

BUILDING LIBERAL IDENTITIES IN 19TH CENTURY MADRID: THE ROLE OF MIDDLE CLASS MATERIAL CULTURE

In recent years, most historians have abandoned the idea that the revolutions that shook the Atlantic world between 1776 and 1848 were the work of a single social class. A number of studies on the social composition of the groups that ignited and propelled the different revolutionary processes demonstrate the diversity of conditions and social backgrounds of the revolutionaries.¹ However, this revisionism is posing new questions as to why these contingencies in Europe and the Americas decided to mobilize, to construct new liberal national states, and how they carried it out.

Spain is a good sample case for this historiographical inquiry. At present, few historians accept the idea that the series of upheavals that brought about a new liberal state during the 19th century resulted from the exclusive pressure of a national bourgeoisie. Recent scholarship has revisited the classic bourgeois revolution paradigm by presenting liberalism as an ideology that captivated the imagination of Spaniards of a variety of social ranks, with special impact among urban middle and popular groups.² But if Spanish scholars are providing better explanations regarding who embraced liberal

¹ See for example William Reddy, *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe: A Critique of Historical Understanding* (Cambridge UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1-23; Lester Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 150-165; Ken Post, *Revolution and the European Experience, 1789-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 16-21; Hilda Sabato, "On Political Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," *The American Historical Review*, 106/4 (2001), pp. 1290-1315.

² See for example David Ringrose, *Spain, Europe and the "Spanish Miracle," 1700-1900* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 366f.; Antonio Morales Moya "Introducción. La transformación del Antiguo Régimen: Ilustración y Liberalismo," in Ramón Menéndez Pidal *Historia de España* (Madrid: Espasa, 1998, t. 30), pp. 49-56; Pedro Ruiz Torres, "Del Antiguo al Nuevo Régimen: carácter de la transformación," in *Antiguo Régimen y liberalismo. Homenaje a Miguel Artola* (Madrid: Alianza, 1994, v. I), pp. 159-192; Jesus Cruz, *Los notables de Madrid. Las bases sociales de la revolución liberal española* (Madrid: Alianza, 2000), chap. 8.

ideas and facilitated their spread, the answers for the “why” and “how” this process occurred are, in my opinion, less convincing.

New approaches pay more attention to the role of culture, providing interpretations which take multiple factors into account. These studies consider the liberal-national revolutions as events triggered not solely by economic factors, but rather as processes of cultural construction aimed at the establishment of democratic societies. In this article I would like to contribute to this inquiry by focusing on the role that material culture might have played in the shaping of Spanish liberal movements.³ As in other parts of the Atlantic world, during the second half of the 18th century, Spanish elites were embracing new notions of progress and modernity and applying them to material life as never before. The *Ilustrado* (Enlightened) and especially the liberal elites reformulated abstract notions of progress and modernity into a more intelligible language, resulting in the adoption of new values which generated new habits and transformed the culture of Spanish people. The signs of this language introduced by the dominant groups may be found in their development of a new material culture, new consumer habits, and in their adoption of new life styles in tune with which they considered beneficial for the progress of the nation.

In the following pages I argue that this new material culture and life style adopted by the Spanish enlightened and liberal elites constituted, in the long run, an essential tool, not only for the building of their new identity but also for the popularization of their political project. This trend originated in Spain, as in other parts of the Atlantic world, in the second half of the 18th century, when a significant portion of the Spanish dominant society started to redefine traditional perceptions regarding taste, manners, and behavior. The impulse that brought about this transition was not exclusively cultural, economic, or political, but rather a combination of all three factors. However, the major components of this new culture: its emphasis on the useful versus the superfluous, its defense of the benefits of materialism, and its belief in the democratization of consumer practices, were very attractive, not only for the well-to-do but also for those in the lower levels who saw its potential as an avenue for social improvement.⁴ This is the aspect that most

³ The contribution of material culture and consumerism to the shaping of revolutionary identities has been pointed out in the case of Europe by Peter Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 323-327; and in the case of America by T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolution of the 18th century,” *Past and Present*, 119 (1988), pp. 76-77; and “Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, L (1993), p. 472.

⁴ John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.

historians have neglected and that I would like to explore here, because it provides a feasible explanation of popular mobilization around liberal ideology, and it also may facilitate our understanding of some of the complexities, in the long term, of the prolonged and tortuous process of modernization in Spain and in other areas of the Atlantic space.

NOTIONS OF OLD AND NEW

As in most Atlantic countries, the Spanish *Ilustrados* (Enlightened ones) first, and the liberals later, popularized the new culture of consumption as an essential part of their social and economic agendas. Their goal was to create communities made up of free citizens as well as satisfied consumers. Such an end required not only a political revolution, but also a cultural one aimed at introducing a new value system and new life styles. This combination of political and cultural change was already occurring in some countries with spectacular results.⁵ Those countries were to become paradigms of the “new,” the models of a modern civility that would be contrasted favorably with the “old” civility of the Ancient Regime. Spanish *Ilustrados* and liberals admired the degree of freedom and prosperity attained by the English, the sophistication and refinement of the French, and the enviable social order accomplished by North Americans.⁶ Though Spain was far behind concerning economic development, the elites pushed hard to catch up with the spread of new political and, above all, cultural values, in particular those related to the adoption of new lifestyles.⁷ Their efforts did not bring about an immediate transformation of Spanish society, but it helped to familiarize Spaniards with aspects of the new culture, and to propel in late 18th-century Spain a passionate and transcendental debate.⁸

⁵ Among which England was, no doubt, the most evident. See Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 33; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination. English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), pp. 663-665.

⁶ *Ilustrado* and liberal literature between 1750 and 1850 is full of passages that reflect the admiration of the Spanish elites for the life styles and social and political achievements of some northern European countries, mainly Britain and France. See Manuel Moreno Alonso, *La forja del liberalismo en España. Los amigos de Lord Holland, 1793-1840* (Madrid: Congreso de los diputados), pp. 49f., the same author's *Blanco White. La obsesión de España* (Sevilla: Alfar, 1998) pp. 611-615; some of the contributions in the collective volume edited by Jean René Aymes and Javier Fernández Sebastián, *La imagen de Francia en España (1808-1850)*, (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1997); and Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, *Recuerdos de un viaje por Francia y Bélgica* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol. 203, 1967), pp. 387f.

⁷ Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton, 1958); Antonio Elorza (comp.), *Pan y toros y otros papeles sediciosos de fines del siglo XVIII* (Madrid, 1971), pp. 7-9.

⁸ For the terms of this controversy see Carmen Marin Gaité, *Love Customs in Eighteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chap. 1; Rebecca Haidt, *Embodying Enlighten-*

The rapid spread of new attitudes toward luxury, fashion, and consumption and the evaluation of its social, political and economic impact, became one of the favorite topics of discussion among 18th century Spanish writers.⁹ Like in other parts of Europe and Latin America, some approached this new culture as a dangerous sign of moral decline and social subversion.¹⁰ Followers of the new fashions and manners were accused of emptiness, amorality, and dissolution. They were portrayed as snobs without personal criteria who were supplanting healthy Spanish Christian traditions with foreign vice and dissolute habits. On the other hand, *Ilustrado* writers were embracing modern doctrines that espoused the utility of beneficial luxury. In their writings they encouraged new attitudes toward luxury, fashion, and consumption as factors for economic growth. Everywhere we turn our eyes in 18th century Spanish literature we can find ambivalence toward the changes in traditional consumer habits that many Spaniards were adopting. From the arrogance of the young dandies who followed brashly foreign fashions, to the discourses defending the good taste of the circles who imported new manners and values from France and England; novels, plays, treatises, and journals present a gallery of characters with a new sensitivity toward consumption.¹¹ But, to what extent did this controversy respond to a real change in the life styles and consumer habits of some segments of the Spanish society? To what extent did the debate reflect only the desires of some intellectual elites instead of a social and economic reality?

THE CONSUMER REVOLUTION IN SPAIN

Some years ago, Carmen Martín Gaité postulated that the intellectual debate did indeed respond to the existence of real structural changes in the habits of Spaniards. She went even further in her acceptance of the literary description as historical evidence by stating that the origins of Spain's modern consumer society have to be placed in the second half of the 18th century.¹² Martín Gaité's assumption anticipated what would become one of the most animated debates in recent historiography after Neil McKendrick's formulation of the 18th century "consumer revolution" thesis.¹³ Based on her analysis of literary sources, Martín Gaité aligns Spain with the countries that experienced a rapid

ment. Knowing the Body in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Literature and Culture (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), chap. 3.

⁹ Martín Gaité, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰ Rietbergen, *Europe*, p. 326.

¹¹ Haidt, *Embodying Enlightenment*, pp. 131f.; Martín Gaité, *Love Customs*, chap. II.

¹² Martín Gaité, *Love Customs*, p. 27f.

¹³ The debate revolves around the idea of the existence or non-existence of a profound change in consumer habits among European populations during the second half of the 18th century. A recent inquiry into the terms of this historiographical controversy can be found in Craig Clunas, "Modernity

transformation. Does this reflect a historical reality? What is the place of the Spanish experience in the context of the 18th century consumer revolution?

The validation of Martín Gaité's assumptions, and the placement of Spain in the context of the consumer revolution debate exceeds the limits of this article. Nonetheless, in light of my archival research, I would like to present some preliminary findings that may contribute to the confirmation or refutation of Martín Gaité's assumptions and to situate Spain in the debate of the consumer revolution. My evidence is based on the study of 766 probate inventories of middle class families who lived in Madrid between the first half of the 18th century and mid-19th century (Table 1). After all, in the literature of the time, as well as in recent historical works, this social segment is normally linked to the main changes in consumer habits during the period which is our object of study. Probate inventories from Madrid Notarial Archives constitute a very detailed source for the study of household material culture, and for the reconstruction of long term changes in household consumption habits.¹⁴ First, I will focus on changes in the distribution of household interior spaces; next I will analyze changes in furnishing and decoration of these spaces; and finally I will briefly address major transformations in clothing. Since each of these changes responded to either cultural, political, or economic impulses, I will make a brief comparative analysis of the historical reasons behind those changes and their impact in Spanish history.

Studies of Madrid's urban history show minor variations in the distribution of urban space from the time the city became the capital of Spain up to the second third of the 19th century.¹⁵ This was not the case, however, with household interiors. In the 19th century some authors were still ambivalent in their evaluation of the comfort and decorative taste of many Madrid middle class homes, especially in comparison to others in northern Europe.¹⁶ But, at the same time there was abundant testimony of change toward a more rational distribution of room functions, improvements in furnishing, and comfort. Let us turn to the evidence presented by our archival materials.

Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West," *American Historical Review*, 104/5 (1999), pp. 1497-1511.

¹⁴ In contrast to other regions within Spain and Western Europe, the probate inventories of Madrid, at least since the 17th century, provide appraised value of all goods recorded.

¹⁵ Carlos Sambricio, "Sobre el proyecto y desarrollo urbano de Madrid en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII," in *Urbanismo e historia urbana de España* (Madrid, 1985), pp. 489-500; Eulalia Ruiz Plomeque, "Ordenación y realidad urbana del casco antiguo madrileño en el siglo XIX," in *Urbanismo e historia urbana de España* (Madrid, 1985), pp. 501-516; Santos Madrazo and Virgilio Pinto (dirs.), *Madrid: Atlas histórico de la ciudad, siglos IX-XIX* (Madrid: Fundación Caja Madrid, 1997).

¹⁶ See, for example, Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, "Las casas por dentro," in *Escenas matritenses* (Madrid: Fernando Plaza, 1991), p. 88.

TABLE 1
THE SAMPLE.* SOCIAL DISTRIBUTION BY OCCUPATION OF
MIDDLE CLASS INVENTORIES FROM *AHPM***

	1752-1758	1793-1820	1874-1883
<i>Upper ranks</i>			
Rentiers	24	22	23
High levels Admin.	34	29	29
Commerce/Finance	19	47	39
<i>Middle ranks</i>			
Middle level Admin.	33	48	16
Professions	26	35	38
Commerce	22	21	41
<i>Low ranks</i>			
Low level Admin.	20	28	13
Shopkeepers	32	19	16
Master artisans	25	31	36
Total	235	280	251

*The cases were chosen randomly from a wide number of notaries due to the lack of thematic catalogues. After consulting large numbers of diverse kinds of notarial documents we have selected only probate inventories. We have considered a case as middle class when the assets inventoried amount to 40,000 or more reales.

**Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid (AHPM).

Many early 18th-century Madrid upper- and middle-class homes still retained the two distinctive features of Medieval and Renaissance conceptions of Spanish urban domestic life: a marked gender division of household spaces, and an almost total lack of privacy in the distribution of habitable areas. Regarding the former, 17th-century Spanish homes differed from their European counterparts in the existence of a gender-divided space in the living area known as the *estrado*. Within the living room there was an area raised by means of a wooden or cork platform and separated from the rest of the room by a slender railing. It was furnished with cushions, stools, pillows, low chairs, oriental rugs, curtains, and several small pieces of furniture to store needles, pins, scissors, thread, and other objects related to female domestic activities.¹⁷ The *estrado* was a space reserved for women, where wives,

¹⁷ Seventeenth century literary sources are abundant in describing *estrados*; one of the most classic can be found in Juan Zabaleta, *El día de fiesta* (Madrid: José M. Díaz Borque, 1977), p. 32f.; José Deleito y Piñuela, *La mujer, la casa y la moda en la España del rey poeta* (Madrid: Espasa, 1966), pp. 32f and 85f.; Grace H. Burr, *Hispanic Furniture: from the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Archive Press, 1964), p. 42.

daughters, maids, and occasionally female kin and friends spent long domestic hours doing needlework and talking about women's affairs. However, if we trust literary accounts, the original function of this segregated space declined by the end of the 17th century.¹⁸ The boundaries between male and female spaces within the living room were becoming blurred, and admission of men within the *estrado* to socialize with their female counterparts became a normal habit. This practice marked a general change of values regarding domestic sociability. Although the *estrado* did not completely disappear from Spanish homes until the 19th century, its existence was less and less frequent and its original function no longer existed.

At the same time there was a clear tendency, seen principally after 1750, toward rationalization in the distribution of interior spaces, as the rooms began to assume specific functions. Most early eighteenth-century inventoried descriptions of household interiors suggest limited privacy, undefined areas for domestic and public socialization, and weak divisions between family spaces, the spaces occupied by servants, and working spaces.¹⁹ However, after 1750, inventories become better organized and the homes they describe reflect a different distribution of domestic space adjusted to the functionality of each room.²⁰ It is true that in many cases this change reflects only the use of new terminology to define spaces that already existed. In other words, what changed was not the physical distribution of interiors, but rather the way in which they were perceived and organized. In any case, that transition marks a really significant cultural shift in the way in which essential aspects of everyday life were conceived. The main features of this transformation were the generalization in the use of the *gabinetes*—living room, the *sala* or *sala principal*—parlor, and the *pieza de comer*—dining room. The *gabinete* was a well-defined space for the privacy of everyday family activities, while the other rooms were designated for public social gathering. This distinction between private and public areas within the house is evidence of the assimilation of new enlightened concepts of individualism and civility by the Spanish middle ranks.

¹⁸ Martín Gaité, *Love Customs*, p. 42.

¹⁹ This lack of functionality in the distribution of household interiors is characteristic of most of Europe up to the 17th century, although it appears to be more persistent in peripheral areas such as Spain or Scotland. See Stana Nenadic, "Household Possessions and the Modernising City: Scotland c. 1720 to 1840," in Anton J. Shuurman and Lorena Walsh, eds., *Material Culture: Consumption, Life-style, Standard of Living, 1500-1900* (Milan, 1994), p.148.

²⁰ One of the main aspects that the enlightened minister Jovellanos emphasized when he remodeled his old provincial family estate in 1800 was, precisely, the conversion of former large spaces he considered too cold and austere into smaller comfortable rooms for private use. See Melchor Gaspar de Jovellanos, *Obras publicadas e inéditas de Melchor Gaspar de Jovellanos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1952), vol. L., p. 204.

Functional specialization of house interiors reflected a new concern for order and spatial control achieved through household objects and their distribution. Inventories show a sustained growth in the amount of domestic goods—such as furniture, decorative objects, clothing, etc.—as a proportion of the total assets itemized in each family case (Table 2). In absolute terms, the major increases took place in items such as linens, furniture and the decorations of interior spaces—especially walls and alcoves. Furnishing went through a substantial process of transformation during the first half of the 18th century. Early 18th century inventories still reflect continuity from Medieval and Renaissance furnishing solutions: few pieces of furniture, lack of functionalism, poor specialization. The average middle class home presents the traditional *vargueño*—essentially a writing desk, but with a multiplicity of uses from writing to storage—as the most common piece of furniture. *Vargueños* were expensive because they were highly decorative.²¹ As an alternative, those who could not afford *vargueños* used *papeleras* or *escribanías*, also types of desks, but smaller, more austere, and, of course, less expensive. There were few chairs in proportion to the dimensions of the interiors. Decorative elements were also limited with the exception of the *estrados* and *oratorios*. In general walls were covered with inexpensive reproductions of paintings and engravings of religious themes. Wealthier houses had mirrors, tapestry, and more expensive original paintings. Small tables—*bufetes*—and large numbers of chests completed the average furnishing elements in our sample.

The average home around 1758, as it is reflected in the inventories, shows important elements of transition. First we can detect changes in terminology: *bufetes* were now called tables, *vargueños*, *papeleras*, and *escribanías* were now called *escritorios* (writing desks). But, alterations were not only in name, but in type. Pieces of furniture such as wardrobes, chests of drawers, and sofas appear in our inventories for the first time. Decorative elements such as mirrors are present in 78% of the inventories, some walls began to be decorated with paper and cloth; also more frequent were wooden friezes, statues of religious motives, folding screens to differentiate spaces, glass windows and doors, and, in a few cases, *cornucopias* (wall candle mirrors) the most idiosyncratic decorative element of late 18th and early 19th centuries.

After the last third of the 18th century, the tendency toward functional specialization was a trend up to the 1880s. Inventories from this period are characterized by a major diversification of furnishing options, and, in par-

²¹ Aguiló Alonso, María Paz, *El mueble clásico español* (Madrid: CSIC, 1987), p. 132.

TABLE 2
DOMESTIC ASSETS AS A PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL ASSETS IN THE PROBATE
INVENTORIES OF MADRID MIDDLE CLASSES (18TH-19TH CENTURIES)

	1752-1758 Domestic*	1793-1820 Domestic	1874-1883 Domestic	Total Cases
Upper ranks	19.36%	22.01%	20.41%	266
Middle ranks	48.02%	50.21%	56.17%	280
Low ranks	58.36%	56.10%	61.30%	220
Total cases				766

*In this category I include personal goods such as clothes, furniture, linens, china, books, etc.
Source: Author's compilation with information from the AHPM.

ticular, a remarkable growth in the amount of new objects, decorative as well as functional, accumulated inside the households. Over seventy-five percent of them now show sofas, love seats, armchairs, more numerous and varied chairs, wardrobes, folding tables, *cornucopias*, side tables, candlesticks, clocks, braziers, and more elaborate beds replacing the simple wooden ones. Slightly over forty percent of inventories show items such as night tables, desks, chest of drawers, sideboards, dressing tables, game tables, consoles, and a large variety of new tableware items such as soup bowls, *chocolateras* (hot chocolate pots), gravy bowls, salad bowls, china, glass etc. Also more frequent, undoubtedly as a form of investment, was the possession of pieces of furniture made of rich imported woods such as mahogany, ebony and rosewood.

Finally, in regard to textiles, the inventories also display important transformations. Most of these alterations were the consequence of a more generalized concern with fashion that increased consumption of cloth. I am going to mention briefly at least three aspects of this new consumer culture that may have some impact on the Spanish economy. First, in the long term, inventories show a trend toward democratization in respect to patterns of dress. Late 19th-century habits of dress among the middle classes were very uniform in contrast to the diversity seen in the early 18th century. Second, though the tendency was toward the simplification of the various elements that formed male as well as female dress, people tended to accumulate more items in their wardrobes. This is especially seen in the number of coats, jackets, stockings, and underwear itemized in the inventories. Finally, the use of some fabrics such as wool, linen, and especially cotton, supplanted the traditional prevalence of silk fabrics. Cotton was undoubtedly the most innovative aspect of this trend. After the second half of the 18th century all

inventories present a generalization in the use of cotton products in items such as bedspreads, tableware, curtains, underwear, and wall covering.

In sum, by the middle of the 19th century the life styles and consumer habits of Madrid's middle classes were substantially transformed over a relatively short period of time—about a hundred years. If it is true that such a change in consumer behavior does not have a similar precedent in Spanish history, as was the case for other parts of Europe and America, then, was this indeed a consumer revolution? I do not think so, at least in the sense of McKendrick's definition. In Spain, the change appears to have more a social and cultural impact than an economic one, although this is an aspect that requires further research.²² The central idea of the consumer revolution is the spread to lower ranks of society, especially the working classes, of the consumer habits of the rich. That change was presumably propelled by three essential developments: an increase of industrial output, a sustained improvement of living standards, and above all, a generalized expansion of the practices of emulation of the well-off life styles by the lower classes. By the end of the 18th century, writes McKendrick, English men and woman consumed like never before, and that consumption resulted from the willingness of the lower ranks to emulate upper ranks' life styles.²³ In Spain the consumption ignited by the emulative factor was limited to a small portion of society due to the failure of the economy to improve living standards for the lower ranks. Nonetheless, the benefits attained by the upper and middle classes from slow but sustained economic growth that characterized the central years of the 19th century were strong enough to bring about a notable sense of change. Mass consumption would not take hold in Spanish society until the next century, but there is no doubt that the seeds of this process were sown during those years. In any case, the shift toward modern consumer culture was a reality that occurred in Spain at the same time as in the most advanced parts of the Atlantic space.

²² Recent scholarship points towards the existence in Spain of a slow but sustained process of incorporation of new consumer habits since the 17th century. This long-term transformation intensified during the second half of the 18th century, but did not evolve into a "consumer revolution" until the first third of the 20th century. See the contributions by Xavier Lencina Pérez, Monserrat Durán, Lidia Torra Fernández, Máximo García Fernández, Fernando Carlos Ramos Palencia, Ramón Maruri, and Juan Carlos Sola in the collective volume edited by Jaume Torras and Bartolomé Yun, *Consumo, condiciones de vida y comercialización. Cataluña y Castilla, siglos XVII-XIX* (Avila: Junta de Castilla y León, 1999). The historical evolution of consumption in Spain fits better into Carole Shammas' evolutionary pattern than into the paradigm of the consumer revolution. See Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and "Changes in English and Anglo-American consumption from 1550 to 1800," in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, pp. 177-305.

²³ Neil McKendrick (et al.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, p. 9.

HOUSEHOLD MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE BUILDING OF A NEW IDENTITY

Writers disparagingly compared the lifestyles of Spanish middle classes with their counterparts in Paris or London during the middle years of the 19th century. Spanish middle classes were portrayed as mediocre, with an inferior material culture, and an excessive attachment to the routines of traditional life.²⁴ Nonetheless, when this middle class style of life was placed in historical perspective, and viewed from within rather than compared with the most developed countries of Europe, everyone agreed about the considerable change which had taken place. Indeed, the evidence from my notarial sources verifies this impression.²⁵ By the 1850s the Spanish middle classes had made great strides toward building a new identity by endorsing new political and economic ideas but also by adopting new styles of life. Let me concentrate now on some of the most significant manifestations of cultural change, turning again to the evidence of household material culture and consumption. Instead of focusing on its general dynamics, I would like to consider its transcendence for the confirmation of new forms of group identity within Spanish society. As we have seen, the roots of this process of cultural shift can be found in the second half of the 18th century, but its maturation occurred during the 19th century. Again, I base my analysis on probate inventories, but now I concentrate on a smaller but significant number—32 cases—of high politicians who held positions as ministers and/or deputies in the 19th century (Table 3).

The most noticeable change in household patterns for this group during the period of this study had to do with its location and external appearance. Due to new notions of social organization, the affluent classes started to abandon the old centers of European cities to settle in socially homogeneous suburbs.²⁶ In Madrid this process started in the 1840s and was consolidated by the last third of the century.²⁷ The houses built in the new bourgeois quarters had all the elements required for a modern lifestyle.²⁸ Already, middle class homes in old buildings in downtown Madrid were considered inadequate in

²⁴ See, for example, Mariano José de Larra, *Artículos completos* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951).

²⁵ Mesonero Romanos, "Antes, ahora y después," in *Escenas matritenses*, pp. 101f.

²⁶ Thomas Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital Cities. Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Development* (Oxford: Chapman and Hall, 1997), p. 47; Leonardo Benevolo, *The European City*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 171f.

²⁷ Clementina Díez Baldeón, *Arquitectura y clases sociales en el Madrid del siglo XIX* (Madrid: Siglo XXI), p. 132f.; Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital Cities*, pp. 144-145.

²⁸ For parallel processes in other Spanish cities see Anaclot Pons and Justo Serna, *La ciudad extensa. La burguesía comercial financiera en la Valencia de mediados del XIX* (Valencia: Diputación de Valencia, 1992), p. 120f.; Gary W. McDonogh, *Good Families of Barcelona: a Social History of Power in the Industrial Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 181f.

TABLE 3
 VALUE OF INVENTORIES OF LIBERAL POLITICIANS, 1800-1866
 (REALES DE VELLÓN)

Net Assets	Ministers	%	Deputies	%
1-500,000	4	18.2	0	0
500,000-1,000,000	2	9.1	2	20
1,000,000-1,500,000	4	18.2	0	0
1,500,000-2,000,000	2	9.1	2	20
2,000,000-5,000,000	3	13.7	5	50
5,000,000-10,000,000	4	18.2	0	0
10,000,000+	3	13.5	1	10
Total Cases	22		10	
Median	1,755,235		2,700,000	
Mean	15,913,448		6,596,214	

Source: Probate Inventories, AHPM. See Appendix B.

regard to the standards of modern life. Mesonero Romanos described them as barely acceptable, full of inconveniences, somewhat uncomfortable, and in many ways unhealthy. As in most old cities in continental Europe, these buildings provided shelter for a diverse group of people of differing social status. The first and second floors were reserved for the rich, while the social scale moved downwards toward the upper parts of the building. That was obviously an inconvenience, but there were many more. Most of the buildings did not have doormen, an indispensable symbol of distinction in new middle class buildings; instead, the entrance was dark, in many cases occupied by a local artisan, most likely a cobbler, the cheap substitute of the elegantly uniformed doormen. Access to the apartments was by means of old and generally dingy stairs.²⁹ In other words, the space between the street and the apartments was not clean, ordered, comfortable, and elegant, to mention only some of the qualities one had come to expect from an appropriate bourgeois interior. However all these insufficiencies disappeared when contemplating the homes from inside, and of course they were eliminated totally in the new buildings of the recently-created middle class residential areas.

Nineteenth century middle class houses were built as status symbols as well as instruments to transmit new notions of modernity.³⁰ The ancient life style, as

²⁹ Mesonero Romanos, *Escenas Matritenses*, p. 90.

³⁰ See Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories. City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 17-18; Ingra Bryden and Janet Floyd, *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior* (Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 13f.

it appears in the writings of Larra and Mesonero, was identified with a dark big building on one of the narrow streets of old Madrid. But even more antiquated than its outside were its interiors, designed and decorated according to a lifestyle no longer in vogue. They featured interiors that were irrationally distributed with long corridors, large rooms, high ceilings, rooms within rooms without separation, and lots of shadowy corners and niches. Spaces were often separated by big doors decorated with small pieces of dark green glass, or without doors at all. White and gray walls were painted with whitewashed without paper or cloth, and decorated with paintings and engravings of religious motifs. Floors were made of tile irregularly cut, and balconies and windows unevenly distributed along the walls. Of course, the decoration of those interiors consisted of big pieces of heavy furniture mainly of walnut, many tables, *vargueños*, and *alhasenas* (cupboards).³¹ This old model of home distribution and decoration rapidly became a relic among mid 19th century Madrid household interiors, where the rationalization of space distribution prevailed.

Rationalization of the interiors, as we noted before, made the distinction between private and semi-public spaces.³² This distinction reflected the two main elements of the liberal ideal of life: the private as an expression of respect for an ordered individualism, and the semi-public as needed space for pacific civic interaction. All houses in our sample present a distinction between a front stage oriented toward public or semi-public activities, and a back stage dedicated to the privacy of family life.³³ The front stage consisted of a series of small and large spaces and rooms that served as a transition between the bustling domain of the public sphere of the street, and the quiet harmony of family life. In large single family dwellings, *palacetes* and *hoteles* as they were called in Madrid, the availability of space made this transitional area more extended. A visitor to the palace home of the Prime Minister and liberal politician Ramón María de Narváez in the heart of Madrid would go through a large hall, a billiard room, a long corridor, and a gallery before arriving at a large parlor followed by a living room.³⁴ The Prime Min-

³¹ Quoted by Fernando Díaz-Plaja, *La vida cotidiana en la España romántica* (Madrid: Edaf, 1993), p. 46. See also Mesonero Romanos, *Esceanas Matritenses*, p. 259.

³² In Madrid's apartments, semi-public spaces served as a transition between the public and the private spheres. These spaces are indication that the traditional conception of the existence of sealed private interiors separated from their public realms needs to be reconsidered. Evidence in this article joins scholarship that argues for the connection between the public civic and the private household interiors. For the classic argument in favor of sphere separation see Michelle Perrot, "At Home," in Philippe Aries and Georges Duby (eds.) *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), vol. 4, p. 341; On the approaches arguing in favor of connection see Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, p. 6.

³³ The concepts "front stage" and "back stage" are borrowed from Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760*, (London: Routledge, 1988).

³⁴ Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid (AHPM), Protocolo (P.), 27896, p. 2116f.

ister's study marked the boundaries between the public wing and the private side of the home. In apartments, this front stage was less spectacular; nonetheless, it was an essential component of middle class homes. In these kind of houses the most frequent distribution was a small entrance hall (*recibimiento*), followed by a parlor (*sala*), and a dining room (*comedor*) before one entered the private rooms of the family and service. The dining room, the study, or the library room were semi-private areas that marked the boundaries between the front and the back stages. Of course this ideal distribution had many exceptions. A visit to the Madrid residence of Joaquín María Ferrer y Cafranga, a member of the *progresista* liberal party and minister of the Spanish Treasury, would show how difficult it was to rationalize the interiors of an old 17th century house following 19th century criteria.³⁵ In this home the distribution of private and public areas was irregular, there were two parlors not directly accessible from the entrance hall. Private rooms were mixed with semi-private ones; nevertheless, the function of all interior spaces followed the customary rules.

The front stage was a space for social life. Its function was to provide an arena for a series of public and semi-public rituals characteristic of the bourgeois life style. In the homes of the upper ranks it constituted a clear continuation of the public salons, waiting areas, and corridors of the Royal Palace, the Ministry buildings, the parliament, or the stock market. They were created and decorated with a sense of public use to hold large parties, almost daily gatherings with large numbers of guests: balls, dinners, even musical or literary performances. There, political decisions were made, profitable business transactions arranged, and brilliant promotions or unpleasant downfalls were hatched. The "*Salon Grande de Recepciones*" (Grand Parlor for Receptions) in Narvaéz's *palacete* was of this sort. It was a large room after a long gallery decorated with mahogany benches, mirrors, and rugs. The grand salon provided seating for about forty people in numerous sofas, chairs, and stools placed in different parts of the room. It was illuminated by six lamps of nine lights each one and a big chandelier in the middle, heated by two chimneys and decorated with a variety of mahogany tables, consoles, and chests of drawers, clocks, porcelain vases, mirrors, curtains of taffeta, and English rugs with a prevalence of crimson colors.³⁶

In smaller homes, the dimensions varied, but not the use or the decorative solutions. Members of the political elites reserved the parlor for similar social gatherings as described above, but for them, as for most members of

³⁵ AHPM, P. 28758, p. 125f.

³⁶ AHPM. P. 27896, p. 2121f.

the middle classes, it was also a space dedicated to formal afternoon visits of friends and family, evening *tertulias* and periodic celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries, name days, promotions etc. In general, the decoration was very similar: one or two sofas on the sides of the room with tables nearby, several armchairs or straight chairs to provide seating for around twenty people, tables adjacent to the sofas and armchairs, rugs, mirrors, consoles, corner tables, Chinese jars, chandeliers, clocks, small pieces of sculpture in marble or ivory, plenty of mahogany, some rosewood, and on occasions a piano. Crimsons, burgundies, and blues were the predominant colors of the main rooms in Madrid's middle class front stages. These lively colors graced the damasks, velvets, and muslins of the upholstery, curtains, tassels, and wall coverings in balconies, windows and seats. More than comfort, the front stages were arranged with functionality in mind. Luxury was an essential component of most of them; in all cases studied the parlors were the rooms with the most expensive pieces of furniture, and those with overall higher appraisals. Luxury meant furniture made of expensive woods, predominantly mahogany and rose wood, but also ebony, cedar, walnut etc. It meant also expensive rugs and elaborate window treatments, and especially decorative objects. There existed a fascination for Chinese, English and French porcelain jars and figures, and also for small figures of porcelain, clay, wood and metal representing smugglers, warriors, and animals. Other common objects were chandeliers, boxes with miniatures, games, flower vases, glasses, cups, coffee and tea sets, clocks and so on. In sum, it was a genuine domain of objects in contrast to the well-known austerity of the traditional Spanish style of interior decoration.³⁷ These objects conformed to a semiotic universe that still needs to be deciphered and interpreted. For instance, the general lack of religious themes is noticeable in this world of beloved trinkets. Religious themes remained only in some wall paintings and eventually only in isolated pieces of decoration.

The back stage was the space reserved for the privacy of family life. The family had both a public and private dimension, and 19th century home interiors reflected this duality by combining both elements in the division between semi-public and private areas. Homes were above all familial realms. While in the semi-public front stage the family was sharing life events with other families, friends, and on occasions an unknown public, the private back stage was a space for interaction within the family itself. Rooms in this part of the home were meant to provide intimacy, comfort, and informality for the consanguineous members of the family group. Those

³⁷ As described by Teófilo Gautier, quoted by Díaz-Plaja, *La vida cotidiana*, p. 50.

who did not form part of this consanguineous group and were nevertheless admitted to share life in this part of the home were treated with familiarity and informality; they were the closest friends, some of them even considered as part of the family. Nonetheless, there were clear limits for this described atmosphere of relaxation, and these limits were those imposed by the authoritarian gender-divided nature of the 19th century bourgeois family. The back stage was also a space segregated according to a hierarchy imposed by the dominance of male over female and master over servant.³⁸

The most characteristic room of the familial back stage in Madrid's homes was the *gabinete* (family room). This room began to appear in the inventories of the second half of the 18th century as a substitute of the traditional Spanish *estrado*. The term *gabinete* has clear French roots. The *cabinet* appeared in 17th century French aristocratic homes as a separated room for the first time. It was a small space contiguous to a bedroom traditionally used to store clothes that was converted into a more intimate room for private activities such as writing.³⁹ In some of our Madrid homes some *gabinetes* are still described as being located near bedrooms or as an area separated from the bedroom by a door with glass panels or simply by a curtain or a folding screen. The *gabinete*, along with the dining room, were common spaces also dedicated to the routine sociability of the bourgeois family: the place for daily meals, family chats, playing, reading, and praying. Of these two spaces for family living, the *gabinete* was the most oriented toward female activities. In the *gabinete* the women of the house would spend most of their time doing needlework, taking care of the children, reading and writing, or receiving visits from the most intimate kin and friends. It was a room frequently decorated with feminine sensitivity. Middle class female characters in the novels of Pérez Galdós and Palacio Valdés are portrayed in *gabinetes* with decoration that reflects some of their main psychological features.⁴⁰ The *gabinete interior* of the home of Manuel Cortina, who served in several liberal cabinets, shows this decorative characteristic. Along with the necessary sofa, arm chairs, and occasional chairs, we find a sewing box, a small sewing table, and small shelves to keep a few books of religion and fashion. José Garcia de la Torre's decorated the walls of his *gabinete* with framed embroideries made by his wife and daughters.⁴¹

³⁸ See Leonor Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes, men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁹ Witold Rybczynski, *Home: a Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 42.

⁴⁰ Some examples can be found in Pérez Galdós' *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *La de Bringas*, *Lo Prohibido*, and Palacio Valdés, *La Espuma*.

⁴¹ José Garcia de la Torre was minister of *Gracia y Justicia* in 1820. AHPM, P. 25446, p. 118.

Objects in the *gabinete* provide distinctive signs to scrutinize the construction of new middle class identities. What the decoding of these signs reveals are the ambivalences that characterized this process in Spain as well as in the rest of the Western world. This room symbolizes, more than any other, the triumph of the family as an essential pillar of social order in liberal Europe and America.⁴² *Gabinetes* were decorated by and for the family. In the majority of cases studied, there was a place within this space reserved for the display of family memorabilia, most frequently portraits and pictures, but also medals, diplomas, and genealogical paraphernalia. The taste for family portraits and pictures reveals new perceptions of the role of the individual within the frame of the nuclear family. Most painted portraits and pictures were of immediate members of the familial group: parents, daughters, sons, and grandparents, but at the same time the taste for genealogy suggests the persistence of a culture strongly committed to the practices of familism.

On occasion, decorative objects also suggest political and religious ambivalence. In general, the presence of religion in 19th century Spanish interiors is notably inferior to what it had been in previous centuries. In the past, the Spanish customarily decorated their walls with paintings, engravings, or inexpensive prints of religious themes, as well as images, reliquaries, ex-votos, and a universe of religious trinkets that constitute a world of consumption still to be studied. That industry was in decline and in the process of being replaced by one that preferred secular symbols. However, we still find in our interiors a combination of both the traditional religious motifs along with an iconography of revolutionary political symbols. For instance, in the *gabinete* of the Gil de Santibáñez family, bankers in the circle of *progresista* liberalism, a big statue of Juan Alvarez Mendizábal, sponsor of Spanish disentanglement of church property, shared room space with an image of the Virgin of El Pilar, symbol of the most traditional Spanish Catholicism.⁴³ The same room in the home of the liberal minister Manuel Cortina combined an imagery of regional virgins with images of family members, and with mythological motifs in its graphic decoration.⁴⁴

These ambivalences are illustrative of the transitional nature of 19th century Spanish society and the combination of traditionalism and innovation that characterized Spanish middle and upper class culture. A greater respect for intimacy, privacy, and independence, for instance, coexisted with a hierarchical atmosphere of patriarchal authority. A more visible presence of women in the realms of the back stage private sphere did not eliminate a

⁴² Perrot, "At Home," p. 342.

⁴³ AHPM, P. 27272, p. 1381.

⁴⁴ AHPM, P. 3573, p. 5522.

clear gender division of household geography and decision-making. A closer cohabitation between masters and servants did not abolish class segregation, but rather encouraged its reinforcement.

Further from the boundaries of the familial *gabinete*, and dining room, our homes present a series of rooms marked by signs of privacy, intimacy, and individualism. For instance, we find rooms with proper names whose function and decoration was determined in part by the personal taste and values of the occupant. We find rooms that inform us of the progress made by the Madrid middle classes in enhancing some of the most desirable aspects of the bourgeois life style: a higher level of comfort thanks to the incorporation of new artifacts to make life easier, and the individualization of material culture and living space to make the generic principle of liberty more tangible. Rooms in the back stage were definitively becoming more comfortable in the course of the century. For the first time, some of them replaced the traditional braziers with iron stoves in the family areas and in the private bedrooms that made interiors much cozier in winter. The number of braziers, and especially of chimneys, was also higher. The use of rugs, bed heaters, quilts, chamber pots, iron beds with wool mattresses over bed springs, etc., increased notably. But the most significant improvement regarding material culture in the bedroom can be found in the increase of the number of objects related to personal hygiene such as pitchers, wash basins, bath tubs, bidets, etc.

Individualization of rooms in the 19th century was an on-going trend, but as I mentioned above, in the context of a defined gendered division of interiors. The rooms that best represent this reality are the female dressing room and the male study, spaces that appear in about 82% of the homes studied. The dressing room was definitely a women's space, always located in the back stage far from the main areas of the home. In contrast, after the parlor, the most important room of the home, as can be inferred from the analysis of our inventories, was the study (*despacho*). The study was clearly a male space reserved for the head of the family, the patriarch. From that strategically located place, the father managed the private and public affairs of the family. In the home of Joaquín María Ferrer y Cafranga, for instance, the study was the most highly prized room. There, Don Joaquín María worked, surrounded by his most esteemed objects: art works, books, family heirlooms, important documents for the life of the family etc. In that space, our character might have spent a good portion of his life surrounded by a material culture which symbolized his role as head of the household. In a more private area within the home, the lady's bedroom was filled with a series of objects whose symbolic makeup clearly displayed the sexual division of

roles within the household. In contrast with the variety and transcendence of the objects in the study, the lady's room was furnished with relative simplicity: a dresser with drawers, a mirror with a golden frame, some family portraits and inexpensive paintings and engravings of religious motifs. There were no books, no writing desks, no arm chairs, no clocks etc., only objects that symbolized her subordinated role within the family hierarchy.⁴⁵ The home of the banker Felipe Rávora had two studies containing locked armoires which stored the money, legal documents and the transcendental correspondence of the family. Within the home there was a room called "the room of the ladies," obviously for the use of the wife and daughters of Don Felipe, decorated with engravings with several scenes of the resurrection of Jesus, the life of Saint Jerome, and Mary Magdalen, several chairs, mirrors, closets, two small tables, a dresser, and a musical instrument.⁴⁶ This evidence shows that the private sphere was indeed a relegated, though not isolated, domain for 19th century women of the middle classes, but additionally it indicates that this sphere was also a gender-divided one.

CONCLUSION

Despite the insufficiencies noted by 19th-century Spanish writers regarding the Spanish middle and upper classes' incorporation into the consumer revolution, this study shows that a good deal of progress was made. In Spain, as in Latin America and other parts of Europe, the early spread of modern consumer culture resulted more from a process of cultural assimilation than from economic improvement. By the middle of the 19th century, Spain undoubtedly did not enjoy the living standards of England or the refinement of French, especially Parisian, selective society. The Spanish urban middle classes still represented only a small fraction of a society characterized as a whole by its ruralism and profound class divisions. Nonetheless, as the persuasive Ramón de Mesonero Romanos pointed out, Spanish society was not the exotic mix of traditionalism and backwardness that most French and English romantic writers liked to describe.⁴⁷ My evidence shows the existence of significant changes in household material culture and lifestyles among extensive segments of Madrid's middle ranks. Homes became more private, more family-oriented and, above all, more comfortable. Slowly but steadily, a modest but significant portion of Spanish society was building a new distinctive identity based, among other things, on the adoption of a new lifestyle and a new consumer culture that was making life

⁴⁵ AHPM, P. 28758, f. 1016.

⁴⁶ AHPM, P. 22848, f. 588.

⁴⁷ Mesonero Romanos, *Recuerdos de un viaje*, pp. 251-255.

more pleasant. This new lifestyle was linked to the implementation of a political program, the main goals of which were the accomplishment of individual freedom and equal opportunity. Thus, liberalism was something other than a series of abstract political postulates; rather, it was an alternative form of life, and a very attractive one, since its principle was to generate prosperity for everyone in a more egalitarian society. The liberals built a new identity not only by embracing abstract political ideals, but also by adopting a new material culture and lifestyles. The Spanish case shows that this development was possible without a profound economic change. The material culture and lifestyles created by the liberals were an essential instrument in providing cohesion and making the liberal project attractive.

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