



GENDER, DIVERSITY & INTERSECTIONALITY RESEARCH CENTRE

Spring Newsletter 2026

🌸 🌿 Feeling the *lentekriebels* as much as we are?
Read along to catch up on some RHEA news! 🌸 🌿

Editor's Choice

Rhea's new coordinator: meet dr. Paulien Broens

Exclusively for the readers of our newsletter, RHEA wishes to highlight our new coordinator, [dr. Paulien Broens](#), who joined in December as full-time Research Coordinator at RHEA. We discuss her research background, current interests, and her role at RHEA.



Many of the gendered patterns identified in colonial legal histories continue to shape institutions and power relations today, through what is defined as *coloniality*, or the persistence of colonial logics long after formal colonial rule has ended.

- Paulien Broens

What attracted you to RHEA, and can you give us some insights into your function?

I felt a strong desire after my PhD to work in a research environment that is more directly engaged with societal questions and impact. RHEA had long been on my radar as a leading research centre in Belgium, known for its foundational work on gender, diversity, and intersectionality. Its interdisciplinary focus and strong commitment to socially engaged research closely align with my own personal and academic values. It has been an honour and a pleasure to join RHEA!

As Research Coordinator, I support the day-to-day functioning of RHEA. My role includes initiating, guiding, and supporting research proposals, as well as

overseeing the centre's internal and external communication and the organisation of events. Overall, I see my role as facilitating collaboration within the centre, strengthening RHEA's research profile, and helping translate it into broader academic and societal impact.

How have your past fields of research impacted your current interests?

I defended my PhD in Law in December of 2024, titled "The Only 'Man' Among Them Was the Queen": Female Legal Authorities and Colonialism in Asante, 1880–1940. My research examined how British colonial rule reshaped indigenous legal and political systems in Asante, an ethnic group located across several present-day West African countries.

Colonial reforms systematically excluded indigenous women from positions of authority and replaced existing legal systems with male-dominated "Native Authorities", which were later presented as 'customary'. As a result, women's roles in lawmaking, governance, and dispute resolution were not only diminished in practice and were largely omitted from historical accounts, by both colonial administrators and later scholars.

As of now, I see a growing need for methodologies that allow historical insights to translate into tangible societal impact. I am developing applied methodologies that connect insights from legal history to present-day policy debates and help co-create indigenous alternatives to lingering colonial logics in postcolonial institutions and governance structures.

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Highlight

Hannelore Van Bavel selected as member for the Jonge Academie



Every year, de [Jonge Academie](#) (The Young Academy of Belgium), selects their newest members based on scientific or artistic excellence of researchers, who have distinguished themselves in an exceptional way since completing their doctorate. On the third of March, Hannelore Van Bavel - postdoc researcher at RHEA - was inaugurated as one of their newest members. Those who are admitted, join the think-tank group of early-career researchers, many of whom go on to build careers at leading universities in Belgium and abroad.

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[More info: Jonge Academie](#)

Flash Back: yearly Machteld de Metsenaere Lecture

Gender Lecture series: Panel on "Refusing Conformity, Trans Bodies as a Site of Resistance"



The panel “**Refusing to Conform: Trans Bodies as a Site of Resistance**” explored topics of gender performance, nonbinary identity, and the history of gender resistance. It inspired us to reflect more deeply on questions of resistance: how can resistance appear in everyday life through play, through awareness, or through experimenting with gender expression? How does the body itself become a space where rigid gender expectations begin to loosen? Our two RHEA interns **Sem Decraene** and **Maximo Meerschaut** offer you their reflections.

Sem: “One piece of advice that stuck came from Olave Nduwanje, writer and podcaster, who encouraged the audience to be playful: don’t be afraid of femininity and *“just have fun with it!”*. This may seem simple, but it fundamentally challenges the way gender is often perceived – and policed.”

Maximo: “As the panelists stated so lucidly: in a world where the categories of “man” and “woman” are still treated as self-evident, the existence of every trans or non-binary body is automatically politicized, regardless of whether they want this or not.



This tension between just wanting to exist in one’s body as a human, and constantly being reduced to a symbol, being reduced to one’s body formed the common thread of the evening. In this way, trans bodies highlight the cracks in our structures of care, safety, intimacy, housing and authenticity. Trans bodies expose the flaws and shortcomings of our cisgender-based society.”

Rhea On the Move: Rotterdam, Dublin



RHEA on the move to... Rotterdam

Engaged Philosophy and Ethics working group, 26/02/2026, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam

In February, the Engaged Philosophy and Ethics working group, a Dutch-speaking network in the field of philosophy, convened for the first time. RHEA Phd-student [Lula Maris](#), whose research in feminist ethics focuses on narrative resistance, went up to Rotterdam to join the network.

During the session, visiting researchers from Sweden, Dr. Anders Hylmö - *Halmstad University* and Dr. Eugenia Perez Vico - *Halmstad University*, presented their qualitative framing analysis on the way academics interpret their role as an expert in the context of (climate) activism. Prof. dr. [Constance Binder](#) also presented on the boundaries and interfaces between academia and activism. Their fascinating insights stimulated a vibrant discussion on the ethical and methodological implications of connecting research and activism, and what this can mean for philosophy. The working group aims to bring together experts from different fields to reflect on these ethical and methodological dimensions more regularly, making for a rather unique forum in

the field.

Lula Maris will join the Rotterdam philosophy department for a research stay from mid-March to May, to keep exploring these questions in relation to her own work and benefit from the experience of other established researchers connecting philosophy and societal engagement.

RHEA on the move to... Dublin

Engaging Utopias, 9-10/03/2026, National University of Ireland



Earlier this month, Phd student [Erinn De Waele](#) joined the ‘Engaging Utopias’ workshop for critical theorising, conceptualisation and methodologies in future-oriented research. The workshop centered on how the concept of Utopia is used in different fields of research. Utopia can be understood as “*the expression of the desire for a better way of being or of living*” and, for instance, may entail a critique of the present, as well as political imagination or active struggle. Rather than remaining within the rigid frames of probable scenarios and possible solutions to problems, this approach concerns itself with scholarly questions of what futures are desirable.

Erinn presented their PhD research on queer homemaking practices in Brussels, where one of their research objectives focuses on alternative homemaking practices. Here, they use queer utopia as a framework and ask the question: “*How are alternative homemaking practices already prefigured in the Brussels’ queer community?*” Therefore, they use the method



of 'dream home mapping', where participants map their desired dream home. The workshop gave many insights and feedback on queer utopia and in practice, and closed off with a collective zine-making session, collecting all the discussed ideas and methods. To conclude, it was not only insightful but also hopeful to see how researchers use utopia as a way to move from focusing on problems and towards hopeful problem-solving.

Vacancy: Genitalks is looking for a jobstudent

Student Assistant Science Communication



Genitalks is looking for a student assistant to support science communication related to the research of Dr. Hannelore Van Bavel on genital modifications, specifically female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and female genital cosmetic surgery.

You will contribute to Genitalks, a platform that makes academic research on these topics accessible to a broader audience through social media, blogs, and events.

In case you're interested, [apply](#) before the **31st of March**.

[Job listing](#)

Must-reads

[Article](#): On altar boys and good-hearted guys: de-Othering and the whitening of male convert "foreign fighters" in Belgian newspapers (authors: Sliti, J. and

[Chapter](#): Emotional Entanglements: Reflexivity, Vulnerability, and the Affective Dimensions of Researching Sexual Violence (author:

Lechkar, I.)

Article: Functional Need or Personal Choice: Medical Professionals' Understanding and Framing of Performing Female Genital Cosmetic Procedures *(authors: Van Bavel, H. and Hermans, A.)*

Article: Cosmetische Gynaecologie: Een Precair Evenwicht Tussen Erkenning En Medicalisering *(authors: Van Bavel, H.)*

Article: Applying Anthropology to Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting *(authors: Van Bavel, H. and Gibson, M.)*

Article: Cisgender Women Navigating Genital Insecurities: Coping, Genital Cosmetic Surgery, and the Role of Medical Encounters *(authors: Van Bavel, H.)*

Fernandes, D.)

Article: Empowerment and resistance in bioethics: the case of do-it-yourself medicine *(authors: De Proost, Michiel and Essex, Ryan)*

Book review: 'Ei, Foetus, Baby' (Trudy Dehue): De maakbaarheid van het ongeboren leven: hoe wetenschap en politiek de grenzen bepalen *(author: Mosuse, M. A.)*

Article: Fertile ground for social support? : Understanding men's use of online infertility support groups *(authors: Van Ryckeghem, L., Wallays, A., Oelbrandt, E., & Buffel, V.)*

Article: Gender quota, and intersectional presence and power: The politics of prototypicality *(Authors: Devroe, R., & Celis, K.)*

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