1   Introduction

> All human history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human
> nature.   (Karl Marx, quoted in Cheng 2009: 1)

Tiago[1] joined the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo)
during the liberation struggle against the Portuguese (1964–75). He and
his wife, Flora, have served the party loyally their entire adult lives, and
now enjoy a comfortable middle-class existence in the capital. They were
radicalised by the example of the 1968 rebellions in France and were
forced to flee Mozambique due to their political activities. While in exile
in Europe, they met representatives of Frelimo and returned to take part
in the struggle. Tiago and his wife worked for Frelimo in offices in Africa
and Europe and then with a ministry in Maputo. They have served
Frelimo throughout its over four decades of political and social contor-
tions, from socialism at independence to Marxist-Leninism, from grad-
ual market reforms during the darkest days of the civil war to the
adoption of multiparty capitalism. The party has rewarded them for their
loyalty, as can be seen by their transition from revolutionaries to
members of the urban middle class. Like many in the capital, Tiago,
Flora and their children often take advantage of the lunch siesta and
come home to eat together. During one lunch, they began to argue about
a scandal involving Tiago's boss, the minister, who had been implicated
in appropriating money from a non-governmental organisation (NGO).
Tiago's son began attacking the alleged corruption of the minister and
the government in general. Tiago half-heartedly defended his minister,
while his children laughed. His son remarked bitterly, 'Come on, Dad,
you know he did it, they always do, but you constantly defend them.
Samora Machel [Mozambique's first president and a socialist icon] is
dead and things have changed. You know how it is now.' Tiago took
offence and stated, 'Yes, I defend them; look at what they have done for
this country!' He paused, trying to think of a policy that he supported and
that was still in place. Finally, he said, 'The emancipation of women!

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[1] All of the names of my interlocutors used in this book are pseudonyms, although I have
used the real names of public figures.

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That is what Frelimo has done. I will continue to support the party, which has accomplished that in this country!'

Tiago's argument with his son illustrated a dilemma that would be familiar to many of those who supported Frelimo during the socialist period. Frelimo had advocated gender equality not as an end in itself, but as one step, albeit a fundamental step, according to Samora, in the revolution.[2] To build the nation, the party first had to create national citizens. The goals of Mozambican socialism were to abolish patriarchy, selfish individualism, tribalism, rural feudalism, superstition, obscurantism, and other 'backward' cultural practices through a grand project of social engineering. In their place, a homogenised, 'rational' citizen who selflessly strove for the collective good would emerge (Vieira 1977). The cultural transformation of the populace was supposedly the precondition for progress, which would ultimately lead to the 'end of exploitation of man by man' (Hall and Young 1997: 89). This did not come to pass. The only thing Tiago could claim as an unambiguous success of the revolution to which he had dedicated his life was something that was supposed to be a 'mere' stepping stone towards the brave new world. Tiago and Flora have comfortable lives, but the revolution they fought had far grander goals than the creation of small middle-class islands floating on a sea of poverty. Their privilege is tainted with unease at the death of the project that once gave it meaning.

Studies of privileged social categories, such as the middle class, are still comparatively rare in anthropology, despite decades of calls to 'study up' (Errington and Gewertz 1997; Nader 1972; Shore 2002). This is beginning to change in African studies, especially as the supposed growth of a middle class has become a central component of the 'Africa Rising' narrative of dramatic transformation and potential, a more liberal version of the East Asian tigers, after decades when the continent was consigned to the bottom of the world's politico-economic hierarchy (Lentz 2015; Schubert 2016; Sumich 2016). While the middle class as a social category is usually defined in strictly economic terms, there is an implicit ideological subtext, a narrative of 'middle-classness', which concerns its social role in the discourse of powerful institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012; Kalb 2014). This discourse provides a teleological story of what the new middle class of Africa and the Global South more generally should be, creating a tale of their emergence as politically independent actors from the combination of market reforms, sustained

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[2] The degree to which women in contemporary Mozambique are emancipated, and what that means in practice, is debatable. The party championed gender equality during the liberation struggle and the socialist period, but this goal was frequently undermined in practice (Manuel 2014).

economic growth, and efforts at democratisation (Melber 2016). This group, then, through professional and educational achievement combined with growing political and economic clout, will, hopefully, entrench liberal values and act as a counterweight to the authoritarian ambitions of overweening states.

In many ways, Mozambique, with its adoption of multiparty elections, its rising literacy rate, and an impressive period of economic growth that lasted for more than a decade, served as a poster child for the Africa Rising narrative, despite the fact that the majority of the nation's citizens are still mired in the persistent and dire poverty that has grown more severe during the last few years of economic crisis. The idea of the middle class as a watchful guardian of the state depends on autonomy and a clear demarcation between the state and society. In his work on state formation in Egypt, Mitchell argues, 'One has to take the distinction between state and society not as a starting point of the analysis, but as an uncertain outcome of the historical process' (2002: 74). This uncertain outcome is evident in much of Africa, and especially in Mozambique. I argue that the middle class in Mozambique is shaped by past and present power relationships, and its origins, autonomy, social role, and relationship to the party state are consequently far more ambiguous than is typically portrayed in the Africa Rising narrative.

What is rarely clear in the optimistic accounts of many champions of the discourse of middle-classness is what a middle class would actually be in a specific social context. What is the basis of the class system and of the social order that gives rise to it and binds the two together? An attempt to answer such questions must go beyond selective statistics and 'just so' stories and examine how such a group sees itself, what created it, how stable it is, and what are the limitations and constraints it faces. With this book, I attempt to answer such questions through the discussion of a specific social context, Mozambique. In classic anthropological fashion, my goal is to explore the ways in which local understandings of what it means to be middle class can challenge prevailing general assumptions. I argue that, for dominant party states such as Mozambique, and perhaps for much of Africa as well, power and status tend to derive more from the ability to access resources rather than from direct control of the means of production (Sumich 2008). In the following, I explore the ways in which the construction of political and social meaning, signification, and symbolic power shape and are shaped by the means of access, the kinds of relationships, and the forms of personhood necessary to acquire resources, and the moral basis of the system's legitimation. In Mozambique, a relationship with the party state and the legacy of a revolution help to define boundaries between social groups and shape the permeability of their borders. It is such symbolic resources that structure ideas of an 'us' and 'them',

a corporate identity, or class consciousness, but a consciousness that is shaped by its particular history and context.

Places of privilege in the social hierarchy of Mozambique are often intimately connected to Frelimo's attempt to create a new kind of 'authentic' national citizen. The party leadership has had a high modernist mindset – drawing from the experiences of the liberation struggle, widespread intellectual currents, and their own idealised self-image – that has informed efforts to shape a new, national subject (Sumich 2009; 2013). In a similar manner to that described by Soares de Oliveira (2015) for Angola, Frelimo championed a form of citizenship that transcended ethnic and regional boundaries and would be free of what the party saw as the degradation of the past. During the socialist period, Frelimo based its claim to legitimacy on the idea that, for progress to occur, the population would have to be transformed into a new kind of subject under the direction of the party. Wedeen demonstrates that politics is not simply material; rather, it is a contest for control of the symbolic world and the appropriation of meaning (1999: 30). As we shall see throughout this book, the transformative project was central to the party's conceptual universe; it was a major component of the symbolic system of signification that attempted to structure power relations as the moral basis of the political order. One of the primary routes to accessing positions of privilege and status was the ability to understand this transformative vision and adapt oneself to it.

As Yurchak argues in his discussion of the last Soviet generation, the world view and values of a political project can continue to shape social life even after the system that enshrined them has collapsed (2006). When socialism in Mozambique was abandoned, its system of signification was not overturned as much as it was transformed. Frelimo continues to base its legitimacy on the claim that the party leadership is culturally 'above' the wider population; that they are the only ones who can arbitrate between supposedly less advanced, inherently conflictual social groups (Dinerman 2006: 273). Many members of Maputo's middle class also share Frelimo's symbolic world and vocabulary. They are deeply enmeshed in its system of domination, which sets out parameters of what constitutes a modern citizen and the ways in which privilege is legitimated, even if they have long lost faith in the party. This calls to mind what Wedeen has referred to as a 'lack of exteriority' in her work on the personality cult of Hafiz al-Assad in Syria (1999: 130). According to Wedeen, Syrians did not uncritically believe in the regime; in fact, many of its claims were viewed with ironic disdain. However, even when Syrians challenged, subverted, or repudiated the regime and its claims, they drew on its conceptual and moral universe and made use of its symbolic vocabulary, and they were therefore not entirely exterior to the state's political project even if they resisted it (ibid.).

Although many members of Maputo's middle class share the same conceptual universe as Frelimo and are among the primary beneficiaries of the post-independence order, they are increasingly alienated from the party. For them, Frelimo continually fails to implement its grand projects on its own terms due to a combination of corruption, malevolence, and incompetence, putting the very fabric of the nation at risk. However, their ability to occupy a privileged space in society stems, to varying degrees, from access based on their closeness to the powerful, in a political system jokingly referred to as a *ditadura de apelidos* – a dictatorship of surnames – referring to the party 'aristocracy'. This 'aristocracy' is composed of the top party leadership, past and present, their families, and their close business associates. The perks of its membership are unstable to some degree, with fortunes rising and falling depending on which party faction is currently ascendant. However, despite internal competition, it is this 'aristocracy' that monopolises power and, since the fall of socialism, economic opportunities, and its members are referred to as a generalised 'them' by the wider population.

The middle class in Mozambique, as elsewhere, can be seen as a broad sociological category encompassing many subject positions. It is primarily made up of those who see themselves as occupying an intermediate position in their immediate social world (Southall 2016: 176). In this book, I discuss those who understand themselves as being members of a middle class based on a variety of factors, including material power, political connections, status, and cultural behaviours. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to them throughout the book as members of the middle class. Instead of devising ever more rigid definitions of the middle class, my primary goal is to examine it as an ongoing process and explore its relationship to the class structure of Mozambique and its underlying systems of signification and attempts at legitimating the social order.

For much of the postcolonial period, the privileged members of sub-Saharan African societies were often portrayed as 'problematic', as corrupt rent-seekers or neo-colonial compradors (Werbner 2004). This began to change with the Africa Rising narrative, if not for the ruling elite then at least for other privileged sectors of society. Now, instead of being the parasitical appendages of the pathologically corrupt state that haunted the Afro-pessimist portrayals of earlier decades, a new discourse of middle-classness has emerged with its connotations of aspiration, meritocracy, and autonomy. Building from theories that a middle class will punish political extremism, demand greater accountability from rulers, and contribute to democratisation (Southall 2016: 220), such people have a far more positive social role to play. This discourse of middle-classness provides a new vision of the social order; unlike earlier discussions of rent-seekers, privilege is recast as 'clean and modern', independent and autonomous, able to enact progressive social

transformation. Bertelsen, in his discussion of the presumed dichotomy between 'tradition' and 'modernity', observes that 'the cleanliness of the modern is constantly made dirty by practices that were thought to be relegated to the undesirable residual category of the modern-tradition' (2016: 16). The relationship between a middle class and the state that created it has many similarities to Bertelsen's observation that are normally omitted in the discourse of middle-classness.

In Mozambique, elements of the discourse of middle-classness have a strong affinity with elements of the ideological rhetoric of Frelimo's earlier social-engineering projects regarding how to create a 'modern' citizenry for a 'modern' nation state. For the people I know, 'middle class' is a concept that draws from international discourses. It is often used as a shorthand to describe local forms of stratification, with the added moral benefit of allowing the privileged to distance themselves from a venal elite while building on conceptions of being 'socially advanced' in comparison to the wider population. Such ideas have served as symbolic ways to legitimate relationships of domination and inequality since independence. Most of my interlocuters have, as previously mentioned, a close relationship to the ruling party. However, viewing themselves as a separate 'middle class' helps them to understand why political initiatives that promised to usher in a period of generalised prosperity have descended into corrupt parody, concentrating power and wealth in narrow sectors of the population while not undermining the moral basis of their own privileged position. However, the level of privilege that underlies notions of oneself as a member of the middle class and as a modern citizen, in contradistinction to the wider population, is essentially dependent on frequently arbitrary relationships to party officials and the practices necessary to prosper in the social terrain of the party state. Rather than being an autonomous social category moulding the state into its own moderate image, the middle class of Maputo is in the difficult position of being dependent upon the political and ideological scaffolding of a system its members often despise, but, as we shall see, one that they also reproduce through their actions.

This book is based on fieldwork conducted with members of the middle class in Maputo between 2002 and 2016. There are many aspects of being a member of the middle class that have received significant attention in other studies, such as schooling, consumption, work, and family life.[3] While my account discusses many of these aspects, the central focus will be on the relationship between the middle class and

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[3] A prime example of this is Roger Southall's (2016) wonderfully detailed and incisive account of the formation of the black middle class in South Africa, which explores everything from this group's political dependency on the ruling ANC to how it has been shaped by marketing strategies.

the party state that created it. Through such an examination, I discuss some of the apparent contradictions that characterise the country. The first is that a socialist, egalitarian revolution became an elitist project of social engineering. The second is that the adoption of aspects of liberalism, such as competitive elections, market reforms, and constitutionally mandated individual rights, has allowed a revitalised, elected, single-party state to preside over an exclusionary political order that even alienates the privileged. While the current state of affairs is a far cry from the utopian dreams of independence or the hopes that followed the end of the civil war, I do not view political projects in Mozambique simply as cynical ploys by entrenched elites, even if cynicism abounds. Nor are political projects an unchanging result of Mozambique's history, even if, as Marx so famously remarked, 'The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.' Instead, I argue that the Frelimo leadership and many members of Maputo's middle class, who have been closest to Frelimo's political project, share a conceptual universe and symbolic set of meanings from which they lack exteriority and which shapes the means of access to and the formation of privilege in Mozambique. This symbolic world is not static or entirely fixed; it can mean different things to different people at different times. The ways in which political projects are implemented, interpreted, manipulated, and resisted, however, take place within a similar set of references and understandings of the nation as a particular kind of moral community. While the state is an experiment in social engineering on a grand scale, it is not a linear, evolutionary process. Instead, it is a chaotic mixture of rupture and continuity. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the middle class of Mozambique and its origins, the 'new man', and the transformative project, briefly examining the ways in which African nationalism and state formation have been conceptualised in order to better understand the formation of a postcolonial, state-based middle class in Mozambique. I then discuss the importance of this book's setting, Maputo, and provide an outline of the following chapters.

The middle class of Mozambique

The middle class across the globe is often portrayed as the cornerstone of liberalism for its supposed role as the bastion of democracy and the consuming engine of global capitalism. This is the heart of the discourse of middle-classness (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012: 18). As mentioned earlier, proponents of the Africa Rising narrative assume that this emergent social category will play a similar role on the continent. The African Development Bank argues not only that the middle class is the future of the continent, but also that 34 per cent of Africa's population, or over 314 million people, are already members of it

as they are capable of daily per capita expenditure of between US$2 and
US$20 (Mubila et al. 2011). This definition negates the existence of
categories such as the working class and much of the urban poor. As US
$1.90 is the World Bank's definition of extreme poverty, there is basically
nothing between destitution and the middle class (Sumich 2016).
Membership of the middle class, as defined by the African Development
Bank and several other leading international agencies, is predicated on
'an individual act of consumption' (Kalb 2014: 160). The overriding
focus on individual consumption (with consumption portrayed by the
African Development Bank as independent of the cost of living) com-
pletely ignores the social, political, and historical relations that structure
inequality and form a middle class. In this book, I attempt to redress this
imbalance by focusing specifically on the political underpinnings that
give rise to a middle class.

The definition of middle class used by Mubila and his colleagues at the
African Development Bank is vague enough to be sociologically mean-
ingless. Being a member of a middle class means that one is not poverty-
stricken by definition, but membership in this social category is not
restricted solely to economic standing. More sociologically informed
studies of classes tend to be based on the work of Marx, Weber, and
Bourdieu. For Marx, classes are the emerging products of social rela-
tionships and the wider social structure, and they cannot be understood
independently of other social groups (1983). In the Marxist conception,
classes are defined and structured by their relationship to the means of
production and by wider social relations based on labour and the control
of economic resources (ibid.). While Weber and Bourdieu place great
importance on economic power, their definitions of class also consider
questions of lifestyle, cultural forms, status, and local specificity as the
foundation of relationships of domination (Bourdieu 1984; Weber
1961). Marx, Weber, and Bourdieu highlight, to differing degrees, the
ways in which the middle class has both quasi-universal and contextually
dependent aspects. For my purposes, the middle class shares some
general sociological characteristics that make this social category more
or less recognisable across the globe. These characteristics include broad
economic factors, such as a degree of material power, and social marks of
distinction such as certain levels of formal education and cultural capital,
employment in a professional capacity, and a largely urban-based life-
style. Within these overarching borders, though, lie considerable vari-
ations that depend on the particular political and economic relationships
that give rise to a middle class in a specific context. Central to this are the
ways in which members of a middle class engage in what Lentz (2015)
calls 'boundary work', the attempts to distinguish itself as a distinct entity
from other social groups. These relationships and distinctions are rarely
static; in this book, I trace the ways in which a privileged category is

continually made and remade in relationship to wider political and economic transformations.

The middle class of the Africa Rising narrative is in many ways the latest iteration of modernisation theory, leading towards a fixed, pre-ordained outcome. This conceptualisation of middle-classness, with its discursive implications of upward mobility due to merit and achievement (Lentz 2015), can help explain the popularity of the term in Mozambique, despite questions about its exact meaning. The fact that the term is frequently used in Maputo, either as a self-description or a description of others, means that it is a locally significant category, and many members of this group have a lifestyle that, superficially at least, corresponds with what would be recognisably middle class globally. Statistical indicators in Mozambique can be vague and unreliable, but they perhaps serve to indicate some general socio-economic contours of a long-established, party-connected middle class. Out of Maputo's estimated population of 1.7 million, the members of the middle class are usually considered to be part of the 31 per cent who work in the formal sector of the economy (Andersen 2012). They are also part of the 14 per cent of the city's population who have had access to higher education (Paulo et al. 2007: 16). Most members of the middle class whom I know number among the estimated 60,000 or so people who have fixed-line internet in their homes (Pitcher 2012: 153).

The above indicators tell us that membership in Maputo's middle class is restricted to a small, privileged group, but little else. The Mozambican middle class occupies its place in the politico-economic hierarchy through its ability to utilise the means of access to power, often as a direct result of their relationship with the political structures of the country. It has been part and parcel of a series of modernising projects, the herald of a brave new world always on the verge of becoming, but still just out of reach. Its status as an adherent of various post-independence transformative projects has been a fundamental factor in drawing boundaries between the middle class and the wider population. In tracing the ways in which the Mozambican middle class is formed through particular political and economic relationships, I feel that it is best to follow the example set by Marcus (1983) and try to understand the composition of privileged groups from members' own points of view. While Mozambican definitions of the middle class take material factors into account, these definitions are often closer to Bourdieu's (1984) idea of 'distinction', as many focus on status, lifestyle, levels of education, mastery of Portuguese (and, increasingly, English), and relationships to the party and the state.

For example, one man from a powerful Frelimo family told me: 'The middle class is extremely vague; it's hard to give firm borders as it blends into the elite on the top and the petty bourgeois on the bottom. I guess

it's a continuum and about social reproduction, especially through education for their children.' A university professor, on the other hand, gave a somewhat contrasting explanation:

I guess I am a member of the middle class, but it's different than in Europe, there is very little security. More than half of my salary goes to paying school fees for my kids; my car broke down and I can't afford to fix it. No, it's different than Europe; there are huge gaps between social groups, not gradients like Europe, very little connects us and if one falls, they fall all the way down.

Others were more concrete: 'The middle class is the state.' The university professor quoted above stated that the Mozambican middle class originated with those who were relatively privileged during the colonial period and took power after independence. This group was joined by those he referred to as *emergentes* (emergent), people who, through Frelimo, were able to access education and use party structures for their advancement (Sumich 2010).

While definitions differ, all of those to whom I have spoken feel that anything that could now be seen as the middle class has its origins in the political structures of the country and stems from a relationship with Frelimo, its projects, and the institutions the party controls. In other words, the middle class is a politically dependent category with little control over resources or the means of production in an economy that is largely dependent on access to the state (a point I discuss in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6). In the case of Luanda, Schubert argues that class stratification is just as intimately tied to expressions of cultural identities and behaviours long seen as markers of the elite as it is to strict material power (2014; 2016). While class relations and social stratification in Mozambique, and in the world more generally, are predicated on unequal access to resources, they are expressed through the mastery or lack of certain cultural forms (as argued by Udelsmann 2007 for Angola). These cultural behaviours, such as urban identification, forms of familial and romantic relationships, particular conceptions of gender roles, and an ambivalent stance towards 'tradition', are expressed in a variety of everyday settings as a claim to distinction. Of central concern to this book are the ways in which these cultural behaviours are intertwined with larger political projects and become fundamental to the creation of boundaries between social categories through concepts such as citizenship and status.

The category of the middle class is often portrayed as depoliticised and benign, both the cause and the result of capitalist, liberal democracy (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012). Membership in a middle class, however, is fundamentally political, based on forms of inequality in relationship to other social groups. Lentz argues for a conceptual division between the middle class of Africa and an elite, as many analysts draw