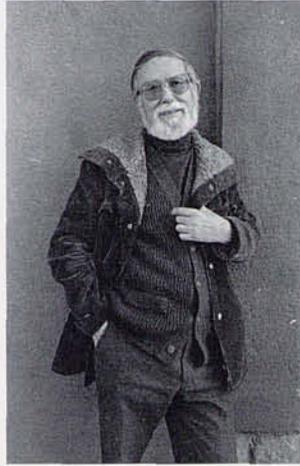


# IMMIGRATION IN CATALONIA



**A**t the end of the last century, Majorcans and Valencians provided Catalonia with the impulse it needed to make up for the low birth-rate at a crucial moment of the country's industrialization. At the beginning of this century, the Aragonese did the same. Later on, people from the provinces of Murcia and Almeria. Then, Andalusians in general. The three great migratory waves toward Catalonia so far this century came at the end of the twenties, in the forties and fifties, and in the sixties. They were three great invasions. The number of people arriving in Catalonia reached its peak in 1965. These three migratory waves are referred to as being 'of the Murcians', 'of the hungry years' and 'of the Andalusians' respectively. The first took place under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Barcelona was preparing for the great *Exposición Universal*, held in 1929 on Montjuïc, and needed a labour-force which the sons of the country could not provide. At the same time, the underground was being built. Projects of such size guaranteed work for some years. During this time, between 25,000 and 30,000 people arrived in Barcelona every year, the peak-year being 1927. They came mainly from the provinces of Murcia and Almeria, but tended to be lumped together and referred to pejoratively as *murcianos*. They settled in shacks on Montjuïc and in Magoria and from there moved on to four cheap housing estates. Most of them ended up in la Torrassa, in l'Hospitalet. There were so many Murcians in this area that, during the Civil War, they put up a notice that read: "Catalonia ends here; here begins Murcia". In the forties, a second wave of outsiders invaded Catalonia. The misery of the post-war years dominated the whole of Spain. It was the time of ration-cards, black bread, the black market, price controls... In some Spanish provinces there was more hunger and poverty than in others. Meanwhile, Catalonia was getting its industry moving again; an industry which, in one way or another, had kept going during the Civil War. Even businesses which had been collectivized improved their equipment and prospered, especially in the textile and metallurgic sectors. But the lack of a sufficient work-force, an illness endemic to Catalonia, remained a problem. For this reason, the poorest people from the poorest corners of Spain flowed in once more. The Andalusians call those terrible years of scarcity 'the hungry years' and

tell how, back home, they would go olive-picking in return for nothing more than a handful of olives. Under these conditions, Catalonia seemed like America to them. The immigrants of this second wave arrived in Catalonia in every way possible: alone or with the family, by train or walking... In the village they had left behind they had sold everything. They camped on the outskirts of the industrial cities and gave rise to all the shanty towns formed at that time. Who

can forget those groups made up of pathetic families on the station platforms, the women in black, the men in corduroy, loaded with children, sitting on their cases and bundles, waiting for something without knowing what? From 1958-60 there was a drop in the Catalan immigration figures for the first time. A great economic crisis, which the government tried to overcome with its 'Stabilization Plan', caused a generalized emigration from the whole of Spain towards Europe, especially Germany. Nevertheless, the movement towards Catalonia had not stopped completely, and in 1961 for example, between 23,000 and 24,000 immigrants arrived in Barcelona; in 1962, almost 36,000. Altogether, from 1961-5, 800,000 people arrived in Catalonia, the majority of them from Andalusia. The Andalusian element has always predominated over the rest of the immigrant population, and has held on to its culture, its folklore and its religious habits, something which the rest of the immigration in Catalonia has been unable to do for lack of numbers. For these and other reasons, this third arrival of people in Catalonia was described as 'of the Andalusians'.

After 1965, immigration remained steady in Catalonia, not going above the average figure of the peak-years, but not really dropping, either. This situation continued until 1971, when, with the first symptoms of industrial unemployment, due to the economic crisis, immigration to Catalonia began to drop quickly and eventually stopped altogether in 1973, considered the year of the beginning of the crisis in all of Europe, including Spain. Plenty of immigrants, because of unemployment, industrial reconversion, early retirement, etc., have gone back to their towns and villages. An income which is not enough to live on in the industrial areas does, on the other hand, allow them to live more comfortably in the rural areas.

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