

Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your

ERASMUS
2017
PRIZE

Annual Report Erasmus Prize Michèle Lamont



Annual Report
Erasmus Prize
2017

Knowledge,
Power and
Diversity



Colophon

Annual Report Erasmus Prize

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Contents

Preface

6

Citation

8

Laudatio

10

Acceptance Speech Michèle Lamont

13

Biography Michèle Lamont

16

Activities

18

Research Prizes 2017

22

Origin and Aim of the
Praemium Erasmianum Foundation

30

Board

31

Preface

The 2017 Erasmus Prize was awarded to the Canadian cultural sociologist Michèle Lamont (1957), professor of sociology at Harvard University. Lamont received the honour for her committed contribution to research in the field of social sciences, in particular on the relationship between 'knowledge, power and diversity', which was also the theme for the year. Lamont has devoted her academic career to examining how social conditions cause inequality and social exclusion and how stigmatized groups preserve their dignity.

The scope of Lamont's professional interests was reflected in an extensive programme of activities devoted to her work. For two weeks around the Erasmus Prize award ceremony, Michèle Lamont travelled from Rotterdam to Groningen and spoke tirelessly at academic congresses and in public debates about her research. In addition, she commented on films and documentaries. She also gave masterclasses in Utrecht and Groningen and was interviewed about her career in front of a large audience of students. Another large audience was introduced to her work at a Studium Generale event in Groningen. Themes such as social exclusion and diversity in academia were explored at lively conferences at the universities of Amsterdam and Utrecht. Lamont discussed various issues in public debates with thinkers such as Philomena Essed and Michael Ignatieff at Spui25 and the Rijksmuseum. Besides all these public activities, Michèle Lamont wrote the essay 'Prisms of Inequality' in the series Praemium Erasmianum Essays. In addition, interviews and articles appeared in all national daily newspapers.

In addition to the Erasmus Prize, the Foundation in 2017 presented its annual Research Prizes to five young researchers who, in the jury's opinion, completed an excellent thesis. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences hosted the award ceremony.

This annual report contains a short report on each of these activities. We thank all our collaborating partners for their enthusiastic involvement: De Nederlandse Boekengids, IDFA, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Movies that Matter, NPO Cultura, the Rijksmuseum, University of Groningen, Spui25, Studium Generale Groningen, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam, WRR, Zuid-Afrikahuis and the Erasmus Festival Brabant.

The programme of activities devoted to Lamont culminated in the festive Erasmus Prize award ceremony, held on 28 November 2017. His Majesty the King presented the Erasmus Prize to Michèle Lamont during the ceremony at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam, in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix. We are very grateful to the Royal Family for their hospitality.

Jet de Ranitz, acting chair
Shanti van Dam, director

多様性
 UKWEHLUKA
 MONIMUOTOISUUS
 ÆPTYPAIVIK
 DIVERSITÄ
 MITMEKESISUS
 РАЗНОБЛИДНОСТ
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 POIKIVIA
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 DIVERSITAS
 KANORAU
 SOKFÉLESÉG
 РАЗНАСТАЙНАСТЬ
 MANGFOLD
 КУСИЯНА
 DUNANAANTA
 DIVERSIDAD

Citation

Article 2 of the Constitution of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation reads as follows:

“Within the context of the cultural traditions of Europe in general, and the ideas of Erasmus in particular, the aim of the Foundation is to enhance the position of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts. The emphasis lies on tolerance, cultural diversity and non-dogmatic, critical thinking. The Foundation tries to achieve this aim by awarding prizes and by organising events that draw attention to the work and vision of the laureates. A cash prize is awarded under the name of ‘Erasmus Prize’.” In accordance with this article, the Board of the Foundation has decided to award the Erasmus Prize 2017 to cultural sociologist Michèle Lamont.

The prize is awarded to Michèle Lamont on the following grounds:

- She receives the prize for her devoted contribution to social science research into the relationship between knowledge, power and diversity.
- An internationally influential sociologist, Lamont has played a leading role in connecting European and American areas of research within the social sciences.
- Lamont has devoted her academic career to investigating how cultural conditions shape inequality and social exclusion, and how stigmatized groups find ways to preserve their dignity and self-worth. Through ground-breaking international comparative research, she shows that disadvantaged groups can achieve new forms of self-esteem and respect.
- In searching for success formulas, she examines the cultural factors and institutional structures that can create more resilient societies. Moreover, she shows that diversity often leads to more vigorous and productive relationships in both society and the academic world. For Lamont also turns her critical gaze inwards, analysing the ideas about worth and quality that underpin the formation of judgement within the academic world. The jury finds her research into the underlying patterns within this discussion of particular importance at a time when

the authority of scholars and their claim to truth is increasingly challenged.

- With her interdisciplinary approach, critical stance and international outlook, Lamont shows herself to be a champion of diversity in research and society. As such, she embodies the Erasmian values that the Foundation cherishes and upholds.

“..a champion of diversity in research and society..”



Erasmus Prize Award Ceremony 2017, Royal Palace Amsterdam. Photos by Jeroen van der Meyde.



Director Shanti van Dam presents the citation during the Erasmus Prize Award Ceremony on 28 November, Royal Palace Amsterdam.

Laudatio

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

Knowledge is power. Or so they say. But what knowledge offers power? Who has access to such knowledge? And who decides? What happens when different groups of people use different sources of knowledge? Will they also be afforded power? Are their unique insights even recognized or valued? Or is knowledge used to include some and exclude others? These questions have guided the work of Michèle Lamont throughout her career.

During the past decades Michèle Lamont has examined the relation between knowledge, power, and diversity. Her personal history and life experiences played an important role in the questions she asked. As a member of the French-speaking minority in Quebec, she experienced first-hand what it feels like when one's language and culture are devalued by others. As a Canadian student in Paris, she realized that the development of scientific knowledge is also shaped by the cultural environments that dominate the daily experiences of individual researchers. Which are different for European and North American scholars. As she advanced in her career at Stanford, Princeton and Harvard, she continued to question standard practices at these top-level knowledge institutions, as an 'outsider' who was raised and trained in a different system. These personal experiences not only determined her life-long fascination with knowledge, diversity and power differences in society. They also helped her find answers to these questions.

Michèle Lamont conducted much of her scientific research by interviewing minority and majority group members in various countries across the world. This allowed her to specify how the place of people in society shapes the things they find important. However, the different perspectives of majority and minority group members also determine how they define success, and what needs to be done to achieve this.

What happens if we fail to acknowledge such differences? What are the consequences when we go along with the views of the majority - if we define the value of people only in terms of their educational and economic success?

Are people less worthy citizens when they are poor but decent? Of course not. Should we raise our children to pursue individual achievement without caring about how they relate to others? No again. Yet this is the message that is implicitly conveyed when we fail to value diversity. A narrow focus on what valued knowledge is, gives rise to the expectation that everyone should pursue the same outcomes. But this only results in a competition with few winners and many losers. If we find ways to acknowledge the worth of a broader range of insights, achievements and contributions people have to offer, this results in a more stable society, where different people can be successful in different ways.

These issues form the core of Michèle Lamont's scientific work over the years. But she makes this very practical. She examines, for instance, what can be learned from innovative high tech companies. Here people with different types of expertise realize they need each to make their own unique contributions. She also analyses what can be learned from evaluation systems that have been developed in the arts. These can also be used in other sectors to evaluate highly diverging products with no direct monetary value.

Michèle Lamont has also extended her work to examine her own professional environment within the university system. In her book 'How professors think' she identifies the criteria that are used to define scientific value. How do we evaluate the research that is done in different scientific disciplines? How do we value the contributions made by different groups of scientists, such as women, or ethnic minority members? How do knowledge, diversity and power impact on the production of science?

In her scholarly work, Michèle Lamont has put her own insights into practice. She mostly combines different types of research approaches, instead of focusing on methodologies that resemble the hard sciences – as so many social scientists do. In an interview, she was asked to comment on this. The interviewer challenged her approach and suggested that methodological rigor, big data, and statistics are seen as the hallmarks of quality in contemporary scholarship. Michèle Lamont responded as follows: "There are good and bad questions, and good and

bad theories but there are no good and bad methods. The method is as good as what we do with it.” She also commented on how scientific disciplines differ from each other. She indicated that: “Disciplines such as chemistry require enormous resources and lab space. These resources help create consensus around which knowledge producers matter and which types of knowledge are fireproof.” She expressed concern that social scientists sometimes suffer from the lack of such clarity and consensus. As a result, they easily feel their work is valued less than the contributions of the hard sciences, which are dominated by men. However, Michèle Lamont declared: “I am not one of these sociologists who suffer from Physics Envy.” Instead, she has argued for the unique strengths of the social sciences, which address different levels with different methodological tools. The micro level of individual concerns, motives, and efforts. And the macro level of broader developments and shifts in societal structures. Michèle Lamont roots for the social sciences as being ideally equipped to connect these levels by examining institutions, neighborhoods, organizations, networks, and cultural repertoires. Michèle Lamont not only emphasizes this as one of the unique strengths of the social sciences. She also reminds social scientists of their political responsibility to use the knowledge they develop in this way, for the benefit of society.

Knowledge, power and diversity. The work of Michèle Lamont on these themes has had a huge impact. Through her many books and scientific publications. Through all the young scholars across the world whom she has trained and inspired. And through her contributions to public debates. On the future of science, on cultural differences and stigmatization. On boundary drawing and divisions in society – and how to overcome these. In her own life and in her scholarly pursuits she has demonstrated the power of diversity. By connecting different bodies of knowledge and by emphasizing the importance of pluralism and inclusion. On behalf of our Foundation, it is my honor to congratulate Dr Lamont on being awarded the Erasmus Prize.

Knowledge is power. Or so they say. But what knowledge offers power?



Board Member Naomi Ellemers reciting the laudatio.



Performance by trombonist Sebastiaan Kemner. Photos by Jeroen van der Meyde.

Acceptance Speech Michèle Lamont

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, distinguished members of the Erasmus Prize foundation, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great emotion that I stand in front of you to accept the amazing honour that is the Erasmus Prize. What good fortune led the foundation to choose “Power, Knowledge and Diversity” as the focus of the 2017 award, and its jury to identify me among the many meritorious candidates for this prize! One can hardly think of a more significant reward for the labour of a social scientist, and it is with a great deal of humility that I thank His Majesty the King and the distinguished members of the Erasmus Prize Foundation for the great honour you are bestowing upon me. I want to use the time that is at my disposal to share thoughts about the meaning I attach to this award and about the current political moment, which presents so many challenges for our societies.

I grew up in Québec in the sixties, in the midst of the Quiet Revolution. This was an intense period of social change, a time when this small society of six million mostly French-speaking North Americans modernized at an amazing pace after the Catholic church lost its political and cultural hold on the social fabric. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the revolution in the world of knowledge that accompanied this change: I showed that while philosophy and theology were at the top of the hierarchy of disciplines in the 1960s, economics and legal studies had become hegemonic by the 1980s. These fields provided the intellectual tools needed for the institutionalization of a large social-democratic bureaucratic state that was to become the main economic engine of Québec society, and a tool of collective empowerment.

Born in 1928, my father had emerged from this pre-technocratic world, and was well acquainted with St-Augustin, Teilhard de Chardin, Paul Maritain and other thinkers, from spending almost a decade studying to become a priest. When I read about the life of Erasmus in preparation for today, my fertile imagination led me to see parallels between the distant humanist world of Erasmus and that in which my father studied.

From the age of 12, my father moved to a seminary and lived away from his family, sharing the life of men

with whom he learned to discuss in Greek and Latin seemingly medieval questions about free will and God. Such questions seemed obsolete to me when I found myself exploring his library in my teenage years. He was quite steeped in humanistic culture, having written a thesis on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. I don’t know why. I was lucky to be exposed to remnants of this world through my own education, also under the guidance of a religious order. This education certainly put more emphasis on history, Latin, culture and literature than it did on instrumental and technocratic knowledge. One of the reasons this award means so much to me is that I see it as a vindication of this multidimensional intellectual world that produced me. Although totally preposterous, the story I tell myself is that Erasmus and I were kindred spirits all along, and that this prize brings us together through the unpredictably meandering paths of life.

Like Erasmus, I left for Paris at a young age to pursue my graduate work, and I studied in the 5th arrondissement, not far from the Collège de Montaigne on the Montagne Sainte-Genève, which our moralist attended. In the post-colonial Québec of the seventies, taking off for Paris was de rigueur for aspiring academics (strangely enough, the United States were at best a distant presence!) This city was simply an extraordinarily exhilarating place to be then, attracting young people from so many intellectual worlds, even if it felt a bit like the end of an era, symbolized perhaps by the funeral of Jean-Paul Sartre, which I attended — I was among the thousands that followed his coffin through the wide boulevards of Montparnasse.

When I landed in 1978, Claude Lévi-Straus and Michel Foucault were still giving lectures at the Collège de France. I attended the seminar given by Pierre Bourdieu in 1979, the year that his book *Distinction* was published — one of the great books that defined the social sciences of the last decades of the 20th century. There were so many exciting ideas floating around, so many discussions to follow. Your own Norbert Elias, a world-class social scientist, was already fashionable in sociological circles, thanks to Bourdieu’s influence. Two of his great books, *The Civilizing Process* and *The Established and the Outsiders*, left a deep impression on me as I was working on developing my research agenda on group boundaries (who is in and who is out), and on how cultural markers

(about, for instance, how to blow one's nose in public) are used to signal elite group membership. I learned from Elias how such practices contribute to the creation of inequality and the monopolization of resources (what sociologists call closure). Such cultural processes eventually moved to the centre of my intellectual agenda, where they remain today.

In 1983, at the dawn of Silicon Valley and neoliberalism (Ronald Reagan had just come to power), I became a post-doctoral researcher at Stanford University, where I learned about American sociology. This unexpected migration broadened my horizon in amazing ways and gave me my dear husband of now thirty years, the sociologist Frank Dobbin, and later, three amazing children, Gabrielle, Pierre and Chloe. This move was a grand écart of sorts, because of the frenetic pace of work, the distance from my intellectual origins, and the linguistic transition it required. To this day, quite paradoxically, I have maintained a view of my vocation that is somewhat at odds with contemporary American academia, and this despite having met most of its requirements. Indeed, I see intellectual work as a complicated, partly unforeseeable and time-consuming craft, which is not entirely compatible with the rootless “publish or perish” mantra to which we submit. Hence another reason why receiving the Erasmus Prize is so meaningful to me: this honour reaffirms the value of seeing scholarship as an unpredictable adventure, an ideal I aspire to that is threatened by the rationalized contemporary conditions of knowledge production and evaluation fostered by our audit systems. This brings me to the absurdities of the current moment and the challenges it presents to us.

The kinds of societies that are being moulded in front of our very eyes bear little resemblance to the world in which I would like to live, or in which I would like our children to live. Every day, in the country where I reside, President Donald Trump, the great divider, finds new ways to strengthen group boundaries and target the most vulnerable members of our society. This is happening when inequality is at its highest point since the 1929 recession, and when many white working-class men experience downward mobility, feel economically vulnerable, and are looking for ways to reassert what they believe to be their rightful, superior place in society. Immigrants are easy prey. In the United States, this group was far less salient in shared definitions of “us” and “them” in the early nineties, when I conducted interviews with American workers for my book *The Dignity of Working Men*. Today, Trump, together with his populist counterparts in a number of European countries,

throws oil on the fire, and feeds anger and resentment the best he can, at a time when unions have lost their influence on workers and are not there any more to tell them about their class interest. These and other factors (most importantly, the powerful political lobbying of the economic elites) make our societies less inclusive and less generous. We know that such changes are antithetical to collective well-being: mean societies don't benefit anyone. We all suffer from greater inequality and less solidarity, as they feed anomie, violence, deviance, mental illness, oppositional radicalism, and a general deterioration of the social fabric.

The kinds of societies that are being moulded in front of our very eyes bear little resemblance to the world in which I would like to live, or in which I would like our children to live.

The path forward is unclear as it is becoming more difficult to reach out to those who don't think like us. Our media are increasingly structured around echo chambers, at least in the United States. We have to consider how to build the cultural bridges needed to get out of our current predicament. It behoves knowledge producers who feed the public sphere to offer new narratives that connect members of our societies together, alternatives to the ideology of meritocratic individualism that isolates us from one another and relies too exclusively on the ascendancy of social success. This will require gaining a better understanding of what makes various groups “tick” morally.

While the progressive middle and upper middle classes often embrace solidarity with the downtrodden as a form of morality, their conservative counterparts and some working-class people maintain their dignity through the promotion of a morality of self-reliance and hard work. At times this lead the latter group to condemn the poor and immigrants who presumably “sponge off” the system. Instead of simply embracing and feeding such different conceptions of morality, making them explicit and discussing them will be crucial in moving forward. The same holds when it comes to defining who belongs in the nation, and the place of skin colour and religion in this

equation, in the Netherlands as much as in the United States.

This is where social scientists have a special role to play. We need to address the growing recognition gap many experience head on, by making visible for everyone how the white working class suffers from the same lack of respect as do members of minority groups and immigrants. Publicizing these similarities in the quest for dignity may help us see a way forward, because this yearning is a widely shared among human beings. We have to articulate and make salient in the public sphere various forms of universalism that may bring us together and help repair a social contract that appears to be more under threat every day in this renewed age of populism.

One of the books that had the strongest impact on my thinking was Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, a book that urges us to "be all that we can be", to eschew having our self-concepts and desires overdetermined by the pressures of the profit motive, productivism and consumption. Marcuse was one of the thinkers who had a powerful impact on the May '68 student movement in France and elsewhere. His book offered a defence of human existence in its many dimensions, a call-to-arms urging us to avoid a flattening of social life to its most elementary economic dimensions. Inspired by Marcuse, as I am nearing sixty today, the aspects of my work that speak most to me have to do with the need to maintain a multidimensional understanding of what defines worthy people and a worthy life. I have been consumed by the need to consider how to promote a plurality of conceptions of success, or how to foster societies where various types of excellence can coexist, as represented by scientists, artists, scholars, spiritual and community leaders, manual workers, businesswomen, dreamers, and much more. This runs counter to predominant conceptions of success that emphasize only money and competition as standards of worth and that turn someone like Trump into a hero.

At this time in history, we have to realize that adopting economic success as the unique criterion of worth for all simply does not work. Not everyone can be upper-middle class or in the top 20 percent of the population — by definition. Embracing this fantasy condemns the majority of the population to thinking of themselves, and to being thought of, as losers by others. Thus, one of the missions of social scientists today is to figure out how to re-engineer our collective imaginaries to empower a wider range of possible futures for all. My hope is that this Erasmus Prize will give me the wings I need to take

on this challenge, with a lot of help from my friends, and that together we will influence in a significant way the paths that our societies can take at the present moment. The task is urgent, and too much is at stake for the future generation, and for ourselves, to not rise to the challenge.

Biography Michèle Lamont

Michèle Lamont (1957) is Professor of Sociology and of African and African American Studies and the Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies at Harvard University. She was born in Toronto and grew up in Québec, and later studied in Ottawa and Paris. After working at the universities of Stanford and Princeton, Lamont moved to Harvard University since 2003. She is the author of dozens of books and articles on a range of subjects, such as social inequality and exclusion, racism and ethnicity, as well as on institutions, academia and education.

In her latest book, *Getting Respect* (2016), she examines the profound influence of discrimination on the everyday lives of stigmatized groups. In her previous book, *How Professors Think* (2009), she reveals how the academic world determines what is valuable knowledge and what isn't. As an internationally influential sociologist, Michèle Lamont has played a key role in connecting European and American lines of research within the social sciences. In 2002 she co-founded the Successful Societies Program at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. In 2016 she received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Amsterdam.



Activities

IDFA with Michèle Lamont

'Land of the Free'

16 November, Tuschinski, Amsterdam

'Land of the Free' documentary (Camilla Magid, 2017). This debut documentary sketches the lives of three generations in South Central Los Angeles, and describes a vicious circle of undermining social patterns. The screening was followed by a conversation with Michèle Lamont. Interview by Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal. In collaboration with International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam.

Movies that Matter with Michèle Lamont

'I, Daniel Blake'

17 November, Cinerama Filmtheater, Rotterdam

Screening of the film 'I, Daniel Blake' (Ken Loach, 2016). About a loner's struggle with the bureaucracy of the social system in Britain and the recovery of dignity. The screening was followed by a conversation between Michèle Lamont and human rights lawyer Jelle Klaas.

Masterclass for students with Michèle Lamont

20 November, Boumangebouw, Groningen

National Masterclass with Michèle Lamont for students of the humanities and the social sciences. The central question was the importance of social sciences in solving social problems. In collaboration with the University of Groningen and SCOOP.

Studium Generale 'Division within Society

20 November, Academiegebouw, Groningen

Public lecture by Michèle Lamont about the division within society. In all Western societies, social status is determined by personal success in terms of level of education, career or money. This results in an imbalanced focus on competences and knowledge, and creates a competitive society of winners and losers. How can alternative values such as morality and life experience promote a broader perspective on social participation and social injustice? In collaboration with Studium Generale at the University of Groningen and Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen.

Academic Conference

'Diversity in Science'

21 November, Gertrudis Kapel, Utrecht

Michèle Lamont spoke to academics from various fields about Diversity in Science. Various current themes were addressed, among them diversity of disciplines, diversity of researchers, and diversity of quality indicators. The key question throughout was: who determines what is successful and valuable in scientific research? Speakers were: Barnita Bagchi, Naomi Ellemers, Henkjan Honing, Anthony Jack, Annemarie Mol, Sarah de Rijcke, Floor Rink, Ingrid Robeyns, Marten Scheffer, Appy Sluys and Iris van der Tuin. In collaboration with Utrecht University and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Interview with Michèle Lamont 'The Academic Professional'

22 november, De Uithof, Utrecht

Interview with Michèle Lamont in the Academic Professional series for master students. Lamont spoke about her personal choices and academic dilemmas, about ethical conduct and scientific integrity. In collaboration with Utrecht University.

Academic conference

'Getting Respect in The Netherlands'

23 november, CREA, Amsterdam

A safe, prosperous and democratic country like the Netherlands also has many forms of social exclusion. What mechanisms create this and, more specifically, why is exclusion often so distressing? Does it mostly concern economic inequality or material uncertainty? Or is it more complex and do identity and recognition play a big role in how exclusion is experienced? Together with Michèle Lamont, social scientists and activists debated these issues. Among them were Natasha Basu, Nadia Benaissa, Esther Captain, Maurice Crul, Jeroen Doomerik, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Margreet van Es, Philomena Essed, Nadia Fadil, Karwan Fatah-Black, Francio Guadeloupe, Halleh Ghorashi, Giseline Kuipers, Paul Mepschen, Annelies Moors, Rogier van Reekum, Willem Schinkel and Elisabeth Silva. In collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Sociology



Camilla Magid and moderator Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal in conversation with Lamont during IDFA in Tuschinski. Photo by Jan Boeve.



Winners of the Knowledge, Power & Diversity Essay Competition after the Masterclass with Lamont. Photo by Ineke Oostveen.

Activities

Debate with Michèle Lamont and Philomena Essed

23 November, Aula/Lutherse kerk, Amsterdam

Debate between Michèle Lamont and Philomena Essed about knowledge, power and diversity. Philomena Essed is Professor of Critical Race, Gender and Leadership Studies at Antioch University (US). Among her best-known works are 'Understanding Everyday Racism' and 'Diversity: Gender, Color and Culture'. The debate was moderated by Jan-Willem Duyvendak, Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. In collaboration with Spui25.

Lecture by Sophie Feyder

'Resilience through the Lens'

24 November, Zuid-Afrikahuis, Amsterdam

Sophie Feyder (2017 Research Prize) in conversation with Bart Luirink about 'Portraits of Resilience'. Feyder researched the personal photography collection of the Ngilima family from South Africa. The photographs date from the 1950s and 1960s and offer a glimpse of everyday life and resilience under the apartheid regime in Benoni. In collaboration with the Zuid-Afrikahuis.

Reflecting on Diversity'

A conversation between Michael Ignatieff and Michèle Lamont

24 November, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

A conversation between the Erasmus Prize Laureate and writer, historian and broadcaster Michael Ignatieff. Michael Ignatieff recently wrote 'The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World'. Together they discussed issues such as the role of knowledge institutes in the debate on diversity. Moderated by Lennart Booij. In collaboration with the Rijksmuseum and WRR.

Film choice by Michèle Lamont

For NTR, the Dutch public broadcaster, Lamont selected and introduced three documentaries that relate to her field of research. The documentaries and introductions were aired on NPO Cultura.

Essay competition on Knowledge, Power and Diversity

How do knowledge, power and diversity relate to one another? What does it actually mean when people say that knowledge is power? And do we not hear the very opposite today, that whoever is in power determines what knowledge prevails? The jury looked for essays in which the relation between knowledge, power and diversity were central. The competition was open to all students of Social Sciences in The Netherlands.

Publications

Erasmus Essay door Michèle Lamont

'Prisms of Inequality: Moral Boundaries, Academic Excellence and Experiences of Exclusion'

In the series of Erasmus Essays of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, on the occasion of the Erasmus Prize 2017.

De Nederlandse Boekengids

The November edition of this bimonthly magazine about non-fiction was devoted to Knowledge, Power and Diversity. It featured articles and essays by authors such as Josien Arts, Judith Elshout, Anouk Kootstra and Kristof Smeyers.



Debate Michèle Lamont and Philomena Essed in the Lutherse Kerk.



Michael Ignatieff, Michèle Lamont and moderator Lennart Booi in the Rijksmuseum. Photos by Ineke Oostveen.

Research Prizes 2017

Since 1988, the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation awards annual Research Prizes. Five prizes of € 3,000 each are awarded to young academic researchers in the humanities and social sciences, who have written a PhD dissertation of outstanding quality at a university in the Netherlands. Important criteria for the award are the broad, case transcending treatment of the subject and the wider relevance of the book for other disciplines. This year's selection committee was formed by Dr. Shanti van Dam, Dr. mr. Max Drenth, Prof.dr. Naomi Ellemers, Prof. dr. Maria Grever, Prof.dr. Bas ter Haar Romeny en Prof.dr. Rick Lawson. For some dissertations the jury consulted experts outside the commission.

The Research Prizes award ceremony took place on Thursday 11 mei 2017 at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam.

The winning dissertations of 2017:

Eric Boot

Human Duties and the Limits of Human Rights Discourse.

Sophie Feyder

Portraits of resilience: writing a socio-cultural history of a black South African location with the Ngilima photographic collection. Benoni, 1950s-1960s.

Tineke Rooijakkers

Dress Norms and Markers: A Comparative Study of Coptic Identity and Dress in the Past and Present.

Lucy van de Wiel

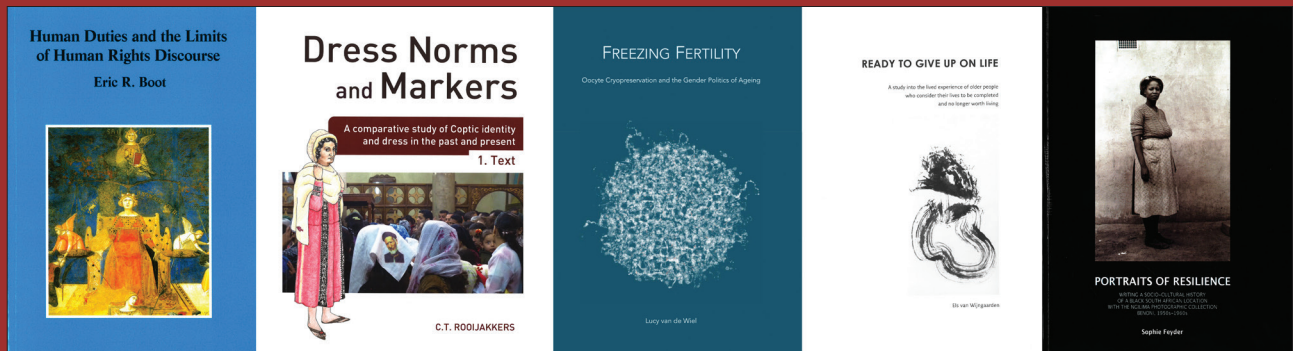
Freezing Fertility. Oocyte Cryopreservation and the Gender Politics of Ageing.

Els van Wijngaarden

Ready to give up on life. A study into the lived experience of older people who consider their lives to be completed and no longer worth living.



Standing (f.l.t.r.)
Shanti van Dam,
Els van Wijngaarden,
Sophie Feyder,
Tineke Rooijakkers,
Eric Boot
and Lucy van de Wiel.
Photo by Ineke Oostveen



The covers of the winning Dissertations 2017

Eric Boot

Human Duties and the Limits of Human Rights Discourse.

Supervisor Prof. dr. T. Mertens
Co-supervisor Dr. R. Tinnevelt
Nomination Radboud University,
Law Faculty

Biography

Eric R. Boot studied philosophy and literary studies at the University of Amsterdam, the Naples Eastern University and the Free University of Berlin. In 2010 he graduated with a MA thesis on the concepts of freedom and responsibility in the works of Kant and Heidegger. As of June 2011 he started work on his PhD in philosophy of law at the Faculty of Law of the Radboud University Nijmegen. In 2013 he visited the Department of Philosophy of the University of Pennsylvania as a visiting scholar. His supervisor there was prof. dr. Kok-Chor Tan. Following the completion of his PhD with honors (cum laude), he started work at Leiden University's Institute for Philosophy in December 2015 on the three-year postdoctoral project 'Unauthorized Disclosures,' which is part of the project 'Democratic Secrecy: Philosophical Analysis of the Role of Secrecy in Democratic Governance,' funded by the European Research Council. His work in this project focuses mainly on the moral and legal questions concerning whistleblowing. In addition he is interested in the philosophy of human rights and Kantian philosophy.

Report of the Selection Committee

The author of this excellently written dissertation displayed courage in dedicating himself to a subject that usually triggers aversion straight away: human rights obligations. A vague and paternalist concept, it is often said, and also a dangerous instrument favoured by dictators. Boot is fully aware of this dimension. Nevertheless, in a wonderfully constructed treatise, he argues that the perspective of obligations does make sense and, moreover, can contribute to a closer protection of human rights. This results in some exceptionally solid passages, for instance on the position of obligations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And his down-to-earth style, in which he always succeeds in exploring theoretical ideas through concrete situations, has produced a highly accessible book. Erasmus, the jury imagines, would thoroughly enjoy it.

Sophie Feyder

Portraits of resilience: writing a socio-cultural history of a black South African location with the Ngilima photographic collection. Benoni, 1950s-1960s.

Supervisors Prof. dr. R.J. Ross
Prof. dr. P.E. Spyer
Nomination Leiden University.
Faculty of Humanities

Biography

Sophie Feyder was born in Brussels and grew up in New York and Luxemburg. After a degree in political science in Paris, she eventually brought together her interests in photography and African history in an MPhil dissertation at Leiden University on black popular photography in Johannesburg. Her encounter with Farrell Ngilima in 2008 initiated a close collaboration on his grandfather's photographic collection, which became a central focus of her PhD research. Her dissertation, entitled 'Portraits of resilience: writing a socio-cultural history of a black South African location with the Ngilima photographic collection. Benoni, 1950s-1960s', looks at how private photographic archives can be mobilised as a serious historical source. Feyder argues that working with the Ngilima collection enabled her to write a different kind of history of black communities, one that is focused on small everyday gestures of resilience in the context of apartheid. Her dissertation deals with themes such as leisure and consumption, the making of an urban black youth culture, and the role of house interiors in asserting a respectable and modern identity. She received her PhD degree cum laude from Leiden University in May 2016. Three years before that, she curated the exhibition 'Sidetracks: Working on Two Photographic Collections' together with Tamsyn Adams. This project continued with the recent publication of an art book entitled 'Commonplace' (Fourthwall Books, 2017). She currently lives in Brussels and is working on projects that combine academia with creative modes of dissemination.

Report of the Selection Committee

This thesis offers a fresh look at 1950s-1960s South African urban history based on a private collection of photographs taken by a father and a son. It tells its analytic story of an anti-monumental memory of everyday life among black and coloured South Africans in Benoni from a social anthropology perspective, and offers a fine supplement and necessary alternative approach to the "struggle stories" and narratives about anti-Apartheid heroes. Equally, the thesis offers genuine insights into urban life during apartheid South Africa. It scores high in originality and international significance. The author used so-called 'photo-elucidation', which entails using photographs to encourage informants to reminisce on their past. The jury was impressed by the successful marriage of the personal and the analytical in this beautifully crafted book. The author shows how, despite apartheid, Black communities continued to live and flourish, and were resilient in the face of racist oppression.

Tineke Rooijackers
Dress Norms and Markers:
A Comparative Study of Coptic Identity and Dress
in the Past and Present.

Supervisor Prof. dr. B. ter Haar Romeny
Co-supervisors Dr. M. Immerzeel
Dr. G. Vogelsang-Eastwood
Nomination Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam
Faculty of Humanities

Biography

Tineke Rooijackers specializes in the social side of dress and its role in the construction of identity, in both the past and present. She finished her Research Master in Archaeology in 2008 (cum laude). In her thesis she already pushed disciplinary boundaries by tracing the development of the tunic in Egypt from the Pharaonic period to the Byzantine era. During her studies she also worked at the Textile Research Centre in Leiden, specifically with the collection of contemporary dress from the Middle East, and assisted in the realization of several exhibitions. Her PhD project at Leiden University (Religious Studies) combined her interest in contemporary dress with her specialization in archaeological textiles. She studied textiles in several museums in Europe, the UK, and the US, and did anthropological fieldwork in Egypt, the Netherlands, and the US. She defended the resulting dissertation at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (cum laude). Her research functioned as a pilot study for the NWO-funded project *Fitting in/Standing out: Comparing Majority and Minority Dress Codes among Egyptian Muslims and Christians*, in which she is currently a postdoc. In September 2017 she started a new project at the University College London (Anthropology, Material Culture) with a Rubicon grant.

Report of the Selection Committee

This dissertation stands out in its combination of archaeological and anthropological approaches to the important element of dress as an identity marker. It offers fascinating insights into Coptic life in everyday Egypt in the late antique/medieval and contemporary period. Insights about how dress works across the public and the private spheres. The aim of understanding the role of dress in the construction of a religious group identity is being delved into by the author in a very elaborate and conscientious manner, only to emerge out of the dusty rubble with a crystal clear comparative analysis. Remarkably, the argument that emerges about 'difference', is it not being the primary marker of Coptic dress in relation to the Muslim community. This highly readable book, beautifully presented, goes beyond its specific topic in making us think about conceptions of minority populations in general, and gender roles through the ages in particular.

Lucy van de Wiel

Freezing Fertility.

Oocyte Cryopreservation and the Gender Politics of Ageing.

Supervisors Prof. dr. M. Bal
Prof. dr. J. van Dijck
Co-supervisor Dr. E. Peeren
Nomination University of Amsterdam,
Faculty of Humanities

Biography

Lucy van de Wiel's research focuses on the socio-cultural dimensions of new reproductive technologies. Her dissertation *Freezing Fertility: Oocyte Cryopreservation and the Gender Politics of Ageing* deals with the wide-ranging implications of egg freezing, an increasingly popular fertility technology with global reach. Lucy van de Wiel received her PhD in 2015 at the University of Amsterdam and won the 2016 ASCA Award for best dissertation. She pursued postgraduate studies as a HSP and Fulbright grantee in Rhetorics at the University of California, Berkeley, holds a Research MA in Cultural Analysis (cum laude) from the University of Amsterdam and an MA in Film Curating (with distinction) from the London Film School and London Consortium, University of London. She currently works as a Research Associate at the Reproductive Sociology Research Group (ReproSoc), University of Cambridge. Here she continues her research into egg freezing, is developing a new research project on embryo selection and leads a major Wellcome Trust-funded outreach programme about reproductive technologies called Life in Glass.

Report of the Selection Committee

Examining the introduction of 'oocyte cryopreservation' (the freezing of eggs) in the early 21st century, using the innovative methods associated with the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, this thesis relates the concern with why or if women should freeze their eggs to a contemporary rethinking and politicisation of ageing. The dissertation shows how the possibility of freezing eggs, which allows motherhood to be postponed, has profound consequences for the way in which female aging is understood. The material the thesis examines is diverse and includes time-lapse photography, documentaries, and news coverage, and the author deftly synthesizes gender studies, biotechnology studies and ageing studies. Parallel to this, the author analyses the cultural debates around these technological developments, showing how egg freezing triggers a series of discussions which are similar internationally and indicative about the sign of the times as a whole. The jury considers this dissertation highly original, lucidly written and above all an important theoretical contribution to understanding gender constructions, reproduction and ageing.

Els van Wijngaarden

Ready to give up on life.

A study into the lived experience of older people who consider their lives to be completed and no longer worth living.

Supervisors Prof. dr. C. Leget
Prof dr.A. Goossensen
Nomination University of Humanistic Studies

Biography

In 2009, Els van Wijngaarden (1976) graduated cum laude in Religious Studies at VU University Amsterdam with a specialisation in (non-denominational) spiritual counselling. From 2007 to 2016, she has worked as a lecturer in ethics and existential counselling at two universities for applied sciences in bachelor and post-bachelor programs. In 2012, she was awarded with a NWO Doctoral Grant for Teachers, allowing her to conduct research into the lived experiences of older people who considered their lives to be completed, at the University of Humanistic Studies. In 2016, she defended her thesis titled *Ready to give up on life: A study into the lived experience of older people who consider their lives to be completed and no longer worth living*. Besides, she wrote a book for the general public titled *Voltooid leven: over leven en willen sterven*. Since October 2016, she works as a researcher for the research company Tao of Care and as lecturer and researcher at the University of Humanistic Studies.

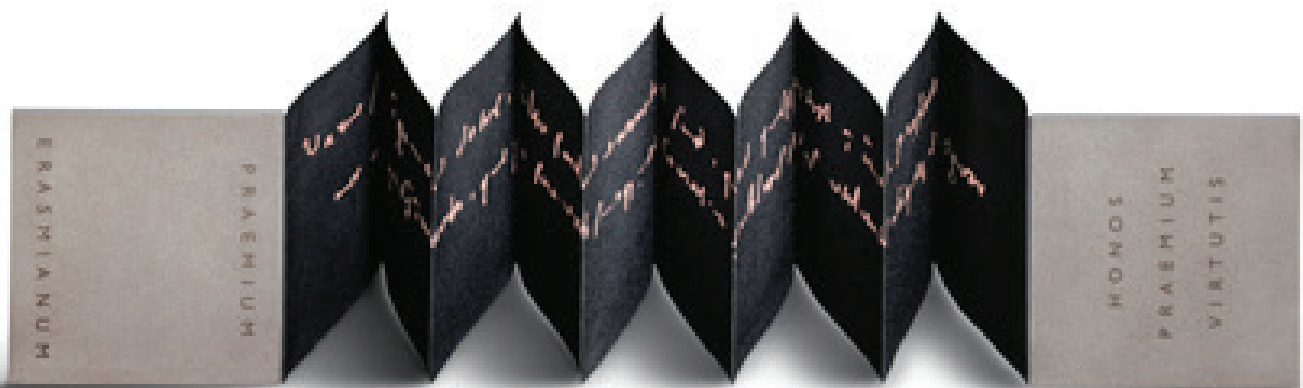
Report of the Selection Committee

This dissertation examines a highly explosive theme, the phenomenon of a 'fulfilled life', in a balanced, lucid and sensitive way. The author researches the scientific context within which this phenomenon is written about. Drawing on interviews, she explores the factors that influence older people who wish to end their lives. She complements this empirical research in an interesting and thorough manner with an overview of existing provisions on the one hand, and external criticism on the other. In her research the author links various academic disciplines and fields of research, such as phenomenology, the psychology of medical studies and ethics. Her combination of individual histories, social structure and moral reflection makes this a finely balanced study. Moreover, this is the world's first study to put forward empirical arguments in the discussion on rational suicide, which to date has largely been a theoretical debate. The jury was impressed by the qualitative analysis and hopes that the work will prove exemplary in future debates on this important social issue.

Origin and Aim of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation

On 23 June 1958, His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands founded the Praemium Erasmianum. The aim of the organisation, as described in article 2 of its constitution, is to enhance the position of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts and to promote appreciation of these fields within society, within the context of the cultural traditions of Europe in general and the ideas of Erasmus in particular. The emphasis is on tolerance, cultural multiformity and undogmatic critical thinking.

The Erasmus Prize consists of €150,000 and adornments. The Board is composed of leading members of the Dutch cultural, scholarly and business communities.



The adornments are designed by Bruno Ninaber van Eyben. The adornments consist of a harmonica folded ribbon with a titanium plate at both ends. In closed form it is a booklet; when opened a ribbon with a text in Erasmus' handwriting. This text, taken from a letter to Jean de Carondelet (Basel 5 January 1523), is characteristic of Erasmus' thinking:

Diverse are the gifts of men of genius and many are the different kinds of ages. let each one reveal the scope of his competence and let no one be envious of another who in keeping with his own ability and style tries to make a useful contribution to the education of all.

*Erasmus to Jean de Carondelet
Basel 5 January 1523*

Board 2017

A number of changes were made to the foundation board during 2017. We welcomed four new board members: Jos de Mul, Nazmiye Oral, Mieke Gerritzen and Andreas Blühm. The board was chaired during 2017 by Ernst Hirsch Ballin. A number of board members stood down after serving the maximum number of terms, namely Martijn Sanders, Maria Grever, Fouad Laroui, Axel Rüger and Frank van Vree. We thank them warmly for their commitment to the board.

His Majesty the King
Patron

Ernst Hirsch Ballin
Chair (21 Jan. 2017 - 20 Jan. 2018)
Former Minister of Justice

Jet de Ranitz
Vice-chair
President Executive Board, Hogeschool Inholland

Tom de Swaan
Treasurer
Chairman of the board Van Lanschot Bankiers

Barnita Bagchi
Professor Comparative Literature, Utrecht University

Andreas Blühm
Director Groninger Museum

Désanne van Brederode
Philosopher, publicist

Naomi Ellemers
Professor of Social Psychology of Organisations,
Utrecht University

Mieke Gerritzen
Designer, curator

Bregtje van der Haak
Documentary filmmaker, journalist

Bas ter Haar Romeny
Professor Old Testament and Eastern Christian Traditions,
VU University Amsterdam

Rick Lawson
Professor of European Law, Faculty of Law,
Leiden University

Jos de Mul
Professor of Philosophical Anthropology, Faculty of Philosophy,
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Nazmiye Oral
Actress, author

Henk Scholten
Director Zuiderstrandtheater The Hague

Xandra Schutte
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Ed Spanjaard
Conductor

Jan Snoek
Observer on behalf of His Majesty the King

Shanti van Dam
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Lucia Aalbers
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Maral Khajeh
Secretary

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