

and then Russo-Japanese wars, would eventually read of attacks on one global umma in the twentieth century, accounts long centred on Jerusalem and the oppression of the Palestinian people before Afghanistan and Iraq took centre stage.

Such stories of the increasing sense of simultaneous suffering are arguably key to the transcendence and replications of the non-Christian blocks that first took their assigned places at the Christian-dominated World's Parliaments of Religions from the 1890s and that equally transformed into international non-governmental organizations in the post-colonial era. At the same time, we need to think more about the ways in which practices were similar and yet suspect. One can point to instances of success and familiarity breeding contempt. Some elite enthusiasts for Russian Palestine, for example, were clearly distressed by the rural and messianic quality of many of their pilgrims to a land that few believed lay in Ottoman territory (just as many Javanese imagined that the Dutch queen ruled with the Ottoman sultan's blessing). Writing on global Sufi networks with a strong South Asian focus, Robinson might also have considered how such processes as the concentration on the figure of the mediating *shaykh* might be compared to the nineteenth-century Catholic cults of the Cross or the Sacred Heart – movements that invited criticism from rival groupings within their respective slices of the transnational order that was so newly aware of nations.

Of course any edited volume has imbalances. The last third loses some of the pace set early on, and perhaps misses the opportunity to bring home fully how religious internationals were often shaped with conscious reference to each other and continued to eye the ever-shifting world map as a collection of territories to be acquired rather than peoples to be shared. There is also a preponderance of chapters dealing with 'religions of the book' (a phrase taken from Islamic parlance), though it should be recalled that the modern insistence on scripture as a defining characteristic of real religion is largely a function of the nineteenth-century (Protestant) repackaging of faiths. One might have wanted a more extended treatment of the curious interactions between members of the Theosophist movement and Buddhists in Sri Lanka, or of the global pretensions of Japanese Buddhists that would serve as a useful matrix for some advocates of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

Even so, these are less lacunae to be regretted than further openings to be explored, for this book succeeds in so many areas, particularly in pointing

out the importance of women (lay and in orders) in the shaping of their communities, and is presented with a lightness of touch that whets the appetite for more. Doubtless this project will have an impact on the writings of its constituent authors, and we can look forward, I think, to even richer studies to come.

The making of the middle class: toward a transnational history

Edited by A. Ricardo Lopez and Barbara Weinstein.

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

Pp. xi + 446. Hardback £77.00, ISBN 978-0-8223-5117-7; paperback £18.99, ISBN 978-0-8223-5129-0.

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doi:10.1017/S1740022813000429

The 'middle class' may be 'fuzzy' – both as a concept and as a social formation – but it remains almost inescapably powerful. Nobody would question the political relevance of a collection that seeks to compare and connect middle-class experiences globally, from India, Zimbabwe, the United States, and Canada, to Latin America, France, Germany, Britain, and the Middle East. Not many subjects lend themselves so ideally to transnational global histories, and few can aim to speak to such a large audience both inside and outside academe. There are more than twenty individual contributions in Lopez and Weinstein's volume, discussing topics as diverse as Mexican revolutionary agronomics, citizenship tutorials for immigrant Canadians, and English folk dancing in the US. Many of these pieces are by leading authors in their respective fields and work individually as excellent topical introductions. Since this review does not have the space to do them justice, I wish to concentrate on the central argument (or 'provocation', as the editors call it) of the collection as a whole.

Like other terms that were born out of political or cultural struggles and then adopted into academic discourse ('religious fundamentalism' is a good parallel), 'middle class' immediately means something to most people, and this conceptual purchase exists around the world. But evidently 'middle class' does not always mean the same thing. The middle class can be near synonymous with the Marxist 'bourgeoisie' – a ruling class in waiting or, indeed, in power; it can denote a constituency of junior

professionals and other 'black-collar workers' who feel forever endangered by pressures from above and below; or it can mean a new breed of respectable notables claiming special favours from their colonial masters in India and Africa. Any analysis interested in the workings of power would have to differentiate sharply here. Accounts, like many in the volume under review, are instead sent on a wild goose chase for shared 'middle-class' characteristics. To heighten potential confusions, in this work 'the middle class' appears anywhere from accounts of the late eighteenth century to the interwar period or the Cold War, all entirely different political and socioeconomic contexts.

The spread of the middle class across time and space is testimony to the extraordinary discursive power of the term itself: in the first instance, the immediate epistemological pliability and political legitimacy of being in 'the middle'; and then in its role in the construction of a sense of historical agency that sits at the very heart of the story of modernization. In this volume, every attempt has been made to reject the conventional 'Europe first, rest of the world later' view of the middle class. But this misses the point. The fact that 'the middle class' has a clear historical origin in the political debates of nineteenth-century western Europe is precisely why it has been transported so successfully around the world. Its appeal has been inextricably linked to the power of colonial rule and later of Western capitalist hegemony under other guises such as economic 'development'. For more than two hundred years, being middle-class has meant being on the right side of history, and it continues to do so in a self-acclaimed age of globalization.

A powerful and well-established tradition of thinking about the middle class (from Dror Wahrman onwards) has put the discursive power of the concept centre-stage. It has argued that the middle class is not so much a social formation on the ground, as it were, but first and foremost a trope that has allowed a great variety of people to speak about their social, cultural, and political aspirations in a manner that automatically lends legitimacy to their claims. The main challenge of writing middle-class history in this vein is to chart and disentangle how and in what contexts this language was deployed and for what purpose.

The making of the middle class does not agree with this proposition, but instead seeks to demarcate a post-revisionist position where languages of class, practices of class, and socioeconomic indicators can once again be reassembled into a (relatively)

stable social formation. In fairness, the inherent problems with such an endeavour are well understood by most contributors. Nobody wants to go back to old essentialisms. In consequence, much of the commentary is filled with disclaimers and caveats, including the upfront claim that the 'middle class' will never be anything but a 'fuzzy', or 'fractured' formation. It is highly illustrative that more often than not the reality of the middle class around the world is glimpsed rather than actually analytically worked out. It cannot just be 'discourse', Barbara Weinstein asserts, when certain Victorian ideals appear to be shared by so many people across space and time. Even if we do not understand precisely why, the volume argues, we simply feel that the global middle class is real. Such an intuitive methodology leaves itself open to circular analysis: to reading middle-class-ness into the material rather than discovering it.

But why seek a criticism of discourse-led analysis at all? The first level of justification – that class is always more solid than 'mere' language – does not really hit its target. Few proponents of post-linguistic-turn analysis would disagree with the assertion – frequently made in this volume – that 'discourse' is intimately connected to practices, which in turn are also implicated in socioeconomic structures. There are deeper reasons at play in the return to class as historical subjectivity. When Simon Gunn points out in his excellent essay that historical accounts of the English middle class are usually inseparable from present-day political debates, this is equally true for the volume in which he is writing. Although few of the contributors state any direct sympathies for the middle class and its cultural project, let alone for *Economist*-style neo-liberal globalization, they remain deeply affected by the continuing romantic pull of their subject matter. Their agenda is not to deconstruct one of the staple ingredients of the modernization myth but to reconfigure this myth in order to make it more inclusive and less Eurocentric. It is hard to understand why else there should be a persistent need to question the European origins of the middle class, which at a discursive level is undeniable. Why not simply be done with the concept altogether? The much-attested 'fuzziness' of the middle class is in fact the fuzziness in the political position proposed in this volume: deeply committed to post-colonialism at one level but also still dreaming of constructing a new master-narrative binding for all, as directly called for by Mrinalini Sinha in her brilliantly perceptive but also revealing afterword.