

Storia e Futuro

A comparative overview at the Spanish and Italian historiography on return migration (1880-1930)

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Abstract

Italy and Spain joined late to the Atlantic migration flows of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth. Early in the century, both countries developed their general migratory legislative corpus, generating a pre – and post – debate that transcended their public opinion and generated positions for and against emigration. The return also entered the public debate based on two premises that decisively influenced the vision of contemporary thinkers and even later historiography: first, that returns were rare, because migration was considered a linear and continuous process; and second, that the return was due to failure of the migration experience. Historiography of the second half of the twentieth century, especially from the disciplines of economic history and sociology, has thoroughly revised these assumptions. This paper presents contemporary views of the return as well as subsequent studies. It concludes with a research proposal for a new approach to study the return through repatriation assisted by the States.

Initial approach

The migration phenomenon is an excellent field of study to do an exercise of comparative history, since it should seek to articulate the specificities –not just national, but also regional, local and even familiar– and the common elements to all areas. Italy and Spain, particularly some of their regions, had a main – though delayed – role in the great wave of migration of the last third of the nineteenth century and the beginnings of the twentieth century, with respect to other countries like Great Britain, Norway or Germany, whose migration streams toward the American Continent had acquired force previously, from the second third of the nineteenth century. Despite this chronological lag between Northern and Southern Europe, the migration from these two Mediterranean countries cannot be detached from a more general phenomenon spanning across Europe, since the destinations, the massive nature and the multiplicity of causes that gave birth to it are common elements for all processes of international displacements in the old continent. Being a phenomenon of vast proportions, capable of relating the demographic dimension with the social, economical and political spheres, the return migration, concretely, appears in this bi-national landscape with feeble and diluted strokes, compared to the huge avalanche of studies on other issues such as the leaving, the reception and adaptation in the host countries or the economical consequences of the migration process. It might be caused by the real difficulty of counting and analyzing the returns from a statistical perspective (due to the vagueness in the figure of the emigrant in the laws and bureaucratic practices), as well as the heritage of some very engraved ideas in the political and social imaginaries contemporary to the migrant diaspora, which tended to interpret the displacements in a one-way and permanent fashion, or considered the return as a failure in the migration experience.

Based on all that, this paper aims to, first, make the revision of the theoretical postulates from which has been analyzed the issue of the return of migration in historiographies of both Mediterranean peninsulas and second, to progress, even preliminarily, in the analysis of one of the least studied features of this process: the assisted return. Indeed, from the remodeling and continuous re-adaptation of legal frameworks established during the period of dominance of political liberalism in most of Western Europe, migration policies headed, mainly at the end of the nineteenth century, to the goal of promoting an assistant, protective State that protected its subjects and citizens, including within the latter the expatriates.

Safeguarding of the emigrant should extend not only to the trip –to face the rapacity and abusing of “recruiters” and brokers in the migratory traffic– but also to their staying abroad and, in a second plane, to their return as long as it occurred in anomalous circumstances that jeopardized the integrity or survival of the individuals. Expressed in a diversity of manners, this principle of assistance for repatriation as a task belonging to the State (through the civil service of State ministries and the network of consulates and

embassies in recipient countries, mainly) appears in the different legal formulations in Europe, and also Italy first and Spain second would include that principle in their respective legislative *corpus* of migration. The hypothesis of this paper is that, in general, the immense gap between legal discourse and political and administrative *praxis* made of the State assistance to the return a poorly efficient recourse, certainly marginal in the framework of political management of immigration issues of both States until the beginning of World War I. It is in this sense, maybe, that can be explained the scarce attention paid by historiography of these countries, hiding out one of the many features that explain the migratory processes, that is, the case of those that at some point needed to go back to their origin places with a trip subsidized by the State.

Economic crisis after the Great War and their impact in the international markets of labor sent back thousands of immigrated to their homelands, after having lost their jobs and savings. In the beginnings of the 1920's the migratory flow became negative in some of the recipient countries; it was mainly after the great depression, though, ten years later, when the global reverse of migratory flows and the massive return of immigrants forced States to revise the conditions in their legislations for assisted repatriation. They had to adapt those formulas in front of a problem that obviously surpassed the rhetoric's used to prepare that legal framework a generation before, when the real need was to order and rule the massive exodus, not the attention to returns.

How was observed and analyzed the return issue at the time? How it has been studied after since? It would be difficult to answer these questions in these few pages; their goal rather is to propose a brief comparison between different experiences, aiming at complementing and reinforcing the historical knowledge on the phenomenon.

A nonlinear circular process: some figures that show it

During a long time, a dominant supposition in the historiography of migrations widely biased the study – and the consideration itself – of return of emigration both in Spain and in Italy: the origin-destination linearity of the migratory process. This classic linear approach considered a sequence of different irreversible stages: expulsion-adjustment-assimilation. Besides, it came from a pessimistic image strongly rooted in some liberal thinkers of the time, that pointed at the issue of return as a failure and, specifically, as the impossibility to have access to the property of land, that had been the main reason for peasants to emigrate. A very questionable certainty today, according to F. Devoto, that moreover stated that

[...] the migrants would have definitively decided to emigrate and any other decision that reverted that (as returning) was actually a drastic exhibition of the impossibility of having success in America and an indisputable evidence of the lacks and limits of the development model of South-American economies in the late nineteenth century (Devoto 2003, 77).

However, when revising the statistical data on the return from American sources, it seems fairly evident that European emigration to the Americas was a nonlinear, rather circular process. Some more than half of the Italian immigrants arriving to Argentina, and little less than half of the Spanish, according to that country's statistics, returned to their origin country between 1861 and 1920. In the case of Brazil the available data is similar (Devoto 1999, 203). According to Spanish statistics, about 44% of the emigrated to Brazil between 1882 and 1925 returned to Spain. Nonetheless, images of those who opted to stay, sometimes buying land and marrying creole women –those who, ultimately, achieved to “make America”– have been much stronger than those associated with the turn back, following F. Devoto, because “we remember more those who stayed than those who decided to silently return” (2003, 75).

M. Livi Bacci (1961) showed in a pioneer study about the migration between Italy and the United States, with statistical data of the U.S., an evolution in the amount of returns with high and rising percentages from the beginning of the twentieth century, which made him believe that the ultimate goal of the immigrants was the return to their homelands, rather than their definitive settling down.

Table 1. Rate of return of Italians from the U.S., 1880-1930

Decade	% of returns
1880-1890	43,4

1890-1900	47,6
1900-1910	52,6
1910-1920	63,2
1920-1930	25,6

Source: Livi Bacci M. (1961). Cit. in Carmagnani M. (1994, 167-168).

Italian statistical data also show a high and growing rate of returns from all transatlantic countries, rate that fluctuated between 34,1% and 61,2% in the years from 1902 to 1928. The percentage of returns from Latin America followed a similar trend compared to that of the U.S. as indicated by M. Livi Bacci: in between the years 1905-1909 and 1909-1914, that percentage went from 49 to 59%, with the highest rate from Brazil (63,4%).

In his classic essay on the Mediterranean migrations to America, M. Carmagnani quoted calculations realized by R. Foerster in 1919 about the third-class tickets of passengers landed in different Italian ports and calculates, on that basis, the rate of returns (Table 2). From Brazil, as can be seen, the rising in the rate started just at the end of the nineteenth century, while in Río de la Plata the trend is very similar to that from the U.S.

Table 2. Return of Italians with third-class tickets, 1887-1911

Period	From Brazil		From Río de la Plata	
	Nº	%	Nº	%
1887-1891	1829	2,6	29815	45,2
1892-1896	11444	12,3	22555	46,8
1897-1901	17122	42,8	27061	51,2
1902-1906	23066	60,7	26013	50,3
1906-1911	14168	86,1	46733	51,7

Source: Foerster R. (1919, 30). Cit. in Carmagnani M. (1994, 168).

The figures of returns of Spanish would indicate percentages even higher than Italians since 1915. M. González-Rothvoss calculated in the decade of 50's the rate of returns of Spanish people after the beginning of World War I.

Table 3. Rate of returns of Spanish people, 1915-1930

Period	% of returns
1916-1920	59,6
1921-1925	64,4
1926-1930	86,4

Source: González-Rothvoss M. (1954). Cit. in Carmagnani M. (1994, 169).

When considering the third-class tickets landing on Spanish docks, the rate of returns is again much higher than the Italian case: 74% between 1881-1889 and a high 91,2% between 1890-1899 (Carmagnani 1994, 169).

At first glance, these data, even scarce and fragmentary they could be, show clearly that Mediterranean emigration had a high hope of return.

The return of emigration in Italian and Spanish contemporary debates

According to B. Sánchez Alonso, the public debates on emigration both in Italy and Spain showed, in many respects, great similarities. However, the Italian debate started much earlier than the Spanish and had a greater influence in the construction of public policies, causing an actual division of opinions that the

author does not see clearly to have occurred in Spain (1995).

Roughly speaking, there were two classic interpretations that characterized the political debate about migration in both countries at the time of the great migratory wave: the first one having majority, Malthusian-like, saw the emigration as a result of the incompatibility existing between a growing population and a reduced access to resources, concretely to the land; derived from this same argument was sustained the idea that, moreover, the demographic problem was caused by the deficient distribution of population and the need of an internal colonization.

Leader of this first interpretation, the Italian politician F.S. Nitti based the need of freeing emigration of any tie on the fact that Italy had a high density of population in its territory and, therefore, this led to poverty. Thus, the author saw in the emigration a security valve with respect to social movements that could have raised from peasant misery, and an instrument of both social redemption for the undeveloped masses and modernization for the country, given that, at returning, the immigrants would have studied and assimilated the mentality, rules and timing of modern times (Nitti, 1888. Cit. in Carmagnani 1994).

The Spanish liberals considered, on the contrary, that Spain's problem was not an excess of population, as was in Italy, and anyway they thought that no benefit whatsoever could emerge from a country losing such a cluster of people through emigration. This is so because in Spain there was a extended opinion, among those *populationists* ideas, that was, in general, much more negative than its Italian counterpart, because it associated the emigration with the decadence of the country, with anti-patriotism, and with the idea that a strongly populated nation would be very powerful.

The fragrant contradiction between individual rights – read as freedom of movement –, and opposition to emigration led many liberal critics of emigration to place the nation above the individual, so that the duties toward the former are privileged over individual freedom.

The belief that emigrants would not come back made the question of return to the homeland difficult to be regarded in contemporary reasoning's, at least until the beginnings of the twentieth century. The essential concern was clearly the effects of going out, not of returning. Neither the idea of remittances that immigrants sent to their land from their host sites became a dimmer to the negative perception of emigration diffused in Spain, since for many those savings were scarce and of very little benefit to Spanish economy compared to the cost of demographic loss. Nevertheless, there were discordant voices, in tune with Nitti, which proclaimed a return that could bring new winds of modernization and progress to the country. A brochure by R. Torres Campos in 1893 is one of the few contemporary examples that offer a more encouraging perspective about the return of Spanish emigration. The author fights the idea that emigration was a loss for the country, since the emigrants not only came back, but they did “with their spirit hardened and their intelligence developed and nurtured” (cit. in Sánchez Alonso 1995, 79).

A second stream of reasoning stated that emigration was a social problem and therefore required the protection and assistance from State. In this context, the migratory fact was presented to public opinion as an additional issue within the broad field of the “social problem”. Cristóbal Botella and E. Vincenti were two of their main supporters in Spain. For Vincenti, emigration was closely related to social and political problems of the country, to the point that “talking about emigration is talking about colonization, pipelining, railways and roads, international trade and even hydraulic and pedagogic policies, since we think about it as a consequence of national poverty” (Vincenti 1908. Cit. in Sánchez Alonso, 1995, 83).

In the Italian debate on the migratory social question were actively involved social groups that barely had appeared in Spain, such as the Catholic Church and the socialist party. The Italian catholics reacted before the abuses suffered in the emigration and undertook a work of assistance and help to the emigrants that, in words of B. Sánchez, “took the lead in many cases of the civil society”. For Italian socialists, emigration was a by-product of the proletarianization process that accompanied the industrialization development, and they tried to enlarge their idea of internationalization in the proletarian struggle through the emigrants (Sánchez Alonso 1995, 67).

On the basis of these two approaches, Foerster established in 1919 three periods in the evolution of Italian debate: until 1895 emigration was deplored and the concern was focused on whether it was a positive or negative fact; between 1895 and 1908 emigration started being considered as necessary and in many cases favorable; and from 1908 more precise evidence started being collected about the advantages of emigration and it was looked as an instrument of exterior expansion, *L'Italia fuori d'Italia* (cit.

in Carmagnani 1992). This last period, following B. Sánchez Alonso, did not come to life in Spain, where the benefits that migration could have to foreign trade were not analyzed. The author mentions only the reasoning of J. Costa, although the philosopher did not talk about emigration when it encouraged the expansion of cultural and language ties, institutions and costumes, able to open the way to market expansion and foreign navigation, and his work had little resonance in those who designed public policies about emigration (Sánchez Alonso 1995, 67).

With respect to the migratory legislation, from the middle of the nineteenth century legislative actions in most of the European States that provided emigrants were in line with the dominant philosophy in International Law of that time, that appealed for permission for the way out, as long as this was not massive or promoter of depopulation. The legal frameworks of European countries, made at the era of expansion of political liberalism, considered in general that the right to emigrate derived from the principle of individual freedom, and that is why States did not oppose to those population displacements. However, none of them admitted the freedom for expatriation in the whole sense, although the latter was eventually referred literally in some legislation (Pérez Prendes 1992). In this sense, as in many others, political practice was well far from its judicial-legal expression.

The Italian Emigration Law of 1901 –inherited from that of 1888– confirmed the view of emigration as an element of economical and social progress to the nation. It showed a mainly protective nature and pointed out the decided intervention from State, as well as reaffirmed the almost unanimous conviction about the positive aspects of the phenomenon (Sánchez Alonso 1995). In parliamentary debates leading to the drafting of the first Spanish Law of Emigration of 1907 no one tried to hide out the similarities of both legislations, since the Spanish text, an actual copy of the Italian of 1901, exhibited the same tutelary feature and the same goal of regulating emigration bureaucratically (Pérez Prendes 1992).

In both legislations, the return was an argument in favor of emigrating. For example, the liberal deputy E. Vincenti, the most active Spanish politician in the debates leading to approbation of the Law of 1907, insisted on the fact that emigration did not cause a population loss, since “if the going out is large, so it is the return” (cit. in Sánchez Alonso 1995, 83). Nonetheless, Spanish treatists of the first third of the twentieth century expressed in general a noticeable delusion facing up the return, that historian J.M. Núñez Seixas assigns to the unbalance between, on the one side, what was expected from the returnees –an idealized image as potential re-builders of the nation, revitalizers of the regional and local economy and promoters of individual initiatives– and on the other side, their actual economical attitudes –driven by strictly rational guidelines arose from the information available– (2000, 50).

An important Report published in 1916 with the title *The Spanish transoceanic emigration* faithfully restates in its pages the topics on which has been built the negative discourse on the emigration and return to Spain. The document pointed out the fact that those who return were really very few, and did not give any productive destination to their money. The *indiano* image described in the Report is specially condemning and has its origin a number of decades before, given that in other works of that time – brilliantly analyzed by B. Sánchez Alonso (1995) – it is shown how the ones who came back did not only spend their money to develop the economy of their origin region, but their return rather became one of the main stimulus for a greater emigration.

In the Report is widely developed, thus, the idea that most of returnees were losers, as occurred in Italy and Portugal – according to its authors – while the return of the successful acquired the status of a myth. Among the explanations that the Report of 1916 gave to the failure of emigrants appeared, first, the lack of culture and elementary instruction, and the unconsciousness of emigrants (the association between emigration and illiteracy was one of the strong arguments of that time); second, it was mentioned the supposedly familiar nature of outflows, that caused the emigration to be, hence, anti-economic; finally, the negligible value assigned to emigrants jobs – farmers, peasants, migrant farmers, etc. – was another cause for the failure exposed in this Report. In Italy the first of these reasons was a special concern, facing the menace of an exam applied in the U.S. to the Italian immigrants (Sánchez Alonso 1995, 91-92).

In contrast to this dominant idea of a failure, that certainly had its supporters in Italy, diverse Italian thinkers of the early twentieth century tried to capture a different kind of images amongst the returned emigrants from America. Authors like G. Bonsignori (1898), L. Villari (1912) and F. Coletti (1912) saw in the successful returnees “the great hope for progressive social transformation of southern Italy” against revolutionary advances, and stressed the need for the State to create institutions to channel the energy of those emigrants, mainly by savings and loan banks (Núñez Seixas 2000, 33).

In conclusion, the demographics in the two countries made the guardian of the balance of contemporary thinkers to tilt in a more or less pessimistic or optimistic way on the consequences of the return of emigration to the homeland. Issues as the quantification of returnees, or the savings previous to their return, remained in many cases in the sphere of prejudices rather than objects of measured analysis. Both in Italy and Spain, the controversy about the value of labor of individuals against capitals returning from overseas eventually opted for what was then considered a certainty: that losses caused by emigration were much larger than their benefits.

Italian and Spanish historiography after World War II

Faced to the analysis contemporary to the massive emigration phenomenon that insisted, as stated before, in the anti-economic use generally given to migratory savings, historiography made a significant shift in the years fifties and sixties to studies on the return. The starting point was a restatement about the usage given by immigrants to the overseas resources in order to clarify till what point many of their investments were tied to the origin society rather than that of hosting.

Thus, after World War II economic historians made substantial contributions to the study of the return from the point of view of the savings prior to it that made it possible, with the essential goal of highlighting that, at least, a small part of the returnees were not losers but rather successful.

Money flowed in very different ways: money orders, bank drafts, bank notes in registered letters, or through relatives and friends at their return. These savings contributed, from the beginning, to the financing of travel tickets for other people, and to a larger monetization of family economies of rural classes. In addition, they made possible the purchase of lands or the amortization of mortgages and avoided the resource of usurious loans (Núñez Seixas 2000, 29).

E. Sori provided detailed information on the usage of remittances in Italy. Goals as stopping the fall in living standards, paying debts, taxes and mortgages, formed a first group of priorities covered by savings, all of which allowed the immigrants to reincorporate into their origin communities, to keep their rights over land and, eventually, prevent the division of the latter. The next level of usage of the overseas resources contributed to stabilize the position of the emigrant and his family, precluding the way back to levels of under-consumption, favoring the building of a house and/or the acquisition of family houses previously alienated (1979).

All of that shows, indirectly, the possibilities of social climbing of immigrants and the expansion in their freedom margins; their idea, ultimately, of getting a better position into the context they wished to live and, with great effort, they had to return to. In Spain, the works by Vázquez González about Galicia made evident that

[...] the money income of the Galician countryside helped cover many “holes” in peasant economies, as were the payment of contributions, usurious debts, or refund the cost of tickets to America; financial help that, in general, we can state that contributed to the maintenance and improvement of life standards (Vázquez González 1988, 99).

Thus, the model seems to be very similar in both countries, that is, that the immigrants invested in the areas they knew best and that supposed a lower degree of risk, such as land.

On the other hand, the rising in the second half of the twentieth century of fields such as sociology and social anthropology in European and American academies oriented the interest of researchers in these areas towards the migratory problem, on the basis of new methodological approaches, like for example life history and in-depth interviews, that, no doubt, broadened the knowledge about processes of return to the Hispanic and Italian peninsulas. By the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, the Catalan sociologist J.F. Marsal and the Italian F.P. Cerase published a number of papers that opened a new theoretical-methodological path in the study of return migration in their respective countries. Marsal's work, *Making America. Biography of a Spanish immigrant in Argentina* (1969), is a paradigmatic text about the shift in how to address the issue: it is about a long story told in first person, reconstructed from a series of interviews with a Catalan immigrant returned from Argentina to Barcelona with a free ticket subsidized by the Spanish State, and managed by the Spanish Consulate in Rosario, after three decades of hard migration experience in different places of Argentina, and exhausted his capacity to keep on living autonomously there.

The story of “J” (initial with which Marsal refers to the character), however, does not recover the idea of failure in the way the contemporaries of the migratory wave considered the return, but he rather stops to reason about the immensity of nuances that could arise from an only individual project, the amount of conditioning facts acting on it, the complexity process of decision-making, frustration, the daily struggle for survival, and the often random, circular and precarious nature of the world of immigrants. At the end of the book, Marsal presents a quantitative study on the repatriation of 265 Spanish returned through subsidized tickets (just like “J” had done from Argentina), in the period from 1946 to 1960 (1969, 377-406).

On the other side, in a short paper titled *A Study of Italian Migrants Returning from the USA*, F.P. Cerase proposed the idea that the role played by the returnees in their homeland was directly related to their integration process in the American society. To do this, he designed a questionnaire that later applied through personal interviews to more than two hundreds of immigrants returned in different places of Italy, with the goal of demonstrating the basically conservative role played by the returning migration in Italy, particularly in the South, both in the social structures and in the rural property of the *Mezzogiorno* (Cerase 1967, 67-68).

Opposite to Marsal, who developed most of his career outside Spain and did not continue his work, Cerase became in the following decades one of the authorized voices in the Italian studies about the return, both from a position before their object of study that could be called essentially pessimistic (Cerase 1967, 1971, 1978, 2001).

From that pioneer research, Cerase broadened his typology about returned immigrants on the basis of three aspects: first, the direct relation of their return regarding the process of labor and social integration in the industrial and urban society to which they had previously emigrated; second, the period elapsed in the host country and third, the career success and social mobility reached during that time (Cerase 2001). Thus, in first place of his typology appears the return of the unsuccessful (those who were not able to adapt to the society of destination after the first cultural shock); the saver, that lived his expatriation frugally to return and settle down as soon as possible (therefore, conceived his migratory experience as something essentially temporary and his integration was scarce or of little significance); the retired returned, that came back to their hometown to pass the last years of their lives with all the bunch of cumulated experience but with no family ties in the host country; and, finally, the return of the investor, that achieved economical success (the greater integration in the country of destination, larger cultural assimilation and accommodation) and that turned to his homeland to buy land and end his days there.

The link established by Cerase between the two processes, the return as a function of the integration achieved previously in the host space, conformed a very influent argument in historiography of migratory displacements at both sides of the Atlantic, and in Spain with supporters as well as numerous critics.

The pessimistic vision of the transforming role of the return in the origin societies proclaimed by Cerase was gradually changing in later authors. Yet in the eighties, C. Gmelch proposed a typology of the returnees entirely based on the level of social mobility, from which he excluded those sectors that had achieved a very high status –which would mean a high level of assimilation in the host society–, and the losers, that would not turn back for not facing the rejection from their origin society before their failure or simply because they were not able to buy their return tickets.

On the other hand, according to J.M. Núñez Seixas, other Italian authors highlighted the innovative role both in countryside and in cities, in issues such as the implementation of new cultivation techniques, the *urbanization* of costumes, the socio-political mobilization and the potentiating of associations and cooperatives in zones of emigration (2000, 33).

It can be stated that, in general, this effort to create different categories to classify the returnees achieved to deepen the analysis of migration itself, and the decades of 1980's and 199's were very fruitful in this regard. F. Devoto speaks for the Argentinian case, for example, about the “temporary” immigrants, the *birds of passage* once studied by M.J. Piore for the Italian case: “all this displacement was dominated not only by one-way emigrants, but also by repeatedly trying the overseas experience many times in their lives” (Piore 1979; cit. in Devoto 1999, 201). Not only was that back-and-forth displacement of agricultural workers ready to raise crops alternately in one or the other continent, the famous “swallows”, but rather recurrent displacements in a changing period greater than three years between expatriations and that also involved people that did not do any farm tasks.

On this scheme operated immigrants that hoped to maximize their incomes in short time, for which the

performance of certain little-prized tasks, or the very precarious living conditions, were justified in terms of the temporariness of the situation, given the expectancy of a short-time return (Piore 1979).

Another strong line of research explored in the last decades of the twentieth century on the return of emigration regards the socio-political influence of returnees. D. Cinel, in Italy, studied in the eighties their political behavior, both in their homelands and destination, which led him to consider them as “new men” between both worlds, with impulse to create networks of collaboration and collective action. In their home places, the author highlights three qualitative aspects of that influence: that returnees he studied showed less deference toward rural masters (*padroni*). Moreover, they promoted education, literacy and democratic political participation and, finally, encouraged rural associations of diverse nature, such as mutual aid. This was specially visible in Southern Italy, however, it does not seem to be important until the World War I (Cinel 1982, 1984, 1991).

Donna Gabaccia (1988), in her studies on Western Sicily, stated that Italian returnees might become promoters of radical political organizations, anti-chief, etc., depending mostly on the existing political conditions. Besides, for this author, returnees were far from being, themselves, a unique and auto sufficient agent of social change, though their collective action might become reformist.

In Spain, most important works in this regard have been proposed for the Galician, Asturian and Basc regions. Núñez Seixas (1998) points out two relevant aspects on the socio-political influence of Galician migrant returnees. On the one side, it is important to consider the level of organization, conscientiousness and political mobilization taking place in the host societies, particularly within the immigrant’s collectivities themselves. Articulation of emigrated communities in associations played an active political and social role over the country of origin, channeling energies of the returnees and providing support to political, social or economical projects, aimed at their homeland. On the other side, it is clear that the relation between the countries of origin and destination is not unidirectional, “it is not always a continuous transfer of ideas, projects and money from America to different places in Europe, but it is a two-way interaction” (Núñez 1998, 42).

Another issue to keep in mind that makes different the Italian and Spanish experiences of return of emigration is the relatively open structure of opportunities offered by the Spain of Restoration (universal vote, Law of Associations, Law of Agricultural Unions, alternancies between the parties during the time of restoration, after 1898) that allowed, following Núñez Seixas, a sharper transforming activity in the socio-political sphere by the returnees, “particularly by the Instruction Societies and organized collectivities of Galician emigrants in general” (2000, 55).

Historical studies about the return in Spain have focused during the last decade fundamentally on two aspects: the return of the immigrants of the European exodus of the sixties and seventies on the one side, and that of exiled by the civil war and Franquism on the other. Without meaning a total abandonment of the research in the period of massive transoceanic outflows, it is a matter of fact that academic production in this regard has decreased and has followed regional and local paths, supported by grants from territorial governments under support programs for the return of emigrants and for the study of emigration.

In the following section is presented a line of research little regarded so far by migration studies, concerning a kind of concrete – and marginal – return in the whole transatlantic movement of return of emigration: repatriation assisted by the State. A comparative approach is not possible yet between the two countries, though some evidences may be given in advance in that regard.

Repatriation assisted by the State: a field of research

The Italian migratory Law of 1901 and the Spanish of 1907 included specific dispositions regarding subsidized or assisted repatriation of poor immigrants that needed help to return. The Italian Law imposed to sailing companies – provided they were to touch Italian ports in their transatlantic trip – the obligation to transport for a daily price of two liras (with food included) the poor Italian people that for different reasons were repatriated by disposition of a diplomatic or consular Italian agent in the host country. The maximum number of repatriated in each ship depended on its tonnage, such that a ship of less than one thousand tons should carry ten individuals, and the number would increase at a rate of one repatriated for each additional ton, until a maximum of thirty individuals in each trip. Children younger than twelve years old and older than three would pay one cent a day, while babies younger than three years old would be repatriated

for free.

Spanish Law, meanwhile, established the same obligation to sailing companies of repatriating immigrants, although the number and way of subsidizing the ticket changed respect to the Italian norm. Ship-owners and shippers transporting emigrants between Spanish and American ports should accept, on their way back, up to a twenty percent of the number of emigrants carried on the way go, with half-price tickets. The annual figure of repatriations would depend thereby on the total number of emigrants transported overseas in the same previous period. The State charged thus a regular fee to sailing business men – national and foreigners – involved in traffic of passengers, relying, by the way, the management and delivery of the half-price tickets to consular agencies featured in the migration-receiving countries.

Lawmakers from both countries were aware, when articles 25 and 47 were prepared of their respective migratory legal *corpus*, that an actual part of the emigrated would need State assistance to return. Hence, they established a set of measures that involved in the management of that special kind of tickets both the consular and diplomatic agencies featured in the countries receiving Spanish and Italian migrant population, and the sailing companies that transported passengers overseas, that would ultimately be responsible of providing such tickets with charge to the respective State. The ideal assistance pursued by both legislations was therefore exercised also in the way back under this semi-free fashion.

The States attended this legal resource in times of crisis. While consular offices did not stop using it regularly with immigrants knocking on their doors, it was mainly during the post-war crisis after World War I – and the consequent unemployment in the United States and other Latin American countries – and again during the Great Depression of 1929-1930, when many European States, among which Italy and Spain, had to perform a greater number of free repatriations of homeless immigrants (table 4).

Table 4. Subsidized repatriations to Italy and Spain, 1926-1930

Country	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	R	R/E	E
Italy	71 520	73 424	49 751	44 419	46 561	285 405	63,8	446 832
Spain	39 949	41 517	38 563	39 114	41 563	200 706	87,9	228 375

R: total repatriations

E: total emigration between 1926-1930

Source: Bureau International du Travail, *Les statistiques des migrations*, Etudes

Subsidized repatriation has barely been considered by historiography about the return of emigration in Italy and Spain (Gil Lázaro 2008; 2010; 2011). The probably marginal nature of the assistance that States could provide to poor immigrants can be one of the reasons, although this seems not to be the case, as shown by the data from the *Bureau International du Travail*, in both junctures of economical crisis of the beginnings and end of the 1920's decade.

From a historiographical point of view, the effort developed by economic history from the sixties to refine and refute the basic understanding that associated return with failure, that focused the attention on the successful returnees and on the usage of their capitals in their homelands, could also influenced in the relative marginalization of the subject, that again locates the debate close to the problems of adaptation and assimilation in the host environment that emigrants had to face up.

Either way, the study of subsidized repatriation allows to place the return in a different spotlight from what has been used so far: the time before the departure, that is, the circumstances surrounding the decision of leaving the host country, the closing of a cycle and beginning of another one, in the complex entanglement of factors involved in the migratory issue. In addition, it makes possible to dimension the capacities and limits of the action of the States about the protection and assistance to its expatriates citizens as well as its relations with operational instances, consulates and sailing companies on the one side, and assistance organizations of the own immigrants on the other side. Definitely, it is a whole field of study for the exam of the evolution of migratory-labor market in times of crisis, of the immigrants' reaction before unemployment, to seek for alternatives and the process that followed the granting of a subsidized ticket.

Conclusion

Throughout the great migratory wave – between the last third of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth – some considerations about the return of transatlantic emigration made by Italian and Spanish politicians and thinkers swung between denial of the fact itself (most of the emigrants were gone for not turning back), or the attribution of the failure category to those who returned. Faced with the nineteenth-century liberal standard that States ought not to interfere by any means in its citizens' displacements as long as these did not promote the depopulation of an area, the protective and assistance ideal of the State made gradually its way, thanks to the boom of the “social issue” at the end of the nineteenth century, ideal about which would eventually be prepared the most determinant migratory legislations for both countries in the first half of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, public opinion from both countries was still divided between two versions, pessimistic and optimistic, regarding the influence of the immigrants turning to their homelands: the scarce benefit their savings had for the country and the negative impulse their example represented for new emigrants, on the one side; or the assumption of being transmitters of agricultural, political and social modernization for the areas where they return, on the other side. All of which did nothing but show how preconceptions, and not the quest for the immigrants' attitudes, dominated the conceptions on the return.

Historians of migration from the second half of the twentieth century managed to broaden the range of these tight categories and explained how migratory experience included, regarding the linearity or circularity of the process, different kinds of immigrants, whose decisions were hardly final in any sense. It was, in words of Devoto, a process “result of uncertainties, ups and downs and more an often circumstantial outcome than the consequence of an origin firm decision” (2003, 78).

Debates about the return of emigration are not at all closed. While in Italy as in Spain the academic effort has focused on the analysis of the consequences the returns had for the societies of origin, it still remains a wide field of research where attention can be centered on the return before leaving, on the immediate and urgent causes for coming back, on the mechanisms that restricted the possibility of immigration in the points of destination and, finally, in the influence of economic crisis over the markets of migrant labor at the time of the great wave.

Biography

Alicia Gil Lázaro has a PhD in history by the Center for Historical Studies at El Colegio de México (Mexico). She currently works as a professor at the University of Sevilla, in the Area of History and Economic Institutions. Her main research interests are the assisted return of Spanish immigrants from Latin America in the time of the great wave of migration; associations of Spanish foreign emigration and migrant labor markets in times of economic crisis.

She is the author of several articles in research journals and several book chapters. She has also participated in the evaluation of articles for prestigious journals in Spain and Latin America and is part of the research project “The Atlantic liberal thought 1770-1880. Taxation, natural resources, social integration and foreign policy from a comparative perspective”, (REF HAR2010-18363), of the University of Alcalá.

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