

MIDDLE CLASS, SOCIO-CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN KENYA. LIMITATIONS OF CLASS ANALYSIS⁹⁶

Dieter Neubert

Introducción

As a scholar working on Africa I am pleased to have the chance to be invited on a conference on “classes and individual groups in Colombia today.” At the same time I ask myself what I might contribute to your discussion. It is obvious that the social structure in African countries and in the case of my research Kenya differs in many respects from the situation in Colombia. However, it might be the difference that may lead to ask different questions and offers a new perspective on social structure in Colombia especially with regard to “individual groups.” The case of Kenya shows that the concept of “class” is full of preconditions that have to be considered when we talk about classes. To be more specific, the case of Kenya points at ongoing processes of cultural differentiation that questions the simple formula that the socio-economic position in the division of labor determines a certain class consciousness (in itself).

A common starting point relevant for Kenya and Colombia is the global debate on a middle growing class and the expectations linked to the this particular group expressed in a “middle class narrative.” At the same time the analysis of middle class is a very good example to pursue the process of cultural differentiation. According to this “narrative” (Neubert and Stoll in print) the middle class is “more likely to have values aligned with greater market competition and better governance, greater gender equality, more investment in higher education, science and technology” (AfDB, 2010: 5). Wiemann (2015) sees the middle class as potential advocates for “just and sustainable economy”, Birdsall (2015: 225) claims that the “middle class is good for good governance,” and Easterly sees

⁹⁶ This paper is based on an ongoing research project, “Middle classes on the rise”, funded by the German Ministry for Science and Research as part of the research group “Bayreuth Academy: Future Africa”. The members of the middle class research team are Erdmute Alber and Dieter Neubert (co-leaders), Lena Kroeker, Florian Stoll and Maike Voigt For preliminary results concerning questions of social structure see: Daniel/Neubert (2014), Neubert (2014; 2015; in preparation), Neubert and Stoll (2015), Stoll (in preparation). The data used here are mainly from joint work with Florian Stoll and Florian Stoll’s fieldwork.

the middle class as a kind of backbone for economic development (Easterly, 2001). At the same time this debate on class implies that the class concept including the implications may be applied globally. In a more general way Göran Therborn (2012: 15) sees in new social protests all over the world in the young 21st century different possibilities for political action, alliances and class formations. From an economic point of view the middle class represents in this debate a new group of consumers whose purchasing power promotes economic development. This narrative about the middle class also implies a certain homogeneity and stability. Do these assumptions apply?

One may argue, whether everybody earning more than 2 or 4 US \$per capita and day who is often counted statistically as middle class, is already "middle class" or whether a different threshold would be more realistic (see section 2). Nevertheless, there is a growing group that escaped extreme poverty and has more money to spend as before. In so far, the middle class debate refers to a real socio-economic development. Without ignoring that large parts of the population in the Global South live under the poverty-line of 2 US \$per capita and day. The question with regard to the middle class is, at least from a sociological point of view, whether there is a real "middle class" that corresponds to the notion of "class" in the strict theoretical sense of the term. This questions turns-up because the term "class" has a wide range of meanings and definitions but its implications are often linked to the specific sociological understanding of this term. Therefore, the first section will shortly re-visit sociological concepts of class and the much wider concepts used in the "middle class debate". I will, secondly, shortly present the definitions of "middle class" in the current debate. Against this backdrop the third section will try to answer the question whether the class defined as a particular income stratum is a proper class in the sociological sense with reference to the example of Kenya. This shows the limitations of the class to concept to describe the growing social diversity in Africa. One of the aspects that are usually overlooked is the socio-cultural diversity in the middle income stratum. This will be analyzed in section four applying the German based "milieu

concept". Whereas the milieu concept is helpful to capture socio-cultural diversity inside and across social positions it is not the answer to all limitations of conventional class concepts. Based on the Kenya case some requirements for a new analysis of social structure are presented in the outlook.

The "class concept"

When we follow the "middle class debate", either in Africa or in the Global South in general, we are confronted with data on income or consumption that is used for the definition of the middle class. From a sociological perspective this purely descriptive approach is puzzling and leaves important elements of class theory aside. For a better understanding we have to re-visit the origins of the notion of class. The classical sociological understanding of class is based on the social structure of the analysed society. According to Karl Marx (1884/1974: 892 f.; Marx, 1894/1976; Marx/Engels, 2009) and his followers (e.g. Poulantzas 1974; Wright, 1982, 2009) Social positions are defined via control of the means of production and/or the control of the produced surplus or via expropriation. For Kenya and other countries of the Global South, the means of production are capital, labour, or land (which is already an extension of the original concept). Linked to the particular means of production there are in Africa the bourgeois class, the labour class, and a peasant class (in cases of large land-holdings the land owners are a special group of bourgeoisie). This clear cut concept has been further developed with the notion of the "petit-bourgeoisie" referring to owners of medium size businesses and the professions (e.g. lawyers, medical doctors) who were seen as co-opted by the bourgeoisie.

An elaborated concept was presented by Max Weber who introduced the term "middle class" (Weber, 1978: 302). He characterizes a class as a group with "...the typical probability of 1. provision with goods, 2. gaining a position in life and 3. finding inner satisfactions". Membership of a particular class depends on property, the possibility of realising assets in the market and the possibility of downward and upward individual or intergenerational mobility.

He differentiates between an upper, asset-holding class, a lower class without assets and a middle class (sic!) in between. In contrast to Marx, Max Weber (1978: 305) refers to important differences inside the classes according to "status and status group (stand)" (referring to socio-professional positions).

Especially Marx/Engels and to a lesser extent Weber are still the central reference point for the further development sociological class concepts applied to the Global South. One important extension has to be mentioned for Africa – and Global South in general: Against the backdrop of this general debate, since the 1960s a number of attempts have been made to analyse the structure of the Global South and Africa in particular. In the post-colonial setting large companies were and are often owned or at least controlled by international or multinational corporations. Based on the dependency theory the national bourgeoisie, the owner of medium sized enterprises, were seen as dependent from the international capital and acted more or less as auxiliary agents. This has been conceptualized as "auxiliary bourgeoisie" or "comprador bourgeoisie". With regard to Africa Kenya was one of the intensively discussed cases (Beckmann, 1980; Khadiagala and Schatzberg, 1987; Leys, 1975; Schatzberg, 1987; Shivji, 1976). In these settings the state was and often still is not only the primary political actor, but also the carrier of economic development - as provider of infrastructure, as entrepreneur (state and para-statal enterprises), as trustee and main beneficiary of natural resources, and as recipient of development aid. The state also controlled the private sector via licensing, price controls, and export and import regulations. Those in control of the state had not only access to state resources but also at the same time they controlled the capital and its surplus. This led to the introduction of the concept of "state class" or "state bourgeoisie", which included political elites and higher- and mid-level administrative staff who profited from and controlled state resources (Amin, 1976; Elsenhans, 1977; Saul, 1979; Sklar, 1979). Members of the state class not only earned their salaries, they also received extra payments and favours from the private sector and used their influence to gain access to profitable licences and other economic activities. The state became the

main source of income and economic control. This state class included members of different social positions. Whereas top politicians comprised a small part of the elite, mid-level staff represented a considerable part of a still small middle stratum.

Current sociological class concepts are still linked to Marx or Weber and they share their basic assumptions. Socio-economic positions are seen largely as stable and are (mostly) reproduced from generation to generation, though Weber at least considers the possibility of upward and downward mobility. In the class concepts the control over the means of production and/or professional positions is the main factor that leads to similar income. Similar positions create similar interests and the members of a class share basic orientations (values) concerning what is a "good society" and a "good life". This implies within a particular class a socio-cultural homogeneity linked to a shared political interest and shared political orientation, offering potential for political action. Therefore, classes are important and potentially political actors that can influence the political processes of a particular country. If these assumptions apply, then the class concept is appropriate to describe that particular society. In this sense Bourdieu's (1984) seminar work "Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste" is based on a class concept and shows that socio-economic position and cultural distinction are closely linked which each other. In a similar less elaborated way a class approach provides the reason for the existence of a middle class consciousness or the "middle class consensus" (Easterly, 2001) that is mentioned or at least implied in the current debate with notions such as being enterprising, hard-working, oriented towards education supporting liberal market economy and democracy.

Definitions of middle class in the current debate

Let us now review the definitions of "class" applied in the current debate on global or regional middle class. A first approach defines "middle" relative to the income of the researched social entity, usually a country. This is done in two ways. One way divides the population into quintiles (or centiles) according to their per capita income. The lowest quintile repre-

sents the poorest 20 % the upper quintile to wealthiest 20 %. The three middle quintiles represent the "middle" (Easterly, 2001: 10)⁹⁷. The other way of a relative definition starts from the median income of the society. Here, "middle" is defined as the share of the population that has 75 % to 125 % of the median per capita income (Birdsall, Graham and Pettinato, 2000: 3). The size of that "middle" varies according to the pattern of income distribution. When these schematic definitions are applied the people in the middle may be very wealthy in international comparison or they may be very poor, specifically, in a country where the majority lives below the 2 US \$ per capita and day – a poverty line frequently used by international organisations. This relative approach is interesting when we want to compare the structure of inequality and the income distribution of two or more countries. The median based definition points at the size of the middle compared to the upper and lower income group and the median income. The quintile-approach highlights the income differences between the income quintiles.

The second and very well-known approach defines middle class based on rates of absolute daily per capita income calculated as PPP US \$. The authors use different more or less arbitrarily chosen thresholds (Ravallion, 2010: 446). Studies that compare middle class on the global level choose relatively high thresholds, for instance, Kharas sets the lower threshold for the middle class on 10 US \$ and the upper threshold 100 US \$ per day and capita (Kharas, 2010: 9, 12). Those who focus on the Global South or on Africa often use the 2 US \$ poverty line as lower threshold. However, the upper threshold for the middle class in the Global South varies between 10 US \$(Banerjee and Dufflo, 2008: 4), 13 US \$(Ravallion, 2010: 448) and 20 US \$(AfDB, 2011: 2). The African Development Bank provides the most differentiated categories: poor < 2 US \$, floating class 2-4 US \$, lower middle class 4-10 US \$, upper middle class 10-20 US \$ and upper class > 20 US \$ per capita and day (PPP).

It is obvious that these socio-demographic concepts of "class" are purely descriptive and define a middle-income stratum in the society, not a

"class" in the strict sense of the classical sociological term based on control over means of production or via a socio-professional position. The socio-demographic concepts point with reference to the middle class only at similar income. But the simple fact, that people who have a similar income hardly justifies similar interests, values and norms. A wealthy farmer and a wealthy business man may have different political interests concerning subsidies for agriculture or taxes on imported food products. At least the definition of classes according to income is not sufficient to assume a common consciousness. Whether there is a middle class consciousness or a middle class consensus is then an empirical question and cannot be derived from the socio-economic position defined via income.

Another descriptive definition is provided by Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu (2015: 589). They define middle class in terms of specific kinds of dwelling, secondary education and secure skilled non-farm employment. This definition refers to some common elements that go beyond a similar income and refer to a specific livelihood. Whether this is sufficient to develop a common class consciousness or at least similar interest, values and norms is still not proven. As we will see, at least for Kenya this definition does not work well. In addition, this definition does not consider the possibility of a rural middle class.

In the debate on middle class we should consider the different notions of class. In the German debate on social inequality and social structure only concepts that follow Marx and Weber use the term "class". The descriptive concepts based on socio-demographic data, mostly income, use the more neutral term "stratum" (Schicht) instead of class. This term seemed to be found in Spanish speaking countries to as "capa social". Stratum is descriptive and is not linked to far-reaching analytical and theoretical assumptions like the class concept. For a precise argument it is necessary to consider the difference between descriptive and theoretical analytical class concepts. To avoid confusion it would be much clearer to use the term "stratum" when the definition of the group is based on a descriptive concept.

This does not mean the descriptive concepts are not helpful. In the contrary, different income levels are important and depict social inequalities.

⁹⁷ In a similar way a division in centiles may be applied.

With regard to the middle stratum they show the possibilities for consumption and also the chances for savings and investment including the possibility for social security provision such as pension schemes or health insurance. But at the same time we have to be aware that the thresholds to define different strata are just a means for statistical measurement of the size of the strata. They cannot be understood as a strict dividing line between clearly distinct groups or even classes in strict sociological sense. When we are interested in the livelihood of people there is no clear difference between people with 2.10 US \$per capita/day and 1.90 US \$per capita/day, just like there is no clear difference between 21 US \$per capita/day and 19 US \$per capita/day.

Middle class in Kenya?

The existence of a middle class in Kenya, in the sense of a middle-income stratum, is not a new phenomenon. In colonial Kenya, as in other African countries south of the Sahara, Africans who had access to education acquired white collar jobs in the formal sector, for instance as clerks, teachers or small entrepreneurs, and formed a new social group. Some Africans even had the chance to acquire university education and became qualified lawyers or took up other professions. They were referred to as the African "elite", which meant in fact a kind of middle stratum because the top ranks in politics, the administration and the economy were reserved for the privileged white population.⁹⁸ These few African social climbers joined in Kenya the small "Asian" population in middle-income positions. Nevertheless, members of this small group of educated Africans established itself in Kenyan politics through newly founded civil society associations and political parties, and in the economy either through small urban enterprises or investment in commercial agriculture. After independence, more Africans joined the Kenyan middle class. On the basis of Kenyan statistical data, Berg-Schlösser (1979: 321) describes the growth of the middle stratum in Kenya from 10.1% in 1950 to 19.3% in 1970. Similar results are presented by Ghai et al. (Ghai, Godfrey and Lisk, 1979: 43). The data is

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

The comparative data of the AfDB identifies a considerable Kenyan middle stratum. If we include the so-called "floating class", Kenya has one of the largest middle strata in Africa south of the Sahara, representing 44.9% of the whole population (AfDB, 2011: 5, chart 4). In only five countries (Gabon, Botswana, Namibia, Ghana and Cap Verde) is this percentage larger, while even in South Africa it is with 41.1% slightly lower. If we quantify the poor stratum with an income below 2 US \$a day (AfDB, 2011: 20, chart 20) the Kenyan 41.7 % are only slightly above the countries with the smallest percentage (Cap Verde 40.2 %, Djibouti 41.1), with South Africa having 47.1%. According to the AfDB data, this is due to the comparatively large percentage of the population with an income above the 20 US\$a day line (13.4 %) ⁹⁹. However, we need to be aware that this data has its weaknesses. The AfDB refers to estimates that are not always clearly related to a specific year, here presumably to 2008. When we compare these results with the data of the World Bank's poverty calculator (www.povcal.net, accessed 7.8.2015) for 2005, the Kenyan poor class appears to be much larger (67.2%), whereas for the other countries the figures of the World Bank are comparable. The data of the AfDB also contradicts the findings of Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu (2015: 597). According to their data only a very small part of the Kenyan population earns more than the 10 US\$PPP per capita and day. However, the consumer analysis data suggests the existence of a considerable middle class in Kenya (Euromonitor International, 2010). The Kenya economic report 2013 by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (2011: 19) counts the

⁹⁸ The debate on "African Elites" is discussed by Carola Lentz (2015).

⁹⁹ Own calculation based on the charts 4, 18 and 20 (AfDB, 2011).

percentage of poor people according to a multi-dimensional poverty index for the years 2006-2012 between 46.1% and 50.8%.

In colonial times the majority of the African population were subsistence farmers or pastoralists. The small new African middle stratum (the so called African elite) shared a number of similarities. They were educated, had access to white collar jobs, and had stable employment mostly in the cities¹⁰⁰. Even the labourers in the formal sectors, in the harbour, employed by Kenyan railways or in the few industrial plants where in a similar situation. Both groups were the backbone of the new labour movement and for the African political associations that claimed political participation and later independence. For our analysis it is more important to note that they did not cut their linkages to the country side. In the contrary they invested in agriculture, land or livestock. Their investment was an important input for the new emerging commercial agriculture. They kept close relations to the extended family in rural areas and the rural place of origin was seen as home, where one wanted to be buried. One important task of the at that time newly founded ethnic associations was the organisation of the transport of deceased members to the rural home for burial. Wealthy family members supported poorer relatives and the children moved between the rural home, where they should grow-up but the city was a place for education. This pattern of close urban-rural linkages across different income groups did not end with independence but is still a dominant pattern in the Kenyan family structures.

Combined modes of production

For an analysis of class positions and particular class interests, the socio-professional structure and modes of production in Kenyan society are of special importance. According to Marxian class concepts, expropriation and control of the means of production or of the surplus product are the main indicators of class position, while Weber points to the ownership of assets and opportunities for marketing these assets combined with a special interest in values according to the socio-professional status

¹⁰⁰ See also: Thurlow/Resnick/Ubogu (2015: 589).

group position (the German *Stand*). The application of these criteria in Kenya faces clear limits. The most striking feature is the permanence of rural-urban linkages. Many blue- or white-collar workers or urban entrepreneurs still invest at the same time in a farm and/or livestock in their home village (Collier and Lal, 1984; Mukras, Oucho and Bamberger, 1985; Oucho, 1996; Ross and Weisner, 1977).¹⁰¹ The work in the rural setting is done by family members in the case of small farms, or by hired employees on large estates. Sometimes the farm is run by a paid employee. In addition, the combination of a salaried job and a small personal or family business is very common. This combination of income sources has been reinforced by a growing number of educated women in employment (Euromonitor International, 2010: 7). Socio-professional positions were changed during lifecourse and were combined in different ways (Kitching, 1980). Our interview data confirms that this pattern is still very common. The data Githinji (2000: 157-163) proves the combination of farm and off-farm income (wage labour, business) and the involvement of family and hired labour. He nevertheless proposes "disaggregated" Marxian class analysis (ibid: 163ff).

With regard to different parts of the Global South in the 1980s, this phenomenon has been analysed as combined modes of production (Elwert, Evers and Wilkens, 1983; Evers, 1987). At that time the focus was mainly on more or less poor groups fighting for survival. But the above-mentioned studies relating to Kenya show that this can be a general pattern across different income strata. People from the Kenyan upper income strata often combine a top administrative position with running a business and a large farm. This has serious consequences for a class analysis. Linking a certain socio-professional position or ownership of assets with a particular class position is not possible. Especially in the middle stratum the criteria of expropriation cannot be applied without contradictions. Wage earners who run a commercial farm with hired labour would be members of two different classes at the same time.

¹⁰¹ It is remarkable that these urban-rural linkages were hardly recognized in the so-called "Kenyan debate". For a critical summary with bibliographical references, see Beckmann (1980).

Assignment to a certain class works better in the upper strata, where people own extensive rural and urban property and business, all run by hired labour. In addition, top politicians either are already part of this asset holding “upper class” or more often than not they use(d) their political functions to acquire assets and become a member of the upper class.

This is not just a theoretical problem of class terminology. This combination of modes of production and socio-professional positions has consequences for the definition of interests in the sense of class-specific interests. When urban white- and blue-collar workers or their close family members are entrepreneurs and farmers at the same time, they cannot be positioned clearly in any specific socio-professional class. They cannot be categorised neatly as peasants, wage earners or entrepreneurs with corresponding political interests. The expression “peasants in the city” (Mangin, 1970) still applies in Kenya and highlights this virtual link to the rural home. This feeling of belonging to a rural home is part of the regional-ethnic identity that is ubiquitous in daily life. In many situations Kenyans are identified by their ethnic belonging, which is usually linked to a particular district.

Uncertainty and instability of socio-economic position

Even the socio-economic position, based on the data on income is less clear than the statistics imply at the first sight. The data on income does hardly consider the obligation of wealthier family members for their poorer relatives. They are under pressure to support the education of children, provide support in case of sickness or unemployment. These transfer payments may add up to a considerable share of the income. At the same time these family relations may provide a certain social security in cases of hardships. Even formal sector employees or small and medium entrepreneurs face manifold situations of risk. Without social welfare benefits, unemployment is a serious social risk for the whole family. If other family members or relatives are earning or if there are savings, people may cope with this kind of threats for a limited time, but without such assets it will inevitably lead to downward mobility. The health insurance schemes in the formal sector for employees or self-employed small and medium entrepre-

neurs do not provide support during a long period of sickness. The insurance often does not even cover all costs for treatment nor is there a compensation for lost salary or income. For those who run a small business of their own, the whole enterprise may be threatened in case of serious sickness.

Aside from the classical social security risk of unemployment or sickness, running a small or medium-sized business in Kenya is bound up with the risk of failure. And commercial farming is also full of risks, due to weather conditions, pests, plant diseases and fluctuating prices for agricultural products. In addition to individual challenges and problems, the overall economic situation directly influences the situation of the middle stratum. The “Consumer Lifestyle in Kenya Survey” (Euromonitor International, 2010) asserts that the middle-income segment shrank from 27% in 2005 to 18% in 2009 due to the economic crisis, though it is unclear on which data this is based. Thus, the unstable situation of at least the lower parts of the middle income stratum is similar to that of poorer groups¹⁰².

This situation of uncertainty with a high risk of downward mobility contradicts basic notions of middle class. The class concept implies according to Marx a relatively stable position during the life cycle of a person or family and over generations. Weber sees the possibility of moving, usually between sub-classes of the same class. The so called “middle class” does not only fall outside the typical categories as labourer, peasant or entrepreneur but the socio-economic position is fluid even when they earn enough to be classified as middle or upper middle stratum. The vulnerability that is linked to the called “floating class” stratum in the concepts of the African Development Bank or the poor stratum applies for a large part of the middle income stratum, too.

Finally, the presumed relative stability of class position, as suggested by Marx or Weber, implies that children belong to the same class as their parents. But under the condition of a growing middle income stratum and common up- and downward mobility children and their parents, or adult si-

¹⁰² Please note, the data is not comparable the data of the AfDB (2011) used in this text for the definition of the middle income strata.

blings within the same family, may have different “class positions”. In Kenya, where the extended family is still of considerable importance, it is quite usual for family members to be spread across different income strata. These cross strata relations exist not only between the middle stratum and the poor stratum but also include members of the upper stratum. The better-off parts of an extended family often support poorer members’ education or help in cases of sickness.

Political voting patterns and class consciousness

According to class analysis being part of a particular class includes the potential for a common political consciousness that either is the background for class conflicts or at least linked to preferences in voting. Voting patterns in Europe have been for long time in the 20th century interpreted as an expression of class differences. Voting patterns in Kenya follow a radically different pattern. They represent a regional-ethnic structure. Politicians are identified as leaders of particular ethnic groups (Barkan and Okumu, 1978; Berg-Schlosser, 1985). Because of the historical pattern of more or less ethnically segregated settlement, the Kenyan rural areas are still seen as linked to a particular ethnic group. This pattern has been opened up especially in the Rift Valley or at the Kenyan coast via in and out migration and in the Rift Valley as a result of the land expropriation by White settlers in colonial times. Despite the changing settlement patterns ethnic groups still claim their “ancestral land”. Voting patterns follow still this regional-ethnic structure and the parties have their regional-ethnic strongholds. This overlaps partly with religion, the Coast region has a large Muslim population made of the Swahili speaking group and a smaller group of Kenyans with historical Arab origin. Race is no real issue in election because the so called “Asians” (Kenyans with Indian origin) or the “White” minority are too small to form a distinct political party.

The programmes of the different parties do not really differ and are of minor importance in election campaigns. And we neither find a “middle class” or

a “working class” or a “peasant” party¹⁰³. The hot political issues are the question of ethnic representation and the amount of central state power versus the districts. In election campaigns topics were the position of the president versus that of the prime minister, or the balance of power between central government and local government. This pattern has been extraordinarily stable for decades. In elections, coalitions of regional-ethnic blocs compete with each other. The coalitions may change but the basic regional-ethnic blocs remain stable (Haugerud, 1995; Hulterström, 2007; Ogude, 2002). The highly disputed 2007 election showed that the majority of middle class and civil society organisations were integrated into the regional-ethnic political blocs (Kagwanja, 2009; Lafargue, 2009). It was only when the violence escalated and nearly led to civil war that the quest for peace became a joint aim of the middle class civil society organisations, as well as of the majority of Kenyans (Daniel and Neubert, 2014). It can thus be concluded that the socio-economic middle stratum does not constitute a politically conscious or active class (see also Cheeseman, 2015: 602, for a similar argument). The Kenyan middle stratum lacks the important feature of particular class interests in the sense of Marx or Weber.

Socio-cultural differences: kenyan middle-class milieus

Based on these limitations there is no indicator to apply the class concept in its strict sociological sense at the Kenyan middle income stratum. This group is not marked by specific means of production, for a large part the socio-economic position is still insecure and this stratum lacks a common consciousness. In the contrary political dividing lines cut across the middle income stratum. Nevertheless, there is this middle income stratum that has at least for time being escaped poverty and parts of it live in a situation

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¹⁰³ In 1995 a party called SAFINA (Swahili for “Noah’s ark”) was founded with a non-ethnic, social-democratic (not especially middle class) party program. In the 2013 election SAFINA formed an alliance with other smaller parties which gained five seats in parliament.

of moderate prosperity (Darbon and Toulabour, 2011: 7). They share an important feature: they have the ability to consume above and beyond the fulfilment of their basic needs. This makes them an interesting market for consumer goods. This is the message of the McKinsey report on the African Lions (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010) and the Consumer Lifestyle in Kenya report (Euromonitor International, 2010). The Consumer Lifestyle report covers a large range of fields of consumption including education, health, toys, leisure activities, electronic goods, drinks, food, fashion and transport. It underlines the similarities in patterns of consumption and marks differences only according to age groups. Household consumer goods such as TV sets or refrigerators, clothing, and electronic products like mobile phones or smartphones are widespread. Middle class families use their moderate prosperity to invest in education and health and spend considerable amounts of money on transport, either public transport or private motorbikes or a car.

This Consumer Lifestyle report is typical of the general debate. It implies that consumption patterns are mainly affected by the level of income and (to some degree) by age. But this ignores obvious differences. The report notes the growth of expenditure on alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. It describes the places where people meet for drinking (e.g. pubs and bars) and where they buy alcohol and cigarettes. However, there are no figures showing the percentage of adults who drink alcohol or smoke compared to those who do not. Yet, an abstinent life style is quite common for a considerable part of the middle class and is clearly visible in Kenyan everyday life. We also find clear differences in relation to fashion. As in many African countries, decency is an important aspect of clothing styles, though younger people differ in their clothing habits. In 2014 this led to the so-called "mini-skirt debate": after a group of conservative Kenyans publicly stripped and beat young women wearing mini-skirts some women's and human rights groups and their supporters organised a protest march to demand that women should have the right to wear what they like (BBC 14.11. 2014).

These examples show that the ability to consume includes opportunities for choice. People may

consume according to their own tastes and preferences. This goes beyond the question of the length of a skirt or whether one drinks alcohol or smokes. Once the basic needs are met, fundamental decisions can be made. How much of the money will be spent on education and training (for children and adults)? How much will be spend on housing? Will the housing be rented or owned? If building a house is possible, will it be in town or in the home village or at both places? Will parts of the money be invested in a new business or in a farm or livestock? Will money be spent for social security in a health care or a pension scheme? Or do the family networks provide greater security so that money must be used on helping the extended family as an investment in family security? Is the money used to improve the family's standard of living by going on holiday, buying better food, dining out, purchasing consumer goods, a motorbike or a car or even a second car? How will these things be paid for, out of current income or out of savings, or through a loan from the bank?

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

This leads to different combinations. The level of income has an influence because some consumer goods need more money than others. The purchase of a car or an expensive urban home needs a certain amount of income. Those with more money may make several expensive investments at the same time. They may have a preference for certain types of investment or consumption. But the decisions of people with similar income do not systematically follow their socio-professional position. On the basis of our interview data, we have come to the conclusion that such decisions are influenced by people's

basic value orientation and preference for certain lifestyles and different visions of their and their families' future. We observe different socio-cultural orientations that do not depend on belonging to a certain ethnic group but are an expression of individual choices. Therefore the middle income stratum covers different socio-cultural orientations.

How may we capture socio-cultural differentiation in a society where the socio-economic position no longer determines values and visions of a "good life"? In (West)German sociology the concepts of life-style and milieu have been developed since the 1980s and point at the societal result of different choices concerning consumption and investment (Hradil, 1987; Müller, 1992; Schulze, 1990). Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer (1993) present an elaborated approach with much success in marketing research the so-called "Sinus milieus"¹⁰⁴ (Sociovision, 2009)¹⁰⁵. They identify different socio-culturally defined groups or milieus: "We find ...sub-cultural entities inside of a society that capture people with a similar view of life and way of life" (Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer, 1993: 55; own translation). They point out that there are different milieus within the same socio-economic stratum and some of the milieus reach across different socio-economic strata. The identification of the milieus is based on a set of empirical building blocks that cover basic values and norms, individual orientations in respect of the future, preferences in leisure and communication and everyday life aesthetics. These include demography/social conditions, aim in life, employment/performance, concept of society, family, partnership, gender roles, leisure, communication, everyday life aesthetics, ideals/role and models (Flaig, Meyer and Ueltzhöffer, 1993: 71). The concept assumes that

a society can be described as a particular set of distinctive milieus, which may overlap slightly but describe distinctive social groups. Similar approaches prefer the term lifestyles that highlight performance and practice, whereas milieus combine practices with basis value orientations and concepts of "good life" (Geißler, 2014: 110-118; Müller, 1992; Schulze, 1990).

We have to be aware of the shortcomings of this concept. It is mainly descriptive and uses very general indicators to assign people to a certain milieu ignoring individual differences. In addition it is questionable whether all people can be seen as part of the milieus (Isenböck, 2014; Otte, 2005; Rössel and Otte 2011). Nevertheless, this approach enables us to describe a basic structure of socio-cultural differences. For an application to Kenya the concepts has to be adapted (Neubert and Stoll 2015). For example we added a category "space and places". This refers to questions such as what is home, assigned place of burial, on the importance of rural urban linkages and places of leisure. Also important is the language used at home and with friends and the ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity of social networks. Concerning the values it is important to indicate sources of trust (family, ethnic group, state institutions, the constitution etc.). Based on interview data and participant observation we constructed a set of seven tentative milieus of the Kenyan urban middle stratum¹⁰⁶. We focussed on the urban setting because there the socio-cultural differentiation is easier to detect. And considerable parts of the middle class live in urban centres because there are the job and business opportunities. These milieus presented here should be understood as ideal types and points of reference.

Social climbers are found in lower and middle range positions. Their social network focusses the nuclear family. This may be supplemented by less important often multi-ethnic professional networks. Social climbers have a moderate urban orientation because they see the economic opportunities of the city. They are hard-working and pursue con-

¹⁰⁴ In the international debate the concepts of "milieu" is often related to Bourdieu. However, in his theory as the book on "distinction" shows is class position goes together with cultural difference. The "German" milieu approach(es), that presented here, are based on a concept of social strata and try to capture cultural differences that do not follow class or stratum.

¹⁰⁵ For a general application to the so-called emerging markets of the South, see http://www.sinus-institut.de/uploads/tx_mpdownloadcenter/informationen_2009_01.pdf (Accessed on: 02. April 2015)

¹⁰⁶ The milieu analysis as applied in Europe tries to cover the whole society and it is not restricted to a particular subgroup.

sequently upward mobility also in cases of difficulties and challenges. This includes emphasis on saving and investment in business and education or in a farm (but not always in the rural home area). They have moderate liberal values and they are not involved in political action nor are they political outspoken. Aside from the limited benefits of standard health and pension schemes they rely on the nuclear family and especially self-employed invest privately in (additional) health or pension schemes. They have clear desire for social advancement of the nuclear family

The *stability oriented pragmatics* are associated mainly with lower and middle range positions (we may find also members in upper positions). Their social network is often focused on the family and relatives of the same ethnic group and they have strong links to their home village. The members of this milieu do not have a distinct career orientation. Moderate consumption is more important than investment either in business or education. However, investment in a home, house or flat, is preferable if they have the financial means. They have conservative values and they are not involved in political action nor are they publicly politically outspoken. The extended family is mostly responsible to supplement the limited benefits of standard health and pension schemes of employees. The plans for the future concern the extended family. All in the entire main goal is to stabilize their (often precarious) social position. (see also: Kliemt, in preparation)

Christian religious milieu(s) range from lower to upper positions. Their social network is focussed on the particular church community (mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic depending on the type of church) with links to the rural home. The members of the Christian milieus are career-oriented, believe in saving, and invest in education and business, and sometimes in a farm. They consume in a decent way¹⁰⁷ and they represent conservative values, including traditional gender roles. Alcohol and clubbing are strictly disapproved. In general they are mostly politically invisible. However, with regard to moral is-

ues (such as abortion or homosexuality) they enter the political arena. Depending on the social position social security is pursued by different combinations of standard social security schemes (not available for poorer groups without formal employment), the nuclear family, sometimes including the extended family; those with more financial means may add privately paid health insurance and pensions schemes. However, for all members of Christian milieus the church community plays an important role for the provision of social security. The plans for the future are individual, include the nuclear family and the church community. The main goal is social advancement (see also: Niechoj, 2016).

Muslim religious milieu(s) are situated mostly in middle and upper range positions (at the coast also lower range). Their networks are inside the religious community and are usually mono-ethnic with a strong urban orientation and family networks play an important role, too. They have a moderate career-orientation, moderate consumption (assessed according to their financial means). Alcohol is strictly disapproved clubbing is refused at least by the conservative parts. The Muslim religious milieu(s) are oriented towards saving and investment in education and business. They are conservative with an emphasis on traditional gender roles and they are mostly not involved in political action or political defensive except for small politically outspoken groups. Social security is based on economic investment and the extended family network supplemented by Muslim networks and Muslim welfare institutions (waqf, saktat). Future orientations are concerned with the extended family and include the Muslim community. Social advancement is important.

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

¹⁰⁷ Decency has to be understood in relation to the income. Depending on their income they may acquire valuable consumer goods, quality housing and a car.

tionalism. Investment in the rural home and in land is an important means for social security combined with the extended family and supplemented by ethnic networks. Standard security schemes and private security schemes may be added. In all there is a moderate desire for social advancement.

The *liberal cosmopolitan* milieu is situated in middle and upper range positions. There exists a core of staff, members and constituencies of NGOs and community based organisations. But the milieu reaches beyond this NGO sphere and includes further often well educated people in different socio-professional positions. Their networks are usually multi-ethnic, often with strong professional and/or private links overseas. Most members have an urban orientation but some may still underline the importance of relations to the rural home. Liberal cosmopolitans are career-oriented and keen to invest in education and consume moderately. They pursue liberal cosmopolitan values and they are politically committed related to topics such as human rights, democracy, gender equality, ecology or development. Social security is mainly provided by the combination of standard and privately financed security schemes supplemented by nuclear and extended family. They have a distinct desire for social advancement.

Young professionals (already described by Spronk, 2012) are found in upper range positions and quite small. The majority are young adults. They are very well educated, highly individualized and often singles or if married still childless. Their networks are based on professional relations and are multi-ethnic. They have a distinct urban orientation. They are career-oriented, hard-working and invest in education and business. At the same time they have the means for hedonistic consumption including partying and clubbing. Their values are individualist, liberal, with an urban orientation and they support gender equality. They are not politically active nor publicly politically outspoken. They invest in social security in addition to standard health and pension schemes. Their plans for the future are individualistic or include the spouse. Economic advancement is the ultimate goal. However, it seems that members of this milieu start a family

with children and move to other milieus.¹⁰⁸ This milieu is comparable to the "black diamonds" in South Africa (Oliver, 2007).

This first overview shows not only the socio-cultural diversity, but points at the fact that only a few milieus are politically committed or even involved in political action. The politically interested milieus represent different and even conflicting political positions, attitudes and values. This finding relates to the absence of a general middle-class consciousness. Without quantitative data, nothing can be said about the size and the detailed socio-economic positioning of these groups in Kenyan society. Therefore this tentative analysis gives only a first impression of the socio-cultural diversity of the Kenyan middle-income stratum.

We have strong hints that most of the milieus may be found also in rural settings. Exceptions are the young professionals and the Muslim religious milieu. Muslims live historically in towns and the young professionals and the young professionals constitute definite urban milieu that needs bars and clubs as place of their consumptive performance and of course the business opportunities. Social climbers may usually pursue their strife for social advancement in towns or urban centres but some may live at the country-side as well. The socio-cultural difference is also relevant in the lower and upper income strata in Kenya. However, some milieus need a certain income to enjoy a particular way of life (young professionals) and therefore cannot be found in the lower strata. But we have to be aware that a considerable part of the currently existing middle class successfully climbed up the social ladder from lower strata. There are reasons to assume that socio-cultural differences exist also in the upper strata. Some leaders of the human rights movement belong to the upper stratum also as leader of ethnic movements and church communities. They might be members of the equivalent milieus (liberal cosmopolitan, neo-traditional, Christian, Muslim). However there might be also a kind of upper class elite milieu meeting in distinguished social clubs (Connan, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Because of the small number of young professional we would need biographical data to know in which milieus they move that is not available.

Our analysis of the Kenyan middle stratum milieu differs in two very basic features from the original Sinus concept. Firstly the Sinus concept claims to classify nearly the whole population in milieus that overlap only slightly. Based on our qualitative data we can identify a certain number of people who seem to represent these milieus. Many more live a life that is close to these ideal types without fitting completely into such a rigid frame. Therefore we describe "milieu cores" that give an orientation for the patterns of socio-cultural diversity without constructing rigid boxes of distinct milieus.

Secondly the Sinus milieus are structured in a two-dimensional system. One dimension orders the basic values according to a scale between tradition, modernisation/ individualisation and reorientation. The other dimension displays simply the income structured into lower, middle and higher income. According to our data, income plays a role in Kenya, especially for "young urban professionals", and we can identify differences according to the tradition, modernisation/individualisation and reorientation scale. However, these two criteria are not sufficient to define the differences between the milieu cores. There are milieus that rely on tradition, religious milieus and the neo-traditional milieu. But they differ in respect of important characteristics. Ethnic identity and a political commitment to strengthening the home region are typical of the neo-traditionalist milieu, but these features do not have the same importance in the religious milieus where communities are often multi-ethnic. The neo-traditionalist milieu shares with the religious milieus a conservative understanding of gender roles, but they differ radically in their attitude towards alcohol and leisure activities such as partying or clubbing. Therefore it is hardly possible to qualify one of the milieus as "more traditional" or "more modern" as the other. They refer to different conservative or "traditional" values. Young urban professionals have the same liberal attitude towards gender roles and the same cosmopolitan outlook as large parts of the liberal cosmopolitan milieu but they differ significantly in their political commitment. A simple depiction of the Kenyan milieus in a two-dimensional figure that presents these socio-cultural differences on one axis and socio-economic differences on the other

is not possible. Nevertheless, the milieu cores can help to structure the socio-cultural diversity of the Kenyan middle income stratum.

The World Value Survey combines two scales to capture socio-cultural diversity: one shows values ranging from traditional to secular-rational, and the ranges from survival to well-being to self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). This might be more adequate but still there are doubts whether it is feasible to restrict the Kenyan diversity to these two scales.

Outlook

The milieu concept is helpful to capture socio-cultural diversity inside and across social positions and it shows the socio-cultural differentiation of the middle income stratum. However, it is not the answer to all limitations of conventional class concepts. The "middle class debate" and the shortcomings and limitations of conventional notion of class point at conceptual challenges for an accurate and appropriate analysis of social structure in Africa and probably in other parts of the Global South and Global North, too. We have to consider two sets of challenges. At the level of the description of social positions income is much too imprecise. As we have seen it makes a difference whether somebody has to fulfill social obligations for the support of relatives and spends a considerable part of his or her income for this purpose or whether somebody with the same income receives support from wealthier relatives. In addition, these transfers are often not regularly but occur only in cases of need. Therefore, they are hard to include into conventional statistics. In a similar way access to health insurance, pension schemes or unemployment benefits and of course the amount of the benefits makes a difference. This potential income or support either as formalized claims or informal claims based on kinship or other social relations may be understood as kind of "entitlements" (Sen, 1981). They make a difference when it comes to ensure stability in case of threats and in old age. These differences are not only important inside a country but also for the comparison between countries. Especially for cross-country studies the general provision

of social infrastructure makes a difference, too, for instance high costs for health services or education compared to free services or comprehensive insurance schemes.

Another important challenge for description is the special characteristic of statistical “one shot” data sets. They work well under condition of a relative stability of the social structure or in cases when large societal groups move synchronically up or down due to processes of social change. However, in Kenya we observe parallel processes of individual up- and downward mobility due to the instability of social positions. The growing size of the middle income stratum shows only a balance that includes dynamic up- and downward mobility. This “positional fluidity” is a characteristic of the Kenyan society (and other dynamic societies). The simple one-shot data sets cannot capture this specific dynamic. Social structure analysis was developed for relatively stable societies we need analysis of dynamic societies.

Another set of even more fundamental challenges refers to the question how social positions are distributed. The conventional class analysis points at means of production or socio- professional positions. As we have shown this does not apply to Kenya. Whereas for the better description some possible answers are given, the question of social-positioning has not been answered sufficiently. This includes two sub-questions. First, what makes upward mobility possible? The main factor discussed is education. But when we consider the large number of educated unemployed education may be a kind of “entrance ticket” into the competition but not more. The access to jobs in Kenya is still a mixture between meritocratic, patronage and networks elements. In addition entitlements play an important role. Wealthy relatives, a supportive local community or a church community offering school and university scholarships are a typical element for upward mobility. But how this plays together has still to be researched.¹⁰⁹

The second sub-question points at the strategies to stabilize the social position. We observe that parents in the middle income stratum invest in good education of their children e.g. in high quality private schools. If possible they will support their children in building up a business of find high quality jobs. And again entitlements and social networks are important. With a better-off family background young adults have the chance to look for better jobs and, they have access to support in case of threats. There are families in Kenya that managed to keep their socio-economic position since the establishment of the middle income stratum in colonial times. Some of them are now part and parcel of the upper class, like the Kenyatta or the Moi families. Others are across different generations members of the middle income stratum. With the current growth of the middle income stratum more families will manage to keep their middle position over generations. As result the cross strata family relations might get weaker. A new generation of city dwellers seems to emerge especially in Nairobi. In this group the use of local languages declines and in some families only the Swahili and English, the Kenyan lingua francae, are used. This is a strong indicator for weakening of rural ties and we find a still small but assumingly rising tendency to choose the Nairobi graveyard instead of the (virtual) rural home at a place of burial (Bechtle, 2014). If this tendency lasts this group may constitute the core of a new urban class. The consequence may be the formation of an urban lower and an urban upper middle class in a more strict sense of the class concept. These are first signs of a middle class in the making. An intensification this process Kenya may create a more clear-cut division of classes similar to South Africa. Whether this new classes develop particular class consciousness remains to be seen. But this potential new class is not identical with the middle income stratum. It arises out of the upper part of the middle income stratum because there the chances to cope with threats are much better. The more also the (close) relatives are in a similar position the better are chances to stabilize the socio-economic position. This potential class reminds at Birdsall’s term of the “real”, income secure middle classes (Birdsall, 2015) and at the definition of middle class by Thurlow, Resnick and Ubogu

¹⁰⁹ An interesting example is the study of Julia Boger (Boger, 2014). She describes the different ways how graduates who finished MA studies in Germany gained access to the job-market when they returned to Cameroon and Ghana.

(2015: 589). But it is not only the specific dwelling, secondary education and secure skilled non-farm employment what makes the difference but at least also the composition of entitlements and obligations. Especially, this line of thought is still under-researched.

The critique of the class concept presented here is based on data drawn from Kenya. Is Kenya exceptional or do we find similar processes and social structures in other African countries, too? The combined modes of production have been found in many countries of the Global South and especially the importance of rural-urban ties seems not to be only a Kenyan phenomenon. Investment in rural land can be found at least in many African countries. The same holds true for the importance of entitlements and the dynamic of up- downward mobility. Erdmute Alber's studies in Benin that were part of the project "middle classes on rise" showed a number of similarities and the so called "Youth associations" in Ghana show the commitment of successful urban dwellers to their rural home (Lentz, 1999). But it would be too simple to ignore the differences between different African countries. For instance South Africa has a long existing urban population and a stable structure of unequal social position marked by race and socio-professional differences. In South Africa clear elements of class structure can be found (Southall, 2016). But we should not make the mistake transfer concepts that work for South Africa without solid empirical evidence to other African countries. We simply cannot bypass the need for empirical studies.

Whether the findings on Kenya apply also for other regions of the world is even more difficult to say. The little I know about Latin America and the debate on social structures the situation differs from Africa. Debates on class are much more prominent and there are good reasons for this. In countries like Brazil or Argentina there are or at least have been for long "classes" in the strict sociological sense including a large working class, and the rural-urban linkages we find in large part of Africa seem to be mostly absent. You might know better whether the migration patterns of the indigenous groups might have similarities with Africa with respect to role of the home region. Ethnic differences are most-

ly of importance for so called "minorities" that are or at least have been under pressure by the ruling groups. However, there has been a successful attempt to analyze different milieus in Brazil (Stoll, 2012). But in this case milieus with their particular habitus coincided mainly with class and could be captured with a Bourdieu approach. These milieus were of course different than those identified in Kenya. And even if we may identify different milieus across strata and in the same stratum they might differ considerably. The milieu concept does not imply a certain set of milieus but offers an approach to structure socio-cultural difference according to the specific empirical findings.

What we may learn from this case is to ask the right questions. Do we find in a particular country classes in the classical sense marked by control of means of production and/or socio-professional positions that share a potential common political consciousness? Is it possible to differentiate between people that make their living out of particular modes of production or do people combine modes of production? Especially are urban and rural sources of income combined? Do members of the same family belong to the same "Class" or the same stratum? How stable is the socioeconomic position during the life-course and across generations? Which entitlements are available for whom to cope with risks? Does the social position determine or at least clearly influence basic values and visions of a "good life" or of a good society"? Are social networks usually homogenous with regard to social strata and or class? Based on question like this it is possible to scrutinize the application of class concepts and find a starting point for an analysis that includes socio-cultural difference.

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