Capitalism and moral change: the genesis of Uganda’s contemporary moral-economic order

Jörg Wiegratz (Lecturer in Political Economy of Global Development, University of Leeds, School of Politics and International Studies)

In this seminar, Jörg Wiegratz introduces some of the main arguments and findings of his new book on the relationship between neoliberal reform, moral-economic change and economic fraud in of the key exemplars of neoliberalism in Africa, Uganda. The book offers a fresh take on a major question of a debate that has gripped not just countries in Africa but around the world: what explains the rise in economic fraud in so many societies around the world? Wiegratz argues that the current age of fraud is an outcome of not only political-economic but also moral transformations that have taken place in societies reshaped by neoliberalism. Using the case of Uganda, he traces these socio-cultural and especially moral repercussions of embedding neoliberalism in a country. His work offers an in-depth, data-based take on the genesis and operation of a ‘market society’ in Uganda, and some of the major aspects of the cultural political economy (and especially the moral climate) of such a market society. Uganda offers an important case of investigation for three reasons: the high level of foreign intervention by donors, aid agencies, international organisations, NGOs and corporations that have tried to produce the first fully-fledged market society in Africa there; the country’s reputation as having adopted neoliberal reforms most extensively, and the intensification of fraud in many sectors of the economy since the early 2000s. The talk does two things: first, it explores the rise and operation of the neoliberal moral economy and its world of hard and fraudulent practices. It analyses especially the moral-economic character of agricultural produce markets in eastern Uganda. It shows that neoliberal moral restructuring is a highly political, contested and conflict-ridden process, predominantly works via recalibrating the political-economic structure of a country, and deeply affects how people think and go about earning a living and treat others with whom they do business. Second, it offers more general reflections about the moral order and moral change in capitalist society and respective scholarly debates.

For more on the new book see [here](http://www.rowmaninternational.com/books/neoliberal-moral-economy). Jörg Wiegratz is Lecturer in Political Economy of Global Development at the University of Leeds. He researches the political economy and moral economy of neoliberalism in Africa and elsewhere. In the past he has researched global value chains and industrial development, predominantly with an empirical focus on Uganda. He previously worked as a researcher and consultant in Uganda for UNIDO, the Government of Uganda, and the GIZ, a Resource Person at Makerere University (School of Economics), and a Visiting Scholar at the Economic Policy Research Centre, Kampala (2004–2007). He is a member of the editorial working group of Review of African Political Economy; here, he coordinates the web blog projects on [*Economic trickery, fraud and crime in Africa*](http://roape.net/category/economic-trickery-fraud-and-crime-in-africa/), and [*Capitalism in Africa*](http://roape.net/category/roape-debates/). He is the author of *Uganda’s Human Resource Challenge: Training, Business Culture and Economic Development* (Fountain Publishers, 2009) and co-editor of *Neoliberalism and the Moral Economy of Fraud* (Routledge, 2016, with David Whyte), and *Neoliberal Uganda* (Zed, 2018, with Giuliano Martinello and Elisa Greco). He has also published articles in *New Political Economy*, *Review of African Political Economy* and *Journal of Agrarian Change*. See also his recent piece on [Capitalist Moral Economy in Africa](http://roape.net/2017/02/14/capitalist-moral-economy-africa/).