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Alyнна Lyon

Associate Professor of Political Science - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Lyon traveled to Portugal in summer 2011 to collaborate with other scholars on a project and to present their research at the Third International Studies Conference at the University of Porto.

“Oh salted Sea! How much of your salt are Portuguese tears?”

— Imaging Faith, Culture and Politics in the Lusophone World

Edited by Alyнна Lyon, Paul Christopher Manuel and Clyde Wilcox



Alyнна Lyon in Portugal

In 1996, Oporto, Portugal was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The city is one of the oldest within Europe and displays the legacies of the once powerful Portuguese empire, the antiquities of Portuguese culture, as well as a modern urban lifestyle. With support from UNH’s Center of International Education, I traveled to Oporto in August 2011, to meet with a group of scholars from a variety of disciplines—political science, history, anthropology, English, sociology—and from around the world. The group is collaborating on a book (with the working title of *Imaging Faith, Culture and Politics in the Lusophone World*) that examines the legacy of Portuguese colonialism in contemporary church/state relations. We conducted an informal symposium to discuss and organize our research as we prepare the introductory chapter of the co-edited work. From our examinations of the current Lusophone world, we are finding a varied and diverse religious and cultural reality: from the Roman Catholic Church’s former support of oligarchy in several countries to a civil-society oriented, populist institution in Angola, Brazil, Goa, East Timor, Mozambique, and to some extent, in Portugal as well.

While in Portugal, my colleagues and I presented our research at the Third International Studies Conference at the University of Porto. In addition to co-editing the volume, I presented my chapter examining the Portuguese colonial legacy within one of the world’s newest countries...East Timor. The country now known as Timor-Leste presents a fascinating case of the legacy of Portuguese colonialism and the Catholic Church. The Church, initially an ally of the government and a tool of colonialism, is now a major independent player in the political landscape of East Timor. From its push for independence in 1999 to today, the Church is a consistently powerful political institution. My research provides an examination of three recent confrontations between the Church and the government. In 2005, for example, the Church forced the secular government to overturn its decision to end compulsory religious classes in state schools and in 2007, it played a decisive role in a political uprising that threatened to bring down the nascent state. In addition, church leaders organized wide spread demonstrations and rallies demanding war crimes trials for Indonesian militias who committed atrocities in 1999. Finally, the Church is working towards including a prohibition against abortion in the new East Timorese constitution. It now faces accusations that the activist church is acting like a ‘political party’ and holds more popular legitimacy and support than the new government.

An added benefit of being in Europe, was seeing and experiencing firsthand the legacy of colonialism today. I will certainly bring this back with me to engage my students in courses like World Politics and US and World Affairs. The experience also enhances my ability to mentor students who plan on traveling, studying and doing research abroad.



Church in Oporto





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