

Fecha de recepción: 1 septiembre 2019  
Fecha de aceptación: 20 octubre 2019  
Fecha de publicación: 9 febrero 2020  
URL: <https://oceanide.es/index.php/o12020/article/view/46/189>  
Océanide número 13, ISSN 1989-6328  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v13i.46>

**Dra. Manuela Palacios**

*Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, España*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7470-441X>

**Dra. María Xesús Nogueira**

*Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, España*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4866-5864>

# Otherwhereness and Gender: Mary O'Malley's "Asylum Road" and Marga do Val's "A cidade sen roupa ao sol"

## ≈ Resumen

El presente artículo analiza la poesía de Mary O'Malley y Marga do Val sobre dislocación y emigración, con el fin de determinar el cuestionamiento de nociones como hogar, pertenencia, movilidad y otredad por parte del sujeto femenino. A pesar de la diferente proveniencia nacional y cultural de las autoras, la historia común de emigración masiva en Galicia e Irlanda nos permite plantear la hipótesis de que la poesía contemporánea de estas dos autoras y sus reflexiones sobre la migración son de relevancia recíproca, tal y como apunta la investigación previa sobre la movilidad de mujeres gallegas e irlandesas (Lorenzo-Modia 2016, Acuña 2014). A medida que se analiza la poesía de cada autora, identificamos sus propuestas más significativas y afines, lo que nos permite concluir que hay en ambas una voluntad de relacionar el tema de la migración con su experiencia autobiográfica de movilidad y que ambas son totalmente conscientes de la relación entre los flujos pasados y presentes de emigración e inmigración.

Palabras clave:

poesía irlandesa; poesía gallega; mujer y migración; hogar; otredad

## ≈ Abstract

This article aims to delve into the gendered nature of Mary O'Malley's and Marga do Val's poetry on displacement and migration, so as to assess the female subject's questioning of notions such as home, belonging, mobility and otherness. In spite of these writers' different national and cultural backgrounds, the common history of massive emigration from Galicia and Ireland allows us to hypothesize that their poetry and contemporary reflections on displacement are mutually relevant, as former research on Irish and Galician women's mobility has indicated (Lorenzo-Modia 2016, Acuña 2014). As each writer is analysed, their most significant and germane propositions are identified. This allows us to conclude that there is a will to connect the theme of migration to the writers' autobiographical experience of mobility and that O'Malley and do Val are thoroughly aware of the relation between past and present flows of emigration and immigration.

Keywords:

Irish poetry; Galician poetry; women's migration; home; otherness

In her poem “Daughters of Colony”, the Irish poet Eavan Boland wrote about the predicament of those Anglo-Irish women who, after living in Ireland for generations, had to leave the country and return to Britain, though they were no longer certain of which country “they belonged to” (2005, 247). Boland’s poetry illustrates to perfection the hybrid condition of colons and colonized after centuries of co-habitation: “I am also a daughter of the colony. / I share their broken speech, their other-where-ness” (248). Boland’s coinage, “other-where-ness”, seems to us a very apt rendering of the migrants’ condition and their difficult negotiation of belonging and alienation. Boland’s focus on female migrants’ “distaff side of history” (248) is also highly relevant and serves as an introduction to the present analysis because, although migration is a universal phenomenon, its discourses and practices are gendered, as the poetry of the Irish poet Mary O’Malley and the Galician poet Marga do Val well attests.

Besides their Atlantic situation in Western Europe, Ireland and Galicia share a number of social and cultural features (Palacios and Lojo 2009). Of special bearing on this study is their common history of migration at times of economic crises, in particular throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lorenzo-Modia 2016; Acuña 2014). The present study aims to delve into the gendered nature of Mary O’Malley’s and Marga do Val’s poetry on displacement and migration, so as to assess the female subject’s questioning of notions such as home, belonging, otherness, alienation, mobility and choice. In spite of these writers’ different national and cultural backgrounds, their poetry and contemporary reflections on displacement are, as we would like to argue, mutually relevant and illuminating.

#### Mary O’Malley: Fault Lines, Borders and Difference

Mary O’Malley is the author of eight poetry collections to date, from *A Consideration of Silk* (1990) to her most recent *Playing the Octopus* (2016). Born in a fishing village in Connemara in 1954, she graduated from University College, Galway, lived for a number of years in Lisbon and travelled widely in Europe and America. One of her literary residencies took place on a ship, where she held the post of “Resident at Sea”, a title that aptly suited O’Malley’s perception of herself and of her literary project. Her insights from this voyage on a research ship have been gathered in the poetry collection *Valparaiso* (2012).

For the present article, however, we will centre our attention on her fourth collection, *Asylum Road* (2001), and on its examination of migration and the female traveller’s predicament. The term “asylum” in the title is actually revealing, since it evokes notions of displacement and alienation – the latter understood both as uprootedness and psychological derangement. An important feature of this book is its intertwining of past Irish emigration and present-day immigration in Ireland from Europe and beyond, an outflow and inflow that somehow convey the impression of unceasing circularity. The blurb on the back cover of *Asylum Road* clearly lays out the subject matter of the book:

Mary O’Malley’s fourth collection takes as its focal point the Irish identity and explores our response to recent immigration in the light of our own history. “In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations” calls for an imaginative reappraisal of who we are as

we respond to emigrants who seek asylum in Ireland... (O’Malley 2001).

O’Malley once let us know, in private correspondence, about her interest in Mary Louise Pratt’s views in *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, a book on European exploration writing that defines travel accounts as an “ideological apparatus of empire” that is intended to produce “the rest of the world for European readerships” (1992, i). Other important considerations in Pratt’s analysis for our study have to do with the need to decolonize knowledge, redefine its relation with gender, and assess the ways in which the Other defines us. Also, of relevance both to O’Malley’s and Do Val’s attention to liminal spaces such as borders is Pratt’s definition of contact zones: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (1992, 4).

One salient polarity that both O’Malley and Do Val deconstruct is that of “home” and “abroad”. O’Malley’s *Asylum Road* begins with a quotation from *The Odyssey* that functions as the preliminary epigraph of the first part of the book: “trials and dangers, even so, attended him / even in Ithaca, near those he loved” (2001, 1). Thus, Ithaca and the family home are not devoid of hazards, as the repetition of the adverb “even” suggests, and home does not constitute a safe realm that may function as the opposite to Ulysses’ perilous travels abroad. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (1994, 3) have drawn our attention to the fact that the division between private and public spaces only emerged in the early nineteenth century as part of the cultural project of a European and North-American middle-class. This may explain why, in ancient classical literature, the politics of Ithaca actually assaulted Penelope’s home and disrupted her family bonds.

O’Malley also establishes intertextual relations with a canonical text on women’s travel: Elizabeth Bishop’s poem “Questions of travel” from Bishop’s homonymous book (1965). O’Malley’s poem explicitly signals to Bishop’s text both in the title and in the initial epigraph of her poem “A Question of Travel” when she quotes Bishop’s words: “Continent, city, country, society: / the choice is never wide and never free” (2001, 75). Challenging utopian narratives of women’s liberation through travel, both O’Malley and Bishop examine and unsettle notions such as freedom of mobility, its emancipatory potential and the home-abroad opposition. The enumeration of places – “continent, city, country, society” – might suggest that there is a relatively ample range of possibilities of choice, but the line that follows – “the choice is never wide and never free” – is conclusive in its refutation of that illusion of choice.

Regarding the home-abroad opposition, Bishop poses a question at the very end of her poem – “Should we have stayed at home, / Wherever that may be?” – the second part of which challenges the concept of home and its magnetic attraction (2008, 75).

On her part, O’Malley’s poem “A Question of Travel” deftly puts forward the trope of the fault line, a geological fracture that destabilizes all our certainties about home and identity: “I have lived at the edge of volcanic faults / before. The possibility of fire under my feet / suits me – this narrow crust fools no-one” (2001, 75). Contrary to common readings of the volcano as a

trope of female repression, as in David S. Reynolds' analysis of Emily Dickinson's poetry (2002, 183), we understand O'Malley's volcano motif as the denial of home as a stable and safe place. The alliteration that brings together the nearby words "fault", "fire", "feet" and "fools" draws our attention to the instability of the ground where the speaker stands.

In her poem "After the Funeral, the Departure" (2001, 22), O'Malley presents a very different case of coveted, though unwholesome, rootedness, as she gives voice to a daughter's reluctance to let family attachments go: "to say goodbye lightly would be nice but I do not; / I move on reluctantly, like every daughter of history / Who has left her father's house unwillingly or late" (22). The patriarchal import of the situation – the father's house, the domestic daughter – is intertwined with the emotional dependence expressed in the poignant scene of the funeral: "... I sit with my forehead on the foot / of a sunken grave", "the ga bolga in the heart, the eye, the right breast" (22). As the poem develops, it contradicts the declarative statement of its title – "After the Funeral, the Departure" – because the daughter actually engages in domestic tasks so as to postpone her farewell: "Before I leave I'll dust the lovely perfume flasks and wrap them" (22). Although leaving home seems inevitable – "is a last look allowed?" (22) – the female protagonist resists it in spite of the numerous signals – the geological fracture reappears here – evincing the precariousness and impermanence of home: "They have survived the rock splitting under the house / the walls straining like weightlifters' arms, the noise" (22).

Part II of O'Malley's *Asylum Road* begins with a poem that deftly weaves the themes of national identity, otherness – outside and within us – and emigration. "In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations" – the title of the poem reproduces the initial words of the Easter 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic – states, in a self-assertive, declarative tone, the poetic persona's sense of strangeness, which goes back to, although it does not end with, the British colonization of Ireland: "I was born outside the pale / and am outside it still. I do not fit in" (2001, 25). The motif of the pale – the boundary that used to circumscribe British colonial settlements – becomes, in O'Malley's poem, a clear mark of exclusion imposed by others and deeply interiorized. This reference to the pale contrasts with the one in the poem "The Mother Tongue" in Eavan Boland's *The Lost Land* (1998). Boland's speaker is more ambiguous about her side of the pale, inside or outside, thereby facilitating the underlying thesis of an Irish-English hybrid identity. This recalls the earlier mentioned definition of contact zones and their asymmetries: "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 1992, 4).

The old pale ditch can still be seen  
less than half a mile from my house –  
[...]  
I was born on this side of the Pale.  
I speak with the forked tongue of colony. (1998, 30-31)

O'Malley's notion of exclusion is further complicated with references to the speaker's ethnic – one could even say racial, because of its alleged biological basis – difference, which

distinguishes her from other Irish people: "gypsy blood and skin / darker again than that / of certain fishermen along the coast" (2001, 25).

The poem "In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations" abounds in autobiographical references, some of them to foreign places where the author lived and relished a nomadic or diasporic existence. O'Malley's speaker proclaims, once more, her identification with spaces of an unstable and ephemeral nature – seismic lands, the narrow distance between high and low tides:

which might be why Mediterranean  
coastal regions pulled me  
with their small tides,  
or areas of high seismic activity  
such as Lisbon and San Francisco,  
so much for place. (25)

O'Malley has similarly shown her fascination for places of imprecise location on real maps – although firmly rooted in the intangible cultural heritage of songs and stories. Such is the case of Hy Brasil, which, O'Malley explains, was erased from maps in the 1860s, only to increase its presence in folk culture, and which had been formerly situated in such varied places as the coasts of Ireland, Azores, Madeira and Canada (2016, 234).

Gender also plays a significant role in the poem "In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations", not just because of the autobiographical import of the text, but because gender is explicitly singled out as a mark of social, cultural and linguistic difference in Ireland: "An old man from the Gaeltacht at a wedding / 'Excuse me, miss, I don't speak English so good' / the Miss a branding iron" (2001, 26). The linguistic conflict between Irish and English, which is one of the many effects of colonization, intersects, in this case, with gender difference, as if Irish-speaking rural Ireland were a male bastion in which the alien woman is marked the way cattle would be: "the Miss a branding iron".

Of special relevance is the correlation between past Irish emigration to the United States (the so-called "black Irish") and present-day immigration in Ireland, rendered in parallelistic semantics and syntax: "They left in the darkened holds of coffin ships, / they arrive sealed in the hold of containers" (2001, 26). This circular migratory outflow and inflow also features, as we will see, in Marga do Val's poetry and actually illustrates these two poets' critical consciousness in the face of contemporary massive migration movements. O'Malley concludes her poem with a forthright condemnation of the different treatment accorded to migrants and tourists: "wounded, sometimes dead, between the jigs and the reels / and the Céad Míle Fáilte" (2001, 26), a distinction that will also be the object of Do Val's irony.

### Marga do Val: Portable Home-Bodies across Borders

*A cidade sem roupa ao sol* [The City without Clothes in the Sun]' (2010) is, until present, the only single-authored poetry collection by Marga do Val (Vigo, 1964). Her previous book, *Entre dunas* [Between Sand Dunes] (2000), was co-authored with Paula de Lemos. Do Val, therefore, does not follow the common pattern of precocious publication that has characterized a good

number of her contemporaries and later poets, with whom she nonetheless shares a great interest in gender configurations. Do Val's personal experiences of mobility also match those of writers of her generation, who have travelled for reasons other than their predecessors' emigration and exile (Nogueira 2014). The city of Trier, where she worked as a Galician-language university assistant, is a significant place reference among the cartographies laid out in her literary work. Indeed, her autobiographical essay "A viaxe na procura das palabras"<sup>2</sup> [The Journey in Search for Words] (Nogueira 2014) delves into the relevance of mobility for a writer: "as viaxes sempre teñen algo de descuberta persoal, a domesticación dalgún espazo, que se me prende da vida e co zume das palabras habita o corpo do poema" [travels always entail a personal discovery, a domestication of some space that adheres to my life and, through the juice of words, inhabits the body of the poem] (Nogueira 2014, 163).

The experience of displacement, in its sundry forms, is conspicuous in *A cidade sen roupa ao sol*, a collection that explores identity through memory – family, childhood, cities the poet lived in – and through the process of literary training. In this reconstruction of identity, the relation between displacement and gender is embodied in a number of characters – mostly female – of a nomadic condition. Contrary to the more frequent literary rendering of mobility as an adventure or a long journey, *A cidade sen roupa ao sol* makes of the daily walk to school a travel of initiation. Such is the case of the poem "Escola" [School], in which the poetic voice opposes the "nenas tristes" who "acompañan tristemente / o deber que as espera / futuras damas do anel" [sad girls who sadly abide by / the duty that awaits them / future ladies with a ring] to the "nenas listas" who "camiñan pletóricas as mañáns", "regresan alegres á casa" and "cheiran a flor das laranxeiras" [clever girls who walk exultant in the morning, return home happily and smell of orange blossom] (2010, 38).<sup>3</sup> The image of girls who "alegres e tristes / van multiplicando a táboa" [happy and sad / go through the multiplication table] (2010, 38) on their way to school is also presented as a personal memory in the above-mentioned essay "A viaxe na procura das palabras", in which the author discusses the language learning process in a bilingual context:

Última rapariga da Escola Unitaria de "Niñas" en Mosende, camiño coa carteira e co libro *Amiguítos*, aprendo a ler nos case catro quilómetros da casa á escola e da escola á casa, aprendo que a machada ten outro nome que comeza por *h* e aos chimpos, nos goios que lle nacen como ollos á estrada entre zurcidos de piche, vou cantando a táboa... (Nogueira 2014, 162)

[The last pupil of the "Girls' Unitarian School" in Mosende, I carry my satchel and book *Little Friends*, and learn to read in those almost four kilometres from home to school and from school back home, I learn that the axe has another name that starts with an *h* while, leaping over holes that open like eyes on the road between darns of tar, I go along singing the multiplication table].<sup>4</sup>

In her autobiography for the *Biblioteca Virtual Galega* [Galician Virtual Library] the poet also refers to this daily trip: "Había que camiñar moito para ir á escola, a Torreiros. Moito para ir ao instituto do Porriño" [We had to walk long distances to go

to school in Torreiros. Long distances also to go to secondary school in Porriño] (2002, n. pag). The writer identifies in these early itineraries of a daily domestic nature the origin of her future wanderlust to be rendered in writing:

É deste andar miúdo obrigado e da visión coa nai e o irmán do porto de Vigo, aberto ao mundo, desde onde me nace o formiguiño nos pés, o desexo de sumar camiños e anotar en cadernos ristras de palabras, lugares que atraveso ás veces coas pernas penduradas do carro da vaca da avoa Benedicta, nese mapa construído desde os nomes das terras da familia: o Coratel, A Rotea... (Nogueira 2014, 162)

[It was this infant, mandatory walking, as well as the view, in the company of my mother and brother, of the port of Vigo, open to the world, that made my feet itchy, so I desired to hoard pathways and note down strings of words, places I still sometimes cross with my legs hanging from granny Benedicta's cow cart, on that map put together with the names of our family's land plots: the Coratel, the Rotea...].

Among the biographical spaces featured in Marga do Val's collection, Tui – the place we intuitively identify as that city without clothes in the sun – gains special prominence. The geographical situation of the city summons the motif of the border.<sup>5</sup> The demarcation between Galicia and Portugal with the river Miño and the international bridge between the two, brings on, in the poem "Oferta e demanda" [Supply and demand], the visibilization of a clandestine, itinerant group: the female smugglers in post-war Galicia who became heroines because, on account of their trade with small goods, they managed to ensure "o pan na mesa" [bread on the table].<sup>6</sup>

En Tui  
As trapicheiras  
Da miña infancia  
Heroínas  
De verdade.

Atravesan a ponte  
O azucre moreno  
O café Sical  
E o xabón de pintas  
Cosidos na infancia  
Do forro daquel abrigo. (2010, 54)

[In Tui / The smugglers / Of my childhood / True / Heroines. // They cross the bridge / Brown sugar / Sical coffee / And spotted soap / Sewn in the childhood / Of that coat lining].

The border and, in particular, the international bridge, are also bound to childhood memories now rendered in verse. The Sunday trips to the Portuguese town of Valença do Minho are recalled in the poem "Liberdade" [Liberty],<sup>7</sup> a luminous text with the evocative childhood image of a balloon flying free in no

man's land as a trope of that other reality of transborder contraband:

felices atravesabamos a ponte  
felices pasabamos a fronteira  
felices regresabamos con peras lisboetas  
e no medio da ponte

ceibabamos aquel globo mercado Na praza da  
Liberdade en Valença]

no final da ditadura polo tempo dos caraveis  
xusto no medio da ponte

territorio de ninguén  
abaixo o río  
ascendía o globo  
a trazar no ar esa liña do estraperlo da fronteira.  
(2010, 60)

[Happy we crossed the bridge /happy we crossed  
the frontier /happy we returned with Lisbon pears  
/ and in the middle of the bridge / we freed that  
balloon bought At Liberty Square in Valença /  
towards the end of the dictatorship, around the time  
of carnations /just in the middle of the bridge // no  
man's land /the river below /the balloon going up in  
the air /drawing that line of border contraband].

The configuration of the “eu poético viaxeiro vencellado a Galicia e Europa” [the travelling poetic I, connected to both Galicia and Europe] (Marante 2010, 96) becomes explicit in the long poem “Autorretrato” [Self-portrait], in which the poet compares the dearth of bananas in East Germany with that in her childhood, as there were no bananas in the local shop and she first tasted them on the intercity coach. The comparison between the fruit savoured on the intercity coach and the banana as a symbol of the unification of Germany after the fall of the Berlin wall – another border – bridges two spaces inhabited by the author at different times of her life:

produto exótico no outro lado do muro...  
o outro lado do muro  
como a miña infancia  
celebran dez anos despois unha festa con bananas  
unha festa como na miña infancia  
no coche de liña  
antes de chegar á casa. (2010, 76)

[An exotic product on the other side of the wall... /  
the other side of the wall / like my own childhood /  
they celebrate ten years later a feast with bananas /  
a feast like that in my childhood / on the intercity  
coach / before arriving home].

Both in *A cidade sen roupa ao sol* and “A viaxe na procura das palabras”, the poetic voice is a nomadic subject – with a portable home-body – familiar with the experience of foreignness while nonetheless trying to forge a linguistic and poetic identity:

habitei o territorio das fronteiras e a estranxeiría que  
se instala para sempre na casa-corpo portátil, coa que  
regreso á miña propia patria para afirmar consciente  
de que a patria é a lingua, mentres me nace e me crece  
dentro o meu alemán “Über den Wolken” e mordo  
cada palabra como morotes dos camiños e invento  
“Wunderlecker” (Nogueira 2014, 163-4).

[I have dwelt in the space of frontiers and foreignness  
which settles in the portable home-body for ever, and  
I thereby return to my own land to consciously declare  
that the homeland is the language, while German is  
conceived and grows inside me “Über den Wolken” and  
I bite each word as if it were a wild strawberry and I  
make up “Wunderlecker”].

The identification of homeland and language appears again at the end of “Autorretrato”, in lines that aptly illustrate the nomadic identity consciously woven by the poet. This time, apart from taking up other domestic – and paradoxically nomadic – symbols used throughout the collection, Do Val borrows a line from “U...ju juuu... (Poema futurista)” [U...ju juuu... (Futurist poem)] (1920), a cosmopolitan poem by Vicente Risco which was actually one of the earliest avant-garde texts in Galicia:

Eu son de Vigo

como a máquina de coser Refrey.  
Dou voltas polo mundo.

Son o meu propio vagón de equipaxe.

O meu barco.

Nacín coa lúa crecente e non había blues  
non nacín en London

Vigo fita os rañaceos de Nova York<sup>8</sup>  
non falo inglés

*a patria é a lingua.* (2010, 79)

[I am from Vigo // like the Refrey sewing machine. /  
I go around the world. / I am my own luggage wagon.  
/ My ship. / I was born with a rising moon and there  
were no blues / I was not born in London / Vigo  
stares at the skyscrapers in New York / I don't speak  
English // the homeland is the language].

Emigration is a central topic in *A cidade sen roupa ao sol* – as it certainly is in Galician literary tradition since the times of Rosalía de Castro – and its intersection with gender requires special attention. Emigration is introduced symbolically in Do Val's book through the figuration of the princess in the tower whose “monecas viñeránlle nun baúl desde Caracas / herdadas” [dolls had arrived from Caracas in a trunk / inherited] (2010, 19). The city of Caracas, as a frequent destination of Galician emigration, is also mentioned in Do Val's later text “A viaxe na procura das palabras”, in which the author refers to her mother's stay in Venezuela, where she had emigrated with her Refrey sewing machine. The following excerpt

also identifies the role of the port of Vigo in Galician emigration: “O meu primeiro soldo profesional gasteino nunha viaxe a Venezuela, para habitar a emoción da paisaxe herdada, onde viaxou a máquina de coser Refrey e de onde regresou a Vigo” [I spent my first salary on a journey to Venezuela so as to inhabit the emotion of the inherited landscape. That was the destination of the Refrey sewing machine and the place where it came from on its way back to Vigo] (Nogueira 2014, 163). The already mentioned sewing machine that goes “around the world” anchors the writer’s identity to a lineage of seamstresses who, very much like the female smugglers mentioned earlier, know the experience of mobility and transnationality:

Crecín coa cantiga do pé da máquina e cría sentir os risos e os falares da nai, da tía Beatriz e das súas clientas, moitas delas bailarinas cubanas que afirmaban ter dado cartos para a Revolución. As fotos da viaxe de ida e volta en barco ficaron nos vestidos que nai poñía en cada desembarco: Santo Domingo, A Habana, Miami, Curaçao, Porto Rico... gardados no baúl. Anos máis tarde na Habana volvín retratarme neses mesmos lugares. (Nogueira 2014, 17)

[I grew up with the tune of the machine pedal and thought I could hear the laughter and talk of my mother, aunt Beatriz and their clients, many of them Cuban dancers who claimed they had given money to the Revolution. The photographs of the two-way voyage remained in the dresses that my mother wore for each landing: Santo Domingo, Havana, Miami, Curaçao, Puerto Rico... kept in the trunk. Years later in Havana I had my picture taken in those same places].

Emigration, past and present, is also introduced from a very critical perspective in references to a variety of places and circumstances:

Subían ao tren na estación de Guillarei  
camiño de Suíza                    elas tamén  
Sen resignación                    sen Fe  
Volvían vinte e un días no verán  
O tren que me leva pola beira do Miño<sup>9</sup>  
Sempre de largo pola estación de Caldelas  
Sen Fe  
Miña señora de Ferro<sup>10</sup>  
Pola ponte vella até Valença  
Coma antes aínda agora. (2010, 40)

[They would get on the train at the Guillarei station / on their way to Switzerland                    the women too // Without resignation                    without Faith // They would come back for a twenty one-day visit during the summer // The train that carries me along the bank of the Miño / never stops at the Caldelas station // Without Faith // My Lady of Iron // Past the old bridge towards Valença / like then, still today].

The poem insists on the centrality of the river Miño in the writer’s personal cartography, as well as on the emblematic international bridge, which becomes here a symbol of borderlessness and fluent communication between both countries. The author referred to this same railway in the article “Desde a beira do Miño co tren” [From the Bank of the Miño on the Train] in which she proposes a “viaxe, unha sinxela e pequeniña, profunda e arredor de Nós, desde a estación de Tui até a de Valença, por esa ponte de ferro de máis de cento vintecinco anos” [a journey, simple, short, deep into and around us, from the Tui station to Valença, across that iron bridge of over one hundred and twenty-five years of age] (Do Val 2013, web). In this text there is also an allusion to the particular circumstances of migrant women: “Pensei nalgunha mociña emigrante que con vinte e dous anos subía ao tren no seu particular maio do 68 para chegar a Basel e traballar na limpeza dalgún hospital, desde aquí mentres o seu mundo se esfarelaba co troupelear do tren, outro lle nacía nas mans” [I thought of a young emigrant woman who, at the age of twenty-two, got on the train for her personal May 68 so as to reach Basel and work there cleaning a hospital; from here, as her world shattered with the clatter of the train, a new one blossomed in her hands] (Do Val 2013, web).

On other occasions, the strangers in the poems are immigrant women recently arrived in Galicia: the “camareira cubana [que] levará na última bandexa / esperanza / esa palabra” (2010, 42) [the Cuban waitress (who) will carry on the last tray / hope / that word] or the Dominican cleaner hired “por caridade” [out of charity]. The poem entitled “Emigración” [Emigration] elaborates on the feeling of uprootedness: “pregúntanche como é o teu país e non sabes que dicir”, “procuras a tribo / e achas tantas tribos como liñas que se escriben nas mans” [Asked about your country, you don’t know what to answer, you search for the tribe / and find as many tribes as lines on your palms] (2010, 49). The poem contrasts the experience of migration with other types of congenial mobility such as tourism or with imperialistic exploration: “na túa equipaxe non vai roupa de turista / nunca houbo sextantes / nin cronómetros para a medición do mundo” [no tourist clothes in your luggage / no sextants ever / nor chronometres to measure the world] (2010, 49). There is special emphasis on the paradoxical tension between identity loss and quest: “es o oco que procuras / mentres perdes o eco / desa voz familiar que te reclama” [You are the void that you explore / while you lose the echo / of that familiar voice that claims you] (2010, 49). The multiple facets of emigration are also portrayed in the poem “Progreso” [Progress] with reference to the people remaining and waiting in the homeland – a theme already present in the Rosalía de Castro’s section “Das viudas dos vivos e dos mortos” [On the widows of the living and the dead] in *Follas Novas* (1880) – as well as to the notion of progress as the objective of emigration – here again to Caracas:

... de cando en vez chegaban cartas  
para explicar o abandono.  
[...]

Logo o progreso viaxou en barco e chegou na lavadora manual desde Caracas. (Do Val 2010, 47).

[...letters arrived occasionally / to explain the desertion. (...) Then progress travelled on ship and brought the manual washing machine from Caracas]

Another type of mobility dealt with in this collection refers to the experience of foreignness and exile, a subject dealt with in the poem “Exilio” [Exile]. This text is written in honour of Mariví Villaverde, a woman forced to seek asylum outside Galicia at various moments of her life. The poem inscribes uprootedness in the “esfuerzo imposible de pronunciar cada palabra / dunha lingua estraña / con esa patria imposible” [impossible effort to pronounce each word / of a strange language / with that impossible homeland] (2010, 50) and concludes by stating the impossibility of ever returning home: “Por iso o regreso é imposible / e desde o silencio non hai outra morada / o interior da cicatriz / a condena eterna do exilio” [Return is therefore impossible / and from silence there is no other abode / the inside of the scar / the eternal punishment of exile] (2010, 50).

There is a different view of displacement in the poem “Miña terra” [My Land], written in the memory of Lois Tobío (1906-2003). In this case, the experience of mobility does not seem restricted to exile but includes other travels for academic and professional purposes due to his role as a diplomat. His position as a translator is important for us to understand the following lines on nomadic identities:

Arte de nomear as cousas máis queridas  
con que transitar os espazos  
corpo  
casa no corpo  
espazo portátil. (2010, 51)

[Art of naming the most cherished things / for the  
wayfarer / body / home in the body / portable space]

Finally, the book also alludes to the particular self-imposed exile of a group of women who live “exiladas da cidade” [exiled from the city] (2010, 69) making fish-shaped almond cakes. The expansion of the concept of exile to comprise confinement evinces the writer’s in-depth exploration of the notions of displacement and gender.

By means of a series of experiences, many of them autobiographical, embodied in female characters (the princess who wants to write, smugglers, migrants, the girl who crosses the international bridge) *A cidade sen roupa ao sol* represents identities in transit, made from scraps, from images projected on others. These identities are designated by that “portable home-body” whose place of return is the border itself. Do Val’s concluding remarks in her autobiographical note illustrate this: “E houbo un regreso a Tui, onde o Miño lembra á Mosela. Onde a fronteira existe. Regresar para sempre partir” [and there was a return to Tui, where the Miño recalls the Mosel. Where the border exists. To return is always to depart] (2002, web). The same idea of circular and recurrent travel as the backbone of identity appears again at two significant moments of her text “A viaxe na procura das palabras”. First when the writer relates her travel to Germany, to work as a teaching assistant, with a childhood experience: “Tiña sete anos e no libro de lectura da escola, *Senda*, un pequeno texto sobre o anel dos Nibelungos, e dixen que iría de grande a Alemaña, grande fun e volvíñ nacer, na súa lingua.” [I was seven and, in the school reading book, *Senda*, there was a short text about the ring of the Nibelungs, and I said that I would go to Germany when old, and old I went and was reborn, in their language] (Nogueira 2014, 17). The second moment shows the same bond language-homeland

(of affects) and takes place when the author writes on a ship – a space of special significance in both Do Val’s and O’Malley’s work – about her second trip to Ethiopia for the adoption of her child:

Agora, mentres escribo desde o Groenland, un barco en Estrasburgo, sei que a segunda viaxe a Etiopía, viaxe á maternidade, tamén vai marcar a miña vida, e a volta de Addis Abeba, xa capital do meu mapa dos afectos, constato que a viaxe acaba de empezar, mentres renazo noutra vida que se vai poboando de palabras en amhárico: Buna, Mus, Taragaga, Taragagui... Tamiru. (Nogueira 2014, 18)

[Now, while I write on the Groenland, a ship in Strasbourg, I know that the second travel to Ethiopia, a travel to motherhood, will also mark my life, and on returning from Addis Abeba, already a capital in my map of affects, I confirm that the travel has just begun while I am reborn into another life with words in Amharic: Buna, Mus, Taragaga, Taragagui... Tamiru]

## Conclusions

A parallel reading of Mary O’Malley’s *Asylum Road* and Marga do Val’s *A cidade sen roupa ao sol* evinces these writers’ will to connect the theme of migration to their autobiographical experience of mobility and shows their awareness of the relation between past and present flows of emigration and immigration. Our analysis has identified the mutual relevance of their reflections: their destabilization of notions such as home, foreignness and free mobility; their perspicacious intertwining of migratory outflows and inflows, departures and returns; their critical stance on the different perception of tourism and migration; their focus on liminal spaces where the border is home, a frontier which entails being on both shores at once (Anzaldúa 1987, 78) in spite of old-time efforts to make the border a hostile divide between insiders and outsiders. Both writers reflect on the gendered nature of displacement and on their own difference, as they come to terms with the Other’s difference.

## Works Cited

ACUÑA, Ana, ed. 2014. *Letras nómades. Experiencias da mobilidade feminina na literatura galega*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.

ANZALDÚA, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands / La Frontera*. San Francisco: Spinsters / Aunt Lute Books.

BERNÁRDEZ, Carlos L. 1994. *A emoción da terra. Poesía de Vicente Risco*. A Coruña: Espiral Maior.

BISHOP, Elizabeth. 2008. “Questions of Travel.” In *Elizabeth Bishop. Poems, Prose, and Letters*, 74–75. New York: The Library of America.

BLUNT, Alison and Gillian Rose, eds. 1994. *Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York: The Guilford Press.

BOLAND, Eavan. 1998. "The Mother Tongue". In *The Lost Land*, 30–1. Manchester: Carcanet.

———. 2005. "Daughters of Colony". In *New Collected Poems*, 247–8. Manchester: Carcanet.

DE LEMOS, Paula, and Marga do Val. 2000. *Entre dunas*. A Coruña: Espiral Maior.

DO VAL, Marga. 2002. "Autobiografía". Marga Romero. *Biblioteca Virtual Galega*. Accessed August 15, 2019. [http://bvg.udc.es/ficha\\_autor.jsp?id=Mardo+Va&alias=Marga+Romero](http://bvg.udc.es/ficha_autor.jsp?id=Mardo+Va&alias=Marga+Romero)

———. 2010. *A cidade sen roupa ao sol*. A Coruña: Espiral Maior.

———. 2013. "Desde a beira do Miño co tren". *Sermos Galiza*, July 7.

GARCÍA MAÑÁ, Luís Manuel. 1993. *Miño, ¿existiu unha fronteira?: apuntes históricos, xurídicos e sociolóxicos*. Vigo: Galaxia.

LORENZO-MODIA, María Jesús, ed. 2016. *Ex-sistere. Women's Mobility in Contemporary Irish, Welsh and Galician Literatures*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

MARANTE, Antía. 2010. "Maqueta a escala de lembranzas íntimas". *Grial* 189: 96–97.

NOGUEIRA, María Xesús. 2014. "Apuntamentos nómades. Viaxe e literatura nas escritoras galegas". In *Letras nómades. Experiencias da mobilidade feminina na literatura galega*, edited by Ana Acuña, 153–77. Berlin: Frank & Timme.

O'MALLEY, Mary. 1990. *A Consideration of Silk*. County Clare: Salmon Publishing.

———. 2001. *Asylum Road*. Cliffs of Moher: Salmon Poetry.

———. 2012. *Valparaiso*. Manchester: Carcanet.

———. 2016. *Playing the Octopus*. Manchester: Carcanet.

———. 2016. "Under Your Keel – The Real Map of Ireland". *Estudios Irlandeses* 11: 234–5.

PALACIOS, Manuela, and Laura Lojo, eds. 2009. *Writing Bonds. Irish and Galician Contemporary Women Poets*. Bern: Peter Lang.

PRATT, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

REYNOLDS, David S. 2002. "Emily Dickinson and Popular Culture." In *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, edited by Wendy Martin, 167–90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1 All translations from Galician into English are by the authors of this article.

2 The essay "A viaxe na procura das palabras" also provides a metaliterary reflection, as Do Val – alongside a few other contemporary Galician women writers – is asked to write there on the impact of travels on her work (Nogueira 2014). We would like to argue that her essay can be read as a paratext of her poetry collection *A cidade sen roupa ao sol*.

3 The line "smell of orange blossom" alludes to the Portuguese song "Senhora do Almortão" by José Afonso.

4 In the girl's mother tongue, Galician, the word for axe is "machada", while in Spanish, the language used at school, the word for axe is "hacha".

5 The river Miño marks the frontier between Galicia and Portugal and the city of Tui is precisely on that border, next to the Portuguese city of Valença. This frontier was effective until 1992, the year when the treaty of free movement of European Union citizens came into effect.

6 The poem alludes to the Revolução dos Cravos [Carnation Revolution], which brought about the end of Salazar's dictatorship and restored democracy in Portugal.

7 "A Cruña fita as brétemas d'Irlanda / Vigo os raña-ceos de Nova York" [Corunna fixes its eyes on Ireland's mists / Vigo does so on the skyscrapers of New York] (Bernárdez 1994, 38).

8 "O tren que me leva pola beira do Miño" is the chorus of a well-known song by Andrés Dobarro.

9 The poetic voice dialogues with the expression "Nosa Señora de Ferro" [Our Lady of Iron] that the Galician writer Manuel Curros Enríquez (1851–1908) had used to refer to a locomotive in "A chegada a Ourense da primeira locomotora" [The Arrival at Ourense of the First Locomotive] where he claims progress as the religion of modern times.

This study has been completed as part of the research projects MINECO-FEDER FEM2015-66937-P, PGC2018-093545-B-I00 MCIU/ AEI/ FEDER-UE, and Xunta de Galicia GRC EDC431C 2019/01, and the Research network "Rede de Lingua e Literatura Inglesa e Identidade III", (<http://Rede-Ing-III.eu>) (ED431D2017/17), Xunta de Galicia / ERDF-UE, which are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

Título:

Dislocación y género: "Asylum Road" de Mary O'Malley's y "A cidade sen roupa ao sol" de Marga do Val

Contact:

manuela.palacios@usc.es