

LITERATURE CITED

- (1) Smith, T. L. 1948. Population Analysis. New York: McGraw-Hill, 292-293.
- (2) Landis, P. H. 1943. The case for internal migration. Survey 79: 74-76.
- (3) Bureau of the Census. 1943. Sixteenth Census, 1940, Population—Internal Migration, 1935 to 1940. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, Table 1, P. 2.



*Social Processes and Social Change Among
Northwest Basques**

JOSEPH H. GAISER

*Department of Social Science
Eastern Oregon College of Education*

IN AN EXTENSIVE REGION of northern Nevada, southeastern Oregon, and southwestern Idaho, which the writer designates in this paper as the Jordan Valley area, dwell the Basques, known locally as "Bascos." It has been the purpose of this investigation to discover who these people are; to inquire into their ethnic and ecological origins and backgrounds; to study their present culture, groups, and institutions; to interpret the facts, as far as their nature permits, in terms of social process and change; and to evaluate their contributions to American culture.

The following procedures were used in gathering data for this study: survey of the geography and ecology of the Jordan Valley area, personal interview, compilation of life histories, nonparticipant observation, participant observation, and study of available secondary sources, including histories, reference works, and school, city, and county records.

A brief consideration of the Old-World backgrounds of the Basques is necessary to an understanding of the social processes and changes through which these people passed in their new Pacific Northwest environment.

The origin of the Basques and their non-Indo-European language remains an ethnological mystery. From ancient times the Basques fought to maintain their identity and freedom against would-be conquerors, developing in the struggle a strong sense of racial, linguistic, and historic group solidarity. By

* A summary of parts of an extension field study undertaken from 1939 to 1948.

retreating into the Pyrenees Mountains of Spain and the foothills, the Basques were able to remain a separate people and cultural group although they lacked distinct political identity. The first Basque immigrants, who came into the Jordan Valley area about 1870, brought with them the Basque language and some of the background culture of their Old-World provinces.

Cultural enclavement among the Basques of the Old World, brought about by strong racial pride, was kept alive by their non-European tongue. This enclavement of the Basques had been encouraged earlier by the attempt of outside groups to conquer or persecute them as they retreated into the safety of the Pyrenees Mountains. In the new environment of the Jordan Valley area the Basques were ultimately welcomed into the economic culture of this immense frontier region. But the Basques clung tenaciously to their ancient language and maintained settlements and segregated areas. Their language, in a sense, represented the old way of doing things and their old family and neighborhood life. By retaining their ancient Basque tongue, they were able to keep alive, for a time at least, their primary culture patterns and functions. Enclavement in the new habitat was clearly a "language-promoted enclavement," since no persecution from outside groups occurred.

NEW WORLD BASQUES TRILINGUAL

TRILINGUALISM BECAME a unique behavior procedure of the Basques in their new environment. In the Old World the Basques were bilingual, using both the Basque and the Spanish. (On the north side of the Pyrenees a much smaller group used the Basque and the French languages.) The ancient, non-European Basque tongue served in all in-group relationships, which were largely primary and face-to-face. The Spanish language had been employed in secondary contacts, as in the Spanish government schools, and in such out-groups relationships as were encountered with Spanish government officials and tax collectors. The Spanish language had, likewise, been used in certain business and commercial dealings, particularly in the seaport towns on the Bay of Biscay.

In the Jordan Valley area another language, English, was in time learned by the foreign-born Basques and their children. This third language became a phase of the social situation. By means of this new tool of communication and interaction, further primary and secondary group relationships were developed, and more far-reaching contacts with local communities and with state and nation were made possible. Among the better-educated Basque

descendents the social possibilities of cultural enlargement and synthesis through knowledge of three languages are evident in the broadened spheres of professional and public activities.

Thus, trilingualism presents a concept which may be of sociological value in the study of social process and historical change. A summary indicates the following sequence: the Basque oral language kept alive primary group life, the reading knowledge of Spanish kept the Basques in touch with their secondary groups, and English brought new primary and secondary relationships and now is becoming the assimilation language of the Basques. The three languages, trilingualism, were needed to give a satisfactory interaction for the Basques in their new habitat in the Pacific Northwest.

SHEEP RAISING CHIEF OCCUPATION

SHEEP RAISING BECAME the chief occupation of the Basques in the Jordan Valley area. Sheepherding has several uniformities: isolation, close contact with nature, and care of numerous helpless animals. These occupational elements tended to develop occupational attitudes of meditateness, reserve, independence, and devoutness in the sheepherders. Accountability for every member of large flocks of sheep over long periods of time accentuated attitude of thrift and of continuous responsibility. Sheep ownership and management of the sheep business promoted further attitudes of foresight, industry, strict organization, and concentration on all phases of the work. These attitudes of sheepmen carried over into viewpoints against strikes and easy living and into attitudes in favor of a strong hand to rule. In all economic affairs the Basques have shown a directness and honesty which are evident to all businessmen and bank officials in the region.

Extension of primary group functions into secondary group relationship is seen in Basque mutual-aid societies, neighborhoods, villages, and other relationships. Devotion to the home and family and to the primary function of socialization through face-to-face association is fundamental in Basque culture. In the church, school, recreational group, and other secondary contact the primary functions of lawfulness, loyalty, and mutual aid are practiced. Court records indicate very few Basque cases, and relief agencies have proved to be unnecessary for the Basques. In business affairs they have shown themselves trustworthy and honest—"a Basque's word is as good as his bond

The extension of the primary functions into many phases of secondary group life continues as Basque acculturation carries them and their children into ever-broadening group contacts.

VERTICAL MOBILITY

THE MOBILITY LADDER, beginning with physical migration, is expressed in occupational progress, educational improvement, and social advancement. Physical mobility carried the Basques from the Old World to the Jordan Valley area, where vertical ascent started occupationally. After several years of sheepherding, many Basques advanced to the higher level of sheep owner and, eventually, some of them became wealthy men. A number of foreign-born Basques, who went into occupations other than sheep raising, advanced from workers to foremen and, eventually, to business owners, as in the mines. Occupational transitions occurred among the second-generation Basques as they advanced up the educational rungs of the mobility ladder into business and professional positions. The son of the Basque immigrant who started as a shepherd, for example, has now gone up the mobility ladder to attain high social status as a successful lawyer and civic leader.

A situation which may be called the mobility differential appears frequently among the Basques of this area. For financial or other reasons not all the children of the foreign-born Basques are able to go on to college. The son or daughter who remains home in the only partially Americanized Basque culture finds himself left far behind on the vertical ascent to higher status. The educated brothers and sisters have become "strangers" to him as they have advanced to better positions in desirable new occupations.

A mobility situation that involves groups, as well as individuals, is of special significance. A group living in the Basque lodgehouse section of Boise is composed of sheepherders and other workers. These single men are not all naturalized citizens and some can scarcely speak or understand the English language. They remain clannishly together, and are still partially enclaved in the Old-World culture. Their leader was, until recently, a wealthy, foreign-born Basque sheep owner who employed them on his ranches, but who was not greatly interested in Basque-American adjustment activities.

Another group, whose members likewise live mostly in the Basque lodgehouse section of Boise, are learning the English language and are becoming

NORTHWEST SCIENCE

United States citizens more rapidly. This improvement of the group is due, largely, to their leader, a foreign-born Basque who has advanced his own American education and social status and is interested in Basque-American assimilation activities. Between the two groups there has existed a conflict situation, or mobility differential, due to their unequal advance in education and to the higher social status accorded the second group by Americans. Between the two leaders there also existed a mobility differential based upon differences in occupation, education, and social status which, in turn, has caused conflict in attitudes and ideals.

In summary of this point, then, it may be said that a mobility differential exists when unequal status is accorded to individuals and groups who have started out together. This sociological concept and the processes related to it may be applied to any situation involving unequal rates of vertical ascent but is particularly apparent among the Basques, where families are usually large and where much of the old culture is still retained in the homes and in the settlements of this region.

Reversal of vertical distance relationships appeared in Basque families when the children became the teachers of their parents in acquiring English. Because of the exclusive use of the oral Basque language and the written Spanish language in the homes and enclaved communities, the foreign-born parents knew little or no English at the time their children started school. The children, proud of their new language, aided the parents in learning English. When new educational facilities were needed in the Jordan Valley community, the children became spokesmen for the community in persuading their parents to vote the necessary bonds. Sons, returning from higher educational institutions, served as scientific livestock and agricultural instructors for their fathers.

BASQUE GAME REFLECTS CHANGE

RECREATIONAL ACCULTURATION of the Basque national game, *pelota*, offers a striking instance of cultural process and change. This game, played in the Old-World Basque provinces: on large stone, brick, or cement courts, was to the Basque a symbol of the courage, endurance, and solidarity of his people. At the cost of great labor, time, and expense, the young immigrant men built pelota courts in the larger Basque settlements of this area so that they might continue their strenuous sport. These old courts may be seen today in Jordan

Valley, Boise, and Winnemucca. For a number of years the original game was played frequently, but acculturation processes began to operate, and pelota underwent modifications and changes. These changes went through the following sequence: pelota courts were built in the Jordan Valley Basque settlements and the Old-World game was played frequently; an American version of the game with changes in equipment developed; modified pelota played infrequently as an "exhibition" game; the second-generation youths engage in American sports of tennis, baseball, football, etc.; pelota is forgotten and the stone courts stand as idle monuments of a vanished culture pattern. Thus acculturation has completed its cycle.

Wartime acceleration of assimilation has been rapidly unifying the community of interest of the Basques and other Americans. The beginning of the recent war was, for the Basque, the Spanish Revolution, which, in a sense, was the dress rehearsal for the world conflict that started a few years later. The Old-World Basque provinces became the proving ground for German and Italian instruments of destruction. Guernica, sacred community of the Basques, was murderously attacked and leveled by German bombers fighting for the rebels. Other Basque cities met a similar fate; relatives and friends of the New-World Basques were tragically killed in these attacks. Thus, after Pearl Harbor, the American Basques needed little urging to support the American war effort. War bond drives, Red Cross work, and other community activities received the support of the Basques in the entire area. Naturalization has speeded up, where it lagged for many years. The Basques are becoming part of the American community; their time and money have been given, and their sons have fought for their adopted nation beside other American boys during the recent war. The transfer of loyalties to the United States has proceeded rapidly, and with this transfer assimilation has been accelerated for the foreign-born Basques. A unified community of interest of Basques with other Americans is emerging as a result of the wartime conditions. This has continued in the present post-war period.

The Basque-group life cycle in the Jordan Valley area of the Pacific Northwest runs a gamut of approximately eighty years, beginning with the coming of the first immigrants, about 1870, and extending probably to about 1950 to 1960. By this time the first generation will have died, or returned to the old country, or become extensively assimilated in the United States. Most of the second generation already have been accepted, for all practical purposes,

as American citizens, but not without first adding their part as a new element in American life. Thus we see in the Jordan Valley area the outcome of a series of social processes and historical changes that have brought a new population element into the Northwest. Gradually, the Basques, from this nucleus, are spreading throughout the Pacific Northwest states, and their unique cultural heritage is being assimilated into the American scene.