This book offers a well-written, engaging study of the emergence of a middle class in a post-socialist African state, Mozambique, that gained its independence in 1975 after a protracted liberation struggle led by the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo). The author examines how his interlocutors – with whom he has interacted for more than a decade since the early 2000s – have negotiated and evaluate 'their transition from revolutionaries to members of the urban middle class' (p. 1). While recent studies of middle classes in the global South have often focused (too) exclusively on modes of consumption and new lifestyles, this book firmly places its middle-class story in a much broader historical narrative. The author shows how, paradoxically, the 'socialist, egalitarian revolution' of the 1970s soon developed into 'an elitist project of social engineering' (p. 7) that offered unprecedented avenues of upward social mobility to loyal party members. Economic and political liberalization since the 1990s, in turn, presented new opportunities for self-enrichment while the former ideological foundations crumbled. The official discourse now centred on the necessity to create a 'national bourgeoisie' (p. 97). But instead of promoting the development of an economically and politically autonomous middle class, government policies only transformed and refined older forms of political clientelism. The middle class remained 'a politically dependent category with little control over resources or the means of production in an economy that is largely dependent on access to the state' (p. 10). There is also a generational dimension to this rather sombre middle-class story: the windows of opportunity closed – the post-independence expansion of education and the post-1992 boom of privatization of housing – and many members of the younger generation will not be able to reproduce their middle-class parents' social status. In any case, Sumich's interlocutors were highly critical of state officials' corruption and deplored the fiasco of Frelimo's original socialist project, but retained their party membership because it continues to give privileged access to jobs and resources.

For a West Africanist like myself, this book offered a brilliant introduction to the contemporary history of Mozambique, with a special focus on discourses on citizenship and nationhood. I was particularly fascinated by Sumich's analysis of the continuities of privilege and its changing ideological underpinnings: from the high modernism and urbanism of Portuguese-educated '*assimilados*' to the Frelimo vanguard's philosophy of 'the new man' to the meritocratic ideals of middle-class subjects in a liberal democratic system that defines citizenship increasingly in racialized terms (rather than categories of political loyalty as before). Sumich's focus on the emergence and transformation of class boundaries provides a most productive perspective on these historical developments. Analyses of the historical middle classes' boundary work in Europe have shown that the intensity of the politics of distinction can shift over time – for instance, from an early emphasis on the upper middle classes' distance from aristocratic circles to a later stress on the symbolic boundaries vis-à-vis the lower classes (for a summary, see Kocka's 'The middle classes in Europe' in *The European Way: European societies in the 19th and 20th centuries*, edited by H. Kaelble (Berghahn Books, 2004)). In the Mozambican case, if I understand Sumich correctly, it was only from the 1990s that an earlier two-class system – of privileged urbanized party cadres versus rural (and urban) masses – developed into a three-class structure of sorts, with an enormously wealthy political elite at the top (created through access to mineral wealth), most of the population struggling for survival at the bottom, and a besieged middle class in between. In the post-independence period, the proto-middle class's major concern seems to have been to legitimate their privilege vis-à-vis the broader masses. Since the 1990s, by contrast, the fraught middle class's emphasis shifted to erect firm moral boundaries vis-à-vis the outrageously rich elite.

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I would have liked to learn more about this boundary between elite and middle class, and its economic and political as well as symbolic dimensions. Can individuals or families cross the line and move upward or downward? What about class endogamy, which Sumich mentions for the middle class, at the top level? If access to wealth is dependent on political connections, someone falling out of political favour would lose his or her standing – or does the amassed wealth allow for continued privilege? To what extent is the rigid boundary between top and middle a fieldwork artefact? Given the socially dominant discourse against corruption and political favouritism, it may be hard to find someone openly admitting membership in the elite. Or is the top group indeed closed so that even the well-connected researcher has no access?

These questions bring me to a final observation regarding the book's structure. The overall narrative is organized along the chronology of political (and economic) history. Throughout, Sumich skilfully interweaves the big story with ethnographic vignettes from his participant observation and excerpts from his many interviews. However, there is a price to be paid for the coherence of the overall argument: the dynamics and vagaries of individual biographies receive less attention. I hope that Sumich will eventually present us with a second book that places the lives and stories of his Mozambican middle-class interlocutors at the centre – a book that will form a fascinating counterpart to this convincing analysis of the larger story of an African post-socialist society.

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Response by the author

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the three reviewers for their generous and stimulating comments concerning *The Middle Class in Mozambique*. Due to strict space constraints, I cannot give each review the attention it deserves, but rather I will discuss what I feel to be a few major issues.

A shared concern among the reviewers was whether my interlocutors are really a 'middle class' or an elite, and what is the nature of both internal (within the middle class) and external stratification. These are intricate questions and I tried to provide a sketch of the social complexity and almost paradoxical nature of the continuous process of boundary-making in my book. In Mozambique, as with other places, systems of stratification can appear as stagnant, as the same families appear again and again over time, and as precarious, as levels of privilege wax and wane. As a different faction seizes power, beneficiaries of the old regime can find themselves muscled aside by newly favoured, hungrier rivals. One can rise, then fall, then rise again. In this shifting terrain it can be very difficult to draw a firm boundary between what could be termed the uppermost reaches of a middle class and the bottom rungs of an elite, or internally between those on the way up and those on the way down. My goal was not to try to map a category of 'middle-classness' as an empirical reality, especially as it is debatable how beneficial the concept of a middle class is as an analytical category. However, it can be very meaningful as a folk concept. My interlocutors generally saw themselves as occupying some sort of middle in their social world. To varying degrees they felt subject to, or hostages of, the whims of a 'they' who occupy the summit of society and the