

THE POVERTY OF THE 'MIDDLE CLASSING' OF DEVELOPMENT: KEY PROBLEMS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Abstract

Recent decades have witnessed a 'middle classing of development' as global institutions hail the expansion of middle classes in the global South. Although the African continent has lagged behind in this regard, expanding middle classes have nonetheless been proclaimed as drivers of development and progress. However, such generalisation smoothes over the rough edges of history, for the emergence, evolution and character of middle classes have been shaped, historically as well as contemporaneously, by the timing and manner of their incorporation into the global system. In this article, it is demonstrated how the character and present prospects of middle classes in key countries in Southern Africa have been differentially shaped, not only by varying experiences under colonial rule, but also by significantly different policies pursued by the party-states of Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, global institutions have identified a rapid advance in the 'human development' status of many countries in the global south following from the industrialisation of 'emerging economies' such as Brazil, China and India. Notwithstanding a recent retreat from rapid growth, the world is hailed as becoming steadily richer, with the lot of the poor steadily improving. More people are becoming 'middle class'. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

(2013: 14), "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". Similarly, the World Bank has hailed "the rise of the global class as a key megatrend sweeping the planet", with the middle class in low and middle income countries increasing from 5 per cent in 2005 to 25 per cent in 2030. China alone, it has proclaimed, will add one billion people to the middle class during this period. Although at present the middle class accounts for only 12 per cent of the Chinese population, this could rise to 70 per cent by 2030, as China stands "on the verge of becoming a middle class nation" (Kharas 2011). Indeed, with middle class consumption in the United States (US) and other G7 powers falling, the world economy will become increasingly reliant upon the expansion of middle classes in China, India and other countries of the South, with their capacity for consumption offering a more reliable prospect of sustainable growth than is to be found in the West (Kharas and Gertz 2010; Kiernan 2015). Furthermore, the middle classes in the South are commonly identified as 'supporters of democracy and progressive political platforms'. They can influence economic development through more active participation in the political process, expressing support for more 'inclusive growth' (Pezzini 2012). In a word, the more the world becomes 'middle class', the more it becomes 'developed' and hence the better the prospects for democracy.

Only around 2 per cent of this expanding global middle class is to be found in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, Africa has been celebrated as having "the fastest-growing middle class in the world", an assertion integral to the narrative of 'Africa Rising'. "After decades of slow growth", proclaimed *The Economist* in 2011, "Africa has a real chance to follow in the footsteps of Asia". In eight of the last ten years, Africa had grown faster than East Asia, including Japan, and even allowing for the knock-on effect of the northern hemisphere's slowdown, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was expecting the African economy to continue growing. Much of its optimism was to do with the manufacturing and service economies that African countries were beginning to develop. China's growing involvement in the continent had boosted infrastructure, and with other non-western countries ("from Brazil and Turkey to Malaysia and India") joining in the fun, the prospects were improving that Africa could break into the global market for light manu-

facturing. Despite numerous reasons for tempering optimism, notably extensive poverty, declining food production, war, corruption and poor governance, more and more African countries were beginning to get their economic development right. There were now around 60 million Africans with incomes of US\$3 000 a year, and there would be 100 million by 2015 (*The Economist* 2013).

The 'Africa Rising' narrative was to be somewhat confounded by the subsequent collapse in commodity prices and the resulting economic slowdown. Even so, optimists continued to identify the rising middle class as providing a major "opportunity for profit (that) was underpinned by volume". This middle class was urban-based, highly educated, future- and children-oriented, and highly aspirational. Furthermore, it was highly attuned to changing technology, it was culturally self-confident, and it was politically assertive (Deloitte on Africa 2013). In other words, not only was the African middle class a "driver of development", but it was robustly modern and a "driver of democracy" (Fletcher 2013).

2. The rise of the middle class

It is economists who have been at the fore in enumerating the middle class in the global South. Overwhelmingly, they have identified the middle class by income and/or consumption. There are two different approaches (Neubert 2013). One identifies middle classes relative to their specific countries and societies, that is, they are in the middle strata in income terms in each country; the other defines the middle class by reference to socio-economic data such as poverty, income or expenditure levels either globally or continentally. Unsurprisingly, the resulting definitions vary widely. The UNDP (2013) used as a measure an income or expenditure of between US\$10 and US\$100 a day. Previously, Bhanerjee and Duflo (2008) had set the bar lower defining the middle class as earning between US\$2 and US\$10 per day, while the World Bank economist Martin Ravallion (2009) had plumped for between US\$2 and US\$13 a day. The African Development Bank (AfDB) (2012) had similarly applied the US\$2 threshold for entering the middle class, although it had upped the ante for exiting the middle class at the top end of the scale to US\$20 a day.

There has been extensive criticism of this literature. Among the critiques has been the argument that the definition of what it is con-

sidered 'middle class', especially if the entry level is set as low as US\$2 per day, is absurdly low. Another has been that if definitions vary so widely, they may be including far too many social layers under a single category of 'middle class', and hence imposing an artificial unity. Above all, this perspective is accused of slipping in unwarranted assumptions, even while it is devoid of political and social theory. The range of definitions of the middle class has become so flexible, avers Henning Melber (2013), that it can be used "to cover almost everything 'in between', thereby signifying little or nothing".

Critics' fundamental objection is to the uncomplicated manner in which the international agencies identify the middle classes of the global South as the products or agents of modernity. This is not to say that they wish to do away with the notion of modernity: despite numerous critiques, it seems unlikely that we can ever do without it. However, it is to argue that, overall, the discourse around 'the middle classing of development' has sought to revive an economistically-driven modernisation perspective which, harking back to Walt Rostow (1960), propagandised in favour of the West and capitalism during the early years of the Cold War, and identified the 'elites' of 'new states' as the instruments of progress. Integral to this perspective was the suggestion that modernisation implied a unilinear evolution of 'traditional societies' to a modernity that embodied the institutions, values and practices of 'advanced' Western capitalist societies. During this period, too, key importance was accorded to the state in priming development, not merely in creating favourable conditions for capital, but in pursuing an independently productive role while simultaneously leading the market.

Modernisation theory was to give way to different phases in thinking, from underdevelopment theory on the left, through to adoption of such missions as 'basic needs' and 'human development' by mainstream development theory. Furthermore, from the 1970s, depression and turbulence in the global economy and growing 'third world' debt brought the developmental role of the state into question. Correspondingly, notions about the developmental agency of 'elites' fell victim to widespread concerns about their corruption and authoritarianism in the now not-so-new states. Accordingly, it was not to be long before their modernising mission was to be handed over to emerging middle classes.

From the late 1980s, the middle classes became central to considerations of globalisation. This followed on from "the rise and spread

of neo-liberal logics, with the end of the Cold War, economic crises in Latin America and Asia, the movement of white-collar jobs from the United States and Western Europe to India and China, and now the current economic crisis" (Heiman *et al* 2012: 4). Stripped of notions of class struggle and class consciousness, middle classes were celebrated as major actors in the drama of global development, and proclaimed as hard-working, aspiring, individualistic, consumption-oriented, entrepreneurial, deserving and proto-democratic. Such approaches, "emptied of the otherwise contentious language of class", cast "middle-class" as a "benign category, free of the implications of exploitation and social struggle", hence clearing the way for the advance of neo-liberal capitalism (Heiman *et al* 2012: 180). Meanwhile, as the reach of globalisation extended, it was accompanied by surging middle class aspirations shaped by the global media. This drew attention to the spread of similar life-styles, careers and civic engagements across the globe, as middle class-ness increasingly became a synonym for aspiration and longing. Notwithstanding nuances, such as recognition that these new middle classes are often acutely vulnerable to economic downturns, their ability to consume is increasingly cited as integral to their class identity (Brandi and Buge 2014). However, because the advance of globalisation is so uneven, because in consequence the ability of discrete national middle classes to consume is so very different, the middle classes of the global South are ranked at different levels of development, with those of China, India and Brazil (particularly) being depicted as being far in advance — qualitatively as well as quantitatively — of those of, notably, Africa. Even so, everywhere, it would seem, the middle classes are invested with the burdens of development, both as consumers and citizens.

The major problem with this vision is that it smoothes over the rough edges of history. While, certainly, complex processes such as the changes in the division of labour and bureaucratisation are almost certainly likely to be integral to the emergence of any middle class, we need to go beyond notions that modernity was uncomplicatedly a product of the European Enlightenment and/or that it was or is a uniform global process spreading from 'hegemonic' Western capitalism to societies on the periphery. Rather, as far as individual middle classes are concerned, the particularities of their emergence, evolution and culture have been profoundly shaped, directly and indirectly, by the timing and manner of their incorporation into the global capitalist system (Lo-

pez and Weinstein 2012). For instance, it is merely to state the obvious that the cultures of the mercantile bourgeoisies which established capitalist trading nodes within medieval European societies were very different from those of the industrial bourgeoisies of 19th century England, while these in turn were profoundly different from the indigenous bourgeoisies which evolved in colonised societies. Again, while these last-mentioned may have provided the platform for the emergence of contemporary middle classes in post-colonial societies (although that cannot be taken as a given, especially as some countries, notably China, experienced a revolutionary rupture with the past), the immense variations in the economic roles (commercial or industrial, innovative or derivative, productive or predatory) played by different middle classes, in different societies and in different eras, speaks to the difficulties of categorising such widely different collectivities as all being 'middle-class'. Even so, if we *do* proceed to define them all as middle class, then it must be that we consider them as sharing some key social characteristics. And that, of course, is where a lot of the trouble starts, for while 'middle class' seems to be one of those categorisations which we are unable to do without, the theorisation of the middle class — beyond general agreement that 'middle class' refers to a category of people who are in (variously defined) middle range of hierarchies of income, wealth, property ownership, occupation and power or whatever — is hugely disputed.

It is trite to observe that the different conceptions of class, and hence of what we mean by 'middle class', flow from the grand traditions of analysis established by Karl Marx (construing class as flowing from ownership or non-ownership of property), and Max Weber (who viewed class as more multi-dimensional, shaped beyond property by income, status and occupation). Even if we argue, as I do (Southall 2016) that these perspectives are as much complementary as they are in combat, it is impossible to ignore them if we are to achieve a credible conception of what it means to be 'middle class' in the modern world. Yet that is precisely what the discourse promoted by the international institutions would seem to be doing when it invests 'emerging' middle classes in the very different regions and countries of the South with so much commonality — notably, in deeming them as inherently 'progressive'. 'Progressive', we are compelled to ask, for whom, how and why?

The intention here is to contrast the generic perspective on the middle class promoted by the international institutions with the nature of

the middle class as it has developed in major countries of Africa. Above all, it will focus upon the key role played by the state in shaping the character of the middle class in African societies, even while these middle classes display their eagerness to join the fray of consumption. It will simultaneously posit how, given their somewhat precarious insertion into the production and rewards system of global capitalism, they are simultaneously heavily dependent upon yet squeezed by the state, African middle classes can by no means be described as inherently progressive, nor as necessarily contributing meaningfully to a wider societal 'development'.

3. African middle classes: Bringing the state back in

Bodies such as the World Bank, the UNDP and AfDB have been at the forefront in highlighting the rapid growth of middle classes in the global South. Their constant flow of data and analysis concerning the definition, size and measurement of the new middle classes, with additional assertions about their capabilities, indicates that they now consider that the steady rise of a middle class is a major dimension of 'human development'. However, as observed by numerous critics (for example Melber 2013; Stoffel 2016), while the number-crunching done by the international institutions may be valuable, it is fundamentally atheoretical, lacks explanatory power and only rarely moves beyond description. Even so, lying behind it is the proposition that the growth of the new middle classes in the global South has been prompted by the rise of new industries.

As far as Africa is concerned, we may take as an example the World Bank study edited by Mthuli Ncube and his associates (2015). Having projected an increase in the size of the African middle class from 323 million people (or 34 per cent of the total continental population) in 2010 to 1.1 billion (or 42 per cent in 2060), it is argued that the middle class is strongest in those countries with the most robust and diversified private sectors. Although manufacturing continues to play a significant role, these now feature rapid employment growth in sectors such as banking, finance, information technology, telecommunications and industrial processing — even though it is simultaneously asserted that the informal sector will continue to dominate most economies.

The assertion that the new middle classes are largely based in the private sector is entirely credible (although this needs more verification than it is usually accorded). However, this raises two immediate issues.

The first is quite simply that buried in this approach, although by no means always spelt out explicitly, is the assumption that the welfare of the middle class is heavily dependent upon 'good governance'. What this usually means is that it is up to the state to allow the private sector to flourish, which in turn implies the 'responsible' management of public finances, curbs on corruption, deregulation and the establishment of tax regimes favourable to private capital. In other words, so long as the state provides an open environment for investment, a middle class will grow and prosper. However, bland reference to 'good governance' ignores the reality that in Africa (as elsewhere) it is the state which brokers relationships with both multinational corporations and domestic business concerns. Even a cursory review of the literature on the state in Africa indicates that, notwithstanding neo-liberalism, state-business relationships continue to be shaped by political connections, influence peddling and access to patronage networks — all of which are likely to have significant class implications. 'Good governance' may be a nice idea — yet it may also be largely a myth!

The second issue is that the state continues to play a major role, sometimes in 'partnership' with the private sector, in providing the basic furniture of middle class life. For a start, states continue to play an important role in shaping labour markets, and for political reasons, may prove resistant to the deregulation urged upon them by international institutions. Indeed, taken together, civil servants, doctors, nurses and teachers and other middle class professionals in public employ continue to constitute a major segment of those in formal employment in most African countries. Even if they have been overtaken, overall, by the private sector, it is probable that the state remains the single largest employer. Indeed, it may be that rather than falling when economic growth slows (as most economists might assume), public employment increases as governments seek to conciliate their constituencies.

Meanwhile, the state is likely to remain a major player in spheres such as education, public health and spatial planning. True, as neo-liberalism has become more strongly entrenched, there has been a significant cut-back in public service provision and a corresponding flight of the better off to private health care and schooling. Even so, privatised

medicine and education remains unaffordable not only for the poor. It is also out of reach for those in the lower echelons of the middle class (quite obviously if they are living on as little as US\$2 a day!). In short, even if the extent and quality of public service provision is falling, public access to relatively decent schooling and healthcare is important if a middle class is to be reproduced.

All this is to suggest that the state, and the form it takes, matters much more than is implied in much of the literature. To elaborate this point, it is useful to turn to a short overview of how the state has played — and continues to play — a major role in determining the fate of the middle classes in four countries in Southern Africa.

4. African middle classes under colonialism in Southern Africa

African middle classes in Southern Africa share a common background in so far as their development was simultaneously summoned up yet stunted by the nature of their countries' incorporation into the expansion of the global capitalist economy and the forms this took under, notably, Portuguese colonial, British colonial and white settler rule.

Under Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique, a tiny number of Africans and *mestizos* (the descendants of white and African liaisons) were offered the prospect of assimilation into Portuguese society. To become '*assimilado*', an African or *mestizo* needed to become recognised by officialdom as having achieved 'civilised' standards. This involved being able to speak Portuguese, earn sufficient income to support a family, be of good Catholic character and so on, whereupon he (sic) would supposedly enjoy the full civic rights of Portuguese settlers and administrators (a small minority of the total population in both countries).

Alongside the brutal exploitation of African labour on plantations and the export of African migrant workers to the South African mines, the Portuguese needed a small corps of relatively educated Africans. Concession companies wanted enough skilled Africans to undercut the cost of privileged Portuguese workers while the state needed an educated African stratum to fill positions such as nurses, teachers and policemen. However, despite the claims of the Portuguese that their colonialism was devoid of racism, *assimilado* were systematically denied

the status and wage levels accorded to their white counterparts (Penvenne 1982). Unsurprisingly, some were therefore to join the popular movements which, from the 1960s, wage armed struggle against Portugal's particularly backward form of colonialism.

At independence (in 1976) the rapid departure of the Portuguese meant that the successor independence regimes were desperately short of the qualified personnel needed to fill managerial and administrative positions. Accordingly, they had little alternative but to turn to those *assimilado* who had continued to service the lower ranks of the colonial administration. This was despite the reservations of the MPLA (the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and Frelimo (the Mozambican Liberation Front). Dedicated to the creation of socialist societies, they were highly suspicious of what they regarded as the 'petty-bourgeois' influences of *assimilado* who had not joined the liberation struggle. Previously wedged between the Portuguese and the subject African population, *assimilado* now constituted an incipient middle class lodged between the incoming liberation elites and the mass of workers and peasants (Bender 1978; Da Ponte 1974; Newitt 1981; Somerville 1986).

In contrast to the Portuguese colonies, the developmental trajectory of South Africa and Rhodesia was profoundly shaped by the political control enjoyed by white settler regimes. The former became a *de facto* independent state under the hegemony of British mining capital from 1910. Following an initial period of company rule, the latter operated as a semi-autonomous British colony under settler rule from 1923. As in Portuguese Africa, the class structure left little scope for the emergence of African middle classes.

Appropriations of African land saw the mass of Africans restricted to 'native reserves', from which migrant labour was drawn to service white-owned mines, farms and industries. The overwhelming majority of African wage workers were employed in poorly-paid and unskilled occupations. They were subordinated to white working classes which, although small, provided vital political support to the white regimes in return for economic privileges. In both territories, severe restrictions were imposed upon African capitalist enterprise, while peasant production within the reserves was required to bear the cost of social reproduction of the migrant labour force, underpinning the cheap labour regime. Ultimately, however, this model proved unable to prevent the growth of permanently settled African populations in urban areas to

service developing industries. Nonetheless, little opportunity was provided for the emergence of African middle classes, save in low level occupations required by the colonial bureaucracies, or to fill occupations (notably, nursing, teaching and religious ministries) required to service the needs of Africans' own communities.

Despite these limitations, small African middle classes emerged from the educational efforts of missionaries, whose efforts to save souls required the spread of literacy. Often those they educated were drawn from families within African society which were relatively advantaged, either because they were drawn from local aristocracies or because they had accumulated capital from peasant farming. Even so, few acquired more than a basic education sufficient to enable them to enter the lower ranks of the nursing and teaching professions, with only a handful acquiring sufficient learning to enter the higher professions, notably law. Although denied the advantages enjoyed by their white counterparts, these small middle classes acquired a status which set them apart from the rest of African society.

In South Africa, the small middle class developed a lively indigenous press, cultivating an emergent African political consciousness, and playing a key role in the formation of the first pan-ethnic political organisation, the African National Congress (ANC), in 1912. Despite enduring numerous retreats, failures and divisions, the ANC was to provide the inspiration for other such proto-nationalist movements throughout southern Africa, inclusive of colonial Zimbabwe (West 2002; Southall 2016).

Given their small size, African middle classes were drawn into collaboration with the far larger African working classes. These alliances underpinned the strike actions and demands for political rights being made by the different nationalist movements. Push-back occurred earlier in South Africa, where in 1948 the National Party (NP) sought to reverse African urbanisation by the introduction of *apartheid*. This emphasised the legalised segregation of the races, the entrenchment of African inferiority and the blocking of African upward social mobility. In contrast, in Rhodesia, tentative moves were made by governments in the 1950s to tame African nationalism by cultivating 'moderate' elements amongst the African middle class.

The banning of the ANC in 1961 by the NP government led to its strengthening its ties to the South African Communist Party (SACP) and incorporating Marxist theory into its otherwise inclusive nationalist

programme. Similarly, reflecting a hardening of settler attitudes, successive nationalist parties were banned in Rhodesia, with the Rhodesian Front (RF) government of Ian Smith declaring unilateral independence in 1965 to circumvent British hopes for political independence under majority African rule. In both countries, the suppression of African nationalism resulted in deeper involvements of African middle classes in nationalist organisations which moved into exile to wage armed struggle.

Portuguese rule in Africa came to a rapid end after a *coup* in Portugal by a disaffected army. This had profound implications for Rhodesia which, denied Portuguese protection along its border with Mozambique, lost effective control of the countryside (notably to the Zimbabwe African National Union [ZANU] of Robert Mugabe) and was propelled into a majority rule settlement in 1980. In South Africa, where the NP was backed by a larger white minority and a much stronger economy, the NP was enabled to hold out much longer. Going beyond outright repression, the *apartheid* regime sought to deflect African nationalist impulses by creating internal ethnic states within the native reserves. Headed by chiefs and middle class collaborators, these left the white population in charge of its own (much larger) territory. Although gaining acquiescence from a complicit stratum of African politicians, bureaucrats and professionals, the '*bantustan*' strategy was overwhelmingly repudiated by the majority African population. By the 1980s, the NP was facing outright popular revolt rooted in the conurbations but spreading out to the rural peripheries. In response, the government introduced various constitutional innovations to shore up white control, inclusive of attempts to devolve political authority to African middle class elements in urban municipalities. However, none of these devices acquired any degree of political legitimacy. Accordingly, when the Cold War came to end, Western powers withdrew their backing for the regime as a supposed bulwark against communism and the NP was propelled into a negotiated settlement with the ANC, neither party able to defeat the other (Southall 2013).

Although obscured under socialist rhetoric, African 'petit-bourgeois' leadership of the liberation movements had proved vital. The transition to democracy in both Zimbabwe and South Africa was subsequently to provide the platform for middle class development.

5. The party-state and the middle class in Southern Africa

The global institutions' assumption of ever-increasing middle class involvement in capitalist growth leaves the nature of the relationships between large companies and the state unproblematised. In Southern Africa, the nature of these relationships varies considerably. However, common to all is the key role played by the 'party-states' (in which the state loses autonomy to the ruling party) which have been constructed by victorious liberation movements. This has played a major role in determining the fate of the middle classes.

In the former Portuguese territories, when faced by civil wars which were vigorously stoked by the *apartheid* regime, both the MPLA and Frelimo had officially adopted Marxism-Leninism and re-structured themselves as 'vanguard' parties on the Soviet model with a view to re-making society along socialist lines. Promoting themselves as alliances of the intelligentsia, workers and the huge mass of peasants, both parties officially opposed what they termed 'petit-bourgeois' tendencies and embraced 'anti-bourgeois' struggle. Nonetheless, the dire need of their economies (shattered by decades of liberation struggle and civil war) required their pragmatic acceptance of both small scale private enterprise and investment by foreign corporations. Similarly, facing acute shortages of skilled and educated personnel with the mass exodus of the Portuguese, they were forced to rely upon *assimilados* and *mesticos*. However, to the extent, that the petit-bourgeoisie as a class was deemed ideologically suspect, it was subject to the revolutionary discipline of the MPLA and Frelimo (RIIA; Sumich forthcoming).

In newly-independent Zimbabwe, a continuing settler presence ensured that there was greater continuity in both the administration and the economy. Nonetheless, a steady exodus of whites combined with the aspirations of ZANU-PF, now the ruling party, to ensure the rapid Africanisation of an expanding public sector (state, parastatals and public services). Officially, ZANU-PF espoused socialism, yet its early policies were pragmatic. In part, this reflected the constraints of the independence settlement which incorporated guarantees of property rights (notably for white owned land), this backed by promises of much needed foreign investment. Additionally, ZANU-PF was inheriting relatively sophisticated diversified commercial farming, manufacturing and

financial sectors which, although white-owned, rendered the economy (which was also well endowed with minerals) one of the most promising in Africa. This ensured that, notwithstanding its rhetorical egalitarianism, ZANU-PF initially opted for collaborative relations with private capital (Southall 2013).

An expanding economy and significant inflows of foreign investment and aid underpinned the rapid growth of what was generally referred to as the African 'elite'. This was largely located in the public sector, and in turn, ZANU-PF increasingly used this as a source of patronage, providing lucrative opportunities for party cadres and cronies of the leadership. Within a few years, this rapidly expanding class was adapting the lifestyle (large houses, expensive cars and private education while buying into farms and businesses) which had previously been reserved for whites. Although the extensive corruption in which it engaged was ritually deplored, the political elite's obsession with private accumulation ensured that little action was taken. Meanwhile, although Mugabe initially urged ZANU-PF to commit to Marxism-Leninism, he met with little enthusiasm. Although the party leadership was hostile to a small African business class which developed outside its orbit, it was in no way opposed to capitalist enterprise as such, so long as it could secure private profit from corporations which in the Zimbabwean context depended heavily on political favour. By the early 1990s, there were reasonable expectations that "a merger between white and black elites" would provide for the emergence of "a post-independence middle class" (Compagnon 2010: 96).

The middle classes in these three countries have subsequently met contrasting fates although their trajectory has continued to be critically shaped by the party-state. Whereas in both Angola and Mozambique the middle classes have expanded considerably, and begun to enjoy greater (if modest and often rather precarious) prosperity following economic liberalisation, the middle class in Zimbabwe has been overwhelmed by persistent political and economic crisis, forcing most of its number to emigrate, and rendering it heavily dependent upon remittances from outside the country.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and looming democracy in South Africa led to the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and a transition to market economies in Angola and Mozambique. In Angola, where the civil war with UNITA¹⁾ continued for over another decade, initial progress towards liberalisation was slow, although it did

allow for a substantial privatisation of state assets (whose benefits, along the Russian model, were largely reaped by those with strong connections to the MPLA). Subsequently, after a peace agreement in 2002, economic reform gained pace. Massive inflows of international investment, notably into the resource sector (oil and diamonds, which account for almost 60 per cent of Gross Domestic Product [GDP]) alongside reconstruction of infrastructure, transformed the economy into one of the fastest-growing in Africa. In Mozambique, an even more thorough-going process of economic liberalisation (extensive privatisations, financial sector reforms and encouragement of a private sector via IMF-backed structural adjustment programmes) similarly provided for extremely rapid growth. This was boosted by international investments in mega-projects, such as the Mozambique Aluminium project, construction and infrastructure and in recent years, a developing off-shore natural gas sector. In both Angola and Mozambique, however, even while formally embracing multi-partyism, the ruling parties have retained their political predominance; their continuing grip upon the state prompting perennial threats by their former rivals, now turned political parties, to return to civil war (Kulipossa 2005; RIIA 2005).

Angola's transition to the market economy has been unaccompanied by any genuine depth of democracy (Soares de Oliveira 2011). Its transition is closely managed by a ruling elite, clustered around the president and his entourage, which uses the party-state as its instrument. Even the big operators, including the major international oil companies, need to engage with elite networks around the presidency which allocate licenses, subsidies and other favours as well as other mechanisms such as over-invoicing, diversion of oil and loan financial flows, and monopolistic or oligopolistic control over imports (RIIA 2005). Mozambique's transition has resulted in a similar outcome, with Frelimo transforming from a liberation movement into "a neo-liberal party with authoritarian tendencies" (Harrison 1994: 432). Having forged a 'party-state' which partners in a triple alliance with multinational corporations and an emergent national capitalist class, Frelimo has engaged in extensive privatisations which, when not involving the sale of state firms to foreign investors, have transferred heavily subsidised public assets to nationals, notably high-ranking Frelimo members who became "born-again private sector entrepreneurs" (Bowen 1992: 270; also Castel-Branco 2014). Meanwhile, the numerous opposition parties (with Renamo at their head) offer no serious alternative, with their leaderships all com-

ing from a similar class background of small businessmen and educated professionals who seek political leverage to enable them to share the loot.

Although economic growth has facilitated the expansion of the middle class, it is difficult to come up with reliable estimates of the size of the latter in either Angola or Mozambique. Generally, it is reckoned that something between a fifth and a third of their populations are 'middle class' by modest definitions in terms of income (Standard Bank 2014; Lopez. 2015). Even if more restrictive criteria are adopted (with for instance, Soares de Oliverreira 2014 arguing that the middle class in Angola refers to little more than some half a million people out of a population of 20-25 million), it is accepted that a wider spectrum of better-off people self-define as or aspire to being middle class. What is less debatable is that the core of the middle classes in both countries is rooted in the higher reaches of the ruling party, the state bureaucracy, the security apparatuses and among educated urbanites (Sumich 2016; Bornschein 2009). Lower down the social scale, the bulk of the middle classes — although elevated above the desperate poverty which defines a lot of the mass of the population — remain heavily dependent upon their own linkages with the party-state and enjoy only a precarious existence.

The international literature places heavy emphasis upon the participation of emergent middle classes in Africa in a globalising consumer culture, and how associated consumption patterns (from designer clothing styles through to flashy cars) are linked to claims to political modernity and citizenship. Yet multiple references to the growing prosperity of the African middle class clash with the evidence of widespread precarity. In both Angola and Mozambique, although formal employment remains a key indicator of status, few belonging to the middle class can afford to live on their salaries alone unless they have highly specialised employment (for instance, in the oil industry). Most need to juggle their jobs with diverse revenue sources (such as '*spaza*' shops or other petty businesses) to make ends meet (Bornschein 2009; Schubert 2016).

Securing housing to meet middle class expectations also remains a battle. Although there is a rapid expansion of luxury accommodation, the provision of housing for the middle class lags massively behind, with the cost of houses usually far above the means of ordinary people, even if they are salaried. Indeed, so exorbitant is the cost of

housing that it is reproducing the sort of socio-geographical patterns that took shape in colonial times, albeit now along class rather than racial lines. While the party-state elite and rich expatriates shelter behind high walls in well-endowed suburbs, many amongst the aspirant middle class are forced to move to new developments on the outskirts of or outside cities, vacating less well-off areas to those below them on the ladder. Even when families gain access to 'social housing', this is very often a result of some connection with the ruling parties or via employment in the civil service. Maputo's middle class, avers Sumich (forthcoming), may be privileged, occupying its place in the social hierarchy through its relationship with the ruling party, yet its aspiration to join the brave new world of global consumer culture seems always out of reach. Anne Pitcher, in relation to the Angolan middle class, agrees. While "a small, incredibly wealthy elite that has access to profits generated by the sales of oil", the middle class "are really struggling" (Pitcher 2013).

If middle class life in Angola and Mozambique has become difficult, in Zimbabwe it has become truly daunting for those without any connection to the party-state. The tale of Zimbabwe's decline is now well worn. It is a story of how a liberation movement and the political-military elite to which it has given rise has refused to give up power, challenging the right of any other political force in society to rule. By the mid-2000s the economy had hit rock-bottom. Massive public indebtedness, fuelled by military adventurism in the civil war then raging in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), plus its adoption of a 'Fast Track Land Reform' programme which involved the expropriation of white commercial farms without compensation, led to a breach of relations with the IMF and Western donors. As the country spiralled further into debt, the government resorted to printing money, leading to a hyper-inflation which destroyed the livelihoods of all those unable to access scarce foreign currency. Inevitably this led to popular protest. Spear-headed by an opposition party (the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC), this was heavily backed by middle class elements, largely from business and civil society, which had been ruined by inflation. In response, the government resorted to vicious political repression.

Although compelled (by regional pressure) to concede a coalition with the MDC in 2008 (following an effective electoral defeat), ZANU-PF ensured that it remained in control of the security forces. This, in turn, enabled the diversion of the profits of windfall diamond discoveries into the

pockets of the politico-military elite, and set the scene (despite the MDC's management of a modest economic recovery) for ZANU-PF to manipulate victory in a further election in 2013 and the re-establishment of its monopoly political control. Subsequently, the economy has plunged back into yet deeper crisis, with no serious prospect of relief until there is a change in political leadership (Southall 2013: 80-84).

Amidst this disaster, the politico-military elite continues to thrive, enjoying privileged access to scarce foreign currency. The US dollar was adopted amongst a basket of currencies as a cure to hyperinflation in 2008. This met with immediate success, yet today there are too few dollars to go around. Paradoxically, therefore, while the country has been reduced to one of the poorest in Africa, its economy has become one of the most expensive. As far as the middle class is concerned, this means it has been faced by two major options: either to struggle on, clinging to jobs which pay very little (with salaries paid by government regularly arriving late), or leaving the country to work elsewhere. Given the heritage of a relatively high standard of education, many middle class Zimbabweans have found jobs in countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada, where currencies are harder, pay is better and employment more stable.

Many have also migrated to South Africa where — despite their skills and training — they face restrictions on their right to work and hence are forced to take menial jobs or work in the informal sector (Crush and Tevera 2010). Notwithstanding such difficulties, the monies they remit to Zimbabwe are crucial to the survival of relatives left behind, and their ability to cling to the rudiments of a middle class life. Few doubt that the return of the Zimbabwean middle class will be necessary to drive an economic recovery, yet this seems unlikely the more an increasingly desperate ZANU-PF clings to power (Thorneycroft 2002; Hobbes 2014; *The Herald* 2015).

The decline of the middle class in Zimbabwe contrasts markedly with the situation in South Africa, where the ANC's party-state has driven a substantial development of the black middle class. Although white employment in the public service was initially guaranteed by a 'sunset clause' built into the negotiated constitution, the ANC moved fast to 'deploy' party loyalists to high state positions. It also deployed party loyalists to the boards of large corporations, most of which were scrambling to curry favour with the new government. Dressed up as 'black economic empowerment' (BEE), this was matched by implementation of 'equity

employment' (or affirmative action) across the key institutions of society.

In practice, it proved far easier to 'transform' the employment profiles of the public sector. Even so, notwithstanding much criticism of the private sector (and the professions) for lagging behind, there has been substantial change across the economy, with the black middle class steadily climbing up both the corporate and the professional ladders. In turn, this process has been underpinned by the (highly uneven) manner whereby the educational system has been deracialised. Basically, this has been *via* the semi-privatisation of the historically privileged white schools. Initially designed to allay white fears by allowing school governing boards the right to charge fees and control admissions, the upshot has been the effective restructuring of the schooling system into a privileged upper tier for the rich and middle class, and a seriously dysfunctional public tier for the rest of the population. In turn, it is those with a schooling provided by the former white schools (alongside the increasing number of private schools) who are most advantaged in terms of gaining admission to the elite tier of formerly white universities.

The existence of a dominant private sector distinguishes South Africa from its neighbours and has imposed greater limits upon the party-state. Even so, the ANC has ensured that its party-state has become powerful. It has established a firm grip over the central government, eight out of the nine provinces and most local governments (although following local elections in 2016 it no longer controls key metropolitan cities). When added to its control over the very significant parastatal sector (directly responsible for around 15 per cent of GDP) and a host of other major public institutions, this provides an extensive platform for patronage and rent-seeking. Outright graft flourishes in the award of contracts to politically connected private companies, all legitimated as implementation of BEE. Party-state corruption has hence become a significant lever for black upward mobility, whilst even in the private sector and the professions, the newly arrived black middle class continues to look to the state to counter perceived racial barriers to their further upward progress. In turn, this reflects the insecurity which continues to define black middle class existence. Many members of the black middle class, especially those at the lower end of the scale in white collar jobs, are severely overstretched financially, their consumerist aspirations outpaced by constantly rising prices and commitments such as school fees. Worse, with the economic slowdown, many now face the danger of retrenchment and the loss of their lifestyle. Even so,

of all the cases in Southern Africa, it is the development of the black middle class in South Africa which most nearly exemplifies the optimistic narrative of 'Africa Rising', even while looming economic difficulties suggest that its future prosperity is far from guaranteed (Southall 2016).

6. Problematising the 'middle classing' of development

If the objective of 'development' is to tackle poverty, it is by no means absurd to hail the upward mobility of the previously impoverished into higher income levels, where they can not only satisfy their basic needs but indulge in discretionary spending for present comfort or future enjoyment. Hence follows the enthusiasm of the global institutions for 'the middle classing of development'. From this perspective, capitalist growth is working, steadily chipping away at global poverty and leading to a better, more prosperous world. Furthermore, for all that many academic critics comment disdainfully upon the consumerism of the 'new middle classes', it is arrogant to condemn popular aspirations for the accoutrements of a better life: formal housing, reliable municipal services, 'decent' jobs and the chance for children to obtain an education which will equip them to participate fully in a globalising world. No wonder then that even as radical a commentator as Goran Therborn (2012) has argued that a globally declining working class is abandoning socialism in favour of middle class-ness as the symbol of a desirable alternative future. Even so, this notion of the 'middle classing of development' remains deeply problematic.

There is no need to belabour the theoretical limitations of allocating people to the middle class purely on grounds of income. This is not to deny the importance of income as an indicator of class, or of higher incomes as an indicator of upward mobility. Global institutions have wholly legitimate reasons for wanting to explore such aggregate data, and our understanding of trends would be much diminished without their efforts. However, what is far less acceptable is when the upward movement of previously poor people into higher income levels is uncomplicatedly declared as their becoming 'middle class'. Yes, it is important to identify middle strata in income terms — yet it is a huge jump thereafter to view such strata as 'middle classes', and to ascribe them with presumed middle class characteristics, without reference to a

wider body of sociological and political theory.

Far from having spontaneously accompanied the capitalist growth, the trajectory of the middle classes in the major southern African countries has been largely determined by the party-states installed by liberation movements whose vision of societal transformation was forged in their armed and popular struggles against colonialism and white minority rule. In Angola and Mozambique, the defeat of the Portuguese and the inheritance of shattered, underdeveloped economies, led to the liberation movements initially pursuing socialist policies which, while reluctantly promoting African middle classes, subjected them to stern political discipline. Even when, subsequently, global and regional changes led to the embrace of capitalism, the fate of the middle classes remained heavily reliant upon connections to the ruling parties, their prospects for economic autonomy and political independence inhibited by the close alliance which foreign companies had forged with the party-state to secure access to opportunities for investment. In Zimbabwe, the policies of the ruling party provided for the substantial progress of the middle class during the early years of post-independence growth. Thereafter, however, economic downturn led to the adoption of disastrous policies, supposedly in pursuit of national revolution, but in practice enabling the politico-military elite to monopolise power and use it to corner diminishing resources for itself. Faced by brutal repression, the bulk of the middle class has simply opted to flee the country. Finally, in South Africa, the ANC's party-state has played the major role in promoting the substantial development of the black middle class. Its influence has also extended to the private sector, demanding that they expand opportunities for suitably educated blacks, even while black employees themselves continue to look to the state to back their further upward mobility.

The question which is now posed is whether, given their varying situations, these middle classes have the capacity to thwart the authoritarian leanings of all these regimes. Much will depend on the extent to which they establish their independence from the party-state. In Zimbabwe, an increasingly desperate, remnant middle class has recently led demonstrations in the major towns demanding political change. In South Africa, the results of recent local government elections have been widely interpreted as indicating that the ANC is losing support amongst substantial segments of the black middle class. Perhaps these are indications that the grip of the party-state in southern Africa is

weakening. The more its independence from the state, the more the middle class will be able to contribute to development and democracy.

Endnote

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EMPATHETIC COSMOPOLITANISM: SOUTH AFRICA AND THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract

One feature of Nelson Mandela's legacy in South Africa is his concept of post-*apartheid* society as a cosmopolitan space. Sadly, recent developments in the country suggest a return to nativist and bigoted world views and cast a dark shadow over his legacy. There is an urgent necessity to review this aspect of Mandela's vision. In so doing, this paper highlights the ethical advantages of cosmopolitanism, and argues that what sets Mandela's cosmopolitanism apart from others is his emphasis on empathy. I therefore suggest that empathetic cosmopolitanism is a particularly South African worldview. In support of this idea of empathetic cosmopolitanism, I discuss such recent theories as 'incompleteness', 'multiple identity', and 'entanglement', suggested by South African thinkers, as registers of Mandela's global citizenship.

1. Introduction

The world greeted the transition from *apartheid* to democracy in South Africa as a unique phenomenon and viewed Mandela as a global icon of morality. Indeed, given its colonial history, the country surprised the world with the peaceful nature of that transition. As Njabulo Ndebele (1999: 153) notes, the anticipated disintegration of the country in a "conflagration of violence did not take place". South Africa provides a valuable case study for the condition of our world as a globalised space, a space in which migration and mixing of people have become normalised. Against a background of centuries of intermixing and entangle-