

Christof Dejung, David Motadel, Jurgen Osterhammel (eds.), *The Global Bourgeoisie, the Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2020.

The middle classes are generally seen as the core of the capitalistic social order. The articles collected by Dejung, Motadel and Osterhammel show the existence of a “red thread” linking all bourgeois structures worldwide. The volume presents a global social history of a class that has mainly been studied within isolated national contexts. In the first chapter the editors make it clear that the book explores the emergence of the middle classes in the context of transnational and imperial connections. The comparison finds common ground in the social identification of the middle classes, beyond national particularities. This makes it possible to determine the real nature of the bourgeois ideology and *modus operandi* globally.

While there are some problems in using European terms as structural categories to study non-European societies, all the middle classes are connected with the capitalistic social order. The middle class, that is, became the connecting link of the international capitalistic social order. However, “the formation of the middle classes around the world was the result of the global spread of European bourgeois cultural standards and lifestyles among economically and socially independent groups.” The European middle class was the product and not, as the editors emphasize, the generator of the process of global change. The formation of the European bourgeoisie was a response to external and internal stimuli and benefitted from exchanges of goods and ideas. The interaction among members of the middle class worldwide allowed the integration of Africa, Asia and Latin America into the world economy. This phenomenon might not have been possible without the assistance of local businessmen. “The cooperation between Western and non-Western businessmen was facilitated by similar business practices and a similar mercantile culture, which is why they can be described as joint members of a globally connected bourgeoisie.”

The rise of the bourgeoisie subverted the pre-existing social order of the *ancien régime*. The European bourgeoisie secured its power following the revolutions of 1848, and in the decades that ensued the middle class was transformed from a revolutionary into a conservative force. Generally, the bourgeois forces sought to retain political power against the emerging progressive forces of the proletarian working class. Outside Europe, the bourgeoisie did not attain power until after the turn of the twentieth century. The historical process differed considerably between states and continents, however. For instance, in Europe, most notably in Germany, Britain and Austria-Hungary, the middle classes collaborated to share power with the aristocracy; in the overseas territories, the local middle class shared power with the colonial state. In France the bourgeoisie's relationship with the aristocracy was more conflict-ridden. And outside Europe the state played an important role in the formation of the middle classes.

In any case, the middle classes worldwide shared the values and principles of individual freedom and political participation within the framework of capitalistic social relations. Capitalism was the fulcrum of global interaction between the national middle classes and what forged them into a worldwide force. Members of the middle classes created international networks based on business interests and knowledge. However, the relationships were not always on an equal footing. European imperial expansionism overshadowed local middle classes. In the occupied territories or occupation-free regions such as the Ottoman Empire, only high finance and the top merchant and professional bourgeoisie were able to retain their privileges.

In short, the emergence of capitalism is bound up with the that of the middle classes. This conclusion is what brings together all the articles collected in the volume. This well-conceived work is a must-read for students interested in the global history of the bourgeoisie and its relationship with the emergence of modern capitalism worldwide.

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