

Book Review: The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Class in the Age of Empire by Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel

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Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds. *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Class in the Age of Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. xv + 375 pp. Hardcover, \$99.95.

Two decades have now passed since Dipesh Chakrabarty made his famous call to "provincialize Europe," that is, to de-universalize the concepts from European societies that have been used to define and justify Western dominance. His perspective has proved highly influential in promoting critical reflection across social science disciplines and bringing to the fore a richer understanding of world societies. More recently, scholars have returned to these concepts, considering them anew through a global rather than universal lens and recognizing the ways in which they have been imposed, but also adopted and transformed within the context of globalization. Indeed, this is the approach taken by the team behind the *The Global Bourgeoisie*, a remarkable anthology edited by historians Christof Dejung and David Motadel. They are joined by Jürgen Osterhammel, a pioneer in the field whose magisterial work on the global nineteenth century looms large over the present work. The premise that unites the chapters in this volume is that the bourgeoisie, understood in the broadest sense as a modern elite, a "middle class" in the provincial parlance of Europe, is a social phenomenon that transcended the bounds of Europe and stretched across the world in the ages of capital and empire. As the editors explain, "One of the most striking features of the nineteenth century was the rise of similar groups around the world" (p. 2). This idea builds implicitly on Chakrabarty by showing that the bourgeoisie as a social stratum may have its origins in Europe, but it played a seminal role in the transformation of societies elsewhere. The contributors offer case studies that come together to form "the first truly global survey of the history of the bourgeoisie" (p. 3), with the goal of establishing "a new trajectory for global historical research by helping define the field of global social history" (p. 6). Even if one may question how thoroughly they succeed in their overarching ambition, their

collective efforts to define and assess the emergence and development of a bourgeois elite certainly creates a viable model for future global social historical research and stands on its own as an impressive scholarly achievement.

Following an introduction laying out the conceptual plan and historiographical stakes of the project, the book proceeds with fourteen case studies that illuminate the roles of the state, colonialism, capitalism, and religion in the construction and transformation of bourgeois class groups around the world in the nineteenth century. The book is remarkably well constructed. The chapters provide a wide range of examples, including cases from the Middle East, East Africa, South Asia, Japan, and the Caribbean. This expansiveness even stretches into a critical fifth thematic section on "failures and fringes," considering the problematic cases where a notable bourgeois segment allegedly failed to materialize during the period under study, such as in China, Latin America, and Russia. A few chapters also consider the global aspects of the middle class in Western contexts, as in Marcus Graser's essay, where he queries the problems of integrity and fragmentation within the mythologized "great middle class" of the United States. The impressive breadth of the chapters is matched by a sense of analytical depth stressing the connections among global bourgeois elites and comparisons of the characteristics, behaviors, and visions that cut across national cases. Among these are patterns of consumption and matters of taste, which in some instances provide a roadmap for emulating the ways of European elites, but in others, as Utsa Ray observes in her study of cooking among Bengali families, create opportunities for new hybridized forms and a measure of "self-fashioning" (p. 133). In this way, the authors create an image of the global bourgeoisie as a pastiche, shaped by common processes but manifesting across the globe with unique, regional characteristics. Several chapters, such as Janet Hunter's consideration of pre-Meiji elites in Japan and Adam Mestyan's study of Islamic philanthropy in

the Ottoman Empire, show how unmistakably new elite groups bore the stamp of long-standing traditional social structures and cultural practices. Others explore the spatial dynamics of global social formation, as in David Motadel's chapter on Germany, where an Islamic middle class defined itself within the intercultural milieu of imperial Berlin, or in Emma Hunter's chapter on East Africa, where print culture aided new elites who were actively "inserting themselves into an imagined global bourgeois culture" (p. 118).

The book concludes with a brilliant retrospective chapter from Richard Drayton that ties together the threads of class formation, along with their myriad intersections with gender, nation, and race, and then places them firmly into the powerful nexus of imperialism and capitalism which dominated this era. Drayton leaves us with an impression of a global bourgeoisie that harvested the rewards of the very modernity that ensnared it. He freely acknowledges his debt to the work of Max Weber, even as he updates the old notion of Weber's iron cage with a nuanced assessment of the paradoxical choices that faced new elites living in the shadow of European hegemony. "Globalization," he writes, "required mediators or all kinds and created the middle classes *an sich*, creating a space of social predicament and opportunity across a number of societies." However, he adds, "European hegemony compelled these people in the middle to negotiate their value in the international bourse of honor, creating the global middle classes *für sich*" (pp. 347-8). Within this space, such categories of difference as race and ethnicity enabled but also complicated the integrative power of the global bourgeoisie, bringing them together into "subtle hybrid hierarchical regimes of status" (p. 354). With this observation, Drayton adds the final piece of an analytical framework that for the moment resolves the conceptual difficulties of this "survey" and marks the pathways for new research to follow. Make no mistake, the path is wide indeed, extending to a

rich horizon of research questions that will draw scholars from across the social sciences, which is why all social scientists should take notice of this work.

Reading *The Global Bourgeoisie* affirms the view that global history as a subfield has matured remarkably over the last three decades. The old challenges of breadth and diversity that formerly gave historians pause and kept them locked in the well-worn habits of nation-state historiography seem to have been overcome not only by methodological innovation and a growing body of work, but also by the successful community-building efforts among academics. This book would never have been possible without the close cooperation of so many dedicated scholars, who lent their expertise and training to the pursuit of large, time-intensive, aggregated projects. Its success stands as a reminder that institutions and funding agencies would be well served to support and recognize such collaborative work.

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