

Minority Diasporas and Migration: Fray Rosendo Salvado as a Pioneer of Spanish and Galician Settlement in Australia

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Abstract

We will consider some of the reasons for the little importance of Spanish and Galician migration to Australia, among them the long distance and the so called “White Australia” policies that discouraged them from joining their Anglo-Saxon counterparts at key periods. However, some feeble migration took place, even at the time of convict transportation, and later on with seminal figures such as Fray Rosendo Salvado, a Benedictine monk from Galicia who settled down in Western Australia.

Figures for Spanish migration to English-speaking countries have been historically low. Needless to say, this is also the case with Galicians. In fact, unlike what happens all over Latin America and Western Europe, we can only find the occasional *Centro Gallego* in very populated places such as London, New Jersey, New York, Florida or Montreal. Among the reasons for this circumstance, we can mention the fact that Spanish-speaking people had plenty of opportunities to start a new life in Latin American countries where the language was no barrier to them. Furthermore, in the second half of the twentieth century booming industrial countries in Europe attracted millions of Spaniards escaping poverty and political stagnation.

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In the case of the migration to Australia, we could be tempted to argue that distance could have been a major factor to prevent a higher percentage of these migrants. However, when we take into account that millions of other Europeans made the long trip to the Antipodes we should find alternative and more convincing explanations. In this sense, we should bear in mind that *White Australia* policies barred or discouraged for some time the arrival of non-Anglosaxon migrants. This meant that, before Federation, the Chinese who had come to the Australian colony at the time of the Gold Rush in the 1850's were subject to hostile policies; later on these would become laws restricting immigration from several other places.

Such policies are reflected in the fact that in the assisted passage scheme implemented by Australian authorities between 1947 and 1974 most of the successful applicants were of British or Northern European origin. It was only in the early 1950's that agreements were signed with Greece and Italy to encourage nationals from these countries to migrate. In the following decade around one million people came to Australia and two-third were non-British (Macintyre, 2004: 202). It seems that the opening up of policies responded to a post-war urge, the so called 'populate or perish' principle; even trade unions, for a long time reluctant to accept large-scale immigration on the grounds that they could threaten wages and jobs. Phillip Knightley (2000: 217) explains this change in attitude: "If anything there was a shortage of labour, and competition for it was forcing up wages. The government and the unions saw no incompatibility between a vigorous immigration programme and its main plank, full employment." This did not involve immediate acceptance of these recent settlers; as Lars Jensen (2005: 136) states:

Newcomers from other regions than the British Isles, the traditional suppliers of future Australians, were welcome to contribute to but could not be acknowledged as influencing or changing the Australian identity. Australia was seen as already formed with its own complete national mythology, represented for example in Russell Ward's detailed description of the typical (white) Australian (male), and in the general Australian pantheon of the

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drovers and the shearers, reaching its fully fledged maturity in the First World War with the Anzacs.

The acceptance of people from Mediterranean countries also involved Spain. After the assisted migration programme signed between the two countries, operations such as 'Emu', 'Eucalyptus' and 'Kangaroo' enabled the recruitment of Basques to work in the cane fields in North Queensland. While only men were transported in a first stage, later on Basque women arrived, in many cases to marry in Australia. However, Spanish migration would remain at low levels since Australia was reluctant to maintain relationships with Franco's dictatorship. The Spanish government would eventually cease to cooperate with assisted migration to Australia in 1962. As a consequence, at present, only some 15,000 Spanish live in Australia² and the figures for Galicians are obviously even lower.

In this paper we will henceforth consider the evolution of this minority diaspora in Australia, coming from Galicia and other parts of Spain. Our survey will start right at the convict times since, contrary to what was commonly thought for a long time, research in the last twenty years has proved that not all prisoners coming to Australia were of Anglo-Celtic stock.

From the arrival of the First Fleet (1788) onwards there were convicts from places as far apart as Finland and India, the West Indies and China who were trapped within the British judicial system, either in the colonies or in Britain. Among these foreign convicts there are a number who were of Spanish and Portuguese origin and also members of the Sephardic community that had, in the main, settled in London. Similarly the use of the term Anglo-Celtic convicts is, in itself, an uncomfortable misnomer as it homogenises the Irish into the "British", as well as the Welsh and the Scots all of whom came from a culturally and linguistically distinct background.

The story of Adelaide de la Thoreza serves as an example of a Spanish woman convicted in the Central Criminal Court for larceny and

² Dwindling figures, verging on the insignificant, are reported in most Australian regions. In the state of Victoria, Spanish migrants have declined in the period 1986-2001 from some 4,000 to nearly 3000. Furthermore, this is an ageing population, since over 40% are between 50 and 69 years old. <http://museumvictoria.com.au/origins/history.aspx?id=57> [Access 15.2.2008]

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sentenced to transportation for seven years. On her arrival in Sydney she was assigned to the reputedly first free Spanish settler, Jean Baptiste Lehimas de Arietta, from San Sebastian. Both these individuals are interesting and tantalising figures to the researcher. Adelaide's biography was published after her death by the Rev. James Cameron. Cameron had a ticket on himself as a writer and it is hard to distinguish what his moralising and gothic imagination put into the text and what is actually Adelaide's real story in so far as we know it. Ten years of research in the archives have led Lucy Frost and myself to verify as much of the truth as is possible. It is untrue that she came from a noble family in Madrid, her court records reveal her to have been serving in the house as a seamstress at the time of her arrest. It seems more than likely that Adelaide, like many convicts before and after her, just reinvented herself for posterity; or did Cameron? Arietta was also a colourful character according to those who reported their meetings with him, but he himself hid his tracks so well that is difficult to verify much of what he says about himself. Certainly he was given 20,000 acres of land, the largest grants awarded at the time, for services to the British Government. What those services were remains a mystery in spite of the fact that he claims to have been a key witness at the trial of Queen Caroline of Brunswick which remains unverifiable. Neither Adelaide nor Arietta were to return to their native Spain. What all of the above leads one to conclude is that, from the very first days of invasion, Australia was a much more multicultural society than we have been led to believe in the past.

If there were convicts of Spanish, Portuguese, and Hispanic origins, what Spanish presence emerges in nineteenth-century Australia? There is one outstanding figure from Galicia; Dom Rosendo Salvado. Given the title of the round table at the last AEDEAN conference, I have chosen to focus on Salvado rather than other relevant figures from other areas of Spain who also left their mark on the pages of Australian history. Another reason to focus on Salvado is because his contribution was not just outstanding but remains with us today in the existence of the Benedictine Monastery of New Norcia in Western Australia.

Dom Rosendo Salvado was born in Tui, in 1814, and demonstrated a strong vocation from a very early age. The historical 'accident' that led to the founding of New Norcia was the closure by an

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anti-clerical government and its confiscation of the property of all men's monasteries in Spain in 1835. Next to the famous Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia was the venerable Benedictine monastery of San Martín Pinario. There, a little earlier, two young men had made monastic profession, promising to live a fully monastic and obedient life in stability with the community there, for life. Dom José Benito Serra, the senior of the two, went almost immediately in 1835 to continue monastic life in the renowned Abbey of the Most Holy Trinity of Cava, near Salerno in Italy. After a few disappointing years of waiting for his own monastery to re-open, Dom Rosendo Salvado followed Dom Serra to Cava, where he made his solemn profession in 1838 and was ordained priest early the next year.

In 1844, fired by missionary zeal, the two monks applied to the authorities in Rome to be sent as missionaries wherever they decided, and were assigned to the newly appointed first Bishop of Perth, Rt Rev John Brady. Two years later in 1846 Salvado had begun to found the mission at New Norcia. This proved to be a long and difficult process, but one thing that was clear in Salvado's mind was that while Christianisation of the Aboriginal people of the area was paramount, it was also absolutely necessary to learn as much about their culture and language as possible. We know from his letters that he held the local Aboriginal Nynugar people in high esteem (www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au):

Salvado led a monastic community which, at its height, numbered nearly eighty men, most of whom were Spaniards and lay brothers. His frequent fundraising trips to Europe provided him with the means to acquire land, to construct buildings and to purchase books, vestments, art works and ritual objects as well as stock and equipment. Practical success and his own personal charm combined to make Salvado both a notable Western Australian and an international figure in the Benedictine world. While on a trip to Rome in 1900, he died at the age of eighty-six. His body was brought back to New Norcia by the Community and interred in the Abbey Church.

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Salvado's death in 1900 spared him the horror of witnessing what was going to happen in New Norcia as a result of the Government's policy of Eugenics which led to generations of mixed-race Aboriginal children being taken away from their families as a means by which to "breed out" the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. The Commissioner for Native Affairs, A.O. Neville, believed the Aboriginal people had to be saved from themselves and that this could only be done through biological absorption. Thousands of children were torn away from their families and placed in missions around the country. I firmly believe that Salvado would have taken any measure to avoid New Norcia being involved in this outrage. However, times and politics were different, Australia had become a federation in 1901 to emerge as the Commonwealth of Australia. The pressure on the monastery was huge and it was impossible to take evasive action if it was to survive. It has survived and is now the only monastic town in Australia with extensive grounds, agricultural land, and has become a place for retreats, restful sojourns and many other activities. There is still much bitterness and anger among the children who were taken there by force, and their descendants, but it is also true that the present monastic community has done much to try and build bridges of reconciliation between the monastery, the traditional owners of the land and the land the site occupies. If Dom Rosendo Salvado is venerated in his native Galicia, he is also venerated at the opposite end of the world where the monastery of New Norcia stands as a lasting memorial to a man of vocation, wisdom and vision.

But what of other Spaniards in Australia? In the 1850s Frances Parer emigrated from Barcelona and became the owner of four hotels and restaurants in Bourke Street, Melbourne, one of which, Parer's Crystal Café, was to be a landmark for long years. His sons too were to enter the annals of Australian history, Damien becoming a well known film maker and winner of Australia's first Academy Award. His brother, Ray, became a pilot establishing an airline in New Guinea and was also something of an adventurer. In 1929 José Paronella built a Spanish castle in the midst of lush gardens where he planted over 700 trees. After a series of ups and downs including severe damage by floods, cyclones and fire, Paronella Park has been restored and in 1997 was listed as a National Trust Heritage site.

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As a conclusion we can say that there are also those who remain anonymous in the annals of history. Asturians and Basques who emigrated to work as shepherds and in the cane fields of Queensland, settling in and around Innisfail which by the 1930s, had become a truly multicultural town. The bulk of Spanish migrants entered the country between 1900 and the 1950s, spreading out into all regions of Australia. Today, however, most Spanish speaking people come from Latin America, particularly refugees from the former dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. Besides, Spanish has become a popular second language for students and Departments of Spanish exist in several Australian Universities, some even offer courses in Galician and Catalan. A lot of research has been carried out on the presence of Spaniards in Australia but perhaps what still needs to be done is for the individual family memoirs of many of those “ordinary” men and women who came out at the turn of the XX century and made Australia their home.

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