
International research workshop

The moral dimensions of economic life in Africa

The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala (Sweden), 14-15 June 2018

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While orthodox views and mainstream analyses tend to exclude morality from the investigation and the understanding of economic life, in reality there are always various moral dimensions at play when it comes to people's economic thinking, practices and relationships, on one hand, and the structures in which they operate, on the other. It is important to pay attention to, and better comprehend, these dimensions, for various reasons: across the world, the moral qualities of contemporary capitalism, and the moral climate in particular economic sectors are being increasingly questioned in public debates. Discussions about the trajectories of moral change in contemporary economies (and societies more broadly) articulate concerns about crisis and decline, as well as calls for moral renewal. Furthermore, awareness of global and national socio-economic inequalities, and demands for stronger redistributive measures, are growing under the impulse of social movements, radical politics, and academic debates.

In its diversity and complexity, Africa is a privileged site to discuss the moral dimensions of economic life. A number of African economies are characterised by rapid change, substantial foreign intervention and related societal restructuring (including a locking-in of a particular variant of capitalism), uneven levels of penetration of capitalism, the persistence of poverty, informality and precarity, and structural transformations that often entail growth and material change as well as rising inequalities across classes and locations. Debates also flourish about the impact of global connections and new technologies, the cultural changes that have come with liberalisation and marketisation, the rise of a new middle class, and the distinctiveness and future of 'Africapitalism'. Increasingly vocal in contesting the existing power, wealth, and inequality structures, social movements and political oppositions challenge the operations and outcomes of the current political economy.

In this workshop we will look more closely at the morality-economy nexus. Exploring this nexus has both an empirical and theoretical relevance. Moralities have become a central theme in contemporary social sciences. There has been a revival in the use of the concept of 'moral economy' in particular; there is a diverse scholarship that has employed it to analyse political conflicts, resistance and social movements, patterns of subsistence, economic behaviour and resource use, fraud, corruption, and violence, as well as moral change in neoliberalised economy and society more generally. We think that there is need to advance relevant theoretical debates via the use of more empirical data that analyses different case dynamics. In particular, the theme of the moral characteristics (including representations, repercussions, contestations) of capitalism in Africa - against the broader global context - deserves more analytical attention.

The empirical relevance lies in obtaining a better understanding of varieties of the nexus, i.e. how different moralities interact (and often compete) in the organisation of economic life in different African contexts. Thematic areas that the workshop organisers hope papers might explore include, for example: (i) the moral articulations of global capitalism and neoliberalism on the African continent; (ii) the international development agenda and apparatus (including international and regional organizations, donors, NGOs, etc.); (iii) state ideologies, programmes and policies concerning the economy (and more generally the link between politics and economic moralities, or political economy and moral economy); (iv) the moralities of powerful economic actors (e.g. large transnational/national corporations), elites, various professions, subaltern classes, etc.; (v) the moral dimensions of economic life in particular local settings (markets, villages, neighbourhoods, mining sites, special economic zones, etc.); (vi) how kinship, ethnicity, religion and other forms of belonging shape economic behaviour and its moral dimensions; (vii) internal and global migration involving Africa, and how mobilities and migration flows transform African economies and their moral representations; (viii) the moralities of reciprocity, solidarity, and sharing; (ix) the moral dimensions of borrowing, saving, investment and consumption; or (x) the moral economies of patron-client relations, corruption, fraud and violence.

The suggested areas are certainly not exhaustive. The workshop aims to be interdisciplinary and welcomes contributions from across the social sciences (political economy, cultural anthropology, political science, sociology, human geography, development studies, history, etc.). Papers should have an empirical grounding and preferably be built around case studies. The workshop is hosted and partly funded by the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. We are also exploring further funding opportunities in order to host a second event later in the year (around autumn) at the University of Cologne, Germany. The most immediate outcomes of the workshop(s) will be:

- A number of posts in a blog series on the website of the journal ROAPE (Review of African Political Economy) on the theme. This includes posts from participants of an earlier panel on 'Moral economy/-ies in African studies' at the ECAS 2017 in Basel. The blog series will be inaugurated in the coming months and continued up to 2019.
- The organisation of a special issue in a peer reviewed journal to be submitted for review by early 2019, and possibly other publications.
- Opportunities to discuss future joint research projects/bids with participants.

Some funding from NAI is available for a few scholars - 4 to 6 max. - who need financial support (please indicate that need in your submission). Scholars based in African universities and research institutions are particularly encouraged to apply and an effort will be made to support their participation. Additional possibilities for funding are currently being explored.

If you are interested, please send your title, author's information and abstract (max. 500 words) to **cristiano.lanzano@nai.uu.se** by March 28th. The authors of the accepted proposals will receive a notification within 10 days and full papers (about 6.000 words) will be expected by May 31st.