View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by LSE Research Online

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

The lived experiences of the African middle classes

LSE Research Online URL for this paper: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/105069/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Mercer, Claire and Lemanski, Charlotte (2020) The lived experiences of the African middle classes. Africa, 90 (3). pp. 429-438. ISSN 0001-9720

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972020000017

Reuse

Items deposited in LSE Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the LSE Research Online record for the item.

lseresearchonline@lse.ac.uk
https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/

The lived experiences of the African middle classes: Introduction

Claire Mercer and Charlotte Lemanski

***Africa*, 90 (3) 2020: 429-38**

What are the experiences of the African middle classes, and what do their experiences tell us about social change on the continent? While there have been ample attempts to demarcate the parameters of this social group, the necessary work of tracing the social life and social relations of the middle classes is just beginning. The papers collected here provide compelling accounts of the ways in which the middle classes are made as much through their social relations and social practices as they are (if indeed they are) identifiable through aggregate snapshots of income, consumption habits and voting behaviours. Rachel Spronk (2018: 316) has argued that 'the middle class is not a clear object in the sense of an existing group that can be clearly delineated; rather, it is a classification-in-the-making.' We agree, and our aim in bringing these contributions together in this special issue is to develop our understanding of *how* this process is emerging in different contexts across Africa. In her opening contribution, Carola Lentz (this issue) suggests that we need more research on 'the social dynamics of "doing being middle class"', or what we term here 'middle classness', which attends to this 'classification-in-the-making' through urban-rural changes over inter-generational life-courses, multi-class households, kinship and social relations. Such an agenda has recently been opened up by two edited volumes on the African middle classes (Melber 2016, Kroeker et al. 2018). We further develop this agenda here with a series of empirically rich articles by scholars in African studies, anthropology, literature and sociology that explicitly address the question of the lived experiences of the middle classes. Echoing Spronk's unease with taking 'the middle class' as an already constituted social group, what emerges across the articles is rather the unstable, tenuous and context-specific nature of middle-class prosperity in contemporary Africa. Social positions shift – or are questioned – as one moves from the suburb to the township (Ndlovu on South Africa) or into state-subsidized high-rise apartments (Gastrow on Angola). Stability gives way over time to precarity (Southall on Zimbabwe). Wealth is not tied to the individual but circulates more widely through social relations. Should one invest in the nuclear or the extended family (Hull on South Africa; Spronk on Ghana)? In a house or a car (Durham on Botswana)? And why does

it matter – for the individual, the household, the family, the city, the nation and the continent? To grasp what it means to be middle class in Africa today necessarily requires an understanding of the historical, social and spatial embeddedness of lived experiences at multiple scales.

Africa's middle classes

Interest in the middle class in Africa has grown in the past decade, driven by the agendas of development policymakers and consultancy firms (McKinsey 2010; Ncube *et al*. 2011) as well as by academic research agendas (e.g. Spronk 2012; Ncube and Lufumpa 2015; Melber 2016; Southall 2016; Kroeker *et al*. 2018; Sumich 2018; Noret 2019). Despite the increasingly varied agendas in relation to the middle classes, debate among policymakers and private-sector actors has been dominated by attempts to define and measure the scale of the middle class in Africa. While precise definitions of the middle classes vary across time and space, with no universally agreed criteria, the two indicators that are usually considered key are wealth, defined as income,[1] and status, emphasizing the role of education and occupation. In Europe and America, scholarly analysis has largely emphasized status rather than income as the primary determinant of class (recognizing, for example, that a dual-income working-class household could potentially have a higher income than a single-income middle-class household), but this is partially mitigated by implicit recognition that the two criteria of income and status interconnect and overlap to such an extent that they reveal roughly the same population group (Gilbert 1998; Savage *et al*. 2013). However, in the global South the inverse is found, where widespread reliance on static income-based class measures has been critiqued for ignoring not just status but also the lived experiences of *being* middle class (Lentz 2016). Indeed, the desire to classify and measure the middle class in the global South has rushed ahead of empirically situated research on the everyday triumphs and trials of middle-class life in Africa.

The dominant definitions of the middle class in the global South and Africa have been established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) respectively (Ncube *et al*. 2011). The global South middle classes are broadly defined by the ILO as households with a daily per capita consumption of US$4 to US$13, using financial measures to categorize the middle class as those who are a little wealthier than the 'working poor' (under US$2 per day) and 'near poor' (US$2–US$4 per day) (Kapsos and Bourmpoula 2013). Focusing on sub-Saharan Africa, the AfDB's (Ncube *et al*. 2011) middle-

class criteria address those with per capita consumption of US$2–US$20 per day. This is a vast income range that, despite comprising one-third of Africa's population, is dominated by those barely (even temporarily) out of poverty. Given that 60 per cent of the AfDB's African middle class consumes US$2–US$4 per day, and that this 'floating class' (Ncube *et al*. 2011) is reliant on irregular and/or informal labour (Banerjee and Duflo 2008), it is unsurprising that the AfDB's middle-class criteria have been highly criticized as a 'stretch concept' (Mkandawire quoted in Kermeliotis 2011; see also Sumich 2016) that propels those literally just outside poverty into the lofty heights of the middle classes, from whom so much is expected.

This is not to reject attempts to define and measure the middle classes; as Lentz (this issue) observes, there is a need for some criteria on what constitutes middle-classness that can travel and have purchase across time and space, and the characteristics of education, occupation and income can enable such comparative research. These factors are important and have been used to illuminating effect by scholars trying to test the relationship between middle-class characteristics and behaviours in particular political economic contexts in Africa (Cheeseman 2015; Resnick 2015; Neubert and Stoll 2018). But it is vital that analyses push further. Can Africa's middle classes be so identified? If so, is middle-classness the sum of particular configurations of education, occupation and income alone? In the following articles, we meet those with professional and managerial occupations in the public and private sectors (Hull; Southall), advertising and banking executives (Gastrow; Spronk), homeowners, suburban dwellers and private car owners (Durham; Gastrow; Ndlovu), all with secondary if not tertiary and postgraduate qualifications. While these characteristics are important, what emerges is that being middle class means more than achieving a certain level of education, or having a particular kind of job, level of income or type of possession(s). How people reflect on their lives, their societies and their role within those societies, what is important to them, their hopes, fears and expectations, or where they think their interests lie or their future is headed are all significant in the lived experiences of the middle classes.

This is not necessarily a call for more emic treatments of middle-class groups. As Lentz (this issue; 2016) has argued in her detailed overview of the literature on the global South and African middle-class identity, scholars within this field urgently need to undertake detailed empirical research on the middle classes in Africa that can 'go beyond folk terminology, [to] develop their own analytical categories, and critically engage with the baggage that received

theoretical concepts bring with them' (Lentz 2016: 19). The articles in this special issue reveal the ways in which demographic groups that might be labelled 'middle class' by policymakers, consultancy firms or academics in fact often *do not* self-identify as middle class. Indeed, we can see in this issue that by discarding the imperative to endlessly debate how to define the middle class in Africa, and instead focusing on examining the everyday lives, hopes and dreams of those living across the continent, more nuanced and grounded perspectives on the experience of class in everyday life can emerge. This also requires attending to the 'conditions of possibility' (Liechty 2012, cited in Spronk, this issue) that enable some to do better than others at corralling assets, wealth and privilege. Understanding the lived experiences of the middle classes, and how they are shaped by and related to other social groups and institutions (Southall 2018; James 2019) – while remaining attentive to what is driving the emergence of Africa's middle class (Carrier 2015; Noret 2019) – is necessary if we are to better understand what it means to be middle class, and the meaning of the middle class in contemporary Africa. As the articles here demonstrate, ethnography, particularly when historically embedded or carried out longitudinally, can provide important insights into such questions.

The lived experience of middle-class prosperity

This special issue brings together theoretical, comparative treatments of class (Lentz) with ethnographic accounts of the lived experiences of the middle classes in Angola (Gastrow), Botswana (Durham), Ghana (Spronk), South Africa (Hull; Ndlovu) and Zimbabwe (Southall). For all of the authors here, the middle class is historically embedded, dynamic and relational, yet taken together the articles display a productive ambivalence towards the category of the middle class. For Spronk, the middle class in Ghana is a classification-in-the-making; for Durham, looking for a delimited middle class in Botswana can obscure the social relationships that configure the circulation of wealth in a middle-income country. In Luanda, the middle classes have routinely studied abroad (Gastrow); in Zimbabwe, many were forced or felt compelled to leave (Southall). Southall places the Zimbabwean middle class in a national class structure, while for others it is transnationally constituted (Gastrow on Angola). In Botswana (Durham), Ghana (Spronk) and South Africa (Hull; Ndlovu), there is a mix of transnational and more localized trajectories to middle-classness. Some readers may find this apparent lack of coherence on the core concept of this special issue frustrating, although we would respond that the concept of class (and the *middle* class in particular) has always been

resistant to scholarly consensus on what it means and how it should be studied, particularly in Africa (see Lentz, this issue).[2] In addition, we would add that if class is socially and historically embedded, then we should expect variation across African countries given their specific political, economic and social histories – hence African middle class*es* rather than *an* African middle class. And yet, despite the apparent slipperiness of the middle class as a category, and the quite different trajectories illuminated here, there are nevertheless significant similarities in the experiences that are explored in this collection. We contend that these similarities can be understood in relation to how relative prosperity is produced and experienced in the current conjuncture. While the articles are not explicitly concerned with relative prosperity, it is nevertheless apparent in the self-built houses and state-subsidized apartments, the distinctive domestic architecture, interiors and private vehicles; in the life chances that enable careers and achievements; in the values attached to professions and lifestyles; and in the belief in, striving for and aspiration towards upward mobility. In what remains of this introduction, we briefly outline how the distribution of prosperity, and its precariousness, can be seen as constitutive of contemporary middle-class experiences.

The distribution of prosperity

Across all of the articles gathered here, the middle classes appear as people who have prospered in some way, having accumulated qualifications, travel, jobs, incomes, houses or cars. But the authors' focus on lived experiences demonstrates that the meaning of those apparently individualized possessions in relation to social class is far from self-evident. In other words, it is not what people have but what things signify, how they are used and how they are circulated through social relations that matter for our understanding of middle-classness.

The articles show that ownership, use or enjoyment of credentials or consumer goods is not only or even necessarily related to an individual's class position. As Durham explores in the Botswanan context, things circulate (or not) through relationships between family, friends and lovers, making it impossible to say who owns or consumes what in any stable sense, or what this might mean for membership in a middle class that is assumed to behave in a more individualistic way. Rather, she finds that, in Botswana, the obligations and social practices associated with ownership and use of things such as houses and cars have come under renewed scrutiny in times of increasing wealth and inequality. Cars are bought on credit, to indicate wealth that is, in fact, not there. Houses are used to fulfil duties of care to kin and to

display status and personal achievement. Neither houses nor cars reveal middle-class status in a straightforward manner. They are instead bound up with increasing tensions between individualism and social obligation that people must navigate. These tensions also emerged in Spronk's discussions with middle-class interlocutors in Ghana, who felt that they had been 'forced' to 'disappoint' their families when, for example, they chose to educate a member of their nuclear family over extended kin. In South Africa, Hull describes the difficulties experienced by a nurse – a profession assumed to indicate middle-class status – whose livelihood suddenly became more precarious when she fulfilled her familial obligation and took on responsibility for the children of a deceased family member.

We are further cautioned against 'reading off' social class from the possession of apparently individualized signs of prosperity such as housing in Gastrow's discussion of the embodied ways in which middle-classness is achieved in Angola. Gastrow highlights the significance attached to what she terms 'the aesthetics of inhabitation' in Luanda, which signal the middle classes as those who know how to live the right way in the right kind of building. In Gastrow's account, the aesthetics of formality are more significant than the legal protection and inclusion conferred by formal housing for the middle classes striving to live in formally planned neighbourhoods. A similar experience is apparent in Ndlovu's account of the South African middle classes who physically and culturally 'shuttle between the suburbs and the township', and, in so doing, must navigate different aesthetic, bodily and behavioural codes. The anxiety that this produces is symptomatic of middle-class experiences on the continent. While the 'fear of falling' (Ehrenreich 1989) has been a well-documented characteristic of middle-class experience in Africa (Kroeker 2018) and beyond, what emerges in the current collection is rather the fear of being *caught out* as being not really middle class. In Angola, domestic habitus might belie parvenu status (Gastrow); in South Africa, people are judged on what they drive, wear, eat and drink. In both of these Southern African contexts, the fear of being caught out takes on a racial as well as a class dimension. The South African essayists discussed by Ndlovu are particularly well placed to explore the anxiety and ambivalence that are characteristic of the South African black middle class in their writing. They offer important insights into the ways in which members of the black middle class are subject to symbolic violence in the formerly white suburbs – places where they are considered to lack the necessary cultural capital – by virtue of their race, and despite their middle-class status.

Other contributors draw attention to the opportunities for individuals and their nuclear families that are opened up over time by the 'conditions of possibility' (Liechty 2012, cited in Spronk, this issue). Taking an intergenerational approach to middle-class trajectories in Ghana, Spronk argues that education is a key factor in the biographies of her interlocutors that enabled them to 'leap' into the middle classes of their time. Yet, she finds that acquiring education is a necessary but insufficient condition for middle-classness, and that motivations and values are just as important for middle-class formation. In Ghana, Spronk argues, some people are more motivated to make life changes than others with access to similar educational, financial and social resources.

The articles underscore the point that middle-classness is bound up with relative access to assets including houses, cars, education, a professional career or a job; but they also complicate this picture, since these assets may not accrue to individuals or represent 'real' prosperity. Rather, the significance of the signs of prosperity lies in what these assets enable, what social expectations accompany them, and what social relations are reproduced, renegotiated or remade through their use over time. They also draw our attention to the anxiety that many in the middle classes feel in relation to raced and classed social expectations of bodily comportment and behaviour, and domestic aesthetics. Such anxieties fuel a fear of being found out as being not truly middle class.

The precarity of prosperity

If middle-classness is first and foremost experienced as the relative acquisition of or access to credentials and consumer goods that must nevertheless be balanced with and distributed across wider social obligations and networks, the experience of precarity comes a very close second in constituting contemporary middle-classness in the contexts examined here. This is not to say that it is only the middle classes who experience precarity in contemporary Africa. However, this collection does suggest that the experience of middle-class precarity in Africa is distinctive and in some way constitutive of middle-classness on the continent. We know from the extensive literature on the social and economic effects of structural adjustment, livelihoods and informality that many in the African middle class were forced from the 1980s to engage in multiple economic activities in order to support their families (Brydon 1999; Meagher 1995). The articles testify to the permanence of this mode of middle-class living as well as to new ways of managing precarity. Nurses in South Africa buy and sell clothing to make ends meet (Hull), and people take on private debt in order to publicly live middle-class

lifestyles (Durham; Gastrow). For Southall, it is the decline in middle-class livelihoods and life chances in Zimbabwe that marks the boundary between the middle class and the elite.

The state has played a major role in defining the contours of prosperity, precarity and decline in Africa. In the countries considered here (Angola, Botswana, Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe), the state either has now, or had in the past, the capacity to provide certain things associated with middle-class status, such as education, housing, jobs and pensions. Yet these benefits were not always accessible, or they were eroded or taken away. Precarity and anxiety have therefore shaped the experiences of those whose middle-classness relied in some way on the state, most often as civil servants or party officials (Schubert 2016; Sumich 2018). Perhaps the most dramatic case of such decline here is captured in Southall's discussion of Zimbabwe, in which a relatively prosperous middle class made up of state and private-sector professionals has been drastically reduced over recent decades – numerically, economically and politically. It offers a potentially cautionary tale for examples elsewhere of middle-classness that is state-driven, such as Gastrow's account of the Angolan state's use of housing as a tool to produce a middle class.

In the recent literature charting the emergence of the apparently 'new global middle classes' (Liechty 2003; Fernandes 2006; Heiman *et al*. 2012; Chen 2013; Ferhérváry 2013; Freeman 2014; Donner 2017), it is often argued that the 'new' middle class can be distinguished from the 'old' middle class by virtue of its emancipation from employment in state bureaucracies and state-owned industries. As neoliberal globalization has fuelled – and has been fuelled by – a growing class of self-confident entrepreneurs no longer tethered to the state, so the new middle classes are less dependent on the state for their position, with potentially significant implications for democracy. This global narrative does not translate well to the African context, as is clear from the articles in this collection. In the minds of the policy and management consultancy analysts, an apparently 'new' or 'emerging' African middle class is imagined as rising from the pain and gain of economic and political reform that started in many African countries in the 1980s and 1990s. In this account, Africa's middle classes are the beneficiaries of, and evidence for, the success of neoliberal reform. As Spronk's article reminds us, we need to remain open to the 'conditions of possibility' that have shaped middle-class trajectories, including as a result of neoliberal reform and transnational investment (also Gastrow, this issue) – but as Spronk also shows, such conditions have much longer histories than those conjured in current 'Africa rising' discourses. Africa did indeed

have an ‘old’ middle class, in many cases from the colonial period (Lentz and Spronk, this issue; Lentz 2016; Budniok and Noll 2018). We need to understand more about the historical accumulation of wealth in African countries and how that wealth has shaped class formation (Noret 2017; Southall 2018; Mabandla 2013).

Moreover, the situation in many African countries reminds us that the apparently neat trajectory from an old state-dependent middle class to a new neoliberal one rarely holds in practice (including beyond Africa). Competing ideologies, both old and new (socialism, developmentalism, populism, racism), the afterlives of conflict, war and apartheid, as well as the lack of decent jobs or housing for the majority of the continent’s population, complicate a linear narrative in which a distinctively neoliberal middle class emerges. As a number of the articles here demonstrate, the state is still an important maker of the middle classes in African countries, but perhaps not in the same way as in the past. In South Africa, for example, Hull argues that it is the professional values of the nurses with whom she conducted her research – now stretched in a context of austerity – that mark their middle-classness, rather than the simple fact of public-sector employment in a context where such employment is in short supply. In Angola, Gastrow points out that the middle classes have actually been left behind by the private housing market, and that they depend on state subsidies if they are to get on the housing ladder and live a middle-class life.

***

The focus here on the distribution and precarity of prosperity draws out the distinctive contribution to our understanding of the African middle classes offered by this special issue. Rather than dismissing the idea of an African middle class as an ‘ideological smokescreen’ (Melber 2016: 8), the authors start from the position that there is sufficient evidence of relative prosperity for some, and that it is worthy of ethnographic exploration. While not all of the contributors here would agree that those currently experiencing relative prosperity amount to a social class – and we do not suggest that that is all there is to social class – the articles nevertheless provide insights into the shared experiences of Africa’s middle classes in relation to the joys and strains of social obligation, the fear of being found out, the permanence of precarity and the changing role of the state in providing the ‘conditions of possibility’ for middle-class lives. Some of the articles make productive use of novel approaches to the study of social class in Africa, including biographical and intergenerational approaches, and the analysis of literature and humour. All caution against linear accounts of

class subjectivity and social action, instead revealing temporal trajectories that emerge and contract. In this sense, class is not about describing a snapshot in time, but about embracing non-linear processes of class formation and social change over time. There is no sense here in which the making of middle-classness across the continent is bound up in any neat fashion with values and behaviours associated with democracy – if anything, the insights offered here point to middle-class ambivalence and frustration towards, or withdrawal from, the political sphere. What emerges strongly from the articles, on the other hand, is the significance of describing and understanding the social relations in which middle-class lives are embedded.

Acknowledgements

The articles collected here were initially presented across four sessions on 'The lived experiences of the middle class', convened by the special issue guest editors and Deborah James at the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK) and held at the University of Cambridge in September 2016. We are grateful to the conference organizers, as well as all session contributors (presenters and audience), for providing the physical and intellectual space for the ideas presented in this issue to emerge. We would also like to thank Deborah James and the anonymous reviewers for their generous engagements with the articles.

Claire Mercer is Professor of Human Geography at the London School of Economics. She has published on civil society and the African diaspora. Her current research examines the middle classes, domestic architecture and suburban space in Dar es Salaam. Email: c.c.mercer@lse.ac.uk

Charlotte Lemanski is Senior Lecturer in Geography at the University of Cambridge. Her research explores everyday inequality in the southern city, primarily through the lens of infrastructure (housing, land and services), urban governance and citizenship. Her recent edited collection, *Citizenship and Infrastructure*, was published by Routledge in 2019. Email: cll52@cam.ac.uk

References

Banerjee, A. V. and E. Duflo (2008) 'What is middle class about the middle classes around the world?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 22 (2): 3–28.

Brydon, L. (1999) '"With a little bit of luck …": coping with adjustment in urban Ghana, 1975–90', *Africa* 69 (3): 366–85.

Budniok, J. and A. Noll (2018) 'The Ghanaian middle class, social stratification, and long-term dynamics of upward and downward mobility of lawyers and teachers' in L. Kroeker, D. O'Kane and T. Scharrer (eds), *Middle Classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carrier, J. (2015) 'The concept of class' in J. G. Carrier and D. Kalb (eds), *Anthropologies of Class: power, practice and inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cheeseman, N. (2015) '"No bourgeoisie, no democracy"? The political attitudes of the Kenyan middle class', *Journal of International Development* 27 (5): 647–64.

Chen, J. (2013) *A Middle Class without Democracy: economic growth and the prospects for democratization in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Donner, H. (2017) 'The anthropology of the middle class across the globe', *Anthropology of This Century*, issue 18 <http://aotcpress.com/articles/anthropology-middle-class-globe/>, accessed 11 April 2019.

Ehrenreich, B. (1989) *Fear of Falling: the inner life of the middle class*. New York NY: Pantheon.

Ferhérváry, K. (2013) *Politics in Color and Concrete: socialist materialities and the middle class in Hungary*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Fernandes, L. (2006) *India's New Middle Class: democratic politics in an era of economic reform*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Freeman, C. (2014) *Entrepreneurial Selves: neoliberal respectability and the making of a Caribbean middle class*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Gilbert, D. (1998) *The American Class Structure*. New York NY: Wadsworth Publishing.

Heiman, R., C. Freeman and M. Liechty (eds) (2012) *The Global Middle Classes: theorizing through ethnography.* Santa Fe NM: School for Advanced Research Press.

James, D. (2019) ‘New subjectivities: aspiration, prosperity and the new middle class’, *African Studies* 78 (1): 33–50.

Kapsos, S. and E. Bourmpoula (2013) ‘Employment and economic class in the developing world’. Research Paper 6. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Kermeliotis, T. (2011) ‘Are one in three Africans really middle class?’, CNN, 20 May <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/BUSINESS/05/20/middle.class.africa/>, accessed 12 May 2018.

Kroeker, L. (2018) ‘Middle class approaches to social security in Kenya’ in L. Kroeker, D. O’Kane and T. Scharrer (eds), *Middle Classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kroeker, L., D. O’Kane and T. Scharrer (eds) (2018) *Middle Classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lentz, C. (2016) ‘African middle classes: lessons from transnational studies and a research agenda’ in H. Melber (ed.), *The Rise of Africa’s Middle Class: myths, realities and critical engagements*. London: Zed Books.

Liechty, M. (2003) *Suitably Modern: making middle class culture in a new consumer society.* Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Liechty, M. (2012) ‘Middle class déjà vu: conditions of possibility from Victorian England to contemporary Kathmandu’ in R. Heiman, C. Freeman and M. Liechty (eds), *The Global Middle Classes: ethnographic particularities, theoretical convergences.* Santa Fe NM: School of Advanced Research Press.

Mabandla, N. (2013) *Lahla Ngubo: the continuities and discontinuities of a South African black middle class*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.

McKinsey (2010) *Lions on the Move: the progress and potential of African economies*. McKinsey Global Institute <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Middle%20East%20a

nd%20Africa/Lions%20on%20the%20move/MGI_Lions_on_the_move_african_economies_full_report.ashx>, accessed 17 January 2020.

Meagher, K. (1995) ‘Crisis, informalization and the urban informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa’, *Development and Change* 26 (2): 259–84.

Melber, H. (ed.) (2016) *The Rise of Africa’s Middle Class: myths, realities and critical engagements*. London: Zed Books.

Ncube, M. and C. L. Lufumpa (eds) (2015) *The Emerging Middle Class in Africa*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ncube, M., C. L. Lufumpa and S. Kayizzi-Mugerwa (2011) ‘The middle of the pyramid: dynamics of the middle class in Africa’. Market Brief. Abidjan: African Development Bank.

Neubert, D. and F. Stoll (2018) ‘The narrative of “the African middle class” and its conceptual limitations’ in L. Kroeker, D. O’Kane and T. Scharrer (eds), *Middle Classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Noret, J. (2017) ‘For a multidimensional class analysis in Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy* 44 (154): 654–66.

Noret, J. (2019) ‘Introduction: theorizing social im/mobilities in Africa’ in J. Noret (ed.), *Social Im/mobilities in Africa: ethnographic approaches*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

O’Kane, D. and T. Scharrer (2018) ‘Anthropology and class in Africa: challenges of the past and present’ in L. Kroeker, D. O’Kane and T. Scharrer (eds), *Middle Classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Resnick, D. (2015) ‘The middle class and democratic consolidation in Zambia’, *Journal of International Development* 27: 693–715.

Savage, M., F. Devine, N. Cunningham, M. Taylor, Y. Li, J. Hjellbrekke, B. Le Roux, S. Friedman and A. Miles (2013) ‘A new model of social class? Findings from the BBC’s Great British Class Survey experiment’, *Sociology* 47 (2): 219–50.

Schubert, J. (2016) ‘Emerging middle class political subjectivities in post-war Angola’ in H. Melber (ed.), *The Rise of Africa’s Middle Class: myths, realities and critical engagements*. London: Zed Books.

Southall, R. (2016) *The New Black Middle Class in South Africa*. Martlesham: James Currey.

Southall, R. (2018) ‘(Middle-)class analysis in Africa: does it work?’, *Review of African Political Economy* 45 (157): 467–77.

Spronk, R., (2012) *Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-perceptions in Nairobi*, Berghahn Books: New York/Oxford.

Spronk, R. (2018) ‘Afterword. The (idea of) African middle classes: theorizing *from* Africa’ in L. Kroeker, D. O’Kane and T. Scharrer (eds), *Middle Classes in Africa: changing lives and conceptual challenges*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sumich, J. (2016) ‘The middle class of Mozambique and the politics of the blank slate’ in H. Melber (ed.), *The Rise of Africa’s Middle Class: myths, realities and critical engagements*. London: Zed Books.

Sumich, J. (2018) *The Middle Class in Mozambique: the state and the politics of transformation in Southern Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

---

[1] As Noret (2017) and Southall (2018) have pointed out, analyses of the middle class tend to rely on measures of income rather than wealth, because data on income is easier to obtain. As Southall (2018: 472) argues, this matters because, ‘whereas income differentials may *reflect* class power, wealth differences *dictate* power!’

[2] We have chosen not to rehearse this debate here, not least because these issues have been recently discussed in relation to Africa more fully by others (see Lentz 2016; Melber 2016; Southall 2016; 2018; Noret 2017; 2019; O’Kane and Scharrer 2018).