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The rise of Africa's middle class

Myths, realities and critical engagements

edited by Henning Melber

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‘Somewhere above poor but below rich’: explorations into the species of the African middle class(es)

Henning Melber

By definition, ‘middle class’ is a relative term –
it’s somewhere above poor but below rich,
but where? (Keeley 2015: 39)

This introductory chapter intends to provide a critical framework and reference point for the contributions following.¹ It recapitulates part of the debate emerging on the middle class(es),² its intricacies and contradictions, and looks for a critical explanation as regards the sudden appearance of such a debate, as if classes (including the middle classes) were a new phenomenon. At the same time it summarizes some of the aspects that are pursued in more detail in the chapters that follow.

The genesis of the middle class debate

Göran Therborn (2012) wondered if we were entering what he called a century of the middle class. He observed that the working class seemingly had been removed from our memory. The project of a worldwide emancipation under the leadership of the proletariat was instead replaced by a universal desire to obtain middle class status. He takes the evidence and stresses its socio-political relevance for a new discourse from the OECD report on global development perspectives (OECD 2011), which emphasized the need to consolidate the growth of the emerging middle classes, and the advocacy role by Nancy Birdsall (2010) and the Center for Global Development she heads as an influential think tank. In a world, so goes Therborn’s conclusion, in which the relevance of the working class and of socialism has been declared obsolete, the middle class society emerges as the symbol of an alternative future (Therborn 2012: 17).

The 22nd Human Development Report (HDR) for 2013 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2013) seemed eager to confirm this assumption. It had a trendy focus on the new global players from the Southern hemisphere, or rather what is termed the ‘Global South’. Following a category developed by the Brookings Institution (2012), the HDR 2013 uses

(with reference to Kharas 2010) a daily income or expenditure of between US\$10 and US\$100 to define a middle class. This is a generous numerical definition, which embraces a wide range of middle class(es) in the plural, right down to the precariat in the industrialized countries, which display fast growing social disparities (Standing 2011). World Bank Chief Economist Martin Ravallion (2009: 17) advocated an even more flexible definition of middle class in the developing world, with a household consumption per capita of US\$2 to US\$13 a day at 2005 purchasing power parity (PPP). In contrast, Sumner (2012: 37) dubs the US\$4 to US\$10 group the 'in-betweeners', i.e., between poverty and a secure middle class lifestyle. Notwithstanding such differentiations, the US\$2 threshold was also a reference point in a 2011 briefing by the African Development Bank, which declared that over 300 million Africans, or one-third of the continent's population, had entered the middle classes. A review in 2012 reconfirmed the bank's almost obsessive gospel about the role of the middle class in the continent's rapid and accelerated development: the 'rise of Africa's middle class, now thought to number between 300 and 500 million people' is identified as a 'key factor' (African Development Bank 2012: 13).³ But it requires substantial creativity to visualize how the defined minimum income or expenditure (be it a paltry US\$2 a day or even the substantially higher US\$10) allows for a lifestyle and social status that qualifies as middle class even in African societies.

That, in turn, feeds considerable doubts that such a middle class could play a pioneering role in the transformation of societies towards greater social justice and less inequality (cf. Furness, Scholz and Guarin 2012). Ravallion (2009: 17) is at least honest enough to admit that such a definition of middle class is at best precarious, since 'the vulnerability of this new middle class to aggregate economic contraction is obvious: one-in-six people in the developing world now live on between \$2 and \$3 a day'. As Raphael Kaplinsky from the British Open University quipped in his lecture at the General Conference of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutions (EADI) in mid-2014, such a category means that everyone not starving qualifies as middle class.⁴

Most problematic beyond fiddling with figures is the deficiency as regards a rigorous definition of middle class, not only because of the almost exclusive emphasis on the financial/monetary aspect, while often ignoring or only considering in passing as a kind of secondary aspect professional and social status, cultural norms and lifestyle-related attributes as well as political orientation(s) and influence. 'Middle class' is rather used in an inflationary manner to cover almost everything without any further internal differentiations that exist within a very broad band of income groups, thereby signifying little to nothing. This is a far cry from the petty bourgeoisie featuring prominently in a proper class analysis, and is devoid of almost any analytical substance.

Especially in the early stages of the current debate many observers/analysts/scholars were tempted to look for a convenient way to avoid a more rigorous analysis, which examines the so-called middle class in terms of its potential as a proper class. They hardly bothered to engage with the more methodological aspects of the analysis of classes, which has a long tradition in social sciences and should have been an integral part of the engagement with the phenomenon now under deliberations and discussed.⁵ While ‘recognising that the middle class is as much a social designation as an economic classification’, Kharas (2010: 11), as a prominent example, opts ‘to measure the middle class in terms of consumption levels’. Several of the chapters in this volume challenge such reductionist approach in their critical engagement with the middle class debate and its underlying assumptions and connotations. As the case studies document in various ways with regard to Angola, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania, there remains a lot of space to put the ‘middle class’ notion into a much more meaningful context.

A striking observation regarding the genesis of the middle class debate is that a handful of economists managed a few years ago to initiate such a debate, which ultimately has had a considerable impact on African Studies without the topic emanating from scholars within the field. As a matter of fact, such scholars from various disciplines (including those in this volume) only gradually reacted to a kind of imposed discourse, over which they are only now gaining the upper hand and are able to claim ownership. It is revealing that the first edited volume on the subject (Ncube and Lufumpa 2015) still falls within the domain of economists relating from a critical distance to the school of thoughts promoting the initial debate. This volume, as well as another one soon to be published (Kroeker, O’Kane and Scharrer 2017) is at least evidence of concerted efforts to respond by means of different perspectives.

So what is ‘middle class’? A South African case study

Phakati – Soweto’s Middling Class is a documentary produced in 2008/2009 by a team headed by Peter Alexander from the University of Johannesburg.⁶ It illustrates mainly through interviews the final stages of a survey, initiated in 2006 in South Africa’s largest black township. Investigating class identity was a core part and aim of the empirical work (cf. Alexander et al. 2013). The outcome was revealing as regards the term middle class in the perceptions of those interrogated. In total 2,284 respondents were classified according to their work status. The biggest groups were 582 in formal (wage) employment and 535 unemployed, followed by 309 recipients of social grants or otherwise not in the labour force, 261 students, 251 partial workers and 225 fill ins (the latter two categories were self-employed ‘survivalists’ or in very irregular unemployment). 129 were classified as petty bourgeoisie (self-employed professionals or small businesses not looking for work), 24 as employed middle class

(salaried managerial positions) and four as bourgeoisie (Phadi and Ceruti 2011: 95). In terms of occupational categories, two thirds of the persons in the sample were without occupation (being unemployed, pensioners, students etc.). Respondents were then offered a variety of class or status related labels with the option for multiple self-categorizations. 20 per cent of the respondents opted only for the middle class label. Adding those who registered in multiple categories, a total of two-thirds (66 per cent) of the respondents classified themselves as middle class (Phadi and Ceruti 2011: 96), followed by 43 per cent working class, 38 per cent lower class and 13 per cent upper or top class (Alexander 2013: 235).

Watching the documentary, the explanations given by a wide panorama of individuals living under extremely different socio-economic circumstances (ranging from a woman being the owner of a company in the educational sector occupying a spacious posh house in the upmarket part of Soweto to an unemployed woman in a shack coping with the daily life without water and electricity) were almost stereotype. Those in the upper segment argued that others were better off, while those in the lower and lowest segment referred to others still worse off. Such comparison disclosed ‘an identity understood as “neither rich nor poor”’ (Phadi and Ceruti 2011: 101). Respondents positioned themselves as ‘living somewhere between those who were “suffering” and those who had “everything”’ (Alexander 2013: 236).

When, at the end of the film, the businesswoman was asked to visit the shack dweller (who had prepared a meal to host the unknown fellow middle class woman), she stopped her Mercedes upon approaching the shack, and at first refused to drive further. She was afraid that if she left her car, it would be stolen. The woman from the shack, who had watched the car approaching, accused the other woman in disbelief of being a liar. By the end, the two women were reluctantly sitting at the table hardly able to communicate, both convinced that the other one was out of her mind by calling herself middle class. But as already suggested, there is some logic and sense to what seems to be an anomaly. According to Phadi and Ceruti (2011: 99), ‘Sowetans who declare themselves middle class are thereby distinguishing themselves from mediocrity’. Their identities ‘not only reflect the material reach that social location confers, but also the width of the social view that different social locations permit’ (Phadi and Ceruti 2011: 102).⁷

The self-perception clearly had to do with a form of pride, of dignity, and of belonging: the middle class label ‘was linked to self-respect, to upward mobility and aspirations’ and ‘regarded as normal, thus neither “above” nor “below” other people’ (Alexander 2013: 236). As Alexander adds further: ‘when Sowetans look “upwards” they tend to emphasis (sic!) cultural and individual characteristics, and when they look “down” they tend to stress economic considerations, such as unemployment. Linked with this, “class”

can be seen as something positive, because unlike “race” it permits upwards mobility’ (Alexander 2013: 236). Being ‘middle class’, therefore, as this example of the Soweto project demonstrates, is a desired self-categorization of most residents. While the differences in their social status, lifestyle and (in)security are enormous, they all merrily classify themselves as being part of a rather arbitrarily defined ‘middle’. This invites the question what a middle class in such a broad meaning actually entails, and if the scholarly engagement with the middle class allows for a better-defined category.⁸

The role of middle class(es) in Africa

The HDR 2013 promoted the gospel of the emerging middle class as a cure to the developmental impasse. It predicted a massive expansion and global reconfiguration of the middle class: ‘Between 1990 and 2010, the South’s share of the global middle class population expanded from 26% to 58%. By 2030, more than 80% of the world’s middle class is projected to be residing in the South and to account for 70% of total consumption expenditure’ (UNDP 2013: 14). The prognosis assumes that two-thirds of this middle class will be in Asia and the Pacific, one-tenth in Central and South America, but only a bare 2 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. The global, generalized assessment mainly based on trends in other parts of the world,

reactivated the middle class category not based on new empirical data, but on new analytical frameworks that were proposed as legitimate elsewhere. The constant comparison of ‘Africa’ with the processes of Chinese, Indian and Brazilian emergence shows how an economic stirring can be interpreted with terms and categories that were validated on an international plane ... (Darbon and Toulabor 2013: 13)

A closer look places Africa’s future in a less optimistic perspective, and reminds us that the resource boom is not necessarily feeding the majority of people on the continent. A performance analysis of 42 countries in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that, compared to other countries similarly placed socioeconomically, most of them are still at the lower levels of the performance index and will find it difficult to keep up (Kappel and Pfeiffer 2012), notwithstanding recent significant increases in growth rates. Already a report by UNIDO/UNCTAD (2011: 105) offered the sobering conclusion that the share of manufacturing value added in Africa’s GDP fell from 12.8 per cent in 2000 to 10.5 per cent in 2008, while the share of manufactures in the continent’s total exports fell from 43 per cent to 39 per cent during the same period. Furthermore, labour-intensive manufacturing played a limited and even reduced role, not a promising trend in the fight against growing unemployment. Despite above-average economic growth rates during the last decade, mainly as a result of extractive industries as part of the resource boom, ‘the size

of the labor force, already characterized by significant open unemployment and under-employment (is) set to surge, leaving 'no room for complacency' (International Monetary Fund 2013: 19). But how can a middle class consolidate while high unemployment remains a chronic feature of Africa's societies? Not surprisingly, then, 'Africa continues to be the least competitive region on average worldwide, trailing more advanced economies across all competitiveness indicators' (World Economic Forum 2013: 26).⁹

Notwithstanding such reservations, the ominous middle classes have sneaked as a popular subject into African Studies too and occupy the thoughts of economists, political scientists, sociologists and social anthropologists alike, often with strikingly a-historical perspectives and short of any awareness of social trajectories representing not as new developments of class-related social structures as often suggested. However, the discovery of the middle class(es) is on closer inspection by no means engaging with a social phenomenon, which would be as new as this trend and some of the contributions to the debate suggest.¹⁰ Resnick (2015: 574f.) therefore rightly observes, that 'scholarship around class formation and its implications for Africa's political economies has deep roots'. One just needs to recall the works of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, who discuss the African petty bourgeoisie of their days (kind of tantamount to today's middle classes, though seen from a perspective more aware of class analysis) half a century ago with differing to opposing conclusions. *The Interpreters*, a handful of young intellectual protagonists who had studied abroad but returned to independent Nigeria and are at the centre stage of the first novel by Wole Soyinka (1965), can be understood as an implicit anatomy of a diverse collection of 'middle class' aspirants torn apart between the old and the new with rather differing orientations beyond the seemingly common. Other African novelists have in different ways and forms also engaged with such middle class protagonists since decolonization and thereby offered lively and often not very flattering illustrations of their behaviour and attitudes.

In contrast to such markers, the current debate appears to be rather short in memory given the obvious but largely ignored trajectories.¹¹ It implies, to a large extent, the assumption that the middle class(es) are a positive ingredient for the development of and in African societies. But such optimism seems rather unwanted both in terms of the potential economic role of such middle classes as well as regards the expectations concerning its political role. Handley (2014: 13) could not find any 'great deal of evidence that Africa's new middle classes on their own will necessarily drive growth in the ways predicted by our normative models'. She is rather sceptical as regards the transformative potential of these new segments. This is reinforced in the political sphere by findings in the Afrobarometer Survey. These suggest that,

middle-class persons display a pervasive suspicion that their fellow citizens are incapable of casting a responsible vote. Afrobarometer surveys repeatedly show that, as education rises, individuals are more likely to agree that ‘only those who are sufficiently well educated should be allowed to choose our leaders’ and to disagree that ‘all people should be permitted to vote, even if they do not fully understand all the issues in an election.’ (Bratton 2013: 281)

Empirical analyses, as Brandi and Büge (2014: 26) suggest, ‘do not offer unambiguous support for the thesis that the middle class holds particular values that are more liberal or more progressive’. On balance one can conclude that neither economic growth nor the proclaimed rise of a ‘middle class’ automatically heralds the spread of democratic values or the anchoring of social security for the majority of the people. Even the prophesized rise of the middle classes in Africa has in the meantime been questioned.

Development and the middle class(es)

The seemingly good news is that over the last 20 years almost all countries had improved their human development status. Of 132 countries with a complete data series, only Lesotho and Zimbabwe had a lower Human Development Index (HDI) value in 2012 than in 1990 (UNDP 2013: 12).¹² But as the report also concedes, the developmental challenges have not been significantly reduced: ‘An estimated 1.57 billion people, or more than 30% of the population of the 104 countries studied for this Report, live in multidimensional poverty’ (UNDP 2013: 13). The HDR 2014 adds that while inequality has on average not been a contributing factor to HDI decline recently in most regions, ‘disparities in income have risen in several regions’ (UNDP 2014: 2).¹³

This actually brings us closer to the core of the matter, the tendency towards growing inequality within as well as between societies. This does not go unnoticed in the HDR report 2013, which identifies ‘a “south” in the North and a “north” in the South. Elites, whether from the North or the South, are increasingly global and connected, and they benefit the most from the enormous wealth generation over the past decade, in part due to accelerating globalization’ (UNDP 2013: 2). The emerging middle class(es) seem to be at least partly beneficiaries of the new wealth creation and selective distribution. But as Sumner (2012: 36) reinforces in general terms, the existence of such a growing middle class might not necessarily have redistributive impacts in terms of social policy if there is little support among the more secure middle classes for paying more taxes. A recent IMF Working Paper conceded that economic growth rates – considered a precondition for the expansion of a middle class and redistributive effects – do not automatically translate into social progress. Examining the correlation between growth dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa and

social indicators, Martinez and Mlachila (2013: 22) conclude that, 'for the most part there is little correlation between growth and social indicators in general' and that 'growth is but an ingredient in the dynamics'. They state further: 'While in principle growth should increase the amount of available resources to undertake social programs, the success hinges crucially on a complex interaction of a number of institutional and policy factors.' However, a middle class is no guarantee of policy factors conducive to greater socioeconomic equality and improved living standards for the poor.

The role subscribed to the middle class(es) as a source of hope seems to be at least in parts of the literature bordering on wishful thinking, if not being an ideological smokescreen. These narratives are the flip side of the 'continent of hope' propaganda, the prevailing currency for promoting investment opportunities for external actors in resource extraction. Middle classes seem to come in handy as justification for the notorious 'trickle down' effect, in the absence of any meaningful employment creation or local capital accumulation through value-added activities. As even the African Development Bank (2012: 13) has to admit, income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient has widened in recent years, and six countries in sub-Saharan Africa are among the world's ten most unequal countries. At the same time, none has achieved the goals set with regard to poverty reduction in the first Millennium Development Goal. Even the global trend is no reason for enthusiasm: 'more than 15 percent of the world's people remain vulnerable to multidimensional poverty', while 'nearly 80 percent of the global population lack comprehensive social protection'. At the same time, some '12 percent (842 million) suffer from chronic hunger, and nearly half of all workers – more than 1.5 billion – are in informal or precarious employment' (UNDP 2014: 2).

So what about 'the middle'?

The relative size of what is considered being 'middle class' in a closer sense based on some realistic number crunching puts the whole debate about its potential role into a much more sobering perspective. As Brandi and Büge (2014: 7) suggest, 'sub-Saharan Africa combined still has fewer middle-class citizens today than Spain or South Korea alone'. Despite the amount of literature using the perceived growth of an African middle class as a point of departure, assessments tend to suggest that the African middle classes are not really expanding as originally anticipated. Credit Suisse, for example, bases its annual Global Wealth Report on a middle class definition of individual wealth between US\$50,000 and US\$500,000.¹⁴ While it records an increase in the number of middle class adults from 524 million to 664 million between 2000 and 2015, the number of middle class members based on such definition has since the financial crisis of 2007/2008 declined in Africa, while the number of those above the middle class range has increased (Credit Suisse Research Institute

2015: 34 and 35). It puts the figure of such defined ‘middle class’ on the continent at 18.8 million (with almost a quarter of it in South Africa), quite in contrast to the 300 to 500 million suggested earlier on by the African Development Bank. Assessments suggest that it is actually not ‘the middle’, which expands most in African societies, but the lower and upper levels, i.e. the lowest and highest segments. A report by the Pew Research Centre maintains that ‘African countries experienced some of the most dramatic declines in poverty rates from 2001 to 2011; however, few countries had much of an increase in the share of middle-income earners’ (Kochhar 2015: 19). As observed by Morten Jerven: ‘What we are seeing is not a pyramid bulging in the middle but a society where the top spenders are getting richer’ (quoted in Brock 2015).

The trend to some extent also worries those who earn their money through sales in specific branches. As a result of market research, companies selling consumer goods and providing services have already adjusted their prognosis and expectations considerably, and suggested a less optimistic outlook for gains. *Nestle*, the biggest global player in the food industry, scaled down its regional operations in Sub-Saharan Africa and cut its workforce there in 2015 by 15 per cent (Mwiti 2015). ‘Africans are mainly rich or poor, but not middle class’, subtitled a report in *The Economist*, and suggested: ‘That should worry democrats.’¹⁵

Despite such critical observations and sobering conclusions, however, the current engagement with the phenomenon called the African middle class(es) is anything but obsolete. Independent of their size, they signify modified social relations in African societies, which indeed deserve attention and rigorous analysis, with the emphasis on the latter. The following chapters contribute in various ways to such an approach, by critically engaging with the notion and deconstructing it.

In this volume

‘Recent empirical work’, observe Brandi and Büge (2014: 26) ‘tends to treat the middle class as a black box without taking its heterogeneousness sufficiently into consideration.’ Not so the chapters following, which share the scepticism as regards the initial debate already voiced in this introduction. The first two contributions include a comparative perspective with some cross-references to studies outside of the African context. They pave the way towards the investigations mainly limited to African affairs. By taking stock of complementing aspects, guided by social anthropology and development studies, they provide a background to the engagements following. The third chapter shows how economics can be fruitfully applied for an engagement with the middle class notion. Chapters 4 and 5 are oriented towards sociological and cultural studies and combine more general reflections with specific case studies. The volume then shifts fully towards another five chapters, all dealing with aspects

of middle class related phenomena in particular countries, offering empirically anchored insights into social realities in a national context.

Carola Lentz presents the state of the art as regards the subject of this volume. She maps the debate also in a historical perspective so often lacking and documents that social strata and segments in African societies nowadays labeled as middle class(es) are anything but new. Rather, as she suggests, ‘the recent global popularity of the term middle class seems to be at least in part a result of the appropriation of academic categories by policy makers’. In contrast, and at a closer look she offers, there has never been an absence of analytical efforts to come to terms with such social actors before. In much detail she revisits and summarizes earlier (often forgotten) analyses and thereby convincingly displays the ahistorical nature of most of the recent contributions. Her review also dismisses the economic reductions, which had initiated the recent hype about the emerging middle classes when ending that this category is ‘a multi-dimensional concept that refers to a socio-economic category, a cultural world, and a political discourse’.

Tim Stoffel demystifies the recent appearance of the middle class debate by recapitulating in more detail than this introduction the initial agenda setting by economists. By linking the effects of poverty reduction in the Global South with high hopes pinned to what was celebrated as the emerging middle classes they reinforced the belief in developmentalism. He displays the conceptual and methodological flaws by contrasting this discourse with efforts to engage with the notion of ‘classness’ in more ‘advanced’ economies. He thereby shows the limitations of the purely economic perspectives confined to income or consumption alone. His investigation questions how these numbers used to define an emerging middle class are calculated, the conclusions and projections derived from them, and their actual explanatory power.

Oluyele Akinkugbe and *Karl Wohlmuth* then investigate in detail the role of the African middle class as a base for entrepreneurial initiatives and innovation. Their examination concentrates on the ‘missing middle’, i.e. the gap between microenterprises (often based on self-employment) and large companies, which would need to be filled by small- and medium- sized companies often barely existing due to a lack of development of entrepreneurship and the absence of a public policy in support of such a development. This points to the need that an exploration of the potential and/or real role of African middle classes has to take into consideration the policy of the state and the influence of the upper class over developmental strategies. As they observe, ‘the “upper class” business interests are dominating the “middle class” business interests, despite the entrepreneurial spirit of the “middle classes” being emphasized in the many reports from international consultancy companies’. This shows the limitations of the role the advocates of middle class policy in international institutions and think tanks attach to this group and welcome with enthusiasm.

Sirkku Hellsten returns to the notion of class and links the concept to the scholarly endeavours in Africa since decolonization, which among those involved in the current debates have been largely forgotten. She introduces the concept of 'Afro-libertarianism', which describes the socio-economic context in contemporary Africa in which different value frameworks partly clash and partly integrate with each other within an incoherent mixture of value systems. These include traditional collectivist values, which appear as sub-national loyalties and patrimonial power relations, contrasting with values of individual profit maximization within economic liberalism. She warns that expecting a middle class to prefer liberal democracy to other (cultural) options available might result in disappointment due to a lack of empirical research into popular values.

Dieter Neubert links his appeal for cultural and milieu studies as necessary dimensions to assess the category of social classes to the case of Kenya. Based on systematic surveys undertaken by complementing research projects, he advocates a stronger emphasis on habitus, lifestyles and milieu concepts to an otherwise insufficient class concept. He also points to the relevance of networks manifested in a diaspora and remittances as contributing factors often neglected and the existence of very different socio-cultural orientations within a segment in society sharing a similar income. His interest is on urban dynamics unfolding, which could well trigger new formations of social groups leaving behind traditional ties.

Nkwachukwu Orji introduces the Nigerian middle class in a historical perspective. He then uses the campaigns of 'Occupy Nigeria 2012' and 'Bring Back Our Girls' as reference points to deal with forms of mobilization using new forms of communication as a potential means of middle class behaviour. Much inspired by the work of Pippa Norris, he traces political activism of a Nigerian middle class presented as rather homogenous. He contends that the evolving new middle class tends to be 'more urbanite, more educated, more strongly rooted in the private sector, and possessing greater capacity to communicate and share information'. New social media provide better access to information and more efficient communication, which enhance mobilization capacity and broadens articulation of views. This suggests that new technology is, to a large extent, utilized by members of a middle class also for politically motivated or linked activities.

Jon Schubert shares his insights of a twelve-months fieldwork in Luanda on urban middle classness in the Angolan capital, 'to interrogate the analytical and conceptual usefulness of the term'. His interest is also in the political orientations of such strata, who as he observes manifest a growing frustration. This includes those, who originally benefited from the 'oligarchy' of the dos Santos regime. The growing dissatisfaction and disappointment over lack of further delivery erodes the sustainability of the status quo oriented rent-seeking

economy based on resource extraction. While material realities for the kind of ordinary middle class beneficiaries do not any longer improve, they feel betrayed by the promises of a 'new Angola'. This puts the hegemonic project of the MPLA under hitherto unknown pressure from those formerly in support of the regime. It also highlights the political role such a segment in society can potentially play.

Jason Sumich adds perspectives on Mozambique's middle class in similar historical and political depth. Like Schubert he points at the disconnection between claims about the African middle class and the political economic realities of this strata. He dismisses the claim that the middle class is a product of the neoliberal era. Rather, it is rooted in a much longer history and is 'deeply embedded in the political history and structures of the place where it emerges'. Far from heralding the dawn of a consolidated liberal democracy, it should be 'viewed as symbolic of the deep and persisting inequalities of the way contemporary liberalism is in actual practice'. Both case studies also offer insights into the socio-economic realities of a middle class within the radius of former liberation movements (MPLA and Frelimo) as governments in relatively firm control of the societies since Independence.

Amuzweni Ngoma explores how higher-ranking and well-educated professionals in a new black middle class in South Africa construct and perceive their class and political identities. In a related way to the cases of Angola and Mozambique, this highlights post-Apartheid dynamics under a former liberation movement as government. Based on interviews and benefiting from a profound engagement with class analysis in the existing local literature, she is able to offer new insights into the specific positioning of members of this new segment in society. These are torn apart between loyalty to the former liberation movement and critiquing it as a government and state administration with a disappointing performance. Their frustrations find no obvious way for articulation in a society still to a large extent divided by a structural legacy of Apartheid and its racial categories, impacting on the social worlds and also affecting political preferences.¹⁶

Finally, *Vicensia Shule* presents some of her results based on interviews with a younger middle class generation in Dar-es-Salaam as regards their consumption preferences in the entertainment sector, in particular their (dis-)like of locally produced video movies. This is an example of how lifestyle and cultural taste are part of identities linked to the category of middle class in the wider sense. It also shows that an emerging middle class does not necessarily have a stimulating impact on local economic developments, since she concludes that, 'the video-film production in Tanzania appears to have been shunned by the middle class'. Her micro-study offers an example of how further explorations could also benefit from engaging with specific social realities in more detail.

The volume is rounded off by some concluding remarks once again engaging with the notion of class and its meaning. Commenting on the current state of the art, Giesbert and Schotte (2016: 2) observe that, ‘knowledge on the political values, attitudes, and behaviours of these new “non-poor” is only just beginning to evolve’. The chapters in this volume seek to refine the analytical approaches and to reduce the unknown. They offer additional arguments for a necessarily critical reassessment of the generalized middle class concept as well as constructive efforts towards more nuanced and comprehensive insights, both on a general level of reflections and through case study related to empirical evidence. The question posed by Darbon and Toulabor (2013: 51), however, ‘as to whether these newly emerging social groups are open to acquiring a central social significance in their societies, and if they can modify their conditions for mobilization and intervention in governance and development’, is still awaiting conclusive answers.

Notes

1 It is based in parts on previous works (cf. Melber 2013, 2014 and 2015).

2 The critical observations presented in this volume include the claim that there is not something like a homogeneous middle class (in the singular) existing. Rather, the notion or category is a rather fuzzy lumping together of a variety of social strata and segments of society. Darbon (2017) therefore calls this ‘a muddle class with no commonly accepted limits; no consensus exists on its nature, its identity or on its social and economic consequences’. For him, this is ‘an exercise in conceptual stretching’. Sharing such criticism, contributions to this volume tend to use the term also in the plural.

3 Not by any coincidence, chapters in this volume make frequent references to the economists at the African Development Bank, as well as Birdsall, Easterly, Kharas, Ravallion, and Summers as the main sources of the quantifying criteria defining an African middle class in terms of monetary aspects. The numerical dimensions are presented and critically debated especially in the chapters by Tim Stoffel and Oluyeye Akinkugbe/Karl Wohlmuth.

4 Raphael Kaplinsky, Sustainable Growth in a Globalising World –

Not *Whether* But Rather *How* to Participate in the Global Economy. *The European Journal of Development Research* at 25: Jubilee Lecture, held at the 14th EADI General Conference, Bonn, 23 June 2014.

5 The concluding chapter will return in more detail to this issue. It is also an argument in the chapters by Carola Lentz, Sirkku Hellsten, Dieter Neubert and Amuzweni Ngoma with reference to the ‘classics’ such as Karl Marx and Max Weber.

6 A few revealing passages are accessible on YouTube and also on the website of The South African Civil Society Information Service (SACSIS) at <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1270>. See references to this project also in the chapters by Carola Lentz and Amuzweni Ngoma in this volume.

7 The concluding chapter returns to the aspect of ‘social location’ with a different, contrasting example from a previously ‘white’ South African middle class suburbia close to Soweto.

8 The chapter by Amuzweni Ngoma in this volume as well as the in-depth study by Southall (2016) undertake in contrast analytical efforts towards an anatomy of the new black middle class, defined by higher professional and other social positions and income, thereby engaging in

a concrete way with a particular segment in South African society more related to class than to location.

9 See especially the chapter by Oluyele Akingube and Karl Wohlmuth on the socio-economic challenges, which limit the 'prosperity gospel' and the attached optimistic associations regarding the role of middle class(es).

10 As Carola Lentz reminds us in her overview in this volume, the debate over the middle class was for a long time preceded by analytical efforts to engage with what was then dubbed elites. Her historical contextualization in itself, combined with proposals on how best matters could be taken further, offers a necessary lesson for those who are busy reinventing the wheel.

11 It is therefore anything but a coincidence, that the case studies in this volume in different ways all present references to a historical context of their current analyses.

12 However, the problem of reliable and secure data, especially in African countries – as repeatedly discussed by Morten Jerven (e. g. 2013a, 2013b, 2015) – is not acknowledged, nor is the mystifying power of numbers critically questioned (Fioramonti 2014).

13 The concluding chapter will return to this issue in more detail.

14 This amount is translated into purchasing power parity (PPP) values by the IMF and hence in South Africa, for example, would require a minimum wealth of US\$22,000 to be middle class.

15 'Africa's middle class. Few and far between', *The Economist*, 24 October 2015. [www.economist.com/node/21676774]

16 Her chapter is a summarized version of an award-winning Master's thesis submitted at the University of Witwatersrand in 2015. Its academic supervisor published in parallel the hitherto most comprehensive study on South Africa's black middle class, in which he asserts: 'the party will strain the loyalty of many within the black middle class. The political direction or directions

in which the black middle class choses to go will prove an important factor in shaping the country's future trajectory' (Southall 2016: 219).

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1 | African middle classes: lessons from transnational studies and a research agenda¹

Carola Lentz

'Africa rising: can the middle class drive growth?' Under this headline, the BBC World Service organized one of its recent 'Africa Debates' in a stylish new shopping mall in Ghana's capital Accra.² In addition to the panellists who included, among others, the African Development Bank's country representative Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade and Ghana's Minister of Finance Seth Terkper, the BBC journalists had invited a broad cross-section of 'middle-class' Ghanaians, ranging from food-sellers, shopkeepers and teachers to university lecturers, doctors, lawyers, civil servants and entrepreneurs. According to the African Development Bank representative, everyone who spends the equivalent of between US\$2 and US\$20 per capita per day belongs to the middle class, a category into which 46 per cent of Ghana's population falls, as against an average 34 per cent in Africa as a whole.³ Many in the audience objected to this definition. 'We may earn and spend that much, but we don't feel middle class'; 'This money would not even be enough for paying my kid's school fees and the necessary fuel'; 'This sum does not allow any savings, and how can you be middle class without savings?', were some of the comments. A real estate manager suggested that everyone who could afford a decent two-bedroom flat in Accra was at least 'on his way' into the middle class. One comment in particular drew considerable laughter and approval: 'Middle class is defined by the ability to mask poverty, by the capability to get through the month without looking dirty or poor'.

The BBC debate clearly showed that despite disagreement on whom exactly to include in or exclude from this category, middle class has become an important concept, not only in contemporary international policy discourses, but also in the way people in African countries, such as Ghana, think and speak about their own position in society. Furthermore, the debate revealed the problems of any simple objectivist, economic definition of this social category. Implicitly, the discussants pointed to the importance of 'boundary work', as Michèle Lamont (1992: 4) has called it, for the making of a middle class.

World Bank economists and policy makers have heralded the rise of the 'new' middle classes around the globe as a stimulus to economic growth, modernization, and political stability. Journalists have begun to report regularly on

the lives and predicaments of middle-class men and women. Social scientists, too, have turned their attention to this new, or (as many would argue) not so new, but recently revived, social category, and the number of studies on the global middle classes grows by the day.⁴ Many believe, as Göran Therborn has provocatively put it, that the twenty-first century is ‘the age of the global middle class’, and that the ‘project of universal emancipation led by the proletariat’ in the twentieth century, which was ‘clearly the age of the working class’, is now ‘replaced by universal aspiration to middle-class status’ (2012: 5, 15).

With regard to Africa, however, in-depth studies of the emerging middle class(es) are still scarce, and scholars are barely beginning to catch up with global research trends.⁵ Furthermore, the conceptual confusion in the study of social stratification, particularly with respect to the analysis of the ‘upper’ end of the social scale, seems considerable, and scholars of Africa have hardly engaged with recent debates on class theory. With the exception of South Africa, where studies of the middle class have a long tradition, those highly educated, professionally successful, and relatively affluent men and women that in other parts of the world would be discussed as middle classes, often continue to be categorized as elites, a category that gained prominence in research on the newly independent African states in the 1960s and 1970s.

The conceptual quagmire in part reflects shifting academic fashions that shape the language of empirical studies, with various ups and downs in the popularity, and debates on the applicability, of class concepts, instead of or alongside with elite concepts. At the same time, the changing scholarly uses of elite and class concepts echo the socio-economic development of the continent where middle-income groups, sharing certain ‘middle-class’ values and lifestyles, have only rather recently come to the fore. These changes in the social composition of African societies are, in turn, reflected in the concepts that the societal actors themselves summon when discussing their own position. When I conducted my first interviews in the 1980s among older educated Northern Ghanaians, for instance, they tended to refer to themselves as elite (Lentz 1994). When I later interacted with members of the younger generation of educated Northerners, I observed that they found middle class a socially much more acceptable term than elite (Behrends and Lentz 2012: 141–3).

Like many key terms in history and the social sciences, then, elite and middle class are at once categories ‘of social and political *analysis*’ and categories ‘of social and political *practice*’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 4). Both terms were initially coined by societal actors and have since the end of the eighteenth century, become catchwords in political discourse, well before scholars defined them in any systematic fashion. Once they had become more or less well-established conceptual tools of research, however, they began to take on an academic life of their own, with scholars also using them to describe people that did not themselves invoke these categories for their self-description. But

scholarly terms also feed back into folk understandings of social stratification. Particularly the recent global popularity of the term middle class seems to be at least in part a result of the appropriation of academic categories by policy makers. How people categorize themselves influences the ways in which they experience their social location, and may have important consequences for political action. Scholars should therefore be sensitive to the complex feedback processes between social science and political-cum-social practice. In order to do so in a comprehensive manner, however, scholars also need to go beyond folk terminologies, develop their own analytical categories, and critically engage with the baggage that received theoretical concepts bring with them. Elite and (middle) class are terminological tools that open particular windows on the societies that we study; while they help us ask some questions, they conceal other issues. Furthermore, concepts of social analysis beyond folk terminologies are also necessary when we want to compare processes of social stratification between various African countries and in a broader, global perspective. Last, but certainly not least, findings from these empirical studies, in turn, can also contribute to further revising and developing our theoretical framework.

In this chapter, therefore, I will discuss the concepts of elite and middle class as well as review a range of empirical studies on middle classes in Africa and, more generally, the Global South. I explore these case studies with an interest in ‘the historical practices of what it meant to be – and live – the middle class in a variety of geographical locations’ (López 2012: 21). Because research on upwardly mobile, educated men and women in Africa often used, and sometimes continues to use, the term elite, I also discuss studies on African elites.⁶ I think that it is high time to (re)connect these two fields of study. Furthermore, I believe that future research on the middle class in Africa can benefit immensely from engaging with the existing rich literature on middle-class formation in Europe and America as well as in other parts of the Global South.⁷ In sum, the major aim of this chapter is to discuss existing theoretical approaches and empirical studies that may be useful for future research on African middle classes. In the conclusion, I will outline the lessons that we can draw from this literature, and discuss some of the particular challenges that scholars of social stratification in Africa face.

Studies of elites

When describing the upper echelons of educated professionals, civil servants, military, clergy and politicians in Africa, scholars have usually spoken of elites, not upper or middle classes. In the 1950s and 1960s, these groups formed such a tiny minority that the term middle class seemed intuitively inappropriate. Furthermore, scholars were interested in their role as modernisers and ‘mediator[s] between western and traditional influences’ (Lloyd 1966: 51), something which elite theory seemed to capture better than class theory. The

1970s and 1980s saw vivid debates on whether African workers and peasants constituted a working class in the making. Studies of the now growing strata of politicians, administrators, and other white-collar employees, however, usually continued to rely on the term elite. Closer inspection reveals that scholars from different disciplines applied the term to somewhat different phenomena. Political scientists, for instance, were interested mainly in political elites which they generally understood as ensembles of decision-making, influential individuals (e.g. Daloz 1999; Francis 2011). Sociologists and anthropologists, on the other hand, focused on elite families and their lifestyles (e.g. Opong 1981; Mann 1985), or examined strategies of elite group cohesion and rituals of distinction (Cohen 1981). These thematic variations reflect, in part, different strands of elite theory.

Optimism and normativity: Peter Lloyd's *New Elites in Tropical Africa* (1966) A landmark study that was to set the tone of much subsequent research was Peter Lloyd's edited volume *The New Elites in Tropical Africa* (1966). It published case studies on a broad selection of African countries that had been presented at a conference of the International African Institute in Ibadan in 1964. Lloyd's comprehensive introduction clearly set out the political agenda behind the conference, namely that knowledge on modern elites was important because 'future political developments in African states will be strongly influenced by the composition and characteristics of the elites, and the degree of their cohesiveness or internal rivalries' (Lloyd 1966: 1).

Lloyd's very definition of elites expressed the widespread hope that Western-educated African politicians, civil servants and professionals would play a crucial role as modernizing agents in the newly independent states. Elites, in Lloyd's eyes, were 'creator[s] of new ideas and values', 'prime movers of change' (1966: 50–1). This normative emphasis on the elites' leadership role stood in a peculiar tension with the descriptive elements of Lloyd's definition of elites, which simply claimed that elites were 'persons who were western-educated and wealthy to a high degree relative to the mass of the population' (1966: 4) – a definition that could obviously include persons without leadership roles who would elsewhere be described as members of a middle or upper class.

The tension between normative and descriptive elements in Lloyd's definition of elites resulted, in part, from his conviction that a class terminology was inappropriate for an analysis of social inequality in Africa. For Lloyd, therefore, the concept of elite served, on the one hand, as a key term in an examination (with normative overtones) of the functional differentiation and leadership roles in African societies; on the other hand, it worked as a cornerstone of an analysis (in a more descriptive vein) of an incipient vertical stratification. African societies, according to Lloyd, were still characterized by high rates of social mobility through education, networks of kin that cross-cut status boundaries,

out-marriage, as well as relative cultural homogeneity and persisting ethnic loyalties across differences in occupation and wealth. In order to grasp these social dynamics, class theory appeared unsuitable – no matter whether one adopted a Marxist understanding of ‘classes as economic or political-interest groups largely hereditary in character and logically opposed to one another’ or a Weberian conception of ‘classes as status groups, hierarchically arranged, but not clearly divided one from the other’ (Lloyd 1966: 55).

In the colonial period, Lloyd explained, African administrators and professionals were often regarded as a ‘middle class’ because they ‘were situated between the expatriate colonial officials and the mass of the population’ (1966: 49). With the demise of colonial governments, these Western-educated African administrators and professionals now stood at the top; but if they were to be called an ‘upper class’, Lloyd asked, who was their counterpart? Peasants and urban workers were ‘ethnically oriented’ rather than identifying as lower or working classes. They were thus better described as masses and their counterpart as elites (1966: 60). Lloyd suggested, however, that the relevance of the term elite for the description of African societies ‘may be short lived’. ‘If the African elite becomes more hereditary’, he argued, ‘and if ... the second and subsequent elite generations lose touch with the rural communities of their origin’, highly educated, wealthy Africans could no longer be adequately termed ‘elite’ (1966: 61–2). Here again, the normative implications of the term become obvious: when elites close their ranks and no longer serve as innovators and role models, they no longer ‘merit this designation’ (1966: 50).

Modernity, privilege and power: elite studies since the 1970s In subsequent studies of social stratification in Africa, one can distinguish three different strands of analysis that all relate back, in one way or another, to Lloyd’s ambiguous understanding of elites: (1) detailed descriptions of the lifestyles of specific African educated elites; (2) discussions on the further development of social inequality in African societies and how to capture it theoretically; and (3) debates on the characteristics of African political and state elites.

- 1 Throughout the past decades, anthropologists and sociologists have produced a number of ethnographic case studies of specific African elites and their projects of leading modern lives while also honouring traditional values.⁸ Without any claim to offer an exhaustive overview, it is worth mentioning some of the themes on which these studies focused. There is a series of works on formal education and its role in elite formation. Some of these studies discussed individual educational as well as subsequent professional trajectories (e.g. Grohs 1967; Behrends 2002; Okeke-Ihejirika 2004; Behrends and Lentz 2012); others focused on school cultures and the formative role particularly of boarding schools (e.g. Simpson 2003); still others examined the stratificatory effects of

secondary education (e.g. Foster 1965; Clignet and Foster 1966; Scudder and Colson 1980). Secondly, a number of studies explored the educated elites' marriage strategies, changing family ideals and redefinition of relations within the extended family (e.g. Harrell-Bond 1975; Imoagene 1976; Oppong 1981; Mann 1985; Dreyer 1989; Pauli 2009). Thirdly, there is a body of research on 'big men in small towns' (Vincent 1968), which explored the networks among influential individuals or groups such as teachers, civil servants, chiefs, and big landowners in specific localities as well as their role as power brokers between local politics and national institutions (e.g. Jacobson 1973; Fumanti 2003). Local-national relations and the role of mobile educated elites in the transformation of the countryside are also discussed in the fourth set of works in ethnographic elite research, namely studies of the educated men's and women's activities in associations, both those formed among themselves ('old boys' associations, social clubs, etc.) and those cross-cutting distinctions of education and social status (ethnic or hometown associations, etc.) (see e.g. Little 1965; Lucas 1994; Lentz 1995; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998; Trager 2001).

In the majority of these thematically diverse studies, elite was used as a descriptive term, and there was little explicit discussion of the relationship between class and elite concepts. However, the list of themes reveals that this body of research often explored social phenomena that, in other parts of the world would have come under the heading of middle (or upper) classes.⁹

A ground-breaking ethnographic study of an African elite that did explicitly discuss conceptual questions was Abner Cohen's analysis of Creole public servants and professionals in Sierra Leone. While Lloyd could be characterized as proponent of a functional elites approach, Cohen was strongly influenced by C. Wright Mills' (1956) ideas of a 'power elite'. Cohen defined elite as 'a collectivity of people who occupy commanding positions in some sphere of social life, who do not overtly form a distinct group, but are nevertheless covertly a group, cooperating and coordinating their strategies of action informally' (1981: 233). Following Mills, Cohen was most interested in how an elite managed to informally close its group boundaries within a modern, liberal, formally open society. His central argument was that this was achieved not only through rational, conscious strategies, such as carefully crafted ties of marriage or the choice of specific schools, but also the use of symbols of eliteness and routine cultural performances, in short: through 'the politics of culture', as the title of his study suggested. Interestingly, Cohen did not discard the usefulness of a class terminology, and even discussed the existence of a growing Creole 'middle class... bridging the gap between the higher and lower sections of Creole society' (1981: 69). However, he felt that the strength of anthropological research was to closely examine not an entire class, but 'manageable groups' such as elites, providing insights into their informal organization and 'power mystique' that would remain hidden to other social scientists who studied larger formalized structures (1981: 236).

- 2 The problem of how to conceptualize social stratification in Africa was intensely debated in the 1970s and 1980s. Many scholars insisted that even contemporary, and certainly colonial and pre-colonial, African societies could not be understood in terms of social classes. Jack Goody (1971), for instance, argued that consistent patterns of out-marriage (instead of social endogamy, as in Europe and Asia) continued to militate against the formation of a class system. Others laid more emphasis on ethnic belonging and vertical ties of patronage as factors that retarded the development of 'a bureaucratic bourgeoisie' (Miller 1974: 526), and its counterpart, a lower class of peasants and workers. In his critique of the application of Marxist class concepts to African societies, Jean Copans argued that class theory was 'in no sense derived from autonomous political experience', but remained 'an imported product in the hands of specialists in the import and export [of] ideas'; it was even a 'luxury product' of limited analytical and political usefulness because it had neither been appropriated by the broader population nor by African 'organic intellectuals' (1985: 37, 36). Other researchers observed an increasing closure of the formerly open educational system, and predicted 'a movement from achievement to ascription' that would 'reinforce the boundaries between what could be legitimately regarded as "social classes"' (Foster 1980: 231, 222). Marxist scholars like Alpheus Manghezi (1976) argued that the term elite concealed the class character of African societies and thus served to entrench power and privilege. Similarly, Irving L. Markovitz (1977 and 1987) argued that even pre-colonial Africa, and all the more so contemporary societies, were characterized by the existence of classes, only that research on class in Africa needed to take ethnicity and regionalism as well as the peculiar fusion of political positions and economic ventures into account.¹⁰ With the exception of Gavin Kitching's study (1980) on the Kenyan 'petite bourgeoisie', however, these class-versus-elite debates did not result in in-depth empirical research on specific upper or middle classes.
- 3 In research on African politics, the use of the term elite experienced perhaps the most notable fluctuations. The hope that Lloyd and contemporary scholars had expressed in the 1960s with regard to the leadership qualities of African politicians and public servants soon gave way to trenchant critiques of the parasitism of African bureaucracies. To the extent that positive identification with the objects of study faded away, 'elite' was, at least for a while, replaced by structuralist, more anonymous concepts. Accusations of exploitation, corruption, and mismanagement were levelled at institutions and corporate groups rather than at identifiable, responsible individuals. In part, these discussions about the character of political rule in African states intersected with the above-mentioned debate on the usefulness of a Marxist or neo-Marxist class terminology. Instead of 'elites', a number of scholars now studied 'state classes', the 'state bourgeoisie' or the 'organizational bourgeoisie' and their role in 'neopatrimonial' political systems (Médard 1982; Elsenhans 1986). If the term elite was still used by these

scholars, then it served to distinguish subgroups of the ruling class, as, for instance, in Tetzlaff's (1983: 50–1) discussion of the 'state class' that he classified into five different 'functional elites', namely the higher civil servants, military and police officers, politicians, the 'intelligentsia' and traditional authorities.

Other political scientists continued to use the term elites, but in a more technical, descriptive manner. Moreover, they employed the term mainly for politicians and leading state bureaucrats. Jean-François Bayart, for instance, explicitly demanded to 'dissociate the analysis of political forms from social stratification', reserving the term 'class' for the latter, although he also insisted that African societies were no 'real class societies' (1993: 153, 178). Bayart focused on the relation between 'old' and 'new' ruling groups and analysed how shared educational trajectories, social activities and political practices resulted in the 'reciprocal assimilation of elites', creating a 'relatively homogenous social bloc' and a unified 'dominant class' (1993: 161, 163). Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999, 2003) argued, somewhat vaguely, that he preferred the term elite 'because it has the advantage of subsuming many types of upper groups, including those in social contexts where the concept of class would be inappropriate' (2007: 27, Fn 1). Critical of Bayart's assertion of the horizontal integration and increasing autonomy of national elites Daloz (2003) emphasized their fragmentation and vertical integration with the broader population through patron–client relationships, usually along ethnic lines.

More recently, 'functional elites' approaches have been revived in research on the social background of political elites such as parliamentarians and executive personnel (e.g. Svanikier 2007; Francis 2011). Other studies look at historical developments of political elites, particularly in the context of radical regime change (e.g. Müller 2005; Sumich 2009, 2010). A decidedly normative perspective on elites, on the other hand, has been reintroduced by Richard Werbner's study (2004) on Kalanga elites in Botswana. Arguing against 'Afro-pessimism' and calling 'for a shift away from the Machiavellian suspicion of elites', Werbner has emphasized the important moral as well as political role that Kalanga business and public service elites have played for the 'public good'. With regard to the elite concept as theoretical tool, however, Werbner's study has little to offer.

More generally, this overview of studies on African elites has shown how variable and often inconsistently scholars have used the concept of elite. Some have discussed its relation to, or advantages over, class concepts and examined the historicity of the different categories explicitly; others have just more or less intuitively exchanged the terms as they best seemed to fit the phenomena they studied. In the conclusion, I will return to these conceptual issues and suggest that it may be useful to adopt a more restricted working definition of elites as persons or small groups with leadership roles. For now, I would like to emphasize the striking similarity of some of the themes discussed in studies of African elites, such as the importance of formal education, modern family

life, and progressive values, with aspects that studies of the middle classes have highlighted to which I will now turn.

Studies of middle classes

Since the 2000s, interest in the middle classes, once heralded as the main forces behind industrialization, urbanization and bureaucratization but then somewhat neglected by social scientists (albeit not by historians), has experienced a renaissance, this time on a global scale. Middle classes in the Global South are seen as being on the rise, and heralded as bearers of new values and lifestyles. They are believed to boost economic growth, promote desirable social dynamics, and safeguard democracy. With respect to the Global North, however, narratives of deprivation and victimization of the middle classes in the wake of structural transformation of the world economy dominate (e.g. Zunz 2002; Collins 2013; Groh-Samberg et al. 2014; Mau 2015). In a recent paper about ‘the tale of two middle classes’, Branko Milanovic (2014) argues that these contradictory developments and perspectives are interrelated. Globalization is ‘not a zero-sum game’, Milanovic asserts, but it seems to produce more ‘losers’ among the middle classes in the West and more ‘winners’ in the Global South, particularly in ‘resurgent Asia’.

In any case, the term middle class currently has become rather attractive, both for policy and market analysts and as a term of self-description. Some scholars attribute this popularity to the global conjuncture of neoliberal politics, with its emphasis on individual achievement which resonates with middle-class ideas about upward social mobility. For Don Kalb, the contemporary ‘discourse of the “global middle class” is ... primarily an effort by global and local elites to intervene in ongoing class formations within globalizing capitalism’, aimed at neutralizing any possibility of popular protest against the wealthy and the powerful (2014: 160). Kalb’s urge to ‘deconstruct the self-confidence of the liberal narrative’ makes him adopt an almost conspiratorialist understanding of idioms of middleclassness as false consciousness, produced by upper-class interventions in the class struggle between ‘the “1 percent”’ and ‘subaltern groups’ (2014: 158, 160, 163–4). Such a perspective does help to problematize the appropriation of middle-class discourses, but I would argue that we need to move on to more open questions regarding why these discourses were, and continue to be, so meaningful to increasing groups of people around the world. And, as Göran Therborn, who is certainly critical of neoliberalism, has conceded, the growing importance of the middle class may indeed imply ‘globalized middle-class consumerism’ and political acquiescence, but can also lead to instances of ‘middle-class political rebellion’ (2012: 26–7).

But who exactly is in the ‘middle’? Is the heterogeneous agglomeration of occupations, income levels, lifestyles and political ambitions usually labelled as middle class(es) really a social formation ‘whose members share situational

characteristics, a sense of belonging together, common attitudes and values, as well as a disposition for common behaviour and actions' (Kocka 2004: 37)? Are the contemporary middle classes in the Global South and in the Global North similar formations? And is it useful to group the nineteenth-century *Bürgertum* in Germany (Budde 2009) or the North American 'middling sorts' (Bledstein and Johnston 2001) under the same umbrella term 'middle class' as twentieth- or twenty-first-century social formations in Latin America, Asia and Africa? In how far can we speak of a global history of the bourgeoisie or middle classes (Dejung 2014)?

Scholars have provided different answers to these questions, and the concept of 'middle class' has a long and varied history. Indeed, the middle classes have always confronted researchers with theoretical problems. They constitute, as Jürgen Kocka (2004: 37) put it, 'a conceptual morass', which Marxist class theories could not disentangle. Nor did Weberian approaches to class-cum-status groups solve all theoretical problems. As an 'intermediate' and obviously relational category, the middle class defied, and continues to defy, neat class divisions. Discussions of the question of who belongs to this fuzzy category and whether the middle class is not, after all, a 'myth' (Wahrman 1995; Maza 2003), upheld by political discourse but not by social practice, are as old as the appearance of the term in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Seed 1992). However, despite certain sympathies for the discursive or narrative turn in class theory (e.g. Somers 1992), my approach here is premised on a 'realist' assumption, namely that the middle class is not 'a mere abstraction, a discourse, a metaphor, a rhetorical device', but indeed a social formation 'out there'. It is, as Ricardo López, has convincingly put it, 'a working social concept, a material experience, [sometimes, C.L.] a political project, and a cultural practice' (2012: 20–1), although not all of these dimensions need to be present at the same time to the same degree. Furthermore, I would argue that it is productive to use the term middle class both for historical and contemporary social formations because this allows for a comparative perspective.

In what follows, I will discuss important findings from research on middle classes in the Global South. Since there are as yet relatively few case studies focusing on Africa, I will also examine research on Asia and Latin America. I will discuss a range of themes that reveal striking continuities of current middle-class formation in the Global South with processes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe and America, namely the centrality of 'boundary work' (Lamont 1992); the role of education, 'intelligent' work and meritocratic values; new ideals of domesticity and gender relations; practices of consumption; and middle-class sociability and political engagement. I will then point to three new themes which were not prominent in studies of older middle-class trajectories: the role of the state in making and breaking

the middle classes; the relations between middle-class status and ethnicity or race; and the transnational dimensions of middle-class formation.

Middle-class boundary work Virtually all historical and anthropological studies on the global middle classes agree that economic definitions of the middle class through its location in the occupational structure or its income and expenditure do not suffice, and can even be misleading. Most scholars emphasize that it is necessary to explore the material and symbolic struggles over class boundaries, and to analyse the middle classes' dynamic, shifting and contested relational self-categorizations as different from 'upper' and 'lower' classes. Mark Liechty, for instance, argues that one common feature of middle-class groups that are otherwise 'separated widely in space and time' is the 'explicitly locational language' they employ, typically placing 'themselves in a socio-moral middle ground while locating their class Others in morally comprised social locations 'above' and 'below' themselves' (2012: 271). Not all middle-class boundary work necessarily foregrounds moral issues. Indeed, the criteria along which class boundaries are drawn can shift significantly over time. In his overview of studies on Latin America's middle class, for instance, David Parker observes that since the late 1980s, when the continent entered into an era of 'neoliberal globalization', middle classes have defined themselves 'less by education and stable employment in the public sector and more by ... income and possessions' as well as 'rampant consumerism' (2013: 13). However, these 'shifting standards' are not agreed upon by everybody; rather, there is 'competition among diverse groups for recognition as the class's standard-bearers' (Parker 2013: 12). In India, too, unprecedented economic opportunities allow ever larger groups to engage in middle-class lifestyles and consumption patterns. However, this 'inclusive moment' has prompted intense contestations over 'what makes middleclassness, and who can claim such a status' (Donner and De Neve 2011: 4–5).

An important aspect of the middle class's boundary work is the reference groups on which people draw when defining their social location. The sometimes surprisingly diverging definitions of who belongs to the 'middle' can be seen as resulting from the different frames of reference that people adopt. In a survey of the social structure and use of class labels in South Africa's largest township, Soweto, Mosa Phadi and Claire Ceruti (2011) have found that 66 per cent of their respondents were comfortable with placing themselves in the 'middle class', although many of them would not qualify as middle class by any hard socio-economic standards. All of Phadi's and Ceruti's interviewees saw 'affordability', 'ability to consume' and 'self-sufficiency' as central characteristics of middleclassness, but judged their own capacities in these respects in comparison to different reference groups, ranging from a narrow range of even poorer neighbours to a much larger social world of

well-to-do South Africans or even cosmopolitan professionals. The lack of agreement on class terminology and social location seems to be particularly pronounced in societies like South Africa that are characterized by separated spheres of life and consumption with little interaction or overlap. However, the co-existence of different reference groups is characteristic for many societies in the Global South. Furthermore, frames of reference and concomitant self-designations may shift over time, as Andrea Behrends and Carola Lentz (2012) show in their analysis of three generations of educated, upwardly mobile men and women from north-western Ghana.

More generally, the boundary work of contemporary global middle classes is characterized by multiple contestations, both concerning the overall architecture of class positions in which people place themselves and others, and concerning the systems of symbols that are used to demarcate class membership and boundaries.

Education, work and changing sources of prosperity The middle classes' boundary work depends, of course, not least on the economic and social contours of this social formation, and thus on changing historical configurations of educational opportunities, occupational structure, levels of income, distribution of wealth, state legislation concerning inheritance, social security, and so forth. While recent anthropological studies of the global middle classes often focus, sometimes almost exclusively, on patterns of consumption, works by historians are generally more attentive to the long-term shifts in the economic bases and composition of the middle classes. In many cases such transformations are understood by scholars and the social actors alike in terms of a partial displacement of the 'old' by emerging 'new middle classes' (Heiman, Freeman and Lietchy 2012: 12–5). However, what precisely is regarded as 'old' and 'new' can vary considerably, depending on the country and period under study. Recent research on Asian middle classes generally regards 'salaried bureaucrats and professionals' as well as 'employees in private firms' as the 'old middle classes', while the 'new middle classes' that emerge in the 'post-liberalization period' comprise various categories of 'newly rich' with a much broader range of occupations and often less educational credentials than the established middle-class stratum (Donner and De Neve 2011: 3–4). In a similar vein, Latin America's 'old' middle class, as David Parker observes, had 'deep roots in the state'; since the 1980s, when state-led development models eroded and 'neoliberal globalization' set in, this old middle class was eventually 'side-lined by a "new" middle class of self-employed entrepreneurs large and small, particularly in importing-exporting, computing, telecommunications, and services' (2013: 12–3).

The close association of 'economic' and 'intellectual' middle-class groups that Jürgen Kocka (2004) discerned in nineteenth-century Western Europe was

apparently a unique historical configuration that cannot be found in trajectories of global middle classes (but see Dejung 2014 for exceptions). However, a certain level of educational credentials seems to be regarded as necessary in order to legitimately claim middle-class status even by those ‘new rich’ (Pinches 1999) who demonstrate middleclassness mainly through consumerism. At the very least, education, and the respectable work to which it gives access, serve to legitimate one’s social position as earned through one’s own effort. In her study of young urban professionals in Kenya, Rachel Spronk (2012, ch. 2 and 2014) examines how these highly educated men and women working in the ICT sector, as accountants, lawyers, journalists, or bank managers, take pride in having earned their social position through continuous investments in education and through hard work, instead of relying on patronage and ethnic networks. As Boris Nieswand’s (2011) research on the status paradox faced by relatively affluent, but not highly educated return migrants to Ghana shows, education may continue to serve as a stronghold of the dominant status hierarchy even when hopes of school and university graduates to access the desired jobs are increasingly frustrated. Middle-class discourses regard education ‘as the means to build a moral community of virtuous and responsible citizens’, as Mattia Fumanti (2006: 97) has argued in his study of views on education in post-apartheid Namibia. In a similar vein, middle-class Ghanaians insist that ‘true education’ is not merely a matter of ‘holding a school degree, but also of living up to certain standards of courtesy and respectfulness’ (Lentz 1994: 154, 158–9). They, and many others in the middle class, believe in education as the universal remedy for poverty and marginalization.

However, education is not only a symbol of a meritocratic order and a community of responsible citizens that the middle class invokes in order to set itself off from the unmotivated poor or the undeserving upper class. In much of the Global South, education has been, and still is, indeed the most important tangible instrument of upward mobility.¹¹ In spite of the increasing inflation of educational credentials, education is still an investment that does, by and large, improve one’s access to better-paid employment. Many studies show how middle-class as well as aspiring middle-class parents therefore devote much money and energy to supporting their children’s education. To give just a few examples: in her study of class formation in south-western Nigeria, Sara Berry (1985) analysed how prosperous cocoa farmers, instead of using their profits to expand their own commercial agriculture, invested heavily in their sons’ education, which enabled them to move into non-agricultural employments. The expectation that expanding the opportunities of formal education for women would produce future ‘mothers as educators’ has been a staple of nationalist agitation and modernization narratives in India, as Henrike Donner’s study of the Bengali middle class shows (2008: 123–4). ‘Education tales’ also play a major role in the narratives of South Korean women about

their struggles to 'ensure class reproduction or mobility' for their children, as Nancy Abelmann (2003: 100) has documented.

Just as important as education for middle-class formation and reproduction is work. 'Nothing seems more middle class than the fact of having a steady well-paying job', assert Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo in their comparative analysis of household surveys from thirteen African, Asian, and Latin American countries. Of great importance is 'the sense of control over the future', they argue, 'that one gets from knowing that there will be an income every month – and not just the income itself'; it is these well-founded hopes for the future that allow 'the middle class to focus on building their own careers and those of their children' (2008: 26). Work stands at the centre of middle-class images of dignity and worthiness. Like education it is a building block of middle-class identities and legitimization towards both the lower and the upper classes. However, middle-class work is of a particular kind. As Barbara Weinstein puts it, the middle class often regards itself as 'the thinking class: freed from the dulling effects of manual labor but not corrupted by a leisured existence'; the ideal middle-class man (or woman) is the 'professional – the educated, modern individual whose knowledge is power, and who plays an indispensable role in pressing the ruling elite to meet to their responsibilities and in teaching the laboring classes proper discipline in the workplace and good hygiene at home' (2012: 108–9).

Looking beyond individual careers at households and families, it is interesting to note that upward social mobility is often aided by the combination of work in different sectors, and by income derived from various types of activity. In his study of Kenya's *petite bourgeoisie*, for instance, Gavin Kitching (1980) observed that in the 1970s, public servants often used their salaries to invest in commercial ventures or cash-crop production. In a similar vein, Nkululeko Mabandla (2013) argues that throughout the history of the black middle class in South Africa, access to, and wherever possible property rights over, land have played an important role for achieving a certain prosperity that enabled people to lead middle-class lives. Combining salaried occupations with landownership, often associated with a gendered division of labour, enabled, and continues to enable, many South African black middle-class households to invest in the education of the next generation, and to endure various economic and political risks as well as to exploit new opportunities. Advantageous combinations of salaried employment with engagement in agriculture or trade can be found in many African countries. In any case, the creation of property, beyond salaried income that is often vulnerable to economic and political crises, is important for transmitting middle-class status to the next generation.

Family life, domesticity and gender relations Middle-class practices with regard to modern marriage, gender relations, and family life are rather diverse and do not neatly correspond to the proclaimed ideals. However, globally

circulating ideas of romantic love, family planning, and responsible parenthood, and of privileging the nuclear family over extended kin networks, have become parts of middle-class imaginaries worldwide. Propagated in movies, lifestyle magazines and transnational advertisement campaigns, these ideas have fired the imagination of many aspiring youth, and fuelled intergenerational conflicts about gender roles, marriage choices, domestic arrangements, child rearing practices, and responsibilities of old-age care. Contested norms and practices in these domains have been a major subject of sociological and anthropological research on the middle classes in the Global South, and I can only present a few glimpses on some of the findings.

There are a number of older instructive studies on changes in household size and fertility patterns as well as the relations between the conjugal family and the larger descent group. Most of them show that contrary to modernist aspirations towards the nuclear family, three-generation households and multiple material as well as symbolic obligations towards extended kin networks are the rule rather than the exception, even among upper-middle-class groups. Where this has been the traditional norm, payment of the bride price and practices of polygyny often continue, as Sharon Stichter (1988) has shown for the Kenyan middle class (see also Harrell-Bond 1975 on Sierra Leone). Loyalties towards the matrilineage conflict with the conjugal families' preference for virilocality and patrilineal inheritance, but are hardly ever completely rejected, as Christine Oppong (1981) has observed among the senior civil servants of the matrilinear Akan in Ghana. Multi-class households with sometimes numerous poorer relatives sustained by, and partly working for, educated middle-class couples can be found in many places. Of course, much depends on the institutional framework. Where the state does not regularly offer facilities of childcare, support during periods of unemployment and illness, and old-age care, extended family networks are of vital importance for individual survival and well-being. At the same time, however, changes do take place – sometimes not immediately visible – and middle-class couples do place emphasis on having less children, and often at a later age; they do find ways to circumvent or alleviate some of the extended family's material expectations towards them; and they invest heavily in the education of their own offspring.

The complex negotiation of traditional family norms and modernist aspirations continues to be an important theme in more recent studies of middle-class families. Erdmute Alber (2014: 263–316), for instance, analyses how West African urban middle-class families and their rural relatives draw on well-established patterns of child fostering in order to support educational ambitions and strategies of upward social mobility. Henrike Donner (2008 and 2015) shows that Kolkata's rather traditionalist Bengali-speaking middle-class families tend to live in smaller household units, but social obligations, such as (female) care for next of kin and members of the extended family remain in place.

Research on changing gender roles, and particularly norms of female comportment, has revealed interesting differences between continents. As Michael West's study of black middle-class families in colonial Zimbabwe shows, there have been repeated attempts by European missionaries and colonial authorities to instil 'the bourgeois domestic ideal' (2002: 73) particularly among educated Africans in the colonies. The latter often accepted the idea that being 'good wives' meant self-fulfilment through 'homemaking' (2002: 98). However, many other studies confirm that, despite these patriarchal ideologies, salaried employment outside the house tends to be the norm for African educated women, just like work on the farm or as traders have been, and continue to be, widespread practices among lower class women.¹² Rachel Spronk's (2012) research among middle-class youth in Nairobi explores how young professional women self-confidently challenge gender stereotypes, and claim a right to work in well-paid, respected jobs as well as to engage in egalitarian partnerships with men and enjoy sexual pleasure beyond traditionalist expectations that they should become good mothers. In South Korea, India, and other Asian countries, on the other hand, middle-class status seems to be more closely connected with the ideal of 'full-time housewives', and the new 'ideology of egalitarian marriage' has not prevented a 'new form of patriarchal family' from taking root that associates the woman with the private sphere at home, and the man with the workplace and the public sphere (Kim 1993: 73).

Beyond the often hidden, everyday negotiations in the domestic sphere, middle-class family relations become highly visible affairs during certain life-cycle celebrations. For urban middle-class families in India, for instance, as Christiane Brosius' (2010: 272–306) exploration of the Indian Hindu 'wedding industry' shows, the traditional marriage ceremony has become a public site for exhibiting their wealth and their ability to reconcile a cosmopolitan lifestyle with respect for cultural 'heritage'. In Africa, it is often funerals rather than weddings that are made to serve as grand public statements of wealth and middle-class status (e.g. Smith 2004; Lentz 2009). However, here, too, middle-class families increasingly turn wedding ceremonies into occasions of conspicuous consumption and demonstrations of familiarity with a modern, cosmopolitan lifestyle (e.g. Pauli 2014).

All of these studies on middle-class family life and domestic arrangements show, as Donner (2008: 182) argues, that 'while the construction of the new middle class as a cultural ideal is relatively homogenous, the outcomes of the processes leading to new middle-class lifestyles are often ambiguous and surprising'.

Middle-class practices of consumption Like lifecycle rituals situated at the interface between the domestic and the public sphere, but of a more durable and solid character, are the diverse forms of middle-class housing. They are also a particular form of conspicuous consumption that has captured

the interest of many scholars of the global middle classes. On the one hand, domestic architecture has a pragmatic dimension. It expresses as well as defines the separation of the domestic world from the sphere of work, and prefigures family arrangements, such as the size of the household, the gendered division of labour, or the place of children in family life. On the other hand, the aesthetic dimension of houses publicly demonstrates inter- and intra-class distinctions with regard to prosperity and the owners' imaginaries of tradition and modernity. Middle-class architecture in Tanzania, for instance, exhibits different styles that range from more traditionalist forms of the 'respectable house' to what Claire Mercer (2014) has termed 'the global aspirational house', which incorporates architectural details from European or Arab traditions. Christiane Brosius' (2010) work on New Delhi's modern condominiums and gated communities shows how middle-class Delhians are encouraged to develop an 'enclaved gaze' (2010: 65) and fantasies of belonging to a 'world-class city' (2010: 40) that combines the amenities of a modern global city with carefully selected, beautified elements of India's Hindu traditions.

The recent boom of private homeownership in post-Mao China, Li Zhang argues, not only expresses the middle class's quest for a 'private paradise', but creates 'a tangible location for a new class to materialize itself through spatial exclusion, cultural differentiation, and lifestyle practices' (2010: 3). At the same time, to create these ideal living places middle-class citizens have to engage with a gigantic real estate industry. Widespread conflicts with developers and property management agencies become sites of 'public sphere activism' through which middle-class homeowners defend their 'private paradise' and develop a sense of collective interests and rights (2010: 2, 4).

More generally, scholars exploring the 'new' middle classes in the neoliberal era have often focused on consumption practices as a central field in which middle-class politics of distinction, 'regimes of pleasure' (Brosius 2010: 14), and global-local imaginaries can best be observed. Moreover, consumption practices are explored as an arena where global images of a desirable life are circulated and, in complex negotiations, domesticated by local norms of respectability and legitimacy. The title of Liechty's study, *Suitably Modern*, expresses the anxiety of the new middle-class subjects in urban Nepal to reconcile global goods and ideas with local norms of morally sane consumption and comportment. Liechty almost celebrates the Nepali middle class as 'pioneers' of 'a new space of cultural "betweenness" – between high and low, global and local, new and old, "tradition" and "modernity"' (2003: 25). Similarly, the young professionals in Nairobi studied by Rachel Spronk (2012) seek to avoid any semblance of uncritically copying American or British ways of life, and insist on creating a modern, but distinctly African lifestyle that is respectful of 'tradition', but, of course, a tradition that is reimagined and renegotiated.

The recent focus on consumption, both by the middle classes themselves and by researchers, needs to be viewed in historical perspective, as some scholars have cautioned. They see the prioritization of consumption practices in middle-class boundary work as typical of the era of neoliberal globalization and the concomitant rise of 'the new rich' for whom 'consumer items operate as the principal signifiers of [social] standing and achievement' (Pinches 1999: 32). 'Compared to their parents' generation', Parker argues with respect to Latin America, 'this [new] middle class was defined less by education and stable employment in the public sector and more by their income and possessions' (2013: 13). In a similar vein, Donner and Neve (2011) concede that 'consumerism' indeed plays an important role in the lives particularly of the newly upwardly mobile groups. However, 'consumerism' has also become 'the trope through which all other relationships, including those of the middle class with the state, with the poor, with globalization and with its own past, are discussed and understood'. Scholars should be aware that consumption is 'not the sole interpretive and experiential framework of India's middle-class subjects' (2011: 9).

These warnings are pertinent. Furthermore, it is important not to lose sight of the hard economic realities of consumption. As David Parker observed, 'a class defined by lifestyle ... was more than ever at the mercy of the ups and downs of the market' (2013: 14). Maureen O'Dougherty (2002: 22) has analysed how in Brazil in the 1990s not only working class, but also middle-class households were obliged 'to dedicate enormous amounts of time and concern to money' and to develop shopping and stockpiling strategies that could mitigate the effects of inflation rates of 2,000 per cent and more. Deborah James (2012; 2014) has drawn attention to the massive levels of indebtedness, with often very high interest rates, into which South Africans, and particularly the 'upwardly mobile and fast-growing African middle class', have been drawn in recent years. The 'black diamonds', as they are sometimes jokingly called, borrow considerable sums of money, not so much in order to acquire 'flashy goods and branded clothes', but to invest in higher education, marriage and bride wealth, and funerals (James 2012: 20). The (re)distributional effects of borrowing and lending have increasingly become a policy concern, not only in South Africa, but in many other countries as well. The importance of consumption for middle-class lifestyles, then, can have important political ramifications and even contribute to the overt politicization of this group that is usually believed to defend 'political moderation and social conformity' (Walker 2013: 8).

Middle-class sociability and politics That the multiple challenges and anxieties of middle-class lives congeal into collective concerns and inspire political debate and activities has an important condition, namely the emergence of spaces of communication and sociability beyond the household. The media obviously play an important role in creating shared middle-class agendas.

Just as important is face-to-face communication. It may occur in informal circles of friends who regularly meet in private homes or in public places such as cinemas and theatres, cafés, bars or churches, as well as in more formal, institutionalized clubs or voluntary associations. Some of the studies of middle-class consumption practices discussed above actually explore urban youth cultures and examine how new norms, lifestyles and political visions are negotiated among peers and friends. Rachel Spronk (2012), for instance, has accompanied Kenyan young professionals in their leisure-time activities. Nicholas Nisbett has followed a group of young middle-class male friends in internet cafés in an Indian city and observed how they develop a collective sense of proper middle-class lives and fine social distinctions by constantly circulating ‘shared moral narratives’ on gender relations, consumption, work and class status (2007: 944). Sociability of married middle-class men and women seems to take place more in clubs and voluntary associations – or at least this is where scholars have studied it. Voluntary associations help to create middle-class networks that can be useful in many ways, including individual professional advancement. Furthermore, such associations often also have charity schemes and development projects for the ‘grassroots’ on their agenda. Such commitment to the common good of society may help to justify middle-class privilege in the face of redistributive expectations of poorer relatives (Lentz 1995: 407–13). At the same time, it may develop into political projects that challenge ruling elites and suggest reforms towards a more inclusive and egalitarian order based on achievement and merit rather than ‘undeserved’ privilege.

In his study of the African middle class’s struggle in colonial Zimbabwe for more spacious, modern and secure housing, quality education, bourgeois domesticity and respect from the white settlers, Michael West (2002) has convincingly shown how informal sociability as well as a rich associational life laid the foundations of what became an increasingly militant nationalist movement.¹³ Propagating the ‘foundational creed of “equal rights for all civilized men”’, the educated black activists first hoped to improve their situation within a framework of ‘racial partnership’. However, the ‘failure of [their] historic quest for nonracial meritocracy’ eventually led the Zimbabwean African middle class ‘to the conclusion that the advancement of its collective interests required taking power from white settlers’ (2002: 239). The struggle for political independence, in turn, required broadening the social base of the movement. What had begun as an interracial middle-class reform project thus developed into black popular nationalism that downplayed distinctions of class.

The Alliance for Progress, John F. Kennedy’s aid programme for Latin America after World War II, was premised on the idea that the middle class ‘could fulfill a moderating, modernizing, democratizing role,’ and many members of this class were indeed quite aware of these expectations and

‘embraced middleclassness as a badge of honor and a source of distinction’ (Parker 2013: 5, 4). In the 1970s, however, middle-class reformism abated, and middle-class politicians instead turned to the armed forces to defend their interests against an increasingly radical working class ‘clamoring for the very same rights and privileges that the middle class has so recently and precariously won’ (Parker 2013: 9). In the times of economic instability in post-1970s Mexico, middle-class citizens were increasingly afraid of ‘losing class status’ and took to the streets in order to demand government policies protecting their investments in education, housing and employment (Walker 2013: 14). As Göran Therborn (2012: 18) has put it, ‘there is nothing inherently democratic about the middle class. ... It is “situationally” (opportunistically) democratic – or anti-democratic’. Whether this is also true for the recent middle-class political activism in the 2011 Arab Spring is controversial. In any case, middleclassness can support a broad spectrum of political orientations. At the same time, the political uses of the term middle class in public discourse is often ‘infused with heavy doses of mythology and moralizing’ (Parker 2013: 16). This, in turn, plays an important role in amalgamating the heterogeneous ‘middle sectors’ into a self-conscious, albeit politically heterogeneous social formation.

New themes: the role of the state, ascriptive differences and the transnational dimension of middle-class formation Most fields of enquiry discussed so far can also be discovered in research on European and American middle-class formation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, contemporary scholarship on middle classes in the Global South has also discerned several novel themes that may even raise new questions for studies of older middle-class histories: (1) the role of the state in the making and breaking of the middle classes; (2) the importance of regional, ethnic, and religious differences in the formation of a national middle class; and (3) the transnational dimension of middle-class trajectories.

- 1 With regard to relations between the state and the contemporary middle classes in the Global South, most researchers would concur that even though neoliberal policies have provoked ‘a certain disengagement of the middle classes from the project of the developmentalist state ... a majority of middle-class households still depend – directly or indirectly – on services and opportunities provided by the public sector’ (Donner and Neve 2011: 15). The public sector was, and often continues to be, one of the major employers of upwardly mobile educated men and women. At least the ‘old’ middle classes, formed during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, emerged precisely from among state employees and were often key actors in nationalist projects. But even currently, public servants still form a sizeable group in middle-class formations in the Global South.

Furthermore, middle-class economic and social trajectories were, and continue to be, significantly affected by governmental policies with respect to taxes, inheritance laws, credit, social services, and so forth. Particularly the educational system, still one of the most important sites that (re)produces social status and class membership, is usually regarded as a major responsibility of the state; the costs of higher education, for instance, have an immediate effect on middle-class parents' capacity to provide their children with the minimal requirements for middle-class careers. Members of the middle class thus have vested interests in how, by whom, and to whose benefit the state offers its services. The question of middle-class 'capture' of the state has been debated extensively and controversially with regard to the future of the welfare state in the Global North since the 1980s (Bertram 1988), and is now beginning to make its way into scholarly discussions of the global middle classes. 'Capture' can mean that state-provided benefits are disproportionately beneficial to, and appropriated by, members of the middle class; it can also imply the argument that the very policies concerning education, social security, and other welfare provisions are strongly influenced by middle-class interests. However, it seems that there are not, as yet, many examples of straightforward 'state capture' by the middle classes. On the contrary, at least for a number of African as well as Southeast Asian states, one would rather have to speak of authoritarianism, patrimonial rule, and state capture by the 'elites' and upper classes, with considerable rates of political disengagement by the middle classes (Welsh 2008: 57–60; Melber 2013).

Much seems to depend on the specific empirical cases that researchers have in mind when embarking on general statements. Some scholars even regard 'state privileging of middle-class subjects' as a strategic project of 'booster states' that aim at coordinating 'class containment' (Heiman, Freeman and Lietchy 2012: 18, 15). Like Don Kalb (2014), Rachel Heiman, Carla Freeman and Mark Liechty believe that the 'states' promotion of middleclassness, with the (false) notion that a majority of people belong to this category, is in part to dispel class tensions between working and capitalist classes' (2012: 17). At the same time, these anthropologists concede that in some cases, 'middle-class politics may represent progressive political agency' (2012: 26). In any case, as these different strands of discussion and competing arguments show, the middle classes' relationship with the state is becoming an important field of (ethnographic) enquiry.

- 2 Questions of race and ethnicity have rarely been addressed by research on nineteenth-century middle-class formations, but new studies on their role with regard to contemporary middle classes in the Global South suggest that ethnic (and linguistic) homogeneity may have been an important pre-condition for the formation of nineteenth-century middle-class culture. In the Global South, ethno-regional origins and race have often determined access to educational institutions and thus access to more lucrative employment and other kinds of economic capital. Class status thus regularly implies, or is even built on,

ascriptive differences. In South Africa under Apartheid, for instance, the black middle class's position in the social hierarchy was mitigated by the colour bar (e.g. Kuper 1965; Seekings 2008); even the current middle-class status of black corporate managers can be significantly influenced by their backgrounds in poorer black neighbourhoods (Modisha 2007).

Case studies on India have explored how caste and religion are articulated with the emergence of the middle class(es). C. J. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan (2014), for instance, show how Indian Hindus translated Brahman caste status into middle-class lifestyles and, more generally, how caste and class have intersected in Indian history. Donner and De Neve (2011: 10), too, have argued that 'persistent identities of caste, religion, language and region are... central to the formulation of contemporary middleclassness in India' – and, one could add, to many other nation-states of the Global South.

Mary Kay Vaughan (2012) has interpreted such 'traditional' cultural identifications as expressions of the deep anxiety that 'modernity' breeds everywhere. Not all scholars would attribute the persistence of apparently older distinctions and memberships to the existential challenges of modernity that may engender a growing nostalgia for a (re-imagined) past. Some would argue that continued, and even revitalized, membership in cross-class institutions such as kin networks, caste, religious communities, or ethnic associations remain relevant to middle-class lives for rather pragmatic reasons, for instance, because state provision of social security and welfare remains inadequate, or because non-middle class kin and peers exert pressure by forcing obligations on their middle-class brethren. However, all would agree that it is necessary to examine more closely how class is articulated with these other identifications and memberships.

- 3 These aspects, finally, are closely linked to the question of how transnational, national and local spaces of middle-class formation and reproduction intersect. What seems clear is that globally circulating concepts of middleclassness play an important role in contemporary middle-class formation. Furthermore, through global migration and migrants' remittances, transnationally generated income has come to play a crucial role in the making of national middle classes. At the same time, middle-class boundary work may transcend national borders, and those 'above', 'in the middle', or 'below' may no longer necessarily reside in the same locality or country. Mark Liechty has proposed the concept of 'interjacency' to capture these complex intersections between space and class, arguing that the 'interjacency of class communities occurs less and less *within* localities or even nations and more and more *across* national borders and even hemispheres' (2012: 276). However, as Liechty concedes, such global class geo-graphies (+) may well coexist with more local forms of middle-class boundary work. Indeed, in most studies on contemporary middle classes that I have consulted, the nation-state still seems to constitute the most important framework within which people negotiate their own place in society, and imagine a desirable, just

social order. Nevertheless, it is imperative to pay attention to the transnational dimensions of these negotiations and imaginations.

Challenges of future research on African middle classes

What are the lessons of this review of existing studies for future research on African middle classes? In what follows, I will first make some suggestions on how concepts of elite and middle class may be further developed in order to enhance fruitful empirical research. Secondly, I will discuss whether we can discern any specific continental or regional patterns of middle-class formation. Third, I want to ask what specific challenges social dynamics and life-worlds in Africa may hold for using middle-class concepts that have been developed for rather different historical configurations. I will conclude by claiming that studies of social stratification in Africa may contribute to problematize conventional class categories, develop a more nuanced understanding of middle-class formation and thus enrich social theory in general, far beyond Africa.

Conceptual issues: elite, upper class and/or middle class? In African studies, elite has been the most widely used term in order to describe highly educated and relatively affluent men and women working as politicians, in the public service, the free professions, and, occasionally, as entrepreneurs, traders, or businessmen. The debate on class in the 1970s and 1980s concerned rather the lower end of the social scale, discussing whether a working class was emerging. If the term class was applied to the upper echelons of society, then mostly with an interest in the close connections between political office and the accumulation of wealth, speaking of a ‘ruling class’ or ‘state class’, rather than more generally an ‘upper class’. After the 1980s, research on class generally went out of fashion. Instead, scholars focused on lines of division and allegiance created by regionalism, ethnicity or religion. Some continued to be interested in questions of social stratification and explored ethnicity as an arena for debates about inequality and redistribution (e.g. Lonsdale 1996). Others concentrated on intra-ethnic patron–client relations as instruments of gaining access to, and justifying, wealth and political power (e.g. Schatzberg 1993; Daloz 2003). When these scholars addressed questions of social inequality, they would invoke the concept of elite rather than (upper) class.

Currently, we are witnessing the re-emergence of class on the scholarly agenda, in African studies as elsewhere – a development that seems to reflect the recent economic growth, resulting in increasing social inequality on the whole and an unprecedented expansion of middle-income groups. Some scholars of Africa continue to speak of elites, even when referring to members of these ‘middling sorts’, while others reconfigure their studies under the heading of ‘middle class’. Which windows do the different concepts open on the societies under study, and what working definitions may be useful for future research?

With regard to elites, I observed that scholars of Africa have used the concept in two different ways: on the one hand, as a key term in the analysis of the functional differentiation of society, and, on the other hand, as a cornerstone of the study of social inequality and vertical stratification. This twofold usage often went hand in hand with a problematic mixing of descriptive and normative perspectives. Furthermore, some scholars tended to focus on the elites as powerful, influential individuals, while others examined elites as quasi-corporate groups, held together by family ties, friendships and other informal networks. I would suggest that for future research, it may be useful to adopt some tenets of 'functional elites' approaches. This would imply a rather restricted definition of elite, understanding elites as individuals in leading positions in the political sphere or other societal fields with regular influence on decision-making that affects larger groups. It would keep questions of management roles ('elites') and social origins ('class') conceptually separate. Focusing on 'elites' helps to address questions of agency and leadership as well as the associated discourses of legitimating power, as George Marcus (1983) has convincingly argued. However, the concept is not so useful, I would argue, for an analysis of social stratification. As John Scott (2008) has insisted, the question of in which social strata the holders of management and leadership positions are being recruited is, at least in principle, an empirically open one, and the term elite should therefore not automatically be associated with upper or upper middle class.

My preference for a rather 'functionalist' definition of elites, and for keeping questions of their social recruitment conceptually separate, pertains, of course, only to the analytical use of the term. As a concept used in social and political practice, scholars will still need to be sensitive to the broad range of meanings that social actors and policy-makers may associate with the term elite. In any case, I suggest that the study of elites, in the sense outlined above, can and should be combined with class analysis (or other approaches to social stratification).

Class is a comprehensive and relational concept, and most class theories would assume that the entire society is divided into classes. To speak of a middle class therefore entails positing the existence of other classes, such as upper, lower or working class. Classes and class boundaries, however, do 'not exist ready-made in reality', as Wacquant (1992: 57) has put it, but 'must be constituted through material and symbolic struggles waged simultaneously over class and between classes.' Furthermore, despite the continuing debate on the precise weight of economic and non-economic factors, the concept of class always invokes economic standing, social status, and similar distinctions that are not determined by biological criteria. Finally, membership in classes is usually thought of as relatively permanent, comprising not only individuals, but the entire family or at least the household, and, incidences of individual mobility notwithstanding, as being transmitted to the next generation.

Methodologically, the concept of class can be employed in three different ways. First, class can be used as a taxonomic or analytical concept, ‘from an external vantage point to describe the make-up of society and to analyze social process’ (Goldstein 2005: 89). Secondly, class may be understood as a bundle of social practices that may or may not be conscious, but that create and mark differences between social groups, in other words: an embodied and experiential sense of class. Thirdly, the concept of class can imply conscious self-identification and become part of a ‘social imaginary’ (Castoriadis 1987); class then works as a discursive construction and political language that certain groups in society use in order to define their social position and interests and further their projects of social order (Furbank 1985; Somers 1992). As the case studies on the middle classes discussed in this chapter have shown, these three understandings may be combined, and some scholars would question whether it makes sense to speak of middle classes if only the first, but none of the other two dimensions are present.

All theories of social stratification and class have to address, in one way or another, the question of in which ways the observers’ categories engage with, or disregard, the social actors’ self-categorizations. However, this issue seems particularly acute in the case of the middle class for which self-confident social ‘boundary work’ is often regarded as a defining characteristic. Personally, I would argue in favour of a fairly wide understanding of middle class(es) as social formations that can embrace a broad variety of socio-economic situations and lifestyles. At the same time, I would agree that some element of conscious ‘inbetweenness’ and active ‘boundary work’ is necessary in order to transform a socio-economic category of people into a middle class. Some scholars have suggested that middle class should best be understood as an ‘aspirational category’ that is increasingly used because ‘middle-class membership becomes a powerful, life-altering goal for many of those poised on the margins’ (Heiman, Freeman and Lietchy 2012: 19). In this perspective, the term middle class would imply a normative dimension, premised on aspirations of social mobility through education, diligent work and achievement, and on certain ideals of professionalism, domestic life, and, more generally, respectability. Research on the middle classes should indeed explore why and how such normative discourses become an attractive means of positioning oneself and expressing one’s social aspirations. At the same time, however, if middle class is to serve as an analytical term that enables historical and transnational comparison, some ‘hard’ criteria regarding education, occupation, and income will also have to enter the definition.

However, the heterogeneity of the social strata thus grouped by scholars, or grouped by the actors themselves, under the umbrella term ‘middle class’ is impressive, both in Africa and elsewhere. It constitutes a challenge for any classical ‘groupist’ and totalizing understanding of class. Members of the

middle class may indeed share some supposedly distinctive values and practices with non-middle class groups, and they exhibit such a range of different lifestyles that the idea of shared class membership may appear spurious. Some researchers have therefore suggested to complement, if not altogether replace, the concept of (middle) class with that of social milieu, as the latter seems to allow for a more nuanced analysis of such heterogeneity (Otte and Rössel 2011). When social milieus are understood along the lines of class concepts, as comprehensive, consistent and long-term formations, however, they would still not be able to capture the fluidity and flexibility that middle-class biographies and life-worlds typically exhibit. This is why Dieter Neubert, for instance, has suggested that for the analysis of social stratification in African societies, it would be useful to complement the idea of ‘macro milieus’ with a concept of ‘micro milieus’; the latter embracing only certain aspects of people’s lives, and allowing for multiple memberships, that is: people can simultaneously belong to various of these ‘part-time lifeworlds’ (2014: 31; also Neubert and Stoll 2015).

Whether milieu concepts, macro, micro, or combinations of both, will indeed be able to inspire theoretically convincing and empirically rich analyses of contemporary African societies remains to be seen. In any case, I would argue that we should (also) retain the concept of middle class, not least precisely because it forces us to examine the ways in which it has become such a powerful resource in social and political practice. I would suggest, however, that the analytical concept may need to be developed further by infusing it with elements of practice-theoretical approaches to the politics of difference (Hirschauer 2014). Rogers Brubaker’s (2004) critique of the naive reproduction of ethnic ‘groupism’ by social scientists can fruitfully be extended to social classes. Instead of thinking of classes as large social groups to which one and one’s family belong (or not), it seems more useful to explore social dynamics in terms of ‘doing being middle class’, as bundles of discourses and performances that can, in specific situations or even over longer periods, be mobilized or demobilized, emphasized or de-emphasized.

Different trajectories of middle-class formation and the question of ‘African exceptionalism’ In how far do the findings from research on the global middle classes allow us to discern specific trajectories of middle-class formation? Do certain historical configurations give rise to particular types of middle classes? Are such configurations likely to differ according to continents or regions, or should we rather develop typologies across geographical boundaries? Is there anything specific to the emerging middle classes in Africa, or more specifically: regions or groups of states within Africa, that distinguishes them from middle classes in other parts of the world? Are contemporary middle-class trajectories so closely tied to global economic conjunctures, and transnationally circulating policy discourses, that it will be more useful to

distinguish between different periods of class formation than between specific regional configurations? I would like to point to some issues that future discussions of these questions may take into account.

To begin with, we need much more research on African middle classes in order to have a sound empirical base for global comparisons. Taking clues from research on the history and contemporary development of middle classes in other parts of the Global South, the following lines of enquiry suggest themselves:

- 1 Since the middle class is a social formation particularly concerned with 'in-betweenness' and boundary work, how have the 'others' above and below against which it defines itself changed over time? How have the politics of distinction changed with the transition from colonial to the post-colonial regimes and in the contemporary context of increasing transnational migration and a new international division of labour?
- 2 Historically, the middle classes in Europe (and some other parts of the globe) were characterized by a conflict-ridden, but powerful association of 'economic' and 'intellectual' segments, uniting, among others, entrepreneurs, businessmen, managers, professionals, artists, and public servants in a shared 'bourgeois culture'. What is the composition of the established and the new African middle classes, and how do they relate to each other? How are the 'nouveaux riches', often with lower educational credentials, regarded by more established and highly educated, but perhaps less affluent professionals? To what extent do the various middle-class segments share sociability and, for instance, intermarry?
- 3 The middle class, both historically and contemporarily, is premised on certain ideas of modernity and values of individualism, work, merit, and achievement, usually associating respectability with modest demeanour rather than conspicuous consumption (although the latter may be contested by the 'new rich'). How does this play out among African middle classes? Are middle-class ideals of, for instance, the internationally adept businessman or the renowned professional eventually supplanting the dominant model of the wealthy and ostentatiously redistributing politician?

These are just some open questions, and the list of desiderata could certainly be extended. With regard to future comparative research, it is useful to recall Jürgen Kocka's (2004) convincing attempt of developing a historical typology of middle-class formation in nineteenth-century Europe, based on specific combinations of and alliances between the 'intellectual' and the 'economic' bourgeoisie. It could be rewarding to develop similar comparisons for current middle-class formation in the Global South. One important element could be the type of capitalism, or more broadly: economic system, in which the middle class develops. It seems that post-socialist and still strongly state-controlled economies offer a different framework than countries and regions with more

established liberal capitalism, or with recent neoliberal policies. A second element would certainly be the role of the state. There seem to be considerable variations in the role that state employment plays in the composition of the middle classes, with important consequences for political orientations. At the same time, the scope of services that states offer, ranging from social welfare to education and general security, may greatly affect the degree to which class boundaries may become tighter or remain porous. Middle-class formation may take on a rather different shape where ethnic loyalties beyond class membership remain relevant because the state cannot provide peace and security, or where family networks across class boundaries have to complement or substitute lacking state provision of social security. Developing comparisons along these lines may effectively run counter any stereotypical idea of 'African exceptionalism'.

Research on Africa and theorizations of class There are a number of challenges that existing research on African elites and middle classes has revealed and that future studies will have to confront. These challenges result, not least, from unresolved tensions that are intrinsic to class concepts in general, but become particularly obvious when these are employed in the analysis of African societies. At the same time, I would suggest, these challenges bear innovative potential beyond African studies as they encourage researchers to develop more nuanced understandings of middle-class formation and social stratification in complex societies in general.

Conventionally, class is understood as an enduring membership that embraces all aspects of life. When looking at typical biographies of educated and well-to-do Africans, however, one may ask whether belonging to the middle class necessarily involves all domains of life and the entire life course. Could not someone be 'middle class' for most of his working life, while living in an urban environment, but behave as a traditionalist elder, appreciating rather different values and styles of consumption after retirement to his home region, or even during his regular visits to the natal village? Similarly, could he or she not participate in rather different circles of sociability even when living in the city, by, for instance, belonging to an employees' union, a posh tennis club, a Catholic lodge, and a popular ethnic association at the same time? How do such multiple loyalties and different registers of behaviour affect class membership and styles of middleclassness?

Similar questions arise from the relationship of class and family relations. Conventionally, social classes are considered as comprising not individuals, but households and families. But what does this mean, for instance, for African first-generation middle-class men who married less educated or illiterate village women? How large a section of the family needs to be included to allow individuals or couples to lead middle-class lifestyles? How does solidarity

within extended kin networks that crosscut class boundaries affect middle-class lives, and what does this mean for social mobility? How do state regulations affect the intergenerational transmission of social status and resources, and how does this interact with the transfer of resources and liabilities between (kin) related persons and households? In any case, particularly among recent social climbers, we often find ‘multi-class’ households and families. Furthermore, class positions may change in the course of a lifetime, depending on demographic, economic and other contingent developments, and on the mitigating effects of social security systems. Research on the formation and reproduction of middle classes thus needs to pay attention to both individual biographical, family and historical time, and their complex interrelations (Hareven 1977).

Finally, moving from the individual and his family to the wider social formation, we should ask which reference group or framework becomes relevant, and when, in middle-class boundary work. Class theories tended, and still tend, to take the nation-state as the self-evident framework in which to study social stratification. However, both historical and contemporary African examples remind us that class formation may have important subnational as well as transnational dimensions. Most African countries are characterized by pronounced regional and ethnic heterogeneity. This has important consequences for the rhythm of social change, which may occur unevenly across a country, opening specific windows of opportunity or disadvantage at different times in different regions. National and regional criteria of what constitutes middle-class status may therefore differ – if we concede that class distinctions can at all be defined within a regional framework. To what extent, then, are regional trajectories of social stratification eventually synchronized, and can we observe the formation of comprehensive national middle classes? In what ways do sub-national horizontal memberships and loyalties, organized around locality, region, ethnicity or religion, defy, intersect with, or drive the emergence of national middle classes? How and to what degree have the different segments of national middle classes developed a shared culture (ideals of family life, standards of worthiness and respectability, patterns of consumption) and a common public sphere?

With regard to the transnational dimension, we may ask what role the involvement in global flows of resources and images plays for middle-class formation. To what extent, for instance, can educational achievements and material resources acquired abroad be converted into social status back home, and how do they impact social inequality and class membership within a nation-state? What reference groups for class status become relevant in transnational family networks, or among highly mobile professionals participating in global social circles? In what ways are the aspirations of African middle classes inspired by global discourses on middleclassness and imaginaries of middle-class lives?

As Donner and De Neve (2011: 8) have suggested, it is productive to ‘substitute the question of what constitutes the middle class... in favour of an exploration of when, where, how and why being middle-class becomes an option, a possibility, desirable or a problem’. Such an open perspective on how, when and why people ‘do being middle class’ will provide an important corrective on all too reified and deterministic theorizations of class. At the same time, I would argue that we must go further and integrate this into more rigorous analytical conceptions of class.

And yet, the analytical difficulty of defining middle classes lies, not least, in one of their characteristics. Much more than other class cultures, middle-classness seems to embody not only actual socio-economic achievements and actually practiced lifestyles, but desires and aspirations; it is as much a bundle of lived social practices as a project that many embrace although they may lack ‘the symbolic and economic capital needed to realize it in a lasting manner’ (Donner and De Neve 2011: 13). In any case, middle class is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to a socio-economic category, a cultural world, and a political discourse. It remains to be seen what further research on African middle classes can contribute both to the knowledge of social stratification and its dynamics on the ground and to the theoretical instruments of scholarly analysis.

Notes

1 A sabbatical stay in 2012–13 at the International Research Center ‘Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History’, Humboldt University, Berlin, allowed me to explore the wide range of relevant literature that forms the basis of this article. Another round of literature review and the write-up of an extended working paper were greatly facilitated by a stay at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg, Institute for Advanced Study, Delmenhorst, in spring 2015. I thank Andrea Behrends, Jan Budniok, Jürgen Kocka, Anna Paretskaya, Katja Rieck and Uwe Schimank for their helpful comments on the manuscript. For a fuller version of my discussion of elite and class theories as well as empirical studies of historical and contemporary middle classes, see Lentz (2015).

2 The debate was first broadcast on 28 June 2013, and was accessible online until June 2014: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01b35m7 (last accessed 24 September 2013).

3 See African Development Bank (2011). For a critique of such simplistic economic definitions of middle class, see Melber (2013).

4 With regard to the policy makers’ interest in the global middle classes, see for instance Easterly (2001) and Ravallion (2009). See Heiman, Freeman and Lietchy (2012) and López and Weinstein (2012) for recent anthropological and historical research on middle classes worldwide.

5 For a useful critical overview, see Darbon and Toulabour (2011).

6 So far, the emerging anthropology of middle classes has taken little notice of the existing anthropology of elites, and vice versa. See, for example, on elites Shore and Nugent (2002) and Abbink and Salverda (2013); on classes in general Carrier and Kalb (2015), and on middle classes in particular Heiman, Freeman and Lietchy (2012) and López and Weinstein (2012); these works do not take note of each other’s existence.

7 For reasons of space, I cannot include a discussion of the history and contemporary development of middle classes in the Global North in this chapter; but see Kocka (2004), Budde (2009), Mau (2015), and Lentz (2015: 19–24) for overviews and references.

8 For an overview see Behrends and Pauli (2013).

9 Interestingly, in the mid-1950s, there were both an international conference on middle classes in ‘tropical and sub-tropical countries’, and a UNESCO-sponsored symposium on African elites (see INCIDI 1956, and UNESCO 1956); it was only after the publication of Lloyd (1966) that the term elite became much more widespread than middle (or upper) class.

10 There are, of course, also numerous works that simply apply a political-economy class terminology in their discussion of social inequality and poverty in Africa without any discussion of the suitability of their categories; see, for instance, Nafzinger (1988). For an overview of studies from the 1960s and 1970s on ‘African bourgeoisies’, see Allen and Williams (1982: 161–202).

11 See, for instance, the study of Bossuroy and Cogneau (2008) on social mobility in five African countries.

12 For pertinent case studies see, for instance, Dinan (1977), Stichter (1988), Fuest (1996), Behrends (2002), and Okeke-Iherijika (2004).

13 For a similar case of the politicisation in voluntary associations, including particularly football associations, among the South African black middle class during the 1950s and 1960s, see Kuper (1965: 309–387).

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2 | Human development and the construction of middle classes in the Global South

Tim Stoffel

Growing middle classes¹ in the developing world have attracted rising attention. Reports by various international organizations that showcase economic and even human development in developing countries, have prominently picked up the topic. These reports contain estimates about the size and the growth of middle classes and even present projections of their development. This trend is based on an increasing body of academic literature that deals with the rise of middle classes in the developing world as a whole, as well as middle classes in specific country contexts; also media reports were picking up the numbers. This discourse provokes three main questions. First, how are these numbers calculated? Second, what conclusions and projections have been derived from them. And third, do they have some actual explanatory power?

Middle classes in the Global South: high hopes and raw measurement

Most definitions set the lower threshold for middle classes at the upper poverty line of the World Bank of US\$2 a day PPP across countries and continents, and most studies describing middle classes or analysing aspects of them focus on these so defined income groups. Banerjee and Duflo (2007: 4) regard an income span from US\$2 to US\$13 as representing middle classes across countries in their comparative consumption study, even though they note that '[t]hese households are still very poor by developed country standards'. One has to add that people at the lower range of that span are also poor by standards of the so-called developing countries. Critique of income as a means to measure and define poverty questions if people or households above this line can be considered no longer poor, let alone be counted as middle class. Pogge (2010: 68) argues that the international poverty lines provided by the World Bank are not sufficient to provide people with the subsistence minimum.

Numerous income spans for defining middle classes in the developing world are being discussed. The arbitrariness of the different thresholds has been criticized most prominently by Sumner (2012: 5), Birdsall (2010: 7) and also Ravallion who reviews a number of studies, which tried to define middle classes on a cross-country level. The assumption that 'middle class living standards begin when poverty ends' (Ravallion 2010: 446) includes all people

in the middle class who are not poor according to the median of the national poverty lines of 70 developing countries, which lies at US\$2 per day at 2005 PPP. While using the US-poverty line, of US\$13 a day, as the upper threshold, he also classifies people in any developing country with consumption from US\$9 to US\$13 per day at 2005 PPP as not poor. Thus he nonetheless suggests a definition based on income or consumption, which mirrors most of the approaches to middle classes in developing studies. There are also arguments made for definitions of middle classes that are starting at even higher thresholds, like Birdsall (2010) and Kharas (2010) who both set the lower threshold for middle classes at US\$10 a day, and suggest rather high upper thresholds. Kharas (2010) uses an absolute definition and draws the upper line at US\$100 a day. There are many attempts to quantify middle classes on a global scale following such quantitative definitions based on income/consumption per day per person. The UNDP's Human Development Report 2013 uses the data gathered and published by the Brookings Institute, based on the definition of middle class, among others, by its Deputy Director Kharas (Kaufmann, Kharas and Penciakova 2012), resulting in the stunning figures of 1.8 billion people worldwide belonging to the middle classes, 58 per cent located in the Global South, with only 2 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2013: 14). Based on Ravallion's rather narrow but low starting scope of US\$2 to US\$13, between 1990 and 2005 '1.2 billion people joined the developing world's middle class' (Ravallion 2010: 452), while only 100 million people reached the middle class status with an income above US\$9 per day (Ravallion 2010: 453). The African Development Bank (AfDB) uses an even more differentiated definition, with three 'classes': The 'poor class' living from under US\$2 a day, the 'floating class' US\$2 to US\$4, the 'middle class' living from US\$4 to US\$20, and the 'rich class' with an income/consumption of more than US\$20 a day (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011: 3), following the division also used by the Asian Development Bank (2010: 3). At the beginning of the report, floating class and middle class are not being distinguished and therefore nearly 350 million people or 34 per cent of Africa's population are counted as middle class, not without mentioning that 60 per cent of those people 'remain barely out of poverty' (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011: 1). Using those more detailed subdivisions, the AfDB report shows awareness to some of the critique of classifications, by communicating limitations like the unlikelihood of a direct switch from poor to middle class by passing the US\$2 line in daily income and by raising questions about the vulnerability of the lower parts of the income distributions among the middle classes and assuming a greater security for people with a daily income above the floating class not to fall back into poverty (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011: 2). However, the report still praises the changes that will come with this shift in the income distribution and therefore with the new middle classes, despite the

notion of Birdsall (2010: 2), also cited in the report for her relative definition of middle class, who regards middle classes more as an ‘output’ of growth and democratic development than as an ‘input’. However, the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2013: 106) views middle class as an ‘essential driver of the economic development process’. The organization included ‘estimates of employment by economic class’ (ILO 2013: 106) as a category in their reports, based on the work of Kapsos and Bourmpoula (2013). The overview compiles absolute definitions for middle classes in developing countries, together with their subdivisions and the derived estimates for the extent of middle classes.

	Thresholds (US\$ in PPP)	Subdivisions	Derived estimates
ADB (2010)	US\$2–20	Lower middle class US\$2–4, Middle middle class US\$4–10, Upper middle class US\$10–20	56 per cent of developing Asia’s population, 1.9 billion people
AfDB (2011)	US\$2–20	Floating class US\$2–4, Lower middle class US\$4–10, Upper middle class US\$10–20	34 per cent of Africa’s population, nearly 350 million people
ILO² (2013)	US\$4–13	Middle class worker US\$4–13, Above middle class workers >US\$13 ³	40 per cent of the developing world’s workforce (for 2011)
UNDP⁴ (2013)	US\$10–100	-	1.8 billion people, 58 per cent in the Global South (for 2009)
Banerjee and Duflo (2007)	US\$2–10	US\$2–4 and US\$6–10 PPP	Cross-regional study with 13 developing countries
Ravallion (2010)	US\$2–13	US\$9–13 not be considered poor in any developing country	26 per cent of population in SSA and 48.5 per cent worldwide (US\$2–13) (for 2005)
Birdsall (2010)	US\$10–95th percentile	Combines absolute and relative definitions	-

Overview: Definitions of middle classes in the developing world based on income/consumption

At least four observations can be made; first, there is a growing body of academic literature about middle classes in the so-called developing world. Second, the focus of this literature is foremost statistically and deals with income and consumption data. Third, for most of the definitions middle classes

begin with US\$ 2 or US\$4 a day and therefore at a low or even the lowest level possible. Fourth, a growing number of organizations use these definitions and the numbers based on them to assess the extent of middle classes and to predict societal shifts.

Speculations on the nature of middle classes

Targeting the poor, especially those that are easy to access, may help to push people above the poverty line while those deeper in poverty or affected by multiple dimensions of poverty or living in chronic poverty do not experience change and social mobility by those upswings. While criticizing and arguing over the inaccuracy of these numbers, one should not overlook the bigger problem of missing significance and sufficiency in explaining societal shifts or social mobility by those models. Statistics showing the rise of middle classes in developing countries are the same used to display the fight against poverty as a success. They are following and therefore reproducing the dominant ‘measurement approach’ to poverty (Harriss 2007: 13). Transcribing the same, largely criticized, approaches to define and measure poverty to another societal phenomenon, depicted as the rise of middle classes in the developing world, leads to similar problems as are already described, analysed and criticized within the research about poverty in international development. Most of the definitions in the recent discourse use levels of income or expenditure to define middle classes in a purely economic sense and at a level that does not allow for ‘a lifestyle and social status that qualifies as middle class even in African societies’ (Melber 2015: 249). Contestable numbers and insufficient differentiation from poverty undermine potential value of the concept assuming a global middle class in the developing world for explaining or predicting social mobility and societal changes. That leads to the question if there is any explanatory power in the whole concept of ascribing the term middle class(es) to economic strata across societies defined purely by income or consumption.

But the literature considers middle classes as indicators for future economic and human development. The AfDB sees them as a ‘key source for private sector growth’ (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011: 1). Ravallion’s statistical approaches to understand different developments in poverty reduction across developing countries lead to the conclusion that a ‘larger middle class by developing country standards – but not Western standards – promotes economic growth in developing countries’ (Ravallion 2009: 23). Easterly (1999: 8) already argued that societies with a ‘middle class consensus’ generate higher levels of income and growth. Ravallion and Easterly refer mainly to reduced poverty or a more equal distribution of income in a society to have a positive effect on growth. While Easterly takes it a step further, including ethnic divisions in combination with his definition of middle class as the middle three quintiles of the income distribution, he basically tries to show that

more homogenous societies, not strongly divided by ethnic or socio-economic conflict, are more prosperous than others. This proves less the central role of middle classes in developing countries to foster economic development but rather that inequality and high incidences of poverty present obstacles for future poverty reduction at any growth rate as Ravallion (2010: 452) describes in a later article. Ravallion concedes that the effects described could also be traced back to lower poverty rates (Ravallion 2009: 23). For him middle classes are a product of growth, but also a motor of growth (Ravallion 2010: 452). Despite the fact that this reciprocal correlation is not untypical for development processes, the latter is a mere assumption, based on the idea scholars have of middle classes in advanced economies.

Other researchers ascribe even more specific and complex roles to the middle classes. Carbonnier and Sumner (2012: 1) assume a 'pivotal role of the emerging middle classes ... in MICs', as domestic drivers necessary for tax reform and change in 'inequality, exclusion and redistribution' (Carbonnier and Sumner 2012: 9) to deal with poverty in middle income countries. At the same time, they refer to the unwillingness of the middle classes in Latin America to support redistribution through rising taxation. Elsewhere Sumner assesses the preferences of the non-poor towards redistribution as important for poverty reduction, especially in middle-income countries. He not only mentions 'little support among the more secure middle classes for paying more taxes' (Sumner 2012: 9), but also assumes that the majority of the broadly defined middle classes, under the US\$10 a day limit, may not be expected to generate significantly more revenue. A growing body of research undermines hopes of middle classes as magnifier of social development, social mobility and egalitarian democratic policies. Melber (2013: 116f.) gathers evidence for a possible tendency among 'more secure middle classes' in developing countries to even hinder more equal economical distribution, and is elsewhere quoting Baud, who concludes that middle classes in India do rather tend to marginalize the poor, and Biekart who sees the new middle classes in Argentina and Brazil already under pressure, which leads to self-centeredness (Melber 2015: 250). Neven, Odera and Reardon (2009) are already posing the question for side effects of the assumed societal shift towards growing middle classes. For example, whether middle class phenomena, like supermarkets and non-smallholder horticulture, have negative effects on smallholder farmers in Kenya. However, by combining value surveys with class affiliation, defined by income, Lopez-Calva, Rigolini and Torche (2011: 4) find middle classes in Latin American countries to share the idea that taxes are justified and should not be evaded. In addition, the authors also maintain that values change more between countries than between income or education (Lopez-Calva, Rigolini and Torche 2011: 14). These contradictory views do not only show how uncertain any predictions about the influence of middle classes on societies are but

also how middle class identity is taken as self-evident. While the academic view of middle classes in developing countries is mainly looking at strata defined by income and consumption, many of the works cited above treat them as social groups with shared values and acting on shared agendas. In a similar discussion about 'the poor' Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (2003: 140) conclude that these are 'more a statistical aggregate than a fully-fledged social group, with its own firmly articulated identity', arguing that 'the same dividing lines can be found amongst the poor as in society as a whole'. Therefore the hypothesis that the poor are a social group with common perceptions and interests is questionable.

Theories of class and the Global South

The term 'class' in middle classes just describes an economic strata within a society; many international institutions along with academic researchers publish assumptions and anticipations that refer to aspects of class that are rooted in a more ideological notion of class, entailing attributes such as group belonging and collective bargaining power that cannot solely be derived from income statistics. The notion of class usually entails its own academic discourse.

Works about social stratification and classes in Europe and the US tend to focus on qualitative and relational criteria, like ownership of property and occupation, as well as structural shifts within societies, whereas the analysis of middle classes in the recent discourse within development studies is concentrated on income or consumption. In his analysis of social stratification in the US, Kerbo (1991: 13) uses 'a person's position in the occupational structure, a person's position in authority structures ..., and a person's ownership of property' as main criteria to distinguish class divisions. This is an advanced position within the discourse, by integrating different criteria into the concept of class, as a reaction to the growing critique of the inaccuracy of definitions and the rising number of positions rejecting the idea of class altogether. Critique of class as an outdated concept to describe societies and socio-economic conflicts has been presented, among others, by Pakulski (2005: 154), who questions the 'classness' of social inequalities in post-industrial societies. Others assess class still as a valuable category, but suggest more detailed analysis of the employment structure, as 'the site of production no longer generates well-organized classes that academics and others can easily discern' (Grusky 2005: 51). This may also be true in lower income and lower-middle income countries, as the predominance of informal employment leads to a similar condition. However, discourses about middle classes in developing countries seem to ignore discourses about class in advanced economies and to work with a more rudiment version of the concept 'class' in the context of development studies. At the same time there are attempts to integrate other variables into the concept and measurement of middle classes in the

developing world, such as vulnerability, the inclusion of assets, health and education data, as well as employment.

Assets, in a conventional sense, as durable goods, as the term is used in the Multidimensional Poverty Index, for example, are treated as signifiers of human development and therefore of social mobility from poverty into middle classes. Ncube and Shimeles (2013: 3) use assets or wealth status, reported in the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for the African continent, including source of water, condition of housing and ownership of assets like television, radio, telephone, car, etc. to determine class. Schlogl and Sumner (2014: 11) suggest that '[c]hanging lifestyles and living standards are arguably better captured by assets than an income, or wellbeing, metric', and therefore add vehicle ownership as a category to identify middle classes. In their case study scooter ownership indicates class affiliation. It might be argued that within consumer societies, possession of or access to durable goods as well as to commodities in general has only limited value as signifier for class affiliation and social status. Wide distribution and intense use of mobile phones, also smartphones, and motor scooters, may be seen as signs of social uplifting of households and individuals as it is an improvement compared to the non-possession of those goods. However, as signifier of middle classes they also may fall short in explanatory power, as the sharp increase in mobile phone and also smartphone ownership in many countries in SSA shows. The need to search for new significant assets, to replace those now too widespread to allow any distinction in terms of social status or class, is one of the challenges. Even in the calculation of human deprivation and poverty within the Multidimensional Poverty Index assets, like radio, television and phones, account for only 6.25 per cent of the indicator.

Another defining criterion that is widely used in concepts of class in advanced economies as well as in attempts to define middle classes in developing countries is employment or occupation. Many concepts and definitions of class use the 'occupational structure' (Kerbo 1991: 13) or 'employment relations' (Goldthorpe and McKnight 2004: 1) as distinguishing criteria. In development studies employment is not used as a defining criterion but as an attribute compared across classes, defined by income. The nature of the jobs held by people in the middle classes is arguably more secure than other occupations and enables people to 'build ... their own careers and those of their children' (Banerjee and Duflo 2007: 21). That creates freedom to plan ahead. The AfDB market brief highlights that many people in the middle class are entrepreneurs due to booming private sectors while, at the same time, points out that 'stable employment' is the basis for larger middle class populations (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011: 14). Such a contradiction originates from a purely monetary definition that is blind to socio-economic factors. In developing countries, hopes for rising middle classes are often combined with hopes for

more formal employment, which would mean a growth in tax income and offer more social security and a rise in income as well. In fact, 'vulnerable employment' is particularly high in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa (ILO 2013: 93). I have shown elsewhere the problematic posed by employment statistics in developing countries to income-based definitions of middle classes with reference to Ghana, where a predominance of the informal economy results in high vulnerable employment and therefore in higher insecurity of individuals that are assumed to be middle class (Stoffel 2014: 9f.). However, Banerjee and Duflo (2010: 14f.) show that within the lower threshold of US\$2 to US\$4 within their definitions of middle class casual wage workers are predominant, while there are more regular wage workers in the upper threshold of US\$4 to US\$10. Missing employment options in many countries of SSA pose the question how a middle class can consolidate itself (Melber 2015: 248). From this follows that it could be more adequate to use employment as a defining aspect of class than income strata. Entrepreneurs, especially vendors etc., may face different problems as those in formal employment, which can be characterized with an assumingly decent and most importantly steady income, higher job security and security on the job, as well as social security. On the other hand, the distinction between formal and informal employment is foremost an act of labelling (Cooper 1996: 465f.), which leads to the possibility that there could be also informal jobs that provide some important aspects of formal employment. Aspects associated with formal employment are more relevant in defining class than the form of employment itself. This also applies to the definitions based on income strata.

The image of class in the context of development studies presents itself as depoliticized and is only concerned with the, mainly economic, definition of class or strata and the economic effects of class, as consumers and source of tax revenue. Ideas of class being collective actors are limited to vague notions about their positive influence on democratic development, without any mentioning of class struggle. The 'reality of class struggle' (Seddon and Zeilig 2005: 24) in Africa is no new research topic but largely unnoticed by the recent discourse about class. Introducing the human development paradigm into the discourse about rising middle classes in developing countries might shed a new light on the used definitions and approaches to class and end the process of depoliticization.

Middle classes and the human development and capabilities approach

Recent discourses about middle classes represent a fallback behind the 'Human Development Agenda', captured to some extent by the Millennium Development Goals (Fukuda-Parr 2004: 395). Assuming a direct connection and causality between economic growth and the rise of the middle classes, reminds of the trickle-down ideology of neoclassical economics within development

studies and makes one forget the long-standing discussion about the quality of growth and the role of inequality, as reflected prominently in the World Development Reports from 2001 and 2006 (World Bank 2001; 2005). When Fukuda-Parr (2003: 117f.) clarifies what distinguishes human development from other approaches within development studies some points are also relevant for the discourse about middle classes. Within the human development approach humans are viewed as ends and not as means, as is the case in approaches to development of human capital formation and human resource development, as she points out. Within the concepts of middle classes discussed before, economic development is often depicted as the main ingredient in building up middle classes. Easterly (1999: 24) even sets policies for growth in contrast to those promoting redistribution, viewing the former as reason for the formation of middle classes and ultimately the middle class consensus, and the latter as consequences of distortions and rivalry in societies that prevents growth. Ideas about human development are neglected in most analysis of middle classes. Only few scholars integrate indicators that can be also used to assess human development, but always using an income-based definition, as discussed above (see also Stoffel 2014: 7f.). Attempts to include non-monetary aspects and measures into concepts and analysis of middle classes are not comprehensive but rather mirror the insufficient use of aspects of health and education to supplement income based views on and measurement of poverty in order to integrate human development (Fukuda-Parr 2003: 118).

Especially in the context of analysing middle classes one should think that the quality of growth bears more insight into how classes with potential class-specific attributes develop as the mere quantity of growth. Living a life with one dollar more to spend a day may make a difference between being hungry or not, but it may also not change that fact due to soaring prices for food or limited access to it. But even if it makes that difference, is such a life radically changed in all its facets and now distinguishable from the other lives or households, that are still 'poor'? Approaches to middle classes focused on measuring their size based on income, consumption, but also assets or even employment will fall short in understanding what constitutes classes, or what specific groups of people try to achieve for themselves in the form of private, socio-economic aspirations but also politically. Introducing the human development approach to the idea of middle classes in developing countries would help to understand what freedoms are valued by people and therefore not only better show at which point people are not experiencing themselves as poor anymore, but also what they strive to achieve.

On the one hand this may offer an opportunity to define 'classness' in developing countries, by how people see themselves and by what people can really achieve with their income, their assets or their jobs, that are all no ends in themselves but means to living a valued live. Human development is often

independent from economic growth of a society as well as rising incomes, as can be seen in the country examples presented in the Human Development Report of 1996 (UNDP 1996: 79–85) and falling poverty rates may not necessarily mean that social needs are met (Fischer 2014: 52f.). Searching for an adequate measurement of social stratification or class is subject to the same considerations as the analysis of poverty. Therefore, a human development approach to class should allow for a more detailed view on the topic, as it does concerning poverty. Shortcomings in definitions of middle classes in developing countries based on income or assets but also based on employment in relation to the expectations towards the explanatory power of the rise of the middle classes, call for a reassessment of what constitutes being middle class in a lower income country.

A different definition of middle class may also change the choice of policies to foster their growth, in contrast to the focus on economic growth as a mean and a product of this process. The human development paradigm is also about a ‘major restructuring of economic and political power’ to introduce deliberate policies so that growth may have an actual impact on people’s lives (ul Haq 2003: 18). Without policy choices that create more equal social, economic and political opportunities, and that redistribute the outcomes of growth, it is unlikely for more people to pass the upper poverty line, as well as for the people now above it to stay there or even advance. It is absolutely unclear if those people earning now US\$1 or even US\$5 a day more have the prerequisites to live better lives through enjoying more capabilities as those may be restrained by other factors than income.

Research about social classes may also bring new notions to the discourse about human development. Integrating class struggles would be a way to integrate people’s collective action into the idea of the human development approach being about participation in development not only in the economic but also in the political dimension. This may be especially true if a definition of class includes factors of employment. Social Security, the capability to plan ahead and others connected to employment seem to be more important, from the point of view of human development, than income thresholds to define a class that is no longer viewed as poor but foremost continues to identify itself as such.

Conclusion

New conceptualizations in the recent discourse about middle classes are a step backward from understanding development as human development. They perpetuate the still dominant paradigm of poverty seen as lack of income and consumption power that has to be overcome by increasing economic growth. The literature is full of calls for additional research on the topic. At the 2014 General Conference of the European Association for Development Training

and Research Institutes (EADI) in Bonn, this was one of the main topics as reflected in the April 2015 debate section of the *European Journal of Development Research* based on this conference (2015). Following the contradiction that high hopes are invested in a statistical trend of more people crossing the upper poverty line of the World Bank, while it is unclear if this trend can be sustained and if this will have any of the consequences assumed in the literature, it seems necessary to readjust the idea and the definitions of middle classes in developing countries.

If one follows the idea of classness in 'advanced' economies, the critical points in the discourse about class show that income or consumption alone might not be enough to describe and understand the phenomenon. Shared values and the ability for collective action, as possible characterizations of class identity, are preconditions for an influence on taxation policies or the development of more democratic governance. These are issues connected with the new middle classes in recent literature and should therefore take more room in actual research about middle classes, instead of following mere assumptions. Even if one considers class as an outdated concept that cannot be applied to advanced and developing economies alike, other factors of development have to be taken into account to understand the implications of shifts in income strata or classes.

There is no direct answer to the question what would be the alternative for a notion and concept of class that fits the different contexts in developing countries, especially. A more national or even sub-national focus has to be applied in order to incorporate concepts of self-identification and the specific structures and cultural backgrounds of societies, and the specific economic situation which is not always captured best in the adjustments of parity purchasing power (PPP) (see Pogge 2013: 219f.). Attempts to integrate self-assessment of 'the poor' and other people in developing countries into views and analysis of poverty by international organizations and national and civil aid-donors is a first step to make count what people deem themselves as development and how they perceive their position within society. This would also partly overcome the problems with external labelling of development and processes as well as statuses that are connected with it. Also a greater country focus of social sciences that are sometimes overly oriented on global problems and global solutions could be a better way to assess the role of classes in developing countries. Constructing phenomena like the global middle classes diverts the focus from changes in international governance structures. These are not as prominently on the international research agenda, while changes in the socio-economic structures of societies are hardly and maybe even wrongly addressed from an international level and with a cross-country approach that follows with it. The discourse about a global middle class does not create better strategies to reduce poverty and to foster human development but continues

a notion of poverty that is based on income and consumption. Construction of a global middle class in the ‘developing world’ but also of income strata as classes within societies therefore does not necessarily present a clearer picture of social mobility but might render social struggles and mobility invisible in many country contexts, as heterogeneous groups with different capabilities are projected as actors with shared values, agendas, and effects on their societies.

Middle classes defined as an income or consumption group offer no explanatory power. Absolute monetary definitions of middle classes as presented above, have merely resulted in ‘descriptive statistics of income groups’ (Lopes-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez 2011: 2). Also subjective perspectives on class are largely overlooked in the current research. The UNDP (2013: 28) report at least mentions indicators such as well-being, that should be integrated into research about middle classes and would also fit with postmodern definitions of class as advocated by Pakulski (2005: 175). Using the human development and capability approach may help to better distinguish between the poor and the middle class. It also puts back some sense in the positive connotation often installed upon the term, especially if one is inclined to see the rise of middle classes as part of a fairer and sustainable overall socio-economic development of a country. Human development might be the missing link between the discourse about middle classes reflecting a statistical trend in income and consumption per day and an understanding of class that not only reveals relevant information about social mobility but also about social change.

Notes

1 The term ‘middle classes’ is used in the plural throughout this chapter to emphasize the existence of different concepts of class, but also the possible multitude of cross- and intra-country middle classes.

2 ILO (2013: 106) on the basis of Kapsos and Bourmpoula (2013).

3 For the first time the ILO divides the developing world’s workforce in five classes: ‘(1) the extreme working poor (less than US\$1.25 a day), (2) the moderate working poor (between US\$1.25 and US\$2); (3) the near poor (between US\$2 and US\$4); (4) middle class workers between (between US\$4 and US\$13); and (5) above middle-class workers (otherwise called ‘developed world middle-class and above’, which are those workers living in households with per capita consumption greater than US\$13 per person per day)’ (ILO 2013: 40).

4 UNDP (2013), see also Kaufmann, Kharas and Penciakova (2010); both based on Kharas (2010).

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3 | Africa's middle class, Africa's entrepreneurs and the 'missing middle'

Oluyele Akinkugbe and Karl Wohlmuth

This chapter examines the role of the African middle class as a base for entrepreneurship development. The 'missing middle', the gap not being sufficiently filled by small- and medium-sized companies (SMEs), between microenterprises and large companies, is critically interrogated. We begin by examining the different arguments in defining and measuring the African middle class in terms of income and consumption, assets, vulnerability, and livelihoods. These differences have implications for the assumed developmental roles of the continent's middle class and the growth of the African middle class itself. There are so many statements in the literature about the developmental potentials and the impacts of the African middle class: seedbed of entrepreneurship and management staff; base for start-ups and high tech companies; impact on market competition and labour mobility; impact on level and structure of consumption and marketing, on housing, car and finance markets; impact on local saving, local investment and on a more long-term investment behaviour; role in developing a new consumer society based on higher quality and branded goods; role in participation, empowerment and the formation of economic interest groups; role in the redistribution of income, assets and economic power; widespread use of new technologies and role in technology diffusion; creating space for upward mobility and societal change; facilitating a transition from survival firms to growth-oriented firms; role in pushing for more rational economic policies and for demanding public goods and fair taxation; providing stability to the political regime, etc. Most of these arguments seem anecdotal and so far not supported by any concrete empirical evidence.

We discuss and evaluate further the scarce evidence on the assumed role of the African middle class as a seedbed of entrepreneurship and managerial competencies. There is a general discussion about Africa's 'missing middle', the assumed gap in terms of small- and medium-sized companies between the many mostly informal microenterprises and the large public and private companies. It is argued that the concepts of the African middle class used in the literature and the ways of defining and measuring it do not allow a deep investigation of entrepreneurship development. The reason is that the economic lives of the various segments of the middle class are so different;

also the poor and the rich classes in Africa have distinct economic lives which partly overlap with those of lower and upper segments of the African middle class. These issues are the major thrust of this chapter.

Our approach starts with a 'measurement analysis' to see the role of assets, income, consumption, and of various income/assets ranges for defining the middle class. Then we turn to a 'structural analysis' to see which type of enterprises and entrepreneurs corresponds to a certain income/assets range of the middle class. In a further step we move to a 'politico-economic analysis' to see if the middle class can perform the task of overcoming the 'missing middle' of enterprises out of itself or if the upper class still dominates the industrial policy formation process and is preventing a positive outcome independent of the income/assets range of the middle class. Lastly, in a 'public policy analysis' some policy issues are discussed to see what public policy can do to support middle class enterprises and entrepreneurs.

Defining and measuring the African middle class: developmental implications

Approaches to defining and/or measuring the middle class are highly diversified, just as is the growing literature on the topic. Both development economists and the international/regional development institutions continue to grapple with an income/expenditure minimum to use in conceptualizing a measure of middle class status in a developing country. And the question continues to be raised about the lower and the upper income level, which will be most appropriate for the classification of the middle class. These lower and upper limits determine a lot: the absolute size, the homogeneity, the social status, the growth rates, political roles, etc. For all these reasons the different approaches mean a lot for the political economy of the middle class in Africa.¹

Building on an earlier AfDB (2011) study and other studies on the definition and measurement of Africa's middle class, Ncube and Shimeles (2013) used the asset or wealth status that is regularly reported in Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) across Africa, obtainable from the World Bank's PovcalNet (World Bank 2014), as a key indicator in identifying the population of the middle class. The middle class is defined as those households that fall within the bounds of 50 to 125 per cent of the median (weighted) asset index for the entire sample which is 0.5 and 0.7, so getting an absolute measure (Ncube and Shimeles (2013: 7). This method departs radically from earlier ones (AfDB 2011; Banerjee and Duflo 2008) and more recent ones (Birdsall 2015; Ncube and Lufumpa 2015) that had used income or consumption expenditure. Ncube and Shimeles report that the middle class size – as defined by a computed asset index for Africa – stood at about 5 per cent at the 1980s, at 11 per cent for the 1990s, and at 15 per cent for the 2000 period. The number of

people belonging to the middle class had therefore increased steeply in the past two decades (Ncube and Shimeles 2013: 8). Even though the methods at measuring the middle class are so different, the results from Ncube and Shimeles' analysis provide estimates of a growing middle class in Africa that are similar to earlier studies done by the African Development Bank, if the 'floating class' people are excluded (AfDB 2011).² The asset index approach has advantages and disadvantages in comparison to the income/expenditure approach, in terms of measurement and interpretation.

The asset status can be better measured than the consumption level, but all depends on the relevance and representativeness of the included asset categories. Because of the predominance of food in consumption expenditure, some factors characterizing a middle class can be easily missed. The middle class is defined by an index incorporating 11 aspects of asset formation, such as source of water for the household, condition of housing, ownership of durable assets, etc. But, the focus on assets is of interest as type and size of assets determine the capacity to save and to invest, as well as the capacity to provide for inputs of entrepreneurship (education and health). While the asset index leads to an absolute measure, what is excellent for comparisons, the method may lead to disturbing and not easily interpreted outcomes. Increases of assets (and of associated living standards) can lead to a shrinking of the size of the middle class (as the upper class increases). While most of the African countries show, in the decade of the 2000s, substantial increases of the middle class based on the asset index (such as Senegal, Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria, countries which have shown considerable growth in the decade), some countries show a shrinking of the middle class (such as in Egypt and Madagascar). In Egypt, the size of the middle class (with an asset index between 0.5 and 0.7) has declined considerably, despite of declines of asset poverty and asset inequality, but between 2003 and 2008 parts of the middle class graduated into the upper class (the rich class). The situation in Madagascar is completely different as a rise in asset poverty and in asset inequality led to a shrinking of the middle class (the mean asset index declined from 0.21 to 0.13). The decline of the middle class was, however, not large in Madagascar, as a rise in inequality prevented a stronger decline (Ncube and Shimeles 2013: 8–11).

It is therefore necessary to study the changes in the size of the middle class case by case when applying the method of an asset index. In this context it is necessary to know more about the assets of the poor and of the rich segments of the population as entrepreneurship is related to such accumulation. There are indications that income, consumption and assets of the poor (especially the market volume of the Base of the Economic Pyramid (BOP) in Africa) are considerably underestimated (see Standard Bank 2011: 4–7). On the other hand, the assets of the rich are increasingly overestimated by global international

finance corporations for calculating the net worth of the assets of the rich in Africa (see Wohlmuth 2014).

The study by Ncube and Shimeles (2013) reveals a significant mobility of the middle class to the upper class. With the asset index methodology, such mobility can be measured more easily. The dynamics of mobility is important also for analysing potentials for entrepreneurship based on asset accumulation (savings and investment) and related human development outcomes (education and health). By using transaction matrices – based on synthetic panel modelling – the authors conclude that those who started in the 1990s in the middle class have a 70 per cent chance of staying there, while many will graduate into the upper class, and only few would flip into poverty (Ncube and Shimeles 2013: 11–13). However, it is also made clear that the middle class has a higher mobility than the classes of the rich and the poor who both are more ‘cemented’ in their position. In Ethiopia, a country for which the authors have a comprehensive data set, the mobility is much higher and different, and this is being explained by the rapid economic and societal changes in this country. For all of Africa, the study reveals correlations between asset ownership and education, governance and ethnic fractionalization; good governance and asset ownership are correlated. This is important for analysing the role of the middle class in entrepreneurship development. Other studies that used the asset approach to estimate middle class size in Africa include the UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing (2012) report and the Standard Bank report on ‘Understanding Africa’s Middle Class’ (see reports on this study in Standard Bank 2014a and 2014b). However, these reports have as a basic rationale to guide companies and banks in their daily businesses (by studying consumption trends and derived credit applications). The Standard Bank report is based on South Africa’s Living Standards Measure (LSM) methodology, a study which is grouping people on a scale from 1 to 10 according to their living standards by using criteria such as ownership of cars and major appliances. Those people who are at level LSM 5 and above – with roughly a consumption level of more than US\$5,500 per year – can be considered as being in the middle class. Overall, these and similar studies using Living Standards Measures come to a lower number of people in the middle class than recorded in the AfDB studies.

From the foregoing and given the current unemployment and poverty rates in Africa and the fact that the top five most unequal countries in the world are in Africa – Namibia, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana and Sierra Leone – there appears to be no logic in celebrating the growth of the middle class size in Africa without touching the issues of middle class growth accounting and analysing the role of the upper classes in these countries. Morten Jerven (2010, 2014a, 2014b and 2014c) sums it all up by highlighting the fact that data sources currently available to most national accounting departments in SSA economies do not capture economic growth properly and that published

GDP per capita level estimates are not adequate reflections of living standards given the associated flaws. He further pointed out the need to recognize the clear distinction between stocks and flows when measuring the middle class size in Africa by using the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which are in any case only conducted periodically in countries that are peaceful. It is also argued that assets are not a perfect proxy for the expansion of income, production and expenditure and therefore may not be too relevant in the claim that growing assets which are obtainable from DHS will lead to growing consumption expenditure of the middle class. So we are left with considerable uncertainties when trying to define and to measure the middle class in Africa. Especially the rich classes get easily out of focus.

Africa's middle class and the 'missing middle' of enterprises

This section examines the assumed developmental role of Africa's expanding middle class. It interrogates the ongoing argument that the 'missing middle' in Africa has a lot to do with the comparatively low number of SMEs as compared to what we see in the developed and other developing regions, as well as the huge gap in investable capital targeted for funding SMEs in Africa relative to all other regions. If the emerging middle class in Africa can overcome these gaps by establishing (formal and informal) SMEs, and being able to finance new ventures and making the established and new enterprises grow, growth and employment could be enhanced on the continent. For instance, in reported cases where small enterprises need loans ranging from about US\$10,000 to US\$100,000, and medium enterprises require loans of amounts between US\$100,000 and US\$1 million for start-up and expansion (according to World Bank definitions), the question arises as to whether the heterogeneous middle class in Africa can secure such funds by own capital accumulation and/or by securing such funds from formal financial intermediaries on the basis of their asset status/base. While SMEs account for 57 per cent of employment and for 50 per cent of GDP in developed countries, in developing countries these shares are just about 18 per cent and 16 per cent respectively (Sene, n.d.). In Africa, SMEs contribute less than 10 per cent of GDP; this potentially avails the middle class a unique opportunity to grow with entrepreneurship (World Economic Forum on Africa 2010). In South Africa, micro and small enterprises provide for more than 55 per cent of all jobs and for 22 per cent of GDP, while the big firms account for 64 per cent of GDP (Kaufmann 2005). However, by exploiting the huge opportunities for SMEs in South Africa and making these enterprises grow, GDP and employment growth could be accelerated in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, infrastructure development, natural gas sector development, agricultural value chains, and service exports, what may lead to 3.4 million new jobs by 2030 (McKinsey 2015). While banks all over the developed and developing world make profits in lending to SMEs, this

financing is rare in Africa, not only in Sub-Saharan Africa's least developed countries but also in Southern Africa and in Northern Africa. Despite some venture capital initiatives, especially for IT firms, no turnaround is in sight.

Will entrepreneurs emerge from the African middle class and overcome the 'missing middle' of African enterprises? How severe is the 'missing middle' phenomenon in Africa? There is a huge gap in entrepreneurial activities between the informal sector microenterprises and the large formal sector enterprises, just as there is a huge credit-granting gap between the microfinance institutions at the low end and the big commercial/merchant banks (and recently established venture capital financing institutions) at the high end in most of the African countries. The relatively weak growth and sustainability records of SMEs and the hierarchical nature of the economic sectors and firms in Africa are resulting from this state of affairs (see Wohlmuth 2014). At the top are some 'growth champions' with internationally comparable growth, sustainability, revenue and profit records. These 40 so-called 'African Challengers' (according to BCG 2010) are in countries such as South Africa (18), Egypt (7) and Morocco (6). Only a few of these companies have any form of presence in other African countries (2 in Nigeria, 2 in Tunisia, 2 in Angola, 2 in Algeria, and 1 in Togo). Some of these companies are even moving up the 'globalization ladder' – from 'master executors' to 'multiregional operators' and then to 'international players' (BCG 2009; BCG 2010; BCG 2013). Africa has only six 'Global Challengers' (five in South Africa and one in Egypt). While the 'Global Challengers' in Africa are already strong in building capabilities and in mobilizing human resources, the 'African Challengers' are involving increasingly local and international talent for their globalized businesses. So, the range of competitive and globalizing companies and firms is limited to quite a small number of firms originating from few African countries, and the presence of South Africa is overwhelming. While the business areas of the 'African Challengers' are diversified, agriculture and agro-industry corporations are underrepresented on the list. Financial services; mining and natural resources; technology, media and telecommunications; and international logistics are the main business areas.

The landscape in Africa with regard to companies and banks is quite heterogeneous. The lists presented annually by The Africa Report identify the 500 largest companies and the 200 largest banks in Africa (see The Africa Report 2013a and 2013b). However, the lists contain companies and banks with a quite different business record. In order to see more of these companies and banks catching up to the groups of 'African Challengers' and 'Global Challengers' substantial reforms would be needed – limiting the influence of the governments on enterprises, pursuing careful privatizations and re-privatizations, and enabling the firms, by proactive state action, to move up the globalization

ladder. Many public policy areas (reforming financial systems, taxation systems, medium-term public finance strategies, competition policies, industrial policies, and science, technology, and innovation policies) would need restructuring in order to allow such changes to happen.

So far, the number of countries where such proactive policies are implemented is small. A major problem is that many of these firms are owned by the state or are connected to the state class of politicians and bureaucrats, especially so in sectors such as mining, oil and gas, and construction. We see that the 'upper class' business interests are dominating the 'middle class' business interests although the entrepreneurial spirit of the 'middle classes' is emphasized so much in the many reports from international consultancy companies (see Wohlmuth 2014). The 'upper class' business interests are controlled by a rapidly growing number of billionaires and millionaires in Africa (see on these trends Forbes 2014a and 2015a, Ventures Africa 2012, 2013a, 2013b, and 2014a, NWW 2015). Their business activities are increasing rapidly but are to a large extent connected with government contracts and licences in sectors such as natural resources, finance, construction, but also services, media, telecommunications, and advanced technologies. However, beside this type of 'upper class' business (organized around groups of companies associated with dynasties of billionaires and millionaires) another type of 'upper class' business is emerging: competitive companies which are owned by independent and innovative millionaires/rich people and with links to technology sectors and to international finance and services sectors are established (see the report in Ventures Africa 2013b and other articles in the magazine on this issue). Some of these companies grow up from 'middle class' ranks, others from former 'upper class' connections. These companies from independent and innovative millionaires and rich people are not related to traditional forms of wealth generation, and many more African countries, such as Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia, are involved as a home base of such companies. These companies work increasingly in new business fields (IT, services and media). Also in the venture capital business domain such entrepreneurs are entering (see Venture Capital for Africa 2015). However, the progress in Africa's start-up space is still modest (Ventures Africa 2014b).

However, the major gap remains with regard to 'middle class' entrepreneurs in Africa despite the claims of the 'empowered African middle classes'. There is still a huge gap in Africa between the rather small group of large formal companies at the top and the very large number of survival-type micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) at the bottom. This 'missing middle' in size and degree of formalization/regulation is prevailing widely. Meant in this context are not only the companies with 250 to 500 and 1,000 employees, called *Mittelstand* in Germany, but also the SMEs, which are growth-oriented and have growth potential down to 10 or 50 employees. There are barriers to

grow up to this range of company sizes, although also many other enterprises at the top of the hierarchy of enterprises share limits to growth (with some few exceptions). Middle class entrepreneurship in Africa is to a large extent 'survival entrepreneurship' and not 'growth-oriented entrepreneurship' (see Berner, Gomez and Knorranga 2012 on this important distinction). As the upper middle class in most of the SSA countries is influential, but small, an agenda for supporting survival entrepreneurship has to be built around the logic of survival entrepreneurship; regrettably the logic of growth-oriented entrepreneurship prevails all over Africa in policy-making and in donor initiatives. So far, only a small share of the middle class may be affected by this logic.

The greatest gap in terms of the structure of enterprises in Africa is in the range of formal/informal SMEs, which are able to grow. According to some estimates, Africa has around 5 million small and medium companies, more than 13 million formalized MSMEs and many more informal MSMEs, but the growth of such firms to become larger firms with more than 50 employees or even more than 250 employees is limited all over Africa (on such estimates, see WEF 2014a; WEF 2014b; Kushnir et al. 2010). This is so despite a quite dynamic African entrepreneurship culture (Herrington and Kelley 2012; Omidyar Network 2013) and a relatively high attractiveness of Africa for foreign investors (Ernst & Young 2013). Also digital entrepreneurship is growing in Africa, but these enterprises share the same characteristics of limits to growth. With so many African countries having an 'upper middle class' of less than 3 per cent of the population (the average according to AfDB 2011 for all of Africa being 4.8 per cent), the base is too small in terms of financing, connecting and competing, especially so for growth-oriented enterprises. Also the young entrepreneurs (mostly from the middle class) suffer from these conditions, which leads to a high number of 'potential entrepreneurs', but to a rather low number of 'actual entrepreneurs.'³ All those aiming at 'growth-oriented enterprises' are then easily disappointed, and entrepreneurial development programmes do not readily support 'survival enterprises' which are so characteristic for most entrepreneurs out of the middle classes in Africa. However, there are great differences from country to country: in terms of entrepreneurial activity, the discontinuance rate, the character of enterprises, in terms of women and youth participation, in terms of public support, etc.

The role of Africa's middle classes in overcoming the 'missing middle' There are so many explanations of the 'missing middle' phenomenon in Africa, but the main thrust is about the weak role of the middle class relative to the dominant and politically connected upper classes. It is not just the lack of a particular ingredient to firm growth, such as finance, that matters. All these finance issues are now considered in Africa by reporting

widely on new venture capital funds, SME funds, and other finance initiatives to support SMEs (although the scope of all these initiatives is limited). It is therefore more important to look at the explanations from the sides of the political economy of private sector development in Africa (Handley 2014) and the 'development as diffusion' debate (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014). According to Handley (2014), there are certain minimum conditions for a transformative middle class in Africa (and elsewhere). First, the middle class can only be politically and economically transformative if there is a 'collective identity', what may also be called 'class consciousness'. Such a class must be aware of its interests and must also have the ability to organize these common interests collectively. The mere 'consumerism' of segments of the African middle class is reported daily and is promoted by international and local marketing companies, emphasizing the quality- and brands-consciousness of the African consumer (McKinsey 2012a). There is also a lack of organizations to organize collective interests of the middle class. This refers to civil society organizations but also to business organizations. No organization is caring for the survival enterprises beside of some donor organizations and some few local NGOs. The interests of the survival entrepreneurs differ fundamentally from the ones of the growth-oriented entrepreneurs as the logic of action is completely different. As most of the African middle class is associated with small survival enterprises, the typical crafts and trades organizations do not represent them. The groups of the 'income insecure middle class' and the groups of the 'income secure middle class' are so different. The ability to form an empowered strategy versus governments and big business is weak for most of the small businesses.

Second, the African middle class can only be transformative if it demands strongly a strategic role by the state in terms of public goods provision. Only when the middle class can exert a strong pressure on the government to supply basic public goods in reasonable quality and scope (security, rule of law, health and education, social protection, infrastructure, coherent economic policies, etc.) and to establish a sound taxation system (being fair and effective) will the middle class become transformative. There is a connection between these two demands. The middle class will only pay taxes if the public goods provision is considered adequate. The expression of consumerism of the African middle class, as revealed by international consultancy reports (Wohlmuth 2014) and local marketing reports, reveals at the upper middle class level a high degree of privatization of public goods provision (in areas such as: power, garbage collection, road repair, health care, and security, etc.). The lower middle class cannot pay for all such services and so they have to make choices (by concentrating on health and education expenditures), and it cannot pressure for such public services. The need to care privately for these public goods is costly and reduces the accumulation potential of the middle class. Banerjee

and Duflo (2008) show that even the lower middle class responds rationally by investing privately in key services (notably health and education), but also the poor make such choices (Banerjee and Duflo 2007). Restricted upper middle class enclaves in African cities show the negative results of these developments. This separation also affects businesses of the lower middle class.

As a third condition for a transformative role of the middle class, their interests should be compatible with the interests of the broader society. The question is whether the middle class organizes political support for a more transformative politics. Taking the middle class definition of AfDB (2011) one can easily see that the political interests of the sub-sections of the middle class are quite divergent, so that it cannot be taken for granted that these groups will articulate political interests in favour of the broader society. Some subclasses may be near to the poor and others may be near to the rich classes when rallying for political support. A homogenous middle class with a homogenous political interest to pressure for good governance, as assumed implicitly by Birdsall (2015), is not in sight.

All of the three minimum conditions for a transformative role of Africa's middle class are not met. It will not have the organizing power of pushing for sustained private sector reforms, it will lack the accumulation potential to finance the growth of micro and small enterprises, and it will not be able to pressure for public goods which are so much needed for business and financing. It is therefore not easy to imagine that this class can overcome the 'missing middle' of enterprises, despite of the emergence of some successful entrepreneurs from this class in many African countries (see examples in Herrington and Kelley 2012, and cases in Wohlmuth 2014). Varieties of capitalism in Africa play also a great role (Handley 2014), but are neglected in analyses of the middle class. The middle classes in Ghana, Tunisia or in South Africa play a different role compared to the middle classes in Sudan, Ethiopia or Kenya. The middle classes in Tunisia and in South Africa were promoted actively by government policies, early in the 1970s by industrial policy in Tunisia and from 1993 onwards by empowerment policies towards the black middle class in South Africa (see Ayadi and Ben Aissa 2015; Lofchie 2015), while the middle classes in Sudan and in other African countries were to a considerable extent destroyed by austerity policies and pro-rich government policies (see GGA 2014). But also the pro-middle class policies in Tunisia and in South Africa were counteracted in recent years by inflation, food price increases, housing scarcity, and cost recovery for health and education services affecting mostly the lower but also the upper middle classes.

From other studies (e.g. Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014) we know that the development of business in Africa and especially also of the middle class is determined by the economic activities of the upper classes, the rich and the very rich classes. The diffusion of development and productivity is

slowed in Africa by three factors. The first factor is business climate, via bureaucratic regulations and incoherent policies, and the burden of such costs is not uniformly distributed across firms and firm sizes. The smaller firms bear most of the burden while larger firms (upper class firms) can overcome the impact better by their market power and by political connectivity. Second, the complex business–government relations in Africa’s relatively small markets lead to an advantage of upper class businesses. Third, firm ownership structure matters, but also the unequal distribution of management and technological capacity are benefiting the businesses of upper classes.

While an unfavourable business climate affects all firms, large and small ones, the high cost associated with an unfavourable business climate (with so many and often conflicting bureaucratic regulations, irregular power supplies, bad quality inputs, lack of enforceable contracts, bad security situations, etc.) creates burdens, especially for those firms which are using non-traded inputs, such as power, transport, security, and locally supplied services. Large firms using mostly international inputs, like the oil industry and all the firms associated with global value chains, do much better. Such firms can also better overcome trade and investment barriers. Offshore sectors having some privileges in trade and customs procedures and more globalized firms (like the African and Global Challengers) do better, and these are related to upper class business interests.

Middle class entrepreneurship is much more affected by these high costs of non-traded inputs so that many of them stay at survival level rather than being able to become growth-oriented enterprises (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014: 8). Upper class businesses can overcome these costs of non-traded inputs by internationalizing their businesses through the use of imported inputs. Such firms can even create their own infrastructure for doing international business; these comprehensive ‘do-it-yourself’ business strategies are reported for horticultural export firms in Kenya (see Wohlmuth 2011). In case that remittances are made available for supplying such inputs (and are not only used for consumption), middle class firms could also benefit. Experiences show, however, that governments must have a specific policy to promote such a use of remittances. Large firms in Africa (from the upper class) can also better manage policy uncertainty. Upper class businesses can use preferential deals to accommodate policy uncertainty because of the political connectivity, giving cost and market share advantages to them. The middle class is not in the same position to deal for their firms with policy uncertainty; they even have to pay high costs for getting decisions made in their favour. The ‘missing middle’ of enterprises is therefore perpetuated by the unfavourable business climate and by the inability of the middle class to push for a better business climate.

Second, business–government relations do not favour middle class entrepreneurship. Competition is weak in most of Africa, and few large companies have

a dominating value-added share (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014: 10). As each sub-sector is dominated by few firms for export and production the relations with government are highly sector-specific; this implies that there are specific pressure groups at work demanding support, subsidies and concessions, and also outright privileges. Other firms in these sectors, the smaller and small ones, do not count as pressure groups and are not even organized for a collective activity. The dominating firms are upper class in terms of ownership and management, whatever the origin is (ethnic minority, local billionaires and millionaires, foreign investors, state-owned and managed firms, etc.). Middle class entrepreneurs face a lot of barriers to compete with these dominant firms (or even to cooperate with them) and to grow to sizes at which they could benefit from new style relations with government. There is low-level business climate equilibrium at work (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014). Dominant firms, influential firms, politically connected firms, and large firms have rents to share between owners, employees, and public officials. At this level there is room for higher wages, extra payments, premiums, etc. Also this equilibrium rent allocation model shows the limits of middle class entrepreneurship. Not only is access to finance limited, but because of the weaker market position extra returns are not accruing and so cannot be distributed to strengthen the capacity of the firm to accumulate. The middle class business sector does not have the support of strong natural political constituencies (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014), neither in government nor in parliament or in judiciary. Government regulations do not facilitate the work of the smaller business ventures. Vulnerability to public policy changes and to political uncertainties makes firms dependent on developing and maintaining close relations with governments, but at a cost for smaller ventures. The 'missing middle' factor is even strengthened because of this type of enterprise-government relations, benefiting upper class businesses.

A third argument is related to the distribution of ownership and management capacity (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014). Studies show that the capacity of firms to grow depends on being part of domestic, regional and global business networks. Business networks help to identify market opportunities, to counteract adverse public policies, and to increase competitive advantages; so they are important for growth. The role of indigenous private owners of enterprises is limited in more advanced sectors of industry. Enterprise ownership maps show for some African countries the limits of indigenous private capital businesses relative to trading companies, ethnic minority businesses, foreign-owned companies and state enterprises (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014: 11-12). There are, however, some interesting new developments. Digital entrepreneurship, such as in Kenya, is building an indigenous base, although the start-ups are small and lack finance so as to grow (GSMA 2014; Wohlmuth 2015); IT clusters and hubs are parts of networks

on which the small entrepreneurs can rely. So the IT sector may become a base of middle class entrepreneurs because of the low entry barriers. In other sectors, middle class entrepreneurship depends on becoming part of established business networks (either of foreign-owned, ethnic minority, trading or state enterprises), which can be achieved via value chains, joint ventures, or various forms of subcontracting. Becoming part of global value chains is a chance for smaller firms to get access to networks, but the chance to grow on this basis is dependent on many preconditions and capabilities (AfDB et al. 2014). Ownership matters a lot for middle class entrepreneurship development. Data for some countries in Africa show that only about 17 per cent of the firms are owned by indigenous African entrepreneurs (Gelb, Meyer and Ramachandran 2014: 12). Comparisons of indigenous African firms and minority-owned firms show that there are great advantages on the side of the non-African minority-owned firms. Besides ownership distribution, the management capacity can limit middle class entrepreneurship development; larger and more globalized firms can hire scarce management capacity. Evidence shows that management capacity is weak in many African countries, thus limiting the growth of middle class enterprises. In order to overcome the ‘missing middle’ the African middle class enterprises need a better integration into business networks and a faster building of management capacity.

How can middle class entrepreneurship be promoted? Small survival enterprises are dominating the income range of the middle class (the more so if we look at the median-based actual middle class rather than the affluence-based middle class such as in South Africa). Growth-oriented small- and middle-sized enterprises may have some relevance for the upper middle class and the upper class. For policymakers, it is obvious that support of middle class enterprises has to do with a support of survival enterprises, as floating and lower middle classes need specific measures to consolidate their enterprises. However, the fact is that the entrepreneurship development programmes in Africa are biased against the survival enterprises; these programmes are not relevant for them. Survival enterprises (see Berner, Gomez and Knorringa 2012) are those which are necessity-driven; have ease of entry; low capital requirements, skills and technology; female majority; are maximizing security; pursuing income diversification, but not specialization; are embedded into family and neighbourhood networks; and are obliged to share income which is generated, and so have a limited capacity to accumulate. For this group of enterprises more than promotional programmes (to increase income, productivity and employment) are needed. Such enterprises need protection in order to reduce the vulnerability of the enterprises, which are run by the poor, the floating class and the lower middle class. An agenda of measures to upgrade survival entrepreneurs is presented (such as security enhancement,

providing basic services, direct assistance to survive, etc.), but is not followed by policymakers. Most of the poverty reduction programmes in Africa fail to reflect the perspective of survival entrepreneurs who are faced daily with 'destructive uncertainty' (Berner, Gomez and Knorrninga 2012).

On the other hand, growth-oriented enterprises are opportunity-driven; face barriers to entry; have male majority; are willing to take risks; are specializing; are embedded in business networks; and have the ability to accumulate part of the income generated in business. For such opportunity-driven entrepreneurs the promotional entrepreneurship development programmes can be useful (such as improving the enabling environment, identifying the missing ingredients for growth, such as finance and training, etc.). Such an agenda may be useful for the businesses of the upper middle class and parts of the upper class. The reports on entrepreneurship in Africa done by Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring (GEM) are revealing; they show that the attitudes towards entrepreneurship are very positive, also among the young people, and that so many Africans start their business with enthusiasm, based on opportunity or necessity, but the rates of discontinuance of business are very high (see Herrington and Kelley 2012). An exception is South Africa as there are so many discouraged people with regard to entrepreneurship; the rate of entrepreneurial activity is very low (GEM South Africa 2014). The case of South Africa can be explained by the fact that the median-based actual middle class is 'income insecure', while the affluence-based middle class is affected by consumerism and is more interested in well-paid and steady salaried jobs.

For the upper strata of the upper class (the 1–0.1 per cent people of the income distribution), different aspects are relevant. This is recorded especially for Kenya as 8,300 super-wealthy control two-thirds of Kenya's economy (Mutegi 2014). The rapid increase in the number of billionaires and millionaires in Africa gives scope for new entrepreneurship networks as based on venture capital funds, philanthropic funds, and start-up capital funds for the digital economy (Wohlmuth 2014 and 2015; McKinsey 2013). There is evidence that the richest are now more active in financing certain sectors of growing social and economic interest (mobile phone, finance, IT, consulting services, etc.). However, the absolute numbers of such engagements are still limited, and government action could be more helpful in creating an environment for the growth of such entrepreneurship development funds (on the modest involvement of the rich in such funds, see Ventures Africa 2014c). Such investment funds from the rich classes towards entrepreneurship development may open the business networks for smaller- and medium-sized enterprises (the online platform VC4A/Venture Capital for Africa is full of examples on entrepreneurship developing and funding models). However, so far the impact on the growth of SMEs is quite limited.

According to the AfDB (2011) data not less than 82 per cent of the African population (the poor and the floating class) have income levels, which are below the US\$4 threshold and so these people are not income secure. These people are definitely the base of the group of 'survival entrepreneurs'. This is consistent with the analyses of the economic lives of the poor and the middle class (Banerjee and Duflo 2007 and 2008). If the group with an income of US\$4–US\$10 is also added (the lower middle class with a share of 8.73 per cent), the potential for growth-oriented entrepreneurship is limited to the upper middle class of 4.7 per cent (with income of US\$10–US\$20) of the population and to the upper class (beyond US\$20 per capita per day) of 4.8 per cent. The base for 'growth-oriented entrepreneurship' is limited to not much more than 9 per cent of the population. But, the researches on entrepreneurship show that despite positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship the rates of discontinuance of businesses are very high in Africa (also for 'opportunity-driven' businesses). The 'missing middle' factor is perpetuated through inadequate programmes and policies towards entrepreneurship, and because of a scarcity of support programmes towards the poor and the middle classes in Africa.

It is argued that the African middle class provides entrepreneurial inputs and acts on the basis of developmental value systems, such as attitudes to save and invest and a readiness to invest in health and education. All these attitudes and characteristics are considered as important for productivity growth. Regrettably there is not much direct evidence on these roles of the middle class, neither for saving and investing and nor for education and health. Banerjee and Duflo (2007 and 2008) even conclude that up to the level of US\$10 in per capita daily incomes the differences between the poor and the middle class are not so great. Also the evidence on education as a major entrepreneurial input by the middle class is not strong; it is just shown that there are correlations between education, economic growth and the growth of the middle class. It is hypothesized (by Kunene, Mubila and Akinkugbe 2015) that the increase of primary, secondary and tertiary education systems all over Africa has potential direct effects on the growth of the economy and the growth of the middle class, via R&D, income increases, consumption habits, and productivity advances, and also potential indirect effects, such as on entrepreneurship, specialization, occupational mobility, FDI inflows, and governance. And the other way round, it is hypothesized that the growth of the middle class leads to increasing standards of living, more private demand for education, growing access to internet, increased consumption spending, higher public revenues, and a changing social behaviour. However, all these potentials are not really measured, and for such a heterogeneous middle class of 34 per cent of Africa's population (according to AfDB 2011 and Ncube and Lufumpa 2015) such interrelationships cannot be readily analysed and measured. The dynamics of interconnectedness between education and the

middle class (Kunene, Mubila and Akinkugbe 2015: 140) is made plausible, but is not measured. Also, the evidence on the interconnectedness between middle class growth and saving, investment, and health sector expansion is scarce. So knowledge about the accumulation potential of the middle class is largely missing.

In fact, looking at country cases, it can be seen that the increasing cost of education and health (because of low quality public systems and/or cost recovery measures) has affected the middle class in Africa up to the upper middle class, leading to an erosion of the middle class status and reducing the accumulation capacity of the 'class'. Only segments of the upper middle class and the upper classes may be in a position to save and to invest besides covering escalating education and health expenditures. The case studies (in GGA 2014) reveal the extent of the erosion of the middle class status by escalating health and education expenditures. Middle class values in the sense of saving and investing for entrepreneurship development are conflicting with human capital accumulation objectives, to the extent that only segments of the upper middle class and the upper classes can overcome this conflict dilemma. Overcoming the 'missing middle' factor in Africa has also to do with solving the problem of the high cost of formalization of enterprises. Because of the high fixed cost of entry into formalization not only necessity/survival enterprises but also opportunity/growth-oriented enterprises stay with an informal enterprise status thus limiting finance, accumulation and growth perspectives of enterprises (see Ayadi and Ben Aissa 2015). Knowledge about saving and investment from the side of the middle class is limited. From some earlier sources (Banerjee and Duflo 2008) we know that the middle class up to US\$10 per day per person saves mainly to become part of the salaried employment force (aiming at steady fully paid jobs), and not so much to become part of an entrepreneurial class. Entrepreneurship in such cases may be a transition status towards gaining steady fully paid jobs.

Segments of the upper middle class and the upper class may have a different behaviour, but there is no evidence that entrepreneurial attitudes and value systems are strong enough to create an entrepreneurial force based on the middle class. Although entrepreneurship is a desired option leading to so many 'potential entrepreneurs', also for the young people of the middle class in Africa (see Herrington and Kelley 2012; GEM 2012 Nigeria; GEM 2013 Zambia, and GEM 2013 Ghana), the reality of the 'actual entrepreneurs' is quite different,⁴ Africa-wide studies and country case studies show that there is a huge gap between potential entrepreneurship and actual entrepreneurship, especially also among the youth. Many young people believe that they have the potential to become entrepreneurs (82 per cent), but only a few are actually starting a business on their own and ultimately are able to succeed over the years (GEM 2012 Nigeria). Information and finance gaps as well as

skills and training problems are mentioned for this situation. Nonetheless enterprises are founded as a survival option but discontinuance rates are high. Public entrepreneurship development programmes seem to miss the point – of survival enterprises and of growth-oriented enterprises. Their impact on overcoming the ‘missing middle’ factor by supporting ‘necessity-driven’ and ‘opportunity-driven’ entrepreneurs is obviously not relevant (on the limits of such programmes, see AfDB et al. 2012).

Although governments in Africa at certain times succeeded in pushing up a middle class (as in Tunisia in the context of the new industrial policies in the 1970s, and in South Africa as a consequence of the Black Empowerment process), the results with regard to entrepreneurship development were rather modest. Neither in Tunisia nor in South Africa had these moves brought about significant changes towards establishing a growing entrepreneurial base. Also the middle class growth was not stable. Inflation is eroding the income base of the middle class, and even the upper middle class is slipping down to the ranks of the lower middle class (not only in Tunisia and South Africa, but also in Sudan, Egypt, and in many other countries in Africa). Countries with declining oil revenues (Sudan), with a danger of terrorist attacks (Tunisia), and countries with escalating inflation and health and education costs experience a decline of the middle class which is partly migrating (see the cases in GGA 2014). Only a few countries in Africa have a substantial share of an ‘income secure’ upper middle class with more than US\$10 a day per person (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Cape Verde, Gabon, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Seychelles and Mauritius), but even many of this ‘upper middle class’ suffer from escalating costs, insecurity of jobs, increasing unemployment, and lack of support for an entrepreneurial life (AfDB 2011; McKinsey 2012b; Wohlmuth 2014). These are just the few African countries, which are favourably ranked on various development, governance and competitiveness indexes for African countries (Kappel 2014; Wohlmuth 2014).

Growing consumption spending in Africa is widely considered as an important impetus for entrepreneurship development, assuming that a secure and growing domestic market pushes up the size of the entrepreneurial class. It is also argued that income growth, ongoing urbanization and spatial redistribution of the population towards urban centres favour the development of local industry and the increased use of brands, luxury items, and ICT products. All this is seen as a basis for a growing entrepreneurial class in Africa. The recent push for the digital economy in Africa and an increasing role of digital entrepreneurship are also mentioned. McKinsey (2010 and 2012a) identify the discretionary spending power of African households (based on the classification of global consumers, the consuming middle class, and the emerging consumers), but also those households with a spending power only for basic needs, the basic needs consumers, have a role to play in providing

the base for local industries, employment and entrepreneurship development. Some confirmation for this potential, also for entrepreneurship, is provided by studies on the potential employment growth in sectors being near to the consumer and to key economic sectors, but this potential can only be exploited if proactive government policies are undertaken (McKinsey 2012b; McKinsey Global Institute 2015). Some confirmation is also presented by studies on the potential of the internet for income and employment growth in Africa (McKinsey 2013; Wohlmuth 2015), but the small IT companies are marginalized by huge mobile operators because of a lack of competition policies. So, there are so many 'ifs' and 'could be' in these studies, based on specific assumptions, which are not always made transparent. An entrepreneurial class cannot just emerge from 'consumerism', but depends on sustained proactive industrial and entrepreneurship support policies and programmes.

Local entrepreneurship development in Africa is projected on the basis of fantastic volumes of consumption spending, up from US\$860 billion in 2008 to US\$1.38 trillion in 2020 (McKinsey 2010: 7). It is argued that consumption spending leads directly to local enterprises for the middle class (shops, restaurants, local industries, services of all types, digital entrepreneurship, etc.). However, evidence for African countries shows that these expectations have to be discounted. As an example, the South African black middle class has largely increased its consumption but has failed to develop a large entrepreneurial class to exploit these opportunities. White businesses mainly benefit from the growth of the Black African middle class to the extent that now the Project Excellence was created in South Africa to increase the awareness among Black African consumers that they can and should buy at Black African shop owners. It is estimated that most of the spending power of R420 billion from the Black South African middle class (being higher by R40 billion than the spending power of the white middle class) is going to White businesses (Casmore 2014). The Buy Black project is aiming at service and quality improvement. Some 600 Black enterprises in Gauteng (retailers, restaurants, plumbers, builders, lawyers, accountants, etc.) were identified to be promoted by quality competitions. The small number of participants and the private nature of this project limit the scale of the initiative.

Much more is needed to get access to these markets by local enterprises, and also proactive legal instruments of the government can play a role. The increasing importance of supermarkets (foreign companies and local upper class businesses) all over Africa raises the demand for government action to protect local small businesses. Safety and health regulations, but also traffic and town planning regulations play a role in this context. The local food economy is a case in point; it needs more support, by legal instruments towards protective regulation, by facilitating spatial planning, and by creating new finance instruments. Local formal and informal food markets can become better regulated, governed, and equipped with physical infrastructure so that

local businesses can flourish. The ‘supermarket revolution myopia’ (Abrahams 2010) has to be overcome by governments in order to support middle class entrepreneurship. The case of Lusaka shows that the rearrangement of the local food economy can give local business players new strengths. Disciplining/ restricting policies towards foreign supermarket chains along with promoting/ protecting policies for the local retail business can help to generate local entrepreneurship, even to the extent of creating local industrial value chains. Otherwise the potential for middle class entrepreneurship development will be missed when urban spatial planning is not considering the local sources and potentials for businesses (Kingombe 2014).

The urban areas will potentially become not only major engines for consumption but also for business development, and middle class entrepreneurship opportunities exist at various levels. There is a hierarchy of cities: there are Volume Opportunity cities, Expanding Mid-market cities, Mature Mid-market cities, and Stable Essentials cities (Kingombe 2014: 17–18). All these types of cities in Africa give opportunities for middle class entrepreneurs at different levels: to formal and informal enterprises, to necessity-driven and opportunity-driven ones, to survival-based and growth-oriented enterprises. However, this potential can only be exploited if there are supportive policies of the government (in terms of legal instruments, spatial planning, land ownership, competition, finance, and training policies, etc.). Some sectors will dominate in the cities because of the huge volume of food and housing-related spending, but growth rates will also be high in cities for recreational and cultural expenditure, for spending in restaurants and hotels, and for communication, and other goods and services (Kingombe 2014: 16–19). The master plans for African large cities undertaken by international investors may miss the point of supplying housing and facilities for the African middle class and supporting an African entrepreneurial class. Such master plans rather favour supplies for upper segments of the upper class consumers and entrepreneurs (Kingombe 2014: 18–19). Middle class entrepreneurship development is not automatically following increases of middle class consumer spending; proactive policies are needed at all levels to strengthen this connection.

The ‘missing middle’ factor is deeply rooted in Africa and can only be overcome by a whole set of actions which are strengthening the productive role of the middle class: implementing new promotional and protective business policies, designing new promotional finance and human accumulation policies, and using new legal and planning instruments to support local businesses.

Conclusion

The chapter is about the role of the African middle class as a base for entrepreneurship development. In this context the ‘missing middle’ in Africa, the gap in small and medium sized companies between microenterprises and

large companies, is exhaustively examined. First, the main concepts of defining and measuring the African middle class – via income and consumption, assets, vulnerability and livelihoods – were discussed. These differences in definition and measurement have implications for the assumed developmental implications of the growth of the African middle class. There are diversified but seemingly anecdotal views in the literature on the developmental potentials and impacts of the African middle class. Emphasis is in the paper on the entrepreneurship activities of the middle class – necessity-driven versus opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, and survival entrepreneurship versus growth-oriented entrepreneurship. A major weakness in the argument of many of the writers on the African middle class is the fact that the upper class/the rich segment of the population are not considered in this context, although most of the opportunity-driven and growth-oriented enterprises, and most of the large and multinational companies in Africa are upper class businesses. It is also argued that policy implications differ if ‘median-based’ or ‘affluence-based’ definitions of the middle class are used. Only South Africa has enough data for deep analyses of the ‘middle class’ and the ‘upper class’.

Second, the scarce evidence on the assumed role of the African middle class as a seedbed of entrepreneurship and managerial competencies is discussed and evaluated by referring to the political economy of the ‘missing middle’ in Africa. The main issue investigated is the role of the African middle class in overcoming the ‘missing middle’ of small and medium sized companies. There is a general discussion about Africa’s ‘missing middle’, the assumed gap in terms of small and medium sized companies between the many mostly informal microenterprises and the large public and private companies. It is argued that the concepts of the African middle class used in the literature and the ways of defining and measuring it do not allow a deep investigation of entrepreneurship development. The reason is that the economic lives of the various segments of the middle class are so different; also the various segments of the poor and the rich classes in Africa have distinct economic lives which partly overlap with those of lower and upper segments of the African middle class.

Furthermore, we quite distinctively identify the African middle class with regard to the potential for entrepreneurship development (in transiting from survival to growth-oriented enterprises), the establishment of entrepreneurial value systems (such as accumulating for education and health, and for saving and investment), and the role in developing local industries and business networks (based on the increasing consumption spending power). Any change towards the development of growth-oriented small- and medium-sized enterprises – between survival and micro enterprises at the lower end and large capitalist and conglomerate enterprises at the upper end – based on the middle class growth in Africa is examined.

However, empirical evidence on the African middle class in terms of being able, over the years, to overcome the misery of the ‘missing middle’ is quite limited. It is therefore pertinent for more research to be undertaken on the role of the African middle class in transiting from survival enterprises towards growth-oriented enterprises, and to distil the role of the upper class in affecting this transition via its strong market power. It will also be of interest to examine how governments in Africa can support entrepreneurial development and the building of management competences for specific African middle class segments, along with public strategies to tap more into the potentials of the poor and the rich classes.

Our approach started with a ‘measurement analysis’ to see the role of assets, income, consumption, and of various income/assets ranges for defining the middle class. Then we turned to a ‘structural analysis’ to see which type of enterprises and entrepreneurs corresponds to a certain income/assets range of the middle class. In a further step we moved to a ‘politico-economic analysis’ to see if the middle class can perform the task of overcoming the ‘missing middle’ of enterprises out of itself or if the upper class still dominates the industrial policy formation process thereby preventing a positive outcome independent of the income/assets range of the middle class. Lastly, in a ‘public policy analysis’ some policy issues were discussed to see what public policy can do to support middle class enterprises and entrepreneurs. It is shown that the upper class dominates the industrial policy formation process in Africa, so that the public policy instruments are quite limited for supporting middle class enterprises and entrepreneurs. Anyway, the public policies have to consider the type of middle class enterprises and entrepreneurs to be effective.

Notes

1 However, it is also important to avoid confusion between concepts of ‘middle classes’ and ‘elites’. Carola Lentz (2015 and in this volume) reminds us that over time abrupt changes took place in self-assessments of people as being part of the ‘middle classes’ and/or ‘elites’, in researches on the subject, and in the political use of these concepts. We as authors of this chapter see in the current debate on African middle classes not much more than a political strategy (arguing that there is a new developmental force at work in Africa) and an economic strategy (arguing that the consumption power of the middle class will attract foreign investment and may accelerate local development and indigenous

entrepreneurship). As the content of the discussion is however lacking theoretical substance and empirical evidence, a look at the implicit assumptions is needed to put the debate into perspective.

2 While the ‘floating class’ has a dominant share, the shares of the lower and upper middle class segments are much smaller (AfDB 2011).

3 See some of the case studies on entrepreneurship activity in Africa: GEM (2014) South Africa, GEM (2013) Ghana, GEM (2013) Zambia, GEM (2014) Burkina Faso, GEM (2012) Nigeria, GEM (2012) Egypt, GEM (2013) Malawi, GEM (2014) Uganda, GEM (2012) Ethiopia, and other recent GEM Africa reports (Singer, Amoros and Arreola 2014). Also

of importance is the annual Doing Business Report, see Doing Business 2015 (World Bank Group 2014). Also the Forbes entries on promising young entrepreneurs in Africa are valuable by giving insights on the theme (Forbes 2014b and 2015b).

4 Especially so in South Africa, with so many discouraged entrepreneurs; cf. GEM (2014) South Africa.

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4 | Deconstructing the myth of the African middle class

Sirkku K. Hellsten

The slogan 'Africa is rising' has become a mantra across the world's development and business communities: African countries have been rapidly gaining more economic power and business competitiveness. Despite the current global economic slowdown, the continent is expanding its share in global markets and offers attractive destinations for investments. Through these new economic shifts, African leaders have also been calling for 'new sovereignty' with more political influence in international decision-making forums.

However, despite Africa's economic 'growth miracle' and increasing affluence on the continent, the gap between the rich and the poor has still not significantly narrowed; neither has democratic governance nor the obedience to the rule of law been taken as seriously as many Western partners would have wished for. Corruption and poor governance, for its part, have been offering fertile breeding ground for illegal activities from trafficking (in persons, drugs, wildlife trophies, and arms) to political and ethnic conflicts, and terrorism.

The rapidly expanding African middle class is often offered as 'a cure' for the various 'governance ills' on the continent. Particularly the studies by economists lay a heavy burden on the shoulders of those categorized as 'the emerging middle class'. This chapter challenges the assumptions that the expansion of the middle class will somehow 'automatically' steer Africa towards democracy and good governance. Instead it is argued that without any clear ideological and practical commitment to solidarity and 'social justice for all', there is no guarantee that the ongoing economic change towards middle income, consumer-societies will also transform the states into 'liberal democracies'.

I will first engage with the complexity of using class analysis in Africa to explain political change. I will then analyse the problematic of moral and political value frameworks in contemporary Africa. Particular attention is paid to the ideological vacuum after the 'death' of (African) socialism. The chapter claims that despite political rhetoric of various leaders, the traditional African values of 'solidarity and egalitarianism' are slowly dying off, or at least, getting tangled together with more individualistic trends of globalization creating social and political practice of 'afro-libertarianism.' In the 'afro-libertarian' context the emphasis on the value of solidarity has led individuals and social groups

to promote their (sub-national) self-interest instead of focusing on changing the whole political system towards more inclusive democracy and social justice.

Class analysis in Africa

Africa has indeed been shown to be an economic growth miracle during the recent years, and affluence in the continent is increasing rapidly (cf. AfDB 2011; UNDP 2013; World Bank 2013; Young 2012). Somehow, this economic progress has encouraged many researchers to set high social and political expectations on the emerging middle class. Depending on the discipline and the final aim of the study, the expansion of the middle class is anticipated to: 1) produce loyal tax payers and eager consumers with expanding purchasing power; 2) create productive and innovative entrepreneurs as well as politically active intellectuals; 3) generate enlightened citizens who are progressive agents for change towards inclusive democracy, human rights and better governance.

In the recent studies there are few references to the historical Marxist class analysis on social tensions within, and between the socio-economic classes (see Lentz in this volume). Contemporary economic analysis seldom sets the above-mentioned expectations within wider social, political and economic context and systematic framework. Similarly profound examination of historical and dialectic transitions from one political order to another as a result of class struggles does not feature significantly in the current class-related research.

Instead, these studies appear to take for granted that their target group, i.e. the middle class, holds a certain framework of social and political values. This follows Paul Collier's (2009) argumentation that a certain level of affluence is needed for democracy to work properly. While this is true in some societies, it does not hold unquestionable prediction power that the countries, which are reaching towards the 'middle income levels', are also reaching towards 'liberal democracy'. After all, in many parts of the world where there is affluence, this affluence is not equally distributed, and there has not always been direct solidarity towards or with those less fortunate.

The justification for these assumptions seems to be drawn from European historical development and from the values and ideals of the Western countries' own development agenda. However, currently we could argue for transformation in class structure and social values in Europe also. Conservative, nationalist and market oriented libertarian values are gaining space during the era of globalization; and particularly now when the European Union (EU) is facing difficult economic and political challenges. The values of humanistic political liberalism are at stake despite their historical role in the European development and in building the EU. The solidarity of many European citizens is now tested when the refugees from the world's conflict zones are crossing the borders and looking for better lives in Europe. It appears that many middle class and also working class members in generally still affluent Europe are not quite

as ready to share their resources with immigrants, or even with refugees in immediate need.

Changing circumstances also call for reconsiderations in class analysis. The class structure in Europe has changed significantly throughout its history. The values, aims and means of proletarian revolutions are different from those of bourgeois revolutions. After the 'death' of socialism the whole interpretation of class analysis has moved from Marxist struggle against capitalism (Marx 1867) to Weberian theory of stratification (Weber 1961) that goes along capitalist development – the latter currently also being applied to Africa.²

With all these changes in history and approaches, it is impossible that the value basis of society and the practical commitment to this would remain the same. As noted earlier, even within the EU, which is based on the 'historically shared' normative principles of humanistic and political liberalism, some governments and high number of citizens of various – if not all – social classes are challenging the practicality of the values of universal and equal human rights when it comes to dealing with the immigrant and refugee influx. But if the Europeans themselves are no longer fully ready to hold on to these values of political liberalism, why would the African middle class have any particular reason to strife towards normative direction that originally was not part of their own culture? Without any long-term historical or traditional attachment to these values, for many in Africa, they remain 'foreign import' and an example of the Eurocentric hypocrisy that does not 'practice what it preaches'. Particularly after the liberation struggle from colonialism, and the subsequent radical push by the Western camp to get the African states to adapt a market economy, it is no wonder that the value base of many African societies is currently rather mixed.

Nevertheless, the current class analysis seldom examines deeply the value-related issues. This is a gap as the whole class analysis has shifted from socialist values to promotion of economic and political liberalism. During and after the liberation struggle and the early post-colonial times African scholarship was using class analysis in order to map out alternative directions for system of governance for the new African states. These alternatives were based on the Marxist critique of the Western individualism and capitalism. Quite ironically, using class in socio-economic analysis had earlier normatively quite the opposite direction it has today. The Marxist analysis was against particularly individualistic economic liberalism. Today, however, class analysis is instead used to support the expansion of economic liberalism with the hope of political liberalism also rising.

African humanistic socialism as nationalist, post-colonial ideology of liberation from capitalist colonial exploitation in various countries (such as Ghana, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Senegal among others) was based on Marxist dialectics of historical revolutions, and its ultimate goal was to return to African

‘traditional values’ of solidarity and egalitarianism in communitarian society.³ Liberation movements in Africa fought against global monopoly capitalism as well as the exploitation practiced by the (former) imperialist colonial powers. While the ideal of ‘the return to traditionally classless’⁴ African society was more of a romantic utopia than rational and reasonable model for a new political order in Africa, the Marxist approach as such was an anti-thesis to the Western political and economic model (see i.e. Cohen 1972; Diamond 1987; Grundy, 1964: 379–393; and Shivji 1976). Some formulations of African socialism (for example Nkrumah 1970; Nyerere 1967, 1968 and 1973; Senghor 1964) also gave practical guidance in building political and governance systems at least in some of the new post-colonial states (for example in Ghana and Tanzania). The goal was to defeat dependency on the imperialistic world markets and to move towards self-reliance, and into pan-African solidarity movement (Cohen 1972; Hellsten 2013; Shivji 1976).

African application of Marxist socialism was also made to fit the circumstances of post-colonial states. For Marx the classless society could be reached by the revolution that was the evident result of antagonism and conflict between the existing social classes – and particularly between the workers and property owners, ‘the exploiting class’. African socialism also called for nationalization of the property of the former colonial masters. In Africa, however, there was no European styled industrial revolution, and the newly independent states suffered from high levels of poverty, illiteracy, and lack of means of production and workers’ skills. As there was no clearly defined working class, instead of ‘the proletariat’ taking over political control, it was transferred to the new national leaders, which rather rapidly formed the new ruling local classes. Despite all good intentions and few exceptionally committed leaders, this locally ruling class soon adopted the manners of their former ‘masters’. After all, it was easy and tempting for the many, often foreign-educated new leaders, to start to see themselves above the common people; the uneducated, the illiterate and the poor population. Post-colonial states were not ready for full democracy with their artificial borders that created ethnic divisions, with the uneducated citizenry, and with high levels of poverty. There was no rational basis for forming a Western-style social contract with enlightened citizens that share the same values and goals, and understand the different governance structures and processes imported to the countries. Thus, while the state ideologies might have continued to preach ‘solidarity and egalitarianism’, the post-colonial African states were far away from heading towards abolishing class divisions. Rather the gulf between the haves and the have not’s has been getting wider as time goes by. The governments of the newly independent countries were often forced to continue their political and economic collaboration with their former colonial masters in order to provide for the very basic needs of their people. In this process they learnt how to get extra compensation

to fulfil their own personal interests. After World War II and during the Cold War, the Western development agenda that combined the ideological call for political liberalism with the market interests of economic liberalization, further integrated the African traditional call for communitarian solidarity⁵ with the newly adopted individualistic political self-interest. The post-colonial states remained dependent on the Western aid and cooperation. In exchange they had to adapt to the Western democratic processes and governance institutions. However, their leaders or the people did not necessarily adapt to the liberal value base on which these were grounded on in Europe, but rather held on to the traditional and patrimonial practices. Even when the internal social and particularly ethnic divisions grew deeper, the ruling class learnt to manipulate the population by drawing the attention to the external enemy, that is, global imperialism and the Western monopoly capitalism. On the other hand, they also learnt to use ethnic divisions politically to enforce their own positions. (Escobar 1985; Grundy 1964: 379–393; Marx 1867; Resnick 2015: 573–587; Rist 2002; Samoff 1982: 105–6; Shivji 1976).

In a manner of speaking, the African post-colonial leadership was often forced to adopt a schizophrenic attitude towards the West: the Western states were to be accepted as development partners while their conditional policies were still considered as neo-colonial impositions. The African states were then often left to balance between the pressures of global markets, political pressures from the ‘liberal’ Western democracies, on the one hand, and their socialist rivals, particularly the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War, on the other. The leaders – and the wider economic and political elites, i.e. the ruling class, had to learn to navigate between different ideological demands, economic pressures, and their own survival. Gradually, as Shivji (1976) notes, in post-colonial Africa, many of those who represented state power learnt to protect their individual interests rather than to pursue the common good of the citizens. To avoid any major political challenges and public questioning of the legitimacy of their authoritarian power and even their personal properties, they often did this by calling for reconciliation in the name of traditional values of solidarity and egalitarianism, and by asking the people to shy away from the Western imported ideas of liberal democracy that ‘would only lead to egoistic individualism and fragmentation of the society’. The appeal to tradition was used to remind the people of their social duties and need for communal cooperation; even if this duty of solidarity within the ruling class only extended into loyalty to ‘the old boys’ networks and patrimonial relationships (Hellsten 2009 and 2013).

As already noted, many positive social and political outcomes are expected from the emerging middle class in Africa, including pushing for accountability, responsive government, and in general, supporting pro-poor policies (e.g. Birdsall 2007: 575–98; Easterly 2001). However, not all middle classes

are created equal, and their politically transformative potential often has been linked to their degree of (in)dependence on the state of resources and preferred access to markets – in most countries often at least partly controlled by the elites/the ruling class (Resnick 2015). The aphorism ‘No bourgeoisie, no democracy’ (Moore 1966) was originally linked to the wealth and status that would be independent of the state, thus also creating independence from the ruling class. In Africa this independence can be questioned: local and foreign political and economic elites have often captured the state and are controlling its business relations and economy. The middle class entrepreneurs (whether land owners, service providers, or working in any other sector) tend to then be highly dependent on the ‘goodwill’ of the ruling elites. Thus, it is not in their direct, short-term interest to call for class revolution that would bring ‘more democratic’ decision-making and more open markets as they may lose their profits and share due to unpredictability and increasing competition (see Hellsten 2009; Young 2012).

Similarly, a large part of the African middle class is currently employed by the dilated public sector. It is not in their immediate interests either to call for radical democratic changes that might include reforms that rationalize the size of civil service and cut down public sector spending. Many people in either group may be deeply discontent on the state of democracy, but it is a different question whether they would jeopardize their positions and their personal security by organizing for radical social and political change. The director of Kenyan Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission Halakhe Waqo (2015) went as far as saying that the middle class in Africa is corrupted as its jobs are dependent on governments and governments’ contracts, and thus, it desires no change.

As mentioned earlier, in Europe industrialization played a major role in the strengthening of democratic processes and institutionalization of ideologically based political parties, as well as the strengthening of labour movements and trade unions. These in turn were able to aggregate and voice common grievances and lobbied for policies that ultimately created the foundation of the middle class in Europe. In Africa the situation is very different, industrialization is happening in very different speed and scale, authoritarian governance styles have prevented serious political competition, and labour movements are relatively weak – and in contemporary Africa their ‘socialist’ agenda is rather unpopular and seen as anachronistic. The increasing South–South partnership and expanding business relations with other countries (such as the BRICS and IBSA) with more authoritarian governance models have further dampened pro-democratic pressures (Resnick 2015: 578; Young 2012).

As Samir Amin (2014) has noted, today’s capitalism calls for a full updating of definition and analysis. The Marxist concept of class and of class struggle is seen as ‘outmoded’. Nevertheless, the social mobility, democratic developments,

or economic progress are still often explained by ‘the expansion of the middle class’ without deeper contextual analysis. The problem is that in reality the class structure in African post-colonial states does not fit originally Western-created academic approaches whether Marxist, Weberian or any other: there was no direct move from feudalism to industrialization; there was/is no clear salaried ‘working class’ vs. proprietary class struggle (particularly after the means of production were nationalized at one point or another in many countries); there was/is no clear ‘petty bourgeoisie’ which could organize themselves with shared interests against authoritarian monarchs – after all, most of the African current leaders are today elected by ‘credible’ elections.⁶

Thus, when class analysis is used to explain social developments and political transformation, it should always take into account its historical context. This was the very starting point of Marx; and is further emphasized in an African context by Issa Shivji (1976) and other African scholars (see Grundy 1964). It is evident that African middle class cannot be studied in isolation from wider global trend. The expansion of *precarariat*,⁷ the lack of political alternatives, the takeover by multinational monopoly capitalism, the emerging ‘protectionism’ in the West, and the expanding economic and political influence of China and the rest of the BRICS and other emerging economies (Cheeseman 2014; Khunou 2015; Easterly 2001; Samoff 1982).

Does purchasing power mean commitment to democratic values? The World Bank (2013) and the African Development Bank’s (2011) definition of middle class based on purchasing power is problematic to start with, and even more so in Africa. If, for example, we take a look at Tanzania, it is also difficult to bring purchasing power, access to services and political as well as other values commitments together. As Kabwe (2013) observed, the number of Tanzanians falling between earning/spending of US\$2–US\$20 a day is estimated to be five and a half million of (now) approximately 50 million people. But if we consider data from tax authorities and pension funds these numbers can be questioned, as a significantly lower number of Tanzanians is reported to pay taxes regularly, while the Total Tax Rate is 44.3 per cent. In general, many who earn over two dollars a day are working in the informal sector and self-employed. If we look at the access to services, Tanzanians registered with pension funds or health insurances are again much less than those earning US\$2–US\$20 daily. When it comes to political participation an estimated 20 million Tanzanians were registered to vote in the 2010 elections, but only approximately 40 per cent turned up to vote. In the 2015 elections the number of registered voters was around 23 million (with many difficulties in registration this number is much lower than those eligible to vote). This time the turnout was around 66 per cent as there were expectations for change – of the party in power, if not directly in the political system as such. This shows some increasing political activity, but still leaves over 30 per cent as non-voters. Also no clear motivations

for voting are mapped: some indeed wanted and expected a change – proof that multiparty democracy can work in Tanzania; others may have been more interested in making sure the old, *de facto* one-party system continues; many others vote out of habit, tradition or loyalty to the party of the country's independence, or more often out of loyalty to their ethnic community, or their extended families. Thus, it is very difficult to know what role the wish for the realization of democratic values plays during the elections (Hellsten 2013).

Whether the middle class representatives live in an urban or rural setting makes a great difference in their consumption habits and services available, but also in their education and interpretation of democratic concepts as well as in their political awareness and activeness. Many Tanzanians are familiar with the international human rights agenda and in general support it, but prefer to interpret it with a collectivist rather than with a liberal and individualistic perspective, ranking cultural and group rights higher than individual rights. Many follow the news and are interested in politics, but many others are not, and many still have no access to TV or newspapers. Many own mobile (smart) phones, computers, a decent house, and a private car, while many others have to use all their meagre income to provide for their daily basic needs. With this heterogeneity of those categorized economically to be members of the emerging middle class, it would be misleading to assume that they share the normative set of values that calls for political reforms towards 'liberal democracy'.

Middle classes all over the world are heterogeneous, and especially so in Africa where class-consciousness is traditionally low. Many Africans are not accustomed to identifying themselves through socio-economic classes unlike the Europeans when it comes to their socio-economic status. In many parts of Africa the social identification is rather made through more 'natural' communal ties such as one's ethnic community, clan, birth and residence areas, or by one's religion and other factors. Afrocentric approaches also use 'race' rather than class as the core self-identification criteria. Also individual experiences even in the same society can make a difference in self-identification.⁸ Burger et al. (2015), for example, argue that social-economic and political context and self-consciousness affect how people position themselves in social classes. In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, the relationship between race and socio-economic status is very complicated and makes class analysis a complex exercise.

African middle classes and the rise of afro-libertarianism

The attempts to map members of the emerging middle class in Africa therefore have to cope with several challenges. This alone makes it very difficult to understand what middle classes value in life besides their ability to consume more and more expensive commodities. The actual mapping of their ideological and political preferences has been limited. In recent economic studies, however, there has been an unwarranted tendency to use *descriptive*

class analysis (the increase in global affluence leads into expansion of the middle class) to draw a *prescriptive* conclusion (the expansion of the middle income consumers will lead to ‘democratic change’). This is rather misleading as it takes almost for granted that liberal and democratic values will emerge in people’s minds at the same speed as their purchasing power increases. While this might have happened in Europe at a certain point of history, this gives no direct support to the predictions that the same will happen to Africa today or in the near future.

At the moment, the moral and political value framework in Africa is very mixed and there is a pull towards different directions. While market capitalism and *economic* liberalism is globally adopted, African global partners have different views on the value of democracy and the practicality of *political* liberalism. The Western partners continue to press for political liberalism based on liberal humanism and universality of individual rights, on the one hand. On the other hand, the old and emerging partners from South, East and elsewhere come with very different combinations of market economy and governance ideals, preferring more state-led capitalism. Africa’s own indigenous, communitarian values of solidarity and egalitarianism are then often integrated with the instrumental and materialist values of free market capitalism. In addition, religious values still have a strong hold on people, but also different religions are bringing in new trends to their followers: many of these with conservative values and indeed, not all of these peaceful and asking for mutual understanding and empathy towards the less fortunate (see Hellsten 2013).

This mixture of value frameworks, belief systems, and traditional plus imported practices, has mixed adaption of the values and adaption to new practices. People no longer know the difference between values as ideals, and practices that are one way or another tied to the different value frameworks. This is clearly not a problem only in Africa, but it is a global trend. In Africa, as elsewhere, the lack of clear political and ideological directions has led many people to look for normative guidance from elsewhere. Unfortunately this often benefits the agenda of extremists, who promote indisputable norms and rules. This vacuum of political values and directions has indeed also pushed people to support revolutions ‘for change’. The Arab Spring uprisings, for example, have showed the wide discontent that ordinary people have with corrupt governments. However, as noted before, the revolutionary changes in power have not often brought revolutionary changes in governance, or better working democracy – rather either chaos or new regimes looking for authoritarian power. Often the alternative for political ideology is found in religion, and this is happening across the world. The difference is that democratic institutions and processes in Africa are much younger and weaker than in many other parts of the world.

In this context the Western normative package for development that ties together two very different types of liberalism, that is, economic liberalism and political liberalism, sets many African countries at the crossroad. As self-interest and profit making of economic liberalism does not always fit comfortably together with political liberalism, it is easier to set towards the road that appears globally more practical and also more practiced (Hellsten 2009 and 2013; Shivji 1976).

Capitalism and global market economy is backed up by neo-liberalistic, one-sided and short-term profit maximization. Political liberalism, for its part, calls for social responsibility and the respect for universal rights. The former appears as egoistic self-interest, greed and materialism, while the latter supports political participation, the rule of law, international norms, and human rights. As economic liberalism is based on the assumed 'invisible hands' of markets (Smith 1970), it is at least partly determinist. Political liberalism, on the other hand, is progressive as its aim is to build a global or cosmopolitan order that respects the universalized values and rights. These two approaches are very different, and even in the Western international practice and development cooperation the values of political liberalism, while insisted upon in policy papers, are often not consistently practiced. This incoherence justifies also the partner countries' accusations of Western hypocrisy. And indeed many African leaders have used this rhetoric to defend their own self-interested actions (Hellsten 2009 and 2013). If the Western countries themselves have problems in creating consistent policies that balance the two trends of liberalism, it is no wonder if much younger post-colonial African states have problems in finding their direction. After the death of African socialism, the value basis for African politics has integrated these different forms of liberalism in a manner that best fits those in power. As analysed elsewhere (Hellsten 2009) this current political scenery in many African countries can be defined as 'afro-libertarianism'. Afro-libertarianism is a mixture of African communitarian cultural traditions (rather than values) and patrimonial hierarchies integrated with the Western individualistic practices (rather than the politico-economic ideals). All this is then set to work with *institutions* designed for democratic governance. In other words, when democratic institutions and structures (such as elections) together with market interests are set in culturally and historically very different environments this results easily in 'pseudo-democracies' that look institutionally like democratic states but are based on very different normative values and principles than those of 'political liberalism'.

'Afro-libertarianism' describes the socio-economic context in contemporary Africa in which different value frameworks partly clash and partly integrate with each other. For example, when the individualistic self-interest of rational profit makers of classical (or neo-) liberalism is set in the context of communitarian traditional solidarity with social duties and networks, the result is

that the communitarian call for solidarity creates biased, sub-national loyalties that look after their own interests rather than for the national interest and the common good. While economic liberalism calls for market rationality, communitarian traditions set this in the networks of patrimonial relations.⁹ The ideal of political liberalism, which sets ‘a social contract’ as the basis of democracy does not work in this context as the calls for sub-national loyalty prevent impartiality and the autonomy of the individual citizens. Instead the leaders and the wider ruling class are able to demand loyalty from their subjects by appealing to solidarity towards one’s social collective – most often this is one’s ethnic community.

In South Africa the middle class is said to share the material culture that has led to the notion of ‘idle class’. It posits shared consciousness that has a strong sense of individualism in contradiction to the ideal of class solidarity, or traditional solidarity. Instead the middle class members can be associated with the new ruling classes. For example, ANC’s affirmative action policy of Black Economic Empowerment that originally represented success and hope for black people formerly oppressed as an underclass, later turned into a symbol of personal greed in the eyes of most South Africans after becoming closely associated with the new ruling class (see Burger et al. 2015: 25–40; Khunou 2015: 90–103.)

However, this is not a tendency confined to post-apartheid South Africa. One can find the same phenomenon in many African societies. It is evident that with this type of integration of values, social practices and aspirations, as well as political frameworks, the role of the middle class as the evident agent of change that strives for liberal democracy, can be questioned. One could summarize that often the upper middle class representatives are climbing upward on the social ladder – closer to the elites/the ruling class, while the lower middle class is still struggling not to fall back to poverty or to the precariat. The upper middle class may not need or want to put its energy in democratic change, as it focuses on the increase of its material affluence. The middle of the middle class may be politically active through civil society movements and organizations, national and local politics, or other ways, but will not be able to produce the critical mass calling for radical political changes. The lower middle class, for its part, is too busy making ends meet to be politically well organized.

When it comes to studies on the political and economic role of the middle class in Africa, there are many gaps in relation to people’s self-identification, individuals’ and communities’ values and aspirations as well as political commitments and communal loyalties. Without these, class analysis in Africa remains an external imposition that tries to categorize African development according to the Western experiences and standards; and to show that the Western model that ties together democracy, liberal values and market economy

can work as a model for global change. This type of class analysis does not take into account indigenous values and local history. It is not consistent, it does not contextualize its categorization of people and thus, it provides unwarranted socio-political predictions.

Conclusion

I have tried to show that in many African contemporary societies there is an incoherent mixture of several very different value systems. On the one hand, there are traditional collectivist values that in practice appear as sub-national loyalties and patrimonial power relations. On the other hand, there are the externally imposed values of materialism and individualistic profit maximization of economic liberalism. In addition, people have a mixed understanding of an individual and collective human rights agenda of political liberalism. I have argued that this situation that I have labelled as 'afro-libertarian political practice' is partly a result of the Western modernization process and development agenda, which binds together two very different forms of liberal democracy under just one package. In many African societies the negative practical elements of economic liberalism have been adopted and mixed with traditional practices. The positive values such as respect for individual rights and equality of opportunity have been set aside. Political reality then allows for self-interest, profit making, and biased, self-serving 'solidarity' (within ethnic communities, old-boys networks, etc.). An earlier African socialist call for wider solidarity and egalitarianism has also been turned into political rhetoric rather than taken as an ethical goal in building more just societies.

In the place of any clear normative political ideology, many African states can then continue to be run by a mixture of principles that allow the persistence of corruption, favouritism, and authoritarian measures of governance. In this situation many people are starting to look for normative guidelines from alternative political directions. This had led to the emergence of different types of extremism (such as religious fundamentalism, ethnically manipulated politics, fascism, extreme egoism) and other destabilizing political movements. At the same time, with more money, commodities and business opportunities available, there are also trends toward adopting to the materialistic values of capitalism and consumer society that easily lead people away from political activity.

An already heterogeneous and rather ambiguously defined African middle class is no exception. Its representatives are shopping not only for the latest fashion trends in new goods and commodities, but also for values and ideologies that could guide their lives. In other words, the logic of the market rationality has been extended to all other aspects of social and political life. This of course is not just typical for Africa, but for the globalized world as a whole. The only difference is that the democratic processes adopted and institutions

built are much younger and weaker in African post-colonial states than in many other parts of the world.

Defining the actual guiding values is getting more and more difficult in the current African context in which the traditional collectivist values of solidarity and egalitarianism are blending with an individualistic value framework. Political parties today seldom pledge to realize any clear normative, ideological directions of development and governance. Instead the campaigns make vague references to democracy, development, change, affluence and sovereignty, but without clear policy programmes. In exchange for aid and economic cooperation the Western partners are offering ‘a development ideal’ that is loosely based on the framework of political liberalism. But acting in the name of ‘ownership’ and national sovereignty allows African states to make their own interpretations and choices, which values to adopt. The results have been the elite controlled and captured states, who focus on personal profits and set aside the call for wider participation and equal rights.

All in all, if the academics and the Western policy makers continue to cultivate expectations that the ‘middle class’ in Africa will choose liberal democracy over many other (cultural) options available, they may be setting themselves up for ‘a disappointment’. After all, when presumptions rather than extensive empirical research on the people’s values is taken as the starting point of the African current class analysis, it is likely to be misguided and be loaded with Western expectations, and thus, leading unwarranted normative prognoses to the continent as a whole. The class theory and analysis in Africa indeed needs more contextualization, depth and value-related studies.

Notes

1 I use the term afro-libertarianism in this context to illustrate the central role that economic liberalism, that is, *libertarianism* has received in African politics, and how it is often mixed with the traditional African values. See also Hellsten (2009 and 2013).

2 See also the chapters by Lentz and Neubert in this volume.

3 Despite African heterogeneous historical and cultural background particularly many liberation movement political philosophers and activists attempted to find certain genuinely African shared and/or traditional values to have a good basis for national and regional unity, including the Pan-African movement. The purpose was to return proudly to non-European/pre-colonial ideals that differ from the colonizers’

individualistic normative frameworks. Some of the most well-known promoters of African shared traditional values were Nkrumah (1970), Nyerere (1967, 1968, 1973), and Senghor (1964). Still current African philosophy – as well as African politicians – often appeal to some allegedly shared and specifically African values that differ from the European framework in their more collectivist nature. See, for example, Wiredu (2006).

4 The very idea of classlessness of traditional Africa was more a nostalgic wish than a state of affairs based on historical facts.

5 On the call for traditional solidarity see, for example, Nkrumah (1970) and Nyerere (1968, 1973).

6 Except in few ancient Kingdoms or Chiefdoms, most of which were integrated

to be part of the larger governance structures.

7 Guy Standing (2011) argues that globalization has plunged more and more people into the precariat, which he analyses as a new emerging social class. According to Standing, the precariat is not only suffering from job insecurity but also identity insecurity and lack of time control, not least due to workfare social policies. Standing describes the precariat as an agglomerate of several different social groups, notably immigrants, young educated people, and those who have fallen out of the old-style industrial working class. In Africa precariat is clearly rising alongside with the other classes, also very relevant for the inter-continent migration and the expansion of unemployed or temporary employed youth.

8 There is a gap in mapping out individuals' and groups' current class consciousness in different parts of Africa, and in different groups of people. This statement here, however, is based on discussions with my academic, professional, and other colleagues on the issue during my 14 years in East Africa. On Afrocentric self-identification see, for example, Senghor (1964).

9 Here patrimonialism refers to an authority relationship in which the leader controls an administrative staff selected from his 'patrimony' and based on personal loyalty to the leader/superior.

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5 | Kenya – an unconscious middle class? Between regional-ethnic political mobilization and middle class lifestyles

Dieter Neubert

The new global narrative of the emerging middle classes in the Global South links the discovery of a new group of consumers with the hope that this group will stand up for democracy and/or democratic change (AfDB 2011: 2; McKinsey Global Institute 2010). This relates as part of this narrative with the debate on democratization in Africa (e.g. Bratton and Walle 1992). At the same time it is claimed that there is a middle class consensus (Easterly 2001). All this seems to support the concept of a (new) middle class, though there are also critical objections voiced (see i.a. Melber 2013 and 2015). In addition, there is empirical evidence of a moderate rise in income among parts of the population in the Global South (data for Africa and especially for Kenya will be shown below). This is matched by the simple observation that new shopping malls have been constructed in and around the urban centres of many African countries. At first glance, it seems evident that there is support for democratic change. In all African countries that provide basic freedoms, there are active civil society organizations that are based in the middle class, or are chiefly represented by members of the middle class. The data provided by Afrobarometer shows that 70 per cent of African citizens from the 19 countries studied support democracy (Gyimah-Boadi and Armah Attoh 2009: 1). However, Gyimah-Boadi and Armah Attoh argue that this overwhelming support is based on an understanding of democracy that lacks basic elements such as accountability and is open to a paternalistic understanding of rule. In political conflicts like the ones resulting from the Arab Spring, members of the middle class are found in the liberal democratic camps, in religious conservative groups as well as among the supporters of the authoritarian governments. This is not at all surprising because we know that European fascism was supported by large parts of the middle class. Scepticism regarding the democratic attitude of the middle class leads us to ask whether the members of the middle class share a common political vision and how this is related to the middle class consensus referred to by Easterly. Or to put it in a nutshell: is it helpful to apply the concept of middle class to Africa south of the Sahara, what can be explained by using the term class, and where are the limits of the class concept?

My discussion of these questions is based on the case of Kenya because it provides helpful empirical evidence regarding some of the contradictions we face when we apply the class concept to Africa south of the Sahara.

After a short discussion of concepts of class, basic information about the Kenyan 'middle class' will be provided. I then look deeper into the formation and structure of the Kenyan middle class. This leads to a revised understanding of the Kenyan middle stratum and to a concept that covers socio-cultural diversity. The conclusion considers possible future prospects of the Kenyan middle class/middle stratum in particular and an African middle class in general.

Concepts of class

Economists and their socio-economic definitions have heavily influenced the current discussion of global and African middle classes.¹ They follow different approaches that pursue two distinctive lines. First, middle classes are defined in particular countries either in relation to the median of the per capita income (Birdsall, Graham and Pettinato 2000: 3) or as the middle quintiles (Easterly 2001: 10). In the second approach, middle classes are defined via global or regional income strata calculated in PPP US\$ per capita and day. The more or less arbitrarily chosen thresholds (Ravallion 2010: 446) are set at the lower end between US\$2 (Banerjee and Duflo 2008: 4; AfDB 2011: 2) and US\$10 (Kharas 2010: 9). At the upper end the per capita income is set between US\$10 (Banerjee and Duflo 2008: 4) and US\$100 (Kharas 2010: 12). If we ignore Kharas, who analyses global middle classes including the OECD countries and therefore sets very high levels, most of the authors define a lower threshold of US\$2 per capita and day that follows the usual poverty line. The upper limit still varies between US\$10 (Banerjee and Duflo 2008: 4) and US\$20 (AfDB 2011: 2). It is obvious that these socio-economic concepts of class are purely descriptive and define a middle-income stratum in the society. They do not refer to the classic sociological concepts that see a link between class and a particular consciousness and a particular position in society with similar livelihoods.²

The classical sociological understanding of class is based on the social structure of the analysed society. According to Marx (1884/1974: 892f.; Marx 1894/1976; Marx and Engels 2009) and his followers (e.g. Poulantzas 1974; Wright 1982 and 2009) social position is defined via control of the means of production and/or the produced surplus or via expropriation. For Kenya and other countries of the Global South, the means of production are capital, labour, or land.³ These mark the bourgeois, labour or peasant classes. Weber (1978: 302) characterizes a class as a group with 'the typical probability of 1. provision with goods, 2. gaining a position in life and 3. finding inner satisfactions'. Membership of a particular class depends on property, the possibility of realising assets in the market and the possibility of downward and upward individual

or intergenerational mobility. He differentiates between an upper, asset-holding class, a lower class without assets and a middle class in between. In contrast to Marx, Max Weber (1978: 305) refers to important differences inside the classes according to 'status and status group (stand)' (referring to socio-professional positions). Both these and other current concepts referring to Marx or Weber share basic assumptions. Socio-economic positions are seen largely as stable and are (mostly) reproduced from generation to generation, though Weber at least considers the possibility of upward and downward mobility. In both concepts, control over the means of production and/or professional positions lead to similar income. Similar positions create similar interests and the members of a class share basic orientations (values) concerning what is a 'good society' and a 'good life'. This implies a socio-cultural homogeneity linked to a shared political interest and orientation within a particular class, offering potential for political action. Therefore, classes are important and potentially political actors that can influence the political processes of a particular country. If these assumptions are true, then the class concept is appropriate for describing a society. At the same time this approach provides the reason for the existence of a 'middle class consciousness'. In contrast to the descriptive socio-economic concept of class, these sociological concepts offer analytical access to a society. Against this background, I will analyse the role of the Kenyan middle class, asking at the same time whether there is a middle class in the strict sense of the concept. For this purpose, the term middle class will at first be used in its descriptive socio-economic sense.

The Kenyan middle class

The existence of a middle class in Kenya, in the sense of a middle-income stratum, is not a new phenomenon. In colonial Kenya, as in other African countries south of the Sahara, Africans who had access to education acquired white collar jobs in the formal sector, for instance as clerks, teachers or small entrepreneurs, and formed a new social group. Some Africans even had the chance of a university education and became qualified lawyers or took up other professions. They were referred to as the African 'élite', which meant in fact a kind of middle class because the top ranks in politics, the administration and the economy were reserved for the privileged white population.⁴ These few African social climbers joined the small 'Asian' population in middle-income positions. Nevertheless, this small group of educated Africans established itself in Kenyan politics through newly founded civil associations and parties, and in the economy either through small urban enterprises or investment in commercial agriculture. After independence, more Africans joined the Kenyan middle class. On the basis of Kenyan statistical data, Berg-Schlusser (1979: 321) follows the growth of the middle class in Kenya from 10.1 per cent in 1950 to 19.3 per cent in 1970. Similar results are presented by Ghai, Godfrey and Lisk

(1979: 43). The data are not comparable with the current ones of the AfDB or the World Bank, but show that there was an African middle-income stratum in the 1970s. In addition, due to the activities of the white settlers and the Asian population, Kenya had a comparatively well-developed civil society at the beginning of independence (Neubert 1997: 102–122). Combined with an orientation towards a free market economy, the stage was set for the further development of the middle class.⁵

The comparative data of the AfDB identify a considerable middle class. If we include the so-called ‘floating class’, Kenya has one of the largest middle classes in Africa south of the Sahara, representing 44.9 per cent of the whole population (AfDB 2011: 5, chart 4). In only five countries (Gabon, Botswana, Namibia, Ghana, Cap Verde) is this percentage larger, while even in South Africa it is with 41.1 per cent slightly lower. If we quantify the poor class with an income below US\$2 a day (AfDB 2011: 20, chart 20) the Kenyan 41.7 per cent are only slightly above the countries with the smallest percentage (Cap Verde 40.2 per cent, Djibouti 41.1), with South Africa having 47.1 per cent. According to the AfDB data, this is due to the comparatively large percentage of the population with an income above the US\$20 a day line (13.4 per cent).⁶ However, we need to be aware that this data has its weaknesses.⁷

In the literature the (African) middle classes are described as a new consumer group that supports democracy, is well educated (secondary and more and more also tertiary education), is career-oriented and upwardly mobile, and at the same time attaches importance to family values (Heiman, Liechty and Freernan 2012: 11; Darbon 2012: 51; Kharas 2010: 7). In our on-going field study we have been able to confirm these assumptions. However, we may add that the members of the middle class are internationally connected either through family members overseas who send remittances, professional links at the global level, or personal diaspora experiences as students or migrant workers. This international connectedness is supplemented by contacts with family members, friends and business partners in other countries via new social media, social networks and reception of news from North America or Europe in newspapers, on radio or television, or in the internet. Using these channels, the people take part in international debates and the Kenyan diaspora comments on and influences political discussions in Kenya. Another important element in the daily life of the Kenyan middle classes is religion. No matter to which denomination they belong, belief in God and participation in services are a matter of course. For the majority of the Christian population this goes hand-in-hand with burial in the home village, even if the deceased has lived for most of his or her life in the city. Nearly everybody will refer to this ‘home’ village when asked where they come from. The expression ‘peasants in the city’ (Mangin 1970) still applies in Kenya and highlights this virtual link to the rural home. This feeling of belonging to a rural home is

part of the regional-ethnic identity that is ubiquitous in daily life. In many situations Kenyans are identified by their ethnic belonging, which is usually linked to a particular district.

This short list of characteristics of the Kenyan middle class seems to fit very well into the general middle class debate. But this is only part of the truth. We find the same characteristics not only in part of the upper class but in the poor class, too. Being religious or having an ethnic identity or putting strong emphasis on the family applies to all Kenyans, including the poorer groups. But even assumed middle class characteristics such as attaching importance to education, striving for upward mobility, career-orientation and an enterprising attitude can be found among the poorer groups. According to the data from Afrobarometer, the support for democracy among better-educated groups⁸ is only slightly higher than such support among the less educated. There are no striking differences between the classes as far as these values and attitudes are concerned. However, the middle class may have a greater political consciousness that provides the foundation for specific political action.

One element, which is usually linked to the middle class, is the existence of a civil society. As already mentioned, Kenya has a visible and vivid civil society with trade unions, professional associations, development and welfare NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and of course numerous churches and religious groups that pursue welfare activities. The members of these organizations are usually middle class. Exceptions are parts of the CBOs and the church communities, but even here the majority of the staff and leaders are from the middle class (Daniel and Neubert 2014). The political commitment of the civil society organizations varies. Politically outspoken and highly visible are human and women's rights organizations and the Law Society of Kenya while faith-based organizations take part in moral and value debates. Trade unions and professional organizations are very active but with the exception of the Law Society they generally refrain from making political statements and focus on their specific interests. However, there is a potential for middle class political expression and political action, especially via human rights and women's rights organizations and faith-based organizations. The important point is that those civil society organizations that take part in public political and moral debates represent different and sometimes conflicting positions.

A striking example is the debate on the new constitution that took place in 2010 (Daniel and Neubert 2014). One crucial point was a new regulation that allows abortion in specific cases where the life of the mother is threatened. This was criticized by a conservative coalition of faith-based organizations, such as the protestant National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the Catholic Church, individual churches and church groups, and the Khadi Courts; this coalition was led by the then minister for higher education, William Ruto. The human and women's rights organizations and most of the

parties supported the new constitution, which was approved by popular vote. This conflict shows that civil society and its middle class leaders and members have the potential to engage in political debates. In this case, a line of conflict went through the middle class between 'liberal' and 'conservative' factions. However, these factions were not related to any particular socio-economic or socio-professional groups.

This temporary divide between 'liberal' and 'conservative' values is unusual in Kenyan political debates. The differences between Kenyan parties are not linked to basic values or attitudes such as liberal or conservative and they do not represent political currents or basic positions. They are built upon regional-ethnic blocs represented by well-known and popular leaders. Therefore the question of ethnic representation and the amount of central state power are typical political issues. In election campaigns topics were questions such as the position of the president versus that of the prime minister, or the balance of power between central government and local government. This pattern has been extraordinarily stable for decades. In elections, coalitions of regional-ethnic blocs compete with each other. The coalitions may change but the basic regional-ethnic blocs remain stable (Barkan and Okumu 1978; Haugerud 1995; Hulterström 2007). There are no parties representing middle class interests.⁹ The highly disputed 2007 election showed that the majority of middle class and civil society organizations were integrated into the regional-ethnic political blocs (see Daniel and Neubert 2014). It was only when the violence escalated and nearly led to civil war that the quest for peace became a joint aim of the middle class civil society organizations, as well as of the majority of Kenyans. It can thus be concluded that the socio-economic middle stratum does not constitute a politically conscious or active class (see also Cheeseman 2015: 602 for a similar argument). The Kenyan middle stratum lacks the important feature of particular class interests in the sense of Marx or Weber. What is left as an identifier of the middle class is the better income of its members and their ability to consume.

Blurred boundaries and lack of stability To understand the absence of a middle class consciousness it is helpful to look closer at the socio-economic structure of the middle class beyond the single factor of income at a certain point of time. The class concept implies according to Marx a relatively stable position during the lifecycle of a person or family and over generations. Weber sees the possibility of moving, usually between sub-classes of the same class. Besides the upward mobility that is linked to the growth of the middle class (including the 'floating class'), our interview data suggest that there is also considerable downward mobility arising from unemployment, sickness or other events. Without social welfare benefits, unemployment is a serious social risk for the whole family. If other family members are earning or if there are

savings, it can be coped with for a limited time, but without such assets it will inevitably lead to downward mobility. And even with the health insurance that is offered by some employers in the formal sector, a long period of sickness is a high risk. There will be no salary and often the insurance does not cover all costs. For those who run a small business of their own, the whole enterprise may be threatened in case of serious sickness. This applies especially to the lower strata of the middle class (the floating class or the lower middle class). The impact of this vulnerability is permeability between the poor and the middle class.

The presumed relative stability of class position, as suggested by Marx or Weber, implies that children belong to the same class as their parents. But where there is a growing middle class and downward mobility is common children and their parents, or adult siblings within the same family, may have different class positions. In Kenya, where the extended family is still of considerable importance, it is quite usual for family members to be spread across different income classes. These cross-class relations exist not only between the middle class and the poor but also include members of the upper stratum. The better-off parts of an extended family often support poorer members' education or help in cases of sickness.

For an analysis of class positions and particular class interests, the socio-professional structure and modes of production in Kenyan society are of special importance. According to Marxian class concepts, expropriation and control of the means of production or of the surplus product are the main indicators of class position, while Weber points to the ownership of assets and opportunities for marketing these assets combined with a special interest in values according to the socio-professional status group position (the German *Stand*). The application of these criteria in Kenya faces clear limits. The most striking feature is the permanence of rural-urban linkages. Many white-collar workers or urban entrepreneurs invest at the same time in a farm and/or livestock in their home village (Collier and Lal 1984; Mukras, Oucho and Bamberger 1985; Oucho 1996; Ross and Weisner 1977).¹⁰ The work is done by family members in the case of small farms, or by hired employees on large estates. Sometimes the farm is run by a paid employee. In addition, the combination of a salaried job and a small personal or family business is very common. This combination of income sources has been reinforced by a growing number of educated women in employment (Euromonitor International 2010: 7). Socio-professional positions may be changed and combined in different ways (Kitching 1980) and our interview data confirms that it is still very common.¹¹

With regard to different parts of the Global South in the 1980s, this phenomenon was analysed as combined modes of production (Elwert, Evers and Wilkens 1983; Evers 1987). At that time the focus was mainly on more or less poor groups fighting for survival. But the above-mentioned (older) studies

relating to Kenya show that this can be a general pattern across different classes or income strata. The Kenyan upper class often combines a top administrative position with running a business and a large farm. This has serious consequences for a class analysis. Linking a certain socio-professional position or ownership of assets with a particular class position is not possible. Especially in the middle stratum the criteria of expropriation cannot be applied without contradictions. Wage earners who run a commercial farm with hired labour would be members of two different classes at the same time. Assignment to a certain class works better in the upper strata, where people own extensive rural and urban property and business, all run by hired labour.

This is not just a theoretical problem of class terminology, for this combination of modes of production and socio-professional positions has consequences for the definition of interests in the sense of class-specific interests. When urban white and blue collar workers or their close family members are entrepreneurs and farmers at the same time, they cannot be positioned clearly in any specific socio-professional class. They cannot be categorized neatly as peasants, wage earners or entrepreneurs with corresponding political interests. In addition, a large part of the middle-income class faces considerable insecurity. Aside from the above-mentioned risks of unemployment or serious sickness, running a small- or medium-sized business in Kenya is bound up with the risk of failure. And commercial farming is also full of risks, due to weather conditions, pests, plant diseases and fluctuating prices for agricultural products. In addition to individual challenges and problems, the overall economic situation directly influences the situation of the middle class. The Consumer Lifestyle in Kenya Survey asserts that the middle-income segment shrank from 27 per cent in 2005 to 18 per cent in 2009 due to the economic crisis, though it is unclear on which data this is based. Thus, the unstable situation of at least the lower parts of the middle class is similar to that of poorer groups.

Class differences are much clearer between those with assets large enough to cope with risks and the large majority of the population who live in insecurity.¹² If we consider that many basic values and attitudes are shared by the middle class and the poor class and that family relations reach across class boundaries, it is not surprising that there is no particular middle class consciousness or a party that represents the middle class. Therefore, the term 'middle class' can only be used as defined by economists to refer to a middle-income stratum enjoying a situation of moderate well-being for the time being. This corresponds well to Dominique Darbon's 'groupe de petite prospérité' (moderate prosperity group) (Darbon 2012: 41).

At the same time we should not ignore the existence of a very rich upper class. The Gini index for Kenya of 47.7 for 2005¹³ underlines the striking inequality. 'Ten millionaires and ten million beggars' (Githinji 2000) points to this difference. The title implies a clear division between rich and poor.

However, as shown by the data previously presented, there is an economic middle stratum in Kenya. In terms of everyday life, the dividing line could be financial security as opposed to vulnerability, used as an indicator for being middle class by Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu (2015: 594). But there are no hints that this difference leads to particular interests and different political attitudes.

Opportunities for choice and socio-cultural diversification Although large parts of the middle income stratum cannot be sure whether they will keep their position, and this stratum is marked by upward and downward mobility, there is a group living in moderate prosperity and a group that is less well-off. They lack joint class consciousness but they share an important feature: they have the ability to consume above and beyond the fulfilment of their basic needs. This makes them an interesting market for consumer goods. This is the message of the McKinsey report on the African Lions (McKinsey Global Institute 2010) and the Consumer Lifestyle in Kenya report (Euromonitor International 2010). The Consumer Lifestyle report covers a large range of fields of consumption including education, health, toys, leisure activities, electronic goods, drinks, food, fashion and transport. It underlines the similarities in patterns of consumptions and marks differences only according to age groups. Household consumer goods such as TV sets or refrigerators, clothing, and electronic products such as mobile phones or smartphones are widespread. Middle class families use their moderate prosperity to invest in education and health and spend considerable amounts of money on transport, either public transport or private motorbikes or a car. This report is typical of the general debate. It implies that consumption patterns are mainly affected by the level of income and (to some degree) by age. But this ignores obvious differences. The report notes the growth of expenditure on alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. It describes the places where people meet for drinks (e.g. pubs and bars) and where they buy alcohol and cigarettes. However, there are no figures showing the percentage of adults who drink alcohol or smoke compared to those who do not. Yet an abstinent life style is quite common for a considerable part of the middle class and is clearly visible in Kenyan everyday life. We also find clear differences in relation to fashion. As in many African countries, decency is an important aspect of clothing styles, though younger people differ in their clothing habits. In 2014 this led to the so-called ‘mini-skirt debate’: after a group of conservative Kenyans publicly stripped and beat young women wearing mini-skirts some women’s and human rights groups and their supporters organized a protest march to demand that women should have the right to wear what they like (BBC 14 November 2014).

These examples show that the ability to consume includes opportunities for choice. People may consume according to their own tastes and preferences. This goes beyond the question of the length of a skirt or whether one drinks

alcohol or smokes. Once the basic needs are met, fundamental decisions can be made. How much of the money will be spent on education and training (for children and adults)? How much will be spend on housing? Will the housing be rented or owned? If building a house is possible, will it be in town or in the home village? Will parts of the money be invested in a new business or in a farm or livestock? Will money be spent on a healthcare scheme or a pension scheme? Or do the family networks provide greater security so that money must be spent on helping the extended family as an investment in family security? Can the family's standard of living be improved by dining out, going on holiday, buying better food, purchasing consumer goods, a motorbike or a car? How will these things be paid for, out of current income or out of savings, or through a loan from the bank?

These are not either-or decisions; numerous combinations are possible. But it makes a difference whether more importance is attached to daily consumption, consumer goods or investment. It makes a difference whether preference is given to investment in education, social security or in a business or a farm. Apart from the question of what to spend money on, there are more decisions to make. Once the family income is enough to support a decently comfortable life, people can decide whether this is enough. Will they strive for more income by working harder or will they choose to spend more time with the family or friends, or on leisure activities such as sports, or going to pubs or nightclubs.

This leads to different combinations. The level of income has an influence because some things need more money than others. The purchase of a car or an expensive urban home needs a certain amount of income. Those with more money may make several expensive investments at the same time. They may have a preference for certain types of investment or consumption. But the decisions of people with similar income do not systematically follow their socio-professional position. On the basis of our interview data, we have come to the conclusion that such decisions are influenced by people's basic value orientation and preference for certain lifestyles and different visions of their and their families future within the same income group. We observe different socio-cultural orientations that do not depend on belonging to a certain ethnic group but are an expression of individual choices. Therefore the middle class, in the sense of a moderate prosperity group covers different socio-cultural orientations.

If we want to describe the impact of the underlying social processes, the class concept is not sufficient. This kind of socio-cultural differentiation according to different lifestyles or milieus is an approach that has been developed for describing (West)German society since the 1980s (Hradil 1987; Müller 1992; Schulze 1990), with Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer (1993) presenting an elaborated concept. They identify different socio-culturally defined groups

or milieus: 'We find... sub-cultural entities inside of a society that capture people with a similar view of life and way of life' (Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer 1993: 55; own translation). They point out that there are different milieus within the same socio-economic stratum and some of the milieus reach across different socio-economic strata. Identification of the milieus is based on a set of empirical building blocks that cover basic values and norms, individual orientations in respect of the future, preferences in leisure and communication and everyday life aesthetics. These include demography/social conditions, aim in life, employment/performance, concept of society, family, partnership, gender roles, leisure, communication, everyday life aesthetics, ideals/role and models (Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer 1993: 71). This approach has been applied successfully in marketing research and has led to the so-called 'Sinus milieus' (Sociovision 2009).¹⁴ The concept assumes that a society can be described as a particular set of distinctive milieus (some approaches prefer the term lifestyles to highlight performance and practice, whereas milieus underline basic value orientations and concepts of 'good life'), which may overlap slightly but describe distinctive social groups.¹⁵

Socio-cultural milieus Despite its limitations, the concept of milieus can help to capture socio-cultural differentiations in Kenya. Using the basic idea of building blocks, we have adapted these and the different indicators to the local situation. For example, we have added a spatial dimension to reflect the importance of rural-urban linkages and linkages to other countries (for more details see Neubert and Stoll 2015). We analysed our qualitative data on the basis of the concept of milieus proposed by Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer (1993) and constructed a set of seven tentative milieus. These milieus should be understood as ideal types and points of reference. They serve as an example of this kind of analysis and at the same time present a picture of the socio-cultural diversity of Kenya.

Social climbers are found in lower and middle range positions. They pursue upward mobility, are hard working, put emphasis on saving and investment in business and education or in a farm (but not always in the rural home area). Their social relations are focused on the nuclear family, and they are *not politically active or publicly politically outspoken*.

Stability-oriented pragmatics are associated mainly with lower and middle range positions. People in this milieu do not have a distinct career orientation. Moderate consumption is more important than investment. Their social network is often focused on the family and relatives of the same ethnic group and they have strong links to their home village. They have conservative values and they are *not politically active or publicly politically outspoken*.

Christian religious milieu(s) range from lower to upper positions. These people are career-oriented, believe in saving, and invest in education and

business, and sometimes in a farm. They consume in a decent way¹⁶ and they represent conservative values, including traditional gender roles. Their social network is focused on the church community (mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic depending on the type of church) and they are mostly *politically invisible*. However, with regard to *moral issues* (such as abortion or homosexuality) *they enter the political arena*.

Muslim religious milieu(s) are situated mostly in middle and upper range positions (at the coast also lower range). They are oriented towards saving and investment in education and business. Depending on income, their consumption is visible and they belong to networks in their particular Muslim community. They are conservative with an emphasis on traditional gender roles and they are mostly *not politically active or political defensive* except for small politically outspoken groups.

The *neo-traditional milieu* ranges from lower to upper positions. There is no dominant career orientation but an emphasis on rural investment in the home area. The consumption patterns are not very distinct but they usually have no problem with alcohol and partying. They have conservative values linked to ethnic customs with traditional gender roles. They have mono-ethnic networks with strong links to the home village and they underline the importance of their local language. They can be mobilized for *ethnic politics* and there is a potential for *micro-nationalism*.

The *liberal cosmopolitan milieu* is situated in middle and upper range positions. It consists of the staff, members and constituencies of NGOs. They are career-oriented and keen to invest in education. Their networks are multi-ethnic, often with strong professional and/or private links overseas. They pursue liberal cosmopolitan values and they are *politically committed* over topics such as human rights, democracy, gender equality, ecology or development.

Young professionals (already described by Spronk 2012) are found in upper range positions. They are well educated, career-oriented, hard-working and invest in business. At the same time they have the means for hedonistic consumption including partying and clubbing. Their values are individualist, liberal, with an urban orientation and they support gender equality. Their social networks are multi-ethnic networks and they are *not politically active or publicly politically outspoken*. This milieu is comparable to the 'black diamonds' in South Africa (Oliver 2007).

This first overview shows not only the socio-cultural diversity, but points at the fact that only a few milieus are politically committed. These politically interested milieus represent different and even conflicting political positions, attitudes and values. This finding relates to the absent middle-class consciousness. Based on our qualitative data we can identify a certain number of people who seem to represent these milieus. Many more live a life that is close to these ideal types without fitting completely into such a rigid frame.

Without quantitative data, nothing can be said about the size and the detailed socio-economic positioning of these groups in Kenyan society. Therefore this tentative analysis gives only a first impression of the socio-cultural diversity of the Kenyan middle-income class.

Our application of the milieu concept differs in some important points from the original approach of Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer (1993) and its application by the Sinus Institute (Sociovision 2009). Firstly, these assume that all members of a society can be covered by a milieu analysis. We have applied the concept only to the middle class with a focus on urban centres.¹⁷ The poor class and the upper class have not been taken into account. But our purpose is to analyse the socio-cultural diversity of the middle class, and so we accept these limitations. Another difference is of greater significance. On the basis of our data we doubt that it is possible to assign everybody to a particular milieu, even if the milieus are only regarded as ideal types. Many of our interviewees did seem to belong to one or other of these milieus, but a considerable number could not be unambiguously categorized. They either fitted into more than one milieu or into none of them. Therefore, we prefer to use the term 'milieu core' to describe a certain socio-cultural orientation. People may move between these milieu cores, changing their behaviour and their expressed value orientation according to the social context. This is close to the concept of 'small lifeworlds' (Hitzler and Honer 1984; Rebstein and Schnettler 2014).¹⁸

Secondly, Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer (1993) and the Sinus Institute construct their milieus on a scale between tradition, modernization/individualization and reorientation, and situate them in a society according to income (lower, middle, higher). According to our data, income plays a role in Kenya, especially for 'young urban professionals', and we can identify differences according to the tradition, modernization/individualization and reorientation scale. However, these two criteria are not sufficient to define the differences between the milieu cores. There are milieus that rely on tradition, religious milieus and the neo-traditional milieu. But they differ in respect of important characteristics. Ethnic identity and a political commitment to strengthening the home region are typical of the neo-traditionalist milieu, but do not have the same importance in the religious milieus where communities are often multi-ethnic. The neo-traditionalist milieu shares with the religious milieus a conservative understanding of gender roles, but they differ radically in their attitude towards alcohol and leisure activities such as partying or clubbing. Young urban professionals have the same liberal attitude towards gender roles and the same cosmopolitan outlook as large parts of the liberal cosmopolitan milieu but they differ significantly in their political commitment. A simple depiction of the Kenyan milieus in a two-dimensional figure that presents these socio-cultural differences on one axis and socio-economic differences on the

other is not possible. Nevertheless, the milieu cores can help to structure the socio-cultural diversity of the Kenyan middle class. The World Values Survey combines two scales to capture socio-cultural diversity: one shows values ranging from traditional to secular-rational, and the ranges from survival to well-being to self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel 2010). This might be more adequate but still there are doubts whether it is feasible to restrict the Kenyan diversity to these two scales.

Thirdly, Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer (1993) and other milieu approaches imply that milieus apply for the nuclear family. Our data reveals the possibility that family members belong to different milieus. Whereas, the wife may be part of a Christian religious milieu her husband may have different attitudes towards drinking and partying. Or one partner might be a political committed member of the liberal cosmopolitan milieu whereas the other partner's attitudes resemble the milieu of social climbers. We have to admit that the socio-cultural differences might even vary inside the same family.

Conclusion

The Kenyan case supports the assumption that there is a strong and growing middle (income) class or moderate prosperity group that constitutes an interesting group of consumers in commercial terms. But the hope that these groups thrive as middle class for democracy or represent a political relevant middle class consciousness is not fulfilled. While there is an active civil society in Kenya which is closely linked to members of the middle class this does not translate into a politically active class advocating a clearly defined class interest. Political mobilization during elections follows still regional-ethnic lines and the largest part of the middle class is neither politically committed nor politically active. One important reason for this finding is that there is no middle class in the strict sense of the concept. The members of the middle-income class are not marked by a particular position towards the control of means of production and/or of the produced surplus or via expropriation. The members of the economic middle stratum combine different modes of production as many members of the poor and the upper class too. Therefore the middle class does not represent particular socio-professional positions either. The middle class shares with the poor a feeling of uncertainty because the social position of the largest part of the middle class is not secured and they risk falling down the social ladder, even when there is at the same time the chance to climb up. Together with strong family relations across the different income levels they are socio-economically not a distinct group but constitute a moderate prosperity group with the option to make choices of consumption and spending, investing or saving money. Against this background the Kenyan middle class does not develop particular political interests because they lack a peculiar structural position that may be the foundation for a

distinct joint political orientation. They share with overwhelming parts of the Kenyan people a general interest in peace and prosperity without representing a particular socio-economic or socio-professional position. In addition their value orientation differs and those milieus with a more or less marked political commitment pursue different political objectives.

The interesting points linked to that moderate prosperity group are the different consequences of their opportunities of choice. We observe a process of socio-cultural diversification along different value orientations, norms and concepts of good life. This reminds us of processes of social diversification described for the second half of the twentieth century (West)Germany. The Kenyan society seems not to be marked by clear class differences but it is still radically socio-economically unequal. But the middle is neither clearly marked-off the lower nor off the higher income groups. In this not clearly defined middle we observe that process of socio-cultural diversification at the level of life-styles, norms, values and visions of the future without a clear foundation in socio-economic differences. This might be one reason for the absence of political consciousness or clear political cleavages referring to class position.

However, this state of openness is not carved into stone. There are families that managed to keep their socio-economic position since the establishment of the middle class in colonial times. Some of them are now part and parcel of the upper class, such as the Kenyatta or the Moi families. Others are across different generations middle class members. With the current growth of the middle class more families will manage to keep their middle position over generations and as a result the cross-class family relations might get weaker. The children will – or do already – attend private schools and a new generation of city dwellers seems to emerge especially in Nairobi. In this group the use of local languages declines and in some families only Swahili and English are used. This is a strong indicator for weakening of rural ties and we find a still small but assumingly rising tendency to choose the Nairobi graveyard instead of the (virtual) rural home as a place of burial (Bechtle 2014). If this tendency lasts this group may constitute the core of a new urban class. The consequence may be the formation of an urban lower and an urban upper middle class in a more strict sense of the class concept. These are first signs of a middle class in the making. If this process intensifies Kenya may face a more clear-cut division of classes similar to South Africa. Whether these new classes develop a particular class consciousness remains to be seen.

Notes

1 Resnick (2015: 574–578) presents a wider picture of the debate on Africa's middle class since the 1970s, including earlier studies by anthropologists and the Marxist approaches.

2 Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu (2015: 589), who define middle class in terms of specific kinds of dwelling, secondary education and secure skilled non-farm employment, provide another descriptive

definition. They do however not consider the possibility of a rural middle class.

3 For a detailed discussion of this issue and its application to Africa see Southall (2016), chapter 2.

4 The debate on African elites is summarized by Carola Lentz in this volume.

5 The qualitative data presented here are from an ongoing research project, 'Middle classes on the rise', funded by the German Ministry for Science and Research as part of the research group 'Bayreuth Academy: Future Africa'. The members of the middle class research team are Erdmute Alber and Dieter Neubert (co-leaders), Lena Kroeker, Florian Stoll and Maike Voigt (for preliminary results see Neubert and Stoll 2015; Stoll in print; Daniel and Neubert 2015). The data used here are mainly from joint work with Florian Stoll.

6 Own calculation based on the charts 4, 18 and 20 (AfDB 2011).

7 The AfDB refers to estimates that are not always clearly related to a specific year, here presumably to 2008. If we compare these results with the data of the World Bank's poverty calculator (www.povcal.net, accessed 7 August 2015) for 2005, the Kenyan poor class appears to be much larger (67.2 per cent), whereas for the other countries the figures of the World Bank are comparable. The data of the AfDB also contradict the findings of Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu (2015: 597). According to their data only a very small part of the Kenyan population earns more than the US\$10 PPP per capita and day. However, the consumer analysis data suggests the existence of a considerable middle class in Kenya (Euromonitor International 2010). The Kenya economic report 2013 by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (2011: 19) counts the percentage of poor people according to a multi-dimensional poverty index for the years 2006–2012 between 46.1 and 50.8 per cent.

8 Education is used as proxy for class because Afrobarometer does not provide

socio-economic information on the interviewees.

9 In 1995 a party called SAFINA (Swahili for 'Noah's ark') was founded with a non-ethnic, social-democratic (not especially middle class) party programme. In the 2013 election it formed an alliance with other smaller parties, which gained five seats in parliament.

10 It is remarkable that these urban–rural linkages were hardly recognized in the so-called 'Kenyan debate'. For a critical summary with bibliographical references, see Beckmann (1980).

11 The analysis of rural households in respect of the combination of farm and off-farm income (wage labour, business), and the involvement of family and hired labour by Githinji (2000: 157–163), identifies 34 household types with different combinations. He nevertheless proposes 'disaggregated' Marxian class analysis (Githinji 2000: 163ff).

12 The influence of the feeling of insecurity and ways of coping with uncertainty is the topic of an ongoing study by Lena Kroeker, a member of our research project on 'Middle Classes on the Rise'.

13 World Bank online data: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?page=1> (accessed 29 July 2015).

14 For a general application to the so-called emerging markets of the South, see www.sinus-institut.de/uploads/tx_mpdownloadcenter/informationen_2009_01.pdf (accessed 2 April 2015).

15 For a critical discussion of the milieu and lifestyle concept, see Isenböck (2014), Otte (2005) and Rössel and Otte (2011).

16 Decency has to be understood in relation to the income. Depending on their income they may acquire valuable consumer goods, quality housing and a car.

17 Because of the importance of urban–rural links, our results also refer to (parts) of the rural population. Except for the urbanized young professionals it seems that the other milieus are to be found also in rural settings. We have as

yet found no evidence of typical rural milieus.

18 For a discussion of this concept's application to Kenya see Neubert and Stoll (2015: 8ff.)

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6 | Middle class activism in Nigeria

Nkwachukwu Orji

Like the economic expansions that followed the Industrial Revolution and World War II, the strong economic growth of the past two decades has created a historic moment. A report by global economic advisory group, Ernst & Young (2013: 2), avers that ‘the world has seen two great expansions of the middle class since 1800 – and we are living through the third’. But unlike the previous economic expansions that triggered huge middle class growth in Western Europe, North America and Japan, the present-day economic growth is enlarging the middle class mostly in the developing world. In Asia alone, 525 million people have been moved into the middle class category (Kharas and Gertz 2010), while it is claimed that Africa’s middle class tripled from 115 million in 1980 to 326 million in 2010 (Mubila and Aissa 2011).¹ The growth of the African middle class seems to have been quite profound in Nigeria where about 35 million people were considered to have been pulled into the middle class since 2000 (Kingombe 2014: 31). Over the next 20 years, it is estimated that the size of the global middle class will rise by another three billion people, coming almost entirely from the developing world (Ernest & Young 2013: 1).

The growth of the middle class in Africa has elicited strong academic interest. Analysis of the economic and political implications of middle class growth draws mainly from the classical literature on middle class development associated with modernization thinkers such as Seymour M. Lipset (1959) and Barrington Moore (1966) as well as more recent studies such as Landes (1998) and Easterly (2001). These studies suggest that the growth of middle-income groups is associated with higher entrepreneurial activity, greater human and financial capital, more consumption, and enhanced democratic development. Views about the role and relevance of the middle class in Africa are broadly divided. While a number of studies see possibilities of middle class contribution to democracy and development (Southall 2014; Cheeseman 2015), others argue that the expansion of the middle class may not produce the positive change urgently needed in the continent (Mattes 2015; Luckscheiter and Al-Zubaidi 2014; Melber 2015). Bringing together the sceptic views, based on an assessment of the current economic conditions in Africa, Melber (2015: 250) concludes that ‘the middle classes as source of hope seem to be wishful thinking, if not ideological smokescreen’.

This chapter contributes to our understanding of the role of the new middle class in Africa by looking at the political activism of the Nigerian middle class. The expansion of Nigeria's middle class has had a remarkable effect on the nature of political engagement in the country. It has widened the civic sphere by bringing in more individuals with greater technical and financial capacities. The new middle class in Nigeria has embraced new digital technologies, particularly the social media, and is using them to widen the boundaries of political action. While Nigeria's new middle class embraces social media activism, there is a vigorous debate on the implications of the use of social media as an instrument of political engagement (Lim 2013). The sceptic view raises concerns about the tendency of social media activism to stimulate superficial and unsustainable political engagements which often fail to transform or renew democratic institutions (Morozov 2009; Gladwell 2010). The optimist perspective argues that social media leads to the rise of new forms of participation in public life which promote a more enlightened exchange of ideas, increase levels of citizens' engagement, and enable social and political change in the society (Kahn and Kellner 2004; Shirky 2011).

In juxtaposing these views against the Nigerian experience, one observes a more complex democratic potential of social media campaigns than the literature presents. Drawing on two recent cases of middle class activism in Nigeria, the *Occupy Nigeria* protest and the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign, this study supports earlier suggestions that gaining a thorough understanding of the impact of the new modes of civic engagement requires going beyond the binary distinction of the limits and benefits of adopting new technologies (Lim 2013: 637). The case studies demonstrate that the new mode of middle class activism in Nigeria, which is based on social media campaign, offers many benefits, yet, it is limited by several weaknesses. While contemporary middle class activism in Nigeria is marked by enhanced capacity for rapid mobilization, more liberal opinion formation, and extensive participation, it is characterized, on the other hand, by poor coordination, which affects the capacity to pressure the government and to realize socio-political change.

The Nigerian middle class

The Nigerian middle class has evolved along three distinct historical phases which coincide with the period of European contact and colonization, the years of military rule, and the post-military era. Nigeria's middle class grew out of three intersecting processes, namely the incorporation of Nigeria into the global economy, the introduction of Western education, and the advent of formal employment. Studies by Kenneth Dike (1956) and Adiele Afigbo (1981) demonstrate how trade between Europeans and Nigerians along with the introduction of Western education fundamentally altered power relationships and forms of social stratification in local communities. The new sources of

wealth and influence that derived from education and trade contacts with Europeans led to the development of a fairly discrete group of professionals, traders and intermediaries who stood side-by-side with the traditional elite groups (Lloyd 1953; Ubah 1980). In addition to the indigenous middle class, Western acculturated repatriates (mainly ex-slaves from Brazil and Cuba) and migrants from within and outside Nigeria successfully created distinct social classes (Paris 1998). The nascent middle class, which rested on racial distinction, the possession of new skills, and acquisition of wealth became more prominent after the introduction of colonial rule (Cohen 1972: 235).

Middle class status during the colonial period was defined by an individual's intermediary position in social relations rather than his or her occupation of the middle strata of income and consumption distribution in the society. Underlining this point, Martin L. Kilson (1958: 374) argues,

to speak of a middle class implies the existence of two other classes: a lower class and an upper class. In the West African context, the 'lower class' is the mass of African villagers and peasants. By the 'upper or ruling class' we have in mind the small, but economically and politically dominant, group of European entrepreneurs, business administrators, senior colonial officials, district officers, and the array of lesser colonial servants.

Cohen (1972: 236) divides this group into three broad sections: 1) the coastal merchants, businessmen and professionals, who were already rich and influential before the establishment of colonial administration; 2) individuals who received Western education and training (often as teachers and lawyers), but lack established social status; and 3) individuals who became involved in full time party politics.

The end of colonial rule in 1960 was closely followed by more than three decades of military rule. This period was characterized by unprecedented socio-economic changes associated with the emergence, rise and decline of revenues from crude oil. These socio-political and economic changes in Nigeria had a transformative effect on the country's middle class. Increased revenues from oil in the 1970s led to, among other things, massive urbanization, industrialization, expansion of educational opportunities, and enlargement of public services (Madujibeya 1976; Ikein 1990). These developments, in turn, significantly transformed the size and composition of the Nigerian middle class. With increased revenue from the 'oil boom', the Nigerian state consolidated its position as the main catalyst of middle class formation, providing opportunities for economic advancement through employment and award of government contracts (Diamond 1987; Joseph 1991). The huge salary awards to public service employees in 1970 and 1973 helped consolidate the Nigerian middle class (Bienen and Diejomaoh 1981).

However, the economic depression of the 1980s severely upset the growth and stability of the Nigerian middle class. Sharp decline in Nigeria's economic

fortunes prompted the adoption of emergency austerity measures in 1982. This involved up to 40 per cent cut in public expenditure, increases in taxes, interest rates and petrol prices, devaluation of the national currency, and cuts in imports (Forrest 1986). These measures dealt a heavy blow to the manufacturing sector which was a crucial engine of middle class formation. A more extensive Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by the government in 1986 put emphasis on public expenditure reduction, import substitution, and liberalization of the economy through privatization and commercialization of government-owned enterprises (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). The implementation of SAP led to huge salary cuts, job cuts, increases in commodity prices, and withdrawal of various forms of social benefits (Olukoshi 1993). The overall outcome of the programme was an unprecedented contraction of the Nigerian middle class.

The end of the 1990s has been marked by political and economic liberalization, which has unquestionably fostered growth. Economic growth in Nigeria averaged an impressive 8.6 per cent a year from 1999 to 2010 – compared with just 1.5 per cent a year between 1983 and 1999 (McKinsey & Company 2014: 8). The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased fivefold from US\$46 billion in 2000 to US\$247 billion in 2011 (Renaissance Capital 2011: 3). Liberalization policies offered the Nigerian middle class greater employment opportunities and consumption capacity, but created also many challenges including the marginalization of particular groups (Ogunlesi 2014). Several analysts note the impact of liberalization on private investments in industries such as telecommunications, banking, aviation and entertainment, and the effect of private investments on the creation of middle class jobs (McKinsey & Company 2014). The consumption capacity of the Nigerian middle class has been enhanced by three major factors: 1) the relaxation of import restrictions that have allowed for the availability of a wider range of consumer goods; 2) changes in banking policies that have made credit far more available to the middle-class; and 3) substantial rise in public-sector salaries (Alford 2010; Aminu 2011). A recent study by Corral, Molini and Oseni (2015: 9) notes the shift towards Western-type consumerism by the Nigerian middle class. This new form of consumerism reflects on the massive expansion of the wholesale and retail sector, particularly on the emergence of exquisite restaurants, lifestyle stores, and glossy shopping malls in the major cities (McKinsey & Company 2013).

The new middle class

Nigeria's new middle class is distinctive in many respects. Firstly, the new middle class is more urbanite. Urban centres and urban population in Nigeria have grown massively with increases in the number of urban centres from 133 in 1960 to 438 in 2000, and urban population from approximately 6 million

in 1960 to 103 million in 2010 (Onibokun and Faniran 1995; Bloch et al. 2015). The growing urban centres are attracting productive businesses and skilled workers, creating urban economies that are nurturing new waves of middle class consumption and economic growth (McKinsey & Company 2013, see also McKinsey Global Institute 2012).

The new middle class in Nigeria is equally more educated. Educational opportunities in Nigeria have expanded massively since independence. In 1960, there was only one university in Nigeria, which produced a few more than 600 graduates since its opening in 1948 (Fafunwa 1974). But a steady increase in enrolment into tertiary institutions in Nigeria – from 3,761 in 1962 to 125,783 in 1986, and then to 1.7 million in 2010, led to a corresponding increase in the number of people with higher education certificates (Okebukola 2013). A survey of the Nigerian middle class by Renaissance Capital found that 92 per cent of the respondents have obtained post-secondary education or have studied at an institution of higher learning (Renaissance Capital 2011).

The new middle class is more strongly rooted in the private sector. Until the late 1990s, indigenous private enterprise in Nigeria was largely underdeveloped due to the stifling operating environment imposed by the colonial regime and the nationalization of key sectors of the economy by the military governments (Schatz 1977; Diamond 1987). Although programmes to promote indigenous private enterprise in Nigeria were introduced as early as 1949 (Sklar 1979), poor implementation of the programmes ensured that the public bureaucracy remained the dominant sphere of middle class formation until the end of the 1990s. The downsizing of the Nigerian public sector following the privatization of public enterprises has, however, triggered an expansion of the private sector (NBS 2007). A study by the African Development Bank (AfDB) asserts that Africa's new middle class 'is strongest in countries [like Nigeria] that have robust and growing private sectors'; the study characterized Nigeria's new middle class as the product of the 'expansion of the private sector in industries like banking, telecommunications, and services' (Mubila and Aissa 2011: 31). Similarly, Ekpo, Afangideh and Udon (2014: 101) identify the 'private-sector driven evolution of the entertainment industry in the [West Africa] sub-region especially in Nigeria' as a major source of middle class jobs. They claim that entertainment is now the second largest employer in Nigeria, behind only the civil service.

Finally, Nigeria's new middle class possesses a greater capacity to communicate and share information through new digital technologies. Many scholars, including Kilson (1958) and Sklar (1979), see modern methods of communication as a major catalyst of class formation. Figures showing vastly improved access to mobile phone and internet, as presented in Table 6.1 below, provide key anecdotal evidence of changing media environment in Nigeria. The middle class constitute a significant proportion of internet users in Nigeria – nearly

half of the middle class surveyed in a study by Renaissance Capital reported having access to the internet (Renaissance Capital 2011). Social networking is the main reason for internet use according to a survey by McKinsey & Company (2013), but Nigerians are also using internet for a broad range of activities, including accessing news sources, entertainment, and sending/receiving emails and instant messaging.

	2003	2009	2013
Mobile cellular subscribers per 100 inhabitants	2	48	73
Internet users per 100 inhabitants	1	20	38

Table 6.1 Technology uptake and usage in Nigeria

Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank 2015).

The modalities of middle class action

How does the Nigerian middle class mobilize politically and what is the main focus of its engagement? To understand the modes of political action by the Nigerian middle class, this study adopts a conceptual framework outlined by Pippa Norris in her well-known study on political activism (Norris 2002). Norris argues that the nature of political activism can be better understood by looking at three key elements of political action – agency, repertoire and target. This section examines the nature of middle class political activism in Nigeria following Pippa Norris’s framework. It sets the context for the analysis of specific cases of political activism by Nigeria’s new middle class. A summary of the modalities of middle class activism in Nigeria is presented in Table 6.2 below.

The first element of political action is agency – the organizational structures through which people mobilize for political expression (Norris 2002). Interest groups and social movements are the most common agencies of political action. However, in recent times, networked agencies characterized by direct action, internet communications, loose coalitions, limited organizational structures, and informal modes of belonging have become prominent agencies of political activism. Middle class political activism in Nigeria was first organized within the context of the nationalist movement. The expansion of wage labour in Nigeria necessitated the formation of trade unions and professional associations to protect and further the interests of workers and professionals (Wogu 1969). In so doing, several middle class organizations became involved in the nationalist politics, pressing for democracy, human rights and development (Coleman 1958; Cohen 1972). Kilson (1958: 378–379) identified three factors that encouraged middle class involvement in nationalist politics. Firstly, the middle class, especially the professionals among the group, possessed the

intellectual tools needed for the struggle. Secondly, members of the middle class had the wealth, influence and leisure required to engage in political activism. Thirdly, the professional and intellectual elements among the middle class had an implicit interest in putting an end to colonialism. Nationalism, ‘in one of its aspects, clearly expresses the dissatisfaction of an emerging African middle class with a situation in which many of the recognized functions and rewards of a middle class – in the commercial, professional, administrative and ecclesiastical fields – are in the hands of “strangers”’ (Kilson 1958: 379). Through trade unions, professional associations, and cultural organizations, the Nigerian middle class fought very hard to put an end to the dominant power position held by the European ruling class and to open up access to middle class privileges.

During the three decades of military rule in Nigeria, the agency of middle class activism expanded beyond trade unions, professional groups and cultural associations, and included pro-democracy and human rights groups (Ihonvbere and Shaw 1998; Ibhawoh 2001). Together, these organizations pressed for democratization, human rights and good governance through public enlightenment, mass protests, and international advocacy (Ihonvbere 1997; Aiyede 2004). In the past decade, the agency of middle class activism has further expanded. While the traditional ‘bureaucratic organizations’ (Norris 2002: 141) still exist, loose movements formed over the social media have emerged as popular avenue for middle class political mobilization, protest and expression (Egbunike and Olorunnisola 2015; Chiluwa and Ifukor 2015).

The concept of repertoire, which means the ways that people choose to express themselves politically, is the second element of political action (Norris 2002). Conventional repertoires of civic engagement include voting, campaign activism, community organizing, and particularized contacting activities (Verba, Nie and Kim 1971). Considering that democracy is just taking roots in Nigeria, voting is not yet an established method of political expression by the Nigerian middle class; so also is campaign activism. Community organizing and particularized contacting are therefore the most common modes of political expression. Petition writing, as a form of particularized contacting, was a major form of political expression during the colonial period (Korieh 2010; Ubah 1980). Channels for dealing with public petitions still exist in Nigeria. The key institutions dealing with public petitions today are the Public Complaints Commission and the Public Petitions Committees of the various legislative assemblies, particularly the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives. But the significance of this mode of political expression has tremendously declined. The typically slow response of the authorities to letters of petition makes mass protest the main channel of political expression (Coleman 1958; Momoh 1996).

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rise of exit as a major form of political expression by the Nigerian middle class. The concept of exit was coined by

Albert O. Hirschman to describe a type of political expression of ‘discontent with organizations to which one belongs’ (Hirschman 1978: 90). Often driven by repression and poor state performance, exit involves a ‘disengagement or retreat from the state by disaffected segments of the citizenry into alternative and parallel social, cultural, economic and political systems which are constructed in civil society and which compete with those of the state’ (Osaghae 1999: 83). Forms of exit include emigration (either voluntarily or through exile), renunciation of citizenship, resignation of posts by officials, and at the group level, secession (Hirschman 1978). Exit promotes ‘internationalization of voice’, as some activists who moved abroad continue to support specific agitations (Hoffmann 2010).

More diversified forms of political expression have been adopted in recent years – the most notable being social media activism. There are three dimensions of social media activism: 1) awareness and advocacy to generate sympathetic information; 2) organization and mobilization of structures for deliberation and planning based on sympathetic information; and 3) action and reaction through implementation of the result of deliberation and planning (Vegh 2003: 71–96).

The third element of political action is target. Targets of political action are the actors that activists are attempting to influence (Norris 2002). These

	Early years	Years of military rule	Era of liberalization
Agency	Nationalist movements Trade unions Professional associations Cultural associations	Trade unions Professional associations Cultural associations Pro-democracy movements Human rights movements	Trade unions Professional associations Cultural associations Pro-democracy movements Human rights movements Networked agencies
Repertoire	Mass protest Petition writing	Mass protest Exit	Mass protest Social media activism
Target	The colonial state: decolonization	The military state: demilitarization	The democratic state: improved welfare and state performance

Table 6.2 The modalities of middle class action
Compiled by the author.

actors are usually state institutions and personnel. Non-state oriented activities can, however, be directed towards diverse public actors including national and international as well as profit and not-for-profit organizations. The state is the main target of middle class activism in Nigeria. Political actions against the Nigerian state aim essentially at reforming its institutions and changing its character. The repressive and disruptive nature of the colonial state inspired struggles for decolonization (Mamdani 2002). Because the middle class perceived the colonial state as blocking opportunities for advancement, political activism at that time was oriented towards eliminating the colonial system. The repression and corruption associated with military rule redefined the focus of middle class activism after independence, leading to the mobilization of resistance against military rule (Aiyede 2004). In recent years, the focus of middle class activism has shifted from establishing institutions of democracy to demanding improved welfare and performance from the democratic state.

Political activism of Nigeria's new middle class

While the target of middle class activism in Nigeria has remained unchanged, the agency and repertoire of its political action have transformed substantially. The turn of the century came with new modes of middle class activism in Nigeria. The emergence of social media tools including instant messaging, blogs, and online news sources, have, as one blogger puts it, 'resulted in the democratization of access to information, and expression of opinion, and a shift in the balance of power between the leaders and the led' (Ogunlesi 2013). The social media provides a space for individuals to participate in production, distribution and consumption of ideas, knowledge and culture – a phenomenon that is commonly referred to as participatory culture (Lim 2013: 640). Participatory culture is a catalyst of civic engagement (Jenkins et al. 2009). Easier and quicker means of information sharing have transformed the agency and repertoire of political action, providing alternatives to the bureaucratic organizational structures of mobilization and offering the people more diversified modes of political action. While the social media might potentially transform middle class activism, this study argues – based on two empirical cases – that the mobilization capacity of the social media vis-à-vis the traditional agencies of political action is still weak in Nigeria, and that this has affected the capacity of the Nigerian new middle class to influence the government. Two recent movements, namely *Occupy Nigeria* protest 2012 and *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign, which relate to social welfare, human rights and state performance, and which illustrate the adoption, application, and result of new digital technologies in middle class political engagement, accentuate the study's claim.

Case study 1: Occupy Nigeria protest 2012 The *Occupy Nigeria* protest of 2012, which mirrors the occupy movements in New York and other major cities, followed the announcement of about 46 per cent hike in the price of petrol – marking the official removal of government subsidies on the product. Protests against the removal of petrol subsidy have been an integral part of popular struggles in Nigeria since the adoption of economic liberalization policy in 1986 (Nwosu 1996; Ezeani 2014). Prior to its decision to withdraw petrol subsidy on 1 January 2012, the government initiated debates and consultations on the matter with organized groups such as manufacturers, transporters, workers and youths. In those engagements, the government maintained that petrol subsidy ‘poses a huge financial burden, disproportionately benefits the wealthy, is inefficient, and diverts resources away from potential investment in critical infrastructure’ (cited in Ezeani 2014: 373). In response, groups opposed to petrol subsidy removal asserted that a hike in petrol price would make life more difficult for many Nigerians, especially in the context of poor social provisioning by the government (Ezeani 2014). While this debate was going on, the government moved ahead to announce the removal of the petrol subsidy.

The traditional agencies of middle class mobilization including trade unions, professional associations, and civil society organizations (CSOs) were taken aback by the government’s action and could not present an immediate response. One study suggests that ‘both the CSOs and labour movements were unprepared for the protests’ (Akor 2014). This left a vacuum, which was quickly filled by social media activists. According to one account, ‘we took to the internet, especially Facebook and Twitter, to express our vehement disapproval of this insensitive policy and its callous and untimely implementation on New Year’s Day’ (Usman 2012). Social media activism focused mainly on creating public awareness and mobilizing action. Through a critical discourse analysis of the protest, Chiluiwa (2015) identified three major strategies adopted by the social media activists. The first involves legitimization – framing of activists as representing the Nigerian people. The second entails denunciation – representing the government negatively as anti-people, while the third has to do with mobilization – calling on the public to resist the government’s action. These strategies worked out relatively well in the sense that by 2 January 2012, a day after the subsidy removal was announced, street protests began in Lagos and spread quite rapidly to other cities including Abuja, Kano and Kaduna.

However, the momentum of the protests was rather low as most people continued their normal daily activities across the country. Only a handful of people gathered in those cities where street protests were mobilized through the social media (Punch 2012). The involvement of the trade unions, professional associations and the CSOs, however, provided the needed boost to

the protest. On 9 January 2012, one week after protests were called via the social media, the main trade unions in Nigeria declared a nationwide strike that paralyzed social and economic activities in the country (Tovrov 2012). At this point, the organized labour, CSOs and social media activists forged a synergy, synchronized their messages, and presented a common front under the *Occupy Nigeria* banner. The workers' strike ensured an effective shutdown of the country, focusing public attention to the protest venues. The strike enabled the protesters to mobilize a huge crowd – in Lagos, about one million people reportedly attended a protest rally on a particular day (Okpi and Baiyewu 2012).

From initial expression of outrage by a few social media activists, the protest spiralled into a multi-class action. Though the primary activist base remained middle class (leaders of CSOs, social media activists, trade unionists, professionals, and university students), the protests expanded exponentially to include the lower classes (the urban poor, informal sector workers, and the unemployed). Many of the protesters were young people who were moved less by any ideology and more by the 'fight corruption' narrative of the protesters widely disseminated by the social media activists.

In the course of the protests, the demands of the social media activists began to shift from the initial 'revert back to N65 or nothing' to 'cut down cost of governance' and 'fight corruption'. Trade union and CSO leaders also revised their rhetoric focusing more attention to 'leakages, looting, and corruption within the oil industry, which has distorted the process of pricing' (Akor 2014). Further shift in the rhetoric of the social media activists demanding the resignation of the president, however, left a deep crack in the organizational structure of the protest. The leaders of the organized labour felt that by calling for the president's resignation, the social media activists and CSO leaders had politicized the protests; a move, which they feared could threaten Nigeria's democracy (Akor 2014). They therefore opted to negotiate with the government and end the protest before it gets out of hand. The suspension of the strikes by the organized labour on 16 January 2012 was based on the agreement with the government, which led to the reduction of the price of petrol from N140 to N97 (BBC 2012). The social media activists and leaders of CSOs rejected the agreement and attempted to continue the protests, but the suspension of the strike by organized labour essentially deflated the street protests.

Case study 2: #BringBackOurGirls campaign On 14 April 2014, the Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram, kidnapped about 276 girls at a government school in Chibok in Borno State. The news of the kidnapping of the girls sparked an outcry in the Nigerian social media. Activists used the platform to express their anger over the lassitude of the government in finding the kidnapped girls, and generally over the inability of the government to tackle

the deteriorating security situation caused by the Boko Haram insurgency. From the social media, protesters moved to the streets. Oby Ezekwesili, a former World Bank vice president and Nigerian minister of education, led a group of protesters to Abuja to demand action by the government to 'bring back our girls'. Re-echoing the words of Ezekwesili, Nigerians started repeating the mantra, 'bring back our girls' in the social media – the hashtag soon started trending on Twitter (Litoff 2014).

#BringBackOurGirls campaign, which started as a local campaign to draw attention to the inaction of the Nigerian government, quickly gained strong momentum and began to trend worldwide in a matter of days. Having been tweeted several times (the hashtag was used more than one million times in two weeks), the campaign attracted supporters from around the world, including celebrities and activists (Tomchak 2014). The global scope of the campaign also made it attractive to the mainstream media, which gave it a widespread coverage and drew more attention to the campaign. The campaigners were convinced that the global condemnation of Boko Haram and pressure on the Nigerian government to respond to the kidnapping could produce positive results (Chiluwa and Ifukor 2015). However, after one year of relentless campaign, the Nigerian government has not been able to rescue the Chibok girls nor contain attacks by Boko Haram.

While some commentators construe the continued disappearance of the girls and attacks by Boko Haram as a sign that the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign has failed, others insist that the campaign is succeeding despite these failures. Johanna Herman (2015) argues that lack of clearly defined objectives and the overly simplified messaging format of the social media, which made it difficult to understand the complexity of the situation, were the main reasons why the campaign failed. In her words, 'instead of considering how the Nigerian government and surrounding region could respond to Boko Haram's actions, people living abroad were pressing their own governments towards intervention because they did not know what other possibilities existed'. Borrowing the words of Teju Cole (2015), she claims that the wave of 'global sentimentality' that the campaign produces has not allowed actors to work out pragmatic solutions or steps that could help the Nigerian government or the international community resolve the crisis. Similarly, Jumoke Balogun (2014) contends that the portrayal of the Nigerian government as weak and the invitation of the US to intervene in the crisis blocked possibilities of a constructive engagement and narrowed the campaign's possibility of success.

Observers who see positive results from the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign point to several unexpected outcomes prompted by the campaign. Chitra Nagarajan and Max Siollun, for example, believe that the Bring Back Our Girls movement was instrumental in mobilizing the conversations and protests that triggered a change of government in Nigeria (Nagarajan 2015; Shearlaw 2015). Other commentators claim that the increased global attention on Nigeria

galvanized by the campaign, forced the Nigerian government to adopt positive measures to address gender-based violence in the country, including the passing of a new gender violence law (Mukasa 2015). Finally, Ramaa Mosley asserts that the campaign succeeded in shedding light on an incident that otherwise may have gone unnoticed, raising awareness about human rights violations in local communities and poor performance by governments (Wiener-Bronner 2015).

Conclusion

The transformation of the Nigerian middle class has been accompanied by changes in the modalities of the group's political action. Tracing the evolution of the Nigerian middle class, this chapter contends that the new middle class differs from the previous ones in terms of being more urbanite, more educated, more strongly rooted in the private sector, and possessing greater capacity to communicate and share information. With the emergence of new technologies, there is more extensive access to information, and activists now have greater capacity to mobilize more rapidly. This way, middle class activism tends to depend less on bureaucratic organizations and more on informal networks formed over the social media. In addition, the advent of new technologies promotes greater participation as more individuals are able to openly and independently express their views without recourse to thick organizational structure.

The transformation of middle class activism in Nigeria has come with significant costs. The cases examined in this study demonstrate that mobilization structures, which rely more on virtual connectivity than on human agency, present the difficult challenge of coordination. By enabling individuals to bypass traditional agencies of political action, new technologies tend to weaken the role of movement leaders as protest organizer and undermine the coordination role bestowed on them by their 'leadership capital' (Nepstad and Bob 2006). Without strong leadership and coordination, pressure on the government cannot be sustained and expected change may not be realized. The *Occupy Nigeria* protest shows that coordination and momentum are required for the social media to amplify and support middle class activism. In the case of *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign, the key lesson is that social media activists cannot organize a movement or supply momentum to a protest that is not there. In successful cases of social media activism, there are often underlying processes of activism which social media activists only help to amplify (Iskander 2011; Lim 2013).

The widespread use of the social media as a tool of political engagement has moved middle class activism in Nigeria into a new developmental phase. For this phase of middle class activism to thrive, three major conditions are essential. First, activists should promote class unity. At present, middle class activism is organized around three different structures – networked agencies, the organized labour, and the CSOs. If the goal of middle class activism is, as most scholars

suggest, to secure advantages to the group, stronger collaboration between social media activists, trade unionists and CSO leaders is required (Matthews 2013). More synergy among the various agencies of middle class activism will promote class-consciousness, and in the words of Sklar (1979: 544), help the group to ‘shed its anonymity as the fledgling “new class” and receive a name that is appropriate to its nature’. This is the basis on which the middle class can effect political change.

Secondly, middle class activists should reach out to the lower classes, as part of their role as source of aspiration to other strata of the society (Handley 2015: 612–613). Because the lower classes constitute the largest section of the society, their support is essential in any struggle for political change. Scholars see collaboration between the middle and lower classes at the expense of the ruling class as the classic formula for political change (Sklar 1979). Middle class activists can inspire the lower classes through effective advocacy, active mobilization, and coordinated messaging.

Finally, social media activism should be tied to grassroots action. Middle class activists should endeavour to create a public space where the cyberspace and physical space nicely overlap. The success of middle class activism depends on the ability of activists to utilize their organizational and technological skills to create a compelling sense of togetherness among disparate groups. The mobilization capacity of the social media should be used to promote real-life participation and engagement.

Note

1 See several contributions in the first chapters of this volume for a critique of such high estimates.

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7 | Emerging middle class political subjectivities in post-war Angola

Jon Schubert

Paz é o calar das armas, mas a própria paz não estamos a viver.

[Peace is the silence of the weapons, but we are not living the real peace.]

Since the end of the war in 2002, Angola has been fêted as a miracle of post-war reconstruction and economic growth. Under the leadership of President José Eduardo dos Santos, the ‘Architect of Peace’, the country has posted record growth rates, attracting investor interest from across the globe. But while impressive macroeconomic indicators and a place among Sub-Saharan Africa’s top three economies would confirm the ‘Africa Rising’ trope touted by international media and international finance institutions, the everyday reality for all but a tiny minority of Angola’s 23.4 million citizens belies this euphoric narrative.

Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the country’s capital, Luanda, this chapter presents the experiences of some inhabitants who might be termed part of a new, emerging urban middle class, to interrogate the analytical and conceptual usefulness of the term in a context like Angola’s.

Analytical signposts

Social classes were very much part of the everyday discourse of socialism in 1980s Angola. In the Marxist language of earlier analytics of the late 1970s and 1980s, classes were described as ‘bourgeoisie’, ‘peasants’ and ‘semi-proletariat’ and defined by the modes of production and ownership of those (Heimer 1979; Clarence-Smith 1980). In practice, this meant in the 1980s mainly the difference between the socialist party *nomenklatura* and the vast masses of the *povo* (people). From the 1990s, however, processes of differentiation and stratification began as a result of economic liberalization (Rodrigues 2007a). Since the end of the war in 2002, these inequalities have only increased. The regime of the ruling MPLA – the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola – invokes a broad-based notion of middle class as both the target of its social policies and the basis of its political support. In practice, however, a majority of the population live under dire material conditions, and only a very narrow upper stratum of urban society has really benefited from the largesse of the regime’s entrepreneurial elite: ‘the most expansive interpretation is that

of a post-war “middle class” of some half million people out of an estimated 20 million Angolans that includes civil servants, members of the security apparatus, and educated urbanites’ (Soares de Oliveira 2015: 82). Nonetheless, a part of the urban population larger than this limited set self-define as, or aspire to being, middle class.

Both due to the changing nature of capitalism – the growing predominance of service industry over productive industry – as well as the rather opaque ownership structures of the modes of production in Angola, a definition of ‘middle class’ in purely economic terms seems unproductive. Moreover, according to the African Development Bank (AfDB), 34 per cent of Africans are part of the ‘middle class’ as they have at their disposal between US\$2 and US\$20 per day (Sumich 2015: 5). In contemporary Luanda, this is a world of difference. However, in a city, which regularly tops the rankings of ‘the world’s most expensive capital for expatriates’, even US\$20 a day will not get you very far. As a first entry point, I thus propose to pay attention to the very uneven material conditions of members of Luanda’s ‘middle class’ and the variety of strategies deployed to make a living and sustain a family in the city.

Second, following the death of class as a ‘master narrative’ (Pratt 2003: 2), ‘middle class’ is today more defined by aspiration and modes of consumption rather than modes of production (Heiman, Freeman and Liechty 2012: 21). Thus, class stratifications as ‘culturally and historically constructed identities’ remain meaningful, as they both are part of the ways in which people make sense of their life-worlds and ‘always situated with respect to the forms and modes of power operating in a given time and place’ (Ortner 1998: 3–4). And, as Bourdieu (1979) reminds us, class inequalities as expressed in ‘cultural’ differences serve to engrain and ‘naturalize’ real power inequalities. In that sense, ‘class’ is here also less of a fixed analytical category but rather an attempt to describe and analyse very real and tangible socio-economic and power differences, and how people express these. As a second point, I suggest we must thus pay attention to the aspirations expressed and acted out by people in their everyday life to discern the contours of middle classness in Luanda today.

Finally, the ‘middle class’ is also often viewed normatively by proponents of the free market as a panacea for the ails of ‘developing countries’ as a bastion of liberal democracy and liberating individual (consumer) choices, and ‘model subjects’ of the neoliberal state (Heiman, Freeman and Liechty 2012: 18). Or, if we think back to Gramsci, they are at least those subjects where the cultivation of consent has been most successful, i.e. where the espousal of values supportive of the state (and the *status quo*) has been naturalized most completely (cf. Gramsci 1971: 40–42). Angola, however, is a paradigmatic case of ‘illiberal peacebuilding’ (Soares de Oliveira 2011), that is a transition closely managed by the ruling elite on their own terms, without the political liberalization usually trumpeted by proponents of ‘transitionism’. This chapter ultimately then addresses the

articulation of political subjectivities in a context like Angola: what are the values and aspirations of this nascent middle class when liberal democracy is a fiction and there is a growing gap between them and the ruling elite?

Surviving in the city

After a year of fieldwork in Luanda, I still have difficulties understanding exactly how people survive. I for one, combining several European grants and part-time work, very much depended on the help and material support of friends to get by. And most Luandans also spend more than they earn to sustain themselves and their families. So how do they manage?

‘A *negócio* here, a *bizno* there, a little borrowing there. For a family of 5 persons, 1,000 kwanzas [USD10 at the time of research] is not enough for one meal. Meat for 500 kwanzas is not sufficient. The Angolan has no dessert. Also, there is not enough money for the 10 o’clock coffee, nor for the afternoon break. Only breakfast, lunch, dinner.’

My informant here, Paulo, combined formal employment as a secondary-level history teacher with voluntary work as an HIV/AIDS activist in his church to sustain his family of four, and still found the energy to study for a law degree in the evenings.

It is true that on the level of ideals and values formal employment still constitutes one of the benchmarks of urban integration, and that informal work is indicative of being ‘less integrated and [having] lower educational qualifications’ (Rodrigues 2007a: 248) – in practice, however, very few people bar those who work specialized jobs in the oil industry, live off their salaries alone, and have to combine formal and informal work. Like Paulo, many of my informants thus juggled various commitments and sources of revenue to make ends meet.¹ This includes both people who came to the city as refugees in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as those who already lived in Luanda before. The latter formed the nucleus of an urban middle class in the 1980s, who lived in flats in the city centre, worked for the government, and went to well-to-do high schools, such as Mutu Ya-Kevela – the former *liceu* (high school) Salvador Correia of colonial times – N’zinga Mbandi, N’gola Kiluanji, or Alda Lara.

And yet, even if they hold a job in an NGO, a service company, or government administration, life in the city is a constant struggle. Mamã Madalena, for example, was a mid-level civil servant in a ministry:

I, as a *técnico médio de 3ª classe* [holder of a mid-level technical degree] earn less than a higher functionary: 32,000 per month [USD 320], that’s 30,000 after deductions. What can I do with 30,000 as a single mother with 4 children? There’s so much misery here. Without the help of my brother I could not keep my children in school. Beyond the fourth grade it’s always

200 dollars, 300, 400 dollars of *gasosa* [lit. a can of fizzy drink, a kickback, bribe]. And in university it's 2,500 dollars only to matriculate. There's much suffering for this people. Every exam you have to pay. Already in primary school they tell the child 'go home and ask your mother for a *gasosa*'. So I also have to make business in addition to my work. With the children of my sister at my charge with 30,000 I can't succeed. I now sell sand for construction works from my house. Before, I used to sell beers, but then with the work of the church I wanted to make my confirmation so I quit that. First I tried to sell *kissangua* cakes but that didn't work out, so luckily I found this business of selling sand to make cement blocks. It's true, *é uma vida chata!* (a bothersome life). To get these bifocal glasses, three consultations and 1,000 dollars were necessary. Life in Angola is sad. There is not even enough [money] to buy milk for your son to grow for all the 31 days of the month.

Much mockery and bitterness was expressed around an earlier speech by president dos Santos, who'd said that in Angola 'no one lives off the monthly salary', following strike threats by public servants.

Common strategies to survive were to combine a steady, but insufficient salary from the formal sector with a little *bizno* on the side: building a little *cantina* (corner shop) into the outer wall of your courtyard, renting out parts of the house, or – especially among women – travelling to Windhoek, Kinshasa, or Guangzhou to buy clothes and shoes and re-sell them with a substantive mark-up in Luanda. Others, like Mamã Joana, initially started out in government service in the provinces but had to flee the countryside because of the war, and found themselves pushed into the informal sector upon arrival in Luanda:

In '76 I worked for the government, I was a guerilla and was in combat, and my husband was also a soldier. In '77 we came to Luanda, and worked in the military until 1996. Then the government paid very little, and I started selling on the Roque [Roque Santeiro, Luanda's largest, now defunct, informal market] to pay for the house and the schooling. In 2001, my husband died of an illness. I continued on the Roque, but the money is not enough. For two years, I have been staying at home. Now I sell bread on the street. If I sell the whole box, I manage to eat supper; if not, I don't.

Leading a decent life

These then, are city-dwellers who by structural criteria (type of work, disposable income, type and area of housing, etc.) are not encompassed in the 'almost obsessive gospel about the role of the middle class in the continent's rapid and accelerated development' preached by IFIs (Melber 2015: 248). And yet, by their ambitions and aspirations to urbanness, 'civilisedness', status, and

propriety, the premium put on the value of higher education or the acquisition of a plot of land to build their own house (Gastrow 2014), for example, they are focusing on more than just the ‘mere survival’ (Rodrigues 2007b: 94) and certainly seem to embody ‘middle class values’.

Bourdieu’s notion of class distinction (1979) is productive here as a point of departure. These ‘indicators of urbanity’, which include language, gestures, greetings, but also the type of clothing, the level of school attendance, the area of residence within the city, the type of housing, the number of cars owned, replicate not only class stratifications but also colonial distinctions of ‘civilisedness’ and urban segregation (Rodrigues 2007a: 238). Some indicators of educational status resort to ‘older’ repertoires, such as the custom among men of growing the fingernail of their little finger to denote white-collar, rather than blue-collar employment; more recent markers of distinction are linked to modes of globalized consumption. For those social actors, class is then an orientation and an aesthetic.

This becomes evident, for example, in the use and switching of speech registers. Indeed, in Angola the mastery of Portuguese represents, ‘not only a factor of social differentiation but also an indicator of an individual’s level or urbanity’ (Rodrigues 2007a: 247). When addressing an audience in any kind of ‘official’ function (a parish assembly, an NGO-meeting, a speech at the National Assembly) I observed that most people – at least those who had some higher formal education – would employ an overly formal language, enunciating it ‘more Portuguese than the Portuguese’, to present themselves as cultivated and educated.² In such cases of switching registers this denotes aspiration and an element of intimidation: like someone wearing a ‘power-suit’, people don the mantle of ‘power-language’ to denote superiority and authority.

There is a subversive flip-side to this, when someone would imitate the President, they would take on the suave, *aportuguisado* (‘Portuguesed’) tone of dos Santos to paraphrase his recent speeches and state some utter nonsense, sending everyone present into fits of laughter. In a much-ridiculed speech about the levels of poverty being part of the colonial legacy, for example, dos Santos stated that he had already known such poverty growing up in the city as a child. As these practices of joking and the switching of registers illustrate, choice of language register do not simply reinforce power differences (Hanks 2005: 77), though they do reproduce long-standing social stratifications in Angola (urban-rural, and ‘civilized’-‘backward’, for example). Linguistic repertoires are not just naturalizing stratification and exclusion, but can also serve to renegotiate claims of citizenship and rights to the city (cf. Roth-Gordon 2009: 59). In that sense, adopting middle-class consumption and *habitus* is a political claim to modernity, citizenship rights, and inclusion in the MPLA’s dominant, but exclusionary vision of the country’s development (cf. Roitman 2005: 33).

It is thus crucial to remember what the ‘emerging middle class’ means in the context of Angola, as we are not exactly talking about the euphoric ‘Africa rising’ narrative touted in international newspapers that mistake impressive macro-economic indicators for actual improvements in the everyday lives of citizens. Many of my younger informants who could also be identified as ‘emerging urban middle class’ lived in peripheral, informal *bairros* (shantytowns) of Luanda, under direst material circumstances. In the *bairro*, services delivered by the state are notably absent, and any additional hardship like an illness of a family member or rains heavier than usual is immediately an existential threat. And yet, those are the people who often cumulate jobs to make ends meet, sustain their family, and still find the energy and ambition to pursue higher education studies to improve their lives. Even if the material conditions of middle classness are out of reach, the ‘middle’ remains a powerful idea among a very diverse cast of social actors as ‘a direction, an imagined site of good social normality’ (Schielke 2012: 49).

Nelma, for example, was in her early twenties and lived in a compound of crooked wooden shacks populated by constantly drunken men in the heart of the Bairro Operário. She was raising and feeding her younger siblings and cousins, trying to keep them clean, healthy, and out of trouble, and studied international relations in a private university in Luanda Sul in the evenings. Or Walter, who at 30, had eight children from three different women, but had now ‘given a new direction to his life’. Starting out as a stevedore (*estivador*) at the Cuca brewery at 18, he now worked as an independent handyman in Sambizanga and had just bought a plot of land in Luanda Sul to ‘create the conditions’ and build a house there for his family.

But does the espousal of such ‘middle class values’ and aspirations automatically translate into approval of the status quo and being ‘model’ subjects like both its proponents and the ruling regime would have it? As I would argue in the following, this is increasingly not the case in Angola.

Nascent political subjectivities

The President and his government justify their continued hold on power by pointing to the economic growth and recovery of infrastructures, and anyone who dare query that post-war consensus is immediately branded an enemy of peace and stability, and thus an enemy of the Angolan people in general (Schubert 2015). For the 2008 elections, the MPLA promised the creation of a million jobs and the building of one million ‘social housing’ units. These electoral promises largely failed to materialize, however: the construction of social housing was very limited, and included the delimitation of plots for *auto-construção dirigida* (directed self-building), where future residents are provided with basic kits and have to build their houses themselves according to a government master plan (Gastrow 2014). The marketing of flats in the new,

model, ‘middle class’ satellite city of Kilamba on the outskirts of Luanda was, as usual, outsourced to private entities connected to regime figures and state oil company Sonangol. This pushed the initial prices well beyond the means of ‘ordinary Angolans’ (Soares de Oliveira 2015: 66–67), and they were only lowered by presidential intervention when the entire plan threatened to become a PR disaster for the government (Buire 2014: 301). Undaunted, the MPLA then cannibalized opposition demands for more equitable wealth distribution, running for the 2012 elections under the slogan: ‘Angola – growing more to distribute better.’ Announcing the end of reconstruction and the beginning of development, it promised, again, the creation of one million new jobs and the construction of 2 million social houses. However, three years after the elections, the promise of material betterment for all is increasingly reaching its limits.

Like in the opening quote of this chapter, Angolans are increasingly fed up with the discourse of peace that is brandished like a weapon by the government to silence its critics: ‘The Angolans are already tired of this; they just want a normal life. For so many decades we have had an abnormal life. We just want to be able to have a coffee on the corner, buy food in a shop, raise our children.’ And yet, that sort of normality is increasingly out of reach for most Luandans, which makes the disconnection between the MPLA government’s populist rhetoric (as in: we are the people) and the *povo*’s lived realities ever more glaring. This was clearly visible in many of my informants’ statements. For example, in a group discussion with *mamãs* who were mostly earning their income as vendors on the informal market, Mamã Laurinda said:

Our government has the habit of only looking one way, towards the growth and development of the country, but is not looking at the *povo*. Of 100% of Angolans, 95% are unemployed. How can we achieve to see true peace? We are still living a war, we are not enjoying peace. There are no more vacancies in government schools, so we have to resort to private ones. To finance this, we have to sell [on the informal market], but where? The *zungueiras* [street vendors], they chase them down like you wouldn’t even treat an animal, and some even die. Peace is the falling silent of the weapons, but we are not living proper peace. I only managed to bring my children up to 12th class; to obtain a *vaga* [study place] its 3 – 4,000 dollars – how to get this? There’s much demand, and little supply. I have three children, and for three years they have not studied because we did not manage to get in. For the Angolan, things are not good, *vão mal*. Maybe for Angolan A things are good, but for Angolan B and C, things aren’t. And we here are Angolan C! Angolan A is the son of the ministers.

The most visible face of this growing discontent are the ‘youth activists’ and ‘revolutionary student movement’, who since early 2011, have tried to stage small, but high-profile anti-government protests in Luanda and other

provincial capitals (Faria 2013; Pearce 2015). By using slogans like ‘*Não há pão, só há paz!*’ (‘There’s no bread, there’s only peace’), calling dos Santos the ‘Architect of Hunger’ (*O arquitecto da fome*) rather than the Architect of Peace, or mocking the omnipresent, omniscient ‘Executive’ as the *Zécutivo* – a pun on the President’s first name José/Zé and the *executivo* – they pick up and subvert the dominant discourse of stability and peace (see Schubert 2015) to express their anger that the post-war economic boom and reconstruction has left most Angolans out.

In 2011, opposition politician Justino Pinto de Andrade affirmed:

We’re not yet like in the Maghreb. There, you have a middle class, well-educated youths who have a consciousness of their rights and democracy. They are frustrated. They don’t want only bread, employment, but also actual freedom. Here, we are also educating youths with capacities and expectations. If we continue with these errors we will also see demands, and urban upheavals of the middle class. The government should start a serious reflection about the hot potato that they are leaving to the youth. Regimes are destroyed by those who they created.

Prescient words, as at the time of writing in 2015 the discontent is spreading both among the ‘urban youth’ as well as among people who are more established and who, until now, have accepted the post-war consensus that places stability and ‘tranquillity’ over political freedoms. Even those who have stable jobs, or the few who might have benefited from government largesse are increasingly questioning the post-war consensus. As Pitcher (2015) shows, for example, the people that finally got a hold of a flat in Kilamba thanks to their connections and employment in the civil service may be happy with their new standards of living and the services provided by the government, but that does not automatically translate into approval of the government, or support of the ruling party – quite the contrary, in fact.

Another of my informants, Pastor Simões, who lived in a small flat in the central Cruzeiro neighbourhood with his family, and who, in his early fifties, was hardly a revolutionary hotspur, expressed dissatisfaction at the growing hardships of living in Luanda, and the disconnect between the government’s triumphalist rhetoric and the realities of the *povo*:

Compared with the world, our economy is growing at a good, even an extraordinary rhythm. The downside is that this has no big impact on the lives of the *povo*. The people live almost like in the past years. The minimal salary is 50 dollars per month. If I live in a rented house with my family, and I need to buy food, how can I do it? Many countries are interested by this growth, but it has no repercussion [in our lives] at all. If you were to interview so many and so many Angolans the reply would be unanimously

one of suffering. [...] A growth of 3% annually does not reverberate in the social area. Many Angolans live below the poverty line. We even have a saying here: here are the poor [indicates a line above his head with his hand], here is the poverty line [indicates at about head level], and we are here [motions below his head].

Similarly, my friend José had a typical Luandan middle class biography, and had gone through institutions that fostered allegiance to the system – the aforementioned Mutu Ya-Kevela school, the party's youth pioneers in the 1980s, and even a brief stint in the police and the army. At one of our meetings he intoned the MPLA hymn with a friend of the same age, in a way that was equally ironic and expressing a widespread nostalgia for the (in hindsight often idealized) values of socialism and solidarity.

When he was 21, he participated in the country's first elections in 1992, and had voted for the MPLA with some conviction: his father was a policeman and had friends in the army, and 'we had already grown up with the MPLA, we knew what they were capable of, what they can give and what they cannot give. They said they wanted to improve – but how? No one said; they were only devaluating the discourse of their adversaries'. Indeed, UNITA back then had a very bellicose rhetoric which scared off many potential voters, and 'we were afraid of change'. Nowadays, however, and despite a well-paid job in a big NGO, José's disillusionment was growing:

In my generation there is a strong sentiment of revolt. The money of the demobilized [soldiers] is not worth anything at all. There are many who did not serve and receive the *kumbú* [money] – it's already become a *esquema* [scheme, fraud]. I originally wanted to study geology & mines, but I did not have family in Sumbe [where the school of mines was], only in Huambo, so they told me to study mechanical engineering in Huambo – back then it wasn't you who decided. We were never free to choose. And we're still not. Today, with the age limits of 25, 30, or 35 [for entering public service], what can we do? Even if we managed to catch up school, we have no chance of a job. With these aspects I will not vote for the MPLA, *porra, nem pensar!* [damn, don't even think about it!]

Conclusion

While the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and mainstream media euphorically hail the emergence of the 'African middle class' and bandy about an increasingly popular 'Africa rising' narrative, the hegemonic strategies of developmental, 'post-democratic' regimes are reaching their limits. The hitherto successful combination of financial largesse for a select few and repression of dissent for the many is no longer sufficient to mitigate growing popular discontent over the broken promises of post-war economic improve-

ment for all. We can observe in many of these countries strong parallels to pre-revolution Arab countries, and, as most recently in Burkina Faso, DRC, and Burundi, the éternisation of long-time Presidents in office further heightens these growing social tensions.

However, rather than focusing on extraordinary events like protests or election periods when these tensions are heightened, I suggest that it is more fruitful in the long run to observe the tentative articulations of political demands by 'ordinary citizens'. Much could be gained here by looking at the mundane, everyday politics of groups that not see themselves *a priori* as political activists, but who will, ultimately, be the drivers of economic and political change, demanding greater political and economic inclusion in the context of heightened economic inequality, decreasing economic growth, and increasing restrictions on open debate and political contestation.

Indeed, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, there is a growing disconnect between the promises and values of middle classness that would sustain a political project that emphasizes stability and the status quo, and the material realities of the 'middle class' in Luanda. And that discontent is now spreading even amongst these who are materially more secure, or the few who have benefited from government projects or employment, contradicting facile notions of the 'politics of the belly'. The social groups that were for years the popular basis of support of the ruling MPLA feel left out of the regime's project of the 'New Angola'. They experience that their rulers have betrayed their originally proclaimed values of solidarity and social advancement for all to the benefit of a small predatory elite. And it is precisely because of this that the hegemonic project of the MPLA is under increasing pressure, even from people who previously were supporters of, and to an extent, beneficiaries of, the regime.³

These insights can then shed light on wider regional developments – this includes the appearance of new, 'third' parties challenging the established post-revolutionary dominant parties across the sub-region (such as MDM in Mozambique, CASA-CE in Angola, or EFF in South Africa) and the imminent generational shift replacing the 'historic' leaders of the independence struggle. Citizens in Southern Africa have substantive expectations of 'democracy' and the functioning services a 'modern' state should provide for its citizens – and this includes not only the traditionally privileged who can afford to pay privately for services the state should provide (water, electricity, health, education, security etc.), or those who have studied abroad and have now returned to their countries with 'Western' ideas, but as 'ordinary citizens' across the social spectrum.

It is, however, moot to speculate how these emerging political ideas will find their expression in Angola, especially in a political system that is so obviously biased in favour of the ruling party (Roque 2009 and 2013; Schubert 2010). For now, these expressions of new political subjectivities can simply be read

as the emergence of a small, however materially fragile and embattled, new urban middle class that has substantive political aspirations for a different kind of social and economic relations.

Notes

1 This also substantially complicated the notion of ‘participant observation’, I should add.

2 With rare exceptions like the independent opposition MP Makuta Nkonda, who presents himself as a ‘son of farmers’ of the North, and speaks a rough, heavily accented Portuguese — also a political tactic to denote ‘authenticity’ and being down-to-earth in opposition to the ‘creole’ urbanites of the MPLA elite.

3 See Sumich (2015), and in this volume, for similar dynamics in Mozambique.

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8 | The middle class of Mozambique and the politics of the blank slate

Jason Sumich

Recently many policy debates concerning the global south have shifted from an overwhelming focus on poverty to the transformative potential of an emerging middle class. August institutions such as the World Bank and the National Intelligence Council (NIC) declare that the growth of the middle class will be one of the most profound global transformations of the coming decades (see Kalb 2014: 157). At a time when inequality has reached truly astounding proportions, the idea of a global middle class often acts as riposte against those claiming life is becoming more polarized. In many ways it serves as the modern equivalent of the trickledown theory: Yes, recent economic changes have largely been to the benefit of elites, but this particular rising tide is lifting all boats. Perhaps this is why the concept is so popular with proponents of liberal economics. The concept of ‘middle classness’ as it is used in such policy debates is reminiscent of modernization theory as it discursively constructs a status quo reaffirming path to the future (Kalb 2014). After decades of being portrayed as a ‘lost continent’ comprised of political and economic basket cases, Africa is taking pride of place in the middle class future. As noted by Schubert (this volume), the growing prominence of an emerging middle class has become one of the bastions of the ‘Africa Rising’ narrative, a flesh and blood symbol of free market reforms. Mozambique is a fitting locale for an exploration of the role of the ‘new middle classes’. The country in many ways embodies the ‘Africa Rising’ narrative, where sustained economic growth has catapulted it into the continent’s ‘Cheetah economies’, despite being perhaps the poorest country on earth a little over 20 years ago.

Most recent discussions of the growing middle class in Africa draw on the study by the African Development Bank that declared 34 per cent of Africa’s population, or around 314 million people, are already members of it as they have a purchasing power of between US\$2 and US\$20 a day (Mubila, Ben Aissa and Lufumpa 2011). There is little need to dwell on the reductiveness of this argument. In such a definition there is nothing between destitution and being a member of the middle class. Such a diverse group of people falls under this all-encompassing rubric, from civil servants to maids and informal traders, that the category is largely meaningless. Other commentators, such as

the magazine *The Economist* (in its issue of February 2009) have gone further and attached ideological positions to this hopelessly vague social grouping, largely supporting free markets and liberalism. The current usage of middle class, often by proponents of the existing global economic system, is largely a 'blank slate' ideology. No matter what the sociological or historical background, once a middle class emerges it will automatically become the anchor of a capitalist, liberal democratic polity.

In the city centre of Maputo, Mozambique's capital, the influx of wealth is increasingly visible. New malls, restaurants and luxury shops spring up with bewildering speed and roads are clogged with seemingly endless lines of SUVs. Mozambique's growing prosperity has drawn international notice and many of my friends mention the influx of Portuguese migrants escaping European Union austerity measures with a mixture of bemusement and pride. However, the recent prosperity, at least for some, has not necessarily instilled hope for the future, even for those who benefit from the system. Pedro is a former cadre of the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (hereafter Frelimo), the ruling party since independence in 1975, who has since secured a comfortable existence in the private sector. He is able to utilize networks of current and former party members for support. However, Pedro has nevertheless become a fierce critic of Frelimo, as he explained to me: 'Who is in charge here? Who controls the system? What system? You see the President driving through town in his convoy. There are sirens, flashing lights, soldiers and police. You think that is power? It's not; it's just noise and show. Actual life in this country is chaos, no one is in charge.'

Pedro enjoys a privileged place in society guaranteed by a system whose very existence he questions. In their ground-breaking work on the anthropology of the middle classes, Heiman, Freeman and Liechty (2012: 18) argue that under the current conditions of neo-liberal capitalism the middle classes have become the cherished figures of the state, they are the '(largely depoliticized) ideological and social construct upon which the neoliberal state rests its political legitimacy'. The middle class may be a depoliticized social and ideological construct in contemporary discourse, but Pedro's remarks demonstrate the centrality of politics and the potential of instability to the experiences of Africa's middle classes, topics conveniently forgotten in the triumphalism of the World Bank and the NIC.

This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted with members of Maputo's middle class I have conducted since 2002. The subjects of this chapter are those who have either a longstanding personal or familial connections with Frelimo. Such people would make up the majority of the contemporary middle class. It is possible to be a member of the middle class while being outside the party's orbit. Examples would include high-ranking members of opposition parties and some businessmen and employees of international agencies, although

they often make use of political connections as well. Being middle class in Mozambique, where the classic attribute of class such as the control over the means of production is rare, is usually the result of a particular political relationship with the Frelimo party, the state and the institutions it rules.

Building on Ferguson's (2015: 50) discussion of changing political orders, I argue that socialism in Mozambique was based on an idea of 'rightness', which was necessary for the construction of a better society for all. Capitalism on the other hand, is based on the idea of individual 'rights' such as the guarantee of freedom. Both, in different ways, are examples of an ideology of the 'blank slate', where a project of social engineering would wipe away the vestiges of the failed past and usher in a new society. A social group that can be characterized as middle class held pride of being part in both visions, either as examples of the 'new man', the vanguard of social transformation or as the anchor of the liberal order. As is usually the case with 'blank slate' ideologies, the lofty goals of socialism and capitalism are frequently undermined by the histories and political orders from which they emerge. During socialism, the unwavering belief held by the party leadership and its cadres of the moral necessity and 'rightness' of the revolution and the need for root and branch social transformation contributed to a brutal civil war. Under capitalism the idea of individual 'rights' and liberalism are tempered by a system that can ironically be referred to as a dictatorship of surnames. Status and wealth are the result of the control of the means of access, not production; and meritocracy means comparatively little if one lacks the right connections. The problem with recent discussions on the African middle class is that it largely ignores the messy political and social realities that form such a group (Sumich 2015).¹ In the following I trace the formation and political embeddedness of a middle class in Mozambique from independence to the present. I argue this group was formed by the underlying elitism of the politics of mass mobilization in the socialist period and acquired its material base through the staggering inequality that accompanied democratization. Far from becoming an anchor of liberal democracy as the World Bank, NIC and African Development Bank would have it, the middle class is symbolic of just how precarious the foundations of the current liberal order actually are in contemporary Mozambique.

Early origins

Mozambique's contemporary middle class is closely associated with Frelimo's nationalist project and many of its behavioural markers are intertwined with the very particular social background of the party leadership. Much of Frelimo's political leadership have their origins in the south of Mozambique and were members of a former colonial category called *assimilados* (the assimilated). One of the more common estimates puts the official *assimilado* population in 1960 at around 5,000, out of a population of 8,200,000, before the category

was abolished and citizenship was generally granted in a hearts and minds campaign by the Portuguese (Sheldon 2002). *Assimilados* were theoretically granted legal equality with Portuguese settlers (Mondlane 1969). This was not the case in practice; however, they were still vastly more privileged than the overwhelming majority of the black population, the *indigenas* (indigenous).

The southern *assimilados* in the party's political leadership tended to have weak ties with so-called traditional leadership as opposed to state structures and a background characterized by some access to education, experience with urban or peri-urban areas, migrant labour and upward mobility (Fry 2000). Although they enjoyed a relatively comfortable existence in comparison to the vast majority, they did so by serving the state that oppressed them. As the first president, Samora Machel (1975-1986) stated: 'The colonial bourgeoisie... wanted to mold society to such an extent that it reached the point of forcing a Mozambican to deny his personality, to transform himself into a little black Portuguese' (quoted in Hall and Young 1997: 64). The humiliation at the hands of the colonial state became a key component in the formation of a new state imaginary of the postcolonial era, the desire to build the world in their image as opposed to that of the colonists.

The political imaginary that animated Frelimo's project was not only a story about what kind of society Mozambique would become, but also what kind of person Mozambicans had to be for this to happen, *o homem novo* (the new man). The new man was to be characterized by new behavioural patterns; supposed superstition would give way to rationalism, narrow kin and ethnic loyalties to a commitment to the general good, clan to nuclear family and patriarchy to more balanced gender relations. The new man was only the first link of the chain, the template for what was to come. Society was to be utterly transformed, through either persuasion or violence if need be. As Dinerman has noted, Frelimo's narrative was based on the idea of a great 'rupture' with the past (2006). In practice the great rupture was as much a myth as a set of actual processes, but for many cadres with more privileged, urban backgrounds, the promise of overcoming what was seen as the moral and social degradation of the colonial period through the utter transformation of Mozambique from a colonial backwater to a glorious future was attractive.

The promise of the early independence period still invokes nostalgia and pride for many who lived through it. Senhor Macamo, a former minister, spoke lyrically about the opportunities created for Mozambicans during the 11-year liberation struggle (1964-1975) and the initial post-independence period.

The liberation struggle created tremendous social mobility and also regional, as many of these people came from the far north. It was the struggle that brought peasants to the fore for the first time really. Granted these were usually those who hailed from the upper strata of the peasantry.

They may have been poor, often little better off than their neighbours, but they had access to some education. People from this group became military leaders, provincial governors and even national directors. This was not the classic model of urbanization. They moved to cities because they already had positions and power, not to gain them. We created a situation where something that would normally take generations happened in just a decade or so. There were limits though. Those who were outside of the struggle often did not gain the same benefits.

Despite reoccurring crises, the early revolutionary period was characterized by an upsurge in social mobility. The exodus of the Portuguese meant that almost all of the professional and managerial positions in the country were vacant and Mozambicans who had any type of qualification or basic education were promoted to the colonialists' former positions. Those who were close to the party and could claim a peasant or worker background (even if this was not entirely the case) benefited from positive discrimination in education and jobs. For supporters at least, and perhaps far more widely, the party created a moral imaginary, with colonialism, capitalism and imperialism conspiring to hold Mozambicans back and the state as a positive force, which would create a new world that redressed the previous wrongs. As we shall see in the next section though, the actual practices of building the new world were far more contested.

Unravelling

Shortly after independence, the economy entered a period of crisis as the economic boom and industrialization of the 1960s could no longer be sustained in a hostile geo-political environment and a brewing civil war. Despite economic problems and the difficulties in imposing Frelimo's rule across a huge country with minimal resources and powerful and hostile neighbours, the party felt confident or desperate enough to embark on its vision of social revolution. Many of the planners in Maputo were ignorant, wilfully or otherwise, of the subtle and nuanced ways in which their project combined with and was challenged by various local discourses. Instead they attempted a grand restructuring that was welcomed by some, but began to alienate many others. Although most could agree that colonialism was bad, Frelimo went much further. They were determined to root out internal 'obscurantism', which consisted of supposedly backwards beliefs, selfish individualism and many other social ills.

When those I know recall the socialist period many speak of the ubiquitous presence of informers and as the civil war worsened, the increasingly paranoid authoritarianism of the government. This was manifest in draconian punishments, such as the camps, firing squads, and after 1983, the reintroduction of public flogging, and in more mundane ways, such as being forced by police

to salute the flag at certain times of the day. While arbitrary actions by the security services created an atmosphere of insecurity and some measures caused widespread revulsion, many still believed in the ideals of the state and felt it had to be protected from the multitude of threats that besieged it. As João, a former member of *casa militar* (the presidential guard) put it: 'Samora was one of the greatest leaders in Africa. He had bad advisors though, he always listened to the secret police and that is why things got bad. Still, Samora really cared about the people.'

The middle class during the socialist period often found itself in a contradictory position. On the one hand, they had the education to benefit from previously unimaginable social mobility and their social background often made them closest to the officially valorized conception of citizenship, the 'new man'. Despite the hardships, many saw the party and its state as a positive force that would build a better world and banish the poverty and what they saw as superstition and 'backwardness' to build a nation that would be viewed as an equal by the rest of the world. On the other hand, the very factors that made many close to the 'new man' ideal, such as established urban residence, changing familial and gender relationships, some degree of education in the colonial period also placed them under suspicion. There was always the danger that they could be accused of being 'contaminated' by their contact with the colonizer and a potential 'enemy of the people'. This dual position, both potential exemplary citizen and potential traitor, underlined the precariousness of privilege.

The struggles of the new state were soon compounded by a devastating civil war (1977–1992). Shortly after independence, Rhodesia formed a rebel movement that came to be known as *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Mozambican National Resistance, hereafter Renamo). After the fall of Rhodesia, apartheid South Africa became Renamo's chief sponsor and the civil war intensified. Although Renamo was a foreign creation, discontent caused by Frelimo's revolution created areas of the country which allowed Renamo to draw support, or at least benefit from growing indifference to Frelimo's social revolution. Even in Maputo, the heart of the regime, Frelimo was becoming increasingly paranoid and authoritarian. This was probably best exemplified by the now infamous '*operação produção*' (operation production) in 1983 that rounded up all who could not prove residence or employment in urban areas across the country and exiled them to the far north to 'build cities in the forest' (Buur 2010). Even many party supporters regarded operation production as cruel, and arbitrary use of power severely tarnished Frelimo's credentials as a positive force. As the war worsened and the economy imploded, Frelimo turned to the West in desperation for aid and inaugurated a series of reforms that accelerated after the death of the first president, Samora Machel in 1986. In the place of promised abundance of the early rhetoric, there were shortages, rationing and

after the acceptance of IMF conditions, hyperinflation and growing corruption. Even the privileged often refer to this period as *o tempo da fome* (the time of hunger). Despite the severe hardships, the privileged were able to secure their position in the socialist period through access to education, jobs in the bureaucracy and the acquisition of housing. Their place in the social hierarchy though began to lose its moral significance. Instead of being a symbol of social transformation, the cultural and behaviour markers of privilege became symbolic of an increasingly restricted elite, and social mobility solidified into a more rigid hierarchy.

Throughout the 1980s the war showed no signs of relenting; and if the state could no longer claim the ability to build a new social order that would transform a supposedly backward former colony into the leadership's vision of a modern, prosperous nation, now, according to my informants, it could barely keep order at all. Friends of mine recall Renamo ambushes at the outskirts of the capital and claim that by the end of the war, criminal gangs had turned parts of Maputo near the city centre into 'no go' areas. However, if Frelimo's transformative project was largely abandoned, the Renamo rebels were even less attractive to them. Its apartheid connections and neo-traditional rhetoric offered little, and years of being demonized in official propaganda coincided with very real acts of spectacular brutality. As Tatiana, a woman who was a teenager when peace was signed told me: 'I was shocked when I saw the peace ceremony and Renamo turned out to be people. I always thought they were some sort of twisted monster with long claws and fangs.'

Post-war

The war finally sputtered to a negotiated end in 1992, two years after Frelimo unilaterally abolished single-party socialism, a move that rendered most of Renamo's overt political demands moot. Since the end of the war, the party-state has slowly rebuilt itself. Those who are well connected and well educated, have been able to take advantage of opportunities created by economic growth, the privatization programme and the massive influx of international organizations, rotating between the often interconnected, government, business, aid and service sectors (Pitcher 2002). The new opportunities of the capitalist period, especially the privatization of the housing stock and the employment prospects that accompanied the vast influx of NGOs, have allowed members of a middle class to bolster their status with a material basis. However, the privileged status that was once a symbol of wider social transformation, is increasing a mark of distinction for a small elite disconnected from the wider populace. If the middle class are the anchor of a new, liberal political project in Mozambique, they are also a symbol of its shortcomings. New freedoms and opportunities for accumulation are contrasted with staggering inequality and the fact that the socialist elite are the best placed to take advantage of the capitalist order. This

state of affairs was symbolized by the former president Armando Guebuza – once a socialist hardliner, who during his tenure in power (2005–2015) reputedly became the richest man in the country. The stark gap between the popular image of Samora Machel as a selfless leader and Guebuza whose nickname was *Tio Patinhas* (Scrooge McDuck) could not be more apparent.

Despite the dramatic political transformations, some core aspects of Frelimo's political project remain. As argued by Dinerman (2006), the party leadership, like many members of the middle class, still portrays itself as socially separate from, or above, the wider population, the only ones who can arbitrate between 'less advanced' and mutually antagonistic groups. Thus, one of the reasons for socialism's failure was that the party had not taken into account a population who was not ready for it. As Paulo, a former high-ranking official, described it:

The British and the French created an elite who could work with the neo-colonial system. The Portuguese did not try until the final six years of colonialism. Frelimo was progressive; the goal was not simply to free the nation, but also to transform it. For this the party wanted to create a modern socialist state but we simply did not have the conditions. We did not have the social preparation to make a revolution. At independence most people were peasants, even those who lived in the urban areas were psychologically peasants. The cities did not fulfill their historic role by making them workers, most people were servants and now they wanted to be masters. We tried to turn peasants into workers, but we failed. We lived in an imaginary nation, the dream of the nation we wanted to create, not the flesh and blood nation we actually had.

Paulo offered a Marxist interpretation of the revolution's shortcomings. Many of those I know share similar sentiments, but this is often based more on political despair. The transformation of the population was one of the goals that made revolutionary nationalism so attractive. For them, though, Frelimo no longer stands above society guiding it to a better world; instead it has degenerated to the level of the rest of the population engaging in avarice and corruption. One woman described the leadership as an 'incompetent oligarchy', and the blunt assessment of another is: 'they are nothing but thieves and murders.'

Growing alienation from the political order underscores the precariousness of the Mozambican middle class. The middle classes of Mozambique and Africa more generally do not necessarily act autonomously from the political system, checking its overweening ambitions, but are largely an outgrowth of the state that created them. In a similar manner, the economic basis of members of the middle class rarely focus on productive enterprises, or through spreading money more widely through the economy, but tend to cluster around economic sectors that depend on political access, such as property. The middle class is dependent on political structures they do not trust and are vulnerable to a

volatile economic situation. The natural resource boom has caused prices to skyrocket, placing even the privileged under strain. As a former high-ranking official told me: 'I earn 5000 USD per month and I cannot afford to buy a house' (see Sumich 2015 for a more detailed description). The resource boom has also brought in new players from the centre and north of the country, who are normally connected to Frelimo but outside the small social circles that have traditionally defined privilege in Maputo. In her ground-breaking work on middle class sexuality, Manuel (2013) describes the social confusion as cash-poor members of the old privileged classes, who can offer the imprimatur of a well-known surname, are marrying the new rich, whose money almost papers over the lack of traditional pedigree. The differences between the vast majority of the population are wider yet still.

Unlike the middle class, the vast majority has to eke out a living through whatever opportunities they can find at the lower rungs of the formal economy, or far more commonly, a precarious existence in the so-called informal sector. The slogans promising a better future appear increasingly empty to the urban poor, who use the verb *desenrascar* (which means to imaginatively get by in any way one can) to describe how they survive. As one newspaper editorial put it: 'the inhabitants of the *bairros* (poor neighbourhoods, or suburbs) do not live, they survive' (Serra 2011). As with many other places across the world, violent crime is rising and the police seem unable or unwilling to do anything about it (or are in fact criminals themselves), and lynching is sometimes the only form of justice available to most people (Bertelsen 2009). Since the adoption of capitalism many of my interlocutors have accepted, sometimes enthusiastically, growing inequality backed by force if necessary. It is not uncommon to hear proposals for draconian punishments for minor crimes, such as summary execution for purse snatching, as it is considered a gateway offence that will lead to still greater transgressions if not held in check. There is a widespread nostalgia for the strict application of rough and ready justice that was thought to characterize the Samora period. If the population cannot be transformed, it can at least be subdued. In the place of enforcing unity however, the state presides over the creation of ever more social divisions that are only too apparent with the glaring inequalities of Maputo. This point was driven home as violent riots, initially triggered by rising costs in transport and food, broke out in Maputo and other southern Frelimo strongholds in 2008 and again in Maputo in 2010 and 2012, causing widespread destruction.

The riots point towards the latent anger of the vast majority of the population who have largely been excluded from most benefits of the new order and demonstrates just how precarious the foundations upon which it rests really are. Mozambique is nominally a democracy and for a time an increasingly viable opposition, *Movimento Democrático de Moçambique* (hereafter MDM), had caused considerable excitement in some sectors. However, it did not seem

to offer much of a real ideological alternative to the current system. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the MDM lost severely in the national election of 2014. Instead, after almost two years of low intensity fighting with the government, Renamo is once again the major opposition party. Voters seemed to appreciate the willingness of Renamo's leader Afonso Dhlakama to stand up to Frelimo, bolstering his party's political comeback after fading to near insignificance in the previous election. Since the disputed national elections of 2014 won by Frelimo, there is a limbo of fruitless negotiations, threats and small-scale clashes between Frelimo and Renamo pointing towards an ever more uncertain future.

Conclusion

The middle class of Mozambique was born of two great political transformations, socialism and liberalism that differ greatly in their methods and goals but are similar in their messianic ambitions. Both socialism and liberalism are examples of ideologies of the 'blank slate', where the constraints of the past will be wiped away and new political subjects will be born. In practice, the ideals of both were undermined by the political and social orders from which they emerged. The political vision of socialism was based on what Ferguson (2015) has called 'rightness', the necessity of transforming the nation and its inhabitants to usher in a new age of prosperity and equality. While many may have agreed with the overall goals, the blueprint for this transformation was based on a vision of a small but determined elite who were perfectly willing to resort to coercion in the absence of consent. Liberalism, as argued by Ferguson (2015) is based on a more narrow idea of individual 'rights', which in Mozambique are legally enshrined in the constitution. In practice those rights often mean little in the growing social polarization unleashed by capitalism, especially when the benefits are often monopolized by hierarchies and structures of power that have been in place since the socialist period.

As argued by Kalb (2014), the middle class functions as a curious ideological negation, a class that allows us not to talk about class. In this conservative vein, the middle class in Africa is often portrayed as the result of free market economic reforms undertaken since the 1980s. They act as a vindication of structural adjustment programmes, symbolic of their overall necessity, painful as it may have been. Throughout this chapter, I have argued much of this description is disingenuous at best. As opposed to being created in a blinding flash of entrepreneurial vigour, privilege in Mozambique, as with so many other places, is deeply embedded in the political history and structures of the place where it emerges. Instead of seeing the middle class of Mozambique, or much of Africa more generally as the heralds of a great transformation that will consolidate liberal democracy, they should perhaps be viewed as symbolic of the deep and persisting inequalities of the way contemporary liberalism

is in actual practice. In Mozambique at least, the transformative potential of such group acting outside existing political structures is doubtful. Instead of transforming politics it is far more likely that they are hostage to it.

Note

1 See also Schubert (2015), and in this volume, for a discussion on the role of politics and middle class formation in Angola.

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9 | South Africa's black middle class professionals

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As Kuper (1965: ix) already noted half a century ago, the 'wealth, patterns of consumption, style of life, and moderating or revolutionary tendencies' of South Africa's emerging Black middle class (BMC) has been a great source of interest.¹ More recently, the broad discourse on the BMC relates to its income levels and patterns of consumption. BMC members themselves reflect images of an ubiquitously consumptive lifestyle. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter are bloated with images of the lifestyle-related appearances – yachts, holiday resorts, boutique hotels, mansions, expensive cars, designer clothes and the latest hi-tech and communication technologies. These are the symbols of the 'I've arrived' – or the 'Black diamonds' – generation.

The younger faction of South Africa's political elite too, most of them appointed by the ruling African National Congress (ANC), has become engulfed in the practice of proliferating images reflecting its conspicuous consumption. Their children, wives and other family members post pictures of themselves garbed in the latest international designer clothing, shoes and jewellery, flying across the world, consuming expensive alcohol, playing golf or otherwise basking in the sun at some 'by-invitation-only' venue. Interestingly, these images stood in stark contrast to those posted by students – predominantly Black and across class-lines – who in late 2015 demonstrated at South Africa's universities in protest against the looming fee increases. The polarization escalated to an extent that a social-media based conversation erupted when a young high-ranking public servant became the face of a marketing campaign for an expensive international alcohol brand. In a *Mail and Guardian* article Athambile Masola (2015) lambasted: 'For young people who are accosted by these images in an economic and political climate that renders their own aspirations void, success seems to be only for the few who are well educated and well connected.'

This chapter is empirically based on a qualitative study that explores how such Black professionals construct their class and political identities. The survey was conducted among two groups: one of upper-middle class members comprising of IT managers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants, managers and entrepreneurs, who were located in both the corporate and

public spheres; another group were middle-middle class members made up of middle-level executives, owners of medium-sized businesses or small businesses that are capital, technology or knowledge intensive, salaried professionals, and the middle management levels in the public and semi-public sectors. The conversations were held in Johannesburg (JHB), Durban, Cape Town (CT) and East London (EL) between 2013 and 2015. The word ‘new’ is added as a periodical marker that distinguishes between the BMC under apartheid and in democratic times.

The socio-political significance of the BMC

The role and influence of the BMC in South African politics has attracted academic interest. Following the wealth-democracy thesis by Lipset, Seong and Torres (1993), which positively correlates economic development to democracy in Western societies, South African academia has sought to establish if the quantitative increase in the BMC could result in greater democratic pluralism and consolidation (Torres 2000; Rivero, du Toit and Kotze 2003; Southall, 2004, 2005 and 2014; Schlemmer 2005; Schulz-Herzenberg 2009b; Mattes 2003 and 2014). These scholars have explored the extent to which social mobility deriving from increased education and income could facilitate BMC political independence from the ANC, allow other political parties to gain a share of this BMC vote and result in democratic pluralism and consolidation. Importantly, the dominant and underlying analytical point in these arguments is that class has superseded race as a social and identity marker.

The analytical outcomes of the above can be summarized in two ways. The size of the BMC, particularly in contrast to the poor, unemployed and working class, has been taken as numerically insignificant to carry out the task of electoral plurality (Rivero, du Toit and Kotze 2003; Schlemmer 2005; Ndletyana 2014). In a similar take and ignoring BMC history, Mattes (2014) concluded that the BMC remains a nascent factor in South African politics, while Southall (2014) suggested that the BMC could not be seen as inherently progressive.

The second analytical outcome derives from the pervasive argument that the ANC’s ‘aggressive new affirmative action policies’ (Pottinger 2008: 105), i.e. the Black Economic Empowerment Act (BEE 2003, BBBEE 2007) and the Employment Equity Act (EE 1998) have directly, if not singularly, created the new BMC resulting in its support of the ANC. Notably though, state-led development of the middle class was already undertaken under apartheid when the expansion of middle class occupations and state-related business opportunities privileged English speaking whites and (Afrikaans speaking) Afrikaners, while post-liberation analysts have focused on BEE and EE’s facilitation of the BMC. Their arguments maintain among others that, ‘the ANC sees itself as the vehicle of transformation of the political economy towards a goal of equity and growth’ (Southall 2005: 72); that ‘in less than ten years,

for example, a Black elite has emerged in South Africa, staffing the top levels of the civil service and taking seats in corporate boardrooms' (Winant and Seidman 2001: 217); that due to 'aggressive new affirmative action policies' (Pottinger 2008: 105) Black economic empowerment promoted Black-owned corporations and a Black capitalist class. The ANC accedes to this claim, as documented by Jacob Zuma, president of the party and of South Africa who stated: 'as a result of these [BBBEE] and other developments resulting from progressive government policies, there has been an impressive growth of the Black middle class' (Zuma 2013).

Debates about the BMC's political alignment are not new. Analysts previously discussed how apartheid's material inclusion and reforms aimed at the old BMC would impact on its political alignment. Beginning in the late 1970s, the apartheid state extended multiple, but carefully limited economic reforms aimed at moderately increasing the numbers of the old BMC. The reforms included the further provision of trading licenses, business finance and the extension of greater independence to Bantustans and urban-based community councils. The relaxation of the colour bar, and the associated Black Advancement (BA) programme resulted in the placement of Africans in middle class occupations at the semi-skilled level. These reforms had a strategic premise. The state and corporate South Africa sought to utilize the old BMC as a buffer between the white minority and rioting Black masses: workers, unions and political parties. Southall (1980) critically observed that while these reforms had the veneer of deracializing the economy, they were more about stripping Black political movements of leadership, which was partly based on members of the BMC. Nolutshungu (1982: 91) in fact argued that the relations being forged with Black business were more about 'containment rather than transformation, encadrement rather than embourgeoisement'.

Notwithstanding the caveats and permutations, the analysis of the old BMC's political alignment became controversial. On the one hand, some theorists advanced the argument that because of economic inclusion, the apartheid-made new BMC would align itself with the reforming apartheid capitalist state and white monopoly capital (Southall 1980; Saul and Gelb 1981; Sarakinsky 1986; Hudson and Sarakinsky 1986; Josana 1989). The assumption was that because of material inclusion and upward mobility, class rather than race would emerge as the dominant organizing principle for the BMC. The opposing argument was that despite such material inclusion, the apartheid-made BMC would align itself with the struggle for liberation (Nolutshungu 1982; Bank 1990; Nzimande 1986 and 1991). The latter argument is evident in Joe Slovo's statement. As a pre-eminent theorist of the South African Communist Party (SACP) he emphasized racial solidarity over class alliance. According to him the racialization of class meant that the BMC would not forge a political alliance with its white counterparts, but would rather align itself with the ANC:

‘The limitations imposed by the white state upon its development meant that historically, the African petty bourgeoisie linked up with the African masses in a class alliance contained within the rubric of the African National Congress’ (quoted in Southall 1980: 39).

Importantly, at different points of South Africa’s history, segments of the BMC were either fully co-opted to support apartheid or opposed apartheid and joined forces with the broader liberation movement, under the leadership of the ANC. Therefore, the old BMC’s political alignment was highly dynamic, never unanimous or unambiguous (Southall 2014: 653). For example, some of the (apartheid established) chiefs that had supported apartheid at the height of monopoly capitalism by maintaining the supply of cheap Black labour to ‘white’ South Africa and keeping the population politically in check, became increasingly opposed to apartheid by the 1980s (Bank and Southall 1996).

Furthermore, the political stance of the urban and Bantustan based Black business segment was chameleon like and morphed from co-option to rejection. This segment, while opposed to racial discrimination bought into the economic reforms and moderate inclusion, received capital and infrastructural investments and loans from white business and the apartheid state. This caused Hudson and Sarakinsky (1986: 182) to boldly declare:

Increasingly it appears that the apartheid state is capable of absorbing the demands of the urban African bourgeoisie, and that it is possible for this class to grow both in size and power within the parameters of apartheid. This means that it is chimerical to continue proposing, and hoping to see established, an alliance, which has as its aim the overthrow of apartheid.

Civil servants and employees such as nurses, teachers, clerks etc., aligned with the broader liberation movement and were active in the struggle against apartheid, even in instances where some had been co-opted. Nzimande (1991) argued that corporate professionals as the politically most conservative group, reluctant to participate in the structures of the democratic movement in their communities became involved by default: because they were Black and lived in the townships, they could not entirely ignore the mass struggles. Most of this group’s activities were church, welfare or developmental activities and sports and recreation.

BMC political support in post-liberation South Africa

The discourse summarized above suggested that ‘race-based policies of the ANC have created an exceptionally strong bond between it and the African core middle class’ and the retention of a ‘powerful sense of solidarity with the ANC and the former liberation movement’ (Schlemmer 2005: 10). Schlemmer’s study reflected the dominance of BMC-ANC support, wherein 64 per cent and 68 per cent of his interviewees and survey respondents said they would vote

for the ANC in the next elections. But his results also indicated a fracturing of BMC-ANC support, since 23 per cent preferred another party. Schulz-Herzenberg's (2009b) dissertation on voter attitudes between 1994 and 2009 also confirmed that the Black owner/employer and professional/supervisory occupations supported the ANC.

Schlemmer explained that the BMC-ANC bond did not indicate singular captivation and acquiescence to the ANC. Instead it reflected a pragmatic preference for the ANC, one that is consistent, solid and durable. BMC support therefore takes place alongside the questioning and critiquing the party's governmental performance and policies; particularly from the tertiary educated, bureaucrats, independent professionals and community leaders. Schlemmer (2005: 11) concluded that the increasing dissension of BMC members within the ANC would begin to assist the process of democratic pluralism and consolidation.

Schulz-Herzenberg (2009b) argued that the South African social order is increasingly characterized by varied social identities and value systems. For her class and age identities had the potential to form new political cleavages that contest the racial cleavage that has thus far been the primary social and political identity. As a result of the evolution of the BMC's identity repertoires, even in the absence of internal coherence and identity cohesion as earlier argued for by Schlemmer (2005), the chances of fracturing the dominant position of the ANC in the polity increase, particularly as the BMC becomes more varied in its political attitudes (Schulz-Herzenberg 2009b). This is supported by Mattes (2003) who found that class and occupation were emerging as strong identity markers within the BMC and that education and economic development were becoming important policy issues for this class. Schlemmer (2005) supposed that as the BMC's assessment of government policy and performance increased, particularly on education and the economy, it would begin to withdraw its ANC support.

Southall (2004: 535) had argued that state managers and the petty bourgeoisie as beneficiaries of EE remained ideologically aligned and sympathetic to the poor but were more individualistic in their advancement and their failing to adequately support the poor. However, Schlemmer (2005) and Khunou and Krige (2013) criticized the low levels of the BMC's participation in voluntary organizations. Schlemmer drew the same conclusion for the ineffectiveness of the BMC in democratic pluralism: it was too new and too small. Mattes (2014: 666) maintained that the BMC was more likely to demand services of a higher order such as free speech and government accountability versus basic goods such as food, water or shelter. He argued further that the BMC is less likely to identify with the governing ANC and more likely to vote for the Democratic Alliance (DA). But, in somewhat a contradictory stance, he also recognized that the BMC was far more likely to define its interests based on the deep history of apartheid than their material status (Mattes 2014: 19).

If we take managers as a proxy for professionals, then the tension between race and advancement into middle class occupations previously dominated by white people was illustrated in Nzimande's (1991) PhD thesis on African personnel managers who had benefited from the BA programme and Modisha's (2006) master's study of Black managers as beneficiaries of EE. Both were conducted in the corporate sector. Both found that corporate spaces and notions of professionalism were racialized and underpinned by the ideology of white supremacy. Nzimande argued that much of the liberal scholarship of the time used the so-called 'backwardness' and inadequate educational backgrounds of Africans to validate the slowness of African advancement in varied workspaces. He argued that the BA programme was used to control, amend and shape Black people's way of being, through expectations of specific types of dress; acquaintances and ways of speaking. He concluded that the success of African corporate professionals depended on their acceptance of racism in the workplace. Modisha's study illustrated the perpetuation of an invisible colour bar and the lack of substantive inclusion of Black managers in various corporate workspaces.

Echoing Schlemmer, Khunou (2013) states that various segments of the affluent and educated BMC struggle to reconcile class and racial identity. 31 per cent of BMC respondents in Schlemmer's study said they were working class, while 5 per cent claimed to be poor. Schlemmer (2005: 7) reasoned that while the BMC enjoyed high salaries they had not 'acquired the material security of accumulated assets'. Phadi and Ceruti (2011: 99) found that Black people in Soweto used 'affordability', self-sufficiency, support, comparison, youth culture, and language to self-identify as middle class. Affordability ('the size of your pocket') and a job were the key concepts that Sowetans applied to classify and identify the middle class (Phadi and Ceruti 2011: 99–100).

Sustained political alignment of the old and new BMC has in recent times caused criticism of this relationship by many analysts who observed that the BMC's upward mobility and aspiration has resulted in corrupt activities within the state and party. Southall (2005) argued that the expansion of the BMC has been cronyism in nature and aimed at domestic patriotic investment. In tandem with such criticisms, Ndletyana, Makhalemele and Mathekga (2013) studied the effect of ANC patronage politics on local government performance. They found that councillors used their political capital to override decisions of municipal officials by ordering specific job and tender allocations. Consequentially, qualified audits have been a perennial problem for the ANC government, where 56.1 per cent of audited municipalities received qualified audits for 2011/2012 (SAIRR 2013: 875).

The new BMC, especially the state-employed BMC, has been framed as a hyper-consuming class, which implicitly and explicitly is corrupt and non-productive. Words such as tenderpreneurship, rent seeking, corruption and

deployment are used to describe the new BMC. Fine (2012: 565) refers to 'a new Black elite [that] has benefitted from the processes of economic and social restructuring in a way that has been entirely parasitical and the exact antithesis of an aspiring indigenous, developmental bourgeoisie'. According to Southall (2013: 1) the BMC is characterized as 'essentially shallow, if not actually parasitic, and seems to lack the industrious and productive character which has traditionally been associated with its historic counterparts in, especially, European and American society'. Krige (2012: 21) cautioned against the tendency to pathologize the BMC as this limits our understanding of the 'historically constructed, multiple and complex meanings' of consumption.

As early as 2007, the ANC recognized that party members were using the party to access state opportunities, either in the form of jobs or tenders for themselves and their networks. The ANC continues to fear that individuals from the new BMC, having benefited from state opportunities for advancement, may be tempted to follow personal advancement or upward social mobility aspirations. The party thus resolved that, 'measures should be put in place to prevent abuse of power or office for private gain or factional interests' (ANC's 53rd National Conference Resolutions 2013: 4). The party aims to take 'urgent action' against the so-called parasitic bureaucratic bourgeoisie. The 'corrupting' tendency of upward mobility has also affected labour unions. Beresford's (2012) study of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) illustrated that upward mobility, resulting from the promotion of shop stewards to management positions was a contributing factor to the erosion of NUM's 'unified' class identity.

The race and class nexus

Participants in the survey conducted were asked to explain what the term middle class meant to them; they were then asked on the basis of the first response, if they saw themselves as middle class. While multiple descriptions of middle classness were given, race emerged as an explanatory factor that served to resist, contradict and disrupt middle class location and belonging. In the main, discussants reflected a neo-Weberian understanding of the middle class by listing the level of education, type of occupation, levels of income and affordability as well as access to debt as the main descriptive indicators of middle class location. For some discussants identity was first seen as Black as an immutable identity, and second only as middle class: a tenuous, precarious and inadequate position, making them Black *and* middle class. Similar to Khunou's (2013) findings, some discussants were reluctant to identify as middle class.

While for Schulz-Herzenberg (2009b) South Africa was increasingly being characterized by varied social identities and value systems, Schlemmer (2005) had argued that the BMC lacked internal coherence and identity cohesion. Khunou and Krige (2013) shared the diagnosis that the BMC struggled to

reconcile its class and racial identity. In a more nuanced analysis, Modisha (2006: 59) suggested that the struggle to reconcile class positions was based on social status meanings: while managers in his study categorically belonged to the BMC, they rejected that location because many other Black people were not part of the BMC. Similar to Modisha, I argue that the high levels of intra-racial inequality maintain the BMC's racial alliances rather than class alliances.

Illustrating the prevalence of Weber's (1946) exposition of the utility of education and skills in the market place, discussants explained that the middle class was about 'possession' and the extent thereof; the ability of 'education' to 'change your class into middle class'; or 'money's' ability to get business people 'out of the lower class'. Therefore education, money and business were instrumental for class mobility, which resulted from and in income, and therefore enabled affordability. Thus, education and skills, income and concomitantly affordability, and importantly, the extent of affordability became the indispensable factors in delineating or defining the middle class parameters, a finding that reinforces Phadi and Ceruti's (2011) assertions. In addition, because education enabled class mobility, it was a strong value and 'everything' for many of the BMC discussants.

Statements during interviews with members of the BMC suggest the resilience of a political and working class identity of the 1970s and 1980s. They suggest continuity in class and belonging, wherein the old BMC identified with the working class and assumed the same political identity (Southall 1980). It further confirms Ndletyana's (2014) assertion that the BMC carries the working class's cultural values and practices. The working class denotes a racial category in South Africa, therefore, identity constructions along the working class lines dovetails with racial and Black solidarity. Therefore it is less so the case that the BMC struggles to reconcile its class and racial identity as suggested by Schlemmer (2005), Modisha (2006) and Khunou (2013). Instead it seems more plausible that segments of the new BMC have an identity that is historically defined and that might be reinforced by the continued dominance of white capital.

Middle class location As with Phadi and Ceruti's (2011) findings, affordability and its extent was a crucial factor in determining the parameters of the middle class and belonging. Affordability therefore meant the ability to meet the expenses of the basic necessities of life or the 'trappings of middle class life' such as a house, car, food, private education for the children, a holiday and credit. An important distinction from Phadi and Ceruti's findings was the extent of affordability and presence of disposable income after the basic needs had been met. As one respondent explained: 'because from where I stand, I think a middle class is someone that is able to pay his or her bills and still have money to enjoy life'. Therefore, the ability to consume luxury items such as overseas holidays and privately provided services such as education

and healthcare and type of residential area were key distinguishing factors in BMC life and belonging, and indicate different levels of middle class location.

Residential location was used to determine working, middle and upper class location; wherein for some, living in the township instead of a suburb meant not being middle class: 'I said I'm not middle class because I live in the township, I live in Langa' and 'I don't consider myself the middle class. I'm still poor. I live in the township. To me people are middle class when they live in the suburbs.' There were distinctions on the type or location of suburbs that people lived in, for example, for one lawyer living in 'Sandhurst and Westcliff is upper class', and 'the elites'. Therefore the quality of life was essential in defining middle class belonging.

The choice of a lifestyle and the extent of affordability were the distinguishing factors for middle class belonging; where the conditions for middle class location have been met, however, individuals abdicate or choose against it. This is in tandem with the emphasis that 'classes are not merely "objective" categories, but that they carry within them a baggage of subjective experiences' (Nzimande 1991: 275). This may be governed by different sets of values that drive choices.

Inter-racial relativity The intersection of race with class modified middle class belonging – particularly along the lines of community. The class position of the BMC must be understood within the context of Black class mobility. Meth (1983: 173) previously argued that the apartheid BMC had expanded from a very small base in a context of a large number of Black unemployed. This situation has remained in South Africa, where StatsSA (2014) recorded a 40 per cent level of unemployment for Black Africans in 2014. In South Africa, unemployment increases faster than employment growth, and this has taken place across all educational levels – that is, those considered educated and skilled also suffer from unemployment. Therefore, while the BMC is rapidly expanding, it does so against an increasing level of unemployed.

Relative affordability in a context of none or low affordability reinforces member's self-placement in the middle class. Affordability is closely linked to debt. In a context of higher levels of community and family responsibilities and obligations, the debt among the BMC is marked. Consumption thereof ranges from the need to afford better education, homes or expensive cars. One discussant stated that the so-called BMC is 'full' of credit cards and personal loans utilized to differentiate themselves from the broader Black population illustrating how debt was being instrumentalized for middle class location. Another stated that the so-called Black diamond generation was not 'drowning' but 'comatose in debt' because it had bitten 'more than we [can] chew'. Interestingly, one specialist surgeon stated that 'once you don't need the credit you can move away from [being middle class]'.

Furthermore, debt consumption is also related to aspiration. This aspiration is commercialized by corporate South Africa – wherein various debt related products are, sometimes recklessly so, extended to the BMC. Income allows a person to be middle class, but debt strips away affordability and therefore middle class status. Credit access was a defining marker in being middle class.

For the discussants race remained a stronger identity marker than class, meaning that BMC members saw themselves first as Black and treated class identity and belonging as variable or given to change. A working class identity was also stronger than a middle class identity. The responsibility for family members and communities makes middle class positionality tenuous and precarious. Its responsibility is also where the social significance of the BMC is derived. It makes them influential members of families, networks and communities. This is where the potential of the BMC to shape the Black community's political ideas and attitudes resides. The precarity was exacerbated by the fact that middle class position was identified and attained through a job, which resulted in credit and affordability, but was mutable.

Support for the ANC The research confirmed the pervasive argument that the ANC's post-1994 affirmative action policies, which are aimed at the removal of racialized barriers to the economy have sustained its BMC political support (Mattes 2014; Modisha 2006; Rivero, du Toit and Kotze 2003; Southall 2004; Schlemmer 2005; Seekings 2010; Visagie 2011; Alexander et al. 2013; UCT 2012; Schulz-Herzenberg 2009b). Many of the discussants ascribed class mobility and income to EE and BEE. The deracialization of access to higher education was also identified as significant for class mobility.

However, sustained political support for the ANC cannot solely be ascribed to the ANC's affirmative action policies. Instead, sustained BMC support for the ANC is reinforced by the perpetual penurious socio-economic conditions and circumstances in which the BMC exists, specifically the high rates of Black unemployment and middle class precarity. High levels of consumerism – including debt consumption – have, firstly, created high levels of precarity in middle class position and secondly, heightened the need to consolidate middle class position. Aspirationally, the BMC's value of education represents its work towards entrenching its middle class position across generations.

Thus, many BMC professionals, managers and entrepreneurs, first recognized the material improvement in their lives; second aspired to consolidate and entrench their middle class position; and thirdly aspired to move up and beyond it. This reinforces Schlemmer's (2005) argument that the BMC's ANC support was pragmatic, solid and durable. The ANC government, more so than South African corporates that are dominantly white owned, was seen as 'a huge source of income and business' and educational opportunities for Black professionals and entrepreneurs, and thus associated strongly with their

social mobility. As such, BMC-ANC support is instrumental or pragmatic and sustained for this reason. This support for the ANC takes place even in the context of perceived poor or weak party performance, particularly in a context where no other political party has seemingly demonstrated its commitment to Black social mobility.

Racism and exclusion In the context of persistent white control of the economy (Southall 2004 and 2014), sustained political support for the ANC draws from comparative analysis against white parties and white-owned or dominated corporates and businesses. The sustained support for the ANC entailed a direct rejection of the Democratic Alliance (DA) because the latter is perceived to have economically excluded BMC individuals and Black people collectively. Black professionals and entrepreneurs viewed the DA as unsupportive of their class mobility, consolidation and entrenchment. As one economist explained: 'I would vote for the DA if they were clearer on their transformation stance, unfortunately they are not' (Ngoma 2014: 162). Thus, professionals and entrepreneurs felt that support for the DA risked their participation and competitiveness in the economy and labour market and thus risked their middle class position. The history of the ANC as a successful liberation party, contrasted with the historical performance of the National Party, now the DA, and the DA's weak performance at Black socio-economic inclusion reinforced the support for the ANC-BMC's historical and ideational ties.

The continued racialized exclusion of Black people from economic opportunities; the BMC's historical and ideational ties to the ANC; and the absence of a better political party to rival the ANC within the South African political spectrum sustained BMC political support for the ANC even in the case where BMC individuals recognized the party's deficiencies. Schulz-Herzenberg (2009b) asserted that cognitively mobilized voters would move their support based on evaluations of performance. This differs from the findings presented here. For example, discussants in the Cape Town group were dissatisfied with the performance of the ANC. But as a participant explained: while the ANC no longer represented what she currently stood for, she continued to vote for the party because of her 'emotional ties' to it.

The ANC represented 'the best option' for the deracialization and development of Black society, which was enough to sustain BMC support. The ideational coherence and complementarity between the BMC and ANC resulted in continued political loyalty. BMC support for the ANC is based on policy choice and assessment. This contrasts with the views represented among others by Schlemmer (2005), Schulz-Herzenberg (2009b) and Mattes (2014), who implicitly suggest that support for the ANC is not based on the BMC's rational assessment of the ANC's policies.

Many Black higher professionals, whether they supported the ANC or not, were not active in party politics. The main reason for this was the perceived lack of tolerance for 'dissent' or opposing views within ANC branches. A lawyer explained that she had wanted to participate in branch-politics as opposed to complaining about the party outside of it. However, she had been dissuaded by the reported lack of tolerance from branches located in suburbia. Instead, it was better to spend her time working and ensuring that she continued to rise up the corporate ladder and becoming entrenched in the middle class or elite, rather than arguing with 'buffoons' and joining 'a party that's already gone wrong'. A research executive explained that while he supported the ANC, and knew many ANC people and attended ANC events, he was 'beyond party politics', because of his public intellectual role and because 'party politics ... can be quite unbecoming, can be quite nasty. It has its own people'.

Two IT executives interviewed were both active participants at the branch level. For one, the main reason was to ensure that he participated in the decision-making processes of the ANC. For him, this was as a result of the voting results at the ANC Polokwane conference where President Thabo Mbeki lost his presidential campaign for the ANC.

Discussants explained the need to 'have a learned choice' and break their support for the ANC, but were bound by historical and ideational ties to the party. In addition to this, many of their assessments of other parties led to the conclusion that despite the ANC's failures, South Africa lacked a political replacement for the ANC. Mattes (2014) suggested that the BMC was more likely to support the DA. This does not appear to be the case with regard to my survey. Apart from the DA's low appetite for Black economic empowerment and the deracialization of the economy, BMC individuals had multiple other problems with the party and would not and had not supported it. For example, the 'DA's use of Black people' like Mamphela Ramphele, Lindiwe Mazibuko and Mmusi Maimane² explains the distrust that the DA was using Black faces to attract voters. One entrepreneur and supporter of the ANC assumed that if within a democratic South Africa the DA ruled, the party would feel compelled to perform better than the ANC for fear of Black majority anger. Therefore, 'an uncomfortable white government – the DA – will make sure that they do things better. They don't want the masses to be restless. The white government would work harder to quell any discontent that may arise from the Black masses.'

Southall (2004 and 2014) suggested that proximity to the government was likely to determine BMC political support. So, social distance from the ANC, like working in the corporate sector, may promote independence from the ANC, while government managers and executives may be aligned to the ANC. However, my findings illustrate that proximity to the state and the application of EE and BEE by the ANC works in different ways towards sustaining BMC

support of the ANC. Depending on the proximity of professionals to the ANC led government, this support is beginning to be frustrated and fractured because 'there's no political tolerance in South Africa. Corrective measures [in local government] are not taking place by politicians. That's why there's new formation of political parties.' In contrast to Southall's (2014) essentialist declaration that the BMC has 'found itself in position of power, privilege and profit is not likely to bite the hand of the party-state that feeds it', some higher professionals in government have moved away from supporting the ANC to supporting the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), while others were privately ambivalent towards the ANC, had no interest in another party, but were silent about this position (Ngoma 2014: 167–168).

There are two ways in which this works. First, the fracturing of ANC support by the BMC takes place from the vantage of a clash between professional autonomy and political influence and interference. Neo-Weberian analysis emphasizes the importance of professions' and professionals' ability and extent of influence in bureaucratic and corporate settings. Operating in highly politicized state organizations that dilute professional power, autonomy, and control over work-tasks has led to the fracturing of BMC higher professionals' support for the ANC. This finding was particularly poignant in the interviews conducted with chartered accountants (CAs) employed in the local government sphere. While a lawyer working for a corporate firm stated that for the 'first and second administrations [there] were good deployments', CAs explained that the ANC's deployment strategy had resulted in the politicization of otherwise technical areas, such as financial management and accounting in the local government sphere. Deployees were perceived as seeking to 'gain things for themselves as they are deployed, they only want to benefit from the system'.

Another CA explained that the politicization of work took place through deployees' lobbying of senior officials and the political elite for budgetary allocations and reallocations that stood outside of authorized annual performance plans. This finding reinforces findings by Ndletyana, Makhalemele and Matheka (2013), that councillors imposed their political authority to divert local government resources. Therefore, the situation of a parasitic bureaucratic bourgeoisie is continuing and it suggests a backfiring of the strategy to increase domestic patriotic investment, as per Southall's (2005 and 2014) argument. The social and political significance of the professional BMC is thus diluted and hindered by the actions of a parasitic bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and in fact signals increasing levels of internal conflict between different segments of the BMC. An implication of this is the possibility that, as the BMC increases in number, its political significance may be precipitated or erupted and be realized through this conflict. The imposition of political hierarchy also isolates and silences the professional BMC, to which they devise mechanisms of navigation and survival within the professional environment of a poor public service.

CAs distinguished between the political and accounting professional spheres where ‘accounting does not mix with politics’ and established a tension between the two spheres. CAs use other measures to maintain autonomy and control over work tasks, where assertiveness and technical knowledge is used; in addition to being ‘a silent politician, but I speak my mind to counsellors. I don’t let them get away with anything. I am not a political but I follow them [politics]. I must understand what is political. I have never been a politician and I will never be.’

CAs recognized the necessity to ‘understand the dynamics because you operate within the sphere of politics. Understanding them [the politics] is very important, otherwise you will be lost.’ At the same time CAs sought to apply ‘professional standards rather than politics’ to carry out work, therefore seeking to maintain the professional autonomy, monopoly and control over work tasks. The politicized interference also diluted the high status and privileged conditions of work. Another CA recognized the authority of his professional body over his political principals, stating ‘[I’m a] member of SAICA, I ascribe to their accounting theory by affiliation. ... Can’t serve two chiefs ... we ... didn’t study for politics.’ This CA was explaining that work tasks should be controlled by the professional standards prescribed by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) regulatory framework. Therefore, the authority to regulate the standards and rules by the professional body was in tension with that of the organization’s political principals’ and demands.

The political affiliations and demands, as in the ‘dirty’ politics engendered animosity towards working with ‘dirty’ politicians and politically charged organizations; it further diluted the interest in working for the government, as CAs thus aspired to work in corporate settings or starting their businesses. Therefore, while 40 per cent of the BMC works within the public sector (UCT 2012), there are those seeking an exit and they are enabled by the high demand for their qualifications and skills (Macdonald 1995); thus suggesting that the politicization of the public sector depletes professionals therein.

One lawyer explained that she would not vote for the ANC anymore, or EFF, because the two exploited lower class’ ‘primal needs’ and illiteracy by giving them ‘food packs’ for votes. She explicitly stated that the ANC does not ‘give a damn’ for the middle class, as such the party ignored the needs of the BMC. The party’s dependence on the ‘lower class’ vote enabled its success at elections. She explained that while the BMC may be dissatisfied with the performance of the ANC, this did not affect the party at the polls because of the lower numbers of the BMC. She explained that she would vote, as this was important for her and her family, and that she would vote for the United Democratic Movement (UDM), not because it was good, but because ‘the others are bad really’. She maintained that she still wanted the ANC in power but wanted ‘a different voice in parliament’. Therefore, in many

ways, voting for the UDM was about giving the ANC 'a wakeup call' as the party had become 'complacent' and was busy defending its many scandals as opposed to serving South Africans. A discussant in the East London focus group stated that she was a staunch ANC member and served in its executive, but would not support it anymore, something she was prepared to suffer for, because the ANC was no longer following the policies that it had fought for during the liberation struggle.

In line with Schulz-Herzenberg's (2009b) idea that voters withdrew rather than moved their support to another party, another discussant stated that she would not vote anymore, until 'there's somebody who comes and says I'm going to do this, then I can see that this person is doing this and this and a change to my life'. She complained that she was tired of paying tax while living in a suburb with potholes.

In the main, Black higher professionals sustained their support for the ANC, specifically related to the need to strengthen the strides in the economy made possible by the party. The ANC sustained its support because of continued and perceived racism and exclusion of the new BMC in the economy. Entrepreneurs and higher professionals operating in the corporate sector complain of the slow transformation in deracializing the workplace. For them, professionalism is utilized not as a function of maintaining monopoly over work-tasks, but as a racial disciplining measure, unlike the manner in which it is instrumentalized for crude accumulation in the public sector. This illustrates continuities from Nzimande's (1991) findings in apartheid South Africa and reinforces Modisha's (2006) argument of the racialized precarity of African managers in the corporate sector. However, there were other BMC members that halted and fractured their support of the ANC. Those were professionals working in highly politicized state departments and parastatals, as well as managers and entrepreneurs in the corporate sector that were dissatisfied about the performance of the ANC.

Conclusion

Post-liberation, the ANC consolidated BMC support. Twenty years into democracy, BMC support for the ANC is instrumental and sustained by its unconsolidated and precarious class position and identity, comprised of a historical and current asset deficit; Black tax; debt and the perpetuated invisible colour bar. Fundamentally, the perpetuation of racial economic exclusion, particularly in the corporate sector reinforces BMC support for the ANC, as various groups within the BMC expect the governing party to improve transformation of the economy. Thus, despite its cognitive assessments of the ANC's poor performance, they continue to support it.

Members of the upper and middle BMC at the same time partly fragment their support of the ANC by either withdrawing from the electoral system

or voting for an alternative Black party, preferably the UDM or the EFF. Particularly the former is gaining credence with the upper and middle segments of the BMC located within the state or corporate sectors. The DA is not an option based on their perception and experiences of economic exclusion and the invisible colour bar. While still seeking to maintain the governing party's dominance, voting for an alternative Black party is used as a disciplining measure of the perceived complacency, corruption and poor programmatic and policy performance of the ANC. In particular, it is the ANC's inability to address and sanction corruption within the party and state that fragments BMC support. Secondly, voting for an alternative Black party is a strategic measure aimed at maintaining a transformative agenda. That is, by voting for an alternative Black party, the BMC does not risk its class ascension and consolidation mechanisms of EE and BEE. Therefore, voting for an alternative Black party is a mechanism of putting in place checks and balances to tame the ANC's dominance and push it for better performance.

The upper BMC prefers freedom of expression to participation in party political structures. It perceives the ANC as highly structured and unwilling to entertain dissent and discussion within the party. Thus they use social media to criticize the party. There is the retrospective support for the ANC because of the EE and BEE policies, but importantly, there is also the future mobility or consolidation that sustains the BMC's support for the ANC. However, sustained political support for the ANC does not solely derive from the ANC's redistributive policies. Instead, sustained BMC support for the ANC is reinforced by the socio-economic conditions under which the BMC exists. Thus, Black tax and high levels of consumerism – including debt consumption – created high levels of precarity and increased the need to consolidate a middle class position. The high valuation of education represents BMC aspirations to entrench middle class position across generations. An indication that the BMC is becoming increasingly confident in its class position, allowing it to critically assess the wider political landscape; it also indicates a deeper commitment to the developmental needs of the class alongside those of the country as a whole.

The popular understanding that BMC mobility is attributable to the ANC's redistributive policies and thus dependent on the ANC limits the discussions on the BMC's role and deliverance of social and economic benefits. It bears the hallmarks of the historical debates wherein the material inclusion and class mobility of Africans under apartheid affected political attitudes towards apartheid. It is limited as it was then. This suggests that the socio-political character of the upper and middle class is maturing, much more complicated, and consolidating democracy in particular ways to the South African political economy. But the social and political significance of the professional BMC is diluted and hindered by the actions of a parasitic bureaucratic bourgeoisie,

which in fact signals increasing levels of internal conflict between different elements/segments. The BMC has not fully realized that they are carrying the costs of poor service delivery from the ANC government, because of its greater concern for the deracialization of the economy and workspaces. An implication of this is the possibility that, as the BMC increases in number, its political significance may be precipitated or erupted and be realized through two sets of conflicts: with the ANC for better performance, and with foreign and national white capital. This is already documented in social media feuds, where big brands are required to respond to poor service.

Apart from academic attempts to quantify and establish the social and political role of the new BMC, other studies and news articles have focused on the commercial and consumption patterns and power of the growing BMC. The discourse emerging out of these studies and articles has been one of a fascination with the commercial power of the BMC, and ultimately resulting in the reduction of the importance of this social group to purchasing power, thus reducing its importance to commercial citizenship. The advertising agencies bombard this class with consumption offers, financed with debt through an equally parasitic banking system. Exacerbating this is the missing delivery by the ANC led government. This results in the BMC having to pay for previously white school education because of the failure of the transformed Black schools.

Poorer people may aspire to education and skills for themselves and their children, in order to ascend to the middle class stratum. If it is perceived that class ascendancy results from corruption, this may also have the effect of aspiration towards that. But it may also be that more Black people will aspire to being professionals as this is a means of class ascendancy as Nzimande (1991) suggested. The framing of the BMC as consumer citizens may create another understanding of the poorer classes in South Africa. These are seeking state 'hand-outs', like free water and electricity, housing and education and income in the form of grants. Thus we have two categories of citizens, the consumer citizens and the welfare citizens. What then, becomes the relationship that those consumer citizens and welfare citizens forge? We need an in-depth understanding of the personal choices of the BMC and how they see themselves.

Notes

1 While the use of racial categories in South Africa has contentious history, I use the term 'Black' to refer only to those that were categorized as African or Black-African under apartheid law, excluding population groups referred to as Coloured, Indian and Chinese. Given that I am referring to a population that encompasses many nationalities, I capitalize the 'b' in Black.

2 Mazibuko was parliamentary leader of the DA from 27 October 2011 to 11 May 2014, while party leader Helen Zille served as Premier of the Western Cape. Maimane succeeded Mazibuko in 2014 and subsequently replaced Zille as leader of the party after her resignation from that position. Mamphela Ramphele, while creating her own party Agang, entered a dubious and controversial

alliance with the DA and ended in political irrelevance.

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10 | The middle class of Dar es Salaam and Kiswahili video-films

Vicensia Shule

This chapter examines the perception of the middle class elite on the Kiswahili video-films in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It argues that the ‘unprofessional’ nature of the industry and lack of creativity in the production of Kiswahili video-films defines the attitude and limits the participation of the so-called middle class in both productions and consumption of Kiswahili video-films, dubbed *Bongo* movies.

The middle class

‘The Rise and Rise of the African Middle Class’ (Deloitte 2012), ‘Africa’s New Engine’ (Juma 2011), ‘The Making of the Middle Class in Africa’ (Ncube and Shimeles 2012) and many other common headings in today’s discussions show that the middle class has become the catchword for renewed hope for Africa’s future and possible renaissance. In fact, it is argued that ‘Africa’s middle class has tripled in the past 30 years’ (Deloitte 2012: 1) and ‘Africa looks to its middle class consumers to drive prosperity’ (Juma 2011: 1). These assertions suggest that through a systematic engagement of the middle classes, African economies will flourish and reap enormous dividends. Most of the arguments stem from the supposed rapid expansion of the middle class of Africa, which is anticipated to translate into economic growth. What emerges from this trending discursive practice is that, the future of Africa and the rise of middle class are different faces of the same coin.

But who are the middle classes of Africa? Where are they? What makes them middle class? These questions have been answered in a growing amount of literature on the middle class in Africa but it is not easy to point out how many countries in Africa have a substantial definable middle class capable of driving and pushing the developmental agenda. In this regard, Lena Kroeker (2013: 23) explains: ‘Few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have a noteworthy middle class. Sociological scholars consider the middle class a force for democratization and development. This is because the middle classes have financial means to participate in consumerism and hold social positions that allow them to question social developments.’ Despite such an affirmation of the role of middle class in Africa, Jean Liou (2013) argues to the contrary: ‘regardless

of the middle class led fast growing economy, the rising figures have failed to translate into poverty reduction'. This implies that, irrespective of the data provided on and about the middle class and their role in managing economies in Africa, the case might not be the same in many African countries. The 'trickledown effect' has yet to be realized.

There have been debates on who forms/belongs to/constitutes the middle class in Africa as elsewhere in the world, and whether there is a general middle class or there are various middle classes on the same continent. The fundamental question remains, is there anything such as middle class(es)? The concept of middle class in Africa is well researched (Liou 2013; Mercer 2014; Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011; Smith 2011; West 2002). Most of the studies focus on justifying the role of the middle class in boosting Africa's economies. According to David Smith (2011), the middle class of Africa is defined according to earning and expenditure, particularly those owning houses, cars, and mobile phones and can afford to take their children to private schools. Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa (2011: 2), further assert that the middle class of Africa is considered to be those who can 'consume' between two and twenty US dollars a day. They further show how the number of middle class has risen in recent years from 26 per cent in 1980 to 34 per cent in 2013.

Zitto Kabwe (2013) in his blog post challenges the provided concept or definition of middle class in Africa based on the defined monetary income as a measurement. The main argument is the fact that the two to twenty dollars' consumption/income a day does not resonate with reality prevailing in Tanzania. Kabwe (2013) uses an example of a woman cassava trader in Dar es Salaam who can make 11 dollars profit a day but has neither health insurance nor social security. She lives in a single bedroom house with her son with no electricity in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam. The fundamental issue is on whether we can define the middle class from an economic, social or political perspective. Regardless of problems associated with defining middle class and research on middle class in Tanzania as elsewhere in Africa, the issue of the relationship between the country's middle class and the arts has never been considered in most discussions.

The two examples of who constitutes the middle class in Africa and Tanzania particularly demonstrate the complex and variable nature of the concept of middle class. It is safer to refer to middle classes especially when comparing one group (country/continent) from the other rather than in its singularity (Banerjee and Duflo 2007; Kharas 2010; Kroeker 2013). In this regard, it is important to note: 'In Tanzania the meaning of middle class must also be understood in the context of the political ideologies of the socialist and post socialist eras and the changing moral values through which accumulation and consumption are perceived' (Mercer 2014: 9).

Historically, Tanzania wanted to build a classless society based on egalitarian principles and Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania strongly believed in this (Nyerere 1966). After liberalization of the economy in the 1980s under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), Tanzania has identifiable classes as in any other place in the world. The emergence of the middle classes seems to be an 'alternative future' for the then socialist nations as Therborn (2012: 17) contends. Therborn's argument is valid in the context of Tanzania, which from 1967 up to the crises of the 1980s had been an avowed socialist country that envisioned building a 'classless' society following the Arusha Declaration. Since the post-1980s period, Tanzania has thrown the socialist script out through the window and the rapid emergence of the middle class concept seems to bring back the concept of classes and their interests as the drivers of the economy.

The government under John Pombe Magufuli came into office in 2015. It is struggling to 'go back to the womb' and reinstall *ujamaa* (socialist) principles. Supporting those in the lower class to achieve quality life and take those who plundered and embezzled public resources to court is part of the process to minimize class differences in Tanzania. The president himself is in the front line implementing what he calls 'bursting the boils' philosophy. He declared that those who plundered government resources are the upper class and that it was unacceptable to him that some of them lived like angels.

This study found that Tanzanians themselves conceptualise differently the concept of middle class in Tanzania. The self-categorization of respondents is influenced by various social and economic factors such as family size, income, disposable personal income, occupation, lifestyle, education, and area of residence. The neo-liberal policies adopted by the country coupled with the *nouveau riche* has changed the social landscape and consumerism culture hitherto a preserve of the capitalist world has taken root: 'Conspicuous consumption of imported goods become the new mark of distinction among elite and an aspiration for the poor and working classes, who could easily achieve 'middle class style' through the purchase of cheap imported clothes' (Mercer 2014: 10).

In this small-scale exploratory study, the research focused on the concept of middle class as it relates to Kiswahili video-film production and consumerism in Dar es Salaam. The main argument is that the majority of the self-identified middle class in Tanzania does not support the Kiswahili video-film industry, and yet it is booming. Specifically, the study wanted to find out how Tanzanians conceptualise the issue of middle class in relation to the video-film industry.

A total of 102 structured interviews were conducted in Dar es Salaam, the business capital of the country, which has a population of over 4.5 million people, an equivalent of 10 per cent of the country's population. The interviews were recorded as audio files for analysis. The interviewees were selected equally with 34 each from all three districts of Dar es Salaam namely, Kinondoni,

Ilala and Temeke. Among the three districts; Kinondoni is considered to be a place occupied by elites as compared to Ilala and Temeke. It is where the state house is, where other dignitaries stay. It is where all embassies and consulates are situated and a home for most government ministries, agencies and departments. Ilala is a place where the biggest market in the country called Kariakoo is which is also the central distribution point for video-films on DVDs/VCDs.

Kariakoo is a ward in Ilala district of Dar es Salaam city, a bustling city area with mushrooming multi-storey buildings that have rapidly replaced old structures. It is an area that is also awash with cheap goods that attracts scores of people each day, a market for literally everything – clothes, home appliances, electronic goods, cars, motorcycles, building materials to name a few. In addition, it is a food market. Fresh vegetables and crops are delivered to the enormous Kariakoo market on a daily basis from upcountry. Generally, Kariakoo is an untidy and unsafe place with some clogged drainage system and swarming with pickpockets. The situation, however, has improved over the past ten years as the rejuvenation of the area continues at breath-taking speed. This is the hub for Tanzania's Kiswahili video-films, or *Bongo* movies. These are films produced in Tanzania in the Kiswahili language, using video cameras, involving mostly Tanzanian actors, directors and producers. These are films, produced mostly for commercial purposes on DVDs and occasionally on VCDs. Apart from *Bongo* movies Kariakoo also distributes films from other African countries, and from Europe, America, and Asia, most of which are pirated copies. From Kariakoo, films are either distributed by duplicators-distributors or wholesale distributors throughout the country and to the neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. Temeke regardless of having the port and the biggest industrial area in the country is the place where most of the low-income people reside. Sampling was random but balancing all age groups and social statuses. Thus, interviews were held with men and women, the young and the old, graduates and non-graduates, the married and the unmarried, and children from a broad social spectrum.

Specifically, 20 respondents were chosen each from five different age groups, that is, children (13–18 years), youth (19–35 years), middle age (36–50 years), advanced middle age (51–60 years) and senior citizens (61 years and above). For children, consent was obtained through their parents, guardians or teachers. The interview guide had three main questions each followed by probing sub questions. The key questions were:

- 1 In which class do you position yourself in terms of social, political and economic perspectives?
- 2 Do you watch or buy films (in general)?

3 Do you watch or buy Tanzanian Kiswahili Video films also known as *bongo* movies?

Observations were done in various places including places where the self-identified middle class of Tanzania prefers to hang out including shopping malls and fitness centres. Various literature sources were used as secondary data.

Out of 102 respondents, 76 (75 per cent) identified themselves as middle class. A small portion of the respondents (5 per cent) identified themselves as belonging to the upper class whereas 20 per cent indicated that they belonged to the lower classes. Those who identified themselves as middle class were asked why. The following examples are illustrative of their responses:

'I get a good salary, I feed my family, I educate my relatives, my children are in good schools' (Kinondoni Female Youth).

'It has to do with my income; it suffices for my [nuclear] family and I can support my extended family' (Kinondoni Male Youth).

'My daily livelihood is guaranteed, I am assured of where to sleep, and I am assured of sustenance for two weeks... three months without worry' (Ilala Male Youth).

'When I consider myself, I see myself in the middle classes' (Temeke Female Youth).

'I have my businesses, I have a good income and I can save money as security for use in future' (Temeke Male Youth).

In the absence of an official definition of middle class in a country that for many years had toyed with the idea of a classless society, of *ndugus* (comrades), anyone can define himself or herself as middle class depending on criteria they develop and deploy. Generally, the growth and embracing of the concept of the middle class tends to be associated with improvements in human lifestyles and rising standard of living. Most of the respondents who categorized themselves as middle class argued that the resources they have and their lifestyles is what makes them middle class. Having their children attending private schools where they pay higher school fees while the public school is free from primary to ordinary secondary education is an achievement for them. Some went further to argue that, because they can not afford to buy everything they want as upper class people do, it makes them middle class until they can afford the same.

The research affirmed that each country has its own middle classes defined according to the prevailing socio-economic conditions. The definition of who belongs to the middle class still poses challenges as it can shift between what economists define as middle class versus individual categorization. For example,

most of those who identified themselves as middle class in this study used income and education to position themselves accordingly. Most of the time the education referred to as justifying one's belonging to the middle class was not necessarily a graduate and postgraduate level as one would expect, but post-primary, high school and diploma level education. It was a source of pride to identify oneself with a middle class rather than a lower class, a source of shame and a sign of failure in life. The following statements exemplify more: 'I have a diploma and run my own salon business that's why I think I'm a middle class. The value of the business and quality of services provided by the salon is not defined but having an activity involving cash exchange means someone is not poor' (Temeke Female Youth). 'My family depends on me as I provide everything for them. I have three kids and they are all in school and I'm paying for their education. That is not easy for someone who is poor [meaning low class]' (Ilala Male Middle age).

Ncube and Shimeles (2012: 4) propose not to use income or consumption expenditure to categorise people in the social classes but rather depend on asset and wealth status. The majority in the middle class see education as an asset (Ncube and Shimeles 2012: 20). The research found that, those who identify themselves as middle class either refer to their education level or to those they support with their education career. Mercer (2014: 8) differentiates elites and middle class: "elite" and "middle class" are not interchangeable terms. Elites are usually understood as members of a "ruling elite" rather than situated somewhere in the middle.' In Tanzania once one has attained any post secondary education is considered as *msomi* (learned). The assumption is once learned you are no longer expected to belong to the lower class.

Another significant finding is that even in the same socio-economic class, people identify themselves differently. For example, there are those who believe they are middle class because of their income, education and lifestyle. Then there are those who believe they belong to such social stratification because others have categorized them so in accordance with their economic and social status. Furthermore, there is also a group of individuals who believe they are in a certain class because their parents or their residences are found in that social grouping. 'I live with my parents. They pay for my school fees and they also give me money to take care of my self that's why I think I belong to middle class', said a Kinondoni Female Child. The notion of a class to most of the Tanzanians is not limited to who they are but also to what others say about those classes. Being poor or living in poverty is directly linked to lower classiness. That being the case most respondents in urban areas like Dar es Salaam avoid using the term as it is directly linked to poverty acclaimed to be a rural phenomenon.

Middle class and Kiswahili video-films

In Tanzania, like in other countries in Africa, the middle class is perceived to be a driving force of the 'fast' growing economy (Brennan 2012; Mercer 2014). Defined by various scholars (Deloitte 2012; Integreon Insight 2013; Kroeker 2013), the middle class is made up of people with stable income, educated people and those who can afford to sustain their families on a day-to-day basis. In parallel to the growing middle class, the video-film industry in Tanzania has been booming. It started with a single film in 1995, rising to the production of over 500 in a year only two decades later. Regardless of 'overwhelming' evidence on the role and position of middle classes in Tanzania, very little is known about their contribution to the growth of the burgeoning Kiswahili video-film industry in Tanzania. The assumption is middle classes consume more, particularly when it comes to entertainment as they have the financial muscle (Kroeker 2013). Thus this chapter seeks to answer the question: To what extent has the middle class of Tanzania contributed to the boom in the country's Kiswahili video-film industry?

Generally, the middle class in Tanzania regards Kiswahili video-films as poor and of a low standard in terms of content and quality of packaging compared to Hollywood films. As a Kinondoni Male Youth explained: 'They do not appeal to me at all, the quality is so low'. And a middle-aged Kinondoni Male said: 'No I do not watch *Bongo* movies but when it comes to films in English, Indian and movies by other people such as Nigerians then I do watch them. But Kiswahili movies are certainly a no. They are so repetitive, same run of the mill, they are so poor in quality.' Such statements have been recurring among societal members who identify themselves as middle class. It should be noted that '*watoto wa mbwa*' (literarily poorest of the poor) in Tanzania are the main customers of the Kiswahili films. These are people who live on less than two dollars a day and have to choose between buying food or a film (approx. US\$2) or paying a small amount of money to see it in a parlour (approx. US\$0.3).

Banerjee and Duflo (2007: 6) show the relationship between increased income and entertainment consumption, that is, as income rises, people tend to devote more of their income to entertainment. Entertaining activities in Tanzania include sports, cultural festivals, playing various games, watching TV, listening to music, going to cinema and watching films, travelling for leisure, drinking, hanging out with friends, and even politics. When it comes to the so-called middle class such entertainment does include watching films but not extend to the consumption of Kiswahili video-films. Out of those who identified themselves as middle class, only 14 (less than 20 per cent) would watch or buy Kiswahili video films. When asked why they do not like Kiswahili video-films, an Ilala Male Youth pointed out: 'No [I don't watch them]... because what you saw the day before yesterday, and yesterday is not different [...] they

are boring, it is the same actors over and over, and they act the same things all over. There is no need to buy something of this nature let alone watch it.' The argument given by most middle class respondents was based on the comparison between the Kiswahili video films with Hollywood films in terms of quality. The nature and production costs for films in the two industries are of course different and cannot be compared. A Kiswahili feature video film can have over 250 minutes running time and a total production cost of less than 5,000 US dollars. This is not well known. Those with a stable income and capable of spending money for entertainment, particularly buying films, are neither willing nor conscious enough to support local industries to grow.

Banerjee and Duflo (2007: 7) further point out that the consumption pattern of the middle class focuses on the quality of life. Data from this study show that Kiswahili video-films do not fit into the profile of what many middle class socialites in Tanzania would call 'quality of life'. For example, over 60 per cent of the middle class prefers to watch Hollywood or Latin American television drama series and soaps dubbed into English. It was noted that 65 per cent of the respondents, who consider themselves as middle class, neither buy nor watch Kiswahili video-films whereas more than 50 per cent said they watch films from other parts of the world.

On the other hand, a few of those who identified themselves as middle class, who happened to watch the *Bongo* movies, provided varied reasons for watching or buying Kiswahili video films. These included social, political and economic reasons. The reasons for those who prefer to buy and watch these films include their content as well as the need to support home artists. For example, an Ilala Male Youth said: 'Yes [...] I like to support local actors [...]. I love *Bongo* movies because they often offer a popular form that is close to the audience's preoccupations and reflects our daily lives and storylines.'

Those who watch films in general prefer to relate to characters of their age. This means, children and young people like young people in the films. The same applies to adults. An Ilala woman aged 60 said: 'I watch movies of King Majuto', one of the most popular entertainers. He started off as a radio actor before moving to the stage and eventually to film in the 2000s. He is among the most popular comedians of all times in Tanzania. Whether they belonged to the middle or low classes, the majority of the respondents did not set aside a specific budget for *Bongo* movies, let alone had a regular pattern of buying such films. The number of those who buy films and those watch films through various means, such as TV and Internet streaming in the video parlour is almost the same. It is interesting to note that most of the middle class members watching films do so through TV or by downloading them from the Internet. Very few (less than 20 per cent) of the middle class watching Kiswahili video-films buy them as DVDs. In terms of possession or assets, it was interesting to note that one respondent, advanced middle age from

Temeke classified herself as a 'middle class' woman who watched Kiswahili video-films but did not possess a TV set or a computer to watch them; she watched them at a neighbour's house as her house does not have electricity. Most places in Kinondoni and Ilala have electricity but not in Temeke. The interviews revealed that there is no clear definition of who belongs to the middle class even in Dar es Salaam itself leave alone Tanzania as a country. It is not easy even to define what constitutes middle class in Dar es Salaam as in Kinondoni, for example, there are areas with no running water.

The refusal of the middle classes in Tanzania to consume *Bongo* movies is based on the assumption that, as a middle class person, you acquire a different status in the society. This position has to be accompanied by certain behaviours and attitudes conscious and selective in the life styles. This implies that, as a middle class person, one has to associate with and consume quality products. Kiswahili video films are not one of them based on the yardstick of Hollywood movies.

Conclusion

It is apparent that less involvement of Tanzania's middle class-elite in the Kiswahili video-film industry has had substantial effects on the industry despite the boom. The effects manifest themselves in a lack of sustainable capital investment as well as limited distribution channels. This implies that the 'unprofessional' nature of the industry and lack of creativity in the production of Kiswahili video-films can be attributed to lack of active participation of the middle class of Tanzania in both the production and consumption. In other words, the Tanzania middle class is not as supportive of the *Bongo* movies as one would expect. Since the majority of the middle class is supposed to be consumers of entertainment products but do not support the Kiswahili film industry, the industry might soon shrink in the absence of a substantive capital injection. Looking at how the industry is performing in terms of production and distribution, it is apparent that there is a need for purposive 'enlightenment' and the involvement of the middle class not only in the production but also in the consumption of the films.

The middle class, many of whom classify themselves as elites, regards Kiswahili video-films as a low standard in terms of content and quality of packaging and hence incomparable to Nollywood, Bollywood and Hollywood films. The limited involvement of Tanzania's middle class-elite in the industry has drastic effects manifested in a lack of sustainable capital investment as well as limited distribution channels. Many observers generally imply that, if the middle class is rising in Africa, the lives of the majority will also improve. Proponents of the middle class believe that the rise of the middle class(es) will reduce poverty: 'Africa's middle class has increased in size and purchasing power as strong economic growth in the past two decades has helped reduce

poverty significantly and lift previously poor households into the middle class' (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2011: 6). But this statement does not necessarily reflect a positive impact on all the sectors of a society through middle classes investing in the promotion of local industries: the video-film production in Tanzania appears to have been shunned by the middle class.

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How much class have the African middle classes?

Henning Melber

This middle class thing is rubbish...¹

Some contributors to this volume could have possibly also used the guiding question posed by a paper on the economics of middle-income traps entitled ‘Caught in the Middle?’ (Agenor 2015) to summarize the subject they are grappling with in their chapters. It certainly is of no coincidence or by accident that many of these chapters refer to a similar debate and its dilemma, which shows the limitations in coming to terms with socio-economic and –cultural (as well as political) realities in African countries and their middle class(es). While in a similar way at pains with a definition, Keeley (2015: 39) suggests, that ‘this new middle class... has at least risen above day-to-day subsistence living and can plan for, and invest in, the future’. But if that is all one has to offer as classification, one feels provoked to further ask, which future this means. A future for the middle class(es)? Or maybe rather a renaissance of the term class, as Therborn (2014: 10) suggests with reference to the ominous middle class debate? At least, as he observes, this discourse brings back reflections related to class(es) and reintroduces (albeit – one is tempted to add – through the back door) class analysis as a necessary tool to bring substance into the hype.

Bringing class back in

Summarizing her explorations of the middle classes in Nairobi (sensibly in the plural) Spronk (2014: 110) suggests that a truer measure of the phenomenon than the income-based position might be sociocultural, with the lifestyle as ‘an important marker of their identity’.² Considering urban young professionals as avant-garde, she further suggests that their lifestyles cultivated ‘are not merely an expression of desires, but can be understood as realizing and maintaining subjective realities’ (Spronk 2014: 111). For her a focus on “middle classness” thus illuminates how education, urbanization, and social stratification have contributed to social and cultural change in Africa. She concludes that considering ‘class as an aspirational category and the ways in which it is practiced allows us to see that forms of capital that are not, strictly speaking, economic, are central to understanding middle-class formation’ (Spronk 2014: 111). This

is – much like various chapters contributing to this volume – a step forward in grasping the formative aspects of so-called middle classes. There seems to emerge a generally growing awareness, that the original ‘middle class hype’ had been somewhat superficial. As Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu (2015: 593) observed, ‘many of the absolute and relative measures... fail to approximate classical concepts because certain income and expenditure levels may be necessary, but certainly not sufficient, to qualify a middle class’. But despite their final appeal to apply ‘a more robust conceptualization that would be minimally applicable in other areas of the world as well’ (Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu 2015: 604) they fail to translate ‘classical concepts’ into what might be considered as a ‘classical’ class analysis. Returning to more analytical efforts inspired by the classics such as Marx/Engels and Weber, but also Pierre Bourdieu (1984), to explore class not only in socio-economic and political terms, but also with regard to habitus as a relational category, would certainly add further insights to an assessment of middle classes in the African context too.³

Revisiting an earlier debate, dating back to the first (provisional and incomplete) thoughts expressed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their preliminary reflections on the notions of ‘class in itself’ and ‘class for itself’ might be illuminating.⁴ In his essay on ‘Class Consciousness’, Georg Lukács (1971: 46-82) has pursued such an approach more profoundly further (cf. Nineham 2010). This is not a nostalgic step backward, but a step forward in coming to terms with the socio-political impact the ominous middle classes might have – or not have, if one defines class consciousness as ‘the self-understanding of members of a social class’ (Munro 2015). Lukács was aware of the different forms of social formations and their (re)production in different societies with differing degrees of penetration by the capitalist mode of production. But he also maintained that, ‘every society constitutes an economic unity. The only question that arises is whether this unity enables the individual sectors of society to relate to society as a whole in such a way that their imputed consciousness can assume an economic form’ (Lukács 1971: 56). And he suggests that ‘the relation to the whole created by the consciousness of one’s status is not directed to the real, living economic unity’ (Lukács 1971: 58). Rather,

Status – consciousness – a real historical factor masks class consciousness; in fact it prevents it from emerging at all. A like phenomenon can be observed under capitalism in the case of all ‘privileged’ groups whose class situation lacks any immediate economic base. The ability of such a class to adapt itself to the real economic development can be measured by the extent to which it succeeds in ‘capitalising’ itself, i.e. transforming its privileges into economic and capitalist forms of control... (Lukács 1971: 58)

Admittedly, in an era where the proletariat or working class has to a large extent faded away and the distinction between white collar and manual jobs

has become of less meaning (which category would for example be the person at the telephone exchange operating world wide from Vietnam or India?), the earlier class analysis requires adaptation too.⁵ But it has not lost all meaning. So then, what class is/are the middle class(es)? Returning to Lukács and the (different) social realities he referred to in the early twentieth century, these (petty bourgeois or peasant) 'other classes' have an ambiguous or sterile outlook 'because their existence is not based exclusively on their role in the capitalist system of production'. Their class interest therefore 'concentrates on *symptoms of development* and not on development itself, and on elements of society rather than on the construction of society as a whole' (Lukács 1971: 59; original emphasis). This suggests that what is lumped together as middle classes represent at best an opaque awareness if not about themselves (in the plural), then at least about society and their position, aims and politics. What then is left in terms of explanatory meaning of the term? Such ambiguity explains the different political and social orientations of members of a middle class, their different roles and positions in social struggles and their difference in interests. A recent, more stringent application of class analysis with regard to the black middle class in South Africa, confirms in its historical analysis for the period between 1910 and 1994 the almost erratic nature it had: 'at different times, in different situations, in different locations it was variously (and sometimes simultaneously) liberal, conservative, nationalist and radical. It might even be argued that the only consistent thing about the black middle class was its political inconsistency' (Southall 2016: 219).

African middle class identities

The introductory chapter prominently referred to the class analysis project undertaken in Soweto. The self-classification of the residents suggested that an identity as 'middle class member' is a preferential choice. It suggests that 'being middle class' is a kind of comfort zone despite the daily struggle for survival. An interesting contrasting analysis was almost in parallel undertaken by Ivor Chipkin (2012) on 'middle classness' in the townhouse suburbia of Roodepoort, a previously 'white' residential area of the wider Johannesburg city, now also inhabited by residents representing components of a black middle class.⁶ Despite all differences to the township habitat of Soweto, some kind of similarity in pursuance of identity seems to exist, which puts perceived commonalities above all differences. With reference to Mattes (2015), Giesbert and Schotte (2016: 7–8) remind us that, 'black South Africans who enjoy physiological security or have access to higher education are more likely to support higher-order needs of good governance and self-expression and less likely to prioritise the provision of basic goods and services than are their worse-off peers.'

As Chipkin (2012: 83) diagnoses, a 'common world' emerges, which 'is not associated with new patterns of sociability that transcend race or ethnicity'.

But despite assertions that different groups defined by ethnicity would ‘signify antagonistic social positions’ and survive especially among white middle class members, these have been replaced by ‘an openness to black South Africans that may well be unprecedented outside liberal and/or leftist political circles.’ Chipkin (2012: 82) therefore concludes, that ‘ordinary life refers to the pursuit of identity, of structure, rather than revolt or resistance to it’. He observes in the Roodepoort townhouse complexes a ‘paradoxical common world conjured into being through a new regime of property right and mediated by body corporates’ (Chipkin 2012: 82). And he asserts that ‘spaces of order have been constituted through a regime of (private) property’, which is not necessarily in compliance with ‘a post-apartheid society tending towards socialism or participatory democracy or, at least, subject to the morality of the Constitution’ (Chipkin 2012: 86). It is, in other words, the identity of haves, who consider their own possession as the only important point of reference.

The BBC’s ‘Africa Business Report’ televised on 1 and 2 January 2016 as part of a continental outlook for the year a conversation with three South African observers of the economic trends. The debate ended with views on the emergence of the new segments of the socio-economic strata discussed in this volume, dubbed the African middle class(es). Asked about their attitudes and roles, one of the participants attributed to them not much more than greed and their own individual aspirations to accumulate wealth and status as a generation seeking ‘instant gratifications’ with ‘no loyalties’ to any political or other ideological orientation.

While not all chapters to this volume would simplify the matter to such an extent but rather offer more nuanced assessments, the conclusions seem to suggest that there is no social force in the making, which by status and definition would indeed be the torch bearer for more democracy, participation, human rights, social equality and redistribution of wealth beyond group-centred own benefits and interests. One might call this to some extent a class interest, shared by many members of these middle classes across the continent. But as several of the chapters in this volume also show, depending on the circumstances ethnicity, pigmentation and other criteria matter as much (and at times even more) than such at best diffuse class awareness.

This will and should not stand in the way of continued interest in this species, which at a closer look is not as new as some of the contributions to the wider debate seem to suggest. After all, there were always some middle layers of societies with a set of differing interests and orientations – only that their visibility and size in African countries seems to have increased lately. We should, however, as the overall approach in this volume suggests, be much more cautious and reluctant to offer simplifying and sweeping explanations as regards the scope for potential social reforms and the impact for social change in the sense of transformation of societies such middle classes are able or

willing to promote. As Handley (2014: 13–14) points out, ‘in order for a new middle class to act in a way that is politically and economically transformative, it needs... first, a collective identity (what used to be a [sic!] called a class consciousness) – that is, as a class it must be aware of its interests and have the ability to organize collectively in pursuit of those interests.’ As she adds, ‘the middle class ought ideally to see its interests as, at least, compatible with the interests of the broader society’ (Handley 2014: 14), which ‘is a fairly demanding set of conditions’.

What’s (not) in the middle class debate?

With reference to the middle class(es) debate Therborn (2014: 10) stresses that discourses on class – whether right or wrong – are always of social relevance. The world wide boom of the middle class(es) debate is therefore a remarkable symptom of our decade. The social class will remain also in the future a category of central importance. But as he states elsewhere, it remains to be seen if the future social developments will be characterized more by the new middle class(es) or by the plebeian masses (Therborn 2012: 27 and 29). Or maybe by the hardly one hundred super-rich individuals, who possess about the same as half of the world’s population?

As other analytical projects show, it is neither the middle class(es) nor the upper fifth of the income pyramid that has any influence on the distribution of wealth in societies. They too are at the receiving end. It is indeed the top decimal (if not the top 5 per cent or an even smaller fraction) among the haves that has grasped the steering wheel. Their forms of appropriation and enrichment are the ultimate determinants of the scope and limit of poverty reduction by means of redistributive measures in favour of those in the bottom half of society. To understand inequalities and the mechanisms of their reproduction, the motto coined by Palma (2011) is appropriate: ‘It’s the share of the rich, stupid.’ Even Nancy Birdsall (2010: 11), who has continued high hopes of the indispensable middle class, admits that in many developing countries ‘the relevant political economy might better distinguish between the rich – with political salience – and the rest.’

While a background paper compiled ahead of the EADI General Conference engaged in much detail with conceptual issues of the middle class(es), it concentrated almost exclusively on a merely economic positioning of these social strata (Wietzke and Sumner 2014). This at least underscored the randomness of interpretations, which is not solved by introducing sub-divisions such as lower, middle and upper middle classes. Rather, this underlines the arbitrary character of such terminology in the middle class debate. This fuzziness risks a futile debate, which ends in a cul-de-sac. One is tempted to suspect that the middle class(es) hype in some of the contexts we witness seeks to propose a historical mission of these social layers in terms of future

perspectives, which in the light of the real (also material and political) power relations and structures of societies and the global economy they are never able to live up to.

In her contribution to this debate, Birdsall (2015: 24) combines several hypothetical assumptions resulting in such a scenario pinning hopes on the growing middle class(es) as a relevant (if not decisive!) contributing factor towards better governance: that economic growth continues unabated; that inequality would not increase further but could decline; that 'a larger middle class has a greater interest in a responsive and accountable government'; and that 'a larger middle class is more likely to support a social contract in which the taxes it pays are largely channeled to collective and public goods from which all – including the strugglers and the poor – benefit'. This scenario seems in tendency bordering to wishful thinking, which detracts from the real challenges in a world of growing inequalities. Allocating such strategic prominence to the emerging middle class(es), elevating them into a historic mission they are expected to fulfil, at the same time allows the really rich to get off the hook again and thereby overlooks the real dimensions of class and power at play when it comes to shaping social realities.

An Oxfam paper – based on data in Piketty (2014) as well as supplied by *Credit Suisse* and *Forbes* – pointed out that about 46 per cent of the world's measurable wealth (some US\$110 trillion) is in the possession of one per cent of the world's population. This is 65 times as much as the lower half of the world's population has to share with about 0.71 per cent of the global wealth. The super rich one per cent in 24 of 26 countries measured between 1980 and 2012 increased their share in the wealth further, while 70 per cent of the global population lives in countries, in which inequalities further increased during the last 30 years. 95 per cent of the US-American economic growth since the financial crisis ended in the pockets of the richest one per cent of society, while 90 per cent of the population became poorer. The 85 richest people in the world control about the same proportion (0.71 per cent) of the global wealth, from which the world's poorer half has to live (all data from Fuentes-Niva and Galasso 2014). In October 2015, *Credit Suisse* published an updated *Global Wealth Report* already mentioned in the introductory chapter, which offers some sobering new insights. While the net worth on what the report considers the middle class worldwide was at US\$80.7 trillion or 32% of the global wealth, the wealth for those above the middle class threshold was put at US\$150 trillion. Together, the total wealth of both groups was put at US\$231 trillion or 92% of the global wealth (*Credit Suisse Research Institute* 2015: 32f.).

Pinning hopes for social advancement on the emerging middle classes, as Birdsall's (2015) optimistic conclusion suggests, is like the trust that those who row the galley will decide its course. Meanwhile, the captain and his

adjuncts are navigating from the commanding bridge, and are not rowing at all. The ordinary crew keeps the galley moving, but only a handful others defines, decides upon and coordinates the course guiding the way – unless there is mutiny. Rather, the more interesting question therefore would be, to which extent in each given particular setting, a ‘spring tide’ would also include segments of middle classes and which potential role these would be willing and able to play. That, in return, requires a proper class analysis based on the empirical socio-economic and cultural realities and the degree and forms of political interaction and awareness within and among different segments of societies. The main thrust of the middle class(es) discourse has so far not been able to gain such insights. This volume has tried in different ways and on different levels to contribute to a stronger awareness of such needs.

Notes

1 The final thought inserted in the short satirical report by Ikenna Azuike, whose interviews in Dar es Salaam were televised as ‘What’s Up Africa: Are you middle class?’ in *BBC Focus on Africa*, 14 October 2015 [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34532170].

2 See also the references to her work in the chapters by Carola Lentz and Dieter Neubert (who offers a similar approach and conclusion) in this volume.

3 Dieter Neubert offers in his chapter some additional and related trajectories rooted in cultural studies and the milieu concept.

4 See for an informed summary of the debate the note by Andrew (1983). He refutes the common adoption and argues that Marx actually made a distinction between ‘class against capital’ and a ‘class for itself’, thereby adding a political dimension which is missing in a ‘class in itself’.

5 Lukács in his writings adapted several times his theories too, moving from the quoted text of 1920 towards a conceptual revision of consciousness in the 1930s, when engaging with aesthetics and art as expressions of culture in its various forms, endorsing the claim that all forms of consciousness reflect reality and are therefore not necessarily ‘true’ or ‘false’ (cf. Stahl 2013).

6 The chapter by Amuzweni Ngoma in this volume explores attitudes of this sub-group in more detail also with special reference to the notions of ‘race’ and class.

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