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## ***DIVERSITY IN SCIENCE***

**Scientific conference in honour of Michèle Lamont,  
Erasmus Prize Laureate 2017**

**21 November, Gertrudiskapel, Utrecht**



*Foto: Martha Stewart*

# **Erasmus Prize 2017 for Michèle Lamont**

The Erasmus Prize is awarded annually to a person or institution that has made an exceptional contribution to the humanities or the arts, in Europe and beyond. The Praemium Erasmianum Foundation has awarded the 2017 Erasmus Prize to the Canadian cultural sociologist Michèle Lamont (1957). She is Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, Professor of African and African American Studies and Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies. She receives the prize for her devoted contribution to social science research into the relationship between knowledge, power and diversity.

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. Her scholarly interests centre on how class and ethnicity determine the way people view reality, and on how the wellbeing of minorities influences the wellbeing of the wider society. Through groundbreaking 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. Lamont also turns her critical gaze inwards, analysing the ideas about worth and quality that underpin the formation of judgement within the social sciences. Her research into the underlying patterns within this discussion is 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.

The Erasmus Prize will be presented in November 2017. In conjunction with the presentation of the prize, a varied programme of activities will be organized around Michèle Lamont and the theme 'Knowledge, Power and Diversity'. This scientific conference is part of that programme.

## **The importance of diversity in science**

Established scientists tend to function as gate-keepers of science, for instance through their impact on peer-review, and in key positions as editors of prestigious outlets. This affords them the power to determine what are considered main stream theories, what methodologies are seen as offering appropriate empirical approaches, and which research findings are seen as most highly valued. However, these key positions in science – and the criteria used to evaluate the work of other scientists - tend to be dominated by representatives of a limited number of disciplines and approaches, who resemble each other in terms of demographics.

Even though research has established the potential benefits of demographic, disciplinary and methodological diversity in creating better and more innovative science, realizing this potential can

be difficult in practice. Contributions from 'newcomers' in the field or the value of unconventional ideas proposed by scientists trained in another discipline are not always acknowledged, even if these may have considerable news value and can offer paradigmatic shifts.

The way scientific institutions are organized does not always facilitate novelty or diversity and this has important political and ideological implications. How is scientific quality defined and assessed, how important is it to be original? How do existing (disciplinary or demographic) networks of researchers impact the opportunities to conduct innovative or cross-disciplinary research? Are 'standard' evaluation criteria and procedures equally suitable for quality assessment in all areas of science, and how does this affect resources made available for different types of scientific endeavours? How open are established scientists to different notions about relevant issues to examine, methodologies to use or theories to develop, when these are proposed by members of underrepresented groups in terms of ethnicity, class, gender or political ideology? What is valued knowledge that begets respect and knowledge in science and society? How to accommodate different scientific traditions without inviting the image that science is 'just another personal opinion'? These are some of the questions that will be addressed at this conference.

## **Structure of the conference**

The conference addresses diversity in science through three lenses. Each topic will be briefly introduced by Dr Lamont (10 minutes per topic). Each time, three speakers who have addressed these issues in their own research will consider 'established' vs. 'alternative' perspectives on the issue at hand (20 minutes per speaker). After these presentations a discussant will respond to the ideas put forth on the basis of personal experiences with different systems of science, as a starting point for further debate with the audience.

### **1. Diversity of disciplines**

Interdisciplinary research tends to be seen as an important tool to achieve insights that are innovative and can be applied to real life problems. However, in practice science is still mostly organized along disciplinary boundaries. This is visible in the structures through which resources are made available, the way researchers are employed and supervised, and the criteria along which research is evaluated. Expert evaluators do not always acknowledge and appreciate the progress that is being made by combining different disciplinary perspectives or methodologies. How can the diversity of disciplines and research traditions be recruited more fruitfully, and how is it possible to provide the necessary boundary conditions and resources of interdisciplinary research, in the context of scientific institutions and procedures that are still largely organized along disciplinary boundaries?

### **2. Diversity of researchers**

The group of established researchers and 'gatekeepers of science' is relatively homogeneous in terms of the gender, ethnicity and class background of researchers. Yet the 'business case for diversity' – promising more innovative, creative and productive work when individuals with different experiences, knowledge and backgrounds work together, also seems relevant for science. However, just as in other types of organizations, the mere knowledge that demographic diversity can

have added value is not enough to realize such diversity. Individuals from underrepresented groups often feel compelled to adapt to the majority to fit in, the ideas of those who are different are less likely to be heard or acknowledged, and it is less easy for them to achieve positions from which they have a real impact on the development of science. What can be done to make sure that developments in science truly benefit from including individuals with a broader variety of background characteristics, experiences and viewpoints about science and scientific institutions?

### **3. Diversity of quality indicators**

The valuation of knowledge is one of the key activities of scientific organizations. However, many of the procedures and criteria used to define and test scientific excellence are modelled after the prototype of the natural sciences. Publications in *Nature* and *Science* are seen as a general hallmark of scientific quality, with the Nobel Prize as the holy grail all scientists are supposed to pursue. This image affects (implicit) views of the characteristics of 'good' science and 'good' scientists, even when it is not appropriate or even feasible. How does this affect resources afforded to areas of science where quality is measured by different standards? How does this affect acknowledgment of the general public for the scientific knowledge collected in this way, and what are the implications for attracting students and young scientists to the social sciences and humanities? Is it possible to develop bibliometric tools that accommodate the diversity of quality indicators? Can we learn from quality assessments in the arts to develop alternative systems for quality assessment?

## **Speakers**

### **Barnita Bagchi**

Barnita Bagchi is an Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at the Department of Languages, Literature and Communication at Utrecht University. She also works at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry. Bagchi's expertises are women's writing in South Asia and Western Europe in comparative perspective, non-Eurocentric utopian studies and connected transnational histories of global education. In her work, Bagchi bridges the humanities and social sciences. She also reviews books and appears regularly in Dutch and Indian print and audio media. [www.utrechtutopianetwork.nl](http://www.utrechtutopianetwork.nl)

### **Naomi Ellemers**

Naomi Ellemers is a Distinguished University Professor at Utrecht University. She examines the behaviour of people in organisations and aims to understand how group affiliations impact on individual behaviours. Ellemers has expertise in the fields of Diversity and Inclusion and Integrity and Ethics at the workplace.

### **Henkjan Honing**

Henkjan Honing is Professor of Music Cognition at the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam. His work covers areas such as the formalisation of musical knowledge and the biological basis of music. Honing works to bridge the humanities, social sciences and technology with an interdisciplinary approach, for which he recently received the Distinguished Lorentz Award.

## **Anthony Abraham Jack**

Anthony Abraham Jack is a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows, an Assistant Professor and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the Shutzer Assistant Professorship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. His research examines how youth acquire cultural and social capital and examines undergraduates' sense of belonging. Jack specifically seeks to explain how institutional policies affect such processes. His research uncovers the overlooked diversity among lower-income undergraduates – the Doubly Disadvantaged and Privileged Poor – and shows, in novel ways, how social class shapes their college experiences. On top of that, Jack's work provides insights in the ways colleges can contribute to and aggravate inequalities in society.

## **Annemarie Mol**

Annemarie Mol is Professor of the Anthropology of the Body working in the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research of the University of Amsterdam. She has a feminist investment in the study of human bodies; care and tinkering; feeding and eating; and in the ways in which ontologies and normativities are enacted in mundane practices. In her research she attends to the ways in which technology and science are implicated in everyday life. Mol's work is highly influential and has contributed to various social science paradigm shifts.

## **Floor Rink**

Floor Rink is Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Groningen and is the Faculty Research Director in Organizational Behaviour. She has expertise on diversity and mobility, on the benefits (and downsides) of hierarchical differentiation in groups, and on the supervision of top management decisions. Her aim is to contribute knowledge on the ways in which identity related processes affect the functioning of individuals and groups in organizations. Rink's research is funded by the Dutch Science Foundation (Vidi scheme 2016) and by several relevant stakeholders in the field (e.g. FAR).

## **Ingrid Robeyns**

Ingrid Robeyns holds the Chair in Ethics of Institutions at the Ethics Institute of Utrecht University. Her research focuses on social justice, desirable institutional change and the capability approach. Much of her research has an interdisciplinary character. She has served in various academic associations, including as the first director of the Dutch Research School of Philosophy, and currently as the president-elect of the Human Development and Capability Association.

## **Sarah de Rijcke**

Sarah de Rijcke is Associate Professor in Science and Evaluation Studies and works as Deputy director at the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS). The focus of her research group is on the way research evaluation and the creation of scientific knowledge interact. Her work contributes to a theoretical and empirical understanding of various aspects regarding the governance of scientific research. De Rijcke is a member of the Young Academy of Europe. <http://www.sarahderijcke.nl/>

## **Marten Scheffer**

Marten Scheffer is Professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at Wageningen University and Research. His interests lie within the stability and change of complex systems. The main focus of his work has been on ecosystems, but Scheffer is also interested in social systems and other natural systems. Scheffer's work is highly interdisciplinary and extends its importance to a multitude of scientific fields. Scheffer also set up the Synergy Program for Analyzing Resilience and Critical transitionS (SPARCS), that has a research focus on resilience of complex systems while aiming to increase co-operation between scientists.

## **Appy Sluijs**

Appy Sluijs is Professor of Paleoclimatology and the co-chair of the research group Marine Palynology and Paleoclimatology in the Earth Sciences Department of Utrecht University. Sluijs is primarily interested in climate and ecological change in geological history, where biology, earth science, chemistry and physics converge. He was a (board) member of The Young Academy (KNAW) and co-founder of the Utrecht Young Academy.

## **Jojanneke van der Toorn**

Jojanneke van der Toorn is Professor of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Workplace Inclusion at Leiden University, and Assistant Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology at Utrecht University. She studies diversity and inequality in society and organisations with a focus on the social psychological mechanisms involved in how, why, and when people resist, provide support for, or directly engage in social change. With her work, van der Toorn aims to contribute to evidence-based diversity policy. In recognition of her academic work, she received the Gratama Science Prize for excellent young researchers.

## **Iris van der Tuin**

Iris van der Tuin is an associate professor in and the program coordinator and education director of Liberal Arts and Sciences and works in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University. Specialised in gender studies and new materialisms, van der Tuin is trained as a feminist epistemologist and is involved in interdisciplinary studies as well.

# Programme

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|-------------------|---|
| <b>10.00 a.m.</b> | <b>Arrival (coffee/tea)</b>                 |
| <b>10.30 a.m.</b> | <b>Welcome and opening</b>                  |
| <b>10.40 a.m.</b> | <b>Diversity of disciplines</b>             |
| 10.40 a.m.        | Michèle Lamont                              |
| 10.50 a.m.        | Appy Sluijs                                 |
| 11.10 a.m.        | Annemarie Mol                               |
| 11.30 a.m.        | Floor Rink                                  |
| 11.50 a.m.        | Discussion (led by Naomi Ellemers)          |
| <b>Noon</b>       | <b>Lunch break</b>                          |
| <b>1.00 p.m.</b>  | <b>Diversity of researchers</b>             |
| 1.00 p.m.         | Michèle Lamont                              |
| 1.10 p.m.         | Iris van der Tuin                           |
| 1.30 p.m.         | Ingrid Robeyns                              |
| 1.50 p.m.         | Anthony Jack                                |
| 2.10 p.m.         | Discussion (led by Barnita Bagchi)          |
| <b>2.20 p.m.</b>  | <b>Coffee break</b>                         |
| <b>2.40 p.m.</b>  | <b>Diversity of quality indicators</b>      |
| 2.40 p.m.         | Michèle Lamont                              |
| 2.50 p.m.         | Marten Scheffer                             |
| 3.10 p.m.         | Henkjan Honing                              |
| 3.30 p.m.         | Sarah de Rijcke                             |
| 3.50 p.m.         | Discussion (led by Jojanneke van der Toorn) |
| <b>4.00 p.m.</b>  | <b>Tea break</b>                            |
| 4.20 p.m.         | Response Lamont                             |
| 4.30 p.m.         | Panel discussion (led by Naomi Ellemers)    |
| <b>4.45 p.m.</b>  | <b>Drinks</b>                               |
| <b>5.30 p.m.</b>  | <b>Closing</b>                              |