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# Women in Brussels street names. Topography of a minoritisation

*Les femmes dans le nom des rues bruxelloises. Topographie d'une minorisation*  
*Vrouwen in Brusselse straatnamen. Topografie van een minorisering*

**Nouria Ouali, Pierre Lannoy, Virginie Desamoury, Sandrine Guillaume,  
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## Introduction

- 1 It is recognised that urban space is not neutral and that it is marked by the hierarchies and multiple inequalities which permeate society [Clerval *et al.*, 2015]: gender relations – like class or race relations – materialise in the city, transforming it into a symbolically meaningful space. Recent controversies over the naming of streets, prompted by feminist organisations in Brussels and around the world, have highlighted the gendered nature of urban toponyms, i.e. the names given to a city's streets [Badariotti, 2002]. Street space generally features male and bourgeois figures [Dobruszkes, 2010], revealing the strong socio-political tradition of the cult of “great men” [Sniter, 2004], which leaves little room in the toponymic landscape for women, the working classes [Steffens, 2007] and the ethnic [Jacobs, 2018] and sexual minorities.
- 2 The study presented here was carried out by a team of teaching staff and students from Université libre de Bruxelles, in the framework of a seminar entitled “Genre et Ville” between February and April 2020. This information comes from a systematic survey of toponyms, documentary research, in situ observations and interviews with elected representatives or civil servants in the various municipalities of Brussels. The study does not aim to retrace the history of street naming or to present a morphological analysis of it, but to set a quantitative overview of female and male toponyms as well as a qualitative analysis of the practices of the municipal authorities with regard to street naming, based on an exhaustive survey of street names in the Brussels-Capital Region (hereafter BCR). The objective is to grasp what the negligible share of female

anthroponyms reveals about gender relations within the urban space and to decrypt what these “street names say about the city” [Bouvier, 2007].

## 1. Women in street toponymy

- 3 The examination of urban odonyms from a gender perspective is a continuation of the pioneering work of francophone feminist historians and geographers who have examined the place of women in the city [Coutras, 1987, 1996, 2003; Tardy *et al.*, 1993; Perrot, 1998], as well as the “androcentric” bias of social science epistemologies in the analysis of urban space [Hancock, 2004; Rey 2002], where gender relations have been ignored for longer than they have been in the fields of work, family or politics [Coutras, 2004].
- 4 While the dominant discourse on the city had presented the urban space as a place of vice, corruption and social disorder for women, the question posed by feminist history and geography was whether the city was a place of emancipation for women, as the literature reveals for the period from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to World War I. Feminist historians are surprised first of all by the lack of interest in research on women in the city, given that feminism is primarily an urban phenomenon and that the use and appropriation of the city from the perspective of social classes and ethnic groups was already being analysed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [Gubin, 1993a]. They also point out a paradox between the significant historical presence of women in the city since the 19<sup>th</sup> century through economic, cultural, religious and political activities and their invisibility in the materiality of urban space (statues, paintings) [Sniter, 2004] and, in particular, in urban toponymy [Richard, 2001; Gubin, 2006].<sup>1</sup>
- 5 In the case of BCR, initial work on women and the city began in the 1990s at two international conferences, one held in Brussels [Gubin and Nandrin, 1993] and the other in Marseille [Knibiehler and Gubin, 1993], in a comparative perspective of the two cities. These conferences examined the material and symbolic spaces occupied by women, the activities they carry out, the places of power they work in or are absent from, including the planning and organisation of the city, and the impact of this “area of emancipation” on the transformation of family and social roles. The analysis of urban odonyms from a gender perspective was not yet available at the time. Thirteen years later, Eliane Gubin [2006] made a mixed assessment despite the promising avenues of research identified at the conference and the international political and institutional (UN, OECD) context which was favourable regarding this topic. The essentially masculine character of the historiography is based on a survey of street names in the historical centre of Brussels; the smallest share of this historiography is reserved for “exceptional” women such as queens, princesses and sometimes artists or martyrs. Apart from a few religious congregations, queens and war heroines, the street names do not really honour women [Gubin, 2006: 102].
- 6 In a number of cities, this issue is often put on the agenda by feminist activist movements; this is the case in Brussels with Noms Peut-Être and L'architecture qui dégenre, which denounce the denial of women in history and their recognition in the urban space. For the municipality of Saint-Gilles, Dejemepe [2017: 28] also acknowledges the disproportion between female and male names (3 compared to 74), underlining “the exceptional quality” of the women honoured (such as Marie Janson) “in absence of quantity”.

## 2. Street names in BCR in 2020

### 2.1. Methodology and context

- 7 Following the example of the work carried out by Gubin [2006], we have established the most exhaustive survey possible of street names in the 19 Brussels municipalities in order to quantify the proportions of female and male odonyms. It concerns inhabited roads (avenues, boulevards, roadways, tree-lined drives, squares and streets) as well as parks, road tunnels, roundabouts, quays, passages, paths, alleys and footpaths. The denominations considered here include the proper names of people whose existence is recognised; the names of groups (Touristes, Vieillards, Relais des Dames), communities or professions (Gaulois, Bouchers, Pilote); isolated first names (Paule or Salome) or unidentifiable characters (La Fiancée); religious, mythological or literary figures (Notre-Dame, Bacchantes, La Belle au Bois dormant). Roads bearing the surname of a couple for which the woman's maiden name is next to the man's name have been counted as both female and male street names, as the aim is to measure the probability of finding a street with a female name or a male name in a given municipality; the names of couples are therefore included in both of these categories. On the other hand, if the name only mentions the wife's first name or title, for example Boulevard Maria Groeninckx-De May (1070) or Square Princesse Jean de Mérode (1040), the street is then counted only among the streets with female names. There are also eleven roads spread over several municipalities, which we have counted in each municipality where they are located; however, they are only counted once in the regional total.<sup>2345</sup>

### 2.2. General picture: overwhelming number of male street names

- 8 As the municipalities are very different from one another in terms of their surface area (32 km<sup>2</sup> for Brussels City, 1,14 km<sup>2</sup> for Saint-Josse), the volume of their population (180 000 for Brussels City, 8 200 for Evere, in 2019) and the number of roads (1 197 for Brussels City, 71 for Koekelberg), it is absolutely necessary to compare the proportions of streets with female and male names, and not just the absolute figures (see table 1).<sup>6</sup>

Table 1. The municipalities of Brussels categorised according to the proportion of female odonyms

1. MUNICIPALITY	2. Total number of roads	3. Roads with anthroponym (proportion)	4. Female odonyms (total number)	5. Female odonyms (proportion of all roads)	6. Male odonyms (proportion of all roads)
BRUSSELS (1000)	730	44%	51	7 %	36,8 %
FOREST	195	50%	13	6,7 %	43,6 %
JETTE	195	81%	12	6,2 %	74,9 %

<b>WOLUWE-ST-LAMBERT</b>	269	45%	14	5,2 %	39,4 %
<b>UCCLE</b>	465	49%	24	5,2 %	44,3 %
<b>GANSHOREN</b>	118	60%	6	5,1 %	55 %
<b>BRUSSELS (Laeken-NOH-Haeren)</b>	367	40%	17	4,6 %	35,7 %
<b>IXELLES</b>	324	53%	14	4,3 %	48,7 %
<b>KOEKELBERG</b>	71	61%	3	4,2 %	56,3 %
<b>MOLENBEEK</b>	288	53%	12	4,2 %	48,6 %
<b>WATERMAEL</b>	255	21%	10	3,9 %	16,8 %
<b>WOLUWE-ST-PIERRE</b>	305	49%	11	3,6 %	44,9 %
<b>BERCHEM-STE-AGATHE</b>	112	33%	4	3,6 %	29,4 %
<b>SAINT-GILLES</b>	158	52%	4	2,5 %	49,3 %
<b>ETTERBEEK</b>	201	67%	5	2,5 %	64,6 %
<b>AUDERGHEM</b>	246	64%	6	2,4 %	61,4 %
<b>ANDERLECHT</b>	487	45%	10	2,1 %	42,9 %
<b>SCHAERBEEK</b>	339	76%	6	1,8 %	73,7 %
<b>SAINT-JOSSE</b>	119	46%	2	1,7 %	44,5 %
<b>EVERE</b>	166	48%	2	1,2 %	47 %
<b>BCR TOTALS</b>	5410	50%	226	4,2 %	46,3 %

Explanation of the table: column 5 shows the proportion of roads with names of female figures recorded in the 19 municipalities of Brussels, in decreasing order.

Source: Authors' census

- 9 For all of BCR, the results are clear: while anthroponyms are given to 50 % of the streets, 46 % are male and 4 % are female. As a result, there are ten times fewer streets in BCR named after female figures than male figures. The proportions vary little from one municipality to another, with the extreme values being 1 % (Evere, where anthroponyms are given to 48 % of streets) and 7 % (Brussels 1000, where anthroponyms are given to 44 % of streets), the majority of cases being around 4 %.

## 2.3. Cross-cutting findings

10 In addition to their share of the Brussels odonyms, it is possible to identify other characteristics which confirm the minority character of women in the road network.

- *Types of roads.* 40 % of roads with female names are streets (88), 23 % are avenues (52), 8 % are squares and 8 % are public gardens. There are 6 parks (2,7 % of female odonyms) and 3 boulevards (1,4 %), compared to 36 parks and 45 boulevards with male names. The higher up in the road hierarchy, the fewer female names there are; among the regional roads, 12 have a female name, compared to 181 with a male name, which is a ratio of 1 to 15. Roads with female names which go through several municipalities have a common feature: they are named after a sovereign. The only exception is Rue de l'Amazone, a residential street with one pavement in Ixelles and the other in Saint-Gilles. Among these routes, there are some major roads with wide views. Unlike men, no woman has had the honour of giving her name to a major road, apart from royal family members. Allée Rosa Luxembourg [Brussels-City] and Square Maurane [Schaerbeek] share one characteristic: they are islands between several roads, which have recently been renamed (2006 and 2019 respectively). These operations therefore did not involve changes to the cadastral and postal addresses of the buildings along these roads<sup>78</sup>;
- *Types of figures honoured.* If we look at the categories of female figures who have had roads named after them, we see that three groups stand out, each representing about 30 % of female odonyms in BCR. The first group includes civil figures referred to by their names: 72 roads are named after them (32 % of all roads with female names), to which can be added couples with the wives' names mentioned (8), which represents a total of 34,2 % of all roads with female names. The second group includes roads named after a sovereign: there are 65 of them (29,3 % of roads with female names), only one of which bears the name of a sovereign couple. The reigning sovereigns are mentioned either individually or with generic names (Impératrice or Reine, for example). In total, for 65 roads bearing a sovereign's name, there are 35 different names, including 15 roads with a generic name. A third group of roads with female names includes those referred to by names related to religion (exclusively Catholic in BCR). There are 49 in total (22 % of roads with female names), of which 33 are saints and 16 are from religious congregations. If we add roads named after mythological figures to this category (23, i.e. 10 % of roads with female names), it represents 32 % of roads with female names. In other words, Brussels odonyms convey three main representations of women: the individual figure, the royal figure and the holy or supernatural figure. It should be noted that there are no roads with the name of a trade in the feminine (with the notable exception of a nun belonging to an order), as Gubin [2006] has already pointed out<sup>9</sup>;
- *Gender in question.* In general, the toponymy of the capital city's street space does not really question the gender categories and their respective attributes. Some roads are an exception in different ways, however. Of the 79 women with a road named after them, 8 are honoured as feminists: in Saint-Josse, Marie Popelin (1846-1913), first woman doctor of law (street named in 2008); in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Louise Van den Plas (1877-1968), founder of the first Christian feminist movement in Belgium (street named in 2017); in Brussels-City, Eliane Vogel-Polsky, lawyer and feminist who fought for the rights of women and women workers (street named in 2019); in Etterbeek, Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), revolutionary and writer, honoured in the new administrative district under construction and whose street should be named in 2021; in Uccle, Isabelle Gatti de Gamond (1839-1905), promoter of women's education, and, since 2019, Monique Rifflet-Knauer (1923-2012), committed to the cause of abortion and family planning; in Anderlecht, Séverine (1855-1929), whose real name

was Caroline Rémy, a French feminist writer, and soon Simone Veil (1927-2017), a French minister who, among other things, passed the law which decriminalised abortion. A future bridge over the Brussels canal will be named after Suzanne Daniel, an LGBTQI+ activist. Let us note the only case of a transgender figure, Willy de Bruyn (1914-1989), a Belgian cycling athlete who was female at birth and was recognised legally as a man in 1937, and who is honoured in Brussels-City by a street named after him in 2019.

### 3. The policy for the naming of streets in the Brussels municipalities

- 11 The naming of streets is a municipal responsibility. The procedure is regulated by various legal texts and by the Commission Royale de Toponymie et de Dialectologie (hereinafter CRTD), which plays a consultative and advisory role primarily, and not a decision-making role.<sup>1011</sup>

#### 3.1. The formal procedure

- 12 A 1972 ministerial circular requires consultation with the CRTD and compliance with certain principles for any change of toponym, which cannot take place “without a serious reason”. In addition to the mandatory consultation of local residents (except in the case of homonymy), the new name must refer primarily to history, toponymy or local folklore; the names of living persons are not authorised (except for heads of state) and those of deceased persons are authorised if their death dates back more than 50 years [Goosse, 1981]. All requests must be accompanied by motives, cartographic documentation and biographies of the selected individuals.<sup>1213</sup>
- 13 The formal procedure for the naming of roads by the municipalities includes the following steps (which are not necessarily all followed or carried out in this order): proposal of the name on the initiative of elected representatives, municipal services or citizens; approval by the college and the council; approval by CRTD; municipal council vote; inclusion of the name in the national register; distribution of information; production and placing of the signs in the streets; possible registration with Google Maps.<sup>14</sup>

#### 3.2. Implementation in the municipalities of Brussels

- 14 How is this formal procedure implemented in the municipalities of Brussels? In order to answer this question, 15 interviews were conducted with elected representatives and administrative officials in charge of street naming in the municipalities, 3 of whom were men, and 12, women. The predominantly female profile of elected officials (8 out of 9 elected officials in our study) reveals the increasing presence of women in the decision-making political sphere, at least at local level, and the involvement of women in the process of transforming municipal street naming in favour of the female gender.

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### 3.2.1. The principle of the feminisation of road names

- 15 The principle of the feminisation of road names is accepted in the 15 municipalities studied: it is consistent with their adherence to the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life. Elsewhere in Europe, there are many political initiatives regarding the feminisation of street names: in Vienna, for example, where elected officials have set ambitious objectives in terms of gender mainstreaming, or in Barcelona, whose mayor is sensitive to feminist struggles and integrates the gender issue into all aspects of her policy, including those concerning urban space.<sup>17</sup>
- 16 How do BCR municipalities fit into this context? First of all, the principle of the feminisation of toponyms is reflected in the existence of an action plan for equality of women and men (Brussels-City and Woluwe-Saint-Lambert) and in a majority agreement to feminise street names. This policy is expressed at different rates and to varying extents: either it is summed up in more or less ambiguous positions of principle (“it is fashionable”), or it is considered a duty (“The feminisation of society has been going on for a long time and we consider it our duty to honour the talent, courage and work of these women”), or it is part of an assertive political strategy, favoured by a new balance of power within the college or the council:
- “It is normal that half of humanity should be represented more in the public space. [...] There is a real inequality there as well [...]. I truly think that my predecessors were not against it, but they may not have taken steps towards changing the names of certain streets as I am doing now. Today, they have no choice because of all of the women! We have one of the city councils with the highest number of women in Belgium.”
- 17 However, this apparent unanimity must not conceal obvious or latent expressions of resistance. While some female elected representatives sincerely believe that their male colleagues are committed to the cause (“They would certainly not slow things down – they are quite feminist in our municipality”), others have experienced reluctance, which has required vigilance and a fighting spirit on their part: some male elected representatives quibble and invoke the principle of non-discrimination for men, or express derogatory and clichéd views about women.

### 3.2.2. Strategies for action

- 18 Our study reveals several strategies adopted by elected officials to feminise toponyms despite the legal, topographical and geographical constraints which severely limit the opportunities to name streets after women.
- *Changing the names of existing streets.* The renaming of streets is not an easy procedure to carry out, as it involves major technical operations linked to the presence of numerous intervening parties. When a road is renamed, it requires all of the addresses above and below ground to be changed. All of the municipal stakeholders interviewed agreed that changing the name of a street is an operation to be avoided, especially if it is densely populated. Municipalities are generally very reluctant to do this, although it is done on exceptional occasions, for example, when King Baudouin died or when Avenue Stéphanie (1190) was renamed Mont Kemmel after World War II because of the collaboration of the princess and her husband with the enemy. Generally speaking, renaming an existing street is a particularly delicate operation, especially when it bears the name of a person (very often a man), as voices are always raised among the population against striking a blow at the



deceased person. However, there are possibilities within the framework of the elimination of homonyms recommended by CRTD, which are also being considered in some municipalities;

- *Feminising new roads.* Nowadays, municipalities frequently opt for women's names when creating new roads or when unnamed places are available (gardens, islands, park paths, etc.). However, the interviews show that this option poses three major problems: firstly, there is a very limited number of new streets created in municipalities which are very densely developed; secondly, there is a lack of consensus to name these new streets after women; and thirdly, there is a lower visibility of women if only minor roads are named after them. Some female elected representatives are aware of this and react by initiating other actions to make women visible in the public space, as discussed in the following points;
- *Feminising spaces and instruments of public action.* Due to the lack of opportunities to increase the number of roads named after women, some female elected representatives consider giving women's names to public buildings, stadiums, swimming pools, gardens, parks, monuments, public transport stops, crèches, schools, community centres, sports centres, buildings, etc. A motion for a resolution on honouring women in the naming of public space in support of this principle was tabled on 6 July 2018 at the Brussels Regional Parliament.<sup>18</sup>

- 19 In addition, some elected representatives consider it necessary to think even more broadly about the gender issue in the public space and in municipal management. To do so, two main tools are used: gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. The first looks at all public policies from a gender perspective and examines municipal staff appointments, the specifications for calls for tender or projects, the make-up of municipal committees, etc. Thus, the interviewees establish links between the increase in the number of women on the municipal councils and the municipalities' aim to achieve a greater feminisation of the public space. Gender budgeting makes it possible to assess the impact of public policies on women and men and to identify more precisely which social groups benefit from them. In the cultural, social and sports domains, the analysis of budgets makes it possible to objectify imbalances in access to the financial resources distributed or to the activities organised by the municipality, which are most often to the detriment of women [Blanchard and Hancock, 2017; Woelfle, 2019].

### 3.2.3. Political strategies

- 20 The political strategy here refers to the way in which elected officials consult with, involve and collaborate with citizens and feminist activists on street naming issues. Three methods exist.
- *Creation of a committee or working group.* On the basis of art. 27 of the Order amending the new municipal law of 5 March 2009, the municipalities of Brussels have the power to set up committees to prepare the debates of council meetings. Several of them have established or are considering establishing a working group or committee to deal with street naming and to focus on the issue of gender equality in this area;
  - *Call for public participation.* Several calls for residents to participate in the naming of streets (female and/or male) have been tested in Brussels municipalities, already during the mandate preceding the October 2018 elections. These calls are promoted for their democratic character and to obtain stronger citizen support. Some elected representatives also consider that a change of toponym should be initiated by the inhabitants, because politicians alone are very limited in the face of the administrative and technical burden which this type of operation entails:

“Now I think that from an administrative point of view it is complicated to change the name of a street, and that it should be the will of the majority of the inhabitants of that street... I have the impression that this would be the easiest lever, if a group of inhabitants of a street are in the majority to wish for a change. The initiative would not come from the politicians themselves as they are reluctant, given that it would entail a lot of procedures for citizens to change their addresses, even if it's not the end of the world. But if it's not the initiative of citizens, politicians won't make the move.”

An emblematic case is the call for public participation to name the 28 new streets on the Tour et Taxis site. It was organised in June 2018 and received 1 397 proposals. After the selection by a jury, only 2 out of 28 streets were named after women: the filmmaker Chantal Akerman, and the first woman academic and doctor in Belgium, Isala Van Diest. A square was also named “Place des Grands Hommes”, enraging the collective Noms Peut-Être, which reminded the College of the City of Brussels of the list of illustrious women whose names it had agreed to use as a priority. The collective also pointed out that the only two streets named after women at Tour et Taxis are among the smallest on the site, reviving the principle of the invisibility of women in the public space. In response, the new alderwoman for urban planning in Brussels-City proposed to the City Council on 18 November 2019 to rename the *drève* honouring the German family von Thurn und Tassis in favour of Anna Boch, a painter who left her mark on Belgian impressionism;<sup>1920</sup>

- *Collaborations with collectives.* Collectives provide food for thought to elected officials and sometimes collaborate on certain actions such as the drafting of motions or the preparation of lists of the names of women to be honoured. They have been very active in recent years in a number of Belgian and European cities and are the result of the observation that there are very few streets in cities which are named after women. In 2015, the French feminist association “Osez le féminisme !” launched the FémiCité campaign in reaction to the figures showing that 2,6 % of streets in Paris are named after women: the association then symbolically renamed the streets after illustrious women. This feminisation movement is spreading to many large French and European cities such as Amsterdam, London and Berlin. Since 2017 in Brussels, the collective Noms Peut-Être has denounced the invisibility of women in the urban space. The group thus carries out “actions of feminist disobedience” aimed at temporarily renaming streets or subway stations – which some of them feel are racialised – with the names of women. In the same approach, they appealed to the authorities of Université libre de Bruxelles, where 11 lecture theatres are now named after women (although there are 15 lecture theatres named after men on the Solbosch campus alone). In addition to this role in the public space, the Noms Peut-Être collective was involved in drafting motions to promote the feminisation of street names in two Brussels municipalities. Finally, very recently, the group has contributed to the production of an interactive map available on the internet, which makes it possible to visualise the imbalance of Brussels toponyms in terms of gender.<sup>2122</sup>

## Conclusion

- 21 Our census of street names, carried out in 2020 in the 19 municipalities of Brussels, confirms the over-representation of male names in street toponymy: 46 % of the total number of streets in BCR compared to 4 % of streets with female names, while the proportion of streets named after people is on average 50 % throughout the region.
- 22 This observation has made it possible to question the social and political dynamics of street naming and the continued existence of dominant gender norms in the

materiality of the city. The state of gender relations inherited from the past can be measured by the number of “great men” – rather than female figures – whom Brussels chose to value during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when cities were expanding and new roads were being created. Nowadays, opportunities to name new roads are rare and the technical and political obstacles to changing names are numerous, although they are not insurmountable.

- 23 Moreover, the gap between the mobilisation of feminist collectives and associations regarding these issues and the adherence to the principle of equality of the political class and the majority of the population illustrates the difficulty of bringing discourse and practice into line, as the case of Tour et Taxis has clearly shown. However, activism is effective when it joins forces with politics to promote the feminisation of street space.
- 24 This difficulty in making egalitarian policies a reality reveals the striking prevalence of patriarchy and systemic sexism in the functioning of our institutions. Gender inequalities and their material expressions are still firmly rooted in a cultural context which maintains an androcentric approach to the city. Street naming in Brussels is also a testimony to this. By working to give more visibility to women in the public space, the norms and practices which dominate the creation of public space are now being challenged, as well as the mentalities of those who inhabit it.

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## NOTES

1. The response is mixed, as the city demonstrates processes of emancipation through access to work, education, culture and leisure, through the reduction of social pressure and individualisation, and the continued processes of domination and inequalities which affect women more than men.

2. Websites consulted for the surveys: [www.ebru.be](http://www.ebru.be), <https://be.brussels/>, [www.irismonument.be](http://www.irismonument.be), [www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org) and the websites of the municipalities. The data were cross-referenced and then supplemented with our observations.
3. We will use alternatively the terms street, road or major road to designate these public spaces for circulation, regardless of their intrinsic differences and their regional or municipal status, even if separate authorities are responsible for their management.
4. There are 9 of them: Rue Draps-Dom and Rue Meyers-Henneau (1020), Rue Pierre et Marie Curie (1050), Rue Tasson-Snel (1060), Avenue Hermann-Debroux (1160), Avenue Fontaine-Vanderstraeten and Avenue Wielemans-Ceuppens (1190), Avenue Albert-Elisabeth and Rue Albert et Marie-Louise Servais-Kinet (1200).
5. For example, Rue de la Duchesse (1040 and 1150); Parc Elisabeth (1081 and 1083); Place Stéphanie (1000 and 1050).
6. The City of Brussels has been divided into two distinct groups: on the one hand, the roads falling under postcode 1000 (inside and outside the Pentagon) and on the other hand, those included in the sections with postcodes 1020 (Laeken), 1120 (Neder-Over-Hembeek) and 1130 (Haeren), three entities which became part of Brussels-City in 1921 and which form a sector at the northern end of BCR, bordering the Flemish Region.
7. Place de la Duchesse de Brabant; Boulevard Maria Groeninckx-De May; Avenue, Place and Tunnel Louise; Square Marie-Louise; Parvis Notre-Dame; Avenue and Place de la Reine, Avenue Reine Marie-Henriette, Place and Tunnel Stéphanie; Avenue Wielemans-Ceuppens.
8. These are Avenue Louise and Avenue de la Reine (the only major road situated in more than two municipalities, in this case Brussels-City, Schaerbeek and Laeken), and Parc Elisabeth. Avenue Marie de Hongrie, most of which is in Ganshoren, is also a wide two-lane avenue separated by a tree-lined section, but located in an exclusively residential area and ending in a cul-de-sac formed by the car park of the Basilix shopping centre.
9. The only trade mentioned in a street name is that of flower assembler, with Impasse de la Bouquetière in Brussels-City, which was named in 1853 and is now inaccessible to the public. However, a plaque on the ground floor of 153 Rue Terre-Neuve indicates its existence.
10. Circular of the Ministry of Security and the Interior of 23 February 2018 relating to the guidelines and recommendations for the determination and allocation of an address and a dwelling number.
11. Decree of 28 January 1974 of the Cultural Council of the French Community relating to the names of public roads, as amended on 3 July 1986, and Cooperation Agreement of 22 January 2016 between the Federal State, the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and BCR concerning the unification of the manner of referencing addresses and the linking of address data (M.B. of 15 February 2016).
12. Circular of the Minister of the Interior addressed to the Governors of Provinces and the Mayors on 7 December 1972 (M.B., 23/12/1972).
13. This criterion is not necessarily respected, as was the case in Uccle (Andrée Dumont) and Saint-Josse (Jean Demannez), where the streets were named during their lifetime.
14. This stage is left to the discretion of the municipalities, and some elected representatives have in fact taken steps with this company to complete the process of making women visible in the urban space.
15. Face-to-face, telephone or email: the study overlapped with the Covid-19 lockdown period, necessitating a change in methods of contact.
16. These are the aldermen and alderwomen for urban planning, equal opportunities (equal rights and gender equality), civil status and public space. The interviews included a description of the procedure for naming a street (who proposes, who decides, which procedures are involved), the criteria for selecting people to be honoured, the cases of naming a street after a

woman or changing street names, the discussions which these procedures have generated, and possible plans to name streets after women in the municipality.

17. Proposed by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions in 2006 and signed by 1792 local authorities in 36 countries, including 9 Brussels municipalities: Anderlecht (2008), Berchem-Sainte-Agathe (2015), Brussels-City (2008), Etterbeek (2010), Evere (2008), Jette (2015), Saint-Josse (2011), Woluwe-Saint-Lambert (2009), Woluwe-Saint-Pierre (2009) and Ixelles (2015).

18. Motion tabled by F. Sidibé, M. Ouriaghli, J. Milquet, K. Zamouri, H. Goeman and B. Grouwels, ordinary session 2017-2018, A-716/1-2017-2018.

19. Other names refer to food, the history of the site or symbols. The street “Ceci n'est pas une rue” is a symbolic reference to the painter René Magritte.

20. See their website: <https://nomspeutetre.wordpress.com/>

21. In 2020, 29 of the 59 Brussels metro stations were dedicated to men and 4 to women. In December of the same year, STIB announced its decision to rename a bus stop after one of its directors in office (Kris Lauwers), provoking a strong reaction, in particular on the part of the collective Noms Peut-Être.

22. <https://equalstreetnames.brussels/fr/index.html#14.07/50.82808/4.39119>

## ABSTRACTS

The article proposes an examination of toponyms in Brussels, i.e. the names of its streets, through the prism of gender. After a systematic survey of street names and the characteristics of the female figures honoured – which reveals a glaring imbalance between the female and male street names in Brussels (there are ten times fewer female toponyms than male toponyms in the Region) – the article analyses the practices and strategies used by municipal representatives to feminise street names and do justice to the memory of women through a transformation of the toponymy, among other things. On the one hand, it reveals the constraints linked to legislation, urban morphology and gender stereotypes which weigh on the undertaking to increase the number of female street names and, on the other hand, it analyses the action of elected representatives and the influence of feminist organisations which fight against the minoritisation of women in the materiality of the Brussels urban space.

L'article propose un examen de l'odonymie de Bruxelles, c'est-à-dire des dénominations de ses voiries, sous le prisme du genre. Après un relevé systématique du nom des rues et des caractéristiques des figures féminines mises en valeur, qui révèle un déséquilibre criant entre les noms féminins et masculins des rues de Bruxelles (sur l'ensemble de la Région, on compte dix fois moins d'odonymes féminins que masculins), l'article analyse les pratiques et les stratégies déployées par les élu•e•s à l'échelle communale pour féminiser le nom des rues et rendre justice à la mémoire des femmes à travers une transformation de la toponymie, entre autres. D'une part, il dévoile les contraintes liées à la législation, à la morphologie urbaine ou aux stéréotypes genrés qui pèsent sur l'entreprise d'accroissement du nombre de noms de rues féminins et, d'autre part, il analyse l'action des élu•e•s et l'influence des organisations féministes qui luttent contre la minoritisation des femmes dans la matérialité de l'espace urbain bruxellois.

Het artikel onderzoekt de Brusselse straatnaamgeving vanuit genderoogpunt. Na een systematisch overzicht van de straatnamen en van de kenmerken van de vrouwelijke figuren in

straatnamen, waaruit een overduidelijke wanverhouding tussen het gebruik van vrouwen- en mannennamen in Brusselse straatnamen (in het hele Gewest zijn er tien keer minder vrouwelijke straatnamen dan mannelijke) blijkt, onderzoekt het artikel de praktijken en de strategieën van verkozenen op gemeentelijk niveau om straatnamen te vervrouwelijken en om de nagedachtenis van vrouwen eer aan te doen door onder andere de toponymie te herzien. Enerzijds wijst het artikel op de beperkingen die verband houden met de wetgeving, stadsmorfologie of genderstereotypen en die het moeilijk maken om het aantal vrouwelijke straatnamen te verhogen. Anderzijds analyseert het de inspanningen van verkozenen en de invloed van vrouwenorganisaties die de strijd aanbinden tegen de minorisering van vrouwen in de materialiteit van de Brusselse stadsruimte.

## INDEX

**Trefwoorden** overheidsoptreden, gemeenten, discriminatie, gender, stedelijke strijd, toponymie

**Subjects:** 1. histoire – culture – patrimoine

**Keywords:** public action, municipalities, discrimination, gender; urban struggles, toponymy

**Mots-clés:** action publique, communes, discrimination, genre, luttes urbaines, toponymie

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