

Global histories

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journal

Review: The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire Edited -- By Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.)
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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2021.376>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 7, No. 1 (May 2021), pp. 170-174.
ISSN: 2366-780X

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Publisher information:

'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

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The Global Bourgeoisie, The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire. By Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Hardcover: \$99.95, Pp. 396, ISBN 9780691195834.

Review by

SIMONE STEADMAN-GANTOUS

Ever since the New Social History of the 1960s brought the study of the working class to the fore, historians have devoted ample time to examining the cultural and social mores of the global “lower” classes. But does the middle class have a similarly global history? This is the claim that editors Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel make in *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise and Fall of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*. Through a collection of essays whose histories span the globe, this work positions itself as the first truly global history of the rise of the middle class during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Using the methodology of “Global Social History,” the writers endeavor to “reemphasize the importance of class and social stratification in global history.”¹ This work, therefore, takes a comparative approach to examining the emergence of middle classes across the globe, as well as the influences, entanglements, and networks through which they were connected.²

In their introduction, the editors suggest that the modern period “saw transformations of class hierarchies across the globe that

were remarkably similar.”³ Forged in a period of increasing globalization, the middle class grew within and between national boundaries, often sharing the same values and lifestyles. The authors refute past theories that traditional bourgeois ideals spread from Europe to the rest of the world. Rather, the emergence of the middle class in every continent was closely tied to the rapid socioeconomic change of the nineteenth century, characterized by the formation of new transnational and trans-imperial structures. Working with a variety of sources, including state records, legal proceedings, newspapers, and cookbooks, the authors in this collection are able to make a convincing argument for the emergence of comparable middle classes across diverse locales.

The book’s fifteen essays are grouped into four categories: state and class, colonialism and class, capitalism and class, religion and the betterment of the world, failures and fringes, and global social history. Each author defines the middle class differently, although a few key features are made clear. The middle class shared “particular forms of sociability and associational life, taking place in coffeehouses, social clubs, and cultural organizations.”⁴ Their values included “the control of emotions, the veneration of education and individual achievement, the development of an individual personality and pursuit

1 Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel, “Worlds of the Bourgeoisie,” in *The Global Bourgeoisie, The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 6.

2 Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, 12.

3 Ibid, 4.

4 Ibid, 9.

of self-perfection, a particular work ethic, a belief in progress, and a distinct understanding of science, politics, and religion.”⁵ In the private sphere, the middle class had “distinct forms of domesticity, family relations, and gender roles.”⁶ While none of these features were universal, the authors argue that there existed quite a significant similarity in the lifestyles, sociability, and aspirations of the global middle class.

The collection dates the emergence of the global middle class as ranging from between the 1850s to 1950s. The authors write that this was a time when global development intensified, arguing that by the 1880s, “clusters of bourgeois classes could be found in the densely populated parts of every continent, and by the 1920s, they had matured almost everywhere.”⁷ Although most of the narratives presented end with the decline of European imperialism following World War II, others feature more general overviews that extend into the period of decolonization.

The first three sections of the book illuminate the ways in which the linked processes of state formation, colonization, and capitalism shaped and were shaped by the emerging bourgeoisie. A strength of this work is that each author strives to explain both the global and local context for the success of specific groups. For example, Marcus Gräser discusses

the rise of the middle class in the United States, where the lack of a centralized government and traditional aristocracy meant that it was the American bourgeoisie who created the first charitable and cultural institutions. Others demonstrated how the bourgeoisie born out of colonial processes often “merged European middle class culture with their own distinct forms of colonial middle-class culture.”⁸ Emma Hunter’s chapter discusses the way in which the economically-marginalized East African colonial middle class asserted themselves as part of a global bourgeoisie, through appealing to shared middle class values and lifestyles. Colonialism and empire also had a profound effect on the middle class living in the metropole, whose lives were intertwined with European imperialism and expansion into global markets.

It was the need for ever-expanding markets that drove the emergence of the economic bourgeoisie—characterized by their ownership over the modes of production—to create global linkages of finance, trade, and industry. The role of local middle class actors who brokered and facilitated larger capitalist networks is explored by Kris Manjapra in chapter 9. Manjapra outlines the emergence of a “global regime of imperial capitalism,”⁹

5 Ibid, 10.

6 Ibid, 11.

7 Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, 11.

8 Ibid, 25.

9 Kris Manjapra, “The Semi peripheral Hand: Middle Class Service Professionals of Imperial Capitalism,”

and with it, a highly mobile class of service providers. This mobile bourgeoisie facilitated the expansion of capitalist regimes of knowledge, information, and control into previously unknown frontiers. The authors in these chapters show how incredibly connected the growth of a global middle class was to the advent of colonialism and imperial capitalism.

The fourth section covers the role of religion and the “betterment of the world” in the formation of middle class identities. The authors contend that religion made up a central component of the middle class worldview. This was especially true in the case of charity, as middle classes across the globe tended to use membership in philanthropic clubs, salons, and organizations to help construct their own identities, values, and respectability in the public sphere. In chapter 10, Adam Mestyan discusses the Muslim bourgeoisie in the late Ottoman empire, who used charities and philanthropic institutions to create new avenues for class sociability. Similarly, in chapter 12, Christof Dejung writes about the European and non-European bourgeoisie’s push to establish philanthropic organizations that would conduct civilizing missions across Empire. Based on a fear of social degeneration among the colonies and underclasses, these forms of philanthropy were influenced by a belief in “social action as a fundamental marker of Christian

in Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, *The Global Bourgeoisie*, 184.

lay religious practice and middle class identity.”¹⁰ These chapters therefore show how the middle class used religion to fashion themselves as a group, and to relate to the rapidly globalizing world around them.

The next section, entitled “Failures and Fringes”, is comprised of cases in which the formation of a successful middle class reputedly failed. In these locations, “the claim of European and North American middle classes to be the epitome of modernity led to a sense of deficiency among the emerging middle classes.”¹¹ In chapters 13 and 14, the authors David S. Parker and Alison K. Smith use the case studies of South America and Russia to reassess this narrative and other global myths surrounding the bourgeoisie. The absences and discontinuities in this section make clear the ineffectuality of attempting to evaluate all class formations against their counterparts in Europe and North America.

The central thesis of the book is fleshed out in greater detail in the final chapter, written by Richard Drayton. Drayton argues that the history of the middle class should be studied through “connective”

10 Christof Dejung, “From Global Civilizing Missions to Racial Warfare: Class Conflicts and the Representation of the Colonial World in European Middle Class Thought,” in Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, *The Global Bourgeoisie*, 257.

11 Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, 33.

rather than comparative history. He constructs the emergence of a global middle class as part and parcel of globalization, and the violent integration of worldwide markets under a Western capitalist hegemony. These processes required the formation of a new class of mediators, thus creating a global middle class. It was in this process of “integration, standardization, and simplification that race, class, and culture became [...] critical axes of status identity and group dynamics in international society.”¹² The question for global historians of the middle class lies in how social differentiation was transformed globally, without assuming that the European middle class was impervious to outside influences.

The goals of this collection are relatively ambitious, which can work to its detriment. While claiming to create a global history that makes room for local specificities, the general overview provided by many of the chapters are necessarily lacking in detail. Furthermore, most of the authors spend a considerable amount of space discussing what exactly constitutes the middle class, which can become repetitive. However, this work serves as an excellent jumping-off point for this new field in global social history.

When viewed as the start of a new realm of historiography, *The Global Bourgeoisie* makes a convincing case for the interconnected and transnational nature of the rise of the middle class across time and space.

The Global Bourgeoisie puts forth a clear framework for the future study of the global rise of the middle class. By arguing for a comparative as well as connective historical survey of the middle class, this work challenges the prevailing notions of bourgeois modernity as emanating solely from Europe. Presenting narratives from around the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe, each author is able to expertly decenter the history of the bourgeoisie during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether they were known as *compradors*, *porteños*, or *effendi*, after reading this work there can no doubt that the rise of the middle class was indeed global.

12 Richard Drayton, “Race, Culture and Class: European Hegemony and Global Class Formation, circa 1800-1950,” in Dejung, Motadel and Osterhammel, *The Global Bourgeoisie*, 345.