

Introduction: empire and the emergence of Spain

Spain, or rather, 'the Spains in their pluralistic unity' (Vicens Vives, 1970:32), was born out of the Reconquista (718–1611). She arose from an unstable alliance of independent Christian kingdoms stretching in a line from Galicia to Catalonia pushing southward against the Islamic invaders. The initial unifying idea behind Spain was that of Christian opposition to the Muslim threat. Unlike Navarra, Leon, Aragon and Catalonia, Castile was a product of the Reconquista. She had no prior separate political existence. Castile was part of the repopulated areas and her dominant classes consisted of Basques, Cantabrians, Aragonese and so forth. In short, Castile was an amalgam of the peripheral ethnic and regional groups over which Castile in turn attempted to assert authority.

Neither the Catholic kings (1469–1516) nor their descendants, the Habsburgs (1516–1700) tried to force a unified royal administration upon the Iberian peninsula. The Basque provinces, Navarra, Catalonia and Aragon maintained distinct legal codes (*fueros*) and autonomous political institutions. This disparate political arrangement was institutionalized in the *Pacto Monárquico* which granted formal recognition to and respect for the autonomy of the different regions under the Castillian Crown. Moreover, the Spanish regions were regarded as having a contractual rather than subordinate position to the central, royal authority.

Whereas Spain's political institutions gave substantial guarantees for regional autonomy, the degree of autonomy the regions actually exercised has been frequently exaggerated. Here the role of Spain's empire must be mentioned. Imperial expansion generated considerable social and political integration in Spain. It imposed a type of organic solidarity.

A critical element in the imperial endeavour which was of benefit to all Spain's regions was military control over the seas and colonies. This requirement demanded the mobilization of human and material resources well beyond the capacity of any single region. The Spanish state in general and Madrid in particular owed their prestige and coherence as a political framework and centre to their ability to fulfil this requirement. But, as importantly, each region in Spain had different, specialized imperial

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ambitions. The Basque country was oriented toward the Americas. Castile looked toward North Africa, America and the centre of Europe. Aragon and Catalonia turned toward the Mediterranean. However, the realization of these specialized overseas ambitions and interests required cooperation and social integration between the regions. Thus, the requirements and benefits of empire forged an extensive urban and administrative network throughout Spain that linked the country socially, economically and politically.

When Spain began to lose control over the mechanisms of imperial power – for example, naval supremacy – and, thereby, lose control over her composite empire, the bases of Spanish unity – and prosperity – were also eroded. The need for a more explicit administrative unification to replace this organic solidarity became acutely apparent. However, a more formal, stable unity was only possible if Spain's diverse regions were able to perceive their specific economic interests in terms of metropolitan Spain herself. A successful political centralization was dependent on the pre-condition of some form of Spanish internal economic unity. It was to this goal – political centralization and the formation of an internal market – that the Bourbons in the eighteenth century and, more energetically, the liberals in the nineteenth addressed themselves. The fact that a satisfactory economic and political alternative had not emerged to substitute for empire when it finally collapsed in 1898 lay close to the heart of what was to become Spain's intractable regional problem.

But the obstacles to modern state formation in Spain were formidable. They were not just confined to the temptation to allow the enormous spoils derived from empire to delay an inevitable confrontation with political realities. An obdurate obstacle to change lay in the nature of the imperial state itself.

Imperial Spain was Counter-Reformation Spain; and the wealth of the colonies disappeared into opulent churches and the support of swollen bureaucracies. Catholic dogma and the entire massive structure of the Church had been reanimated and extended. Whereas, in Reformation Europe the state had been trimmed down through reform or revolution, in Spain the 'Renaissance State' with its ever multiplying and increasingly parasitic bureaucracy remained largely intact (H. R. Trevor-Roper, 1956:78–79). Indeed the sale of official office and bureaucratic posting was a major source of state revenue. These officials produced little, being dependent upon those who did, whom they exploited and regulated until the producers of wealth emigrated.

Bourbon reforms and state centralization

The accession in 1700 of the Bourbon dynasty to the Spanish throne marked the beginnings of a serious attempt to overhaul the Spanish state and society.

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Marianne Heiberg

Excerpt

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Spain was fragmented. Lacking any overall political control, each region, religious order and social sector was locked in a continual process of confrontation as specific interests were pursued and the idea of a general interest remained non-existent. Economic development was plagued by a massive waste of resources. Two-thirds of all land was held by the nobility and Church in entail and mortmain and a large part of the active male population (30 per cent according to the 1797 census) was employed in unproductive activities (Carr, 1966:39). Moreover, aristocratic privilege and local autonomies combined to create a motley taxation system which left the state economically anaemic. Arguably, in a society where political and economic attitudes disregarded and scorned the vocation of wealth production and industry and emphasized the values of heroism, luck and prestige, economic development simply was not a possibility.

The reform-minded ministers and civil servants assembled by the Bourbon monarchy were the architects of a political vision and social programme which would form the inheritance of nineteenth-century liberalism. As Raymond Carr has pointed out (1966:62), uniform centralization was the administrative precondition of all other reforms. Philip V (1700–46) managed to abolish the special privileges and local *fueros* of most of Spain's regions – including Catalonia – between 1706 and 1714. However, the *fueros* of the Basque country and Navarra, which had given much-needed support to Bourbon claims during the Spanish War of Succession, remained intact and constituted the major challenge to administrative unity.

Spanish 'Enlightenment' reached its peak during the reign of Charles III (1759–85). Inspired by notions of utility and felicity and appalled by the chronic poverty of much of the countryside, Bourbon bureaucrats proposed a series of radical agrarian, Church and education reforms which were crucial for their centralizing mission (and which in 1931 had still to be carried out) (Carr, 1966:62). According to the theory, these reforms were to provide proof that the national welfare could best be served by strengthening the power of the Crown and the central state (Clissold, 1969:96).

However, Bourbon attempts at enlightened reform and state centralization failed dismally. It was a failure that marked the end of Spain's *ancien régime*. Some of the reasons lay inside the regime itself. The over-staffed and paper-loving administrative apparatus was incapable of effective, concerted action of any kind. The increasing power of the Crown degenerated into an increasing dependency on the calibre of the king's ministers (Clissold, 1969:96). The weakness of enlightened despotism became personified in Godoy, the extremely unpopular and resented prime minister of Carlos IV (1788–1808). Godoy accumulated more personal political power than any other Spanish political figure with the possible exception of General Franco.

Just as importantly, Castile's striving to exert her hegemony over the

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Spanish periphery coincided with the stagnation of the Castilian economy and the renewed prosperity of the peripheral areas. Succession of the Bourbon dynasty had led to a reinforcement of commercial links between Spain and Europe and helped a 'take-off' in both Basque and Catalan commerce (Laborda Martin, 1978:137). But Spain's mercantile empire was contingent on her ability to maintain political control over her American colonies and military control over the seas. The independence movements in the Americas, disastrous war with England (1796–1802) and Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian peninsula effectively defeated Spain's commercial aspirations. Although all Spain's regions suffered the economic consequences, Castile was the least able to respond. The Castilian wool trade, the backbone of her economy, crumbled. Castile had no other commodities which she could profitably feed to overseas markets.

In contrast to Madrid, the periphery at the end of the eighteenth century was experiencing rapid demographic growth, rising wages and forced commercial and industrial modernization. The tensions resulting from peripheral economic vitality and Castilian sluggishness would lie near the heart of the Catalan 'question' and the Basque 'problem'.

However, the Bourbon regime's problems were not confined solely to economic ones. The fatal flaws were political.

The War of Independence and the failure of liberalism

The reign of Carlos IV and Godoy had been disgraced by its foreign adventures, the loss of the American market, the subsequent economic depression and ministerial dictatorship. Napoleon's drive into Spain offered the opportunity for its overthrow. In 1808, the year of the Spanish uprising against the French invaders, the initial struggle was concerned with liberating Spain from Godoy rather than from Napoleon's troops (Vicens Vives, 1970:122). Under the force of popular pressure Carlos IV abdicated and Napoleon set about imposing an efficient administration, a liberal constitution (the Constitution of Bayonne) and a new king, Joseph I.

The popular reaction came on 2 May 1808. The revolution of *dos de mayo* had two motives. The obvious one was to oust the French in the name of Spanish sovereignty. But the revolution also provided the means by which the monarchy could be reoriented and restricted so as to prevent a reoccurrence of the despotic excesses of the past (Vicens Vives, 1970:122). With the state apparatus in chaos and the traditional ruling classes attempting to accommodate the French, the prime movers of the rebellion were the lower classes who made their first dramatic entry onto the Spanish political scene and frightened Spain's established orders as much as they did Murat. Moreover, new types of men – military officials with political

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ambitions, financial speculators, intellectuals, local gentry and rhetoricians – quickly assumed leadership and power.

One product of the situation in 1808 was the emergence of regionalism as a political factor. The Spain of the War of Independence was a type of federal republic (Carr, 1966:91). Resistance was organized – to the extent that it was organized at all – by provincial *juntas* (assemblies) which functioned as sovereign states and often displayed as much hostility toward each other as they did to the French. But the leaders of the *juntas* were not separatists; they aimed at reform and social renovation and, thus, saw the need to reestablish some sort of centralized order. A Supreme Central *Junta* was organized and the reformers convened a constituent *cortes* (parliament) in Cadiz. The result of their deliberations was the Constitution of 1812 which attempted to transform and modernize Spain's entire political structure.

The War of Independence created an opportune moment for far-reaching change. W. C. Atkinson has argued (1960:263) that the *de facto* vacancy of the throne and the total collapse of traditional society made new concepts of national unity possible. The Constitution of 1812 affirmed that national sovereignty was to reside in the people rather than the King and a division of powers between parliament and Crown was imposed. Proportional representation, a complex version of universal suffrage and a uniform tax structure were proposed. Moreover, the constitution aimed at the elimination of special feudal and regional jurisdictions, abolition of internal customs lines and the disentanglement of the common lands. Although Catholicism was reaffirmed as the state religion, the Holy Office was suppressed. Liberty, equality and property were the new God-given, natural rights. It was to become the classic nineteenth-century liberal constitution.

But Spanish liberalism failed majestically. The central vision of liberalism was the construction of a political and economic framework for a modern bourgeois society. Politically, it sought constitutional unity as a means of transferring power away from the realms of sectoral and regional privilege into the hands of Spain's middle classes. Economically, liberalism insisted upon the establishment of absolute individual property rights as a means of stimulating production and creating a viable internal market. Influenced by the 'ideas and armies of the French Revolution' (Carr, 1966:79), the main ideological assumption underlying these considerations was the idea of national sovereignty, of Spanish nationalism.

Liberalism did achieve certain partial successes. A uniform educational system was established and fiscal and administrative uniformity imposed. Limited social welfare legislation was enacted and Spain received the rudiments of a national communication system of roads and railways.

Although liberals saw their reformist tasks as both socially liberating and economically urgent for the national welfare, the concrete effects of liberalism

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were not as selfless and patriotic. Gerald Brenan has commented (1969:109) that liberalism handed the Spanish peasantry over to a new class of exploitative landlords. 'Liberalism ... united to a swarm of lawyers, tradesmen and petty capitalists anxious to enrich themselves by cultivating land, brought this about. This is the class that since 1843 has held political power in Spain – a middle class enriched not by trade or industry but by ownership of land ...' Certainly the major goals of liberalism – such as an agrarian reform and the consolidation of Spanish nationhood – were never achieved.

Among the more basic reasons for the fiasco of Spanish liberalism was that the centrepiece of a bourgeois revolution – an increasingly influential national middle class based in industry and modern commerce who possessed certain attitudes to life and politics – did not exist. This type of bourgeoisie only developed in Catalonia and the Basque country. The lack of capital, entrepreneurial skills and technology made the emergence of a solid Spanish – as opposed to local or regional – middle class impossible.

These same factors severely restricted the creation of an internal market. However, an additional, major barrier lay in the agrarian problem. Without agrarian reform the majority of Spaniards simply could not be brought into a market economy. Peasants had to be transformed into consumers in a modern sense. And agrarian reform required a political power and unity the liberals lacked.

Although liberalism strengthened and broadened the functions of the Spanish state, it could never overcome the fragmented nature of Spanish society. The idea of a cohesive Spanish nationalism crumbled upon a new form of intrusive state aimed at protecting shifting conglomerations of local vested interest groups. With the empire lost, this state, centred in economically stagnant Castile, was no longer viewed as a source of economic benefit or as an essential requirement for the country's more dynamic peripheries. This failure of Spanish nationalism to provide Madrid with a moral authority and Spanish citizens with an overarching and binding political identity was the background upon which Basque nationalism grew.

At the end of the nineteenth century when the two most tenacious illustrations of Spanish fragmentation made their first serious bid for separate national status, the Spanish state was incoherent and dislocated. Unlike London, Paris or even Berlin, Madrid was unable to transform the people over which it governed into Spaniards. The core problem was not, paraphrasing Eugen Weber, of turning peasants into Spaniards, although this too was a serious matter. Madrid was unable to endow the identity of 'Spaniard' with advantages and a dignity that outweighed the identity of 'Basque' or 'Catalan'.

Modern Spain – the Spain, still devastated by the War of Independence, that arose with the first liberal constitution of 1812 – was born politically

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defective and divided. During the last 170 years or so there have been two Spains as partly different polarities have succeeded each other. First, the absolutist and constitutional gave way to the arch-conservative and progressive which was finally replaced by the rightist and leftist (Farias, 1975:19). Until very recently, Spain has lacked a political centre and consensus that would have provided a stabilizing buffer for the violent competition between the two antagonistic blocks into which the country was divided. Throughout the nineteenth century various versions of liberalism clashed with the vestiges of dynastic absolutism for control over an unstable political order. The country was shattered by revolts, civil wars, and dozens of *pronunciamientos* (military uprisings) by disaffected generals who felt they could run Spain better than unscrupulous, inept politicians. Typically the first act of Fernando VII upon his return to Spain in 1814 as a constitutional monarch was to abolish the constitution, reestablish the *fueros* and restore pure absolutism.

PART 1

From plurality to Basque ethnic solidarity

1

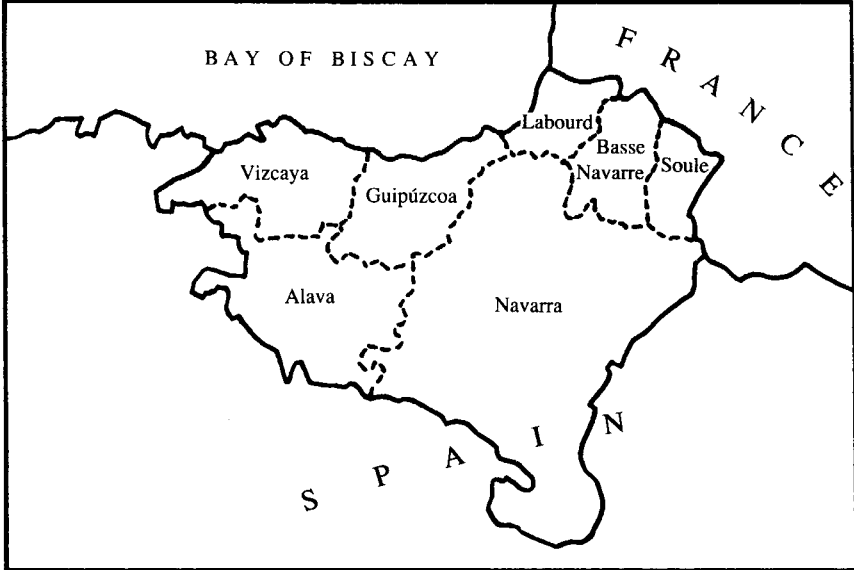
The Basques in history

The two regions that developed the most aggressive and confident nationalist movements in Spain – the Basque country and Catalonia – had many features in common which set them apart from the rest of Iberia. Both enjoyed a relatively prosperous agricultural base characterized by medium-sized landholdings, security of tenure, polyculture, dispersed residential patterns and an inheritance system that transmitted the rural farmstead intact to only one heir. Both were in direct geographical contact with Europe and developed powerful mercantile classes which were enthusiastic recipients of European technical and ideological innovations. Finally, during the nineteenth century both experienced an industrial take-off. In Catalonia and the Basque country industrialization was managed by a native industrial bourgeoisie and generated a politically militant proletariat of mixed regional origins. Despite these similarities, however, Basque and Catalan nationalism are very different political creatures.

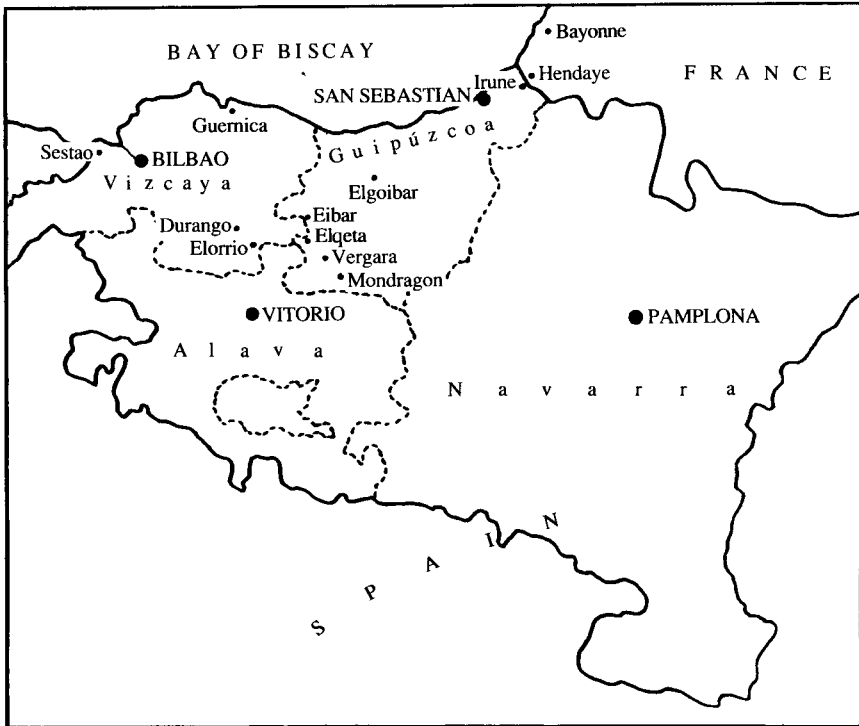
The Basque country – or Euskalherria – runs along the Bay of Biscay. It extends from Bayonne in the northeast to just west of Bilbao and, straddling both sides of the Pyrenees, cuts inland some 200 km. This hilly, luxuriant region, whose densely green appearance belies an infertile soil, is composed of seven provinces: Guipúzcoa (*Gipuzkoa*), Vizcaya (*Bizkaia*), Alava (*Araba*), Soule (*Zuberoa*), Basse-Navarre (*Baxanabarra*) and Labourd (*Lapurdi*).¹ Covering slightly more than 20,000 km², the region contains 2,376,134 inhabitants (1974 census) of which about 90% live in the Spanish Basque country and the remainder in France. Divided politically between two states, Euskalherria is divided geographically by two massive mountain ranges. The Pyrenees separate the French Basques from their Spanish counterparts. The Cantabrian cuts Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya off from Navarra and Alava as well as from the rest of Spain. The Basque country has no sharp physical boundaries. Alava and southern Navarra have the climate and landscape of the Castilian meseta into which they smoothly merge.

Theories and arguments concerning the origins of the Basques and how the Basques can be defined in cultural terms as an exclusive and separate group are numerous. The origins of Euskera, the Basque language, remain

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Map 2 Euskalherria



Map 3 Spanish Basque provinces