

Where does the middle class belong? Namibian weddings and the contested production of locality

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Rites of passage like weddings produce local subjects, i.e. people who according to Appadurai (1996) properly belong to a community, a kin group or a neighborhood. New forms of global mobility have enlarged these productions of locality. Previous research has shown that the increase in international migration has triggered the spread of translocal identities. In how far does class mobility lead to similar transformations of place making practices? Based on a long-term field project that I started in 2003 in rural Namibia and extended to urban Namibia in 2015 and 2016 I want to examine how urban middle class couples actively build their class and local belongings through the planning and celebration of their weddings. Being part of the urban Namibian middle class does not cut one's kinship ties and rural belongings. Many middle class Namibians living in the capital Windhoek express deep sentiments for their 'home village'. In the village, they build second homes, spent the holidays, support rural kin folk and own livestock. Rites of passages, however, are increasingly not being celebrated in the countryside. Urban middle class couples are torn between their own desire for what they perceive as an intimate and romantic wedding with their friends and their families' plans for a 'traditional' and expensive marriage celebrations in the rural 'home' area. The decision where to marry can tear generations and families apart. Many young couples prefer the capital Windhoek while rural kin groups despise this choice. The paper will describe these conflicts surrounding middle class weddings and show how an emerging middle class identity might reconfigure kin relations and rural belongings in the long term.