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The ‘Dying’ Bourbon Dynasty: The Diplomatic Role of the Spanish Monarchy in the Long Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This article explores one of the main arenas in which change came over the role of the monarchy as part of Europe’s transition to a modern political system: diplomacy. Traditionally, there had been a dual aspect to monarchy that merged dynastic and state interests. The creation of modern constitutional political systems in the nineteenth century forced European crowns to modify their prerogatives and effective power, sharing this with elected politicians. This included foreign policy, which thenceforward pursued national interests that did not always agree with dynastic ones. Focusing on the Spanish branch of the house of Bourbon, I examine this involved and controversial process. Firstly, I trace the breaking of the Bourbon alliance which had been dominant in the eighteenth century and its unsettled reconfiguration into the worldwide system created by the Congress of Vienna. I then discuss the complex imposition of the nation-state interest over the dynastic one in a time of deep ideological division – between constitutional and absolutist systems – and traumatic revolutions that overthrew Bourbon monarchs. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the liberal and nationalist wave forced transnational family ties to succumb to national interest.

Keywords: monarchy; nineteenth century; diplomacy; nationalism; Spain

On 4 May 1898, Lord Salisbury gave a controversial speech dividing ‘the nations of the world as the living and the dying’.¹ The former were those great countries ‘growing in power every year, growing in wealth, dominion, and

¹ *The Times*, 5 May 1898.

the perfection of their organization', whereas the latter were states characterised by disorganisation, decay, misgovernment and corruption. 'Decade after decade,' he said, 'they are weaker, poorer, and less provided with leading men or institutions in which they can trust.' In his opinion, 'the inevitable result' was quite obvious. Amidst his colleagues' laughter and cheers, he stated, 'the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying'. Thus, they would cure or cut up 'these unfortunate patients', removing 'desolation and sterility by means of this aggrandisement'. Nobody was unaware that the prime minister was alluding to Spain.² Just a fortnight earlier, US ships had attacked Spanish possessions in America and Asia to consummate its 'manifest destiny'.

That conflict exposed the definitive retreat of Spain to second-class power status,³ but it also confirmed the end of an era when sovereigns claimed the right to play a leading diplomatic role. As monarchs throughout the century had done, Maria Cristina of Habsburg-Lorraine promptly corresponded with her royal cousins to request their support. The Spanish queen regent thus invoked a sort of monarchic, supranational fraternity to oppose the republican United States. Months before the war broke out, in 1898, she wrote to Queen Victoria 'to expose my complicated situation' to her but also to seek 'her powerful support and great advice'.⁴ Maria Cristina went into all the outrages committed by the United States in financing the Cuban independence fighters to provoke a war and exclaimed, 'I can no longer allow my country to be humiliated.' Appealing for peacekeeping, she begged Victoria 'not to deny me her powerful protection'. Victoria's response foreshadowed the kind of tensions her grandson, George V, would be exposed to sixteen years later. After consulting her government, Victoria responded in terms of the strictest neutrality. However, in her journal, she wrote: 'it is monstrous of America'.⁵ Informal contacts between monarchs might continue, but their personal preferences were already outweighed by state interest.

In 1898, Spain was reduced to a 'dying nation', a lesser and decayed country that had lost its former powerful international presence. However, the same certainly did not apply to its monarchy and dynasty.⁶ The Bourbons restoration in 1874 succeeded in stabilising the Spanish monarchy with the explicit support of other European sovereigns.⁷ Fears, after the Paris Commune, of revolutionary excesses and the republic undoubtedly helped. The Spanish

² Rosario de la Torre, 'La prensa madrileña y el discurso de Lord Salisbury sobre las naciones moribundas', *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea*, 6 (1985), 163–80.

³ James W. Cortada (ed.), *Spain in the Nineteenth-Century World: Essays on Spanish Diplomacy, 1789–1898* (Westport, 1994); Alfred W. McCoy, Josep M. Fradera and Stephen Jacobson (eds.), *Endless Empires: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline* (Madison, 2012).

⁴ Queen Maria Cristina to Queen Victoria, 17 March, 1898, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria. Third Series*, ed. George Early Buckle (1932), III, 236–7.

⁵ Queen Maria Cristina to Queen Victoria, 21 April 1898, *ibid.*, 244.

⁶ David San Narciso, Margarita Barral and Carolina Armenteros (eds.), *Monarchy and Liberalism in Spain: The Building of the Nation State, 1780–1931* (2021).

⁷ Julio Salom, *España en la Europa de Bismarck. La política exterior de Cánovas, 1871–1881* (Madrid, 1967).

monarchy now participated as one of the cosmopolitan European royal families in a way that had never been seen before. In 1906, Alfonso XIII actually married Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg, one of Queen Victoria's most cherished granddaughters. This was far from the previous image of the Bourbon monarchy. In 1857, Victoria and Albert urged the young newly crowned Pedro V of Portugal to marry, avoiding especially the Bourbons. In their opinion, the dynasty 'had not only a simple education', but 'it was also corrupted by the Court's incest'.⁸ Four years later, Albert again advised him not to marry a Spanish princess. Her blood, he claimed, 'promised little spiritual, moral, and physical health'.⁹ The Neapolitan branch of the family was not spared censure either. In 1857, Pedro wrote to the Portuguese ambassador in London discussing possible marriage alliances for his sister. In his opinion, they had to reject the proposal of the duke of Calabria because 'it would make us, through the bond of kinship, partners in the intrigues that fly from Naples to Madrid and from Madrid to Naples'.¹⁰ Political reasons strongly discouraged the match. As he wrote, 'we are one of the few princes who have accepted the representative regime wisely and sincerely', while the Bourbons 'represent diametrically opposed principles'. Their counterpoint was 'the house of Savoy which, since 1848, has given highly regarded proof of its adherence to the constitutional regime'.¹¹

The image of the Bourbons as a degenerate dynasty circulated throughout Europe and created a body of opinion that associated moral excesses with the purest political absolutism. Hence, following Lord Salisbury's analogy, there were living and dying dynasties. Among them, there was a clear winner: the Coburgs. From the 1830s onwards, that family extended its tentacles steadily around Europe until its infiltration into the innermost realms.¹² On the other side, the identity of the corresponding dying dynasty, over the top of which they built their power, was evident: the Bourbons. Decade after decade, revolution after revolution, this family saw its power and international influence progressively decline. Historians have focused primarily on the winners. However, there are almost no studies dealing with the losers. This article proposes a global analysis of the house of Bourbon, centred on its Spanish branch. Based on a wide range of sources, I study the role that the monarchy played in the modern diplomatic system. Firstly, I trace the breaking of the Bourbon alliance which had been dominant in the eighteenth century. But I also locate it in the worldwide system reconfiguration that followed the Congress of Vienna. I

⁸ Prince Albert to Pedro V, 13 Feb. 1857, in *Correspondência entre D. Pedro V e seu tio, o príncipe Alberto*, ed. Maria Filomena Mónica (Lisbon, 2000), 188.

⁹ Prince Albert to Pedro V, 16 May 1861, *ibid.*, 367.

¹⁰ Pedro V to Francisco de Almeida, 7 Dec. 1857, in *Cartas de D. Pedro V ao conde de Lavradio*, ed. Ruben Andresen Leitão (Porto, 1949), 167–8.

¹¹ Bernardo de Sá da Bandeira to Luís I, 22 Dec. 1861, in Julio de Vilhena, *D. Pedro V e o seu reinado: novos documentos* (Coimbra, 1922), 174–5.

¹² Olivier Defrance, *Léopold I^{er} et le clan Cobourg* (Brussels, 2004); Karina Urbach (ed.), *Royal Kinship: Anglo-German Family Networks, 1815–1918* (Munich, 2008); Patrick Weber, *La saga des Saxe-Cobourg* (Paris, 2016).

then discuss the complex imposition of the nation-state interest over the dynastic one in foreign affairs.

The monarchy in the modern diplomatic world

Its role in international affairs was one of the most relevant and lasting powers of the monarchy. Historiography has traditionally defended an idealised model of royal adaptation to the modern world, according to which liberalism restricted monarchy to its symbolic place throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, it is said, the institution relinquished its active and effective political role, avoiding political struggles and becoming apolitical. The reality, however, was somewhat different. The transition was much more complicated and less peaceful. Liberal politicians all around Europe fought to impose themselves over monarchies and repurpose the institution.¹³ The battles between parliaments, monarchs and governments were sometimes extraordinarily intense.¹⁴ However, it was the executive branch that was central to these fights. Notwithstanding the separation of powers, no constitution enshrined what the nature of the monarch's coexistence with ministers should be. It was primarily a process achieved through political practice. Sovereigns were reluctant to yield even a whit of their sovereignty, prerogatives or effective exercise of power. To that end, they would use their constitutional prerogative of appointing and dismissing ministers and take advantage of the cabinet's need for royal support to survive. Thus, ministers had to get the upper hand over the monarchy. And this was only possible with strong political parties and parliamentary forms of government.¹⁵ The result was frequent tensions between monarchs and politicians throughout the whole of the century.

Diplomacy was one of the main battlefields. Traditionally, this was the monarchy's dominion par excellence, in which state politics merged with dynastic considerations. The established account would have it that the government progressively appropriated and absorbed the sovereign's role in foreign affairs. While this process might be apparent in theory, it was much tougher in practice. The monarch's removal from active power in foreign affairs was a convoluted and lengthy process all over Europe and almost up to 1914.¹⁶ Sovereigns' day-to-day involvement in policy could be progressively reduced, but their governments always required their consent for their most consequential policies. In the end, the cabinet had to have royal support to survive. In that

¹³ Dieter Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie im Jahrhundert Europas. Selbstbehauptung durch Wandel im 19. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 2013); Volker Sellin, *Violence and Legitimacy: European Monarchy in the Age of Revolutions* (Berlin, 2018).

¹⁴ Martin Kirsch, *Monarch und Parlament im 19. Jahrhundert. Der monarchische Konstitutionalismus als europäischer Verfassungstyp* (Göttingen, 1999).

¹⁵ Petra Schleiter and Edward Morgan-Jones, 'Constitutional Power and Competing Risks: Monarchs, Presidents, Prime Ministers, and the Termination of East and West European Cabinets', *American Political Science Review*, 103 (2009), 496–91; Carsten Anckar, 'Constitutional Monarchies and Semi-constitutional Monarchies: A Global Historical Study, 1800–2017', *Contemporary Politics*, 27 (2021), 23–40.

¹⁶ Roderick McLean, *Royalty and Diplomacy in Europe, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, 2001).

sense, as the new diplomatic history has emphasised, it is necessary to reconsider the importance of agency,¹⁷ especially in a field that was controlled by few people and demanded the utmost secrecy. Besides monarchs being intent on defending their prerogatives, governments of all political stripes also understood that informal royal networks could be useful to them, so they favoured correspondence and international meetings between sovereigns to mediate in the governmental interest.

Beyond the direct involvement of monarchs in diplomacy, the nineteenth century saw an intensified struggle for the direction and conditioning of foreign policy. The first decades were presided over by a ‘royal international’, as Johannes Paulmann has called it.¹⁸ European monarchs still formed a ‘fraternity’ to promote political equilibrium, thwart revolution and stabilise the monarchical principle. After the revolutions of 1848, this situation changed radically. For this to happen, as Eric Hobsbawm pointed out, European crowns had ‘to provide a new, or at least, a supplementary national foundation’, as opposed to the traditional one.¹⁹ Both in new and former states, dynastic and personal bonds between sovereigns slowly ceased to structure foreign affairs and state relations. Modern diplomacy would be distinguished by bureaucratisation, professionalisation, the growth of government control and greater openness to parliamentary and even public scrutiny.²⁰ But above all, it was characterised by the imposition of a prevailing national interest. As Emperor Franz Joseph I wrote to his mother during the Crimean War (1853–6), ‘leaving aside Emperor Nicholas as a person, I am pleased with the weakness Russia is now showing’.²¹ ‘Even if it is hard to have to stand up against former friends,’ he continued, ‘there is no other way in politics.’ Ultimately, ‘it is urgent to be Austrian above all’. In that sense, Johannes Paulmann concluded that the *fin de siècle* monarchs ‘still acted on an international stage, but their role was now that of figures from national dynasties’.²² Also, there was no longer a direct connection ‘between dynastic and inter-State relations’. Thus it happened that three cousins fought on two sides in the Great War despite their close relationships.²³

The very constitutional British monarchy illustrates this struggle for influence over domestic and, notably, international policy. Many historians have placed in Queen Victoria’s reign the diminution of the monarchy’s political role and its

¹⁷ David Reynolds, ‘International History, the Cultural Turn, and the Diplomatic Twitch’, *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), 75–91.

¹⁸ Johannes Paulmann, ‘Searching for a “Royal International”: The Mechanics of Monarchical Relations in Nineteenth-Century Europe’, in *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, ed. Martin Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (Oxford, 2001), 156–8.

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1990), 84; Charlotte Backerra, Milinda Banerjee and Cathleen Sarti (eds.), *Transnational Histories of the ‘Royal Nation’* (2017).

²⁰ Matthew Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (New York, 2013), 142–8.

²¹ Franz Schnürer (ed.), *Briefe Kaiser Franz Josephs I. an seine Mutter, 1838–1872* (Munich, 1930), 232.

²² Paulmann, ‘Searching for a “Royal International”’, 176.

²³ Catrine Clay, *King, Kaiser, Tsar: Three Royal Cousins Who Led the World to War* (New York, 2008); Matthew Glencross and Judith Rowbotham (eds.), *Monarchies and the Great War* (2018).

seclusion into a symbolic sphere. The reality was far more intricate. Encouraged by her husband, Prince Albert, and his 'Coburg model' of a powerful monarchy, she firmly believed that sovereigns had an active role in the cabinet.²⁴ They understood the Crown as the only institution qualified to protect the general interest of the nation. For that reason, there was no place for insignificant political squabbles. They sought to build a strong monarchy that might govern above politics and supervise them. Both Victoria and Albert shared this vision in the diplomatic field. To quote David Cannadine, they 'regarded foreign affairs as the crown's special preserve'.²⁵ Their contemporaries could see this too. Lord Clarendon wrote in 1856 that the royal couple 'labour under the curious mistake that the Foreign Office is their particular department and that they have a right to control, if not to direct, foreign policy'.²⁶

This fact evidenced a deep problem with the constitutional procedures and the political competencies of the monarchy. Albert wrote to the prime minister in 1850 stating that the queen 'has a right to demand from him [the foreign secretary] that she be made thoroughly acquainted with the whole object and tendency of the policy to which her consent is required'.²⁷ She also should have assurances 'that the policy is not arbitrarily altered from the original line, that important steps be not concealed from her, nor her name used without her sanction'. Queen Victoria stuck to these views throughout her reign. For example, during the Polish uprising against Russia and during the Schleswig-Holstein crisis (1863),²⁸ she wrote to the foreign secretary expressing 'her desire that no step is taken in foreign affairs without her previous sanction being obtained'.²⁹ Even so, over the course of her reign the monarch's prerogatives and effective power progressively gave way to a new form of influence. In the latter part of her reign, responsible ministers took charge of foreign policy and imposed the state interest. For this to happen, however, it was necessary to have strong, vigorous political structures. Thus, as Vernon Bogdanor has pointed out, from 1868 onwards, 'the growth of organized parties pushed the sovereign, somewhat against her will, above party'.³⁰

British monarchs were not exceptional in their practices. Their European cousins reproduced these dynamics in articulating international policy. In

²⁴ Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997), 92–107.

²⁵ David Cannadine, 'The Last Hanoverian Sovereign? The Victorian Monarchy in Historical Perspective, 1688–1988', in *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honor of Lawrence Stone*, ed. Augustus Lee Beier, David Cannadine and James Rosenheim (Cambridge, 1989), 143.

²⁶ Lord Clarendon to George Cornewall Lewis, 26 Dec. 1856, in Herbert Maxwell, *The Life and Letters of George William Frederick* (1913), 1, 340–1.

²⁷ Prince Albert to John Russell, 1 Apr. 1850, in Frank Eyck, *The Prince Consort: A Political Biography* (Bath, 1975), 132–3.

²⁸ W. E. Mosse, 'Queen Victoria and Her Ministers in the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis 1863–1864', *English Historical Review*, 307 (1963), 263–83.

²⁹ Queen Victoria to Lord Palmerston, 11 Aug. 1863, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria. Second Series*, ed. George Early Buckle (1926), 1, 102.

³⁰ Vernon Bogdanor, *The Monarchy and the Constitution* (Oxford, 1995), 27.

France, for example, Louis Philippe was reluctant to lose any vestige of his power.³¹ When there was a powerful prime minister, the king would mount a defensive resistance, and if the government was weak, he went on the offensive. Thus, when André Dupin insisted on the need for a real prime minister and the king's political seclusion, Louis Philippe 'sternly responded that he did not intend to put himself under tutelage by appointing a viceroy'.³² This fact was especially noticeable in foreign policy. As Adolphe Thiers attested in 1835, 'the king wants to do everything, talks and never listens, pretends to manage foreign affairs personally'.³³ He even corresponded secretly with some of his ambassadors, such as Talleyrand. Napoleon III continued this practice and took it to its fullest extent. In his mind, he had both to reign and to govern. As he wrote to his minister of war in 1856, 'I want and have to know everything because I alone am responsible for the facts of government'.³⁴ Respecting international politics, Napoleon III not only maintained secret correspondence, his parallel diplomacy went as far as his having direct contact with sovereigns or their ambassadors in Paris.³⁵ He did not require the mediation of his minister for foreign affairs, or even his presence or knowledge. He told the Prussian ambassador, 'a statement written by my foreign minister would be of no importance. I alone know what France's foreign policy will be'.³⁶

Examples were widespread across Europe. In Belgium, King Leopold was directly involved in shaping Europe through his family ties for much of the nineteenth century.³⁷ Personal diplomacy went on until 1909, based on parallel networks and developed without their government's knowledge, particularly in colonial aspects.³⁸ Something similar applies to the house of Savoy after the unification of Italy in 1861,³⁹ and even to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As Emperor Franz Joseph told the militarist count Franz Graf Conrad von Hötzendorf in 1911, 'I do foreign policy' and 'my policy is a policy of peace. So, my minister of foreign affairs conducts my politics in this sense'.⁴⁰ The Spanish monarchs were integrated into these very same general dynamics.

³¹ Charles H. Pouthas, 'Les ministères de Louis-Philippe', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 1 (1954), 102–30.

³² André Dupin, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1856), II, 441.

³³ *Journal et correspondance intimes de Cuvillier-Fleury*, ed. Ernest Betin (Paris, 1903), II, 18 Feb. 1835, 129.

³⁴ Napoleon III to Jean-Baptiste Philibert Vaillant, 8 Sep. 1856, quoted in Émile Ollivier, 'Napoléon III. Création et procédés du gouvernement impérial', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 145 (1898), 801.

³⁵ Yves Bruley, *La diplomatie du sphinx. Napoléon III et sa politique internationale* (Paris, 2015).

³⁶ Count Von der Goltz to Otto von Bismarck, 27 Feb. 1858, quoted in Émile Ollivier, 'Napoléon III. Son dessein international', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 146 (1898), 69.

³⁷ Frédéric Marchesani, *Léopold I^{er}, roi diplomate, 1850–1865* (Brussels, 2007); Gita Deneckere, *Leopold I: De Eerste Koning Van Europa 1790–1865* (Antwerp, 2012).

³⁸ Jean Stengers, *L'action du roi en Belgique depuis 1831: pouvoir et influence* (Brussels, 2008).

³⁹ Paolo Colombo, *Il re d'Italia. Prerogative costituzionali e potere politico della Corona, 1848–1922* (Milan, 1999), 320–34.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Engel-Janosi, 'Der Monarch und seine Ratgeber', in *Probleme der franzisko-josephinischen Zeit 1848–1916*, ed. Friedrich Engel-Janosi and Helmut Rumpler (Munich, 1967), 17.

Like the rest of their royal counterparts, the Bourbons had to find a new role in the liberal system. On international affairs, they competed fiercely with their ministers to define their competencies in diplomacy. But also, as I will demonstrate, they struggled to impose the national or family interest as a structuring principle for foreign affairs.

The Bourbons' dynastic dynamics in the age of revolutions

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars dynamited the alliances maintained by the Bourbons during the eighteenth century. The so-called *Pacte de Famille* rhetorically appealed to a supra-state dynastic identity but created a political system of balance against England.⁴¹ In 1761, during the Seven Years' War, Carlos III of Spain and Louis XV of France reaffirmed their mutual commitment and updated their offensive–defensive alliance. The imbalance created by England's conquest of Canada required this. In this way, based on 'the close ties of blood that unite the two monarchs', they made 'permanent and indissoluble' the duties 'that naturally bring kinship and friendship'.⁴² The agreement perpetuated 'the distinguished mentality of Louis XIV', which prioritised the union against England. The Italian branch of the Bourbons – the king of the Two Sicilies and the duke of Parma – joined the new covenant. As the seventh article stated, the Spanish monarch exercised a direct influence on them as father and elder brother, respectively.

The alliance was still in force in 1789 when the system collapsed. Carlos IV initially upheld an ambiguous policy towards the revolutionary governments. The death of Louis XVI made him radically change his position and join the First Coalition. However, once the Directory stabilised, Spain renewed the traditional alliance. The eighteenth-century logic of union against England prevailed over any dynastic dynamic to preserve Spain's power.⁴³ Thus, in 1801, Carlos IV signed with Napoleon Bonaparte, then First Consul, an important agreement. In addition to Spain's ceding Louisiana and several warships to France, they also divided up the northern Italian states.⁴⁴ Spain guaranteed that Ferdinando of Bourbon would cede to France the duchy of Parma. In exchange, his son – married to Carlos IV's daughter, Maria Luisa of Bourbon – received the duchy of Tuscany with the new status of the kingdom of Etruria. The alliance changed drastically after the defeat at Trafalgar (1805) when English ships destroyed the Spanish navy. In 1808 Napoleon decided to intervene directly and appoint his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, as king of

⁴¹ Didier Ozanam, 'Dinastía, diplomacia y política exterior', in *Los Borbones: Dinastía y memoria de la nación en la España del siglo XVIII*, ed. Pablo Fernández-Albadalejo (Madrid, 2002), 17–46; María Victoria López-Cordón, 'Pacte de famille ou intérêts d'État? La monarchie française et la diplomatie espagnole du XVII^e siècle', in *La présence des Bourbons en Europe XVI^e–XXI^e siècle*, ed. Lucien Bély (Paris, 2003), 185–220.

⁴² Alejandro del Cantillo, *Tratados, convenios y declaraciones de paz y de comercio que han hecho los monarcas españoles de la Casa de Borbón desde el año de 1700* (Madrid, 1843), 468–81.

⁴³ Emilio La Parra, *La alianza de Godoy con los revolucionarios: España y Francia a fines del siglo XVIII* (Madrid, 1992).

⁴⁴ Cantillo, *Tratados, convenios*, 697–8.

Spain. An agitated political situation compounded the loss of military power. Fernando VII supported a riot against his father, forcing Carlos IV to abdicate. Meanwhile, French troops invaded Italy. Napoleon proclaimed Joachim Murat as king of Naples while the Bourbons secluded themselves in Sicily, under British protection.⁴⁵

From that moment, the dynastic alliance survived more as a rhetorical appeal than an effective action, despite fighting together against Napoleon. As Paul Schroeder has shown, between 1813 and 1815 Europe abandoned the competitive balance-of-power politics of the previous century.⁴⁶ A new equilibrium was established based on a system of rights and obligations underpinned by a security alliance among the five major powers. While the new international system arose, the Bourbons' dynastic community collapsed, generating intense civil wars and clashing legitimacies.⁴⁷ The Spanish branch had to find a new place in a world where many of the territorial, social and political changes introduced by Napoleon endured.⁴⁸ The process was especially involved, mainly due to a lack of perspective and political reality on the part of Fernando VII and his ministers. They went into the treaty negotiations following the Napoleonic Wars with a false sense of returning to 1808. The instructions received by the ambassadors were highly eloquent. They demanded Louisiana, economic compensation and the restitution of plundered artworks, but the emphasis was on reclaiming the dynastic Bourbons' rights in Italy.⁴⁹ Against this fiction, the great powers merely invited Spain to accede to the treaties already signed. Fernando was obliged to contribute men during the Hundred Days in order to be a signatory party. In other words, he should have participated as a true regulatory power; instead, the reality after decades of struggle was a decomposed empire, economically bankrupt, in demographic decline and with its military power in decay.

Nevertheless, the phantom of the *Pacte de Famille* and its renewal remained ever present. Chateaubriand mentioned it in a pamphlet supporting the Bourbons' restoration in France. In his opinion, Napoleon's great mistake was his 'impious, sacrilegious, hateful, and above all anti-French actions' in Spain.⁵⁰ Not content with 'ruling it as a province from which to extract blood and gold', he wanted to 'rule the throne personally'.⁵¹ To do so, 'he sowed discord in the royal family, kidnapped it in defiance of all human and

⁴⁵ John Davis, *Naples and Napoleon: Southern Italy and the European Revolutions, 1780-1860* (Oxford, 2006); Pierre-Marie Delpu, Igor Moullier and Mélanie Traversier (eds.), *Le royaume de Naples à l'heure française, 1806-1815* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2018).

⁴⁶ Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994).

⁴⁷ Carmine Pinto, 'Sovranità, guerre e nazioni. La crisi del mondo borbonico e la formazione degli Stati moderni (1806-1920)', *Meridiana*, 81 (2014), 9-25.

⁴⁸ David Laven and Lucy Riall (eds.), *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴⁹ Pedro Gómez Labrador, *Mélanges sur la vie privée et publique du Marquis de Labrador écrits par lui-même* (Paris, 1849).

⁵⁰ François-René de Chateaubriand, *De Buonaparte, des Bourbons, et de la nécessité de se rallier à nos princes légitimes* (Paris, 1814), 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

divine laws, and invaded the territory of a faithful people who had fought for him'.⁵² Thus, France must re-establish the *Pacte de Famille* to regain its power. For its part, England feared a revival of the alliance. In a treaty in 1814, it included a secret article whereby Spain undertook 'not to enter any obligation of the so-called *Pacte de Famille* that would encroach upon its Independence or prejudice the English interests'.⁵³ However, a few days later, the Franco-Spanish peace and friendship treaty included Talleyrand's classified commitment in this regard. He promised to mediate 'on behalf of the Spanish Bourbon princes who had possessions in Italy and make an order for Spain to obtain compensation'.⁵⁴ They thus attended the Congress of Vienna together. Consequently, the loss of power of one had a negative influence on the other. Despite the favourable international image Spain enjoyed for defeating Napoleon in 1812, it did not achieve its objectives.

Following the king's instructions, Spanish diplomats refused to agree to the Treaties of Paris and the Final Act of Vienna. It was the reaction of a power that neither understood its international degradation nor its consequences. Two factors conditioned the Spanish integration into the Restoration system: the Bourbons' request in Italy and the territorial integrity of its empire in America. In other words, Spain followed the eighteenth-century logic of competition with Austria for hegemony in Italy and with England in America. In both cases, it started from a precarious situation. Firstly, the Bourbons had been restored in Naples by Austrian arms and not by Spanish diplomacy.⁵⁵ And secondly, England had taken advantage of the Latin American independence revolutions to extend its informal empire and economic influence in the region.⁵⁶ Fernando sought to continue the spirit of the *Pacte de Famille* with France, at least officially and rhetorically, to achieve his aims. However, their international position had changed radically. Besides, thorough ideological differences weakened the Bourbons' solidarity: Louis XVIII in France promoted a policy of forgetting, and Ferdinando I accepted in Naples many of the Napoleonic reforms, whereas the Spanish monarch maintained an intransigent counter-revolutionary absolutism.⁵⁷

Given these complications with the traditional alliance, Fernando VII did not hesitate to approach Tsar Alexander I. A confluence of interests facilitated the agreement.⁵⁸ Spain offered Russia the prospect of establishing a foothold in the Mediterranean and curbing Austrian supremacy in Italy. At the same time, it allowed the Russian-American Company along the California coast to

⁵² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵³ Cantillo, *Tratados, convenios*, 732–4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 734–41.

⁵⁵ Marco Mugnaini, *Italia e Spagna nell'età contemporanea. Cultura, politica e diplomazia, 1814–1870* (Turin, 1994), 68–9.

⁵⁶ Gabriel Paquette, 'The Dissolution of the Spanish Atlantic Monarchy', *The Historical Journal*, 52 (2009), 175–212.

⁵⁷ Juan Luis Simal, "'Strange Means of Governing': The Spanish Restoration in European Perspective (1813–1820)", *Journal of Modern European History*, 15 (2017), 197–220.

⁵⁸ Ana María Schop, *Un siglo de relaciones diplomáticas y comerciales entre España y Rusia, 1733–1833* (Madrid, 1984).

strengthen its commercial power. For his part, the tsar could facilitate Bourbon pretensions in Italy and help Spain's pacification efforts in Latin America. Fernando established a direct, secret correspondence with Alexander. In summer 1814, the Spanish ambassador to Russia received instructions to arrange the king's marriage to the grand duchess Anna Pavlova. Alexander rejected the proposal, however, due to its diplomatic complications and 'the very terrible system adopted in Spain under the excessive influence of clergy and friars'.⁵⁹

Rapprochement strengthened after the signing of the Holy Alliance. On 31 March 1816, the tsar sent the Spanish king a letter, both inviting him to agree to the pact and advising him to take 'moderation measures to forget the past and consolidate the future'.⁶⁰ Fernando replied instantly, and secretly agreed to join the alliance. Barely three months later, he directly requested the tsar's mediation on behalf of the queen of Etruria.⁶¹ The issue was too tangled by then. In the Treaty of Fontainebleau (1814) and the Final Act of Vienna, Russia granted the duchy of Parma to Maria Theresa of Habsburg – Napoleon's wife and the Austrian emperor's sister – to the detriment of María Luisa of Bourbon.⁶² On the tsar's advice, Spain now began to accede to the treaties, except for the articles on the Parma question.⁶³ European chancelleries resumed negotiations, reaching an agreement that was only relatively satisfactory for Bourbon dynastic interests.⁶⁴ The duchy of Parma would be passed to María Luisa when the Austrian princess died, something that did not happen until 1847. However, the modification finally settled the Italian question.

Personal relationships between the monarchs changed drastically and dramatically in 1820 when a liberal revolution triumphed in Spain. Fernando VII had to swear the Constitution of 1812 and restore the institutions and persons harshly repressed in 1814. The liberal shock wave drove a constitutional shift across Europe, notably in the Mediterranean.⁶⁵ Ferdinando I of Naples was forced to swear the same constitution as his Spanish nephew. This new situation prompted the European powers to react swiftly. Later that year, the Holy Alliance agreed on the right to intervene in a country whose revolution could cause instability to the others. England and France provided legitimacy for this by abstaining. In 1821, after the Congress of Laibach, the Austrian military intervened in Naples and restored monarchical 'normality'. However, this also demonstrated Austrian hegemony in the Italian peninsula vis-à-vis the Bourbons.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151–2.

⁶⁰ Jerónimo Becker, *Historia de las relaciones exteriores de España durante el siglo XIX* (Madrid, 1924), I, 418.

⁶¹ Wenceslao Ramírez de Villaurrutia, *La reina de Etruria* (Madrid, 1923), 134–5.

⁶² Marco Meriggi, *Ducato di Parma, Piacenza & Guastalla, 1731–1859* (Milan, 1995).

⁶³ Cantillo, *Tratados, convenios*, 745–84.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 794–5.

⁶⁵ Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou (eds.), *Mediterranean Diasporas: Politics and Ideas in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2016).

⁶⁶ Paul Schroeder, *Metternich's Diplomacy at Its Zenith, 1820–1823* (Austin, 1973).

The intervention in Spain was slightly more intricate. Russia could not act directly, as it wished, or it would arouse the misgivings of the other powers and encourage France to take the initiative. At the Congress of Verona, the Holy Alliance pledged to help Louis XVIII to intervene in Spain if revolutionaries attacked it, put Fernando VII's life in danger or modified the line of succession.⁶⁷ Besides, they agreed to send the Spanish government formal notes threatening to intervene. As Metternich wrote, the revolution there had posed a danger to Europe, serving as 'a model everywhere'.⁶⁸ Its constitution, moreover, provided that it was necessary 'to move towards moderation'. It 'required, above all, the king to be free' in both physical and political terms by restoring his sovereignty. Behind these words lurked Fernando VII's own shadow. He personally led the counter-revolution from the outset, even engaging in two thwarted putsches.⁶⁹ To this end, he sought the support of his cousins. Through his diplomats, he conveyed to the European courts a victimising discourse of a king held captive by the liberals.

Following the above dynamic, Fernando first sought Tsar Alexander's support. However, the Russian ambassador advised him to seek help from France. Dynastic ties as head of the house of Bourbon, as well as their being neighbours, suggested this. In December 1821, the Spanish king requested one of his mediators to make 'the foreign sovereigns know his very critical and painful situation'⁷⁰ so that, he continued, 'they may come to free me from the slavery and danger I am currently suffering'. His already liberated uncle, Ferdinando I of Naples, promptly wrote to the other kings communicating the request for help. France finally intervened in 1823 after ascertaining England's neutrality.⁷¹ Rather than the threat to European order, the French government favoured a discourse that appealed to monarchical solidarity and dynastic ties. At the state opening of parliament, Louis XVIII announced that 'a hundred thousand Frenchmen, commanded by a prince of my family, are ready to march invoking the name of Saint Louis to safeguard the Spanish throne for a grandson of Henry IV'.⁷² Wellington noted with surprise to Metternich that the French government did not base 'its action on the revolutionary question, as agreed at Verona, but on the house of Bourbon, wishing to re-establish influence and relations with the Spanish branch as they had been before'.⁷³ An eventual revival of the *Pacte de Famille* would be an attack on England's honour, inasmuch as 'it sought to oppose its maritime power', but also that of Austria. Ultimately, he added, 'you are European and not a Bourbon', and France should not use international legitimacy to 'promote family views outside Europe's general interest'. In barely six months, the French army – supported by internal counter-revolutionary forces – managed to

⁶⁷ Irby Nichols, *The European Pentarchy and the Congress of Verona, 1822* (The Hague, 1971).

⁶⁸ 9 Jan. 1823, Madrid, *Diario de Sesiones de Cortes* (DSC), no. 98, 1298.

⁶⁹ Emilio La Parra, *Fernando VII. Un rey deseado y detestado* (Barcelona, 2018), 420–32.

⁷⁰ Wenceslao Ramírez de Villaurrutia, *Fernando VII, rey constitucional* (Madrid, 1922), 301.

⁷¹ Emmanuel Larroche, *L'Expédition d'Espagne. 1823: de la guerre selon la Charte* (Rennes, 2013).

⁷² François-René de Chateaubriand, *Congrès de Vérone. Guerre d'Espagne* (Paris, 1838), I, 281–2.

⁷³ Duke of Wellington to Prince Metternich, 1 Apr. 1823, in Arthur Wellesley Wellington (ed.), *Dispatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda* (1867), II, 83–6.

defeat liberalism and 'freed' Fernando VII. To avoid uprisings, as in 1808, they were careful to present themselves as the monarch's collaborators. Thus, as Chateaubriand wrote retrospectively, 'legitimism burns gunpowder under the [Bourbon] white flag for the first time since the Napoleonic Empire', succeeding 'where his army failed'.⁷⁴

French diplomacy not only sought to restore Fernando VII in Spain; it also wanted to face down the challenge of Spanish American independence, for its own and the Bourbons' benefit. Chateaubriand proposed creating new constitutional monarchies in America, headed up by Spanish princes, to halt both the republican and British expansion.⁷⁵ The idea was not entirely original. In 1821, American deputies in the Cortes proposed a solution to the conflict. They argued for the creation of a federal empire, wherein the Spanish Cortes would have three sections in America: Mexico, Santa Fé and Lima. Each of them would be governed 'in the king's name' by a person, 'among them members of the royal family', responsible to Fernando VII and the Cortes.⁷⁶ However, the monarch perceived the problem in quite the opposite way. Fernando even considered of moving to Mexico in 1820, to escape the liberal revolution.⁷⁷ The obstinacy with which he closed off the transatlantic monarchical solidarity solution exasperated the diplomats, mainly because, as the French minister for foreign affairs pointed out, 'to place Spanish princes at the head of the government in this vast colony is not relevant to Spain alone'.⁷⁸ The question was 'of great interest to all European countries, which did not want the republican system to be established throughout the American continent'. Besides, he concluded, this federal monarchical solution was the only way for Spain 'to preserve its relationships with its overseas possessions'.

The second restoration of Fernando VII proceeded under this rhetoric of dynastic cooperation. The reality was quite different. Between 1823 and 1828, France maintained a standing army in Spain to 'ensure prosperity and tranquillity', allow the reorganisation of the armed forces and 'strengthen the government'.⁷⁹ The request came from the Spanish king himself, aware of his vulnerability to liberal insurrections. The relationship between the two Bourbon branches, and between their countries, was no longer on the equal terms posited in the *Pacte de Famille*.⁸⁰ France used the campaign to rebuild its international prestige and expand into areas previously controlled by Spain, such as North Africa. It also exerted a direct influence on Spanish politics, trying to moderate the reactionary, counter-revolutionary regime – assimilating it to the tempered 'constitutionalism' present in the French *Charte* of 1814 – and establish its economic interests. This tutelage created manifold tensions between Fernando VII and Charles X and

⁷⁴ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Brussels, 1849), IV, 215.

⁷⁵ Chateaubriand, *Congrès de Vérone*, II, 260–4.

⁷⁶ 25 June 1821, DSC, no. 118, 2476–7.

⁷⁷ Josep Escrig, *Contrarrevolución y antiliberalismo en la independencia de México, 1810–1823* (Zaragoza, 2021), 267–71.

⁷⁸ Baron of Pasquier to Count of La Garde, 30 Nov. 1821, quoted in Carlos Villanueva, *La monarquía en América. Fernando VII y los nuevos Estados* (París, 1912), 107.

⁷⁹ Cantillo, *Tratados, convenios*, 833–8.

⁸⁰ Gonzalo Butrón, *La ocupación francesa de España, 1823–1828* (Cádiz, 1996).

broke the dynastic understanding after the Portuguese crisis (1826). Matters went far better between the Spanish and the Neapolitan branch.⁸¹ As soon as he was freed, the Spanish king wrote to his uncle, Ferdinando I, assuring him that he would do 'everything possible to preserve and increase the relations that unite us'.⁸² Ultimately, he continued, 'the similarity of our misfortunes' had made him feel 'very close to you'. This harmony paid off in 1829 when Fernando married his niece, Maria Cristina of Two Sicilies. Nevertheless, this unsteady Bourbon 'royal international' was about to collapse definitively.

The national turn and dynastic contradictions

The 1830s were a turning point in the decline of the Bourbon dynasty. The loss of power in foreign affairs was compounded by a profound crisis of legitimacy within the family. In March 1830, Fernando VII abolished the Salic Law of Succession a few months before his consort gave birth for the first time. Introduced in Spain by the Bourbons in 1713, this law forbade women from reigning, against Castilian tradition. Therefore, the birth of Princess Isabel in October opened a grave legal and dynastic dispute. The hitherto heir to the throne, Prince Carlos, did not accept his niece as Fernando's legitimate successor. For his part, Francesco I of Naples also protested. He mobilised his diplomacy to try to make a joint Bourbon complaint with Charles X. The change could endanger the dynasty's hold on the Spanish throne, compromise the European equilibrium and undermine their rights in the succession.⁸³

The July Revolution in 1830 changed the main actors and altered this dynastic united front. In contrast to the liberal coherence shown by the Coburgs, the Bourbons' ideological consensus broke down. In France, the revolution dethroned Charles X and replaced him with his relative the liberal Louis Philippe of Orléans. Fear of revolutionary contagion, knowledge of his political moderation, and the consummated facts persuaded both Spanish and Neapolitan Bourbons to recognise him. Fernando VII hesitated at first and mobilised his army on the border. However, Louis Philippe used the Spanish liberal exiles, whom he supported morally and financially, to pressure the government and compel recognition.⁸⁴ For his part, Francesco I promptly accepted the king of the French. He knew Louis Philippe very well. Barely a month before, the hitherto duke of Orléans had given a party in his honour on his return from Madrid.⁸⁵ In addition to his well-known moderate disposition, the revolutionary echoes in northern Italy, stifled by Austria, persuaded the duke to recognise him quickly.⁸⁶ Thus, fear of the revolution spreading to

⁸¹ Mugnaini, *Italia e Spagna*, 101–14.

⁸² Fernando VII to Ferdinando I, 9 Oct. 1823, Naples, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Borbone, 178, quoted in Pedro Rújula, 'El rey', in *El Trienio Liberal (1820–1823). Una mirada política*, ed. Pedro Rújula and Ivana Fraasquet (Granada, 2020), 35.

⁸³ Becker, *Historia de las relaciones*, 1, 597–8.

⁸⁴ Rafael Sánchez, 'L'Espagne et la Révolution de 1830', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 9 (1973), 567–79.

⁸⁵ Francesco Michitelli, *Storia delle rivoluzioni ne' Reami delle Due Sicilie* (Rome, 1860), 1, 505–7.

⁸⁶ Acton Harold, *The Last Bourbons of Naples, 1825–1861* (New York, 1961).

their countries was more influential than dynastic ties. Fernando VII told the deposed Charles X, through a confidential agent, that he wanted to help him, but circumstances obliged him not to get involved. The Bourbons' solidarity broke, and a rift was created between a liberal branch of the family and another reactionary, legitimist one.⁸⁷

In 1833, this fracture became even more acute. When Fernando VII died without male offspring, his daughter was proclaimed queen by the moderate absolutists and the liberals under the regency of his mother, Queen Maria Cristina of Bourbon–Two Sicilies. A dynastic and political civil war ensued in Spain. Supported by reactionary forces, Prince Carlos rose against Isabel II. The domestic dispute promptly fed into the international fight between liberal and reactionary powers, showing the tensions within the dynasty. Ferdinando II of Naples took diplomatic action before the European courts and called for the recognition of Prince Carlos.⁸⁸ On one side, he directed his efforts at enlisting Holy Alliance support, especially that of Austria. The leading conservative power preferred to wait for events to unfold before recognising Carlos, while supporting him financially. Metternich requested military victories and popular shows of support for the Carlist cause to even intervene diplomatically.

On the other side, Ferdinando set himself up as the mediator for the Bourbon family, arranging a three-way correspondence with his sister, Maria Cristina, and Louis Philippe to seek a negotiated end to the war. The formula always involved a marriage between Isabel II and Prince Carlos's heir, Carlos Luis of Bourbon. However, the other conditions varied according to the fortunes of war and the consolidation and deepening of liberalism. At times of great tension, such as in 1836, when progressive liberalism seized power through revolution, Maria Cristina asked her French and Neapolitan relatives to mediate. On several occasions, she even wrote requesting their intervention and help to get out of Spain.⁸⁹ When victory came within reach, she threw out the agreements and denied that a marriage alone would solve the problem. Obstacles were not only dynastic but also ideological. The determining factor was Louis Philippe's ambiguous attitude and the course of the war. In his early days, he had to approach England and even joined forces with the liberal Coburg dynasty. Despite being favourable to the Bourbon marriage pact solution, France's international policy was heavily dependent on British support, limiting its scope for action.⁹⁰ As a result, England, France, Portugal, and Spain signed a crucial alliance in 1834.⁹¹ The first two gave economic, diplomatic, and military aid to the liberal sides in both civil conflicts. The

⁸⁷ Jean-Paul Bled, *Les lys en exil ou la seconde mort de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1992); Bruno Dumons and Hilaire Multon (eds.), *«Blancs» et contre-révolutionnaires en Europe. Espaces, réseaux, cultures et mémoires, XVII^e–XX^e siècles* (Rome, 2011).

⁸⁸ José Ramón Urquijo, *Relaciones entre España y Nápoles durante la primera guerra carlista* (Madrid, 1998).

⁸⁹ Isabel Burdiel, *Isabel II. Una biografía, 1830–1904* (Madrid, 2011), 40–51.

⁹⁰ Roger Bullen, 'France and the Problem of Intervention in Spain, 1834–1836', *The Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), 363–93.

⁹¹ María Teresa Menchén, 'La Cuádruple Alianza (1834). La Península en un sistema occidental', *Cuadernos de la Escuela Diplomática*, 2 (1989), 31–51.

development of the war led to the victory of the liberals in 1839 and shaped a European Western constitutional, liberal system facing an absolutist Eastern one. The Carlists thus joined the list of the transnational legitimist dynasties oriented towards clearly reactionary positions, and the Bourbon family further aggravated its differences and loss of power.

Louis Philippe's political consolidation would progressively legitimise his dynasty within the traditional royal families. He then tried a rapprochement between the branches of the Bourbon family to rupture the watertight blocks of powers established in Vienna. His primary tool for this was the marriages of his offspring according to one international recognition policy.⁹² In the beginning, he could only join the liberal dynasties, particularly the Coburgs. Thus, several marriages took place, merging the two families. In 1832, the king of the Belgians and head of the dynasty, Leopold, actually married the eldest daughter of Louis Philippe. However, Louis Philippe began to explore the possibility of joining an ancient dynasty. In 1837, he succeeded in marrying his heir to the niece of the king of Prussia. As Alphonse Lamartine stated, Louis Philippe's aim might be rightful according to 'the legitimate solicitousness that his royal paternity entails'.⁹³ He thus sought to 'royalize his blood more and more, to place his young sons in the high aristocracy of thrones'. But his goal was essentially political. He wanted 'to reconstitute a kind of universal monarchical family in a house of Bourbon resurrected from its ruins'.

In this context, the ghost of the *Pacte de Famille* appeared for the last time as a plausible strategic alliance dangerous to both English and Coburg interests. The idea was to shape a coherent, homogeneous and mighty south of Europe united by family ties.⁹⁴ As before, Louis Philippe used the marriages of his extensive progeny as a political instrument. He planned a triple alliance that involved union with the Neapolitan and Spanish Bourbons. As Guizot wrote, 'this triple combination would bind the three crowns, the three countries, very closely together and make the house of Bourbon more strongly constituted than ever'.⁹⁵ Despite Austria's reluctance, Louis Philippe succeeded in marrying Henry of Orléans to Maria Carolina of Bourbon-Two Sicilies in 1844. However, the third vertex of the triangle, the Spanish one, generated enormous difficulties. The balance between French international ambition and its agreement with Britain was by far the most complex. In 1843, Queen Victoria visited Louis Philippe in the Château d'Eu. Besides staging the *Entente Cordiale*, the visit aimed to discuss the marriage of the Spanish queen. In order to maintain the balance of diplomatic influence, they agreed that she could marry neither a Coburg nor a son of Louis Philippe. They also decided that Princess Luisa Fernanda, sister of Isabel II and heir to the throne, could marry Antoine of Orléans only when the queen's succession

⁹² Grégoire Franconie, *Les lys et la cocarde. Royauté et Nation à l'âge romantique, 1830-1848* (Paris, 2021), 179-234.

⁹³ *Le Courrier Français*, 8 Oct. 1846.

⁹⁴ Salvo Mastellone, *La politica estera del Guizot (1840-1847). L'unione doganale, la lega borbónica* (Florence, 1957).

⁹⁵ Ernest Jones Parry, *The Spanish Marriages 1841-1846: A Study of the Influence of Dynastic Ambition upon Foreign Policy* (1936), 179.

was assured. Thus, neither the young queen's tastes nor the opinion of Spanish politicians was taken into account.

The candidate proposed by Louis Philippe was Francesco of Bourbon–Two Sicilies, the younger brother of both Ferdinando II and Maria Cristina. The triangle closed with the marriages of Isabel II and her sister to Neapolitan and French princes, respectively. This political movement led to the official recognition by Naples of the Spanish liberal monarchy, to the great indignation of Austria.⁹⁶ However, the count of Trapani displeased Spanish public opinion so much that it made his candidacy impossible. Many diplomatic manoeuvres to marry the queen of Spain began. Maria Cristina even wrote to the king of the Belgians and the duke of Saxony–Coburg to propose the marriage of Isabel II to Prince Leopold.⁹⁷ However, the vetoes between the two powers and the change in England's international policy with the advent of Palmerston left marriage to a Spanish Bourbon as the only possibility. In 1846, Queen Isabel finally married her cousin, Francisco de Asis of Bourbon. Simultaneously, and contravening what was agreed in Eu, Luisa Fernanda married Antoine of Orléans. Thus, France's alliance with England did not survive, nor was the Bourbon union planned by Louis Philippe consummated.⁹⁸

The family entered less powerful and only partially united a turbulent political time during which their thrones began to fall one after the other, engulfed by the liberal, nationalist wave. As Lamartine concluded, 'it is no longer time for family pacts but between people'.⁹⁹ The coexistence of the monarchy and the nation was only possible insofar as 'the spirit of family and dynasty disappeared for the sake of the national essence and interest crowned by the revolution'. The Bourbon solidarity and dynastic interest should be subordinated to nationalism, while the monarchy was being nationalised.¹⁰⁰ The political earthquake of 1848 was felt throughout Europe, including in the Bourbon territories. It started in Naples, where Ferdinando II had to promulgate a liberal constitution and put a stop to the Sicilian insurrection, which lasted sixteenth long months. The newly appointed duke of Parma, Carlo II of Bourbon–Parma, had to abdicate in favour of his son Carlo and go into exile. Finally, the revolution dethroned Louis Philippe accused, among many things, of putting his personal and family interests before national ones.¹⁰¹ The first Bourbon piece on the international chessboard had fallen.

The Italian unification process was the last and most complex challenge the dynasty would have to face. Neapolitan participation in the First Italian War of Independence (1848–9) against Austria, and its subsequent withdrawal, showed the contradictions and tensions that the dynasty experienced in trying to

⁹⁶ Federico Curato, *Il Regno delle Due Sicilie nella politica estera europea, 1830–1861* (Palermo, 1989).

⁹⁷ Burdiel, *Isabel II*, 164–6.

⁹⁸ Roger Bullen, *Palmerston, Guizot, and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale* (1974).

⁹⁹ *Le Courier Français*, 8 Oct. 1846.

¹⁰⁰ David San Narciso, 'Being a Nation through the Crown: Banal Monarchism and Nation-Building in Spain, 1833–68', *European Review of History*, 27 (2020), 474–93.

¹⁰¹ Jo Burr Margadant, 'Gender, Vice, and the Political Imaginary in Postrevolutionary France: Reinterpreting the Failure of the July Monarchy, 1830–1848', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), 1461–96.

maintain its independence in face of the Italian nationalist, liberal wave. In the second war (1859), these contradictions became a significant challenge for its continuity. Isabel II tried to assume leadership of the family interests at this difficult juncture. However, Bourbon solidarity was increasingly conditioned by the prevalence of national interest¹⁰² and the limitations of their reduced foreign power, particularly after their fall in France. In northern Italy, popular revolutions supported by the Sardinian army dethroned the monarchs of the small states, including the duchy of Parma, and created a confederation which finally joined Piedmont in 1860. Spain mobilised to defend the rights of the Bourbons and formally protested.¹⁰³ Its position, however, was too precarious for it to be able to impose on the other powers. In the south, likewise, Garibaldi landed in Sicily and began the conquest of the Two Sicilies. Both France and England supported, or at least consented to, the action, due to Ferdinando II's reactionary turn and his harsh political repression in the post-1848 context. His son, Francesco II, quickly turned to his Spanish cousin for help. The government repeated its strategy of providing diplomatic aid but no material or military assistance. Thus, it protested in the European chancelleries more at the way the royal family was expelled from Naples in 1861 – without a negotiated solution, when Spain had proposed itself as a mediator – than for its substance.¹⁰⁴

Bourbon family connections went from structuring and underpinning their foreign power to becoming a serious political problem. With her French and Italian cousins in exile and her political positions increasingly anti-liberal, Queen Isabel II found herself in a critical dilemma. She refused to recognise the new kingdom of Italy and offered to host Francesco II despite the government's firm opposition. After a deep political crisis, the cabinet finally asserted the national interest over the queen's dynastic one. However, she continued to lend symbolic support to her reactionary relatives. The astonishment of the Coburgs and the opposition of Spanish liberalism were colossal. In 1864, she tried to name the deposed king and queen of Naples as godfather and godmother of her new offspring. Four years later, she arranged the marriage of her first-born daughter to the count of Girgenti, Francesco II's brother. As the French ambassador in Madrid wrote then, Isabel seemed not to understand that 'she is the queen of Spain rather than the cousin of the fallen sovereigns of Naples'.¹⁰⁵ Thus, he continued, 'she could not sacrifice to family considerations the duties imposed on her by her dignity as queen'. As Benito Pérez Galdós summarised after her death, Isabel II had an exclusive private world where 'the invisible political spirit of the nation never entered' but only royalty based on dynastic spirit.¹⁰⁶ Like a house of cards, the Spanish Bourbons finally fell in 1868, also overwhelmed by the national, liberal wave.

¹⁰² Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York, 2012)

¹⁰³ Becker, *Historia de las relaciones*, II, 630–1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 634–5.

¹⁰⁵ 29 Jan. 1864, Paris, Archive du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Politique de l'Espagne, vol. 865.

¹⁰⁶ Benito Pérez Galdós, *Memoranda* (Madrid, 1906), 22.

After a difficult six-year period of exile, the dynasty succeeded in returning to the Spanish throne in the person of Alfonso XII. The young king was free of those contradictions experienced by his mother, Isabel II, on account of her relatives. At this point in the century, the Bourbons were an outdated residue among the reigning European families, some of them royals without a kingdom, associated, most of the time, with reactionary political solutions. This fact made the Spanish monarchs definitively detach themselves from dynastic interests. Nevertheless, by no means did it inhibit their participation in foreign policy. They continued to use their constitutional prerogative and played a direct role in diplomacy. Alfonso XII tried to break free from the traditional international dynamics of Spain to join the rising monarchical power, the German Empire. After a meeting with Kaiser Wilhelm II in Berlin and the journey of the crown prince to Spain in 1883, they reached a verbal, secret and personal agreement on mutual aid against possible attacks from France.¹⁰⁷ The government, however, thwarted their plans and stopped the alliance, upholding the primary principle that had guided Spanish international policy since 1834: act only in conjunction with France and Britain.¹⁰⁸ For his part, Alfonso's heir continued participating in foreign affairs, intervening in the decision-making process and even negotiating bilateral treaties. But Alfonso XIII's actions coincided with those of his ministers, prioritising the paradigm of the nation state over dynastic interests.¹⁰⁹ As he wrote to his prime minister in 1913, 'this monarchical solidarity was already history'.¹¹⁰ The clearest evidence of this, he continued, was precisely 'our conflict in Cuba (1898) in which no one came to Spain's defence' despite the desperate appeals of his mother, Maria Cristina of Habsburg-Lorraine. At the gates of the contemporary world, the Spanish Bourbons found themselves alone, freed from all ties, and subject to the national interest.

Conclusion

In 1885, amid rising tensions in the Anglo-Russian rivalry, the German parliament discussed the role of its royal family in this quandary. Ultimately, the close royal kinship with both contenders was able to force an intervention. Prince Bismarck angrily objected to 'the association of dynastic relationship and its influence on questions of foreign policy on which two nations might differ'.¹¹¹ He acknowledged, of course, the legitimate authority of the German dynasty in politics. However, it should 'always be exerted on the side of the national interest and never of princely relationships'. As an English journalist commented at the time, the same thing would happen in

¹⁰⁷ Ingrid Schulze, 'La diplomacia personal de Alfonso XII: una proyectada alianza con el Imperio alemán', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 183 (1985), 473–50.

¹⁰⁸ José María Jover, *España en la política internacional, siglos XVIII–XX* (Madrid, 1999), 136.

¹⁰⁹ Antonio Niño, 'El rey embajador. Alfonso XIII en la política internacional', in *Alfonso XIII. Un político en el trono*, ed. Javier Moreno (Madrid, 2003), 239–76.

¹¹⁰ Alfonso XIII to Eduardo Dato, 2 Dec. 1913, quoted in Carlos Seco, *Estudios sobre el reinado de Alfonso XIII* (Madrid, 1998), 158–9.

¹¹¹ *Leicester Chronicle*, 21 March 1885.

Britain: Queen Victoria's 'long reign has been to such a large extent a recognition of the spirit and fact of nationality'. Thus, modern royalties 'may still win a new lease of power in yielding to the influence of a royalty that has already put itself in harmony with nationality'. At this point in the nineteenth century, monarchs still maintained a legitimate and essential influence on their country's foreign politics. But the increasing prevalence of nationalism and imperialism changed the relations between the monarchs even despite their close family ties. As Johannes Paulmann highlighted, supra-monarchical solidarity could no longer exist in this modern world.¹¹² Liberalism managed to nationalise the crowns, but it also imposed the predominance of the national interest in foreign relationships over the dynastic one.

In this struggle for European domination at the *fin de siècle*, the Coburgs had to face contradictions and challenges quite similar to those that the Bourbons experienced a few decades earlier. The difference, now, was that the competition did not confront two different dynasties and two antagonist political models but some imperialist nations reigned over by the same family. The Bourbons, meanwhile, extended their bonds of solidarity to support each other in their respective exiles. Their thrones had gradually fallen as the years passed, and revolutions succeeded from 1830. The family that had dominated the world during the eighteenth century was expelled from most of its territories. Strongly associated with the counter-revolution, from the 1860s the dynasty was primarily in exile throughout Europe. By 1885, only modest Spain, after many difficulties, remained under the Bourbons. But their position was much reduced from that of global dominance to a secondary, dependent one that aimed solely at maintaining the status quo. Besides, the Spanish Bourbons had to distance themselves from their openly reactionary, legitimist relatives. Freed from family commitments, they tried to maintain a clearly liberal facet and get closer to the triumphant royal families. It was the only possible way to survive the challenges posed by liberalism.

The political evolution of Europe from the French Revolution to the unification of Italy was evident in that sense. Structured on the so-called *Pacte de Famille*, the Bourbon dynasty reached the apogee of its foreign power in the eighteenth century based on the offensive-defensive alliance among Spain, France, and the Italian states. The spectre of this alliance was kept alive until the 1840s, not only in the minds of the Bourbons themselves but of all their royal counterparts. Chateaubriand even fantasised about the idea of establishing 'two or three Bourbon monarchies in America, working for our benefit as a counterpoint to the influence and commerce of the United States and Britain'.¹¹³ Certainly, Spain did not cease trying to place a Bourbon prince in the newly independent states, particularly in Mexico, until as late as 1864.¹¹⁴ However, like one of those phantasmagorias so popular

¹¹² Paulmann, 'Searching for a "Royal International"', 175–6.

¹¹³ Chateaubriand, *Congrès de Vérone*, II, 425.

¹¹⁴ Víctor Alberto Villavicencio, *El camino del monarquismo mexicano decimonónico* (Ph.D. thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015); Marcela Ternavasio, *Candidata a la Corona: La infanta Carlota Joaquina en el laberinto de las revoluciones hispanoamericanas* (Buenos Aires, 2015).

at that time, this possibility was pure fiction. Spain lost the international role that it had played in Mediterranean and American politics, after the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the independence of Latin America in the 1820s. For its part, France on its own could not maintain the family hegemony. In this context, revolutions directly attacked the theoretical and ideological foundations of the dynasty. In contrast to the coherence of principles shown by the expanding Coburgs, the Bourbons were divided between those who had to assume liberalism and those who advocated reaction. Although they still played an active role in their countries' diplomacy, the Bourbon monarchs saw their scope of action to help their relatives wholly constrained. Their loss of power and mere survival meant that Bourbon solidarity lasted more as rhetoric than an effective policy. Transnational family ties have thus succumbed to the prevalence of the national interest.

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