

## **Seminar series**

### **Trust and Trust Making in Africa's Global Connections**

When the academic interest in trust gained momentum in the 1990s through works like Fukuyama (1995), Misztal (1996), Giddens (1995) and Elster (1989), most theorizing focused on the (post) industrial world: economists and western sociologists observed that in the modern world, despite the globalization tendencies of capitalist development, more openness, communication and collaboration were not automatically developed between the people thus connected. Instead, it was found that processes of localization, social retreat, and economic stagnation frequently occurred. In this light, it was considered all the more interesting that some societies in south-east Asia appeared to be able to successfully couple aspects of globalization with their local cultures, leading to economic success stories. Trust was welcomed as a concept that eventually could shed light on all of these phenomena. (Kaag 1999)

At that time, Africa hardly emerged as a field of study among scholars of trust, neither was trust taken up as a theoretical notion by Africanists. While in the work of Bayart (1989), for instance, glimpses of trust can be detected, the issue was not explicitly elaborated upon. Scattered scholarship on the working of trust in Africa did however develop on the basis of empirical case studies, with an accent on trust in migrant and trade networks. Hart (1988), for instance, used trust as a core concept in his study of migrants in Accra. He concludes that 'trust is central to social life when neither traditional certainties nor modern probabilities hold' (Hart 1988: 191). Other examples include Von Oppen (1994), Levitt (1999), Zakaria (1999), Bellagamba (2004).

The past few years have seen a renewed interest in issues of trust in Africa, triggered, among other things, by observed changes in the character, shape, and reach of networks, the opening up of different terrains of encounter with the unfamiliar, the expansion of modern communication technologies, and shifting research and policy agendas. Thus, examples of recent empirical studies of the workings of trust in Africa include work on trust within extended families affected by HIV/AIDS (Cooper 2012), elites and democracy in Ghana (Osei 2015), the political strategies of ANC leaders in South-Africa (Shapiro 2012), Kenyan election management (Ehrlich and Kerr 2016), local entrepreneurial strategies in Ghana's oil and gas industry (Dziwornu Ablo and Overa 2015), questions of trust between migrants and migration brokers in Cameroon (Alpes 2017). The workings of trust and distrust also figure in studies of witchcraft in contemporary Africa (Geschiere 2000, 2013) and in Africanist research on entrepreneurship and capital accumulation in the context of globalization (Peraldy 2011).

Also in our own work, which focuses on diverse aspects of Africa's global connections, questions of trust have proved to be of importance, for instance in working relations between Chinese entrepreneurs and their African employees and counterparts (Marfaing and Thiel 2015; Giese and Thiel 2012; Khan-Mohammad 2021), brokerage between transnational migrants and land sellers (Kaag and Steel 2019; Rosenfeld 2017), the interaction between Islamic charities from the Gulf and African populations (Kaag and Sahla 2020) and in global charitable networks like the Lions Clubs (de Hasque 2018); in migration control mechanisms, surveillance and security (Thiel 2020); and communication within African transnational families (Seck, Canut et Ly, 2015).

Interestingly, while in Africa, people have often relied more on personal linkages and less on formal institutions, it seems that currently, globally, there is a converging tendency of relying less on (formal) institutions, and more on one's own (virtual) network and the personal credibility of, for instance, politicians, vloggers and other public figures - making it imperative for those figures to strongly invest in strategies for maintaining/enhancing their trustworthiness.

We feel that this is the right moment to bring the presently rather dispersed observations and analyses together and reflect in a more explicit, thorough, and crosscutting way on questions of trust in Africa's global connections. Critics have argued that trust is too elusive a concept and that, in the analysis of social phenomena, one can easily do without trust. Yet, trust and distrust do inform people's behavior, and people - not in the least in Africa - also frequently motivate their (and others') actions by referring to trust and distrust. For this reason of lived reality alone, a more thorough reflection on the workings of trust in Africa's global connections is worthwhile. In addition, we feel that looking at questions of trust may add an important layer to the analysis of, for instance, collaboration and partnerships, political and economic strategies, and the functioning of networks, as it enables one to go beyond that what is directly visible on the spot and to consider its embeddedness in larger social processes and mechanisms. As Luhmann argued: "Without trust, only very simple forms of human co-operation, which can be transacted on the spot are possible. In more complex situations, people have to cope with events not directly visible, with factors not yet present, and with other people who cannot be fathomed entirely" (1979:88), a complication which certainly applies to transnational contexts. Studying trust is therefore highly relevant for a deeper understanding of the processes by which Africa's global connections are shaped - which also includes a critical reflection on the workings of trust in our research on these connections (Kaag and Sahla 2020; West 2007).

We propose to delve into this subject by a seminar series consisting of four subthemes, the first being Trust and Trust making with a focus on African migration (April 2021). The second will focus on Trust and Trust Making in COVID-19 politics (July 2021), followed by Trust and trust making in global business and charitable networks in and from Africa (November 2021), and Trust and trust making in transnational families and kin networks (January 2022), the fourth will finally have a more reflective and synthesizing focus and reflect on conceptual issues like system trust vs interpersonal trust; agency and trust making; practices and processes of trust, distrust and trust making in doing research on Africa's global connections (March 2022).

In this way, the seminar series will explore the nature of trust, mistrust and distrust in the relationships of actors and institutions that circulate across continental boundaries, therewith opening the discussion to move beyond the fragile association of trust and cooperation, to include arrangements of surveillance and control, as well as other encounters with the unfamiliar that might be more prominently shaped by open mistrust. Presentations and discussions in the seminar series revolve around the question how actors in diverse African contexts navigate potentially competing agendas and inscriptions shaped by power relations, cultural differences, and possibly diverging interests and moral perspectives, by actively building or working to maintain fragile trust – or, on the contrary, by fostering distrust and disconnection.

**Part III:  
Trust and Trust Making in Africa's Global Connections:**

**The Case of Global Business and Charity Networks**

**15-17 November 2021**

During three sessions of 1,5 hour divided over the third week of November 2021, we will reflect on trust, distrust and trust making in global business and charity networks connecting Africa to other parts of the globe. Of old, interregional trade networks like those connecting both sides of the Sahara desert and the shores of the Indian Ocean, have importantly functioned through trust relationships, carefully maintained and fashioned by ethnic and family ties, trusted middlemen, and chains of reciprocity. Current global trade networks such as those of the Mouride sufi order (Diouf 2000) also importantly function by way of informal relations in which trust is embedded in religious and kinship ties. But increasingly, business partners come from very different backgrounds and are not familiar with the others' strategies and rules of the game, such as in complex multi-actor infrastructural projects like the Kribi port project in Cameroun (Nkot and Amougou 2020), or in the case of Chinese motor cycle companies trading in Burkina Faso (Khan Mohammad 2020). How to build trust and how to know who/what is trustworthy in markets that change far more quickly than they used to, with new products appearing all the time (Roschenthaler 2020), where people have to react quickly to new business opportunities, and in which digital means of communication have become important? Global charity networks are in many ways different from current global trade and business networks, but have in common with the latter that they also importantly include intercultural encounters, such as with their target groups, other charity providers, and state actors in the countries in which they work. Both categories have to deal with competitive contexts in which it is difficult to 'read' the other due to unfamiliarity with the others' codes of conduct, cultural interpretations, and strategies. Rivalry and differences in knowledge, power, and backing, may further complicate communicating through difference, creating trust and signalling trustworthiness in order to have the business/charity work 'done'.

In this subseries, we aim to address some of the foregoing and related issues, starting from Africa, but with an eye on their broader relevance.

**Monday 15 November 2021, 4pm-5.30pm (CET) – Trust and Trust Making in the Distribution and Consumption of Chinese Manufactured Electronics in Ghana**

*Speaker: Mark Kwaku Mensah Obeng, University of Ghana, Legon*

Although trust is central to almost all human interactions, it is generally taken for granted and assumed that every party will diligently play its part. Key to this neglect is the tendency to deal with people with whom we share strong social ties. Trust however becomes a critical subject when one has to deal with a third party or someone outside the network (weak or arms-length ties). In this lecture, I discuss trust and the making of trust between Ghanaian transnational traders, distributors, and consumers of made-in-china electronics to highlight how the taken-

for-granted phenomenon of trust is “resurrected” in the importation and distribution of made-in-China products as a result of the uncertainties involved in having to navigate the institutional, linguistic, historical and normative complexities of transnational trade with China. I also discuss how the absence of trust is skillfully resolved by the importer, distributor and the consumer to enhance their various interest through trust-making measures such as adopting piecemeal payment arrangements, employment of key celebrities as brand ambassadors and offering and acceptance of product warranty and after-sales services. This lecture combines various aspects of my ethnographic research on Africa-China over a period of ten years.

**Tuesday 16 November 2021, 4pm-5.30pm (CET) - Une perspective de l’Afrique sur l’organisation internationale philanthropique du Lions’ Club : La place de la confiance lorsque des accords entre individus servent un business model**

*Speaker: Jean-Frédéric de Hasque*

Dans le contexte globalisé, les relations entre individus et collectivités ont été affectées par ce que l’on pourrait appeler la méfiance se traduisant par un repli sur soi, autour de son groupe, son pays, sa tribu et qui a généré une revendication d’appartenance pour contrer la perte d’identité (Geschiere 2009, Apter 2007). Les conséquences ont été le rejet de l’altérité, le durcissement des politiques migratoires (Mazzochetti 2011), mais aussi l’intérêt grandissant pour la création ou l’affiliation à des réseaux qui se déploient en dehors de la sphère étatique et familiale (West & Sanders 2003, Rothkoff 2008, Freeland 2012). C’est d’ailleurs l’une des hypothèses que l’on peut avancer pour expliquer le succès du Lions Club sur le continent Africain. La confiance semble être la condition sine qua non à la création d’un réseau, quelle est sa nature ?

Le Lions club est constitué de 45 000 clubs, c’est une gigantesque structure au service de la philanthropie, mais également de sa propre survie. Le fonctionnement bureaucratique du club repose sur un système méritocratique, les membres bénévoles suivent des règlements très précis qui leur permettent de se valoriser en présentant de bons résultats aux supérieurs hiérarchiques (en terme d’effectifs, de services philanthropiques prestés). Le réseau s’agrandit sans perte d’efficacité grâce au contrôle, il existe donc une confiance qualifiée d’entente utilitaire au bénéfice d’une entreprise. Cependant, lors de la sélection des nouvelles recrues les relations familiales se re créent, les nouveaux sont choisis par cooptation et invités à intégrer « la famille » ou tous s’appellent des « amis ». La notion de confiance retrouve son terrain lignager, la proximité et le déploiement d’une histoire écrite en commun (Cornu 2003). Le club propose donc un agencement qui crée une connivence locale, qui serait la confiance, et une entente au sein d’une structure globale performante qui transforme la confiance en une transaction pragmatique. Mais dans le contexte africain, les « œuvres philanthropiques » vont révéler l’ambivalence de ces relations modulées par la taille du groupe, en rappelant la nature lucrative des rapports qualifiés comme étant de « confiance » dans les réseaux globaux de philanthropie.

## **17 November 2021, 4-5.30pm (CET) - Reflections on Trust and Trust Making in the Work of Islamic Charities from the Gulf region in Africa**

*Speaker: Mayke Kaag, African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden University, the Netherlands*

My research on Islamic charities from the Gulf region and their work in Africa has not only led me to a reflection on the importance of trust in aid relationships more generally, but also on the active trust making done by these organisations. Indeed, as transnational charity providers they are embedded in a web of relationships that they need to maintain and/or further, and for which trust is indispensable. First of all, they need to prove their trustworthiness towards their donors in the Gulf countries. Secondly, they need to create trust in the local African contexts in which they come to work. Lastly, Islamic charities, especially those from the Gulf, face a lot of distrust in the global context post 9/11, which they need to deal with and counter. I will discuss these challenges and Gulf charities' strategies to address them. In particular, I will show that their strategies of trust making toward different audiences may create tensions, implying the need for navigating different narratives of trustworthiness. How does this influence their work on the ground in Africa?

**The seminar series will be online and take place via Zoom:**

<https://universiteitleiden.zoom.us/j/62933524596?pwd=NnJ1ODIISGdoWHh6dk15MmYvaUJ6QT09>

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