

## Distinguished Public Lecture

# Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart

**10 December 2018 at 17:00**  
**AM308, Amenities Building**  
**Lingnan University**



**Andreas Wimmer**  
Columbia University

**Abstract:** Nation Building presents bold new answers to an age-old question. Why is national integration achieved in some diverse countries, while others are destabilized by political inequality between ethnic groups, contentious politics, or even separatism and ethnic war? Traversing centuries and continents from early nineteenth-century Europe and Asia to Africa from the turn of the twenty-first century to today, Andreas Wimmer delves into the slow-moving forces that encourage political alliances to stretch across ethnic divides and build national unity. Using datasets that cover the entire world and three pairs of case studies, His theory of nation building focuses on slow-moving, generational processes: the spread of civil society organizations, linguistic assimilation, and the states' capacity to provide public goods. He contrasts Switzerland and Belgium to demonstrate how the early development of voluntary organizations enhanced nation building. He also examines Botswana and Somalia to illustrate how providing public goods can bring diverse political constituencies together; and shows that the differences between China and Russia indicate how a shared linguistic space may help build political alliances across ethnic boundaries. He reveals, based on the statistical analysis of large-scale datasets, that these mechanisms are at work around the world and explain nation building better than competing arguments such as democratic governance or colonial legacies. Wimmer shows that when political alliances crosscut ethnic divides and when most ethnic communities are represented at the highest levels of government, the general populace will identify with the nation and its symbols, further deepening national political integration.

**Biography:** Andreas Wimmer is Lieber Professor of Sociology and Political Philosophy at Columbia University and has previously taught at Princeton, UCLA, and the Universities of Bonn, Neuchatel, and Zurich. His research brings a long term historical and globally comparative perspective to the questions of how states are built and nations formed, how individuals draw ethnic and racial boundaries between themselves and others, and which kinds of political conflicts and war results from these processes. Using new methods and data, he continues the old search for historical patterns that repeat across contexts and times. He has pursued this agenda across the disciplinary fields of sociology, political science, and social anthropology and through various styles of inquiry: ethnographic field research (in Mexico and Iraq), comparative historical analysis, quantitative research with cross-national or survey data, network studies, and formal modeling. His most recent book is Nation Building, Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart (Princeton 2018).

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