Environment and Migration: Can the past help us rethinking the matter?

Oscar ALVAREZ GILA
University of the Basque Country
Faculty of History

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change"

Ch. Darwin



• Recent discoveries on climate change and global warming, and its spreading in mass media.

- Recent discoveries on climate change and global warming, and its spreading in mass media.
- Migration as a rational consequence of the worse effects of climate and other environmental changes.

- Recent discoveries on climate change and global warming, and its spreading in mass media.
- Migration as a rational consequence of the worse effects of climate and other environmental changes.
- Accumulated scientific evidence and increasing theoretical debates on the issue.

Bogardi, 2005

" (..) there are well-founded fears that the number of people fleeing untenable environmental conditions may grow exponentially as the world experiences the effects of climatic changte and other phenomena".

Bogardi, 2005

" (..) there are well-founded fears that the number of people fleeing untenable environmental conditions may grow exponentially as the world experiences the effects of climatic changte and other phenomena".

Markandya, 2007

"There will be floods, devastated regions, and the inhabitants of a lot of territories from all around the World will be compelled to migrate in order to find a safe future. Just question of surviving".

- Recent discoveries on climate change and global warming, and its spreading in mass media.
- Migration as a rational consequence of the worse effects of climate and other environmental changes.
- Accumulated scientific evidence and increasing theoretical debates on the issue.
- The concept of "catastrophic event" at the media (Lozano, 2004).

- Recent discoveries on climate change and global warming, and its spreading in mass media.
- Migration as a rational consequence of the worse effects of climate and other environmental changes.
- Accumulated scientific evidence and increasing theoretical debates on the issue.
- The concept of "catastrophic event" at the media.
- The not-so-new collective fear at host societies because of the migrations.



ALICANTE

Inmigración, «¿invasión o huida»?

■ Dentro del seminario que se celebra en la sede de la Universidad en Alicante -Ramón y Cajal 4-.



rá de los factores de rechazo en los lugares de origen de los inmigrantes. A las 18.15 Gemma Cáno-

a las 16 h. Víctor Martín, de la Universidad de La Laguna, hablaves disertará sobre la inmigración como fuerza de trabajo rentable.



Fig. 1.: 1) IMMIGRATION: STOP TO THE INVASION Image from the website of the Spanish righ-wing party Nuevo Orden;

- IMMIGRATION: INVASION OR RUNAWAY? Information about an universitary seminar;
- THE INVASION WE DON'T WANT TO LOOK
 AT. From the opinion section of the manstream
 newspaper La Vanguardia

- Recent discoveries on climate change and global warming, and its spreading in mass media.
- Migration as a rational consequence of the worse effects of climate and other environmental changes.
- Accumulated scientific evidence and increasing theoretical debates on the issue.
- The concept of "catastrophic event" at the media.
- The not-so-new collective fear at host societies because of the migrations.
- The need of futher research to determine how, whom, when and to which extent environmental factor can condition of affect migration.

- Migration: as old as Humankind.
 - Not an excepcional incident but a core foundation of individual and collective behavior for millenia.
 - A complex and mutating phenomenon.

- Migration: as old as Humankind.
- But History has not paid that much attention to the matter:
 - A preference to study questions based on a fixed place rather that issues that cross borders and link several spaces together.

- Migration: as old as Humankind.
- But History has not paid that much attention to the matter:
 - A preference to study questions based on a fixed place rather that issues that cross borders and link several spaces together.
 - Linked usually to other topics -politics, economy, nationbuilding...-.

- Migration: as old as Humankind.
- But History has not paid that much attention to the matter:
 - A preference to study questions based on a fixed place rather that issues that cross borders and link several spaces together.
 - Linked usually to other topics -politics, economy, nation-building...-.
 - > A strong dependence on theories imported from other human and social sciences, normally with delay.

- 1885. Ravenstein. The birth of the scientific historiography on migrations.
- "Migration is life and progress, and permanency is immovability"
- It has impelled researches to the way of understanding the phenomenon in terms of "positive" or "negative".

XX century: approaches.

- School of "Annales". Mainly economic approach.
 - Cost/benefit ratio.
 - Focus on a macro perspective (comparison of wages and salaries).

XX century: approaches.

- School of "Annales". Mainly economic approach.
 - Cost/benefit ratio.
 - Focus on a macro perspective (comparison of wages and salaries).
- Social turn (decade of 1960).
 - Putting atention in individuals rather than in masses (rationality of migrants).
 - Focus on a micro perspective.
 - Chain migration (McDonalds); Social Space theory (Bordieu), Social networks...

Newest tendencies.

- Eclecticism.
 - Combining economic, social, and even cultural perspectives.
 - Comparing macro, meso and micro perspectives.
 - Taking into account both individuals and groups (families).
- Accept the complex variety of migratory processes.
 - Not only the traditional view of one-time one-way displacement, from a departing to an arriving point, once in life.
 - But other types: temporal, circular, seasonal, forced...

The concept of SPACE.

- Understood in the narrowest of its meaning: DISTANCE.
 - used to differentiate three types of migration only taking account of the distance: long-, medium- and short-distance migrations.
 - forget that any person can combine during his life different kinds of migration (not a characteristic of contemprary world).
 - > A neutral chessboard in which pieces are spread out, depending on several economic, politic, social factors.
 (migrations are produced because of human factors).

The birth of Environmental History.

- Space understood as a interrelated factor with society.
 - not a sumatory of kilometers, but as ENVIRONMENT.
 - relatively young speciality or approach to history -not more than 20 years old-.
 - > "every history is contemporary history" (B. Croce).
 Asnwer to today's hot questions.

From the IRISH EFFECT...

- Pre-Ravenstein European literature on migration: focuses on environmental (mainly "natural") causes to explain migrations.
- The example of the Potato Famine of Ireland (1848-1849) as a path to follow.
 - Causes and effects of Famine.
 - Environmental changes and natural catastrophes as cause of migrations.
 - Focus on rural-to-urban migrations.

From the Irish effect to the Basque case.

- All the essayists on Basque migrations try to establish correlations between migration flows and environmental factors.
- "Impoverished territory, bad provided by Nature, of barren soil, high mountains (..) that has not got a mild climate that fit with the needs of agriculture; is not given by Nature the advantages that it mercifully offers to other regions" (Egaña, 1876).
 - > Where Nature is not munificent, emigration is not a choice but a need.

Aided by the spread of theories on the effect of environment and Nature in historical development of civilizations (XIXth century).

- Ratzel: try to apply Darwin's theories to History.
- Huntington. Theory of climatic determinism of societies.
 - > Too simplistic, univocal theories (uni-causal)
 - > a society proud of its recent scientific and technological advances (industrialization) was more prepared to accept an human perspective (like Ravenstein's) than an environmental one.
 - Vidal de la Blache: historical geography: possibilistic theory. Accepted and diffusse by the school of Annales.
 - >Braudel (1949). Long durée Le Roy Ladurie (1983).
 Climate's history.

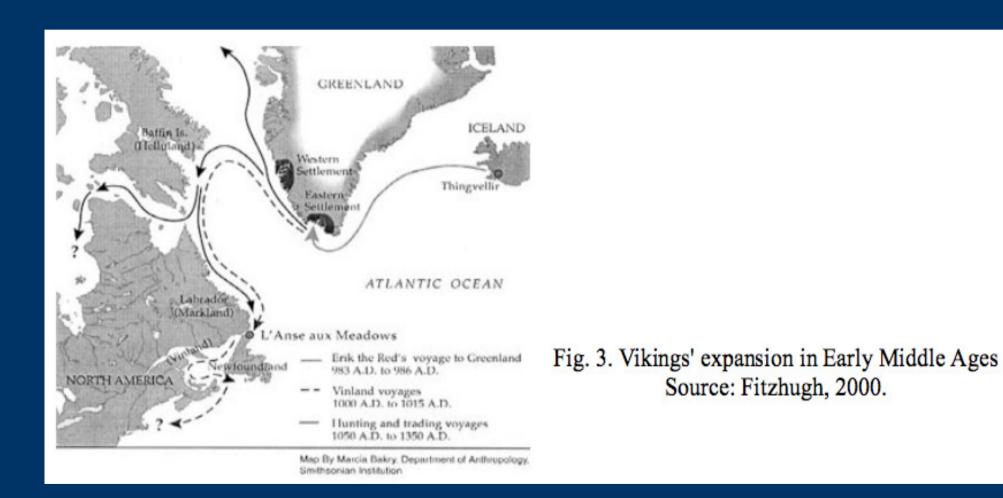
- "Horror determinismi". Resilience to introduce environmental factors in historical explanations.
- More willing to accept the use of these environmental explanations in "underdeveloped", "savage", "cold" societies out of Europe, than in our "developed", "complex", "civilized" world.
- First relevant contributions from the *edge of history*: specialities of History that have intense relationships with other social and natural sciences (prehistorians, historical anthropologists, archaeologists...).

Examples:

- Climate changes after the end of Pleistocene: Sahara, the valley of Indus, the population of America.
- The Mayan people's great exodus of Xth century.

Examples:

• The Early Middle Age's "climate optimum".



Examples:

• The XVI-XVIII centuries' "Little ice age".



Fig. 4. The Little Ice Age reflected in Art works P. Brueghel: Winter Scene (1565)



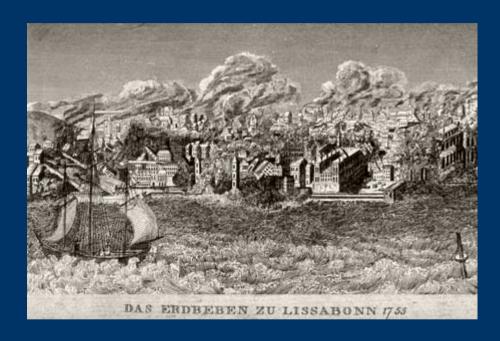
H. Avercamp: Iced Scene (c. 1610)

- Increasing of conflicivity.
- Increasing of migration flows overseas.
- European internal migrations North->South.

Disasters and their management:

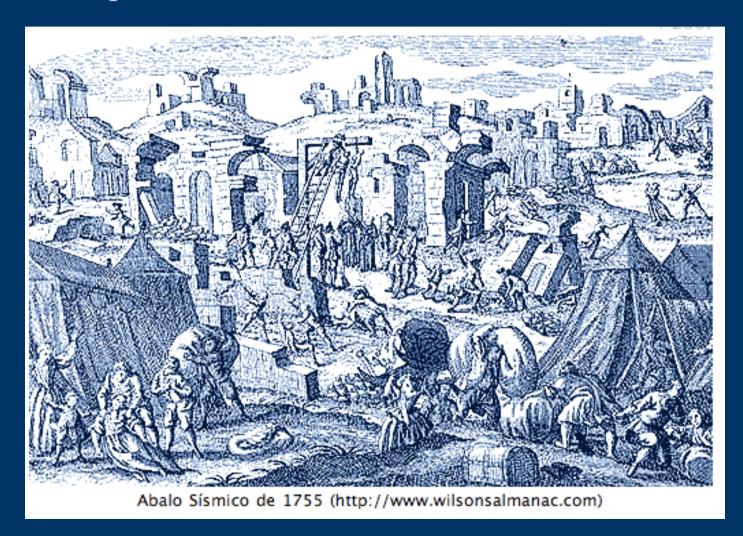
• The earhquake and tsunami of Lisbon (1755).





Disasters and their management:

• The earhquake and tsunami of Lisbon (1755).



"Even though scientific History cannot either "predict" the future nor provide with examples of infallible behavior, it allows us to present the origins of present and illuminate the circumstances of its gestation, running and transformation. The historical experience of any society is its only positive reference, its better tangible resource, from which we can infer its plans and projects to be implemented in the present and the future".

E. Moradiellos (1996)

Thank you!

Applause (if you wish)