In Conversation with... Michèle Lamont

Interview by Kristin Caulfield and Megan Margulies

Michèle Lamont, Director-Designate, reflects on teaching and her collaborative research on inequality.

Come fall 2015, Michèle Lamont will begin a five-year term as Center Director. As Lamont looks ahead to her upcoming directorship, she is hoping to contribute to reshaping the overall landscape of the social sciences at Harvard. Her plans for the Center will appear in a future Centerpiece article when her term begins.

When we sat down with Professor Lamont she was in the midst of preparing the prestigious Adorno lectures to be delivered in June at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, Germany, under the title “Worlds of Worth: Cultural Processes of Inequality.”

As a young scholar coming up the ranks, she received tenure at Princeton University in 1993 with her first book, Money, Morals and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class, and was later appointed full professor in 2000 with her second book, The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Immigration. She came to Harvard University in 2003 and was appointed Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies in 2006. Owing to her interest in the transformation of collective identity over the past thirty years, Lamont moved away from her original focus on class to study race and stigmatization and is now focusing on the cultural processes by which classification systems feed into inequality.

A fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), Lamont has codirected its research program on Successful Societies since 2002 with Weatherhead Center Faculty Associate, Peter A. Hall. She has served as a consultant to the World Bank and UNESCO, and is currently working on an international group project that focuses on responses to stigmatization and discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel. Lamont acknowledges that
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Cover: Cherry trees in bloom. The trees outside of the Center’s 61 Kirkland Street building were donated by the 2007–2008 affiliates of the Program on U.S.-Japan Relations.  

Photo credit: Jennie Kim  
Michèle Lamont.  
Photo credit: Megan Margulies

her intellectual agenda has benefitted enormously from her involvement in this NSF and Weatherhead Initiative-supported interdisciplinary project.

**Your current project, Responses to Stigmatization, is a cross-national exploration of how diverse minority groups deal with and respond to stigmatization in the course of their everyday lives. Can you tell us how the case studies and data were analyzed?**

We had 150 interviews in each country and systematically asked questions such as: “Have you ever been treated unfairly? Describe the incidents?”; “How did you respond?”; and “What are the ideal tools that people in your group have to respond to discrimination?”

We then systematically compared the salience of various types of incidents across national contexts: confronting, what we called “managing the self” (e.g. avoiding anger, using humor), demonstrating work and competence, and more. We found very different patterns between the groups. For instance, African Americans believed they should confront racism as well as get an education and work hard. Then we considered the cultural repertoires that are likely to sustain such responses. In this case, we argued that confronting is a response enabled by the success of the civil rights movement while neoliberal themes relating to market competitiveness make working hard a more likely response. Self-improvement is a predominant type of ideal response for this group.

But when it came to responses to concrete events, we found different patterns. One teacher explained that when she walked into the teacher’s lounge and no one says hello to her, she considers whether to confront or to ignore the slight, and generally chooses the latter. However, African Americans generally agreed that one has to confront incidences of racism. What we are looking at in our research is a very detailed analysis of what the experience of stigmatization is like, and we provide an explanation for patterned differences.

In another example, we studied three ethnic groups in Israel: Palestinian Israelis, Mizrahim (Jews from the Middle East), and Ethiopian Jews (immigrants). These three groups have different types of collective identities and experience exclusion very differently. The book provides an explanation for how the institutional and cultural contexts in which these individuals live influence not only their experience of stigmatization and discrimination, but also possible responses. Respondents are mostly concerned with stigmatization—the experience of being ignored or overlooked, misunderstood, and isolated. But most of the literature is on discrimination. Our argument is that the texture of these experiences, and the responses, are significantly shaped by the extent to which each ethnic group sees themselves as a group.

In the case of African Americans, they readily have access to strong narratives about their historical experiences and how they’ve been discriminated against. They clearly think of themselves as a group. There are stories immediately available about how one reaches and gains cultural membership in our society and achieves the American dream. In contrast, Mizrahim are unclear about whether they are a group or not. They are a largely assimilated ethnic group, yet many of them will say they are discriminated against and presumed to be low class. The added value of our research is that we have these five groups whose experiences vary enormously—there is clearly a language to talk about discrimination in each group, but it is very different from one group to the next.

This research has been fed by the Successful Societies project with CIFAR. A few months ago, Peter Hall and I published a second book called Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era. We approach neoliberalism as an economic and political phenomenon, but also as a cultural phenomenon that affects the way people frame their worth—the cultural repertoires that we draw on to determine our worth as human beings.

**Now that you have dedicated a significant amount of time to these collaborative projects, what would you say are the benefits of interdisciplinary research?**

I not only engage in interdisciplinary research on racism and stigmatization but was also asked by CIFAR to study nine different research groups to improve our understanding of the markers of successful interdisciplinary collaborations, and the factors that improve them. Together with my collaborators, we compared three research networks from CIFAR, three from the Santa Fe Institute, and three from the McArthur Foundation. Individually, we don’t have the analytical tools of every discipline, so when we put our heads together, we can see things that we couldn’t otherwise see. A good collaboration is cognitive, but what we found in our research is that a lot of it is emotional and interactional as well. Scholars talk a lot about what we call “collective effervescence,” that moment when as a team you think, “We’ve got it!”

When you’ve been a scholar for thirty years, there is a lot of interaction with graduate students and colleagues, but there is something very nice about being involved in a twelve-year collaboration with a group of scholars. It’s a little bit like being married for a long time—much is shared and produced collectively and you
work through your conflicts. What you gain from surviving these conflicts is a level of trust.

**How does your research influence not just other scholarship, but public policy and the work of NGOs?**

I was in Hangzhou, China, last May at a large conference that UNESCO organized around culture and sustainability. One of the goals of the conference was to consider how to integrate "culture" and "inclusion" in the human development index. This led me to participate in conversations about using a less individualistic approach to defining societal well-being. Last fall, I presented this work to the Human Development Reports office at the United Nations.

I also served on the board of the scholarship program of the Open Society Institute. We oversee a large program that provides scholarships to help in creating stronger middle classes in countries with low state capacity. For example, social work and criminology are occupations that are essential for the exercise of state capacity. If this layer of professional occupations is missing, you can't have a functioning society. As I have written a book on peer review, *How Professors Think*, I mobilize my understanding of evaluation to contribute to the production of social change in a very concrete fashion. This service is my own form of philanthropy.

Additionally, I'm in conversation with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to explore what they call the "cultures of health" which is a new program they are now launching. The foundation's mission has been influenced by our book, *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*. Their vice president for research asked a colleague and me to organize a meeting in the next few weeks that will put them in conversation with a number of cultural sociologists. This is like gold—to be able to influence such an important foundation just as they are redefining their future mission. We are given the opportunity to make a case, which is just wonderful. It's meaningful to go beyond academic influence and have an impact on the thinking of foundations and nonprofits that are involved with creating social change.

In 2010, the Harvard Graduate Students Council awarded you the Everett Mendelsohn Excellence in Mentoring Award. What advice do you have for students embarking on an academic and research-based path in the social sciences?

Deciding to be a scholar is a difficult choice to make because it is a path with a high level of uncertainty. I did my graduate work in France where "mentoring" didn't exist as a word—it was a sink or swim system. I have a lot of sympathy for the gambles students and researchers are making.

I teach the required qualitative methods course for first-year sociology graduate students. I spend the semester telling them that the bar is higher than they had expected it to be and that this is what being in graduate school is about—learning where the bar is. Of course, it is also about intellectual curiosity and urgent questions, but many people have this and are not scholars. Understanding the relationship between theory and data, and what makes a project significant is important.

For over ten years, I have run the Culture and Social Analysis Workshop in my department, a popular forum where graduate students, postdocs, and visitors present their work for feedback. And because I have a large number of graduate advisees, I have created a small informal group called "Inside the Sausage Factory," where students discuss projects that are at an early stage. We call this our "safe space." My advice to students is to create a mentoring network: turn to different people to get advice on different aspects of your scholarship and your life. This network can serve as a scaffold and a buffer. It is crucial. Also, don't jump through hoops. Be serious about your intellectual vocation. Don't just follow the market. Follow what is of true interest to you. I feel that this is what I have done and it has served me very well—even if at times I felt I lacked a safety net.

**How do you like to spend your time outside of the office?**

With my family of course: three kids, a partner, a dog—the works. They are the linchpin of my life (my dog less so). But also, Danny Kahneman, a psychologist who studies happiness, has two findings that I really like: people are most happy when they exercise and when they hang out with their friends. I commute by bike most days from Brookline Village to campus, and it really does make me happy. Even though his approach is too individualistic, an ideal life would be one that takes Kahneman's theories into consideration, but also has a multidimensional idea of what a good society is about, what kind of commitments we should be expecting from one another. I could say, in small ways, the social sciences should help to move our understanding of collective well-being toward this ideal.

Learn more about Michèle Lamont by visiting her website: scholar.harvard.edu/lamont
His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence
By Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

Francis Clooney’s latest work of comparative theology seeks a way beyond today’s religious and interreligious uncertainty by pairing a fresh reading of the absence of the beloved in the biblical Song of Songs with a pioneering study of the same theme in the *Holy Word of Mouth* (ninth century CE), a classic of Hindu mystical poetry rarely studied in the West.

*(Stanford University Press, 2013)*

Francis X. Clooney, S.J. is the Parkman Professor of Divinity, professor of comparative theology, and director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School.

Japan at Nature’s Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power
Edited by Ian Jared Miller, Julia Adeney Thomas, and Brett L. Walker.

*Japan at Nature’s Edge* is a timely collection of essays that explores the relationship between Japan's history, culture, and physical environment. It greatly expands the focus of previous work on Japanese modernization by examining Japan's role in global environmental transformation and how Japanese ideas have shaped bodies and landscapes over the centuries.

*(University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013)*

Ian Jared Miller is a professor of history at Harvard University. Julia Adeney Thomas is an associate professor in the Department of History at the University of Notre Dame. Brett L. Walker is a regents professor in the Department of History and Philosophy at Montana State University.

Moral Nation: Modern Japan and Narcotics in Global History
By Miriam Kingsberg

This trailblazing study examines the history of narcotics in Japan to explain the development of global criteria for political legitimacy in nations and empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

*(University of California Press, 2013)*

Miriam Kingsberg is an assistant professor of history at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She was a Harvard Academy Scholar from 2010–2012.

The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo
By Ian Jared Miller

In this eye-opening study of Japan's first modern zoo—Tokyo's Ueno Imperial Zoological Gardens, opened in 1882—Ian Jared Miller offers a refreshingly unconventional narrative of Japan's rapid modernization and changing relationship with the natural world. As the first zoological garden in the world not built under the sway of a Western imperial regime, the Ueno Zoo served not only as a staple attraction in the nation's capital—an institutional marker of national accomplishment—but also as a site for the propagation of a new “natural” order that was scientifically verifiable and evolutionarily foreordained.

*(University of California Press, 2013)*

Ian Jared Miller is a professor of history at Harvard University.

Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism
By Anya Bernstein

*Religious Bodies Politic* examines the complex relationship between transnational religion and politics through the lens of one cosmopolitan community in Siberia: Buryats, who live in a semiautonomous republic in Russia with a large Buddhist population. Looking at religious transformation among Buryats across changing political economies, Anya Bernstein argues that under conditions of rapid social change—such as those that accompanied the Russian Revolution, the Cold War, and the fall of the Soviet Union—Buryats have used Buddhist “body politics” to articulate their relationship not only with the Russian state, but also with the larger Buddhist world.

*(University of Chicago Press, 2013)*

Anya Bernstein is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University.

Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador
By Jocelyn Viterna

From 230 in-depth interviews with men and women guerrillas, guerrilla supporters, and non-participants in El Salvador, Jocelyn Viterna investigates why some women were able to channel their wartime actions into post-war gains, and how those patterns differ from the benefits that accrued to men. Through this analysis, Viterna develops a new model for investigating the causes, patterns, and consequences of individual-level variations in activism.

*(Oxford University Press, 2013)*

Jocelyn Viterna is an associate professor of sociology at Harvard University. She was a Harvard Academy Scholar from 2006–2007 and 2009–2010.
30-Second Ancient Egypt: The 50 Most Important Achievements of a Timeless Civilization Each Explained in Half a Minute

By Peter Der Manuelian

30-Second Ancient Egypt presents a unique insight into one of the most brilliant and beguiling civilizations, where technological innovations and architectural wonders emerge among mysterious gods and burial rites. Each entry is summarized in just thirty seconds using nothing more than two pages, 300 words, and a single picture. From royal dynasties and Tutankhamun's tomb, to hieroglyphs and mummification, interspersed with biographies of Egypt's most intriguing rulers, this is the quickest path to understanding the fifty key ideas and innovations that developed and defined one of the world's great civilizations.

Ivy Press, 2014

Peter Der Manuelian is the Philip J. King Professor of Egyptology at Harvard Divinity School.

Advancing Electoral Integrity

Edited by Pippa Norris, Richard W. Frank, and Ferran Martinez i Coma

Recent decades have seen growing concern over problems of electoral integrity. The most overt malpractices used by rulers include imprisoning dissidents, harassing adversaries, coercing voters, vote-rigging counts, and even blatant disregard for the popular vote. This volume collects essays from international experts who evaluate the robustness, conceptual validity, and reliability of the growing body of evidence. The essays compare alternative approaches and apply these methods to evaluate the quality of elections in several areas, including in the United States, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America.


Can China Lead?: Reaching the Limits of Power and Growth

By F. Warren McFarlan, William C. Kirby, and Regina Abrami

Based on a new and popular course taught by the authors at Harvard Business School, this book draws on more than thirty Harvard Business School case studies on Chinese and foreign companies doing business in the region, including Sealed Air, China Merchants Bank, China Mobile, Wanxiang Group, Microsoft, UFIDA, and others. Can China Lead? asserts that China is at an inflection point that cannot be ignored. An understanding of the forces that continue to shape its business landscape is crucial to establishing—and maintaining—a successful enterprise in China.


F. Warren McFarlan is a Baker Foundation Professor and the Albert H. Gordon Professor of Business Administration, Emeritus, at Harvard Business School. William C. Kirby is the Spangler Family Professor of Business Administration and the T. M. Chang Professor of China Studies at Harvard Business School. Regina Abrami is a senior lecturer of political science, senior fellow at the Management Department at Wharton School of Business, and director of the Global Program at the Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt

By Tarek Masoud

Tracing the performance of Islamists and their rivals in Egyptian elections over the course of almost forty years, this book not only explains why Islamists win elections, but also illuminates the possibilities for the emergence in Egypt of the kind of political pluralism that is at the heart of what we expect from democracy.

Cambridge University Press, 2014

Tarek Masoud is an associate professor of public policy at Harvard Kennedy School.

Empires at War: 1911–1923

Edited by Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela

Empires at War, 1911–1923 offers a new perspective on the history of the Great War, looking at the war beyond the generally accepted 1914–1918 timeline, and as a global war between empires, rather than a European war between nation-states.

Oxford University Press, 2014

Robert Gerwarth is a professor of modern history and director of the Centre for War Studies at University College Dublin. Erez Manela is a professor of history at Harvard University.
Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization
By Neil J. Brenner

Drawing together classic and contemporary texts on the “urbanization question,” this book explores various theoretical, epistemological, methodological and political implications of Lefebvre’s hypothesis. It assembles a series of analytical and cartographic interventions that supersede inherited spatial ontologies (urban/rural, town/country, city/non-city, society/nature) in order to investigate the uneven implosions and explosions of capitalist urbanization across places, regions, territories, continents, and oceans up to the planetary scale. (Jovis, 2014)

Neil J. Brenner is a professor of urban theory and director of the Urban Theory Lab at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.

Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood
By Charles S. Maier

Thomas Hobbes laid the theoretical groundwork of the nation-state in Leviathan, his tough-minded treatise of 1651. Leviathan 2.0 updates this classic account to explain how modern statehood took shape between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, before it unraveled into the political uncertainty that persists today. (Belknap Press, 2014)

Charles S. Maier is the Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History at Harvard University.

Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People
Edited By David Armitage and Alison Bashford

The first comprehensive account to place the Pacific Islands, the Pacific Rim, and the Pacific Ocean into the perspective of world history. A distinguished international team of historians provides a multidimensional account of the Pacific, its inhabitants, and the lands within and around it over 50,000 years, with special attention to the peoples of Oceania. It provides chronological coverage along with analyses of themes such as the environment, migration, and the economy; religion, law, and science; race, gender, and politics. (Palgrave Macmillian Press, 2014)

David Armitage is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History and chair of the Department of History at Harvard University. Alison Bashford is a professor of modern history at the University of Sydney.

Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala
By Kirsten Weld

In Paper Cadavers, an inside account of the astonishing discovery and rescue of Guatemala’s secret police archives, Kirsten Weld probes the politics of memory, the wages of the Cold War, and the stakes of historical knowledge production. After Guatemala’s bloody thirty-six years of civil war (1960–1996), silence and impunity reigned. Weld explores Guatemala’s struggles to manage this avalanche of evidence of past war crimes, providing a firsthand look at how postwar justice activists worked to reconfigure terror archives into implements of social change. (Duke University Press, 2014)

Kirsten Weld is an assistant professor of history at Harvard University.
Former Fellow Appointed to Alphinat Board of Directors

Former Fellow (1986–1987) Marcel Côté has been appointed to the Alphinat board of directors. Côté is a strategic advisor at KPMG Canada. For thirty-five years, he has led the Secor Group, one of Canada’s largest management consulting firms, until it merged with KPMG Canada in 2012. Alphinat provides software that simplifies, accelerates, and improves interactions with all business constituents. It was awarded the IBM Top Star award for best e-government solution among entries from 189 countries and was recognized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for its E-Government for Better Government report.

Weatherhead Center Faculty Associate Ranked in Top 100 Law School Researchers

J. Mark Ramseyer, the Mitsubishi Professor of Japanese Legal Studies at Harvard Law School, ranked in the top 100 law school researchers. Statistics released by the Social Science Research Network (SSRN) indicate that, as of the end of 2013, Harvard Law School professors and senior fellows associated with the Program on Corporate Governance featured prominently on SSRN’s law author rankings. These professors and fellows captured ten of the top 100 slots in all legal areas in terms of citations to their work.

Weatherhead Center Faculty Associate Recipient of Frontiers of Knowledge Award

The BBVA Foundation has named Elhanan Helpman, the Galen L. Stone Professor of International Trade in the Department of Economics, as the recipient of the Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Economics, Finance, and Management. The recipient of the Frontiers of Knowledge Award the Galen L. Stone Professor of International Economics, Finance, and Management. The BBVA Foundation has named Richard Hornbeck, assistant professor in the Department of Economics, as a recipient of a 2014 Sloan Research Fellowship. These fellowships seek to stimulate fundamental research by early-career scientists and scholars of outstanding promise. These two-year fellowships are awarded yearly to 126 researchers in recognition of distinguished performance and a unique potential to make substantial contributions to their field.

Weatherhead Center Faculty Associate Named Radcliffe Institute Fellow

Professor Michael Kremer, the Gates Professor of Developing Societies in the Department of Economics, was named as one of the 2013–2014 Radcliffe Institute Fellows. Kremer researches developing societies and is a specialist on education and health in developing countries. The Radcliffe Institute Fellowship Program annually selects and supports fifty leading artists and scholars who have both exceptional promise and demonstrated accomplishments in their field.

Weatherhead Center Faculty Associate Awarded Outstanding Author Contribution

A chapter coauthored by Diane Davis, professor of urbanism and development in the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and Onesimo Flores Dewey, lecturer and senior researcher at the Harvard Kennedy School, was named an Outstanding Author Contribution in the 2014 Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence. “How to Defeat an Urban Megaproject: Lessons from Mexico City’s Airport Controversy,” appeared in Research in Urban Sociology last year and was called “one of the most impressive pieces of work the team has seen throughout 2013” by the Emerald Group Publishing Editors.

Davis and Flores Dewey are director and senior researcher for Transforming Urban Transport (TUT)—The Role of Political Leadership, a project hosted by the GSD. Sponsored by Volvo’s Research and Educational Foundations, TUT advances the knowledge of how, when, and where political leadership has been critical to the successful implementation of path-breaking transportation policies.

Three Harvard Academy Scholars Recent Award Recipients

Julian Go (2001–2003) was recently awarded the Francesco Guiccardini Prize, given annually for the Best Book in Historical International Relations given by the Historical International Relations section of the International Studies Association. The Guiccardini Prize is given “to those books that conduct careful historical analysis while producing significant insights into ongoing concerns in international studies.” Go’s book, Patterns of Empire: British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present, was also noted to be “simply a beautiful read.” Patterns of Empire also received the 2011 Greenstone Book Prize of the American Political Science Association and the 2012 Best Book in Global and Transnational Sociology from the American Sociological Association.

Fotini Christia (2009–2010 and 2011–2012) was recently recognized by the International Studies Association (ISA). Her book, Alliance Formation in Civil Wars, was presented the Distinguished Book Award by the Emigration, Nationalism and Migration Section (EMNISA) which recognizes the best book published over the past two years in the study of the international politics of ethnicity, nationalism or migration.

Lina Britto (2013–2014) was the recipient of the Latin American Studies Association/Oxfam American’s Martin Diskin Dissertation Award Honorable Mention for 2014.

The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities, by Harris Mylonas (2008–2009 and 2011–2012), won the European Studies Book Award by the Council for European Studies for the best first book on any subject in European Studies published within a two-year period. Mylonas was also awarded an honorable mention by the Rothschild Prize in Nationalities and Ethnic Studies Committee of the Association for the Study of Nationalities.
Remembering Robert R. Bowie: A Celebration of His Life and His Contributions to US Foreign Policy and Harvard University

On Tuesday, April 15, 2014, a panel of speakers paid tribute to the life of Robert R. Bowie, founding Director of the Center for International Affairs who passed away in November 2013. Pictured above: The panel was introduced by Michèle Lamont (center), Acting Center Director, Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies, and professor of sociology and African and African American studies, and chaired by Karl Kaiser (far right), director of the Program on Transatlantic Relations and adjunct professor of public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. The speakers were: Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (far left), Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor at the Harvard Kennedy School; J. Bryan Hehir (left of center), Parker Gilbert Montgomery Professor of the Practice of Religion and Public Life at the Harvard Kennedy School and secretary for health and social services, Archdiocese of Boston; and Jorge I. Domínguez (right of center), chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Antonio Madero Professor for the Study of Mexico, and vice provost for international affairs. Photo credit: Megan Margulies

Celebrating Former Center Director Beth A. Simmons

On May 8, 2014, faculty, students, staff, and other affiliates of the Center gathered to recognize and celebrate Beth Simmons’s tenure as Director from 2006 until 2013. The event included introductions by Michèle Lamont; Peter Marsden, Edith and Benjamin Geisinger Professor of Sociology and dean of Social Science; Jorge I. Domínguez; Cosette Creamer, PhD candidate in the Department of Government; Steven B. Bloomfield, Center Executive Director; Sparsha Saha, Graduate Student Associate and PhD candidate in the Department of Government; and Erin Baggott, Graduate Student Associate and PhD candidate in the Department of Government. Top: Beth A. Simmons. Bottom: Clare Putnam (center), program coordinator of student programs and fellowships and Shinju Fujihira (right), executive director of the Program on U.S.-Japan Relations. Photo credit: Kristin Caulfield

Watch videos for this and other events on the Center’s Vimeo channel: vimeo.com/channels/wcfia
Undergraduate Thesis Conference
February 6–8, 2014

The Weatherhead Center Undergraduate Thesis Conference featured a series of panels chaired by Faculty Associates and Graduate Student Associates. Clustered by regional or disciplinary themes, each student’s presentation was followed by questions, commentary, and feedback for the enhancement of their thesis work in its final stages.


Nataliya Nedzhvetskaya (Social Studies) presented "The Influence of Religion on Perceptions of Holistic Health in Faith-Based Health Education Programs" in a session entitled "Tenets of Healing in Contemporary Africa." Photo credit: Megan Margulies

Right to left: Kyle Jaros, Graduate Student Associate and PhD candidate, Department of Government, chairs a session entitled, “Dynamics of Change in China.” Christian Føhrby (Government) presented “Chinese and American Middle School Teacher Conceptions of Patriotism and Attitudes to Foreign Powers.” Photo credit: Megan Margulies

The full agenda and thesis abstracts from this and past Undergraduate Thesis Conferences can be found at: conferences.wcfia.harvard.edu/undergraduate_thesis/
The Two Africas

The Third Wave of democracy reached Africa in January 1989 when throngs of Benin students protested the government’s failure to disburse scholarships. Five years later, with the Cold War over and food prices soaring, Africa’s autocrats bowed to popular demands for reform. Some fell, others survived. But virtually all were subjected to nominally democratic institutions: term limits, parliaments, and regular multiparty elections. African politics in the decades since has been a contest between autocrats and these democratic institutions. In some countries—Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa, most notably—the democratic institutions won. Elections grew more competitive, losers were forced to respect the will of voters, and equitable economic growth produced a middle class. But elsewhere—places like Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon—elections remain a sham and ruling families grow wealthy while their citizens remain the world’s poorest. There are, increasingly, two Africas: one democratic, the other autocratic. Scholars know much less about the latter.

Virtually all African autocrats now govern with parliaments and organize regular, multiparty elections. They have little choice. Since the end of the Cold War, Western governments have required nominally democratic institutions in exchange for economic aid, investment, and debt relief. In an era of YouTube and smartphones, moreover, violent repression is impossible to conceal from the international community. Life as an autocrat has thus grown more perilous. Since 1989, autocrats forced to govern with nominally democratic institutions have been nearly 80 percent more likely to lose power each year than autocrats who proscribe political competition. Accordingly, between 1986 and 2000, the number of autocracies in Africa fell from forty-five to thirty.

But Africa’s autocrats are learning to survive despite democratic institutions. As the pace of democratization in Africa slows to a trickle, surviving autocrats are securing their place among the global super rich, earning the attention of French courts in the process. As part of their ongoing corruption investigation—known as the _bien mal acquis_ affair—French investigators recently seized a handful of Paris apartments belonging to the ruling families of Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Congo, with Gabon’s to be targeted next. One, belonging to the Equato-Guinean president’s son, was valued at some $180 million; it includes 101 rooms, a Turkish bath, a hair salon, two gym clubs, a nightclub, and a movie theater.

How do contemporary African autocrats survive democratic institutions? To answer this question, my dissertation develops a model of modern autocracy based on two stylized facts. First, most autocrats are removed by regime elites: the people to whom they entrust their government’s most important portfolios. Autocrats must prevent elites from acting collectively—from one elite mobilizing coconspirators—when the act of seizing power is simple and the gains significant. Second, autocrats must prevent popular uprisings. For the international community’s insistence on regular elections creates “focal moments”—periods when the citizenry is engaged, discontent is palpable, and opposition politicians easily mobilize their supporters. Once citizens appreciate the extent of popular frustration, unrest easily coalesces into mass protest. When violence against civilians is difficult to conceal, modern autocrats must prevent protests altogether. Regular elections make this difficult.

The exigencies of political survival in the early twenty-first century compel autocrats to organize politics in novel ways. With political institutions fixed,
Africa's autocrats increasingly secure elite compliance with social tools. Moreover, Africa's autocrats have learned to minimize the risk of popular unrest surrounding elections without employing violence. To understand how, my dissertation focuses on a single, contemporary autocracy: the Republic of Congo, ruled by Denis Sassou Nguesso for all but five years since 1979. This essay discusses the modern African autocrat’s techniques of elite control and popular repression in turn. The concluding section addresses the dissertation’s implications for development policy.

**Social Tools of Elite Control**

Nominal democracy institutions render elite compliance more difficult for Africa’s autocrats to secure. Seats in the National Assembly earn politicians a measure of independence from the autocrat, while nominally independent media provide a platform to communicate. Consequently, autocrats must persuade elites that loyalty to the regime provides the best path to political success. They do this, in part, by truncating the “labor market” for the regime’s most lucrative positions: by limiting the pool of candidates to a narrow, well-defined segment of the population. By committing to geographic recruitment strategies, autocrats persuade occupants of—and aspirants to—the most sensitive positions that their career prospects would be far worse under an alternative regime. In Congo, then, the best predictor of whether an elite ascends to one of the regime’s lucrative financial or military portfolios is not co-ethnicity with Sassou Nguesso or even loyal service during the 1997 civil war. Rather, the best predictor is simply the travel distance between an elite’s home village and Sassou Nguesso’s own. The mere possibility of eventual appointment keeps elites within the geographic boundary loyal even when excluded from the government.

Truncating the labor market is difficult, however, when elections reward cross-regional alliances. For securing electoral alliances requires offering ministerial portfolios that would otherwise be distributed within geographic boundaries. To monitor these new appointees, Africa’s autocrats create social institutions. Membership in these institutions is costly: initiates are monitored by the autocrat’s most trusted loyalists and marked as collaborators with the regime, diminishing their prospects under democracy. These social institutions increasingly take the form of freemasonry lodges. A legacy of French colonialism, they are now operated by over half of Africa’s autocrats. In Congo, virtually all high-level office holders are now members of the lodge; after initiating, elites engage in far less anti-regime behavior than before. These freemasonry lodges also enable Africa’s autocrats to learn from each other. In 1995 Abdou Diouf, then the ruler of Senegal, initiated Sassou Nguesso, and Sassou Nguesso, in turn, has initiated François Bozizé of the Central African Republic, Thomas Yajî Boni of Benin, and Idriss Déby of Chad.

Securing elite loyalty in the absence of conventional bureaucratic institutions is essential, and so Africa’s most affluent autocrats employ a second technique: assigning multiple appointees responsibility for a single portfolio. These tournaments generate competition for the autocrat’s favor, however, only when competing elites are unable to collude: to mutually agree, perhaps, to steal oil or tax revenue together. Consequently, Africa’s autocrats pair elites who are separated by ethnic or family rivalries, which renders trust unlikely. Cleavages, in short, can be useful.

Scholars have long believed that autocrats arbitrarily shuffle elites among government posts. When tenure is precarious, the conventional wisdom goes, appointees believe they owe their fortunes to the autocrat’s favor. I find little evidence of this in contemporary Africa. Indeed, modern African autocrats are nothing so much as shrewd personnel managers. And, increasingly, they behave like the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies: They reward loyal service with reappointment, and punish malfeasance with termination. As in the private sector, senior regime figures serve for years.

**Popular Suppression without Violence**

Modern African autocrats are as concerned about elite conspiracies as their predecessors. They are, however, far more concerned about popular uprisings. Since elections create new opportunities for popular collective action, they are dangerous even when autocrats guarantee victory with fraud. Moreover, smartphones and YouTube make violence costly for autocrats beholden to foreign creditors. Modern African autocrats, in turn, have learned to suppress citizens in new ways.

Although electoral fraud is costless and widespread, modern African autocrats forge electoral alliances with opposition parties. They do so not to secure victory, but to render popular protests less likely. For opposition leaders in contemporary Africa constitute the centers of broad social networks; since they inevitably gain most from political change, they also happily bear the risks of mobilization. Autocrats, accordingly, target opposition leaders who are most capable of mobilizing popular unrest: those with the broadest, most cohesive social networks. These alliances cost opposition leaders their political careers. After joining the regime they once impugned, they have little credibility among frustrated citizens. Of course, when opposition leaders believe the only way to political power is to join the regime, it’s a sacrifice they accept.

Not all elections in Africa’s autocracies, however, are fraudulent. Indeed, regime lieutenants often compete against each other for seats in the National Assembly. For intense electoral competition generates genuine goodwill for candidates: Candidates court voters by offering jobs in the local bureaucracy, cash transfers, and in-kind gifts. Consequently, Congolese citizens often refuse to vote for Sassou Nguesso, but fervently support the regime’s candidates in local elections. And as long as these regime emissaries believe the autocrat’s blessing is

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The Weatherhead Center congratulates the following Undergraduate Associates who were awarded 2014 Thomas Temple Hoopes Prizes on the basis of their outstanding scholarly work or research.

**2014 Thomas Temple Hoopes Prize Winners**

The following students have been appointed Undergraduate Student Associates for the 2014–2015 academic year and have received grants to support travel in connection with their senior thesis research on international affairs.

**Daniel Barcia** (History) Weatherhead Initiative on Global History Undergraduate Research Fellow. *The Maroon Rebellion and slavery in Spanish and British Florida.*

**Julia Cohn** (History and Literature) Samuels Family Research Fellow. *Analyzing Gloriosa Victoria, a mural by Diego Rivera depicting the US and United Fruit Company roles in the 1954 Guatemalan coup, in particular, how the intellectuals and artists of Rivera’s inner circle, influenced his representations of US and Guatemalan political figures.*

**Magumi Cornejo** (Government) Williams/Lodge International Government and Public Affairs Research Fellow. A comparative case study of the Rondas Campesinas in Peru, examining the civic engagement of peasant patrols and their relationship with the state to explain growth and variation of political activity throughout different regions of Peru.

**Nafisa Eltahir** (Sociology) Rogers Family Research Fellow. *The skin lightening trend among Sudanese women and comparing their attitudes toward skin color and shade with those of African American women.*


**Alyssa Leader** (Psychology) Rogers Family Research Fellow. *The trans-generational effects of wartime trauma on the children of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone.*

**Manuel Andrés Meléndez** (Government) Williams/Lodge International Government and Public Affairs Research Fellow. *New right-wing party building in Latin America, with a focus on successful cases in Chile (UDI) and El Salvador (ARENA).*

**Hannah Mullen** (Government) Simmons Family Research Fellow. *How institutions shape initiatives to reform military justice systems, with a focus on the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.*


**Debbie Onuoha** (Joint concentration in History and Literature and Anthropology) Rogers Family Research Fellow. *Urban “decongestion” policies in Accra, Ghana, in particular, communities surrounding the Korle Lagoon, that mobilize environmental language to target informal housing and populations for removal.*

**Eliza Pan** (Social Studies) Canada Program Undergraduate Research Fellow. *Mainland Chinese astronaut households in Vancouver, Canada.*

**Elizabeth Pike** (Social Studies) Rogers Family Research Fellow. *Confucianism & ubuntu: The role of communitarianism and sustainable urban development, a study of Chinese and South African eco-cities.*

**Owen Senders** (History) Weatherhead Initiative on Global History Undergraduate Research Fellow. *How international organizations shape, intentionally or unintentionally, the academic communities of the countries in which they operate, particularly the influence of the Ford Foundation on economists at the University of Chile during the 1960s and early 1970s.*

**Hilton Simmet** (Social Studies) Samuels Family Research Fellow. *A look at alternative economic, agricultural, and social approaches to development through the “Ecovillages” project being implemented by the Senegalese government in conjunction with the United Nations Development Program.*

**Amy Sparrow** (Social Studies) Williams/Lodge International Government and Public Affairs Research Fellow. *Determinants of food safety in China and what it takes for the government to react to food safety concerns.*

**Katryna Cadle** “Selling the Philippine Voice: Vocal Adaptability and the Colonial History of Service in Philippine Call Centers”

**Anne Marie Creighton** “A New Light on the Incas: Depictions of History and Civilization in Inca Garcilaso, 1609–1617”
FIRST-YEAR GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATES 2014–2015

The following students will begin their first year as Graduate Student Associates in the 2014–2015 academic year and will receive support for their dissertation research.

Christina E. Crawford, PhD Candidate, Architecture and Urban Planning. Socialist urban theory in the early Soviet Union through three diverse social-industrial settlements built between 1917 and 1932.


Connor Huff, PhD Candidate, Department of Government. Exploring variation in the strategies of terrorist groups as they work to garner popular support.

Yitzchak Jaffe, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology. How early Chinese colonial expansions created new forms of localized social identities that were part of a larger complex mesh of social conditions and interactions in a new global reality.

Madhav Khosla, PhD Candidate, Department of Government. The political thought and ideological origins of India’s constitutional founding.

Charlotte Lloyd, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology. How reconciliation institutions and practices originating in the Global South have been adapted in Australia and the implications of this process for marginalized indigenous and immigrant populations.

Margot Moinester, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology. How deportation from the United States affects the health status of deportees living in Jamaica.

Erin Mosely, PhD Candidate, Department of African and African American Studies. How the post-genocide moment in Rwanda has impacted the complex ways in which “Never Again” operates as a powerful ideological and epistemological framework.

Nadav Orian Peer, SJD, Harvard Law School. The political debate surrounding the establishment of the Federal Reserve in 1913 with emphasis on its international dimensions.

Eva Payne, PhD Candidate, Program in American Studies. International networks of sex reformers who shaped the moral and legal frameworks that govern American and international policy about sexual issues.

Jonathan Phillips, PhD Candidate, Department of Government. The process by which programmatic politics arises in unfavorable, weakly institutionalized polities, and the conditions that make this possible.

Mircea Raianu, PhD Candidate, History Department. A historical study of the Tata Group, India’s largest business firm, focusing on the dynamic of mercantile and industrial capital as well as on ethics and modes of governance.

Kai M. Thaler, PhD Candidate, Department of Government. The cross-national impact on conflict, governance, and development when rebel groups win civil wars.

Lydia Walker, PhD Candidate, History Department. The end of colonialism and examining why some states were stillborn and when others came to life with specific analysis of failed nationalisms from 1960–1966: Nagaland (India), S.W. Africa (S. Africa), and Katanga (Congo).

Emrah Yildiz, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology. The changing nexus of state sovereignty, religious pilgrimage, and contraband economies along the Hajj-e Fuqara pilgrimage route.
I can hear the voice speaking Italian, which I know a little, so I recognize right away that the Italian I hear down the hallway is not spoken by a native speaker. It’s one-sided, clearly a telephone conversation. I recognize it as the voice of Naor, one of our Harvard Academy Scholars. He works on the Mediterranean world, North Africa, and Sicily, so of course Italian is one of the languages of his work. It is not Naor’s only foreign language. He is Israeli and completed his PhD here at Harvard, so he has Hebrew and English as well, among other languages.

It’s quiet out in the hallway, the Italian ends, and in an instant Naor is talking with fellow Academy Scholars Noora and Pascal. Noora is Bahraini and received her undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States; Pascal is French and studies Saudi Arabia. Their three-way conversation is in a stranger sounding tongue, with gutturals and hard consonants. Naor, Noora, and Pascal are in easy, rapid-fire conversation in Arabic. No doubt Naor learned his in the Levant; Pascal knows Saudi Arabic and acquired the colloquial of young Saudi street racers. And Noora, from a Gulf State, has heard Arabic from all over the world. They are joking, each raising the level of laughter with a quick comment topping the one before.

Such types of conversations might take place in the halls of the Harvard Academy in a variety of languages. How many languages are being used by the Harvard Academy Graduate Fellows and Academy Scholars this year? Let’s see: Chinese, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Pashtun, Spanish. That’s thirteen if you include Arabic and Italian. One might add that other foreign language: statistics.

The languages are an index of our internationalism. To me this variety represents a great deal of what the Harvard Academy is about: the anchoring of the social sciences in places around the world, making the Academy itself a center of many languages, and hence, many experiences of a staggering variety of cultures far removed from the United States. As I step down from over seven years as the executive officer of the Harvard Academy, I would point to the many languages spoken at the Academy as reassurance that it remains true to the mission of anchoring social-science theory with first-hand knowledge of nations, regions, and cultures so different from our own.

Laurence H. Winnie
April 2014
more important for career advancement than popular support, they use their accumulated goodwill to generate support for the regime. In short, competitive local elections, carefully organized, stabilize Africa’s autocrats.

Scholars have long viewed repression as the defining feature of autocracy. And, indeed, repression is central to survival in contemporary Africa. But repression must also be credible to deter popular protests, and increasingly it is not: Civil society activists know that Africa’s autocrats are loathe to jeopardize foreign investment with violent suppression. Africa’s autocrats are learning to construct their internal security apparatus in ways that render violence at least somewhat credible, while not provoking local populations. Some ninety percent of Sassou Nguesso’s presidential guard—stationed in the capital and responsible for his personal security—is drawn from his native region. Where popular uprisings are most likely, however, Sassou Nguesso employs regional natives at lower levels of the security apparatus and non-natives at senior levels. This combination persuades frustrated citizens that senior officers would indeed open fire on the population, while also minimizing the human rights abuses—rape and expropriation, most notably—that exacerbate popular frustration and render protest more likely. Modern African autocrats employ ethnic cleavages to intimidate without provoking.

Policy Implications

The dissertation’s broadest argument is that autocrats are powerful when their citizens believe so. Financial resources are surely useful. They enable autocrats to reward loyalty, assign multiple elites similar responsibilities, and lure opposition leaders into alliances that diminish their public credibility. But security, I find, begets security. When opposition leaders believe their only path to power is partnering with the autocrat, their support becomes cheaper to purchase. When prominent regional politicians believe the autocrat’s blessing is more useful for career advancement than popular support, autocrats commission electoral competition to create a veneer of popular support. When young men who would otherwise take up arms against the regime believe doing so is futile, they police their hostile native region on the regime’s behalf. When citizens believe the autocrat’s threats of violence are credible, they acquiesce.

All this is good news for policymakers. Political scientists increasingly believe that nominally democratic institutions stabilize Africa’s autocrats. Democracy promotion efforts that mandate democratic institutions, in short, may have unintended consequences. If the conventional wisdom is correct, the way forward for the international community is unclear. My dissertation, however, suggests it is not.

The international community should require democratic institutions as a condition of foreign aid, investment, and debt relief. But it should do so knowing that Africa’s autocrats are learning to work around these democratic institutions. International creditors, I believe, should recognize their strength. Many African autocrats require Western aid, investment, and debt relief to finance their regimes. To attain them, Africa’s autocrats are often willing to make real concessions to Western creditors. This moment of Western bargaining power, moreover, may prove fleeting. For as China has expanded its investment portfolio, Africa’s autocrats may soon be less disposed to Western human rights norms.
NEW FACULTY ASSOCIATES

The following Harvard faculty accepted invitations to become WCFIA Faculty Associates in the 2014–2015 academic year:

Lawrence Bobo, W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences and Professor of African and African American Studies, Department of Sociology and Department of African and African American Studies; Chair, Department of African and African American Studies. Race; ethnicity; politics; and social inequality.

Paul Y. Chang, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology. Social and political change in South Korea; and democratization and the changing family structure.

Alejandro de la Fuente, Robert Woods Bliss Professor of Latin-American History and Economics, Department of History; Professor of African and African American Studies, Department of African and African American Studies. Comparative slavery and race relations in the Americas; the evolution of slave regimes in a comparative perspective; and the intersections between race, nation, and citizenship in Latin America.

Laura Diaz Anadón, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School. Drivers of technology innovation; science and technology policy; water–energy–food–pollution infrastructure linkages; managing uncertainty; United States; China; European Union; and the Middle East and North Africa.

Ann Forsyth, Professor of Urban Planning, Department of Urban Planning and Design, Harvard Graduate School of Design. The social aspects of physical planning with a focus on suburbs and creating healthy places.

Tamar Herzog, Monroe Gutman Professor of Latin American Affairs and Professor of Spanish and Portuguese History, Department of History. The relationship between Spain, Portugal, and Latin America in the early modern period.

Tarun Khanna, Jorge Paulo Lemann Professor, Strategy Unit, Harvard Business School. Entrepreneurship in emerging markets; and comparative work on trajectories of economic development.

Horacio A. Larreguy Arbesú, Assistant Professor, Department of Government. Political economy and economic development using both theory and econometrics.

Quentin Mayne, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School. Comparative political behavior; urban politics and multilevel governance; and welfare policy, with a focus on advanced industrial democracies.

Rahul Mehrotra, Professor of Urban Design and Planning, Harvard Graduate School of Design. Ephemeral Urbanism—studying and constructing taxonomy of patterns of temporary occupation of space across the globe.

Kathryn A. Sikkink, Ryan Family Professor of Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School. Human rights; international law; transnational advocacy networks; Latin American politics; and transnational justice.