



# Friday Seminar

## Pharmaceuticals in Divergence: *Chakachua* (Fakes), Fugitive Science, and Postcolonial Critique in Tanzania

Date: 23 Oct 2020

Time: 1-2:30 pm

### Speaker:

Dr. Laura Meek

Centre for the Humanities and Medicine, The University of Hong Kong

Zoom Meeting Link: <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/97537051112>

Meeting ID: 975 3705 1112

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*Powerful pharmaceuticals are readily available for purchase throughout Tanzania and global health workers decry this situation as dangerous and disordered, as if no rules govern the use of drugs in Africa. In the prevailing global health understanding, 'truth' lies in the laboratory science that goes into the making and proper prescription of drugs, and such deviations as 'overuse' and 'misuse' result from the fact that locals misunderstand what these drugs are and how they should be used. In this talk, based on 30 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Iringa, Tanzania, I demonstrate how my interlocuters experiment with ways to determine the 'true' nature of pharmaceuticals, differentiate types of drugs, and establish control over their variable capacities. I begin by discussing the problem of chakachua (or fake) drugs and the embodied epistemological practices employed by medical personnel and lay people in response to such conditions. I conceptualize these empirical practices as methods of "fugitive science" which at times reconfigure the capacities of drugs in ways that exceed biomedical frameworks. Finally, I consider critiques of pharmaceuticals as poisonous and interpret such critiques as astute analyses of the politics of life and biosecurity regimes which increasingly characterize global health initiatives in Africa.*

### Biography:

Dr. Meek is an Assistant Professor in the Centre for the Humanities and Medicine at the University of Hong Kong. She is a medical anthropologist who researches biomedical globalization, bodily epistemologies, and the politics of healing in East Africa. Her current book project is based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork in Iringa, Tanzania, and focuses on the proliferation of counterfeits in local biomedical markets, where an estimated 30-60% of drugs are thought to be fake. Dr. Meek received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of California, Davis, and an M.A. in Women's Studies from George Washington University.

**ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!**