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Between Two Shores: Galician Immigration to New York. *Morriña* and Transnational Identities

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Abstract: *Morriña*, a keen sense of nostalgia and longing for one's homeland, has long been closely aligned with a Galician way of being. Yet there are as many ways of experiencing this feeling or condition as there are—or have been—Galicians wandering the world. Although Galician philosophers and writers—Alfonso Castelao, Rosalía de Castro, Emilia Pardo Bazán, and José Camilo Cela among them—have already said much about *morriña*, its role in constructing transnational identities remains largely unexplored. Galician immigration to New York from 1945 to the present offers a unique opportunity to study this phenomenon. In the often anonymous, quotidian, and arduous trajectories of their lives—as they started small businesses, worked long hours, invested their prized savings, and raised their young families—these tens of thousands of Galicians linked their country of origin with their country of settlement. In the melting pot that is New York, the *morriña* experienced by Galician immigration in the second half of the twentieth century reshaped their way of understanding themselves in the world and played a pivotal role as these immigrants forged a new and unique identity as Galician-Americans.

Keywords: Galicia, immigration, identity, *Morriña*, New York, transnationality

1. Introduction¹

*Adios, ríos; adios, fontes;
adios, regatos pequenos;
adios, vista dos meus ollos:
non sei cando nos veremos...*

Rosalía de Castro
Cantares Gallegos, 1863

Water defines Galicia's landscape, its history, and its people's national character. Galicia, the northwestern corner of Spain, boasts nearly 1,000 miles of rocky coastline scored by deep *rías* connecting to inland streams. Rivers such as the ones Rosalía de Castro mentions in her poetry crisscross cities and villages, pastures, forests, and hills. Water infuses Galicia's air as rain and fog enshroud its landscape, and it inspires its thinkers to probe the connection between the terrain and the melancholic nature of its people.

For centuries, the sea assisted the Galician exodus that also shaped the plaintive national temperament. Galicians regarded their mass migration with ambivalence. For those who stayed, it was both a blight and a boon. Emigration was a draining tide dividing family members for decades, if not forever; it siphoned the best elements of Galician society and culture—its laborers, artisans, artists, engineers, and academics—and dispersed them all over the world. At the same time, emigration was

¹ This study would not have been possible without the invaluable collaboration of Carlos Sánchez Somolinos. The author is grateful for his work in the research and data collection phases of this article as well as in the design of the personal biography survey used here.

a rising tide lifting an often impoverished, hungry land with hard-earned wages from afar that were used to restore family homes, build local schools, and enable technological advances. For those who left, emigration intermingled pride at their own resourcefulness, grief at leaving a homeland unable to support them, and hope of returning to it someday. The Galician writer Alfonso Castelao remarks:

[...] the fact is that we know how to wander the world in search of our welfare [...] We Galicians know how to get papers and a third-class ticket; we know how to crouch on the holds of transatlantic ships when we have no money; we know how to take to the road with a bundle over our shoulder or pushing a grinding wheel; we know how to open closed borders and ask for a job in all languages; we know, in short, all that a good wanderer should know, even though the journey may be the first in our lives [...] There is a force that pushes us towards the world and another that yokes us to the native land; if paths tempt us to walk, it is because we leave a light on in the home where we were born, and there it awaits us until the end of life. To walk, walk, walk, and at the end of all work, give back to the earth the body it lent us² (1976, p. 230).³

The melancholia of migration is so emblematic that the Galician language has a term for it: *morriña*. While Galician *morriña* has been compared to American homesickness, Spanish *añoranza*, and Portuguese *saudade*, *morriña* is so rooted in each individual's immigrant experience that it defies a fixed, objective definition. The Real Academia Galega defines it as a “melancholic, depressive state of mind in particular due to longing for one's land” (*Morriña*, n.d.).⁴ Camilo José Cela, a native son of A Coruña and the recipient of the 1989 Nobel Prize in Literature, attempted his own definition when he labeled *morriña* “a vague and abstract sense of emptiness [...] a sadness without object” (1982, pp. 13, 20).⁵ Some of the Galician immigrants we interviewed for this study defined *morriña* as “the wish to rest your bones at last in the

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² All citations translated from Spanish or Galician to English are by the author.

³ Original text: “...o certo que nós sabemos andar polo mundo á cata de benestar [...] Os galegos sabemos arranxar os papeles e pedir unha pasaxe de terceira; sabemos agacharnos nas bodegas dun trasatlántico cando non temos diñeiro; sabemos pillar estradas cun fatelo ao lombo ou empurrando a roda de amolar; sabemos abrir fronteiras pechadas e pedir traballo en tódalas linguas; sabemos en fin, canto debe saber un bo camiñante, aínda que o viaxe sexa o primeiro da nosa vida [...] Hai unha forza que nos empurra cara o mundo e outra que nos xungue á terra nativa, pois se os camiños nos tentan a camiñar é porque deixamos unha luz acesa sobre a casa en que fomos nado, e alí nos agarda o fin da vida. Andar, andar, andar, e no remate dos traballos devolverlle á Terra o corpo que nos emprestou.”

⁴ *Morriña* (n.d.). In *Real Academia Galega's* Online dictionary. Retrieved from <https://academia.gal/dicionario/-/termo/morri%C3%B1a>

⁵ Original text: “una vaga e inconcreta sensación de vacío [...] una tristura sin objeto.”

same place as your first memories.” Others described it as “being present in body but not in mind. It is when you feel restless and lonely because you don’t belong anywhere.”

While *morriña* is “one of the elements that make up or break down the proper and peculiar way of being Galician” (Cela, 1982, p. 14),⁶ there are as many ways of experiencing it as there are—or have been—Galicians in the world. Much has been said already about *morriña*, yet its role in constructing transnational identities remains largely unexplored. Galician immigration to New York from 1945 to the present offers a unique opportunity to study this phenomenon. In the often anonymous, quotidian trajectories of their lives—as they started businesses, worked long hours, invested their savings, and raised their families—these tens of thousands of Galicians linked their country of origin with their country of settlement. Using available census information and archival records as well as field research and the personal biography surveys of 78 participants, this article discusses how in the melting pot that is New York, the *morriña* experienced by Galician immigration in the second half of the twentieth century reshaped their identity.

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2. Galician Immigration to the United States

The last few years have unearthed critical information about Spanish migration to the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century. The photographic and written records in James Fernández and Luis Argeo’s 2014 project *Invisible Immigrants* as well as Phylis Cancilla Martinelli and Ana Varela-Lago’s anthology, *Hidden Out in the Open*, bear witness to the immigration of those from Galicia, Asturias, the Basque Country, Castilla, Málaga, Andalucía, and Cantabria, among others, to the United States. To discuss the legacy of this diaspora, works such

⁶ Original text: “uno de los elementos que integran, o desintegran, el propio y peculiar ser de lo gallego.”

as the ones mentioned above adopt the term “Spanish” to convey the experiences of a plurality of peoples reflecting the diversity of the Iberian Peninsula itself.

Of these groups, Galicians are the oldest and largest in the United States to fall under the umbrella of “Spanish immigration”—a movement generally characterized as invisible. Perhaps it should not be surprising that Galician regional identity, similar to other regional identities, was subsumed under the term “Spanish.” Using the formation of mutual aid societies as example, Cancilla Martinelli and Varela-Lago observe the interplay between the regional and national identities of Spain: “While immigrants in the Spanish-speaking American republics established region-based mutual aid societies, [Spanish immigrants perceived] similar attempts in the United States [...] as divisive, not only because of the small size of the immigrant community, but because of the challenge to Spanish unity” (2018, p. 7) posed by groups from other Spanish-speaking countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and México. Certain elements of Galician culture itself may have further contributed to its invisibility: for many an ordinary Anglo-American, the Galician language, folk music, and cuisine may appear to be part of more visible cultures with greater immigration to the United States such as the Scottish, the Irish, and the Polish, for example.

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No discussion of Galician immigration in the United States would be complete without a brief overview of its roots. Therefore, this study uses it as a base to examine the contemporary, multifaceted waves of Galician migration that arrive in later decades.

2.1 An Overview of Early Galician Immigration: 1880s-1930s

The beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 marked the end of the first phase of Spanish emigration to the United States. But the country had not been a preferred destination for Spaniards. According to Blanca Sánchez-Alonso, “From the 1880s to the First World War, more than 3 million Spaniards departed for foreign destinations

[...] 90 percent of those emigrants went to Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Uruguay [...] between 1900 and 1913, less than 2 percent landed in the United States, the major destination for European emigration as a whole” (2000, pp. 730-731). The similarity in culture and language, prior colonial links, and destination-country policies guided Spanish emigration to Latin America rather than to its northern neighbor. These socio-cultural factors outweighed the economic considerations of what by comparison were higher American wages.

Among the approximate 8.5 million emigrants pouring into New York Harbor from the 1880s to the 1920s were close to 30,000 Spaniards (“Rise of Industrial America,” n.d.).⁷ Close to 66% arrived directly from Spain, while the other 34% arrived from an earlier Latin American migratory destination like Cuba (Campos, 2018, p. 6). Most of these immigrants were young, unmarried men between the ages of 15 and 23 predominantly from Galicia and then closely followed by those from Asturias and the Basque Country respectively. Population expansion, local feudalities, a *minifundio* system of inheritance limiting agricultural production, usury, and lack of industrial innovation brought on economic crises that made a prosperous future in those Spanish regions—let alone living wages—difficult (Delgado, 2016, p. 13).⁸

Like generations before them, these Galicians turned to their long migration history and left, not for Castile, Lisbon, or Oporto as in previous centuries, but for New York. The bustling city, a key nexus of the shipping, manufacturing, and commercial industries, offered ample employment opportunities. Young men from the western coastal provinces of Galicia—especially from A Coruña and then from Pontevedra—were the first to arrive and the most numerous because, as a port, New York provided a strong connection to the seafaring occupations that brought them from the home

⁷ Rise of Industrial America. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/imgnts/>

⁸ For a more detailed description of land ownership and the foral system in Galicia, see Allyson Poska’s *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain: The Peasants of Galicia* (25-26).

country. Many were sailors, ship boiler workers, engine greasers, and cooks—crewmembers of shipping companies who had “fallen off the boat,” as they themselves described it, to settle in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn. This initial contingent of Galicians attracted compatriots—men from the internal provinces of Ourense and Lugo among them—who set up small service sector businesses and eventually included family members such as wives and children.

Galician women did not emigrate to New York in the sole role of spouse. Family reunification was a major factor, but not all women comprising 30% of Galician immigration at this time came to join husbands (Delgado, 2016, p. 37). They were younger daughters with little or nothing to inherit, illegitimate offspring, or single women with the scant possibility of marriage (Cagiao, 1991, p. 43). The growing labor market incentivized female migration as well but with certain differences from male migration. Nancy Pérez Rey points out that “the working future awaiting women in their emigration journey was not as planned as that of men since in most cases it was supposed that they would tend to the tasks of domestic service” (2008, pp. 41-42).⁹ In addition to being an important presence in the service sector of the Spanish community as they performed domestic tasks, they were also farm laborers and seamstresses. The incorporation of women into the American immigration stream made Galician emigration more permanent: “The greater [...] the percentage of female immigration, the greater the possibilities that migration would last longer; for economic reasons, journeys had an elevated cost, and these made them definitive and of longer duration” (Delgado, 2016, p. 67).¹⁰

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The Quota Laws of the 1920s depressed Spanish immigration in general and Galician immigration along with it. Mirroring the Anglo-American apprehension

⁹ Original text: “o futuro laboral que lles esperaba na emigración non era tan planificado como a dos homes, xa que na maioría dos casos se supuña que se dedicarían a actividades propias do servizo doméstico.”

¹⁰ Original text: “Cuanto [...] más peso femenino haya, mayores posibilidades de que la emigración sea duradera; por razones económicas los viajes requerían un elevado coste, por eso las migraciones eran definitivas o de larga duración.”

grounded on what Joseph P. Sánchez refers to as the “uncritical concept of Nordic superiority” and the “historical anti-Hispanic attitudes” (2013, pp. 15, 22), the Quota Law of 1921 marked the start date of exhaustive immigration control in the United States and favored immigration from Northern Europe while limiting the number of Spanish immigrants to 912. These numbers became more stringent after the National Origin Law of 1924: only 131 Spaniards were to be allowed in after the law came into effect two years later in 1926 (Delgado, 2016, p. 64). Spanish immigration with its Galician majority consistently met these quotas, but these numbers may not tell the full truth of the story. The quota numbers restricted long-term single, male emigration but did not take into account those self-identifying as temporary labor and family members claimed by Galicians who had previously obtained citizenship status. In addition, these Quota Laws inadvertently shed a bit more light on Galicians coming into New York. To avoid being “a charge on the state,” immigration policy required newcomers to provide proof of having sufficient resources to purchase their own passage. This meant that arriving immigrants were not those who were indigent but who possessed a degree of capital.

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Towards the close of the 1930s, political exiles joined the influx of Galician immigrants and settled primarily in Astoria, Queens, and in the southern part of Manhattan. Nancy Pérez Rey observes that “in the case of the United States, and namely in New York, there was an apparent integration of exiles” especially in academic circles (2001, p. 614).¹¹ Previous waves of Galician immigrants saw New York as a permanent destination. However, most political exiles fleeing the Spanish Civil War and, later, Franco's regime, viewed the city as a temporary transit hub, a stop on their way to countries like México, Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay (Pérez Rey, 2001, p. 614).

¹¹ Original text: “[...] no caso dos Estados Unidos, e concretamente en Nova York, houbo unha aparente integración dos exiliados [...]” Among the Galician exiles joining academic circles in New York, Nancy Pérez Rey mentions Emilio González López, historian and professor of Romance Languages at Hunter College of the City University of New York, Ernesto Guerra da Cal, author and head of the Romance and Slavic Languages at the City University of New York, and Enrique and Leonardo Santamarina, the former a professor of language and literature at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

2.2 Contemporary Galician Immigration: 1945 to the Present

A dearth of information plagues not only the early days of Galician immigration, but its current state as well. The second phase of Galician immigration begins at the end of the Second World War and is, much like the first phase, small enough to make it an invisible contingent in American society despite the struggles and toil of earlier generations. According to 2019 data from the Consulate General of Spain in New York, of the 30,998 Spaniards currently living in said city 5,810 of them are native-born Galicians.¹² Most of them come from A Coruña (3, 696) followed by those from Pontevedra as a distant second (942), Ourense (924), and Lugo (248). Men surpass women by 3,237 to 2,573.

The data accurately reflects that patterns related to the gender and provinces of origin present from the earliest days of Galician migration to New York continue until the present day. Despite the turning of the years, Galician immigration is and has been predominantly male, and largely from the province of A Coruña. This information also indicates other factors that the two chapters of Galician immigration have in common. Calling attention to registered Galicians, these numbers simultaneously bring awareness to Galician immigrants absent from both official records such as those from Spain's Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Social Security or the U.S. Census and from unofficial family or Spanish society archives destroyed by dampness or forgetfulness. In addition, although Connecticut, Delaware, and Pennsylvania are also among the Mid-Atlantic States under the jurisdiction of the Consulate General of Spain in New York, the vast majority of Galicians who comprise these numbers live in New York and New Jersey.

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¹² The number of Spaniards in the United States is provided by the Consejo de Residentes Españoles. Consulado General de España in New York (2019), personal communication; email from Luis Pertusa, Cultural Consul from the Consulate General of Spain.

As was the case in the closing decades of the first phase of Galician immigration in the three opening decades of the 1900s, portuary cities like New York continued to attract Galician newcomers well into the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. A notable distinction, however, is that during the second phase of Galician immigration, the port city of Newark becomes a greater attraction and the germ for what would later be known as *la Pequeña Galicia* [Little Galicia] (López, 2011). As previously indicated, these numbers indicate the overwhelmingly male character of Galician immigration. They also attest to the embedded, indispensable presence of Galician women as they embarked upon and contributed to the American experiment. One last shared essential trait implicit in these numbers is that the desire to improve their economic futures fuels Galicians' journey to the United States and guides the path they take once they arrive in the country.

The most marked difference between Galicians reaching the banks of New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century and those arriving in the 1940s and 50s was that the median age of men as well as the percentage of women emigrating (Pardellas, 1981, p. 20) increased steadily. Nevertheless, economic hardships and local cultures of "out-migrations" (Álvarez, 2009, p. 78) continued pointing Galicians, who still exceeded rates of emigration compared with the rest of Spain, to American shores.

Like Galicians who arrived before them, immigrants of the 40s and 50s largely came from Galicia's rural areas and settled around the coast of the Hudson and East Rivers comprising Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood and New York City's Lower East and West Side, including Greenwich Village. Along with other Spanish immigrants, Galicians also moved up Manhattan to settle in the Chelsea stretch of neighborhood occupying 14th Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues. These enclaves flourished around shipyards, dry docks, piers, and other maritime facilities because its inhabitants were seafarers in their vast majority. Like the Galicians in the first migratory phase to New York, these Galicians were longshoremen, greasers, and sailors, boiler

stokers, machine operators, and cooks as well. They were men related to the United States Merchant Marines or hired by American transatlantic ships docked in Spanish ports (Delgado, 2016, p. 34). As had occurred during the earlier instance of Galician migration, around them sprang tertiary sector occupations in hostelry, commerce, sales, and other services (Pérez Rey, 2008, p. 51) while secondary sector occupations—farm hands and day laborers—steadily decreased.

The subsequent two decades—the 1960s and 1970s—ushered a greater diversification of Galician immigrants and Galician labor. Increased restrictions on Spanish workers—most of them Galician—by German, French, and Swiss immigration policies aggravated in part the continued economic crisis in the home country (Campos, 2018, p. 8). Growing sociopolitical and economic instability due to the oil crisis in Cuba, México, Argentina, and Venezuela conspired as well to guide an unprecedented number of Galicians to the United States. Most of these immigrants, still predominantly from A Coruña, continued to be employed on the docks as sailors, longshoremen, and steamfitters. In addition to Manhattan and Brooklyn in New York, Newark, New Jersey, became the dominant port for longshoremen and sailors from the province of Ourense, particularly from the townships of Ramirán, Celanova, and O Carballiño. These decades also saw a small, gradual uptick in technicians and industrial workers (Pérez Rey, 2008, p. 42).

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The concluding decades of the twentieth century saw the numbers of Galicians leaving the home country diminish. The 1980s witnessed Spain's economic invigoration as the result of a new democratic government after four decades of Franco's dictatorship and its entry into the European Union. However, the numbers of Galicians from destabilized Latin American countries continued their journey north in a second or even a third migration. Two migratory experiences, often within the same family, converged at this point. On the one hand, older Galicians undertook yet another migration to ensure the wellbeing of their family, but this time, they did so as parents

rather than as children. On the other hand, the offspring of these emigrating Galicians became immigrants in their own right for the first time in their lives.

While the docks continued to employ a majority of Galicians, especially in Newark, these decades observed a greater diversity in “a labor migration” where “most men [...] work in unskilled occupations: in construction work, in factories” or sales (Richter 271, 273). These were the occupations of the earlier generation of Galician men working in Uruguay, Venezuela, and México who engaged in unskilled occupations until they saved enough money to invest in their own small businesses. When this occurred, the initial labor migration metamorphosed into what we term *investment migration*. Still working long days, these immigrants now invested their labor and earnings into their own modest growing businesses. Those Galicians who found their way to New York engaged in investment migration once again. Selling the businesses they had in their previous host country, they invested this capital in new, more promising small businesses—meat markets, grocery stores, wine shops, and restaurants—and eventually, in “urban rental properties and the renovation or construction of houses” (Kelley, 1999, p. 136).

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These years also mark the continuous spread and dispersal of the Galician community from “Little Spain” in 14th Street to Queens. According to Nancy Pérez Rey, the borough included approximately 12,000 people from A Coruña and Ourense. While the 1990s saw a substantial rate of return for Galicians finally retiring to the home country, only 37% of them were from the Americas.¹³ In the case of those who settled in New York, their return to Galicia did not represent a clean personal or economic break with the United States, but was circular in nature (Campos, 2018, p. 51). For most, a stable fiscal status and property assets in the United States allowed them to have a home in Galicia and return for a limited period of time to enjoy time with family

¹³ In their article “O retorno como culminación do ciclo da emigración galega” [Return as the Culmination of Galician Emigration], Xoán Fernández Bouzada and Xesús A. Lage Picos observe that in the eight years between 1992 and 2000, the rate of return to the home country increased: while 63% returned from Europe, only 37% returned from the Americas (2004, p. 28).

and friends and indulge in a sense of greater calm and cultural rootedness. However, they continued to foster strong bonds with their businesses and family members remaining behind in the United States (Rodríguez Galdo, 2005, p. 2). As Figure 1 indicates (on p. 30 of this study), 77.9% of participants who responded to our survey reported they did not or would not return to Galicia on a permanent basis. More than a third of them cited the fact that they have children and grandchildren in the United States and are loath to leave them. As one person mentioned, “The children remain here. Emigration is a trap—we all go to whatever country to work, to improve financially and then return...but before we realize it, the years have passed, and then with the children and grandchildren here, we are trapped forever even though...new technologies make life better and make distances shorter.” Other participants cited a distinct lack of professional opportunities as a significant deterrent to their return. Others still conditioned their return on factors beyond their control such as the health or wellbeing of aging family members.

The first decade of the 2000s witnessed another significant flow of Galicians to the United States prompted by the return of economic crisis to Spain and its subsequent austerity measures (Campos, 2018, p. 33). Most in this category were expatriates and, as such, exhibited different characteristics—in degree rather than in kind—from Galicians who immigrated to the country in earlier decades. While human capital—family members, friends, and neighbors from Galicia who settled in New York first—was primordial for those immigrants arriving over the last fifty years, cultural capital—internalized values, abilities, attitudes, knowledge, and academic skills (Campos, 2018, p. 32)—was especially relevant to the latest Galician arrivals. Rather than rely on social networks, expatriates relied on the professional networks forged by transnational companies and institutions.

Although many expatriates settled in New York, the city now shared its status as a locus of attraction with other important cities in both coasts of the country, like Los Angeles and Miami. In fact, expatriates were most attracted by places hosting

universities, colleges, transnational companies and other institutions that could foster their professional development, hone their skills, and provide opportunities of advancement in their field (Campos, 2018, p. 34). The opportunity to have contractual stability and higher salaries were powerful factors informing their decision to come to the United States. Although expressed through different employment pursuits, economic concerns continued to propel Galicians to this country. Similar to other Spanish expatriates, Galicians' high educational capital, the contemporary labor market, and structures of opportunity granted them greater international mobility. Similar to earlier Galician immigrants, the United States was not likely to be their first migratory journey because their positions in research, engineering, technology, education, and business had previously led them to the United Kingdom, France, Ireland, Belgium, Australia, and Canada (Campos, 2018, p. 31). Like earlier Galician migrations, that of expatriates was largely a family enterprise where micro social factors weighed heavily as well. They valued the American experience as an investment in the family's capital, especially in their children's acquisition and practice of the English language.

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One significant difference was the average length of their stay. While earlier Galician immigrants settled in the city for decades, rooted their families here, and participated in a circular return to the home country, if they returned at all, expatriates lived in New York for the length of time stipulated by their employment contracts. Once this period expired, they moved on to their next professional commitment. If they returned to New York, it was often on vacation or holiday rather than to put down personal or family roots.

With the exception of Galician expatriates mentioned above, Galicians' social life in New York was less broad than in other American countries. Once established in New York, "fear of the loss of their unique cultural background...ultimately led Spaniards to cling more tightly to regional and national identities even as they espoused a more broadly inclusive one" (Bunk, 2018, p. 177). Galicians established

cultural clubs, spaces mediating “the public and the private spheres...[playing] a role in [the] process of socialization” (Varela-Lago, 2018, p. 12). These self-created spaces were a compass for immigrants in search of information, work, cultural validation, and even political representation.

La Nacional remains the oldest cultural club in the New York area. Founded in 1868, the Spanish Benevolent Society, as it was initially known, helped its members find housing, employment, health care, and legal advice. Opening its doors to all Spanish immigration, La Nacional boasted a large Galician membership. In the spring of 1964, the club’s president, a Galician immigrant from Sada in A Coruña named Aniceto Pérez, testified before the United States House Committee and proposed that “the Spanish quota should be increased at least 10 or 20 times from the present insignificant number of 250 to 2,500 or 5,000 per year” (HR 2580).¹⁴ President Lyndon Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Act, or the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 in October of that year, gifting the club one of the pens he used to sign the bill into law. Other cultural clubs founded later in the twentieth century also served as “a tangible expression of community identities and as a site for individuals and groups to perform those identities” (Bunk, 2018, p. 181). For example, Alfonso Castelao helped compatriots found Casa Galicia in 1940 when he exhorted them to create a place for them to meet and preserve their language, folklore, music, and cultural values. The Centro Orensano in the heart of Newark’s Ironbound District brought greater opportunity to Galicians, particularly from the province of Ourense. The Centro Español in Astoria, Queens, followed in 1971. In more recent years, these four cultural clubs have played a pivotal role in reconstructing the lives and experiences of Galician immigrants because they have preserved the records, photographs, and memories of many of their members.

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¹⁴ HR 2580: *Hearings before Subcommittee No. 1 of the Committee on the Judiciary House to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act*, 89th Cong. 431 (1964) (testimony of Aniceto Perez).

These cultural clubs were an important but not the sole element of the networks forged by Galician immigrants. Although the clubs provided support for Galicians once they arrived in New York, most of the bonds among immigrants originated in close local relationships forged in the home country. If, as Luis Delgado observes, the importance of networks are commensurate with the smallness of the group of immigrants (2016, p. 17), then such networks were Galicians' most crucial resources because they transmitted information regarding opportunities of employment, loans, goods, and services. As small Galician colonies became more entrenched, individuals based their decisions to immigrate not just on the social and economic conditions in the United States but also on the human capital that these social networks offered. When those who migrated preserved ties with the home country, they activated a migratory process among friends, family members, and neighbors in their region. Once in New York, newcomers often made the decision to stay because of established friends or family members who were able to claim them and extend a helping hand.

It is impossible to speak of sustaining social networks for Galician immigrants in New York without discussing the Galician family and its most stellar protagonist—the Galician woman. Despite the strong patriarchal nature of the community, women exerted—and continue to exert—real agency. But women's influence has been obscured by the invisibility of the domestic sphere and their relational existence as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. Although Galician women migrated to America in larger numbers than women did from the rest of the peninsula (Cagiao, 1991, p. 94), they had significantly lower numbers than their male counterparts even into the last half of the twentieth century. Yet women played a fundamental role in Galician immigration since they were the transmitters of information in these networks beginning in their local Galician municipalities.

Rather than being the spectral “widows of the living” many imagine, after reading Rosalía de Castro's words describing women left behind in Galicia by spouses who never returned, women played a role in the masculine migration within their own

families. Because migration journeys were decisions taken within the family, women were also sources of financing for their spouses and children's journeys and their expenses once they arrived in New York.

Galician women emigrated to improve their personal economic situations as well as the economic situations of their families—both the families they left behind in Galicia and the families joining them in their migratory journey. The vast majority of married women made the journey with their husbands or subsequently, once their spouses had improved their initial financial situation. As wives, Galician women in New York were active participants in their families' reunification and staked a strong claim on their family's migratory future. Rather than being passive participants in the process, they were equal partners who, along with their husbands, decided on the host country of choice, the area where the family would settle, and, if the family was in a position to invest in its own business, the enterprise in which their savings would be invested.

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The earliest days were the most difficult because of the unfamiliar nature of all that surrounded them—from the climate to the geography, sometimes from a rural to an urban environment, and from brand new habits and behaviors to the language itself. Pilar Cagiao suggests that “possibly, the effort women had to put in was greater due to the patriarchal organization of the family, based on rooted cultural habits” (1991, p. 14)¹⁵ and quotes G. Malgesini to further explain: “Much was expected of them: that they would work in the home, and out of it if necessary; that they would be virtuous and not compromise the family's honor; that they would obey their husband and their father, sharing with them the trials and tribulations demanded of them by integration and the institutional frame of the new country, but that they would be at the same time responsible for maintaining traditions by keeping the language, the

¹⁵ Original text: “posiblemente o esforzo que tiveron que realizar as mulleres foi maior a causa da organización patriarcal da familia, baseada en arraigados hábitos culturais.”

songs, the cuisine, and the clothes at the heart of the family and connect to people of the same home region” (Cagiao, 1991, p. 14).¹⁶

In attempting to reunite with family members in Galicia once they settled in New York, women activated chains of migration beyond their own family and encompassed additional people from their own parish or municipality. Herminia Pernas Oroza notes that “preexisting micro-social networks allowed many exiled Galicians the ability to be in touch with acquaintances, family members or friends in diverse parts of America...All this resulted in a relative availability of information and resources” (2011, pp. 43-44).¹⁷ And women formed the support and base of these micro-social networks. If the key to the prosperous settlement of Galicians in the city was having a contact—a relative or an acquaintance—then women held this key in their hands because they understood that such social connections were based on ties of family and friendship. In many cases, they opened their homes to husbands or couples who arrived to prepare the way for the rest of their families until they found their own quarters and enterprises; they conveyed housing and economic opportunities, and suggested social and legal contacts that proved to be of service to the newcomers. The bonds of friendship and family woven by these women promoted a sense of belonging to the Galician community in New York.

Women also played an instrumental role in sustaining the more formal networks of the cultural clubs mentioned previously. Galician women certainly encouraged their children to attend these spaces in hopes of keeping at bay the creeping fear that their children were becoming “too American.” But they also spent substantial time and emotional labor in arranging the social life of these clubs: during

¹⁶ Original text: “mucho era lo que se esperaba de ellas: que trabajaban en el hogar y fuera de éste si era necesario, que fueran decentes y no comprometieran el honor de la familia; que obedecieran al marido y al padre, acompañándolos en los avatares de integración y el marco institucional del nuevo país, pero que a la vez fueran responsables del mantenimiento de las tradiciones a través de la lengua, las canciones, las comidas, las vestimentas, etc., en el seno del hogar y en la comunicación con congéneres de su misma procedencia.”

¹⁷ Original text: “redes microsociais preexistentes posibilitaron moitos exiliados galegos o poder dispoñer de coñecidos, familiares ou amigos en diversos puntos de América [...] Todo isto redundaba nunha relativa dispoñibilidade de información e recursos.”

the Christmas holidays, they planned dinners and dances to bring even the youngest members of the community together; they organized monthly entertainments as well as informative events; they decorated floats rolling down Fifth Avenue to commemorate the *Día de la Hispanidad* and sewed the traditional garb of the children riding in those floats; they kept the clubs' records, tallied their accounts and worked to grow their memberships. Galician women were often the face and voice of their cultural clubs.

Approximately fifty years before women joined the second migratory movement to the United States in the 1940s, Emilia Pardo Bazán observed that the Galician woman “was liberated by a deaf, merciless emancipator: necessity” (*La España Moderna*, 1890, p. 145).¹⁸ Their most immediately discernible claim to authority was the work and earnings they contributed to the home. Although these were perceived to be secondary sources of income, they were nevertheless acknowledged “as a contribution to the final aim of migration: the family’s economic wealth” (Richter, 2004, p. 274). In addition to generating needed income, these women’s source of authority also resided in their ability to make daily household economic decisions and manage the home’s finances. Such is the case among Galician women who journeyed to New York. Economic necessity compelled some women to work outside the home. Many worked in undeclared jobs that underscored the traditional domestic traits of maternity, childcare, or housekeeping. Although from the 1940s to the 1970s some women worked in traditionally male occupations—as machine operators and drivers, for example—most were employed in the traditionally feminine sectors related to the textile, administrative, education, and service industries. Many worked as maids, paid by the hour, in well-to-do apartments and neighborhoods. The strong tradition of women in the needle industry in Galicia gave them a positive advantage in the manufacturing labor markets not just in Northern Europe but in New York, as proven

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¹⁸ Original text: “la emancipó una emancipadora eternal, sorda e inclemente: la necesidad.”

by the high percentage of seamstresses recruited in the clothing and apparel industries (Grosfoguel, 2018, p. vii).

Women continued to fill the ranks of education and clerical work in the 1980s and 1990s while their work in the textile industry decreased significantly. Due to an increase in investment migration during these decades, women described themselves as being self-employed or employed in domestic service. Although in small numbers, there was greater occupational mobility among Galician women than among men. For example, while men continued working in the ports and in the construction industry well into the 1990s, women swelled the ranks of the education and corporate sectors. Some moved into more academic liberal professions.

By and large, the work of Galician women was in the home—and therefore unsalaried, informal and invisible until left undone. Clearly demarcated domestic work was comprised of “three basic responsibilities: to be a good wife, to keep a good house and to be a good mother” (Pernas Oroza, 2011, p. 168).¹⁹ Theirs was the emotional labor of sustaining affective bonds and of caring for the sick, the old, and the young. Women’s work also included maintaining proper gender roles by instilling traits of Galician womanhood—diligence, decency, honesty, and dignity—in their daughters and an appreciation of these qualities in their sons so they could choose worthy wives when the time came for them to marry. Theirs was the task of preserving ‘performative aspects of ethnic identity’ (Varela-Lago, 2018, p. 12) by keeping alive the traditions necessary to nurture the individual and communal Galician identity in the American host country. Galician women embodied all of the gender, regional, and national traditions central to the community’s sense of itself (Bunk, 2018, p. 188).

Although immigration asked much of women, it also offered them the possibility of abandoning their traditional environment and afforded the opportunity to join their

¹⁹ Original text: “tres eran as súas funcións básicas: ser unha boa esposa, levar a casa e perpetuar a especie.”

own labor force, access a greater level of schooling, information, consumption, and social mobility. There was also a change in traditionally assigned gender roles. These become more egalitarian, in part because women, too, worked outside the home. The need to form a household in a strange land, with other cultures, languages, foods, made these women see themselves as courageous and competent (Ruiz, 2001, p. 70).

While we uncover the defining traits of Galician women and men arriving decade by decade in the second half of the twentieth century, it is easy to forget that these waves of immigration are the result of the personal trajectories shaped by each individual's financial resources, personal characteristics, abilities, education, and skills. What in hindsight now looks like a certain, steady ascent into prosperity and fortune could—and did—turn into grimmer narratives of disappointment, failure, and desperation. Although immigration is a socioeconomic, collective enterprise that leaves a mark on the immigrants' country of origin and country of reception, it also leaves an indelible imprint on each woman and man's sense of identity and sense of self in the world.

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3. Developing Transnational Identities

As is true in the Galician case, when migration is a persistent condition, it becomes “a structural feature inseparable from the society in which it occurs” (Rodríguez Galdo, 2005, p. 7).²⁰ Accordingly, immigration shaped Galician character and comprised a significant portion of its psychological makeup. For individuals, being part of a culture means having a system of references—habits, values, institutions, and traditions shared with others in the same ethnic community—that guide their behavior and help them know themselves in the world. Galicians have a series of characteristics that give them a greater consciousness of themselves as Galicians and bond them in the

²⁰ Original text: “un rasgo estructural inseparable de la sociedad en la que se produce.”

experience of immigration—their language, strong work ethic, strong bonds of family and friendship. But as they assimilated into American culture, they found their frame of reference shifting. Galician immigrants faced an alien world where they grappled with languages, conducts, and modes of living they did not fully understand. Therefore, they used their own familiar mechanisms, habits, values, and traditions to orient themselves and assimilate into American society.

Identity is not static. For immigrants, this means that it is difficult to cling compulsively to their native identity for long (Gugenberger, 2000, p. 815). The immigrant identity is in constant and dynamic transformation. Although Galicians preserved their identity through public and private mechanisms, cultural clubs and social networks of family and friends respectively, theirs is not the exact identity of those Galicians who never left the home country: they have been transformed by the keen economic, social, and psychological pressures in the host country. The tension between the degree to which Galician immigrants maintain their own cultural heritage and the degree to which they identify themselves with American culture results in the psychological phenomenon of a unique Galician-American identity that enacts a wide array of traditions, values, and behaviors. It is an identity suffused by aspects of previous, if any, and current receptor countries. For example, if the United States is the second or third host country, individuals, families, or small communities will incorporate American customs into already existing Cuban, Uruguayan, Argentine, Venezuelan, or Mexican traditions. The Galician-American identity is as varied and multifaceted as the individuals who live it.

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Assimilation is an intricate process. Commonly speaking, assimilation assumes an addition to the person's foundation. When individuals arrive in the country of reception, they gradually internalize the different new realities in their environment and add them to their already existing base of experience. In the United States, assimilation presumes a unilateral cultural process where the country grants the immigrant a central influx of attitudes, behavior, and sense of integration (Santos Rego, 2015, p.

90) and expects immigrants to shed their cultural and ethnic “baggage” and conform to Anglo-American norms as a condition for inclusion into mainstream society. While the United States may expect newcomers to wholly adopt its way of life, Galician immigrants, like many others, “insisted on preserving the integrity of their social and cultural differences” (Camarillo, 2001, p. 27).

This notion of assimilation does not take into account the array of social, institutional, political, and cultural forces helping immigrants preserve aspects of their ethnic and cultural identity (Camarillo, 2001, p. 27). Nor does it take into account the fact that adopting some elements of the host country’s culture transforms the immigrants’ way of thinking and being. When Galician immigrants absorb some American values, they undergo a process more closely aligned with a chemical reaction than with the neat stacking of blocks. Because Galician immigrants undergo an integrated cultural exchange, their process is more of an interculturalization than an assimilation (Santos Rego, 2015, p. 90). The life experiences of Galician immigrants in New York—as harsh and unforgiving as many of them were in the moment—ultimately establish rather than endanger their identity. The acquisition of English provides a good model to explain the interculturalization model. For Galician immigrants—many arriving from Galicia or from a Spanish-speaking country—the language seemed a formidable gatekeeper. Without it, it was difficult to transact business, find well-remunerated employment, or obtain goods and services. In short, without English, it was difficult to move beyond the scope of the Spanish-speaking neighborhood. But in learning the new language and coming into contact with the broader American society, Galicians also came into contact with a previously unknown, expanding ideology of American beliefs. Eventually, English joined Galician (and Spanish), to convey emigrant circumstances and American possibilities. The Galician-American identity does not adopt completely the identity of the receiving society—that is to say, it does not assimilate—but fuses different, even conflicting, elements to create new forms (Gugenberger, 2000, p. 815).

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Morriña is the catalyst for the Galician-American identity. This condition is rooted in a sense of deep ambivalence. On one hand, Galician immigrants feel expelled, banished from a beloved land. On the other hand, immigrants also feel a pang of guilt at having left their country and family rather than share in their sorrows. Upon their arrival in the United States, Galicians may perceive their new environment as bewildering, hostile, and forbidden. They feel distant from the world they know, a world where they felt understood and where they communicated in their own language. In other words, Galician immigrants feel as if they are “citizens of a country where they don’t live and they live in a country where they don’t feel they belong” (Álvarez, 2009, p. 87).²¹ The Galicia they leave behind is easy to idealize, and their romanticized memory of home prompts in them a keen sense of loss and longing for the comforting scenes and things they leave behind. These images serve as a counterpoint to their often precarious, disaffected situation in the new country: “When the aggressions of the climate, of human injustices, and of illness etched the mark of death on the Galician, a wonderful defense mechanism came into play: the wretch experienced a phenomenon [...] which held death at bay [...] the prospect of fountains and fields, trees, crags and hills seen every day since birth” (Santamarina, 1963, pp. 203-204).²² *Morriña* makes the exalted homeland symbolize the kind of freedom born out of an undisputed ethnic character.

But the *morriña* of Galicians over the past fifty or sixty years is different from that suffered by those emigrating over one hundred years ago. As Enrique Santamarina observed:

Without a doubt, today’s emigrant does not feel *morriña* with the same intensity as the emigrant of yesterday [...] Today’s world is more humane; most of us live where we find better living conditions, where we are respected and esteemed [...] the Galician emigrant continued to be victims of unjust working conditions for many generations. This is why they yearned to return to

²¹ Original text: “cidadáns dun país onde non viven e viven nun país do que non se senten cidadáns.”

²² Original text: “Cando as agresións do crima, as inxusticias humanas, e as enfermidades estampaban un sello de morte na testa do despatriado galego, un maravilloso mecanismo defensivo poñíase en xogo: experimentábase, no desdichado, un fenómeno [...] co cual lograba aprazar a morte [...] o panorama de fontes e prados, arbores, penas e outeiros que viu todos os días desde nacéu.”

their Land [...] it was their only hope of escape [...] As if inhuman conditions were not enough, they felt the moral torture of the modes of communication and transportation fully fall on them [...] On the contrary, today we may say we arrive to those cherished places more rapidly with our bodies than our ancestors reached them in their imagination (1963, p. 203-204).²³

As the twentieth-century advanced, most Galicians experienced improved working conditions and more diverse employment opportunities. Upon their arrival in New York, Galicians not only performed the most menial and dangerous jobs, but they also embraced the opportunity and risk of opening their own businesses, of working in transnational companies, and of researching in prestigious institutions. Many Galicians in recent decades sustain a steady relationship with their place of origin because they are in permanent contact with what goes on ‘over there’ through short holidays or vacations, by phone or the Internet. They have a greater opportunity to feel closer to Galicia and may feel *morriña* in different ways. Yet they feel it nonetheless. And in contrast to the migratory wave of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, contemporary Galicians use it to forge a transnational, Galician-American identity.

In “Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration,” Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton define transnationalism as the process by which immigrants connect their society of origin with the society of settlement through the businesses they establish, the investments they make, the social institutions they form, the homes they build in both countries, and the children they raise (1992, p. 1). Although at first blush transnationality appears to contravene *morriña*, this psychological state inextricably binds the host country to the home country in the minds and hearts of Galician immigrants. Eva Gugenberger notes, “a kind of exchange—still undefined—among the relationship immigrants have with the

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²³ Original text: “Non cabe dúbida que o emigrado de hoxe non sente a *morriña* coa intensidá que a sentiu o de antes [...] O mundo de agora é mais human; os mais de nos vivimos donde haxamos mellores condicións de vida, donde mais se nos respeta i estima [...] o emigrado galego continuou por moitas xeneracións vítima das inxusticias das condicións do traballo. Por iso arelaba voltar a sua Terra [...] era a única esperanza de fuxir [...] Por si for a pouco o trato inhuman o que o emigrado de antes taba sometido, caíalle encima a tortura moral dos medios de transporte e comunicación [...] Pola contra, hoxe en día, cásiq ue podemos decir que chegamos mais de presa os sitios co corpo que chegaban nosos antepasados co pensamento.”

homeland, their behavior in the host country, and *morriña* (2000, p. 809).²⁴ She goes on to observe: “While hope remains—though perhaps illusory—of returning to the country that had to be left behind, the connection to the homeland does not fade, it is that which helps to withstand the painful feeling of separation” (2000, p. 809).²⁵ Most Galician New Yorkers live between two places and have strong links in both.

Morriña complicates the Galician immigrant’s sense of longing and belonging: it is a continuous restlessness fed by the fear that ties to Galicia are not strong enough even as they feel them to be painfully deep; it is the feeling of not belonging to the Galicia of their imagination nor to the America of their reality; it is the struggle of yearning for Galicia when in the United States, and longing for the United States when in Galicia. Family in the country of origin and in the country of reception keeps them firmly rooted in both places. According to Figure 2 (on p. 30 of this study), 36.1% of survey participants report that it is the family they leave in Galicia that they miss the most when they are in New York, while 27.1% in Figure 3 (on p. 31), report that the family they leave behind in the United States is what they miss the most when they are in Galicia. In addition to family, Galician immigrants mention other aspects of each culture that tie them to each country. Its cuisine and landscapes as well as its more relaxed quality of life root them in Galicia. One participant said, “...I feel as if I belong in Galicia, that I have my feet firmly planted on the ground and no one can take it away or deny it.” But New York has its own undeniable draws: in addition to their children and grandchildren, survey participants mentioned that their daily routine, the overall convenience and efficiency of American services, and the welcome, freeing anonymity of a large city connect them to the United States. *Morriña* indicates a growing sense of a transnational consciousness, of having roots in Galicia, but wings in the United States.

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²⁴ Original text: “un tipo de correspondencia—aún non definido—entre a relación que ten o inmigrante coa súa terra, a súa conducta no país receptor, e a morriña.”

²⁵ Original text: “Mentres se manteña a esperanza—aún que sexa ilusoria—de voltar á terra nai que tivo que ser abandonada, non esmorece o vínculo coas propias raíces, o que axuda a soportar este sentimento doloroso de arredamento dela.”

Their sense of a unique transnational Galician-American identity gives Galician New Yorkers agency to assert independent perspectives rather than passively acquiesce to home-country or American objectives (Camarillo, 2001, p. 30).²⁶ These American children of Galicia, these Galician children of America, add to a pluralistic American society and to an enduring Galician society through their music and their writing, through their teaching and their labor, through their votes and their earnings. Galician-Americans are bound in a dynamic interaction in American society, a dialectical process in which both the group and the society at large are constantly changing one another (Camarillo, 2001, p. 28). Galician transnational citizens “choose and commit to their adopted country without breaking with Galician culture” (Gugenberger, 2000, p. 816).²⁷

If “Galicia steadily expanded its horizons and created new communities beyond the limits of the nation’s geopolitical boundaries” (Colmeiro, 2013, p. 132),²⁸ it has been due to its emigrants. As the communities of Galicians that settled in New York since the late 1940’s manifest, the *morriña* they endured over the last fifty or sixty years reconciles the seemingly antithetical traditional Galician and contemporary American identities to create a responsive, hybrid society, a proud sense of Galician-American identity that effectively fuses transnational local values. *Morriña* is not a troublesome feeling to “get over” but a transformative condition for many Americans.

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²⁶ Camarillo and Bonilla call this independence “cultural citizenship”: “Hispanics and other groups not only make cultural contributions to a plural society, but alter society [...and they] are bound up in a dynamic interaction in American society, a dialectical process in which both the group and the society at large are constantly changing one another (2001, p. 28).

²⁷ Original text: “elije y se compromete con su patria de adopción sin interrumpir en su acontecer existencial la influencia de la cultura gallega.”

²⁸ Original text: “Galicia expandiu progresivamente os seus horizontes e creou novas comunidades máis alá dos límites das fronteiras geopolíticas da nación.”

4. Conclusion

Water has defined the Galician landscape, its history, and its people's character; water has also shaped Galician emigration—the sea facilitated Galician transatlantic migration to the United States and provided a continuous source of livelihood for decades after their arrival in the new country. But water also informs the nature of Galician immigration as well: arriving in such small numbers as to resemble a few invisible droplets of rain, Galicians have called to other Galicians until their numbers swelled into small, persistent streams finding their way and making their mark in difficult, unyielding territory. And in the process, the flow of their immigrant experience changed Galicians themselves, often without their explicit knowledge.

Galician immigration to the United States is but a drop in the comprehensive oceans of Galician emigration and American immigration. This study seeks to emphasize not only the silent sacrifices and small triumphs of Galician immigrants but also to the way they cultivated a new, fluid identity as Galician-Americans. Over time, many Galicians embraced their role in the diverse American puzzle. And they felt *morriña*. And wondered whether they were a part of a larger, more complex whole. They felt *morriña*. And asked how their beloved interconnecting societies understand and organize themselves. They felt *morriña*. And forged transnational identities full of nuance, subtlety and complexity.

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5. Appendix: Results from Survey

Figure 1. Do you plan to return to Galicia?

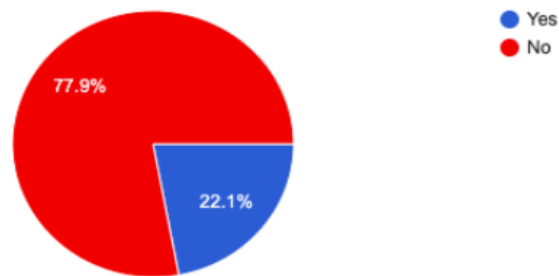
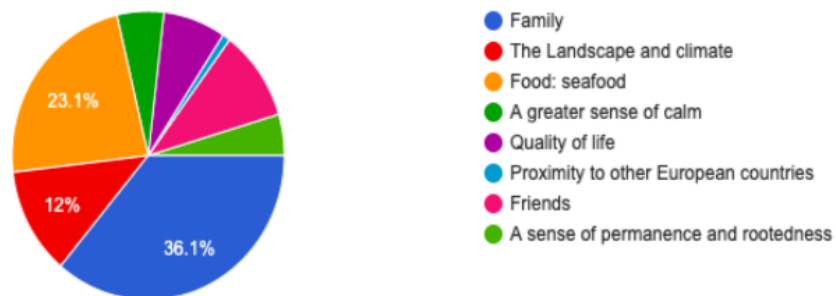
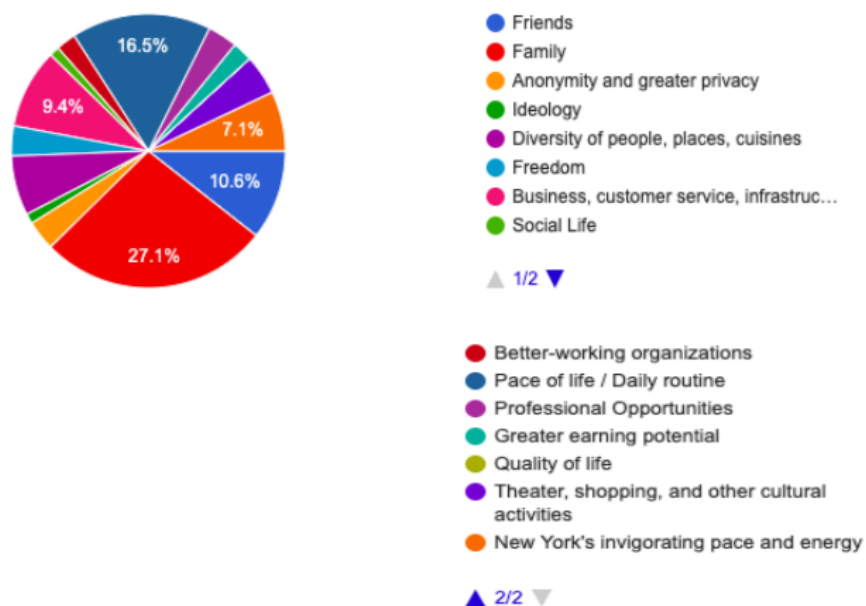


Figure 2. What do you miss most about Galicia when you are in the United States?



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Figure 3. What do you miss about the U.S. when you are in Galicia?



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