

Causes of basque contemporary immigration

Gaur egun 400 milioi emigratzaile baino gehiago da munduan, eta hain gizatalde ugaria izan arren, ez dira sakonki aztertzen gertakizun tamalgarri honen zergatiak. Hamaikatzko euskaldunek jasan dituzte hemeretzigarren eta hogeigarren gizaldian antzerako egoerak. Zergatiak bat baino gehiago dira, eta, ondorioz, euskaldun askoren itxaropen bilakatu izan dira atzerriko hainbat lurralde, batez ere Ameriketan.

There are many different causes for Basque contemporary immigration, but if we mix them all together they form a homogeneous whole which can explain why the Basques emigrated to America during the contemporary stage (19th and 20th centuries).

This is not an isolated phenomenon, it has some things in common with other Spanish migrations, especially those of the Cantabrian and Catalan coasts, and there are indeed also many coincidences with other European migrations. When there are massive emigrations from one country to another, the destination country must provide adequate conditions for so many people to enter, and the country of origin has to act as a migratory catapult.



Euskal Etxea in Puerto de la Cruz (Venezuela). Photograph: Peru Ajuria.

The Basque Country underwent the most radical of social and economic transformations during 19th century, as a farming and shepherding society became industrial. This phenomenon, which started in 1850 and sped up from 1875 on, brought about:

- ✓ The loss of Basque social identity.
- ✓ The loss of importance of the primary sector.

- ✓ Massive foreign immigration lured by industrialization.
- ✓ The transformation of urban and country landscapes.

These changes took place around the extraction and transformation of Basque

iron ore. The dramatic social change brought about by this process in the Basque farmers is one of the main causes of the two Carlista Wars that ravaged the Basque Country between 1833-1839 and 1872-1876. It also explains the need to defend the Basque social and economic traditions against the liberalism that came hand in hand with industrialization. This emerging ideology proposed:

- ◆ Disentailment
- ◆ Less power for the Church
- ◆ Foral modification
- ◆ A change of mentality
- ◆ Equality before the law
- ◆ Compulsory military service
- ◆ Taking the Basque Customs from the inland to the coasts
- ◆ Primacy of the secondary and tertiary sectors over the primary sector.

Both Carlista civil wars were won by the liberals, who came mostly from the

Cities, therefore the old Basque rivalry between the country and city dwellers was fanned back into life. Many of the losing Basque farmers decided to move to America, starting with Uruguay and later on Argentina, where they could be land owners and were not forced to work in factories owned generally by liberals who antagonized them deeply. Moreover, the bleak consequences of war encouraged many Basques to emigrate.

But on top of these wars and their outcome, we must point out that during 19th century and the early 20th century there were important cyclic crises in the Basque agricultural sector that also help explain the migratory avalanches. Moreover, as a consequence of the Somorrostro Proclama Agreement, signed in 1876, Cánovas del Castillo, head of the Government, signed the Law of July 21st 1876, which forced the young Basques to attend the compulsory military ser-

vices under the same conditions as the rest of the Spaniards. As a result, there were many fugitives and deserters from a military service that lasted three years and took the young Basques to the colonial wars in Marruecos, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, unless they had enough money for a quota soldier.

There are two other causes that explain Basque con-

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Demografi hazkuntza, industrializazioaren eragina, karlistadak eta foruekiko bere eragina eta atzerriko hainbat lurralde aberasbide ziurtzat jotzeak izan ziren, besteak beste, hamaikatxo euskaldunek bere jaioterria utzi eta atzerrira bultzatu zituen arrazoiak.

temporary immigration to Latin America:

The population of the Basque Country grew as a result of better sanitary conditions and an increase of births. There was a population of 535.539 people in 1787 and 986.023 in 1910. This caused even more problems in the distribution of the «caseríos». As we all know, the Basque Country is not precisely a plain, and

the uneven territory makes fragmentation more difficult. That is why the Fuero of 1526 allows the inheritance of the caserío and its belongings to one direct descendant, who was normally the elder son, although this was not compulsory. A daughter married to an «Indiano» could inherit, as it happened in Navarre for instance. The heir and his wife had to take care of the parents and the rest of brothers and sisters were left with a tile or a tree in the far end of the caserío, although they were allowed to stay in it working in the fields and the iron ore with no salary.

This situation, far from being idyllic, as Julio Caro Baroja has proven, caused enormous family tiffs and those who did not inherit often chose to emigrate to America, to work in the Spanish Administration or to enter the Church.

If we conceive immigration as a lucrative business, we have to

mention the baits and the immigration agencies as a very important factor. The immigrant mortgaged his economy in exchange of working in the destination country to pay his debt, sometimes for another Basque.

In 1880 the General Consul of Uruguay in the Basque Country (Vitoria) published in the newspapers of Vitoria paradise-like offers for the Basques wishing to emigrate to his country, and in 1873 this same Consul sent a report to the Uruguayan Foreign Minister in which he showed his interest in the Basques because they were:

- hardworking men capable of hard physical labor
- Catholic
- Spanish speaking, as in those days it was already compulsory to learn the language in primary schools.

All these factors united to make of immigration a business in which shipbuilders and captains participated, in addition to baits and agents, with the good will of Argentinean authorities. Obviously none of these processes would have taken place if the South American republics had not wanted to receive immigrants for two reasons:

- 1] Because after their independence from Spain the population of many countries was established only in the capitals and coasts. And since the beginning of 19th century economic progress was identified with population (agricultural utopia). The Argentinean President Alberdi stated it clearly: to rule is to populate.
- 2] Because this way of thinking included the idea that the Latin blood had to be mixed with Anglo Saxon blood in order to improve the race and become wealthier. The Basques were a good solution for the reasons pointed out by Consul Quiroja (hardworking, Catholic, Spanish speaking).

The communication with relatives or friends established in the other side of the Atlantic Ocean also contributed to increase Basque immigration.

Therefore, there were factors in both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, which acted together in a symbiotic relation to explain this huge Basque contemporary immigration, which started since the twenties in 19th century, kept increasing until the fifties, when it decayed, and took strength again from 1875 until the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Bitartekariak gizon eta emakume katolikoak, lan gogorretara ohituak eta gaztelania zerbait zekitenak bilatzen zituzten, hain gutxi jendeztatuta zeuden lurralde zabaletan lan egiteko. Eta aurkitu ere ugari aurkitu zituzten, batez ere Euskal Herriko gizonetzkoen artean.

