

# 14

Bayreuth African Studies  
**WORKING PAPERS**

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Bayreuth Academy  
of Advanced  
African Studies

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## **Socio-Cultural Diversity of the African Middle Class The Case of Urban Kenya**

Dieter Neubert and Florian Stoll

**14**

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WORKING PAPERS**

**Socio-cultural  
Diversity of the  
African middle class**

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- Concepts of Future in Mediaspaces of Africa and its Diasporas (Sub-project 4);
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# **Socio-cultural diversity of the African middle class.**

## **The case of urban Kenya**

**Dieter Neubert & Florian Stoll**

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In recent years there has been an increase of interest in the middle class in the Global South, as witnessed by media reports, economic forecasts and academic research. In the present discussion, the term “middle class” is used to refer to a middle-income group, whose income is above the poverty threshold. There is an extensive debate concerning what threshold values to use in defining the middle class. On the one hand, it is defined from a comparative global perspective, including the OECD countries; on the other hand, it is defined in respect of specific regions or countries in the Global South, which leads to lower threshold values. The middle class is usually defined as people with a daily per capita income of between two and ten US dollars at the lower end, and

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<sup>1</sup> The text is a slightly revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the Congress of the German Sociological Association in Trier on 6-10.10.2014. It was translated by Ruth Schubert. Many thanks to Eberhard Rothfuß for his constructive comments.



between ten and 100 US dollars at the upper end (based on purchasing power parity).<sup>2</sup> This debate will not be carried on here (for an overview, see Neubert 2014: 24f). For a discussion of socio-cultural differentiation, the categories proposed by the African Development Bank (AfDB 2011) are helpful as a rough guide and can be applied to the case of Kenya, which is presented in this article. The African Development Bank uses the following categories: 2–4 US dollars as “floating class”, which lives above the poverty line but is threatened by poverty; 4–10 US dollars as lower middle class and 10–20 US dollars as upper middle class.

While the existence of a middle class has long been acknowledged in Asia, North Africa and Latin America, the development of a large middle class in Africa south of the Sahara is a relatively new phenomenon which has attracted special attention. In a number of studies, the growing middle class is seen as representing an important economic potential for the development of Africa, since it also stands paradigmatically for a more positive economic image of Africa (AfDB 2011; McKinsey Global Institute 2010; Ncube, Lufumpa 2015). In all studies of the middle class in the Global South, it is remarkable that everyone talks of “the” middle class (Easterly 2001; Kharas 2010; Milanovic, Yitzhaki 2002). Apart from the difficulties of agreeing on a socio-economic definition, the implication is that this middle class has many common features. This also applies to Africa. At first glance, there are good reasons to speak of “the African middle class”. From an economic perspective, this is a group with greater consumption opportunities. The studies also underline the importance of education and careers. But especially in Africa, regional and ethnic identities continue to be important, even for the middle class.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this is often bound up with a marked rural orientation. At least since the wave of democratization at the beginning of the 1990s, widespread pro-democratic views can be observed in parts of the middle class. Our own research shows that great importance is still attached to family and wider kin groups, as well as religion. In addition, the middle class has intensive international contacts. The money sent home by family members is important for financing education and other investments. A remarkable number of members of the middle class have migration or diaspora experience. Taken together these features seem to reflect the socio-cultural homogeneity of the African middle class as the socio-economic definition implies. But on a closer look, this is not so clear. The normative assumptions we have mentioned are not restricted to the middle class, but also apply to large parts of the lower class. The desire for education and social advancement, family values, religion, regional identities, democratic views and the importance of having contact with family members who live abroad are not limited to a specific socio-economic class. Features which at first might appear to be typical of the African middle class are in fact typical of large parts of African societies. The main difference between the middle class and the other groups is a socio-economic one based on the better position of the middle class with regard to consumption opportunities. The members of the middle class are financially better off than members of the lower class and this is their most distinctive attribute in

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<sup>2</sup> 2–10 US dollars Banerjee, Dufo 2008; 2–13 US dollars Ravallion 2010, 446; 2–20 US dollars AfDB 2011: 2; or even 10–100 US dollars Kharas 2010: 9.

<sup>3</sup> Despite many differences between the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the aspects described here also apply in differing degrees to many of these countries. It is therefore justified to speak here of “Africa” without further distinction.

comparison to the lower class. An important consequence of their higher income is that they are in a better position to buy consumer goods. But this is only a very broad way of describing the special realities of the middle class, which is defined by this socio-economic position. There is plenty to suggest that it would be a gross simplification to regard Africa's middle class as a uniform, socio-culturally homogeneous group with largely similar or identical attitudes and orientations. Thus, the question is not whether the desire for education and social advancement, family, ethnicity, religion, diaspora relations and other characteristics are positive values for members of the middle class, but how these elements influence their everyday practices and their hopes and plans for the future. Very different orientations can be seen in connection with Africa's political development, as an example will show. In Africa there is a significant group which cultivates liberal, cosmopolitan and democratic values and forms the core of the civil society. But there is another significant group which has a neo-traditional orientation. These groups have different views regarding so-called "traditional authorities", the political role of ethnicity, ethnic micro-nationalism and the issue of abortion (see also Daniel/Neubert 2014).

From the existence of a middle class in the socio-economic sense we cannot conclude that this class is socio-culturally homogeneous as is implied by classical concepts of class. On the contrary, we observe in Kenya a remarkable socio-cultural differentiation. With this article we want to show how socio-cultural differentiation within the African middle class can be grasped conceptually and empirically. This analysis of socio-cultural difference adds a further dimension to the analysis of social structure beyond socio-economic stratification and/or class. There is no existing analysis of socio-cultural differentiation in Africa and large parts of the Global South. To date, social structure analyses relating to the Global South have been limited to the analysis of socio-economic strata, or class in the (neo-) Marxist or Weberian sense, or they use class in an unspecified way. In most cases, socio-cultural differentiation has been perceived and studied only in terms of ethnic or religious identities. For the purpose of analysing socio-cultural differences, we refer to approaches that have been used for the analysis of socio-cultural differentiation in European societies, especially for Germany: "socio-cultural milieus" and "small lifeworlds". These approaches are hardly known in the anglophone scholarly debate. One reason for this is that these approaches to the study of socio-cultural differentiation were developed in Germany and these texts have only recently been published in English (for example Zifonun 2015). The main idea behind these concepts is that the differentiation of social groups cannot be described only in terms of socio-economic differences, although these are still important. Moreover we have to consider that people in the same socio-economic position do not share necessarily the same values and lifestyles. Subgroups that do share the same values and lifestyles are categorized as socio-cultural "milieus". The social settings where people meet in a particular sphere of their everyday life are conceptualized as "small lifeworlds". In the first part of this paper we will present and discuss these approaches (1 Conceptualization of socio-cultural diversity: social macro-milieus and small lifeworlds). In the second part of the paper we will adapt the milieu approach to urban Kenya (with an empirical focus on Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, supplemented by information from Mombasa, Kisumu and Eldoret) (2 Milieu analysis for Kenya). In a further step we present two examples of (urban) Kenyan milieus (3 Two examples: neo-traditional and religious Christian milieus). In the final part we

discuss the scope and the limits of this analysis (4 Conceptual conclusions and further challenges). To be clear, we do not ignore the existence of socio-economic differences, nor do we claim that this inequality is not important. In this paper we simply want to show that for the understanding of social differentiation we have to consider socio-cultural differentiation too.

The discussion is based on the first results of a current research project entitled “Middle Classes on the Rise – Concepts of the future between freedom, consumption, tradition, and morality”, which is part of a broader project entitled “Future Africa – Visions in Time”, conducted at the Bayreuth Academy for Advanced African Studies and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The authors of this article are responsible for the sociological part of the project, and Erdmute Alber, Lena Kroeker and Maike Voigt for the anthropological aspects. The empirical dataset is based mainly on participant observation and 82 biographical interviews carried out by Florian Stoll in Mombasa and Nairobi in 2013 and 2014, in the course of three periods of fieldwork totaling six months. Other important sources of information are observations and interviews conducted by Lena Kroeker, Erdmute Alber, Maike Voigt and Dieter Neubert. In 2014 eight Master’s students each spent at least six weeks doing field research in Nairobi, Eldoret and Kisumu on the topic “middle classes”, in preparation for their Master’s theses, which are not yet completed.

## **1 Conceptualization of socio-cultural diversity: social macro-milieus and small lifeworlds**

At least since the 1980s, socio-cultural differentiation – in addition to class and class differences – have been an important topic in German social structure analysis. Social differentiation is described not only in terms of socio-economic positioning, but also in terms of (sub-) cultural differences.<sup>4</sup> One point of reference is the internationally acknowledged theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1982) which links socio-cultural differentiation to specific class positions. In Germany this idea was extended and developed by Vester et al. (2001). Vester’s approach combines the analysis of milieus with a class analysis, by examining the connections between position in the division of work and cultural features. The debate in Germany rejected the analysis of classes in favour of a more descriptive approach. The study of socio-cultural differentiation was based either on the concept of “milieus”, without Bourdieu’s reference to classes, or on what were called different “lifestyles”. The concept developed by the Sinus Institute, which will be discussed below, links socio-economic positionings, on the basis of a descriptive model, with different socio-cultural orientations or “milieus” (see Sinus Sociovision 2009; on the background to this conception, see Flaig et al. 1993). Hradil (1987) goes a step further and conceptualizes not classes but social positions, where in addition to the typical criteria for distinguishing different social strata, such as occupation, income, education, other criteria are also considered, such as job

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<sup>4</sup> For a good overview of classic and new approaches to social structure analysis and the analysis of social differentiation, see the edited volume by Solga et al. (2009).

security, place of residence, or access to infrastructure and social services. The milieu construction basically corresponds to the Sinus model. In his attempt to distinguish different lifestyles, Schulze (1992) attaches more importance to identifying socio-cultural differences. In addition to contrasting value preferences, he places leisure behaviour in the foreground and links this up with theoretical considerations in respect of the “thrill seeking society” (*Erlebnisgesellschaft*). This discussion was mainly restricted to the German-speaking countries. For an overview, see Isenböck et al. (2014) on milieus, Rössel and Otte (2012) on lifestyles. In the US there were only scattered echoes, such as Mitchell (1983), who suggested an implicit hierarchy of different lifestyles.

These approaches all concentrate on the analysis of milieus in Germany and are applicable to the African context only to a certain extent and with adaptations (Neubert 2005). But there are a few studies which offer some reference points for milieus, on the basis of Bourdieu’s approach, in non-European countries such as Brazil (Stoll 2012) or Laos (Rehbein 2004; 2007).

The Sinus concept of milieus (Sinus Sociovision 2009; Flaig et al. 1993), which was developed in Germany but is now used in a number of OECD and emerging countries, has gained importance as a descriptive model in applied (market) research. The special feature of this approach is the way it is able to take into account socio-cultural orientations that transcend class boundaries, as well as different socio-cultural orientations within the same socio-economic class. This descriptive concept of class as a socio-economic stratum is easier to operationalize and apply empirically than the more complex concept of “social positions”. Because of its flexible approach to the positioning of milieus and its more simple concept of class, the basic idea of the Sinus model can be adapted to African societies south of the Sahara (or the whole of the Global South). This model does not presuppose a more or less fixed class structure, the existence of which may be doubtful or disputed. The descriptive division into strata is usually possible on the basis of available data, and the milieu definition of this concept is open enough to be able to apply it to non-European contexts with appropriate adaptations.<sup>5</sup>

The Sinus concept reconstructs “[...] subcultural units within a society which group together *people with a similar view of life and way of life*” (Flaig et al. 1993: 55; italics in original, translated R.S.). These units are called “milieus”. This is clearly a social structure analysis which considers more than just limited social units. Rather, it claims that society as a whole can be described in the form of distinct (macro-) milieus.<sup>6</sup> This macro-milieu concept works with two dimensions. In addition to the socio-economic division into lower class, lower middle class, middle middle class, upper middle class and upper class, a second dimension is created on the basis of differing cultural orientations. These range from preservation of tradition to modernization, individualization and

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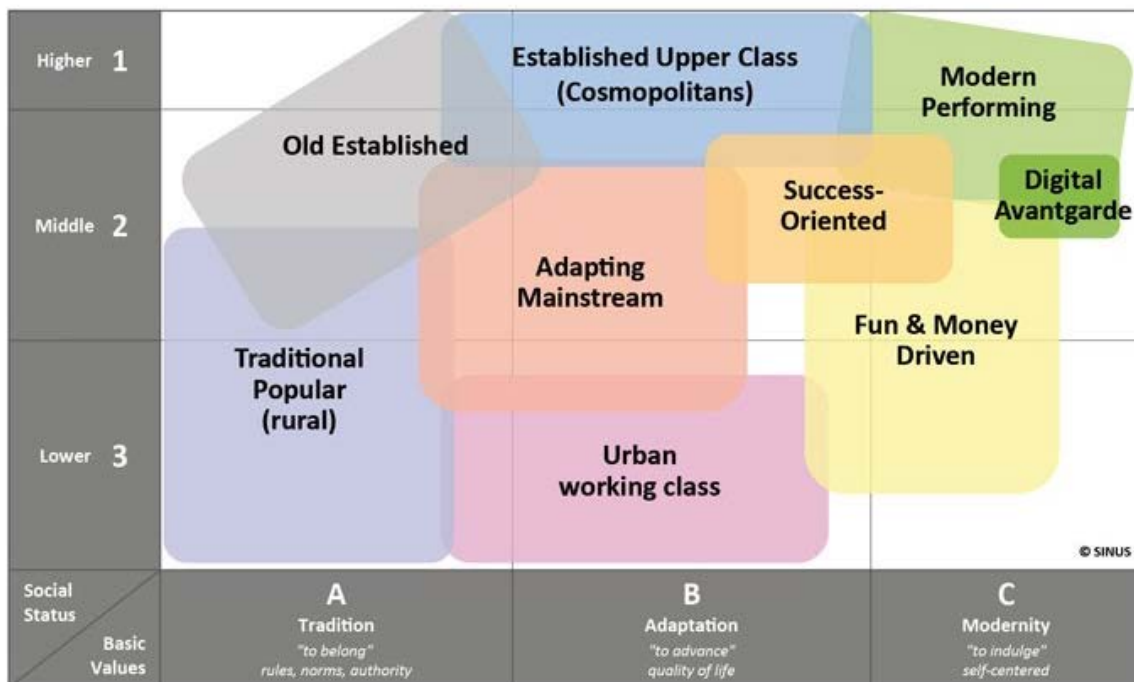
<sup>5</sup> The question whether “class” is an appropriate concept to describe social inequality precisely, especially in Africa, is not the topic of this paper. And we will neither discuss the term of “elites” that has been used especially in the 1960 and 1970s (for the discussion see Lentz 2015; Neubert 2005, 181ff, 2014, 23) Therefore, we follow – despite our doubts – the general practice and use the term class.

<sup>6</sup> We speak here of (“macro-”) milieus because this term can be used to refer to large social macro-groups which should not be confused with scenes, small subcultures or socio-culturally homogeneous face-to-face groups.

re-orientation. This structure is visualized by means of “fields”, which may overlap, located within a coordinate system. A milieu is defined in terms of a particular combination of so-called “milieu building blocks” (Flaig et al. 1993: 71). These relate to social position, aims in life, work/performance, image of society, family/partnership, leisure, ideals or role models, and lifestyle. Depending on an individual’s values and orientation in relation to these building blocks, he or she will be assigned to a milieu, in the sense of social macro-milieus.<sup>7</sup> The Sinus Institute now offers milieus for emerging markets in countries of the Global South (see Fig. 1).

Assignment to a milieu thus depends on people’s values, normative orientations and everyday practices. This way of analysing social differentiation is closely connected with people’s visions of the future and shows that such visions can vary greatly within a society. They are reflected in ideals and role models, people’s image of society, and, more concretely, their aims in life. Milieus thus not only show existing socio-cultural orientations and practices, but are also linked to aspirations which mean that actions are directed towards attaining future goals.

**Figure 1: Sinus-Meta-Milieus in emerging markets**



Source: <http://www.sinus-institut.de/en/solutions/sinus-meta-milieus.html>

The milieu concept, and the whole Sinus approach, like the lifestyle approach, has been subject to various criticisms (see for example Otte 2005; Geißler 2006: 116–119; Hitzler, Honer 1984). It is

<sup>7</sup> A chart showing the Sinus milieu can be seen on the website of the Sinus Institute: <http://www.sinus-institut.de/en/solutions/sinus-meta-milieus.html>, (last accessed on 02 April 2015)

said that the concept lacks a theoretical framework, and consists only of a descriptive division into milieus based on the distribution of orientations in relation to the milieu building blocks. Moreover, milieu and lifestyle studies that follow this approach tend to use different definitions and delimitations of the various milieus. This means that their results in respect of one and the same society are not necessarily comparable. They are also sometimes accused of being arbitrary. It is not always clear how the values named by respondents relate to concrete practice. It is claimed that there is no great difference between values and practice within milieus, meaning it can be assumed that the milieus are relatively homogeneous. Milieu approaches and empirical studies both give the impression that families or households belong as a rule to the same milieu. With its concentration on the macro level, the milieu approach ignores individual deviations, and phases in which individuals are unsettled. In addition, there is no place for individualized realities, so that single individuals may fit into the pattern only to a limited degree. This is bound up with a fundamental critique of the macro orientation of milieu approaches, similar to the critique of class concepts, since the description of general features cannot explain the logic of social practices on the micro level.

Different approaches to the study of socio-cultural differentiation include, for instance, the analysis of specific subcultures as “scenes” (Hitzler et al. 2001), or the use of concepts such as “small lifeworlds” or “micro-milieus”. These are based on the work of Anne Honer and Ronald Hitzler in the 1980s (Honer 1985; Hitzler/Honer 1988), who began by using the term lifeworlds with reference to Berger/Luckmann (1966). In order to distinguish these more clearly from macro-milieus, we use the term “small lifeworld” (Rebstein/Schnettler 2014). Small lifeworlds are voluntarily chosen part-time lifeworlds or communal spheres that share common interests, meanings and behaviours (such as sports clubs, fitness studios, rabbit breeders’ associations, migrant organizations, political groups) (Soeffner/Zifonun 2008; Zifonun/Cindark 2004; Zifonun 2010). In contrast to macro-milieus, membership in a small lifeworld is limited to a specific time and space. Thus, people may belong to different small lifeworlds at the same time. A member of a fitness studio can also be a member of a migrant organization or a political group. The other members of the same fitness studio may belong to other small lifeworlds, such as a sports club or a particular subcultural scene. The special feature of this approach is that the different socio-cultural orientations of individuals can be observed and analysed together. The fact that a person belongs to one small lifeworld says nothing about his or her other small lifeworlds. Different combinations of small lifeworlds are an expression of individuality, of people’s independence from bigger group structures in which all spheres of life are shared. The small lifeworlds approach thus differs from those milieu concepts which assume that all spheres of life are similar for the members of a particular milieu – or which do not consider this issue at all. Defenders of the small lifeworlds approach doubt whether it is useful or reasonable to divide a society into distinct and homogeneous milieus. In contrast to the macro-milieu method, this approach adopts the perspective of the subjects (subject-oriented approach).

These small lifeworlds can be studied empirically using qualitative ethnographic methods, with a relatively high level of ethnographic “accuracy”. Subjective views of the self can also play a role here. But this approach is not suitable for social structure analysis. Those researchers who use the

concept of small lifeworlds sometimes also doubt whether social structure analysis along socio-cultural differentiations is possible at all in view of the great variety of subjective orientations (e.g. Hitzler/Honer 1984; Rebstein/Schnettler 2014, 55).

Despite all criticism, the description of social macro-milieus continues to be used as a method in market research. Its strength lies in its relatively high statistical accuracy and it offers a rough estimation of socio-cultural differentiation on a macro-level. In addition, the milieu categories are similar to everyday categories of socio-cultural differentiation, since they often clearly bring out typical features of lifestyles, even without a sociological analysis. A particular advantage of this macro-milieu approach is the avoidance of predetermined normative assumptions. It allows an open and unprejudiced, empirically based analysis of the socio-cultural differentiation of societies and it can add new milieus to do justice to changes that take place within societies. With all due caution, we will now ask to what extent the concept of macro-milieus can be used to examine socio-cultural differentiation in middle strata in the Global South. We will do this using the example of middle class in urban Kenya, especially in Nairobi.

## **2 Milieu analysis for Kenya**

The question whether specific small lifeworlds exist in Kenya, or whether it is possible to analyse macro-milieus, can only be answered by empirical studies. During our fieldwork in Nairobi and other towns, we discovered a large number of small lifeworlds. These include, for example, sports studios (fitness or bodybuilding studios), nightclubs and discotheques, and human rights and women's rights groups, but also religious groups – mainly involving women – and various self-help groups for income-generating activities or rotating savings and credit groups. All these small lifeworlds are tied to concrete times and places. Within each small lifeworld, certain values and activities relating to the common purpose are shared.

On the basis of the available data it is also possible to identify potential macro-milieus. These include a specific “young professionals” milieu, which has already been described in an impressive ethnography by Rachel Spronk (2012). In addition, we have found a group of conservative and religious milieus with various Christian backgrounds, and possibly also with Muslim or Hindu backgrounds, although this cannot be clearly decided on the basis of our research so far. We have also identified a neo-traditional milieu that is equally conservative but with different orientations. Other milieus are liberal cosmopolitans, to which the above-mentioned human rights groups and other non-governmental organizations belong, an apolitical stability oriented pragmatic milieu, and a milieu of apolitical social climbers without any particular religious or neo-traditional affiliation.

This tentative list of milieus was created by using the milieu “building blocks” discussed in Flaig et al. (1993, 71). The criteria for the building blocks were adapted on the basis of our empirical findings to make them applicable to Kenya, and specific points were added that were relevant to

Kenya or to other African countries south of the Sahara, including the category “space and places”. This resulted in the following criteria for the milieu building blocks<sup>8</sup>:

- Demography/social position: age, marital status, socialization (rural, urban), place of residence (rural, urban), education, occupation, languages used, social networks (ethnic, socio-economically homogeneous/heterogeneous).
- Space and places: important places and meeting places, current mobility profile (more in the home, more outside the home), spatial dimension of social networks including long-distance contacts (internet, telephone), urban-rural contacts, diaspora contacts, personal experience of migration and travel.
- Aims in life: basic values, identity, home (rural/urban), savings, investments, consumption, what is a “good life”, perspectives for old age, burial place.
- Work/performance: role of occupation (just a job or constitutive of identity), career orientation, work ethos, socio-economic mobility, attitude to education.
- Ideals and role models: elements of a “good life”, wishes, fantasies, role models, visions or plans for the future, fundamental value orientations, consumption and savings behaviour.
- Image of society: basic social principles, political and civil society engagement, satisfaction with political and social system, perception of social problems, bases/sources of trust.
- Family/partnership, gender roles: family values, gender roles, partnership, sexual morality.
- Leisure/communication: Leisure activities: family, nightclubs/dancing, events, reading, DVDs, sports (active, passive), general hedonism, Communication: role of the internet, IT social networks, newspapers, TV, radio.
- Everyday aesthetics: clothing, home, furnishings, equipment, hairstyle, body image, art, demonstrative consumption, status symbols.

The additions made can be illustrated by few examples. For Kenya and other African countries, which as a rule are multilingual, the languages used by people in their everyday lives are important, as well as the question of ethnically homogeneous or heterogeneous networks. The degree of a person’s attachment to their home village, together with the desire to grow old and be buried there, also proved to be important criteria for differentiating between milieus. This also

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<sup>8</sup> These milieu building blocks are the first result of our research. They are very broad and not yet clearly distinguished. The creation of significant categories is possible only on the basis of extensive empirical data. However, these building blocks serve to indicate the features of milieus that can be labelled empirically, and they offer a first empirical approach to a description of differentiations.



applies to the question of the sources of trust, which may be anchored in the family, the ethnic group, a region or an institution. There are clear differences in people's conceptions of gender roles and sexual morality. In the area of leisure and communication, the important activities and forms of communication are often not the same as in Europe. For instance, an important marker is the consumption or rejection of alcohol, while typical European markers such as going to the theatre or choosing particular television programmes are not important.

### 3 Two examples: neo-traditional and religious Christian milieus

The way milieus may be distinguished from each other can be shown by taking the example of two conservative milieus. Although these two milieus overlap with regard to certain basic orientations, in this case some conservative values, it is also possible to identify distinct differences between them. They can be described by means of the above-named milieu building blocks. These two conservative macro-milieus agree especially on the importance of the family and share the same conservative ideas about gender roles or the refusal of homosexuality. But there is also a whole range of prominent differences between them.

In neo-traditional milieus, social networks are mainly based on a shared ethnic identity such as Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya or Kalenjin<sup>9</sup>. In these networks a person's place of origin and the local language are important. There is a collective orientation focused on ethnic belonging, which can potentially be bound up with a political micro-nationalism focused on a particular region of Kenya. This may also involve claiming specific ethnically legitimized land rights on the basis of ethnic settlement patterns in the region. This ethno-political orientation is an important component of visions of the future. Referring to tradition is a way of legitimizing conservative values. This includes a special reference to extended families and rules and rituals associated with marriage (such as payment of a bride price), which can be combined with Christian or Western practices (a "white wedding"). Members of the same ethnic group have, at least nominally, a right to mutual aid, for instance with the financing of burials, including conveyance of the corpse to the home town or village. Leisure activities often take place within the ethnically homogeneous networks, and by no means exclude things like dancing and alcohol. Importance is attached to the maintenance of traditional customs or dances, and tendencies toward folklorization can be observed. This includes an affinity for "neo-African clothing"<sup>10</sup> and corresponding objects and symbols. Respected elders are important role models for men, and for both sex marital status and age determines the assignment of gender roles. Economic success in the rural environment and investment in the farm or in cattle are particularly important. As in Kenya generally, a high value is attached to education and getting a

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<sup>9</sup> Because of the multi-ethnic population of Nairobi we find specific ethnic networks for nearly all Kenyan ethnic groups.

<sup>10</sup> This is a term used to refer to garments made of batik cloth or wrappers (kangas) with "typically African" printed designs. These are fashions borrowed from West Africa or from the East African coast and have very little to do with what people wore in precolonial times.

good job, but these are not core elements of the value system and are not pursued with the same degree of seriousness by all members of this milieu.

For members of the religious Christian milieu, the church community constitutes the main social network and is the chief point of reference in everyday life, in addition to the family. Contact with the extended family and with one's place of origin is an individual matter and not part of the joint canon of values. Particularly in towns, there are also ethnically heterogeneous church communities. Even in ethnically homogeneous congregations, ethnic ties do not play an important role in everyday life apart from sharing a common language. Conservative values are legitimized by referring to the Bible and not to tradition. This includes, at least nominally, the acknowledged duty to help socially disadvantaged people regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation. While such help is often given to members of the congregation, the degree of willingness to help other socially disadvantaged people varies from group to group, despite general claims that this is an obligation. The ideal role model is a life that is pleasing to God, which means distancing oneself from leisure activities that are regarded as immoral and refusing to drink alcohol. Clothing must be modest and dignified in conformity with these moral ideas. Especially in protestant and fundamentalist groups, importance is attached to economic success, which brings to mind Max Weber's reading of Protestantism (2001 [1920]) as the expression of a godly life. Many Kenyan Christians regard worldly success as a sign of God's favour. Visions of the future are shaped by these religious ideas, together with religiously based career ambitions. Apart from having conservative values, Christian milieus do not represent any particular political orientation.

The two milieus described here show that despite common conservative values, there are distinct differences with regard to values and orientations and that different emphasis is laid on particular values and attitudes. The other milieus which were identified in the course of the fieldwork can be described in a similar way. These are: young professionals, social climbers, other conservative and religious milieus (Muslim, Hindu), the milieu of liberal cosmopolitans and an apolitical stability oriented pragmatic milieu.

The basic patterns of the two milieus outlined here are shown in the table below with some added elements.

**Table 1: Comparison of neo-traditional and Christian milieus**

	<b>Neo-traditional milieu</b>	<b>Christian milieu</b>
<b>Demography/ social position</b>	All age groups; great importance of local language; often ethnically homogeneous networks; extended family important	All age groups; mostly grew up in rural areas; church as social network; group includes low and high incomes; differing degrees of contact with extended family
<b>Space and places</b>	Socialization in a rural area to at least some degree; place of origin is an important reference point; regular contact with place of origin, even when living elsewhere	Church as important spatial point of reference; frequent meetings with church members (including activities such as Bible study or help for the poor); differing degrees of contact with place of origin
<b>Aims in life</b>	Maintenance of (ethnic) traditions and of ethnic customs; support of ethnic and local identity and belonging; family, village home and house; burial in home village; financial transfers and investments in village house/farm/cattle	A life conducted according to Christian values; economic success; preservation of Christian identity; respect and appreciation in the congregation; salvation in the afterlife
<b>Work/performance</b>	Career is not of first importance; contact with local and ethnic group is preserved (for instance when studying abroad, or through activities to promote development in the home region)	Career is important and (if possible) high sums are invested in education and work; long working hours; desire for social advancement
<b>Image of society</b>	Solidarity/collective orientation (micro-nationalism); social and political engagement and trust along ethnic bonds; public observation of moral standards	Christian values very important; critique of immorality; help for socially disadvantaged people; importance of success
<b>Family/partnership/ gender roles</b>	Importance of local family values and gender roles; importance of lineage or clan and the local community	Importance of Christian family values and gender roles; often a demonstrative rejection of sex before marriage
<b>Leisure/ communication</b>	Visits to family and relatives in home region; leisure time often spent with members of the same ethnic group	Leisure time often spent at church and in church groups (apart from time spent with the family); many friends are church members
<b>Everyday aesthetics</b>	Clothing with strong "African" elements (especially on festive occasions); importance of "traditional" objects and symbols	Classical clothing; (if possible) manifestation of success through cars, clothing or type of home; (generous) donations to the church as sign of status
<b>Ideals and role models</b>	Respected elders; respected mother or father, grandmother or grandfather, successful farmers or herders	Economic success in agreement with Christian principles; success as expression of godly life; respect for religious authorities

## **4 Conceptual conclusions and further challenges**

The milieu building blocks and typology presented here represent a first attempt to describe socio-cultural differentiation within the Kenyan middle class. Our identification of the milieus is based on an on-going qualitative field study. Without systematically collected quantitative data, it is not possible to determine the size of these milieus, nor to say for sure whether they constitute a complete picture of all social milieus in urban Kenya. Highly visible and distinctive milieus can be identified and described using the qualitative data. Visibility is created by common institutions (such as churches), common organizations (such as so-called councils of elders as keepers of ethnic traditions), or socio-politically active groups (such as women's rights organizations). Public self-representation is also helpful for identifying and describing specific milieus. For example, the "young professionals" milieu is easy to identify because its members demonstratively spend high sums on specific leisure activities. By contrast, for a long time we failed to register the milieu we have called "apolitical stability oriented pragmatic", since, apart from paid employment outside the home, the main activities take place in the home.

Although this is still an on-going study, our results confirm the existence of different milieus. The analysis of socio-cultural differences adds a new dimension to any purely socio-economic division into classes. The Christian milieu, for example, spans different socio-economic classes. Each church community may be relatively homogeneous in socio-economic terms, but the different communities share the same basic ideas and everyday practices that transcend socio-economic boundaries. With improved data, the picture can be completed and sharpened. An important general finding is that milieu membership can be determined in the first place only for individuals, not for families. This can be seen for instance in the case of the Christian milieu, in which women predominate. The church is often not the middle point of their husbands' lives, even if these are practising Christians and regular church-goers. Moreover, it is not uncommon for husband and wife to belong to two different churches.

But before the backdrop of the milieu structure outlined here we need to ask whether the macro-milieus capture all members of the Kenyan society. In the course of our fieldwork we began to doubt whether the whole of the Kenyan population can be allocated to macro-milieus. According to our findings there are a number of individuals who cannot be unequivocally assigned to a particular macro-milieu because they combine features of several milieus or switch between milieus according to the social setting. However, the milieus identified here and the two examples discussed show that there really are subcultural units in Kenya consisting of people who share similar ideas and lifestyles. In these cases, where most social contacts outside the workplace happen in a uniform social space, the concept of macro-milieus serves very well. These individuals share much more than just the specific behaviour and norms of a part-time setting in a particular place (such as a fitness studio, a discotheque or a women's group). The common social reality of the members of such a milieu is comprehensive and consists of many overlapping small lifeworlds. Furthermore their commonalities are based on shared basic norms and values and go far beyond a social network with a specific purpose or a loosely connected small lifeworld. We are therefore

inclined to conclude that the macro-milieu concept (as in the Sinus model) and the small-lifeworld concept are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that in Kenya there are macro-milieus which can be described in social structural terms, and a considerable number of Kenyan citizens who cannot clearly be assigned to any of these milieus. This latter group is involved in several different small lifeworlds with differing, and in some cases contradictory, values.<sup>11</sup> We therefore plead for a comprehensive analysis which distinguishes certain milieu cores, around the borders of which are people who only partly share or live the basic values and practices of the milieu in question. This results in clear overlapping areas between milieus, and a large group of people who belong simultaneously to very different milieus or small lifeworlds.

This leads to the question whether this open milieu approach could also be used to describe societies in the Global North. The continuing statistical accuracy of the macro-milieu method suggests that in Germany and Europe there might also be milieus which could accurately be described as milieu cores. This also suggests that further conceptional work on group structures is necessary, using the available data. It is important to note here that in Germany and Europe, too, families and households do not necessarily belong to the same milieu, as many studies seem to suggest. At the same time, the small-lifeworld approach makes it possible to include those people who do not fit into the fixed pattern of macro-milieus in an analysis of socio-cultural differentiation on a lower level of social aggregation. This takes into account the fact that these small-lifeworlds are too diverse to be considered as macro-milieus. Additionally, this concept allows us to analyse how these small lifeworlds are connected.

For the analysis of African societies it is necessary to continue developing the criteria for distinguishing different milieus (milieu building blocks), making them as specific and meaningful as possible. Only then will it be possible to produce empirical evidence of the existence of socio-cultural milieu cores by means of quantitative studies.

This socio-cultural analysis of the African middle class (taking Kenya as an example) is only a first step. In a subsequent step, the analysis must be extended to include the upper class and especially the quantitatively dominant lower class. Our study of the middle class may serve as a beginning. Because of their better socio-economic position, members of the middle class have more freedom of choice with regard to planning their future and consumption preferences. They are able to put different values into practice which makes socio-cultural differences clearer. At the same time the middle class is more easily accessible for research of this kind than the upper class, which is often isolated and aloof. An analysis of socio-cultural differentiation in the middle class can close an important gap in the analysis of the structure of African societies.

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<sup>11</sup> One example is a young woman who is an active member of a Christian women's group which strictly refuses alcohol and promotes sexual abstinence. At the same time, she has a sexual liaison with a married man and goes clubbing, enjoying alcoholic drinks in the discotheques.

As we said in the beginning, focusing on socio-cultural differentiation should not lead to leaving out the existence and consequences of social inequality. Employment insecurity, the uncertain success of small and medium-sized businesses, and dependence on socio-political power structures that go beyond milieu boundaries are common conditions affecting peoples' lives which cannot be ignored. This has been described and analysed for people living in poverty (Freeman et al. 2004; Githinji 2000; Ouma 2006), but also applies – with less severe consequences – to the middle class. The next step towards a comprehensive analysis of social structure would be the combination of socio-economic inequalities with all its consequences with the analysis of socio-cultural differentiation. Our contribution to this much larger project is to underline that the analysis of social structure needs to include the socio-cultural diversity. We contribute with the analysis of marco-milieus despite the limits an approach that reaches beyond ethnic or religious differences and might pave the way for the conceptualisation of socio-cultural differences against the backdrop of socio-economic inequality.

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