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978-0-521-48198-4 - Gentlemen, Bourgeois, and Revolutionaries: Political Change and Cultural Persistence Among the Spanish Dominant Groups 1750-1850

Jesus Cruz

Excerpt

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Part I



Careers, business, and fortunes

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Introduction

This book has as its protagonists a group of families who belonged to what Spanish writers of the first half of the nineteenth century called the “middle classes” and contemporary scholars call the “bourgeoisie.” Its object is the study of social and economic practices of this group in the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Its main argument is based on the conviction that the historical changes which characterized the crisis of the old regime in Spain were mainly of a political nature. While they also in part reflected economic necessities, only to a very small degree were they the result of alterations in the traditional social structure of Spain between 1750 and 1850.

Madrid is the setting for most of this story. Because Madrid was the political capital of the Spanish state, in addition to being an important business center, most of the historical transformations related to the crisis of the Spanish old regime took place in this city. However, although my analysis focuses on Madrid, my intention is to go beyond the limits of the old wall that surrounded the town until the first third of the nineteenth century. First of all, this study aims to offer the reader a comparative perspective of the formative process of Madrid’s dominant groups. This process will be analyzed in comparison to similar occurrences in other Spanish regions and in other European countries during the same period. The ultimate goal of the project, however, is to study the formation of the group which has been called the “Spanish bourgeoisie”: that ascendant social class which, according to some historians, transformed the course of Spanish history in a revolutionary manner.

Historians have analyzed Spanish history using two basic models of interpretation that were formulated in response to the need for an explanation of modern Spain’s economic backwardness and political instability.

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The first model offers a sociopolitical explanation based on the so-called process of the bourgeois revolution between 1812 and 1843. It has been elaborated primarily by Marxist historians, although important representatives of non-Marxist historiography have accepted this approach.¹ According to the defenders of this model, a new social class, the bourgeoisie, seized power and then reformed law and society to serve its own interests, that is, to promote capitalist development. With the passage of time this bourgeoisie, consisting of a group of new landowners, merchants, and bureaucrats, who had maintained a revolutionary position between 1812 and 1843, became increasingly more conservative until they merged with the landed aristocracy. The threat of a popular revolution inspired by the rural and urban proletariat led to this confluence of interests between the new bourgeoisie and the old aristocracy. Thus, a sociopolitical block was formed which, according to these historians, impeded industrialization and democratization. Nevertheless, there exists only limited agreement among historians regarding the historical content of this “process of bourgeois revolution.” They only coincide in the use of the term; the interpretation of facts differs so greatly from one scholar to the next that at times it seems as if they are describing different Spanish bourgeois revolutions.

The second model, which complements the first, offers an economic explanation based on the failure of agrarian and industrial revolutions in Spain. According to this theory, agrarian revolution failed because the processes of disentanglement did not change traditional property structures. The old landed aristocracy was merely augmented by a new class of landowners. Spanish agriculture continued to be immobilized by a social minority with minimal interest in raising their yields and productivity.² This lack of an agrarian revolution stifled the demand for and accumulation of capital necessary for a large-scale industrial revolution. Consequently, industrialization occurred only on a regional scale in Catalonia and the Basque country.

¹ Pérez Garzón (1980) summarizes the origin and development of the paradigm in Spanish historiography. About the conflicting application of the general model of bourgeois revolution to the Spanish case, see Clavero and Ruiz Torres (1979); Alvarez Junco (1985 and 1986); Gil Novales (1985); Ringrose (1986); Pérez Ledesma (1991). For general works in which the paradigm has been defined see Fontana (1979 and 1987); Tuñón de Lara (1983); Sebastià and Piqueras (1987: 13–19). The works of Artola (1983) and Marichal (1977) offer an interpretive variable emphasizing the political nature of the revolution, though never questioning the role of the bourgeoisie. Jover (1992) and Bahamonde and Martínez (1994) offer new revisionist approaches to the nature of the nineteenth-century revolutions and the role of the bourgeoisie.

² See the already classic works of Tomás y Valiente (1971: 87–96); Simón Segura (1973: 278–279). See also Fontana (1977: 162).

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In addition, the occasional spurts of industrial modernization in the rest of Spain were sponsored by foreign investors whose economic behavior was colonial. For these reasons, according to this view, the Spanish economy maintained a level of backwardness which made social and political stability impossible.³

In the past few years, an important revision of the second model – the well-known thesis of “failures” – has been made. By means of a minutely detailed reconstruction of series of production, prices, exports, and so forth, historians have arrived at the conclusion that Spanish agriculture maintained a slow but sustained growth (per capita as well as overall) from the decade of the 1830s until 1931.⁴ Among other factors this growth reflected changes introduced in property structure by disentanglement. The revisionists have also concluded that foreign investments, far from hurting the Spanish economy, were a dynamic factor. The failure to obtain access to foreign markets, rather than the narrow scope of the interior market or the colonization of domestic productive sectors, lies behind the mediocre performance of Spanish manufacturing. Thus relative delay, rather than failure or stagnation, is a more appropriate term to describe the performance of the Spanish economy up to 1931. From the perspective of the new economic history, Spain is not seen as an economically stagnant or failed country, but rather as a country whose economy remained submerged in a slow, although constant, process of modernization.⁵

Although historians have revised the economic paradigm, the old sociopolitical paradigm of the bourgeois revolution remains⁶ in spite of the fact that the two concepts no longer complement each other. Indeed, if the failure of the Spanish economy has been explained by virtue of an agreement between an appeased bourgeoisie and a recovered aristocracy, how can the same argument be maintained after changing the terms of the paradigm? If we accept the existence of steady economic modernization, there is no reason to explain any economic “failure” by hypothesizing the existence of a

³ Nadal (1981 and 1987).

⁴ For an update on the progress of Spanish economic history, see Harrison (1990) and Martín Aceña and Prados (1985). Concerning agrarian history, see García Sanz and Garrabou (1985), whose works continue a research line initiated earlier by Artola (1978), Anes (1970), and Tortella (1973).

⁵ Part of the debate on the adequacy of the term “failure” to characterize the performance of nineteenth-century Spanish economy can be found in Sánchez Alborno (1985); Prados de la Escosura (1988) finds it more appropriate to speak of “delay with slow modernization” instead of “failure” to define the achievements of the Spanish economy during the nineteenth century.

⁶ That is the case of the collective work of García Sanz and Garrabou (1985: 43, v. I), otherwise very innovative.

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bourgeoisie which abandoned its historical function. The revised economic paradigm leaves us with a piece that does not fit into this puzzle of contemporary Spanish history. I believe that this ill-fitting piece is the theory of bourgeois revolution and the concept of bourgeoisie as an emerging new and revolutionary social class.

Thus, the central objective of this study is the revision of the existing paradigm of the bourgeois revolution. In my analysis, I use tools similar to those utilized by economic historians in their revision of the growth rhythms of modern Spanish economy. In other words, I study the details of the formative process of the social class known as the “bourgeoisie.” Curiously, historians have formulated a theoretical model – the bourgeois revolution – without a concrete empirical foundation. Because of this, the model is no more than a cliché, and its use limits the understanding of specific aspects of contemporary Spanish history.⁷

The revision proposed by this book requires an approach to the problem based on new methodological frameworks. The first framework deals with the characteristics and the treatment of the historical sample to be studied. This sample must be situated in a broad chronological context in order to perceive rhythms of change or continuity in the evolution of the social group under study. The model of bourgeois revolution articulates a fundamental premise: the existence of an emergent and revolutionary social class. The spark of this revolution is placed at 1812; thus, the formative process of the revolutionary social group presumably occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. My work is based upon a statistical sample of 549 cases of families who lived in Madrid between 1750 and 1850. Most of the data of this sample comes from notarial sources, although these have been supplemented by sources from familial archives and from literary and periodical texts. My intention is to study changes and continuities in the history of these families taking two basic analytical variables: economic strategies and patterns of social behavior.

This study begins with the variations and continuities detected in economic activities. I analyze the manner in which individuals or groups of

⁷ As Cobban (1964: 22) mentioned some years ago regarding the French example, “an empirical examination of social facts is needed, such as a contemporary sociologist would make of his own society. An estimate of social position must not be based on a single criterion, legal, political or economic, as it often has been in the past, but on a plurality of tests – actual wealth and its nature, sources of income, social status and prestige, origin and direction of social movement of the individual and his family, legal order, political orientation, contemporary esteem, economic function, personal aspirations and grievances, and so on.”

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individuals established their fortunes, focusing on the most frequent forms of capital accumulation and investment. The purpose is to discover the way these families contributed to the development of the capitalist system in Spain between 1750 and 1850. The next topic of study is the patterns of social reproduction within this sample to determine when its members truly began to constitute a new social class. I examine issues regarding their demographic behavior and biological reproduction, to verify the articulation (or the lack thereof) of a culture that could define their identification as a social group. I also attend, when such information exists, to the cultural preferences and political positions adopted by our protagonists throughout their lives. Once we obtain a profile of the families that make up the sample, I place the results in comparative perspective. As I have already indicated, the ultimate goal of this study is to analyze the problem of integration of an ascendant social class on a national scale. I believe that with the currently existing regional studies it is possible to establish some preliminary features to characterize the so-called Spanish bourgeoisie.⁸

The second methodological assumption refers to the analytical framework that couches the argument of this work. One global observation is that its focus is decidedly interdisciplinary; therefore, its analytical frameworks have to be understood in a complementary manner. Throughout these pages, the reader will notice the interaction of concepts such as region, class, group, culture, and hegemony. From the beginning it is essential to reflect upon their significance and their theoretical content.

Although this study does not deal exclusively with one region, and it is not a work of economic history, nevertheless its first analytical frame of reference is the theory of regional systems analysis. I would like to take as my point of departure William Skinner's assertion that

human activity or social action is in the last analysis systemic, and . . . systems of human interaction are at once, spatial, temporal, and hierarchical. Methodologies that ignore even one of these dimensions necessarily yield inadequate explanations. Social-science history needs models that bring space, time, hierarchy, and scale into a single analytical paradigm.⁹

⁸ The following list of works published in recent years illustrates this progress: Bahamonde Magro (1981 and 1986); Caro Baroja (1985); Cruz (1986 and 1990); Fernández (1982); Franch (1986); Eiras (1981); García Baquero (1966); Guimera (1985); Maruri (1990); Molas (1985); Otazu (1987); Pérez Garzón (1978); Ramos Santana (1987); Tedde (1983); Villar (1982); Zylberberg (1979 and 1983).

⁹ Skinner (1977:37).

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The basic unit of spatial analysis is the nodal region, understood as a socioeconomic space of interaction which is differentiated and organized hierarchically. Every nodal region has a temporal structure; that is, all of its systems of interaction are reproduced with the passage of time. Based on this combination of temporal and spatial variables, models of interpretation applicable to distinct fields of the social sciences have been constructed. The application of this methodology has obtained best results in the study of economic spaces through the analysis of the formation and evolution of markets. Starting with the basic model of the nodal region, that is, a geographical space with a sole center of articulation, models of greater complexity have been constructed.¹⁰ In these models, cities are crucial insofar as they almost always are the centers of regional spaces and, therefore, form the networks of hierarchy. But the cities are more than nodes of economic activity. As places of residence of the elite, cities are centers of political and cultural decision. Therefore, the significance of the analysis is not limited to the field of economics but is also very useful for understanding a wide variety of political, social, and cultural phenomena.¹¹ As a consequence, any approach to articulation of a social formation which ignores its regional dimension runs the danger of offering an inadequate explanation.

Following these theoretical assumptions, it seems logical that any analysis of the peculiarities of Madrid society should take into account the role of the city as the center of a regional space. The same can be said of the rest of Spanish cities. Finally, the problem of articulation of regional markets, and later of the national market, along with their respective social formations, will have to be understood within an analytical paradigm that considers the three dimensions defined by Skinner: space (region), time (history), and hierarchy (power).

Despite the abundance of regional studies of eighteenth-century Spain, there still does not exist a model of regionalization that offers an integrated vision. In the light of recent research, the classic paradigm of a dynamic periphery and a stagnant center seems only partially valid. Nevertheless, some studies undertaken in recent years in this field have produced noteworthy results.¹² Prime examples are Pierre Vilar's already classic study of Catalonia, and the more recent study of Madrid by David Ringrose. Both

¹⁰ See Smith (1976); Christaller (1966); and Rozman (1973).

¹¹ About the role played by the city in history, see Bairoch (1989) and Reher (1990: chap. I); see also Madrazo (1986) and Ringrose (1988).

¹² Fernández (1985).

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works offer an alternative model in which the region is understood as an interactive space between the urban centers and their respective hinterlands. Vilar demonstrates how Barcelona, during the eighteenth century, was transformed into a center of production which connected a regional market with an international one. Unlike Barcelona, Madrid maintained its character as political center of the old Spanish empire and, according to Ringrose, was only a place for the redistribution of goods and services. The capital acted as a drain that absorbed the income generated in much of Spain. While at the end of the eighteenth century Catalonia began to integrate an urban network with its center in Barcelona, Madrid failed in this role as an integrating center. This had immediate consequences on the formation of the middle classes and the elites. While in Barcelona, as Jordi Maluquer has pointed out, the bourgeois elite was renewed by access to new social groups from the artisan and rural world, the elite of Madrid remained static. In other words, what differentiated Madrid from Barcelona was the reproduction there of an elite from within the same social realm as compared with the renewal of Barcelona's elite via the opening of access to new social groups.¹³ This example serves to demonstrate the importance of the regional systems analysis theory for any study of social history.

The second analytical framework on which this study is based comes from cultural anthropology and refers to the interaction between the concepts of culture, class or group, and hegemony. I work with the assumption that any social relation is fundamentally cultural, and that in every social formation there always exists a hegemonic culture.¹⁴ In a traditional sense, to be a cultured person means to master certain areas of academic knowledge, which also implies a different type of social behavior. A person is considered a cultured man or woman because he or she behaves in a distinctive manner, knows conventions, and is an educated person. This concept of culture is the result of the transfer of certain patterns of behavior of the elite to the rest of society. It reflects, therefore, a partial view regarding education in particular. On account of this, some social scientists prefer to speak of "cultural capital" rather than simply culture, when it is understood in this sense of exclusivity.¹⁵

¹³ Vilar (1987: vol. III); Ringrose (1987: 125–137); Maluquer (1989: 188–89).

¹⁴ The original definition of the concept of hegemony appears in Gramsci (1971: 57) and (1979: 17 and 110). See also Mouffe (1979).

¹⁵ For a definition of cultural capital, see Bourdieu (1977: 191; 1988: 78–83). Its application for a study of the formation of a Spanish social group can be found in McDonogh (1986: 166–201).

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In this book I will use the concept of culture as it is defined by anthropologists and ethnologists: the life style of a people. This life style consists of conventional models of thought and behavior, which include value systems, beliefs, norms of conduct, and even forms of political organization and economic activity. These models of thought and behavior are transmitted from one generation to the next by means of a learning process, never by means of genetic inheritance. Individuals or groups learn modes of behavior; therefore, culture is something malleable, and should not be considered outside of its economic and social context.¹⁶ Finally, cultural models influence the structuring of thought and perception; this is what anthropologists call cultural conventions or cultural prejudices. The importance of conventions is decisive in understanding the articulation of value systems in diverse societies. The application of this principle helps historians to understand the variety of responses in different spaces with similar levels of historical development.

In every social space, one can locate several cultures which, in turn, are the product of the action of different social groups. To the extent that every social relationship is also a relationship of domination, we find that there are always one or several social groups which end up imposing their culture. This is what Gramsci called “cultural hegemony,” and he particularly defined it as the usurpation of language by the dominant classes. Following this line of analysis, the bourgeois revolution should be understood fundamentally as the attempt of the bourgeoisie to hegemonize their culture, in the same way that feudal society was characterized by the hegemony of the values of aristocratic culture. The central question that I will pose in this book concerns the existence of a bourgeois culture in Spain before 1850, a culture which should have been the expression of a new class consciousness acquired by the protagonists of the Spanish revolution between 1812 and 1843.

This leads us to a new problem of particular importance for historians: how to explain alterations in different hegemonic cultures. Durkheim only partially resolved the problem by introducing the notion of “collective conscience” to explain the basis of certain manifestations of collective action. His great contribution consisted of combining two analytical categories that in the Cartesian and Kantian traditions fit together rather poorly: knowledge and action. For Durkheim, social life should be explained not

¹⁶ For a definition of culture see Williams (1981:10–13); Hatch (1973); Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963).