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## Etterbeek replaces colonial street names with women's names

By Maïthé Chini

The Brussels Times (15.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3eeFQNL> - From Monday, the Brussels' commune of Etterbeek has replaced the names of eleven streets, that were named after Belgians with a colonial history, with women's names.

The new name signs are temporary and will only stay in place for half a year. With this measure, the college of aldermen wants to decolonise the street names, and show that it is also possible to tell the other side of history.

"We want to see more women represented. And we want to tackle the overrepresentation of the colonial names," said alderman for Public Space Karim Sheikh Hassan. "Of its own accord, the urban landscape does not change so fast, but we wanted to do something temporary," he added.

Many street names, named after Belgians with a military history in the former Belgian colony, have made way for women's names. "We chose a mix of Etterbeek women and international women," said Sheik Hassan.

"We need to allow the people of Etterbeek to own their public space. It also goes with knowing why the place where you live has a certain name, and what is behind it," he added.

A few of the women represented are Rosa Parks, who fought against racial segregation in the United States, the Algerian Lalla Fatma N'Soumer, who fought against French domination, or the Polish Irena Sendlerowa, who saved Jews from Nazi-Germany.

From Etterbeek, the feminist Elise Soyer and the artist Marthe Wery were chosen. The first female doctor of law in Brussels was also given a nameplate, Marie Popelin.

"The number of streets bearing women's names is ridiculously low. We have chosen to pay tribute to women who illustrate the diversity of backgrounds and origins that make up the richness of the Brussels population," said Françoise de Halleux, alderman for Equal Opportunities and Diversity in a Facebook post.

Initially, the aim was to launch the street names around International Women's Day (8 March), but that plan was delayed because of the coronavirus.

The nameplates are part of a broader decolonisation programme organised by the College of Aldermen, which will also include various educational walks for residents and schools will follow in the autumn.

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## **Famous Belgian lawyer does not hire women because of #MeToo**

By Maïthé Chini

The Brussels Times (09.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2TQY9Rk> - A Belgian high profile lawyer, Sven Mary, recently stated in an interview with a Belgian newspaper that his law firm no longer hires women because of the #MeToo movement.

When a woman applies for a job at Sven Mary's law firm, she will be rejected out of fear for #MeToo, he said in an interview with Het Laatste Nieuws on Friday.

According to an analysis by the Harvard Business Review, men are less inclined to hire attractive women since #MeToo, a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault, took off. Mary said that this was true, and that his firm no longer hires women in general since there had been "an incident with an intern," he said.

"It's a shame, because a lot of competent and intelligent ladies graduate. But I once had a problem with an intern who claimed that she owed her poor evaluation to the fact that she hadn't accepted my advances," Mary said, adding that the complaint was "based on nothing" but that "today, as a man, you are vulnerable" and that he did not want to expose himself to such risks.

"I understand that such accusations cut in. But basically, saying that no woman is going to be hired? I'm afraid he won't get away with that," labour market expert Jan Denys told De Morgen. "Women who are working in good faith are being punished here. I'm assuming, in time, Mary will come to understand that," he added.

In addition, rejecting applications from a specific group of people is prohibited by law. "It does not differ a lot from employers who say they have a problem with Moroccans, for example," Denys said, adding that in reality, an employer takes on whoever they want. "Those who effectively do not want to recruit women can still hide behind the fact that the woman in question is not competent enough," he added. "However, by Mary's saying it, he is not making it easy on himself," Denys stressed.

On social media, Mary's remark has garnered a lot of attention, and many people on Twitter have called for an investigation by Unia, the Belgian centre for equal opportunities.

Assita Kanko, a Belgian MEP and human rights activist tweeted "Lawyer for serious criminals. Afraid of victims of sexual violence," pointing to several of Mary's clients, which include Salah Abdeslam, who is a suspect of the terror attacks in Paris, and Fouad Belkacem, who was an extremist member of the radical Islamic organisation Sharia4Belgium.

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