

lower-class whites and free and enslaved African Americans as an affirmation of full participation in the polity.

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Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class* (2006), xi + 325 (Princeton University Press, Princeton, \$35.00).

Keith Watenpaugh's *Being Modern in the Middle East* is a ground-breaking *tour de force*. The book, comprising eleven chapters divided into three sections, focuses on the history of the middle classes in the cosmopolitan city of Aleppo (Syria) during the first half of the twentieth century. Its purpose is to narrate the rise of modernity within this non-western milieu, in particular amid the 'new man' of Aleppo. Watenpaugh, like other recent scholars of modernity in the Middle East, argues that this is not a pale imitation of a western 'modern', nor does it constitute a rupture with the Ottoman past and society. Rather, he argues, by *emulating* the western ideas and institutions of modernity, they globalize the phenomenon by universalizing their own experience with 'modernity'; and they do so by consciously situating themselves within a constructed local history in which the Ottomans play a significant role.

Watenpaugh begins his story in 1908 when the Committee on Union and Progress carried out a revolution that brought back constitutional rule to the Ottoman Empire. The middle classes of Aleppo saw this moment as politically embodying their own liberal social ideals. They celebrated it as an opportunity to remake the society and polity of Aleppo in their own 'modern' image and to wrest control from the 'traditional' elites of the city. Appropriately enough, the tools they opted to use for this purpose were the newspaper, mutual aid societies and the telegraph – all symbols of the modern middle class. Watenpaugh captures this drama through a close analysis of the text of newspaper editorials and petitions sent by telegram. The rhetoric used transformed middle-class men into 'potential heroic actors' (89) and brought them from the very margins of politics into the centre. Yet this was a fleeting taste of power which lasted only until 1912, when the Ottoman state came under the power of a military dictatorship that placed its heavy hand on the public space and all of its constituent technologies.

Despite their dismay at this loss of power, the middle classes still lived and functioned in an Ottoman world which they knew historically and intimately. This soon came to an end however. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Aleppo – by European colonial design – was torn away from its historical hinterlands in Anatolia and encircled by new borders that made it part of a new and alien political entity called Syria. This economically, culturally and politically traumatic moment elicited a multiplicity of disparate responses from the middle classes of Aleppo. On one hand, ideas of exclusive Arabism were propounded. Instead of the ethnic, linguistic and historical cosmopolitanism of historical Aleppo, the editors of newspapers sought to convince their readers that the city had always been exclusively Arab. For the Ottoman bureaucratic and military middle-class elites, this narrow ethnic nationalism was unacceptable, and they opposed its roots – foreign occupation of their country – through violent rebellion. But the most significant means of dealing with

these anxieties emerged through attempts to write the history of Aleppo as part of a global history. Using self-consciously Arab literary genres, various authors followed the European model of a linear history where the pre-modern defines the modern and where there are clear moments of bifurcation, such as the First World War. Thus, and paradoxically, the confusion of style belied the clarity of thesis depicting in a very real manner the conundrum of an Aleppan middle class riddled with uncertainty and anxiety.

This uncertainty carried over into the Mandate period, when France acquired colonial power over Syria. Thus, in addition to the difficulty of coming to terms with the national idea of Syria, the middle class of Aleppo confronted the equally daunting task of remaining modern while rejecting the colonial manifestation of modernity. Here Watenpaugh finds the middle class losing any remnant of its ideological cohesion. Some member of this class reached out to traditional elites; others were attracted to communist and fascist political parties because they embodied modern politics; and still others arrived at a *modus vivendi* with the colonial powers. As this class of 'modern men' lost its shape, it concomitantly lost its ability to play a key role in the politics of Syria – and the Middle East as a whole.

By emphasizing the complexity and contingency of the values, ideas, institutional organization and self-representation of the middle class in Aleppo, Watenpaugh effectively captures the problematic nature of the project of modernity and convincingly shows it to be simultaneously a western and non-western endeavour. Yet his near-exclusive focus on middle-class men hides the role of gender in shaping the contours of this class as well as the hallmark of middle-class modernity: the public sphere. And while he shows the linkages between the modern middle classes and the 'traditional' notables, he elides the genealogical and social links which connect those 'new men' to the working classes of Aleppo. These are issues which would have added greater depth to an already powerful argument, and they are ones that others have effectively used in tracing the history of the middle class in the Middle East and beyond.

In the final analysis, what is novel and interesting about this book is that it theoretically engages the intellectual history of the middle class in the Middle East more fully than any previous work. Conceptually, it reconnects three periods (Ottoman revolution, nationalism and colonialism) in the history of the eastern Mediterranean that have been unconvincingly sundered apart within most studies of Middle Eastern history. In the process, Watenpaugh raises pertinent questions (albeit ones previously posed in other contexts) about several ideological binaries (national/colonial, patriot/collaborator, modernity/tradition) that have come to dominate the history of the Middle East. As such, it is a most valuable contribution not only to the history of the Middle East, but also to the history of modernity and the non-western middle classes.

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Mridula Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory* (2004), 577 (Sage Publications, New Delhi, \$81.95).

Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution is a considerable achievement: a meticulously researched and provocatively argued work of social history. Mukherjee is not lacking in