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The Emancipatory Praxis of Women in Galician Emigration and Exile Theatre in Buenos Aires during the Mid-Decades of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract: Galician theatrical activity in Buenos Aires has traditionally been approached from a text-centric and androcentric perspective, with a strong emphasis on canonical plays such as *Os vellos non deben de namorarse* and *A soldadeira*. With the exception of studies by Laura Tato and an issue of *Cadernos da Escola Dramática Galega* devoted to the Compañía Gallega de Comedias Marujita Villanueva, the dramatic work of Galician women in Buenos Aires has been mostly consigned to the margins or directly overlooked. Only the actresses in Castelao's *Os vellos non deben de namorarse* receive even a passing mention. The aim of this article is to highlight the important role of female figures such as Maruxa Boga, Maruxa Villanueva and Mariví Villaverde in Galician dramatic activity in Buenos Aires in the mid-decades of the twentieth century, and to examine the emancipatory activities of some of these women outside the patriarchal confines of their time.

Keywords: Galician theatre; women; migration; exile; Buenos Aires; emancipatory praxis



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1. Women in the Context of Galician Emigration and Exile in Argentina

Although women accounted for just over 40% of immigrants from Galicia in Buenos Aires in the 1920s (Cagiao Vila 2010, p. 206), scholarship up to now has tended to ignore the female component of the Galician migration phenomenon. This veil of silence may be explained by the systematic concealment of women at the time, but also by the androcentric vision that has dominated academic research for so long. The same marginalisation of women's experiences is also seen in the history of the Galician population who went into exile as a result of the fascist coup in Spain in 1936 and the decades of repression that followed. In addition, the strongly text-centric focus that has guided theatrical research until very recently centres on the author of the text and, occasionally, on the director in charge, with little attention paid to what was taking place behind the scenes, which is where the work of women in the theatre is most apparent.

The omission of women from research is not limited to the invisibility of their work, however. Very often, even their names disappear, subsumed under that of the male head of the family. For example, in the ship's manifest of the *Ipanema* on its voyage from France to Mexico, only men of legal age and women travelling alone are named (Fundación Pablo Iglesias 2012)¹. Wives are listed anonymously among the dependents of their husbands.

Traditional research identifies family reunification as the main cause of emigration among Galician women. This theory has a number of implications: firstly, that single women and widows did not emigrate; secondly, that those who did emigrate did so as a consequence of the decision of the head of the family; and thirdly, that it was not normal for female emigrants to undertake work outside of the family unit or business, or that, if they did, their work was directly related to traditionally female domestic duties (e.g., housekeeping and child rearing). Furthermore, since emigration was understood as a means of earning money, and always with a view to returning home eventually, women were seen as the mainstay of the family savings economy.

This conception has remained firmly established among Galician scholars and society in general, despite clear evidence to the contrary in the Galician press of the time, which remarked on the varied typology of emigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Ya no sólo emigran los jóvenes, sino que lo hacen viejos, niños y mujeres aislados, y cuya misión fuera de su patria no acierta a comprenderse bien. Y aún más, porque también parten familias enteras y ello encierra una gravedad incuestionable, pues más que emigración parece un éxodo, sin ansias de regreso, que va despoblando rápidamente nuestra tierra. (*El Eco Ortegado* 1911)

Other important factors that do not fit easily with this traditional framework have been systematically silenced, including the relationship between immigration to Río de la Plata and prostitution (Cagiao Vila 2001, p. 121).

This limited (and limiting) construction of women was not confined to this side of the Atlantic, however. In Argentina, Galician women were typically associated with domestic service and depicted as hardworking, resilient and religious, but also fundamentally and irretrievably ignorant, clichés that soon made them the butt of mockery and derision (Lojo et al. 2008).

Particularly surprising is the blurred role of exiled Galician women, often highly educated, independent women who, having achieved civil rights for their gender under the Second Spanish Republic (e.g., right to vote, divorce, etc.), found themselves thrown back into an earlier age characterised by the restriction of women's presence in the public space.

The emergence over the past two decades of studies on the role of women in Galician emigration and exile (González Parente and Lombán Pazos 2000; Fernández Asperilla and Lomas Lara 2001; Cagiao Vila 2001, 2010; Soutelo Vázquez 2006; Iglesias López 2010; Alonso Alonso 2021) has brought about a gradual dismantling of false dogmas such as the low level of female participation among Galician migratory flows and the limited range of economic activities performed by women (e.g., domestic work, inside or outside of the family home). Research by Cagiao Vila (2001, p. 116) shows a strong presence of women emigrants in the 1930s, despite the restrictions imposed by law, and that by the 1940s and 1950s, their participation in the phenomenon was constant. The reasons for the general concealment of women's participation in these fields (i.e., androcentrism and disregard for the role of women both at the time of the events and at the time of their analysis) also accounts for the scarcity of documentation and research on their contribution to the Galician associations in Argentina around which theatrical activities were organised (Alonso and Fernández Cruz 2010, p. 247).

The sexist conception of women as transmitters of culture and identity, coupled with the denigration of artistic activities as inferior to those involving an economic return, resulted in women within the different Galician organisations and associations being pigeonholed into these roles. Unseen and unnamed, any type of personal individuation was thus precluded:

[A] presenza feminina nas institucións foise consolidando asociada a dúas actividades básicas e estendidas: a participación nas actividades de beneficencia e a preparación e organización de festividades e encontros. Dito con outras palabras: cocíñar e axudar. (Alonso and Fernández Cruz 2010, p. 247)

Predictably, given these prejudices and the additional obstacle of access to formal (and even informal) education, both in Galicia and in emigration, women were completely absent from the ranks of responsibility within these associations.

En los banquetes, fiestas, bailes y chocolates, se les confiaba la organización de la comida, la elección del color de los manteles y la limpieza final. Pero la política, eso era cosa de hombres. El reglamentarismo siempre primó sobre las decisiones perentorias, proponer que antes del orden del día se apruebe el voto de las mujeres era una clara búsqueda de enfrentamiento. (Díaz 2007, p. 145)

Today, however, we know that Galician women played a much more active role in these communities than was previously claimed:

En cuanto a la participación de mujeres gallegas en el mundo de la cultura en la Argentina, como en otros países, en general fue muy intensa en ciertas actividades tales como orfeones y corales, grupos de danza folclóricos, recitales de poesía, representaciones teatrales, y, como se ha afirmado, en tantos y tantos actos efímeros en los que se derrochan esfuerzos, a menudo sin ningún interés económico, y de los que no han trascendido nombres propios para la posteridad. (Caglio Vila 2001, p. 133)

Some of the names that have survived, alongside the legion of anonymous women from the period, include the composer Obdulia Prieto; the writers Áurea Lorenzo Abeijón, Anisia Miranda and Elsa Fernández (the latter two being second-generation Galician immigrants); the ceramist Elena Colmeiro; the painters Mercedes Ruibal and Maruxa Mallo; the actresses Maruxa Villanueva and Maruxa Boga; and the actress, translator and editor of the *Galicia* newspaper, Mariví Villaverde.

2. The Participation of Women in Galician Emigration and Exile Theatre in Argentina

Until 1979, few people in Galicia knew anything at all about the theatrical activities of the Galician community in emigration. This changed with the publication that year of *O teatro galego* by Francisco Pillado and Manuel Lourenzo, and a special issue of the Escola Dramática Galega *Cadernos* collection, entitled *A Compañía Galega Maruxa Villanueva*. New research by Luis Pérez Rodríguez followed in 1991 in the form of two new issues of *Cadernos* on the subject of Galician theatre in Argentina and a monograph on the actor Fernando Iglesias “Tacholas,” published by Edicións do Castro. Nevertheless, most scholarship on Galician theatre in Argentina has tended to focus on the premiere of Castelao’s *Os vellos non deben de namorarse* in Buenos Aires and Montevideo in 1941.

In her analysis of the reception of Castelao’s only play, Tato Fontaiña (2019, p. 250) reflects on the increase in stage activity in Buenos Aires following the visit of the Ourense folk choir De Ruada in 1931:

Este aumento debeuse non só á influencia do coro, senón tamén a que a colonia nesa altura contaba coa presenza de actores, como Fernando Iglesias “Tacholas” e dramaturgos, como Ricardo Flores e Manuel Daniel Varela Buxán. Os dous primeiros estiveran vinculados ás actividades dramáticas xa con anterioridade ao momento de emigraren. Este aumento das representacións galegas culminou, en 1938, coa creación dunha compañía semiprofesional, impulsada por Manuel D. Varela Buxán, que fixo a súa presentación no Teatro Maravillas, coa estrea da comedia *Se o sei . . . non volvo á casa*, do seu director. A partir de 1939 pasou a se denominar “Compañía Galega Marujita Villanueva” por mor de aproveitar a fama da primeira actriz, que era tamén cantante e locutora de radio. (Tato Fontaiña 2019, p. 250)

Yet, as Tato also observes, this theatre remained largely unchanged since the beginning of the century owing to the prevailing socioeconomic, ideological and political conditions, and performances continued to be held on the major feast days of the Galician calendar:

As pequenas comunidades asociadas na Federación de Sociedades Gallegas facían algunhas representacións dramáticas en datas moi concretas, como o día do Apóstolo Santiago ou polo Nadal, sobre todo, naquelas agrupacións que contaban cun coro e con dirixentes próximos ideoloxicamente ao rexionalismo ou ao nacionalismo. Mais a partir da visita do coro ourensán De Ruada, en 1931, as representacións aumentaron. (Tato Fontaiña 2019, p. 250)

Pérez Rodríguez (1996, p. 78) characterises this emigration theatre, performed by and for Galician emigrants, as moralising, didactic, sentimental, patriotic and propagandistic of the ideals of their native land:

Reflexa, fundamentalmente, á Galiza campesiña e mariñeira, depositaria da lingua, da tradición e dos costumes máis enxebres. Triunfou na Arxentina e no Uruguai, no contexto da emigración, pois o público que asistía a estas representacións transpúñase ó seu recuncho natal, ansioso de recordar á Terra. O seu teatro soubo intuír os gostos da colonia emigrante, ofrecéndolle un teatro de ton sentimental, pero patriótico. (Pérez Rodríguez 1996, p. 78)

Though rarely named in the records that have reached us, women were so central to the activities of the Galician theatre that the whole endeavour would have been impossible without them. The Villanueva company alone, for example, was home to the following catalogue of women artists: Maruxa Villanueva, Maruxa Boga, Maruxa Iniesta, Eva Carreras, Pepita Duarte, Señora de Lugo, María Pazos, Águeda Malvar, Blanca Pereira, María Nieves García, Marina Alén and Lidia C. García (Pérez Rodríguez 1996, pp. 92–99).

Following the declaration of the dictatorship in Spain in 1939 and the subsequent repression, the huge colony of Galician immigrants in Buenos Aires was joined by a smaller group of exiled men and women who integrated themselves into the Galician associative networks in the capital while promoting new cultural initiatives, including the dramatic arts. As Pérez Rodríguez (2001, p. 1348) points out, there was never a clear boundary between the theatrical activity of Galician emigrants and exiles. Though forced to leave their homeland for different reasons, the two communities formed a single theatrical family of mutual influence despite their differing conceptions of theatre.

One of the fruits of the creative ferment within the expatriate community in Buenos Aires was the creation of the Teatro Popular Galego (Popular Galician Theatre) group within the Galician Association of Students, Writers and Artists of Buenos Aires (AGUEA) in 1957. Founded by Eduardo Blanco Amor, a former emigrant himself and, at the time, a lecturer in the Department of Theatre Studies of the National University of La Plata and at the Argentine National Comedy, the new theatre was an attempt to replicate the Escola Dramática Galega (Galician School of Drama) in emigration (Pérez Rodríguez 2001, p. 1364). Though short-lived, the group's members included the actresses Pepita Arias, Nacha del Río and María del Carmen Pose (Tato Fontaíña 2016, p. 183).

Other initiatives included the creation of the Lugo Theatre School by the Centro Lucense, and the Ateneo Curros Enríquez theatre group by the Federación de Sociedades Gallegas (Federation of Galician Societies), spearheaded in both cases by Blanco Amor once again. Their productions included *A camisa* by Lauro Olmo and *O casamento do latoeiro* (*The Tinker's Wedding*) by the Irish playwright John M. Synge in 1960, and *As bágoas do demo* by Ramón Valenzuela in 1964, under the direction of Blanco Amor. The actresses involved were María Victoria Villaverde, Carmen Juvino, Dolores López and María Lobeira (Tato Fontaíña 2016, p. 183).

In emigration, as throughout the history of the theatre in Galicia, what little record there might be of women's activities as actresses vanishes completely when it comes to their work as playwrights (Tato Fontaíña 2011, p. 5). So completely has their role been erased, in fact, that in this context of Galician emigration and exile in Buenos Aires, there is not a single surviving work of drama written by a female Galician author.

3. The Emancipatory Praxis of Women in Galician Emigration and Exile Theatre

The plays produced by Galician theatre companies in Argentina tended to reproduce the archetype of a submissive, subordinate woman, far removed from any emancipatory praxis. Tato Fontaíña (2016, p. 179), for example, highlights the key elements of the plays produced by the Compañía Gallega de Comedias Maruja Villanueva as "rural setting, exaltation of the moral values of the Galician people, praise of Galicia, recreation of Galician customs and folklore, criticism of atavistic local feudalisms and emigration," adding that "all of these themes were presented in a realistic, nineteenth-century aesthetic designed to meet the demands of an emigrant audience who came to the theatre to reconnect with their idealised homeland, which was the thematic and aesthetic antithesis of the cosmopolitan city in which they lived."

Many of the women working in Galician theatre rejected this stock depiction, however, along with the expectations of their sex and the narrow space of action to which tradition and patriarchy consigned them, displaying instead behaviours that were boldly emancipatory for their time, as the following sections illustrate.

3.1. Expansion of the Areas of Socialisation

The areas of socialisation for Galician women in emigration were hugely restrictive (Cagiao Vila 2010, p. 211). For this reason, the first act of rupture with the limiting patterns of androcentrism was the entry of women into nondomestic spheres, such as drama groups.

Women were not expected, for instance, to have a dynamic social network of relationships outside of the home, such as that of Maruxa Villanueva, who, in addition to her acquaintance with Castelao, Lorenzo Varela, Otero Pedrayo, Salvador de Madariaga, Xavier Bóveda and María Casares, was in regular contact with Luís Seoane and Blanco Amor (Heinze 1991, pp. 232–34).

Although to a different degree than among the immigrant community, the presence of women exiles in the Galician theatre in Río de la Plata is also an example of emancipatory praxis in the face of the new subordination projected on them by exile, where gender rights won under the Second Spanish Republic were among the first things dispensed with in the interest of “more important and urgent matters” (Tato Fontañá 2016, p. 176).

3.2. Public Visibility

The female researchers of the Herbas de Prata project explain the painful process that led to the disappearance of Galician women expatriates in Buenos Aires as enunciating subjects and their consequent erasure from the public sphere:

Nun círculo tanto familiar como social, onde a súa palabra non é valorada, a muller vai anestesiando cada día máis o seu potencial enunciativo, é dicir, os significantes que como suxeito a confirman, profundando entón naquela dor que, case sen ela mesma darse conta, se fai o seu máis fiel e silencioso compañeiro. (Alonso and Fernández Cruz 2010, p. 244)

One of the sociopsychological consequences of this situation for Galician women migrants was low self-esteem and a self-perception of worthlessness beyond the confines of the domestic sphere, attitudes that remain ingrained to this day:

Aínda hoxe, mulleres emigradas se presentan inseguras ao ir cara a afora . . . , amosando case sen querelo os seus medos, tristezas, dores e inseguridades.

Como María, a quen súa nai “lle prohibira ser galega, e a quen as súas fillas lle dixeran que non querían saber da súa galeguidade”, continuando desde o seo familiar o estigma represivo do réxime franquista. E como Carmen, quen relatou, emocionándose aínda hoxe como naquel entón, que de pequena se escondía xunto a súas irmanciñas baixo a mesa cando viñan de Madrid seus outros parentes, pois non querían que as escoitaran “falar galego”, porque lles daba vergonza. (Alonso and Fernández Cruz 2010, p. 244)

By contrast, the emigrant and exiled women who used their own names in their stage work, or to found and promote new drama groups (as in the case of the Compañía Gallega de Comedias Maruja Villanueva and the Compañía de Arte Folclórica Boga-Tacholas), broke with the constraints and insecurities of their gender and staked their claim on a place in the public space.

3.3. Casting off Paternalisms

The project of paternalistic tutelage promoted by the Spanish state after the installation of the dictatorship was targeted especially at women, as the central transmitter of cultural and social values within the family and society. This paternalism centralised decisions of all kinds in the male head of the household so that a woman’s wishes and opinions were generally subordinate to those of her husband. This policy of “emotional coercion” (Alonso

and Fernández Cruz 2010, p. 244) spread across the Atlantic through emigration, and was reinforced by the regime back in Spain through propagandistic radio broadcasts around the Hispanic world (Piñeiro-Otero and García-Cofrades 2016, p. 546).

Divine guardianship was also offered to immigrants through the different Roman Catholic religious orders in the country of reception. The Society for the Protection of Young Servant Girls (also known as the Daughters of Mary Immaculate), for example, trained young female immigrants to work as domestic servants in order to keep them away from more scandalous occupations such as acting, while the Tertiary Carmelites patrolled the ports for new arrivals in order to steer them down the path of virtue (Caglio Vila 2010, pp. 208–9).

The first step towards self-emancipation as a prerequisite of female independence was often an act as apparently trivial as using one's own name and surname without filiation or subjection to that of one's husband. While some remained hidden behind their husband's surname (as in the case of "Señora de Lugo", one of the actresses of the Maruxa Villanueva Company), for women such as Eva Carreira, Pepita Arias, María do Carme Pose, María Pazos, Lidia García, Blanca Pereira, Marina Alén, Águeda Malvar, Blanca Pereira, Anisia Miranda and others, the simple fact of owning and using their names was a statement of identity and independence.²

As mentioned, exiled women found themselves in a similar position to their emigrant peers, as they had, in practice, lost the rights won before the fascist coup d'état. The loss of name is observed, for example, in the case Mariví Villaverde, who in most publications on the Galician theatre in Argentina appears with her husband's surname (Valenzuela), or even stripped of any surname as simply "Viqui" (Tato Fontaiña 2016, p. 184). Villaverde herself was not consistent in this regard either (if it was indeed she who made these decisions), signing her works in Spanish for the newspaper *Galicia* as M. V. Valenzuela or under the pseudonym M. V. Arealonga (Acuña Trabazo 2011, p. 94).

Other aspects of private behaviour contain significant emancipatory power, such as the decision by immigrant women to end a marriage and separate from the husband, as in the case of Maruxa Villanueva.

3.4. Doing "Men's Work"

The bid to free themselves from the yoke of paternalism and achieve greater personal visibility led these women to occupy jobs not usually associated with their gender and far removed from the traditionally domestic context of paid and unpaid female labour. Caglio Vila (2010, p. 206) points out that, while industrial development required a lot of labour, women were usually employed in tasks related to the production of food and clothing items. This "women's work" took place not only in factories and workshops, but also in the homes of the workers themselves, with long working days and generally poor wages.

Maruxa Boga, the voice of Galician emigrants in Buenos Aires (Piñeiro-Otero and García-Cofrades 2016, p. 557), is the epitome of this female conquest of traditionally male domains of employment. As a national associate professor at the National Academy of Declamation and Scenic Art, this second-generation Galician immigrant became a role model to generations of radio presenters in Buenos Aires (Blanco Rosas 2014, p. 229), and also worked as the director for the radio programme *Recordando a Galicia* alongside the script editor, Alfredo Aróstegui.

Mariví Villaverde and Maruxa Villanueva were also directors, Villaverde of the newspaper *Galicia* and Villanueva of a radio programme of the same name.

3.5. Opposition to the Degrading Stereotype of Galician Women

Prejudice against Galician immigrants, and Galician immigrant women in particular, gradually gave rise to a stereotype of the community as conservative, unstimulating and stuck in their ways (Lojo 2008, p. 28), which acted as a social glass ceiling in the case of Galician women. One of the sources of this stereotype was a short farce by Mario Bellini, entitled *Ramona*, which premiered in 1931 and was published a year later in the

Revista Teatral La Escena. The play features a grossly caricatured representation of a Galician housemaid, a predecessor of the archetypal Cándida popularised in the 1940s by the actress Niní Marshall and inspired by the actress's own maid—who, it turned out, was not actually Galician.

Just as Fernando Iglesias “Tacholas” sought to dignify Galician men through his stage work (Biscainho-Fernandes 2016), so the actresses of the Buenos Aires Galician theatre used theirs to combat the negative image of Galician women. This battle extended to some of their other cultural activities, such as the radio programmes directed by Maruxa Boga and Maruxa Villanueva³, in which the objective of dismantling prejudices and preconceptions about their fellow countrywomen was a constant presence (Blanco Rosas 2014, p. 223–24).

The desire to dignify Galicia and its women, and the consequent demand for respect for both, led at times to paradoxical situations, such as the dilemma faced by Maruxa Villanueva as a member of the cast of *Os vellos non deben de namorarse* by Castelaio. Like the majority of the immigrant community, Villanueva was less than enthusiastic about Castelaio's dramatic proposal. Regardless of the play's aesthetic merits and the great revolution it represented for Galician theatre, the problem lay in its unidealised vision of Galician women and society. Villanueva confessed years later that, despite the play's undeniable beauty and deep humanism, she did not like it, and only agreed to do it because Castelaio had written it (Pociña and López 1995, pp. 73–74). As Tato Fontañá (2016, p. 180) insightfully explains, the actress's artistic sensitivity coincided with that of her audience, so while critics in the Argentinean press celebrated Castelaio's feat of dramatic imagination, the emigrant colony saw it as an offence to Galician women. Undoubtedly, the reception of *Os vellos non deben de namorarse* revealed all kinds of tensions (of class, cultural level and even gender) within the Galician collective in Buenos Aires.

The fight against distortional stereotypes also extended to the Galician language and the bid to reverse the widely held opinion of Galician as the embarrassing, domestic dialect of an ignorant immigrant community. Maruxa Boga recalled years later the strategies used by the Boga–Tacholas Company in order to continue to perform their shows in Galician for an Argentinean audience:

Cuando íbamos a los festivales [. . .] hacíamos sketches y hablábamos en gallego. Y como todos eran argentinos de pañuelito y chamberguito y bailando tango, no entendían un *cornio* de gallego. Entonces les decíamos una cosa en gallego y enseguida les explicábamos en castellano, y así íbamos enseñándoles cómo era el gallego. (Boga 2012, p. 2)

In Boga's case, however, her efforts extended beyond the stage to her role as a teacher of Galician language and literature among the emigrant communities in Buenos Aires (Porteiro García and Torres Bugallo 2012).

3.6. Exercising Freedom of Expression

The women of the Galician theatre in Argentina during this period not only laid claim to the right to have their own opinion but, in a more complete exercise of freedom of expression, authorised themselves to display their points of view publicly, including on ideological matters. In doing so, they moved away from the passive role reserved for immigrant women exemplified by the Ladies' Committees of the Federation of Galician Societies, whose virtually sole function was to receive important visitors with a bouquet of flowers (Díaz 2007, p. 145).

While their stance on different issues and how they expressed their ideas were undoubtedly influenced by the dynamics of their social circles and Argentinean society itself, as well as by their separate personalities and education, they never hesitated to show themselves as political subjects with views and convictions. One such incident involving a performance by the Maruxa Villanueva company at the Solís Theatre in Montevideo was reported in exultant terms by *España Democrática* (9 October 1940), the organ of the National Aid to the Spanish People Committee. During the intermission, a bouquet from the Casa de España was brought to the stage, symbolically adorned with a ribbon in the republican

colours. According to the newspaper, Villanueva excitedly took the republican flag in her hands and kissed it, to the spontaneous and fervid delight of the audience. The report in *España Democrática* described the gesture as a more eloquent way of remembering “the Galician martyrs . . . of Franco’s sadistic ambition” than any speech could.

Despite numerous differences of background and personality between the members of the Boga–Villanueva–Tacholas triad—Villanueva and Iglesias were more traditional—their initiatives grew primarily out of their ideological and cultural affinities as republicans, Galicianists and people interested in energising the cultural fabric of the Galician community in Argentina (Blanco Rosas 2014, p. 217); that is, to intervene politically—in the original sense of the term.

However, the true paradigm of this emancipatory political intervention in defence of Galicia and female freedom of expression is embodied by Maruxa Boga. Boga’s highly developed sense of independence of opinion and freedom of expression was evidenced in 1955 in a radio interview conducted by Luís Seoane on the reception of the premiere of *Os vellos non deben de namorarse*. Unswayed by the “sugar-coating” exercise underway among the community of exiled intellectuals (Seoane included) (Tato Fontaiña 2019, p. 252), Boga regretfully concluded that Castela’s theatre was too refined and avant-garde to be understood by Galician immigrants:

[. . .] non alcanzou sen dúbida o éxito que todos agardábamos [. . .] Era un teatro demasiado sutil para que gustase, así tan facilmente. Noite a noite chegaban os mais calificados homes das letras e de crítica; as mais calificadas actrices e actores . . . todos estaban dacordo en asegurar que era algo maravilloso aquel teatro de caretas . . . mais o público non o entendeu así. (Braxe and Seoane 1996, p. 231)

In a famous editorial in *Galicia Emigrante*, Seoane himself describes Boga’s work for radio as a true example of “free, poor, honest, independent journalism” (Piñeiro-Otero and García-Cofrades 2016, p. 556).

Against the folkloric sentimentalism of most of the programming created for Galician radio listeners, Boga’s editorials were often highly political and socially charged (Blanco Rosas 2014, p. 214). One text, dated 1948, celebrated Concepción Arenal as a living symbol of the spirit of liberation of the conscious women of the universe, while others contained explicit condemnation and censure of the Francoist regime in Spain.

Mariví Villaverde’s public criticism in *Galicia* (Valenzuela 1961) of the La Plata Galician Centre for its decision to invite the pro-fascist Joaquín Calvo Sotelo to speak in the Salón Castela can be seen as a further example of Galician emigrant women asserting their right to a freedom of expression not usually permitted to them. Villaverde condemned the centre’s actions, asking, ironically, if the name Castela did not oblige them to uphold certain standards (Valenzuela 1961).

4. Conclusions

In order to appreciate the role of women in Galician emigrant and exile theatre in Buenos Aires in the mid-decades of the twentieth century, we need to break away from the androcentric, text-based paradigm that has dominated theatre studies for so long. Moreover, if we contextualise women’s public roles in society in terms of the prevailing values of the time, we perceive numerous examples of emancipatory actions and attitudes that saw women occupying social spaces and functions beyond the domestic sphere.

The sociocultural repression suffered by emigrant women also extended to those forced into exile, who saw how the rights they had won under the Republic were subordinated to the imperatives of the exile cause.

The actresses, authors and directors of the time who succeeded in making a name for themselves broke with the stereotypes of ignorance, unworldliness and domesticity associated with women and Galician women in particular. Many of them asserted their right to comment publicly on whatever issues they chose and occupied professions not usually considered appropriate or possible for women. Despite the prevailing culture of

patriarchal androcentrism, these women succeeded in forging and freeing a voice of their own, which continues to resonate to this day.

This paper is dedicated to all of them.

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Notes

¹ Held at the Pablo Iglesias Foundation (Madrid).

² Women in Spain do not usually take their husband’s name when they marry.

³ Androcentrism also explains the lack of attention paid to these initiatives by historiography on Galician immigration to America. The fact that these programmes were directed by women explains why they were mostly ignored, in contrast to others such as Luís Seoane’s *Galicia emigrante*, or *Galicia en el aire* by Andrés Rodríguez Barbeito (Piñeiro-Otero and García-Cofrades 2016).

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