

LOVA Marjan Rens Master's Thesis Award 2019

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At the end of a highly inspiring day we have come to the moment of the announcement of the eighth LOVA Marjan Rens Master's Thesis Award. This award is for the best Master's thesis in the field of women- and gender studies in anthropology in the Netherlands. Because today we celebrate the 40th anniversary of LOVA we decided to nominate not three but four theses. The award consists of 500 euro for the first prize and 100 euro for each runner up. Winners will be invited to publish an article based on the thesis in LOVA Journal. LOVA has received thirteen very good theses. All of them had already passed a pre-selection, as a grade of 8 or above was required. They covered a wide range of countries – from Indonesia to Florida, from Cuba to Lebanon – and a wide range of topics, including land rights, sexual transactions, tattoos, migration, education or polyamory, of course all studied from a critical gender lens.

A committee, composed of Ina Keuper, Lenie Brouwer, Maja van de Velden and Marina de Regt, delved into the pile and composed a short list on the basis of criteria such as: A feminist anthropological approach, value of ethnographic data, theoretical contribution, reflexivity, style, and innovativeness. I was given the privilege to rank the short list, but we soon found out we all agreed on the order. To define my criteria I looked back at the roots of our profession. Because what is it exactly that makes a good anthropologist? For me it is a

profound and open interest in 'the Other', the urge to look, listen and understand. To notice mundane and everyday details and apparent contradictions, and place those in a wider context and pattern in order to let us and other readers understand why people do and think the things they do and tell. The ability to draw us into the stories of others; to make that story interesting and believable; in a clear style without jargon or an avalanche of superfluous theories that distract us from the story. I totally agree with the Marabout quoted in one of the theses who told Stoller and Olkes what is important for a researcher: "You must learn to sit with people ... You must learn to sit and listen." (Stoller and Olkes 1987).

A quality that the winners shared was fearlessness. None of them was afraid to tackle difficult problems. You need guts to study love behaviour punishable by heavy prison sentences, activists who hold ideas you find offensive, or gender fluidities that hardly can be captured with the language available. Another shared quality was the high level of theoretical and methodological reflection. But let's start with announcing the runners up:

The third runner up provided a systematic and precise comparison of national action plans on climate change and gender in Mozambique and Peru. She meticulously analysed and compared the discourses in these policy papers in order to find out how they are related to gender justice and climate justice principles. Congratulations to Isadora Cardoso Vasconcelos with her thesis *Gender and climate change in pathways of development: Encounters of national policies with gender justice and climate justice*.

The second runner up studied gender queer and non-binary persons in Rotterdam. With attention to detail the thesis shows how difficult it is to negotiate an open and undefined position in a binary gendered society. We see the respondents struggle with binary language, streets, stores, public toilets, and bodily identifications. Congratulations to Nika Looman with *Everyday gender queerness: Negotiating dominant*

notions of Dutch citizenship through everyday practices in a binary gendered society.

The first runner up managed to gain sufficient rapport with persons organised in the ‘Women Against Feminism’ movement to elicit interesting responses that give us clear insights in their ways of reasoning. Her respondents can be posited at the other opposite of the spectrum as those of Nika Looman. They also struggle with the binary system, but not to attack it but to reconstitute and protect it. They detest the very insecurity and gender fluidity feminists want to reveal and respect. Congratulations to Melody Jap-Sam with *Women against feminism: A qualitative research into the understanding of modern Western anti-feminism in the context of an online community.*



Price winners and jury members from left to right:
Nika Looman, Isadora Cardoso Vasconcelos Willy Jansen, Loes
Oudenhuisen, Melody Jap-Sam, Marina de Regt.
Photo by Filipa Oitavén

The winning thesis opens with a vignette that draws the reader immediately into the topic of same-sex intimacies in urban Senegal. In impeccable English she deftly welcomes us into an unknown cultural enclave. Profoundly aware of the anthropological credo that discourse does not equal practice, she dissects both shifting and situational emic discursive categories and their meanings as well as surreptitious same-sex practices, and moreover beautifully describes how her research participants negotiate and develop tactics to overcome discrepancies between normative discourse and actual practices. The winner of the 2019 LOVA Marjan Rens Master's Thesis Award is Loes Oudenhuisen with "*You have to know how to play, otherwise they will catch you.*": *Young women and the navigation of same-sex intimacies in contemporary urban Senegal.*

Reference

Stoller, Paul, and Olkes, Cheryl. 1987. *In Sorcery's Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.