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## Article

# Poetics of Expulsion in UK Narratives of the New Galician Diaspora

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**Abstract:** Since 2008, thousands of young Galician graduates have left their country looking for the job opportunities they cannot find at home, with the UK (particularly London) as their main destination. A noticeable feature of this movement is the increase of women migrants, who have sometimes occupied unskilled, low-paid jobs despite their university qualifications. Starting in the second decade of the 21st century, a corpus of narrative texts written by Galician women authors (Alba Lago, Anna R. Figueiredo, María Alonso, and Eva Moreda) has given visibility to these experiences. Lago's, Figueiredo's, and Alonso's characters express anger and frustration as a way of denouncing the precariousness of their situation and the material conditions that led to their departure from Galicia. Combining different theoretical approaches from migration studies (Morokvasic; Nail; Kędra), criticism of global neoliberalism (Bourdieu; Bauman; Sassen), and affect theory (Ahmed), I propose an analytical framework for reading these texts as expression of a "poetics of expulsion" with four thematic axes: expulsion, exploitation, (dis)connection, and repossession. I finish by considering Moreda's novel as illustrative of a different view of migration, focusing on the migrant's agency and on migration as a personal choice (Silvey and Lawson).

**Keywords:** new Galician diaspora; United Kingdom; migration; gender; narrative; expulsion; economic crisis



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## 1. Introduction

Spain's economic prosperity at the end of the twentieth century seemed to reverse historical trends in migratory movements. From a being a "migrant country", it started to receive a higher number of immigrants by the mid-1980s, attracted by post-transition political stability and the economic prospects of its entry into the European Economic Community, eventually leading to "la década prodigiosa de la inmigración", the wonder decade of immigration, from 1998 to 2008 (Barbulescu et al. 2015, p. 128). Galicia was similarly affected by this reversal of migration flows, which made academics celebrate the "ruptura da imaxe tradicional do galego como emigrante" (break up with the traditional image of Galician people as migrants) (Alonso Alonso 2017, p. 32), to the extent that "some considered the century-long Galician diaspora to have reached its end" (Domingo and Blanes 2018, p. 93).<sup>1</sup> However, when the housing bubble was burst by the fall of the market and the global economic crisis that ensued in 2008, it became clear that those expectations were based on a mirage, only a temporary halt to Galicia's exportation and consequent loss of human capital since the end of the nineteenth century.

The Great Recession, the biggest financial crisis of the capitalist system since World War II as defined by Cachón (2012, p. 72), also resulted in an economic fissure in Europe, with especially devastating effects for the southern members of the European Union. These countries, labelled together with Ireland under the unfortunate and derogatory acronym PIIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain) were not only severely affected by the crisis, but also urged to comply with austerity measures to balance their national economies. The so-called "financial rescues" implemented to this end focused on clearing the banks'

debt and neglected the economic hardships endured by a large proportion of the population. Some of the crudest consequences of the crisis in these countries were the rise of youth unemployment to high levels, as well as the increase of house prices and of life in general (Domínguez-Mújica et al. 2016, p. 207). Young graduates saw their professional and life projects curtailed due to the lack of job opportunities in their countries, and migration flows from southern countries resumed, particularly to northern European economies less affected by the crisis.

The United Kingdom, especially London, became the main destination for a “nueva emigración española” (new Spanish migration), as it has been labelled in several studies (for example by González-Ferrer 2013; Barbulescu et al. 2015; Domingo and Blanes 2016). In 2013, the number of Spanish migrants in the UK was only topped by those arriving from Poland (González-Ferrer 2013, p. 6). This new migratory flux shows a distinctive trait compared to the previous wave of migration from Spain to Europe in the 1960s–1970s: not only an increase of younger migrants, but also a higher presence of women, a fact highlighted by Barbulescu et al. (2015, p. 130) and Clara Rubio Ros, whose analysis of the PERE (Padrón de Españoles Residentes en el Extranjero, Census of Spanish nationals abroad) indicates “una notable feminización” (a notable feminisation) of the migrant group, with 12% of women between 25 and 50 years of age within the Spanish nationals born in Spain and living in the UK in 2015 (Rubio Ros 2018, p. 46).

The “nova diáspora Galega” (new Galician diaspora), a term coined by Alonso Alonso (2017, 2021b) for this wave of Galician migration, has contributed greatly to increasing the overall numbers of young migrants leaving Spain for other European countries. Domingo and Blanes argue that there is a “higher intensity of Galician youth emigration compared to the rest of Spain” (Domingo and Blanes 2018, p. 109) and suggest that they would take advantage of pre-existing family networks established in the diaspora during the 1960s and 1970s (Domingo and Blanes 2018, p. 94). The PERE shows that 53,613 people left Galicia for another country between 2015 and 2019, with a preference for European destinations (Nós Diario 2021). As in the rest of Spain, the number of women migrants from Galicia has also increased. In a report for *Nós Diario*, Susana Rois gathers the opinions of experts who support the view that “na actualidade hai máis mulleres que homes no exterior” (currently there are more women than men outside of Galicia), since “as mulleres, agora formadas, son quen sofren as maiores taxas de temporalidade e de precariedade laboral, e tamén as que cobran os salarios máis baixos” (women, who now also have an education, are those who suffer the most from job precariousness and casualisation, and they earn lower wages) (Rois 2020).

Amparo González-Ferrer has pointed out the lack of fully reliable data and the discrepancies between Spanish and British registries, arguing that UK and Germany data not only suggest a higher number of Spanish migrants entering these countries than those estimated by Spanish sources, but that the figures were continuously growing (González-Ferrer 2013, p. 6). By contrast, analyses by Díaz-Hernández et al. (2015) and Almudena Moreno Mínguez (2017) sustain that these numbers do not correspond to the “sobredimensionada” (oversized) image of mass migration and “brain drain” presented in the press, especially when compared to the migratory flow of the 1960s and 1970s. The contradictions shown by different statistical sources and varying interpretations indicate the difficulties to quantify the phenomenon in numerical terms, even more so in the case of Galicia. However, there is unanimity about the qualitative loss, the economic hardship that has led to the departure of highly skilled young Spaniards, the precarious job conditions experienced by some of them (at least on arrival if not for a longer period) and their shared feeling of indignation. These are key issues also addressed in the growing body of literary texts about the new Galician diaspora, which we can gather under the term “narrativas das novas diásporas” (narratives of the new diasporas) as suggested by Alonso Alonso (2021c).

The experience of young Galician migrants in the UK is the theme of the novels *Andrea contra pronóstico* (Andrea against All Odds 2016) by Alba Lago, *Os bicos feridos* (The Wounded Kisses 2018) by Anna R. Figueiredo, and *Para toda a vida* (For the Rest of Your

Life 2020) by Eva Moreda, María Alonso's autobiographical activist essay *Transmigrantes. Fillas da precariedade* (Transmigrants. Daughters of Precariousness 2017) and her short story "Estar e non estar na terra" (To Be and Not to Be Home) from the collection *Alén* (Beyond 2020), as well as the unpublished play *Get Back* (2016) by Diego Ameixeiras studied by Alonso Alonso (2021b) in this Special Issue.<sup>2</sup> A salient characteristic of this corpus is the prevailing presence of women writers and characters. Similarly, Dolores Vilavedra had already identified a growing female authorship in previous works about Galician migration to European countries, of which Xohana Torres' *Adiós María* (1971) is a prime example (Vilavedra 2015, pp. 188–89).<sup>3</sup> This trend also reflects the growing incorporation of women to migratory movements from Galicia, although women were never absent from migratory flows. As Carmen V. Valiña argues in her study of Galician female migration to Switzerland, migration studies that pay attention to women are not only still scarce, but "quando a questão da emigração feminina se menciona, é frequente que se focalize o tema na situação da Galiza e dos países recetores, mas sabemos muito menos das experiências individuais das migrantes e da sua interação com o ambiente" (when the issue of female migration is mentioned, the focus is frequently placed on the situation of both Galicia and the receiving countries, but we know much less about the individual experience of these migrants and their interaction with the new environment) (Valiña 2019, p. 21). The project "Ex-sistere: Women's Mobility in Contemporary Galician and Irish Literature" led by Manuela Palacios is one of the latest interventions to address this lack of attention to women migrants, with the publication of two volumes that include academic essays on literature, history, and photography, as well as a compilation of personal testimonies (Acuña 2014; Lorenzo-Modia 2016). While I am writing this article, María Alonso has also published *Migrantas. A nova diáspora galega contada por mulleres* (Female Migrants. The New Galician Diaspora Told by Women) (Alonso Alonso 2021d), based on conversations with Galician women migrants.

These UK Galician narratives draw attention precisely to the personal experience of young women migrants. In a seminar delivered at the Birmingham's Institute for Research into Superdiversity in 2020, Amy Burge posed the question: "what can literature tell us about migration?" (Burge 2020). As she went on to answer, "one of the central claims made about migration literature is that it tells stories that are not told elsewhere" (Burge 2020, p. 10). Burge quotes Claire Gallien's work on refugee novels, which provide "testimony that is not heard in mainstream media as well as existential and universal reflections" (in Burge 2020, p. 10). Similarly, Dirk Hoerder suggests that "migration novels [...] provide a better guide to subjective factors than the analyses of most historians" (Hoerder 1996, p. 252). Following this argument, we may then ask: what can the "narratives of the new diasporas" tell us about the subjective experience of Galician young women migrants? If Burge argues that "the study of migration literature is as much about its form and production as its content" and that "formal aspects of literary texts can be affective" (Burge 2020, p. 16), how does the form of these texts relate to their affective content? This article examines the representation of women migrants from the new Galician diaspora in the works by Lago, Figueiredo, Alonso and Moreda. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the study of literary representations of Galician migration by reading these texts as expression of a "poetics of expulsion" with four thematic axes: expulsion, exploitation, (dis)connection, and repossession.<sup>4</sup> The article also intends to provide a framework for the study of similar literary works that engage with migratory movements from other parts of the world, particularly from southern Europe.

I propose that these texts demand a critical examination that refocuses our attention to the material conditions that prompted these young migrants to leave, also addressing their emotional responses to the effects of such unwanted displacement. They echo the voice of a generation often described as the most highly educated in Galicia's history, as in the rest of Spain, "usually the descendants of small middle-class families who have pinned their hopes on their children's schooling, shouldering the cost of higher education with the expectation of social advancement" (Díaz-Hernández et al. 2015, p. 204). I use the

verb “demand” here not just as suggestion for academic methodology, but as an actual demand that emanates from the texts themselves, since a salient characteristic in Lago’s, Figueiredo’s, and Alonso’s narratives is the palpable anger and frustration expressed by their characters. However, not all the stories of the new Galician diaspora fit the pattern of expulsion, as shown by Moreda’s novel, which I analyse last as a text that focuses, instead, on migration as a personal choice.

## 2. Expulsion

Post-2008 migration flows placed southern Europe in a paradoxical position: on the one hand, as a receptor of immigration from the Global South, “gatekeeper” of the “European Fortress”,<sup>5</sup> and enforcer of restrictive immigration laws. On the other, while far-right political parties, such as VOX in Spain, capitalise on discourses of hate towards immigrants who have limited economic resources, these countries also became the providers of young and highly qualified migrants for the north of the Global North, sometimes employed in unskilled and precarious low-paid jobs. By contrast with the rampages of the far-right against migrants from Africa and other areas of the Global South, Spanish conservative politicians from PP (Partido Popular, Popular Party) undermined the new wave of Spanish emigration, or even downright negated its existence, by saying that it was caused by “el impulso aventurero de la juventud” (the youth’s adventurous drive) (Agencias 2012), arguing that “no podemos decir que trabajar en la UE es trabajar fuera” (we cannot say that working in the UE is the same as working “outside”) (EFE 2013), and defining it as “movilidad exterior” (external mobility) (Agencias 2013). This sort of statements only added more indignation to the aggravation felt by this young generation of migrants. The beginning of Alba Lago’s Spanish language novel *Andrea contra pronóstico* encapsulates this feeling quite explicitly:

Quién coño me iba a decir que, después de cinco interminables años de carrera y un máster, tendría que irme del país de mierda en el que había nacido y crecido. Sí, habéis leído bien, una puta mierda. . . y para vislumbrar el futuro prometedor del que tanto me hablaron desde que aprendí la tabla del dos, tuve que hacer las maletas y empezar de cero. Otro país. Otra cultura. Otro idioma. (Lago 2016, p. 11)

(Who the hell would have said that after five endless years studying an undergraduate degree and an MA, I would have to leave the shitty country where I was born and grew up. Yes, you have read it right, a fucking shit. . . and to be able to have a glimpse into the promising future I was told about so often since I learnt to multiply, I had to pack my things and start from scratch. Another country. Another culture. Another language.)<sup>6</sup>

The protagonist is Andrea, a young graduate in Physical Sciences from Vigo, with a specialism in Atmospheric Physics. However, now, these qualifications “no valían ni para limpiarme el culo dadas las circunstancias” (were not even useful to wipe my arse with them given the circumstances) (Lago 2016, p. 48). Unable to find a job that matches her education and expectations in Spain, she decides to leave for London to hone her English language skills until she can apply for a job in “lo mío” (my discipline) (Lago 2016, p. 31). Andrea is soon employed in a boutique located in Oxford Circus, right in the city centre, adding a certain air of glamour to the narrative, as she hangs out with her colleagues in trendy clubs and her love life swings between her womaniser English boss, the Northern Irish bassist of a hype indie band, and the boyfriend she left in Galicia. Written in a chick-lit style, the novel also addresses the difficulties endured by the protagonist to stay afloat in London, her initial struggles with the language, economic hardship, and the emotional distress caused by the separation from her family.

Like Andrea, the main characters in Figueiredo’s and Alonso’s narratives are skilled young women who migrate to the UK with the hopes of finding the job they are denied in Galicia. Olivia, the protagonist of *Os bicos feridos*, is a 23-year-old woman “moi preparada.



Moi, moi preparada" (highly qualified. Very highly qualified) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 176) who feels forced to leave "por ter soños. Por ter unha formación. Porque aquí non ten sitio" (for having dreams. For having an education. Because here there is no place for her) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 105). Similarly to the protagonist of Lago's novel, Olivia feels that her university qualifications are just a worthless piece of paper for which she had to sacrifice "os mellores anos da súa vida sufrindo as cadeas de libros, cadernos e cálculos infinitos" (the best years of her life suffering from being chained to books, notebooks and endless calculations), with the only result of now having to "mendigar un sustento moi lonxe" (go very far away to beg for a way to sustain herself) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 107). In London, Olivia finds work as a home maid and au pair for a chief coroner, which she combines with a cleaning job at the mortuary hospital in Croydon. Far from being fluent in English yet, she awaits "esa oportunidade para a que leva a súa vida preparándose, cun bo traballo e un soldo acorde ás súas calidades, capacidades e coñecementos" (the opportunity for which she has been preparing for her whole life, to have a good job with a salary that matches her qualities, capacities, and expertise) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 76). Although at the beginning of the novel Olivia adopts a rationalising stance according to her scientific education, and strives to maintain an anti-sentimental attitude as a strategy to cope with her life circumstances, she struggles to contain her emotions as the story develops. After her boyfriend breaks up with her via WhatsApp from Galicia, she confesses to her father, in an expressive manner that echoes the beginning of Lago's novel: "menuda merda a emigración. Deixas atrás todo, joder. Todo" (migration is so shit. Fuck, you leave everything behind. Everything) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 262). However, by contrast with Andrea's story, Olivia does not find any glitter in London, as her only distractions are her weekly visit to the British Museum and sporadic visits to Soho to look for solace at the house of the only friends she has made in the city. Loneliness, frustration because of her wasted education, and a growing emotional disorientation are the key themes that articulate the narrative.

The unnamed protagonist of Alonso's short story "Estar e non estar na terra" also holds a BA and an MA, in this case in Filoloxía Inglesa (English Studies). Together with a friend from the university with similar qualifications, they arrive in Edinburgh looking to be employed as teachers. Reality soon crashes their expectations. Struggling to pay rent and even to buy food, having to resort to economic aid from their families, they have no choice but to accept any kind of job they can get: a zero-hour contract cleaning rooms in a hotel for the main character and serving in a "sinister looking" pub for her friend Ana. The situation slightly improves for Ana later, as she is hired as receptionist in a Book Festival, a job that might lead to establishing further connections in the literary world. The main character, however, enters a spiral of self-destruction motivated by a depressive mood and the substance abuse she is dragged into by her Scottish boyfriend. Gradually, her mental health deteriorates until she has a breakdown. The story is in fact interspersed with extracts from a conversation between a psychologist and the protagonist, who is in therapy to recover from the damages caused by her migratory experience. In one of these dialogues, the character snaps at the doctor with anger, for being lied to and let down by the false promises of politicians, and having to carry the weight of feelings of disappointment, despair, even guilt and shame:

Sabes o que é que todo che saía mal? Ter a impresión de que botaches a túa vida a perder estudando como unha idiota coa idea de ter un seguro asegurado e despois decatarte de que todo era unha mentira? Unha puta mentira. [...] Sabes o que é ser unha carga para os teus país? Decepcionalos porque non es quen de te gañar a vida cando todo o que eles fixeron foi renunciar a unha vida máis cómoda para darche unha educación? [...] Teño medo, entendes? Porque non hai nada; porque todo son mentiras, embustes, contos de fadas deses corruptos que falan pola tele facéndonos crer que hai que se sacrificar. Todo son mentiras, sabes? Unha puta merda. [...] Eu fixen o que se esperaba de min; cumprín coa miña parte do trato [...] E agora son eu a covarde por tirar a toalla? Son eu a que ten que sentir vergoña? (Alonso Alonso 2021a, p. 116)

(Do you know what it is like when everything you do goes wrong? To have the feeling that you wasted your life studying like an idiot, thinking that you'd have a future and then realise that everything was a lie? A fucking lie. [...] Do you know what it is like to be a burden to your parents? To disappoint them because you're not able to earn a living and all they did was to renounce to a more comfortable live to give you an education? [...] I'm afraid, do you understand? Because there isn't anything; because there're only lies, fabrications, fairy tales told by those crooks who speak on TV making us believe that we have to sacrifice ourselves. Everything is a lie, do you understand? A fucking shit. [...] I did what was expected from me; I held up my end of the bargain [...] And I am the coward now for giving up? Is it me who has to feel ashamed?)

The expectations and disappointments of the characters in Lago's, Figueiredo's, and Alonso's texts are reminiscent of Sarah Ahmed's conceptualisation of "the promise of happiness": "if you have this or have that, or if you do this or do that, then happiness is what follows" (Ahmed 2010, p. 29). "The very expectation of happiness", Ahmed continues, "gives us a specific image of the future. This is why happiness provides the emotional setting for disappointment" (Ahmed 2010, p. 29). For this generation, this is also the promise of neoliberal democracies: meritocracy leads to success, to social advancement and prestige; a promise that obscures the relevance of class as a key factor for achieving these goals, especially in times of crisis. Pierre Bourdieu's criticism of globalisation in his 1998 essay "Job Insecurity is Everywhere Now" is still as valid at the beginning of the 21st century, perhaps even more so. The French sociologist sees globalisation as a "myth", "which has the function of justifying a restoration, a return to an unrestrained—but rationalized—and cynical capitalism" (Bourdieu 1998, p. 36), and highlights the global effects of neoliberalism in terms of job insecurity, low-paid wages and casualisation. Drawing on a clear reference to Marxist theory, he argues that "the existence of a large reserve army, which, because of the overproduction of graduates, is no longer restricted to the lowest levels of competence and technical qualification, helps to give all those in work the sense that they are in no way irreplaceable and that their work, their jobs, are in some way a privilege, a fragile, threatened privilege" (Bourdieu 1998, pp. 82–83). Marx suggests that a "surplus population of workers" is not only "a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis", but that "it forms a disposable industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital [...] a mass of human material always ready for exploitation by capital in the interests of capital's own changing valorization requirements" (Marx 1982, p. 784). In his examination of various "figures of the migrant", Thomas Nail refers to surplus population as an "excess of social motion that needs to be redirected" and, therefore, key to explain modern migration (Nail 2015, p. 106). For Nail, migration results in "a certain degree of expulsion from [...] territorial, political, juridical, or economic status" (Nail 2015, p. 2). His use of expulsion as "a general dispossession or deprivation of social status" (Nail 2015, p. 240) is inspired by Saskia Sassen's analysis in *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Sassen 2014). Here, she examines the case of Spanish economy as an example of a shrinking economy affected by a relentless "growth of inequality" (Sassen 2014, p. 30), rising levels of youth unemployment, "over twice as high as adult employment in the G20" in 2012, and "an increase ratio of unemployment rate for women" (Sassen 2014, p. 40). Sassen suggests that austerity policies implemented in Spain are "channels for expulsion" (Sassen 2014, p. 2). The combination of these three concepts (reserve army, excess of social motion, and expulsion) together with Bourdieu's quasi-prophetic reference to the "overproduction of graduates", serve to explain the material conditions for the expulsion the "new diaspora". Regardless of their specialised training or university qualifications, these young migrants are enlisted into the ranks of an industrial reserve army of workers for the Global North, within a globalised market that goes beyond the nation-state and expects a similar degree of movement from its workers—when required, and if they are deemed worthy of crossing the border. In 2021, Spanish migrants into the UK have appeared in the British press as examples of

the restrictions on UE movement put in place after Brexit, sometimes being locked up in detention centres before deportation (Tremlett and O'Carroll 2021), or encountering problems to regularise their status after spending almost their entire life in the country (Gentleman 2021).

Members of the new Spanish migration have also publicly expressed a feeling of expulsion, particularly in response to political statements that have undermined the migratory nature of this movement. They have defined themselves as “economic exiles”, forced to leave their country (Feixa and Rubio 2017, p. 17) due to the economic crisis and the actions of politicians (Soto Merola and Barbosa 2017, p. 40). Similar terms are also used in some of the works studied here. In *Os bicos feridos*, Olivia refers to her situation as “desterro” (banishment) and “exilio” (Figueiredo 2018, p. 49), and to her decision to leave as “unha necesidade imperativa de fuxir” (a pressing need to escape) from “un pozo sen fondo da precariedade” (a bottomless pit of precariousness) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 78). María Alonso, in her essay *Transmigrantes. Fillas da precariedade*, also explains the new Galician diaspora as the exile of a “xeración de expatriados” (a generation of expatriates) that “non só se sente rexeitada polo país que as e os expulsa, senón que tamén está a experimentar un sentimento de indiferenza ou incluso rexeitamento cara a súa patria” (not only feels rejected by the country that expels them, but is also experiencing a feeling of indifference towards and even rejection of their own homeland) (Alonso Alonso 2017, p. 27). This feeling of rejection towards their country is the consequence of what Zygmund Bauman terms “individualisation”: the transformation of identity from something given into a task. Paradoxically, in a system that seems to endorse free choice, individuals cannot escape the obligation of carrying out this task, being also responsible for any of its consequences, including “collateral damages” (Bauman 2003, pp. 37–39). The result, and here Bauman draws on Ulrich Beck, is that social risks are solely explained as “biographical solutions to systemic contradictions” (Bauman 2003, pp. 37–40). That is, like the character in Alonso’s short story, young migrants are left to their own devices to absorb the damage caused by the “self-regulating” dynamics of the market: not only their social and economic dispossession, but also the feelings of failure and shame that go with it. In *Os bicos feridos*, Olivia dreads the idea of “volver a casa non sendo ninguén, como os indios que volvían arruinados da Arxentina, ou de Suíza, ou mesmo de Alemaña” (going back home being a nobody, like the returning migrants who came back ruined from Argentina, or Switzerland, even from Germany) (Figueiredo 2018, pp. 175–76). In this sentence, Figueiredo’s novel connects the hardships experienced by the new Galician diaspora with the suffering of the migrants from the first and second wave. This is a crucial point to understand the feeling of dispossession and expulsion expressed by these characters. They were supposed to be the generation that finally broke the cycle of migration and deprivation that characterised Galician society in the past, but despite the sacrifices made by their parents to give them an education, so they could become “someone”, they repeat the fate of migrating to a foreign land to work in a precarious low-paid job.

### 3. Exploitation

The linkage between the new and the classic diaspora is also a feature of Lago’s and Alonso’s texts. The former alternates Andrea’s migratory experience in London with her grandfather’s in Buenos Aires, told in a series of telephone conversations. Alonso’s short story collection starts with an account of early 20th-century Galician migration to Latin America, focusing on the sadness felt by the migrants before and during their long journey by sea. The arrival of the migrants in Uruguay at the end of the story is juxtaposed with the beginning of the protagonist’s stay in Edinburgh at the start of the next one, creating a continuity between the experience of the “old” and “new” diasporas. While embarking on the plane to London, Andrea also realises her migrant condition: “empecé a ser consciente de que, muy lejos de lo cool que parecía desde España vivir en Londres, formaba parte de la oleada de jóvenes emigrantes de la que tanto hablaban las noticias” (I began to be aware that, far from the idea that living in London was cool as it might look from Spain, I was part



of the wave of young migrants that featured so often in the news) (Lago 2016, p. 22). These connections not only serve to place the new diaspora historically as another period in the long-lasting loss of human capital in Galicia, but also to counteract political discourses that undermine it as an “adventure”, as well the narratives of success that seem to be the focus of much of the media.<sup>7</sup>

Especially in the texts by Figueiredo and Alonso, this historical continuity also highlights some similarities in the way migration is experienced by women from both periods. Referring to 19th and early 20th century European migrations, Leslie Page Moch points out that “women sought positions as domestics [...] Especially when they moved without their families, single migrant women responded to the demand for urban domestic servants on both continents”; a fact that led to not considering “migrant women’s labor [...] as an explanation of female movement” (Moch 1996, p. 11). As we know, Olivia is not only a cleaner at a mortuary hospital, but also works as both maid and au pair for her boss. The protagonist of Alonso’s short story cleans rooms in a hotel, an extension of domestic work into the public sphere. Both works suggest a gendered continuity with regard to the social position that migrant women are pushed into in the hostland.

The occupations of both characters are in stark contrast with their education in the sciences and the humanities. This is not new either. As Donna Gabaccia points out in relation to the period of mass European migration, “ironically [...] the most emancipated female migrants took the most traditional jobs in domestic service, where relative demand was declining, while unmarried ‘family migrants’ entered the more modern—and still expanding—industrial sector’ (Gabaccia 1996, p. 101). In her influential essay “Birds of Passage are also Women...” (Morokvasic 1984), Mirjana Morokvasic argued that women’s employment as “extension of women’s domestic roles” or “accomplished on domestic premises” leads to the “crucial question of the interrelationship between women’s exploitation within the household and their exploitation in the economic system” (Morokvasic 1984, p. 888). Women migrants still suffer from these two forms of exploitation today, as shown for example by Nawyn (2010).

In *Os bicos feridos* and “Estar e non estar na terra” both protagonists are employed in exploitative jobs. Alonso’s main character is hired on a “zero-hour contract”, and when she has an accident in the workplace her employers initially refuse to pay her a compensation. They only agree to do this after her Scottish boyfriend speaks to them, because “chegas a ir ti soa e seguro que non che fan ningún caso” (if you had been on your own they would’ve most likely not paid any attention to you) (Alonso Alonso 2021a, p. 108). This episode encapsulates the double discrimination suffered by migrant women, placed in a position of dual subalternity as foreign and female. In the case of Olivia, her workplace exploitation comes from another woman. She must be available whenever her boss needs her to be: “o traballo dunha *au pair* non rexe por horas específicas [...] ela asinou de xeito tácito unha flexibilidade de horas que nunca tivera pensado” (an au pair job does not have specific working hours [...] she tacitly agreed to be flexibly available in a way she would have never conceived before) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 69). Lisa, her employer, is a successful career woman who struggles to strike a work–life balance. Additionally, although she seems to disagree with her father’s Brexit induced racism, Lisa cannot help to fall recurrently into forms of micro-racism with Olivia, for example reminding her of how lucky she is to have a cleaning job, because she would not be able to find anything better given her lack of proficiency in English (Figueiredo 2018, p. 222). Again, the protagonist of Figueiredo’s novel is exploited on the basis of being a migrant woman.

The forced and continued relegation of migrant women to the domestic sphere and to tasks related to caring and cleaning is also reflected in the links that *Os bicos feridos* creates between Olivia’s occupations and those of her mother in Galicia and the women of the second wave in the UK. When asked to cook pasta for dinner at Lisa’s house, she remembers her mother: “os macarróns con tomate fainos como todas as nais do mundo. Perfectos. Olivia, por suposto, aprendeu dela” (she cooks tomato macaroni like all mothers in the world. To perfection. Olivia learned how to cook them from her, of

course) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 73). Despite her university qualifications, Olivia performs the role of her mother as homemaker, but employed as a precarious worker in a foreign country. Similarly, her cleaning job mirrors the occupations held by the women of the second wave of migration to Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Xesús Fraga's account of the migratory experience of her grandmother in *Virtudes (e misterios)* (2020) provides an insight into the work of these women in cleaning and the domestic service. Like Olivia, *Virtudes* worked cleaning in a hospital, as well as cleaning houses (Fraga 2020, p. 17). The second wave also features in Figueiredo's novel, in which Doña Merche, now the owner of a Bed and Breakfast, "tamén pensou que ía chegar lonxe e aos seus sesenta e poucos anos aínda frega con moita lixivia" (she also thought that she would go far in life and in her sixties still does the cleaning with a lot of bleach) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 353). The persistence in time of this practice is also hinted at in Alonso's short story. When the main character's mental health starts to deteriorate, she has visions and dreams with an old woman shouting at her to leave, "MARCHA!!!" (Alonso Alonso 2021a, p. 112). The character then realises that "coñecía aquela voz. Era unha voz familiar... era como... a miña propia voz" (I knew that voice. It was a familiar voice... it was like... my own voice") (Alonso Alonso 2021a, p. 112). The woman whom she hallucinates is a projection of herself in the future, an expression of the fear of growing old as an exploited migrant woman. At the same time, it connects the character to the past, in the echo of the voices of the older women that came before her. The similarities between the experience of women migrants from different generations in the texts therefore contribute to delineating a geography of women exploitation in the history of the Galician diaspora that goes across space and time, across continents and migratory waves.

Despite the recurrence of this practice, it has been often ignored or even taken for granted as the consequence of a "natural" division of labour. A case in point is an episode included in Alonso Alonso's *Transmigrantes*. In 2013, the tweet of a young male Spaniard living in London became viral, seen as the epitome of the working conditions endured by the new generation of highly skilled migrants: "Hola. Me llamo Benjamín Sierra, tengo dos carreras y un máster y limpio WCs" (Hello. My name is Benjamín Sierra, I have two undergraduate degrees and an MA, and I clean toilets) (Alonso Alonso 2017, p. 14). Thanks to the attention received by the media, Sierra was able to find a job in an advertising agency and to publish a book about his experience as a precarious migrant worker (Alonso Alonso 2017, p. 15). Although Sierra's story is also one of the expulsion and exploitation that characterises the new migration, women migrants have been cleaning toilets for generations, without receiving this level of media coverage. Texts like Figueiredo's, Alonso's, and Fraga's make their stories visible.

#### 4. (Dis)Connection

Having already examined the links established between the classic and new diasporas across time in the texts, I turn, now, to two other types of connections. Firstly, to the communication between the migrants and their families. Contrary to the idea of the migrants' "uprootedness" that permeated the study of migration until the 1990s, migration studies have since then seen the arrival of a "mobility turn" and the notion of a "transnational diaspora", meaning that "it is no longer assumed that emigrants make a sharp break from their homelands. Rather, premigration networks, cultures, and capital remain salient" (Lie 1995, p. 303). This new paradigm has a greater focus on movement as flux and in the way migrants are "understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, p. ix). More recently, with the advent of new communication technologies such as mobile phones, social media, and instant messaging apps, migration studies have also started to pay attention to the "virtual proximity" they enable and how they foster an "emotional transnationalism" between the migrants and their families back in the homeland (Kędra 2021, p. 462). That is why, after arriving in London, one of Andrea's priorities in Lago's novel is to buy a pay-as-you-go SIM card to

call home and with “WhatsApp gratis, que era lo importante” (with WhatsApp for free, which was the most important) (Lago 2016, p. 34). As we have seen, the conversations she has on the phone with her grandfather are also a feature of the narrative, as a mechanism to maintain her emotional ties with home, while relating to the prior history of migration in her family.

However, the possibility of having a greater connection with their loved ones can also lead to disconnections, as it happens in Figueiredo’s text. From the start, several chapters of the novel are headed by Olivia’s WhatsApp notifications from home, indicating the number of messages that she has received from her mother, her father, her boyfriend, and the chat group she has with her friends. In Chapter 29, she accumulates 513 new messages. Although she daydreams with her parents and wonders whether her boyfriend is still interested in their relationship, she refuses to respond to their messages until Chapter 32. The incessant flow of messages even causes her emotional distress, making her feel like her life in Galicia is now in the past, very far away, like the “Alén” (afterlife) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 155)—significantly, *Alén* is also the title of Alonso’s collection of short stories. Olivia’s phone is described on several occasions as a sort of extension of her heart, “saturado de sensaciones e querenzas” (saturated with sensations and loving feelings) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 29), but also a reminder that she is no longer part of that world, as she feels more and more disengaged from the conversations her friends have in the chat group (Figueiredo 2018, p. 37). Furthermore, she avoids communication because she does not want to lie to her mother about her situation in London, as she in fact does when she finally decides to write back (Figueiredo 2018, pp. 261–63). Something similar happens to the protagonist of Alonso’s story, who “inventaba historias” (made up stories) when speaking on the phone to her mother, “pretendiendo que todo ía ben aínda que a realidade era unha merda” (pretending that everything was going well although the reality was shit) (Alonso Alonso 2021a, p. 109). The behaviour of both characters is not so different from that of migrants from previous periods. Referring to early 20th century migrants arriving in the United States from Europe, Hoerder argues that “immigrant letters sometimes explicitly stated that earlier unemployment, deprivation, or illness had not been mentioned at the time so as not to trouble old-world parents and kin. [...] Thus much of the disagreeable information was screened out of the letters” (Hoerder 1996, p. 254). Once again, the characters of the narratives of the new diasporas replicate traits from previous migratory waves, in this case hiding their hardships, together with the shame and guilt that torments them.

The second connection I would like to discuss here is that of the migrants with their surroundings in the hostland. Compared to her reluctance to respond to the messages she receives from home, Olivia yearns for bonding with the people around her. She has feelings for an English friend, Julien, and wonders whether “existe unha verdadeira conexión” (there is a true connection) in the messages she exchanges with him (Figueiredo 2018, p. 156). However, the novel goes much further than this, taking on magical realist characteristics as it progresses. In one of her weekly visits to the British Museum, Olivia meets a teenager called Samuel Leighton-Santos, Doña Merche’s grandson and, therefore, a member of the third generation of the Galician diaspora in London. Days later, Samuel is run over by a train at West Croydon Station, in what seems to be an accident, or a suicide. His body is taken to the mortuary directed by Lisa and where Olivia works as a cleaner. During the autopsy, Lisa and her team are shocked when they see that the space where Sam should have his heart is instead filled with what seem to be orange butterflies, which fall from the body and spread on the floor. Lisa urges them to hide the incident and asks Olivia to get rid of the butterflies. However, unable to dispose of what she thinks is Sam’s heart, she takes them with her to Lisa’s house. Later, during a fight with her boss, suspicious that Olivia has not done as she asked, the young Galician discovers that the butterflies have turned into an orange dust, and she ingests it. The dust changes both Olivia’s physiology and perception of reality. It is as if the butterflies came back to life inside of her. Her heartbeat slows down to become almost imperceptible. She begins to hear voices, to feel the emotions

experienced by people she never met before. As the story unfolds, we learn that Samuel, a very artistically talented and sensitive young man, had developed the ability of distilling his emotions into a drug that takes the shape of orange leaves. The drug enhances people's creativity and it has been consumed by other people in London, including Samuel's mother, the actress Emma Santos, who relies on it to boost her performance skills. Samuel's death at the train station had been an accident, a miscalculation: he was attempting to generate enough adrenaline in his body to produce a vast amount of the drug, so he could give it to his mother.

The fantastic turn in *Os bicos feridos* is imbued with a symbology of emotion, which plays with the figurative image of having butterflies in the stomach. Olivia, who has also symbolically eaten Samuel's heart, is now able to connect with the stories of other people and feel them like her own. Particularly, these are the lives of other migrants, from Galicia and elsewhere in the world. She can, for example, relive the memories of Helena Makarova, a Russian researcher looking for a job in London, who is turned down at an interview despite having the required qualifications because, as a young woman, she could still get pregnant and, therefore, go on maternity leave. Her interviewer also argues that hiring immigrants is starting to be frowned upon in London, and suggests that Helena should focus on taking care of her family or open a nursery school at home (Figueiredo 2018, pp. 166–67). By contrast with the anti-immigration sentiment that is growing in several of the English characters of the novel, Olivia connects with the experiences of other migrants like her. Similarly to the way the text establishes a continuity between past and present migration from Galicia, it also creates a transnational connection that enhances a sense of empathy not based on national origin, but on the migrant condition.

This transnational empathy is also embodied in Samuel. His relationship with his mother is dysfunctional, as Emma does not seem to really love him, and he feels neglected by her. Emma is a very ambitious "career woman" who also despises her Galician origins and is, therefore, disconnected from her cultural heritage. Samuel does not behave this way, and is very much loved in the Galician town where he spends the holidays with his grandparents. However, there is another reason for Emma's emotional disconnection from her own son: he was conceived thanks to an egg donation from another woman, probably an immigrant as Emma insinuates in a derogatory manner (Figueiredo 2018, p. 344). Like the novel, Samuel's own conception intertwines the paths of the Galician diaspora and other migratory movements, suggesting a transnational connection based on solidarity and empathy with other migrants in London, as a response to the anti-immigration rhetoric prompted by Brexit.

## 5. Repossession

After narrating the expulsion, exploitation and (dis)connection suffered by their protagonists, the texts by Lago, Figueiredo and Alonso end with different types of repossession. Andrea is the most successful out of the three, as she is invited to take part in a research project directed by one of her former lecturers. Although she has to re-emigrate to the United States, this time she travels first class and has finally managed to find a position in her discipline. Her new journey is not one out of necessity but a professional decision, and in doing so she has gained the social position that she had expected after completing her education.

Olivia returns to Galicia, "para volver á casa e devolver o corazón prestado" (to go back home and give back the heart she had borrowed) (Figueiredo 2018, p. 393). She throws into the ocean hundreds of Samuel's poems, which turn into a myriad of orange particles when they come into contact with the water. Within the fantastic logic of the narrative, Olivia's act bears, again, a symbolical meaning. While Samuel's body was incinerated in London, his creative soul is also released in Galicia, therefore honouring him as a transnational Galician Londoner. Moreover, Olivia's emotions seem to have stabilised, and her return home is, like Andrea's, a decision that she has consciously prioritised over having a possible relationship with Julien.

The protagonist of Alonso's story has a sadder ending. After her hallucinations worsen as the result of another mental breakdown, she returns to Vigo with no possessions other than the clothes she is wearing and without letting her parents know in advance. Like the "unsuccessful" migrants of the first wave, she returns to Galicia as a wretched individual. However, we also know that since then she has been attending therapy sessions with a psychologist, in which she has gradually been able to repossess her voice and be in control of her thoughts. Knowing that "o problema non está dentro da miña mente; está fóra" (the problem is not inside of my mind, but outside) (Alonso Alonso 2021a, p. 120), she is now able to articulate a criticism of the socio-economic situation that led to her expulsion. As Alonso also proposes at the end of her essay *Transmigrantes*, the anger and discontent felt by these young migrants can lead to the construction of spaces of activism and denunciation. Making use of technology to establish transnational communications, they have created "a new framework of political participation based on a new form of migrant associationism, developing political strategies and practices in communities that overflow national borders" (Domínguez-Mujica et al. 2018, p. 3). A case in point is the so-called "Marea granate" (Maroon Tide), whose motto "no nos vamos, nos echan" (we are not leaving, they are throwing us out) draws quite explicitly on a poetics of expulsion. Significantly, this kind of activism is absent from the fictional texts of the narratives of the new Galician diaspora set in the UK. Although some of their characters establish personal networks with other migrants, they are consumed by solitude, resentment, and frustration that never lead to political or social action. Drawing again on Bourdieu's essay, these characters are profoundly affected by neoliberal practices, which "by making the whole future uncertain", prevent "all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable" (Bourdieu 1998, p. 82). However, this lack of political response in the characters does not mean that the texts operate in the same way; quite the opposite: by highlighting the expulsion and dispossession felt by their protagonists, they work politically to give visibility to and denounce their struggles. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed asks: "can we rewrite the history of happiness from the point of view of the wretch?" (Ahmed 2010, p. 17). Ahmed suggests that "wretched" is a word with "a suggestive genealogy, coming from *wretch*, referring to a stranger, exile, or banished person" (Ahmed 2010, p. 17). In both Galician and Spanish, a possible translation of this term could also be "precario" (precarious). The texts analysed here do precisely that: they re-write the history of the new diaspora, not to show stories of success as often told in the media, but to bring attention to their precarious working and living conditions. In doing so, they are also related to the political activism of the "Indignados" (Outraged) movement that sprang from the seemingly spontaneous mobilisation of young people in various parts of Spain, particularly in Madrid but also with presence in several Galician cities, on 15 March 2011. Also known as 15-M, this social movement was "a response to the global economic crisis and the approaches taken by the European Union and the Spanish government to handle it in general", especially by "discontented college-educated youth who cannot find jobs that pay enough to cover rent and basic expenses" (Castañeda 2012, p. 309). Activist migrant movements, such as the "Marea Granate", are also part of this movement, and remain active today.<sup>8</sup> At the end of *Transmigrantes*, Alonso, in fact, makes a plea for activism via creative practice: "é hora de chamar á revolta para canalizar toda a nosa frustración vital de xeito creativo e produtivo. Soamente así poderemos vencer esta angustia vital que nos pode chegar a paralizar" (it is time to call for a revolution to channel all our existential frustration in a productive and creative way. Only by doing that will we be able to overcome this existential anguish that can end up paralysing us) (Alonso Alonso 2017, p. 119). The narratives of the new Galician diaspora set in the UK that I have examined echo this call for action.



## 6. Agency vs. Expulsion

I finish my analysis by discussing a different understanding of migration, which I argue is illustrated in Eva Moreda's novel *Para toda a vida*. Instead of being a narrative of expulsion, Moreda's text places a greater emphasis on migration not as forced displacement but as a personal decision. In their examination of the new Galician diaspora, Domingo and Blanes suggest that "some people are emigrating because they can't find work, but some would have done so anyway" (Domingo and Blanes 2018, p. 93). Rachel Silvey and Victoria Lawson have, in fact, argued for giving more attention to the migrants' agency, so they are understood not "in terms of their class position and as the objects of global capitalist exploitation and restructuring" but as "interpretive subjects of their own mobility, rather than as economically driven laborers responding to broader forces" (Silvey and Lawson 1999, p. 126). Although the texts analysed so far in the present article do require an engagement with the effects of global capitalism on the new generation of migrants from southern Europe, and of which Galicia is a prime example, I also suggest that Moreda's novel is better understood in the terms proposed by Silvey and Lawson.

Paula, the protagonist of *Para toda a vida*, is also a young woman who has moved to London. However, she leaves because it was "o que quería facer" (what I wanted to do) (Moreda 2020, p. 24). Hers is not an economic decision, as she goes to the UK to study a degree in Arts and later complete a PhD in the same discipline. She has been in Great Britain for twelve years, now working in a teaching position, although she did not go there looking for a job, but because of her fascination with England, as she expresses using an English inflected syntax: "o que eu quería de Inglaterra era xusto Inglaterra" (what I wanted from England was just England) (Moreda 2020, p. 60). She does not long to return indefinitely to Galicia, as she thinks that "volver volvo abondo ou mesmo de máis" (I go back enough, even too often) (Moreda 2020, p. 10) and even struggles to feel comfortable at her parents' for more than a couple of weeks (Moreda 2020, p. 140). However, when her father passes away during the Christmas holidays, she chooses to remain in Galicia with her mother. Although Paula goes back to London several times to finish teaching her module, she gives up her job in a distance-learning university to be reinserted into the domestic space of her parents' house. It remains ambiguous whether her return has been meditated for some time, as she insinuates to one of her lovers (Moreda 2020, p. 18), or a more impulsive decision to keep company to her mother, since her brother works in a different town. Her mother is not dependent on her, but Paula seems to immediately feel the obligation of taking on caring responsibilities, even if her return means a step back in her life. In London, she has a sense of freedom that she cannot enjoy in her hometown of Viladride, often described as an oppressive environment where she feels watched by the community and monitored by her mother when she goes out. The text, therefore, reverses the trajectory of the characters examined before: not only as a return narrative, but also because Paula leaves a professional occupation in the UK for an uncertain future in Galicia. Rather than being expelled from her own country, she goes away from the place where she had chosen to live. Instead of suffering from exploitation in a low-paid job in a foreign land, she goes back home to a more precarious condition, under the weight of gendered obligations.

A key feature of the novel is the tension between a static view of life and the potentiality of reinventing oneself, and, at the same time, the difficulties that younger generations have to find a stable occupation. The sentence that gives the text its title, "para toda a vida" (for the rest of your life), appears regularly in Paula's thoughts and conversations, referring to jobs and personal relationships. Tapping into the lack of job opportunities for young people in Galicia, and despite the perception that others have of her as highly educated for having lived abroad, the only viable option for a stable occupation seems to be the "oposicións" (exams for public service) (Moreda 2020, p. 27). Succeeding in securing a job in the public sector would allow Paula to be employed for life in Galicia, which is what her parents would have wanted (Moreda 2020, p. 90). However, this is not what Paula wishes to do, and she says to her mother that "a vida non é xa para toda a vida" (life is not for life

anymore), like it was for her parents (Moreda 2020, p. 47); she would like to “atopar o meu camiño, vivir a miña vida” (find my own path, live my own life), something that she could only do in London (Moreda 2020, p. 48). Paula seems in fact to have grown disconnected from Galicia: she struggles to understand Galician if spoken too fast and with local words (Moreda 2020, pp. 17–18), her own language is infused with English expressions, she would not know how to find a flat like she does in London (Moreda 2020, p. 52), and her habits have changed to the extent that she wonders whether she is already “un pouco inglesa” (a bit English) (Moreda 2020, p. 63). A passage that takes place in the workplace also hints at Paula’s sentimental detachment from Galicia. She finds a part-time job in a luthier’s studio, something more of a pastime than a permanent occupation, although with the potential to allow her to develop a career in a new sector. There, she learns to craft an *adufe*, a percussion instrument. When it is almost finished, her boss suggests that they could keep it in the studio, as a memento of her first successful creation, instead of selling it. However, Paula does not wish to keep it: “que o leven [...] Se o fixen sería logo para que o leven” (let them take it [...] If I made it, it’s for them to take it) (Moreda 2020, p. 130). Her indifference towards the instrument she has manufactured, played in traditional Galician music, echoes her lack of identification with her homeland. Paula, therefore, breaks with the stereotype of the overly sentimental migrant who longs for returning to their “paradise lost”. Her life in the UK was far from perfect, she was not able to gain a permanent position at a university and survived with a part-time job, sharing a flat with her landlady and having a rather limited social life; however, this is the place to which she feels more sentimentally attached, and when she thinks she is leaving London for good she laments not having time to go to the city centre one last time (Moreda 2020, p. 78). A similar sentiment has been expressed by the author when speaking about herself: “foi no Reino Unido onde atopei o meu lugar [...] Eu, que tantas veces me sentín frustrada coa mentalidade e a forma de ser galegas, ás veces non podo crer ata que punto Reino Unido me deu o que eu buscaba sen sabelo” (I found my place in the UK. I often felt frustrated by the Galician mindset and character, and I still can’t believe to what extent the UK has given me what I was looking for without knowing it) (Nogueira 2014, p. 169). Although I do not wish to conflate a fictional character with Moreda’s personal life, both experiences reflect a de-essentialising conception of identity, not necessarily attached to the homeland, or at least not with an excess of sentimentality as has been often associated with the migrant condition.

The text is, however, rather ambiguous about Paula’s emotions and intentions, and this is particularly palpable in the indecision she shows towards her lovers. As if trying to find a way of staying emotionally connected with London, during her last visits to the city Paula goes out a couple of times with Ian, one of her mature students. They have sex both times at his house, and she experiences a disconcerting sense of familiarity with him: “o que hai é como un coñecerse de toda a vida, que case non entendo” (it’s like we’ve always known each other, a feeling that I almost don’t understand) (Moreda 2020, p. 37). During the Christmas holidays, she had started to have sexual encounters with Daniel, a friend from her teenage years in Viladride. Later on, she overlaps Daniel and Ian with Octavi, a former academic from Catalonia that she had previously met in the UK. None of these relationships are stable. When Paula tells her mother that she is seeing someone and her mother suggests that they should invite him for dinner, Paula hesitates. She had already stopped seeing Daniel. She would like to invite Ian, but that is not possible, so she chooses to have Octavi over. However, Paula breaks up with him soon after. By contrast with the familiarity she felt with Ian, neither Daniel nor Octavi are able to see her true self, “tal como son” (the way I am) and she is not able to see them in the same way either (Moreda 2020, p. 119). She bursts into tears when she realises this, feeling unable to put down roots anywhere, perhaps not even knowing for sure whether she would really like to stay in Galicia forever, or return to the UK where she could be herself again.

In fact, the ending of the novel seems to point towards a repossession of her place in London, although this remains uncertain. Paula finds out that she is pregnant, and her calculations indicate that Ian is the father. Around the same time, she is contacted by

her former PhD supervisor, offering her to take part in a research project in the UK. Over the space of four pages, Paula goes from exhilaration about the news to reaffirming her decision to stay in Galicia, breaking communications with her former supervisor, and then telling her mother that she has to go back to England (Moreda 2020, pp. 136–39). The novel finishes with a reencounter between Paula and Ian, who embraces her intensely when she tries to explain the reason of her visit. Significantly, whereas her sexual encounters with Daniel and Octavi took place in an abandoned house and a hotel, respectively, Ian is the only one out of the three with whom she shared a bed in a home. It is not clear what Paula's final decision is, but a return to London seems plausible, to start a life with Ian and find the stability she now longs for, something for life, "para toda a vida", but in London rather than in Galicia. Compared to the narratives of expulsion studied earlier, her potential decision to migrate again is based on personal agency, and although influenced by the circumstances of her pregnancy, her return to England is more akin to a homecoming than to a forced displacement.

## 7. Conclusions

The narratives of the new Galician diaspora in London give visibility to the migratory experience of young and highly qualified women, reflecting the growth in the number of women migrants leaving Galicia in the opening decades of the 21st century, particularly in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. In doing so, they offer an insight into the reasons for their departure, their working and living conditions in the UK and their reactions to this situation. These texts are particularly relevant as an expression of the emotional responses to the consequences of the crisis on young Galician women. Their migratory movement is conceived as an expulsion prompted by a mismanagement of resources in their home country, resulting in a lack of job opportunities for young graduates, who resort to migration as a way to find a professional occupation elsewhere, even if this means a start in a low-paid precarious job. Repeating the pattern from previous migratory waves, women tend to be employed in home or cleaning duties, sometimes in exploitative conditions. This leads to a sense of failure and even shame that makes them hide the reality of their situation to their families. Again, and despite the greater possibilities for communication offered by new technologies, this disconnection with their homes echoes previous migratory practices. Some of these texts in fact insert themselves into the long-lasting history of Galician migration, therefore challenging institutional discourses that undermine their displacement.

Therefore, I suggest a reading of the texts by Lago, Figueiredo, and Alonso as expression of a "poetics of expulsion" with specific thematic and formal characteristics. These are used to express the anger and frustration of this generation, which I understand as related to the narratives and discourses of discontent associated with the *Indignados* movement in Spain. Their language is often highly emotional and direct, placing emphasis on feelings of expulsion, exploitation, and (dis)connection. At the same time, all the texts studied in this article suggest a movement towards repossession, be it professional or personal, as a way of empowering the characters so they regain control over their lives and are even able to articulate a criticism against the material conditions of their expulsion.

However, not all these narratives work as an expression of a forced displacement. Mirroring the tension between the consideration given in Migration Studies to the migrants' agency on the one hand, and to the socio-economic factors behind their movement on the other, Moreda's novel takes a different angle. Written in a more dispassionate tone, its main character challenges the stereotypical sentimental excess sometimes associated with migrant subjects, and provides a de-essentialising view of identity. In this case, migration is rather presented as a choice, and the return to Galicia as a setback for personal development.

As a whole, this corpus paints an encompassing picture of the subjective experiences of young women migrants from Galicia in Great Britain, going beyond the coldness of figures and statistics. It now remains to be seen whether the end of free mobility between

the EU and the UK, and other factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have meant an end to this migratory wave, or just another a halt to the continued history of Galician migration.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The first wave of Galician migration took place from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, when Galicians migrated massively to Latin America. The Spanish Civil War (1931–1936) and following dictatorship (1939–1975) caused another type of movement, the Republican exile. The economic changes brought about during the Franco regime by the 1959 Plan de Estabilización Económica (Economic Stabilisation Plan), involved greater international mobility and a second migratory wave, in this case to European countries, such as France, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. It lasted from 1960 to 1973, when European governments responded to the oil crisis by implementing more stringent restrictions on international inbound mobility.
- <sup>2</sup> Of course, not all texts written by Galicians in the UK during this period revolve around the new diaspora as a social phenomenon, as some provide different angles on the experience of living in this country, for example in the poems by Lorena Souto, Xelís de Toro, Isaac Xubín and Óliver Escobar included in the anthology *Onda Poética 2018* (Queipo et al. 2018).
- <sup>3</sup> The literary representation of Galician migration to the UK during the second wave has been analysed by Hooper (2011) and Vilavedra (2015). Garrido González (2021) has also studied Xohana Torres’ novel in depth.
- <sup>4</sup> My use of “poetics” in relation to migration is inspired by Hooper’s “geopoetics” of Galician cultural history” (Hooper 2011, p. 13). She suggests to focus on “presences” and “positionings” (Hooper 2011, pp. 33–34) rather than on fixed points anchored in what she calls the prime coordinates of Galician cultural nationalism, “*terra* (homeland), *lingua* (language), and *morriña* (homesickness, nostalgia)”, directly related to “established discourses of emigration” that emerged from the first period of Galician mass migration to Latin America (Hooper 2011, p. 2).
- <sup>5</sup> For the origins of this term, see Alonso Alonso (2017, p. 44).
- <sup>6</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
- <sup>7</sup> In her analysis of Iciar Bollaín’s documentary *En tierra extraña* (2014) about Spanish young migrants in Edinburgh, Alonso Alonso suggests that the film questions “the almost obscene and delusional image of emigration portrayed in the Spanish media, which focuses exclusively on stories of success and ignores the harsh reality for the vast majority of migrants”, for example in TV programmes such as *Espanoles por el mundo* and *Callejeros viajeros* (Alonso Alonso 2018, p. 32).
- <sup>8</sup> See <https://mareagranate.org/>, accessed on 29 November 2021.

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