

# Middle Class Urbanism: New Aesthetics of Difference and Detachment in Cities of the Global South

International Conference  
9-11 June 2021



Middle Class Urbanism:  
New Aesthetics of Difference and  
Detachment in Cities of the Global  
South

Conference  
9-11 June 2021

Middle Class Urbanism  
The National Museum of Denmark  
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# Introduction

The **Middle Class Urbanism** research team is delighted to welcome you to the international conference "Middle Class Urbanism: New Aesthetics of Difference and Detachment in Cities of the Global South". The conference brings together a number of world-leading urban scholars to explore current and historical articulations of 'urban middle classness' in cities across the Global South.

During the last couple of decades, the urban middle class has been consistently mobilized as the harbinger of desirable and sustainable futures for the cities of the Global South. Today practitioners, researchers and analysts are less upbeat in their predictions about the prospective role of the urban middle class. In many cities of the Global South macro-economic growth has not materialized and it is doubtful whether an expanding middle class does, in fact, lead to the expected outcomes.

While the urban middle classes may have failed to bring about radical improvements of socio-political and economic conditions, imageries and expectations associated with 'middle classness' continue to reverberate across the urban landscapes of many cities today.

With this international conference, we want to gauge the role of the urban middle class for exploring contemporary processes of urbanization in the Global South.

We pose the following questions:

- » How do transnational flows and geopolitical aesthetics affect middle class articulations in cities of the Global South?
- » How are existing patterns of urban governance and land administration interwoven with new dynamics of middle class urbanism?
- » How do urbanites use middle class aesthetics as a driver for urban citizenship?

We present here the program for the three-day conference as well as abstracts from all presenters, which cover a range of interrelated themes and challenges associated with urban middle classness in both contemporary and historical perspectives.

We are looking very much forward to three days of interdisciplinary discussions with you!

On behalf of the **Middle Class Urbanism** research project

Nikolai Brandes & Morten Nielsen

# Programme 9 June

Zoom link Wednesday 9th June: <https://ucph-ku.zoom.us/j/61322295859>

Important: Please note that the schedule follows Danish time (CEST (UTC+2))

9:00 – 9:45 Welcome by MCU Team. Presentation of all participants.

Moderator: Karoline Husbond Andersen

## **Session 1: Middle Class Urbanism - Beyond the Middle Class as Concept and Category**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 9:45 – 10:00  | Session introduction by MCU team (Nikolai Brandes)                     |
| 10:00 – 10:20 | Ricardo López-Pedrerros: A Class that Does (not) Matter                |
| 10:20 – 10:40 | Roger Southall: Middle Classness and Non-racialism in South Africa     |
| 10:40 – 10:55 | Coffee Break   |
| 10:55 – 11:15 | Ben Page: Occult economies, moral exclusion and the urban middle class |
| 11:15 – 11:35 | AbdouMaliq Simone: The Surrounds of the Extensions                     |
| 11:35 – 11:50 | MCU Intervention 1 (Nikolai Brandes)                                   |
| 11:50 – 12:35 | Discussion   |
| 12:35 – 13:30 | Lunch Break  |

## **Session 2a: Land and Governance - Drivers of New Urban Spatial Forms**

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 13:30 – 13:45 | Session introduction by MCU team (Carla Mirella De Oliveira Cortês)                           |
| 13:45 – 14:05 | Paul Jenkins & Vanessa De Pacheco Melo: Peri-urban expansion in the Maputo city region        |
| 14:05 – 14:25 | Mary Muthoni Mwangi: Planning irregularities in middle-income housing developments in Nairobi |
| 14:25 – 14:45 | Break   |
| 14:45 – 15:30 | Discussion  |

# Programme 10 June

Zoom link Thursday 10th June: <https://ucph-ku.zoom.us/j/62704980705>

## **Session 2b: Land and Governance - Drivers of New Urban Spatial Forms**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 9:00 - 9:15   | Session Recap  |
| 9:15 - 9:35   | Emile Sunjo: Middle Class Desires and the Politics of Land Governance in Buea, Cameroon  |
| 9:35 - 9:55   | Martin Murray: Satellite Cities, the Enclave Format, and Hyper-modernity in Urban Africa |
| 9:55 - 10:10  | MCU Intervention 2 (Carla Mirella De Oliveira Cortês)                                    |
| 10:10 - 10:40 | Discussion   |
| 10:40 - 11:20 | Online Surprise  |

## **Session 3: Aesthetics of Entitlements: New Forms of Material Belonging**

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 11:20 - 11:35 | Session introduction by MCU team (Flora Botelho)  |
| 11:35 - 11:55 | Julio D. Davila: Your Lane or Mine? Urban transport decisions and the middle classes  |
| 11:55 - 12:15 | Claire Mercer: Landscapes of class in Dar es Salaam   |
| 12:15 - 13:15 | Lunch Break   |
| 13:15 - 13:35 | Jess Auerbach: The Mental Load of the Angola Middle Class: concerning primary education   |
| 13:35 - 13:55 | Azza Mustafa Babikir Ahmed: Tea, Love, and Public Order Under Tuti Island Bridge: An Ethnographic Glimpse of Contested Urban Spaces |
| 13:55 - 14:10 | MCU Intervention 3 (Flora Botelho)  |
| 14:10 - 15:00 | Discussion  |

# Programme 11 June

Zoom link Friday 11th June: <https://ucph-ku.zoom.us/j/62397377972>

## **Session 4: Urban Citizenship: The End-Point of Middleclassness?**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 9:00 - 9.15   | Session introduction by MCU team (Anna Mazzolini)  |
| 9:15 - 9:35   | Henning Melber: Urban Citizenship and Middle Class Politics - Impressions from Namibia   |
| 9:35 - 09:55  | Manja Hoppe Andreasen: Urban Property as Security: Examining the intersections between Africa's growing middle classes and urban transformations |
| 09:55 - 10:15 | Coffee Break   |
| 10:15 - 10:35 | Darja Klingenberg: Failed Aspirations. Middle Classness between Cruel Optimism and Melancholic Incorporation of Meritocracy                      |
| 10:35 - 10:50 | MCU Intervention 4 (Anna Mazzolini)  |
| 10:50 - 12:30 | Final Discussion & Summing Up  |



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# **Tea, Love, and Public Order Under Tuti Island Bridge: An Ethnographic Glimpse of Contested Urban Spaces**

On March 21 2009, a suspension bridge was opened, connecting Tuti Island - a landlocked island located at the junction of the Blue Nile and the White Nile in Greater Khartoum, the capital region of the Sudan- with main land Khartoum. Tuti Island Bridge, apart from speeding up the flow of goods and people, in and out (Larkin 2013), the shade it creates on the island's side is appropriated for unanticipated uses by unexpected users (Simon 1994), which ploughed a ground for different social interactions that are structured and routinized through the everyday practices of the users. Different actors (e.g. women tea vendors, lovers, friends, farmers, vehicle drivers, tourists, etc.) meld to perform scenes of "illicit orders" that contradicts the Islamic Civilisation Project promoted by Jama'at al-Akhwān al-Muslimiyyn (Muslim Brotherhood), after they came to power in 1989, to engineer an Islamotopia (Shavit,2011) that serves

the 'Islamist Middle Class' in Sudan. Through their urban planning policies, they managed to encroach over public parks, and sold them to private investors. The majority of the urban dwellers who cannot afford privatised leisure, created their own recreation spaces and under the bridge of Tuti Island is a good example. Through an ethnographic account, this presentation will demonstrate how the Islamist Middle Class aspirations of a 'Civilised City' reflected in the state's public space regulations and policies are challenged by unanticipated and undesired uses and users who are seen as a distortion of the civilised facade of the city.

# **Urban Property as Security: examining the intersections between Africa's growing middle classes and urban transformations**

Africa's middle classes are growing both in terms of numbers and purchasing power. They form a significant share of urban populations and command a majority of urban resources. This research examines the spatial practices of Africa's new urban-based middle classes and the implications for urban transformations. The focus is on households in the lower end of the spectrum, which form the majority of and account for most of the remarkable growth of Africa's middle classes. The research draws on insights from a qualitative study of urban property investments among self-builder households in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, Tanzania. The research highlights the strong appetite for urban property among moderately resourceful urban households and draws attention to the middle classes as significant actors in the local housing systems, informal land markets and incremental construction practices commonly associated with the urban poor. The research illuminates that property investments are crucial for understanding how moderately resourceful strive

to achieve the kind of long-term security and upwards social mobility commonly associated with the middle classes. Property investments are significant in long-term processes of asset accumulation, which may be crucial for households' ability to overcome adversities and stay out of poverty in the long term. Likewise, the research highlights the significance of these practices for urban transformation: by shaping informal urban expansion processes, co-financing settlement upgrading and producing socially diverse neighborhoods with a mixture of social groups and tenure forms. This research draws attention to incremental property investments as a common and ordinary practice among moderately resourceful households and the significance of such practices in fueling and shaping the informal urban expansion. The focus on middle class spatial practices provides a more nuanced understanding of urban expansion processes beyond common themes of informality, poverty, and service deficits.

# **The Mental Load of the Angola Middle Class: concerning primary education**

This paper builds on work presented in my book, *From Water to Wine: becoming middle class in Angola*. It considers the challenge of middle-class membership for parents making decisions about the education of children of school-going age in the coastal Angolan city of Lobitowith a particular focus on the materialities of schooling. The paper develops the feminist notion of the 'mental load' to argue that while education is widely available, parents must do extensive scaffolding work aroundthe urban conditions of schooling itself to provide their children with an experience that is comparable to that of their peers in more affluent countries. This requires attention tophysical infrastructure, transportation, power-systems (literal, in terms of electricity), the importation of learning resources, extra-curricula engagement such as ballet and karate(and the facilitites for them), and middle-class habituses that include recycling in a countrywith no recycling facilities. It also includes attention to the management of food, waterand knowledge infrastructures such as wifi

and telecommunications. At a theoretical level this poses challenges to the literature on both class and nationalism, requiring an intersectional approach to not only the contemporary, but also the work that goes in to the making of potential futures.



# Your Lane or Mine? Urban transport decisions and the middle classes

In a context of decentralised government whereby decisions about infrastructure investments are entirely or partially devolved to local governments, local planners and policy makers are arguably better positioned than national governments to respond to local interests. Given favourable fiscal conditions, elected politicians may choose to ignore or adapt national policies that prescribe one-size-fits all transport interventions, implementing instead novel approaches that might be better suited to local conditions. Such is the case of Medellin's aerial cable-cars, public escalators and tramway lines, financed entirely with local government funds.

Local decisions about transport and mobility can be costly fiscally and politically and result from factors such as finance, technical viability, political cycles, external support and a city's image. In a context of limited local revenues, such decisions need the acquiescence and political support of a broad range of local interests, notably businesses and the local middle class.

The middle class is often associated (mainly in the US economic literature) with values such as moderation, stability and conserva-

tism, but is also seen as politically pragmatic. It tends to be more vocal in local affairs than the poor and is likely to be more influential in municipal decisions. There are broad methodological inter- and intra-disciplinary disagreements in defining 'the middle class'. Income, occupation and education are key definitional variables, with self-reporting and indirect quantitative measurements as contrasting methods to outline analytical boundaries.

Drawing on examples mostly from Latin America, this paper explores the conditions under which a city's middle class might influence local planning and investment decisions about mobility interventions, from mass transit systems to controls on car circulation and segregated bike lanes. The analysis is enriched by a variety of factors, such as the private appropriation of gains from public infrastructure investments, aspirational values as regards certain modes of transport, NIMBYism and a city's demographic profile. The pandemic has shed new light on these issues, in some cases reversing a downward motorisation trend, but also giving impetus to interventions likely to be acceptable to sections of the middle class.

# **Peri-urban Expansion in the Maputo City region: land access and middle-class advances**

Urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa has been marked by high socio-economic inequality, which continued after Independence. The growth of a still ill-defined middle-class has introduced new dynamics in urban space in the region, with different impacts on the still vast majority of lower-income groups. Access to urban land is central to these new dynamics and plays an important role in the reduction of pre-existing inequalities. In the Mozambican capital Maputo, as land becomes increasingly scarce, development expands into the peri-urban areas of a fast-growing city region, partly encouraged by the improvement and construction of main roads, but also official urban planning praxis in a context where land is state owned.

The paper analyses the land occupation processes promoted by these state initiatives and how these are shaping expansion in the Maputo city region, with a focus on new occupation by a growing middle-class, linked to increasing land value and commodification. It argu-

es that recent state initiatives in urban development have been supportive of middle-class advances into peri-urban areas of the Maputo metropolitan area, with reduced consideration of the majority of lower-income groups, on which these advances often have negative effects.

# **Failed Aspirations. Middle Classness between Cruel Optimism and Melancholic Incorporation of Meritocracy**

In the context of migration from the global East and South, Middle classness is often articulated through the capacity to aspire (Appadurai) rather than through material culture or status. It is realized through the ability to hold onto expectations - for security, comfort and status; for self-realization and recognition - until better times may or may not come. The contents of middle-class longings are deeply relational: they depend on possibilities, local and global imaginaries, hopes-failed and realized-and investments-active or sunk; of both the individual and previous generations.

Aspirations mobilize migratory movements and social transformation. They help people endure periods of scarcity, and encourage long-term investments in education, family or real estate. Yet they also bind migrants, and the global middle classes from East and South, to a social order-a promise of recognition or upward mobility-that often fails them. This raises the question of how to conceptualize these aspirations failing

the dreamer; how to grasp their material and biographical weight; and ultimately how to evaluate them. Building upon research on dwelling and material culture of post-Soviet migrants in contemporary Germany, I discuss realized and failed migratory hopes that negotiate between Global East, South and West. I sketch out the dynamics between the transformative and mobilizing energy of these aspirations as well as their disappointments. Addressing the question of why people hold on to middle class ideals, I unfold the concept of Melancholic Incorporation of Meritocracy to complement the concept of cruel optimism (Berlant) of migrant middle class aspirations.

# **A Class that Does (not) Matter: Rethinking Histories of Latin America from the Middle**

The last decade has seen the publication of important scholarship from different disciplines on the making of the middle classes across the world. This presentation seeks to bring together some of the arguments put forward by scholars to initiate a critical interdisciplinary conversation on how to rethink the historical formation of the middle classes—as a social category, a political project, a subjectivity, and a material reality—in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. The presentation proceeds in two ways. First, it offers a transnational genealogy of the idea of the middle class in the Americas to explain why, despite the increasing amount of scholars committed to the study of the middle classes, such class appears vestigial—that is, as a class that does not matter—in what is considered a “proper” analysis of power relationships in Latin America. Second, by drawing on the Colombia case in a transitional framework during the Cold War, it demonstrates how the study of the historical formation of the middle classes opens up a multiplicity of met-

hodological and theoretical questions to rethink major historical processes in Latin America: meanings of citizenship, the relationships between state and society, experiences of (counter) revolutionary change, the growth of affective labor, the naturalization of different forms of material inequality, the realities of urbanization and democracy as a methodology of domination. It is an effort to stimulate a broader discussion on how we materialize interdisciplinary approaches to critically question the role of the middle classes in our current neoliberal order now that scholars and policy makers alike have yet again sacralized the middle classes as the solution to the “crisis” of democracy, the expansion of unequal distribution of wealth, and the political repercussions of neoliberalism across the world.





# **Urban Citizenship and Middle Class Politics - Impressions from Namibia**

After 31 years of Independence, the political landscape in Namibia shows some shifts to be taken note of. For the first time the results of the National Assembly and Presidential elections in November 2019 documented a decline of the hegemonic status of the former liberation movement SWAPO, still in exclusive control over government. The relative loss of influence was also brought about by new political agencies, which to some extent are rooted in urban social movements.

The new dynamics unfolding since then culminated so far in an unforeseen loss of support to SWAPO in the Regional and Local Authorities elections of November 2020. Most municipalities and bigger towns as well as several regions are now under the control of new political alliances. These again include social movement elements.

While it is too early to judge if and to what extent these are lasting shifts with a major re-balancing of political power

also on the level of central government (with the next elections in November 2024), they merit a closer look at the factors influencing and contributing to the new constellations.

The urban middle class deserves in this context some special focus: Has its role and understanding as citizens claiming entitlement to good governance influenced voting patterns? And if so, is there any way of measuring and analysing this reliably? Does an urban middle class be of sufficient political influence to play a significant role in changes of governance?

This paper examines these and related questions to assess if and to what extent a focus on urban citizenship and middle class politics (or rather political behaviour) might help to analyse current political dynamics unfolding in Namibia.

# Landscapes of Class in Dar es Salaam

Landscape has received little attention in the growing literature on the global middle classes, despite interest in how middle class consumption is often associated with particular spaces, such as the home, the suburb and the shopping mall. The concept of landscape captures the way in which places are visually and materially arranged and represented through the social production of space. In this paper I use the concept of landscape to examine the aesthetic qualities of Dar es Salaam's self-built northern suburbs to show how these landscapes have become a resource to be deployed in the pursuit of social distinction. In many African cities, landscape aesthetics are not only a matter of taste and social judgment, but are also deeply informed by colonial attempts to enframe African urban space. Colonial Dar es Salaam was shaped through planning regulations into three racially distinct zones which came to represent different types of urban landscape. These became known as Uzunguni (the place of the European), Uhindini (the place of the Indian) and Uswahilini (the place of the

Swahili). In this paper I argue that this colonial frame still has resonance for many city residents, and is particularly important for the way the middle classes understand urban landscapes. At first glance it might seem that the development of the suburbs as a distinctive landscape modelled on uzunguni has allowed the middle classes to find space for themselves in the city at a distance from uswahilini. But in the same way that the middle classes are not the wakubwa (rich, powerful), the suburban landscape they have built does not approximate uzunguni. In unpacking the history of this enframing and its contemporary manifestations, I show how paying attention to urban landscapes helps us to grasp the in-between, unsettled nature of middle class subjectivities in African cities.

# **Satellite Cities, the Enclave Format, and Hyper-modernity in Urban Africa**

The unprecedented pace and scale of urbanization in Africa have transformed the continent in ways totally unimaginable even two decades ago. The “new arrivals” pouring into cities large and small all across urban Africa have come in search of steady work and decent housing that never seems to materialize. While the jobless urban poor have struggled to survive through reliance on informal economies and irregular accommodation, the aspiring urban middle classes and wealthy have reacted to these changing circumstances by seeking ways to retreat into spatial enclaves and luxury zones where they can pretend to be somewhere else. Exploring the “enclave option” enables us critically examine the spatial dimension entrenched urban inequalities in access to the mainstream of urban life. While the enclave format that characterizes the emergence of new satellite cities varies considerably across urban Africa, what remains constant is the demand for sequestering and securitization. The combination of rising consumer demand for upscale housing accommodation and

the growing need of large-scale corporate enterprises for new office facilities and business parks (enabling them to seamlessly integrate into the world economy) has attracted real estate developers – some with global connections and sources of external financing, and others with local roots – to the prospect of profitable investments in property markets in urban Africa. Dispensing with the idea of refurbishing or retrofitting existing built environments, these corporate real estate developers have instead turned their attention to constructing entirely new satellite cities from scratch. The enclave format offers the aspiring and propertied middle-classes a concrete opportunity where they can fulfill the global imaginary of safe-and-secure environment capture by the oft-repeated mantra “live work, and play.”

# **Planning Irregularities in Middle-income Housing Developments in Nairobi, in the Context of Poor Land Administration and Governance**

The demand for housing by the middle-income group in Nairobi, as in many other cities of the global south, is of a significant size, and growing at an alarming rate. This group is not only an engine of economic growth, but also a driver for new urban spatial forms, including residential developments.

The use and tenure of land should be subject to public control, since land is limited in supply. However, housing developers for the middle income group, in pursuance of high investment returns, are not necessarily concerned about complying with planning laws and regulations; they have found ways to negotiate with land administration and governance to realise returns from their investments. This phenomenon of non-compliance with planning laws and regulations is an on-going issue of concern for sub-Saharan Africa cities; it creates informality in urban development in that the resulting developments have aspects which are perceived to be outside formal planning stipulations. The costs of non-compliance with land use regulations include informalities in developments, and the

inability of the state to ensure developers comply with planning regulations.

This paper investigates the effectiveness of land use administration and governance on controlling urban spatial forms in Nairobi. Qualitative interviewing was aimed at understanding perceptions of the planning system by both planners and developers, and how and why their interests differ. It was of interest to this research to find out why non-compliance in land use planning is tolerated or ignored.

The study argues that even though developers defy the planning system, their contribution to the production of habitable space is commendable - they play an important role and planners would do well to embrace this. Non-compliance in land use planning, and informalities in housing developments thereon, does not necessarily produce inappropriate housing for the residents. Resulting residential developments have a niche in the housing market and serve a housing need, affirming that local perceptions and realities are not in sync with formal planning requirements of the state.



# **Occult Economies, Moral Exclusion and the Urban Middle Class**

As the Q-Anon conspiracy in the USA shows, increasing prosperity, increasing inequality and occult accusations are positively correlated worldwide. For at least two decades it has been commonplace in African Studies to understand witchcraft accusations as a rational means of explaining the mysterious social differences that have emerged as economies have changed (Comoroff and Comoroff 1999; Geschiere 1997). Yet, the literatures on 'the modernity of witchcraft' and 'the new African middle class' have rarely been brought together. Why has my neighbour (who used to sit next to me in primary school) prospered in this new world and joined the middle classes when I have not? It must be because he is involved in occult practices. Some of the new urban middle class in Cameroon have to negotiate these accusations, and as such face moral exclusion within their communities. In this paper we start by briefly rehearsing the long history of occult economies in Buea (Cameroon) going back to the 1930s and specifically relating to questions of hou-

se-building (Ardener 1970). We then turn to a specific individual whose prosperity and upward social mobility in the 21st century is the subject of multiple stories around the town. His house, which is in a prominent and visible location, is often the focus of this gossip with much speculation about the design and use of these domestic spaces. To paraphrase Moore and Sanders (2001) to what extent are these accusations about illicit forms of accumulating capital a locally-inflected moral framework for making sense of class formation? How has the debate on witchcraft and modernity evolved over the last 20 years? What is particular about the middle class in relation to discourses of the occult?

# The Surrounds of the Extensions

Deploying an invented concept, the surrounds, the presentation explores the ways in which urban space and temporalities are produced through the often inexplicable and improbable gatherings of bodies, materials and places whose intersections, while subject to intensive formatting guaranteed by dispossession, financialization, state power, and apparatuses of extraction, nevertheless, concretely suggest and operationalize unanticipated dispositions of collective life. This is part of an emerging conceptualization of the urban extensions, a process whereby urbanization is produced through the intercalibration of different, often antagonistic registers and scales, generating often unruly results in which inhabitants are situated in the “middle of things”, thus constituting a particular “middle class.” Situated in ethnographic observations of the growth of extended urban regions in Jakarta and analyses of the theoretical presumptions of contemporary black urbanism, the presentation

points to the importance of collective life as a locus of spaciousness rather than an imaginary of an urban commons as a consolidation of consensually determined aspirations.



# Middle Classness and Non-racialism in South Africa

The aspiration for South Africa to become a 'non-racial society' was central to the platform of the African National Congress (ANC) when it came to power in 1994 and was embodied in the democratic constitutions of 1993 and 1996. Nonetheless, apart from the widespread agreement that non-racialism required the abolition of all the racially discriminatory enactments and policies of the preceding National Party government, there has never been firm agreement about what 'non-racialism' actually means, beyond the fact that, formally, South Africa is striving towards a goal of 'racial equality' whereby 'race' no longer shapes or matters in societal and economic interactions.

Today's South Africa remains a 'multi-racial' rather than a 'non-racial' society, its different racial segments overlapping at the edges (notably in the workplace). It is a statement of the obvious that much of the responsibility for this lies in the legacy of apartheid geography, which deliberately sought to entrench the separation of the races. This combines with racial differentials of wealth which – to a very con-

siderable extent – are de facto protected by the property rights enshrined in the constitution. This means that, in practice, any serious progress towards 'non-racialism' depends heavily upon the continued upward social mobility of the black middle class and its movement into white suburbia, and consequent racial mixing. To put it crudely, while the black middle class aspires to move into white areas and to attain 'white' standards of living, the reverse does not apply. In reality, therefore, it would seem that, to the extent that it has been attained or is likely to be attained, non-racialism is an overwhelmingly suburban, middle-class phenomenon.

In pursuing this argument, this paper will (i) trace the evolution of the commitment to non-racialism within the ANC as an outcome of the growth of a black middle class in South Africa's major cities; (ii) outline the major demographic shifts in suburbia since 1994; (iii) explore the extent to which black movement into formerly racially exclusive white areas has led to racial mixing; (iv) consider the implications for 'non-racialism'.



# **Middle Class Desires and the Politics of Land Governance in Buea, Cameroon**

The paper links the story of a land restitution scheme on an urban periphery to middle class desires for detached houses. Empirically it focuses on land adjacent to Buea in the South-west of Cameroon that was transformed into banana plantations during the German colonial period (1891-1916), nationalized in 1947, and which has, since 2003, been returned piecemeal by the state to Bakweri communities identified as 'indigenes'. Most of this land is then sold by these indigenes to non-Bakweri middle class families who use it to construct houses on. First, the paper shows how the land restitution scheme has allowed the political centre to allocate financial benefits within its patron-client network, whilst undermining those outside the elite coalition. Second it shows how ideas of local socio-spatial hierarchies of territorial belonging were mobilised to justify transferring this land from public to private ownership. The idea of Bakweri ownership of this land was sustained by a small Bakweri middle class over many decades, but many within that Bakweri middle class today

have not benefitted from the scheme, which they regard as a scam because ultimate legal land ownership rights pass to non-Bakweri middle classes households. Third, it explores the fraught experience of competing middle class households who attempt to claim formal land rights over these building plots in a context where political power always trumps wealth. This is an example of the limits of middle class privilege and cohesion. Finally, it assesses the role of the non-Bakweri middle class in Buea (whose desire to build houses has inflated land values) in fuelling this highly political land restitution scheme. In so doing it shows how urban governance, land administration and new articulations of middle class urbanism are interwoven in cities of the Global South.

## **Middle Class Urbanism**

*Middle Class Urbanism.* An interdisciplinary study of the physical reordering of urban sub-Saharan Africa is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research (FKK). The aim with the project is to investigate rapid urbanization processes in sub-Saharan Africa with a special focus on the radical transformations of the built environment caused by middle class urbanism.

Middle Class Urbanism

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