

Gentlemen, bourgeois, and revolutionaries

Political change and cultural persistence
among the Spanish dominant groups
1750–1850



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
Part I: Careers, business, and fortunes	
1. Introduction	3
2. Merchants	16
3. Bankers	58
4. Bureaucrats and professionals	87
5. Politicians	128
Part II: The museum of families	
6. Habitus, solidarity, and authority	169
7. Kinship, friendship, and patronage	208
8. Conclusion: Rethinking the Spanish revolution	259
Appendix A: The sample	277
Appendix B: Analysis of assets	293
Appendix C: Archival sources	317
<i>References</i>	321
<i>Index</i>	343



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.

Careers, business, and fortunes

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).

Introduction

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 Albornoz (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.

Careers, business, and fortunes

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.”

Introduction

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).

Careers, business, and fortunes

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).

Introduction

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).

Careers, business, and fortunes

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).

Introduction

only according to the conception of those who participate in it, but also by profound unconscious causes. However, in spite of the value which knowledge and logical structures have in his theory, Durkheim, like Marx, located definitive reason on the level of objective structures to explain social change.¹⁷

The Marxist tradition solved the problem by subordinating ideological changes – the superstructure – to the equilibrium between productive forces and the means of production. In the end, the superstructure is always determined by the infrastructure. History is thus explained by a succession of modes of production which are basically defined by the dominant means of production in their interior. The well-known debate about the transition from feudalism to capitalism is in part inherited from this conception, which concentrates on the development of the productive forces in order to explain historical change.¹⁸ Beginning in the 1960s, the influence of Gramsci, structuralism, and modernization theory opened the way for a revision of this model of interpretation. This helped to form a more pragmatic attitude leading to a new definition of the concept of social class which was less dependent on economics, and more concerned with ideology. In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson showed how a class is not only defined by objective categories, but also by its own self-conception. For this reason, a class is not defined as an aggregate of agents that share the same position in the productive process, but rather as a cluster of norms, habits, meanings, customs, and symbols with which groups of individuals identify.¹⁹ Using a cultural approach, I will attempt to determine how the individuals or groups under study represent themselves – to see to what degree these dominant families were capable of creating a new symbolic space or a new culture. But above all, I wish to determine whether this culture arose as an alternative to another which was displaced, and if that process was the result of the consciousness, raising of new social agents.

The model of bourgeois revolution focuses its attention on the fact that during the first half of the nineteenth century radical changes occurred in the political systems of Western European countries. These changes profoundly affected economies and, in large part, favored more dynamic social spaces. However, this interpretative model is based on the acceptance of the existence of a social class which promoted revolutionary changes. At the

¹⁷ Thompson (1985: 14–20).

¹⁸ See Mooers (1991: 17–26); Aston and Philpin (eds.) (1987); Barceló (1987).

¹⁹ Thompson (1966: 9–12).

Careers, business, and fortunes

foundation of this model is the classic Marxist premise of class struggle as the driving force of history, and the definition of social class based on its place in the process of production. Certainly, the new role of the bourgeoisie in the capitalist mode of production would explain this class necessity to carry out its revolution.²⁰ Nevertheless, in the two last decades, social scientists have been revising this interpretive model, questioning not only its validity but even the premises on which it is based: (a) the existence of a new social class with the ability to incite a revolution; (b) the relationship between economic, political, and social change in the historical process; and (c) the very concept of social class and of class struggle as the sole explanatory element of social change.²¹

To the extent that the French Revolution has been presented as the most developed example of bourgeois revolution, it seems logical that the revision of the paradigm began by using the historical process initiated in 1789 as a point of reference. Once the institutional developments were studied, historians began to research which groups moved the revolution forward. Their conclusion is that in those years a real bourgeoisie did not exist in France, and that a large part of the nobility was never opposed to revolutionary liberalism.²² Similar studies in Germany and England arrived at similar conclusions regarding the existence of a revolutionary bourgeoisie.²³

With regard to the relationship between economic changes and politico-cultural changes, or in other words the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, current historiography has rejected all forms of economic determinism. The studies of Abner Cohen and, especially, Pierre Bourdieu, demonstrate how the structures of domination are more than the product of control of the means of production by a social class. The forms of domination depend, in great part, on the capacity of a specific social group

²⁰ Marx and Engels (1934: 11–12); Marx (1920: 455); Ossowsky (1956); Dahrendorf (1959: 34).

²¹ Reddy (1987: 1–23).

²² Cobban (1964) opened the debate criticizing the thesis of Lefebvre (1963) and Soboul (1981) which emphasized the bourgeois character of the revolution. Regarding the social nature of the groups that protagonized the revolutionary process, see Furet (1971: 255–289). A general vision of the debate can be found in Doyle (1980). Chaussinand-Nogaret (1976: 39–64) revised the political role played by the nobility during the revolution.

²³ The revision in Germany was initiated when historians debated the causes of the failure of the 1848 revolutions – Krieger (1957). On the lack of a bourgeoisie or a bourgeois culture in nineteenth-century Germany, see Bleiber (1977: 193–95). Also see Mayer (1981: 79–127); Diefendorf (1984); Harris and Thane (1984: 215–234). On the nature of the English revolution, see Russel (1979); Stone (1972). One of the central themes in the debate about the lack of a revolution in England refers to the standards of living of the English working class during the nineteenth century – Taylor (1975); Deane (1986: 255–271).

Introduction

to impose their culture upon others. However, this culture is not the product of the exclusive action of objective structures, as is the case with means of production. For Bourdieu, a fundamental element in the shaping of a class culture is what he calls “habitus.” According to this author every social process is dynamic, and its dynamism is made possible by what he calls “fields” or “groups” – in other words, social classes. Habitus is understood as a series of internal structures of perception, of thought and action, which have a relative autonomy and which change more slowly than economic structures. These internal structures of perception, thought, and action are deeply rooted in the human conscience through custom and norm. Even where historians have perceived revolutionary changes, habitus is barely altered. It is as if we constructed a functional skyscraper with materials from a medieval castle. We could, perhaps, succeed in creating an innovative building in its exterior appearance, but its structure would remain old. Thus, where we actually should look for revolutionary social change is in those behaviors that signal a different habitus. Obviously, those changes operate in less conventional historical cycles than those which historians are accustomed to using.²⁴ In this book, I will try to define the most characteristic habitus of Madrid’s dominant groups. Their comparison with that of other groups outside Madrid helps us to know more about the reality of social change in Spain beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century.

A more complicated issue is the concept of social class, its theoretical content, and its use as a category of historical analysis. It is clear that the term “social class,” as it is used in this book, does not refer exclusively to a group of people who share a common position in the productive system. This does not mean that I completely reject the economic content of the concept. Wealth – defined as control over means of production – is always a clear element of social distinction. But it is not the sole determinant. Social rank depends not only on money but on many other factors that fall into the category which Bourdieu called cultural capital.²⁵ Prestige, influence, and power are categories which are not necessarily associated with wealth, although those who possess money have greater possibilities of acquiring these social goods. Most of the time, cultural capital is not the patrimony of a single class, but of several. Whether we call them class factions, social layers, or social blocs, the idea of group always prevails. Thus when I use the

²⁴ For a definition of habitus, see Bourdieu (1988: 127 and 128).

²⁵ Status according to Weber (1978).

Careers, business, and fortunes

concept “social group,” I take into account that this category implies multiplicity and, therefore, does not contradict the concept of social class.

As stated earlier, this study deals with the group that the Spaniards of the first half of the nineteenth century called the *clases medias*. Although the word “bourgeoisie” appeared as early as the eighteenth century, it did not then have the connotations it has acquired since around 1870. It seems that the term was initially used with more of a political meaning than a social one. It began to be used systematically in the political vocabulary of the first workers’ unions.²⁶ Returning to the period we are studying, what did the historians, journalists, and writers who discuss social themes in the first half of the 1800s understand by middle class? We can consider the example of Marquis de Miraflores in his *Apuntes histórico-críticos para escribir la historia de la revolución de España*, one of the most important works of the period. According to this author, Spain’s great problem resided in the isolation which the Spanish monarchy imposed upon its elites, especially the aristocracy. Since the end of the sixteenth century, a tacit alliance was established between the monarchs, the people, and the clergy, in order to weaken the aristocracy. The people benefited from this alliance by obtaining advantages “that made their civil existence superior to any other in Europe before the eighteenth and nineteenth century revolutions.” The crown, in its way, was able to exercise absolute power with scarcely any opposition. “But,” writes Miraflores, “the ruin of the aristocracy also involved the ruin of prosperity and of enlightenment, and the lower class, although a blind instrument of its own ruin, retained better conditions than did the aristocracy, the middle class, and the industrial classes.” This explanation has doubtful historical validity because Miraflores was only interested in legitimizing his opposition to absolute monarchy from an aristocratic perspective. But it is interesting to note two points from this reasoning: first, that the political projected presented by the enlightened aristocracy was compatible with that of the middle class, and second, that the author makes a distinction between middle class and industrial groups. From 1830 on, according to Miraflores, a cycle of history closed, thanks to the reconciliation between the crown and the aristocracy, with the consent of the middle class and industrial classes.²⁷

There is no consensus with regard to the real influence of this middle class in Spanish society of those years. Concerning the social definition of

²⁶ See Botrel and Le Bouil (1973: 137–160).

²⁷ Marqués de Miraflores (1834: 4–10). Saint Simon made the same distinction concerning the groups who made the French Revolution possible. Quoted by Cobban (1964: 58).

Introduction

this group, however, there seems to be general agreement about two distinctive features: their exclusivity – which distinguished them from the old aristocracy as much as from the industrial classes – and their leadership role. Perhaps Miraflores had a very Castilian way of understanding the middle class, but the immense majority of his contemporaries concurred with his view of this social group. Obviously, the vantage point from which they viewed Madrid society determined their definitions of social groups. They saw it as a society whose intermediate layer consisted of bureaucrats, businessmen, professionals, and property owners, and as a society that tended to exclude all those who depended, directly or indirectly, on manual labor.

Contemporary characterization of the middle class contradicts the use of the term “bourgeoisie” in the sense employed by the Marxist tradition. Thus, the Spanish middle class, like its European counterparts in the same period, did not necessarily have to be a new social class which defined itself in opposition to the aristocracy. To the contrary, a substantial portion of these middle classes consisted of families of unequivocally noble origins.

To summarize, this work attempts to fill a vacuum in Spanish historiography of the last decade as it treats the social history of the first half of the nineteenth century. For diverse reasons the attention of historians has been displaced from this topic. On the one hand, there exist a greater number of works about the eighteenth century, especially its second half. Social history has benefited from this first displacement. In recent years, there have appeared several high-quality monographs dealing precisely with the problem of the formation of the bourgeoisie.²⁸ However, they all end in 1800, thus limiting themselves to the frame of the old regime. Furthermore, they are mostly regional studies which, on occasion, do not concern themselves with general historical processes.

On the other hand, interest has focused on twentieth-century studies, with some interest in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, research on the crisis of the old regime, fashionable during the 1970s, has suffered from a certain lethargy which only began to dissipate in the late 1980s.²⁹ Meanwhile, the tendency in other European countries has been just the opposite. I hope that my study works toward restoring the continuity of process between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that has been overlooked by Spanish historiography.

²⁸ See fn. 10.

²⁹ Alvarez Junco and Santos Juliá (1989: 53–63).