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Middle-Class *Déjà Vu*: Conditions of Possibility from Victorian England to Contemporary Kathmandu[1]

Déjà Vu *de la clase media: condiciones de posibilidad de la Inglaterra victoriana a la Katmandú contemporánea*

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ABSTRACT: Although the term "middle class" is often invoked, almost never is the concept defined or theorized in any systematic, coherent manner. What is a middle class or middle-classness? Is there one middle class or many? How are we to understand relationships between middle-class formations in different times and places? Combining perspectives from both anthropology and history, this paper tries to address the problem of how it is that we can call groups "middle class" even if they are culturally very different and separated widely in time and space. How do we conceptualize "middle class" theoretically to account for both what is similar, and what is different? Drawing on the concept of "conditions of possibility", this paper offers a historical and spatial model of middle class formation, one that attempts to theorize the formation of middle classes, and the emergence of differences between them, in terms of historical processes and patterns of inter- and intra-class spatialization. This involves conceptualizing the emergence of middle classes in the context of global capitalism while also avoiding the teleological reduction that labels some middle-class cultures as merely derivative of others.

Keywords

Middle class
Historical and spatial model
Middle class formation

RESUMEN: Aunque a menudo se invoca el término "clase media", casi nunca se define o teoriza el concepto de manera sistemática y coherente. ¿Qué es una clase media o clase media? ¿Hay una clase media o muchas? ¿Cómo entender las relaciones entre formaciones de clase media en diferentes tiempos y lugares? Combinando perspectivas tanto de la antropología como de la historia, este artículo trata de abordar el problema de cómo es que podemos llamar a los grupos como "clase media", incluso si son culturalmente muy diferentes y están muy separados en el tiempo y el espacio. ¿Cómo conceptualizamos teóricamente la "clase media" para dar cuenta tanto de lo que es similar como de lo que es diferente? Basándose en el concepto de "condiciones de posibilidad", este artículo ofrece un modelo histórico y espacial de la formación de la clase media, que intenta teorizar la formación de las clases medias y el surgimiento de diferencias entre ellas, en términos de procesos y patrones históricos. de la espacialización inter e intraclase. Esto implica conceptualizar el surgimiento de las clases medias en el contexto del capitalismo global y, al mismo tiempo, evitar la reducción teleológica que etiqueta a algunas culturas de clase media como meramente derivadas de otras.

Palabras clave

Clase media
Modelo histórico y espacial
Formación de la clase media

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While reading about middle classes cross-culturally and historically —from contemporary Brazil to mid-nineteenth-century France— I have often had a strange feeling of recognition, sensing in those distant places and times ways of life that are closely analogous to my own middle-class experience, and the middle-class milieu of Kathmandu, Nepal, that I have studied and written about for the past two decades. And indeed, as I have spoken with other historians and ethnographers of middle-class culture, I've learned that I am not alone in having these *déjà vu* moments in which I (like they) recognize what seem to be close similarities in the experiences of middle-class groups separated widely in space and time.

One such example concerns the explicitly locational language that I documented in my earlier work on the middle class in Kathmandu (Liechty, 2003). There, I recorded an insistent middle-class discourse of middleness and a subjective experience of social betweenness. People continuously located themselves in a socio-moral middle ground while locating their class Others in morally compromised social locations "above" and "below" themselves. Intensely aware of their class Others and forced to mingle with them on a daily basis, middle-class culture in Kathmandu in the 1990s was all about the discursive and performative production of middleness. Middle-class Nepalis anxiously walked a tightrope between the vulgarities above and below, carving out a middle ground of "suitable" behavior that avoided the immoral excesses of both modernity and tradition.

Of course this highly moralistic locational discourse is not unique to late twentieth-century Nepal. In his work on nineteenth-century European middle classes, historian George Mosse describes what he calls the "concept of respectability" that characterized middle-class cultural life:

> "The middle classes can only be partially defined by their economic activity and even by their hostility to the aristocracy and the lower classes alike. For side by side with their economic activity it was above all the ideal of respectability which came to characterize their style of life... They perceived their way of life, based as it was upon frugality, devotion to duty, and restraint of the passions, as superior to that of the "lazy" lower classes and the profligate aristocracy". (1985: 4-5)

The moral project of locating oneself between "the 'lazy' lower classes and the profligate aristocracy" would have been extremely familiar to Kathmandu's middle class in the 1990s even if the cultural nuances of that project were very different from those of nineteenth-century Europe.

A recurring theme in the Kathmandu middle class's discursive project of mapping (im) morality onto other classes concerned accusations of sexual impropriety —prostitution— aimed mainly at the urban poor. Almost reflexively, people leveled accusations of prostitution against any "lowerclass" woman who consumed "fashion" goods beyond her status. Asked why there had been a sudden increase in prostitution in the city, one middleclass woman explained, "It's just like that. The reason is fashion. They [lower-class women] need money for fashion. There are people who, needing money for fashion, will go and do this immediately" (Liechty, 2003: 78). While attitudes like this were common in middle-class Kathmandu, what I have found in further comparative reading is that virtually the same attitudes are common within many other middle-class formations. For example, Joan Scott's (1999: 135) historical study of French attitudes toward women's labor suggests that the Kathmandu "fashion prostitute" was alive and walking the streets of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. There too moralizing middle-class commentators reported that "the taste for luxury" had "corrupted"

poor young women, leading them to "passion and vice", a conclusion easily warranted given that they earned "wages insufficient to support the style of life they [led].". Elsewhere, I describe how several elements of Kathmandu's middle-class consumer culture bear remarkable similarities to analogous developments in other places and times (Liechty, 2005)[2].

Part of what is unsettling about these uncanny flashes of recognition is that they force us to ask some very basic questions about just what we mean by "middle class" or the condition of "middle classness". What exactly is it that seems to resurface in diverse ethnographic and historical accounts of middle-class cultural formations? What is the nature of middle classness that seems to allow us to recognize its expression across huge spatial and temporal divides? Drawing on both theoretical perspectives and ethnographic material from Nepal, these are the questions that this chapter addresses.

Fundamentally these questions force us to grapple with how to conceptualize the relationships between particular forms of sociocultural life (namely, middle classness) and their locations in time and space. If "middle class" is going to be something more than a vague heuristic category, we need ways of locating and conceptualizing its occurrence both historically and geographically. As a Chicagoan with research interests in Kathmandu, how am I to make sense of the fact that there is a middle class in each place? Are they the *same* class or different? How should we conceptualize degrees of similitude? And, even more troubling, how am I to explain the *déjà vu* moments that seem to indicate close proximities between the elements of middle-class experience in contemporary Nepal discussed in this chapter with, say, early twentieth-century Chicago, Victorian Britain, or nineteenth- century France? What can ethnographic perspectives from Nepal contribute to broader historical understandings of middle-class cultural processes? How can we think about seeming parallels across space and time without falling into the trap of historical derivativeness, thereby condemning locations like Kathmandu to following in Europe's teleological wake?

1. "REGULARITIES OF RESPONSE": THE CONDITIONS OF CLASS

To answer these questions we need ways of understanding class and the emergence of class cultures that are able to recognize historical patterns —local and regional sequences of socioeconomic and cultural change— without postulating a universal (Eurocentric) narrative that claims a single originary experience for The West and a derivative experience for The Rest. In this chapter I work with three key ideas which, when combined, form the basis for a nonreductive understanding of middle-class occurrence (history) and experience (culture). Together, these ideas contextualize the ethnographic material that follows by helping to frame trends in Kathmandu's local political and cultural economy within larger historical and spatial processes.

First is the idea of *conditions of possibility*. Rather than proposing a single middle-class history —a unitary, linear, sequential narrative that all middle-class formations will necessarily trace

[2] Just one example, continuing on the theme of prostitution: In Kathmandu in the early 1990s, hoping to attract middle-class men, prostitutes dressed in school uniforms and carried textbooks (Liechty, 2005: 15). Similarly, Timothy Gilfoyle (1992: 285) notes that in early twentieth-century New York City, it was common for prostitutes to pose as school girls, wearing "juvenile attire" and carrying book satchels.

and along which different middle-class experiences can be charted— I will view middle classness as the historical manifestation of specific conditions of possibility. Middle classes across time and space appear not as repeated instantiations of some kind of structural laws of history, but rather through the convergence of socioeconomic forces in specific times and places that create the conditions under which middle-class cultural logics and subject positions become possible and instrumentally desirable for certain people. From this perspective no middle-class experience is any less authentic (derivative) or more originary (the teleological source) than any other. No matter where they occur, when sufficient socioeconomic conditions of possibility coalesce, middle-class formations (may) emerge in all of their local and regional specificity.

The idea of conditions of possibility appears in a number of sources (for example, Bourdieu, 1998: 87), but I draw mainly from Foucault (1970: xxii) who argues that historically transformative ideas arise not simply from within the minds of creative individuals, but from the "epistemological fields", "modalities of order", or the worlds of logic, rationality, and common sense in which social groups live. As these fields of meaning and modes of social organization change, so do the ideas and experiences that become thinkable and possible. I want to push this concept further to suggest that we think of middle classes as social formations that emerge and develop historically within the context of certain conditions of possibility.

The other main inspiration for this conditions-of-possibility approach comes from the British cultural historian E. P. Thompson who, in the 1960s, almost single-handedly brought class into the orbit of cultural analysis (Thompson, 1963). But, even more important, Thompson attempted to rescue class from its conceptual prison within social theory. Not unlike his colleague Raymond Williams, who argued against "the mistake" of "taking terms of analysis as terms of substance" (1977: 129) Thompson insisted that we understand class as a "*historical* category" (his emphasis). For Thompson, class was not a "model" or "structure", not a "sociological or heuristic category", but a lived experience, a "social process over time" (1978: 147).

By stressing an understanding of class as a historical process, Thompson makes two fundamental points. First, he insists that classes exist *only in relationship* with other classes. No class can ever arise or exist on its own but must, by definition, stand in continuous relations of mutual tension and interproductivity with other classes against which it continually defines and defends its interests and identities as a group (Thompson, 1963: 9). This understanding of classes —including middle classes— as being *necessarily* relational (and therefore historically dynamic) is crucial because it forces us to be attuned to the question of how interclass relations change and how those relational changes affect the experiences and cultural lives of class subjects.

Thompson's second decisive point related to the idea of conditions of possibility is his insistence that we understand class not as a uniform transhistorical category, but instead as a complex, located, lived experience that while always relational in its dynamic, in content will never be the same twice:

> We know about class because people have repeatedly behaved in class ways; these historical events disclose regularities of response to analogous situations... and of a culture with class notations which admits to trans-national comparisons. We theorize this evidence as a general theory of class and of class formation: we expect to find certain regularities, "stages" of development, etc... But...it is only too often the case that the theory takes precedence over the historical evidence which it is

> intended to theorize. It is easy to suppose that class takes place, not as historical process, but inside our own heads... Models or structures are theorized that are supposed to give us objective determinants of class. [Hence] once again, class as a historical category —the observation of behavior over time— has been expelled. (Thompson, 1978: 147)

Rather than understanding class as a predetermined phenomenon or teleology (something that can be turned into a "general theory" complete with "'stages' of development, etc."), Thompson insists that the reality of any class formation consists in "how class *defines itself* as, in fact, it *eventuates*" (1978: 150, emphasis added). For Thompson, all classes and their histories are unique manifestations of local material and social conditions —the socioeconomic conditions of possibility—. Yet even though no class is "any truer or more real than any other", and none may make any "claim to universality" (ibídem.), Thompson still holds that because people "repeatedly behave in class ways", if we undertake "transnational comparisons" we will be able to see certain "regularities of response to analogous situations". It is precisely these "regularities of response to analogous situations" that account for the *déjà vu* moments mentioned above. The point is that when we encounter these elements of regularity and analogy across a wide range of middle-class formations and cultures, we are encountering similar responses to similar conditions of possibility, not elements of structure in a unilinear history.

The second key idea that I will be working with is *interjacency*, building on Edward Soja's work in cultural geography (1989: 247). Interjacency points to the implications of how social groups (classes, racial or ethnic groups, genders) are organized in space and, in particular, how spatial organization manifests and reproduces power relations. As opposed to being simply *ad*jacent, the idea of interjacency stresses the fact that social groups —whether physically intermingled or segregated— are never ontologically independent of each other but are, instead, always intereffective, interproductive, and mutually constitutive. Power is itself spatialized, and the ways that social groups are distributed in space (in ghettos and suburbs, in "free trade zones" and across militarized national borders) have everything to do with how power is (re)produced. The ways that social hierarchies are mapped onto geographic spaces are never coincidental but always (re)productive of the very conditions of social inequality. For my purposes the idea of interjacency is crucial because it takes Thompson's insight into the relational ontology of class and literally locates it in space: a fundamental aspect of class relationality is the interproductive geographic distribution of class formations.

I will consider the role of interjacency as one of the conditions of possibility of middle-class formation and historical transformation. But whereas Soja's focus is on neighborhood and region, I want to expand the logic of interjacency to consider how the ever-growing scale of sociospatial organization (specifically of class groups) that we call "globalization" reproduces Soja's "instrumental nodal structures" and "essentially exploitative spatial divisions of labor" (1989: 246) but on a global scale. The current global order produces an unprecedented level of class spatialization in which the interproductive interjacency of class communities occurs less and less *within* localities or even nations, and more and more *across* national borders and even hemispheres[3]. Thus, the conditions of interjacency (the instrumental spatial

[3] Schielke captures this point nicely when he suggests that in Egypt, middle-class aspirations "are not so much related to a specific place, but more to a wider imagination of the world, primarily a First World world of possibilities" (2012: 42) that includes the East and the West.

organization of groups) are among the principal conditions of possibility within which middle classes form and transform.

The third key idea that I want to weave into this model concerns *scale*, particularly a scalar understanding of geographical and historical processes. A scalar approach offers a crucial corrective to many of our instinctive understandings of difference and change, understandings that impose rigid categorical divisions onto time and space at the expense of a realization of spatial and temporal simultaneity. As suggested above, I argue that there are patterns of interjacency (mutual intereffectiveness) between social groups at every level from the neighborhood to the global. The scale at which classes are organized interjacently changes over time (as they are integrated into larger and larger spheres of interproductivity) but these scales of organization coexist *simultaneously*, not sequentially or to the exclusion of other levels of organization. At different points in time, different scales of organization may form the dominant or relevant conditions of possibility around which class groups identify, but never to the exclusion of ongoing relations of interjacency (at other scales) that may disrupt or contradict the group's understanding of itself.

Just as a scalar understanding of spatial organization allows us to think of multiple processes coexisting simultaneously, not sequentially, the same goes for a scalar understanding of historical processes. Historians (and others) have tended to understand the past in terms of epochs: distinct historical periods separated by distinct transitions; the age-of-this followed by the age-of-that in the unilinear march of history. Most histories of capitalism are classic examples of this epochal logic with generations of historians intent on finding the "origins of capitalism" or debating the periodization of the capitalist era. Lost in an epochal understanding of the history of capitalism is the ability to conceptualize how capitalism is able to exist simultaneously, not in sequence, with other forms of economic organization or logic. Drawing on Weber and Braudel, I take a scalar approach to historical processes, arguing that we have to see the "rise of capitalism" not as a matter of historical breaks, but as a slow process of scalar transition whereby capitalist market logics gradually encompass more and more of a region's relations of exchange. From this point of view the dominance of capitalist market relations will rise or fall, but capitalism will always exist simultaneously with other market logics against which it competes in a moral economy for hearts and minds. Crucially, it is this scalar interrelation of competing socioeconomic logics that forms one of the primary conditions of possibility within which middle-class formations may emerge.

2. MIDDLE-CLASS CONSUMERISM IN WORLD HISTORICAL TIME

One way to conceptualize middle classes and their comparative histories without lapsing into Eurocentric teleologies is by theorizing the relationships between class, consumerism, and capitalism in world historical time. This perspective is based on two main propositions: first, class is a material phenomenon linked to the history of capitalism; and second, middle classes are intrinsically consumer formations. The very act of using the word "class" to account for middle-class phenomena locates us in some kind of materialist perspective. For people to constitute a middle class —as opposed to clusters of "status groups" (Weber) or "habitus" (Bourdieu)— implies that there is not only a middle *class* but also a *middle* class, situated between and in material relationship with at least two other classes. While I acknowledge

other perspectives, this chapter advances a materialist/consumerist interpretation of the middle classes because I believe it offers an effective means of accounting for many of the cultural patterns we see associated with middle classes across time and space.

One place to start conceptualizing the middle class in world historical time is to consider the role of consumption in socioeconomic life. If middle classes are indeed *classes*, then at any given point in time or space they must stand in relation to other classes within historically and geographically specific material conditions, such as modes —and relations— of production. Any economy is about circulation (the market processes that link production and consumption) and therefore middle classes will be emergent within the conditions of possibility constituted by both new and shifting modes and relations of production, circulation, and consumption.

Every mode of production also entails consumers and modes of consumption or, as Althusser points out, the reproduction of any mode of production requires the reproduction of not only the means of production, but also the "means of consumption" (1971: 125). Within any system of market relations (relations of production, circulation, and consumption), as the scale of commodity production increases, the social location of consumption —the consuming class— shifts and expands. Thus, within regional systems of market relations, as modes of production change and more and more goods are launched into circulation, we see the composition of the consuming class shift from a small, luxury-consuming elite, to a larger urban bourgeoisie to —under conditions of industrial capitalism— a modern middle class. Profitable mass production requires reliable means of mass consumption in the form of an established, large-scale consumer class. Around the world we see the consumer mantle gradually shifting to new middle classes along with the transformation of elements of earlier elite classes into new capitalist elites, the decline of landed forms of production and power, and the growth of landless, "free", wage-dependent working classes. Middle classes emerge within shifting systems of market relations (at every scale from the local to the regional to the global) as increasingly dominant capitalist modes and logics of production form new conditions of possibility within which people can pioneer new spaces of subjectivity built around consumerist socio-moral logics. Nowhere do middle classes eventuate in the same ways, but to the extent that people experience analogous class relations and behave in class ways (because of analogous social locations within material relations of production, circulation, and exchange) middle-class histories will always be particular manifestations of materially related conditions of possibility.

By emphasizing the central role of consumption in middle-class history, I do not mean to suggest that consumption is the only salient cultural dynamic at work in middle-class life. In terms of interclass relationality, modern middle classes stand primarily as consumers in larger capitalist relations of production. But when it comes to middle-class subjectivity —what it means to *live* and *be* middle class— consumer desire and consumerist strategies of class distinction are only parts of a complex class experience. Tightly integrated with consumer ideologies are new ideologies of labor, and indeed middle-class modes of consumption are ideologically complicit with new middle-class modes of labor. It is no coincidence that around the world, middle classes couch their consumer privilege in ideological rhetorics of democratic, individual "achievement"[4] —as the result of either personal "entrepreneurial

[4] See Yeh (2012) for a discussion of the middle classes as the arbiters of democracy and merit in Mexico.

success" or (via "meritocratic" education) academically credentialed, salaried, "professional" employment—. Middle-class consumption and labor are (clinically) codependent.

In fact, labor and consumption are ideologically integrated in ways that are perhaps unique to the middle classes. Elsewhere I have argued that middle-class subjects —simultaneously sellers of labor and owners of capital (skills, education, achievements)[5]— might be said to embody, or combine within their own class-cultural practices, the mutually productive antagonisms between labor and capital that have historically been played out *between* the working and capitalist classes (Liechty, 2003: 18). This internalized class conflict may help explain the anxieties and contradictions so characteristic of middle-class life. For example, it highlights the inherently tenuous nature of middle-class embodied capital, the achievements and credentials upon which middle-class subjects base their labor value and try to sell it in fickle, highly competitive markets. The fact that education, the classic mode of middle-class meritocratic validation, is itself essentially a consumer enterprise (with the most valuable credentials going to those who can invest the time and money to "achieve" them) points to the uneasy, smoke-and-mirrors foundations of middle-class privilege. It also underlines the ideological complicity of middle-class labor and consumption.

This internalized class struggle may also help explain why the middle classes have often been politically manipulable and ineffective (their motives dulled and allegiances split between their positions as laborers and as owners of capital). I believe that this embodied contradiction (in effect, being laboring capitalists) may also help to explain why middle classes have sometimes been characterized as politically progressive and even radical (Joshi, 2001; Johnston, 2003)[6], while at other times middle-class culture comes off as being obsessed with consumption and a class politics aimed at protecting privilege —which is how I have characterized it (Liechty, 2003)—. One view seems to capture a manifestation of the middle class's identification with and as sellers of labor, while the other seems to reflect the middle class's experience as owners of (tenuous, embodied) property. Either way, as Weber (1958) and Bourdieu (1998: 11) insisted, the middle classes are much more likely to exist as social networks bound together by complex webs of status competition and consumer lifestyles than as communities united around common economic or political objectives.

My point here is that middle-class subjectivity might usefully be thought of in terms of an inner class struggle through which people must reconcile, and try to integrate, the necessity to act simultaneously as consumers and laborers, owners and sellers, conservatives and progressives. As laboring capitalists, middle-class subjects embody the contradictions of

[5] Thus, the middle classes do not own the massive, capital-intensive means of production in the Marxist sense, but *become* their own individual means of production.

[6] This view of middle classes as politically progressive is often associated with a Habermasian logic whereby the middle classes (or bourgeoisie) are characterized as a relatively leisured and educated class that, emerging in early modern European history, pioneers a new "bourgeois public sphere" in which to rationally debate ideas and advance progressive causes (Habermas, 1989). This image of middle classes as a historical force for democratic, progressive action stands in contrast to other perspectives (Weber, Bourdieu, Gramsci) that see middle classes in almost opposite terms —unlikely, or even unable, to mobilize coherent political action—. But this progressive middle-class political stance would also fit into Lefebvre's (1991) characterization of middle-class practice (discussed further below) as being liberal and inclusive in its political rhetoric even while it simultaneously actively pursues and protects its class privileges through segregating spatial practices. But even if we don't simply write off middle-class political progressivism as cynical rhetoric aimed at obscuring simultaneous projects of protecting class privilege (consumer property), Lefebvre's claims at least force us to acknowledge some deeply contradictory dimensions of middle-class life.

capitalism; attempting to resolve the tensions between their conflicting class positions, their lives are shot through with the anxieties of maintaining (ideologically and economically) a tenuous class position. As I discuss below, part of *becoming* middle class is learning to (or being forced to) embrace this form of subjectivity. Becoming middle class means coming to terms with conflicted moral and material logics[7]. But how are we to understand this "becoming"? How are we to conceptualize the conditions of possibility under which middle classes emerge within the larger history of capitalism?

3. CAPITALISM IN WORLD HISTORICAL TIME: "RISE" *VERSUS* "SPREAD"

There is a crucial distinction between the rise and the spread of capitalism, and "capitalism" itself is a notoriously slippery concept. But to the extent that we agree that capitalism is a global, historical reality —an actual historical socioeconomic condition that can be objectively distinguished from other conditions— then it is going to have global, historical manifestations. The question of capitalism's *rise* or *spread* highlights the problem of the ontological status of capitalism: the conditions of its being or reality as a phenomenon. In the spirit of Williams and Thompson, who cautioned against mistaking "terms of analysis" for "terms of substance", I want to argue that (as with class) the *reality* of capitalism lies in the specificities of its eventuation (its lived "substance"), not in any universal —typically Eurocentric— condition or experience (its analytical category). As a term of analysis, capitalism becomes an idealized category with a singular history, a history of origins and spread, a teleological narrative that becomes more real than the historical circumstances it is meant to describe[8]. But as a term of substance, capitalism is a process of eventuation that can only occur within specific social, cultural, and material conditions. Furthermore, there is no *thing* to "spread", no existential reality that can "move" through time and space. The reality of capitalism is always the reality of its local emergence —its "rise"— within shifting material conditions and in the face of competing socio-moral logics. The rise of capitalism in any time or place does not signal its "arrival" (as part of the quest-like "spread of global capitalism") but shifts in the conditions of possibility brought about by changing patterns of socioeconomic relations (interjacency) at multiple scales of interaction. If the global history of capitalism is one of uneven and nonparallel development this is not because of uneven spread but because the very conditions of possibility within which people live are widely variable.

The move away from the History of Capitalism to histories of capitalisms is well under way in the growing historiography of "early modernity", a historical perspective that points to multiple emergences of regional capitalisms around the world from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Bose, 1990; Ludden, 2004; Pomeranz, 2000). In the early modern world, South Asia was a leader in early capitalist market development, with manufacturing powers

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7 For an expanded discussion of moral and material logics, see Carla Jones (2012: 147). Jones suggests that the middle-class project in Indonesia involves "transubstantiating money into morality, often through practices that reveal the relatedness of consumption and religion." The conflict of moral and material logics is particularly acute for women attempting to negotiate between expanding economic opportunities and persisting ideas regarding a woman's proper role in the home.

8 This is the standard logic behind claims for the origins of capitalism in Europe and its spread around the world, a perspective critiqued by Blaut (1993) and Wolf (1982).

that not only surpassed Europe but indeed attracted Europeans like lesser moths to a greater flame (Chaudhuri, 1985; Goody, 1996; Parthasarathi, 1998; Subrahmanyam, 1996). The "early modern" thesis assists in the project of "provincializing Europe" (Chakrabarty, 2000) by locating all capitalisms in a global context and situating European capitalism as one among many emergent variants on the global scene.

One important element of this perspective is that early modernity was a *world* phenomenon. From the sixteenth century onward a truly global "world system" gradually emerged, linking earlier regional "world systems" (Abu-Lughod, 1989) together for the first time. While commodities (and many other things)[9] had long circulated within local and regional commercial networks, once Europeans finally advanced to the point where they could directly access the ancient Indian Ocean luxury trade (with, fortuitously, New World wealth to finance it), commodity trading reached its greatest geographic extent. With increased scale and efficiency of production and transportation, over time products that began as precious luxuries destined for elite consumption were transformed into mass market goods until by the nineteenth century Caribbean sugar and Chinese tea had become the cheapest sources of calories and caffeine for the British industrial working classes (Mintz, 1985), while cheap copper and machine made textiles from Europe were putting the ancient Nepali copper-mining and weaving industries out of business (Liechty, 1997).

But perhaps more important than the movement of goods was how these new circulations brought distant groups of people into new relations of class interjacency on a global scale. Increasing the distance of trade put more and more space between producers and consumers while the increased volume of long-distance trade created distantly separated producing and consuming classes. Laboring classes (including slave labor) in one part of the world created (part of) the conditions of possibility for consuming classes elsewhere, and vice versa. Indian and Chinese textiles transformed emerging urban consumer cultures in places like London while the massive surge in global silver circulation following Europe's entry into the Asian trading sphere not only expanded laboring classes across Asia (especially in the coastal textile-producing regions of South Asia and China) but also spurred similar transformations in Asian urban life. While none of this eliminated *local* relations of interjacency, the point is that gradually expanding scales of trade (in terms of distance and volume) began to gradually transform the relations of interjacency between classes of producers and consumers on a *global* scale. Though it occurred at a glacial pace, processes of early modern "globalization" meant that in many parts of the world one's class Others —those to whom one was bound in mutually constitutive interjacency through patterns of circulation— were increasingly distant.

Crucially, "early modernity" does not signal an epochal shift but rather points to an era that saw the gradual expansion of capitalist market logics from *within* age-old local and regional systems of circulation. I have found Fernand Braudel's work to be very helpful in conceptualizing this process (most succinctly: Braudel, 1977). Rather than searching for the origins of capitalism, or looking to chart history in terms of shifts from one economic epoch to another, Braudel begins with the assumption that economic life is *always* a mixture of

[9] Because my focus is on class, and because class is (I am arguing) a social phenomenon related to modes —and relations— of production, circulation, and consumption, I am less concerned here with the circulation of noncommercial elements (people, knowledge, religions, technologies, etc.) even though these noncommercial circulations may be important aspects of the conditions of possibility from which new middle classes emerge.

interacting market/exchange logics and practices ranging from subsistence production, to market exchange, to capitalist exchange (using wealth as capital) (ibídem: 5). For Braudel the fruitful question is not "When did capitalism begin?" because, he argues, capitalist market logic has likely existed to at least some extent practically everywhere and for a very long time[10]. Capitalism does not *start* somewhere and then *spread*. It is rather, in effect, always already there. The real historical question asks: "*Under what conditions* does capitalist market logic grow to encompass more and more of a community's or region's economic life?" This approach offers a profoundly different perspective on the growth of capitalism. Within any system of circulation, capitalist market logic stands in dynamic tension with other logics. When placed in the context of centuries of shifting relations of interjacency (at every level from local to global), these changes in the balance between different economic logics help turn capitalism into what Thompson called a "*historical* category" in all of its situated richness and specificity, instead of a rigid model all are condemned to follow. Globalized relations of interjacency brought about by, for example, British mercantilism and eventually colonial rule in South Asia mean that early modern capitalisms are often linked and therefore intereffective, but they are also particular expressions of related conditions of possibility.

This approach puts us in a much better position to understand the relationship between capitalism and class formation. From this perspective, local class cultures will be local manifestations of specific historical developments and shifting relations of class interjacency, not derivative repetitions of someone else's history. If classes are mutually constitutive within systems of production, circulation, and consumption, then as the volume and geographic scope of that circulation expands, and as the conditions of possibility for the expansion of capitalist market logics develop, class histories become dynamically linked at larger and larger scales. If modern middle classes are (crucially but not simply) consumer classes that become possible (and necessary) under conditions of rising levels of capitalist production and larger scales of circulation, then we will see consumerist middle classes emerge within specific relations of interjacency. Like capitalism, middle-class culture or middle classness does not spread, but grows organically from necessary but uniquely configured local conditions that situate places within larger and larger geographic and socioeconomic contexts.

Another of Braudel's key insights into economic life is his insistence that *exchange relations are always social relations* embedded in cultural/moral systems. For Braudel there is no economic exchange that is not simultaneously a moral exchange: different exchange systems rest upon different moral logics or "values" (1977: 64-65). What's more, to the extent that different exchange logics coexist and compete within the same economic sphere (as Braudel suggests will always be the case), debates over the morality of exchange relations will be an inescapable part of *any* community's cultural and economic life. We have abundant documentation of the intense moral debates that accompanied the growing dominance of capitalist market logic in Europe in the early modern period (Tawney, 1957; Thompson, 1993; Weber, 1958) and elsewhere more recently (N. Harvey, 1998; Taussig, 1980). In Kathmandu also debates over the morality of consumption and exchange relations were a conspicuous

[10] This is the same point that Weber makes in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber argues that "capitalism and capitalistic enterprises (...) have existed in all civilized countries of the earth (...) [including] China, India, Babylon, Egypt, Mediterranean antiquity, and the Middle Ages, as well as in modern times (...) Capitalistic enterprise and the capitalist entrepreneur (...) are very old and were very widespread" (1958: xxxiii). In fact Braudel's whole approach could be seen as an elaboration on earlier Weberian conceptualizations.

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feature of interclass negotiations when I conducted research there in the 1990s (Liechty, 2003: chap. 4). And in North America and Western Europe contemporary consumer concerns over things like "fair trade" and locally produced food illustrate how even in "advanced" capitalist societies consumers are still aware of the moral basis of production and exchange even after centuries of indoctrination about the value-neutral, "natural" laws of the "free market". My point is that the rise of capitalist market logic within any economic system is itself already a profoundly *cultural* phenomenon, a process that plays out in the lives of real people who wrestle with competing moral logics and economic imperatives as they come to embody new class subjectivities, middle and otherwise. The emergent class-cultural dynamics that accompany this "rise" are not epiphenomenal but integral to larger historical processes.

4. COMPETING MARKET LOGICS AND MORAL ECONOMIES IN KATHMANDU

To illustrate some of these historical processes I turn now to an ethnographic account that traces the socioeconomic, moral, and cultural transformations that have taken place in the Kathmandu valley[11]. In my 2003 book on middle-class culture in Kathmandu I argued that since the 1960s, and more intensely during the 1980s and 1990s, the city saw the formation of a middle class that emerged from within the context of an earlier essentially two-class social system of urban elites and merchant/ agrarian commoners. A massive surge in cash flow (due to a huge influx of international "development" aid money, mass tourism, local manufacturing, and remittances from millions of Nepalis working abroad) formed part of the material conditions of possibility through which profound shifts in patterns of social interaction and exchange moralities occurred. Caste communities began to fragment as new consumerist middle-class neighborhoods sprouted on the outskirts of town. What I document in that book are the morally fraught and anxiety-inducing processes whereby a consciously "middling" social formation coalesced around newly possible consumer identities and practices of moral distancing, creating new forms of distinction that allowed them to construct themselves as a new sociocultural entity. I argued that a wide array of consumer subjectivities and "rational" (in the Weberian sense) behaviors were at the very heart of the new middle class's project of constituting itself as a "suitably modern" sociocultural formation. What I believe I encountered, and tried to capture ethnographically, is something of the cultural-historical moment in which a new middle-class socioeconomic formation struggled to make itself legible in local cultural terms within (globally) transforming local conditions of possibility.

Pramod was caught up in this larger process of middle-class emergence and the negotiation of new moral logics of exchange. I got to know him in the mid-1980s and for several years, when in Nepal, I would spend part of almost every day sitting with Pramod in the tiny food

[11] In this short chapter, I can tell only a tiny part of this story. A fuller accounting would consider the slow expansion of capitalist market relations in the Himalayas over previous centuries, the role of British colonialism in South Asia, the Nepali elite's extraordinary fixation on foreign consumer goods and efforts to regulate consumption prior to 1951, Nepal's post-1951 liberal import policies, the rise of massive development aid and remittance economies, and so on. Elsewhere, I have sketched out these and other elements in what I consider to be the "prehistory" of middle-class formation in Nepal (Liechty, 1997, 2003).

and grain shop that he operated in Asan Tole, the market square at the center of the old city of Kathmandu, site of the ancient crossroads around which the city formed more than two thousand years ago. Pramod is from a Newar merchant caste and the shop that he ran had been his family's business for as far back as anyone knew: several centuries, if not longer. Scattered around the Asan Tole area were literally dozens of other shops almost identical to Pramod's, owned by other members of the same caste, each selling more or less the same variety of grains, beans, pulses, and a few odds and ends like matches or eggs. Their tiny shops were no bigger than walk-in closets, with the walls and floor lined with bins.

Like Pramod's, these other shops had been there more or less forever: historical accounts show that this area was the city's principal grain market three hundred years ago and probably even long before that[12]. When I asked Pramod how all these shops survived selling virtually the same goods, at the same prices, all clustered right next to each other, he explained matter-of-factly that each shop owner sold goods to a set of customers, from various castes, who had been buying from his family for generations: his grandfather had sold rice and *dal* to his current customers' grandmothers. They had relationships with these families and exchanged ritual gifts and greetings on religious holidays throughout the year.

Getting to know Pramod and his business was a real education because it helped me understand how a lot of the old bazaar areas of Kathmandu worked. I had often wondered how merchants in the old city stayed in business when, at least traditionally, all the goldsmiths had their shops right next to each other, and the same went for all the bangle sellers, all the cloth merchants, all the oil pressers, all the potters, and so on. I came to realize that, as with the grain merchants, each of these businesses had established service ties with a set of customary clients. By maintaining these ties across generations, and by marking them in a variety of social and ritual ways, business relations were embedded in a moral economy of customary allegiance, caste interdependence, and community pricing. Profits were pegged to a merchant family's basic needs for social reproduction in the context of their caste and larger community.

That this system had persisted for centuries, if not millennia, amazed me, but in 1991 there were signs that the arrangement was under strain. No doubt the system had weathered ups and downs before, but that year Pramod confided that his grain shop was having real financial problems. When his father had died a few years earlier, it had fallen to Pramod not just to support his mother and siblings, but also (looking ahead) to get his sister married off. He described with obvious anxiety how weddings within his caste community were getting more and more expensive: newly available imported consumer goods had escalated dowry demands, and wedding feasts now had to be fancy catered affairs. No longer could you offer the traditional Newar wedding fare: beaten rice and stewed meat served on leaf plates with guests seated on the floor. Now, rather than using family labor, you had to hire expensive caterers and rent everything from table service to tents and folding chairs. Without a guarantee of this kind of wedding and a dowry of modern consumer goods, Pramod worried that many families would not agree to marry a son to his sister. Being unable to marry his sister off would be a terrible blow to his family's reputation within the caste community. Weddings had always entailed some borrowing for Newar merchants, but with the new consumerist demands, Pramod worried that he might never be able to repay the debt. The

[12] The square's ancient Annapurna Temple (dedicated to the goddess of grain and harvests) also suggests that the area has been a grain market for millennia.

point is that the business that had kept Pramod's family securely within his caste's social life for centuries now seemed unable to meet the standards of new consumer demands.

On a later trip to Nepal, in 1996, I dropped in on Pramod's shop. His younger brother directed me to a dark back room where I found Pramod tinkering with what looked like antique machinery. It was a dilapidated knitting machine the size of a small car. Pramod explained that the family business was in terrible shape, and losing money fast. A few months earlier he had borrowed money from a relative to buy this machine. The hope was that he would be able to make and sell machine-knitted socks to support his family.

When I asked what had happened to the food and grain retailing business, Pramod told an interesting story. He described how, several years earlier, one of the neighboring shopkeepers —a man from the same caste as Pramod who also ran a tiny grain shop that had been in his family for ages— had borrowed some money and bought a small warehouse on the outskirts of town. Once he had his warehouse, instead of buying small amounts of rice, pulses, and wheat every couple of weeks to sell at his store, as he had done before, this man started buying large amounts from the state-run commodity-importing corporation. Because he was buying in large volume, he could buy the best-quality goods for lower prices. Pramod described how he and the other shopkeepers in the Asan Tole market realized that this one merchant was not only underselling them, but also buying up all the top-quality products, and leaving them the rest. To make matters worse, the man with the warehouse could hold goods until the market price went up, and then make big profits while his neighboring shopkeepers were forced to buy from wholesalers at inflated prices. With consumers feeling the pinch of inflation (brought about by greater levels of cash flow in the local economy), even Pramod's trusted old patrons sheepishly started to abandon him in their search for lower-priced goods.

By 2001 Pramod's shop was being run by his (still unmarried) sister, who sold some food items and cheap miscellaneous goods. Though she made almost no money, it was something for her to do. Pramod and his brother were working for low wages for a wealthy distant relative who ran an import business. (Another brother was working illegally in Malaysia and sending home irregular remittances.) It turned out that Pramod's sock-making machine could not compete with the cheap goods coming from India and China. Many of the old shops in Asan Tole were shuttered as Pramod's merchant caste fragmented in the face of a newly expanding moral economy of exchange —known as capitalism—. Increasingly, those who were able to do so left their old caste occupations, invested in new explicitly capitalist trade and light manufacturing ventures, and moved out of the old caste neighborhoods as a new system of social stratification —known as class— reoriented their experience of everyday life in Kathmandu. While some moved to the new (mixed caste) middle-class suburbs, others, like the horrified Pramod, appeared poised to fall between the cracks into the expanding population of urban poor.

But this story of capitalist market disruption does not end there. When I visited Pramod in 2004, I found him back in his shop with his sister married and prospects looking slightly less bleak. A couple of years earlier Pramod and others like him had formed a retailers association that allowed them to buy goods as a block and to lobby the government for more favorable terms on import tariffs. But even more important, Pramod explained, government deregulation[13] had encouraged numerous competing import wholesalers, which meant

[13] These changes were due to neoliberal economic policies imposed on Nepal by the World Bank (cf. Rankin, 2004).

that it was much more difficult for any single merchant to corner the local market, as had happened some years earlier. The plus side of this scenario was that the proverbial playing field was again relatively level. But the downside, Pramod explained, was that his family's old customary client base was more or less gone; many of the old urban families had moved into more comfortable middle-class suburbs, their former homes rented to poor rural migrants. With everyone now looking for the lowest possible price, merchants had to cut their profit margins razor thin. Pramod noted that his sales volume was high but there was little profit.

In 2008 I dropped in on Pramod's shop again, only to find his elderly mother presiding over the cash box. She greeted my surprised look with a laugh and pointed down the street, saying that Pramod was "at the other shop", which turned out to be just a few doors away. Pramod had rented another tiny storefront like his own from a cousin whose family had left the traditional caste business. Pramod explained that with two shops selling the same goods, he was able to trade at a higher volume, increase his local market share, and slightly improve his profits. The (to Westerners) familiar logic of "get big or get out" had arrived in Asan Tole. The problem was that this new strategy required that the two shops be staffed from morning to night, seven days a week. Hiring someone to work at the second shop would have eliminated any increased profit, so the work rotated between Pramod, his wife, and his mother. (Pramod's brother had by this time set up his own shop in one of the new middle-class suburbs.) Pramod seemed perpetually exhausted, but he was proud to be able to send his two daughters to decent schools.

Sitting in his shop in 2008 Pramod told me (in a tone of astonishment) that his merchandise now came from over twenty different countries, including popcorn from Argentina, beans and peas from Canada, rice from Thailand, soybeans from Brazil, corn oil from Malaysia, and so on. After a decade of Maoist civil war, Nepal's own agricultural production had slumped, not least because millions of rural Nepalis had fled the violence and gone abroad for work. Ironically, nowadays many of Pramod's customers use remittance money from around the world to purchase basic foodstuffs from around the world. Pramod has weathered the storm of local capitalist market transformation, but the current worldwide recession could bring this precarious (neoliberal) global system down like a house of cards: global dependencies create global vulnerabilities.

Although Pramod's story could seem like an isolated case, in an inconsequential market, in an out-of-the-way part of the world, that is part of my point in telling it. In spite of its seeming remoteness and insignificance, since the 1980s Kathmandu's Asan Tole market has been encompassed by a capitalist market logic that, while not new in Nepal[14], has greatly expanded in the past half century. Pramod's story is an almost textbook example of the introduction of a capitalist market sensibility into a noncapitalist economic niche. As such, it illustrates Braudel's (1977) main contention that what changes historically is not the presence or absence of capitalist market activity, but the extent to which that moral logic encompasses the totality of a community's economic life. Perhaps because they dealt in food items —products heavily imbued with moral and religious qualities in Hindu society (Liechty, 2005)— Pramod's caste's micro-economy was one of the last market segments forced to

[14] Other segments of Kathmandu's economy, especially the merchant communities that have been involved in long-distance trade between Tibet and India, have operated around these capitalist principles for at least several centuries. See, for example, Tuladhar (2004).

"adapt [its] manner of life to the conditions of capitalistic success...[or] go under" (Weber, 1958: 72).

What does Pramod's story have to do with theorizing the middle class? Pramod's caste community (of grain merchants) was among the last to be drawn into the consumerist moral politics of the growing class society. The moral and market logics of caste have now been almost totally transformed by the moral and market logics of class[15]. Pramod services a "rationalized" —and now globalized— market economy in which maximizing consumers have replaced the morality of caste-based exchange (based on notions of reciprocity and ritual hierarchies) with class-based exchange (founded on the morality of "free trade", market competition, and low prices). Pramod's story illustrates the process whereby the dominant logic governing a local economy shifts from what Braudel called simple market exchange (here, culturally articulated in customary caste-based relations), to a capitalist consumer logic in which all goods become freely traded commodities —" free", that is, from any meaning aside from price—. The relationship between goods in the marketplace (reckoned in terms of price) has replaced the relationship between merchant and customer (reckoned in terms of customary moral reciprocities).

Have Pramod and his family "achieved" middle-class status? If not already, then they are certainly aspirants: they are learning the rules, logics, and desires of middle classness and struggling to get a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1998: 77). Pramod's (forced?) embrace of rational, maximizing business logics suggests a shift toward a middle-class, entrepreneurial labor ethic while his careful (and fiscally painful) investment in his children's education points to a new consumerist future orientation. Though I don't want to imply some crude shift from a "cyclical" to "linear" experience of time, it is true that the salience of the city's old ritual calendar —the annual cycle of religious festivals and caste-based feast days around which so much of Kathmandu's social and economic life revolved— is more and more eclipsed by a different strategic logic of time tied to new periodicities and values, such as investment, risk, insurance, delayed gratification, and aspiration. Kathmandu's Newar businesspeople have no doubt always had an instrumental relationship with time, but the instrumentalities of time associated with the growing dominance of capitalist market logics place merchants in larger and more complicated chains of relations and dependencies that decrease the amount of control that any individual has, raising both the anxieties and the stakes.

Pramod has clearly begun the shift toward a new form of middle-class subjectivity (with all its contradictions and anxieties) though "making it" into the local middle class may take generations. But if he and his children are *unable* to convert earlier forms of wealth (the assets and social capital of a caste-based market system) into new forms of middle-class capital (entrepreneurial skills, educational credentials, and so forth) then it is likely that they will slide into Kathmandu's growing class of "free laborers". Translating a middling *caste* status into a middling *class* status, while the socio-moral logics of the market shift beneath your feet, is a terrifying act of social navigation with terrible penalties for those who fail —and fall—. It is the primal "fear of falling" (Ehrenreich, 1989) —especially for one's children— that stokes the anxious, exhausting, entrepreneurial labor of marginal people like Pramod around the world.

[15] It is crucial to understand that class logic does not *replace* caste relations but profoundly alters those relations, as I have documented in detail elsewhere (Liechty, 2003, 2005).

5. THE SPATIALIZATION OF CLASS: FROM INTIMATE TO GLOBAL INTERJACENCY

One of the key shifts in Pramod's social existence in the past few decades has been his growing experience of (inter)dependency on globalized markets, a shift that has been realigning his social universe in relations of class interjacency at greater and greater scales. Although to this point I have focused mainly on the problem of locating the middle class in historical time, now I will turn to some thoughts on locating the experience of middle classness in space, with a more sustained focus on the experience and changing nature of class interjacency, or how the spatial organization of class groups affects the nature of their interproductivity.

One of the characteristics of middle-class life in Kathmandu during the 1980s and '90s was the experience of what we might call intimate class interjacency. Though some spatial segregation was in place, to a considerable extent urban Nepalis of all classes regularly shared public spaces and in very real ways competed to claim those spaces for their own class based moral projects (Liechty, 2003: 255 ff.). In this context of intimate interjacency, middle-class Nepalis engaged in a kind of continuous moral locational discourse, repeatedly locating their class Others in morally compromised social locations "above" and "below". What's more, this inescapable public intermingling produced intense feelings of consumer anxiety among middle-class people as they struggled to walk the fine line of suitability between the vulgar poor and the vulgar rich. Intensely aware of their class Others and forced to mingle with them on a daily basis, middle-class culture in Kathmandu in the 1990s was all about the discursive and performative production of middleness. As a twenty-first-century Chicagoan, this experience of intense class interlocationality seems alien to me, but reading Chicago School sociology from the 1930s sparks a sense of *déjà vu:* at that time Chicagoans too anxiously tried to maintain social distance in an urban class world of intense physical proximity (Hannerz, 1980: 63; Wirth, 1938: 12). This anxious middle-class experience of intimate class interjacency finds analogous expression in different times and places and suggests that similar configurations of class interjacency will result in similar class-cultural experiences and behaviors.

But what happens when different socioeconomic strata are no longer intimately interlocated, when different class formations come into increasingly less and less contact in physical space or in socially meaningful or consequential ways? As in many other U.S. cities, in the twentieth century Chicagoland saw a steady process of sociospatial segregation, from the ghettoization of early immigrant/ethnic groups, to the production of racially segregated "projects" and slums, to the emergence of middle-class and elite suburbs —a process that Bullard, Grigsby and Lee (1994) refer to as "residential apartheid"—. Similar processes are now also at work in Kathmandu as sprawling new middle-class residential suburbs spread out from the old, densely settled urban core, gradually creating more and more class-segregated urban communities[16]. Already in the early 1990s commentators noted the imminent demise of Kathmandu's ancient, caste-based "urban instinct" in the face of a new, middle-class-driven "suburban instinct" (Dixit, 1992).

How are we to understand these shifts in the spatial nature of class interjacency and the associated cultural practices whereby class groups naturalize their sociospatial locations? Each historical eventuation will be unique, but one pattern that seems to characterize a

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[16] See Li Zhang (2012) for a discussion of this at work in China, and Sanjay Srivastava (2012) for a discussion of this at work in India.

number of middleclass emergences concerns shifts in projects of class distancing. Whereas intimately interjacent middle classes first work to naturalize their class privileges in discourses of *moral* distance, that project of distancing eventually (perhaps even simultaneously) is transformed into a project of *spatial* distancing (as with the suburbanization of many of Pramod's old clients). In Kathmandu (and around the world) as middle classes use their consumer power to convert moral distance into spatial distance, they tend to reframe their moral politics. In some cases this reframing is toward a more (neo)liberal ethic that embraces the supposedly value-neutral promises of an entrepreneurial, "free market" state economic agenda, as with India's "new middle class" (Fernandes, 2006). In other cases, such as in North America, middle classes tend to "forget" socioeconomic difference, or depoliticize it by rendering difference as ethnic or cultural (from class politics to identity politics), thereby allowing them to imagine their society as egalitarian and classless. In either case, as Henri Lefebvre insists, middle classes increasingly embrace a discourse of political equality ("freedom", "rights") even while engaging in the active production, reproduction, and segregation of difference through spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991: 52; McCann, 1999) such as the suburban residential "zoning games" described by Rachel Heiman (2012). The existence of India's massive urban slums alongside posh, middle-class gated communities (Srivastava, 2012; Waldrop, 2004) is strangely analogous to the parallel growth of prison populations and middle-class gated communities in the United States (Low, 2001). Both suggest new patterns of class interjacency —the "instrumental" and "essentially exploitative" spatial displacement of social difference (Soja, 1989: 246)— that verge on a new kind of middle-class culture of incarceration (voluntary and involuntary) and bear witness to the lengths that people will go to spatially segregate themselves from their class Others[17].

If urban class segregation is one important measure of the growing spatial distancing between socioeconomic groups, the rise of neoliberal globalization has only amplified the effect, further distancing the relations of interjacency that link mutually productive class formations. Taking a process that began in the early modern period to the extreme, neoliberal globalization has increasingly divided the world into functionally interproductive class zones. After half a century of gains on the part of organized labor in the early twentieth century, the rise of conservative "free trade" economics in the 1970s and '80s saw the growing export of Western capital and jobs to low-wage parts of the world. As millions of blue-collar, working-class jobs were "offshored", U.S. cities underwent major sociospatial transformations (Soja, 1989). Once-vibrant working-class neighborhoods slid into poverty, their populations increasingly segregated along racial and ethnic lines. The vacuum left by the exodus of working-class jobs was quickly filled by a new sub-working class of un- or underemployed "flexible" laborers, including millions of new undocumented, criminalized, "illegal" migrants who now form huge pools of docile labor (legally unprotected, unrepresented, and often "invisible") in American cities (De Genova, 2005). This influx of "illegal" Third World labor into the First allows the post-industrial service economy to feed at the same low-wage trough that industrial capital enjoys beyond the state's militarized borders (Harvey, 2005)[18].

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[17] Gated communities are now also increasingly common in Kathmandu's elite residential suburbs.

[18] The growing prevalence of Third World (im)migrant labor in First World countries reminds us of how different systems of market relations can coexist interdependently even though spatially segregated across national borders. As Meillassoux (1972) noted and others have corroborated (Weyland, 1993), the capitalist mode of production is often dependent on the coexistence of non-capitalist hinterlands —often rural subsistence-producing agricultural areas of the "Third World"— from which are extracted adult laborers, and to which they are later expelled. In this way the capitalist mode of production often avoids the cost of the social reproduction

In terms of the modern Western experience of class interjacency, neoliberal globalization has meant an even greater distancing of the middle classes from their class Others. Fifty years ago it was a novel experience for American consumers to acquire a product manufactured outside the United States. Today, the United States' multi-billion-dollar annual trade deficits with China are evidence of the fact that it is almost impossible to buy American-made consumer goods. America's new role in the global economy is no longer producer-to-the-world but consumer-of-the-world. With its working class exiled offshore, and its underclass criminalized (evidenced in racially uneven incarceration and "illegal" immigrants) and spatially segregated, the huge American middle class can confidently shoulder its consumerist responsibility as the leading member of the world's middle classes, enjoying the "democracy of goods" at home and promoting "free trade" abroad. With its class Others largely out of sight and out of mind, middle-class Americans can happily embrace an ethic of "freedom and democratic equality" in which any mention of economic disparities invites accusations of being "anti-American" or inciting "class warfare"[19].

We need to understand these changes in the nature of class interjacency in terms of shifting conditions of possibility: shifts in capitalist circulation that occurred at increasing volume and scale for several centuries, culminating in crucial new forms of interstate relations that took shape in the middle decades of the twentieth century. As the era of European imperial domination began to wane and eventually collapse after two world wars, decolonization opened up new conditions of possibility out of which emerged new patterns of geostrategic organization. Among them was the emergence of what Kelly and Kaplan refer to as a new "world system of nation-states" (2001: 9), formally egalitarian units arrayed in "democratic" international institutions (e.g., the United Nations) that cleared the way for ever-greater efficiencies and the rationalization of global capitalist market relations. With postcolonial states (as well as post- and neo-imperialist states) now formally equal and equally sovereign —each with its own (supposedly) independent "national economy" (Mitchell, 2002)— new forms of "multilateral" (as opposed to colonial or binary) interstate relations were propounded in the form of agencies and treaty organizations (IMF, World Bank, GATT, WTO). All of these new multilateral entities had both political and economic powers through which they could uphold the dual ideologies (myths?) of "free nations" and "free trade" as well as impose uniform interstate property and contract laws. In the context of the Cold War the United States (via the Truman Doctrine) took the lead in the global promotion of "freedom", offering "development" as the carrot (and military intervention as the stick) to bring reluctant nation-states into the freedom-loving and free-trading camp. As Kelly and Kaplan note, in the postcolonial era of freedom and national sovereignty "only corporations, not nations, are free to pursue dreams of domination" (2001: 59). In the postwar nation-state system the domain of "economics" has been ideologically recast as a sphere separate from the powers whose interests it serves (Mitchell, 2002: 14)[20].

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of the working class by offshoring the cost of producing and maintaining laborers before and after their period of peak laboring productivity.

[19] Such as those leveled against John Edwards in the 2007 Democratic presidential primaries in the United States.

[20] My thinking in this paragraph is heavily influenced by Kelly and Kaplan (2001) and Mitchell (2002). Mitchell argues that global political and economic turmoil from the 1930s to the 1950s "transformed economics into a global form of knowledge" characterized not just by new geopolitical institutions, but by "new forms of value, new kinds of equivalence, new practices of calculation, [and] new relations between human agency and the nonhuman" (2002: 7, 5). In this world, a globalized capitalist class marshaled its powers through a depoliticized "rule of experts", who claimed state power in the name of "economic development".

Although they don't use the term "interjacency", what scholars like Kelly and Kaplan, and Mitchell are talking about is how geopolitical shifts in the twentieth century created the conditions of possibility for new sociospatial organizations as class relations were mapped onto a world-scale "instrumental nodal structure" (Soja, 1989: 246). Half a century of neoliberal free-trade policies has produced a new global spatialization of relations of production, circulation, and exchange. To the extent that one's class Others have been offshored (or otherwise spatially segregated), one no longer has the sociospatial experience of intimate interjacency, which produces the intense discourses of socio-moral distancing that I documented in Kathmandu. Even Bourdieu's famous maps of French "social space" from the 1960s and '70s (1984: 128-29; 1998: 5) now seem out of date because of their prominent representation of working-class habitus in direct proximity to those of the middle and upper classes[21]. "Social space" (or class interjacency) in the neoliberal era needs to be charted less *within* national economies and more *across* global economic systems of production and consumption. To an unprecedented degree, neoliberal globalization produces a new *global* spatialization (and segregation) of class that increasingly neutralizes what were once visceral (and politically charged) *local* interclass relations. Class interjacencies that were once negotiated within local and national political structures are now the stuff of multilateral (GATT, WTO, NAFTA) deal making that effectively pairs off global blocks of producers (working classes) and consumers (middle classes) in the interests of global capitalist elites. States retain the important function of regulating exactly what is "free" to move within free-trade regimes by legitimating and protecting global capital transfers while also granting (or denying) citizenship and the rights to transnational movement (labor recruiting, "guest workers", "illegal immigration"). In this way, states more and more function to segregate mutually productive classes on a global scale by maintaining wage differentials across increasingly militarized national borders.

Where does Nepal fit into this new world of globalized class interjacencies? An extremely marginal player in a world economic system increasingly less characterized by capital "flows" and more by capital that "hops" between global financial centers (Ferguson, 2006: 37), Nepal's economy is largely a fly-over backwater. Although Nepal has been integrated into capitalist circulation for centuries (Liechty, 1997), the scale of that integration has always been small, a condition that remains to this day as Nepal continues to have among the lowest GDPs and per capita incomes in the world[22]. From World War II to the 1980s, First World "development aid" largely funded Nepal's national economy, but since the end of the Cold War Nepal's donors have increasingly focused less on aid and more on trade. Neoliberal doctrine has shifted the focus from national development (education, health, and so forth) to market development, "capacity building", and free trade. This means that Nepalis can now enjoy Argentine popcorn and Canadian beans (as in Pramod's shop) yet for large parts of Kathmandu's middle class (and even more for middle-class aspirants) access to this new consumer smorgasbord is possible only through remittances from family members abroad. With free trade but few jobs, international remittances now make up a

[21] In the United States, decades of conservative, anti-labor rhetoric has made the very idea of the working class vaguely sinister. Good Americans should be "hardworking" (wage-earning) but not "working class" —suggesting that consumption, not production, is (or should be) at the heart of our subjectivity—. The middle class works to consume.

[22] The World Bank and other analysts routinely rank Nepal behind countries such as Haiti, Mali, and Lesotho in a range of economic development standings. See: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GDP.pdf.

huge but essentially invisible (because unmeasurable and unregulated) part of the national economy. Working through state-licensed labor-export businesses, millions of Nepalis work in miserable, low-wage jobs in India, the Gulf states, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, sending home the equivalent of billions of U.S. dollars per year. Among the most striking changes in the Kathmandu valley in the decade between 2000 and 2010 were massive suburban sprawl, numerous glitzy new shopping malls, and thousands of Western Union outlets[23]. Ironically, Nepal too has begun to offshore its working class, even if those drawn into global labor mobility do so out of a desire to propel their own social mobility into the nascent Nepali middle class[24]. Global labor exports have created the conditions for a small Kathmandu-based middle class, which in turn coordinates, and feeds off, Nepal's position on the fringes of the neoliberal global economy.

6. CONCLUSION

Marx famously denied the historical significance of the industrial capitalist middle classes. Even Gramsci —who acknowledged the strategic political importance of the middle class— refused to characterize it as a potentially "hegemonic class". Gramsci argued that because the middle class is not involved in the key Marxist contradiction between labor (working class) and capital (capitalist class), it will not be a moving force in history (Mouffe, 1979). Even if middle classes are unlikely to be hotbeds of historical and political dynamism, I have argued that middle-class formations do play a key role in the cultural-historical processes whereby capitalisms (locally emergent patterns of capitalist market relations) play themselves out around the world. Middle classes emerge within the conditions of possibility formed by class interjacencies (sociospatial interproductivities) as changing modes and scales of production open up spaces for new consumer subjectivities and practices around which new middling classes constitute themselves in cultural life. Whether intimately interjacent, or separated by continents (or national borders) from their interproductive class Others, middle classes everywhere stand between modern laboring classes and finance/capitalist classes as salaried or entrepreneurial consumers of capitalist production.

Middle classes first attempt to naturalize and protect their class privileges through discourses of moral distancing from their class Others, but as class spatial segregation grows the middle classes increasingly embrace moral and political rhetorics of freedom, equality, and (in the neoliberal era) "free trade" while simultaneously reinforcing the spatial parameters of their own privilege. The gated communities and militarized (walled) borders of the United States, needed to protect the spaces of middle-class privilege, suggest that the possibilities of local and global class segregation may be reaching their limits.

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[23] In 2008 I went to the Western Union desk at a major international bank in Kathmandu, intending to send money to India. But I was told it was impossible. In Nepal, Western Union is set up only to receive money from abroad.

[24] This is very similar to the Egyptian case described by Schielke (2012) in which labor migration abroad is a strategy for local social mobility.

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