

The Spanish *Descamisado(s)*: Zero-Translating in the London Papers during the Liberal Triennium (1820–1823)

Los *Descamisados* españoles: “Traducción cero” en los periódicos londinenses durante el Trienio Liberal (1820–1823)

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Abstract: This article analyses the introduction and use of the word *descamisado(s)* in newspapers around London during the Spanish Liberal Triennium. It focuses on how the term was introduced, the editors’ sources of information, and the evolution of its meaning, paying attention to the representation of the radical liberals involved and the events portrayed. As previous studies centred on the use of the term by Peronism, this draws on the references found in London periodicals at that time. A critical review provides information on the press’ role during the liberal revolutions and might bring to light the importance of translation in newspapers.

Keywords: *Descamisado(s)*; Liberal Triennium; *The New Times*; London papers; British press; zero-translation.

Summary: Introduction. First Records of the Word *Descamisado(s)*. The British Press and the *Descamisado(s)* (1820–1823). Year 1821. Year 1822. Year 1823. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la inclusión y el uso de la palabra *descamisado(s)* en los periódicos londinenses durante el Trienio Liberal español. Se centra en cómo se introdujo, las fuentes de información de los editores y la evolución de su significado, prestando atención a la representación de los liberales radicales y los acontecimientos descritos. Como los estudios previos se centraron en el uso del término por el Peronismo, este se basa en las referencias localizadas en los diarios londinenses. Su revisión crítica aporta información sobre el papel de la prensa durante las revoluciones liberales, y la importancia en esta de la traducción.

Palabras clave: Descamisado(s); Trienio Liberal; *The New Times*; periódicos londinenses; prensa británica; “traducción cero”.

Sumario: Introducción. Primeros registros de la palabra *descamisado(s)*. La prensa británica y los *Descamisados* (1820–1823). Año 1821. Año 1822. Año 1823. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 1820, a liberal revolution started in Spain after General Rafael del Riego’s military insurrection in Cadiz. The restoration of the 1812 Constitution, finally accepted by Ferdinand VII, gave rise to a new period known as the Liberal Triennium (1820–1823). In this period Spanish affairs were closely followed by European powers that, gathered in the Quintuple Alliance, feared the impact of those revolutionary movements on their countries. In contrast to the Peninsular War, Great Britain agreed on a policy of non-interference in Spain. The crisis there was not assessed by authorities in London as a real threat to the European balance of power. British energy, resources, and time should go instead into recovering maritime strength, with an eye on the Spanish American colonies (Guerrero Latorre 216–20). However, events in Spain were very carefully followed in the British Isles by the Government, the press, and civilians. The public, who had never approved of Ferdinand’s policy, were surprised by the Spanish liberal revolution. British newspapers were echoing from the very first moment. Despite claiming political neutrality, there was growing support for the liberals among the press and its readers. However, public opinion was less unanimous as the conflict radicalised. From November 1821 onwards, London newspapers used the Spanish word *descamisado(s)* on a regular basis to generally refer to the radical liberals or *exaltados*. The historical evolution of the term throughout the nineteenth century and its inclusion without translation in British papers during the liberal revolutions make it particularly interesting since previous scholarship has exclusively analysed its employment by supporters of Peronism in speeches and the press in the twentieth century.

This article therefore aims to examine the use of the word *descamisado(s)*, rather than its translation to “shirtless,” in the British newspapers, specifically those published in London, during the Liberal Triennium. First, a brief explanation is given of the term’s first records both in Spanish and in English, focusing on the evolution of its meaning in that first language from the fifteenth century to its peak use between

1820 and 1823. The following sections centre on the analysis of its appearance in the London papers in 1821 and special attention is paid to the translation techniques applied, or the lack thereof, and the changes in the word use and meaning in English until the year 1823. Emphasis is also placed on the context in which the word is inserted, that is, the events described in those newspaper articles, but mainly on their source of information. This, together with the paper's ideology, greatly determined the image of the Spanish radical liberals the press was presenting to its readers, which is explored here as well.

In consequence, this study draws on the references found in London periodicals, available online on the British Newspaper Archive (hereafter BNA) website, from 1820 to 1823.¹ Secondary sources on the Spanish Liberal Triennium (Gil Novales, Rújula and Chust, Carr, and Esdaile), on the British Press during the nineteenth century (Barker, Bourne, Brake and Demoor, Brown, and Laspra Rodríguez), and on translation analysis (Coletes Blanco, Molina and Hurtado, and Newmark) have also been examined to approach the use of the word *descamisado(s)* in the period. A critical review of these documents and works provides an example of the early stages a foreign word follows to become part of a language lexis, although *descamisado(s)* seems not to have lasted over time in English as terms like *guerrilla* has. More importantly, it might offer more information on the role the press played during the liberal revolutions and, also, bring to light the relevance of translation, or the lack of it, in newspaper reporting.

1. FIRST RECORDS OF THE WORD *DESCAMISADO(S)*

The word *descamisados*, according to Waissbein, was possibly used in Spanish for the first time in the first half of the fifteenth century in a poem entitled “Coplas de los pecados mortales,”² collected in the Duke of Híjar's songbook. However, some other experts transcribed the term in the original manuscript as *descaminados* instead, meaning that some doubt surrounds this particular instance (Waissbein 119–20). After that, and with more certainty, it is found in 1629 in Jacinto Antonio de Maluenda's ten-line stanza named “A la miseria que pasa un pobre estudiante,”³ included

¹The British Newspaper Archive (hereafter BNA): www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/.

² My translation: “Coplas” on the Deadly Sins.

³ My translation: To the Poverty that a Poor Student Suffers, in *Taste Tickle*.

in his work *Cozquilla del gusto* (Waissbein 120). In both cases, its meaning is connected to “nakedness” and “poverty,” and that is how the *Real Academia Española de la Lengua*, the Spanish Language Academy, defined it in 1729 (Waissbein 118).

It was not until the French Revolution, and mainly at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the word *descamisados* acquired moral and social class connotations, detaching itself from its literal meaning: clothes were then understood not only as a reflection of the person’s social and economic level, but also of a specific ideology. Thus, it became commonly used from 1810 onwards to, contemptuously or proudly, refer to dissatisfied low-class members of society and, later on, to violent and radical liberal groups. The connection between the term *descamisados* and the French word *sans-culottes* is therefore clear, providing an example of the translation technique called modulation, which Vinay and Darbelnet defined as a “variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective and very often of the category of thought” (trans. in Newmark 88).⁴ That meaning seems to be conveyed for the first time in Ramón María Salas’ book *El mayor despotismo acompañado de la más crasa ignorancia*⁵ published in 1811 (Waissbein 132). It was, however, during the Liberal Triennium when the number of examples in Spanish debates, books, and papers, both with a positive or derogatory sense, increased considerably. After that, it would not be so extensively used again in the Spanish language until the 1940s in Argentina.

In the British context, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*) defines the Spanish term *descamisado*—which unlike the word *guerrilla* is not classified as a borrowing—as “a nickname given to the ultraliberals in the Spanish revolutionary war of 1820–23” (234). The *OED* rightly contends that it was introduced in the English language during the Spanish Liberal Triennium and states that its earliest record is to be found in 1823 in volume 14 of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, a Tory monthly literary review, as follows: “They are men of liberal ideas, and in general, members of the Descamisado” (514). This article, however, will show that prior evidence of its use can be traced back to the London dailies in 1821.

⁴ Vinay and Darbelnet defined modulation as: “Variation obtenu en changeant de point de vue, d’éclairage et très souvent de catégorie de pensée” (11).

⁵ My translation: The Biggest Despotism Accompanied by the Crassest Ignorance.

2. THE BRITISH PRESS AND THE *DESCAMISADOS* (1820–1823)

Just like the Peninsular War, the outbreak of the Spanish Liberal Triennium had a significant impact on the British Press. Papers tried once more to provide their readers with the latest news about the revolution in Spain, even if Great Britain was also undergoing a period of serious social unrest. In 1819, numerous working-class riots had ended with the passing of the Six Acts (or Gags Acts) in December (Laspra Rodríguez). The situation in the British Isles, and in Europe in general, was thus far from stable, which influenced not only the publication of news about Spain in those periodicals, but the press's interest in the events there. In that turbulent context, it is also important to bear in mind the increasing role of the press as a public opinion generator among popular classes. British periodicals, regardless of their ideological leaning, supported Spanish liberals and their confrontation with Ferdinand VII's absolutist monarchy, closely observing the situation in the Spanish American colonies. Liberal, independent, and conservative papers exploited events in Spain, albeit in different ways: the former, to criticise the British Government without being sanctioned and, the latter, to draw their readers' attention away from internal affairs, such as the consequences of the Peterloo Conspiracy and Massacre, the Cato Street plot, George III's death, and Queen Caroline's return to England.

According to Laspra Rodríguez, the first British paper to report, briefly, Riego's military uprising in Cadiz was the radical-liberal *The Examiner* on 23 January 1820. However, no comment on the news was made and the idea of it being quickly controlled was transmitted. From the 25th onwards, all London dailies were communicating the beginning of the Spanish revolution. Surprisingly, the word *descamisados* does not appear in the periodicals until the second half of 1821. This might be striking because the division between moderate and radical (or *exaltados*) liberals is asserted to have occurred after the dissolution of the Army of La Isla, led by Riego, in August 1820 and with the Decrees of 21 and 22 October that year on Patriotic Societies and the Freedom of the Press, respectively (Gil Novales 22–25). Neither Spanish papers nor French ones included the term until mid-1821 either. A plausible explanation is that at that time, and essentially after the Battle of the *Platerías* (September 1821), the Spanish mob violently burst into politics and, in consequence, intense social disturbances took place in several provinces in the following months. In that context, the word being analysed suited perfectly.

Before examining the use of the term *descamisado(s)* in the London papers between 1821 and 1823, some significant figures should be considered. The search engine on the BNA website finds a total of 235 results for *descamisados* in that time and area range, although the number is indeed higher since more references were located while browsing the papers. The comparison with the Spanish words *liberales* and *exaltados*, shown in the table below, speaks for itself on the relevance of each one. Regarding the term *descamisados*, if the total figure is broken down by years, there would be 9 for 1821 (mainly in December), 111 in 1822 (August and December gather the most references), and, finally, 115 in 1823 (mostly in February and March). The word is found in 30 periodicals of rather different ideologies, from the liberal *The New Times* or the *Morning Herald*, and the conservative *The Sun* or the *Morning Post*, to the independent *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, being the first paper mentioned the one that used it the most.⁶ *The New Times* will thus play a central part in this article.

Table 1. Comparison among references to *descamisados*, *liberales* and *exaltados* in the London papers

Year	<i>Descamisados</i>	<i>Liberales</i>	<i>Exaltados</i>
1820	–	64	–
1821	9	63	–
1822	111	85	42

⁶ The 30 London papers in which the word *descamisado(s)* appears (number of references in round brackets) are: *Anti-Gallican Monitor* (4), *Baldwin's London Weekly Journal* (8), *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (1), *British Mercury of Wednesday Evening Post* (3), *British Neptune* (2), *British Press* (5), *Commercial Chronicle* (11), *English Chronicle and White Hall Evening Post* (19), *General Evening Post* (2), *John Bull* (3), *London Chronicle* (1), *London Courier and Evening Gazette* (1), *London Evening Standard* (1), *London Moderator and National Advertiser* (1), *London Packet and New Lloyd's Evening Post* (12), *Morning Advertiser* (1), *Morning Chronicle* (6), *Morning Herald* (20), *Morning Post* (12), *National Register* (1), *New Globe* (2), *New Times* (63), *The News* (2), *Observer of the Times* (3), *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* (10), *Saint James's Chronicle* (12), *Star* (5), *Statesman* (1), *The Sun* (29), and *Weekly Dispatch* (1). Source: The BNA. Their affiliations from the website www.victorianperiodicals.com/ and, also, from The British Library. Newsroom Research Guide (UK National Newspapers).

1823	115	25	99
Total	235	237	141

Source: Prepared by author from data in The British Newspaper Archive.

2.1 Year 1821

On 29 November in 1821 the word *descamisados* first appeared in a London periodical: *The New Times*. On page 2, in a section entitled “French Papers,” it included the translation into English of some extracts from private correspondence dated “Madrid, November 14” and published in *Le Gazette de France* and the *Journal de Paris*, both pro-Bourbon papers and organs of the French Government. In an alarming tone, those dispatches described the riots that were taking place in Madrid and also in other towns, such as Cadiz and Valencia, which brought the Spanish Government into question. In this context, the term *descamisados* was used in the first excerpt in italics, accompanied by an explanation in brackets, “(sans-culottes),” and in relation to the Spanish liberal paper *El Eco de Padilla* (hereafter *El Eco*), which was defined as “the Journal of the *Descamisados*” (2). These texts were later published in *The Sun* that same evening, and in the *London Packet and New Lloyd’s Evening Post* the following day.⁷

The transference of the word *descamisados* from the Spanish journals via the French papers into the London press seems clear, thanks to instances like this one, and can be easily traced. As stated in *The New Times*, the information published that day came from *Le Gazette de France*. The French periodical actually inserted this piece of news in its issue for 23 November, in a section entitled “ESPAGNE. Madrid, 14 novembre,” as follows: “L’Echo de Padilla, journal de *descamisados* (sans chemises ou *sans culottes*) annonce aujourd’hui que la véritable révolution aura lieu dans un mois au plus tard. Cette nouvelle peut être prématurée, mais elle fait grand tort à l’emprunt.”⁸ Not only does the London daily

⁷ *The New Times*, 29 Nov. 1821, p. 2; *The Sun*, 29 Nov. 1821, p. 2; and, the *London Packet and New Lloyd’s Evening Post*, 30 Nov. 1821, p. 1. Online editions in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

⁸ *Le Gazette de France*, 23 Nov. 1821, no. 327, p. 1. Online edition in *La Bibliothèque nationale de France* (hereafter BnF), www.bnf.fr/fr/. My translation: The *Eco de Padilla*, journal of the *Descamisados* (without shirt or *sans culottes*) announced today that the real

include the same information in translation, but it also explains the term *descamisados* in the same way, that is, through the French perspective and wording. This, however, is not the first reference to the Spanish word found in the Paris papers. It seems to have been previously used once, along with a similar description, in the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* three days before, on 20 November, in connection with a private dispatch dated in Madrid on the 8th of that same month.⁹

The term *descamisados* can still be traced further back in the press, *El Eco*. Both *The New Times* and *Le Gazette de France* cited the issue for 14 November as the source of the mentioned extracts, although a search reveals that they cannot actually be found there. Instead, on that date *El Eco* included the word twice in a supplement dedicated to the newspaper's defence against the attacks of *El Imparcial* and *El Universal* on the representation to the King made by the authorities in Cadiz, San Fernando, and Seville. *El Eco* criticised that the papers falsely attributed the disturbances in the said towns, first, to a small group of *descamisados* and, then, questioned the content of the representations, not daring to define merchants or upper-class people involved in the issue in that way (5). The first time, however, that *El Eco* used that term was at the end of August and, according to *El Imparcial*, copied it from *El Espectador* (5).¹⁰ This is the fourth Spanish newspaper referred to on the preceding lines, which illustrates the remarkable outburst of periodicals during the Liberal Triennium. As Gil Novales states, 680 papers appeared at that time (qtd. in Rújula and Chust 43).

From the end of August to November 1821, *El Eco* used the word *descamisados* seven times to describe the violent mob. In all such cases, the paper criticised how the term was being used, in the construction of a “counterrevolutionary” or “counterradical” discourse (Behrendt 17), to disrespectfully refer to those who did not accept the political and social situation at that time. In addition, the periodical defended that the so-called *descamisados*, and thus individuals dissatisfied with the system, were not just the low-class people involved in the disturbances. This might justify

revolution will take place in a month at the latest. This news might be premature, but it seriously damages the loan.

⁹ *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 20 Nov. 1821, p. 1. Online edition in the BnF, www.bnf.fr/fr/.

¹⁰ *El Eco de Padilla*, 14 Nov. 1821, supplement to no. 106, p. 5; 22 Aug. 1821, no. 22, p. 5; and *El Imparcial*, 31 Oct. 1821, supplement to no. 52, p. 5. Online edition in the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (hereafter BNE), www.bne.es/es/.

El Eco's nickname as "the Journal of the *Descamisados*" by the French press.¹¹

As previously stated, *The New Times* was the first London paper to include the word *descamisados* in connection with *Le Gazette de France* and the *Journal de Paris* on 29 November 1821. But this is not all. The most relevant section on its page 2 is found in the following column: its leading article. Echoing the alarming tone of the French papers, the editor comments on the events unfolding in Madrid and identifies and describes the responsible ones, the *descamisados*, disapproving of English radicals' support and of a worrying lack of concern in Britain over a revolutionary contagion.¹² The term is used four times. The first instance is introduced in italics, copying the mentioned French source, and followed by the phrase "fellows without a shirt," to ensure readers' understanding:

The political news from Spain is of the most gloomy and disastrous kind. It is painful to see our worst anticipations realised as they are, in that ill-fated country. The Clubbists of the Fontana de Oro parade the streets of Madrid by night, shouting 'Long live RIEGO, Emperor of the Spanish Republic!'—The *Descamisados*, or 'fellows without a shirt,' are ranked as a distinct political party. They have a Journal devoted to them, 'the Echo de Padilla,' which announces, without the least reserve, that the real Revolution will take place at latest within a month. Thus, the secret is at length revealed, that the so much vaunted Spanish Constitution was a mere stepping-stone to the real Revolution; which must be sealed (as it was in France) with the blood of the Bourbons!—in short—Spain must be plunged into blood, anarchy, and Atheism, to pave the way for a Republic, of which RIEGO, or some other Military Despot is to be the Emperor—such is the decree of the *Descamisados*! (2)

In the rest of the instances, in which their similarities with the French *sans-culottes* and their revolutionary ideas are examined emphasising their violent nature, the word appears on its own. Like the term *guerrilla* or Spanish place names, this might be understood as an example of what Coletes Blanco, building on Barthes, coined "Zero-Translation" ("Anglo-Spanish Transfers" 234). This means the introduction of a Spanish source

¹¹ *El Eco de Padilla*, 22 Aug. 1821, no. 22, p. 5; 1 Sep. 1821, no. 32, p. 4; 28 Oct. 1821, no. 89, p. 3; 30 Oct. 1821, no. 91, p. 5; 1 Nov. 1821, no. 93, p. 3; 2 Nov. 1821, no. 94, p. 3; and, 6 Nov. 1821, no. 98, p. 3. Online editions in the BNE, www.bne.es/es/.

¹² *The New Times*, 29 Nov. 1821, p. 2. Online edition in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

text (a single word here) without being translated into an English target one. The word “shirtless” could have been used, but instead the Spanish one was preferred, due to the lack of a cultural-pragmatic equivalence, as a better way to represent that specific reality, that is, the most violent radical-liberal groups made up mainly of the Spanish mob, whose main objective was to establish a republic. This leading article somehow lays the foundations for the use of the term and its meaning in the following three years. Likewise, the editor of *The New Times*, in line with the British liberal press, exploits the Spanish Revolution to criticise the Government’s performance during that turbulent period, warning about a radical future in Great Britain. No wonder the paper was aligned with the Spanish *moderados*’ ideology. The “self-referential way,” according to Howarth, in which the British usually observe the events in Spain can be appreciated here (33).

In December 1821, the word *descamisados* is found in four more papers: *Morning Post* (10 and 21 Dec.), *General Evening Post* (11 Dec.), *Baldwin’s London Weekly Journal* (15 Dec.), and *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* (21 Dec.). In all of them, it appears in the sections on page 2 made out of translated extracts from the French periodicals, and entitled as “French Papers,” “Foreign Affairs,” and “Foreign Intelligence,” where social disturbances are described. For example, the excerpts in the *Morning Post* (10 Dec.), the *General Evening Post* (11 Dec.), and the *Baldwin’s London Weekly Journal* (15 Dec.) reads as follows: “(From *Le Moniteur*) MADRID, Nov. 22. — This morning a numerous assemblage took place in front of the Fontana d’Oro, when the following communication was made to the *descamisados* (shirtless herd), and hailed with loud acclamations by the multitude.” Also, the one published in the *Morning Post* on the 21st provides the following information: “Paris, Dec. 17. — The elections in that quarter [Pamplona] have been less revolutionary than in other provinces; and this has occasioned the disorder, by exciting the dissatisfaction of the garrison and the *descamisados* (*sans-culotte* tribe).”¹³ Two main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of these references. First, the Spanish word was introduced in the London periodicals in italics and followed by an explanation in English, or in

¹³ *Morning Post*, 10 and 21 Dec. 1821, p. 2; *General Evening Post*, 11 Dec. 1821, pp. 2–3; *Baldwin’s London Weekly Journal*, 15 Dec. 1821, pp. 1–2; and *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 21 Dec. 1821, p. 2. Online editions in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

French, to ensure readers' understanding; and second, its origin was always the French press. Except for *The New Times*, the papers analysed, regardless of their ideological bent, did not include the term in their own comments on the events yet, which is revealing.

2.2 Year 1822

In 1822, the first paper to use the word *descamisados* was again *The New Times* on 8 January in the section devoted to the French press. In it, the London periodical featured the violent riots occurring in Cartagena:

The advices [*sic.*] from Madrid in the French Papers mention that the Society of *Descamisados* (the Club of the shirtless), at Carthagena, have addressed RIEGO, inviting him to become their chief and father. He has answered in the most obliging manner, that he accepted the flattering title: 'Yes,' he says, 'since you wish it, I will become the first of the virtuous *descamisadoes*; and all burning with the same patriotic fire, we will be the terror of tyrants; and the rock upon with all the projects of our enemies shall go to pieces.' (3)

This extract is particularly interesting since it illustrates an attempt to "domesticate" the Spanish word by applying to it the English rules to form the plural of a noun: as *descamisado* ends in "-o," the suffix "-es" is added to it.¹⁴ No more instances of this pluralisation process, however, have been found in the British press during the Liberal Triennium.

Throughout 1822, the pieces of news in the London papers in which the term *descamisados* was integrated deal with the following topics:

- urban disturbances in several Spanish cities and towns (such as Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, La Coruña, Valencia, and Seville);
- General Riego's arrival in Madrid in February as a deputy for Asturias in the Cortes, his performance as President of this representative body, and his participation in the disorders in the Spanish capital in July;
- complaints about the growing union between the *descamisados* and the Cortes, and the debates in that assembly on the Freedom of the Press, the Right of Petition, and Patriotic Societies;

¹⁴ *The New Times*, 8 Jan. 1822, p. 3. Online edition in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

- the fear of the spread of the revolutionary ideas in France and in other European countries, a possible military intervention in Spain, the Duke of Wellington's role to prevent it, and the Pyrenean cordon sanitaire;
- the liberals' hypocritical attitude towards the American colonies and the Spanish Government's economic problems;
- and, finally, British support of the liberals and the Spanish Constitution.

From these articles, *The New Times*'s leader on 20 August stands out due to its analysis of the terms used to refer to and describe the opposing factions in the Spanish Revolution. In it, the editor discusses an extract from *Le Conservateur*, dated in St. Petersburg, as follows:

It is not less essential to remark the names which the revolutionists apply to those who oppose their system of destruction; they call them rebels and insurgents—expressions no more applicable to them than to the man who defends his life or his purse from highway robbers. Every subject who rises against a legitimate Government is a rebel and an insurgent: the word insurgent applies more particularly to colonies which strive to shake off the yoke of the mother country. As to the epithets of *bandits*, *brigands*, &c. lavished by the popular party on their opponents, we know that it was thus that the French Jacobins called the Royalists of La Vendée. Thus, in order to read the news from Spain, without the confusion resulting from the abuse of words, the factious of all ranks should be called *comuneros*, *exaltados*, *descamisados*, *anarchists*. They have not even the right to call themselves constitutionalists, for they have not been constituted; and as long as they shall persist in an absurd and monstrous accumulation of usurped powers, they can never produce a constitution. The party on the other side, may justly have the titles of Royalists, Army of the Faith, &c. because they defend the altar, the throne, the liberties, the institutions of their country, and wish to annihilate or repress the efforts and the audacity of that class of men, who having nothing to lose, but everything to gain by troubles, are always ready to overturn social order, of which they are in all places and at all times the declared enemies. (2)

In the excerpt, the two main contending ideologies in Spain are not only being labelled but, more importantly, a negative image of the radical liberals is being constructed in opposition to the defenders of the traditional *status quo*, or *serviles*, whose identity is positively reinforced.

In this case, the *descamisados* are depicted through the Russian and French lens as violent individuals—a key feature in this narrative—who are against the monarchical system of government and the Ancient Régime social order. This demonisation, or stigmatisation, contributed to building the necessary international “counterrevolutionary” discourse to justify a foreign intervention in Spain, and also to find support to do so.¹⁵

The highest number of references in 1822 is concentrated in July and August, due to the Madrid uprisings from 30 June to 7 July, and in December in connection with the European discussion in the Congress of Verona (October–December 1822) on the measures to take to prevent a contagion effect. In it, Great Britain, represented by Wellington, defended a policy of “no interference” in Spain and, as a mediator, tried to avoid the Holy Alliance powers’ intervention there since it could pose new obstacles to British commercial aspirations in the Spanish American colonies (Coletes Blanco, “Poems” 157; Guerrero Latorre 231).

In slightly more than 88% of the occurrences in which the London papers used the word *descamisados*, the source of information was a French periodical (*Le Quotidienne*, *La Gazette de France*, *Drapeau Blanc*, *Journal des débats*, *Journal de Paris*, *Journal Politique et Littéraire de Toulouse*, *Pilote*, *Le [Moniteur] Universel*, *Le Courrier Française*, *Le Constitutionnel*, and *L’Écho du Midi*). This testifies to the fact that it was introduced into the British Press via the French papers, which in turn had borrowed it from the Spanish journals. At the beginning of the Liberal Triennium, and until correspondents were sent, the London dailies knew about and transmitted the events in Spain through the French papers (mainly Paris ones). As Laspra Rodríguez has pointed out, the reason might be an initial lack of direct information from the Iberian Peninsula. However, it could also have been used, later on, as a way for the periodicals to distance themselves from the data they were sometimes publishing without being confirmed, and on whose reliability they casted doubts. Another explanation might be that French, being the international language of communication at that time, was more widely known. In any case, the use of the word *descamisados* in the London papers continued to predominantly appear in connection with the French press or context, which had an obvious consequence: the image of the Spanish radical

¹⁵ *The New Times*, 20 Aug. 1822, p. 2. Online edition in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

liberals that was leaking into British press readers conveyed a pro-Bourbonic and “counterrevolutionary” perspective.

In less than a fifth of the occurrences was the term *descamisados* included in the editors’ comments, which suggests that it was not part of the English journalists’ word-stock yet. In 1822, it appears for the first time in a leading article in the paper *The New Times* (22 Feb.), where most of the references of this type are found (no. 9), followed by the *Morning Chronicle* (1) and the *Morning Post* (1). The editor there supported British neutrality towards the Spanish question, whereas foreign financial assistance (British, as well) is criticised.

An evolution in the word’s use and meaning has been found in the instances located in the 1822 press. First, from July onwards, a translation or explanation of the term is no longer included; and also, in the second half of the year, especially after 7 July, its meaning expands emphasising the radical ideology and identifying Spanish institutions with the *descamisados*, as an apparently *exaltado* government took over (Gil Novales 55–56). The word did not exclusively refer to that violent mass any longer, but powerful, educated, and upper-class individuals were also included in it. A double evolution is thus appreciated in its scope: from referring to a very specific part of society, the lower-class mob, to its highest representatives; and simultaneously, from being limited to the borders of the Spanish territory to opening to the wider European context, being used in relation to other revolutionary episodes (Italy, Portugal and Greece), the impact on France and Great Britain, and the discussion on an intervention policy in Spain. Yet in the word’s meaning one feature remained consistent: the *descamisados*’ aggressiveness.

2.3 Year 1823

Finally, the search engine of the BNA website reports 115 results for the word *descamisados* in the London papers in 1823, mainly in its first three months. Apparently, this is a slightly higher figure than in the previous year, 1822, but a careful analysis reveals that it is not so. In most cases, periodicals were just copying the same translated French extracts, and thus including the term. This fact might reflect that British interest, or at least that of the British press, shifted to internal or other international issues (e.g., the crisis in Ireland due to famine and social unrest). Despite the lower number of new references to the *descamisados* in 1823 (roughly 48% of the global figure), *The New Times* should be highlighted once more

for its extensive use of the word, being the first paper to include it this year as well. On 2 January, in the leading article on page 2, the editor responds to their Paris correspondent's dispatch, dated 29 December, in which foreign intervention in Greece is justified, as follows:

We have always expressed ourselves most decidedly against wars of aggrandisement. We distinctly assert, that England would not suffer a war of aggrandisement to be undertaken, either by France against Spain, or by Russia against Turkey; but the case is widely different where an oppressed population implores foreign aid against the tyranny and barbarity of a *Descamisado* faction, or of a Musulman despot. The *right* of foreign intervention in the civil wars of Spain or Turkey is clear: the *expediency* of such intervention is in all such cases a problem of great delicacy; but its resolution, so far as concerns England, may safely be left to those firm but temperate councils by which the British Cabinet has long been guided. (2)¹⁶

On this occasion, the adjective *descamisado* is used instead of the noun. In the overall figures (total no. 235), this word category appears in less than 6% (no. 13) of the references between 1821 and 1823, and thus they have been analysed together in this article. Some examples are: “the *descamisado* Ministry,” “the *descamisado* consul of Spain,” “the *descamisado* cabinet of Spain,” “the *descamisado* Jacobins,” and “the *descamisado* faction.” These instances show the semantic shift in the use of the word, in which Spanish authorities and institutions are gradually integrated as radical liberals come to power.

In 1823 the term *descamisado(s)* was included in the London papers in articles and extracts describing or commenting on a wide range of topics:

- the agreements reached in the Congress of Verona at the end of 1822, and an ongoing debate in Europe about a possible military intervention in Spain;
- the impact of the Spanish Revolution on France (a deep social and political division there), the replacement of the cordon sanitaire for a French Army of Observation in the Pyrenees, and war preparations;

¹⁶ *The New Times*, 2 Jan. 1823, p. 2. Online edition in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

- the entrance and advance into Spain of the Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis, under the Duke of Angoulême’s command, General Francisco Espoz y Mina as a radical-liberal leader, and relevant military operations;
- the British stance on the situation in the Peninsula, commitment to their position of neutrality, and their economic support of the liberals;
- King Ferdinand VII’s possible transfer to Andalusia, and urban disturbances in Madrid and other towns and cities (such as Seu d’Urgel, Valencia, Bilbao, León, and Alcalá);
- and finally, the fall of the Spanish bonds in Great Britain, and the *descamisados*’ problems to fund the war.

The source of this information was once again the aforementioned French papers, and thus, the context for the word being used in more than 70% of the cases. On the contrary, the remaining almost 30% of the references are found in the periodicals’ comments, and even in a reader’s letter to the editor, an important part of the “writing culture” that might help better understand historical events (Behrendt 19). On 5 April, *The New Times* printed a dispatch, signed by “PUBLICOLA,” in a section entitled “To the Editor of *The New Times*.” In it, people’s attention was drawn to another benefit of England’s neutral position towards the European intervention in Spain: the low price of the Hackney Coach fares. While developing this argument, “PUBLICOLA” referred to the *descamisados* in the following way:

I am far from wishing to deprive any set of men of all the benefits that have flowed to them from the peace (which I trust we shall honourably maintain for many years to come, notwithstanding the pseudo patriotism of our Radicals, who would identify our country in common cause, if they could, with the Descamisados of Spain); yet it does seem to me, that an extension of time and distance might be conceded to the Public, and the Hackneymen at the same time liberally rewarded for their labour. (4)¹⁷

In this extract, the author reveals some relevant information about the situation in Great Britain: an underlying social division between supporters

¹⁷ *The New Times*, 5 Apr. 1823, p. 4. Online edition in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

and detractors of the Spanish radical liberals' cause, despite the official neutral position claimed.

Shifting the emphasis to the use of the word *descamisados* in the press, in 1823 there is a moderate increase in the number of times it was included in the periodicals' own articles and comments, regardless of their ideological bent. It appears in *The New Times* (no. references: 15), *Morning Herald* (1), *John Bull* (2), *Anti-Gallican Monitor* (1), *The Sun* (8, reproducing *The New Times*), and *Saint James's Chronicle* (1, reproducing *The Times*). This shows a gradual incorporation of the Spanish term into the journalists' and their readers' word-stock and speech, or at least, a tendency in this direction. Evidence can be found in *The New Times's* leading articles published from January to July. There the editor continues siding with British neutral position in the Spanish question while opposing the *Descamisados'* Regime and a French intervention. However, he insists that the British press should focus on internal issues instead and seems concerned about the consequences for British people of their financial support of the radical liberals. For example, in the issue for 5 July, *The Times* was accused of leading many British families to ruin after having encouraged them to acquire Spanish bonds. The editor of *The New Times* continued his attack by "dismantling" *The Times's* warnings on the negative consequences of asking for a French loan and the effect that would have on Spanish credit. It is there where the *descamisados* are mentioned as follows:

Why, the Spanish Cortes is bankrupt, broken up, and run away, long ago. Some twenty or thirty fugitives have sought a shelter in Cadiz; but as to credit, even their portmanteaus have fallen into the hands of the French, and few of them will find credit enough to buy themselves new shirts and breeches. They must become Descamisados and Sansculottes, in a literal as well as in a figurative sense. Again, English families which have lent money to the Cortes will be ruined! (2)

At a later date, on 10 July, *The New Times* referred to the *descamisados* for the last time during the Liberal Triennium. In a similar way to the ball that took place in London on 26 April 1820 to celebrate the reinstatement of the Spanish Constitution (Laspra Rodríguez), a "Grand Spanish Fete" was held, with the presence of the Duke of San Lorenzo, in the Covent Garden Theatre on 4 July 1823. Its purpose was to raise money for the Spanish radical liberals, although expectations seemed not to have been

met. In that issue, the editor of *The New Times* was thus mocking the ridiculous amount of money collected:

It was to recruit the exhausted treasury of the Descamisados—to buy shirts for the shirtless, and breeches for the Sansculottes—it was to raise armies, to purchase cannon, to store magazines, in fine, to build *chateaux en Espagne*—and has netted 3721.6s. (3)¹⁸

Two aspects need to be highlighted in both previous extracts. First, the word *descamisados* was no longer accompanied by a translation into English or written in italics, in contrast to the French phrase “*chateaux en Espagne*” included in the second quotation. This might suggest that at least that person had assimilated the Spanish term and it was thus part of his lexis. In addition, a play on words can be appreciated in those references, which shows another step towards the term’s incorporation into the English word-stock. To create that word play, the editor of *The New Times* combines the term’s figurative and literal meanings: not only the Spanish liberals’ ideas are *descamisadas*, but they are also physically naked now. There is, in consequence, a return to the original meaning in Spanish explained above.

In the 1823 references, the noun *descamisados* consolidates the shift or expansion in its meaning observed in the previous year: from referring to the Spanish poor mob that took up arms, emphasising their violent nature, to now drawing the attention to radical and revolutionary ideas in connection with political leaders and institutions. Although both meanings coexist and their aggressiveness is present in the second one as well, the latter seems to be more widely used at this time, given the radicals’ control of the Spanish constitutional government (at least, apparently) and a greater interest in international “diplomacy” (due to the negotiations over a foreign intervention in Spain). Finally, the different labels attached to the Spanish liberals seem to gradually disappear from the analysed London papers, presenting them as a homogeneous radical entity. This might explain the sharp decrease in the use of the term *descamisados* after Angoulême’s arrival in Madrid (no. 3) in favour of *exaltados* (no. 40), but that is already another story.

¹⁸ *The New Times*, 5 and 10 July 1823, pp. 2 and 3, respectively. Online editions in the BNA, www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive/.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has sought to analyse the introduction and use of the term *descamisado(s)* in the London papers during the Spanish Liberal Triennium (1820–1823), paying attention to the evolution of its meaning and the source of those references. The following conclusions can be drawn. First, the term was widely used (mostly as a plural noun) between 1821 and 1823 by the periodicals printed in the British capital, particularly in the liberal *The New Times*. And, after tracing the news source, it seems to have been borrowed from the French press. This might be explained considering that information arrived in London faster from Paris than from Madrid, and also the international status of that language, which made its translation easier. This had, however, an impact on the image of the *descamisados* transmitted to British readers, since the French pro-Bourbonic perspective resonates in it, helping to construct an international “counterrevolutionary” discourse.

Second, the word meaning did not remain static, but evolved over the three years. In the early examples, the term *descamisados* referred to the aggressive and poor crowd that wanted to change an unfair system in a violent way. This is the definition conveyed when the use of the word reached its peak in 1822, and most of the references were registered in the London papers. It was later expanded emphasising the radical ideology behind it, maintaining the violent nature but leaving aside economic or social levels, incorporating politicians, ministers, officers, and institutions in the scope of the term. This broader meaning is the one that leaked out to the *OED*. On a wider scale, a shift in the context surrounding the word has also been appreciated: from an initial national-related environment, focused on the situation in Spain, to a more international and even French and British oriented one, when the Spanish Revolution started to have a bigger impact beyond its borders.

Finally, the inclusion of the word *descamisados* in the London periodicals as untranslated is an example of “Zero-Translation.” However, its use in the papers underwent some changes during the time range of this study (1820–1823). Initially, it was always incorporated in italics followed by an explanation, or a possible translation into English, in brackets, to ensure readers’ understanding. After a few months, that support was removed, and editors and press readers started to include *descamisados* in their own comments. There was thus a tendency to integrate the term into the English word-stock as had happened with the word *guerrilla* during

the Peninsular War although possibly not in such a successful way. Lord Byron, for example, referred to the radical liberals in Canto XII of his *Don Juan* using the English translation instead: “Who rouse those Spanish shirtless patriots?” (verse 5, line 3). However, a footnote was added to that line stating “The Descamisados” in a single volume of Byron’s complete works published by John Murray in 1837 (719). A further study needs, therefore, to be conducted to examine the use of this word, or rather its translation, in other fields such as literature, art and popular culture, to better determine the extent to which the term was part of the English lexis.

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