

A TEACHER, A SCIENTIST, A WIFE: THE COMPLEX SELF OF JOSÉPHINE SCHOUTEDEN-WÉRY (1879-1954)

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ABSTRACT

In early twentieth-century Belgium, a number of women started careers in teaching and furthered their education at university. This article explores how one of them, Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry—a teacher, a botanist and wife of a successful zoologist—built her public image as a professional “teacher-scientist” by tapping into various pre-existing cultural repertoires for the female popular science writer and for the scientist. I examine how several elements were instrumental in this process, for both the making and the circulation of her public self. Attention is thus directed towards the opportunities provided by the ambiguity of the field as a place of biological research and teaching, the fluidity and uses of the persona of the explorer by scientists and non-scientists alike, and the different impacts of scientific sociability. It is argued that while Schouteden-Wéry strove to construct an independent and consistent public self as a scientist, a teacher, and a wife, the different sides of her multifaceted public self occasionally clashed with each other.

KEY WORDS

Gender; Women in Science; Place; Education; Identity; Persona; Botany; Field; Colonialism

In a letter dating from early February 1920, a request was sent to the Brussels local board for education:

I am delighted to bring to your attention that I have been appointed by the Ministry of Colonies as Botanist for the Congo biological mission which is to be led by my husband, Dr Schouteden, head of the Natural Sciences section at the Congo Museum. [...] This mission, which has received the highest royal approval [...] will last several months. I hereby request you to be so kind as to grant leave of absence, so as to fulfil the mission I have been given (Schouteden to the Echevin, AVB, 12/02/1920).¹

The sender, who defined herself as a scientist on a mission, was also a teacher. Born in Molenbeek in 1879, Joséphine Wéry graduated as a *régente* (a lower secondary school teacher) in 1900 and started teaching soon after. In 1902, she registered as a student in Botany at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, under the supervision of Jean Massart, a biologist and conservationist. She left university in 1906 without having completed her doctoral degree. She was then promoted to a tenure position at a school for girls and future female teachers, the *Cours d'éducation*. In 1908, Wéry married one of her fellow students, Dr Henri Schouteden, who

would soon become a renowned entomologist and zoologist, and the director of the Museum of the Belgian Congo. The couple never had children. Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry continued her research after the years she spent at university and published three scientific articles and two popular science books between 1904 and 1920. As the letter quoted above indicates, she participated in a scientific mission led by her husband in the Belgian Congo in 1920-1921. She retired in 1930 and devoted the following years to the writing of history books and of botanical articles in gardening magazines. She died in 1954 (Gubin 2006; Heizer & Cardoso Cerqueira 2014; Prigogine 1989).

Schouteden-Wéry's career path was not an exception. She was part of a generation of Belgian women with a strong interest in the life sciences who had careers as teachers as well as university educations. Historians have analysed the impact of women's increasing access to university on female professions, and especially on the gendered division of scientific work according to skills or fields perceived as being naturally feminine. Labelled as "women's work in science", such jobs included that of computer in observatories (which required patience, perseverance and a methodical approach) or positions in home economics or hygiene (Rossiter 1984, pp. 51-72). Sally Gregory Kohlsted has recently argued that, in the US, the nature study movement created "yet another niche for 'women's work in science'": many nature study teachers and supervisors were indeed women (Kohlsted 2010, esp. p. 146; 161).

The case of women's work in education is particularly interesting, as there was a pre-existing tradition of women popularisers of science. In the late eighteenth century, traditions of popular science writing had conveyed new templates for the scientific woman, and women built careers as science popularisers in the nineteenth century (Findlen 2003; Lightman 2007, pp. 95-166; Gates 1998). Women teachers' access to the academic sphere in the early twentieth century and career paths such as that of Schouteden-Wéry raise a number of questions for historians. How did they consider themselves and how were they perceived by their peers? Did they seek recognition for their work? How did their identity as single women, wives, or mothers interfere with their professional endeavours, be it as scientists or as teachers? What sort of tools do historians have at hand to think about such processes?

In reflecting upon how women built professional identities, and how their activities were pictured as scientific, the recent literature on scholarly personas is particularly useful. Scholarly personas are cultural templates used by individuals to fashion their public image. They are generic images, models shaped as much by institutions and professions as by other individuals, that "circulate across milieux and might be recognised by lay persons" (Algazi 2016, p. 13). As part of cultural repertoires, they are used by individuals like masks worn on a stage. However, rather than concealing the bearer's true self, they help construct his or her identity and act as a medium between the individual and his or her social context (Daston & Sibum 2003, p. 3). Examples of such scholarly personas include the explorer, the lab worker, and the *femme savante*. Personas can also be understood as clusters of virtues (such as meticulousness, perseverance, etc.) and skills (the ability to, say, collect plants correctly and experiment on them in the lab) embedded in those cultural models (Paul 2014, Paul 2016). Such sets of ideal attributes are cultivated by scholarly communities, and represent "what it takes" to be part of that community (Paul 2014, p. 363). In a similar fashion, gender historians have shown how "gender is done" by individuals by using "pre-existing gender scripts" (Bosch 2013, pp. 18-22).

Other contributions have stressed the connections between *place* and persona in the history of science. The field, for instance, was perceived as an ambiguous and less reliable site of knowledge production than the lab, notably because it was also visited by non-scientists (Kohler 2002, pp. 6-11). This prompted field scientists to put into place persona strategies that were

highly gendered. Naomi Oreskes (1996), in her seminal article on women's invisibility in science, demonstrated that masculine ideals of scientific heroism surrounding field work were central in the making of (male) scientific credibility. The impossibility for women "computers" of presenting themselves as heroic explorers in the field, Oreskes argued, helped make them invisible. Raf De Bont (2017) has further explored how virtues, space and gender intersect by contrasting women's documentation work—performed in the metropolis, away from the public eye—with the visibility of men's field work.

While these contributions have persuasively demonstrated that, in some instances, women's exclusion from field work had an impact on their visibility and credibility as scientists, I argue here that the ambiguity of the field could also provide an opportunity for women to present their work as being scientific as well as educational. The context of early twentieth-century Belgium particularly lends itself to this analysis. Field practices were viewed by Belgian biologists and naturalists at the time as instrumental for research as well as education, making it possible for women to position themselves as important actors in this field. On the other hand, the persona of the explorer was being increasingly used outside science by women who travelled to the Congo, notably for building a collective identity for Belgian "colonial women". Templates, models, personas, and virtue language were thus extensively circulated, hybridized and negotiated.

This article focuses on the ways a single individual, Schouteden-Wéry, constructed her public self over the course of her life. While personas are situated somewhere between the individual and the institutional level, they are best explored at the level of the individual's "self-fashioning" or "performance". As historian and theorist Herman Paul has argued (2016, p. 43), "histories of scholarly personae will never operate at an ideal-typical level but show in detail how scholars in the past found themselves torn between different, incompatible personae and wove their ways between them". This is precisely what is at stake here. As a (married) woman, a scientist and a teacher, Schouteden-Wéry strove to construct a consistent public self by tapping into a variety of pre-existing templates and cultural repertoires of virtues—a task that was not without struggle or inconsistencies. Schouteden-Wéry left behind a wealth of manuscripts and publications, in which she fashioned herself both directly—by using autobiographical elements in the text, mentioning her occupation on a book cover, etc.—and indirectly, by using a certain style and inscribing herself into former literary traditions.

I first look at Schouteden-Wéry's early years as a teacher and as a student. I examine how she promoted a "hybrid" persona, that of the "teacher-scientist", by using pre-existing templates and models for the scientist and the female popular science writer. The sources here are two handbooks she wrote on the subject of leading field trips in the Belgian countryside, based on trips performed with Jean Massart. I also show how the connections with the conservationism and educational activities of Massart, and the ways the field was used as a venue for scientific enquiry, sociability and teaching, were central in this "cultural cut and paste" (Daston & Sibum 2003, p. 5). Following this initial discussion, I examine how this image evolved after the First World War through two publications about her trip to the Congo, *Lettres Africaines* (1920-1921) and *Souvenirs d'Afrique* (1938-1949). In both, Schouteden-Wéry made use of the persona of the explorer. In the third section of the article, I look at the way she advocated for her status as a "teacher-scientist" in her exchanges with the administration that employed her as a teacher, through two series of letters written ten years apart. The first series of letters related to the negotiation of the conditions for her mission (1920-1921), and the second series at obtaining a raise in her pension given her academic experience (1930). Schouteden-Wéry's letters provide helpful insights into the negotiation of new templates between individuals and institutions (Wils & Huistra 2016) and Schouteden-Wéry's views of her

own career. The final portion of this article explores how her public self as a teacher-scientist coexisted with her status as scientist's wife through patterns of scientific sociability. The article ends by considering to the relative success of Josephine's self-fashioning and to some concluding remarks.

UNIVERSITY, THE FIELD AND THE ADVENT OF THE "TEACHER-SCIENTIST"

Belgian women started gaining access to careers in non-denominational education in the 1860s, when education for girls became a primary concern for the liberal and anticlerical bourgeoisie. The main issues at stake were the fear of conversion to Catholicism due to the lack of education of future mothers, and the growing idea that women could have a major impact on the next generation of (male) decision-makers. In this context, several schools called *Cours d'Education*, providing both a lower secondary education (*école moyenne*) and training for primary school teachers (*école normale d'institutrices*), were founded from 1864 onwards (Gubin, Piette & Van den Dungen 2004, pp. 29-46). Twenty years later, sections for the training of lower secondary school teachers (*régentes*) opened, and universities started welcoming their first female students: Emma Leclercq, a primary school teacher, was admitted to the Natural Sciences Faculty of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)*—the academic stronghold of the Belgian liberal bourgeoisie—in October 1880 (Gubin, Piette & Van den Dungen 2004, p. 55). Almost a quarter of women students who registered at the *ULB* over the following years already held a teaching degree (Despy-Meyer 1980, p. XII).

There were several reasons why women graduated as teachers before going to university at this time, the main one being that, although many men were teachers, this career fitted well with ideals of feminine, motherly work directed towards education. The idea that women's primary role was to be home-makers, wives, and mothers would prevail at least into the late 1920s and early 1930s, and feminist organisations such as the *Conseil National des Femmes belges*—for which Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry was president of the Education Committee—supported women's employment in typically feminine jobs such as sewing (Jacques 2013, pp. 52-53, 127-128). By 1930, 64% of all teachers in Belgium were women (Jacques 2013, p. 155). In this context, university was seen as a way to further one's knowledge and possibly climb the teaching career ladder (Despy-Meyer 1980, pp. 62-72). Also, before 1920 and the opening of a complete secondary curriculum for girls, becoming a teacher was the best available preparation for university (Gubin, Piette & Van den Dungen 2004, pp. 61, 125).

At the *Université Libre*, in the early twentieth century, most female students joined the Natural Sciences Faculty (Despy-Meyer 1980, p. XII). Schouteden-Wéry was one of them, and the impact the university curriculum had on her career and the way she presented herself was at least twofold. First, her collaboration and friendship with Jean Massart (1865-1925) allowed her to build a public self that consisted of a cross between a populariser and a scientist. Second, her connections to the academic world would enhance her public image as a teacher.

Jean Massart (1865-1925) was a physiologist-turned-naturalist and professor of botany at the *ULB* who had a broad interest in the field that he shared with the wider public in general and with women (teachers) in particular. Massart's main scientific interest was geobotany, the study of plant distribution over a certain territory in order to understand the connection between plant growth, the soil and the climate. His students took part in his work in this area: Schouteden-Wéry, for instance, published a long article about the factors for algae distribution on the Belgian coast. This contribution, for which Schouteden-Wéry had done work in the lab and in the field over several years, was explicitly framed as a step towards Massart's desire to draw the geobotanical map of Belgium (Schouteden-Wéry 1911, p. 101). Massart also thought

that the field was a good place to teach, and often went on trips with his students (*Inauguration*, 1933, pp. 13-14). His interest in education went beyond his duties as a university professor: he led excursions for the wider public, designed gardens for secondary schools, and published several popular science books (Denaeyer-De Smet, Herremans & Vermander, 2006, pp. 30-32; Stynens 2006, pp. 705-708). Massart was also directly involved with the sphere of female education: he was an inspector for the *Cours d'éducation*, and conducted field trips with school girls (Stockmans 1968, p. 725; Hens, Vanden Borre & Wils 2014, p. 33).

Massart's interest in the field meant that he also was a strong advocate for nature conservation (Denaeyer-De Smet, Herremans & Vermander, 2006). In 1912, he wrote *Pour la protection de la Nature en Belgique*, which pleaded for the creation of nature reserves. His activism could have been perceived as opposed to the scientists' expected virtues of detachedness and objectivity; he therefore carefully depicted the field as a source of (scientific) truth where evolution could be seen in action (De Bont & Heynickx 2012, p. 238). While he distanced himself from the outspoken sentimentality of other nature protection organisations, he was also in touch with associations that were far from being exclusively populated by scientists. These included *Le Nouveau Jardin Pittoresque*, which aimed at promoting the making of "natural" gardens, and *Les Amis de la Forêt de Soignes*, a circle of artists and politicians who sought to protect a forest close to Brussels (De Bont & Heynickx 2012; Notteboom 2006, p. 34). Schouteden-Wéry regularly contributed to these two associations' publications and, along with other women close to Massart, was actively involved in a new naturalists' society that was particularly aimed at women, children and teachers, *L'Aquarium pour tous* (L'Aquarium 1916, pp. 5-7). In short, Massart's field-based scientific, political, and educational agendas did not seem incompatible, but rather consistent with one another. This interest in the field, as we have seen, extended beyond the academic sphere, and women were important actors in the process.

This interplay between field work, teaching and research, academia and the wider public, and the role of women in these knowledge-making and transfer processes are exemplified in a series of accounts of day trips led by Massart for the *Extension de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles*—the university's organisation for the diffusion of academic knowledge (De Bont 2015, p. 102). These excursions were virtual field-based lessons in botany, in which both Massart's students and the wider public, including (female) secondary school teachers, took part (Stockmans 1968, p. 725). They were all recorded in four thick volumes entitled *Excursions scientifiques organisées par l'Extension de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles* and written by three women close to Massart: Schouteden-Wéry, Jeanne Barzin—a *régente* at the *Cours d'Éducation*—and Mrs Lefebvre, the president of the *Nouveau Jardin Pittoresque* (*Excursions* 1906-1913; Notteboom 2012, p. 24). Such collaborations with women for the writing of educational and reference works would continue after the war: in 1920, he co-wrote a guide to the destroyed towns and the battlefields of Belgium with yet another *régente*, Henriette Dirckx-Coenraets (Hens, Vanden Borre & Wils 2014, pp. 33-37).

Schouteden-Wéry's two accounts provide long and easy-to-read descriptions of both the excursionist's experience in the field and descriptions of the vegetation as it was encountered, with full morphological and physiological details of the plants' relations to their environment. From a narrative point of view, the *Excursions* are reminiscent of the annual accounts of trips that figured in learned societies publications, describing the excursionists' day out, and their observations, starting and finishing with the train journey out of and back to the city. It is also reminiscent of former templates of feminine popular science, which itself used the 'wanderings through nature' sub-genre as a literary template.

Women had written works of popular science since the late eighteenth century and had gained a certain authority in this field, notably by “establish[ing] a set of narrative paradigms which in the end they made their own” (Gates 1998, p. 37). Until the 1840s, most of these stories were framed as a dialogue between a mother and her children at home. In the mid-nineteenth century, women popularisers sought to broaden their audience, and these new writers used journeying as their literary template (Gates 1998, p. 44-48; Lightman 2007, p. 132-133). Such traditions of feminine popular science writing allowed women to build identities as popularisers but also conveyed in-text models for the engagement of women in science, by showing the mother as an authoritative source of knowledge (Lightman 2007, p. 21). In many ways, Schouteden-Wéry's published works belonged to this tradition, which placed her as a populariser rather than a scientist. Like many female popularisers before her, she defined her audience in her introduction, and gave her definition a slightly moralistic tone: the *Relations* were aimed at excursionists, teachers, and those who were “attracted by things other than mundane distractions” (Lightman 2007, pp. 123-126; Schouteden-Wéry 1913, p. XIII).

Her position as an educator was made clear by the mention of her occupation as a teacher at the *Cours d'Education* on both book covers. Yet the quality of her explanation of biological processes and the scientific vocabulary she used placed her in a different position from that of her female populariser predecessors: it displayed her level of education, her relation with Massart, and her contacts with the academic world. Her connection with Massart would be reaffirmed during social occasions and ceremonies for which she wrote speeches where she reminded the public that she had been his student and collaborator (*Inauguration*, 1933, pp. 4-5; *Discours* 1938, p. 4).

The excursions were an opportunity for Schouteden-Wéry to write popular science, and like her predecessors, explain nature *in nature*—in the field. Yet the field was also where she and Massart performed research. As a “border-line” space of scientific enquiry, education and leisure, it provided a remarkable stage on which Schouteden-Wéry could perform as both a scientist and as an educator: she could display the skills and virtues pertaining to both roles in a single setting. On the one hand, Massart's interest in geobotanical studies gave Schouteden-Wéry a way to show her scientific accuracy, thoroughness, and objectivity, and display her plant identification and analytical skills through her scientific contributions. On the other hand, Massart's interest in education corresponded with Schouteden-Wéry's background as a teacher, and the pre-existing tradition of travel writing as a feminine popular science template allowed her to display field-based educational skills.

A TRAVELLER AND NATURALIST IN THE CONGO

The influence of travel writing as a literary template for feminine popular science on Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry's writing and self-fashioning would be all the more visible after the war, in her account of her 1920-1921 journey to the Congo. The *Lettres Africaines* were first published in *La Gazette* during her trip, and later proudly advertised as the “first feminine *reportage* in the Colony”. They were then almost entirely re-written and published in the *Bulletin de l'Union des femmes coloniales*, under the title *Souvenirs d'Afrique* in the form of a serial between 1938—the year she became the temporary president of the *Union*—and 1949.²

Unlike Schouteden-Wéry's previous written work, these pieces were autobiographical and allowed a more direct self-fashioning relying on an old, highly flexible template: that of the explorer. In the 1920s, this persona and its associated ideas of adventure and danger were put to use not only in the scientific academic sphere but also in women's travel writing and colonial gender politics. In all three, hagiographic figures such as Stanley and Livingstone loomed large.

The brochure advertising Schouteden's mission—a copy of which was sent to Schouteden-Wéry's employer, the local board for education, and was kept in her file—relied extensively on quotations of Stanley's descriptions of the grandeur of nature in the Congo, so as to demonstrate the importance of studying colonial flora and fauna on site (*Un projet* 1919, pp. 5-15).

Attention has already been brought to the ways narratives surrounding the roles of explorer's wives during expeditions were crucial in the self-fashioning of these women themselves but also of other women, inside and outside science. Donna Haraway has shown how the two wives of Carl Akeley, naturalist-explorer for the American Museum of Natural History, contributed to the making of the complex gendered narratives of their participation in their husband's field expeditions, oscillating between being his equals in adventurous hunting sessions to acting as important camp managers (Haraway 1984, pp. 43-49). The life and adventures of other women, such as Mary Moffat (Livingstone's wife), were instrumental in the making of a persona for the female explorer for francophone women travel writers in the 1920s (Venayre 2008).

Moffat and Belgian women "pioneers" were also used as models of behaviour for Belgian colonial women in the publications of the newly founded *Union des femmes coloniales belges*. In its *Bulletin*, Moffat was described as a courageous yet modest wife who followed her husband through the jungle, while teaching needle skills to young ladies, looking after children, and providing food to the poor (Lejeune 1938). Such a template was found in other narratives for the role of the naturalist-explorers' wives, whose "domestic and quiet lives" were put in contrast with "the perilous work of the manly explorer" (Herzig 2005, p. 81). Founded at a time when women were increasingly accompanying their husbands to the Belgian Congo, the *Union* helped women find meaning for their lives in the Colonies: as dedicated wives, their main role was to assist their husbands, sanitise the colonial milieu and "civilise the black". A collective identity was created for the women who, regardless of the time spent in the Congo, all shared the same unifying experience (Jacques & Piette 2004, pp. 98-104).

The fluidity and importance of a template such as that of the explorer could prove particularly useful for people who, like Schouteden-Wéry, built their public self at the intersection between several spheres—yet it also yielded a certain ambiguity that could prove detrimental to their image. The two versions of Schouteden-Wéry's travel account reflect this: she navigates between presenting herself as a mere travel-writer accompanying her husband, and as an educator, and as a scientist, all aspects of roles that are infused with the exciting flavour of exploration. Most interestingly, the *Lettres Africaines* were published under a female pseudonym: "Munia". The letters contained no allusion to the identity of either the writer or her husband. This was an anonymous feminine travel account: the author's interest in the Congolese flora and fauna was described in only one of the first ten "letters". Only a depiction of Léo Errera as a remarkable man of science allowed the reader to guess that the writer had connections with the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* ('Lettres', 21st August 1920).

In the later version, however, Schouteden-Wéry changed both audiences—from the general public to current and future colonial women—and purposes—from simple story-telling to education. Slight tensions arose regarding the way she presented herself, her relation with her husband and the purpose of the article. The first episode of the *Souvenirs* resembled the version published in the *Gazette*—Schouteden-Wéry described the landscapes she encountered and her feelings in a highly lyrical fashion—and she introduced her testimony by stating that she hoped it would spark "interest in [...] women [...] in the prodigious Congolese nature", and set a clear hierarchy between her role and her husband's during the mission: "I was a mere traveller in the Congo. I was accompanying my husband during one of his missions as an expert

naturalist" ('Souvenirs', January 1938, p. 4). In the third episode of the series, however, she openly refashioned the way she presented her journey, the nature of her relation with her husband during the trip, and the aim of her *Souvenirs*:

As I told you before, we were both taking part in this mission as biologists passionate about nature. Therefore, I feel it to be my duty to provide you with a biologist's account of this journey. My *Souvenirs* will thus differ from more classic accounts of our colony in which landscape impressions, ethnic observations, or economic matters take pride of place. Moreover, there is nothing more captivating than real stories about plants and beasts. [...] For these reasons, and while I shall spare you the scientific jargon that puts off so many people wishing to instruct themselves in zoology and in botany, I promise I shall tell you the life story of my plant and animal characters by always remaining truthful ('Souvenirs', April 1938, p. 6)

Having now thoroughly redefined herself as a scientist and populariser, she gave most of the following episodes the form of natural history lessons, while comparisons between the Congolese and Belgian coasts and allusions to Massart reminded the reader of the author's academic past ('Souvenirs', August 1938, p. 5). The *Souvenirs*, however, were written in a feminine, feelings-laden style, and distilled messages that coincided with the journal's agenda. Colours, smells and sights were described in a vivid fashion, anthropomorphized plants delivered lessons about motherhood, and her dangerous crossing of a river at dawn is complete only once she sees her husband—her "lord and master"—reaching the other bank ('Souvenirs', January 1939, p. 5). Schouteden-Wéry's style was later praised in an article devoted to her in the *Bulletin*: "her science is far from dry; rather, it is lively, sensitive and feminine, and awakens a curiosity for things of nature in young girls that they will retain for their entire life" ('Madame Schouteden' 1952, p. 6).

Almost twenty years after her journey, Schouteden-Wéry relied more than ever on feminine templates of popular science, while defining herself as a scientist. Her desire to present herself as both an educator and a scientist was all the more visible in her correspondence with another, less public audience: the local board for education that employed her as a teacher. In her letters, Schouteden-Wéry explicitly defined herself as a scientist but also implicitly referred to virtues and qualities that were increasingly associated with the scientist: travelling, publishing, and obtaining funding. The letters also show that several versions of the "teacher-scientist" model were used by women at the time, with varying degrees of success: what it took to be considered as a good teacher and the impact of academic standards on those models were changing.

THE "TEACHER-SCIENTIST": AN INSTITUTIONAL NEGOTIATION

Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry first series of letters started with the request for a leave of absence featured at the beginning of this article. The leave was granted but she was informed that her salary would be suspended during her journey. Unhappy with this decision, Schouteden-Wéry reminded the *échevin* that she was still a scientist performing experimental research in the lab and that she was a published author, and wrote:

I am telling you all this, *Monsieur l'échevin*, to show that really, I work a lot, and that it might not be without reason that I have been appointed as botanist for this mission [...], also to prove that I am particularly attached to the popularization [*vulgarisation*] of better science teaching, and that one can expect from me serious efforts [...]. You can now judge for yourself whether the leave of absence I have requested is a mere whim [...] or rather an opportunity

for hard scientific labour that deserves to be supported by your administration.
(Schouteden-Wéry to the *Echevin*, AVB, 15/03/1920)

Matters were made worse upon her return, when Schouteden-Wéry realised that her colleague, Alice Scouart (1885-1932), had received part of her teacher's salary as well as a grant from the University Foundation—a new funding body—for her stay at the University of Berkeley that same year. Scouart and Schouteden-Wéry knew each other: they were both teachers who had furthered their training at the *Université Libre*—Scouart had graduated in physics and mathematics in 1911 (Dupont-Bouchat & Nandrin, 2006)—and both had taken part in Massart's excursions. While Schouteden-Wéry acknowledged in her letters that the two trips were very different—“Mrs Scouart spent a year studying in America whereas I studied our Colony's flora and fauna for nine months” (Schouteden-Wéry to the *Echevin*, AVB, 21/04/1921)—and despite a supporting letter from the head of their school contending that the two women should receive equal treatment, the administration did not consider the two cases to be equal.

The second series of letters was written when Schouteden-Wéry retired, just after academic degrees had started to be taken into account in the calculation of pensions for teachers. Schouteden-Wéry, unlike Scouart, had not graduated. However, she considered she should benefit from the same advantages as graduates: she had published, and had been Massart's assistant, and had taken all the courses leading to the degree. The only reason why she had not sat the final exams was that, according to one of the *ULB* professors, “it did not seem useful at the time” (A. Lameere to Mr Tils, AVB, 13/02/1930). According to her this proved her dedication to science and teaching: “I have done my work in the University laboratory, not out of ambition but out of pure scientific interest and in the best interest of my educational work” (Schouteden-Wéry to the *Echevin*, AVB, 20/02/1930).

In her letters, Schouteden-Wéry pictured herself as a selfless, hardworking (lab) scientist. Both requests displayed at length her acquaintance with the scientific sphere, and were supported by a number of letters from *Université Libre* academics, including Massart. This, she argued, “prove[d] without doubt that the University of Brussels ha[d] always considered [her] as one of them”—even twenty-five years after leaving university (Schouteden-Wéry to the *Echevin*, AVB, 20/02/1930). Her correspondence also points to a willingness to display qualities pertaining to the scientific sphere, such as fundability and “publishability”.

Schouteden-Wéry's request that her wages be maintained during her trip to the Congo was unlikely to have stemmed purely from fear of financial hardship, as her husband received considerable funding for the mission. It may have been related to the rise of fundability and travel as two important elements in scientific careers at the time. Pieter Huistra and Kaat Wils (2016, pp. 115-117) have recently shown how the creation of funding bodies such as the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF) and the University Foundation in Belgium in the 1920s led to the emergence of having travelled to the US and having received funding for one's research as two important qualities in the building of men's and women's scientific personas. Not being paid for research was increasingly seen as a sign of amateurism. At the same time, the importance of publications as a proof of recognition and as an element of the “teacher-scientist template” is relatively unsurprising. Since the late nineteenth century at least, the circulation of scientific ideas in dedicated journals and reviews by an increasingly separate sphere of professional scientists was paramount in the making of its identity (Gates 1998, p. 83).

The promotion of the “teacher-scientist” model did not bear the expected fruit for Schouteden-Wéry: both her requests were rejected. Her status as a “teacher-scientist” was not as convincing as that of Scouart, who held a doctoral degree, had received funding, and had travelled to the United States. Schouteden-Wéry had not graduated, and her collaborations with

Massart and Errera were unofficial: the *ULB* admitted that no contract could be found and that Wéry must have been Massart's "private assistant" (A. Lameere to Mr Tils, AVB, 3/03/1930). Her stress on the work done in the lab, a place of more scientific authority than the classroom or the field, is telling, but apparently did not make a difference.

Another element was detrimental to her: the administration considered she was first and foremost accompanying her husband to the Congo. Unlike most of the women surrounding Massart and the majority of her colleagues at the *Cours d'éducation* (including Scouvert) she was a married woman—a scientist's wife. This suggests that while general views of women's social role led most of them to embrace teaching careers regardless of their marital status, it did not mean that this marital status did not matter. Women had different opportunities according to whether they were single or married and whether or not they had children. As Herman Paul has rightly noted, "scholarly personae exist among other personae or culturally sanctioned scripts for how to be a neighbor, a father, a mother, and so forth", and while the two types of personae might "live in peaceful harmony", they are most likely to be "in tension" with one another (Paul 2014, p. 356). This multiplicity of personae was undoubtedly at work for Schouteden-Wéry.

THE WIFE

To a certain extent, Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry worked hard at promoting a public image based on her personal career and distinct from her role as her husband's wife. The general context was not especially favourable. Negative views of married women's work loomed large in Belgium between the wars. Belgian married women could not receive their own salary before 1932—a right granted to French women in 1907—and could not practise a profession without the husband's permission before 1958 (Jacques 2014, pp. 138-148). Schouteden-Wéry had started publishing before she married (Wéry, 1904) and combined her maiden and her married name in all her publications afterwards. Her publications generally display an image of an independent woman with her own career as a "teacher-scientist", with few mentions of her husband, even in the Congo pieces.

The fact that the two spouses had different scientific interests—Henri Schouteden was an entomologist and zoologist while his wife focused on botany—arguably gave her room for the making of an independent "scientific" public self and meant that their collaboration was situated more at the level of career-building and practicalities than actual research. While Schouteden was on his second mission to the Congo in 1924-1925, his wife would visit the museum often, making sure all the material he needed was duly sent, and preventing allegedly ill-intentioned colleagues from taking decisions that might be detrimental to his career (Schouteden-Wéry to Schouteden, MRAC, 1924-1925)³. This role as a supportive wife also needed to be combined with her professional "teacher-scientist" template. The interplay between the two sides of her life and public image are visible in the different ways Schouteden-Wéry became involved in a variety of learned societies, associations, and political organisations.

Learned societies were a venue for scientific collaboration as well as social encounter, in which the two spouses would become involved differently according to how it served their career. While both were presented by Massart to the *Société Royale de Botanique de Belgique* in 1904, it was Schouteden-Wéry, the botanist of the two, who quickly became a member of the Society's board. Conversely, her husband held important administrative duties at the *Société Malacologique et Zoologique de Belgique* and the *Société entomologique de Belgique*, and Schouteden-Wéry became a member of these two societies first and foremost as his wife. Such contrasting roles are also visible in the ways the spouses were involved in the congresses of entomology and botany that were held in Brussels in 1910. In the first instance, Schouteden was

heavily involved in the organisation, while Schouteden-Wéry fulfilled social duties, such as taking part in social events and joining a small “Committee of Ladies” who made sure the wives and daughters of the participants found their way around the city (Severin 1912, p. 32). Conversely, during the botany congress, Schouteden-Wéry was a member of the organising committee and actively participated in the debates regarding the creation of new curricula for the teaching of botany in schools, while Schouteden was simply listed as an attendee (De Wildeman 1910, pp. 33, 324-325).

During the war and in the interwar years, Schouteden-Wéry turned also to organisations devoted to popularization, women’s education and—following her husband’s professional turn—the colonial enterprise. Both spouses took up duties in the newly founded naturalist society *L’Aquarium pour tous*. It was Schouteden-Wéry, however, who became a board member of this society when it changed its name to *Les Naturalistes belges* after the war. By 1924, she was a member of the *Conseil général de la Ligue de l’Enseignement*, and obtained positions in a number of moderate feminist organisations related to women’s education, such as the *Union des Femmes Coloniales* (UFC), the *Conseil National des Femmes belges* and the Belgian *Lycéum Club* (‘Madame’ 1952, p. 6; Soyer 1996, p. 156). In all these later activities, Schouteden-Wéry was acting on her own, building her persona as an educator with a career while conforming to the idea that a woman’s primary role in society was that of a dedicated spouse.

The patterns of affiliation of the two spouses show that on some occasions, Schouteden-Wéry “acted” as her husband’s wife, while on others she performed as a “teacher-scientist”. In this respect, the benefits of being involved in learned societies were twofold. On the one hand, it allowed her to present herself as formally belonging to a number of (scientific) communities. Her membership and administrative functions became an integral part of her persona, and she would mention them in her letters. On the other, it allowed her to circulate this public image through the organisation’s publications, social events and conferences: both Scouart and Schouteden-Wéry displayed their performance as brave naturalists in the field by giving talks to the *Société Royale de Botanique de Belgique* after their travels in 1921 (‘Assemblée’ 1923).

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION: BEING REMEMBERED

The varying success of Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry’s self-promotion as a “teacher-scientist” is reflected in the ways others talked about her, both during and after her life-time. Most commentators were colleagues or biographers of Henri Schouteden who almost systematically placed Schouteden-Wéry back in the domestic setting, relying on the dated template of the *salonnière*. She was described as “good fairy of the director’s home”—and as a wife who had bravely travelled with her husband in order to support him (*Hommage* 1954, pp. 37-40). Likewise, a later biographer of Schouteden described her as a “born naturalist [and] an understanding wife who gave him help and affectionate support” (Prigogine 1989, p. 340). Another, who also mistook her first name for Jeanne, contended that “[e]veryone would talk of Mrs Schouteden’s *salon* as one would of those of the great ladies of the 18th century” (Basilewski 1980, p. 605). Her past occupation as a teacher and her scientific research seemed to have been forgotten by her husband’s collaborators. Yet the obituaries which were published after her death in *Le Soir*—a widely read newspaper—and in the *Bulletin de l’Union des femmes coloniales* both celebrated her university background, her career as a teacher, her publications, her connection to the *Union*, and her collaborations with Massart and Errera (‘Un grand deuil’ 1954; *Le Soir*, 8 December 1954).

In many ways, Schouteden-Wéry sought to promote a public image as a “teacher-scientist”, by writing popular science based on pre-existing feminine literary templates while at the same time displaying the qualities expected from a scientist, such as experience in the field and in the lab, fundability, travel and collaboration with eminent biologists. Yet her use of fluid cultural models such as that of the explorer, and of the field as a place of both scientific enquiry and education, was only mildly successful. It allowed her to combine different aspects of her public self, but did not completely succeed in promoting an image of her as a scientist to a wide audience. Her marital status, while being an integral part of her complex public image, was also occasionally at odds with her image as an independent professional teacher and scientist. Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry’s self-fashioning resulted in the circulation of a multiplicity of public images of herself rather than embodying a single and consistent model for the (married) female teacher with a university education.

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END NOTES

¹ In all following in-text references, ‘AVB’ refers to Joséphine Schouteden-Wéry’s administrative file as a teacher: Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles (AVB), Département de l’Instruction publique, Dossiers du Personnel, Lettre S (4), AVB IP II 1304/12.

² Munia [Schouteden-Wéry, J], ‘Lettres Africaines’, *La Gazette*, 9 July 1920 to 20 August 1920, hereafter ‘Lettres’; Schouteden-Wéry, J, ‘Souvenirs d’Afrique’, *Bulletin de l’Union des Femmes Coloniales*, January 1938 to 1949, hereafter ‘Souvenirs’.

³ Correspondence Henri Schouteden, Musée Royal de l’Afrique centrale (MRAC)

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