

# THE BASQUES AND THE LOSS OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES (1810-1840): APPROACH TO A PROBLEM

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«La brutalidad del acontecimiento fue total, hasta el extremo de que puede afirmarse que la guerra civil carlista estalló a consecuencia de la sucesión americana. Si Fernando VII hubiera sido capaz de retener las posesiones de America, éstas hubieran mitigado, con sus envíos de metales preciosos y sus enormes posibilidades comerciales, la contracción producida en la economía española por la guerra de Independencia y la fase depresiva de la coyuntura.»

Jaime Vicens Vives, *Manual de historia económica* 3rd ed., p. 555.

## INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL FRAMEWORK

From the time of the Spanish Conquest the American colonies were of paramount importance to the Basques in several major socioeconomic areas: 1) as sources of colonial goods; 2) as outlets or markets for Basque manufactures, namely, iron wares; 3) as key regions for capital formation and the “repatriation” of significant profit revenue drawn from trade, mining, land ownership and other economic and social activities; 4) as places for employment in the royal and clerical bureaucracies, in the military and in the private sectors; and 5) as generators in the metropolis of business, shipping and other marine-related enterprises. A substantial part of the region’s manufactures was transported to America through an efficient network of Basque entrepreneurs, often employing Basque ships, captains and crews. Hence, in tangible and complex ways, the Basques were substantially dependent upon the Spanish overseas possessions. Therefore, the movements for emancipation across the Atlantic and the territories’ eventual political independence were necessarily bound to have serious repercussions throughout the Basque region.

The loss of the American colonies, among others, disrupted traditional lines of communication, upset age-old business and commercial relationships, and increased foreign competition. In fact, after 1810, the Basques were faced with a rapid loss of revenue/capital, a noticeable decline in colonial goods and a drop in colonial markets. These unfavorable developments were probably most evident in 1) the profound crisis faced by Basque iron products and other manufactures in the aftermath of the war of independence and overseas turmoil, and in 2) the stagnation of Basque commerce with the colonies. As might be expected, all of this led to a pervasive socioeconomic crisis and to a decline in prosperity among the Basque. Ultimately too, the chain of events would have a serious impact upon the local body politic, as members of the provincial elites struggled to preserve intact institutional structures without yielding to the winds of change and the calls for reform —e.g., state proposals to create and/or increase taxes in the region to offset the loss of colonial revenue.

This paper proposes to examine these questions —broadly and within the constraints of time and space— and, more specifically, 1) how the Basques interpreted their own changing situation vis-a-vis the colonies; 2) their reactions to the ongoing historical shifts; 3) the role the *Fueros* (provincial liberties) in the Basques' general response. In a larger sense, I propose to link these questions to significant political and socioeconomic regional dynamics that in my opinion contributed powerfully to the gestation and development of Basque Carlism.

## THE BASQUES IN THE COLONIAL WORLD

As many contemporaries were well aware during the *ancien regime*, capable and ambitious Basques—some of them well-educated—spilled out of their own region continually for other parts of the peninsula and colonies. This was by no means a totally voluntary migration. Basque males —the younger ones in particular, that is, the *segundones* or second sons— found themselves pushed out of their provinces by a combination of inheritance laws which favored the older sons and daughters, inadequate employment opportunities in the small local administrations, insufficient land, and a host of other socioeconomic factors. This outward movement, however, proved vastly beneficial to the Basque Provinces as a whole. Significantly, not only was demographic tension relieved but Basque success outside their region proved nothing short of phenomenal. In nearly every enterprise, endeavor and occupation, Basques managed to work their way to the top of society with a mixture of unrelenting drive, industriousness and ingenuity —ruthlessness too sometimes added their detractors. Together, they formed the backbone of the Basque diaspora, a tight network possessing vast socioeconomic power and political influence.

Kinship ties, ethnic solidarity and attachment to the *patria chica* (village, province and region), contributed no small part to the Basques' irresistible advance in the New World. Juan Antonio de Zamacola, the Vizcayan *afrancesado*, vividly underscored these considerations in his landmark and rich (if inexplicably much overlooked) *Historia de las Naciones Bascas*:

“Se aman los Bizcaynos y los otros Bascos con una afición extremada adonde quiera que la fortuna los conduzca, y se ligan tan estrechamente entresi para socorrerse unos a otros, que más parecen individuos de una sola familia, que naturales de una provincia. Particularmente se ve esta virtud en grado superior entre los Bizcaynos que han marchado a las diferentes regiones de America, y que todavía conservan el uso de la lengua Bascongada: entre ellos se juntan, y como estan formados con unas mismas máximas de educación y virtud, no pueden estar jamás sin que los una aquel amor fraternal, que enlazó sus corazones en la juventud” (1).

Expectedly, Zamacola proudly extolled the Basques' colonial achievements:

“Las casas en que pueden dar alguna educación de letras a sus hijos, los destinan al comercio de España y al de las colonias americanas, donde hacen por lo regular fortunas más brillantes que los herederos de las haciendas, pero no por esto olvidan jamás a los suyos, antes bien parece que a porfía se ocupan todos en enviar los caudales que pueden recoger para socorrer las necesidades de sus casas nativas, cuyo recuerdo permanece en ellos constantemente, y así es que no hay provincias

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(1) Auch: Imprenta de la Viuda de Duprat, 1818. (3 vols.), 3, p. 55.

en España y Francia más favorecidas de caudales de América que las regiones Bascas" (2).

In fact, in addition to the continual "repatriation" of overseas, capital, aided by strong colonial connections through native sons, by relations with foreign suppliers and shippers, by the provincial Fueros and other important commercial freedoms, and by the lack of effective government controls in the region during much of the ancien regime, the commercial oligarchies were able to attract to the Basque Provinces from America a wide array of merchandise at fairly reasonable prices. These colonial goods came to the Basque region legally, via Cádiz, Santander, Bayonne, Bordeaux (and other ports), but often as well illegally (by land and sea), through multiple and sophisticated smuggling channels. For all of these reasons, both in the Old World and in the New, Basque industriousness and determination were much admired (3). Regional antagonists, however were considerably less charitable toward the Basques, labeling them cliquish and clanish, and quick to band together to promote each others' welfare at the expense of the larger Spanish collectivity or commonweal (4).

However viewed by others, given their prominence in the New World on the eve of the Napoleonic occupation (and subsequent important events), the stakes for the Basques —indeed for many other Spaniards as well— in America were enormous. Among the many to recognize this was the Vizcayan representative at the Assembly of Bayonne, Juan Jose Maria de Yandiola, who appealed in June 1808 to Napoleon for the preservation of the Basque constitution. What made this petition particularly remarkable —and in fact prophetic— was Yandiola's explicit linkage between the maintenance of the Basque Provinces' political institutions and privileges and the continued control of the colonies:

"Todas estas estimables qualidades desaparecerían sin el noble entusiasmo de su constitución cuya observancia es tanto más interesante quando se advierte que la maior parte de las Américas esta poblada por Vizcaynos, Guipuzcoanos y Alabeses que gozan de la más distinguida consideración por sus talentos, por sus virtudes y por sus quantosísimos caudales. Si estos idólatras de su Pays saben que su constitución ha sido religiosamente guardada en el nuevo orden de cosas, qual será su influencia para la conservación de aquellas importantes colonias que tan dignamente ocupan la augusta atención de V.M.Y. y R. y la de toda España?" (5).

Yandiola's concerns were hardly unfounded. In fact, the profound interrelationship between the colonies and the Basques was continually underscored —albeit unwillingly— by the

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(2) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 260. (All of the emphasis, unless otherwise noted, is mine).

(3) Lucas Alamán enthusiastically praised the Basques' drive and discipline. For a memorable passage from the classic *Historia de Mejico* (Second Edition. Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1968), see vol. 1, p. 15.

(4) For more on this opposition see Renato Barahona, "Regional Attitudes and Conflicts in Ancien Regime Spain: Basques and Castilians Revisited", *Journal of Basque Studies*, vol. 4, n.º 1, 1983. More on how Basques were perceived by others in the Early Modern Era in Miguel Herrero Garcia. "Ideología española del Siglo XVII. Concepto de los vascos", *Revue Internationale des Etudes Basques*, vol. 18, 1927, pp. 549-569; and in *Ideas de los españoles del Siglo XVII*. (2nd edition. Madrid: Gredos, 1966) pp. 249-274. Also an invaluable resource is William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak. Basques in the New World* (University of Nevada Press: Reno, 1975), a work containing extensive notes and a thorough bibliography.

(5) *Archive de la Diputación de Vizcaya (A.D.V.)*, *Sala de Guernica, Noticias históricas de Vizcaya*, vol. 1. Yandiola's "Exposition" is dated 25 June. It is found in a set of documents entitled "La representación de Vizcaya en la Asamblea de Bayona" (pp. 146-173). Thus is a transcript of original materials, apparently the work of Antonio de Trueba y la Quintana, former archivist and chronicler of the Señorío.

French during the brutal peninsular conflict. When plans for the annexation —euphemistically labeled a “reunion” by its proponents— of the Basque Provinces to France arose in mid-1810, there was widespread local opposition —i.e. Spanish and Basque— to the project. Surprisingly, some resistance also came from French quarters. Cognizant of Basque influence in the colonies, Laforest, Napoleon’s ambassador to Madrid suggestively observed: “*L’Amerique est perdue si l’Ebre est cédée*” (6). However, if plans for Spain’s dismemberment were thwarted, the cataclysms that shook the Hispanic world after 1808 sparked a chain of events culminating in the loss of the bulk of Spain’s American possessions.

## EFFECTS OF THE PENINSULAR WAR ON THE BASQUE PROVINCES

As most of the peninsula, the Basque region was badly battered by the French occupation and anti-Napoleonic struggle. At war’s end much of the countryside was abandoned, farms were run down, and many of the legendary Basque *ferrerías* (forges and ironworks) and other manufactures lay in ruins and were deserted (7). Indebtedness was the norm for many of the rural classes and village communities, and trade was stagnant and disorganized after years of truncated relations with the rest of the peninsula and colonies. Heavy damage had been done at the source —and, by extension, at the outlets/markets— to key components of the Basques’ colonial structures. Other causes not directly related to the war also contributed to the plight of Basque iron, among them 1) an increased foreign competition —at home and abroad— and 2) a panoply of unfavorable government policies (in the form of tariffs and administrative blockages) (8). Along with the loss of important colonial markets, these factors effectively accelerated the *ferrerías*’ decline and that of other local manufactures traditionally oriented toward America. An 1815 petition of the Vizcayan Diputación detailed neatly the many-sided problems confronting the region’s iron production:

“La fábricas de hierro, que son su verdadera y mayor riqueza, se hallan en el mayor abatimiento por mantenerse obstruida su extracción a las Americas, y no tener salida aún para los puertos de la península donde introducen los extranjeros su hierro a un precio tan bajo, que no puede entrar en su concurrencia el de este país por ascender a mayor cantidad su primitivo coste en las mismas fabricas” (9).

In sum, beyond the immediate and short-term consequences, the war and occupation acted as potent agents of change, leaving in their wake far-reaching and complex political and socioeconomic legacies. Among the most significant was the loosening of longstanding overseas metropolitan controls and political authority that would ultimately lead to the emancipation of the American colonies.

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(6) Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Paris (A.M.A.E.), Correspondance Diplomatique, Espagne, vol 683, letter of 27 September 1810, folios 346-348. More on this question elsewhere in this volume and in the next one.

(7) Around 1800 Vizcaya may have had 140-160 ironworks, although by 1807-1808 possibly as many as 20-25 of them were already inoperative. This decline was sharply accelerated by the Napoleonic invasion, the coup de grace from which the *ferrerías* never fully recovered. A post-war testimony asserts that by 1815 only 50 ironworks so may have been in operation, with total production dropping steadily.

(8) See Romeo Flores Caballero. *Counterrevolution: The Role of the Spaniards in the independence of Mexico, 1804-1838*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979, pp. 55-56 and 71-72. The question of return migration from America to the Basque region during the 1810-1840 period, a neglected area, sorely needs additional attention and research.

(9) A.D.V., Sala de Guerra, 1813 y 1814, 15 y 16. *Copiador de Representaciones al Gobierno*, petition dated 30 December 1815.

## THE AMERICAN INSURRECTIONS AND THE FIRST RESTORATION (1814-1820)

The insurrectional movements in the colonies posed severe challenges to Basque society. The American turmoil disrupted to an extraordinary degree traditional lines of communication and business relationship between the metropolis and the colonies; led to the forfeiture of colonial revenue, goods and markets; exacerbated an existent crisis in iron products and other local manufactures; caused a sharp increase in smuggling; closed overseas outlets and possibilities in private and public employment; and, in the long run, contributed to a decline in the Basques' generally high standard of living. Probably no one was more acutely aware of the impact of the new political realities and economic situation across the Atlantic than ferrerías' owners and others with interests in this sector (10). There is little doubt that Basque iron manufactures had depended heavily on colonial outlets:

“Nuestras ferrerías se mantuvieron en un estado regular hasta la guerra de la independencia; porque sus productos hallaban un mercado seguro en America, y eran también admitidos libres de derechos en el vecino Reyno de Francia, circulando del mismo modo en todas las provincias nacionales. Con posterioridad, no solo se perdieron aquellos mercados por los trastornos que experimentaron nuestras colonias de Ultramar, y las trabas que opusó la Francia a su importación para aquel Reyno, sino que empezó también a ecsgirse un recargo sobre ellos al paso por el Ebro para esponderlos en el interior de la Peninsula” (11).

Despite the convulsions and socioeconomic changes (and possibly hoping for a quick return to normalcy), most Basques stubbornly defended the status quo and the regional liberties the board, even at the risk of continued economic blockages and discriminatory policies on the central government's part. A case in point: following the War of Independence, the Ferdinandine administration requested *emprestitos* (loans) in part, to finance its colonial ventures. Some of these were addressed to the Consulados and commercial centers. However, the Basque commercial and political elites strongly resisted these loans, commonly invoking the *Fueros*.

Apparently, the elites were not interested in the forceful reconquest of the rebellious territories. Perhaps the Basques, who because of the regional and provincial privileges had never possessed legally enfranchised ports for direct overseas trade, felt confident enough about their connections, capital and expertise to seek an accommodation along “neocolonial” lines under the new (if highly) adverse conditions. In other words, even though Basques had been in the forefront of colonial activity, they had never been fully legally incorporated into the Spanish overseas commercial monopolies. Among others, this had forced the Basques to seek other (often illegal) arrangements and channels of trade. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the Basque oligarchies, in their role as outsiders, were not interested in reconquering territories, which, no matter how essential to their well-being, had never *completely* and/or *formally* belonged to them (12).

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(10) Unable and unwilling to recover the overseas possessions by force—an idea toward which the Vizcayans, indeed most Basques, were cool—there was painfully little the region could do except to seek favorable treatment from the central government and improve home iron production for greater competitiveness.

(11) *A Nuestra Señora Dona Isabel II Reina Constitucional de las Españas, los ferrones de las Provincias Vascongadas y la Navarra*. Imprenta de la Viuda de Mendizabal: Tolosa, 1844, pp. 7-8.

(12) Strikingly, in the countless Basque petitions to the central government of the period—aftermath of the War of Independence and throughout the 1820s—I have been hard pressed to find a single reference to the need or desirability of reconquering the American territories.

Nevertheless, the notion that the Basques must be willing to sacrifice some local privileges in exchange for the benefits derived from national integration was steadily making headway in the region among some manufacturers advanced sectors of the commercial bourgeoisie. In December 1819 a group of iron producers from Arratia (Vizcaya) noted that as long as Basque products were not regarded in the same manner as all national ones, “the industry and factories will never be able to prosper” in the region. Oblivious to repeated Basque objections, however, in August 1819, the central government reaffirmed longstanding tariffs on the region’s iron products upon entering the tax-paying provinces. In short, during 1814-1820—in part, to curb smuggling—the ministry objectively treated Basque manufactures as foreign commodities (13). Far-reaching disputes over these issues would occur during the Liberal Triennium.

#### AN ATTEMPT AT REFORM: THE LIBERAL TRIENNIUM (1820-1823)

Compounding the region’s economic difficulties, Bilbao and San Sebastian were still not legally enfranchised (*habilitados*) for direct colonial trade, a circumstance that added to the woes of local products. Some Basque businessmen were convinced that the ports’ enfranchisement would prove beneficial to the manufacturing community. Such an eventuality, however, was bound to split ranks in the province, pitting traditionalists—who feared the establishment of customs houses by the sea, presumably in violation of the *Fueros*—against hard pressed producers looking for much needed outlets—this, ironically, at the time when most colonial markets were closing once and for all to the metropolis. Constitutionalist officialdom in 1820 optimistically predicted prosperity for the Basque Provinces as a result of impending direct trade to America and Asia. The government of the Cortes believed that Basque entrepreneurs, attracted by new business opportunities at a time of painfully stagnant trade, would support constitutionalist economic policies even if this meant enacting reforms previously resisted in the region. In anticipation of new government tariffs and prohibitions (effective 1 January 1821), Basque merchants rushed to stockpile a wide array of goods destined for the colonies (cloths, spirits and manufactures), as well as colonial goods (coffee, sugar, cacao and spices), for the peninsular market. The scramble to stock up was such that the French commercial agent in Bilbao reported that the entrepôts at Bordeaux and Nantes had emptied to fill those of the Basque region and Navarre (14). The bold gamble would backfire on the region’s entrepreneurs. Basically, merchants were faced with an overabundance of inventory at a time of stagnant trade. Much to the Basque elites’ dismay the post-Napoleonic international economic slump continued to take its toll on the region’s trade.

The removal of the inland customs barrier (*contrarregistros*) exemplified constitutionalism’s attempts at administrative uniformity and national integration, projects shared in large measure by the powerful Basque economic oligarchy but equally resisted by local conservatives. In other words, Basque reformers were willing to place the Basque region on the same institutional and administrative footing as the rest of the nation *regardless of some of the provincial privileges that might be relinquished in the process*. This underscores the fact that the

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(13) Important information on Basques smuggling in *Copia del Informe de la Junta de Reforma de Abusos de Real Hacienda de las Provincias Vascongadas, creada en Real Orden de 6 de Noviembre de 1875*, Madrid: Oficina de Tomás Jordán, 1839. Interesting observations on Spanish smuggling following the Napoleonic Wars in Jaime Vicens Vives, *Manual de historia económica*, 3rd ed. Barcelona: Editorial Vicens Vives, 1964, pp. 639-640.

(14) A.M.A.E., Correspondance Consulaire, Bilbao, vol. 3, “Rapport de fin d’année 1820”: 11 January 1821.

Basque capitalist magnates' actions were probably motivated more by material self-interest than by political and ideological conviction. In sum, Basque entrepreneurs embraced constitutionalism in large part as a way of ending the economic crisis affecting the region since the War of Independence. Still, it would be wrong to construe the economic elites' actions as purely opportunistic. Rather, they must be viewed as a natural, indeed logical, continuation of the perennial search for new markets—a process in which the attraction of direct American trade played a central role. Although Basque constitutionalism's economic strategy appears to have been sound, a host of circumstances—foremost among them the continuing business recession and the upheavals in the New World—combined to thwart its objectives, paving the way as well to strife at home. Economic difficulties and material hardships, then, as much as political differences, were at the center of the violent conflicts that erupted during the Trienio. As Vicens Vives perceptively observed: “*La guerra civil fué, desde sus primeros chispazos, en 1821, una guerra de hambre y de miseria, no una guerra de ricos y potentados*” (15). Significantly, some astute Basque traditionalists were quick to capitalize on the rapidly deteriorating socioeconomic situation to rally resistance against constitutionalism. For instance, an anonymous and clandestine Vizcayan royalist pamphleteer suggestively remarked that the population's standard of living would tend to decline under constitutionalism, in part because of the loss of the province's commercial franchises. Directed at the heart of the region's “free-trade” practices, these arguments' strength cannot be overly emphasized (16). As the forces of international reaction closed the curtain on Spanish constitutionalism in 1823, not even a second Ferdinandine restoration appeared to offer much hope on the colonial front. Now more than ever Basques would feel the full brunt of the American emancipation. In other words, perhaps for the first time they had to confront head-on, and cope with the irreversible loss of the overseas territories—with the panoply of unpleasant consequences and ramifications that this reality implied.

#### TOWARD THE FINAL LOSS: THE “OMINOUS DECADE” (1823-1833)

During this decade, under the shadow of the colonies' loss, the Basques faced important new challenges, among them the following: 1) new centralist requests for contributions and services, 2) aggravated problems in iron production and distribution, 3) a more pronounced crisis in their trade, in particular its colonial component and 4) projected government changes in the legal status of Bilbao and San Sebastian as well as in the region's customs administration. On most of these issues, the Basque political and economic elites managed to preserve the status quo the sacrosanct provincial liberties, although the adamant resistance to reform led to persistent internal social tension and conflict with Ferdinand VII's administration.

1) A central administration in dire financial straits, and faced by the loss of overseas revenues, attempted to tap hitherto inaccessible Basque resources, notably through request for “voluntary” contributions (*donativos*) and military services. However, despite steady pressure and threats (emanating primarily from Ballesteros' and Zambrano's departments), Madrid for the most part was unable to secure the desperately needed assistance (17).

(15) *Manual de historia económica*, pp. 555-556.

(16) An extensive discussion of this in Renato Barahona, “Politics, Ideology and the Fueros in Vizcaya During the Initial Phase of the Liberal Triennium (1820)”, in *Basque Politics: A Case Study in Ethnic Nationalism*, William A. Douglas, editor (Associated Faculty Press, 1985).

(17) Considerably longer discussions of these matters in my *Vizcaya on the Eve of Carlism: Politics and Society, 1800-1833* (University of Nevada Press, 1989) chapter 4 passim.

2) An important joint 12 June 1824 Basque petition to Ferdinand VII devoted considerable attention to the problems of local iron. Lashing out against centralist “levelers” (niveladores) allegedly bent on national uniformity, the Diputaciones underscored the harmful effects of insufficient protection against foreign imports, as well as the effects of the loss of colonial outlets which, until the Spanish-American revolutions, had been an essential market for Basque manufactures (18). Another candid and critical assessment of the problems confronting the region’s products, and in particular iron, is found in the lucid *Memoria* submitted to the 1827 Vizcayan Juntas by the Diputación of Pedro Novia de Salcedo and the Marquis of Valdeespina. The document reiterated the important causes —among them the state of the Americas, foreign competition and unfavorable and discriminatory centralist policies— responsible for the disastrous state of local iron manufactures (19). More explicitly, the preamble to the new 1827 Vizcayan *Reglamento de Minería* grimly observed: “*La disidencia de los Españoles Americanos ha causado un golpe mortal a la industria Vizcaina*” (20). Essentially, barring major improvements in production, the region’s iron sorely needed the ministry’s unconditional economic and political support. Consequently, having given up hope on the bulk of the colonies, to protect the remaining Spanish outlets, the Basque leadership concentrated instead on securing two interrelated key objectives: a total ban on foreign iron and the complete opening of peninsular markets to Basque iron in a tariff-free capacity. To the Basques’ dismay, however, the royal administration would not accede to these demands.

3) As long as the *Fueros* remained, the Basques could expect no favorable treatment from the central government in matters of trade. Moreover, the Basques —in particular the Vizcayans— tenaciously defended the 1727 Patino Conventions (and subsequent amendments) between themselves and Madrid, which the regional elites had liberally interpreted in advantageous ways. During the decade, to Madrid’s displeasure, Basques insisted on importing many colonial goods without satisfying all centrally-impose requirements. Nor surprisingly, the central administration responded with severe new controls against those engaged in outright smuggling or, more subtly, in the so-called *comercio de mala fe*. These measures—more stringent certificates or *guias*, beefed up powers for the Judgeship of Contraband, and others—contributed strongly to the often troubled relations between the state and the region (21).

The controls could hardly have come at a worse time. As the correspondence of the french commercial agent in Bilbao shows, the turmoil in the New World and the general economic crisis nullified any meaningful foreign trade during 1823-1833. To reactivate a stagnant trade, the Basques responded with repeated demands for direct American commerce. A high-level conference of Basque delegates at Tolosa in December 1830 succinctly summarized the regional leaderships’ aspirations in a petition to the monarch “demanding two things: free trade with the colonies and the free importation and circulation in the rest of the kingdom of the

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(18) A.D.V., Sala de Guernica, 1823. *Representaciones al Rey y otras Autoridades*. Another copy of this document in the register *Conferencias de las Provincias Bascongadas. 1812 a 1833*.

(19) *Memoria de la Diputación general sobre el punto de Minería*, in *Ordenes Circulares del Señorío de Vizcaya (OCSV)*, 1827, pp. 15-16 of the printed version.

(20) *Ibid.*, p. 30.

(21) A 25 February 1824 royal orden in particular contained these harsh provisions: “That the foreign and colonial goods arriving by land or by sea from the Exempt Provinces and Navarre into the Contributing [ones], bring precisely expedited safeconducts destined for the main customs offices, or for the first [point of] entry of the respective line and, in addition, [carry] certificates as to their origin from the Judge of Contraband of Bilbao and the Sub-delegates of Guipuzcoa and Navarre, without wick requirement[s] the goods Will be seized”.

iron manufactured in these provinces” (22). The representation bitterly complained about the central government’s tradebarriers that Basques had unsuccessfully tried to remove. Ironically, claimed the remonstrance, it was easier for french businessmen to introduce colonial merchandise into Spain through Bordeaux and Bayonne, than for local merchants to exercise legal trade through San Sebastian and Bilbao. Conspicuously missing from the account, however, was the intermediary role of the Basque Provinces in the trade between foreign nations and the rest of the peninsula—a commerce that often took the form of smuggling. According to the Diputaciones, the solution to the gamut of problems was simple—if advantageous to Basque economic interest—namely, direct and free trade with America. Unsympathetic to these demands, Madrid instead chose to pursue a course begun earlier.

4) On 21 february 1828 the central government had legally enfranchised Bilbao and San Sebastian for colonial trade, an unexpected move that apparently caught many Basques off-guard. Bilbao merchants reacted favorably but, as the Vizcayan police admitted, news of the habilitacion was “equally welcome in the rest of the region [...] on account of the impulse that its depressed commerce will undoubtedlytake with this measure and the advantages that will accrue to its manufacturing industry and to the relations that its inhabitants conduct with those of the Spanish possessions in the Americas” (23). Strangely, this communique did not report the opinions of the pro-fueros stalwarts who controlled the Diputación. And they, in defense of the liberties, dreaded the institutional changes thrust upon the Basque Provinces by Madrid. Not surprisinglytherefore, the ports’ enfranchisement, eagerly awaited by powerful entrepreneurs (desirous of ending restrictions and expanding overseas trade), swiftly ran into stiff traditionalist opposition, and the project was in deep trouble from the outset. A crucial sticking point was the eventuality of customs bureaus by the sea and border. Revealingly, the Consulado of Bilbao, ostensibly predisposed to the port’s enfranchisement, was put on the defensive by Vizcayan conservatives who firmly opposed a change in the bureaus sites. Claiming that its members were “Vizcayans before being merchants”, the influential body faced the delicate (and perhaps impossible) task of supporting the enfranchisementwhile convincing skeptics that no alterations to the Fueros would ensue. As matters became mired in controversies over the privileges, the results of the ports’ new status proved exceedingly disappointing or nil. Failure to achieve the habilitacion in 1828 was a blow to the Basque entrepreneurial and manufaturing sectors which were forced to continue doing business under bothersome centralist constraints.

No significant developments occurred in the commercial sphere until San Sebastian’s November 1832 enfranchisement for colonial trade. Why the royal administration chose this port while excluding Bilbao remains largely unknown, although possibly the measure was a calculated slight to reiterate centralist disapproval with Vizcayan recalcitrance on trade matters. After an uneasy period of observation, the Diputaciones finally objected to San Sebastian’s enfranchisement in March 1833. Instead, in a familiar refrain, the Basques pleaded for free trade with the colonies without transfer of the customs offices to the sea and borders. In essence, when the Diputaciones successfully resisted the 1828 and 1832 enfranchisements, the Basques were saddled with the continuing disadvantage of not being able to unload colonial

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(22) A.D.V., Sala de Guernica, *Conferencias de las Provincias Bascongadas. 1812 a 1833*, session of 11 December 1830: and Sagarmínaga, *Gobierno*, 8: 85-88.

(23) Archive de la Casa de Juntas de Guernica (A.C.J.G.), *Policía*, Reg. 12, dispatch n.º 56 to central headquarters, 29 February 1828.

goods legally at their ports. More to the point, their political victory was also a clearcut economic defeat.

## CONCLUSION

Prior to the breakup of the old other the Basques enjoyed substantial interests in America. Kinship, regional ties, industriousness and ambition, and export-oriented economy and service to the monarchy had propelled them to some of the highest echelons of the colonial world. The Napoleonic Wars and the emancipation movements in the New World (within the framework of the crisis of the old order), severely affected the Basques colonial standing. In the process, irreparable harm was done to vital economic sectors linked to the colonirs, namely, iron manufactures and overseas trade. Nevertheless, despite the high stakes, the Basques as a whole showed remarkably little enthusiasm for the rebellious territories' "pacification". Possibly, the political elites may have felt that the region could continue doing business as before without institutional changes and modifications in the liberties. Fundamentally, despite the winds of change and the radically altered relationships across the Atlantic, the traditionalists who controlled the Diputaciones during the period—except of course for the Trienio—ferverently wished to preserve the status quo. And this, even in the face of a stern economic crisis that called for political and administrative reforms enacted in Madrid or promoted domestically. There is considerable evidence—doubtless in need of further empirical corroboration and a more precise theoretical framework—that the loss of the colonies had a markedly negative impact on Basque society—e.g., increase in unemployment and marginality and, in general, a decline in the population's standard of living, particularly that of the lower urban and rural classes, groups that would form the mainstay of Carlism.

A final note: the above is far from the last word on the question. Quite the opposite, it should only be the beginning. Considerable work remains to be done both on the Basques' role in the metropolitan control of the colonies and on how the 19th century American emancipations in turn specifically impacted upon the Basque Provinces. This author is deeply persuaded that as we learn more about these crucial topics we will be in an incomparably better position to comprehend the complex makings of Basque Carlism, a historical process in which, judging by even the most recent accounts, the colonial dimension is strangely and unpardonably missing.