

Changing Skin: Identities and Strategies in Late Medieval Basque *banderizo* Warfare

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1 Objectives and Scope: The *luchas de bandos* in the Basque Country

Traditionally, studies of late medieval Spanish inter-noble warfare known as the ‘*luchas de bandos*’² saw it as an explanation for the endemic political unrest in the different kingdoms of the Peninsula or as an explanation for the weakness of kings or even whole dynasties. This essentially political analysis then gave way to a perspective which regarded such conflict as a symptom of structural contradictions within the feudal system. Both interpretations have now been superseded and more recently, alongside individual case-studies, the focus has been on the internal structure and dynamics of the conflict, on the interaction between the main actors and the local institutions of the different towns where it played out, on the way the conflict regulated itself, and on the relationship between the warring bands and the values and social structures of the nobility.

This study is based on the accumulated experience of a number of researchers who, in recent years, have challenged previous interpretations³ based on

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2 Literally, ‘fights between bands’, and from which the adjective *banderizo*, which we shall use henceforth, is derived.

3 José Ramón Díaz de Durana, ‘Historia y presente del tratamiento historiográfico sobre la Lucha de Bandos en el País Vasco: balance y perspectivas al inicio de una nueva investigación’, in *La Lucha de Bandos en el País Vasco. De los Parientes Mayores a la Hidalguía universal. Guipúzcoa, de los Bandos a la Provincia* (Bilbao, 2008), 21–46. José Ángel Lema, ‘Bibliografía y fuentes impresas para el estudio de la Lucha de Bandos en el País Vasco’, in *La Lucha de Bandos en el País Vasco*, 557–602.

the publication of a host of previously unknown medieval sources.⁴ Our primary objective here is to offer a synthesis of the state of the inquiry surrounding the evolution and results of the *luchas de bandos* in the Basque Country: Álava, Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya. Far from comprising a single political unit in the Middle Ages, the history of these three territories is quite distinct; nonetheless, a series of common cultural traits, and above all the relationships and interests of certain local nobles that spanned the three territories, allow for a comparative analysis that works on several different levels.

Traditionally, the *banderizo* warfare of the Basque Country has been interpreted in terms of the conflict between the *Oñacino* and *Gamboíno* bands. We will analyse the meaning of these denominations from the perspective of political identity, showing how in each case this identity went beyond the geographical origins of the group's members or the institutional particularities of each territory, and instead was rooted in the legendary origins of the bands, as described by one of the main protagonists of the phenomenon, Lope García de Salazar (1399–1476), to whom we will return repeatedly. These identities became all the more relevant when the conflict spread beyond its original territorial confines and came to pose a political problem for the Castilian monarchs. In this context, the internal dynamics of the bands, their territorial stratification and their relationship with lineage structures and local power interests imply an extremely complex identity.

We will also attempt to shed some light on the mechanisms that led to membership in the bands, evaluating the importance of family, neighbourhood and material interests in the creation of clientship. We will attempt to show how—alongside the undoubted importance of group dynamics—individual values,

4 *Colección de Fuentes Documentales Medievales del País Vasco* (150 vols.) in <http://www.euskotikaskuntza.org/es/publicaciones/colecciones/fuentesmedievales/>. See also the edition of source material by José Ángel Lema et al., eds., *Los señores de la guerra y de la tierra: nuevos textos para el estudio de los Parientes Mayores guipuzcoanos (1265–1548)* (San Sebastián, 2000); José Ángel Lema et al., eds., *El triunfo de las elites urbanas guipuzcoanas: nuevos textos para el estudio del gobierno de las villas y de la Provincia (1412–1539)* (San Sebastián, 2002); Javier Goicolea et al., eds., *Honra de hidalgos, yugo de labradores: nuevos textos para el estudio de la sociedad rural alavesa (1332–1521)* (Bilbao, 2005); Arsenio Dacosta et al., eds., *Poder y privilegio. Nuevos textos para el estudio de la nobleza vizcaína al final de la Edad Media (1416–1527)* (Bilbao, 2010) and José Antonio Munita et al., eds., *En tiempo de ruidos y de bandos. Nuevos textos para el estudio de los linajes vizcaínos: los Barroeta de la merindad de Marquina (1355–1547)* (Bilbao, 2014). More specifically, as regards sources for the study of the *luchas de bandos* in the Basque Country, see also Arsenio Dacosta, 'La nobleza vizcaína ante un siglo de cambios', in *Poder y privilegio*, 15–105 and José Ramón Díaz de Durana, *Anonymous Noblemen: The Generalization of Hidalgo Status in the Basque Country (1250–1525)* (Turnhout, 2011), 41–44.

strategies and feelings were other important factors, although these aspects were all too often obscured by the strong sense of noble competitiveness referred to in the literature of the time (and ever since) as *valer más* (literally “being more worthy”, though not just in the sense of moral worth, but also encompassing power and wealth).

Furthermore, we will consider the way the *banderizo* conflict evolved, observing the differences but also the capillary relationship between rural and urban societies in this context. Finally, we will show how the conflict came to be resolved, evaluating the importance of a mixture of internal factors—generational change, the effect on noble families of such public violence, peasant and urban resistance—and external ones, as political institutions such as urban councils, provincial brotherhoods and the Crown intervened. By way of an epilogue, we will observe the extraordinary and paradoxical way in which the *Oñacino* and *Gamboíno* bands nominally survived within the local and regional institutions of Vizcaya during the sixteenth century, seemingly with the Crown’s blessing.

2 Lineages and *banderizos* in Álava, Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya: Beyond the *Oñacinos* and *Gamboínos*

Alongside the documents conserved in municipal, judicial and to a lesser extent family archives, a few historiographical works elaborated in Vizcaya during the fifteenth century afford us a fascinating insight into the *luchas de bandos*. The most outstanding example is the *Libro de las buenas andanças e fortunas* written by Lope García de Salazar, a lengthy work largely dedicated to telling the story of the *luchas de bandos* in both the Basque Country itself and in neighbouring regions such as Navarre, Labourd, eastern Cantabria and northeastern Burgos. The significance of the text is enhanced by the fact that its author had himself been one of the main protagonists of these conflicts during the mid-fifteenth century.⁵

In his account of events, García de Salazar introduces us to two concepts fundamental to and inseparable from his theme: the lineage and the band. He regarded the former as a group of individuals who recognised a common ancestor from the paternal line, although maternal ancestry was also valued. The concept of lineage extended not only to actual family members, but to artificial kin too, associated in contemporary texts with terms such as *vasallo*,

5 Consuelo Villacorta, *Libro de las buenas andanças e fortunas que fizo Lope Garçía de Salazar* (Bilbao, 2015).

amigo, *atregrado* or *acotado* (the latter two explained below). It is from these ties of family and kinship that the lineage drew its strength, and in the Basque Country this structure was the absolute protagonist during the later Middle Ages. At the head of each lineage there was the *pariente mayor*, a term which, as J.A. Marín has indicated, alludes to the superior social condition of this figurehead in comparison with all the other members of the community.⁶ This privileged condition imposed on him the responsibility for protecting, administering and augmenting the lineage's patrimony, as well as maintaining the internal cohesion of the structure.

As we have said, the lineage comprised not only the immediate family and more distant blood-relations, but also those linked by marriage alliance, and others tied into it by a variety of forms of artificial kinship, geographical proximity, or feudal ties: servants, priests installed in churches over which the lineage exercised patronage,⁷ men responding to a call to arms and expecting an economic reward for doing so (known as *atregrados*), and even outlaws (known as *acotados* or *encartados*) who sought refuge in the lineages' strongholds, the latter of whom were regarded as being responsible for most of the violence denounced by peasants and townsfolk.⁸

Each lineage's head, the *pariente mayor*, occupied the fortified manor house (*casa-torre*) which was the group's ancestral home and which through its name identified the lineage. As well as the manor house itself, the ancestral estate brought together all the other elements, both real and symbolic, that contributed to the lineage's prestige: the mill, the foundry, the winepress or ciderpress and the church. All of this served to reinforce awareness of the lineage's origins in a remote and common ancestor, alongside symbolic elements of enormous importance such as onomastics, the coat of arms and the family pantheon, elements which were used by the *pariente mayor* to express his feudal authority over the peasant community.

6 José Antonio Marín, "Semejante Pariente Mayor". *Parentesco, solar, comunidad y linaje en la institución de un Pariente Mayor en Guipuzkoa. Los señores de Oñaz y Loyola (siglos XIV-XVI)* (San Sebastián, 1998), 87–101.

7 Iosu Curiel, *La parroquia en el País Vasco-Cantábrico durante la baja Edad Media (c. 1350–1530)* (Bilbao, 2009), 319–67.

8 Jon Andoni Fernández de Larrea, 'Las fuerzas de los Parientes Mayores en Álava, Guipúzcoa y Vizcaya en la Baja Edad Media: reclutamiento y organización', *Iura Vasconiae* 4 (2007), 163–88; José Ramón Díaz de Durana and Jon Andoni Fernández de Larrea, 'Las relaciones contractuales de la nobleza y las élites urbanas en el País Vasco al final de la Edad Media', *El contrato político en la Corona de Castilla. Cultura y sociedad políticas entre los siglos X al XVI* (Madrid, 2008), 293–321.

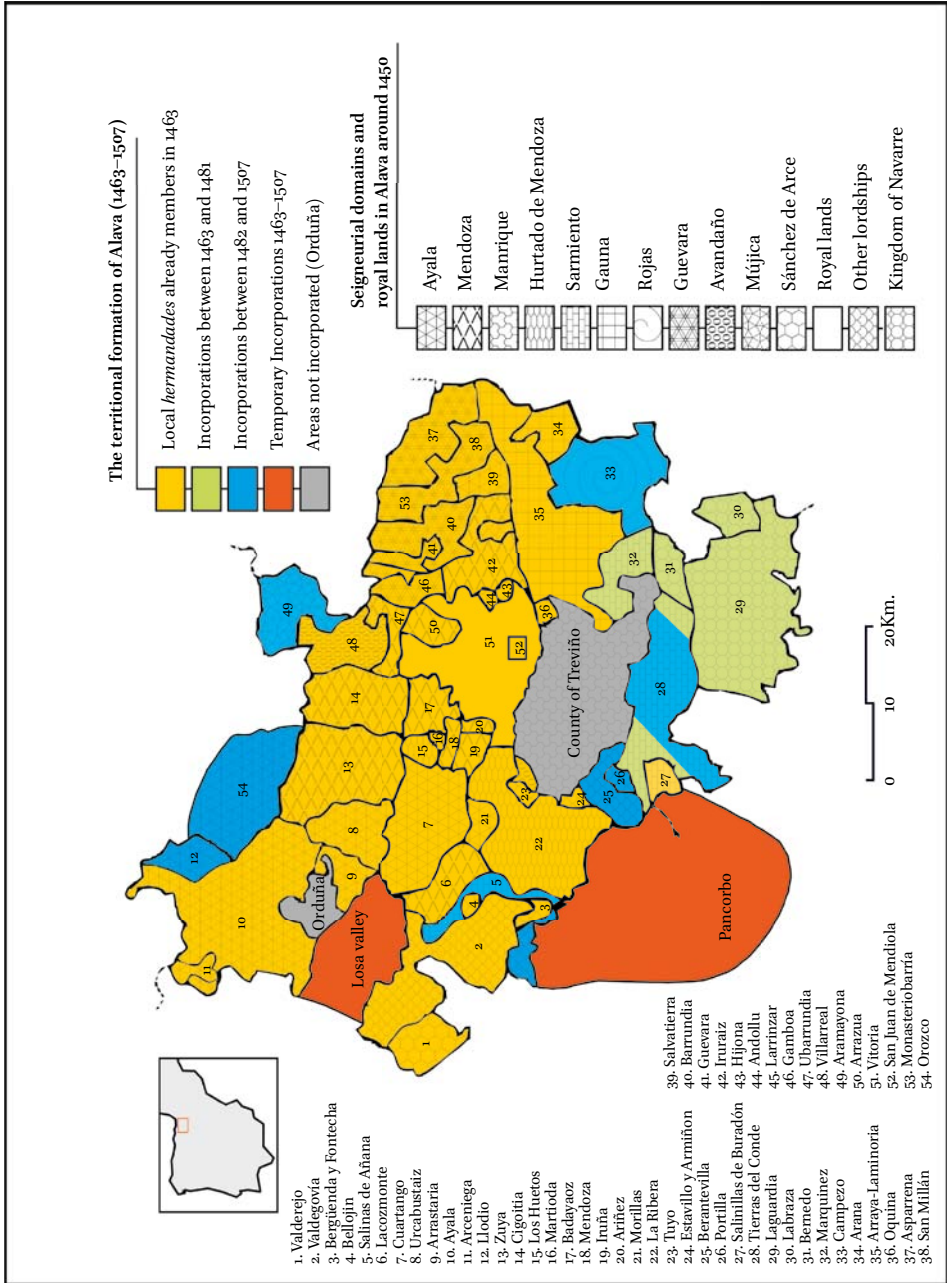
The internal cohesion of the lineage and its incorporation of new members were key components in its ability to both extend its influence beyond the ancestral estate and to demonstrate the political clout of the lineage's head. In the Basque Country, alliances cemented the relationship between the different lineages that made up the *Oñacino* and *Gamboino* bands, leading to a complex map of interrelated alliances and hostilities on local, regional and even inter-regional scales, which have been studied in Vizcaya by A. Dacosta (cf. maps 3.1, 3.2, 3.3).

In the cities of the Crown of Castile during the late Middle Ages, the different lineages were grouped together in units known as lineage-bands (*bandos-linaje*), whose sphere of action was generally local. In the Basque Country, however, these lineage-bands were often rurally based. Family and geographical proximity were vital factors for recruitment into such groups, together with a sense of identification strengthened by the existence of mutual enemies or common interests, although straightforward coercion tied some individuals to the band. Despite all these unifying factors and forces, such groups were inherently unstable, and unity relied on the success or failure of the leading *pariente mayor's* strategies, and above all, his fulfilling the expectations placed upon him by his relatives and the communities under his control.⁹

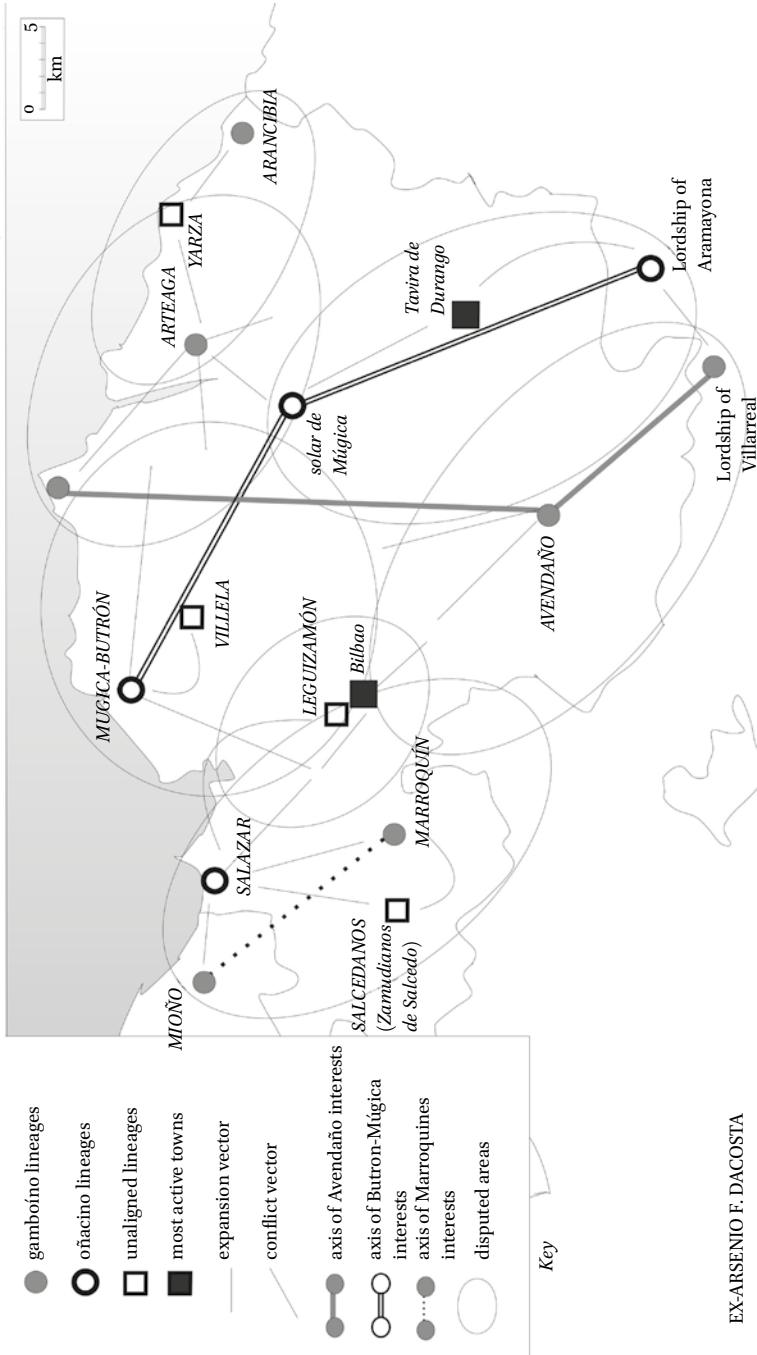
In Castile, even more striking, though, was the tendency of the associates of some lineage-bands to further group together into what have been termed partiality-bands (*bandos-parcialidad*): unions of different noble lineages. In the Basque Country these partiality-bands might even encompass towns and rural communities. Apart from the question of scale, what further distinguished them from the lineage-bands is that they were much more highly politicised, with ambitions reaching far beyond the objectives and strategies of a particular *pariente mayor* or lineage.¹⁰ Within the context of the Crown of Castile they would become endemic during the reigns of Juan II (1406–54) and Enrique IV (1454–74). Although on occasion they would influence each other, there were important differences of scale between great partiality-bands operating on a kingdom-wide basis and more localised versions. Lacking any

9 José Ramón Díaz de Durana, Arsenio Dacosta, 'La dimensión social del liderazgo del linaje: solidaridad, poder y violencia (País Vasco, siglo XV)', *Studia Zamorensia* 12 (2013), 87–106.

10 Marie-Claude Gerbet, *Les noblesses espagnoles au Moyen Âge. XI^e–XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1994), 171–72; Julio Caro Baroja, *Linajes y Bandos. A propósito de la nueva edición de las "Bienandanzas e Fortunas"* (San Sebastián, 1956), 13–61; Isabel Beceiro and Ricardo Córdoba, *Parentesco, poder y mentalidad. La nobleza castellana, siglos XII–XV* (Madrid, 1990), 310 seq.; Arsenio Dacosta, *Los linajes de Bizkaia en la baja Edad Media: poder, parentesco y conflicto* (Bilbao, 2004), 292–302.



MAP 2 The seigniorial domains around 1450 and the territorial formation of Alava (1463–1507).



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MAP 3 The Private (banderizo) warfare (15th c.).

institutional role, their mode of functioning depended enormously on their size and on the particular political context: the kingdom-wide versions were constantly reforming themselves during the period mentioned, but because of their large size tended to be less stable, while the localised Basque partiality-bands became almost permanent fixtures, for reasons we will explore.

As we have mentioned, in what is now the Basque Country these partiality-bands were known as the *Oñacinos* and the *Gamboínos*. The names were derived from those of two of the main lineages of Guipúzcoa, the Oñaz and the Gamboa, although oddly their legendary origins were, according to Lope García de Salazar, to be found in Álava. As A. Dacosta has shown, the chronicler hardly ever employed these labels when referring to the Lordship of Vizcaya, and when he did so it was only to highlight clashes between Vizcayan and Guipuzcoan lineages. The names were much more commonly used in Guipúzcoa as that is where the ancestral homes of the Gamboa and the Oñaz, sworn enemies and leaders of the respective bands, were located. In Vizcaya, on the other hand, the main conflict was between the Avendaños and the Butróns, and the Oñacino and Gamboíno labels were only used by García de Salazar when fighting spread beyond the Lordship's borders. Nonetheless, paradoxically, it would be in Vizcaya where these names survived into the Early Modern period as the bands became institutionalised: the local elites nominally aligning themselves with one band or the other when assuming roles in the territory's various institutions. As for Álava, we only encounter the two labels when there are clashes between Guipuzcoan and Alavese lineages, particularly when the Guipuzcoan Lazcano lineage—aligned with the Oñacinos—was involved. At the local level the bands did not identify themselves with reference to the lineages that led them, contrary to the case in Vitoria, where the opposing bands were known as the Ayalas and the Callejas.

In urban contexts too, the elite was organised in terms of lineages. In general terms, these urban lineages were the result of the fusion of the richest merchant families with the lesser branches of rural noble lineages which, from the mid-fourteenth century had established themselves in the towns with a view to profiting from the new economic opportunities that were opening up. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as J. M^a Monsalvo has shown to be the case in Castile, as the rural nobles adapted to the urban milieu and the two groups strengthened their mutual ties, their partnership developed into a tremendously efficient operation for appropriating wealth and monopolizing power.¹¹ Soledad Tena, who has studied such formations in Guipúzcoa,

11 José Maria Monsalvo, 'Parentesco y sistema concejil. Observaciones sobre la funcionalidad política de los linajes urbanos en Castilla y León (siglos XIII–XV)', *Hispania* 185 (1993), 939–41.

distinguishes between two different models of evolution for this new patriciate. The first is applicable to the towns of San Sebastián and Fuenterrabía, where the creation of the elites resulted from a fusion of Gascon merchants present from the twelfth century onwards and whose origins were in nearby Bayonne, and autochthonous elite lineages with whom they subsequently merged. The second model was driven by rural lineages which established themselves in the towns of Rentería and Oyarzun. Two models then, one allochthonous, the other autochthonous, but both involving essentially the same process, led to the creation of “powerful commercial oligarchies” in each of these four towns.¹²

From the second half of the fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth, the urban lineages, divided into bands, faced off over political control of the towns and reached a power-sharing agreement that ensured each 50% of the towns’ magistracies, effectively marginalising and even negating the political representation of the common townfolk. The struggle between these bands is best understood in the context of a struggle for control of the profits to be made from the thriving town economies and for social and political influence over the rest of the community.

Lope García de Salazar, both a leading participant in and eyewitness of the *lucha de bandos*, explains the origins of the Oñacino and Gamboino bands in terms of a legend which, set at some time in the distant past, suggested that the devil was at the root of the conflict between the two families who had previously maintained a peaceful co-existence. Though competition and rivalry are clearly part of human nature, thus explaining why García de Salazar’s legend of a feud with its origins stretching back into the mists of time would have found acceptance, we note there is no evidence that prior to the fourteenth century the noble elites had been divided into bands. Historiography has offered several non-legendary explanations for the emergence of the conflict. Layburu, writing in the late nineteenth century, observed that rooted in the origins of the hostility was the idea of social pre-eminence, generally expressed through the formula “the most worthy in the land” (“quien valía más en la tierra”), a recurrent theme in Lope García de Salazar’s work. J. Caro Baroja brought this theory back into the spotlight,¹³ while J.A. García de Cortázar developed it further, suggesting that questions of honour and worth would have been as quantifiable as rents and retainers.¹⁴ A. Dacosta has further explored the notion,

12 Maria Soledad Tena, *La sociedad urbana en la Guipúzcoa costera medieval: San Sebastián, Rentería, y Fuenterrabía (1200–1500)* (San Sebastián, 1997), 375–465.

13 Caro Baroja, *Linajes y Bandos*, 13–61.

14 “...por un lado, en número contante y sonante de rentas y hombres y, por otro, en cantidad, igualmente medible para los contemporáneos, de valor, temple y honor”, José Ángel

suggesting that the concept of worthiness (*valer más*) would have functioned as an ethical frame of reference and programme of action for the northern nobles.¹⁵ The work of A. Otazu and E. Fernández de Pinedo has also suggested that *valer más* was related to late medieval social conflict. Indeed, *banderizo* warfare seems to have grown fiercer whenever the elites came under pressure, whether through a drop in income from rents in the fourteenth century, or as a result of increased inter-noble rivalry caused by the spectacular economic recovery of the fifteenth century.¹⁶ It is within this framework that grouping together in bands of lineages with conflicting economic interests begins to make sense: some may have been allies within a band and possibly even part of the same lineage, but in conflict over the patronage of a given church, or over access to firewood and iron ore for their iron works, peasants' rents or the control of municipal magistracies.

Clashes between different lineages and bands were part of a chain of hostilities that existed for the purpose of maintaining the *parientes mayores'* hegemonic positions. The violence, while common to every valley and region, was particularly virulent in Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya. It was somewhat less so in Álava, a territory dominated by great lords with interests that extended far beyond their ancestral lands, stretching to the royal Court and other parts of the realm. By contrast, the *parientes mayores* of the two coastal territories (i.e., Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya) had relatively few interests outside their areas of origin, and neither the scale of their possessions nor of the rents they received were comparable to those of the magnates of Álava.

Although the earliest evidence of the existence of bands dates from the first half of the fourteenth century, it was not until the end of that century, and above all during the reigns of Juan II and Enrique IV of Castile in the mid-fifteenth century, that the conflict became generalised. The most serious episodes took place during the 1440s, with the burning and destruction of Mondragón in 1448, which should be regarded as the high water mark of the private warfare between lineages and bands. Thereafter the *hermandades* associations (literally 'brotherhoods') which had earlier been formed in

García de Cortázar, 'El fortalecimiento de la burguesía como grupo social dirigente de la sociedad vascongada a lo largo de los XIV–XV', in *La sociedad vasca rural y urbana en el marco de la crisis de los siglos XIV y XV* (Bilbao, 1973), 283–313; José Ángel García de Cortázar et al., eds. *Vizcaya en la Edad Media: evolución demográfica, económica, social y política de la Comunidad vizcaína medieval* (San Sebastián, 1985), vol. III, 350–80.

15 Dacosta, *Los linajes de Bizkaia*, 82–93.

16 Emiliano Fernández de Pinedo, '¿Lucha de bandos o conflicto social?' in *La sociedad vasca rural y urbana*, 29–42; Alfonso de Otazu, *El "igualitarismo" vasco: mito y realidad* (San Sebastián, 1973), 41–92.

Vizcaya (1394), Guipúzcoa (1397) and Álava (1417) with the aim of maintaining public order, stepped up their activities with the support of the Crown. For example, in order to combat the lineages' methods of binding and controlling their adepts based on a lineage's social and political pre-eminence and to dismantle the client networks that riddled rural society, in 1450 the Crown prohibited the participation of Guipuzcoans in indentures (*treguas*) with the *parientes mayores*. Such measures were accompanied by other occasionally effective tactics such as demolition of the *banderizo* fortified manor houses, so important to the material and symbolic power of the lineages.

In response to the *hermandades'* initiatives, in July 1456 the heads of the lineages, in a remarkable display of unity, declared war on twenty-four leading townsfolk whom they considered had been most active in the campaigns directed against them. The twenty-four were accused by the *banderizos* of demolishing their strongholds, murdering their relatives, setting them against the king, wiping their names from the countryside and depriving them of their churches. Nonetheless, the *hermandades* kept up their offensive, systematically attacking symbols of seigneurial power, and above all concentrating on the core of their power in local communities, the patronage of churches. In this context, it is no coincidence that immediately before decreeing their banishment, the king had demanded to see the legal deeds on which the rights of patronage claimed by the *parientes mayores* were based. The decree of exile of April 1457 stipulated that the leading *parientes mayores* of Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya should remain between one and four years waging war at their own expense against the Muslim enemy on the frontier with Granada. On completion of their exile, they were to swear before the king that they would henceforth obey his orders, neither usurp royal revenues and rights nor enter again into hostilities with the *hermandades*, and would even abide by the latter's ordinance books.

In the short term, the exile of 1457 implied explicit royal disauthorisation of the activities of the *parientes mayores*, and moreover temporarily de-activated their client networks and *banderizo* strategies. In the medium term, such measures were to prove particularly effective in Álava and Guipúzcoa, owing to the actions of the *hermandades*. In parallel, the royal justice system began to rule against the arbitrary obligations and abuses that the *parientes mayores* had imposed upon the peasantry and the townsfolk, while nevertheless respecting their genuine jurisdictional rights. The main political consequence of this was the distancing of the *parientes mayores* of Álava and Guipúzcoa from the new institutions of government that evolved from the *hermandades*: the General Assemblies (*Juntas Generales*). It is worth pointing out, though, that participation in these new assemblies was restricted to those who could satisfy certain requisites of wealth and land-holding, and thus these bodies were firmly in the

grip of the urban elites, which through them also controlled administrative bodies at the local and provincial levels.¹⁷

In Vizcaya, on the other hand, measures taken against the *parientes mayores* initially proved a failure. Although the Vizcayan *hermandad* launched a powerful campaign against them between 1450 and 1452,¹⁸ the local nobility reacted resolutely on two fronts, stepping up their own violent actions, and also initiating an institutional offensive which saw the leading *parientes mayores* temporarily overcome their differences and act in concert for the first time. This was the context of their determination in 1452 to secure confirmation of the traditional legal code, known as the *Fuero Viejo*, which effectively enshrined the nobility's privileges. The other factor to be borne in mind with regard to Vizcaya is the Castilian Civil War (1475–79), in which the majority of the Vizcayan nobles supported the parties that would later become the Catholic Monarchs (i.e. Ferdinand and Isabel), and this, together with their common front against the *hermandades*, led to a general consensus among the nobles during the 1470s. This consensus came into particularly sharp focus in 1471 when most of the Vizcayan *parientes mayores* united against an invasion by the Conde de Haro. Nonetheless, it is not these events that explain the simultaneous end of *banderizo* warfare in Álava, Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa. The explanation is rather more complex and far-reaching.

3 The End of *banderizo* Warfare: Towards a General Explanation

The *banderizo* wars in the Basque Country, characterised as they were by their duration and extreme violence, can be explained by a combination of the social composition of the noble class, a mentality insisting upon noble honour, the complex jurisdictional mosaic of these territories, and the particular conditions pertaining to Castile during the economic and political crisis of the fifteenth century that led to a growth in inter-noble competition. Consequently, the end of this warfare should be understood as a long-term process related to the evolution of each of these structural factors.

17 José Ángel Achón, *A voz de concejo: linaje y corporación urbana en la constitución de la Provincia de Gipuzkoa: los Báñez y Mondragón, siglos XIII–XVI* (San Sebastián, 1995), 120–95; Ernesto García Fernández, *Gobernar la ciudad en la Edad Media: Oligarquías y élites urbanas en el País Vasco* (Vitoria, 2004), 21–278.

18 Sabino Aguirre, *Las dos primeras crónicas de Vizcaya. Estudios, textos críticos y apéndices* (Bilbao, 1986), 176–181; Estanislao J. Labayru, *Historia General de Vizcaya* (Bilbao, 1897), 111, 293–316.

The structure of the noble lineages and the power base of the *parientes mayores* would not undergo significant change during the transition to the Early Modern period. Nor would it seem that the *valer más* mentality changed, and there are a number of documented examples of both inter-noble conflict and hostilities between lords and local communities during the reigns of the Catholic Monarchs (1474–1516) and Charles V (Carlos I of Spain, 1516–1556). Nonetheless, new ideas and patterns of behaviour began to mould the social reality of these territories, and they were accompanied by a series of radical changes in the structure and balance of power in Álava, Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, although with significant differences in each territory.

In Álava, a powerful anti-seigneurial alliance formed against the nobles. Comprising both townsfolk and members of rural communities, it controlled a new institutional alternative, the *Juntas Generales* of Álava, in which all the territories and towns participated irrespective of their individual jurisdiction (royal or seigneurial), and which was led implacably by the city of Vitoria. As for Guipúzcoa, practically the whole of its territory was under the jurisdiction of a group of twenty towns, the elites of which engineered an alliance based around the *hermandad* and supported by the *corregidor*, a governor appointed by the Crown. Between 1463 and 1495, the *hermandad* was transformed from an instrument for suppressing *banderizo* violence and defending the frontier with Navarre into an institution which represented the whole of the territory in the *Juntas Generales*.

As for Vizcaya, the balance of power was rather different. The institutional peculiarities of the Lordship were maintained and even strengthened with the institutional consolidation of the rural councils known as *anteiglesias*, which were effectively under the control of the *parientes mayores*. The *Juntas Generales*, assemblies in which in theory all Vizcayans were to be represented, were effectively monopolised by the nobles from the mid-fifteenth century onwards as they sought to promote themselves as the direct representatives of the Crown in the territory. They were so successful in this that the townsfolk were effectively excluded from the *Juntas*, and moreover failed to articulate an alternative representative assembly.¹⁹ Indeed, by the end of the fifteenth century, some towns would see their jurisdictional limits eaten into by the rural *anteiglesias*, while others, with few responsibilities and little real political clout, ended up being controlled by local lords.

19 Arsenio Dacosta and José Ramón Díaz de Durana, 'Political identities in conflict: the Lordship of Vizcaya in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 7 (2015), 112–34.

The Crown was at first happy to accept this situation in return for the submission and service of the nobles. However, the stance of the Catholic Monarchs towards Vizcaya would change substantially after 1483. That year Garci López de Chinchilla was named *pesquisidor real* (Royal Inquirer) and given two main objectives: to ensure the definitive implementation of the *corregidor* system, and to reform governance in the towns, introducing what would be known as the *regimiento* model. As regards the *corregidores*, their period of office was reduced and their role was professionalised, while the crystallisation of the new territorial institutions and the end of the *luchas de bandos* helped consolidate their position. As for the governance of the towns and the new *regimiento* system, the municipal reform initiated in Vitoria in 1476 was continued, was then further developed in Bilbao (1483), and was subsequently extended to the other Basque towns (1487).²⁰ The process would be further consolidated by the institutionalisation of the bands in the towns of Vizcaya.²¹

The institutional and political consensus allied to the growing efficiency of crown officials permitted the introduction of royal justice as an alternative to the private justice of the *parientes mayores*. *Banderizo* activity was criminalised, and police, political and judicial mechanisms were established, led by the *corregidores* and *hermandades*, to ensure implementation of the reform. On another level, the Crown's initiatives had begun to create a radical new framework for its relationship with the nobility in these northern territories, and this in turn helped to defuse the logic behind the *luchas de bandos*. Setting aside the case of the *Juntas Generales* of Vizcaya, in which the nobility as a class were granted privileged political representation, the Crown's handling of the situation tended towards establishing personal links with each lord or head of lineage. Anticipating the logic of the modern state, the Catholic Monarchs guaranteed the rights of the nobles, but on a case by case basis. In Vizcaya, the *status quo* as regards lay patronage was respected, and the old seigneurial right was reformulated as a royal concession. In this way the *parientes mayores* in Vizcaya saw their control of the rural communities confirmed, as was its

20 José Ramón Díaz de Durana, 'La Reforma municipal de los Reyes Católicos: el Capitulado vitoriano de 1476 y su extensión por el noroeste de la Corona de Castilla', *La formación de Álava* (Vitoria, 1986), I, 213–36; Regina Polo, *El régimen municipal de la Corona de Castilla durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos: organización, funcionamiento y ámbito de actuación* (Madrid, 1999); Javier Enríquez et al., 'Política real y control municipal en Vizcaya durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos (1476–1516)', *Vasconia* 15 (1990), 27–42; José Ramón Díaz de Durana and Arsenio Dacosta, 'Culture politique et identité dans les villes cantabriques à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Histoire Urbaine* 40 (2014), 149–55.

21 Manuel Basas, 'La institucionalización de los bandos en la sociedad bilbaína y vizcaína al comienzo de la Edad Moderna', in *La sociedad vasca rural y urbana*, 117–60.

hereditary transmission. The nobles who benefitted from these concessions are referred to in the documentation of the period as “royal vassals”, and as such they had the duty of providing the Crown with a given number of men at arms, in direct proportion to the rents they received.

Military commitments on the frontiers with Granada, Navarre and France, and in Flanders, North Africa and America made these Basques particularly valuable to the Crown. The focus of the war effort, other than the town militias and the contingents provided by the *parientes mayores* and other nobles, was mainly maritime, and the nascent State provided new opportunities for what were generically referred to as Vizcayans.²² It was a question of social survival: in the Basque Country of the late fifteenth century, the high level of entropy, or, put differently, the informality of power structures at all levels, meant that the system was incapable of guaranteeing the survival of local elites, a problem that has similarly been found for England in this period.²³ This absence of formalised power structures allowed fluid movement from rural community to seigneurial estate to kingdom and even empire, to a degree that is surprising from our modern perspective.

In the specific case of the *parientes mayores*, their contribution to the wars of the Catholic Monarchs was centred on the conquests of Granada (1492) and the kingdom of Navarre (1512). When the king requested some 2,000 men from his Vizcayan vassals in order to complete the conquest of Navarre, command of the troops was shared evenly between two of the main *parientes mayores*, Martín Ruiz de Avendaño and Gómez de Butrón y Múgica.²⁴ This arrangement was at odds with their traditional *banderizo* enmity, and is an example of how influence and power was gradually being shared, or, in other words, of the institutionalisation of the bands. It was their proximity to the Crown as vassals and as a result of services rendered, which allowed them to secure these positions, in spite of the anti-seigneurial opposition’s continued hostility. The case of the Múgicas and the Avendaños is particularly revealing when set in the context of the succession of lawsuits brought against them from 1485 onwards by rural communities within their seigneurial jurisdictions in Aramayona and Villarreal de Álava, respectively.²⁵ The support these nobles offered the

22 Alfonso de Otazu and José Ramón Díaz de Durana, *El espíritu emprendedor de los Vascos* (Madrid, 2008), 43–72. In sixteenth-century Castile the term “Vizcayan” came to denote the natives of any of the Basque provinces.

23 Peter Coss, *The origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge, 2003), 11 and 202.

24 Micaela Portilla, *Torres y casas fuertes en Álava* (Vitoria, 1978), II, 1045.

25 José Ramón Díaz de Durana *Álava en la Baja Edad Media. Crisis, recuperación y transformaciones socioeconómicas (c. 1250–1525)* (Vitoria, 1986), 356–72.

Catholic Monarchs during the early years of their reign was rewarded with new grants and favours as well as a consolidation of the aristocratic *status quo*.

By way of conclusion, the direct action of the Crown was the single most decisive factor in bringing an end to *banderizo* violence in the Basque Country. The question has been well-studied by Susana Truchuelo in the case of Guipúzcoa,²⁶ while for Vizcaya we have summarised the process of the “domestication of the Vizcayans.”²⁷ Nonetheless, the question goes beyond the governmental and judicial activity of the Crown in these territories. The nascent modern state of the Catholic Monarchs, with its evident monopoly on the use of violence, contributed decisively towards the creation of a new culture. In a relatively short period of time, Castilian society in general, including Basque society, accepted that warfare could no longer be a private matter, but rather that it should exist only at the service of the state. Moreover, the Crown established itself in all walks of life as the sole and irrefutable arbiter and authority, even with respect to morality, an aspect of Castilian life which was relatively undeveloped given the scant moral and jurisdictional capacity of the bishops in these territories. The Catholic Monarchs confirmed their authority physically with visits to Vitoria and Vizcaya in 1476 and 1483, respectively. This authority was of course based on the power of the new state, but also on the feudal logic of the earlier system, as we appreciate when Fernando, in November 1476, demanded that the leading *parientes mayores* of Vizcaya fulfill their traditional obligations.

This gradual shift in perception with regard to authority and, more specifically, the use of violence, would have enormous consequences for all aspects of Basque life. A new political and judicial culture was introduced along with new instruments that depended on the full acceptance of the laws of the realm and the formalisation of local legislation. Moreover, the way was opened up for new tools relating to and governing submission and pact in the political sphere, contractual formulas in economic relations, and lawsuits in the judicial arena. Faced with these new mechanisms for conflict resolution, the *luchas de bandos* had become completely discredited and obsolete. Moreover, these deep-seated changes emerged in parallel with a spectacular growth in lucrative economic activities such as maritime commerce and iron-working as well as opportunities for service at different levels of the new state, from the militia to administration.

Changes were taking place at all levels and in all spheres, and all of them were contributing towards the demise of the *banderizos*. Some of these changes

26 Susana Truchuelo, *Gipuzkoa y el poder real en la Alta Edad Moderna* (San Sebastián, 2004).

27 Arsenio Dacosta, ‘La nobleza vizcaína ante un siglo de cambios’, *Poder y privilegio*, 93.

are particularly worth stressing because of their relationship to the factors we have just explored. One fundamental change was the inevitable generational turnover that took place among the leading noble families. While private warfare had been accepted as entirely legitimate by the generation of *parientes mayores* who led the hostilities of 1456, the survivors who had continued in that vein until 1468 were starting to die off by the early years of the Catholic Monarchs' reign, including, for example, Juan López de Lazcano, Pedro de Avendaño "the Elder" and Lope García de Salazar. Violence is behaviour learned in a specific social context and its chief exponents were disappearing.

The heirs of those masters of violence inhabited a radically different world which had seen profound changes, affecting even their own lineages. On the one hand, the leading regional nobility was faced with a matrimonial market severely restricted not only by inherited enmities and *banderizo* adscriptions, but also by the logic of seeking the most advantageous alliances for their heirs. The changes made to the system of inheritance, with the steady consolidation of the *mayorazgo*,²⁸ which institutionalised primogeniture, would similarly have a radical effect on the members of what had until then been the relatively broad and all-encompassing lineage, leading to a surplus of younger sons in search of a living and of daughters needing to be placed in accordance with the new patrimonial logic. Moreover, the *mayorazgo* implied a significant change in the economic strategy of the lineage, which was now exclusively centred on the first-born son. All of this meant that the *pariente mayor's* capacity for redistributing income became more restricted, which in turn affected the informal system of adhesions to the lineage. Thus, though in many ways the new social system was as hierarchical as in the past, the flow of relationships and income had been restructured: the informal vertical solidarity which had allowed for the dynamics behind the *luchas de bandos* had been dissolved.

All of these factors, along with the internal dynamics of the armed conflict itself, which in its different phases had run on for some sixty years, would put an end to *banderizo* violence. Nonetheless, some of its characteristics would survive, such as the alienating mentality of *valer más*, and structural violence caused by the society's own contradictions.

The most extreme example of this generalised change was the extraordinary declaration of universal *hidalguía* (nobility) contained in the *Fuero Nuevo* of Vizcaya of 1526 and sanctioned by Charles v. Although the actual social implications of this declaration were to some extent limited, as there were still

28 The *mayorazgo* was a social practice which favoured the first-born male descendent, making him sole heir of most of the rights and possessions of the lineage and excluding other otherwise legitimate heirs.

peasants tied to estates, the fact that the condition of nobility was theoretically applied to all persons born in the territory displays a significant change in the self-perception of Vizcayans. It is worth asking whether the generation of *parientes mayores* that had declared the hostilities of 1456, or the feudal lords who had controlled Álava in the same period, would have permitted the declaration of universal *hidalguía*.²⁹ Their direct descendants, nonetheless, tolerated the concept—which some decades later would be extended to Guipúzcoa—and even assumed positions of leadership in the new institutions, which were transforming the political reality in these territories. A good example is Diego Martínez de Álava, from the Vitoria-based Calleja band, who would become, by appointment of Isabel I, General Deputy of Álava—i.e. the leader of the *Juntas Generales*—from 1499 to 1533. He was aware, as were many other descendants of the *banderizo* leaders, that their power and privileges were no longer founded on the bands, but instead were secured on their loyalty and service to the Crown. Thus the *banderizo* families of the past had turned into loyal servants of the Crown; shedding their old skins to adapt to new times.

29 José Ramón Díaz de Durana and Jon Andoni Fernández de Larrea, 'El discurso político de los protagonistas de las luchas sociales en el País Vasco al final de la Edad Media', in *Lucha política: condena y legitimación en la España Medieval* (Paris, 2004), 313–36; Díaz de Durana, *Anonymous Noblemen*, 119–30.