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# Density and Differentiation: Cities in Global Social History

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## Abstract

The present article examines the particular role that cities have played, and should play, in global social history. It notes that many of the historiographical discussions that in the past years have addressed the reach and limits of the bourgeoisie and the middle class as a globalized social formation have implicitly focused on cities. It also notes that these discussions have often not been very forthcoming in explicitly acknowledging this urban focus. From this starting point, the present article ponders the implications and ramifications of making this focus more explicit. What do we conclude from the observation that the ‘global bourgeoisie’ or the ‘global middle class’, inasmuch as they existed at all, were quintessentially urban formations? And what do these conclusions, conversely, entail for the field of urban history? Highlighting density and differentiation as key traits of the urban form, the article ultimately argues for greater attention to the spatiality and to the built environment of class formation in global history.

As the writing of history has become less focused on Western Europe and the United States, the label of global history has become an increasingly broad church. ‘Global history seems to be everywhere’, Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier have recently stated in a volume tellingly titled *Global history, globally*.<sup>1</sup> Along such expansion have come not only definitional fuzziness and fragmentation, but also the temptation to prefix older subfields of history with the adjective ‘global’, as in global intellectual history, global labour history, global urban history, or global social history. As the sequencing of the adjectives suggests, the addition typically gestures to the demand to render more global – which customarily translates into less Eurocentric or less Western-centric – various areas of historical inquiry that predated the global turn under way since the 1990s. But they can also serve to discuss the merits

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<sup>1</sup> Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global history, globally* (London, 2018), p. 1.

and hindrances of interrogating the second adjectives for those long converted to global history.<sup>2</sup> To highlight that global social history cannot do without interrogating the role that urban space played in tying global economic developments to local class formation is the central purpose of this article.

An obvious starting point for this purpose is to underline the close global relationship between processes of social stratification and urbanization. Even as inequality research has been booming for several years by now, less systematic attention has been paid to the particularly urban dimension of inequality, especially in history. This is surprising, insofar as, in a variety of past and present settings, rising levels of socio-economic inequality within nation-states have been associated with growing urban–rural disparities as well as greater levels of inequality within cities, compared to rural areas. The Gini coefficients, Theil indices, and Palma ratios of major cities tend to vastly exceed those of the countries in which these cities are located. Very large cities tend to be most unequal.<sup>3</sup> The formation of middle classes – a process that, if understood too literally, might in fact be mistaken for reducing inequality – has likewise been a quintessentially urban phenomenon. Though urban scholars have recently theorized that ‘planetary urbanization’ is blurring the boundaries between urban and rural areas altogether, historically white-collar occupations have largely been an urban affair. The term ‘working class’ can of course comprise rural residents, but given its frequent demarcation from the peasantry, it usually has an urban connotation, too. Density and differentiation have long been identified as mutually constitutive dimensions of ‘urbanism as a way of life’, as the sociologist Louis Wirth put it in 1938.<sup>4</sup>

Cities were no less central to the sociology of globalization, as it emerged in the 1990s. A who-is-who of that scholarship instantly reveals the marked urban bias of the authors most commonly associated with the early literature on globalization.<sup>5</sup> Saskia Sassen’s study of the financial command-and-control centres of the world economy encapsulated this trend, just as it tied the rise of these ‘global cities’ to processes of stratification and the segmentation of labour markets within them.<sup>6</sup> Though Sassen contrasted present and past, and differentiated her global cities from the ‘world cities’ of earlier times, there is no reason to assume that cities were less pivotal to earlier phases of intensifying global connections, such as the years between 1870 and the First World War. Frederick Cooper, a historian of Africa, has called upon global

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, ‘Social history and world history: from daily life to patterns of change’, *Journal of World History*, 18 (2007), pp. 69–98.

<sup>3</sup> See Edward L. Glaeser, Matt Resseger, and Kristina Tobio, ‘Inequality in cities’, *Journal of Regional Science*, 49 (2009), pp. 617–46; and Kristian Behrens and Frédéric Robert-Nicoud, ‘Survival of the fittest in cities: urbanisation and inequality’, *Economic Journal*, 124 (2014), pp. 1371–400.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Wirth, ‘Urbanism as a way of life’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1938), pp. 1–24.

<sup>5</sup> David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); and Manuel Castells, *The informational city: information technology, economic restructuring, and the urban regional process* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Saskia Sassen, *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ, 1991).

historians to pay attention to the ‘lumpiness of cross-border connections’.<sup>7</sup> Surely most of the lumps that spring to mind were cities.

Given the ostensibly prosaic nature of these observations, is there anything to be gained from underlining the importance of cities to the endeavour of interpolating a more flavourful social history ingredient into global history? This article argues that there is for several reasons. Those quarters of global history with the strongest social history inclinations have until recently had relatively less interest in cities and in middle classes and bourgeoisies than in mobile and rural labour. The tilt has been most pronounced in global labour history, which is understandable considering that the vast majorities of past populations lived on the land rather than in cities, even more so in societies beyond the North Atlantic, the study of which global history has particularly encouraged. In fact, if the historical rural–urban distribution of populations is our yardstick, global historians probably still have, just like historians in general, *over-studied* urbanites – a bias no less understandable considering that power, long-distance connections, and written historical records have long been inordinately concentrated in cities. Even specific attention to countryfolk has typically been refracted through the lens of urban archives, with the attendant documentation and collection logics of urbanites, to be then processed by historians largely residing in cities, who write for a predominantly urban readership.

What is astonishing, by contrast, is the lack of analytical attention to this implicit urban bias. It is all the more surprising in a field like global history, which is proudly attuned to how power differentials have skewed the historical record and shaped historical writing. And yet, global historians have long implicitly favoured urban perspectives without acknowledgement, taking cities for granted as the natural container of their analysis and sometimes mistaking them for the nations in which they are located. The fallacy might even be especially common in the historiographies of world regions with many primate cities, such as Africa and Spanish America. Instead of pleading to study more cities to the detriment of rural areas, this article argues that, for a global social history, it is essential to interrogate the dimensions of density and differentiation. In order to highlight their importance, the article simultaneously delineates a genealogy of why these two categories have so far not received the visibility in global history that they deserve.

## I

The intimate ties between urban density and social stratification were obvious enough to generations of sociologists. Sociology after all was a discipline born urban, in the double sense of being produced by scholars who lived in cities, marvelled at the consequences of their exhilarating growth, and paid particular attention to quintessentially urban phenomena of social differentiation. It is no accident that Ferdinand Tönnies’s distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* mirrored the rural–urban binary and that Émile Durkheim’s

<sup>7</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), p. 95.

writings on the division of labour and on anomie focused on cities.<sup>8</sup> One of Georg Simmel's most read works, once the Chicago School of Sociology rescued it from its previous oblivion,<sup>9</sup> was written in his turn-of-the-century Berlin, from where it painted the modern metropolis as the seat of the money economy and thus the origin of a particular social type characterized by being 'blasé'.<sup>10</sup> Max Weber's discussions about the origins of the *Bürgertum* – which in German connotes the urban citizenry, even as it is usually translated into 'bourgeoisie' – revolved around the specific nature of medieval and early modern European cities, 'in the sense of a unitary community [with] the possession of its own law and court and an autonomous administration'.<sup>11</sup> The most influential brand of sociology in the early twentieth-century United States, the Chicago School, not only emerged from a boomtown if ever there was one, but also developed a primary interest in urban ecology, casting a long shadow over the later rise of urban studies as a distinct academic field.<sup>12</sup>

There were good empirical, and even etymological, reasons to treat particular social categories – such as the middle class and the bourgeoisie – as inherently urban phenomena. The French terms *bourgeois* and *citoyen* quite simply denoted urbanites as residents of usually fortified *bourgs* and *cités* prior to the French Revolution, after which they split into connoting socio-economic (*bourgeois*) and political (*citoyen*) collectives. The German *Bürger*, meanwhile, continued to conflate the two dimensions.<sup>13</sup> Etymologically tied to membership in the ancient *polis* or *civitas* as much as to medieval urban occupations in trade, commerce, and craftsmanship, the intrinsically urban nature of these terms, as well as that of the modern bourgeoisie, were thus both obvious and amply commented upon. The term 'urbanity', so deeply intertwined with expectations of bourgeois demeanour and respectability, betrayed the very same connection.

The working class, meanwhile, was only marginally less associated with urban life. Nominally, socialists incorporated the rural work force in their understanding of the working class, as long as these rural workers were not propertied and thus sold their labour. However, as the catchphrase of 'workers and peasants' illustrated, the workers of the working class were nonetheless widely imagined as an urban social group, too, closely associated with the twin processes of urbanization and industrialization both by Marxists and, later, modernization theorists. E. P. Thompson's English working class was a largely urban affair.<sup>14</sup> Precursors of twentieth-century sociology and

<sup>8</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig, 1887); Émile Durkheim, *The division of labour in society* (New York, NY, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> David Frisby, *Georg Simmel* (London, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Georg Simmel, 'The metropolis and mental life' (1903), in Donald N. Levine, ed., *On individuality and social forms* (Chicago, IL, 1971), pp. 324–39.

<sup>11</sup> Max Weber, *On charisma and institution-building* (Chicago, IL, 1968), p. 242.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: institutionalization, diversity, and the rise of sociological research* (Chicago, IL, 1984); Andrew Abbott, *Department and discipline: Chicago sociology at one hundred* (Chicago, IL, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Manfred Riedel, 'Bürger, Staatsbürger, Bürgertum', in Otto Brunner et al., eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I (Stuttgart, 1972), pp. 672–725.

<sup>14</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (New York, NY, 1963).

anthropology, such as the German ethnographer Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, similarly differentiated between the urban forces of change, consisting of the bourgeoisie and the working class, and the rural forces of persistence or inertia, which he identified with the aristocracy and the peasantry.<sup>15</sup> In Riehl's writings, as much as in those of subsequent generations of sociologists, both the middle and the working classes appeared as relational formations, which arose in the same (urban) setting through differentiation from one another.

The increasingly institutionalized variants of social history that emerged from the 1960s onwards, which in any case derived much of their ethos from interdisciplinary cross-fertilization with sociology, were no less aware of, and explicit about, this urban link. In a 1995 article on the middle classes in Europe summarizing decades of scholarship, Jürgen Kocka echoed Weber in identifying 'the European tradition of self-governed towns' as a decisive factor in the rise of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie, two terms he opted to use interchangeably. Since 'bourgeois culture could flourish only in towns and cities', he even found that national percentages of 'middle-class families' were essentially 'corresponding to the ratio between urban and rural population'. In his view, European bourgeoisies eventually emerged out of three charter groups, all urban: the 'burghers of early modern towns', 'those who served the rulers and governments', and merchants, capitalists, and bankers.<sup>16</sup> Even beyond the study of specifically urban social groups, a good part of social history at large, including many studies of social mobility, were primarily urban histories.<sup>17</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the institutionalization of urban history was itself a child of the social history boom of the 1960s. British Marxist historians, for example, founded an Urban History Group as a subsection of the Economic History Society in 1963, which lives on today in the form of Leicester's Centre for Urban History and the journal *Urban History*. As Geoff Eley has remarked, this 'freshly invented subdisciplinary field...subsisted on methods and approaches learned from the social sciences'. Though 'vulnerable to narrowness and empiricism', it 'brought issues of place, environment, and setting actively into the orbit of social history, rather than passively, as they had been treated before'. The relationship between urban and social history, though the former was clearly subordinated to the latter, was so symbiotic that 'the urban community study became the main practical medium for investigating class formation', just as it had been for E. P. Thompson.<sup>18</sup>

What do these urban birthmarks of sociology and of social history imply for the writing of a global social history today? The first point to make is that

<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1851).

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Kocka, 'The middle classes in Europe', *Journal of Modern History*, 43 (1995), pp. 787, 784, and 796.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Stephen Thernstrom, *The other Bostonians: poverty and progress in the American metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); William H. Sewell, *Structure and mobility: the men and women of Marseille, 1820-1870* (Cambridge, 1985); Hartmut Kaelble, *Social mobility in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Europe and America in comparative perspective* (New York, NY, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Eley, *A crooked line: from cultural history to the history of society* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005), pp. 44 and 183; Thompson, *The making*.

social history – and with it, its offshoot, urban history – developed out of synch with global history, if by that term we mean the rising interest in connected, often transregional, history with an explicit anti-Eurocentric edge, as it has emerged in both Western Europe and the US since the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> In between the heyday of social history and the rise of global history fall the cultural and linguistic turns, which across the entire discipline eroded much of the topical interest in class and status, as well as the Marxian and Weberian theoretical foundations that had underpinned the social history boom. These were replaced with more variegated approaches and primary source bases, in favour of a growing interrogation of race, gender, language, and that most elusive of themes, culture. By the time global history arose in the 1990s, the effects of the cultural and linguistic turns had already been well entrenched in Western academia.

Certain scholarly strands eventually underpinning the rise of global history, to be sure, were initially animated by a strong interest in economic formations and class. Subaltern Studies in India, which via postcolonial studies eventually informed swathes of global history writing in the 1990s, had many Marxist and especially Gramscian influences.<sup>20</sup> Yet, in line with the poststructuralist and postmodernist *zeitgeist* framing the reception of Subaltern Studies in Western academia, the conceptual critique of Eurocentrism, encapsulated in Dipesh Chakrabarty's pithy formula of 'provincializing Europe' reverberated more thoroughly and lastingly than the group's empirical findings about subalterns in Bengal.<sup>21</sup> A similar fate befell older strands of world history practised primarily in the US, which had emerged alongside world-systems theory in the 1970s, but from the late 1980s onwards were increasingly derided as hopelessly materialist by the proponents of the cultural turn.<sup>22</sup> The charge of a socio-economic bias at any rate no longer hit the strands of global history emerging since the 1990s. Studies of class formation and of social mobility never came to form the mainstay of the nascent wave of global history monographs.

Asynchronicity itself was less weighty a problem for the integration of social and global history than the hiatus's implications in terms of conceptual baggage and preferred methods. Especially fateful was the contamination of the social history boom of the 1960s with what later turned out to be the three sworn enemies of global history: Eurocentrism, methodological nationalism, and modernization theory.<sup>23</sup> The triad's combination, and its normative political flavour surrounding notions of liberal democracy, thickened in idealizations of the urban bourgeoisie. This was the social formation that embodied Eurocentrism in its purest form – or perhaps better, North Atlantic-centrism,

<sup>19</sup> For a similar understanding, see Gareth Austin, 'Global history in (northwestern) Europe', in Beckert and Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global history*, pp. 21–44.

<sup>20</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'A brief history of Subaltern Studies', in Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz, eds., *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien* (Göttingen, 2010), pp. 94–104.

<sup>21</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Pomeranz, 'Social history and world history'.

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian Conrad, *What is global history?* (Princeton, NJ, 2016).

insofar as a majority of European countries and, prior to David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley's demolition of the *Sonderweg* thesis, even Germany were regarded as suffering precisely from that bourgeoisie's relative absence or weakness, compared to the benchmark cases of France, Britain, and the United States.<sup>24</sup> Countryfolk in southern Europe, let alone the 'Third World', were infamously tagged as 'primitive', even in the diction of reasonably sympathetic Marxist historians such as Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>25</sup>

Weber's genealogy of the *Bürgertum* as rooted in the particular history of urban autonomy, embodied in guilds and corporations, indeed rested on an explicit contrast between the West and the rest: 'Cities have not existed outside the occident in the sense of a political community', Weber wrote, compelling himself to explain away the autonomy of non-European cities such as Ottoman Mecca; unconvincingly, as later critics pointed out.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, the very category of the bourgeoisie remained embedded in European history, and especially urbanization, as Margrit Pernau has underlined in her study of the ashraf in nineteenth-century Delhi: 'to use the term *Bürger* [burgher/bourgeois/citizen] in an Indian context without, for instance, being aware of the distinctions that flow from differences in the development of cities, one may end up circumscribing the category in ways that do not correspond to the self-understanding of the protagonists'.<sup>27</sup> To drop the term bourgeoisie in favour of 'middle classes', as the title of the English translation of Pernau's book does, at first sight mitigates the problem, if we follow Jürgen Osterhammel's reasoning: "Middle class" or "middle stratum" is poorer in cultural content than "bourgeoisie", and so it can be used in a larger number of contexts and is better suited for a global social history.<sup>28</sup> Yet, even the transferability of 'middle class' has been doubted. In Kocka's verdict, 'at the eastern and southeastern margins of Europe a coherent middle class hardly existed' and 'it is not very likely that they will be found in many other parts of the world'.<sup>29</sup> The statement strikes at the heart of the emerging field of global social history.

## II

This is also where the second problem besides Eurocentrism comes in: methodological nationalism; or, to be more precise, the intuitive reach for comparing *national* units. The whole reasoning about the middle classes' irredeemable urbanism recommends adopting a finer (urban, i.e. non-national) lens. Yet, the

<sup>24</sup> David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The peculiarities of German history* (New York, NY, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Manchester, 1959).

<sup>26</sup> Weber, *On charisma and institution-building*, p. 242. For a critique, see Sami Zubaida, 'Max Weber's "The city" and the Islamic city', *Max Weber Studies*, 5 (2006), pp. 111–18.

<sup>27</sup> Margrit Pernau, *Bürger mit Turban: Muslime in Delhi im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2008), p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *The transformation of the world: a global history of the nineteenth century* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), p. 763; Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into middle classes: Muslims in nineteenth-century Delhi* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Kocka, 'The middle classes in Europe', pp. 795 and 806.



customary national frame has reinforced the argument that middle classes were an inherently Western phenomenon because the *national* share of middle classes was larger in countries in which the urbanization rate was high and in which rural–urban socio-economic gaps had narrowed early; both criteria truer for Europe and North America than for other world regions. One can of course criticize Kocka's conclusion as 'yet another example of Eurocentric historiography',<sup>30</sup> but as long as national datasets are the yardstick, it will be difficult to disprove these classes' relative nationwide thinness in most of Asia, Africa, and Latin America prior to the mid-twentieth century. The problem lies in the national lens here, which, as Osterhammel reminds us, is not the most useful one for examining historical class formations.<sup>31</sup> If Kocka is right about the correlation between urbanization rates and the nationwide proportion of middle classes, the gap between the West and the rest in terms of the importance of the bourgeoisie will diminish, once we downsize our units of analysis from nations to cities.

The spatial fine-tuning invariably reveals the existence of urban middle-class pockets in the Global South, in spite of their limited national weight. Given these pockets' inordinate importance for cross-border and long-distance connectedness, they should be a natural subject matter for global history. For this reason, in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Global South, particular kinds of cities are the best places to search for such clusters: fast-growing port cities in commodity-exporting regions typically had a greater proportion of one of Kocka's charter groups: merchants, bankers, and capitalists. Capital cities naturally contained greater numbers of civil servants, or 'those who served the rulers and governments', while centres of learning and culture were also home to social groups most resembling that most untranslatable of German words, the *Bildungsbürgertum*. If Christof Dejung's literature review of global social history is a reliable indicator, the epicentres of discussion are places like Buenos Aires, Mexico, and Lima, Cairo, Alexandria, and Istanbul, Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Singapore, and Shanghai.<sup>32</sup>

As Sven Beckert has argued, a global social history of urban middle classes should contain a comparative element including 'information on the social and economic structure of these places'.<sup>33</sup> One obstacle to assembling such information in a globally comparative manner is that the term 'middle class', in contrast to working class, aristocracy, or bourgeoisie, is not functional but purely relational within intra-society parameters. Notoriously, in today's Britain middle class means almost the opposite of what it denotes in the United States. Even if the middle classes of various locales are disaggregated

<sup>30</sup> Sanjay Joshi, 'Thinking about modernity from the margins: the making of a middle class in colonial India', in A. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein, eds., *The making of the middle class: toward a transnational history* (Durham, NC, 2012), p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Osterhammel, *The transformation*, p. 745.

<sup>32</sup> Christof Dejung, 'Auf dem Weg zu einer globalen Sozialgeschichte? Neuere Studien zur Globalgeschichte des Bürgertums', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 59 (2014), pp. 421–48.

<sup>33</sup> Sven Beckert, 'Comments on "studying the middle class in the modern city"', *Journal of Urban History*, 31 (2005), p. 394.



into more manageable occupational groups, or individual professions, comparisons are encumbered by the paucity of censuses and the kinds of serial sources dear to the first generation of social historians, as well as by cultural differences in the definition and social implications of occupations.

For what they are worth, rates of literacy, a basic and almost universal precondition for middle-class status, are a useful starting point to underline the urban concentration of middle classes around the world. International comparisons of historical literacy rates suffer from countless flaws, among them the co-existence of various scripts in many colonial and semi-colonial regions. But they do show that the rural–urban literacy gap was much wider in the Global South than in Western Europe and North America; and that, correspondingly, the literacy gap between the Global South and the Global North was smaller if we look at cities than if we look at countries. Whereas by 1910, rural literacy rates in New England and mid-Atlantic states surpassed that of Manhattan (92 per cent),<sup>34</sup> the opposite was true elsewhere: In Manila in 1903, 50.7 per cent of the population above ten years of age could read and write, but only 20.2 per cent of the Philippines’s population in that age bracket could. In Alexandria in 1917, literacy stood at 24.7 and in Cairo at 24.2 per cent, but it dropped to 16.6 per cent in the Damietta governorate and 3.4 per cent in the Eastern Desert and Oases Province.<sup>35</sup> Literacy rates in Latin American cities were generally higher. To be sure, the figures for Havana in 1899 (71.1) and Buenos Aires in 1914 (82.2) were still lower than the one for Paris in 1906 (95.8). But tellingly, these gaps between capital cities were smaller than the national gaps between Cuba (40.5), Argentina (64.9), and France (85.9).<sup>36</sup>

A more detailed breakdown of literacy rates for such cities also reveals the degree to which social differentiation was racialized, or ethnicized, as well as gendered. Whereas, in the absence of usable historical data on income, literacy has widely been used, and accepted, as a proxy for class in circum-Atlantic settings, the co-existence of multiple scripts, with their attendant different trajectories as to the social implications of reading and writing, encumbers its usefulness for other contexts. What are we to conclude from the Egyptian census of 1917, for example, which recorded very different literacy rates depending on religion and on gender, ranging, in Alexandria, from 77.2 per cent for Protestant men to 2.4 per cent for Muslim women?<sup>37</sup> As Hoda Yousef has shown, literacy itself was actively promoted as a desirable societal aim, but in the process had to be disentangled from earlier understandings of knowledge and ignorance, adjusted to gendered and religious precepts, and redefined

<sup>34</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth census of the United States taken in the year 1910* (Washington, DC, 1913), I, pp. 1207 and 1238.

<sup>35</sup> *The census of the Philippine Islands: 1903* (Washington, DC, 1905), II, pp. 620 and 632; Ministry of Finance, *The census of Egypt taken in 1917* (Cairo, 1920), II, pp. 558–9.

<sup>36</sup> War Department, *Report on the census of Cuba, 1899* (Washington, DC, 1900), pp. 361 and 377; República Argentina, *Tercer censo nacional levantado el 1o de junio de 1914* (Buenos Aires, 1916), III, pp. 321 and 329; French census results are available at: [www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2653233?sommaire=2591397](http://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2653233?sommaire=2591397), accessed 2 Sept. 2022.

<sup>37</sup> *Census of Egypt 1917*, II, p. 558.

for census purposes. In a multicultural and multilingual colonial context, different scripts, regardless of potential objective variations in their complexity, also had different functional associations with reading and writing.<sup>38</sup> The form in which Alexandria's elites came to view literacy as a fundamental prerequisite in the city's bourgeois public sphere had to be negotiated over a racialized and gendered access to that sphere. It was only in the late nineteenth century that a new local class of educated men, the *efendiyya*, came to conflate formal schooling, gender, and public respectability into an overall bourgeois imaginary.<sup>39</sup>

Gender gaps in literacy rates, as well as occupational profiles, tended to be widest in cities with relatively small bourgeois sectors, with particularly segmented labour markets, and with significant degrees of segregation along racial, ethnic, or religious lines. The Egyptian census of 1917 alleged that Alexandria's men above five years of age were more than twice as likely to be able to read and write than the city's women (32.7 versus 16.3 per cent), but the gap was much larger among Muslims (18.0 versus 2.4) than among Catholics (64.0 versus 54.3) and Protestants (77.2 versus 72.3).<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the gender gap was greater in Manila in 1903 (60.7 versus 34.4) than in Havana in 1899 (77.6 versus 64.0) or in Buenos Aires in 1914 (84.4 versus 79.1), where it was almost entirely driven by the foreign-born.<sup>41</sup> Exclusionary urban differentiation was thus remarkably intersectional in many cities around the world; in some more strikingly than in others

The main alternative to literacy rates as proxies for class are occupational categories, which come with their own methodological pitfalls. Partly reflecting real labour market conditions and partly as a result of census takers' prejudices, preferences, or laziness, women's work was notoriously under-recorded, except in specific working-class occupations – say, as seamstresses or cigarmakers in Havana or Manila – that threatened to undercut the ideals of female propriety and bourgeois respectability that white social reformers in such cities sought to construe along European models.<sup>42</sup> Reflecting the globalizing bourgeois and urban gender norms as described by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, insofar as cities in the Global South had developed a middle-class culture by 1900, censuses revealed it as a distinctly male affair in which masculinity was measured through occupation and the provision for dependants confined to the private sphere.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Houda A. Yousef, *Composing Egypt: reading, writing, and the emergence of a modern nation, 1870–1930* (Stanford, CA, 2016); on the census esp. pp. 134–5.

<sup>39</sup> Lucie Ryzova, *The age of the efendiyya: passages to modernity in national-colonial Egypt* (Oxford, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> *Census of Egypt 1917*, II, p. 558.

<sup>41</sup> *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, p. 620; *Census of Cuba, 1899*, p. 377; *Tercer censo nacional 1914*, III, p. 321. Among the Argentine-born the figures were 92 for men and 91.2 for women.

<sup>42</sup> An excellent study about gender, labour, and class in the urban Global South is Elizabeth Quay Hutchison, *Labors appropriate to their sex: gender, labor, and politics in urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, IL, 1987).

Large undifferentiated categories of merchants or *comerciantes*, which could comprise the managers of transoceanic shipping companies as much as small grocers, encumber the pinning down of population shares of middle classes from such censuses. The usual aggregates are rarely more helpful. The largest chunk among them in most such cities, at any rate, were categories such as ‘unknown or without gainful occupation’, which in turn-of-the-century Havana or Manila, for instance, accounted for more than one third of the total recorded. The other large groups were usually domestic and personal services, manufacturing and mechanical professions, and trade and transportation – of which only the last contained a significant middle-class element. The category ‘professional services’, meanwhile, consisted chiefly of white-collar groups, but in Havana and Manila they accounted only for approximately 1.5 per cent of these cities’ total population of roughly 240,000 and 220,000 respectively.<sup>44</sup>

The number of specific professionals per 1,000 inhabitants are thus perhaps the least unreliable of the many treacherous indicators of middle-class shares in turn-of-the-century cities around the world. Manhattan in 1910, for instance, had 2.7 lawyers and 2.35 physicians per 1,000 inhabitants; below Buenos Aires’s 3.36 (lawyers) and 3.44 (physicians), not far from Havana’s 3.1 and 2.0, but well above Manila’s 0.95 and 1.2 and Alexandria’s 0.26 and 0.25.<sup>45</sup> All such figures should be treated with great caution, as they depend not only on variable criteria for the admission to occupational categories and titles – a problem with serious ramifications in settings of legal pluralism and fragmented healthcare provision, such as Alexandria – but also, quite simply, on where the city limits were drawn and what an urban population meant to begin with.

City limits and the meanings of urbanity, however, are precisely the point in that a certain level and kind of urbanization constituted the infrastructural prerequisite for the existence of middle classes. Residence in the more recently built, ‘modern’ parts of large cities became one hallmark of Egypt’s *efendiyya*.<sup>46</sup> Yet, there were serious variations in the infrastructural conditions for middle-class formation. Havana and Manila, for example, in spite of their long-term similarities in Spanish colonial layout, their shared nature as trading entrepôts and political capitals of sugar-heavy island economies, their similar official population count by 1900, and the deceptively similar census designs that American occupiers adopted in both countries after 1898, were very different cities in the early twentieth century. The Cuban capital was chiefly built of stone and had a compact layout, significant parts of which had paved streets, sewage systems, and electricity. Above all, it fulfilled the requirements for the flourishing of the political, cultural, and economic capital distinctive of middle classes: dependencies of shipping companies and merchant houses, insurance companies, courthouses, a large secular university,

<sup>44</sup> *Census of Cuba, 1899*, pp. 406–11 and 485; *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, p. 932.

<sup>45</sup> *Thirteenth census of the United States*, IV, pp. 180–93; *Tercer censo nacional 1914*, IV, p. 209; *Census of Cuba, 1899*, p. 485; *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, p. 1004; *Census of Egypt 1917*, II, p. 400.

<sup>46</sup> Ryzova, *The age*.

theatres, townhouses for the nuclear family, public parks, cafés, restaurants, piano and gramophone sellers, as well as 128 telephone operators.<sup>47</sup>

Manila, by contrast, still consisted of a small walled Spanish citadel surrounded by emerging business districts and a fragmented riverine archipelago of largely unregulated and unpaved settlements, in good part wooden shacks with more communal living arrangements, with no access to sewage or electricity. With the isolated colonial core (*Intramuros*) dilapidating after 1898, the period of American colonialism saw the rise of some of the features present in Havana, but to a thinner extent and in more hybrid fashion, symbolized in the figure of less than half as many telephone operators (61).<sup>48</sup> The ethnic composition of the two cities and their respective local systems of segregation had also been very different long before 1900. Built on enslaved labour, Havana's population was nonetheless counted as 71.4 per cent white in 1899. Of these, almost one third were foreigners, mostly Spanish immigrants, whose rapidly rising numbers testified to the economic opportunities offered by the Cuban capital. By contrast, Manila, where Spanish colonial power had long subsisted parasitically on exploiting, taxing, and segregating Chinese traders, had a large Filipino majority according to the census of 1903, whereas whites (3.6 per cent) and Chinese (9.9 per cent) constituted no more than small minorities.<sup>49</sup>

Their flaws notwithstanding, such comparative figures tell us that the conditions for the emergence of various kinds of bourgeoisies varied not only, as Kocka made clear, within countries (depending in part on the function of settlements) and within world regions (including Europe, as Kocka concedes). There were also significant differences between the kinds of cities in the Global South where middle-class pockets existed, even when these cities were functionally comparable from a world-systems perspective. Beyond simply asserting and empirically substantiating these differences, the finding of asymmetries across a range of spatial scales and of the micro-spatial concentration of middle classes should compel historians to abandon national and regional comparisons – except perhaps in cases where the role of bourgeoisies for national politics is concerned – in favour of more fine-grained units of analysis, such as cities, where these middle classes clustered. As David S. Parker has put it, 'cities and ports around the world were essential nodes of late nineteenth-century globalization, making South American capitals as much part of the bourgeois West as Lisbon, Madrid, or perhaps even Paris itself'.<sup>50</sup> In terms of demography, the local prospects for middle-class habits, and the global symbolic capital for bourgeois sensibilities, an equation between

<sup>47</sup> Jorge Núñez Vega, 'La danza de los millones: modernización y cambio cultural en La Habana, 1915–1920' (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. Pompeu Fabra, 2011); and Guadalupe García, *Beyond the walled city: colonial exclusion in Havana* (Oakland, CA, 2016), pp. 153–207.

<sup>48</sup> Cristina Evangelista Torres, *The Americanization of Manila, 1898–1921* (Quezon City, 2010); Ian Morley, *American colonisation and the city beautiful: Filipinos and planning in the Philippines, 1916–1935* (New York, NY, 2020).

<sup>49</sup> *Census of Cuba, 1899*, pp. 194–5; *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, pp. 230–1.

<sup>50</sup> David S. Parker, 'Asymmetric globality and South American narratives of bourgeois failure', in Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *The global bourgeoisie: the rise of the middle classes in the age of empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), p. 278.

Quito and Paris is probably misleading. But the point that ‘the bourgeois West’ was by no means coterminous with the European landmass is irrefutable.

### III

Even beyond the predicaments arising from the asynchronous emergence of social history and global history, there continue to be several obstacles to a brand of history that is simultaneously comparative, global, urban, and social. First, the types of primary sources on which social history in the 1960s and 1970s relied – especially serial sources, on which the historical social sciences and social mobility studies drew heavily – are harder to come by in Cuba or the Philippines than in the Global North. As a result, intellectual history, political history, and historical essayism tend to be better developed in much of the Global South than social history, especially of a quantifying kind. For all the criticism of the conceptual and ideological Eurocentrism of earlier generations of social historians, it is too often forgotten that their methodological preferences and the archival possibilities dictated by these inclinations reinforced their topical focus on Europe. For much the same reason, Indian Subaltern Studies conversely never reproduced the serial-source predilection that characterized the earlier social history boom in Europe and North America. While the cultural turn in any case eroded these preferences and diversified the range of admissible primary sources in the discipline at large, it is therefore difficult to imagine a global social history that does not ponder whether the ‘global’ requires a methodological recalibration of the primary source preferences distinctive of earlier iterations of social history.

Second, the anti-elitist inclinations of social history played out differently in Western Europe and North America than they did in countries like Argentina or Egypt. For the history-from-below movement, there existed a vast world of urban workers to discover and reconstruct in the industrial cities of the north. But wherever cities were seen as bastions of a Westernized elite, the predilection for studying the downtrodden easily translated into discouraging urban history. To be sure, unless the definition of the working class is reduced to the manufacturing sector, Buenos Aires or Alexandria in 1900 were not less working-class than Boston or Liverpool, but from a *national* viewpoint they were in their entirety regarded as elitist and cosmopolitan bridgeheads of foreign penetration.<sup>51</sup> True, the greater density of written historical records for cities, combined with the greater weight of political and intellectual history compared to the US and Western Europe, nonetheless tilted Argentine or Egyptian historiography towards the study of urbanites, especially when measured against historical rates of urbanization. But much of this historical writing was neither explicitly social, nor explicitly urban.

Third, disciplinary divisions made matters worse. Sociology, the main reference discipline for social history, was typically more Eurocentric than

<sup>51</sup> Michael Goebel, *Argentina's partisan past: nationalism and the politics of history* (Liverpool, 2011); Michael J. Reimer, *Colonial bridgehead: government and society in Alexandria, 1807–1882* (Boulder, CO, 1977).

anthropology, which did have a much more pronounced interest in non-European societies. Although anthropological influences had long been more prominent in some national variants of social history (notably in France and Britain) than in others (particularly in Germany), their widespread impact in history as a whole really came at a time when the cultural turn began to displace social history. Moreover, anthropology had a strong rural bias compared to sociology.

Finally, in the Global North, urban history in its institutionalized form has been slower to embrace the global turn than history at large. Between 2012 and 2019, the leading urban history journals in the United States, Britain, Germany, and France carried far fewer articles with a focus on world regions outside of North America and Europe than journals such as the *American Historical Review*, *Past & Present*, *Annales*, and *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*.<sup>52</sup> Problems surrounding primary sources, the aforementioned factors discouraging urban histories in countries like Argentina and Egypt, lower urbanization rates in the Global South, and urban history's birthmark associations with Eurocentrism and modernization theory, may all have contributed to this state of affairs. Inasmuch as histories of Asian, African, and Latin American cities were being written, they mostly emerged laterally to urban history as an institutional subfield. Weakly communicated with that subfield's discussions and concerns, they had a more comfortable institutional home in the historical area studies and increasingly in global history. As a result of all of the above, the perhaps even greater urban anchorage of middle classes in the Global South compared to the North Atlantic never quite translated into sustained historical inquiry of the implications of their urbanism.

In light of these mitigating factors, it is all the more remarkable that the two basic empirical building blocks for a global and comparative urban history of middle classes in fact increasingly exist. The first of these consists of the burgeoning literature on port cities, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – their 'golden age', as Osterhammel has put it.<sup>53</sup> Chiefly interested in connectivity and trade, as well as city–hinterland relations, this historiography invariably touches upon (especially merchant) bourgeoisies, but rarely focuses explicitly on urban class formation.<sup>54</sup> This task is, in turn, taken on by the second building block, which is the literature explicitly concerned with middle classes and the bourgeoisie around the world.<sup>55</sup> Equally focused on the years between 1850 and 1930, much of this literature is urban in

<sup>52</sup> As judged from their titles or abstracts, more than 80 per cent of all articles in the *Journal of Urban History*, in *Urban History*, in *Histoire Urbaine*, and in *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* between 2012 and mid-2019 dealt with European or North American cities. In the other four journals, that share was below 60 per cent, in the case of the *American Historical Review* even below 40.

<sup>53</sup> Osterhammel, *The transformation*, pp. 275–82.

<sup>54</sup> For a useful survey, see Lasse Heerten, 'Ankerpunkte der Verflechtung: Hafenstädte in der neueren Globalgeschichtsschreibung', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 43 (2017), pp. 146–75.

<sup>55</sup> Again, Osterhammel, *The transformation*, pp. 744–50, has condensed the disparate threads into coherent form, when asking whether a global social history is possible. Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, eds., *The global bourgeoisie*; and López and Weinstein, eds., *The making of the middle class*.

content, but national in name.<sup>56</sup> Thus, save for the syntheses by Bayly and Osterhammel, these historiographies tend to be fragmented along national or regional lines, which handicaps global comparisons.

#### IV

For what kinds of larger questions do such comparisons actually matter? Why is it important to know how similar or different Havana's and Manila's middle classes were, be it in terms of their relative demographic weight, their economic function, or their cultural and political sensibilities? For global historians, in particular, comparisons of this kind ultimately seem to fulfil the purpose of saying something about convergence. This is what is at stake in Chris Bayly's remarks about the uniformity of Western dress codes 'in public arenas' by the First World War, shared by 'a growing number of the most important men...wherever they lived'. Elsewhere, Bayly clarified how much such outward symbols of increasing conformity surrounding bourgeois notions of respectability and educational aspirations owed to urbanization and connections between cities.<sup>57</sup> On a much broader level of analysis, such convergence, or the lack thereof, is important because it promises to tell us something about the degrees and kinds of reciprocity between class formation and global connectivity; perhaps the ultimate purpose of a global social history.

The dimension of global connectivity, and its specific relation to local social fabrics, can be broached through a discussion of two outdated, overlapping yet distinct, concepts that haunt the pre-history of global social history: the comprador bourgeoisie and the middleman minority. Their classification from a global angle all too easily descends into rhetorical pirouettes: Osterhammel has labelled them both 'commercial minorities in the growing world economy', which in turn belonged to 'the middle ranks' (rather than classes), eventually summarizing: 'non-European quasi-bourgeois often exercised "comprador" functions as middlemen'.<sup>58</sup> This middling function connoted their simultaneous roles as lubricators of long-distance trade and as mediators within segmented local labour markets with stark ethnic distinctions, as they were typical in the larger peripheral, and especially colonial or semi-colonial, port cities. They were therefore intrinsically urban social formations, middling in a global as well as a local sense. As the noun minority suggests, they did not need to be large. The 1901 census of the British empire counted no more than 148 *compradores* in Hong Kong out of a total population approaching 300,000 – a figure altogether disproportionate to the scholarly and political commentary devoted to them.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps even more so than the bourgeois businessmen of turn-of-the-century Vienna, Amsterdam, London, or New York, both comprador

<sup>56</sup> Dejung, 'Auf dem Weg'.

<sup>57</sup> C. A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world: 1870-1914* (Malden, MA, 2004), pp. 194–8. Citation from p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Osterhammel, *The transformation*, pp. 768–9.

<sup>59</sup> *Census of the British empire 1901* (London, 1906), p. 137.



bourgeoisies and middleman minorities were widely perceived as predominantly male social formations. Demographically, they indeed were more male-dominated than the middle classes of European or North American cities. The American census of the Philippines in 1903 recorded more than thirty-one men for every woman 'of the yellow race' in Manila. Chinese sojourners in Southeast Asia were an admittedly extreme example of a skewed male-to-female ratio, but even for whites in Manila this ratio stood at 4.16. Similarly, Ottoman subjects in Buenos Aires in 1914, a group consisting primarily of Lebanese traders, had a male-to-female ratio of 3.66. While such a male demographic predominance was very typical of sojourners and of middleman minorities, much larger immigrant streams, such as Italians in Argentina, also contained more men than women.<sup>60</sup> Such demographic realities necessarily upended European bourgeois gender norms of male breadwinners as heads of sedentary families, in which women and children were confined to the domestic sphere. The sexual innuendo of turn-of-the-century tango lyrics is testament to a world not conforming easily to middle-class family values.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond certain commonalities in relation to gender, the concepts of the comprador bourgeoisie and that of the middleman minority differed in important respects. Compradors were local middlemen liaising between foreign firms and local suppliers, particularly in Chinese treaty ports during the second half of the nineteenth century. Their role as the forerunners of an autonomous entrepreneurial elite has been widely debated in Chinese history,<sup>62</sup> but from the second third of the twentieth century, the expression 'comprador bourgeoisie' came to be used primarily by Marxists in explicit contradistinction to 'national bourgeoisies'.<sup>63</sup> Though the term never shed its association with China entirely, it was thus to some extent globalized. Even as it occasionally came to refer to groups more commonly called middleman minorities, such as Lebanese traders in West Africa,<sup>64</sup> it never explicitly connoted an ethnic minority, unlike the concept of the middleman minority. After all, the very point of the compradors of Chinese treaty ports was that they belonged to the ethnic majority population.

As the literal Portuguese meaning of *compradores* ('buyers') underlined, they were characterized by their specific economic function, even as they were maligned for their supposed cultural Westernization. This functional economic definition made compradors resemble what dependency and world-systems theorists and economic historians have called collaborating elites or externally allied middle classes in the context of informal imperialism in

<sup>60</sup> *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, p. 676; *Tercer censo nacional 1914*, IV.

<sup>61</sup> Pablo Ben, 'Plebeian masculinity and sexual comedy in Buenos Aires, 1880–1930', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16 (2007), pp. 436–58.

<sup>62</sup> Marie-Claire Bergère, *The golden age of the Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911–1937* (Cambridge, 1989); Sabine Dabringhaus and Jürgen Osterhammel, 'The Chinese middle classes between empire and revolution', in Dejung, Motadel, and Osterhammel, eds., *The global bourgeoisie*, pp. 313–36.

<sup>63</sup> The classic form of separation can be found in Nicos Poulantzas, 'On social classes', *New Left Review*, 78 (1973).

<sup>64</sup> Eliphaz G. Mukonoweshuro, *Colonialism, class formation, and underdevelopment in Sierra Leone* (Lanham, MD, 1993), pp. 31–42.

Latin America.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to the middleman minority, the comprador bourgeoisie thus acquired markedly normative-political overtones. As Marxists around the world debated the merits and dangers of alliances with national bourgeoisies, often in the form of discussing their very existence, in order to bring about national-bourgeois revolutions paving the way for later socialist revolutions,<sup>66</sup> the comprador descended into a term of political invective – ‘the running dog of the imperialists’, as Mao memorably phrased it.<sup>67</sup>

The term’s specific Chinese origins, its mutation into a more global insult levelled at political adversaries, and its use as a characterization of a social formation with a principal view to that formation’s world economic function (as in world systems and dependency theory) conspired to impede, outside of China, localized empirical studies of what the comprador bourgeoisie actually was or did. Wherever historians dug into local social, political, and economic relations, as they did for cities in the Eastern Mediterranean, they often emerged with the finding that, from a sociological perspective, the comprador bourgeoisie was all but indistinguishable from the national bourgeoisie,<sup>68</sup> or else coterminous with middleman minorities that possessed a much greater degree of economic and political independence from Western imperial business interests than the term comprador implied.<sup>69</sup> For good reasons, then, outside of the specific context of Chinese treaty ports, the label began to fall into historiographical oblivion from the 1980s, alongside the more general decline of interest in class.

The concept of middleman minorities equally denotes economic brokers and negotiators with a locally specific function for trade and the bridging of the divides in segmented labour markets. But as a scholarly invention of the 1960s, it lacked the politically normative baggage of the comprador bourgeoisie, even as really existing middleman minorities around the world were frequent targets of nationalist attacks. In the absence of the noun ‘bourgeoisie’, or derivatives thereof, the middleman minority’s connotations in terms of class are less immediate. Instead, it refers specifically to ethnic minorities and in fact continues to be most commonly employed in ethnic studies.<sup>70</sup> Used for groups such as Armenians, Jews, and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean, Lebanese in West Africa and the Caribbean, Indians in East Africa, Parsees in India, and Chinese in Southeast Asia, the term’s geographical

<sup>65</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, ‘The imperialism of free trade’, *Economic History Review*, 6 (1953), pp. 1–15; Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and development in Latin America* (Berkeley, CA, 1979).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (Lima, 1928).

<sup>67</sup> *The writings of Mao Zedong, 1949–1976* (Armonk, NY, 1992), II (Dec. 1956 – Dec. 1957), p. 136.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Vitalis, ‘On the theory and practice of compradors: the role of Abbud Pasha in the Egyptian political economy’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 22 (1990), pp. 291–315.

<sup>69</sup> Reşat Kasaba, ‘Was there a comprador bourgeoisie in mid-nineteenth-century Western Anatolia?’ *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 11 (1988), pp. 215–28.

<sup>70</sup> Edna Bonacich, ‘A theory of middleman minorities’, *American Sociological Review*, 38 (1973), pp. 583–94.

range has always been more global, yet also more closely tied to formally colonial settings with sharp and racialized political and economic disparities.<sup>71</sup> Compared to the comprador bourgeoisie, the term thus tended to mute attention to class, instead highlighting the ethnic dimension of urban middling brokers in much of the Global South – in line with the increasing scholarly focus on race and ethnicity since the 1970s.<sup>72</sup>

The concept thus has the merit of highlighting that, for multiethnic commodity ports like Alexandria, Izmir, Cape Town, Singapore, or Manila, the ethnic, racial, or religious underpinnings of class formation were crucial. As has been pointed out for Bombay and Delhi, too, self-declared middle classes in these cities, suffused with Westernized habits of consumption, notions of bourgeois respectability, and philanthropic practices, were disproportionately drawn from ethno-religious minorities (Parsees and Ashraf).<sup>73</sup> Much the same has been found for Indians in Nairobi and the Lebanese in French West Africa.<sup>74</sup>

One defining trait of the cities in which middleman minorities played a prominent part in trade and middle-class formation was that they had labour markets that were highly segmented by ethnicity or race. In colonial port cities, these divisions were infamously deep, as census figures demonstrated. For instance, in Manila in 1903, whites were heavily over-represented in numerically small middle-class occupations tied to the state and in the liberal professions (clerks, clergymen, police, government officials, journalists, lawyers, physicians, typewriters, and teachers), and nearly absent from many working-class categories (bricklayers, cigarett-makers, embroiderers, labourers, painters, seamstresses, servants). The Chinese had a more varied composition in terms of class, but clearly formed a trade-oriented enclave, with a disproportionate share among accountants, merchants, and salesmen, as well as among carpenters, shoemakers, and stevedores. Most notably, the Chinese had a negligible share in almost all the categories in which whites were *either* over- or under-represented, testifying precisely to their middling role in society.<sup>75</sup> Yielding a whopping occupational dissimilarity index of 67.6 between whites and Chinese, these ethno-occupational divisions were typical of colonial settings in which political power and cultural capital were concentrated in

<sup>71</sup> The term, to be sure, has been used outside of such settings, for example for Japanese Americans: Harry H. L. Kitano, 'Japanese Americans: the development of a middleman minority', *Pacific Historical Review*, 43 (1974), pp. 500–19. But colonial and semi-colonial contexts have remained dominant.

<sup>72</sup> For a critique of this shift: Athanasios Gekas, 'Class and cosmopolitanism: the historiographical fortunes of merchants in Eastern Mediterranean ports', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 24 (2009), pp. 95–114.

<sup>73</sup> Jesse S. Palsetia, 'Parsis and Bombay City: community and identity in the nineteenth century', in Prashant Kidambi, Manjiri Kamat, and Rachel Dwyer, eds., *Bombay before Mumbai: essays in honour of Jim Masselos* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 35–55; Pernau, *Ashraf into middle classes*.

<sup>74</sup> Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: the politics of diaspora* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of empire: the Lebanese diaspora in colonial French West Africa* (Oxford, 2014).

<sup>75</sup> *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, p. 1004.

white hands, whereas, if there was something resembling an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, it was a matter of a middleman-minority enclave.

Compared to the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia, the concept of middleman minorities has never had the same purchase in Latin America, but processes of class formation were not for that reason less racialized there. Indigenous and African-descended populations were widely excluded from middle-class status across the region. Even in relatively less multiracial cities, such as early twentieth-century Buenos Aires, ideals of a bourgeois public sphere shaded into notions of whiteness.<sup>76</sup> Again, there is demographic corroboration of this imagery for other Latin American cities. Of Havana's 749 lawyers that the Cuban census counted in 1899, not a single one was recorded as 'coloured' (*de color*), even as that group accounted for 28.6 per cent of the city's population. Only 3 out of 496 physicians, 23 out of 824 teachers, and 492 out of 15,171 merchants were 'coloured' according to the census. In stark contrast, 68.9 per cent of the 15,025 servants were counted as 'coloured'. Meanwhile, 'foreign whites', a category primarily populated by Spanish immigrants, were over-represented in exactly the groups occupied by the Chinese in Manila: Forming 22.4 per cent of the city's entire population, they accounted for 68.1 per cent of Havana's merchants and 79.6 per cent of its salesmen.<sup>77</sup>

The term middleman minority, among historians more so than among other social scientists, has all but vanished today, though for reasons that differ from the ones responsible for the eclipse of the comprador bourgeoisie. Some authors have complained that its focus on ethnicity entailed a neglect of class.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, however, the rise of global history has empowered a terminology of networks, flows, and interactions that sits uncomfortably with the image of locally segregated, if transnationally connected, ethnic enclaves that the concept evokes. Recent studies of cosmopolitan port cities in the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia, formerly the epicentres of studies of middleman minorities, have barely mentioned the term, since they have aimed at 'challenging historical narratives...that focus on communal division' and providing a 'corrective to studies...too often...conditioned by assumptions of clear-cut ethnoreligious boundaries and national divides'.<sup>79</sup>

What matters most for construing a global social history more broadly is not so much whether individual empirical studies certify or falsify the assumption of impermeable ethnic boundaries, but rather whether the concepts of the comprador bourgeoisie and the middleman minority can contribute something meaningful to staking out a field of historical inquiry. Whereas the notion of the comprador bourgeoisie speaks to a function in a world economy tied together by high imperialism as well as local class formation, the concept of the middleman minority brings to the fore the racial and ethnic underpinnings

<sup>76</sup> Enrique Garguin, 'Los argentinos descendemos de los barcos: the racial articulation of middle-class identity in Argentina', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 2 (2007), pp. 161–84.

<sup>77</sup> *Census of Cuba, 1899*, p. 485.

<sup>78</sup> Gekas, 'Class and cosmopolitanism'.

<sup>79</sup> Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: the rise of a cosmopolitan port, 1840–1880* (Minneapolis, MN, 2011), p. 7. Similarly Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in motion: urban life and cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 10.

of that class formation in the global periphery, as well as its concrete urban micro-spatial embedding. Regardless of their many flaws, which may in the end still compel us to jettison them, their combination helps spotlight questions about the reciprocity between locally embedded, racialized processes of class formation and global connectivity.

They also point once more to the centrality of the interplay between nodal density and social differentiation for these processes. Middleman minorities occupied their roles as lubricators of the world economy only in relation to their function as brokers within the densification characteristic of socio-economically differentiated urban spaces. As a consequence, middleman minorities typically clustered in dense inner-city neighbourhoods at the intersection of shipping and railroad routes. Manila's Chinese minority was concentrated in Binondo, just north of the customhouse on the River Pasig and south of the main railway station.<sup>80</sup> In early twentieth-century Dakar, the Lebanese lived in an area nearby both port and station, sandwiched between the European and the African quarters – an 'interstitial zone which seemingly reflected, in all too neat a fashion, their status as commercial brokers and cultural intermediaries'.<sup>81</sup> In Izmir, the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish quarters encircled the increasingly cosmopolitan middle-class Frank (European) quarter, where, just like on Shanghai's famous Bund, the foreign merchant firms, banking, and insurance were concentrated.<sup>82</sup> Spanish immigrants in turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Havana flocked to the oldest and densest parts of these cities, where colonial ties had survived. Middle Eastern and Jewish immigrants specialized in commerce and retail (especially of textiles) frequently settled in strategic locations between downtown, the port, and railway stations, as in Buenos Aires's Once or Havana's Calzada del Monte.<sup>83</sup> They thus literally occupied middling positions within urban geographies.

Argentina and its capital are particularly illustrative of the macro- and micro-spatial manifestations of the relationship between the external economic connection, urban space, and local class formation. In the 1970s, dependency and world-systems theorists made it a habit to visualize the effects of an outward-oriented agro-exporting economy, dominated by collaborative elites and plagued by the absence of a national bourgeoisie interested in creating a domestic market, with a map of Argentina's British-owned railways. Showing numerous individual arteries radiating north, west, and south from Buenos Aires, but barely any cross-connections between these lines, the map encapsulated a broader point made by Frederick Cooper about the 'arterial'

<sup>80</sup> Richard Chu, *Chinese and Chinese mestizos of Manila: family, identity, and culture, 1860s-1930s* (Leiden, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Arsan, *Interlopers of empire*, p. 164.

<sup>82</sup> Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir*.

<sup>83</sup> José C. Moya, *Cousins and strangers: Spanish immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), pp. 123-204; Hernán Otero and Adela Pellegrino, 'Sharing the city: residence patterns and immigrant integration in Buenos Aires and Montevideo', in Samuel S. Baily and Eduardo José Míguez, eds., *Mass migration to modern Latin America* (Wilmington, DE, 2003), pp. 81-112; Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Embracing transculturalism and footnoting Islam in accounts of Arab migration to Cuba', *Interventions*, 18 (2016), pp. 19-42.

nature of colonial power, which condensed in nodal points.<sup>84</sup> But there was also an intra-urban dimension to this concentration: Not only Spanish immigrants, but the entire built environment on which a putative bourgeoisie depended was crammed into the dense six square-mile quadrangle delimited by the Rio de la Plata and the port to the east and the three railheads arriving from the north, west, and south: political power, public administration offices, courts, insurance companies, banking, commerce, department stores, educational institutions, libraries, social clubs, philanthropic societies, professional associations, cafés, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment. Close to the middle of it all: the opera house Teatro Colón, first opened in 1857 and enlarged and renovated in 1908, that single most striking epitome of bourgeois *porteños'* aspirations to build the 'Paris of South America'.<sup>85</sup>

Buenos Aires – embellished neither by an eventful topography nor by a byzantine layout – provided an unusually striking example, but the correlation between centrality, density, and middle classes was by no means unique to the Argentine capital. To be sure, the development of wealthy suburbs, which between 1890 and 1930 emerged not only in Buenos Aires, but also in Havana, Alexandria, Cape Town, Singapore, and Manila, gradually began to confound the earlier social geographies of these cities. But as late as the middle of the twentieth century, their socio-spatial residence patterns never approached the Chicago School model of concentric zones characteristic of North American cities, which separated decaying poor inner-city wards from leafy suburbs for the rich.<sup>86</sup> On the contrary, at least until the First World War, literacy rates in most of the entrepôts of the Global South, the most easily available proxy for class, by and large increased with density and proximity to the port and the old colonial centres.<sup>87</sup> This social differentiation of urban space was not only a key ingredient of middle-class formation, but also betrayed that process's long-term roots in the external connectivity forged by colonialism and imperialism.

## V

In an oft-cited, but too rarely heeded, 1996 article, Charles Tilly reminded urban historians that they 'have the opportunity to be our most important interpreters of the ways that global social processes articulate with small-scale social life'. Lamenting that instead of fulfilling this potential, 'they are playing a cautious, constricted game', he predicted that 'their work does not respond to exhortation; only concrete examples – preferably including dissertation-size chunks – will move them to new forms of investigation'.<sup>88</sup> Such works now exist, but they have flourished primarily outside the institutional jurisdiction of urban history.

<sup>84</sup> Cooper, *Colonialism in question*, p. 48.

<sup>85</sup> The classic book on turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires remains James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires: plaza to suburb, 1870–1910* (Oxford, 1974).

<sup>86</sup> Ernest W. Burgess, 'The growth of the city: an introduction to a research project', in Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, eds., *The city* (Chicago, IL, 1925), pp. 47–62; Sam Bass Warner Jr, *Streetcar suburbs: the process of growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, MA, 1962).

<sup>87</sup> Moya, *Cousins and strangers*, pp. 140–72; *Census of the Philippine Islands: 1903*, II, p. 620.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Tilly, 'What good is urban history?' *Journal of Urban History*, 22 (1996), pp. 702 and 704.

Instead, they have been more at home in national or regional historiographies, which has limited their usage in the transnational and transregional comparisons we need in order to answer questions about the global reach of concepts such as middle class and bourgeoisie. A global urban history is only in the process of being born. For the establishment of a global social history it will be indispensable.

A social history not primarily interested in the inter-relationship between density, population size, and social heterogeneity, which Louis Wirth has defined as the three distinctive traits of 'urbanism as a way of life', is of course imaginable. In the form of global labour history, with its marked focus on discussions about free versus coerced labour, it has existed for some while. But if the point of global social history is to discuss the interplay between global connectivity and the formation of middle classes and bourgeoisies, as Osterhammel and others have suggested,<sup>89</sup> it can ill afford to neglect the issues of space brought to the fore by urban history.

As Christof Dejung has argued, middle classes were partly a product of nineteenth-century connectivity, while they also helped to bring that connectivity about – as world-systems theory has in fact long pointed out.<sup>90</sup> But inasmuch as that connectivity was 'lumpy' and concentrated in particular kinds of urban space, they were middling not only as mediators for the running of the world economy, but also within local societal relations. It is this circumscribed urban embedding that the relational term 'middle' most typically denotes and that the etymologies of the 'bourgeois' and the 'citizen' betray. Earlier generations of sociologists and social historians were attuned to this link. The more recent literature about global cities has once again reminded us of the intimate ties between globalization, density, and differentiation. Global social historians should take note, too.

For at the most basic level, the social differentiation that was necessary for the emergence of middle classes – or, more broadly, middling societal formations – correlated with population density. No less importantly, the formation of middle classes hinged on an infrastructure of transport, communication, educational institutions, access to certain consumer goods, and recreational facilities – all the items, in short, mentioned in any tourist guide's description of Buenos Aires's six square-mile central quadrangle. It might be demurred that the potentially endless list of such infrastructural requirements for middle-class life amounts to nothing more than a disaggregation of buildings characteristic of almost any large city. But that is precisely the point: the social differentiation necessary for the emergence of a middle class or a bourgeoisie almost everywhere depended on built environments whose mutually constitutive components were in turn premised on socio-spatial density.

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<sup>89</sup> Osterhammel, *The transformation*, pp. 744–50.

<sup>90</sup> Dejung, 'Auf dem Weg'.