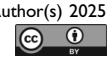
Article

European History Quarterly
2025, Vol. 55(2) 263–286



DOI: 10.1177/02656914251323829
journals.sagepub.com/home/ehq


French Legitimists and Spanish Carlists: Transnational Ultra-Conservative Solidarity During Spain's First Carlist War, 1833–1840

Talitha Ilacqua
Durham University, Durham, UK

Abstract

When the First Carlist War (1833–1840) broke out in Spain between the queen regent María Cristina, supported by the liberals, and the absolutist pretender Don Carlos, French legitimists portrayed it as a clash of civilizations between absolutism and liberalism. As supporters of the eldest branch of the Bourbon dynasty who had governed France from 1589 to 1792 and then again from 1814–1815 to 1830, legitimists had been ousted from power by the July Revolution in 1830. Three years later, they regarded Don Carlos's mission to regain the Spanish throne as their latest hope for the restoration of absolutism in France and Europe. Although historians have largely portrayed the 1830s as a decade in which legitimists had little say in politics, the liveliness of the French legitimist press during the First Carlist War reveals that legitimists were far from quiet. Their support of Don Carlos contributed to the definition of a coherent set of reactionary ideas, which contributed to making legitimism a credible political alternative in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Keywords

Carlism, First Carlist War, French legitimist political thought, French ultra-royalism, modern French history, modern Spanish history, nineteenth-century French history, transnational political thought

Corresponding author:
Talitha Ilacqua, Durham University, Durham, UK.
Email: talitha.ilacqua@durham.ac.uk

On 1 February 1837, the French legitimist newspaper *L'Europe* commented on the ongoing Spanish civil war between conservatives and liberals, arguing that '[t]he diatribe between King Don Carlos and the revolutionary government in Madrid is not only Spanish; everyone knows that it is European; but what is essential for us to remark is that it is first and foremost [a] French [question]'.[1] When a dynastic conflict broke out in Spain in 1833 between the queen regent María Cristina, supported by the liberals, and her reactionary brother-in-law Don Carlos, the French legitimist press immediately started portraying it as an ideological battlefield between absolutism and the rising forces of liberalism and revolution. At stake, it argued, was not only the political future of Spain, but that of France and of Europe as a whole. The First Carlist War began at the end of three disastrous years for French legitimism. In July 1830, the restored Bourbon conservative government of King Charles X was overthrown and replaced by the more liberal regime of Louis-Philippe, a member of the cadet branch of the Bourbon family of the Orléans. Two years later, Charles X's supporters, by then known as legitimists, failed to regain power by force after an ultra-royalist uprising in the Vendée led by the Duchesse de Berry was crushed by governmental forces. Disillusioned with domestic politics, legitimists turned abroad for support. The championing of Don Carlos's cause in Spain represented both a sign of hope for the restoration of legitimism in France and a distraction from the embarrassment of the Vendean defeat.[2]

As supporters of the eldest branch of the Bourbon dynasty that had governed France from 1589 to 1792 and then again from 1814–1815 to 1830, legitimists believed that the throne belonged to them by historical right. They perceived the deposition of Louis XVI in 1792, Napoleon Bonaparte's proclamation of the First Empire in 1804 and the toppling of Charles X in 1830 as a series of usurpations, which deviated France from its predestined path. While legitimists ascribed Louis-Philippe's ascent to the throne to the same revolutionary and liberal forces that had disrupted the European order since 1789, they also acknowledged that his usurpation was different, because it challenged the eldest Bourbons' suitability to rule France, not the principle of monarchy itself. As a result, the advent of the July Monarchy forced legitimists to redefine what constituted the legitimist monarchy and contributed to positioning legitimism more coherently at the reactionary end of political conservatism.[3] While legitimism rested on the *ancien-régime* principles of a monarchical, hierarchical and religious society, ultra-royalists were not mere counterrevolutionaries who aimed to return to the past. As historians have remarked, they were aware that the French Revolution had destroyed the political,

[1] *L'Europe*, 1 February 1837: 'La question entre le roi don Carlos et le gouvernement révolutionnaire de Madrid n'est pas seulement espagnole; chacun sent qu'elle est européenne; mais ce qu'il est essentiel pour nous de remarquer, c'est qu'elle est, avant tout, et surtout, française'. Translations are my own. French spelling reflects the original.

[2] Jean-Philippe Luis, 'France and Spain: A Common Territory of Anti-Revolution (End of the 18th Century–1880)', in Matthijs Lok, Friedemann Pestel and Juliette Reboul, eds, *Cosmopolitan Conservatisms: Countering Revolution in Transnational Networks, Ideas and Movements (c.1700–1930)* (Leiden 2021), 272.

[3] Olivier Tort, *La Droite française. Aux origines de ses divisions, 1814–1830* (Paris 2013), 16.

social and ideological preconditions of the absolutist monarchy forever.[4] Additionally, they were fearful of a return to the factionalism that had defined the eighteenth century.[5] Instead, they aimed to reconstruct a social edifice that was based on the principles of the throne and the altar, but that equally married power and liberty, the monarchy and the nation. They insisted that legitimism, not liberalism, was the real ideology of the people and, on such a premise, they developed a novel outlook on the social question, blaming the growing misery of the urban proletariat on the liberal capitalist bourgeoisie who supported Louis-Philippe's regime.[6] Their commitment to moral regeneration, they maintained, would result in a new social order, which would promote people's interests within a naturally hierarchical society and would eliminate the need for alternative ideologies.[7] In this sense, legitimists spoke the language of nineteenth-century politics as a precondition to preserve their relevance in the French political arena.

Given the apparent similarities between the dynastic conflicts in France and Spain, legitimists took the outbreak of the civil war in Spain in 1833 as an opportunity both to draw an ideological distinction between legitimism and revolutionary liberalism and to attack the July Monarchy. The dynastic conflict that triggered the First Carlist War began in 1830. On 29 April, King Fernando VII repealed Salic Law, which, upon his death, would have crowned his brother Carlos the next king of Spain, and issued the *Pragmática Sanción*, a mixed-succession system of inheritance law that made his toddler daughter Isabel first in line to the throne. Upon his death, on 29 September 1833, Isabel inherited the crown under the regency of her mother, María Cristina.[8] Don Carlos – or Carlos V for his supporters – rejected the overruling of the traditional male line of succession and took up arms to defend his right to kingship. Two factions fought bitterly until María Cristina's victory in 1840: the Carlists on the one hand, who preached a return to an *ancien-régime* style of monarchy and administrative decentralization, and the *cristinos* on the other, who, from 1834, stood for constitutionalism and centralization. Both sides solicited international help. The Carlists gained the support of absolutist Europe, which included Russia, Prussia, the Habsburg Empire and the Holy See, though only the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and The Kingdom of Sardinia offered Don Carlos official diplomatic recognition.[9] The *cristinos*, on their part, were backed by the liberal governments of France and Britain. In 1834, Paris and London signed the Quadruple Alliance with Spain and Portugal in order to expel from Portuguese territory Don Carlos, who had been living there since March 1833, as well

[4] Steven D. Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society, 1852–1883* (Baton Rouge, LA 1992), 10–14.

[5] Michael Broers, *Europe after Napoleon: Revolution, Reaction and Romanticism, 1814–1848* (Manchester 1996), 56.

[6] Tort, *La Droite française*, 284.

[7] Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society*, 13.

[8] The *Pragmática Sanción* ratified a decree issued by King Carlos IV and approved by the Cortes in 1789, which replaced the system of semi-Salic Law with a mixed-succession system that predated the Bourbon dynasty.

[9] John F. Coverdale, *The Basque Phase of Spain's First Carlist War* (Princeton, NJ 1984), 170.

as the deposed Portuguese absolutist king Miguel I.[10] Although both sides were reluctant to send military aid to Spain, the alliance system contributed to an ideological crystallization of the conflict. Rejecting France's formal position, French legitimists presented themselves as the Carlists' staunchest supporters. They made use of a numerous and vociferous press, which included such newspapers and periodicals as *L'Europe*, *La Gazette de France*, *Le Légitimiste*, *La Mode*, *La Quotidienne* and *Le Rénovateur*. The papers displayed 'an exaggerated enthusiasm' for Don Carlos's mission, reporting daily on the conflict and predicting a Carlist victory with boundless optimism.[11]

The importance of the French legitimist press on the ideological conceptualization and diffusion of Don Carlos's mission cannot be understated. Except for the military bulletin *Ejército del Rey N. S. Don Carlos V*, which began appearing in late 1833, Carlism lacked an official press organ until October 1835 when Miguel Sanz y Lafuente founded the *Gaceta de Oñate*.[12] As such, in the critical first two years of the war, the French legitimist press, which possessed a European readership, arguably served as an unofficial organ of the Spanish Carlist cause. It advanced the Carlist cause in two main ways. First, by equating Carlism with legitimism, it contributed to Don Carlos's aspiration of presenting Carlism as a valid European political ideology, rather than a mere Spanish dynastic conflict.[13] Second, the extensive press coverage helped to mobilize European legitimist public opinion. Especially receptive were the aristocracy, who associated Carlism with Romantic notions of medieval honour that they believed had been lost in liberal Europe. In France, as in the rest of the continent, partisans of absolutism raised funds to support the Carlist war effort and appealed to volunteer fighters. As a result, between 120 and 250 foreign volunteers, one fourth of whom were of noble origin, travelled to Spain to fight in the Carlist ranks. French legitimists were the most numerous, followed by a Prussian contingent, who placed their Protestant piety at the service of a pan-European legitimist cause against the rising threat of liberalism.[14] Later, volunteers recorded their experience in popular memoirs, where they defined the conflict in terms of a clash of civilizations. Significantly, the influence of the French legitimist press continued also after the foundation of the *Gaceta Oficial*. The first two pages of the biweekly newspaper were usually dedicated to a summary of the political commentary of the pro-Carlist press in France and Britain. Throughout the course of the war, the legitimacy of the Carlist cause relied, in part, on the foreign coverage of the conflict.

[10] On the position of the European powers vis-à-vis Carlism, see Mariano de la Cámara Cumella, *La política exterior del carlismo (1833–1839)* (Seville 1933).

[11] Laëtitia Blanchard Rubio, 'La Première guerre carliste ou la guerre de la dernière chance: la communauté légitimiste face à son destin', *Amnis*, Vol. 10 (2011), np.

[12] The *Gaceta de Oñate* was known as *Gaceta Oficial* from 1835 to 1837 and as *Boletín de Navarra y Provincias Vascongadas* from 1837 to 1839. On the Carlist press, see José Ramón Urquijo Goitia, 'Prensa carlista durante la primera guerra (1833–1840)', in Alberto Gil Novales, ed., *La prensa en la Revolución Liberal* (Madrid 1983), 319–36.

[13] Juan Pedro Recio Cuesta, 'El ideario carlista durante la primera guerra: el caso de la *Gaceta Oficial de Oñate* (1835–1837)', in Juan Carlos Colomer Rubio, Javier Esteve Martí and Mélanie Ibáñez Domingo, eds, *Ayer y hoy. Debates, historiografía y didáctica de la historia* (Valencia 2015), 117.

[14] Mark Lawrence, *Spain's First Carlist War, 1833–40* (London 2014), 69.

French ultra-royalists identified in the war many of the same components of their own crusade. They regarded Don Carlos as the legitimate monarch of Spain whose right to the throne had been usurped by the future Isabel II, exactly as Charles X was the legitimate king of France, who had been ousted by the usurper Louis-Philippe. Don Carlos's commitment to the restoration of absolutism against María Cristina's liberalism, moreover, shared similarities with the way in which legitimists contrasted Charles X's *ancien-régime* style of kingship with the July Monarchy's liberal one. Significantly, legitimists' depiction of the *cristinos* was largely exaggerated. For one thing, María Cristina, very much like Louis-Philippe, was not as much of a liberal as the legitimist press portrayed her. She was an absolutist, whose husband had begged for French military aid in 1823 in order to restore absolutism in Spain after the Liberal Triennium (1820–1823). She was forced to seek liberals' help in response to the Carlist uprising but always felt at odds with the progressive policies of her liberal governments. Moreover, the *cristinos* themselves did not identify with liberalism from the start. Liberals came to power only in 1834, when the army pressured María Cristina to end the premiership of Francisco Cea Bermúdez. His successor, the moderate liberal Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, promulgated a new constitution, the *Estatuto Real*, which put an end to the period of absolutism that had followed France's invasion of Spain of 1823.[15] Finally, except for the radical reforms of the Mendizábal government in 1835–1836, the liberal transformation of Spain in the 1830s was mostly gradual and moderate, not violent and tyrannical as legitimists had it. The *Estatuto Real* itself, for example, represented Martínez de la Rosa's attempt to bridge the divide between Spain's two factions.[16] Similarly, the Carlists were hardly as coherent a group as the legitimists portrayed them. In the wake of the Liberal Triennium, Don Carlos's cause attracted anyone who opposed the notion of revolution and Carlist supporters thus ranged from moderate liberals to ultra-reactionaries. According to Carlos Seco Serrano, some realists who embraced the reactionary principles of the *Manifiesto de los Persas* of 1814 even viewed Don Carlos himself as a cause of revolution and a hindrance to the reestablishment of absolutism in Spain. As a result, Carlism lacked a defined ideological foundation in 1833.[17] Ultra-royalist propaganda, nevertheless, had no time for such nuances. Legitimists advertised Don Carlos's victory in Spain as desirable for France too, as they believed it would weaken Louis-Philippe's legitimacy and set out the preconditions for the restoration of the legitimist pretender, the Duc d'Angoulême, to the French throne. Legitimists, then, played a pivotal role in turning an all-Spanish dynastic conflict into a confrontation between incompatible political ideologies that, they claimed, would determine the future of France and Europe.

Since Louis-Philippe's regime ruled against intervening in Spain, historians have primarily treated the First Carlist War as a Spanish domestic conflict, with little in the way of

[15] Carlos Seco Serrano, *Historia del conservadurismo español. Una línea política integradora en el siglo XIX* (Madrid 2000), 55–6.

[16] Lawrence, *Spain's First Carlist War*, 66 and 74; Seco Serrano, *Historia del conservadurismo español*, 55.

[17] Carlos Seco Serrano, *Tríptico carlista. Estudios sobre historia del carlismo* (Barcelona 1973), 52–5.

repercussions on France and the rest of the continent.[18] As a result, scholars have studied European powers' reactions to the war,[19] but they have largely overlooked its influence on European political ideas and, in particular, on French legitimist political thought.[20] Additionally, while much has been written about royalists during the Restoration,[21] little has been produced on French legitimism in the years after the deposition of Charles X.[22] Historians have largely portrayed the 1830s as a decade in which legitimists exiled themselves to the countryside, only to reappear in the second half of the century.[23] Yet the liveliness of the French legitimist press during the First Carlist War reveals that legitimists remained active in the 1830s, albeit through different, less official organs than parliamentary politics. Their support of Don Carlos's cause in Spain strengthened the transnational conceptualization of their reactionary ideology, which contributed to making legitimism a credible political alternative in France in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The remainder of the article is divided into three sections. The first part analyses legitimists' historical and geographical contextualization of the First Carlist War within European political developments since 1789. Their insistence that the conflict was a European ideological war fostered a sense of transnational ultra-conservative solidarity across the continent. The second section looks at how legitimists contrasted María Cristina and Don Carlos in order to conceptualize the key principles of legitimist monarchism. In particular, they claimed that legitimism stood for both liberty and local liberties, which made ultra-royalism the real cause of the people. Finally, the third part studies legitimists' understanding of the impact of the Carlist War on France's international relations. They claimed that by supporting Don Carlos, they protected France's position in Europe and the European balance of powers as a whole. As such, they concluded, the legitimist monarchy was the only truly patriotic regime.

[18] Some work has been produced on the idea of an *internationale blanche* in the nineteenth century, but little attention has been paid to the Carlist War. See Matthijs Lok, Friedemann Pestel and Juliette Reboul, eds, *Cosmopolitan Conservatisms: Countering Revolution in Transnational Networks, Ideas and Movements (c. 1770–1930)* (Leiden 2021). On the First Carlist War in Spain, see Lawrence, *Spain's First Carlist War*; Coverdale, *The Basque Phase of Spain's First Carlist War*.

[19] See, for example, De la Cámara Cumella, *La política exterior del carlismo*; Emilio Condado, *La intervención francesa en España (1835–1839)* (Madrid 2002).

[20] A notable exception for France is the work of Laëtitia Blanchard Rubio. See Blanchard Rubio, 'La Première guerre carliste ou la guerre de la dernière chance'; Laëtitia Blanchard Rubio, 'La Mémoire du conflit carliste et ses enjeux: entre usage politique et mise en ordre du passé', *Amnis*, Vol. 18 (2019). For Britain, see Carlos Santacara, *La primera guerra carlista vista por los británicos, 1833–1840* (Madrid 2015).

[21] Tort, *La Droite française*; Francis Démier, *La France de la Restauration, 1814–1830: l'impossible retour du passé* (Paris 2012).

[22] One exception is Hugues de Changy, *Le Mouvement légitimiste sous la Monarchie de Juillet (1833–1848)* (Rennes 2004).

[23] See, for example, Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society*; Bernard Rulof, *Popular Legitimism and the Monarchy in France: Mass Politics without Parties, 1830–1880* (London 2020); Jean Charbonnel, *Les Légitimistes. De Chateaubriand à de Gaulle* (Paris 2006).

A European War

Legitimists regarded the Carlist War as the continuation of a conflict between legitimism and liberalism, monarchy and revolution that had started with the French Revolution of 1789 and, after a 15-year hiatus following the fall of Napoleon, had resumed in 1830. Although liberal and absolutist governments had been alternating in Spain since the proclamation of the liberal *Constitución de Cádiz* of 1812, French ultra-royalists portrayed their southern neighbour as a cradle of European reactionary conservatism, which was only then succumbing to the same liberal and revolutionary forces that had already spread across much of Europe.[24] While the revolution had now crossed the Pyrenees, they claimed, its nature had not changed. It still violated the law, enforced change by means of violence and dispossessed the clergy of their property, as it had done during the Revolutionary Terror of 1793–1794.[25] The *année terrible* of 1793, with the assassination of Louis XVI and the beginning of the Terror, which targeted primarily the aristocracy and religion, represented a symbolic milestone in legitimists' popular memory, as well as a point of reference with which they compared subsequent attempts on the monarchy and on religion.[26] In this respect, María Cristina was an easy target. Not only had she seized power illegally in 1833 but, between 1835 and 1837, her government confiscated ecclesiastical property and abolished feudalism.[27] *La Mode*, for instance, wrote in 1836 that '[b]etween the butchers of 93 and the Spanish butchers, there are no Pyrenees left [il n'y a plus de Pyrénées]', making reference, somewhat ironically, to the phrase that Louis XIV had alleged pronounced after placing a fellow Bourbon on the throne of Spain in 1700.[28] María Cristina, *La Mode* added four years later, was a 'hideous parodist of the revolution of 93'.[29] As revolutions always caused disorder, legitimists believed, it was not surprising that contemporary Spain was experiencing the same level of violence, desecration and cupidity that France had endured in 1793.

Despite their sombre depiction of the Spanish civil war, legitimists remained optimistic about the future. They presented two main arguments for the success of the legitimist cause. On the one hand, they reminded their readership that 1793 was also the year of the beginning of the counterrevolutionary war in the French region of the Vendée, which symbolized the site of heroic resistance to the Revolution. Although the Vendean conflict officially ended in 1800, its ideals lived on and were currently pursued by Don Carlos, the latest embodiment of the ultra-royalist cause. As the Vendée represented a crucial ideological bond between several generations of legitimist fighters,[30] French volunteers in the Carlist War claimed to be carrying on the counterrevolutionary mission that had begun 40

[24] *La Gazette de France*, 11 October 1833.

[25] *La Mode*, 1 January 1840; *La Quotidienne*, 5 October 1836.

[26] Charbonnel, *Les Légitimistes*, 43.

[27] Mark Lawrence, *Nineteenth-Century Spain: A New History* (Abingdon 2020), 77.

[28] *La Mode*, 1 January 1836: 'Entre les massacreurs de 93 et les massacreurs espagnols, il n'y a pas-de Pyrénées; alors c'était en France, maintenant c'est en Espagne'.

[29] *La Mode*, 1 January 1840: 'hideuse parodiste de la révolution de 93'.

[30] Charbonnel, *Les Légitimistes*, 43; Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven, CT 1994), 27.

years earlier. Spain, in this respect, was the new Vendée: a holy site where legitimists pursued their fight for survival in the name of the sacred principles of the throne and the altar. On the other hand, legitimists believed that the restoration of Louis XVIII to the throne of France in 1814–1815 after two decades of revolutionary upheaval showed that the doctrine of revolution caused disruption but did not develop roots. As *Le Rénovateur* explained, the Revolution assassinated the king but could not kill off the principle of royalty. 'The doctrines that spread peacefully are those that remain', it wrote.[31] The same pattern of events, legitimists predicted, would occur in Spain and Don Carlos would ultimately succeed.

Although the Bourbon Restoration was characterized by bitter divisions within the royalist party,[32] legitimists after 1830 described it as a time of peace and glory, when France was prosperous at home and respected abroad. Such prosperity, *Le Légitimiste* argued, could be achieved only under a legitimist government,[33] because only legitimism provided the conditions of law, stability and hierarchy necessary for a harmonious society. The return of revolution in 1830, ultra-royalists claimed, did not result from the inherent weakness of royalist principles, nor was it indicative of the will of the people.[34] Rather, it was the baleful outcome of a new political ideology that had corrupted even the principle of monarchy and dynastic succession: the *doctrinaires'* notion of the *juste milieu*. The *doctrinaires* were a group of liberals who, during the Restoration, had distinguished themselves for trying to find a middle ground between reaction and revolution, absolutism and democracy. Ultra-royalists regarded such attempt at compromise as self-serving and morally corrupted. Additionally, they did not forgive the *doctrinaires* for supporting the July Revolution in 1830 and regarded the fact that such liberal royalists as Adolphe Thiers, François Guizot and the Duc de Broglie held powerful positions under the July Monarchy as the ultimate sign of betrayal.[35]

Rather than operating on virtuous principles, legitimists claimed, the *juste milieu* was governed by two main iniquitous notions: self-interest and revolutionary violence. They distinguished between legitimism, which operated on the basis of historical right, and the *juste milieu*, whose principles and actions were situational. While tradition provided stability, they explained, the overthrow of established norms caused instability and civil strife, which the *juste milieu* encouraged in order to stay in power.[36] *La Quotidienne*, for example, wrote that the nature of the *juste milieu* was 'a nature of chance, the work of violence and deceit, born of insurrection … relying on no principles, equally hostile to legitimacy and to the sovereignty of the people, and foreign to any morality

[31] *Le Rénovateur*, 6 March 1835: 'Les doctrines qui se propagent par la paix sont celles qui restent'.

[32] Tort, *La Droite française*, 17.

[33] *Le Légitimiste*, 5 July 1834.

[34] *La Gazette de France*, 10 March 1835.

[35] *La Mode*, 1 January 1836.

[36] *La Quotidienne*, 8 October 1833.

but that of success'.[37] As a result, legitimists argued, in 1830 Louis-Philippe had released France from its natural monarchical status that had lasted for 14 centuries and had replaced the national interest with the revolutionary interest.[38] The country that emerged from the July Revolution was not the real France, because the latter could only be represented by a legitimate monarch. It was 'the France of July', [39] ruled by a new 'royalty of the barricades'.[40]

Legitimists regarded the Carlist War as the conclusion of a new *juste milieu*-inspired revolutionary movement that was born in France in 1830 and had since then travelled across most of Europe. Among the *juste milieu*'s successes, they believed, was the creation of an independent Kingdom of Belgium under a liberal constitutional monarchy supported by Great Britain, nationalist uprisings across the Italian peninsula, and Russian Poland's November Uprising against the tsarist regime, which engendered revolts in other parts of the Russian Empire. Although these revolts had many different matrixes, legitimists accused liberals of being the trigger behind all of them. After Belgium, Britain, Poland, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Switzerland, *La Quotidienne* wrote, '[n]ow it is the moment of Spain. The French *juste milieu* is now completing its tour of Europe'.[41] In 1835, ultra-royalists associated every Spanish prime minister since Fernando VII's death with the *juste milieu*, although the first three – Cea de Bermúdez, Martínez de la Rosa and the Conde de Toreno – were moderate liberals, while Mendizábal was a progressive. Since Don Carlos's return to Spain from exile in July 1834, though, legitimists claimed, the *juste milieu* had started to vacillate under pressure from the pretender's 'legitimate rights'. Spaniards, they warned, would soon oust Mendizábal from power by favouring monarchy, religion and restoration over anarchy, impiety and revolution.[42]

Given the European dimension of the crisis, legitimists warned absolutist regimes across Europe that they were making a dangerous error of judgement in dismissing the war in Spain as an insular conflict. Indeed, Prussia, Russia and Austria sided with the Carlists but refused to offer them official recognition, while Pope Gregory XVI, although upset by the anticlerical policies of the Mendizábal government, declined to take any official stance if the northern absolutist powers did not.[43] As a result of such inertia, ultra-royalists claimed, the outcome of the war would soon have repercussions on the rest of the continent. *La Gazette de France*, for example, described the fall of Don Carlos in Spain as a symbolic event, which exposed the fragility of the old European monarchies.

[37] *La Quotidienne*, 24 February 1834: 'Sa nature était, si l'on peut dire, une nature de hasard, œuvre de violence et de ruse, sortie de l'insurrection et la reniant après en être sortie, ne s'appuyant sur aucun principe, également ennemie de la légitimité et de la souveraineté du peuple, et étrangère à toute autre morale qu'à celle du succès'.

[38] *La Quotidienne*, 19 December 1833.

[39] *La Gazette de France*, 19 January 1835: 'la France de juillet'.

[40] *La Quotidienne*, 20 April 1834: 'royauté des barricades'.

[41] *La Quotidienne*, 20 October 1833: 'C'est aujourd'hui le moment de l'Espagne. Le juste-milieu français achève à présent son tour d'Europe'.

[42] *Gaceta Oficial*, 17 November 1835: 'legítimos derechos'. The *Gaceta Oficial* was citing *La Gazette de France*.

[43] Coverdale, *The Basque Phase of Spain's First Carlist War*, 170–1.

'It is not only the banner of Don Carlos that fell in Spain', it claimed, 'it is the banner of the old European legitimacy'.[44] Legitimists rallied European absolutist monarchs to support the Spanish pretender, claiming that only a legitimist victory would ensure the survival of the other absolutist monarchies still holding power in Europe. *Le Rénovateur*, for one, wrote that if European monarchs did not do everything in their power to ensure Don Carlos's victory in Spain, they would soon see legitimism succumb in Berlin and in Vienna too. '[I]f [Spain] were to fall momentarily', it claimed, 'Europe as a whole would enter the revolutionary track without any hope of return'.[45] The argument for the European dimension of the Carlist cause was similarly advanced by the Carlist *Gaceta Oficial* in one of its first numbers in November 1835. 'The question that is weighing on all of Europe today, that is, [that of] *revolution and legitimacy*', it wrote, 'is going to be decided in Spain'.[46] The future of Europe, French legitimists and Spanish Carlists agreed, depended on the outcome of the war in Spain.

Legitimism Means Liberty: Ultra-Royalism in the Domestic Sphere

Facing a European-wide crisis of legitimacy, legitimists took the Carlist War as an opportunity to define the meaning of reactionary monarchism in the nineteenth century. From the start, they presented it as a conflict between two antithetical principles: legitimist royalism and revolutionary liberalism. On the one hand, they identified Don Carlos as the embodiment of the legitimist cause and its principles. As the rightful successor to the Spanish throne by Salic Law, he stood for law and order, liberty, tradition, religion and dynastic rule. *La Quotidienne*, for instance, wrote that Don Carlos represented 'the political law of the country'. He was 'the symbol of order', who 'ruled on the basis of the order of succession'.[47] Such a depiction mirrored the manifesto that Don Carlos himself had issued to the Spanish people in the aftermath of his brother's death. There, he defended his right to kingship on the basis of the principle of legitimacy, respect of the fundamental rights of the monarchy and divine right.[48] On the other hand, French legitimists depicted María Cristina and her daughter Isabel as usurpers and, as such, as partisans of the liberal and revolutionary ideology. *La Quotidienne*, again, claimed that María Cristina's 'crowned revolution' was the most dangerous form of revolution because 'it defiles the insignia of monarchy'.[49] The ideological distinction between

[44] *La Gazette de France*, 9 July 1840: '"C'est plus que le drapeau de don Carlos qui est tombé en Espagne: c'est le drapeau de la vieille légitimité européenne"'.

[45] *Le Rénovateur*, 10 October 1833: 'si elle devait y succomber momentanément, l'Europe entière entrerait dans la voie révolutionnaire sans espoir de retour'.

[46] *Gaceta Oficial*, 17 November 1835: 'La cuestion que tiene suspensa hoy á toda la Europa, es decir la *revolucion y la legitimidad*, va á decidirse en España'. Emphasis in the original.

[47] *La Quotidienne*, 13 September 1835: 'le droit politique du pays. Il règne en vertu de l'ordre de successibilité … le symbole de l'ordre'.

[48] Jordi Canal, *El carlismo. Dos siglos de contrarrevolución en España* (Madrid 2000), 65–6.

[49] *La Quotidienne,* 15 January 1834, 'la révolution couronnée … elle souille les insignes de la monarchie'.

legitimist and liberal monarchism, as opposed to, for example, the starker division between monarchy and republic, was significant for French legitimists, who claimed the superiority of the elder branch of the Bourbon dynasty in France vis-à-vis Louis-Philippe's cadet branch of the Orléans.

At its core, legitimists claimed, the conflict between legitimism and revolution was a dispute between legality and illegality. Legitimism was the embodiment of the law itself. According to *Le Légitimiste*, any type of government that was founded upon the respect of the law was legal and legitimate, and should hence be respected,[50] but royalist legitimacy was superior to mere legality. While legality could be defined as the general respect of the law, legitimism represented the essence of the law itself. As such, it was a moral principle and the foundation upon which society and social interactions should be built.[51] Legitimism, ultra-royalists believed, found its validation in France's glorious past, as history proved that the elder Bourbons were predestined to rule over France.[52] Since revolutionary governments were founded upon the destruction of historical right and pre-existing political tradition instead, legitimists regarded them as necessarily illegal. The problem with illegality, they argued, was that it damaged the mores of the population. *Le Rénovateur*, for instance, wrote that '[t]he principles of usurpation, destructive of all property and relying only on the rule of force, bring people back to barbarism. It is an incontestable truth of which today's Spain offers a sad example'.[53] While historical legitimism ensured piety and morality, then, legitimists believed, modern revolutionary governments threatened the virtuosity and rectitude of the societies they ruled upon.[54]

Legitimists accused liberals of misleading the people when they claimed to be standing for liberty. True liberty, they argued, was the result of law and order and, as the ideology embodying both values, only legitimism could ensure and foster it. Legitimists understood liberty in two primary ways. On the one hand, liberty equalled peace, which ultra-royalists believed to be a precondition for both social and moral order. The identification of the monarchy with pacifism was a correlation that dated back to the first years of the Restoration. In 1818, for example, during a discussion in parliament over the Gouvion-Saint-Cyr Law on conscription, Louis de Bonald, one of the founding fathers of counterrevolutionary thought, had argued that pacifism should be a key value of monarchical regimes.[55] While at the time monarchical pacifism was a natural reaction to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, with time legitimists came to contrast monarchies' ostensibly peaceful nature with the alleged violence and disorder of any liberal regime. On the other hand, ultra-royalists understood liberty in a collective sense and

[50] *Le Légitimiste*, 5 July 1834.

[51] *Le Légitimiste*, 12 July 1834.

[52] Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society*, 2.

[53] *Le Rénovateur*, 7 April 1837: 'Les principes de l'usurpation destructeurs de toute propriété, et ne s'appuyant que sur le droit de la force, ramènent les peuples à la barbarie. C'est une vérité incontestable dont l'Espagne offre pendant toute cette époque un triste exemple'.

[54] *Le Rénovateur,* 13 December 1835.

[55] Tort, *La Droite française*, 262.

contrasted it with the universalistic and individualistic definition of liberty stemming from *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789. Bonald was once again a reference point. In his *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux* of 1796, he rejected the abstract idea of man that stemmed from the Enlightenment and the Revolution and argued instead that man was a social being and, hence, that liberty was to be found only in society. While *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* had undermined society by attributing to man rights he should not possess, ultra-royalists claimed, the principle of monarchism aimed to restore man to his natural societal and hierarchical state, the only one where he was truly free.[56]

While revolutionary regimes claimed to stand for liberty, legitimists argued that they were mere 'constitutional utopias'.[57] Liberal revolutionaries, they elaborated, presented themselves as friends of the people and seduced them by making promises they knew from the start they could not keep.[58] Instead, they did not have people's interests at heart and their actions were driven exclusively by corruption and self-interest. The distinction, they claimed, was evident in the different moral stature of María Cristina's revolutionary government and Don Carlos's legitimist one. Ultra-royalists accused the queen regent of pretending to be a people's monarch but, in fact, of being the opposite. From the moment she seized power, she showed avarice and cupidity and, in the words of *La Mode*, she engaged in 'the shameful art of enriching [her] treasure at the expense of the people'.[59] Although the accusations were exaggerated, they revealed legitimists' conviction that social problems were exacerbated by capitalist elites' greed, who put personal gain above their responsibility to improve society.[60] Don Carlos, on the contrary, was a true popular monarch. Not only did he not shy away from the people but, legitimists claimed, he engaged with them in order to lead them onto the right path. *Le Rénovateur* imagined him saying to his subjects: 'People, they are deceiving you. You want liberty, it is the monarchy that is the mother of liberty; the revolution, it is slavery. The flag of liberty, I have it in my hands. Here it is, this sign of freedom'.[61] In Spain, the *Gaceta Oficial* used the same arguments to warn Spaniards against liberalism. When in September 1835 Prime Minister Mendizábal announced a new project of electoral law, for example, the *Gaceta* wrote, citing *La Gazette de France*, that the reform would only be favourable to one party and would thus oppress the majority of the nation. As a result, it concluded that 'we shall see established in Spain all the fantasies of liberty with all the realities of despotism'.[62]

---

[56] Gerard Gengembre, *La Contre-révolution ou l'histoire désespérante* (Paris 1989), 157.

[57] *L'Europe*, 7 April 1837: 'utopies constitutionnelles'.

[58] *Le Légitimiste*, 12 July 1834.

[59] *La Mode*, 4 January 1840: 'l'art honteux de grossir un trésor aux dépens d'un peuple'.

[60] Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society*, 148.

[61] *La Rénovateur*, 8 October 1834: 'Peuple, on vous trompe. Vous voulez la liberté, c'est la monarchie qui est la mère de la liberté; la révolution, c'est l'esclavage. Le drapeau de la liberté, c'est moi qui le tiens dans la main. Le voilà, ce signe libérateur'.

[62] *Gaceta Oficial*, 18 December 1835: 'y se verán en España establecidas todas las ficciones de la libertad, con todas las realidades del despotismo'.

While liberals tricked people into believing that revolution was a prerequisite for freedom, reactionaries claimed that they ensured people's real liberty by caring for the long-term prosperity of their subjects. People's wellbeing, they believed, was not conditional on the overthrow of pre-existing political and social structures nor on constitutional rights. Rather, it depended on gradual reform within the pre-existing system of government. *Le Rénovateur*, for example, pointed out that legitimists were not against reform, but that they stood for 'prudent reforms and necessary innovations',[63] while the *Gaceta Oficial* rejected liberals' accusation that progress and absolutism were incompatible ideas.[64] In particular, ultra-royalists challenged revolutionary iconoclasm and secularism, arguing that a people could be free only if protected by the sacred principle of religion. The latter, *Le Rénovateur* explained, represented 'their strength and their security', as it awarded them the moral principles that prevented them from falling prey to tyranny. While irreligion created slaves, religion created free men.[65] The view that religion was essential for the preservation of order because it inflicted in people's minds fear of divine punishment was old and not specific to legitimists. Reactionaries after 1814, though, made of the association of the throne and the altar a crucial and non-negotiable principle of their ideology, which had not always been the case before the French Revolution of 1789.[66] Although some legitimists attempted to separate the two, ultra-royalists largely believed that the legitimist cause and Catholic interests were two faces of the same coin.[67]

As the self-proclaimed defenders of real liberty, ultra-royalists maintained that legitimism was the cause of the people. *Le Légitimiste*, in particular, dedicated a long article to the topic, arguing that it was a mistake to associate legitimism only with the cause of the king, as well as to contrast the cause of power with the cause of liberty. Instead, it claimed, legitimism defended the entire social order. The paper maintained that legitimists did not sacrifice 'their rest, their wellbeing, their liberty, their life' only for the sake of one man. Rather, they supported the cause of law and order, power and liberty, against all forms of 'usurpation and disorder'. It wrote: '[I]t is the cause of the people against the despots and the tyrants, as well as against the schemers and the usurpers, against the false and perfidious friends of the people'.[68] In this respect, legitimists believed that Don Carlos, with his heroic resistance to liberal usurpation, was an example of commitment to the legitimist mission that all European monarchs ought to follow. *La Gazette de France*, for instance, wrote in 1835 that Don Carlos showed to the other kings 'the sympathy there is between a king and his people, the strength there is between this

[63] *Le Rénovateur*, 16 August 1834: 'des réformes prudentes et des innovations nécessaires'.

[64] *Gaceta Oficial*, 10 November 1835.

[65] *Le Rénovateur*, 26 August 1834: 'leur force et leur sécurité'.

[66] Broers, *Europe after Napoleon*, 56.

[67] Charbonnel, *Les Légitimistes*, 121–3.

[68] *Le Légitimiste*, 12 July 1834: 'de leur repos, de leurs biens, de leur liberté, de leur vie … d'usurpations et de désordres, c'est la cause des peuples contre les despotes et les tyrans tout aussi bien que contre les intriguants et les usurpateurs, contre ces faux et perfides amis des peuples'.

alliance of the principle of order and of the principle of liberty'.[69] French legitimists, then, believed that Don Carlos's mission in Spain possessed a didactical value for the legitimist cause itself. Revolutionary liberalism, they claimed, had succeeded in weakening monarchical absolutism not only because it made use of illegal, violent and duplicitous means, but also because of the weakness of contemporary monarchs. Don Carlos, in this sense, should serve as a 'tutor for all kings, reminding them of their duties, their dignity, their sublime mission'.[70]

Ultra-royalists maintained that the fact that legitimism was the cause of the people was most evident in its defence of local liberties against liberal centralization. The crusade against the centralizing reforms of the French Revolution came to define the ultra-royalist cause after 1814, although arguments for decentralization were widespread across the political spectrum,[71] and the Restored kings never dismantled the new, efficient system of administration that was the product of Revolutionary and Napoleonic reforms. Legitimists identified local liberties with the provinces of the *ancien régime*. They portrayed them as microcosms of an idealized rural, organic and pious world, which had been swept away by the Revolution. The establishment of a new industrial and financial bourgeoisie in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, legitimists claimed, replaced such harmonious rural society with an atomized, alienated and urban proletariat, which lived in misery and immorality. Louis-Philippe's government, they argued, was partly responsible for the debasement of French society because the new king was under the influence of industrialists and speculators.[72] Despite their idealization of the *ancien-régime* provinces, though, legitimists did not preach their restoration. Instead, they conceptualized an alternative decentralized administrative system, which would return some power to the rural elites.[73] Legitimists targeted local politics in France's countryside as the place from where to rebuild their cause after 1830.

The Carlist War proved especially suited to supporting legitimists' decentralist position because, from the start, the autonomous provinces of the Basque country and Navarra in northern Spain rose in support of Don Carlos, who had pledged to preserve their local liberties, alongside the plains of Aragón-Valencia and western Catalonia.[74] French ultra-royalists' support for the rebel provinces, then, was a political statement against administrative centralization in France. *Le Rénovateur*, for instance, pointed out that the cause of the Basque provinces and Navarra was the same cause that French legitimists had been fighting for since 1789:

[69] *La Gazette de France*, 4 June 1835: 'ce qu'il y a de sympathie entre un roi et son peuple, tout ce qu'il y a de force dans cette alliance du principe d'ordre et du principe de liberté'.

[70] *La Gazette de France*, 4 June 1835: 'tuteur de tous les rois en les rappelant à leurs devoirs, à leur dignité, à leur sublime mission'.

[71] Annelien de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville* (Cambridge 2008), passim.

[72] Tort, *La Droite française*, 275–89.

[73] Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society*, 89–91.

[74] Lawrence, *Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 64.

> It was not the royalists who overturned the estates of Provence, of Languedoc, of the Dauphiné, of Bourgogne, of Bretagne, of Artois and of Béarn; it was the Revolution. Neither our fathers nor we have ever abandoned the cause of the provincial *franchises*. Our fathers protested the decrees of the constituent assembly, which destroyed the internal organisation of the kingdom; we still demand decentralization every day. One should not be surprised by our sympathy for the four insurgent provinces, since they write on their banners: LEGITIMACY AND LIBERTY.[75]

In this respect, *L'Europe* added, the war in Spain could be interpreted as a conflict against the liberal 'mania of centralization' coming from France.[76]

Since Bilbao, in the Basque province of Vizcaya, was the first town to rise in revolt in October 1833, both the liberal and the absolutist camps came to see the Basque country and Navarra as Carlist strongholds. At the core of the Basques' hostility to María Cristina's government was the preservation of the *fueros*, ancient local treaties that awarded the Basque provinces substantial administrative, fiscal and military autonomy from Madrid. Although in the previous decades both absolutist and liberal regimes had made attempts at the *fueros*, Basque elites perceived María Cristina's liberal regime to be incompatible with local autonomy. Such a perception was corroborated by the fact that in November 1833 the government announced its intention of reorganizing Spanish territory by dividing it into 49 provinces. The project shared similarities with the French Revolution's replacement of the *ancien-régime* provinces with 86 *départements* in 1790. Since the goal of the symmetrical subdivision of France's administrative territory into *départements* was the curtailing of provincial loyalties in favour of unity and equity, reactionaries regarded them as partially responsible for the debasement of local traditions and morality in France. Don Carlos, on his part, remained quiet about the *fueros* at the start of the war, which historians have seen as a sign of the lack of substance of the pretender's political programme. Upon returning to Spain from exile in July 1834, though, he established his headquarters in Urdax, in Navarra, and one of his first acts was to confirm the *fueros* of the Basque province of Vizcaya.[77] Two years later, he published a decree in the *Gaceta Oficial*, in which he announced his defence and perpetuation of the *fueros* of Navarra as a symbol of gratitude for the Navarrese's sacrifice in the war.[78] As a result, Don Carlos's legitimist cause and the Basques' quest for local autonomy became almost synonymous.

Liberals reacted to the alliance between the Carlists and the Basques by accusing the latter of self-interest, claiming that their support of Don Carlos was only an excuse to

[75] *Le Rénovateur*, 20 September 1834: 'Ce ne sont pas les royalistes qui ont renversé les états de la Provence, du Languedoc, du Dauphiné, de la Bourgogne, de la Bretagne, de l'Artois et du Béarn; c'est bien la révolution. Ni nos pères, ni nous, nous n'avons jamais abandonné la cause des franchises provinciales. Nos pères protestaient contre les décrets de l'assemblée constituantes, qui détruisaient l'organisation intérieure du royaume; nous réclamons tous les jours encore la décentralisation. Il ne faut donc pas s'étonner de nos sympathies pour les quatre provinces insurgées, puisqu'elles ont inscrit sur leurs bannières: LÉGITIMITÉ ET LIBERTÉ'.

[76] *L'Europe*, 5–6 May 1837: 'la manie de centralisation'.

[77] Coverdale, *The Basque Phase of Spain's First Carlist War*, 265–70.

[78] *Gaceta Oficial*, 15 April 1836.

defend their autonomy from Madrid. Legitimists disagreed, arguing that there was no contradiction between the two ideals. The protection of local liberties, they maintained, was an inherent trait of legitimism.[79] *La Mode*, for example, wrote that the Basques rose in arms to defend both their independence and their legitimate king, as they possessed two 'political religions': 'the cult of the monarchical legitimacy of Charles V [and] love of their *fueros*'.[80] The Basques, legitimists elaborated, trusted legitimism as the defender of local liberties because absolutism had enforced a decentralized model of society for centuries. History, in this respect, was the ultimate guarantor of legitimists' promises. The 'alliance between the people and royalty', several publications argued, had defined France and Spain for the past 800 years,[81] and was hence an alliance whose legitimacy was 'sanctioned by time'.[82] It proved that only legitimism could keep a country united, because only by preserving local liberties were people happy and the country stable.[83] The Basques, then, naturally preferred the 'experience of good administration and real liberties' that they had enjoyed for centuries to the 'vain promises' of an 'alleged liberty' that María Cristina was trying to enforce with violence.[84] Subsequently, *La Gazette de France* argued, '[r]eal liberty is in Navarra with Charles V', where the pretender defended the long-established laws of the country. In Madrid, instead, there was only 'arbitrariness, injustice, confiscation'.[85] Thus, legitimists claimed that the Basques, by defending the *fueros*, were protecting the 'legitimacy and civilization' of all monarchs and of all peoples from 'usurpation and revolutionary barbarism'.[86]

Given that the Basques were Don Carlos's staunchest supporters, and the Basque country was one of the main theatres of the war, ultra-royalists turned the Basques into legitimist heroes. *Le Rénovateur* celebrated them as 'a people of giants',[87] the *Gaceta Oficial* called them a 'model of loyalty and valour',[88] and *La Gazette de France* referred to them as heroes who took up arms and faced 'the soldiers of usurpation, uttering a cry of freedom'.[89] Legitimists portrayed the Basque country as a new Vendée, to the point that

[79] *La Quotidienne*, 13 September 1835.

[80] *La Mode*, 4 January 1840: 'deux religions politiques, le culte de la légitimité monarchique de Charles V, l'amour de leurs fueros'.

[81] *Le Rénovateur*, 20 September 1834: 'alliance du peuple et de la royauté'.

[82] *La Quotidienne*, 26 March 1835: 'sanctionné par le temps'.

[83] *La Quotidienne*, 13 September 1835.

[84] *La Quotidienne*, 26 March 1835: 'expérience de la bonne administration et des libertés réelles … vaines promesses'; 'prétendue liberté'.

[85] *La Gazette de France*, 7 March 1836: 'La veritable liberté est en Navarre auprès de Charles V … qu'arbitraire, injustice, confiscation'.

[86] *La Quotidienne*, 5 August 1834; *La Quotidienne*, 26 March 1834: 'la légitimité et la civilisation contre l'usurpation et la barbarie révolutionnaire'.

[87] *Le Rénovateur*, 2 May 1835: 'un peuple de géans'.

[88] *Gaceta Oficial*, 15 April 1836: 'modelo de lealtad y de valor'.

[89] *La Gazette de France*, 4 June 1835: 'les soldats de l'usurpation en poussant un cri de liberté'.

multiple publications advertised it as 'the Spanish Vendée'.[90] The similarities between 1793 and 1833 were obvious. As the Vendée rose in revolt against the First Republic's usurpation of Louis XVI's throne, the Basques rose up against María Cristina's usurpation of Don Carlos's throne. Moreover, as the *cristinos* represented the latest heirs of the French revolutionary tradition, the Basques were pursuing the counterrevolutionary mission that strove to prevent liberal and revolutionary forces from conquering Spain and the rest of Europe. Finally, like the Vendeans, the Basques were fighting to defend the two key principles of legitimism: monarchy and religion. *L'Europe*, for instance, wrote that:

> God and the king! Screamed the winners of Cholet and Angers; God and the king! Here is the cry of the people of Navarra, Vizcaya, Aragon and Valencia; these words … include a moral idea. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the legitimist prince are regarded as inseparable.[91]

Legitimists, then, regarded the Basques as continuing the counterrevolutionary mission that European ultra-royalists had started in 1789.

The legitimist press hailed in particular Tomás de Zumalacárregui, the Basque military commander who temporarily turned the tide of the war in favour of the Carlists, from the first weeks of the conflict in October 1833 until his death, during the siege of Bilbao, in June 1835. Legitimists portrayed him as both a military and a spiritual leader, who revitalized Don Carlos's cause when the pretender was in exile in England at the start of the conflict and was instrumental in his return to Spain. *La Mode*, for example, called him a 'Spanish hero, who deserves the name of El Cid of Navarra',[92] adding that Zumalacárregui resembled the Vendean general Bonchamps, one of the uprising's leaders who was mortally wounded in the battle of Cholet in October 1793, displaying the 'same trustworthiness, same courage and same death'.[93] The popularity of Don Carlos and Zumalacárregui fed off each other. Don Carlos's cause took on momentum as a result of the Basque commander, and the pretender's arrival in the Basque country gave the Carlist cause its natural leader.[94] Zumalacárregui, on his part, thanks to his military prowess, royal endorsement and premature death, became a legendary hero. As Don Carlos established his headquarters in Navarra, legitimists regarded the success of legitimism as inextricably tied to that of the Basque country and the Basque uprising as the embodiment of the Carlist cause as a whole. Upon Zumalacárregui's death, for example, *La Gazette de France* wrote that:

---

[90] A. de Beauchesne, 'Zumalacarregui', in *La Mode*, 5 July 1835 and *La Gazette de France*, 15 September 1835; Vocaltha, *Zumalacarreguy et l'Espagne, ou Précis des évènemens militaires qui se sont passés dans les provinces basques depuis 1831* (Nancy 1835), 15: 'la Vendée espagnole'.

[91] *L'Europe,* 12 July 1837: 'Dieu et le roi ! criaient les vainqueurs de Chollet et d'Angers; Dieu et le roi ! voilà le cri des peuples de Navarre, de Biscaye, d'Arragon, de Valence ; ces mots … n'expriment pourtant qu'une idée morale. Le règne de Dieu et le règne du prince légitime y sont regardés comme inséparables'.

[92] *La Mode*, 5 April 1835: 'héros espagnol, qui a mérité le nom de Cid de la Navarre'.

[93] *La Mode,* 2 April 1836: 'même fidélité, même courage et même mort'.

[94] Lawrence, *Spain's First Carlist War*, 63.

> [He] was at the same time the hero of the liberty of his *pays* of which he defended its independence and its *franchises*, and the champion of the royal right of Charles V, whom he defended with his sword. … His death is undoubtedly a great loss, but his spirit will live on among his comrades; he animates them, and the warriors that he used to lead into battle will continue to win in the name of God, of liberty and of Charles V.[95]

Thus, the Basque country, as the new 'Spanish Vendée', embodied the values of monarchy, religion and local liberties upon which nineteenth-century legitimism claimed to be founded. Don Carlos's Basque army was the legitimists' latest hope to reacquire power in Europe.

Legitimism Means Patriotism: Ultra-Royalism in the International Sphere

While Don Carlos's victory was essential to ensure peace and liberty in Spain, legitimists claimed, it was equally crucial for the preservation of France's position within Europe's balance of powers. The crux of the issue was Salic Law. The *Lex salica* was an ancient civil code promulgated by the Frankish king Clovis around 500 A.D. One of the document's most significant laws was the exclusion of women from inheriting the throne, a principle that still regulated France's order of succession in the nineteenth century and had determined the Spanish one since 1714. In the wake of the First Republic, French royalists claimed that male primogeniture inheritance law was essential for a kingdom's stability because, in the words of *Le Légitimiste*, 'the great figure of the king who never dies' was 'the most invincible safeguard of property and of the glory of a nation'. Countries that had always applied Salic Law, such as France and Aragon, it added, were countries of 'liberty and nationality'. Countries that had abolished it, like contemporary Spain, witnessed the substitution of 'civilization' with 'barbarity': it was 'the end of the political world'.[96]

The problem with Fernando VII's overruling of Spain's Salic Law in favour of his daughter Isabel, legitimists argued, was that it did not concern Spain alone: it was a French problem too. Since Felipe V's contested ascent to the Spanish throne in 1700, a member of the Bourbon royal household had always ruled over both France and Spain, except for the period between 1792 and 1814–1815. The so-called *pacte de famille* between the two branches of the Bourbon family was, in legitimists' eyes, Louis XIV's great 'œuvre nationale', as it ensured that France always possessed an ally on its southern border. In this respect, *Le Rénovateur* argued, dynastic politics

[95] *La Gazette de France*, 9 July 1835: 'Zumalacarrégui était en même temps le héros de la liberté de son pays dont il défendait l'indépendance et les franchises, et le champion du droit royal de Charles V, qu'il soutenait avec son épée. … Sa mort est une grande perte, sans doute, mais son esprit vit parmi tous ses compagnons; il les anime et les guerriers qu'il conduisit au combat vaincront encore au nom de Dieu, de la liberté et de Charles V'.

[96] *Le Légitimiste*, 5 July 1834: 'la grande figure du roi qui ne meurt jamais, sont les plus invincibles sauvegardes des propriétés et de la gloire d'une nation'; 'de liberté et de nationalité'; 'la barbarie … la civilisation; … la fin du monde politique'.

equalled national politics.[97] The overruling of Salic Law was a menace for France's security, because a female monarch's wedding to a foreign prince would change the dynasty on the Spanish throne, and a foreign king would pursue interests inimical to France. Legitimists were especially wary of the eventuality of Isabel marrying a prince of the House of Habsburg, which ruled over much of central Europe and was one of the principal victors of the Vienna settlement that had punished France after the fall of Napoleon in 1815. If the *infanta* Isabel were to marry an Austrian prince, *Le Rénovateur* claimed, the latter would promote the interests of the Habsburgs, which were incompatible with those of the French.[98] Additionally, if such a hypothetical Austrian prince were to be called to the imperial throne, *L'Europe* warned, France would find itself encircled and endless conflicts would ensue, like the time in the sixteenth century when Charles V was both Holy Roman emperor and king of Spain.[99] An Austrian archduke in Madrid, the paper explained, was 'a menace to the integrity of [French] territory' because France would have to balance the presence of the British in newly independent Belgium and of the Austrians in Spain.[100] These arguments revealed widespread anxieties about France's struggle to recover its international prestige after Waterloo. In particular, by 1830, many French across the political spectrum resented British interference in European affairs, including in the Mediterranean, where the French were conquering Algeria, and were dissatisfied with the London Conference of 1830, where France had joined Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia in recognizing Belgian independence and neutrality. By guaranteeing Belgian independence, France renounced its centuries-old goal of expanding its 'natural frontiers' to the north, at a time when a vociferous portion of public opinion revendicated another French 'natural frontier', the left bank of the Rhine.[101] In this regard, then, Don Carlos's victory in Spain was desirable because, in legitimists' eyes, it would protect France's position on the international stage. 'If there is a representative of French interests in Spain', *L'Europe* claimed, 'it is King Don Carlos'.[102]

The fact that Louis-Philippe supported María Cristina's cause, instead of Don Carlos's, legitimists argued, was proof that the new king was not working in the national interest. Since Louis-Philippe was a usurper just like María Cristina, they elaborated, he found himself in the awkward position of having to support the Spanish queen regent's revolutionary government, although such a decision was at odds with France's interest. The claim was not far-fetched. It seemed that, in private, Louis-Philippe indeed displayed pro-Carlist views and, in 1837, he even indicated that he may pull France from the Quadruple Alliance with Britain, Spain and Portugal if Don Carlos managed to make

[97] *Le Rénovateur*, 15 October 1833.

[98] Ibid.

[99] *L'Europe*, 17 June 1837.

[100] *L'Europe*, 23 March 1839.

[101] Dominique Barjot, Jean-Pierre Chaline and André Encrevé, *La France au XIXe siècle, 1814–1914* (Paris 1995), 213–14 and 221–2. On the history of France's 'natural frontier' theory, see Peter Sahlins, 'Natural Frontiers Revisited: France's Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 5 (1990), 1423–51.

[102] *L'Europe*, 1 February 1837: 'S'il y a en Espagne un représentant des intérêts français, c'est le roi don Carlos'.

significant military progress in the Basque country.[103] Given Louis-Philippe's official pro-*cristino* position, though, legitimists argued that the king weakened the position of both the July Monarchy and France on the international stage. On the one hand, Louis-Philippe's support of María Cristina enfeebled the July Monarchy because the war in Spain was a missed opportunity for the new regime to legitimize itself on the international stage. Indeed, the European powers mistrusted the new French king and maintained France in relative isolation, despite Louis-Philippe's attempts, in the early 1830s, to reassure Europe of the pacific nature of his regime.[104] According to *La Quotidienne*, the Carlist War was an occasion for Louis-Philippe to defeat revolution in the south and flatter the absolutist monarchies of Europe. Instead, the paper argued, all he did was to encourage a revolution in Spain.[105] On the other hand, Louis-Philippe's support of María Cristina favoured British interests at the expense of French ones. Legitimists, riding widespread Anglophobia, portrayed Britain as France's arch nemesis. They depicted it as the malign source of all of France's troubles, flagging London's support of Louis-Philippe in 1830.[106] The depiction conveniently overlooked the fact that Britain had given asylum to plenty of French aristocratic *émigrés* during the Revolution, as well as to Don Carlos in 1834, and that it had been instrumental in the restoration of Louis XVIII to the French throne in 1814 and 1815. In this respect, legitimists' criticism of Louis-Philippe for his dependency on England was arguably, in part, an attempt to efface the humiliating and much criticized fact that, after the fall of Napoleon, the Bourbon dynasty had owed its restoration to the French throne to Britain.

Legitimists claimed that since Louis-Philippe owed his success to Britain, he would never do anything to upset it, and that this was a weakness London was taking advantage of. 'The July Revolution turned us into vassals of England', *La Mode* proclaimed.[107] According to legitimists, since the beginning of the *pacte de famille*, an unspoken rivalry had developed between Britain and France concerning influence over Spain. Britain had since been working with Austria to separate Spain from France, in order to weaken Paris on the international stage.[108] Austria hoped to rewind the clock to the time, before 1700, when a Habsburg ruled over both the Holy Roman Empire and Spain. Britain, on its part, wished to weaken France in order to strengthen its imperialist goals in Europe and beyond. As *La Gazette de France* described it in dramatic terms, with the end of the *pacte de famille*, France would be busy on its southern border and would stop working on reconquering Belgium and on reaching the 'natural frontier' of the Rhine. Additionally, Spain under British control would strengthen British industry at the expense of its French counterpart. Britain would be able to take advantage of the ports of Cádiz and Barcelona, as well as Lisbon and Porto in Portugal, and would prevent France from accessing them. With the cadet branch of the Bourbon family on

[103] Lawrence, *Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 80.

[104] Barjot, Chaline and Encrevé, *La France au XIXe siècle*, 213.

[105] *La Quotidienne*, 15 August 1834.

[106] Charbonnel, *Les Légitimistes*, 83–4.

[107] *La Mode*, 5 April 1835: 'La révolution de juillet nous a imposé le vasselage de l'Angleterre'.

[108] *L'Europe*, 1 February 1837; *L'Europe*, 23 March 1839.

the French throne, the paper concluded, 'they will rejoice in Liverpool, in Manchester and in the city [of London]'.[109] In fact, Louis-Philippe was hardly as naïve as legitimists portrayed him. His government believed that the recovery of international prestige depended on a careful system of diplomatic alliances. This included the Quadruple Alliance, which it saw as a defensive entente with Britain that would smooth France's relations with absolutist Europe yet prevent London from acquiring too much influence in southern Europe. In this respect, one of the reasons why the king argued against intervening in Spain was to avoid antagonizing absolutist Europe in the long term, which would make France excessively dependent on Britain. Moreover, although France joined the Quadruple Alliance, Louis-Philippe and his ambassador to the United Kingdom, Talleyrand, worked to impress upon Spain that France, not Britain, remained its main patron in international affairs.[110] Thus, both legitimists and Louis-Philippe's government were keen to restore France's prestige on the international stage and to stop Britain from acquiring excessive power in southern Europe. However, they disagreed on whether the Carlists or the *cristinos* were more likely to satisfy France's ambitions.

Since legitimists believed that Louis-Philippe's support of the *cristinos* posed a danger to France, they accused the king of lacking patriotism. *La Quotidienne* argued that the national interest should be *super partes*, but in reality it was not. The revolutionary party was substituting it with its personal interest, which was fleeting and situational. In order to achieve their goals, the paper accused the revolutionaries of not being afraid to turn Spain into an 'arena' open to the ambitions of France's rival powers.[111] By contrast, legitimists posited themselves as the real patriotic party in France, which placed the security and wellbeing of the nation above personal and party interests.[112] '[I]t is this French interest that we defend; constituent interest, immutable, withstanding the test of time, independent of party struggles', *La Quotidienne* explained, going on to state that such interest 'should be preserved and respected [in France], regardless of the government that rules [it], because this interest is, above all, that of the country'.[113] Legitimists, then, seized on Louis-Philippe's awkward position vis-à-vis the Carlist War as an opportunity to present themselves as the real French patriots. This was an important stance to take for a party that liberals had frequently accused of anti-patriotism during the Restoration. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the restored Bourbons' claim that the monarchy engaged in warfare only defensively, as opposed to the warmongering republic, had prompted liberal accusations of 'militant anti-patriotism'. Liberals claimed that royalists continued to sell the country to foreigners as they had allegedly done in 1792 on the occasion of the Brunswick

[109] *La Gazette de France*, 11 October 1833: 'on se réjouira à Liverpool, à Manchester et dans la cité'.

[110] Roger Bullen, 'France and the Problem of Intervention in Spain, 1834–1836', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1977), 363–4 and 370.

[111] *La Quotidienne*, 3 October 1833: 'arène'.

[112] *L'Europe*, 23 March 1839.

[113] *La Quotidienne*, 3 October 1833: 'c'est cet intérêt français que nous défendons; intérêt constituant, immuable, à l'épreuve du temps, indépendant des luttes de partis; intérêt qui devrait être maintenu et respecté chez nous, quelque soit le gouvernement qui régisse le pays, parce que cet intérêt est, avant tout, celui du pays'.

Manifesto.[114] By means of the Carlist War, legitimists tried to turn the tables on liberals. By refusing to engage in the conflict, they claimed, the Orleanist dynasty and, by extension, liberals, were the anti-patriotic party, which failed to have the national interest at heart. By actively supporting Don Carlos as the next king of Spain, instead, the senior Bourbons and legitimists as a whole were the guarantors of French interests.[115]

To guarantee French interests, legitimists added, meant to guarantee European interests. They rallied European legitimists to intervene in Spain in support of Don Carlos because, they argued, a strong France was desirable for the balance of powers of Europe as a whole. By protecting France's leading position in Europe vis-à-vis Great Britain, they claimed, legitimism would ensure the strength and prosperity of the entire European continent. On the one hand, *Le Rénovateur* wrote, France was a crucial counterbalance between Britain's maritime empire and Russia's population strength. On the other hand, France was the protector of small nations against the ambitions of bigger ones. In this regard, the paper claimed, a strong France was essential for the perpetuation of a 'social Europe'. While legitimists argued that France should not expand beyond its natural borders, they claimed that its strong position was essential against other states' attempt at conquest and despotism. The European balance of power, *Le Rénovateur* wrote, started with the protection of Salic Law in Spain: 'to withdraw France from the [dynastic] alliance with Spain means to weaken it for the benefit of the ambition of one man or one people, at the detriment of Europe as a whole'. [116] A legitimist Spain was essential for a strong France; and a strong France was crucial for a stable and secure Europe.

Conclusion

Spain's First Carlist War between the queen regent María Cristina and the pretender Don Carlos is today frequently ignored by histories of nineteenth-century Europe. In the 1830s, however, the war was one of the main topics of discussion among European elites. Its violence preoccupied rulers across the continent and its ideological premises stirred and politicized European public opinion. It revived the hopes of French legitimists, who had been ousted from power in 1830 and regarded the conflict as their latest opportunity for the restoration of absolutism in France and Europe. French ultra-royalists viewed the war as a clash of civilizations between two incompatible ideologies, legitimism and liberalism, and made use of it to redefine the identity of reactionary conservatism within the new nineteenth-century political framework. They rejected the Jacobin claim that there was an incompatibility between power and liberty, the monarchy and the nation. Instead, they compared María Cristina's and Don Carlos's causes to prove that legitimism was the real cause of liberty and of the people. As such, they maintained,

[114] Tort, *La Droite française,* 263.

[115] *Le Rénovateur*, 8 October 1833; *L'Europe*, 23 March 1839.

[116] *Le Rénovateur*, 18 October 1833: 'L'existence et la force de l'empire français est un intérêt européen'; 'Europe sociale'; 'retirer à la France l'alliance de l'Espagne, c'est l'affaiblir au profit de l'ambition d'un homme ou d'un peuple, au détriment de l'Europe toute entière'.

legitimism was the only true patriotic ideology. By means of an enthusiastic daily coverage of the conflict, which included news reports and opinion pieces, the legitimist press worked tirelessly to mobilize legitimist Europe in support of Don Carlos. As a result, they contributed to fostering a transnational network of ultra-conservative solidarity across the continent.

Despite French legitimists' optimism, the Carlists lost the war, and Don Carlos was never crowned king of Spain. His cause, though, was by no means lost from the start. In May 1837, amidst a governmental and diplomatic crisis among the *cristino* ranks, the Carlist army launched the Royal Expedition, leaving the Basque country with the aim of conquering Madrid. On 10 September, despite many setbacks along the way, the Carlists reached the walls of the capital. Victory appeared at hand. Don Carlos's characteristic military indecision, though, and a sudden change of government from a left-liberal to a moderate one, revitalized María Cristina and prompted the Carlists to withdraw. The retreat represented the beginning of the end of the Carlist cause, at least for the duration of the conflict.[117] In August 1839, the liberal *generalísimo* Espartero and the Carlist general Maroto signed the Convention of Vergara. Don Carlos was forced into exile, and Espartero agreed to defend the question of the Basque *fueros* in the Cortes, the Spanish parliament. A limited number of Carlists, led by general Cabrera, refused to concede victory, but by the summer of 1840 the war was over and thousands of Carlists fled Spain for France and England.[118]

French legitimists stood by the Carlists until the very end. Similarly to Cabrera, they accused Maroto of treason for signing the peace treaty and incited his troops to resist. The outcome of the war was not in their favour, yet the Carlists' ultimate defeat did not silence them. On the contrary, in the 1840s legitimists gained renewed strength in France and, until the 1880s, legitimism represented a serious alternative to the various regimes in power. Although France's republican myth since 1870 has portrayed nineteenth-century French history as a succession of predestined republican experiments until the successful establishment of the Third Republic, for much of the century there was nothing preordained about an eventual republican victory. Republicans governed relatively little between 1789 and 1870, and the elites, afraid of the instability that republicanism caused, regarded the viable political options in terms of three types of monarchy: legitimism, Orleanism and Bonapartism.[119] In this respect, although the French Revolution undermined the foundations of the monarchy, the fact that legitimists never regained power in France after 1830 was more accidental than predetermined. After France's catastrophic defeat against Prussia and the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, legitimists, as part of a conservative coalition, won a majority in the National Assembly and had the opportunity to restore the new pretender, the Comte de Chambord, to the throne of France. However, as the latter refused to compromise with the Orleanists and to accept the tricolour as the French flag, the last hope for a restoration of legitimism in France

[117] Two more Carlist wars occurred in 1846–1849 and in 1872–1876. The Third Carlist War led to, among other things, the abolition of the Basque *fueros*.

[118] Lawrence, *Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 80–7.

[119] Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society*, 2.

evaporated. Unlike legitimists in the 1830s, the new pretender refused to understand that the *ancien régime* could not be restored. The legitimacy of the legitimist monarchy after 1789 could only rest on speaking the language of nineteenth-century politics.

Acknowledgements

The research for this article received generous funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101063509 and support from the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University.

ORCID iD

Talitha Ilacqua https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9691-8638

Author Biography

Talitha Ilacqua teaches Modern European History at Durham University and is the author of *Inventing the Modern Region: Basque Identity and the French Nation-State* (2024).