. Molnár-Kovács (2011) examined the visual representation of women's work in the history textbooks of Grade 8 of primary school. She concluded that the number (and proportion) of images that represent women doing intellectual work increased (from 1999 to 2009). In most of the images, however, women do not occupy centre stage, as the images focus on the work activity and environment first and foremost. Among the history textbooks for secondary schools, Ventilla (2012) shows that the analysed textbooks for Grade 12 hardly mention women; and, if they are mentioned, women appear in sources or other supplementary passages, rather than in the main learning text.



## Research context: history education in Flanders and Hungary

History education is part of the basic curriculum in secondary education in Flanders (Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2020). Flanders, rather than Belgium, is mentioned, because in 1989, education was formally devolved to the three Belgian communities (the Dutch-, the French- and the German-speaking communities), who became autonomously responsible for this policy matter. In general education, two hours a week are assigned to the subject of history; in technical and arts education, one hour a week. The curriculum of history education is set by the regional Flemish government, which establishes standards, delineating the minimum targets that should be met at the end of each stage. The history standards put forward a double goal: students should be offered an introduction to history as an academic discipline (with an emphasis on critical source analysis), and, at the same time, they should be prepared to become members of society. The standards establish a chronological structure, and they require that prehistory, ancient Near East and classical antiquity (from the beginning of mankind until c.500 CE) are addressed in Grades 7 and 8, the Middle Ages and early modern period (ca. 500 CE–ca. 1750 CE) in Grades 9 and 10, and the modern period and contemporary history (ca. 1750 CE–present) in Grades 11 and 12. They also state that the various societal (political, economic, social and cultural) domains have to be addressed. In defining the standards, the Flemish community made a deliberate choice not to enumerate factual knowledge that must be taught; they only provide some guidelines that can help to select content. These guidelines make clear that the standards adhere to a very structural and social sciences approach to the past, and they put the emphasis on non-human actors, large social processes and structures, rather than on individuals and ordinary people. Instead of providing concrete content, the standards rather focus on critical thinking skills and attitudes. This means that teachers are attributed a large amount of freedom in selecting content to teach about. The basic frame of reference in Flemish history education is (Western) European. In order to go beyond a Eurocentric view of the past, the standards require that at each stage at least one non-Western society is studied. In reality, however, this attempt was not successful (Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2019b). The (sub)national past is only marginally present in the standards. Completely in line with developments within popular historical culture in society at large, the national past gradually evaporated from history curricula in Belgium and Flanders after the Second World War. The history standards only require that students analyse the lines of fracture within evolving Belgian society from 1830 onwards. The main values underlying history education in Flanders are not at all related to patriotism, but to Western Enlightenment values such as individual rights, individual and collective freedom, equality, democratisation and respect for human rights. Based on the standards, the different educational networks can devise their own curricula. Based on the standards and the curricula, publishing houses then draw up history textbooks. History teachers are not obliged to use textbooks. Many, nevertheless, use them, yet in different ways. Some follow them quite literally, while others solely use them for the historical sources included. Most textbooks are written by history teachers, who are not specialists in the various issues addressed in the textbooks. Moreover, textbook authors often combine the writing of a textbook with a full-time teaching job in secondary education. As a result, little time remains for them to catch up on recent academic historiography; they rather lean on previous versions of textbooks to produce new ones (Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2015). Textbooks do not need governmental approval to be used in schools. In line with the constitutional freedom of education, the government does not interfere at all with textbook production and dissemination. Five publishing houses offer history textbooks for secondary education. Also, the Flemish government does not impose central examinations on schools.

In Hungary, the National Core Curriculum (NCC) is a regulatory document that prescribes skills and content requirements for public education. The latest version was published in 2020, but as at the beginning of this research, the textbooks (in Grades 10 to 12) related to the NCC were not yet available, so the subject of this analysis has been the so-called 'New generation' (or experimental) textbooks based on the 2012 NCC. Hungarian public education (at primary and secondary level) is regulated on two levels: the NCC sets broader educational goals and student competencies, while the framework curriculum identifies more concrete themes and topics and details curriculum content (historical figures, definitions, dates, geographical locations), structured into chapters. The so-called national textbook validation process is based on the framework curriculum. The Hungarian central school leaving examination (standard or advanced level) with specific subject knowledge testifies to some overlap with the curricula. Two hours a week are devoted to history as a school subject in public education in Grade 10, and three hours a week in Grades 11 and 12. History textbooks are authored by teams of history teachers and

historians working for research institutes and universities. The first Hungarian textbook series (called 'New generation' or 'experimental' textbooks) under examination in this study were produced by the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development and the state-founded (yet since 2021 Roman Catholic) Eszterházy Károly University. Its authors were men; women were included in the broader team that realised the publication of the textbooks (as managing editor, creative editor, illustrator and pedagogy reader). The 'New generation' textbooks follow a chronological order. The textbook for Grade 10 addresses the period from about 1492 to 1848/9, the one for Grade 11 the period between 1848/9 and 1945, while the textbook being used in Grade 12 addresses the recent past since 1945. The last chapter of the latter textbook is entitled 'Social studies', and it touches on some topical issues. In the Hungarian textbooks, the focus is on Hungarian and European culture and tradition, without a connection to non-Western perspectives. The second textbook series published under the 2012 NCC was called the 'New source-centred' textbook series, and it was also made by the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development and Eszterházy Károly University. These textbooks also follow a chronological order (in order to correspond to the NCC 2012). Their authors were also men, and women were also only included in the broader team. According to data from the state-owned Könyvtárellátó Nonprofit Kft (Library Provider Ltd), the 'New source-centred' textbook series was, and still is, more widely used than the 'New generation' textbook series. In 2019, for instance, the total number of history textbooks for Grade 12 being sold was approximately 55,000. About 80 per cent of them constituted the 'New source-centred' textbook series (this proportion was about 77 per cent in 2020). Less than 20 per cent of the textbooks sold were 'New generation' textbooks. The rest constituted very small textbook series with an often-limited edition of no more than 300 copies. These percentages are significant because, while the 'New generation' textbook series is free and can be used without limitation, the other textbook series can only be used if all parents agree and the educational authority permits the school to use them. This is not self-evident, because this textbook series is not free, but has to be purchased by the parents. So, despite the 'New generation' series being propagated by the government, the 'New source-centred' textbook series is preferred. However, this finding is not to be explained by political reasons. Rather, it is because many teachers, before 2012, already used the (old) 'Source-centred' textbook series; furthermore, as there was only a short time between the publication of the brand new 'New generation' textbook series and the start of their use during the new school year, teachers did not have a sufficient amount of time to study the 'New generation' textbook series, and therefore they did not use it much.

## Research questions, data collection and analysis

### Research questions

Two main research questions guide the analysis. The first one is how women in the past are represented in current (until 2023) Flemish and Hungarian history textbooks, in chapters about the Hungarian and (pre-)Belgian national past, and about the past in general since 1750. Which women are mentioned, how and in what capacity? Are they attributed any agency? And does the account of women in the past testify to a predominantly national, Eurocentric or global perspective on the past? Specific attention is paid to the representation of the three consecutive feminist waves (the first at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century; the second in the 1960s and 1970s; and the third in the mid-1990s). The second research question concerns the presence or absence of underlying patterns in the history textbook accounts with regard to the representation of women's position and role in the past. For instance, do textbooks take a gender perspective, or rather give the impression to have added some women's history to an existing storyline? Is the representation of women in the textbooks to be seen in an underlying storyline of liberal progress, or rather of conservatism? This analysis will be done in a comparative perspective, taking the different Flemish/Belgian and Hungarian societal contexts into account, such as the liberal tradition versus post-socialism.

### Data collection

This research is based on current (until 2023) history textbooks being used in Grades 10 (only in Hungary), 11 and 12 of secondary school history education. This allows the analysis of history from 1750 onwards, which includes interesting developments in the history of the Habsburg Empire, of which the territory of

current Flanders and Hungary was part, as well as more general important developments, such as the rise of the Industrial Revolution and of profound political changes (such as the outbreak of the French Revolution or the rise of nationalism).

Four currently used history textbook series in Flanders have been analysed: *Storia*, *Historia*, *Passages* and *Janus*. As these series provide a textbook per grade (except for *Passages*, offering two textbooks for the modern period), in total nine volumes have been analysed. Three textbook series, *Storia*, *Historia* and *Janus*, are written by a team of history teachers. They combine this effort with their (often full-time) teaching duties. One textbook, *Passages*, is written by a team of academic researchers with diverse expertise; one of them is the co-president of the Belgian archive and documentation centre for women's history. The author teams of all four textbook series are gender mixed. Previous research on other topics has concluded that *Historia*, *Storia* and *Janus* connect less closely to recent and current academic historiography; *Passages*, by contrast, does. *Historia*, *Storia* and *Janus* apply primarily a chronological order to the sequence of historical topics that they address. *Passages* applies a thematic order; it distinguishes five themes around which it centres concrete historical topics: nature, labour, individual and community, people and power, and war. The textbook accounts are divided into autonomous chapters. The number of chapters per textbook ranges from 12 to 55. In the latter case, the chapters are very short: only four pages. All textbooks offer a combination of learning texts and historical sources, accompanied by very little contextual information. *Passages* is the only textbook series that includes a reference list of historical studies; among those, studies on women's history are mentioned. The other textbook series do not provide a reference list with historical studies that they base their learning texts upon.

Since 2010, the educational system has constantly been changing in Hungary. At the time of the start of this research, the latest history textbooks based on the latest NCC (2020) and its associated curriculum were not yet available, as its introduction in Grades 9 and 10 was planned for September 2021. In this study, therefore, we examined the two most frequently used history textbook series for Grades 10–12: first is the 'New generation' textbook series mentioned above, which was licensed from 2017 and 2018 on the basis of the NCC 2012 (NAT, 2012) and the related framework curriculum (Kerettanternv, 2012: 51/2012), and composed of a printed version accompanied by an online open access portal through which the National Public Education Portal (NKP) made additional material available (Kamp, 2019). These textbooks are written by history teachers and academic researchers, and the main authors are men; women are only contributors (see the section 'Research context: history education in Flanders and in Hungary' above). The second series of textbooks are the so-called 'New source-centred' textbooks, written by a male history teacher. This series is also based on the NCC, which means that there is no significant difference in content compared to the 'New generation' series. Both series follow a chronological order and discuss Hungarian and 'world history' (the latter being primarily European history) in separate large units. The series offer a combination of learning texts and historical sources, but to a different extent: historical sources are more important in the 'New source-centred' textbook series than in the 'New generation' textbook series. In the 'New generation' textbooks, developers have put a strong emphasis on the link between print and digital learning materials. While the 'Source-centred' textbook series focuses on developing critical thinking in students, the 'New generation' textbooks also aim to encourage students to be creative and to think reflectively.

## Methodology

This article draws mainly on a qualitative content analysis of school history textbooks, addressing both the learning texts and the historical sources included in the textbooks. It examines what these tell the users of the textbooks, and what messages they transmit (Krippendorff, 2022; Pingel, 2010). In order to conduct this qualitative content analysis, a coding scheme of categories was deductively developed, a priori, based on the outlined research questions (Mayring, 2000). The coding scheme guided the close reading and data analysis of the selected textbooks. Subcategories (hereafter exemplarily mentioned in parentheses) were developed inductively throughout the close reading and data analysis. 'Utterances' served as the unit of analysis: (parts of) a phrase or a sentence (or consecutive sentences) that included a mention of women as individuals or as a group, or of a gender issue (Peck et al., 2011). The main categories of the coding scheme were: (1) the mention of women, as individuals and as a group, both in the learning texts and in the historical (visual and textual) sources accompanying the text; (2) the profile and capacity in which the women (as individuals or in a group) are mentioned (for



instance, as autonomous beings or rather as wife of; as leaders, as victims, as heroines and so on); (3) the particular societal domains in which women (as individuals or in a group) are named; (4) the agency (not) attributed to women; (5) the geographical sphere and perspective in which women are mentioned (national and international, Western and non-Western); (6) the time periods in which women are mentioned (eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first century); and (7) the representation of the three consecutive feminist waves (the first at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century; the second in the 1960s and 1970s; and the third in the mid-1990s). Throughout the application of the qualitative content analysis, we included aspects of discourse analysis, mainly with regard to the (positive, negative, neutral and so on) adjectives accompanying descriptions of women as individuals and groups, and the (positive, negative, neutral and so on) sketch of the context in which their presence was mentioned.

The aforementioned categories also help to evaluate the textbooks under examination, and whether patterns underlying the textbooks' narratives could be found (Vanhulle, 2009). For instance, do the textbook authors use a gender perspective to look at the past? Or a feminist perspective? Or do they rather add aspects from women's history to the prevailing narrative? They also contribute to determine whether or not, and to what extent, storylines, such as of liberal progress or of conservatism, underlie the textbook accounts.

The analysis is first and foremost taken up as a cross-case analysis, meaning that the results hereafter are presented in an overarching manner per case, across textbooks of Flanders and Hungary. Where worthwhile, however, a within-case analysis (for Flemish and for Hungarian textbooks) is done, to determine possible significant differences between history textbooks per case (Miles et al., 2014). This within-case analysis is particularly important in view of the second research question.

## Results

When looking at the learning texts throughout the textbooks, it can be noticed, first and foremost, that women do not occupy centre stage. Women are hardly mentioned. In Flemish textbooks, women are mentioned in only 11 per cent (*Historia* and *Storia*) and between 33 and 50 per cent (*Janus* and *Passages*) of the chapters per textbook. Moreover, of the 75 women mentioned as individuals in the textbooks, 17 occur in the learning text, and 58 in the historical sources accompanying the learning text. It is striking that women are represented more in historical sources, and in particular in visual sources, than they are included in the main learning texts. In Flemish textbooks, women are represented in almost half of the visual sources (48 per cent): 38 per cent of the visual sources include women and men, 10 per cent of them include solely women.

In Hungary, the 'New generation' history textbooks also do not include many women in the learning text. Somewhat more women appear in the textual and visual sources accompanying the learning text and in the didactic/supplementary sections. This does not mean, however, that, in so doing, women's voices and experiences come more to the fore. The studied chapters of the textbooks for Grades 10–12 contain 201 textual sources; only 13 of them were authored by a woman (of which 5 by Maria Theresa). Regarding the visual sources, the textbooks contain 466 visual images of people: 105 (22.5 per cent) include women and men, 17 (3.65 per cent) only women, and 344 (73.8 per cent) only men. Similar findings apply to the 'New source-centred' textbooks. Here only 18 of the 534 textual sources present in the examined chapters were authored by women. These textbooks contain 418 visual images of people: 135 (32.3 per cent) include women and men, 15 (3.6 per cent) only women, and 268 (64.1 per cent) only men.

### Women mentioned in the textbooks as individuals and as groups: active agents in different societal domains?

When compared to men, history textbooks in Flanders and Hungary only scarcely mention individual women by name. Overall, 75 women are mentioned as individuals in Flemish textbooks. Hungarian history textbooks mention 53 women as individuals, of which 6 without their name (5 women appear only as wives of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Nicolae Ceaușescu, J.F. Kennedy, János Kádár and László Rajk – the latter two were Hungarian Communist party leaders – while Rosa Parks is mentioned as a 'middle-aged African American seamstress'). Those women as individuals can be sorted, according to their functions and capacity, in 10 different categories. Table 1 presents an overview with examples.

**Table 1. Mentions of individual women, and their function or capacity, in Flemish and Hungarian history textbooks**

Women's role	Mentions (Flanders)	Example(s) (Flanders)	Mentions (Hungary)	Examples(s) (Hungary)
Political leader	16	Empress Maria Theresa; Empress Catherine the Great; Queen Victoria of England; British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; French extreme right leader Marine Le Pen	13	Empress Maria Theresa; Empress Catherine the Great; Queen Victoria of England; British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; Hungarian MPs Margit Slachta and Anna Kéthly; underground journalist and dissident during the Hungarian Communist regime Ottilia Solt
Wife and partner of political leaders	6	Queen Astrid; Empress Charlotte of Mexico; Queen Marie-Antoinette; Lilian Baels	11	Queen Marie-Antoinette; mistress of Emperor Napoleon, Maria Walewska; Jacqueline Kennedy; Elena Ceaușescu; Countess Katinka Andrassy, wife of Hungary's first president Mihály Károlyi
Feminist activist	17	Isabelle Gatti de Gamond; Marie Popelin; Isala Van Diest; Aletta Jacobs; Emmeline Pankhurst; Naomi Wolf	2	Emmeline Pankhurst; Emily Davison
Activist in general	7	Yoko Ono; Rosa Parks; Harriet Tubman; Malala Yousafzai	2	Rosa Parks; Hungarian Romany activist Mária László
Entrepreneur	2	Helena Rubinstein; Angele Manteau	1	Coco Chanel
Victim	4	Saartje Baartman; Ethel Rosenberg; Phan Thị Kim Phúc	6	A Christian peasant girl, Eszter Solymosi (in connection with blood libel of 1882); Countess Sophie Chotek; Holocaust survivor Yagoda Judit; victims of wartime rape, Elaine Polcz and Fanni Gyarmati
Hero	3	Edith Cavel; Florence Nightengale; Marie Abts	2	Florence Nightengale; Ilona Tamás
Scientist	2	Marie Curie; Emilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil	2	Rachel Louise Carson; Barbara Daly Metcalf
Entertainer and artist	15	Ursula Andress; Josephine Baker; Halle Berry; Madonna; Oprah Winfrey; Marilyn Monroe; Leni Riefenstahl	10	Writer Harriet Beecher Stowe; writer, literary translator and conservative women's activist Cécile Tormay; Hungarian singer Zsuzsa Koncz; six American actresses such as Angeline Jolie

Symbol for...	3	Ruby Bridges, the first African American child to desegregate the all-White William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana during the New Orleans school desegregation crisis on 14 November 1960; Linda Brown, campaigner for equality in education; Bernadette Soubirous, received visions from the Virgin Mary in a cave near Lourdes, and dedicated her life to religion and religious care	2	Klára Leövey and Blanka Teleki, pioneers in the field of girls' education
Other	0	–	2	Olympic champion Ibolya Csák; Countess Katinka Andrássy, as author of her memoirs, used to illustrate the lifestyle of nobles

In other instances, women are not mentioned individually, but as a group. Here as well, according to their capacity, different (eight) categories arise. Table 2 provides an overview with examples.

This overview indicates that, although women are in a few instances represented as passive beings (victims, cultural 'objects'), they do often get ascribed agency in textbook accounts: as activists, as creators, as rulers and so on. This applies to both individual women and to women in a group. In Hungarian textbooks, particularly in a group, women get ascribed agency.

**Table 2. Mentions of women as a group, and their capacity, in Flemish and Hungarian history textbooks**

Capacity of women as a group	Examples (Flanders)	Examples (Hungary)
As a political force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– women leading politically influential salons during the eighteenth century</li> <li>– women acting for the right of women to vote and as an important electoral group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– March of Women (French Revolution)</li> <li>– women acting for the right of women to vote, and as an important electoral group</li> <li>– a silent march of women in Budapest after the suppression of the 1956 revolution</li> </ul>
As labour forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– women striking for better labour conditions</li> <li>– women playing an important economic role during the First and Second World Wars</li> <li>– women reinforcing the labour market after 1945 due to their increasing entry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– women playing an important economic role during the First World War</li> <li>– women reinforcing the labour market in the Communist era</li> </ul>

As activists for emancipation and gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– women's movements, such as the Dolle Mina's and the suffragettes, as well as the establishment of other organisations</li> <li>– women struggling to be 'boss in their own belly' (abortion issue) and for acceptance of anti-conception etc., during the sexual revolution</li> <li>– women entering higher education (universities)</li> <li>– women contributing to science</li> <li>– women struggling for equal wage for equal work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– British feminist movement</li> <li>– right-wing conservative women's association in Hungary</li> </ul>
As consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– women and spare time</li> <li>– women and music</li> <li>– women and running households, and consumption society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– women and fashion</li> <li>– women and consumption society</li> </ul>
As victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– in nineteenth-century factories and mines in Western Europe</li> <li>– in non-Western societies where they often 'still' testify to a subordinated position</li> <li>– in war zones in Central Africa where rape is used as a weapon against them</li> <li>– being refugees, on the run from violence and poverty</li> <li>– of street violence against women suspected of having collaborated with the German occupier during the Second World War</li> <li>– English women killed during uprising in India</li> <li>– During the Holocaust, when women were gassed immediately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– in witch-hunts and trials</li> <li>– in nineteenth-century factories and mines in Western Europe and Hungary</li> <li>– of cholera, as a result of which female beauty fades and becomes ugliness</li> <li>– 'Boer' women in concentration camps during Anglo-Boer War</li> <li>– Romany women during the Holocaust</li> <li>– women deported to conduct forced labour in the Soviet Union</li> <li>– of street violence against women suspected of having collaborated with the German occupier during the Second World War</li> <li>– of the volley of Mosonmagyaróvár in 1956</li> <li>– of wartime rape in Bosnia</li> <li>– women in the Islamic Republic of Iran</li> </ul>
As passive object	in terms of family reunification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– in terms of family reunification</li> <li>– aiding war widows as one of the first social reforms in West Germany</li> <li>– abortion ban</li> <li>– nursing mothers in socialist industry</li> </ul>
As cultural object	In terms of beauty ideals	In terms of beauty ideals
In the context of education	–	Female education in Western Europe and Hungary

Considered from a gender perspective, however, the overall agency in the past is still mostly attributed to males by the textbook authors. In the Flemish history textbooks, in particular in *Historia*, *Janus* and *Storia*, not only is female agency scarce; it is also to a large extent limited to the (autonomous) chapters with regard to the struggle for women's right to vote and women's rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In many other chapters on various historical topics, women are completely

absent. This applies, for instance, to the accounts about the Restoration Policy after 1815, the modernisation of Japan during the nineteenth century, evolution within economic thinking and philosophy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the rise of nationalism and liberalism in general throughout the nineteenth century, the Russian Revolution, the Cold War and the supranational and intergovernmental organisations (such as the United Nations, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) established after 1945. In other chapters, they only play a very minor role, such as in the chapters on the First World War, the Industrial Revolution or the Belgian Revolution (in which a woman named Marie Abts is mentioned, as the person who made the first Belgian flag). Moreover, in a number of cases, female agency occurs under the auspices of a male. It was pointed out, for instance, that American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice served under the presidency of George W. Bush Jr. In other cases, women are mentioned as being the first to be or do something, without, however, any elaboration. Marguerite De Riemaeker is, for instance, mentioned as the first female minister in Belgium; nothing, however, is mentioned about her actual policies. Women being active in the cultural domain get ascribed more 'autonomous' leadership, as artist, entertainer, writer or scientist. A notable exception to this is to be found in *Passages*. Contrary to what has been mentioned above, this textbook includes women and their perspective more systematically in the regular chapters about politics, economy, culture and so on, in general.

In the Hungarian textbooks, a distinction is to be made between the learning text and the accompanying historical sources. In the learning texts, women are less represented as agents, but rather as victims or passive subjects of external acts and decisions, when compared to the historical sources. The silent march of women in Budapest after the suppression of the 1956 revolt, for instance, does not appear in the main learning text, yet it is included via a photograph (in the 'New generation' textbook Grade 12) with a caption in which the march is explained. In several chapters, women are not mentioned. For example, the 'New generation' textbook on the nineteenth century refers to the expanding associational and club life, yet it does not mention the increasing number of women's associations. Women's employment, private life (for example, marriage habits) and the transformation of traditional women's roles are also ignored. In the chapters on the revolution and the war of independence in 1848/9 (for example, armed and military hospital duties), on the Cold War, on the supranational and intergovernmental organisations (such as the United Nations, and the important role Eleanor Roosevelt played in the establishment of the Declaration of Human Rights) established after 1945, and on the 1956 revolt (for example, the female freedom fighters), women are absent. Both textbooks for Grade 12 report that after the 1956 revolution, 228 people were executed. They analyse their social status, for example, yet they do not provide any information on their sex, even though one of the best-known victims was a female student, Ilona Tóth. In other chapters, women are mentioned in a very selective way. The textbooks, for instance, do not mention Hungarian feminist activists or movements, yet the 'New generation' textbook for Grade 11 does mention a right-wing Conservative female activist (Cécile Tormay) and the association that she led.

Regarding the position of women within the various societal domains, in Flemish textbooks, women as individuals are particularly mentioned in issues related to the political (36 times) and cultural (37 times) domain. In the political domain, they are mentioned as rulers, or as advocates for women's political and social rights. In the cultural domain, individual women are mentioned as artists or scientists. In everything that has to do with economics, by contrast, individual women are largely absent. Only two women are mentioned as entrepreneurs: Helena Rubinstein (a Polish Jewish American businesswoman in cosmetics) and Angele Manteau (a Belgian publisher whose publishing house was very influential). This latter finding does not apply to the mentions of women as a group. Women as a collective are mentioned in relation to all societal domains: the political, economic, social and cultural domains.

In the Hungarian history textbooks, women are particularly mentioned in issues related to the political domain (58 times). In the cultural domain, individual women are mentioned as artists or scientists (6 times), although two Hungarian female artists from the inter-war period get a mention because of a political rather than a cultural (aesthetic) reason. Cécile Tormay and Elemérné Pap-Váry, both artists, are mentioned as political activists via their poems and novels, rather than as poets, writers or literary translators as such. Regarding women as a group, in the cultural domain, they are mentioned mostly as consumers and objects of education. The latter means at the same time that the topic of education is not interpreted in the context of female emancipation or equality, even though the question of whether women have the intellectual capacity to attend university was an important issue in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, the emergence of the first female scientists in Hungary marked an important



milestone in the emancipation of women, as more and more conservative professors began to recognise the abilities of their female colleagues.

### **The mention of women in a temporal and geographical perspective: present-oriented, and Eurocentric versus national approach**

From a temporal perspective, it is striking to find how the more the Flemish textbook accounts address recent history, the more women they include. In the account on historical phenomena and developments in the eighteenth century, only 5 individual women are mentioned: Empresses Maria Theresa and Catherine the Great, Queen Marie-Antoinette, Mary Wollstonecraft (an English writer, philosopher and advocate of women's rights) and Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil (a French natural philosopher and mathematician). Throughout the account on the nineteenth century, 18 women are mentioned as individuals, among which are many feminist activists. Most individual women, however, are mentioned in the accounts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: 52. Similar findings apply to the Hungarian textbooks. Where the textbook addressing the period from 1711 to 1848 contains 10 mentions of individual women, the one on the 100-year period from 1848 to 1945 contains 12 mentions, and the one addressing history since 1945 includes 18 mentions of individual women.

Regarding the spatial balance of the mention of women between national and general history, it is first found that of the 75 women mentioned as individuals in the Flemish history textbooks, 19 are mentioned in topics specifically about the national past, and 56 in topics about the past in general. This is rather striking, taking into account the fact that the national past is given only little attention in Flemish history textbooks. When looking at the learning texts in particular, this finding becomes even more striking, as 16 individual women are mentioned in learning texts about a topic from the national past and only 1 woman in the learning text of a topic from the past in general. The mention of women as a group, however, shows an opposite finding, and hence nuances the previous finding. Of the 41 mentions of women as a group in the learning texts, only 6 occur in texts specifically on the national past, while 35 occur in texts about the past in general.

When looking in more detail at the mention of women (individually or in a group) in topics related to the national past, it comes to the fore that these topics almost always constitute a national illustration of a more general, internationally oriented historical phenomenon or development, such as the feminist struggle for women's votes and equal social rights, or women participating in cultural, scientific and political life. Feminism in Belgium is hence not addressed in an autonomous way; the Belgian situation is merely an illustration or concretisation of a more general historical phenomenon, particularly occurring in the West.

This immediately points to another finding for the Flemish history textbooks – that the perspective through which women in the past are represented is a Eurocentric one. Of the 75 women mentioned as individuals, 68 of them stem from the West; only 7 women mentioned by name are from a non-Western descent: Ci Xi (the Chinese empress who effectively controlled the Chinese government in the late Qing dynasty); Malala Yousafzai (a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest Nobel Prize laureate); Saartje Baartman (a South African Khoikhoi woman who was exhibited as a freak show attraction in nineteenth-century Europe under the name Hottentot Venus); Phan Thị Kim Phúc (well known as the 9-year-old child and victim of a napalm bombardment during the Vietnam war; she became an activist for peace); Massoumeh Ebtekan (the first female member in the cabinet of Iran after 1979); Mahinur Ozdemir (a Belgian politician with dual Turkish–Belgian nationality, and the first woman to wear a headscarf in a Belgian parliamentary assembly); and Soong Ching-Ling (one of the leaders of the 1911 revolution that established the Republic of China). These women are presented either as activists for women's rights or as victims of violence against women. Both 'roles' are framed within a Eurocentric perspective, as the situation of these women is compared to the situation within Western Europe and the West, with the West as the standard by which to judge non-Western societies. This is, for instance, the case in the comparison of the position of women in nineteenth-century Japan or twentieth- and twenty-first-century non-European Muslim countries and Western Europe. The conclusion, then, is that those countries 'still not' or 'not yet' attribute women equal rights. One textbook avoids this Eurocentric discourse: in *Passages*, no traces could be found of such Eurocentrically inspired comparisons.

In the Hungarian history textbooks, of the 53 individual women mentioned, 29 are part of the national past, and 24 of a Western past: 14 are mentioned in topics about the European past, 10 in topics

about the North American past. This means that women from African, Asian or South and Latin American parts of the world do not appear in the Hungarian history textbooks. The same finding applies to the mention of non-Western women as a group. Only the subchapter on the Iranian–Iraqi war addresses non-Western women: it mentions the segregation of women and men in public in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the compulsory character of wearing the chador. There is no chapter or other subchapter on non-Western societies and their gender relations.

Regarding the balance between women mentioned in chapters on the national ‘versus’ the more general, mostly Western past, in Hungarian history textbooks, the closer the accounts get to the present, the more Hungarian women are mentioned. The history textbooks addressing the period from 1711 to 1848 contain 3 women in topics related to the national past, of which 2 were members of the Habsburg dynasty, namely Maria Theresa and Franz Joseph’s mother, Archduchess Sophie. The textbook addressing the period from 1848 to 1945 mentions 14 Hungarian and 8 Western women, while the history textbook used in Grade 12 mentions 15 Hungarian and 13 Western women. Furthermore, it is striking to see that no close connections or interactions are made by the textbook authors between women’s history with the national and the general past. Feminism, for instance, is characterised as a British phenomenon, not a general one in the ‘New generation’ textbook (the ‘New source-centred’ textbook does not mention feminism at all). In so doing, no causal link is made between the feminist movement and its struggle, and the right of women to vote in Hungary. The same applies to the social impact of the First World War which the ‘New generation’ textbook authors consider in connection with European history but which they ignore in connection with the aftermath of the Great War in Hungary (the ‘New source-centred’ textbook series does not mention how the war shaped gender norms). The textbook authors hence do not connect to a more global history. Only in the last part of the ‘New generation’ textbook for Grade 12 is there a chapter entitled ‘Fulfilment of globalisation’, which reports on the events of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first one of the twenty-first century from both a Eurocentric and a national perspective. The ‘New source-centred’ textbook for Grade 12 addresses the recent national and global events in a separate way.

## History textbook representations of three consecutive feminist waves

Three Flemish textbooks, *Historia*, *Janus* and *Storia*, address the consecutive feminist waves in separate, autonomous chapters, in which they offer Grade 12 students a diachronic case study on women’s emancipation since the late eighteenth century. They sketch an overview of women’s societal position from the nineteenth century to the present, with a focus on the three feminist waves, on the evolving voting and political rights, on increasing female emancipation and on societal rights (equal pay, abortion and so on), and on women being able to build a career (mainly in science). General Western European and Western developments are illustrated by examples from the national, Belgian past. Isala Van Diest was, for instance, the Belgian exponent of women starting to study at university, and the Ligue Belge du Droit des Femmes was an exponent of feminist movements being established across Western Europe. The only particularly Belgian aspect in the accounts of the feminist waves concerns the connectedness the textbooks emphasise between feminism and the struggle for women’s rights, and the lines of fracture within evolving Belgian society from 1830 onwards. The textbooks pay attention to the tensions, for instance, within the feminist movements between Catholics, liberals and socialists. The focus, in general, on evolutions in the West again illustrates the Eurocentric stance of textbooks. They predominantly offer a Western (European) perspective on feminism and the struggle for women’s rights, and, furthermore, suggest that women in the West are emancipated (although not fully), contrary to women in other parts of the world. Particularly the textbook *Historia* emphasises the harrowing fate of women in the non-Western world, compared to the West.

One textbook, *Passages*, opts for a different approach. It tries to include women’s history more in the regular chapters about politics, economy, culture and so on. In so doing, it aims to introduce something of a gender perspective, via regular attention to the different impact of historical events and developments on men and women, throughout the main learning text, and in specific subchapters.

The Hungarian ‘New generation’ history textbooks do not take gender aspects into consideration. They do not include an autonomous chapter on women’s history or on gender; the feminist waves are not addressed in the textbooks. The Hungarian feminist movement and its leader, Róza BÉdy-Schwimmer (or Rosika Schwimmer) or the Seventh Conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, hosted in Budapest in 1913, are ignored. The British suffragette movement is merely labelled as

a feminist movement, yet this is not mentioned in the main learning text. Female equality and female employment are mentioned in a supplementary section and, in the learning text addressing the totalitarian Communist regime in Hungary. The textbook declares that 'the communist regime propagandised female equality and female employment' in Hungary in the 1950s, but its 'interpretative context' is the forced industrialisation. In so doing, the textbooks suggest that feminism and female equality can be interpreted as a curiosity and as a Communist invention. Regarding the right of women to vote, the chapter entitled 'Social studies' offers a timeline, mentioning, as a first date and location, 1893 and New Zealand, and, as a last one, 1971 and Switzerland. The first general and multiparty elections in Hungary in 1920, when women were entitled to vote, and after which the first female Hungarian MP, Margit Slachta, was elected, are, however, omitted from the timeline. Here again, it is clear that the textbook authors do not connect the national and the general past with regard to women's history.

Similar findings apply to the 'New source-centred' textbook series. This series also does not contain a chapter on women's history; it does, however, include two small parts ('sub-subchapters') about it. A first one, entitled 'Changes in women's position', addresses the 1920s and is part of the chapter on 'Problems of the winner Europe'. The second one is about the 'Improvement of women's position' in inter-war Hungary, and it is part of the chapter 'Social changes and way of life'. The unit 'Social and civic studies' contains a chapter on 'Social diversity', in which some paragraphs under the title 'Men and women' detail female inequality at work as a phenomenon in contemporary societies. Feminism or feminist waves as such are silenced.

### Underlying patterns (not) to be discerned in the textbook accounts

From the above, it is clear that Flemish history textbooks do not take a real gender perspective, except for *Passages*. This textbook not only includes women's history systematically; it also pays attention to the different impact of historical events and developments on men and women. In so doing, it includes a gender perspective, that is, by contrast, not present in the other analysed Flemish history textbooks. *Historia*, *Janus* and *Storia* almost do not address ideas about gender, nor do they explain (or only very rarely, superficially and in short form) how gender relations were established and how these evolved throughout the past. *Historia 6*, for instance, only mentions, without further explanation, that a gender perspective gradually emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In this sense, a true gender perspective is absent in those three textbooks. Their authors, nevertheless, do seem convinced of the importance of bringing more women into the account of the past. However, they do so primarily by including more historical sources from or about women, rather than by adapting the learning texts, and taking a fundamentally different, gender perspective. A second observation is that, throughout the accounts of those three textbooks about the period from 1750 to the present, an underlying narrative of progress reverberates implicitly. The textbooks draw a picture of progress towards more rights, freedoms and gender equality over the past two centuries. The efforts in this respect are not yet completed, the textbooks emphasise; by contrast, a lot of work still needs to be done (for example, concerning breaking through the glass ceiling, and creating awareness about sexual violence and domestic abuse, also in light of the MeToo movement). Yet there is, in their representation of the past, a continuous progress to be discerned with regard to the societal position of women, at least in the West. Other parts of the world clearly lie behind in this respect. The latter shows how an underlying narrative of progress goes hand in hand with a Eurocentric view of the past.

Hungarian history textbooks do not take a gender perspective either. Furthermore, their authors do not seem to be convinced of the importance of bringing more women into the account of the past, as women's history is not much addressed, and women are not much mentioned. Even some famous women who have public squares and institutions named after them in Hungary are missing in the textbooks (for example, Zsuzsanna Kossuth, heroine of 1849, mentioned above). The two textbook series do not reflect on how gender norms have changed over the past two centuries in Hungary. This is surprising, as women's historiography in Hungary is relatively advanced and the results of research are constantly being published. In so doing, the Hungarian history textbooks seem to testify to an underlying conservative storyline, reflecting a very traditional view of, and role for, women in public life. Besides, the textbooks also offer a very nation-centric account. They do not make much connection between the national past and a more general (even Western) past, particularly not in relation to topics from women's history.

## Conclusions and discussion

This research examined how women in the past are represented in current (until 2023) Flemish and Hungarian secondary school history textbook accounts, in chapters about the Hungarian and (pre-)Belgian national past and about the past in general since 1750, and whether underlying patterns were to be found in those accounts.

A first conclusion is that women in both Flemish and Hungarian history textbooks are not mentioned much in the textbook accounts, either as individuals or as groups. Moreover, they appear more in the sources accompanying the learning texts than in the learning texts themselves. At the same time, however, there are differences to discern between the history textbooks in the two countries, in terms of how precisely they address women's history, and to what stage of academic historiography they relate.

In Flemish textbooks, a separate chapter is devoted to the struggle for women's votes and women's rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is the case in three of the four textbook series studied in Flanders: *Historia*, *Janus* and *Storia*. This seems to indicate that the textbook authors do recognise the importance of including women in their accounts of the past and attributing them more attention. The way they do this is in line with the second stage of academic historiography, in which academics paid more attention to women by 'adding' them to existing narratives. It is also in line with the conforming and reforming approaches, as described by [Osler \(1994\)](#). Women are added because the seemingly purely male narrative was perceived as problematic, but the conventional paradigm in which this is done remains. In only one textbook, *Passages*, is a different approach taken: the challenging approach in which gender is considered as a dynamic of history and a category of analysis. The question then arises as to what the distinguishing features are between *Passages*, which is the only textbook that adopts a true gender perspective, and the other three textbooks. Two factors emerge. The first is that no previous version of the *Passages* textbook existed. So, when this textbook was written around 2010, the authors were able to start from scratch, unhindered by the influence of previous versions. *Passages* does not constitute a palimpsest ([Christophe and Schwedes, 2015](#)). A second factor is that the process of 'alchemy' ([Popkewitz, 2004](#)) that takes place when academic knowledge is translated into textbooks for secondary education is less involved here, because *Passages*, unlike the other textbooks, was created from an academic perspective. The authors and the accompanying guiding team was not composed of secondary school teachers, but of academics familiar with the most recent insights and trends in historiography, both in women's and gender history, and in history in general. This shows how important the connection between the academic discipline and the school subject is, if one aims to avoid the pitfalls of the process of alchemy mentioned above.

Overall, Hungarian textbooks do not pay much attention to women and women's history. The learning texts hardly mention anything in this respect; however, the sources do, yet only to a very limited extent. This gives the impression that Hungarian textbook authors do not seem truly to recognise the importance of including women in their accounts of the past. In so doing, they relate to the first stage of academic historiography, in which women were hardly included in historiography, or not included at all. While several Hungarian historians meanwhile started to pay more attention to the role of women in the past, history textbooks did not reflect these changes. They also reflect a conforming approach, as they solely add women to existing content within conventional paradigms. These findings should not be reflected upon in themselves; they should be considered in relation to the NCC and its associated curriculum, issued by the government. Both the NCC and the related curriculum do not pay much attention to women's history, and, as a result, textbook authors are neither encouraged nor triggered to do so.

The latter finding brings us immediately to a second conclusion, which is that the history textbook accounts relate rather well to popular historical culture in both Flanders and Hungary. In Flanders, both in popular historical culture and in history education, the national past has to a large extent evaporated and has been integrated and dissolved in a larger Western (European) narrative. Furthermore, the two traditional types through which women used to be represented in historical culture still seem to resonate in the textbook accounts. The traditional 'queen type' remains present in the textbook accounts, with women both as political leaders and as wives/partners of leaders. The same applies to the 'heroine type' occurring in the textbooks, for instance, in the accounts of the First World War. At the same time, this finding should be nuanced, because the 'black legends', by contrast, have disappeared. Except for Lilian Baels, mentioned as the mistress and wife of Belgian King Leopold III during and after the Second World War, and mentioned as part of the explanation of the Royal Question which enormously divided

the country between 1945 and 1950, women are not attributed 'typically feminine' – read: negative – characteristics. Moreover, new categories occur, related to women playing an important role in societal life, such as scientists, artists and activists.

In Hungary, popular historical culture, or more precisely the political use of the past, is also reflected well in history education. The conservative policy of the current FIDESZ-led government, which considers women and their societal position in a traditional way, is continued in the newer history textbook accounts. Since neither the NCC nor the related curriculum initiate elements of a feminist narrative, or a narrative in which women play a considerable role, these are omitted in the state-approved textbooks. In addition to political and ideological reasons, social and professional conservatism also plays a significant role. Only two traditional types of women appear, scarcely: the queen type and the victim type. Some female political leaders are mentioned in the textbook accounts (as well as wives/partners of leaders); also, some women are presented as the victim of compulsion or violence by political power, or by men. It is significant that the heroine type, which is related to female agency, is disregarded by the textbooks, for instance, in the omission of female freedom fighters of 1848/9 and 1956. This can be interpreted as an illustration of, and evidence for, the existence of a traditional historical account in the Hungarian textbooks, because, according to the traditional gender norms, heroes and freedom fighters are/were brave, robust and powerful men, virtues not ascribed to women. Therefore, the women occurring in the account of the revolution of 1956 are represented at most as helpers of men. An exception in this respect is the mention of Anna Kéthly, a political leader during the revolution, but the textbooks do not explain what she did during and after the revolution.

A third conclusion is that underlying the textbook accounts, a different storyline is to be found. In the Flemish history textbook accounts (except for one), a Eurocentric narrative of progress can be identified. Indeed, more women are mentioned the closer the textbook accounts get to the present, and the storyline is one of more rights, freedoms and equality. The view of this evolution is a Eurocentric one: it is mainly in the West that the position of women is improving, in 'the rest of the world' (according to [Stuart Hall, 1992](#)) there is much more work to be done. Again, this demonstrates the intertwining of textbook accounts with representations of the past in popular historical culture, which also clung, and still cling, to a liberal narrative of progress. In Hungary, by contrast, the history textbook accounts are clearly nation-centred. They do not much connect the account of the national past with that of the more general, Western, past – neither in terms of similarities, nor in terms of differences. The second wave of feminism in the West, coinciding with the politics of 'centralised feminism' (with female equality as a label) in the Soviet bloc, were, for instance, neither confronted with nor compared to each other. As a result, they also could not reveal that the 'rehabilitation' of female fashion and a partly Western-inspired beauty ideal in Hungary in the 1960s was part of the policy of the so-called 'Goulash Communism' (a new way of political control and raising the living standard), and was less about free female choices or the female right to make decisions themselves. This illustrates that a national instead of a wider international perspective prevails in Hungarian history textbooks, combined with a conservative stance.

A fourth conclusion is that, despite the common history (at least for certain periods in the past) that both countries share, Flemish and Hungarian history textbooks have little in common, and do not testify to elements of a common, or joint, memory culture. It seems very clear that the common past that was shared is too remote to enable the creation of a common ground. By contrast, distinct, sometimes even contrasting, developments in the recent past and present day in Flanders and Hungary prevail over the shared past. Differences in the textbook accounts are, for instance, clearly connected to the tradition of liberal democracy and progressiveness in Flanders versus the heritage of communist dictatorship and the current conservative and controlling political regime in Hungary. They are also connected to differences in the extent of a national feeling. Whereas in Hungary a nation-state feeling is strongly present, in Flanders this has largely evaporated and been replaced by a Eurocentric (Western and Western European) orientation. All this explains why there is little similarity in the content of the textbooks as far as women's history is concerned.

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## Data and materials availability statement

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available in the repository: University Library of KU Leuven (<https://bib.kuleuven.be/pbib/collectie/hcppw>).

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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