

**"Politics, Culture, and the
Microfinance Industry in Cameroon "**

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Date: Monday, Dec. 03, 2018

Location: 701 South Ross Building

Research: 10:00-11:30am

Teaching: 2:00-3:30pm

My research uses an approach grounded in political economy and economic anthropology to explain the operations of the microfinance industry in Cameroon. As finance is critical to neoliberal-led development, I argue that it is important to examine the politics of microfinance in the country, including the role that culture plays in mediating access to formal finance.

First, I contend that the microfinance narrative was enthusiastically embraced by the government in Cameroon due to its disciplinary potential, which makes it especially conducive to functioning as a political safety net. Second, I show the symbiotic relationship between traditional institutions (that serve as the custodians of culture) and microfinance institutions.

On the one hand, by facilitating access to finance at the local level, traditional institutions serve to legitimate, normalize, and consolidate the activities of microfinance institutions that benefit from finance-led development. On the other hand, the mediatory role performed by traditional institutions makes it possible for these institutions to reinvent themselves and remain relevant in contemporary societies. This reinvention of traditional institutions renders it challenging for the modern state to curb its influence on local communities.