

# THE IMPACT OF EMIGRANT REMITTANCES ON SPANISH AND SCOTTISH SOCIETY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Spain and Britain both have long traditions of emigration and yet the motives for and responses to emigration in the two countries differ. Far more Spaniards than Britains returned to their own country and Spaniards also send vast sums of money (remittances) back to Spain. The impact of these remittances will be explored and contrasted with the situation in the Highlands of Scotland.

In the period 1815-1939 nearly 52 million people left Europe. Spain and Britain are amongst the six countries that dominate in terms of the proportion of the population lost through emigration. In the early nineteenth century mass emigration was predominantly a northern European phenomenon, but by the end of the century there had been a remarkable increase in emigration from southern Europe including Spain.

In 1912 it was estimated that about 4 million Spaniards lived in Latin America, thirty-five percent of them resident in Argentina.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that Baines's conclusion that between 1815 and 1930 (the period of mass emigration) approximately 4.4 million people left Spain is an under-estimate.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the total population of Spain in 1900 was just under 20 million, which means that emigrants equalled over twenty-three percent of the Spanish population,<sup>3</sup> an impressive exodus. Emigration from Spain peaked in 1913 and continued into the 1920s, a period when restrictions impo-

sed by the importing countries severely restricted flows. France attracted many refugees from the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and after the Civil War,<sup>4</sup> but the Americas remained the main emigrant destination for Spaniards until 1959. Martinez Cachero has argued that Spanish emigration changed fundamentally after 1959, emigration after that date being almost entirely within Europe.<sup>5</sup> However, it has also been shown that Galicians have continued to retain links with America, especially the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Just as most Spaniards initially went to Spanish-speaking countries, so British emigrants went to English-speaking ones such as the United States or the British Empire. It is only very recently that the British have emigrated to Europe.

In 1900 the population of Britain was just over twice that of Spain and one would therefore expect greater losses through emigration. It is estimated that between 1815 and 1930 almost eleven and a half million people (11.4 m) emigrated from Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), far more than from any other European country,<sup>7</sup> and within Britain the highest proportions lost were from Scotland.

Britain's emigrant experience is particularly interesting because emigration peaked in a period of economic boom. Generally it was the countries experiencing only limited economic growth that exported the most migrants, such as Norway and Ireland (who in fact lost the highest proportions of their population). If the economy "took off" this generally resulted in a downturn in emigration, a pattern that can clearly identified in late nineteenth century Germany.<sup>8</sup>

If the discussion of British emigration seems rather thin, this is because of the tremendous difference between Spanish and British material on emigration. The Spanish records are excellent, allowing one to determine not only how many people are leaving, but where they are coming from. British data on emigration are generally very weak. There have never been any checks on those emigrating; for example, there is no military service in Britain, which would require checks to restrict males leaving. The decennial censuses of the British population began in 1801 and can highlight regions gaining or losing population, but out-movement does not necessarily mean emigration and place-of-birth is not recorded in all censuses. This makes it impossible to accurately assess which regions are exporting most people. Moreover, perhaps due the volume of emigration from Britain, the British or even regional groups do not tend to stay together or even retain a link beyond their immediate family. There are no British societies akin to the "Centro Gallego" which appears to be found wherever Galicians settled. It is

only the Highlanders from Scotland, a small proportion of the British population, that formed emigrant clubs abroad.

The number of British nationals abroad can only be estimated by counts in the country-of-residence made, for example, by emigration officials at the port of entry. The British Government asks that people should register with the British Consulate abroad, but there is no obligation to do so and it has been shown that it is only in countries where there is "trouble" that people bother to record their residence.

Having considered the limitations of British data, let us now consider what sort of people became emigrants, bearing in mind that emigration involves expenses and the poorest people could not afford to emigrate.

The majority of Spanish emigrants in the nineteenth century were manual labourers, but some either took or made wealth abroad because by the tern of the century fifteen percent of the 60,000 Spanish-born emigrants in Uruguay were described as property owners.<sup>9</sup> It has already been noted that the direction of Spanish emigrant flows changed after 1959, but so also did the nature of emigration. Before that date emigrants were generally rural-born, indulging in spontaneous individual permanent movement overseas. After 1959 emigration was more planned. It was often for only a short period, in other words temporary, and by industrial workers.<sup>10</sup> Some people did continue to emigrate to Latin America, but evidence suggest that this movement is now restricted to the skilled.<sup>11</sup> A study on Spanish emigrants in Europe just before Spain joined the EU found more family emigration than previously. The men were working in unskilled jobs rather than factory-work as earlier research. Nevertheless, the men considered that they had bettered themselves in terms of qualifications whilst abroad, which in view of their low status jobs suggests that they were poorly educated before they left.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of emigrants from Britain in the early nineteenth century were also rural dwellers with agricultural skills, many wanting to continue their lifestyle abroad. However, by the late nineteenth century, Britain had become an urban, industrial society and the majority of emigrants had urban skills that were very much in demand by the rest of the world.<sup>13</sup> The cheap land abroad no longer existed and most rural emigrants, despite their aspirations, ended up in urban occupations.

The proportions leaving Britain declined markedly after 1914, and since 1945 the proportion of highly skilled professional people has increased. Indeed in Britain it has been shown that mobility declines with class. Agricultural workers are a very small proportion of the workforce and not a significant proportion amongst emigrants.

Having considered the type of people who migrate, it is now appropriate to consider regional aspects of emigration.

In the major emigrant countries, emigration was a widespread phenomenon, but it was nevertheless concentrated in certain regions. However, the regions exporting population do not necessarily remain constant, and furthermore, the fact that people leave an area does not mean that they emigrate, as they may merely move to a nearby or more distant major town within a country.

In Spain it has been the peripheral regions that have provided the bulk of emigrants. This can be seen in terms of push and pull factors. The push of declining domestic industries, and the lack of land and industrial development led to a shortage of work in Andalucia and Galicia, while the pull of nearby France, with opportunities for better employment, enticed both the Catalans and the Basques. However, two regions stand out as providing the majority of Spanish emigrants in the twentieth century; Andalucia and Galicia.

Galicia became a mass exporter of her population in the mid nineteenth century when her largely subsistence economy entered a period of crisis. However, the economy adapted, first to stockraising and then with coastal industrialisation. Both these adaptations were geared to export markets and represent enclave development; rural industries in the interior did not provide complementary services, and there was no integrated industrialisation in Galicia. Urbanisation occurred very slowly, and people left the land to emigrate rather than to go into industry and this meant that markets for goods were very limited. However, some return-emigrants did create a canning industry.<sup>14</sup>

The scale of nineteenth century emigration from Galicia is impressive. Between 1850 and 1930, 650,000 people emigrated, i.e. one in every two Galicians left home either temporarily or permanently.<sup>15</sup> The departure of the surplus rural population meant that those who remained were able to make their farms more profitable and this capital accumulation was helped by emigrant remittances. This new wealth had two benefits:- firstly, in the early twentieth century it enabled the peasants to buy their own land; and secondly, it encouraged technological improvements, specialisation, and modernisation in agricultural practices. However, labour remained very cheap and the Americas continued to attract emigrants.

Andalucia superficially appears to have everything going for it; mineral resources, fertile areas producing marketable crops, and ports ideally suited to trade with the Americas. But what we have in fact is a very polarised society of rich landowners with weak entrepreneurial skills and minifundis-

tas (small landowners). There was rapid population growth in the early nineteenth century which meant labour was cheap and this delayed the introduction of new technology both to industry and agriculture. Moreover, tariff protection meant that firms did not need to modernise. Andalusia's industries were - with notable exceptions - unable to compete with domestic industry or foreign competition. The guaranteed prices for cereal producers may have prevented social upheaval, but in the long run it prevented the use of new technologies that might have increased yields. Labour was cheap and agriculture did not experience a labour shortage until the 1950s. The phylloxera catastrophe in Malaga is thought to be the crisis that triggered mass emigration.<sup>16</sup>

We have, therefore, two areas in Spain with rapidly expanding populations, low wages and unemployment. Britain also experienced rapid population growth in the nineteenth century. Her economy had industrialised, yet immigration from Ireland and in-migration from rural areas meant wages were low. By the 1860s the majority of emigrants had industrial skills and were leaving from major urban centres. In-migrants from rural areas replaced the departing emigrants.<sup>17</sup> These in-migrants were similar to the Andalusians and Galicians in that they were from peripheral areas where domestic industry could not withstand the onslaught of industrialisation.

The Scottish Highlands provide an example of pressures on a very distinctive, peripheral society in Britain. It also provides some interesting similarities and differences from the Spanish experience.

Within Scotland there is really only one area of small farming communities, the crofting parishes of the Highlands. In order to understand the current farming practices, it is necessary to understand how the system of "crofting" developed.

In the Highlands of Scotland the estates were very large, relatively infertile, and of low market value because the land was remote and had few marketable resources. The population was thinly spread in small communal farmsteads in river valleys, and lived by subsistence farming. In order to create more revenue for themselves, the landlords developed the inland areas as large sheep farms or shooting estates and needed the farmed valleys to allow the animals to over-winter. The Highlanders were evicted or forced to settle in infertile areas on the edge of estates or on the coast. It was at this time that many Highlanders either migrated or emigrated. This planned clearance of people from many Highland estates is known as "the Highland Clearances". The impact of the Clearances on the population of the region has been profound; some counties began to lose their population in the 1820s and the

entire region has been losing its' population since the 1840s through clearance, migration and emigration.

If clearing the land of people for sheep farming was part of the landlords' strategy to increase revenue, renting very small plots of land to their tenants in order to maximise income was another. These plots were deliberately made too small to sustain a family by farming alone. This was to force their tenants to diversify, to be involved in more than one economic activity, otherwise known as bi-employments. Examples of these would be kelping (gathering seaweed),<sup>18</sup> fishing, or working as farm labourers. This farming system is known as "crofting" and between 1760 and 1830 it completely displaced traditional communal farming.

The Highland Clearances have remained deeply embedded in Highland consciousness, and the population is still highly antagonistic to any policy of enforced removal. The crofters have had security of tenure and the legal right to inherit their croft for the last hundred years, but they are not allowed to sub-divide it amongst their heirs. The right to inherit was intended to encourage crofters to improve their holdings, but many are held by descendants who refuse to relinquish their rights but are not crofters, while others who would like crofts cannot get them.<sup>19</sup> Many crofts have been abandoned or are no longer used for farming. In some places tourism has made the crofts viable, but in other areas and particularly on the islands, the system remains largely intact to this day, mainly because sea fishing, weaving or more recently salmon farming have provide practical bi-employment opportunities.

There have been attempts to generate an industrial core in the Highlands but these have failed and the area really has no industrial base. The oil industry has provided a major injection of capital but it remains an enclave development, providing considerable but temporary employment. It benefits the Highlanders in terms of employment opportunities, and does employ some local people, but many employees are "travelling people". The latter are people who retain their family home in their area of origin and work elsewhere, sleeping in lodgings or work camps, and returning to their homes for substantial periods of leave.<sup>20</sup> These workers do not have the same legal rights as local workers, but it is a pattern that suits remote crofters.

The croft is therefore a Highland farm that has been deliberately made too small to be viable without a second source of income. There has been a declining population in the Highlands due to the nineteenth century Clearances and migration which has only now has begun to stabilise. In contrast, in Andalucia and Galicia the large population and low wages have cre-

ated the need to emigrate either temporarily or permanently in successive generations.

In Spain there appears to have been a strong tradition of returning after a period of emigration abroad. This pattern has always been far less pronounced in Britain. Thus, in the late nineteenth century it is estimated that over half of all Spaniards that emigrated returned, but for Britain a third is probably more realistic.

When Spanish emigrants went abroad, they never totally ignored the motherland and banking data clearly shows that many emigrants send back remittances (literally money sent or brought back from abroad), and have been doing so since the turn of the century. This tradition of sending back remittances is also found in Italy, Ireland and Portugal.

British historiography has always argued that emigrants sent little back beyond perhaps fares for a relative to join them. Very little is known about the connections British emigrants retain their country. British banking records are private and it is impossible to establish if emigrants are sending back money as remittances, because bank records are destroyed once legal requirements have been satisfied. We therefore know very little about the finances of British emigrants. It is because I am interested in the impact of remittances that have been analysing the Spanish data and have investigated whether the acknowledged truism that emigrants did not remit back to Britain is in fact correct.

One can appreciate the scale of Spanish remittances from the fact that they had a significant effect on the national budget. In the early twentieth century Spanish immigrants in Spanish America and Brazil remitted annually about 240 million pesetas, of which sixty-five percent came from Argentina and Uruguay. This sum was large enough to enable Spain to resolve her monetary crisis after the war with the United States of America. This pattern continued, and in the mid 1920s remittances accounted for ten percent of the Spanish Government's national budget.<sup>21</sup> The pattern was to continue; between 1962 and 1969 remittances equalled \$2.262m,<sup>22</sup> about a third of the contribution of tourism, and was able to offset almost eighteen percent of the total visible deficit.<sup>23</sup>

Having seen that remittances have been a very significant factor in the Spanish economy nationally, let us consider the local level, looking firstly at emigrant savings in banks, and then secondly at the impact in the community. This will be done with reference to studies on Galicia and Andalucia using evidence cited by Oporto del Olmo.<sup>24</sup> Finally, there will be some consideration as to whether the Highlands of Scotland is experiencing the same impact.

The impact of remittances deposited in savings banks (*Cajas de Ahorros*) has been analysed. These savings banks are an important depository of emigrant funds, and in 1976 they held forty percent of emigrant remittances. Emigrants tend to remit their savings to their local bank, thus the savings banks in Andalusia and Galicia have a higher proportion of their total deposits in foreign accounts than larger banks in other parts of Spain. Indeed seventy percent of emigrant investments in savings banks were in Andalusia, Galicia and the West of Spain. Whilst the money is in the bank the depositor has no control on how the money is invested by the bank, which in seeking the best return on its capital may well invest outside the immediate area. The remittance is not therefore benefiting the local community.<sup>25</sup>

However, one instinctively feels that the impact of an injection of capital into a local area must be beneficial, and indeed the discussion has already noted that this was the effect on the local economy in Galicia in the late nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The peasants were able buy land, although it was observed that this was not capitalist investment, but a way of defending their traditional way of life rather than modernising it. In other words emigration can promote under-development, preserve existing social conditions and at the same time be a product of these conditions. Remittances help to maintain the status quo. Furthermore remittances may be detrimental to future development because migration and remittances may decrease total output, especially in agriculture and other commodities that could be sold. Workers who have emigrated cannot be replaced and relatives who are left behind are unable or unwilling to do all the work. Indeed in Ireland Curson has shown that remittances undermined traditional forms of community co-operation.<sup>27</sup> Agricultural productivity tends to decline, and remittances tend to reduce self-sufficiency and increase the dependence of a region on goods from outside the area, especially consumer durables. In short, a region becomes dependent on remittances.

Indebtedness can be resolved by emigration; indeed remittances are a way of paying off debts incurred in emigrating. They may also be used to buy machinery to compensate for having less people available on the farm, as it is generally the younger, fitter, most able people that leave. In this sense remittances are paying the costs of emigration. Research on Spanish remittances suggests that less than ten percent of remittances are used to repay debts and it is not clear how the debts were incurred. Moreover, emigration was not necessarily a successful method of saving money, despite the fact that emigrants tend to live very frugally. A study of Andalusian emigrants in



Germany showed that thirty percent found it impossible to save. Generally however, emigrants found it easier to save money abroad than in Spain.

The emigrant may send back remittances with the intention of starting a business but only a small proportion of remittances are directly involved in productive activities. Most Spanish studies suggest that less than ten percent of emigrants aim to or have started a business, and when they do they are generally very small ones such as shops, bars and workshops and without any employees. The benefits to the region are therefore very limited. An extreme example of misplaced emigrant entrepreneurial endeavours is shown in the small village of Elijas in Extremadura, where the number of bars and discotheques tripled as a result of emigrant investment.<sup>28</sup> This might have improved the night-life temporarily, but it represents a mis-allocation of useful resources and gross over-supply.

It is argued that the majority of remittances are spent on daily activities such as food, clothing and housing. Whether these are economically productive to a region is debatable.<sup>29</sup> In Spain the most common objective for emigrants was to buy or renovate a flat or house and indeed one study of return-emigrants in Galicia found seventy-four percent lived in their own flat, thirteen percent owned two flats and seven percent three or more. The study does not make it clear as to whether these were purchased by the emigrant, but it plainly represents a lot of capital being used non-productively. However, it has to be asked why people return to poor districts or undesirable places and it has been suggested that return-emigrants buy a flat not from economic motives but in order to increase their status in the community. This would create a positive link between remittances and future migration in the minds of potential emigrants.

If a family or community becomes dependent on remittances then there is a problem of reliability. This is outside the control of the emigrant and is due largely to the state of the economy in the host country. Thus in 1967 there was a large fall in remittances from Germany to Italy due to a recession in Germany, and the 1973 recession and oil crisis caused a much steeper drop in remittances throughout Europe. The economic crisis of 1973-6 led to the first restrictions by EEC members on immigrants and ultimately to the implementation of policies to encourage foreign workers to return to their native countries. There was a marked increase in Andalucians returning home, thus increasing unemployment and reducing remittances. This happened because Andalucians tended to emigrate to Europe, whereas Galicia was less affected and the remittances were sustained because Galicians were more likely to have been involved in trans-Atlantic emigration.

To summarise the discussion so far, it can be seen that emigrant remittances can be of national significance, do not necessarily benefit the local area even if invested there, tend to promote under-development, may decrease output, create or solve indebtedness, encourage house-building, create some small businesses but at the same time make the community more vulnerable to economic conditions in the host country.

In Scotland the population of the Highlands is too small and the British economy too large for remittances to be nationally significant. At the local level banking records are unobtainable, although evidence suggests that some men working in the Gulf States used investment strategies to spread their risk when sending their savings back to Scotland. Oral evidence suggests that they do send back money to their villages. Many Highlanders have always gone to the major British cities, especially Glasgow, but in the 1970s islanders talked of relatives in Patagonia, Argentina, the Gulf States, the merchant navy and fisheries (especially in Greenland, Newfoundland and South Georgia). These were not all unskilled jobs; Patagonia offered work with sheep, and the navy and fisheries skills the of seamanship. Workers could be away for long periods in the merchant navy and fisheries, and an informal system of paying wives back home was developed within firms.<sup>30</sup> Clearly this sort of system completely side-stepped conventional monetary systems through banks. More recently the oil industry in the North Sea has probably reduced the need to go abroad for work.

The idea of going abroad to save money in order to maintain the croft has proved persuasive. As long ago as 1923 Leneman found evidence of a crofter going to Canada with the intention of "bettering himself" and then returning to the island of Barra. He never returned, and his croft has remained empty.<sup>31</sup> Not all empty crofts are evidence of emigration; this is an area where there are many empty crofts with idle land attached. The legacy of the Clearances has been that people are unwilling to abandon a croft even if they do not use the croft house or farm the land. Some islands such as Scarp have been completely abandoned, but the crofters still have the right to return.<sup>32</sup>

Can this form of remittances also be seen as destructive? In the Highlands it can be argued that again it has promoted underdevelopment and maintained the status quo. Agricultural production has declined, and is illustrated by a report in a local newspaper from the Shetland Isles. In the 1939-45 War, it noted that so many men were working in the merchant navy that the islands were experiencing a boom, and despite Government encouragement to increase agricultural production, output was actually declining.<sup>33</sup>

Many crofts contain the wife and children, because the husband is abroad and the croft is a convenient place for the family to live. One is therefore describing a situation where in many cases the croft is no longer even a bi-employment activity.

Crofters regularly leave to work in the major cities (a pattern similar to that found in Spain). That crofters are getting remittances from within the country but outwith the local region was first noted in research on temporary migration in the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Oral evidence suggests that this still occurs, and the crofting system depends on more than one source of income, but unfortunately the monies involved cannot be identified. Interestingly a group of crofters in Assynt, Sutherland recently formed a cooperative to buy the estate when it came on the market. This was feasible because of a large number of donations sent from abroad (mainly North America), which enabled the crofters to purchase the estate, the first purchase of this kind to take place. Assynt is an area that had been notorious in the Highland Clearances 180 years ago and most of the donations were from people with no known family connections with the area. They were simply unsolicited remittances from people who felt a cultural affinity with the Assynt crofters.

In the Highlands there is a situation of plenty of low grade land, but with very tightly controlled restricted access to it, and for the crofters the crofting way of life being totally inadequate to support a twentieth century lifestyle. Clearly although there are similarities, this is not the same situation as in either Andalucia or Galicia although plainly access to land is equally restricted. The savings of Spanish emigrants enable them to return to their "pueblo" with an enhanced lifestyle, through the purchase of homes and consumer durables. This is not so apparent in Scotland, where sustaining the croft while attempting a late twentieth century lifestyle (even if no longer being a crofter in the agricultural sense) seems to be the limit of their achievements. In all cases the remittances serve to maintain the status quo and create a dependency culture.

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