

In the Shadow of the Marital Tent; The Emotionalization of Relationships and the Christian Engagement in Botswana.

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While weddings in Botswana have become important status-symbols as a result of the considerable expense that marriage celebrations nowadays require, this form of conspicuous consumption is also part of a process of emotionalizing the relationship. The most important symbol for a grandiose wedding is the white marital tent, where a large gathering that attends the wedding is received with food, dance, music and speeches. Usually put up right at the edge of the parental compound and decorated in a stylish fashion, it represents a clear marker in between private and public spaces. While the tent is the site for showing the splendour of the couple, and to eat together with the bride and the groom the food that is prepared, it provides a semi-secluded space for the demonstration of affect between the couple for which otherwise there is usually little room in public spaces. from the perspective of how Christian groups support a pursuit of greater affectionate and emotional expression of the marital relation and how this process of emotionalization is entangled with cultural contestations in which the marital tent takes a symbolically loaded place. .

While in these terms the tent is important for the younger generation, the older generation of 'parents' usually devotes a lot of attention to certain cultural traditions that often take place prior to the moment when the couple will be ready to enter the marital tent. These traditions are hidden from the public eye, are held in-doors and require, among other things, an act of consuming a specific type of meat by the young couple. While this hidden eating represents a 'consummation' of the marriage in customary understandings, these traditions are contested by some Christian groups who construe these practices as representing 'love-less' acts. Often, leaders of these Christian groups perceive of the tent as a place for prayer and preaching, thereby turning this semi-public place into a site of cultural contestation.

In important ways the tent marks a site of emotions and sentiments that concern the marital bond, intergenerational change, religious contestation and a space for greater possibilities of marking relationships by expressions of affect as compared to what an older generation used to enjoy. This paper analyzes weddings in Botswana