

Understanding the Diversity of Middle Classes in 21st Century Kenya: Social Milieus, Lifestyles and Meanings in Nairobi (Fellowship am Center for Cultural Sociology der Universität Yale)

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten in Deutschland und den USA

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This project examines which sociocultural differentiated groups - or social milieus - exist in the middle classes of Kenya's capital Nairobi and how it is possible to grasp the sociocultural characteristics in a conceptual frame. Preliminary results of empirical research in Nairobi show that sociocultural influences like ethnicity, the relation to the extended family, or forms of religiosity differentiate the realities of life among members in the middle income stratum - a culturally homogenous class does not exist. On the basis of already collected data, the project examines first which middle class milieus can be found in Nairobi and which specific sociocultural features are distinctive. Secondly, the study develops a frame that helps to understand the diversity of the milieus - specific sets of meanings, symbolic boundaries and small lifeworlds. The frame connects the milieu concept with the "strong programme" in Cultural Sociology (Alexander/Smith 2003), Michèle Lamont's study of symbolic boundaries and Randall Collins' "Interaction Ritual Chains". Sociocultural aspects and meanings are the starting point for the analysis of milieus as well as for Cultural Sociology. By connecting both approaches, the project aims to develop an interpretive frame, which can offer a new look at milieus in Nairobi, but also in other contexts of the Global South and North. While the study of milieus aims at capturing all socioculturally differentiated groups in a certain setting on a macro-meso-level, approaches of Cultural Sociology can explain complementary meanings and other aspects on a micro-meso-level. For this reason, the project goes beyond an exemplary study on middle classes in Africa: It combines the milieu-approach, which is mainly used in German Sociology, with Cultural Sociology, which is firmly established in American Sociology.

Projektbeteiligte

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Living today or saving for tomorrow? Perspectives of the Future among middle-class milieus in Nairobi .