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 charitative 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 charitative networks in and from Africa (September 2021), and Trust and trust making in transnational families and kin networks (November 2021), 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 (January 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 II:
Trust and Trust Making in Africa's Global Connections: COVID-19 Politics and Diplomacy

5 - 7 July 2021

During three sessions of 1,5 hour divided over the first week of July 2021, we will reflect on trust, distrust and trust making in COVID-19 politics and diplomacy in and towards Africa. It is clear that the current pandemic and the policies designed to counter it, have seen strong expressions of distrust globally. Citizens have questioned the need for strong measures, such as partial and complete lockdowns in their countries, as well as the trustworthiness of vaccines, and the knowledge and actors behind these. Africa is not an exception in this respect. These expressions surfacing so strongly in the current atmosphere of (global) crisis do not stand on their own but point to deeper tendencies of mistrust against governments and other actors of authority, as well as the densification of parallel truths, stimulated by social media and populist politics.

Vaccinations are loaded with meaning as they cross bodily borders and affect people very directly in their (well)being. It seems that such encounters in which people's survival is directly at stake, questions of trust and mistrust become very important. Who (and which truth) is considered trustworthy, and on what grounds? Whereas a couple of years ago, some observers labelled the sometimes strong distrustful responses in West- and Central Africa to ebola medical teams as primitive answers by un-educated Africans, the current COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that in cases of intense crisis, the emergence of strong feelings of distrust as well as strategies of trust in face of the unknown, appear to be commonly human.

In many African countries, as elsewhere in the world, people have manifested against corona measures of their governments. In several countries, including heralded democracies such as Ghana, there has been evidence that governments have used the pandemic for blocking opposition initiatives and free media.[1] How will these experiences influence further relationships, including processes of trust and mistrust, between African citizens and their governors?

Local processes of trust and distrust in the context of COVID-19 are not only related to local experiences and local relationships with the national level, but are also directly linked to the transnational and global level. The 'mask diplomacy' especially towards Africa as led by China, India among others since the beginning of the pandemic not only met with distrust and critical reactions in Africa, but also in the West. Suspicions were raised whether these initiatives were not only meant to support and increase these countries' interests in Africa (obviously raising further questions as to why the West was so concerned with these initiatives..). So-called vaccine diplomacy, as currently deployed by China, Russia, and India,[2] is a further interesting endeavour in this respect; its results will of course depend on whether these global powers are able to live up to their promises—a challenge that is also faced by the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) programme of the World Health Organization.

At all three levels mentioned in the foregoing (local, national, global), it is not only important to identify feelings of trust and mistrust in relation to COVID-19 interactions and measures, and how COVID-19 may influence trust and distrust in society now and in the future. Processes of trust-making are also important to analyse, including the question how actors who want to be seen as trustworthy, try to 'signal' their trustworthiness. These may be international

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[1] https://theconversation.com/ghanas-president-has-invoked-a-tough-new-law-against-coronavirus-why-its-disquieting-13547
[2] https://www.theafricareport.com/61188/covid-vaccines-russia-china-india-who-is-supplying-africa/

diplomats, government actors, medical doctors, journalists, but also African citizens trying to stand up against COVID-19 measures, and/or local and transnational solidarity initiatives.

In this subseries, we aim to address some of the foregoing and related questions. COVID-19 has once more underscored that our current world is fundamentally interdependent, hence that fighting the pandemic is a global endeavour. In view of this, a focus on the intertwining of local and global processes of trust and distrust from the perspective of Africa appears all the more important.

Monday 5 July 2021, 4pm-5.30pm (CEST) – COVID 19, Toxic Coloniality, and the Limits of Western Arrogance

Speaker: Dr. Cheikh Thiam (School of International Training, Brattleboro, USA)

This contribution explores the effects of coloniality in the representation of Africa's experience with COVID 19 and analyzes the limits of toxic coloniality on the West's engagement with the world and its consequences on its management of the pandemic. The author argues, from a decolonial perspective, that the arrogance constitutive of Western modernity has led to the prediction of the doom's day for the African continent and limited Euro-America's ability to take on the COVID 19 challenge, while also nourishing global processes of distrust. He proposes, in consequence, that humility, a basic principle of African ontologies, leading towards a respectful engagement with life and all living things may offer a perennial solution to critical global issues such as the COVID 19.

Tuesday 6 July 2021, 4pm-5.30pm (CEST) - Trust Building in a Two-party System: Covid-19 and Electoral Politics in Ghana

Speaker: Dr. George Bob- Milliar (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, Ghana)

How did the lack of trust in formal institutions affect the covid-19 politics in Ghana? Trust in formal and informal institutions is crucial in state-building and serves as a critical fundament for state legitimacy. Despite decades of excessive attention on good governance and more countries holding multiparty elections, many Africans don't trust the state and its institutions. Ghana has an enviable record of conducting peaceful democratic elections and transition of power. Yet, there exists a widespread lack of trust in governments and public institutions in Ghana. This lack of institutional trust signals a crisis of legitimacy of the political system, and it poses a risk of destabilizing the relationship between the state and its citizens. Ghanaians trust religious organizations and traditional authorities more than political parties and public institutions. It is, however, political parties that govern and implement public policy. This talk will examine how the main political parties responded to the covid-19 pandemic in an election year in Ghana. I will argue that trust in political parties is generated through their performance in government. The governing New Patriotic Party (NPP) used its incumbency advantage to build trust and rally the citizens around its core message akin to 'prevention is better than cure.' On the other hand, the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), promoted a strategy aimed at creating trust/distrust to mitigate the impact of the frozen political landscape. Ghana emerged as a model in its management of the pandemic and received funds

and global praise. Nevertheless, the incumbent party exploited the containment strategy for its electoral campaign

7 July 2021, 4-5.30pm (CEST) - Trust and Trust Making in COVID-19 Diplomacy and Beyond: An Africa - Central and Eastern Europe Perspective

Speaker: Prof. István Tarrósy (University of Pécs, Hungary)

The aim of this talk is to widen the horizon of the global connections of countries with Africa, African countries with different parts of the world. Here, the four Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) (of the Visegrad Group), i.e. Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia will be looked at more closely, while a transnational overview of interdependence connected with the pandemic will be offered. After intensive decades of cooperation during the bipolar world, the politico-economic changes of the late 1980s, early 1990s resulted in scarce contacts with African countries until after all these four former Eastern Bloc-countries joined the EU in 2004, and from the 2010s each of them individually, as well as the four of them collectively in the Visegrad Group opened new chapters in their foreign policies about re-engagements across Africa. Rebuilding trust and trustworthiness, therefore, have been playing a role in contemporary CEEC–Africa relations, among which responses to the global pandemic might offer opportunities for more/different interactions. We will deal with both governmental and non-governmental dimensions and actors.

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

https://universiteitleiden.zoom.us/j/66887568737?pwd=aEZielg2UzBkdmd2UTdkVThlZ2xoUT09

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