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The Uncertainty of Prosperity: Dependence and the Politics of Middle Class Privilege in Maputo.

Abstract

In this essay, I examine the moral basis of a ‘middle class’ in Maputo, Mozambique, the narratives, forms of dependence and types of hegemony that the social hierarchy rests on. I argue that the political and economic processes that have given rise to ‘new’ middle classes in the global south also create conditions of precariousness. In recent years it has been argued that these ‘emerging middle classes’ are central for economic growth and the safeguarding of a stable, liberal order. The case of Mozambique complicates this assertion and demonstrates an occurrence now taking place across the globe. When the relationships of dependence and obligation and the narratives that justify them erode, the structures of power that may have once been mutually constitutive between an emerging middle class and the state can become damaging as the system they once upheld loses its legitimacy.

Keywords: Middle Class, Frelimo, Hegemony, Narratives, Dependence, Prosperity

Word Count: 8990

In the spring of 2013, I was speaking with Tiago, a former cadre of Frelimo (Mozambican Liberation Front, the ruling party since independence in 1975) in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. I have known Tiago since 2002 and while he has consistently been critical of the government, I have never seen him so despondent before. In his words:

I am worried about the ways things are going, it’s bad. I have worked for years and I currently earn US\$5,000 a month but it’s not enough, I can barely make ends meet. We don’t wear fancy clothes or take extravagant holidays; it all goes towards taking care of my family and education for my children. Housing and

prices are out of control, I struggle and I am far luckier than most. There is massive corruption, political uncertainty and the situation is becoming unbearable. I worry about the future; I think this will all end bloody.

Tiago spoke of his unease as we drove through a city filled with construction sites, ever-present Chinese work crews, traffic jams, new shops and restaurants and all the other detritus of unprecedented prosperity. All this in a country, which 20 years before, was one of the poorest in the world.

Abner Cohen remarked that members of an elite face a paradox; to remain in power they must serve their own sectional interests, while also demonstrating that they legitimately represent the universal good (1981). How this is done, the forms of rhetoric used, the mobilization of symbolism and cultural resources, the cultivation of functions that are both ‘universal’ and ‘sectional’ and the creation of moral bonds that link members of the dominant classes to each other and the wider population, are central issues for anthropology despite the fact that calls to ‘study up’ are still rarely heeded in the discipline (Cohen 1981, Shore 2002). In the following, I examine the importance of the symbols, narratives and moral bonds that provide the foundation of Frelimo’s hegemony. Specifically I focus on the relationships of dependence between the ruling party elite, the state it controls and members of a privileged middle class. In doing so, I explore how Frelimo, more powerful than ever in its history, uses the legacy of the liberation struggle and economic growth to claim that its rule serves the people as a whole. At the same time, Frelimo’s hegemony is crumbling even among those who benefit most. While I am discussing Mozambique, I hope these issues will shed light on the fault lines, the combination of official prosperity with declining standards of living, a lack of political alternatives and the complicated interplay between complicity and growing social polarization that have sparked cases of ‘middle class’ revolt throughout the world.

My argument expands on James Ferguson's discussion of dependence and personhood in South Africa (2013). Ferguson argues that, in a situation where personhood is seen as a relational concept instead of an autonomous individual, dependence can create larger relationships and mutual obligations in hierarchical social orders (ibid). While such systems can be paternalistic, brutal and exploitative, they are 'people hungry'; the goal is to increase the membership of the polity and, while this is based on subordination, there is the promise of security and even upward mobility. The problem today is not so much 'social inequality', but that inequality is strikingly 'asocial' as the poor are severed from wider morally-binding membership in society as they are simply no longer needed, even as subordinates (ibid: 233).

Building from Cohen's insights on the symbolic and moral dimensions of privilege and on Ferguson's model of dependence, I discuss members of Maputo's middle class who remain firmly enmeshed within the social order unlike the cast off poor and due to their role as functionaries and beneficiaries of the system they are therefore complicit in its growing illegitimacy. The category of middle class is often portrayed as depoliticized and benign, both the cause and the result of capitalist, liberal democracy (Heiman, Freeman and Liechty 2012). Membership in a middle class though is fundamentally political, based on forms of domination. Social relationships arising from stratification, privilege and inequality always are, and this is perhaps especially visible in the case of Mozambique. The subjects of this essay are those who have either a longstanding personal or familial connections with Frelimo, in fact they have long been mutually constitutive of each other. They are members of what could be termed an 'old' middle class, those who have not been part of the national leadership but have occupied positions of privilege since the early independence period and in some cases, the colonial period as well. There are other social groups that can claim middle class status; examples would include high-ranking members of opposition parties, some

businessmen, those who have risen through the opportunities afforded by the adoption of capitalism and employees of international agencies, although they often have party links as well. However, the space for independent social mobility has shrunk in recent years. An example would be a Paulo who graduated university at the top of his class. He was invited to numerous job interviews, but was always taken aside and asked if he had a 'red card' (Frelimo membership card). When Paulo replied that he did not, the invariable response was a shrug of the shoulders and the remark: 'deal with it'.

As noted by Ray, the premise of middle class politics is the belief that its values are universal, therefore: 'By claiming to speak for the nation this category performs the cultural task of concealing inequality' (2010: 319). In similar manner, the Frelimo leadership based their hegemony on the mission to universalize their values and social background to the population as a whole. However, while the forms of domination and the networks of dependence still exist, the universalizing mission that attempted to conceal and/or legitimize inequality has quite visibly failed. To understand how such a situation has come to pass, we must examine the moral basis of the social order: specifically, the narratives that explained forms of dependence, inequality and wider obligations and how these have been affected by socio-political transformations since independence. Like Somers (1992), I understand a narrative in this case to be the symbolic production of a more or less compelling story (or series of interconnected stories) that helps to constitute social actors and their social world. I argue that during the liberation struggle (1964-1975) and the early independence period (1975-1983), Frelimo built a powerful narrative that explained relationships of dependence and inequality by stressing the obligations that bound Mozambicans together to build a better world for all.

While the subject of Frelimo's narrative encompassed the entire nation, its main characters comprised those who are strongly represented in the contemporary middle class.

For them the party's narrative became, in Somers terms (ibid), a master narrative, one whose elements influenced (either positively or negatively) the various contenders that explained the present and offered a vision for the future. They were a precursor of what Mozambicans were supposed to become and thus the prime movers in the goal to escape a subordinate position in the hierarchy of nations and become 'modern', prosperous and strong, a place that could no longer be conquered and humiliated by the weakest of colonial powers. Or as they say in Maputo: 'Our tragedy is that we were colonized by the Africa of Europe'. Bearing such a distinguished place in the party's narrative, both in the socialist period and in a more fragmentary way in the liberal period, has ensured privilege. However, it has also left the middle class as a social category trapped by a vision of the future that can never be, but nonetheless powerfully informs the present (See Nielsen 2014 for a wider discussion of temporality in Maputo).

In Cohen's (1981) terms Frelimo's master narrative was the rhetoric designed to show that the ruling elite served the general good. Although the initial vision collapsed through the policies implemented to bring it about and the devastation of civil war (1977-1992), elements of it remain a powerful source of legitimacy, although it is losing its coherence. As noted by Scott (2014), our perception of the present depends on how we think the end of the story will unfold, and the unravelling of Frelimo's hegemony can be traced to the erosion of the party's ability to credibly promise a better future for all; instead it seems to preside over slow decay.

In the current era, the narratives that once justified inequality as a temporary measure have fallen by the wayside, privilege has been divorced from wider social meaning and many obligations between members of different social groups have long since frayed. Liberal reforms were meant to reinvigorate the moribund nationalist project, to use capitalist methods to achieve the dream of 'modern prosperity' as socialism was utterly discredited. In her work on post-socialist Hungary, Fehérváry argues that life was explained as an attempt to achieve

‘normalcy’, an idealized imaginary of life in the ‘west’, as opposed to the socialist period and its legacy that served as the epitome of ‘abnormal’ (2002). Unlike Hungary, Mozambican socialism was an attempt to escape what was widely seen as ‘normal’ for post-colonial African nations, poverty, chaos and corruption. For most people I know, this grand attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. As a Frelimo cadre told me in despair: ‘After all the hopes and dreams, years of struggle and hardship, now we are just another African country’.

In the following sections I discuss the difficulties in understanding what a ‘middle class’ is and the changing forms of symbolism, dependence and obligation that gave rise to this category in the Mozambican context. I then examine the origins of this category and how it has been transformed. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion on how growing economic prosperity can cause alienation even among those who benefit from the system.

Uneasy Privilege

While the rhetoric of class, be it consciousness, struggle or interests, is now out of fashion in much of contemporary political discourse, the middle class is gaining considerable attention for its supposed role as an anchor of liberal democracy and the consuming engine of global capitalism (Heiman, Freeman and Liechty 2012: 18). Africa is no exception, the British newspaper *The Guardian* declares that ‘Africa’s Burgeoning Middle Class Brings Hope to a Continent’ through a combination of technology, financial assertiveness and cultural self-confidence (Smith and Lamble, 25 December 2011), while the German magazine *Der Spiegel* claims that ‘Africa’s Growing Middle Class Drives Development’ (Knaup and Puhl, 07 June 2012). The African Development Bank has not only decided that the middle class is the future of the continent, but that 34% of Africa’s population, or 314 million people, are already members of it as they are capable of US\$2 and US\$20 daily per capita expenditure (Mubila et al. 2011). As anything below US\$2 per day is the official definition of poverty,

there is nothing between destitution and the middle class. Membership in the ‘middle class’, under the definition of the African Development Bank and several other leading international agencies, is predicated on: ‘an individual act of consumption’ (Kalb 2014: 160). The social and historical relations that structure inequalities in diverse settings, or even the cost of living, which would theoretically influence one’s ability to consume, are ignored.

In his work considering the aftermath of the Grenadian revolution, Scott argues that the collapse of the socialist project transformed the understanding of time for the island’s inhabitants (2014). In his words: ‘it ... ruined a generation’s experience of time – that is, it destroyed the temporality constitutive of the organization of political hope and future-oriented expectation through which a generation lived’ (ibid: 108). Despite the triumphalism of the African Development Bank the lack of a credible dream for a better future that is far removed from the present casts a long shadow. Kalb (2014) has argued that the view of the middle class championed by international institutions, such as the World Bank, rests on the ideological assumption that despite recurring financial crises wealth is trickling down and creating new bases of support for the liberal economic order. Even if the west loses its political and economic hegemony, the future of the world, under such assumptions, is cast in a firmly bourgeois and ‘western’ image.

While this vision is ideologically neat, the reality is more complicated. Instead there seems to be no end to what Rigi refers to as ‘neo-liberal disordered order’ where the fetishization of law and order goes hand in hand with corruption and illegality (2012: 81). Perhaps this is one of the causes of the ‘middle class revolts’ seen across the world. Economic growth and new opportunities empowers some, while at the same time entrenching the polarizing status quo and lack of security and few seem to have any idea what to do about it. In Maputo this means being permanently enmeshed in relationships of dependence that have lost moral significance and the prospect of security. Instead of a wider societal mission,

for those I know it appears the nation is presided over by an indolent, corrupt ruling class. Middle class Mozambicans decry official corruption, while at the same time internalizing its logic. After a long diatribe against the ‘thieves’ in government a teacher at a private secondary school told me she altered the lacklustre marks of her nephew. When I asked if this was not similar to the behaviour she criticized, she replied: ‘No, what they do is corruption. What I do is helping my family, what’s wrong with that?’ Or, when I asked one young man what the result of the revolution he proposed would be, he told me: ‘I will be the one driving the Mercedes’.

As we will see the ‘middle class’ of Mozambique, as a historically produced social category, has its origins in the colonial period and has gained prominence since independence. Its members’ fortunes have largely been tied to that of the Frelimo party. Frelimo took power in 1975 after winning an eleven-year liberation struggle that soon gave way to a fifteen-year civil war. In 1977, Frelimo moved away from a broad socialist orientation and declared itself a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. Tentative moves towards market reform began in 1983 and gained force from the mid-1980s as the party faced collapse. Since the abandonment of socialism in 1990 and the end of the war, Mozambique has boasted an annual economic growth rate that averages around 7 per cent (African Development Bank, 2014). This seems set to increase as coal, natural gas, oil and other mineral reserves have been discovered. The country has held three presidential elections without a return to war, although the levels of ‘freeness’ and ‘fairness’ are disputed. Frelimo retained power through the transition to democracy and achieved a position of outright electoral dominance. The stability of the foundations of the social structure the party has built though is less certain.

The Ever Elusive Middle Class

Whether the term ‘middle class’ objectively describes Mozambican reality is a matter of debate. However the international importance attached to the term and the fact that it is frequently used in Maputo, either as a self-description or a description of others, means it is a locally significant category. Statistical indicators in Mozambique can be vague and unreliable, and do not adequately explain the sociological complexity of class membership, but they will perhaps serve to indicate the possible size of the ‘old’ middle class. Out of Maputo’s estimated population of 1.7 million, members of the middle class usually number among the 31% who work in the formal sector of the economy (Andersen 2012). They are also part of the 14.1% of the city’s population who have had access to higher education (Paulo et al, 2007: 16). Most members of the middle class that I know number among the 60,000 or so people who have internet in their homes (Pitcher 2012: 153).

The above indicators tell us that membership in a ‘middle class’ in Maputo is restricted to a small privileged group, but little else. With such a vague, though ideologically potent social category, 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, it is similar 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. Therefore it is not enough to have a cement house that is connected to the water and electricity grid, but also to have the right kind of house. Preferably one should own a home in the right part of town (an increasingly difficult feat with Maputo’s skyrocketing real estate prices), with South African or European style decorations and appliances (see also Fehérváry 2002 and Holston 1991 for a further discussion of class expression through domestic space). One should have a steady salary from a white collar job, usually as a professional, civil servant or businessperson. As noted by West for Zimbabwe, membership

is not defined strictly by wealth though, but shared background, experiences forms of family life and leisure activities and types of occupation (2002: 2). Therefore housing, clothes and comportment should reflect one's education and social background by reaffirming the boundary not only between members of the middle class and the poor, but also between them and the corrupt and undeserving ruling class, even if the actual difference is at times much less significant than imagined.

One man from a powerful Frelimo family told me: 'the middle class is extremely vague; it's hard to give it firm borders as it stretches from the petty bourgeois to the elite. I guess it's a continuum and about social reproduction, especially through education for their children'. A university professor explained:

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. 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' (in this definition state and party structures are indistinguishable to the speaker). The university professor mentioned above felt that the origins of the Mozambican middle class were those who were relatively privileged during the colonial period and became Frelimo cadres after independence. This group was joined by those he referred to as *emergentes* (emergent), people who, through Frelimo, were able to use state and party structures for their advancement.

In other words, the 'middle class' is a politically dependent category with little control over resources or the means of production. In the early independence period, political power was to be used to fulfil a great mission, the utter transformation of the country (Nielsen

2014). Many of those who would now be in the middle class were the first link in the chain for this grand mission. Few people I know wish to return to the socialist period and most have benefitted immensely from the capitalist dispensation. The new narratives to justify privilege though, a largely incoherent and self-serving rhetoric of nationalism and development that reward the rich now and put everyone else off to sometime in the distant future have stripped the system of much of its moral basis. In the face of growing discontent, the future for many of the people, I know is increasingly uncertain and their ability to socially reproduce themselves is mired in doubt.

Socialist Origins and Capitalist Transformations

The forerunner of the ‘old’ black middle class in Mozambique was the colonial category of *assimilados* (the assimilated) until it was abolished by the Portuguese in 1962. *Assimilados* were a group that proved to be extremely influential despite the smallness of their numbers, around 5000 in 1960, out of a population of 8,200,000 (Sheldon 2002). To be an *assimilado* one had to fulfil certain legal criteria: to swear loyalty to the colonial state, speak only Portuguese at home, adopt ‘European’ manners, abandon ‘heathen’ beliefs and have a Portuguese official vouch for one’s character. If one fulfilled these criteria then one was theoretically granted full legal equality with Portuguese settlers, although it could be rescinded for ‘backsliding’ (Mondlane 1969). While equality was not the case in practice, *assimilados* were granted a range of privileges. These included exemption from forced labour, jurisdiction under civil law, as opposed to customary law, and better access to education, employment and urban residence (O’Laughlin 2000; Penvenne 1982, 1989). *Assimilação* (assimilation) provided a vital narrative trope by becoming like those in power and abandoning the ‘old ways’, so advancement and social transformation would follow. *Assimilados* were well-represented in the first generation of the Frelimo leadership.

With Frelimo's victory in the liberation struggle, the idea of *assimilação* became a symbol of the humiliation by the colonial regime. No longer would Mozambicans be forced to imitate their former colonial masters; instead the party devoted its energy to the construction of the *homem novo* (new man), the main character of the revolutionary narrative. The 'new man' would be a new kind of national subject, one who shed the 'backwards' ways of the past and became a paragon of the virtues the party championed. During the presidency of Samora Machel (1975-1986), relationships of dependence were to become the base of a new morally-binding community, which linked the highest to the lowest to enact a social revolution under the direction of the party. Now though, the mission of personal transformation went far beyond individual advancement, it would be extended to the entire population as a necessary precondition of 'development' (Zawangoni 2007). The 'new man' was the universalizing promise that formed the narrative basis of Frelimo's domination. By transforming Mozambicans into the socialist new man, based on collectivism, 'rationality' and science, the party would raise the nation from a humiliated colonial backwater into an industrial power. Despite the rhetorical shifts, the legacy of *assimilação* remained influential. Both the elitism and the insecurity of privilege, (one had to constantly prove themselves worthy of being a new man, or it too could be rescinded) were echoes of *assimilação*.

In the time of Samora, the party was supposed to stand above the state, watch it carefully and guide it in its transformative mission, although a lack of personnel meant the party and the state were largely indistinguishable in practice (Sumich 2010). The new man was the prime mover in the narrative of radical transformation. To strive to be a new man and to disparage officially condemned traits such as 'tribalism', 'rural feudalism', 'selfish individualism', and 'obscurantism' was to make a statement that one accepted the legitimacy and the necessity of the party's attempts of social engineering. Those that did so and dedicated themselves to the revolutionary narrative tended to be closer to power and were

better able to move up the hierarchy. As with *assimilação*, rank came with privileges, although privilege was part of a wider mission. As a former high-ranking Frelimo official recalled: ‘To be called a new man by Samora was thrilling, we were building a new nation, part of a new world, everything was urgent ... we lived in a permanent state of exultation’.

The ability to climb the new forms of hierarchy was not limited to the miniscule ranks of former *assimilados* alone. As mentioned earlier, this was also the time when the *emergentes* came to the fore. Despite reoccurring crises, the early revolutionary period was characterized by an upsurge in social mobility. The exodus of the Portuguese meant that almost all of the professional and managerial positions in the country became vacant and Mozambicans who had any type of qualification or basic education were promoted to the colonialists’ former positions. Those who were close to the party and could claim a ‘peasant’ or ‘worker’ background (even if this was not entirely the case) benefitted from positive discrimination in education and jobs.

An example of this new social mobility would be Chuabo. He was born in 1964 in the far north, in one of the poorest and most remote provinces in Mozambique. His village was near an Anglican Mission that had the best school in the area. Most of the students, including Chuabo, came from rural backgrounds, but due to the education they received and the opportunities created by the revolution, many subsequently became high-level cadres. In 1977 the best students, often those from disadvantaged backgrounds, were selected to study in Cuba, and Chuabo was picked to go. First they were sent to Maputo for orientation. It was an amazing experience for him, as he said: ‘It was the first time I ever took a plane and Maputo was the biggest city I had ever seen. I met people from all over the country, from different provinces, backgrounds and cultures. It was an amazing time’. It was experiences such as these that demonstrated the legitimacy of Frelimo’s revolutionary narrative to Chuabo

as it explained how privilege was connected to a wider social role, to be a forerunner of the transformations that would reshape the entire nation.

Frelimo's revolutionary goal of remaking the nation in the image of an 'enlightened' vanguard, while devaluing much of what came before, was by no means universally popular. In large areas of the country the party's attempts to replace existing forms of social organization and meaning failed and Frelimo relied on coercion to gain compliance (Lubkemann 2008). Shortly after independence the white minority regimes of Rhodesia and then apartheid South Africa formed and supported an internal rebel group, Renamo (Mozambican National Resistance), in an effort to destabilize their left-wing neighbour (Hall and Young 1997, Newitt 1995). Mozambique was soon facing a full-scale civil war. To build a constituency, Renamo attempted to capitalize on the discontent amongst some sectors of the population with Frelimo's programme by portraying themselves as the movement of 'tradition' and the peasantry against an 'alien, creole, urban elite' (Dinerman 2006, Geoffrey 1990, Hall and Young 1997). With the intensification of the civil war, the economy teetered towards utter collapse and the revolutionary narrative unravelled as the fruits of grand societal transformation brought devastation (West 2005).

Cristina comes from a Frelimo family. Her mother went to school with many top members of the party leadership and held a high state position after independence. Shortages became endemic and Cristina's mother began using her contacts to smuggle goods in from Swaziland in 1982. This was a relatively common, if dangerous option, one that could be considered 'economic sabotage', which held severe penalties. Cristina remembers when cooking they would have to cover the windows with towels, as the neighbour children would stare through the windows and they could not explain how they obtained food that was not on the rations list. Eventually her mother was reported by Cristina's teacher, who noticed Cristina and her sister had shoes that were not available in Mozambique. That evening agents

of the security services came to their home and ordered her mother to accompany them. Cristina's sister faked an asthma attack and the police took pity on them and said they return the next day. Cristina's mother used the reprieve to mobilize her contacts and avoided punishment. Due to their place in the social order, Cristina's family was able to manipulate the system in a way others could not. While this brought benefit, it did not necessarily bring security. Despite their status and background they remained vulnerable to the envy of their neighbours and dependent on a party that was unpredictable. Instead of privilege being the first step in a wider transformation, it began to symbolize a widening social gap.

Disillusionment became widespread, even among party cadres. Chuabo returned home from Cuba in 1986, during the height of the civil war and was assigned to a government department. He found the country completely transformed, the euphoria he remembered had given way to despondency and working for the government was disheartening. Everything was conducted in a top-down manner. It was impossible to do something without the consent of someone higher up; therefore little was actually done. Following Samora Machel's death in 1986, Joaquim Chissano (1986-2005) assumed the presidency. By the late 1980s the war degenerated into a bloody stalemate and in a bid to bring peace, Frelimo unilaterally abandoned single-party socialism for multi-party capitalism in 1989/1990.

When the war ended in 1992, Mozambique was one of the most aid dependent countries on earth. Frelimo held on to power, but was forced to court favour with international agencies through various reforms (Pitcher 2002). During the 1990s efforts were made to decouple the party from the state, although there was still significant overlap in practice (ibid). In her discussion of pre-Arab Spring Tunisia, Hibou remarks that processes of reform are not necessarily enacted to 'modernize' the state or streamline the practice of governance, but as a method of social control. 'Perpetual reform makes the exercise of power

possible. Reformism is thus a mode of control that implies an uninterrupted and constant coercion, which watches over the process of the activity rather than its result' (2011: 242). This is not to say that there were no changes during the Chissano period; the party opened itself to previously excluded social categories, such as traders and the religious (Morier-Genoud 2009). Frelimo's role as a vanguard above the state withered, while the official government grew stronger. However, the hold of the dominant classes increased after the turmoil of war and with the influx of new resources from aid agencies and foreign investors.

As Mozambique slowly rebuilt itself, the late Chissano period became known as *deixa andar* (let it go, let it roll) referring to a new, more relaxed attitude towards personal accumulation. The Chissano era reminded many of 1975-1977, which was considered a relatively liberal time. Exploding corruption coincided with a relaxation of political scrutiny and a relative expansion of personal freedoms. With the advent of the liberal period those who had worked their way up the socialist hierarchy as the main characters of the revolutionary narrative once again took centre stage. Now though, the former 'new men', party faithful, more recent opportunists and the well-connected were recast as an emerging middle class, the group that would cement the liberal order by unleashing their entrepreneurial energies and creating a 'civil society'.

A privileged few, those who were well-connected and well-educated, have been able to take advantages of opportunities with the often interconnected government, business, aid and service sectors. Those with connections were able to study at special party schools and/or private institutions, later attending universities at home and abroad. Even for them though, the networks of support that bind the privileged together began to unravel. As one woman in her fifties recalls:

The early days were tough. The government was very communist, they even banned Christmas for a time. We all had to rely on each other, my husband had a good job, but the salary was barely enough to survive. If anyone managed to get a hold of something nice, like meat, we would all get together and share it. We all looked out for each other and helped each other. That is gone now sadly, people went off and did masters degrees or something and everyone is just concerned about themselves and their family.

The symbolic meaning of privilege, its ability to act as a forerunner for the universal good, crumbled along with the revolutionary narrative of transformation, but the opportunities of accumulation for the powerful increased dramatically. Political freedoms were extended to the nation as a whole under Chissano, but this did not come without cost (Morier-Genoud 2009). The vast majority have to eke out a living through whatever opportunities they can find at the lower rungs of the formal economy, or far more commonly, are abandoned to a precarious existence in the so-called 'informal' sector. While there are still modes of subordination that bind together members of different social groups in hierarchically ranked forms of obligation, such as long-standing, often generational relationships between better-off families and their maids, guards and gardeners, the system no longer requires the multitudes for the grand goal of building the nation. The sectional interests of the dominant classes still exist, but socially meaningful forms of subordination and convincing arguments that those in power serve the general good seem in short supply.

Decay

In 2005 Chissano was succeeded by Armando Guebuza (2005-2015). Towards the end of Chissano's time in office, many of those I know felt change was needed. Party structures were weak, corruption was seen to be getting out of control in an economic system that was frequently referred to as 'savage' or 'gangster' capitalism and the overall situation seemed to

be stagnating. Quite a few of my informants were cautiously optimistic about the elevation of Guebuza. He had revitalized the party and strengthened its role as a guardian of the state, won staggering electoral victories and as a former Frelimo hardliner, it was thought he would bring back some of the discipline of Samora. In his inaugural speech, Guebuza, picking up on the feeling of the moment, pledged to put an end to the spirit of *deixa andar*. However, Guebuza's time in power has been marked by growing social polarization, resurgent authoritarianism, the personalization of power and wealth, bloody urban riots, widespread labour unrest, political violence and a series of strikes in essential services such as health care and education. As a friend told me: 'Who would have thought it at the time, but *deixa andar* was actually a more humane system and Guebuza really did put an end to it'. Another remarked: 'It shows how far we have fallen if we look back to Chissano as a golden age'. Uncertainty has long been characteristic of status for Mozambicans. The threat of having one's privileges revoked has been present since the late colonial period. In the current era though, uncertainty for many that I know seems to have taken an existential character not seen since the dark days of the civil war. Despite new economic opportunities, my informants are confronted with precarious subordination to a system whose moral basis has eroded and to the boiling anger of those below who feel forgotten.

Tatiana is a professional woman from a party connected family. In her view of the situation:

Everyone is unhappy, the cost of living is spiralling out of control and discontent is growing rapidly. No one really minds if Guebuza is corrupt, this is allowed, the problem is that he is not letting anyone else eat. Instead he is taking everything himself, it's out of control. We wanted Guebuza to rebuild the party, and he did, but at the same time he has made himself stronger than the party and that has never happened before, not even in the time of Samora. I am worried, I think there could be another civil war or

revolt and I will be caught in the crossfire. My family has been privileged since the colonial era; we have done well with every regime. I am not part of the top, but I doubt too many will make fine distinctions if trouble comes.

Tatiana mentioned that a relative of hers had recently requested a transfer for his government post from a municipality won by an opposition party, the MDM (Democratic Movement of Mozambique) as he was afraid he would be fired by the new administration for corruption. While she admits that he probably was corrupt, the example illustrates how insecure and politically dependent status can be. While many people I know feel the future is uncertain, they are still bound to the system as the alternative could be even worse.

Tatiana's ambivalence towards the social order, where she and her family is complicit but dependent on a regime they fear could be swept away shows the uneasy position of the middle class. In 'Global Shadows', James Ferguson discusses the ways that various forms of 'African Socialism' drew on pre-existing moral discourses of collective prosperity, solidarity and obligation to try to legitimize their economic programmes (2006). This does not mean that brutal forms of exploitation and self-interest did not exist but simply that the ideology of African Socialism attempted to base its moral legitimacy on powerful local imaginaries. Frelimo was contemptuous of many of the doctrines of African Socialism and the party leadership never believed in a pre-colonial golden age of village equality; in fact it was viewed as rural feudalism (Hall and Young 1997). The party did base its revolutionary narrative on moral discourses of personal and social transformation, if perhaps those that appealed more narrowly to the dominant classes. However, the grand societal project that once used to legitimize privilege did not come to pass. The party's current, largely incoherent narrative of 'development' can no longer subsume the wider desires of even its followers. Instead there is growing social polarization. In the recent series of riots, disenfranchised urbanites angrily clamoured for inclusion, jobs and security. As a young rioter told reporters:

‘They (Frelimo) think they can cut us off, well we can cut too!’. Many people I know were torn between sympathy for the rioters and the fear of the resulting disorder. Members of Maputo’s middle class have reached a point when they have something to lose and they are dependent on a regime that, to them, seems hell bent on putting everything at risk by provoking the populace.

Maria comes from the nation’s ‘revolutionary aristocracy’. She has a good professional position and was able to study abroad. Maria is near the top of the social hierarchy in Maputo, but she is also dismayed.

I think another civil war could be coming. Expectations are being raised, but very little is trickling down and there does not seem to be a plan. The government should know the situation is dangerous but they really do not seem to care. Costs are skyrocketing; even a decent kindergarten cost US\$300 per month. Housing is even worse; almost no one can afford to live in the city centre anymore. I am married, have a child and a good job and we still have to live with my parents. There is no plan or overall programme. It is just five or so families eating everything. My generation are still nationalists, we love Mozambique and while material things are of course important and everyone wants them, we also want to do something for the country, but they don’t let us. Instead they (Frelimo) seem to be purposely making things worse and antagonizing the population.

A full-scale civil war breaking out in the relatively near future is unlikely. There are no clearly defined sides, nor would it be in many foreign powers’ interests to provide arms, finance or logistics for future violence. As Bass argued for Tamils in up-county Sri Lanka, predictions of looming violence (always to be undertaken by someone other than the speaker) are often ways of speaking of social problems while absolving oneself of blame and demonstrate a sense of lacking agency, as control of events is taken by others (2008).

However the narratives that once attempted to provide symbolic legitimacy to the social order and resulting relationships of dependence have fallen apart, replaced by the fear that everything could be taken away.

Mozambique is nominally a democracy and for a time an increasingly viable opposition, MDM, has caused considerable excitement in some sectors. There is the danger though that the opposition are just as complicit as are my informants. As Maria told me:

My husband just came back from Quelimane (a provincial capital in the centre of the country). MDM won Quelimane and it was very embarrassing for Frelimo as their candidate got fewer votes than the city has registered party members. My husband told me that he had spoken with MDM cadres who were saying that the municipality should be buying them houses as they are now the power and they deserve them. It is basically the same logic as Frelimo; it does not seem that there are that many differences. Yes Frelimo killed Simango's (the leader of MDM) father, but his father was a founder of Frelimo. I do not think much would change if Simango took power; he studied in Frelimo schools and is still tied to many members of the party by old links of friendship. He is part of the system, and he calls Guebuza '*tio*' (uncle).

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the MDM lost severely in the national election of 2014. Instead, after close to two years of low intensity fighting with the government, Renamo is once again the major opposition party. Voters seemed to appreciate Afonso Dhlakama's (the leader of Renamo) willingness to stand up to Frelimo, bolstering his party's political comeback after fading to near insignificance in the previous election. Even so, Renamo's inability to win power and lack of any kind of coherent alternative to Frelimo could entrench the very status quo which causes so much discontent.

Disaffection with the current social order is by no means total. Frelimo claims over two million members, close to ten per cent of the population (Bertelsmann 2012). The winner of the 2014 election, Filipe Nyusi (considered a Guebuza loyalist), garnered around 57 percent of the vote and was the clear victor despite allegations of fraud and electoral misconduct. While many of the people I know despair for the future and consider emigration the most viable option, others are being drawn back from abroad by the new opportunities of the economic boom. The foreign investors who began trickling in the Chissano years have become a flood, with new economic ventures being set up by South Africans, Brazilians, Indians and especially Chinese. While opportunities for enrichment multiply exponentially, these too fall under the purview of the party. A Mozambican businessman explained to me that: ‘You can set up a corner shop in relative peace, but you need to bring the party in for anything bigger’. Furthermore the competition between educated Mozambicans and foreigners for the few professional posts outside of the state is heating up dramatically. The party’s crumbling narrative also faces competition from other sources of meaning and legitimacy, such as the explosion of evangelical churches and Islamic missionary movements. One again though, these are being incorporated into the system. One example is the deal between the Brazilian Universal Church for access to Mozambique and a building for their headquarters in return for purchasing machines used to count votes at national elections. Economic growth and its associated opportunities are creating unprecedented prosperity for some; however such developments also serve to bolster a hierarchy that has long since lost its moral legitimacy and whose foundations are uncertain.

For many Mozambicans I know, there is still a connection with Frelimo. I attended a dinner party where an argument broke out between the host, a Frelimo loyalist, and the more sceptical dinner guests. Even the most critical though still referred to himself as a ‘child of Frelimo’ and admitted he and his family had benefitted from the party immensely. That is

precisely the bind members of Maputo's middle class find themselves in. The revolutionary narrative that promised to bind all of the nation's citizens together for the general good has crumbled, even if former hierarchies and power structures remain. The rhetoric and symbolism of the current era do not, in Cohen's (1981) terms, successfully argue that relationships of dependence strive for the greater good. Instead people remain hostage to a system that even many of the privileged feel is unjust.

Conclusion

In Ferguson's discussion of dependence in South Africa, he refers to a political opinion poll where: 'the majority of South Africans agreed with the statement 'people are like children, the government should take care of them like a parent' (2013: 236). I am not aware if similar polls exist in Mozambique, but one frequently hears such sentiments. Phrases like: 'the government needs to give me a job', 'the government needs to take care of us' are common and in Cohen's terms provide symbolic legitimacy for the social order. The problem is not hierarchical relationships of dependence to a paternalistic government, but a government that is acting like a delinquent father; in this case a father that has forgotten the majority of children and could always abandon the rest.

As noted by Ferguson, one of the major problems of social inequality is that it is strikingly asocial, abandoning the vast majority to their own devices (2013). The violent riots of 2008, 2010 and 2012 in Maputo were fed by the terrible conditions in the *bairros* (popular neighbourhoods) and sparked by the rise in prices for public transport, meaning urbanites were spending half or more of their salary just to get to work. The privileged are also increasingly struggling as prices skyrocket and even doctors are on strike. The early moral basis of Frelimo's hegemony, the grand mission to homogenize the population with the forerunners of the middle class as the first link in the chain has collapsed. Instead privilege

has become intertwined with precariousness and complicity, with members of a middle class increasingly hostage to a regime they fear will cause them to lose everything they and their families have struggled so long for.

Kalb argues that contemporary debates concerning the rise of the 'middle class' in Africa and other parts of the post-colonial world are often an effort not to talk about class (2014: 160). The importance attached to the 'middle class' by institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank are part of a depiction of the world where under the careful hand of an enlightened capitalist elite wealth will trickle down without overt conflict and the liberal status quo will be entrenched (see Kalb 2014). In this case the cultural role of the middle class under liberalism is to conceal inequality and stratification, hence its contemporary pride of place in political discourse (Ray 2010)

The moral basis of social hierarchies though is more expansive and encompasses narratives that explain and attempt to justify forms of dependence, inequality and wider obligations and how this will build a better future. It is these narratives that are crumbling, seemingly being eroded by those entrusted to bring them about. Nor is this confined to Mozambique alone, as was seen on the streets of Turkey and Brazil. While the narratives and their associated dreams differ, the ideological exhaustion seems similar. As with other increasingly restive populations across the world, the grand political transformations of the last twenty years increasingly seem like attempts to, in Somers' (1992) words, add a slightly different ending to an old story: mere cosmetic changes to prop up the foundations of power that offer little security even the privileged. Much like the aftermath of the Grenadian revolution described by Scott (2012), the belief in a future oriented time in Mozambique, where a new and better world would emerge from the present, has been lost to a sense of decay. Perhaps that is truly the foundation of a middle class, the ability to create conditions

where one can socially reproduce their privilege with a degree of relative confidence and certainty for the future, something most of the Mozambicans I know lack.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Afia Afenah, Bjorn Bertelsen, Casey High, Edward Simpson, Jon Schubert and the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading and helpful suggestions. I also benefited from presenting a draft of this essay at “The Making of the Middle Classes: Social Mobility and Boundary Work in Global Perspective” workshop held by re: work and Humboldt University, Berlin November 6th – 8th 2014. This research was made possible by financial assistance from the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics and the Department of Social Anthropology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

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