

Before and after the First Carlist War: changing images of the Basques

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Testu honetan, Lehen Karlistaldiaren aurrean eta ondoren azaldu ziren euskaldunekiko jarrerak konparatzen dira, eta nabarmendu egiten da gerra horrek erabat irauli zuela europar bidaiariak Euskal Herriaz zuten pertzepzioa. Gogo ematen zaio bereziki Victor Hugo edo Adolf Loning bezalako bidaiari ospetsuen lanari.

Giltza-Hitzak: Euskaldunak. Karlistaldia. Foruak.

En el texto se comparan las actitudes hacia los vascos antes y después de la Primera Guerra Carlista, y se destaca cómo esta guerra supuso un giro radical en la percepción del País Vasco por parte de los viajeros europeos. Se presta particular atención a la obra de viajeros notables como Victor Hugo o Adolf Loning.

Palabras Clave: Vascos. Guerra Carlista. Fueros.

Dans le texte on compare les attitudes envers les basques avant et après la Première Guerre Carlisle, et on fait remarquer le virement radical qu'a donné cette guerre à la perception du Pays Basque de la part des voyageurs européens. On prête une attention particulière à l'œuvre de voyageurs remarquables tels que Victor Hugo ou Adolf Loning.

Mots Clés: Basques. Guerre Carlisle. Fueros.

One of the problems of having to talk or write about the Basque Country is that many times we do not know what we are exactly referring to. Or, at least, it is a problem when addressing that topic in Spanish. It may be different when speaking or writing in English, it may even make things easier, because perhaps I could simply say I am going to talk about the Basque Country and leave it at that. My audience would probably be interested in what I have to say but they would not, I want to think, quibble about exactly what territories I believe that name comprises. I do not have (as I would, were I be writing this in Spanish) to choose among a number of different and contentious names for our object. Writing in Spanish, I could of course skip the problem and merely say I was going to have “el País Vasco” as my topic of discussion, but it would not be very clear what I really meant, what territories I included under that name. For clarity’s sake, I might use a longer phrase and say I was dealing with “el País Vasco, Navarra y el País Vasco-francés”, that is, with the Basque Country, Navarre and the French Basque Country; or I might resort to a Basque name and simply say it was “Euskal Herria” I was discussing.¹ But my effort to bring some clarity in can and most certainly would be interpreted as an ideological commitment. The longer definition would be construed as a bow to the existing administrative division of the Basque Country (between France and Spain and, within Spain itself, between the Basque Country and Navarre) and, therefore, as a pro-Spanish definition; the definition using the term “Euskal Herria” would be interpreted as an attempt to overcome or sidestep that same division and, therefore, as a Basque nationalist definition. I could also make use of the term “Vasconia”, the name the Romans gave to the Basque territories. It is a neutral term, but then, it has no currency in everyday life and it appears only in literary and academic discourse and using that term when discussing identity matters would be a way of avoiding the question rather than confronting it.²

There are other possible options. There are names which have ceased or are ceasing to be fashionable (like “Euskadi”) and names which are being proposed just now (like “Navarra”, referred to whole Basque territory). Every one of these names has its own history and its own political and cultural connotations. An essay on “The names of the Basque Country” would indeed have all the chances to be an interesting one.

The existence of a variety of names, of a wide range of terms for designating the Basque lands is not something new. Early in the nineteenth century Wilhelm von Humboldt remarked on it.

It is rather embarrassing to try and find a single name for the whole of the Basque nation and one looks in vain for one equally accepted by French, Spanish and Germans. The French have no common denomination for the Basques. They say

1. This problem I am commenting would also disappear in an essay written in Basque, where “Euskal Herria” would be the expected and accepted form to be used.

2. The titles of two recent publications may serve to prove that I am discussing a real problem: Iñaki Bazán (dir.), *De Túbal a Aitor. Historia de Vasconia*, released in 2002, and José Luis de la Granja & Santiago de Pablo (eds.), *Historia del País Vasco y Navarra en el siglo XX*, also published in 2002. Moreover, both books share some contributors.

Biscayens, when talking about the Spanish Basques, *Basques* when talking about the French Basques and, if necessary, they take shelter in the older name: *Cantabres*. The Spanish limit the name Vizcaya to the Lordship proper, to the *Señorío*, and otherwise call the land: *las provincias Bascongadas*, and the language *el Bascuence*. They name the inhabitants according to each province: *Vizcainos*, *Guipuzcoanos*, *Alaveses*. So this unhappy race has lost even the unity of its name (Humboldt 1920: 5, footnote).³

And he goes on to explain the names he will be using.

It seems to me, however, that Humboldt remains rather unique in deploring the absence of a single, unifying name and the implications of this absence. Other travellers do not seem to be bothered at all and are quite satisfied with simply registering this variety of names. French traveller Jean François Peyron, writing in 1782, says that “Biscay is divided into Biscay proper, whose capital is *Bilbao*, the province of *Guipuscoa*, whose capital is *Tolosa*, and that of *Alava*, which has *Vittoria* as its capital” (Peyron, 1782: II, 346);⁴ in the same vein, Arthur de Capell Brooke, who travelled in Spain and Morocco in 1828, remarks upon entering the Basque Country:

On leaving [Miranda de Ebro, the last town in Castile] we entered the province of Alava. This is one of the three ‘Provincias Vascongadas’; namely, Biscay, Guipuzcoa, and Alava, and which are better known by the more general division of Vizcaya, or Biscay (Brooke, 1831: II, 323).

Others are more careless and leave the reader wondering what they mean when they say Biscayans: are they referring only to the inhabitants of the Lordship of Biscay, to those of the three “Basque Provinces” or are they making that name extensive to the Navarrese as well? Irish traveller John Talbot Dillon, discussing in 1781 the “genius and character of the Biscayners”, seems at one point to include under that name the inhabitants of the three provinces, only to affirm later that the only title the King of Castile has over them is that of “Lord of Biscay”, restricting thus his attention only to Biscay proper (Dillon, 1781: see pp. 172-181 for the letter on the “character of the Biscayners”). John Francis Bacon, explaining in 1838 the reasons which had led to the outbreak of the first Carlist war, affirms he is going to enumerate the privileges enjoyed by “Biscayans, Alavese, and Guipuscoans”, but then he also refers repeatedly to those enjoyed by Navarre; and if sometimes

3. “Man geräth in Verlegenheit, wenn man den ganzen Stamm der Biscayischen Nation mit einem Namen benennen will, und man sucht vergebens nach einem, der einstimmig von Spaniern, Franzosen und Deutschen angenommen wäre. Die Franzosen kennen schlechterdings keine allgemeine Benennung. Sie sagen: Biscayens, wenn sie von den Spanischen, Basques, wenn sie von den Französischen Vasken reden, und nehmen im Nothfall ihre Zuflucht zu dem alten Namen: Cantabres. Die Spanier schränken den Namen Vizcaya nur auf die eigentliche Herrschaft, el Señorío, ein, und sagen übrigens von dem Lande: las provincias Bascongadas, und von der Sprache el Bascuence. Die Bewohner benennen sie nach den einzelnen Provinzen: Vizcainos, Guipuzcoanos, Alaveses. So hat diese unglückliche Völkerstamm selbst bis auf die Einheit seines Namens verloren” (all translations in this article are my own).

4. “[L]a Biscaye, qui se divise en Biscaye proprement dite, dont *Bilbao* est la capitale; en province de *Guipuscoa*, dont la capitale est *Tolosa*, & en celle d’*Alava*, qui a *Vittoria* pour capitale”.

he seems to include the Navarrese among the Basques, at other times he clearly distinguishes between the “Basque provinces and Navarre” (Bacon, 1838). Edward Bell Stephens, who spent three months among the Carlists in 1836 as correspondent for the *Morning Post*, clearly distinguishes between Basques and Navarrese, saying that the latter “appear to be a mixed race. They are not nearly so well looking, amiable, or intelligent as the Basques” (Stephens, 1837: I, 153); however, another Englishman, Michael Burke Honan, who also spent some time among the Carlists, failed to appreciate those differences and speaks of the “four Basque provinces” (Honan, 1836: 225). Like Honan, French traveller Alexis Sabatier describes the Carlist armies of the “quatre provinces bascongades”, and C. J. E. de Sain Bois-le-Comte devotes his “essai historique” to the Basque Provinces, explaining between brackets that he is referring to Alava, Guipuzcoa, Biscay and Navarre (Sabatier, 1836: 26; Bois-le-Comte, 1836).

At this point we could join Humboldt in regretting this confusion, this persistent disagreement as to who the Basques are. But we could also try to read this in a different, more subtle way.

1. THE LAND OF THE FUEROS

If we are to believe Jean François Peyron, the Ebro River which divides Castile from the Basque Country is also the border of that “sort of liberty enjoyed in Biscay”. Similarly, John Talbot Dillon, writing, like Peyron, in the late eighteenth century, insists on the liberty of the Basques, on their ancient origins and nobility. The houses in the Basque Country (and the families inhabiting them) “may be held as the most ancient in Spain”, says Dillon. And the whole chapter in which he talks about the “character of the Biscayners” rehearses the narratives put forward as political arguments by the Basques since the sixteenth century. Since something has already been said about these narratives, I will not insist on them.⁵ But what I would like to point out is that in these two texts the Basques are identified mainly by the possession of their own laws, by their country being a land of freedom within the Spanish Monarchy. The Basque language may also be mentioned (Dillon mentions it, for example, though Peyron does not), but I think that what places the Basques in the map, what, so to speak, allows people to spot them, are their liberties, the so-called *fueros*. In other words, the Basques as an object are constructed from a political discourse; what defines them is their forming a small body politic within the larger body of the Spanish Monarchy.

I think this changed during the early nineteenth century and, particularly, during the first Carlist war, in which the partisans of Queen Isabel II fought against those of her uncle and pretender to the throne Don Carlos. Although Don Carlos had supporters all over Spain, his main strongholds were up in the North, in the Basque Country, where the war lasted longest. Moreover, this war attracted the attention of all Europe and the massive support of the Basques for the Carlist cause gave rise to an abundant literature which tried to explain the caus-

5. See in this same book Coro Rubio's essay.

es that had led to the conflict. It must be noted that that European attention was not impartial. On the contrary, many writers and travellers took sides with one or the other party and that produced, as might be expected, contending accounts of the war causes and of who was to blame for it.

There is no denying that the *fueros*, the liberties of the Basques, figure pre-eminently in that literature produced by Europeans who came to the Basque Country during the war. John Francis Bacon, an Englishman who spent the war in Bilbao, devotes many pages of the introduction to his *Six years in Biscay* to explaining what the *fueros* really consist of and, as a result, in what respects the situation of the Basques differs from that of other Spaniards. His conclusion, incidentally, is that the Basques are much better off than the rest of Spain's population. They are "free citizens, while in the rest of Spain they are a mere flock, who are squeezed and beaten at the will of their masters", and he therefore deems it the more unjust and unjustifiable that when

the provinces beyond the Ebro attempt to raise themselves somewhat in the scale of nations, [...] they find their favoured brethren of the Basque provinces joining their own oppressors, the privileged classes, to crush all their efforts to ameliorate their social state.

Bacon had no sympathies for the Carlists and denied that there was any link whatsoever between their cause and the defence of the *fueros*. "In the following narrative", he says,

it will be my task to make manifest that the rising of the Basque provinces was wholly unconnected with their *fueros*; that they proclaimed the pretender king of Spain, before even a voice had been raised, or a line written against their privileges.

In fact, he maintains that a constitutional government, such as that of the liberals supporting Isabel II, would be much more willing to respect the Basque liberties than the Carlists:

The privileges of the Basque provinces are odious to the Spanish nation, of which Charles is so well aware, that if he was king of Spain next year, he would quickly find excuses for infringing them, if not their total abolition. A representative government will endeavour to raise Spain to a level with the Basque provinces, – a despot, to whom the very name of freedom is odious, would strive to reduce the provinces to the same low level with the rest.

Accordingly, he criticizes the views of the English writers who support the idea that the Basques are fighting for the safeguarding of their liberties. He does not give the names of these "Anglo-Carlists", as he calls them, but he may very well be thinking of writers such as Charles Frederick Henningsen, Michael Burke Honan or Edward Bell Stephens, all of whom spent some time among the Carlists and did not hide their sentiments in favour of Don Carlos's cause. And the three of them stated that the Basques were fighting for their *fueros*. In their view, the war was a response to the perception that the Basque liberties would be endangered by a constitutional government. For Honan, for example, the whole country was in favour of Don Carlos,

and so deep a hatred to the Queen has been engendered by the atrocities of [liberal Generals] Rodil, Mina, and Quesada, and the attempt to extinguish their *fueros*, that the people will never submit to her rule" (Honan, 1836: 259).

And for Stephens (whose pro-Carlist sympathies were much more resolute than Honan's) it was clear that the Basques were "fighting at once for loyalty and liberty, for the principle of legitimacy and the exercise of practical freedom; for the rights of their sovereign and their own constitutional privileges" (Stephens, 1837: I, 15). This view is also shared by travellers of other nationalities. Adolf Loning, a German who fought in the Carlist field, affirms that the Basques had fallen "in defence of their time-honoured privileges, fighting for the *Fueros*, for the cause of religion and for the King" (Loning, 1844: 266).⁶

Thus, the travellers who visited the Basque Country between 1833 and 1839, that is, during the years of the first Carlist war, started a debate which has lasted until our days. What role the *fueros* played in the Carlist war and what the motivations of the Basques for supporting Carlism were have been questions debated by historians since then. So, as I said earlier, I am not denying the importance of the *fueros* in the definition of the Basques.

But I think that other elements begin to play a much more central part in that definition. Important as they are, the *fueros* do not single the Basques out as they used to do. Their *fueros*, their liberties, may be what the Basques are (or are not) fighting for, but now other discourses come into play when perceiving the Basques. The book written by Edward Bell Stephens with the title *The Basque provinces: their political state, scenery, and inhabitants; with adventures among the Carlists and Christinos* may be a good example to spell out what I am trying to say.

2. A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT THE BASQUES

As I have mentioned before, Stephens seems to distinguish quite clearly between Basques and Navarrese. On one particular occasion, for example, when the Carlist troops engage in looting after having entered a village, he comments that it was the "Navarrese, the Aragonese and the Castilians" who did it, and he adds:

Had the Basque peasant battalions, (i.e., Biscayans, Alavese, or Guipuscoans), only been there, I am confident every description of property would, as heretofore, have been respected (Stephens, 1837: I, 236).

But despite this, Basque and Navarrese seem to share some characteristics and are therefore susceptible of a common description. Apart from their commitment to the cause of Don Carlos, they have a similar style of architecture, they are equally laborious, and in both the Basque provinces and Navarre "women play a

6. "[F]ür die Vertheidigung ihrer von der Zeit geheiligten Privilegien, für die *Fueros*, für Religion und für den König".

very active and influential part". And, to complete the portrait, these territories are also self-sufficient as regards agriculture:

wheat is chiefly grown in Navarre and Alava, and exchanged for the maize of Biscay and Guipuscoa; so that the Carlist provinces are quite independent of the rest of Spain for the main articles of subsistence for man and beast (Stephens, 1837: II, 237; I, 60).

In other words, what Stephens does is to describe a self-sufficient, self-contained world to which he can apply his observation. His attitude throughout the text is very much that of an ethnographer. He asserts his authority by underlining that his opinions are the result of his experience, of his having lived among the Basques; indeed, he presents his stay in the Basque Country as process of personal enlightenment:

Before I crossed the Pyrenees, I confess I was often amazed at the strange duration of this eventful struggle, and the facility with which a scanty band of Guerrillas gradually swelled into a well organized and most formidable army. I went amongst this singular people – lived with them – shared in their toils and privations – and took my part in their dangers and amusements, till what surprised me before, surprises me no longer (Stephens, 1837: I, v).

In addition to this, apart from being able to speak Spanish, he claims some interest in Basque too and in a thoroughly practical way:

I found myself learning Basquense every day through the mere pleasure of chatting with these people (Stephens, 1837: I, 156).

It is on having shared the Basques' toils and privations, on having chatted with them in their own language, that Stephens can describe them as

an independent primitive people, with a constitution at least as good, and free and ancient as your own – as distinct in laws and language, character, form, pursuits and national feeling, from Spain, as Spain is from England (Stephens, 1837: II, 254).

Both Charles Frederick Henningsen and Michael Burke Honan draw in their books the reader's attention to the Basque language, Basque women and other traits shared by all the Basques. Henningsen, for example, remarks that the costume of Basques and Navarrese "differs in nothing" (Henningsen, 1836: I, 72). And, in order to back up their observations, both Henningsen and Honan make reference to their personal experience, to their having been among the Basques.

I believe few strangers have had the advantage of seeing so much of the country, or the privilege of inspecting in detail all the resources of Don Carlos as we had; and we returned with the full conviction that the truth is but little known, and that the Basque provinces are more exclusively devoted to Don Carlos than any one we had previously spoken with imagined (Honan, 1836: 258).

It may be argued that this perception of the Basques is exclusive of writers who had sympathies for the Carlist cause. But John Francis Bacon, whose support was clearly for the liberals, also finds that on the Carlist side the war is being

fought by “four provinces [...], speaking a different language, of peculiar manners, fanatically enthusiastic, and yielding implicit obedience to their chief” (Bacon, 1838: 110). And although he was in Bilbao during the war, he seldom, if at all, refers to its inhabitants or to the liberals in general as Basques. The only Basques in his text are the Carlists; they form the “Basque army” and they are the “Basque soldiers”.

Bacon compares the Basques to the Irish. In fact, he thinks that the Basques are a Celtic people, the difference between Basque and Gaelic notwithstanding:

It is true the Basque language is very different from the Gaelic, Welsh or Irish, but this does not disprove their being radically the same people: the physiology and manners have a strong resemblance, and their traditions are very similar. The languages of the tribes in Guayana are more unlike each other by far, than the Basque and Irish, and yet few or none have ever entertained the idea, that the tribes of the Orinoco are not descended from the same stock. Perhaps, when the science of ethnography is more known, it may be ascertained that *there is a tendency* in small secluded tribes to corrupt and change their original language (Bacon, 1838: 54).

Stephens too finds in the Basques “all the natural active politeness of the Irish peasantry, without any alloy of servility”; however, “they differ [...] so much in one material respect from the Irish, that I can scarcely believe the latter have any fair claim to a common origin”, that respect being the “remarkable sobriety” of the Basques (Stephens, 1837: I, 151-152).

If comparison with the Irish was not rare, comparison with the American Indians was somewhat more uncommon. Bacon disparages the Carlist army by saying that

[i]t is even no more than truth, when I affirm that they made war upon the town [upon Bilbao] more like a tribe of American Indians than a European army

and later in his books, he explains the fear within the city at the possibility of a Carlist victory after such a long siege by remarking that

[a] regular army might respect the brave men, who had well defended themselves; but from the ignoble crew of savages who besieged us, nothing but the direst cruelties could possibly be expected (Bacon, 1838: 261 and 414).

And Stephens again takes up Bacon’s comparison and reverses its sense:

In their self-possessed dispassionate conduct they [the Basques] bear resemblance to those native gentlemen the North American Indians, who never allow themselves to betray surprise or vexation (Stephens, 1837: I, 152).

Interestingly, we see that when it comes to comparing the Basques with other peoples so that the foreign reader may make more sense of what he is being told and described, both Bacon and Stephens resort to the same comparisons. They endow these comparisons with entirely different meanings. Comparing the Basques to the Irish and to the American Indians is for Bacon a way of despising

them. The contrary is true in Stephens's case; the comparisons serve him to praise the nobility of the Basques. But whether we are confronted with a bunch of bloodthirsty savages, as in Bacon's text, or with a noble people still living "in a primitive Arcadia of their own" (Stephens, 1837: I, 173), as in Stephens's, they are both constructing their object from what we might call an ethnographic point of view. Bacon's explicit reference to ethnography is rather telling in this respect.

In addition to all that, this ethnographic view of Basques endows them with a new degree of difference. They become exotic. I have already mentioned that Bacon and Stephens compare in their books the Basques and the North American Indians. Let me add now that they are not the only ones to draw that comparison. Prosper de Lagarde, a Frenchman writing in 1835 (though unconnected with the Carlist war; he visited mainly the French side of the Basque Country), makes a trip to Bayonne only in order to see the Basques. He had been many times to the Pyrenees but never further West than Pau; this time, however, he was decided: "It was the Basques that I wanted to see" (Lagarde, 1835: 29).⁷ And one of the reasons why he wanted to see the Basques was their language; he had read the Basque names of rivers and mountains in his map and he was already fascinated.

Evidently, that must be a language as baroque as at least that of the Iroquois and Mohicans. What a pleasure to be among those savages without even leaving France!, such is the power that the strange and the unknown have always to excite our desires and to seduce our imagination (Lagarde, 1835: 28-29).⁸

Lagarde's intention was surely not to be offensive. In fact, he shows himself appreciative of the Basques and their language, which at several points he defends is a language and not a dialect or patois. The point, rather, is that it is the Basques' utter difference that is attractive to him. Lagarde compares himself to A. Daumont, author of a *Voyage en Suède* published in 1834. When in Sweden, Daumont (as told by Lagarde) went to a church to listen to a Finnish preacher in order to hear that language, even though he knew he would not understand a single word. Similarly, Lagarde knows he will not be able to understand Basque, but it is precisely because of that that he wants to go to the Basque Country. By the way, he could finally realize his dream. In a small church in the village of Ziburu he "had the satisfaction" of hearing a priest preaching in Basque, and had also the "no less great pleasure of not understanding a single word" (Lagarde, 1835: 102).⁹ The Basques' strangeness, their otherness, is what attracts Lagarde.

7. "C'était des Basques que je voulais voir".

8. "Évidemment ce devait être une langue aussi baroque pour le moins que celle des Iroquois ou des Mohicans. Quel plaisir d'être au milieu de ces sauvages sans sortir de France! tant il est vrai que l'étrange et l'inconnu ont quelque chose qui excite toujours nos désirs et séduit notre imagination!".

9. "Là j'eus pour la première fois la satisfaction, après laquelle j'aspirais, d'entendre parler le basque posément et avec pureté. J'eus d'ailleurs le plaisir non moins grand de n'y pas comprendre un seul mot [...]"

The Basques are not then a small republic in a big Monarchy, as they were for travellers in the eighteenth century; they are rather a distinct people characterized by certain traits such as their language, their customs, etc. Humboldt's case is particularly interesting in this connection because it was precisely his use of a single criterion for defining the Basques, that of language, that allowed him to produce a clear image of the Basque Country beyond the variety of different existing names for it. But, as I said before, Humboldt's case was rather unique. In the English texts I have been commenting this image is not as clear-cut as in Humboldt's case. It is rather a silhouette with blurred borders.

The farther you go from the mountains [...] the inhabitants present less of the distinctive character of an ancient people; they become gradually darker and of a different stature, till, on the banks of the Ebro, they are to all appearance a new race (Henningsen, 1836: I, 66).

But, whatever its borders, this emerging silhouette results from applying a new way of looking at the Basque Country.

I have insisted so far on the importance these texts attribute to what we may call the ethnographic traits of the Basques. I am not suggesting however that these texts in any way constitute ethnographic treatises. Their observations are impressionistic and unsystematic, and they are meant to be so. In fact, they can be read in a number of different ways. Turning once more to Stephens, his book could be considered as a long condemnation of the British foreign policy of supporting Queen Isabel II's government (and, at several points in the book, Stephens makes some scathing comments against the British Legion). In that sense, we could see the nobility of the Basques as a side effect of the main argument: pointing out this nobility would serve to underline the injustice of the English government in helping the liberals. On the other hand, we could also think that Stephens is merely showing off when he talks about his experiences in the Basque Country, and indeed there is a good deal of boasting in the book. We could read his text as an attempt to present himself as a brave explorer opening up new, uncharted paths for subsequent travellers. In fact, he ends the book with a chapter in which he gives some advice for future travellers and the tone is characteristically smug. The Basques in this case can be seen as a sort of fantasy, they would be that "other" into which the writer has successfully inserted himself. Prosper de Lagarde is another case in point. Though he makes much of his desire of seeing the Basques with his own eyes, of travelling into the Basque Country, his personal notes are mostly about the buildings he had the opportunity to visit at Bayonne or at St Jean de Luz. His comments on the Basques' customs, language and history are drawn from books (which he duly quotes) not from his personal observation.

If it is difficult to find a straightforward, unambiguous definition of the Basques in these texts, it is also hard to decide what the relation of the Basques with the other Spaniards exactly is. Of course, Stephens informs us that the Basque Country is as "distinct [...] from Spain, as Spain is from England", but in other places Stephens himself refers to the "Spanish courtesy and gravity" of the Basques in Durango. For his part, Michael Burke Honan finds, on arriving at Oñate, that women there "were all in black, with the mantilla and comb so truly

graceful and becoming to the Spanish women” (Honan, 1836: 100). Sidney Crocker and Bligh Barker are more direct than most when it comes to assert the relation between Basques and Spaniards:

The Vasques, or as they term themselves, the Escaldunes, do not consider themselves Spaniards, and differ widely from them, in character and language (Crocker & Barker 1839: explanation to plate 1);

that, anyway, does not prevent them from showing the contrast between the “melancholy gloom of unhappy Spain” and the “smiling fields of prosperous France”, South and North (respectively) of the frontier formed by the river Bidasoa (Crocker & Barker, 1839: explanation to plate 13). And to give but another example, Henningsen says “the courage of the Navarrese, and not only of the Navarrese, but of the Spaniards generally, is of a nature that requires some explanation”, thus implicitly including the Navarrese within the Spaniards (Henningsen, 1836: I, 63).

If in our travellers’ texts the image of the Basque Country has shifting borders, the limits of its relation to Spain are equally fuzzy. In my opinion, this fuzziness points towards a double paradox in these texts, a paradox regarding the travellers’ texts themselves and our attitude to them. The texts seem unable to define very precisely the Basque Country, whether Navarre does or does not belong to it or whether the Basque Country is or is not Spain. They seem to be unable to decide those issues but they try nevertheless, and it is not very difficult to come across strong statements about the radical difference, the utter distinctiveness of the Basques. And we do try as well. Confronted with the question of Basque identity, we approach travel literature searching for an answer. A foreign view on the Basques can be more perceptive than any other precisely because it is foreign. But perhaps (and this would be the paradox) the interest of these texts lies in that they give no straight answer to our questions, in their very inability to establish precise, well-drawn, clear-cut limits. Perhaps the point is not to look for a fixed definition of the Basques in the travellers’ accounts, but to recognize that Basque identity (and, for that matter, Spanish identity) is negotiated in every one of those texts. In other terms, that that lack of definition *is* the definition.

3. LIBERTIES OLD AND NEW

After the first Carlist war, when the time comes to think about its causes and effects, the Basques offer the opportunity to make a reflection of a wider intent, commenting on the relation between the new liberty introduced by the French Revolution and the old liberties such as those represented by the Basque *Fueros*. To be more precise, I think there are two texts which we can read in this light, Victor Hugo’s *Pyrénées* and Adolf Loning’s two books about the Spanish people and the Basque *Fueros* (Hugo, 2002; Loning, 1843 and 1844).

Hugo’s trip to the Basque Country was made in 1843 and the notes he took during his stay have won an unusual amount of attention from Basque scholars and writers, and have recently even been the object of a partial translation into

Basque (Aulestia, 1996; Azurmendi, 1985, 2002 and 2003). Especially his statements that “Spanish is a foreign language here [in the Basque Country], as is French” and his remarks on the attachment of the inhabitants to the Basque language have been of particular interest (Hugo, 2002: 781).¹⁰

Loning is a more problematic figure. At the beginning of his book *Das spanische Volk*, he affirms to have spent nine years in Spain (many of them in the Carlist army), what would apparently allow him to make a better description of the land and its inhabitants than usual. In fact, he underlines that in the title itself, where he claims his description of Spain’s customs and the episodes of the Carlist war are made *nach eigener Anschauung und Quellen*, i.e., after his own observation and sources. This would be all very well, were it not for the fact that he can be proved to have plagiarized some of his alleged observations from other books. For example, his narrative of Tomas Zumalacarre’s life is a translation, word by word, of that of Alexis Sabatier’s (compare Sabatier, 1836: xxii-xxviii and Loning, 1844: 124-132). Equally, his description of the Basque institutions in his book about the *Fueros* has been copied from C. J. E. Sain de Bois-le-Comte’s *Essai historique*. Moreover, Loning has a rather shameless attitude about this. After stealing from Sabatier’s work a conversation between Zumalacarre and liberal General Quesada, he states that he had “at several times the opportunity to hear that story from Zumalacarre himself”, which was why he “could not pass without recounting it here” (Loning, 1844: 129).¹¹ In the same vein, before describing the Basque *fueros*, he finds it proper to say that

it will be pleasant for the reader to receive some information about them, and the more so, because none of my predecessors, who have partially recounted the Carlists’ efforts, have taken the trouble to describe them exactly (Loning, 1843: 36).¹²

I have chosen to discuss Loning’s texts in spite of all that because I think that they offer an interesting counterpoint to Victor Hugo’s. Published at the time of Hugo’s trip, Loning’s books sometimes coincide with and sometimes disagree from the French in their analyses and comments. Plagiarism, insofar as it implies a selection of the materials to be plagiarized, does not, I think, entirely efface the authorial work, and I believe that Loning’s opinions and views can fruitfully be compared with those of Victor Hugo’s.

When approaching Hugo’s text, we should remember that it does not deal only with the Basque Country; the trip-diary contained in the *Pyrénées* starts in Bordeaux. I mention this because I think that the reflections made there are relevant to a better understanding of those made in the Basque Country itself. In

10. “La langue espagnole est ici étrangère comme la langue française”.

11. “Ich hatte zu verschiedenen Malen die Gelegenheit, diesen Auftritt von Zumalacarre selbst erzählen zu hören, weshalb ich auch nicht unterlassen habe, ihn hier anzuführen”.

12. The whole sentence reads as follows: “Da die *Fueros* der Basken und des Königreichs Navarra im letzten Kriege dieses Volkes mit der Madrider Regierung eine vorzügliche Rolle spielten, so wird es den Lesern gewiss angenehm sein, darüber etwas Näheres zu erfahren, um so mehr, da noch keiner meiner Vorgänger, die theilweise den Kampf der Carlisten erzählt, sich die Mühe genommen, diese genau zu bezeichnen”.

fact, there are a number of topics which reappear constantly throughout the *Pyrénées*, such as the burden of the past versus the fragility of the present or the old liberties versus the revolution. More generally, I would say the Victor Hugo is thinking critically about the legacy of the French revolution and trying to assess the importance of the past in that legacy. This is all, I would argue, present in his discussion of the Basque *fueros* and of Basque Carlism (as well as in his comments on the Basque language), but it is already present in the notes taken in Bordeaux. The city itself becomes a symbol of what I am saying.

Hugo finds that Bordeaux possesses a curious double physiognomy, the result of “time and hazard”; but now, he adds, new houses, built following the principles of “good taste”, are winning ground to the old historic city. “In other terms”, he says, “Bordeaux-Versailles is devouring Bordeaux-Anvers”, and he cautions its inhabitants against that process:

Anvers, all in all, is much more interesting for art, history and thought than Versailles. This latter does not represent but a man and a kingdom, Anvers represents a nation and several centuries. Keep the balance between both cities [...]. You have had a history, you have been a nation, remember it, be proud of it (Hugo, 2002: 754).¹³

Hugo, then, is exhorting the inhabitants of Bordeaux to keep alive the historic memory of the nation, as the words with which he ends his harangue show:

I have said it elsewhere, let us respect the buildings and the books; in them only is the past alive, whilst it is dead anywhere else. The past is part of us, the most essential part perhaps. The stream which carries us, the sap which enlivens us, it all comes from the past; what is a tree without roots? What is a brook without its source? What is a people without its past? (Hugo, 2002: 755).¹⁴

Later on, at Bayonne, Hugo will draw an explicit contrast between this profound and solid past of the nations he has extolled in Bordeaux and the fragility and superficiality of the political revolutions, and he will draw that contrast through a romantic and incredibly macabre scene. On his way to Bayonne he comes across groups of Spaniards going into exile due to General Espartero's fall from power. Some time later, at the cathedral of the Basque city, he remembers his visit to the church of St Michel of Bordeaux and, more specifically, to its charnel house; and, after giving us a fantastic description of all the circumstances of his stay down at the charnel house, of the contemplation of the mummies of about seventy corpses (the most ancient being some 800 years old), after offering us his thoughts on the secret, impalpable but constant presence of the past down there, embodied in

13. “Anvers, à tout prendre, est plus intéressant pour l’art, l’histoire et la pensée que Versailles. Versailles ne représente qu’un homme et un règne; Anvers représente tout un peuple, et plusieurs siècles. Maintenez donc l’équilibre entre les deux cités [...]. Vous avez eu une histoire, vous avez été une nation, souvenez vous-en, soyez-en fiers”.

14. “Je l’ai dit ailleurs, respectons les édifices et les livres; là seulement le passé est vivant; partout ailleurs il est mort. Or, le passé est une partie de nous-mêmes, la plus essentielle peut-être. Tout le flot qui nous porte, toute la sève qui nous vivifie nous vient du passé, qu’est-ce qu’un arbre sans racine? Qu’est-ce qu’un fleuve sans sa source? Qu’est-ce qu’un peuple sans son passé?”.

those old mummies, he then contrasts that vision with the fleetingness of political revolutions taking place up in the surface (Hugo, 2002: 773).

The density of the past as opposed to the thinness of the present. And that is what he will find in the Basque Country too. First of all, the Basques have their own liberties since time immemorial:

They already lived here [in the Basque Country] under a Charter at a time when France was still under the absolute and *très chrétienne* Monarchy and Spain under the absolute Catholic Monarchy. Since time immemorial, the people elect the *alcalde* and the *alcalde* governs the people. The *alcalde* is mayor; the *alcalde* is judge and belongs to the people. The curate belongs to the Pope. What is there left for the King? The soldier is. But if it is a Castilian soldier, the people will turn him down; if it is a Basque soldier, his heart will be with the *alcalde* and the curate; only his uniform will belong to the King (Hugo, 2002: 781).¹⁵

In this paragraph, Hugo affirms that a Castilian soldier would be seen as a foreigner by the Basque people. Indeed, he points out that the Basques form a group completely different from both Spain and France. Beyond or above the political frontiers established by both countries, there has been and still is – so Hugo says – the unity of the Basques, which has the language as its particular symbol:

I add here that, even despite the diplomatic frontiers set by political treaties, even despite the natural frontiers set by the Pyrenees, a deep and secret link, which nothing has yet been able to break, ties together all the members of the mysterious Basque family. The ancient word *Navarre* is not a word. One is born Basque, one speaks Basque, one lives Basque and one dies Basque. The Basque language is one's fatherland; I have nearly said one's religion. Speak a word in Basque to a highlander on a mountain; before that word, you were hardly a man to him; after it, you are his brother. Spanish is here a foreign language, as is French (Hugo, 2002: 781).¹⁶

It was perhaps to be expected that such a people with such an old tradition of republican liberties would be particularly well prepared to receive the ideas spread all over Europe by the French revolution: "Wrong. The old liberties fear the new liberty. The Basque people have proved that" (Hugo, 2002: 781).¹⁷ We are reaching now to the heart of Hugo's reasoning. It is because the old liberties fear the new liberty that

15. "Ici l'on vivait sous une charte tandis que la France était sous la monarchie absolue très chrétienne et l'Espagne sous la monarchie absolue catholique. Ici, depuis un temps immémorial le peuple élit l'alcalde, et l'alcalde gouverne le peuple. L'alcalde est maire, l'alcalde est juge, et il appartient au peuple. Le curé appartient au pape. Que reste-t-il au roi? Le soldat. Mais si c'est un soldat castillan, le peuple le rejettera; si c'est un soldat basque, le curé et l'alcalde auront son coeur; le roi n'aura que son uniforme".

16. "J'ajoute qu'ici un lien secret et profond et que rien n'a pu rompre unit, même en dépit des traités, ces frontières diplomatiques, même en dépit des Pyrénées, ces frontières naturelles, tous les membres de la mystérieuse famille basque. Le vieux mot Navarre n'est pas un mot. On naît basque, on parle basque, on vit basque et l'on meurt basque. La langue basque est une patrie, j'ai presque dit une religion. Dites un mot basque à un montagnard dans la montagne; avant ce mot, vous étiez à peine un homme pour lui; ce mot prononcé, vous voilà son frère. La langue espagnole est ici étrangère comme la langue française".

17. "Erreur. Les vieilles libertés craignent la liberté nouvelle. Le peuple basque l'a bien prouvé".

the free provinces of the Pyrenees have united forces with the supporters of the absolute monarchy both in the Carlist war and before. And that fear was not without reason, the same as this union was not, according to Hugo, without its logic:

Revolutions, we should insist on this point, do not treat old liberties less rudely than the old powers did. [...]. In the revolutionaries' language the old principles are called *prejudices*; the old facts, *abuses*. This all is true and false at the same time. Regardless whether they are republican or monarchical, old societies get filled up with abuses, as old men with wrinkles and old buildings with weeds. One should be able to distinguish, to weed out respecting the building, to clear up the abuses respecting the state of things. And that is exactly what revolutions can not and will not do. To distinguish, to choose, to weed out, as if they had time for such things! They do not come to tidy up the field but to shake the earth. A revolution is not a gardener; it is God's blow (Hugo 2002: 782).¹⁸

If the French revolution had wanted to start history afresh, Victor Hugo is showing that everything prior to the revolution was not despotism, that there were also liberties which should be taken into account. There was history before the revolution and that history was not only the history of Kings and Queens but also the history of the nation, of the French nation (as in Bordeaux) and of other nations (like the Basques). His appreciation of the Basques' attachment to their language should set, I think, against the backdrop of a revolution which had enthroned French as the language of reason and of freedom. And his appreciation of the Basques' distinctiveness, their separateness, should also be put in relation to the idea of France (or Spain) as indivisible nations. According to Hugo, it is when the Spanish Cortes "decreed the Spanish unity" that the "Basque unity" rose up in revolt. Below the surface of political revolutions, Hugo discovers the weight of history and thus engages critically with the legacy of the French revolution. Liberalism is not the only freedom, France and Spain are not the only nations, and French (or Spanish) are not the only languages; other people have their own attachments too and it is the revolution's lack of discrimination what has thrown them into the arms of absolutism.

I do not think we should take Victor Hugo for a Basque nationalist *avant la lettre*. In spite of all the quotations I have made here, he was definitely not for the independence of the Basques; he rather believed in their disappearance in a not very distant future:

Undoubtedly this Basque unity tends to decrease and will end up disappearing. Big states must absorb the smaller ones; it is the law of history and of nature (Hugo, 2002: 781).¹⁹

18. "Les révolutions, insistons sur ceci, ne traitent pas moins rudement les anciennes libertés que les anciens pouvoirs. [...]. Dans la langue révolutionnaire les vieux principes s'appellent préjugés, les vieux faits s'appellent abus. Cela est tout à la fois vrai et faux. Quelles qu'elles soient, républicaines ou monarchiques, les sociétés vieilles se remplissent d'abus, comme les vieux hommes de rides et les vieux édifices de ronces; mais il faudrait distinguer, arracher la ronce et respecter l'édifice, arracher l'abus et respecter l'état. C'est ce que les révolutions ne savent, ne veulent ni ne peuvent faire. Distinguer, choisir, élaguer, elles ont bien le temps vraiment! Elles ne viennent pas pour sarcler le champ, mais pour faire trembler la terre. Une révolution n'est pas un jardinier, c'est le souffle de Dieu".

19. "Sans doute cette unité vascongada tend à décroître et finira par disparaître. Les grands états doivent absorber les petits; c'est la loi de l'histoire et de la nature".

In any case, it is interesting that Hugo can spot the Basques as a separate nation and take them as an excuse to make a series of political comments. By pointing out that the indiscriminate attitude of the revolution towards the political systems such as that of the Basque Provinces had put them in the absolutist field, he is not bringing into question the legacy of the revolution but is underlining the need for a better understanding of the past in politics.

For his observations Hugo draws on what I have called the ethnographic view on the Basques. He speaks of them as a unity, as a big family. But all that does not exhaust the text of the *Pyrénées*, in which other elements also turn up. In particular, he applies to the Basques the Arab sort of exoticism common when talking about Spain. In the village of Pasages San Pedro, for example, he encounters a Moroccan landscape:

The street of the old Pasages is a true Arab street; massive, bumpy, whitewashed houses, with hardly some holes in their walls. Were it not for the roofs, one would imagine being in Tetuan (Hugo, 2002: 805).²⁰

And he tells us later that the sun makes of Pamplona – “ceci est bien la vraie Espagne”; “this is the real Spain” – almost an Oriental city (Hugo, 2002: 820, 828).

Compared with Hugo's, Adolf Loning's texts, *Das spanische Volk* and *Die Fueros*, are much simpler. As the title of one of his books suggests, he has a general interest in the Spanish people, and he sees the Basques' distinctiveness, which he readily acknowledges, as one example of the diversity and variety of Spain's population:

No land in the world, united in an all-embracing State, standing under the same Sceptre, and calling itself a nation, contains more differences within it than Spain does. The Galician is a complete stranger to the Navarrese, and the Andalusian to the Catalan. And they are different not only in their clothing, but also in their housing and even in their very language (Loning, 1844: 201).²¹

In a way consistent with this view, he touches on the Basques' love of the *pelota* game in the wider context of a discussion of the Spaniards' penchant for all kind of games and gambles (Loning, 1844: 264-265).

If we do not find in Loning as clear-cut a statement as those we have found in Hugo regarding the Basques being a nation, it is nonetheless significant that the German traveller decided to publish a book about the Basque *fueros*, consid-

20. “La rue du vieux Pasages est une vraie rue arabe; maisons blanchies, massives, cahotées, à peine percées de quelques trous. S'il n'y avait les toits, on se croirait à Tétuan”.

21. “Wohl kein Land der Welt, welches einen zusammenhängenden Staat bildet, unter einem Scepter steht und eine Nation mit demselben Namen in sich enthält, ist mehr unter sich verschieden, als Spanien. Ganz fremd ist dem Navarresen der Galizier, der Andalusier dem Catalanier. Nicht allein durch ihre Kleidung, sondern auch im ganzen häuslichen Wesen, ja sogar in der Sprache sind sie gänzlich verschieden”.

ering that a proper explanation of what they really were would enlighten the reader about the causes of the Carlist war.²²

In the first part of *Die Fueros*, Loning discusses the origins of the Carlist war and, in order to do that, he goes back to the times of the Peninsular War. If the Spaniards were successful in their fight against Napoleon, if the invasion of Spain “brought this world conqueror no benefit”, the seed of the ideas of the French revolution was nevertheless sowed on Spanish soil; accordingly, the Spaniards themselves thought it necessary, due to the Enlightenment newly introduced by Napoleon, “to give the country a new Constitution” (Loning, 1843: 4).²³ Like Hugo, then, Loning too is dealing with the consequences of the French revolution, but, unlike the French poet, he does not want to refine or to improve that legacy by taking into account the importance of the past; his thinking points rather in another direction, namely, how to contain the revolution’s effects. At the end of this first part of *Die Fueros*, Loning asks when the wounds caused by the war in Spain might finally be healed. And this is his answer:

When the current situation will end, God alone knows! But if I should be asked for my opinion, this would be my answer: let the Constitution be abolished and the Estatuto Real re-established; let the Carlists and the Moderados unite forces and chase the Exaltados out of the country; let [Queen] Ysabel marry the [Carlist] Prince of Asturias and the Basques be given back their *fueros*, of which they have so unjustly been robbed; Spain will then be peaceful and happy. A lasting peace would heal the wounds caused by a ten-year war (Loning, 1843: 33-34).²⁴

Moderation is the answer for Loning. The re-institution of the Ferdinand VII’s Royal Charter, allowing some liberties but keeping the monarch’s power well in its place, instead of a Constitution; the alliance of Carlists and Moderates and the throwing out of the Radicals out of the country; these are Loning’s solutions for Spain. The lessons he draws from the Carlist war and the Basque *fueros* are then diametrically opposed to those drawn by Victor Hugo: not how to improve

22. I have already mentioned that a large part of Loning’s *Die Fueros des Königreich Navarra und der baskischen Provinzen* had been copied literally from C. J. E. Sain de Bois-le-Comte’s *Essai historique*. The French book, however, is much longer and deals with other topics. The relevant point here is that Loning chose specifically to publish a book on the Fueros as a way of explaining the reasons leading to the Carlist war and the Basques’ attitude in it, even if he plagiarized much of the information he gives.

23. The whole paragraph reads: “Brachte auch diesen Weltoberer der spanische Krieg keinen Gewinn, so hat er doch durch denselben auf Spanien erfolgreich eingewirkt. Auch hier wurden jetzt Grundsätze bekannt, die mit den alten Gebräuchen sich nicht vertrugen; und obgleich ganz Spanien sich damals vereinigte, den verhassten Fremdling über die Pyrenäen zurückzuwerfen, so hielt man es doch für nöthig, wegen der von ihm hervorgerufenen politischen Aufklärung, dem Lande eine andere Verfassung zu geben”.

24. “Wann aber die jetzige Zustand aufhören wird, das weiss Gott allein! Würde ich um meine Meinung gefragt, wo würde ich zur Antwort geben: Man hebe die Constitution auf, stelle das Estatuto Real wieder her, vereinige Carlisten und Moderados, und jage die Exaltados aus dem Lande, verheirathe Ysabel mit dem Prinzen von Asturien und gebe den Basken die Fueros wieder, die gegen alles Recht ihnen genommen worden; alsdann wird Spanien ruhig und glücklich sein. Ein dauerhafter Friede würde bald die Wunden hiele Cuad., 2, 2008.

the revolution, but how to keep its effects at bay as much as possible. Loning does not see any contradiction between the Basque Country being a land of liberty and the Basques fighting for Don Carlos. For him, those liberties are probably part of the landscape of traditional Spain, the Spain the Carlists are fighting for. For the French writer, however, there is a contradiction. A land of freedom such as (in his view) the Basque Provinces were ought to have been more ready and better prepared than any other to welcome the novelties brought about by the French revolution. Therefore, that the Basques had fought for the absolute monarchy was something that needed explaining. Hugo finds the key in the revolution's inability to draw fine distinctions, in its failure to appreciate the liberties already existent under the Ancien Régime.

Victor Hugo and Adolf Loning, writing at the same time, about the same people (the Basques), and on the same topic (liberties old and new) give us quite diverging views, even if both have similar starting points. They both agree to underscore the Basques' singularity, though this is more intensely underlined by the French than by the German; both point out their possessing a particular language, different customs and their own system of political government; and for both the importance of this latter in the Carlist war is one of the main points of discussion. And there comes the disagreement between a traditionalist and a liberal interpretation of the Basque *fueros*. For Loning, who has fought for God and King in the Carlist war, the solution lies in restricting liberalism as much as possible or, in other words, in adapting the traditional monarchy to the new times only as little as necessary. For Hugo, who compares the Carlist war to similar conflicts in France, such as the Vendée, and who sees them as a reaction to certain excesses of the French revolution, the solution lies in taking notice of the importance of history and of the attachment of nations to their past. History did not start in 1789, is Hugo's message.

Before and after the Carlist War, we see the image of the Basques changing. The travellers disagree as to their borders, their traits, the importance of their political system, but through all those comments and discussions a certain image of them slowly emerges. During the 19th century, as Victor Hugo's and Adolf Loning's conflicting views show, the Basque will continue offering an apt object for political debate. Similarly, we also find a growing conscience of the Basques as a singular group, defined by certain particular traits. As the travellers' views, the Basques' views on themselves show deep disagreements and important divergences among them. All this confirms, I think, that our travellers were not expressing their thoughts in the void, but were being part of a wider debate in which the Basques themselves would have something to say. How and when the Basques received the travellers' texts, what use they made of those travel accounts such as the ones mentioned in this article, what influence they had in the Basques' self-fashioning: all these are, I believe, intriguing questions, but ones which, for the moment, go beyond the limits of this essay.

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