

The Global Middle Classes

I

Introduction

*Charting an Anthropology
of the Middle Classes*

Rachel Heiman, Mark Liechty, and Carla Freeman

In recent years, there has been a constant stream of media attention to the condition of the middle classes. On the one hand, there has been curious fascination with (and competitive envy of) places where middle classes are expanding, particularly India and China. At the same time, there has been escalating concern about the cultural, political, and economic implications of the fragility of the middle classes in the United States and Western Europe and the shrinking middle in Latin America. On the fringes of these discussions have been hints of attention to sites in Eastern Europe where the configuration of postsocialist middle classes looms large and to areas of the Middle East where the composition of the middle classes is changing. In 2011, of course, the revolutionary potential and religious orientation of middle classes in North Africa took center stage. Public intellectuals, policy makers, and academics from a variety of disciplines and interdisciplinary locations have been debating these issues in an effort to discern rhetoric from reality and to understand the implications of these shifts for the global economy and for people's everyday lives. Anthropology—a discipline uniquely poised to complicate this discourse—has not, until this book, offered a collective contribution to this theorizing.

This volume emerged out of an advanced seminar at the School for Advanced Research and brings together ethnographers who have been doing research on the middle classes in a range of nation-states. The impetus for

the seminar was our desire to explore global economic changes through the lens of the middle classes and to engage universal theories through ethnographies of everyday life. A series of key questions guided our early discussions: How does close attention to the middle classes broaden our understanding of contemporary forms of globalization? What analytical questions are raised about the category of “middle class” when its diverse referents, multifaceted uses, and different historical contexts of emergence are brought into view? In what ways might we need to reconfigure our concept of “class” once the middle classes are given their due place in class relations? And finally, how can anthropology’s particular theoretical approaches and empirical methods contribute to these debates?

Since the mid-1980s, anthropologists have been at the forefront of theorizing contemporary forms of globalization through examining its local articulations and cultural formations (for example, Appadurai 1996; Ferguson 2006; Ong 1987, 2006; Rouse 1995; Stephens 1995). Not content with universal theories that fail to attend to the range of lived experiences, subject formations, and local epistemologies, anthropologists have conducted in-depth ethnographic and historical research to offer nuance to our understanding of everything from the gendering of global divisions of labor (Fernández-Kelly 1983) to the production of locality (Appadurai 1996) to the nature of transnational citizenship (Ong 1998) to the emergence of multi-scalar activist networks and coalitions (Tsing 2005). Starting in the late 1980s and the 1990s, the middle classes began to emerge as a critical site for considering the implications of globalization, particularly the rise and spread of neoliberal logics, with the end of the Cold War, economic crises in Latin America and Asia, the movement of white-collar jobs from the United States and Western Europe to India and China, and now the current global economic crisis. In the years leading up to this seminar, a burgeoning number of anthropologists were tackling these concerns head-on (such as Caldeira 2000; Freeman 2000; Guano 2003; Heiman 2004; Liechty 2003; Lomnitz 2003; Mazzarella 2005; O’Dougherty 2002; Ortner 2003; Patico 2008). The time was ripe for anthropologists to come together not only to think deeply about the relationship between global economic shifts and middle-class formations but also to interrogate our understanding of what constitutes a “middle class”—and class politics more broadly—in this pivotal historical moment.

The chapters in this volume span the globe in their portrayal of the middle classes, with pieces that focus on Barbados, China, Egypt, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal, and the United States. Our introduction is framed around a series of five questions that emerged

when the ethnographic material and theoretical insights from each of the chapters came together within a shared analytical purview. With so much contextual particularity, along with striking comparative resonances, our discussion here addresses how anthropology can contribute to theorizing middle-class culture and history within global capitalist relations. Our goal is less to defend a particular answer to any of these questions than to lay out a range of intellectual lineages and analytical concerns with which anyone attempting to study middle classes will have to contend.

First, why have the middle classes become such an important focus in anthropology, and what has hindered—both from within the discipline and from without—anthropological efforts to shift the theoretical terrain on which middle classness is understood? Second, how does the incorporation of the middle classes into our theorizing of capitalist relations enable us to transform conventions of class analysis and our understanding of class politics? Third, how can we theorize the differences and similarities among middle-class formations through time and across space in a way that does not fall into a teleological understanding of the history of class? Fourth, while keeping in focus different conditions of possibility in which middle classes emerge, grow, and contract, how can we conceptualize the relationship between states and capitalism, particularly the role of the state in the formation, management, and privileging of the middle classes? Fifth, what practices, affects, and spaces are most associated with middle-class forms of labor, consumption, and citizenship, and how might we better understand ever-changing structures of capitalism and class relations if we place middle-class subjects and middle-class subjectivities at the center of our class theorizing?

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES: FROM AN AMBIVALENT TO A CRITICAL DOMAIN

The ethnographic analyses of middle classes around the world offered in this volume highlight a formerly ambivalent domain for anthropology. As a field whose origins rest upon a commitment to the holistic study of non-Western and small-scale societies, with sociologists and political scientists having traditionally focused primarily on industrialized, class-based societies, anthropology's engagement with class analysis has mainly taken the peasant, the lower classes, and the oppressed as its central protagonists. Indeed, while some anthropologists have taken the charge to "study up" (Nader 1972)—generating ethnographies of elites and the powerful (Marcus 1983; Marcus and Hall 1991; Ong 1998), as well as studies of middle classes, particularly in the United States and Europe (Frykman and

Löfgren 1987; Newman 1988, 1993; Ortner 2003)—the field as a whole has traditionally privileged the powerless ethnographic subject as indicative of a more purposeful, “morally engaged” scholarship (Scheper-Hughes 1995:420). Middle classes and upward mobility into the middle classes were viewed as tainted not only by implicit exploitation of their lower-class counterparts but also by cultural inauthenticity and mimicry of (often foreign, colonial) elites.

This previous anthropological avoidance of the middle-class subject reflects the dominance of certain gatekeeping concepts in anthropology and also other analytical traditions in which anthropologists are engaged, particularly geographic areas of study. Today, in an era of the global, it may seem overly traditional to return to region or “culture area” as significant analytical lenses, yet we suggest that some of the legacies of area studies offer indispensable clues to the ways in which middle classes have been left out of the analytical frame and how they have been articulated in the contemporary context of globalization. Not surprisingly, these traditions and concepts are, themselves, framed differently in the world areas in which anthropologists have worked (Appadurai 1986; Fardon 1990). For example, in Caribbean social science, the dominant paradigm for analyzing class has been Marxist political economy. This is due, in large part, to the historically close fit between the Marxist framework and the region’s plantation economy, in which a small, white, planter/corporate elite and the region’s black or nonwhite laboring masses constituted the fundamental struggle and the middle strata garnered only marginal interest. For this part of the world, a Marxist reading of class struggle has shaped not only the enterprise of academic inquiry but also politics more generally (Freeman, chapter 4, this volume). By contrast, in Indonesia, once home to the largest communist party outside the socialist bloc, class analysis by Indonesian and foreign scholars alike was explicitly silenced under the Suharto regime precisely because of its political threat (Jones, chapter 6, this volume). That is to say, state politics and local histories, as well as the power of academic gatekeeping concepts and theoretical trends, have contributed in particular ways in the past to the marginality of the middle classes as worthy ethnographic subjects and of class analysis that engages these groups as central actors.¹

At the same time, the growing interest in contemporary middle classes reflects a long tradition of anthropological inquiry in which fieldworkers are driven to topics both that their subjects make imperative and that geopolitics bring to the fore. Indeed, amid escalating contemporary economic flux, neoliberal restructuring, and the extensive reach of global media, surging middle-class aspirations and anxieties throughout the world have

compelled our attention to this emic preoccupation with middle-class lifestyles, spaces, sentiments, careers, and civic engagements. Not only has middle classness become an increasingly powerful category for aspiration, longing, and anxiety in many parts of the world, but “the middle classes” are also an increasingly common subject/citizenry hailed by political and corporate leaders. The global political-economic transformations that are giving rise to a renewed interest in class require an explicit theorization of the middle. Meanwhile, this stratum is susceptible to a wide range of assumptions and meanings, depending upon the local specificities of what it means to be middle-class—apathy, industriousness, fiscal irresponsibility, thrift, political conservatism, progressivism, cultural inauthenticity, and national character, among them—in part because of the analytical vagueness that has framed the usage of “middle class.”

With these groups increasingly in the public eye, their changing structures of work; changing patterns of consumption, reproduction, and citizenship; and associated middle-class subjectivities are imperative domains of ethnographic inquiry. The chapters in this collection demonstrate striking resonances: aspiring middle classes in Egypt, for example, bear notable similarities to middle classes in China and Hungary in their longing for middle-class lifestyles, spaces, and modes of consumption and in the ways in which middle classness is now achieved by new means. At the same time, the chapters expose critical differences arising from divergent histories, colonial traditions, and political-economic formations. The anthropological lens on the global middle classes that lies at the heart of this collective enterprise thus foregrounds cultural specificity, presents new logics of class itself, and offers the kind of powerful comparative analysis and theorizing that is most richly produced through ethnographic research. In so doing, this ethnographic perspective offers not only a glimpse of emergent groups and changing economic arrangements across the world but also a unique set of tools for analyzing middle classness itself as a culturally specific position and set of subjectivities, articulated in and through shifting terrains of gender, nation, race, caste, ethnicity, and empire. The manner in which these transformations are unfolding has urged anthropologists studying middle classes and the practices, ideologies, and meanings associated with middle classness to provide a more nuanced theorization of “middle class” and to rethink traditional tools of class analysis.

For anthropologists concerned with class, the rich tradition of Marxist political economy has offered a critical lens through which struggles between a ruling class and a subordinated class, bourgeoisie and proletariat, have constituted the central drama of capitalism. For many of us, our

own political sympathies made this framework additionally compelling: it made sense of our ethnographic projects, whether of nationalisms, state socialism, postcolonial politics, global labor restructuring, or new urban landscapes. Yet, just as Marx provided little insight into the position of middle classes—envisioning their eventual dissolution into either owning or laboring groups—many anthropologists have viewed these groups with trepidation. But in the contemporary period, globalization and neoliberalism have pushed our analyses to include not just the expanding realms of multinational capital and global factory labor (and associated migrations), but a widening array of immaterial and affective labor and the mounting significance of consumption and new forms of citizen action. It is time for anthropologists to collectively delve into the murky plurality of the global middle classes.

THE MATERIALITY OF MIDDLE CLASSNESS; OR, WHY MIDDLE CLASSES MATTER FOR THEORY AND POLITICS

The contemporary expanding fields on which new middle classes enact themselves call for analytical tools that highlight the complexities and inextricable dimensions of economy and culture, labor and subjectivity, in the production of class. Although broadening materialist readings of class to examine its cultural and affective underpinnings illuminates all class positionings, we find that these complexities are made especially salient in the longings and entailments associated with middle classness. For here, as many of the chapters in this collection make plain, styles of consumption, modes of production (immaterial and material), approaches to reproduction, and motivations for citizen action are often inextricably connected in middle-class practices and subjectivities, and they are often imbued with affective traces of aspiration and anxiety and the desire for a feeling of security or belonging. We suggest that an important outcome of affording the middle classes their due place in anthropological theories of capitalist relations will be to strengthen the foundation upon which anthropological studies of *all* class locations rest and to broaden our understanding of what counts as class politics.

There has long been an either-or debate about whether class is a material phenomenon (arising from a more or less Marxist understanding of socioeconomic relations of production) or simply a kind of associational category of people aligned around common sociopolitical goals. One argument holds that the very use of the word “class”—as opposed to, for example, “status group” or “habitus”—implies a materialist perspective: class is an idea associated with group experiences of socioeconomic difference.

All of the contributors to this volume share this basic understanding of class as a sociocultural phenomenon growing out of industrial relations of production and the modern state, at the same time incorporating notions such as status and habitus for the ways in which they are implicated in class relations, even if, as in the case of status, they are social phenomena not specific to capitalist relations of production.

This volume thus builds on the contributions to class analysis that have come from theorists who have been compelled—through empirical findings that combine historical perspective with ethnographic insight—to engage the writings of not only Marx but also Weber, Gramsci, Veblen, Bourdieu, Foucault, Lefebvre, Hartmann, and others. Their concepts of status, hegemony, conspicuous consumption, habitus, reproduction, discipline, and the production of space enable us to broaden our understanding of class relations, particularly the means through which people make meaning in their everyday lives, make do amid the conditions of possibility in which they live, become classed subjects, and ultimately influence the economic order of things. It is this attention to broad modes of capitalist regulation—still including analysis of the relationship between labor, capital, and the state but going far beyond—that is advanced by the scholarship in this volume. We view cultural logics, spatial practices, and affective states not simply as superstructural reflections of economic conditions; we understand them to be dynamics that can and often do have material effects on economic futures. That is, we see these material, affective, and symbolic dimensions of class to be dialectically intertwined in the production of class subjectivities and class relations.

Below, we identify more precisely the characteristic practices and subjectivities of middle classness, but for new students of the middle classes, we take a moment here to briefly highlight some of the key foundational works on the middle class. Written mainly by theorists outside anthropology, these texts focus largely on the location of the middle classes within relations of production. Although this theoretical lineage has been productive in our understanding of certain aspects of middle classness, its primacy has occluded the above-mentioned dimensions of class subjectivity that enable a broader understanding of how class works, and it has obscured the middle class in our theorizing of class politics.

A key collected volume on the middle class from the late 1970s was tellingly titled *Between Labor and Capital* (Walker 1979). This dual sense of class, with the primary site of class struggle as always already (and only) between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, comes out of a long tradition of Marxist analysis in which the middle class was expected to “sink gradually into the

proletariat,” as Marx and Engels (1968[1848]:16) famously remarked in *The Communist Manifesto*. The middle class to which Marx and Engels were referring was the classic petty bourgeoisie, which included small producers, artisans, and farmers (Bottomore 1983:378). The proletarianization of the middle class would occur, Marx and Engels (1968[1848]:16) explained, “partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new means of production.” Less often noted in discussions of Marx’s limited engagement with the question of the middle class is that he did acknowledge, almost two decades later in *Theories of Surplus Value* (2000[1863]), the importance of the increasing middle class for the development of capitalism, particularly for the type of immaterial labor (what Marx referred to as “unproductive labor”) necessary for capitalism to function (Urry 1973). Although neither Marx nor Engels made a distinction between different kinds of middle-class work, this latter discussion can be interpreted as Marx’s recognition of the increasing numbers at that time of technical workers, clerical workers, managers, governmental officials, and teachers, among others (Bottomore 1983:378).

Despite the fact that this type of middle-class labor grew profoundly and became central to the workings of industrial capitalism, many strict Marxist theorists continued to omit the middle class from their theorizing, viewing it as an ideological illusion and thereby maintaining a polarized understanding of class relations. This failure to account for the “empirical evidence” of a large middle class in advanced capitalist societies led ultimately to what Erik Olin Wright (1989:3) described as the “‘embarrassment’ of the middle class” for Marxists. Attempts to rectify this lacuna by some Marxist theorists at first kept intact the notion of two primary classes, offering up the idea that the middle class was actually a segment of the other classes: either a “new petty bourgeoisie” (Poulantzas 1978) or a “new working class” (Mallet 1975), marking the distinction in the former through its mental (versus manual) labor and the latter through the proletarianization of mental labor that occurred in the years leading up to May 1968, which Mallet hoped would lead the “knowledge industry” to align against bourgeois class power.

This latter theoretical move was a great challenge to one of the central tenets of Marxist theory, which held that the proletariat was the *only* class with radical potential. Central to this rethinking was that the proletariat was no longer the only site for thinking through class politics. Wright’s (1989) contribution to these discussions was to build on the work of the

Ehrenreichs (1979), who defined the new middle class *as a class*—the “professional managerial class”—with the potential to align with either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie because their material interests overlapped with both, echoing Gramsci’s (1971) argument that the intellectual “ideas” of the middle classes could prove to be fruitful for the interests of *either* the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. Although Wright (1989:26) was ambivalent about whether this was a class unto itself, he saw that this was a group of people simultaneously located in various positions in class relations and thus positioned in contradictory locations within “exploitation relations.” The broader implication of this theoretical shift, as Rouse (1995) has elaborated, is that cross-class coalitions—across *all* established lines of difference—are essential to undermining exploitation relations. Such an understanding of the middle classes broadens the parameters of who may qualify as a subject for a morally engaged anthropology.

This volume thus includes pieces that address the more entrenched structural lines of difference, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion, and other cultural meanings and distinctions marking class groups and their identifications. This perspective allows us to understand the broad spectrum of how people perceive themselves; make meaning in their everyday lives; make decisions about the types of jobs they hold, the products they consume, and the issues they decide are worth their political action; where they choose to live, relax, and shop; whom they choose as partners; how they raise their children; and when they make moral claims or demand ethical practices. As noted earlier, this broader understanding—beyond relations of production—is often deemed to transcend the boundaries of material concerns. This is why key theorists of the middle class who have, for example, included Weberian analyses of status in their understanding of the middle classes—like C. Wright Mills (1951), who coined the term “white-collar”—were regarded by some Marxists to have moved away from theorizing the role of material interests in the working of capital. Mills’s work, in fact, provides an extremely important analysis of the material implications of middle-class status concerns. By revealing the means through which white-collar workers become consumed with status issues, such as their reputation in the office or their access to the boss, Mills demonstrates what leads some white-collar workers to focus little attention on their location in class relations and others to embrace white-collar unionism.

Following in the footsteps of Gramsci (1971), Mills (1951), the Ehrenreichs (1979), Wright (1989), and Rouse (1995), we take the question of whether middle classes are progressive or conservative, politically agentive or politically manipulated, as open to debate, but the debate itself

highlights the fact that middle-class practices (not unlike working-class practices in the current political-economic climate; De Genova 2005) are often deeply contradictory. Regardless of whether one's interest in reading this book is a curiosity about middle-class lives or a desire to theorize middle classness or to critique the neoliberal capitalist globalization of our times, the necessary starting point is an understanding of people's everyday lives, including how they act, what they believe, what they say, and what they do not say. This is what historically minded ethnography provides and what this volume contributes. In order to embark upon this type of project, we must move beyond theories that were built on developments internal to particular countries—like most of those described in this section—and begin “to identify the historically specific character of the national/global dialectic” (Rouse 1995:396).

THE GLOBAL MIDDLE CLASSES: HISTORICIZING AND COMPARING THE “OLD” AND THE “NEW”

How are we to understand the differences and similarities among middle-class formations through time and across space? In this book, we argue that middle classes emerge under certain socioeconomic and historical conditions of possibility that allow us to conceptualize the middle class as a coherent category of social analysis. Yet, we also insist that the term's analytical coherence should not obscure the fact that, in actual practice, middle-class dynamics play out in potentially infinite ways. The multiplicity of middle classes documented in this book reminds us that class, despite its analytical value, is never, as E. P. Thompson (1978:147) argued, a “model” or “structure,” but a lived experience, a “social process over time.” As anthropologists, our job is to maintain a constant balance between the heuristic idea of class, as expressed in our theoretical conceptions, and the lived experience of class, as documented ethnographically in all of its multiplicity.

We foreground the middle class as a cultural and historical problem and explore what is at stake in how we theorize middle classness and its variations across time and space. Because the historical emergence of middle classes is tied to the history of capitalism, it is not surprising that class histories are subject to many of the same conceptual problems as the history of capitalism itself. Histories that understand capitalism to have “originated” in some time and place (typically, early modern Europe) and then spread globally also tend to impose the same teleological pattern onto the history of class. By this logic, capitalist class relations and formations believed to have arisen first in Europe are said to generate derivative echoes as Western

capitalism “penetrates” and “modernizes” societies around the world. In this view, all middle classes share an originary moment and vary only to the degree of their distance downstream from the source of historical innovation in the West.

Drawing on the ideas of conditions of possibility, sociospatial interrelatedness, and scalar (rather than categorical or epochal) difference, Liechty (chapter 11, this volume) makes a case for a new reading of middle-class history that accounts for the emergence of middle classes through time and space without falling back on Eurocentric teleologies. Class is fundamentally a relational and interproductive phenomenon: class formations emerge only in relation to other classes, none more so than middle classes, which appear between—and in constitutive tension with—classes above and below. As capitalist economic logics have gradually encompassed more and more of market relations in regions around the world (a scalar rather than epochal process of transformation that is *not* driven by European capitalist penetration), new socioeconomic relations of production, exchange, and consumption also emerge, forming the necessary conditions of possibility for middle classes to materialize.

By this logic, middle classes and middle-class culture are the lived experience or manifestation of particular kinds of socioeconomic relations that arise within certain historical and spatial circumstances and are articulated in and through culturally specific parameters of gender, nation, race, caste, ethnicity, and empire. We can thus theorize the conditions of possibility of middle-class formation in a coherent way (that avoids Western teleologies) while acknowledging that both the conditions and the possibilities are local, highly variable, and nonderivative. For example, just because we see a concept such as respectability associated with middle classness across time and space—from Victorian England to contemporary Nepal (Liechty, chapter 11, this volume), Barbados (Freeman 2000, 2007, and chapter 4, this volume), and Egypt (Schielke, chapter 2, this volume)—does not mean that this class-encoded moral concern traveled by diffusion around the globe from nineteenth-century Britain. Our job as historically and geographically minded anthropologists is to always start with the premise that middle classes or middle-class practices are not real *because* they exist in theory but rather because people exist in classed ways that can be theorized (Wacquant 1991).

Central to this theorization is one of this volume’s most important contributions, which is not just to document the emergence of “new middle classes” (which others have also done), but to examine how new and old middle classes coexist, often uneasily. Neoliberal policies have aimed not

just at supercharging consumer cultures and organizing the consent and support of what David Harvey (2005:62) calls “traditional middle classes” for the neoliberal state, but also at spawning a host of new middle classes worldwide who are charged with the responsibility of being independent entrepreneurs and consumers, especially in the realm of services. If what Harvey calls the “traditional middle classes” emerged from the populist, modernist, bureaucratic, state-driven economic policies of mid-twentieth-century states (in capitalist countries, quasi-socialist states such as India or Egypt, and even socialist states such as Hungary; Fehérváry, chapter 5, this volume), the “new middle classes” are products of the post-1980 global neoliberal turn. Around the world, declining rates of accumulation during the 1970s triggered new policies of systematic deindustrialization in Western industrialized nations (that is, the “offshoring” of industrial labor) with a matched industrialization in nations such as India and China, along with the privatization of state functions (such as health, education, and security) around the globe. A host of nation-states packaged new economic policies in the ideological trappings of private property, entrepreneurship, and “personal responsibility” (read “personal accumulation and self-optimization”; Ong 2006). While real wages have fallen in the Western industrialized nations since the dawn of the neoliberal era in the 1980s (Harvey 2005:25), profit rates in certain economic sectors worldwide (notably, banking and finance) have soared. This has led, in turn, to the peculiar phenomenon in which, even as the traditional middle classes struggle to maintain their living standard (through longer hours and multiple wage earners), new (neoliberal) middle classes have emerged, with their members typically clustered around the new centers of global finance (Sassen’s [2001] “global cities”), where they are best situated to feed off the “trickle-down” largesse of the (pre-2008?) neoliberal economic boom.

The anxious coexistence of various middle classes not just *between* nations and regions, but *within* them, is, both theoretically and ethnographically, one of the most important themes in this book. Ethnographically, around the world we see the tensions between these middle-class formations playing out in a fascinating array of moral politics, pitting against each other new and old economies, nationalists and trans- (or even post-) nationalists, religious conservatives and progressives, social collectivists and “self-made” entrepreneurs, and many others. Theoretically, these dual (dueling) middle classes represent different visions of the state, different modes of capitalist (re)production, and (perhaps most interestingly for anthropologists) different forms of subjectivity, imbricated within shifting fields of gender, race, ethnicity, and geography.

The contributors to this volume explore a range of middle-class subjectivities (often constructed in explicit opposition to *other* middle-class subjects), and are what these lived ways of being that need to guide our evolving (re)conceptualizations of the global middle classes. Rachel Heiman's work, for example, vividly illustrates tensions between "new" and "old" middle classes in the uneasy "McMansionization" of middle-class New Jersey residential suburbs outside New York City. Research in India (Srivastava, chapter 3), Egypt (Schielke, chapter 2), Hungary (Fehérváry, chapter 5), and China (Zhang, chapter 9) also points to similar and related tensions between "traditional" middle classes—often associated ideologically with relatively collectivist, national modernization paradigms—and new neoliberal middle classes organized around ideologies of global "free trade," individual entrepreneurial success, and unabashed assertions of private property. This insight reminds us, crucially, that middle-class history is ongoing, its lived embodiment continuing to evolve as its conditions of possibility continue to change across time and space, with elements of the "residual" and the "emergent" simultaneously in play (Williams 1977:121–27).

THE PROMOTION OF MIDDLE CLASSES: BOOSTER STATES AND THE COORDINATION OF CLASS CONTAINMENT

While keeping in focus different conditions of possibility in which middle classes emerge, grow, and contract, how can we conceptualize the relationship between states and middle classes, particularly the role of the state in the formation, management, and privileging of the middle classes? Addressing this question is one unavoidable challenge for students of the global middle classes. To begin, we need to acknowledge that the question of how states relate to classes has to do with how states relate to processes of modern capitalist industrial production. Of course, the existence of class groups *and* capitalism (as one form of market logic functioning among others) long predates the origins of the modern industrial capitalist state. When and how capitalist logic becomes the logic of the state is a question for historians, but, as Braudel (1977:64) argues, "capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state."

It is worth taking a moment here to remember that—from China and India to the Middle East and Europe—premodern states that depended on agrarian tax bases often harbored capitalist enclaves (typically, coastal trade centers). Relations between agrarian feudal elites and merchant capitalist classes were often notoriously tense. Arguably, capitalism first "triumphed" over (or became) the state when and where weak or receding

agrarian (land-based) states allowed coastal merchant enclaves to take affairs into their own hands, forming city-states in which capitalist values could be enshrined as the defining interests of the state itself. In Europe, this occurred famously in places such as fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice and Genoa and seventeenth-century Holland, following earlier but closely analogous, state-like capitalist merchant enclaves in the Indian Ocean such as Hormuz, Calicut, and Malacca (Chaudhuri 1985). Notably, it is in the earliest capitalist states that we see the earliest middle classes, complete with many of the same consumer practices, social preoccupations, and moral anxieties documented in this volume.²

Yet, to say that middle classes are associated with capitalist states is not to suggest that capitalist state power in some way *creates* middle classes. Rather, the “triumph” of capitalism within any state is one of the crucial conditions of possibility for middle-class subject formation, a process that contributors to this volume document as ongoing in, for example, post-socialist Europe (Fehérváry, chapter 5) and China (Zhang, chapter 9). It is *within* capitalist states—places where capitalist principles (such as private property), corporate rights, and moral values such as “individualism” and “equal rights” are enshrined in state law—that middle classes form in the context of larger relations of production, circulation, and consumption.³

Thus, middle classes may not be the *products* of capitalist states in any intentional way, but, as this volume makes clear, states have ever-increasing stakes in the promotion of middle classes and their class interests. It is here that we enter a rich and complex field of play in which capitalist states seek to manage classes and class relations in the interests of capital. At least since the rise of industrial capitalism, (capitalist) states have struggled to keep relations of production and consumption profitable and to maintain political stability, a particularly tricky ideological task for liberal democracies (Poulantzas 2000). The late twentieth-century neoliberal turn is only the most recent (and perhaps desperate) effort to protect rates of capital accumulation and to fend off political unrest, albeit with a much broader range of state players and state political structures. New middle classes have emerged and become more central to states’ efforts to develop new markets through new forms of labor, to promote old and new forms of consumption, and to protect the interests of capital through new modes of security and surveillance, military involvement to secure resources and create markets, or the scaling back of resources earmarked for social welfare.

What is perhaps unique about the era of neoliberal globalization is the degree to which states now cooperatively *coordinate* the politics of class containment (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Vast multilateral “free trade”

agreements allow states to “free” the movement of goods and capital while regulating the movement of people, thereby creating new global patterns of labor differentiation and class spatialization (Liechty, chapter 11, this volume; Peebles 2011; Rouse 1995). Special “export production zones” in Mexico, India, China, and elsewhere allow robust consumer states with high labor costs to offshore the labor-intensive parts of their industrial work or, as in the case of China, to create spaces within the nation in which certain types of labor practices and trade policies are allowed that might not be acceptable elsewhere within its borders (Ong 2006). This set of conditions enables the free flow of underpriced consumer goods and services to the robust consumer states and to places like India and China with small but growing consumer bases. At the same time, many countries have little to export but labor, generating movement of all kinds, including rural workers flocking to national “special economic zones,” formal state-to-state labor export-import schemes (for example, millions of Nepali labor migrants to various Persian Gulf states and Filipina maids to Taiwan and Europe), and flows of criminalized labor migrants across national borders (for example, between Mexico and the United States or between Zimbabwe and South Africa). Changes associated with neoliberalism suggest that the manipulation of transnational class relations is—more than ever—the business of the state (Ong 2006). To be left out of the neoliberal, nodal interstate system is to be essentially left out of the world economy, as Ferguson (2006:13) notes for much of Africa.

If the global regulation and interstate divvying up of class relations is one of the hallmarks of the neoliberal era, this is certainly not to say that capitalist states advocate an overt politics of class within their own populations. On the contrary, neoliberal states around the world typically delegitimize (or even actively suppress) class-based politics, with its revolutionary, Marxist implications. Indeed, states’ promotion of middle classness, with the (false) notion that a majority of people belong to this category, is in part to dispel class tensions between working and capitalist classes. The trend is most starkly apparent in postsocialist states where talk of class struggle and workers’ rights—until recently the very basis of the state’s rhetorical legitimacy—is shelved, replaced by a new (neoliberal) gospel of individual prosperity (such as in Hungary [Fehérváry, chapter 5] and China [Zhang, chapter 9]). In the United States, anyone speaking of class (difference) is open to accusations of implying the (un-American) existence of inequality, promoting “failed socialism,” or even “inciting class warfare.” From the perspective of neoliberal statecraft, class is an idea—disruptive and destabilizing—whose time has (hopefully) passed.

Yet, even while rhetorics of class consciousness and struggle disappear from state discourse, talk of middle classes proliferates. Emptied of the otherwise contentious language of class, “middle-class” is cast as a benign category, free of implications of exploitation and social struggle, that neoliberal capitalist states can embrace. In the discourses of neoliberal states, middle classes are bastions of “democracy” and “equal opportunity” where ideologically individuated subjects exercise individual (consumer, “lifestyle”) freedoms (as opposed to socialist politics that stress group activism and liberatory freedoms). Around the world, national middle classes have become the darlings of the state, identified as model subjects, their interests held up as the interests of the state.⁴ Imagined as inclusive and open to any hard-working, deserving, “entrepreneurial” individual, the middle classes have become the (largely depoliticized) ideological and social construct upon which the neoliberal state rests its political legitimacy.

States have long worked to engineer social space according to their changing visions of national interests and ideal citizens. From boulevards constructed in rebellious Parisian neighborhoods, to the building of apartheid townships in South Africa, to bulldozing neighborhoods in U.S. cities for “urban renewal,” states have long been deeply invested in creating spaces that (aim to) foster particular kinds of social relations, subjectivities, and practices. The global neoliberal shift toward privatized state functions and the exploding private capitalist development initiatives around the world might suggest an end to state involvement in social engineering. Yet, many have noted the irony that while neoliberal capitalism extols the virtue of “private initiative” and decries the inefficiencies of the bureaucratic state and “big government,” as much as ever, states play pivotal roles in *enabling* the very “private” projects that claim to be self-made (often through “deregulation,” banking “reform,” tax policy, and so forth). Notable for this volume is the fact that much of this new (state-backed) private development is aimed squarely at, and expressly for, the middle classes. The vast new residential, leisure, and commercial developments springing up around the world, described extensively in this book (Srivastava, chapter 3, and Zhang, chapter 9) and elsewhere, graphically chart the rise of new (neoliberal) state practices that directly and indirectly promote the interests of the new, individuated, “self-made,” entrepreneurial middle classes, or what Srivastava (chapter 3) calls ideal “consumer-citizens.”

One of the key sociocultural phenomena associated with this state privileging of middle-class subjects (and their ubiquitous presence in state and public discourse and global media) is that “middle-class” has become not just an increasingly common category of self-identification, but—perhaps

even more important—an *aspirational* category. As middle classness becomes a more and more emic concept (circulated in vernacular speech and made meaningful in local commercial and state rhetoric), middle-class membership becomes a powerful, life-altering goal for many of those poised on its margins, even for those living in states where middle-class boosterism is not a primary ideological tactic. In chapter 2, Schielke describes the frustration and perpetually delayed gratifications of young Egyptians—in what he refers to as the “‘lumpen’ middle class”—who long for membership in the global middle and struggle to acquire consumer status markers that would allow them to create a version of middle-class domesticity. This middle-class aspiration is, we believe, one of the key political dynamics of contemporary states: by shifting the desires of marginalized groups *away from* liberatory politics (which would threaten the state’s capitalist and, in some instances, repressive underpinnings) and *toward* relatively depoliticized aspirations for middle-class goods and lifestyles, states can contain discontent (including demands for public education, health care, infrastructure, and so forth) within the confines of never-ending private quests for the consumerist “good life.” To aspire to or maintain middle classness is to “live in the future” (Schielke, chapter 2), with one’s life oriented around longing, debt, and the struggle to secure that future. Of course, the 2011 developments in Egypt provide an important counterpoint: middle-class frustrations can also be precisely the impetus for revolutionary movements.

Contemporary states thus have deep interests in maintaining and privileging middle classes. Whether as a form of self-identification or aspiration, middle-class subjectivity shifts consumerist longing and political action away from social transformation (for the public good) to private transformation (for oneself, one’s family, or one’s small social group), vesting subjects in state commercial agendas (free trade, market access, privatization, individual responsibility, etc.) rather than in the protection and social welfare of the state. In some extreme cases, the new middle-class subject can even be politically valorized as embodying a new (neoliberal) freedom (usually vis-à-vis a demonized “old” socialist subject) in which individual entrepreneurship is cast as heroic resistance to the “failed economic policies of the past.”

Yet, this freedom and agency can be illusory for some and fleeting for others. In an era of globalized media—in which images of middle-class lifestyles and leisure move far more freely than do the marginalized people who long for them—mobility is a constant contradiction. Strategies of social mobility often require spatial mobility (often criminalized) across the very borders that neoliberal states construct to protect the interests

of capital (and middle classes). Additionally, in the current neoliberal scramble for capital accumulation—in which many white-collar jobs now move around the globe as freely as has long been the case for manufacturing jobs—middle-class workers are increasingly aware of the temporality of their upward mobility. As Andrew Ross (2006) describes, young engineers in China are already actively optimizing their wages because they know that it is only a matter of time until another nation-state (such as Thailand or Vietnam) primes its policies and its citizens to offer a more affordable labor option for “offshore-able” middle-class jobs.

LONGING TO SECURE: MIDDLE-CLASS AFFECTS, LABORS, AND LONGINGS

Although the middle classes are clearly in a (relatively) privileged position in the economic order of things, all the chapters in this volume address—in one way or another—the feelings of insecurity that infuse middle-class subjectivities around the globe. This affective state of being, which includes a host of context-specific desires, aspirations, and anxieties, enables us to highlight the types of practices, spaces, and sentiments most associated with middle-class forms of (re)production, consumption, and citizenship. In calling attention to what we refer to as a “longing to secure,” which is central to the ontology of middle-class subjects across cultural and national boundaries, one goal of this volume is to underscore the constant anxiety and work that go into the management of middle-class subjectivities. The affective and material contours of this work take many forms, through ever-evolving and newly articulated discursive and spatial strategies and disciplinary practices not only on the part of states but also via a host of key institutions, informal networks, and actors, including aspiring and middle-class subjects themselves (Foucault 1991). In light of the volatility now being experienced by most classed subjects, we suggest that the theorizing of middle-class subjectivities presented in this volume can prove fruitful for thinking through the ontology of all classed subjects in the current global economic climate.

When thinking about classed subjects, we have necessarily returned to classic theories of capitalism that have expanded the theoretical landscape well past the limits of structuralism in which subjects are, as Althusser remarked, mere “spectators...in *an authorless theater*” (Lipietz 1993:106). In particular, it is fruitful to first return to Gramsci’s (1971) writings on Fordism, particularly the dialectic between contradictions in relations of production and the production of new subjectivities, or a “new man” in his words. Gramsci was fascinated with the Taylorist means of production

being utilized in Ford's factories, particularly the moment when workers' bodies began to move in sync with machines, which in turn freed their minds for other thoughts. As workers started to realize that they were, in Taylor's words, "trained gorillas," they began to question their role in the means of production and to act as citizens in various ways to challenge those relations. Ford's solution was to offer higher wages to his workers, although he soon realized that increased wages brought a new contradiction to the fore: with more money, workers would be involved in leisure activities that might harm their ability to be stable, hard workers, such as drinking too much or spending too much time in the Ford cars that they were finally able to afford. To deal with this challenge, Ford sent sociologists and social workers to the homes of workers to do what Gramsci called a "psycho-physical" transformation, that is, to transform workers into subjects who were rationalized just like the means of production, including temperance in regard to drinking, desires in sexual relations, and ways of being "proper" U.S. citizens.

Gramsci's astute reading of this particular moment in capitalist relations offers a powerful reminder: new moments in capitalist modes of production are dialectically intertwined with new relations of production that involve new classed subjects, and grasping this dialectic means keeping in view people as workers, consumers, reproducers, and citizens. Gramsci's insights into the "psycho-physical" transformation of early twentieth-century working-class subjectivities also challenge us to think about analogous changes in modern classed subjects and how the middle classes might be a particularly fruitful site for theorizing the contemporary "hegemony of immaterial labor" (Hardt and Negri 2004) and what some see as the growing dominance of consumption over production as the defining force behind social class. Starting with the relationship between class subjectivity and labor, we quickly enter the domains and spaces of consumption, reproduction, and citizenship.

It is important to remember that, for Marx and in this example from Gramsci, labor is specifically located in formal relations of production (between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie) and specifically tied to the production of a physical commodity: labor becomes an expression of the commodification of the laborer himself (Marx 1961). Extending this understanding of labor's forms to include what some have defined as *immaterial* and, in particular, *affective* labor (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004; Hochschild 1983; Lazzarato 1996; Mills 1951), we expand our understanding of not just what forms of commodities are being produced, but what kinds of experiences (from pleasure to alienation) and subjectivities lie at the heart of

these modes of production, consumption, and exchange. Theorizing the U.S. middle class in the early 1950s, C. Wright Mills (1951:65) noted that “everything from managerial to teaching, office and sales work—involves putting subjectivity to work in jobs that are less about manipulating things and more about handling people and symbols.” What was once a distinctive feature of middle-class labor now marks an ever-expanding field of labor across classes and has, concomitantly, become a central analytical question for scholars of all classes.

Expanding our understanding of labor to include affective labor allows us to more fully theorize the nature of class subjectivity. In the new economy, a variety of services, white- and pink-collar office work, and a widening field of entrepreneurial enterprises strain traditional Marxist notions of the commodity form and thereby what counts as labor and what we might consider a site and mode of production. By rethinking the commodity form in a range of “immaterial” and affective values—in domains such as elder, child, and health “care work”; aesthetic, therapeutic, psychological, and “pleasure” work; and many other services—we can see these forms of labor as new productive processes with new affects and subjectivities produced and consumed within them (Dill 1994; Heiman 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Padilla 2007; Parreñas 2001; Sherman 2007).

Significantly, this new, broadened understanding of labor stems from feminist readings of both the value produced and the skill involved in what had been invisible forms of labor. Drawing from C. Wright Mills, Arlie Hochschild (1983) drew our attention not just to the affective dimensions of exchange relations in the “personality market,” but to the gendered labor processes entailed in emotion work (Weeks 2007).⁵ Further, the manner in which class subjectivities are permeated by other social formations—not only gender but also ethnicity, race, and religion (De Genova 2005; Fernández-Kelly 1983; Freeman 2000; Ong 1987; Rofel 1999)—demonstrates how the types of labor performed transcend material relations and demand a dialectical class analysis that can account for ongoing transformations in reproduction/production and in production-exchange-consumption. In Barbados, for example, while sugar and manufacturing have declined as the nation’s economic mainstays, the state and NGOs have actively promoted entrepreneurship and services as critical growth areas. For women entering the entrepreneurial arena, their business pursuits are tied to new desires in the realms of reproduction and consumption. Specifically, the neoliberal imperative for entrepreneurship is radically altering the structure of marriage and family life, creating new spaces for these newly middle-class subjects to enact their middle classness, such as

family restaurants and summer camps for their children (see Freeman, chapter 4, this volume). This is but one example of the dialectical process whereby efforts to address the needs of the capitalist classes lead to new contradictions and a new set of “needs” that, in turn, reflect and produce new subjectivities and forms of alienation.

Attention to immaterial and affective labor is one way to keep labor in focus at a time when many have been inclined to see consumption as having trumped production and when “lifestyle” usurps “class” in the post-Fordist era (Featherstone 1991; Giddens 1991; Lash and Urry 1994). Moreover, as we argue here and as the example of Barbados demonstrates, we need to also make sure that our understanding of immaterial and affective labor includes *all* kinds of immaterial and affective labors. This means considering not only the effort that goes into the mustering of a warm smile on the part of a service worker but also the labor that goes into managing intimate relationships (Freeman, chapter 4) or aspirations for children (Katz, chapter 7, and Schielke, chapter 2), the labor that is required to travel across national borders to buy longed-for goods (Yeh, chapter 8), or the labor that is expended by anxious citizens trying to shape the physical and social terrain of their neighborhoods and communities (Fehérváry, chapter 5, Heiman, chapter 10, and Srivastava, chapter 3).

Like most aspects of middle classness, broadening our understanding of labor to highlight its immaterial and affective forms is not to suggest that these forms are exclusive to the middle classes or to middle classness *per se*. Rather, given the affective load of in-betweenness, or middleness, characteristic of middle-class life—the heightened anxieties, longings, and desires foregrounded in many of the ethnographic cases presented here—our attention is perhaps more finely tuned to the confluences of affect in middle-class subjectivities and practices. Nevertheless, analyzing relationships between affective and other forms of labor in the middle classes should also transform our understandings of labor dynamics in other classes, including the spheres of the middle classes that are becoming proletarianized or that are transitioning into the capitalist classes.

Along with this extension of the parameters of labor, we argue that a broadening of our understanding of consumption among the middle classes may have similarly illuminating implications for other classes. Consumption has been perhaps the single most recurring theme in scholarly works on middle classes. From early modern (McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 1982) to Victorian Britain (Campbell 1987) and the United States (Blumin 1989) to early twentieth-century Peru (Parker 1998) to contemporary Brazil (O’Dougherty 2002), India (Fernandes 2006), post-Soviet Russia

(Patico 2008), Africa (Burke 1996), and East Asia (Robison and Goodman 1996), historians and anthropologists have repeatedly linked middle-class formation with the emergence of consumer cultures. Likewise, every author in this volume (to a varying degree) portrays middle-class life as bound up in consumer practices whether in terms of debates over appropriate consumption, lives oriented around consumer desire, or consumerist projects of class distinction.

Yet, many of these same authors also argue that middle-class practices cannot simply be reduced to consumerism. Although there is almost universal agreement on the links between consumerism and middle-class practice and subjectivity, how consumption relates to labor (including new kinds of labor) in middle-class experience is both understudied and a matter of debate. Whether consumption is the defining theoretical characteristic of middle classness or one of several constitutive dynamics in middle-class life may depend on whether one takes a broad, *interclass* (relational) perspective or a more focused, *intra*class point of view (and the two may not be mutually exclusive). Any system of interclass socioeconomic relations requires not only producers but also consumers. As the scale of production increases over time, the social location of consumption shifts and expands, as we are seeing most dramatically in China today.⁶ Capitalist mass production requires mass consumption, and since the nineteenth century, Liechty (chapter 11) argues, the modern middle classes have emerged as the social location and mode of consumption of industrial capitalism. With the application of fossil fuels to industrial processes worldwide, the scale of production has exploded, requiring ever-greater scales of consumption—and ever-larger consumer classes—in order to maintain rates of return on capital investment. It is in this interclass, mutually constitutive context that consumerist middle classes have become not just more visible, but more and more crucial to the ongoing viability of global capitalism. As we have noted, this creates new tensions for states involved in this process. In Indonesia, for example, the dramatic rise in consumption among the middle classes led the state to fear that male state workers might escalate state corruption to support their wives' material desires. The state thus instituted training classes for the wives of state workers to teach them to be more modest in their material desires (Jones, chapter 6). States increasingly depend on consumerist middle classes, but along with this increased dependence come increased anxieties over the moral practices of consumption and increased state vigilance in managing middle-class consumerism.

Producing and nurturing middle classes have become central concerns of contemporary neoliberal capitalism nationally and globally because

consumerist middle classes, along with entrepreneurial middle classes, have become so important for the future prospects of global capital accumulation. From a critical perspective, we have to recognize “entrepreneurship” as part of a broader neoliberal ideology that helps mask middle-class privilege, legitimates middle-class “success,” justifies cuts in social services, and blames the poor for their poverty (Srivastava, chapter 3). Yet, it is now clear that neoliberal state ideologies that privilege entrepreneurial labor (through various subsidies and policy “reforms”) in fact make possible new middle-class subject positions, new forms of immaterial and affective labor, and new patterns of class mobility, consumption, and capital accumulation (Freeman, chapter 4). State ideological practices have material outcomes through which middle classes serve as essential converters within capitalist relations of production, their entrepreneurial labor and consumption required for the transformation of commodity production into profits and for the capital accumulation of the capitalist classes. With so much of global economic “health” hinging on the unpredictable affective dynamics of middle-class consumers (consider the concept of “consumer confidence”), building consumer infrastructure, promoting middle-class buying power (consumer debt), and advancing middle-class freedoms (construed as consumer choice) and “security” (in gated communities) have become central goals of capitalist state politics from China to India to Europe to North America. Still open to debate is whether consumption by the middle classes alone is enough to satisfy the needs of global capital. As efforts in the United States during the Great Depression (Cohen 2003) and recent moves in China indicate (Wong 2010), in the face of global recession, nascent national middle classes may be too small, requiring states to recruit working-class consumers in their efforts to stave off recession and social unrest.

These efforts to promote consumption are inextricable from the development, management, and politics of a physical geography of consumption: sites *advancing* consumption (such as the offices of marketing firms), sites *for the labor of* consumption (malls), sites *of* consumption (homes), sites *about* consumption (mass media), and sites undergirding all four (public and private infrastructure). All of these spaces and places are critical when thinking about middle-class subjectivities. For example, if suburban shopping malls and gated communities are contemporary spatial manifestations of certain aspects of middle classness in particular contexts, they also are the reservoirs of middle-class (and other) anxieties, aspirations, and longings. Just as a conspicuously grand gate proposed by a new homeowner provoked the ire of a New Jersey zoning board for its challenge to the

spatial codes of middle-class appropriateness set by long-standing residents (Heiman, chapter 10), so, too, are elements of interior home decor and modes of transportation scrutinized for their capacity to uphold expected markers of middle classness in liberalizing China, India, and Hungary (Zhang, chapter 9, Srivastava, chapter 3, and Fehérváry, chapter 5).

Spaces are critical for subject making not simply in terms of marking the physical spatialization of class—which proximities are afforded and which curtailed (Lefebvre 1991 [1974])—but it is in those very spaces that classed subjects are made. All the places mentioned above are sites whose boundaries both reflect and actively produce class subjectivities and affects. Bourdieu (1977:90) notes, “The ‘book’ from which the children learn their vision of the world is read with the body, in and through movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted as much as they are made by it.” We see this among certain middle-class segments in the United States as people channel their class anxieties into decisions about which schools their children should attend in order to acquire the right edge to eventually make it into a top university (Katz, chapter 7). We see this power of space vividly demonstrated, as well, in contemporary Tijuana, where having a visa to cross the border for shopping excursions into the United States not only marks one as a member of the Mexican middle class but also creates the conditions of possibility for becoming a middle-class subject (Yeh, chapter 8).

Not surprisingly, it is often in regard to space that we see the most pronounced presence of citizen action among the middle classes. Theorists who see middle-class politics as largely separate from interclass material relations (that is, consumption, production, reproduction, and circulation) often analyze it on its own terms, that is, outside an explicitly materialist worldview and without direct reference to its situatedness in larger capitalist relations. This view is often associated with the relatively leisured and educated people who, in early modern European history, pioneered a new “bourgeois public sphere” in which to rationally debate ideas and advance progressive causes (Habermas 1989). This is the approach taken by historians as diverse as Sanjay Joshi (2001), writing of an emerging middle class in nineteenth-century Lucknow, and Robert Johnston (2003), writing on “radical” middle-class progressivism in early twentieth-century Portland. In this book, we hold the question of middle-class politics in analytical tension. From residents welfare associations in India (Srivastava, chapter 3) to zoning debates in the United States (Heiman, chapter 10) to news reporting on party politics in Mexico (Yeh, chapter 8), middle-class politics may represent progressive political agency, even those inextricably bound

up in, and therefore complicit with, the larger capitalist political economy. Politics, too, is a form of immaterial and affective labor with very real material effects.

CONCLUSION

At many moments in anthropology's history, the discipline has contributed in significant ways to class analysis. In these uncertain economic times, we strongly believe that too much is at stake not to contribute what we do best: provide close ethnographies of critical issues that push theories to account for the histories, intricacies, and nuances of everyday life. The contemporary moment calls not for a repudiation of class but rather a richer, more expansive framework in which "middle-class" is integral to the analysis. It is time for us to include people from *all* class positionings in our anthropological studies and, in so doing, to develop more nuanced accounts and theories of class itself.

What we are arguing for here is a framework for theorizing middle classness that is productive not only for anthropologists and others whose research seeks to tackle this set of questions head-on but also for those who have studied among the middle classes but have not analyzed the class dimensions of these groups per se. Even many participants in the advanced seminar that spawned this collection found that their work centrally engaged middle-class actors but their capacity to theorize the particularities of middle-class practices and subjectivities *as* class practices and subjectivities crystallized through our collective conversations. We hope that this volume provides the same rich experience for its readers.

The chapters that follow provide a supple understanding of class in which culture, consumption, and subjectivity are critical dimensions of class relations and of the project of class making, as are material and immaterial modes of production. It is this fascinating interweaving of desires and the creation of new "needs" that our volume brings to the fore. In so doing, it highlights the convergences and subtle redefinitions of labor and consumption as they unfold across processes of social reproduction, production, and citizenship. We hope to illuminate the means through which a person's identifications, habits, and affects have bearing on the workings of capitalism. Middle classness seems especially to demand this analysis, which ought to inspire a rereading of class more generally.

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Notes

1. This is not to say that there has been no anthropological research with subjects from among the middle classes. There has been a long tradition of research among middle-class subjects with other theoretical questions in mind, as in gender studies (Ginsburg 1989; Martin 1987), colonial studies (Feldman 2008; Stoler 2002), science and technology studies (Gusterson 1996; Martin 1994; Rapp 2000; Zaloom 2006), linguistic anthropology (Mertz 2007; Ochs and Taylor 1995), urban anthropology (Low 2003), and visual anthropology (Mankekar 1999; Strassler 2010), for example.

2. See, for example, Schama 1987 on middle-class culture in seventeenth-century Holland.

3. Fehérváry (chapter 5, this volume) argues that in Hungary in the 1960s–80s the socialist state experimented with limited forms of private property, consumerism, and individualism in ways that fostered a “socialist middle stratum” that shared many cultural similarities with the experiences and conditions of middle classes elsewhere in Europe. Ong (2006:10) writes of China’s use of zoning technologies in the 1980s and

1990s to create “economic and political zones that are marked off from the normative activity established elsewhere in the planned socialist environment.”

4. Having lived through national election cycles in India and the United States in 2008, Liechty notes the comparable and striking, laser-like rhetorical and political focus on middle-class interests in both elections, in spite of the vast underclasses in each country.

5. And, as socialist feminist standpoint theorists have noted, these can be sites not only of exploitation but also of agency and transformation (Weeks 2007:237).

6. We could trace the consuming classes from prehistoric “chiefs,” to medieval elites, to early modern urban bourgeoisie, to—with the advent of industrial capitalism—emergent middle classes. Although this wording suggests that these classes are related in terms of some unilinear historical process, these consumer formations (and, no doubt, many others) may be simultaneous and interrelated. What is more, there is no reason to believe that this sequence is not reversible, given that the scale of production (and therefore consumption) can as easily fall as rise.