

Princess Carlota Joaquina and the Monarchist Alternative in Spanish American Independence

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This paper focuses on the curious episode in Iberian American history when Princess Carlota Joaquina, daughter of Carlos IV, brother of Fernando VII of Spain, and wife of Dom João, Prince Regent of Portugal and later King João VI of Portugal, tried to assert sovereignty over the Spanish monarchy, in whole or in part, during 1808-10. Although Carlota's pretensions were unsuccessful, they are nonetheless worthy of discussion for a number of reasons. Not least of these is the light that Carlota's proposal throws on the crisis of monarchy in the Spanish world immediately after 1808, and the context it provides for assessing the resilience of both monarchy and monarchism in Spanish America during the couple of decades that followed.

Carlota's Proposal

The 'Carlotist project', if we may call it that, seems to have originated in the Portuguese court in early 1808, shortly after the royal family and its entourage had fled from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, to avoid capture by Napoleon's invading army. The immediate context was one in which Portugal aimed at revenge against Spain for cooperating with Napoleon's invasion of Portugal, agreed at the Treaty of Fontainebleau (which allowed French armies to attack Portugal from Spanish territory in return for a promise to partition the Portuguese monarchy). Once the centre of Portugal's empire was established in Rio, the Prince Regent Dom João began immediately to seek ways to extend his power into Spanish South America, in consort with Britain, his chief ally. His primary target was the Spanish Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata where Portugal had long-standing ambitions to extend the boundaries of Brazil south to the banks of the Río de la Plata, into

the region known as the Banda Oriental. It was at this time that the idea of placing the Infanta Carlota Joaquina on a Spanish throne first appeared.

The idea surfaced in Rio de Janeiro amidst schemes for securing British backing for a Portuguese invasion of the Río de la Plata. In March 1808, the Portuguese foreign minister Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho (later the Conde de Linhares) used this threat to try to intimidate the cabildo of Buenos Aires into accepting the ‘protection’ of Portuguese. When this offer was refused, Sousa Coutinho persuaded Princess Carlota to approach the cabildo of Buenos Aires with an offer to act as Regent of the Viceroyalty.¹ At this point, the scheme attracted its first adherents in Buenos Aires, among members of the Audiencia and local notables who hoped that an alliance with Carlota would forestall a British military assault.²

Rumours of an imminent British attack in the River Plate region were well-founded. Spain had good reason to suspect an attack there, given that the British had already made two attempts in 1806-7, and after the Portuguese flight to Brazil, Spanish fear of a fresh attack increased. British cabinet papers show that ministers were certainly discussing this possibility from the end of 1807. In December 1807, Castlereagh recommended taking a position in the River Plate from which Britain could protect its trade and its ally in Brazil, and influence events in Spanish America. In February 1808, he went a step further and favoured plans to encourage independence in Spanish America, if possible under a constitutional monarchy. Meanwhile, Rear-Admiral Sir Sidney Smith was sent to Rio with a British naval squadron, tasked with patrolling the eastern coast of South America against French attack. On arriving at Rio in May 1808 he became a strong advocate for a joint British-Portuguese invasion of the Río de la Plata. Thus, when Strangford, the

¹ Julián María Rubio, *La Infanta Carlota Joaquina y la política de España en América, 1808-1812*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Historia Hispano-Americana, 1920, pp.36-8.

² Enrique de Gandia, ‘La Princesa de Brasil, la diplomacia inglesa, y el Reino de Buenos Aires’, *Anales de la Sociedad Científica Argentina*, vol. 144, 1947, pp.72-3.

British envoy to the Portuguese court, arrived in July 1808, he was presented with plans for a Portuguese attack on Spanish territory, supported by the British navy.³

At this time, however, news began to arrive in July-August 1808 of the great upheaval in Spain caused by the kidnap of Fernando VII and the subsequent rebellion of Spaniards against the French. With this, came revival of the project for a regency in Spanish America. From the Brazilian court, Carlota and her cousin Don Pedro Carlos issued manifestos expressing their solidarity with the Spanish Bourbons and willingness to defend their rights. Carlota seemed at this time to be ready to give precedence to Pedro Carlos, but, as the prospects for a Spanish American regency improved, she began to present herself as the prime candidate.⁴ The scheme had obvious attractions for the Prince Regent who, though he hated his wife, saw that his power would be reinforced if she were to take up position as a Spanish Regent in neighbouring Río de la Plata, and might even lead to the unification of the two monarchies.

The proposal that Carlota might become Regent failed to attract support in Spanish official circles. The leading officials in Spanish America who received her August manifesto sent polite but non-committal replies, while Viceroy Liniers in Buenos Aires exchanged letters but offered no support. Nor were her credentials taken seriously in Spain. The Junta Central rejected the idea of her Regency in September 1808 on the grounds that she had acted without the consent of the Spanish government, and continued to oppose it when, in November-December 1808, she argued that she should act as Regent for the entire Spanish monarchy.

On the other hand, her proposal did attract interest in American circles in Río de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, among those who favoured the independence of Río de la Plata. From Río, the pro-independence exile Saturnino Rodríguez Peña (who had been an ally of the British during their second invasion of Buenos Aires and was forced to leave when the British pulled out) set up contacts to carry out negotiations with likely allies in

³ John Street, *Gran Bretaña y la independencia del Río de la Plata*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1967, pp.96-110.

⁴ Rubio, *La Infanta Carlota*, pp. 42-73.

Buenos Aires, and Manuel Belgrano, later a key leader of independent Buenos Aires, entered into correspondence with Carlota on behalf of his political associates. For such men, Carlota's proposal suggested a way to achieve independence with Portuguese and British acquiescence and without bloodshed, via a smooth transition to an independent constitutional monarchy.⁵

This was an imaginative but impractical scheme. Carlota had strong support from Admiral Smith, who saw her as a means to prevent the French-backed republican takeover in Buenos Aires that he feared and a guardian of British interests there. In November 1808, he sent his own secret envoy, James Paroissien, to Buenos Aires to negotiate with Peña's contacts on Carlota's behalf. However, despite her friendship with Smith, Carlota pulled back. Her secretary persuaded her that she was being manipulated by rioplatense subversives who wanted an independent republic, and she scuppered Smith's plans by denouncing Paroissien to the authorities in Buenos Aires, in the hope that this might win favour with Viceroy Liniers.⁶ In fact, her behaviour did not have the desired effect. On the contrary, it simply persuaded the Spanish authorities that the British were covertly planning their overthrow and encouraged them to be on their guard against their ally. However, this betrayal did not end Carlota's intrigues. In 1809-10, she made further attempts to win support in Buenos Aires, through the contacts made by her personal agent, the Portuguese Felipe Contucci,. Indeed, Contucci raised her hopes by informing in mid-November 1808 that 124 leading men were ready to support intervention by a military force led by the Infante Pedro Carlos and supported by Admiral Smith, to install her the constitutional monarch of an independent kingdom.

This scheme made no more progress than its predecessors. The Portuguese foreign minister Sousa Coutinho joined with British ambassador Strangford in resolute opposition to Carlota's plans, and the Prince Regent insisted that the British government recall Admiral Smith for his unwarranted intrusion into Portuguese affairs. The Spanish

⁵ On *carlotismo* in Buenos Aires, see John Street, *Gran Bretaña y la independencia del Rio de la Plata*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1967, pp. 116-25.

⁶ R.A. Humphreys, *Liberation in South America, 1806-1827: The Career of James Paroissien*, London: Athlone Press, 1952, pp. 21-36.

government in the Peninsula also moved to block Carlota's schemes. When the Marqués de Casa Irujo, the Spanish ambassador arrived in Rio in August 1809, he brought instructions from the Junta Central to prevent Carlota from entering Spanish territory and to deflect her ambitions to become Regent. Carlota responded by changing her tactics rather than abandoning her ambitions.⁷ In late 1809-10, she cut her secret contacts with creole conspirators in Buenos Aires and, as Spain's internal crisis deepened, tried to convince Casa Irujo in Rio and Spanish officials in Buenos Aires that her Regency offered the best hope for sustaining Spanish rule. Viceroy Cisneros took no notice, however, and nor, after the May Revolution of 1810, did the Junta of Buenos Aires. Convinced that it had the tacit recognition of the British government, the Junta saw no future for Carlota's proposal, and, to emphasise the point, informed the British that it would prefer government by Bonaparte to rule by Carlota or the Portuguese.

The Carlolist project did not quite end there. After the May revolution in Buenos Aires, royalists in Montevideo saw Carlota as a potential ally. In June 1810, José María Salazar, the naval commander and loyalist leader in Montevideo, wrote to the Marqués de Casa Irujo to ask for Carlota's help in defending the River Plata region for Spain, as well as British support in the blockade of Buenos Aires.⁸ The response was negative, not because Carlota was unwilling but because she had no means to intervene on Montevideo's behalf. In reply to Salazar, she acknowledged that it was her duty, as brother of Fernando VII, to help a 'loyal people' but she also pointed, somewhat vaguely, to 'the obstacles which continue to stand in the way of my ideas and just operations.' As compensation, she provided a gift of jewels and plate worth over 50,000 pesos, a gesture which Salazar admiringly described as 'la acción heroica que caracteriza la grandeza de alma de una Infanta Española'.⁹ Casa Irujo meanwhile blocked cooperation from Montevideo, informing Salazar and Governor Soria that they should not send a

⁷ Rubio, *La Infanta Carlota*, pp.74-77.

⁸ Salazar to Casa Irujo, Montevideo, 4 de junio, 1810, núm. 45: ACD, Ultramar 21, Expediente 7.

⁹ Salazar to Secretario de Estado del Despacho Universal de la Marina, 15 de septiembre, 1810, núm. 151: BNM, Manuscritos de América 7225, fols. 146-7.

deputation to her in Rio as she had asked, except in the extreme circumstances that Montevideo should fall to Buenos Aires.¹⁰

The attempt to resuscitate Carlota's plans to intervene in the Río de la Plata to defend the royalist cause thus amounted to very little. Not only were the Prince Regent, the Portuguese foreign minister and the British envoy all opposed, but the new government which had emerged in Spain from the collapse of the Central Junta at the end of 1809 was no more favourable to Carlota than its predecessor. In January 1810, the Junta had mandated its own Regency, inaugurated by a five-man Regency Council, and the convocation of the Cortes in March 1810 saw the inception of a constitutional monarchy which had no reason to be even slightly interested in Carlota's candidacy. The subsequent establishment of juntas in Buenos Aires and in other Spanish American cities from April 1810, all proclaiming to act as the depositaries of sovereignty in Fernando VII's absence, reduced Carlota's relevance to vanishing point. So ended the politically eccentric, though not legally impossible, scheme for a Carlotist Regency which had greatly excited Carlota herself and had for some months seemed to dissidents in Buenos Aires to be a possible vehicle for their plans for independence.

Historical Significance of the Carlotist Project

Given that it failed to have any lasting impact on the politics of Hispanic world, what is the historical significance of Carlota's attempt to make herself a Regent in the Spanish monarchy? It was, perhaps, more apparent in the Portuguese than the Spanish world. For, a decade after her failure to wield power in her own right in Spanish America and after the Braganza court had returned to Portugal, Carlota rekindled her ambitions as a political actor. When King João was disposed to accept a constitution in 1821, Queen Carlota tried to replace him with the army commander, their son Prince Miguel. Her conspiracy failed, but it deepened antagonisms in Portuguese politics, with consequences that projected into the years that followed.

In the Spanish world, Carlota's attempt to intervention was less forceful and her influence much shallower. Nonetheless, when seen in the context of Spanish American

¹⁰ Rubio, *La Infanta Carlota*, p.101.

history, she presents an interesting figure because her attempts to intervene in Spanish American government emphasise the depth of the crisis caused by the fall of Fernando VII, and illuminate the character of the conflicts and contradictions which arose from it.

First, Carlota's intrigues provide a perspective on the Spanish crisis which is often ignored: namely, the part played by foreign powers in the defence and dismemberment of the Spanish monarchy, and in particular the part played by the Portuguese monarchy in the affairs of the Spanish monarchy to which, from 1808, it was allied. Although Carlota's plans deflated, the Portuguese government in Rio de Janeiro continued to play an important part in the political theatre of the River Plate for years to come, thanks partly to the attempts made by political opponents in Montevideo and Buenos Aires to manipulate the government of Brazil for their own ends. On one side, Buenos Aires tried to persuade the people of Montevideo that they should unite to resist Portuguese expansion into the Banda Oriental. On the other side, the Spanish authorities in Montevideo turned to Brazil for military support when it was threatened in 1811 by assaults from Spanish American enemies. Viceroy Elío invited a Portuguese army to enter the Banda Oriental in order to save Montevideo from military defeat. This was a very risky manoeuvre because there was no guarantee that, once installed as protectors of Spanish sovereignty, the Portuguese would ever leave. Elío simply trusted that Britain, Spain's other ally and power in the region, would persuade the Portuguese to return to Brazil. In this instance, they did leave, but only to return in 1816 on the pretence that they were retaking Montevideo from Buenos Aires. Carlota duly wrote to the Spanish government to assure it that Portuguese aggression was directly solely against Buenos Aires, but it soon became clear –to Carlota's consternation- that King Joao intended to remain in the Banda Oriental.¹¹ Thus began the severance of the region from Spanish rule and its incorporation for some years into the kingdom of Brazil.

Second, Carlota's intrigues in Buenos Aires draw attention to its peculiarities in comparison to the other Spanish America cities. In Buenos Aires, unlike other Spanish American capitals, there were groupings who, as a consequence of the British invasions

¹¹ Timothy Anna, *Spain and the Loss of America*, p.157.

of 1806-7, had already contemplated independence and were ready to seize opportunities to secure it when the Spanish crisis started in 1808. Buenos Aires had responded with an extraordinary display of loyalty to the Spanish crown when the British invaded, but in repelling the British, they also ousted the viceroy and changed the balance of local political power. The creation of a large force of militia companies which elected their own officers and were paid by the government, decisively altered the politics of Buenos Aires. The city had experienced a *de facto* autonomy which made it open to ideas of independence, and the militia officers became potentially important political actors, in command of autonomous military units. Buenos Aires was, moreover, a city in close contact with the politics of the Portuguese monarchy, through its maritime connections with the city of Rio de Janeiro. The presence of political exiles from Buenos Aires (men like Saturnino Peña, who had moved because they had tried to use the British to secure independence from Spain) acted as the bridge between Carlota and those politicians in Buenos Aires who saw opportunities for themselves in the onset of Spain's crisis. If Carlota achieved some initial purchase in Buenos Aires, it was because she offered a means of achieving independence without offending the British.

Thirdly, and more generally, the Carlotist project reminds us of the importance of the concept of monarchy and its resilience as a form of government in both Spain and Spanish America during the crisis of the Bourbon regime. Although Carlota's pretensions were ignored, her aim of defending the Spanish throne was widely shared throughout the Spanish world. Spaniards and Spanish Americans, however, employed a different reading of the political theory of kingship. While Carlota argued that her brother's throne was best defended by a dynastic heir until he was restored, Fernando VII's subjects ignored her claims. This was not simply because she was a woman. In fact, in 1789 Carlos IV had abolished the Salic law introduced by Felipe V, because he wished to prevent the succession of his brother, the King of Naples, but at the time had no male heir. Thus Carlota acquired a legal claim to the succession which she could exercise when the male heir was unavailable.¹² Her problem was that this claim was not taken seriously by the new political bodies which emerged in Spain in 1808. These provincial juntas simply did

¹² Rubio, *La Infanta Carlota*, pp.43-4.

not contemplate a Bourbon candidate to replace Fernando VII; they claimed instead that sovereignty had passed to the sovereign people, and they presented themselves as the depositaries of that sovereignty. Moreover, the Infanta Carlota and the Infante Pedro Carlos lacked political leverage in Spain: the Spanish princess and her cousin were in Brazil, had no contacts in Spanish politics, and thus did not appear to be viable actors on the Spanish political scene. And, of course, there was the problem of Carlota's close connection to a Portuguese monarchy that many Spaniards still regarded as an enemy, notwithstanding British insistence that, from 1808, Spain and Portugal were partners in the war against Napoleon. Thus, while the leaders who took over the residual Spanish state during the *juntista* and *centralista* period (1808-10) shared Carlota's commitment to preserving the Spanish Bourbon monarchy, they had no good reason to see her role as a regent as the obvious means to ensure its survival.

The Survival of the Spanish Monarchy in the Crisis of 1808-10

The refusal to admit Carlota's claims did no damage to the continuity of Bourbon kingship in Spain or Spanish America. In Spain, the king's legitimacy was not in question and he remained the crucial figure in political thought and practice that he had been before the crisis. Anti-monarchism had never established a strong foothold in Spain, despite the fears among Spanish ministers during the 1790s that revolutionary contamination might reach across the Pyrenees. The Bourbon monarchy also weathered infighting at court, where the opposition of a fernandino faction to Godoy culminated in the Aranjuez coup which removed Godoy and forced the abdication of Carlos IV in March 1808. However, neither this, nor the perception that Fernando VII had allowed himself to be victimized by Napoleon, seems to have damaged the concept of monarchy. On the contrary, the profound crisis of the monarchy caused by Fernando VII's capture transformed him into a mythical figure who symbolized the Christian virtues of a just Spanish king against the impious vices of the tyrant Napoleon.

It is worth noting, too, that the crisis of 1808 was not a crisis of monarchy *per se*. It did not arise from ideological and political challenge within Spanish society but was a dynastic crisis triggered by Napoleon's usurpation of the Bourbon throne. Napoleon's action was not designed to abolish monarchy in Spain; he simply aimed to convert Spain

into a more reliable ally by replacing a dynasty which had originated in the family of Louis XIV with another dynasty of much more recent French origins, drawn from his own family. His effort to strengthen the Spanish monarchical state by changing its leadership and its constitution did not have the intended effect, however, for it was very different from Bourbon succession to the Habsburgs in 1700. Then, the French candidate Philippe d'Anjou was acceptable because he was a Catholic prince, destined to take the throne by the testament of Carlos II and the hand of God. Joseph Bonaparte, by contrast, was a heretic who had taken power illegally and by force of arms. So, rather than effecting a smooth transition from Bourbon to Bonapartist rule, the imposition of King Jose I on the Spanish throne provoked multiple rebellions and provided the setting for political revolution throughout the Spanish world.

Initially, the principle of monarchy survived this upheaval because those who opposed Napoleon did so in the shared political language of the old regime: they rallied to the recently-anointed Fernando VII, merging defence of the king with defence of country and religion. The juntas which were convoked throughout Spain in 1808 justified themselves as temporary depositaries of the sovereignty of king: they claimed their authority in the name of Fernando VII and did not imagine any kind of government which was not legitimated by the royal connection. This position of loyalty to the king solidified under the Central Junta in 1809 until, with the convocation of the Cortes at Cádiz in 1810, a new vision of the future of the monarchy became possible. For, from the deliberations of the Cortes, a constitutional monarchy emerged, verified by the Cádiz Constitution of 1812.

Monarchy in Spanish America during the Interregnum

Ongoing support for Fernando VII in Spain guaranteed the continuity of monarchy in America. When news of Napoleon's usurpation and Spain's rebellion arrived (shortly after Spanish Americans had celebrated the proclamation of Fernando VII as king), their response to his usurpation was an extraordinary affirmation of continuing loyalty, backed by financial support through taxes and voluntary donations. This situation changed in early 1810, with the arrival of reports that France had overrun the Peninsula and that the Junta, after taking refuge in Cádiz, had transferred its authority to a Regency Council.

But the language of monarchism still prevailed. The juntas de gobierno which emerged from American cabildos during 1810 were invariably royalist in their rhetoric, proclaiming themselves as defenders of Fernando VII and depositaries of sovereignty in his absence.

Such continuity is unsurprising. Despite the sometimes unpopular innovations introduced by the Bourbons during the previous century, at the time of the imperial crisis anti-monarchist sentiments were almost as rare in Spanish America as in Spain. Although Bourbon fiscal and administrative innovations had triggered some serious disturbances during the reign of Carlos III, the hegemony of monarchism was plainly inscribed in the rebellions provoked by reform. The slogan, ‘Viva el rey y muera el mal gobierno’, reflected their conservative cast: participants called for an end to ‘bad government’ not monarchy, and castigated the king’s ministers, not the king. Even where there was some claim to self-government, as in the rebellion of the barrios in Quito (where there was talk of making the Conde de Selva Florida the king of Quito) and in the great southern Andean rebellion (where Túpac Amaru suggested that he might rule as king of Peru), the rights of the Spanish king were never fully nor seriously denied. Bourbon regalism, with its more centralised, authoritarian and utilitarian idea of the state, was unwelcome to those accustomed to the practices of the Habsburg plural monarchy, no doubt, but resistance was largely expressed and contained within the institutional order. Burgeoning American regional identities gave new energy to creole patriotism, but this not necessarily translate into opposition to the monarchy. American ‘ilustrados’ looked for a new place within the monarchy, not outside it, and, in criticising the backwardness of their societies, were inclined to see the crown as the essential agent for reform ‘from above’ in highly-conservative social and cultural milieux. Outright opposition to monarchy was very rare, even after the American and French revolutions. Although republicanism became fashionable among educated, generally younger, sections of the American upper classes towards the end of the century, it rarely translated into political action. The occasional conspiracies which incorporated ideas about the overthrow of monarchy and separation from Spain (such as Nariño and others in Santafé de Bogotá in 1796, Gual and España in Caracas in 1797, Miranda’s abortive attempt to promote revolution in Venezuela in 1806) showed that only very small minorities entertained

ideas from the European revolutionary tradition, and fewer still participated in conspiracies which were far outside the mainstream of political life and culture. When the Bourbon monarchy collapsed, it was because of French intervention, not colonial rebellion. Only when the crisis was underway did 'enlightened' ideas contribute to the construction of political alternatives to the Spanish monarchy. And such alternatives did not emerge immediately, nor did they follow some pre-determined pattern of replacing one political system for another; they arose instead from the complicated process of political experimentation with which Americans responded to the 'decapitation' of the monarchy in 1808.

The most common response to political turmoil was in a monarchist idiom. Its most obvious exponents were the government functionaries and other beneficiaries of the old regime, such as Peninsular merchants and many of the clergy, who opposed any challenge to Spanish sovereignty and struggled to sustain the status quo ante 1810. Their commitment no doubt took various forms, but underpinning it was a powerful body of ideas which represented the king as the guarantor of peace, dispenser of justice, and protector of the Catholic faith. The advance of regalism during the eighteenth century had placed the king still more firmly at the centre of the political system, reinforcing the monarch as the apex of a hierarchical social order ordained by God, organized by rank and divided into corporations. In the realm of ideas, then, the king was a charismatic figure: he was the bridge between the divine and the mundane, the embodiment of a metaphysical order revealed by the Christian religion.

Such powerful and pervasive ideas persuaded many to defend the monarchy. Indeed, royalism seems to have reached across the social spectrum from the richest to the poorest elements of society. Evidence from both Mexico and South America suggests, for example, that Indian communities tended to remain loyal to the Spanish monarchy. Their reasons no doubt include both genuine commitment to a system into which they had been firmly incorporated as Christians subjects of the crown, alongside a preference for a paternalist system in which the 'republica de indios' enjoyed the protection of the king and, through its direct relationship to the crown, some degree of autonomy.

Examples of Indian fidelity abound. In southern Peru, most Indian communities remained faithful to the royal cause. The Indian nobles of Cuzco was a particularly firm bastion. Despite loss of wealth and status after the Túpac Amaru rebellion, they remained committed to the Spanish monarchy on which they depended and did not rebel against Spanish government until 1814.¹³ In New Granada, the Indians of Pasto and Santa Marta played important roles in defending enclaves of royalist government, while Indian communities in coastal Caracas and Cartagena also favoured the royalist side against its republican enemies.¹⁴ This loyalty usually reflected the importance of traditional leadership and its ability to sustain a following, as well as political calculations arising from local disputes over resources. Indeed, where such leadership was either absent or divorced from the communities, then loyalty to the crown was more fragile. In Upper Peru, for example, especially in the region around La Paz, the divorce between the peasantry and the traditional authority of cacicazgos, many of which had passed into the hands of whites, made Indians more prone to rebel against Spanish rule.

Fidelity to the name of Fernando VII and in defence of his monarchy was, conversely, also expressed in rebellions against Spanish rule, as was vividly demonstrated in Mexico. While Indian communities in much of southern Mexico and Central America remained passively loyal to the crown, displaying a tolerance of, if not a preference for the status quo, Indian peasants in central and northern Mexico joined in insurrection and insurgency. But, in the Hidalgo rebellion and subsequent insurgency directed against the viceregal authorities, loyalty to Fernando VII and the principle of monarchy remained strong. Hidalgo and Allende, co-leaders of the great insurrection of 1810, presented themselves as defenders of Fernando VII and 'holy religion', both, it seems, essential

¹³ David T. Garrett, *Shadows of Empire: The Indian Nobility of Cusco, 1750-1825*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp.242-52.

¹⁴ Rebecca A. Earle, *Spain and the Independence of Colombia 1810-1825*, Exeter: University of Exeter, 2000, pp.36-54. Steinar A. Saether, *Identidades e independencia en Santa Marta y Riohacha, 1750-1850*, Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2005, pp.158-63; Jairo Gutiérrez Ramos, *Los indios de Pasto contra la República (1809-1824)*, Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2007, pp.158-164; 201-6.

qualifications for political leaders who aspired to widespread support. It may be that members of the creole directorate of the insurgency did not believe in the *fernandino* mantra –certainly Allende expressed some scepticism- but the fact that they intoned it reflects a belief that obeisance to ‘el deseado’ was essential for sustaining popular support. Peasant voices reinforce the impression that popular rebellion was underpinned by a commitment to throne and altar, a commitment that was sometimes coloured by messianic beliefs about a saviour king. Testimonies taken from captured rebels record the beliefs that Fernando VII was present in Mexico and guiding the rebellion; that he was in league with Hidalgo and Allende; that he had joined with the Virgin of Guadalupe to defeat the Spanish. In others, others stood in for Fernando VII: thus Hidalgo and Morelos were sometimes spoken of as kings for Mexico, as, more surprisingly, was the wealthy creole landowner Ignacio Allende during his time as Hidalgo’s deputy.¹⁵

Popular monarchism can also be found among other subaltern social groups who occupied a lowly position in the social hierarchy. In southern New Granada, for example, the free black and coloureds of the Patía Valley played a key part in resistance to the confederation of autonomous cities in the Cauca region and as allies of the Indians of Pasto; in Venezuela, the pardos of Valencia opposed the revolutionary government in Caracas, as did the mixed race groups of the Llanos, whom Boves converted into the republic’s military nemesis. Even slaves joined the loyalists in Venezuela, where royalist military commanders turned to them for armed support against creole landowners.¹⁶

If Spanish American commitment to the monarchy derived resilience from a broad social base, it was also energized by the political revolution that took place in interregnum Spain. A new kind of monarchism sprang from the creation of the Cortes of Cádiz which, in 1812, formally turned Bourbon absolutism into a constitutional monarchy that awaited completion by the return of Fernando VII. In American regions

¹⁵ Eric Van Young, *Popular Religion and the Politics of Insurgency in Mexico, 1810-1821*, in Austen Ivereigh, *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival*, London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000, pp.74-114.

¹⁶ Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2005, Chap. 2.

which remained under royalist control, the change was welcome to many: it seemed to fulfil aspirations for autonomy within a reformed empire, where Americans might enjoy greater participation in government while avoiding the social upheaval that might result from more radical political change. Mexico was the most striking example of a country where modified monarchism won allies for the crown. Not only did it appeal to American elites by providing for their fuller representation in government, but it also won support in small communities (over 1.000 inhabitants) who were now able to exercise greater influence over their own affairs by establishing ‘ayuntamientos constitucionales’.¹⁷

Respect for monarchy was, more surprisingly, also strong among the autonomous governments set up by the juntas which rejected the Spanish Regency and Cortes. The first Spanish American juntas, from Caracas in the north to Santiago de Chile in the south, all acknowledged Fernando VII as their legitimate king, and presented themselves as depositaries of his sovereignty. So, too, did Hidalgo, Morelos and other leaders of the insurgency in Mexico. When the juntas moved to the next stage of their political evolution and created constitutions, several continued to recognise Fernando VII as their sovereign, albeit with the rider that he would have to come to reign in their territories e.g. Cundinamarca. Only a minority formally rejected both Spain and its king, and became independent republics during Fernando’s interregnum (e.g. Caracas and Cartagena in 1811).

There were many reasons for this formal adherence to Fernando VII and the principle of monarchy. In some instances, it was a flag of convenience. Those who wished to make a radical break with Spain wore the ‘mask of Ferdinand’ in order to secure popular support for revolutionary political objectives which enjoyed little public sympathy.¹⁸ On the whole, however, it is more plausible to see allegiance to the king as evidence of the strength of a political culture rooted in the past and anchored by religion.¹⁹ The images,

¹⁷ Timothy Anna, *The Fall of Royal Government in Mexico City*, makes a persuasive case for seeing the constitution of Cádiz as the main reason for Mexican loyalty to Spain.

¹⁸ Simon Collier, *Ideas and Politics of Chilean Independence*,

¹⁹ On the sincerity of Mexican commitment to Fernando VII, see Marco Antonio Landavazo, “Fernando VII y la insurgencia mexicana: Entre la ‘máscara’ y el mito”, in

institutions and practices of kingship were so deeply embedded in Hispanic political and cultural life that they dominated the political imagination and shaped thinking about the significance of the monarchy's crisis. In the vacuum left by the *vacatio regis*, the lawyers, clerics, *cabildantes*, and other notables who took part in the debates held in cabildos and *juntas de gobierno* in 1808-10 reflected the political practices and thinking of local elites under the old regime, that is the composite Hispanic monarchy which had been modified but not transformed by the Bourbons. Facing crisis at the centre, they turned to what they knew. Thus, in debates about the locus of authority in the king's absence, they interpreted their position in terms of the neo-scholastic vision of the sovereign who derived his right to power from a pact with the 'people' (to whom sovereignty reverted in his absence), and drew on concepts taken from Hispanic intellectual traditions, transmitted through the study of natural and canon law in American universities.²⁰ The appeal to an Hispanic 'ancient constitution' was one such invocation of Hispanic intellectual and political traditions.²¹ At the same time, the cabildo was the primary forum for decision-making, again reflecting recourse to Spanish political traditions, in this case to political bodies that had probably been strengthened by Bourbon reform in the later eighteenth century.²²

Such responses were a natural way for American elites to cope with emergency within the existing system of government, while also taking advantage of the crisis to assert their influence without preserving social peace. By deploying legalistic justifications for the temporary transfer of sovereignty, they not only found a legal way to take power but, in assuming the mantle of the legitimate king, they also upheld the continuity of the existing social order.

Marta Terán & José Antonio Serrano Ortega (eds.), *Las guerras de independencia en la América española*, Zamora, Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán et al., 2002, pp.79-98.

²⁰ Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, *Un Nuevo Reino: Geográfica política, pactismo y diplomacia durante el interregno en NuevaGranada*, Bogotá: Universidad Externado, 2010.

²¹ José Carlos Chiaramonte, 'The "Ancient Constitution" after Independence (1808-1852)', *HAHR* 90:3, 2010.

²² María Teresa Calderón & Clément Thibaud, *La Majestad de los Pueblos*, Chapter 2.

This did not mean that the monarchical order was untouched by innovation. As the *juntas de gobierno* and their successors grappled with the problems of government, they began to move away from reliance on traditional Hispanic ideas and drew on other sources too, notably the primary texts of the French and American revolutions. The early constitutions of New Granada and Venezuela are thus replete with references drawn from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and from the federalist thinking of North American statesmen. But they were not merely copies of imported templates. Indeed, the adoption of federalism in New Granada and Venezuela is an striking example of the fusion of Hispanic and North American political ideas.

Clearly, the federalist project was an initiative from above, from men within the cultured elites who were familiar with liberal political ideas. But it is misleading to see the federalist project as simply applying foreign political formulae in disregard of local realities. At the very least, this fails to explain why the federalist model was so enthusiastically taken up during the first independence of New Granada and Venezuela. Federalism made more immediate sense to political leaders in those regions than did the notion of a single republic for reasons that had much more to do with their political experience than with their access to foreign political texts. After all, they represented regions with distinctive cultural characteristics, different economic interests, and inherited rivalries, all of which pointed to a future as separate political entities. They had also imbibed the vision of a composite monarchy which, having been composed of reinos which owed allegiance to the King of Castile, became sovereigns in his absence. In these circumstances, unity under a central power was not automatic; it had to be negotiated between independent states, each of which aimed to create its own constitution.²³

It seems, then, that, Spanish Americans did not import liberal ideas in order to initiate or develop movements for constitutional change or for independence. During Fernando's interregnum, ideas and practices inherited from the Habsburg composite monarchy (and

²³ Anthony McFarlane, 'Hacia la independencia colombiana: La época de la "Primera República" en la Nueva Granada, 1810-1815,' in Juan Bosco Amores Carredano (ed.), *Las independencias iberoamericanas. ¿Un proceso imaginado?* (Pamplona: Universidad del País Vasco, 2009), pp.37-88.

perhaps strengthened by Bourbon reforms which fortified municipal government) were the starting point for change. Under the *juntas de gobierno* of 1810, they provided the ideological platform for autonomous constitutional experiments which shifted allegiance away from Spain and towards independence and republicanism. In areas where Spanish governments were not supplanted by juntas (Mexico and Peru were the most important), the political system also moved along a new trajectory, but this time driven from without rather than within, from the constitutional experimentation of the metropolitan Cortes which aimed at political reconstruction within the confines of a recomposed Spanish monarchy.

These two broad movements towards constitutional change, one heading towards republicanism and the other towards a new constitutional empire, was stopped in 1814 by military power. In Spain, British and Spanish forces defeated the French and, with the end of the Peninsular war, opened the way to the restoration of Fernando VII and, with it, the suppression of the Cortes and end of the constitutional regime. In Spanish America, American loyalism made a key contribution to the reinstatement of the monarchy by sustaining Spanish rule and defeating, or at least containing, threats to Spanish authority. This ensured that Fernando VII's restoration to the throne of Spain was matched by his restoration as king in most of Spanish America.

The Disappearance of Monarchy

The restoration of Fernando VII in 1814 was, however, a false dawn. By 1825, three centuries of monarchical rule came to an end throughout most of the old empire, and the Spanish monarchy survived only in diminished form in regions which remained under the sovereignty of Spain, until replaced by the first republic in 1873. Why, then, did the concept of monarchy fade in the decade after its return in 1814? And why did it make no return under independent governments in the 1820s (with the sole and very brief exception of Agustín Iturbide in 1821)?

Explanation of the end of the Spanish monarchy is, in large part, co-terminous with explanation of the fall of Spanish empire and the creation of independent Spanish American states. But the decline and fall of the empire does not wholly explain why the monarchical form of government, which had been so central to political thinking and

behaviour for so long, disappeared with the end of Spanish rule. I will draw this paper to a close by suggesting some of the reasons why monarchy faded with the dissolution of the Spanish monarchy in America after 1814.

One major cause of the fall of the Spanish monarchy, and the concomitant disappearance of the institution of monarchy, was the failure of Fernando VII. The sardonic epithet applied to the Bourbon émigrés who returned to France after Napoleon's fall -as people who had 'forgotten nothing and learned nothing'- fits Fernando well. Before going into exile, his political experience was formed by life in a royal family whose King and Queen he resented, in a court riven by intense factionalism. His brief period as king in 1808 brought no experience of government, and while in exile he had been disconnected from the forces which reshaped politics in the Spanish world. On his return to Spain, he had no clear plans beyond an urge to return to the status quo ante 1808. Fernando was, most historians agree, deeply insecure, fiercely anti-liberal and, perhaps because of his insecurity, quick to try to assert himself as an authoritarian figure. This state of mind dictated his immediate political goals: to destroy the institutions of representative government created in the constitutionalist years; to purge prominent liberals from public life and ally himself with the reactionary *serviles* (conservative deputies in the Cortes) who sought to turn back the clock; to choose ministers who would mirror his views and act on his decisions. His determination to put his stamp on Spain was, however, not matched by insight into what might best serve Spain as it emerged from the devastation of war, and he showed no aptitude for the reconciliation need to rebuild his monarchy and country.²⁴

Ferdinand's reactionary disposition was encouraged by the repressive political climate in Europe at large. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the recovery of Spain's American empire was underwritten by European statesmen at the 1815 Congress of Vienna. In agreeing to rebuild the political structures torn down during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the Congress and the Holy Alliance which emerged from it created a political context that favoured the reconstruction of imperial Spain.

²⁴ Charles Esdaile, *Spain in the Liberal Age*, pp.42-50.

Reconstruction was also favoured by the end of war in the Peninsula. Peace not only allowed Spanish government to focus again on imperial governance; it also left Spain with a large army (about 150,000 men) which, although it had not always distinguished itself in the war against France, was more experienced, combat-ready and, above all, more available for overseas deployment than any Spanish army had been since 1810. Its deployment in America was, moreover, encouraged by groups with powerful political leverage -not least of which was the body of Spanish merchant who lived from the transatlantic trade- who were convinced that Spain could retain its place among the concert of powers only by recreating the mercantilist and authoritarian structures of the pre-war Bourbon monarchy.

By committing itself to such intentions without the resources to achieve them, the Fernandine regime embarked on a difficult course. Perhaps its central mistake was to commit itself to military solutions and, in America, to create government of a distinctly militaristic character. This flowed from Fernando's restoration. His return to power owed much to army officers who believed that the army had been mistreated during the constitutionalist period; few defended the constitutionalist regime, and some played key parts in restoring Fernando to the plenitude of power. Military men then subsequently contributed to the failure of his American policy by backing a military solution which imposed increasing strain on the Spanish army, while also proving unable to defeat resurgent independence movements, and alienating American populations who might have been amenable to a more reformist approach.²⁵ The incipient crisis at the heart of government broke out in the Riego revolt of 1820, when army officers joined with liberals to restore a constitutionalist government. But it was too late to save the monarchy. Indeed, new policies exacerbated Spain's problems in America. By now, the Spanish monarchy had lost credibility. After abandoning the experiment with constitutional monarchy in 1814, an experiment which might conceivably have saved the

²⁵ See, for example, the impact of Fernando VII's policies in New Granada and Venezuela: Earle, *Spain and the Independence of Colombia*; Stephen Stoa, *Pablo Morillo and Venezuela, 1815-20*.

monarchy -perhaps in the form envisaged by the Conde de Aranda in 1783-²⁶ and insisting on a return to absolutism, Fernando's regime pushed its American opponents further along the path to republicanism on which some had already embarked in 1810-14.

The return of Fernando VII did not, however, immediately eliminate interest in constitutional monarchy in Spanish America, outside Spanish rule. In the United Provinces of Río de la Plata, his restoration provoked a panicked interest in rapprochement with Spain. Posadas, who became Supreme Director of the United Provinces in January 1814, sent Belgrano and Rivadavia to London to ask the British to prevent Spain from launching a new offensive and, covertly, to negotiate a peaceful solution in which the Río de la Plata would become either an independent constitutional monarchy under a Bourbon prince or an autonomous state within a reformed Spanish monarchy. When Alvear became Supreme Director in January 1815, he went a step further, and sought to defend the United Provinces by attaching them to the British monarchy, and he requested that Britain send troops to Buenos Aires to enforce British sovereignty. In London, meanwhile, Manuel Sarratea, another Buenos Aires' envoy in Europe, took another tack: he contacted the former king Carlos IV of Spain to persuade him to propose his youngest son as the future king of an independent monarchy in the Río de la Plata. In 1816, at the Congress of Tucumán which declared *rioplatense* independence, Belgrano also argued for constitutional monarchy on the grounds that it would foster internal unity and order while improving the external image of the independent power. Such schemes had no purchase in Spain, however; indeed, when

²⁶ Aranda's plan took the form of a secret memo to Carlos III, composed when he was plenipotenciary envoy at the negotiations in Paris at the end of the American war of independence. Fearing a future in which Spanish America would follow the United States to independence, Aranda envisaged placing three infantes for three kingdoms - Mexico, Peru, and Costa Firme - while Cuba and Puerto Rico were kept as commercial entrepôts. These kingdoms would be allies of Spain and France and thus act as a counterbalance to growing British and British North American power. See Manuel Lucena Giraldo, *Premoniciones de la independencia de Iberoamérica: las reflexiones de José de Ábalos y el Conde de Aranda sobre la situación de la América española a finales del siglo XVIII*, Madrid: Fundación Histórica Tavera; Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 2003.

Casa Flores reported on them from his post in Rio de Janeiro in 1817, it was mainly to urge Spain to take advantage of rioplatense weakness and to send a military expedition.²⁷

These arguments recurred in 1818, when France made discreet diplomatic enquiries into the possibility of establishing independent Bourbon monarchies in America. The French foreign minister sent an envoy to Río de la Plata, where Puerreydón, the Supreme Director was willing to consider the installation of a foreign prince.²⁸ This secret policy was soon abandoned, however, when it became clear that it might do irreparable damage to relations with Spain. The prospect of a foreign prince for Peru nonetheless remained alive while General San Martín was leading the campaign against royalist Peru, only to recede again during Bolívar's ascendancy. It then briefly reappeared in another form when some of Bolívar's followers favoured making him king during the early 1820s. In the event, Bolívar found means to exercise strong central authority through the constitutions he created, and only Mexico experimented with setting up a monarchy. The Plan de Iguala offered Fernando VII the throne if he came to Mexico, and in his absence Agustín Iturbide became Emperor in 1821. The briefness of Agustín I's reign suggests that monarchy had lost its attractions in Mexico, even in the new form. But Mexican interest in monarchy persisted among conservatives, who eventually succeeded in the 1860s in launching Maximilian's monarchy with the backing of France. This was the only such experiment seen in Spanish America. Another plan to do so, floated by Flores in Ecuador, came to nothing.

Why did schemes for constitutional monarchies fail? In the first place, it was difficult to find acceptable suitable candidates, whether American or European. In Spanish America, with its truncated aristocracy, there were serious dynastic claims. Ideas about enthroning Incas, floated by Miranda in the early 1800s and by Belgrano in 1816, never won any serious support, for reasons which are not hard to imagine. Placing European princes at the head of new constitutional monarchies was, on the other hand, a solution which also suffered numerous practical weaknesses. In the first place, there was a distinct

²⁷ Timothy Anna, *Spain and the Loss of America*, p.174.

²⁸ Robertson, *France and Latin American Independence*, pp.163-73.

scarcity of European candidates who were willing and acceptable to the leading international powers, particularly England and France. Secondly, Spain's intransigent refusal to recognise Spanish America's independent states further inhibited recruitment. Thirdly, the idea of sharing out monarchies among Fernando VII's relatives was impractical, given that he had only two brothers, neither of whom were suitable candidates, and the other three possible infantes all had some impediment to their candidacy.²⁹

There was, moreover, a certain absurdity about such schemes. They suggest a patronising belief that the only serious option for benighted peoples who had suffered the chaos of war and political upheaval was rule by Europeans, and monarchical schemes thus ignored what was probably the principal reason for the end of monarchy in America: namely, the discrediting of monarchy that stemmed from the disastrous political career of Fernando VII, together with a decline of interest in monarchy as republican solutions gained greater traction. Although there were important thinkers and statesmen who continued to see republican equality as the inevitable road to disorder and conflict, the advocates of monarchy seldom made headway in practical politics. In the immediate aftermath of republican triumphs in war, monarchism must have seemed a relic of the past, and there was certainly a tendency to see the political future along the lines laid down by the United States. By the 1830s and 1840, such optimism had often faded, but by that time republican government was sufficiently established to make a revival of monarchy unpalatable and, to all but the most desperate conservatives, inconceivable.

²⁹ Pedro Carlos, Carlota's and Fernando's cousin had died in Brazil in 1812. Fernando's brother Don Carlos was an 'indispensable companion', while Don Francisco de Paula was not only rumoured to be the illegitimate child of Godoy, but was also a liberal and a mason by the 1820s. The other Bourbon possibles were the king's uncle, who was too old; his nephew, Don Carlos Luis, was more eligible but not a Spaniard; Don Luis was primate of Spain: Timothy Anna, *Spain and the Loss of America*, pp.175-6.