Catalanism would become further radicalized from the early 1880s and a nationalist movement would emerge at the end of the decade. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of Marxist historians put forward the argument that, unable to construct the Spanish nation and state in its own image, from the mid-1880s the bourgeoisie (through its ‘organic intellectuals’) either led or took over the construction of an alternative Catalan nationalist project.\(^1\) This analysis represented an adaptation to Catalan and Spanish conditions of the classic Marxist position that nationalism was a product of the newly dominant national bourgeoisie’s efforts to build its own state and construct a national market.

As we shall see, detailed empirical investigation does not bear out such assertions. Nevertheless, this does not mean that a study of the origins of Catalan nationalism should not consider these elites and the politicians and propagandists that sympathized with many of their demands. Their outlook would have an enormous bearing on Catalonia’s political and cultural development. Moreover, to say that they did not in general embrace Catalan nationalism before 1898 does not exhaust the range of ideological options open to them. Did economic elites maintain the Spanish nationalist discourse of the mid-nineteenth century? To what extent did they collaborate with the new Restoration regime? Did they show growing sympathy for regionalist ideas and were they able to collaborate with Catalanists and Catalan nationalists? How did conservatives close to business elites, like Joan Mañé i Flaquer and Manuel Duran i Bas, react to the rise of Catalan nationalism? Such issues are of key importance, both in understanding the evolving relation between Catalonia and the rest of Spain in the late nineteenth century, and to the evolution of the Catalanist and Catalan nationalist movements themselves.

**Nation-building, the Cánovas Restoration and Catalan economic elites**

The Cánovas Restoration was consolidated between 1876 and 1881. Its architect was the most talented liberal-conservative writer and politician A. Smith, *The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770–1898* © Angel Smith 2014
of his generation, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo. He aimed to construct a monarchist-liberal regime which both kept out the republican Left and offered a greater degree of stability than its predecessors. There were a number of elements to this vision. He built his own Liberal Conservative Party (usually referred to simply as the Conservatives), but he also encouraged the moderate monarchist Left to form their own party and operate within the boundaries of the regime. Práxedes Mateo de Sagasta took up the challenge and set up what from 1885 was called the Liberal Party. These two ‘official’ parties would, from the 1880s, alternate in power (the so-called turno pacífico), using the links established between the parties and local caciques to engineer a majority for the party whose ‘turn’ it was to be in power. This had a twofold benefit: it contained the vicious political infighting between the monarchists, who had in the past frequently turned to military figures in their own ranks (through pronunciamientos) to take power, and it marginalized the republicans, Carlists and other political forces that rejected the regime.2

Yet, while the Restoration’s underpinnings proved to be more secure than those of its predecessors, at an ideological and cultural level there was a significant degree of continuity with mid-nineteenth-century liberal monarchism. The Restoration once again reverted to policies aimed both at centralizing the political system and homogenizing the legal system. Hence, a high degree of control was asserted over local and provincial authorities, and attention was turned to the enactment of a unified civil code. In addition, the regime’s conservative roots were on show in its attempt, like that of the Moderates before it, to reach a modus vivendi with the Church, and to incorporate strong Catholic and militaristic elements into its state nationalist discourse.

This discourse was given ideological cover by more conservative Madrid-based academics, who laid emphasis on the central role of the Church and military orders in the construction of Spanish nationhood. At the same time, these men rejected the early-nineteenth-century historicist liberal vision of Spanish history, which eulogized those fighting to retain what were seen as popular liberties in the face of royal absolutism. On the contrary, they argued, the anti-absolutists were defending medieval privileges and the absolutists had modernized Spain.3 The result, as we shall see, was that the distance between the historical interpretations emanating from Madrid and Barcelona was to dramatically widen.

Until the end of the nineteenth century the regime did provide the country with greater political stability. From 1869 the economy grew at a much more rapid pace than in the previous decade, with a serious agrarian crisis in the mid-1880s followed by several years of much stronger growth after new tariffs were introduced in 1890 and 1891.4 However, for the Spanish middle and upper classes, and cultural elites, these were not years of optimism. The key reason was the intensification of imperial rivalries, as Britain’s economic