

The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Class in the Age of Empire

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In August 2015 a truly global array of scholars gathered at the University of Cambridge to discuss the emergence of the global bourgeoisie in the long 19th century. Supported by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Economic History Society, the German History Society, the Leibnizpreis programme 'Global Processes' of the German Research Foundation, and the Smuts Memorial Fund of the University of Cambridge, the conference brought together historians working on different regions ranging from East and Southeast Asia, Russia, the Middle East and Europe to Africa and the Americas. They discussed the question what similarities and differences there existed amongst different „middle classes“ and „bourgeois cultures“ that emerged across the globe in the long 19th century and to what extent connections, interactions and interdependencies between these social groups contributed to the rise of a truly global bourgeoisie.

In his introductory remarks, DAVID MOTADEL (Cambridge/Edinburgh) highlighted the aim of the conference to look at the global rise of a new middle class in the age of empire and stressed the need to both engage in global comparisons and examine global connections. CHRISTOF DEJUNG (Cambridge/Konstanz) then explained that the rise of different „middle classes“ in the 19th century can be an important new approach towards a global social history. Dejung also pointed out that despite its breadth, the conference programme did not cover certain aspects (such as gender roles in the formation of middle classes) or regions. At the same time, he stressed that the conference did not aim to provide an all embracing conclusion, but ra-

ther understands itself as a first step towards a study of the global bourgeoisie.

The first panel dealt with the connections between class and politics. HOUCANG CHEHABI (Boston) discussed the rise of the middle class in Iran. He described how starting in the 19th century and reinforced by the Europeanisation propagated by the state after 1925, a dual society with two middle classes emerged in Iran, with one middle class remaining critical of the West and the other aspiring to Western lifestyles. Next, ADAM MESTYAN (Cambridge, MA) explored the important role religion played in the formation of Arab middle class culture in the Ottoman empire. Using charitable organisations as an example, he argued that in contrast to Western secular modernity, the rise of various Arab middle classes was based on a distinct religious modernity that stressed solidarity among the people, and not participation in state affairs. MURAT SIVILOGLU's (Istanbul) paper focused on the relationship between the Ottoman state and the emergence of an Ottoman middle class. Siviloglu explained that traditionally the Ottoman state viewed the bourgeoisie as a danger to the state and suppressed it. While a commercial class did nevertheless exist, the intelligentsia did not show any interest in merging with them. In the final presentation of the panel, CHRISTOF DEJUNG examined the emergence of the European middle classes during the 19th century from a global and postcolonial perspective. Dejung explained how both the missionary movement of the 19th century and European reactionaries in the early 20th century constantly compared the metropolitan underclass to colonial subjects abroad and related domestic socio-political conditions with processes on the periphery to deal with the rapid transformation of the world in the age of empire.

The first day of the conference ended with the keynote lecture by RICHARD DRAYTON (London). Drayton argued that the period of European hegemony and global integration and linkage from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century produced mediating groups around the world, be they called *Bürgertum*, bourgeoisie or middle class. He explained that in so far as we can think of a global bourgeoisie, its members recognised themselves according

to race, class and culture, which became the critical axes for status identity in an international society dominated by Europe.

The second day started with a comment by JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL (Konstanz) on the discussions of the first day and the keynote lecture. Osterhammel emphasised the need to differentiate historical analysis of the global bourgeoisie from present day views of the middle class as the harbinger of civil society. From this follows that historians need to critically think about how to define what the global bourgeoisie means and how a history of the global bourgeoisie can be written that is not simply anecdotal. Osterhammel suggested that historians should in their analysis focus on processes of group formation, the function of middle elements in society as mediators of circulations, and patterns of inclusion, exclusion and recognition of global middle class status.

The second panel on the subject of class and capitalism started with a presentation by JANET HUNTER (London) on the rise of the Japanese middle class in the long 19th century. While Hunter argued that by the interwar period a new middle class had indeed emerged, especially defined by new patterns of consumption and occupation, she also stressed that this new social group grew out of and remained connected to an older group of commercial elites, lower officials, skilled artisans, scholars and wealthy farmers. In the next paper REBECCA KARL (New York) discussed how Chinese Marxist thinker Wang Yanan in his writings connected the Chinese bourgeoisie to the broader evolution of a global comprador formation. Karl explained that Wang saw the Chinese comprador bourgeoisie not as a Chinese but as part of a global class structure, which facilitates processes of primitive accumulation in the global capitalist economy. CHAMBI CHACHAGE (Cambridge, MA) looked at the connection between alcohol and class formation in colonial Tanzania. He described how colonial legislation banned Africans from producing, distributing or consuming European liquor. As a consequence, towards the end of the colonial period and after the lifting of this prohibition wealthy Africans used European liquor as a symbol of status to distinguish themselves as

a new economic elite. SVEN BECKERT (Cambridge, MA) charted the global entanglements of the American bourgeoisie from an economic, social, cultural and ideological perspective. Beckert showed that the American bourgeoisie developed partly an understanding of itself as a transnational social class. He stressed that bourgeois class formation should be understood as a global project, while also emphasising that these transnational entanglements always developed in close connection to the nation state.

The third panel on class and colonialism was opened by TITHI BHATTACHARYA (West Lafayette, IN), who explored the role of the Indian middle class in the construction of the nation as an aspiration and in the rise of the nation state as a political project. She delivered a critique of previous studies of multiple modernities, arguing that different articulations of modernity should not be seen as alternative forms of European modernity, but as part of a singular ongoing project of universal human emancipation. EMMA HUNTER (Edinburgh) then returned to East Africa and discussed how newspapers and print media contributed to the rhetoric construction of an East African middle class. Hunter stressed that the social groups she discussed did not use the term „middle class“ to refer to themselves and did not possess the wealth, political rights or transnational social connections of middle classes in Europe or America. However, print media still allowed them to transcend the colonial reality and imagine themselves as part of a global collective striving for progress. BERNHARD C. SCHÄR (Zürich) used the „nature-nurture controversy“ between Swiss botanist Alphonse de Candolle and British polymath Francis Galton in the late 19th century to map the shared features and fragmentations within the trans-imperial character of the European bourgeoisie. Schär highlighted the importance of early modern networks in forging trans-imperial connections within the modern European bourgeoisie and stressed that an investigation of competing visions of European modernity within Europe can help us to complicate homogenizing notions of „Europe“ or the „West.“

The conference's closing panel revolved around the theme of fringes and failures. AL-

ISON K. SMITH (Toronto) started the panel with a discussion of the often purported absence of a Russian middle class by placing it in both the sub-local context of the estate divisions of Russian towns and the global context of Western visions of the middle classes. Smith argued that different estate identities to a certain extent prevented the formation of a unified middle class, although these dividing lines became increasingly blurred by the end of the 19th century. At the same time, she stressed that it were the contact with and comparison to an idealised European middle class that exacerbated and problematised these internal sources of confusion. DAVID S. PARKER (Kingston, ON) scrutinised how Latin American intellectuals depicted their bourgeoisie as imperfect, failed, or absent in comparison to an idealized image of the European bourgeoisie, in order to explain their own nations' underdevelopment. He charted how these diagnoses developed from focusing on a backward Spanish heritage during the mid-19th century to more Darwinist ideas at the turn of the centuries and nationalist and anti-imperialist viewpoints by the 1920s. Finally, KRIS MANJAPRA (Medford, MA) explored the function of a particular fraction of the global bourgeoisie, namely service professionals like accountants, engineers or statisticians, in the global regime of colonial capitalism. Manjapra described how these service professionals, who offered their knowledge to colonial states in the semiperiphery, were produced out of the dependency of the 19th century world economy on the spread of plantation frontiers and the expansion of agricultural capitalism.

The concluding discussion revisited many themes and questions that had already appeared in the debates of the preceding panels. One of the recurrent questions was whether it makes sense to talk about a global bourgeoisie and how to define it without being tied to a European ideal type. Some discussants also raised the importance of investigating processes of social group formation and identity group formation and of looking not only at local but also at global influences on the evolution of class structures. A common feature that emerged from some of the papers exploring non-European cases was the difficulty of an

integration of the intelligentsia with other social groups to form a unified middle class. At the same time, most papers focused on connections between Europe and the rest of the world, so that there appears to be a need to explore the potential existence of connections between different non-Western countries and their influence on the emergence of a global bourgeoisie. Finally, another question that remains to be further explored is how to relate the emergence of the nation state to the internationalism of a global middle class. Nevertheless, the richness, breadth and quality of the papers clearly showed the great contribution further research into the origins and evolution of the global bourgeoisie could make to the emerging field of global social history.

Conference Overview:

Introduction

Session 1: Class And Politics

Chair: David Motadel (University of Edinburgh/University of Cambridge)

Houchang Chehabi (Boston University): The Rise of the Iranian Middle Class and the State

Adam Mestyan (Harvard University): Charity and patriotism: The Religious Culture of the Ottoman Arab Middling Classes in the Nineteenth Century

Murat Siviloglu (Istanbul): The Emergence of an Ottoman Middle Class: A State Endeavour?

Christof Dejung (University of Cambridge/Universität Konstanz): Global Civilizing Missions and Class Politics in Europe

Keynote

Richard Drayton (King's College London): Race, Class, and Culture: European Hegemony and Global Class Formation, c. 1800-1950

Introductory Discussion

Jürgen Osterhammel (Universität Konstanz): Chair and Comment to the Keynote and the Discussions of Day 1

Session 2: Class And Capitalism

Chair: Christof Dejung (University of Cambridge/Universität Konstanz)

Janet Hunter (LSE): Modern Business and the

Rise of the Japanese Middle Classes

Rebecca E. Karl (New York University): Com-pradores: The Mediating Middle of Capitalism in China's early Twentieth Century

Chambi Chachage (Harvard University): Alcohol Consumption and the Cultural Rise of Capitalism in Colonial Tanzania

Sven Beckert (Harvard University): The American Bourgeoisie and the World in the Age of Empire

Session 3: Class And Colonialism

Chair: Jürgen Osterhammel (Universität Konstanz)

Tithi Bhattacharya (Purdue University): Re-reading Gramsci in Colonial Calcutta: Class location, Class Formation and Ideology

Emma Hunter (University of Edinburgh): Modernity, Print Media and the 'Middle Class' in Colonial East Africa

Bernhard C. Schär (ETH Zürich): Science and Supremacy: The Nature-Nurture Controversy and Imperial Protestantism, c. 1870-1880

Session 4: Failures And Fringes

Chair: David Motadel (University of Edinburgh/University of Cambridge)

Alison K. Smith (University of Toronto): The 'Missing' or 'Forgotten' Middle of Imperial Russia

David S. Parker (Queen's University): Narratives of Bourgeois Failure: Export Economies and Imported Categories in Argentina, Chile and Peru, 1860-1928

Kris Manjapra (Tufts University): The Semiperipheral Hand: service professionals in the rise of liberal empire

Concluding Discussion

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