Gender and Well-Being
Interactions between Work, Family and Public Policies

COST ACTION A 34

Second Symposium:

The Transmission of Well-Being: Marriage Strategies and Inheritance Systems in Europe (17th-20th Centuries)

25th -28th April 2007

University of Minho
Guimarães-Portugal

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Being well or survive? Heirs in North-Western Spain, 18th-19th centuries

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Summary

This study looks at the different situations of inheritors of both sexes of rural families in the territory of Galicia, Spain, characterized by a traditional agrarian economy, the demographics of overpopulation, the intense emigration, and a homogenous social system in which the key is the survival of the families, not an improvement in living conditions.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Galicia lived through a period of economic stagnation – after strong growth in the 17th century– due to agricultural sclerosis and to overpopulation, the result of which was an intense emigration from Spain. There was no other solution in this territory characterized by the absence of an urban and modern economy, and by the predominance of traditional agriculture, complemented by the textile proto-industry and by fishing. The small size of the agricultural plantations and their subdivision in each generation provoked a process of parcelization of the properties, to the point that they seemed to be nonviable. Nevertheless, the families endured thanks to a foundation of life based in strict survival and this explains at the same time that because the land that they worked was their own property or they had it in regime of long uso fructo (the right to the use) and they had cattle and, tools and equipment, and because the rural communities had ample space in the mountain or in the land dedicated to the communal operations.

The survival of the system is based in the family and the collective strategies designed to conserve the patrimony of the families within a very homogenous society at the levels of a
modest life, which acted to slow down the changes that, in benefit of the improvement of the conditions of some, would not benefit the collective. The family strategies looked to assure the existence of the domestic group even at the cost of sacrificing one or several of its components: the wellbeing of some and of others cannot be measured in the same terms as in other peninsular territories with different natural conditions, but that valued in itself the fact of survival with minimums not very demanding but sufficient, as, for example, to satisfy the basic alimentation per capita, avoid debt, to have the necessary but not spend on the superfluous, assure care at the aged, etc.

The formulas for the transmission of inheritance were fundamental in these strategies. The law of Castille reigned in Galicia, which did not change between 1505 and 1889: they were obliged to give what was legitimate to each child, with no distinction as to sex, and recognized the possibility to give more to one son or to one daughter, as well as the practice of the dowry – which was not obligatory. Within this frame, that allowed for an ample range of action, in Galicia there were two different methods that used different formulas in order to provide a style of life and the survival of the inheritors and of the non-inheritors, formulas that followed a coherent logic, although, for example, in neighbouring Asturias, these functioned in an inverse fashion and continued to be coherent.

**Male and female inheritors**

In Galicia, due to emigration, women of working age were the majority – 350,123 women from 16 to 50 years of age as opposed to 303,972 men in 1787 and compared to 409,905 in 1860, which decisively influenced the division of work and of inheritance, now that in general the men benefited more than the women. This did not occur where males were scarce: the sex was not a determining factor in the division of the inheritance. What was a determining factor
was the relationship between the size of the family and the dimensions of the patrimony to be divided, from that we deduce the capacity of survival of the inheritors: how was inheritance to be divided and among how many persons were the essential questions (Table 1).

In five different zones, it is observed that: a) more than 13–15% of the families did not have children to whom to leave an inheritance and they would have had to select the inheritors from among other families; b) between 23.2% and 30% only had one child, a son or a daughter, and did not have to select an inheritor; c) there was more than one inheritor possible in less than half of the homes in the more populated zones as well as in small families, and in two thirds of the homes in the less populated areas and in large families, d) only one third had to choose between a man or a woman in the first case and 40% in the second case. The scarce number of children born in matrimony – and the low rate of illegitimacy – was the cause of this situation. The result was that an important number of children were not subject to the process of selection that occurred with every generation, but that did not convert those children into privileged persons, nor did it assure them a particular style of life, as it was most probable that what was inherited was all or part of a small agrarian holding (Table 2).

A scarcity of land and of livestock was the characteristic that generally applied to the poor rural family that had to search for complementary resources or go into debt. Poverty was a homogeneous factor in the population and only a minority was free of extreme concerns, although they were not “accommodated” people. How many families made up this minority? That is difficult to calculate because the fiscal information and the size and characteristics of the agricultural property were not conclusive data:

In the region of Salnés, which was situated in the rich and overpopulated western coast (±100 inhabitants/km²), the “accommodated” agrarians made up only 11.3% of the total in
1753; they owned their livestock, their equipment, and approximately 3 to 5 hectares of land – 22.8% was owned outright and the rest was enfiteusis (rent of the land on a perpetual basis) – of which 40% was able to be cultivated and was highly productive (Pérez García 1979). In that model, the families were small (-4 members) and there was a large number if homes of single people (20%). Nearby in Covelo, in a zone less populated (51.2 persons/km²), there was little cultivated land (16.6%) and it was not very productive. Single person homes were few in number (6.6%) and, on the contrary, there were many homes with 6 or more members (24.1%): the average family had 4.2 members, it disposed of 2.18 hectares of land and of 19.5 head of livestock, but only about 15.8% of the total was in this situation. A family with 5 or more members did not possess an average of 0.138 hectares. That is to say that in the larger families, the available land was 40% less than that of families with 4 members, and moreover, the larger the families were, the more overloaded they were with children and elderly. What two very different districts had in common was that the communal mountain was not cultivated and, although it served for firewood or lumber as well as for grazing for the livestock, its production did not compensate the deficit in the operations. The use of the mountain was open to all of the neighbours and the use was not inherited, so that the rural community did not put limits to the notion of creating new families that would be able to use it.

In the mountainous northwest, where the cultivated land made up from 14 to 21% of the surface and the density of population was only 14.2 person/km², the average holding was 1.22 hectares – 7.83 if one includes the mountain – but 86% of the holdings in Queixiero, 72.8% in Moeche or 58.5% in Cambas did not reach this size. The minority of country people who were more or less ensured of survival but were by no means wealthy was very different, although neither larger nor more richer than in the preceding case: in Cambas, 14.6% possessed holdings of 53.5 hectares and controlled 53.8% of the land and 71% of the
mountain. In other villages, it was 10.4% of the population and they held 11.86 hectares, but in those cases only 6.2% of the land could be cultivated and the main crop was rye, which meant that subsistence depended to a large extent on the use made of the mountain, which they cultivated with cereals every 15, 24, or 36 years, that gave wood and combustible material and grazing for the livestock, up to the point that it contributed a third of family incomes. The rights to the use of the mountain were reserved for groups of persons with a family relationship and these rights were transferred by inheritance. In this system, a typical family had 4.6 members; there were few homes of single persons (2 to 4%, except in Moeche which had 11.1%); but there were many with 6 or more members (30%). The size of the land holding and the number of livestock available to the family was greater when the family was larger, although the ideal disposition corresponded to families with 3 or 4 members, due to the fact that larger families were loaded with more children and old people that contributed little effort/work. The “accommodated” minority was in reality who controlled more hectares of mountain that was able to be cultivated and in which they could feed their livestock (Table 3).

In summary, inheritance to be received is not a unique concept nor is that of the sex of the inheritor the most decisive when selecting to whom or how much, but how and when. This is a decision that the parents make having all of the information available and establishing some provisions, whether they were effective or not.

1. Masculine trajectories

The presence of a large number of men of the same age, in the place and at the same time was a determining factor for the men of the population; they had to fight over the same nuptial and labour markets in a non-elastic economy. Given that in Galicia the birth rate for married couples was low, there was a large number of young men who were only children or heads of
household: in the military levy of 1762, 21.4% of men between 18 and 40 years of age were only children and 5.6% were heads of households (27% in total); 38.2% were in the southwest and 35.9% were in Cantabria. Of course, their lives were not resolved, but they had little competition. On the contrary, they made up only 16% in interior Galicia, an area with large families where the competition was much greater. This pattern reproduced the distribution of family models and the transmission of inheritance (Map 1).

1.1. The poor second-born

In the less wealthy and in the poor rural families, second-born children had few options with which to prosper. In interior Galicia, a territory less populated than the rest, families were large – 5.28 persons in 1753 – and there were many extended nuclear families (31.1%) and some multiple families (7.2%). The agricultural holdings were much larger than the Galician average, they were dedicated to rye, and later, to the potato as well. A periodic cultivation of the mountain was practiced by cutting and clearing in order to obtain more cereal. The control of the local community was very strong concerning this patrimony and many obstacles were erected regarding the establishment of new homes. In this poor economy, the system of inheritance gave priority to the first-born male, who married in the home: they also used the practice of the mejora which in the bestowing of additional portion added to the legitimate portion; the mejora is equivalent to and extra one-third plus and additional one-fifth over and above the legitimate portion. There was a predominant/preference of the mejora (65.9%) in favour of one male child (63.7%) or, less, of female children (13.7%) and the rest to various children or grandchildren. The mejora was conceded to the eldest male child by the parents at the moment that the child married, imposing upon him to live with them and to care for them, to take charge of the agricultural production, to pay the debts and the taxes, to maintain his siblings at home respecting their legitimacy and the dowry of his sisters, to do all
of this attempting to maintain an integral patrimony (Sobrado 2001). The second-born had few options: some married inheritors in other families, others became clerics, and the majority remained single (definitive male celibacy of 18.2% in 1787). Given that were few non-agrarian options for work, in theory, the only solution to become independent was to leave home; but they were necessary for work in the family fields and in the cutting and clearing to the effect that they were retained as non-paid workers. Now, the single-culture of rye left a labour vacuum at periods during the agricultural year and, during those months, young single persons went to Castille or to Madrid to work. It was different with the single men from western Galicia, the single men that left Galicia did not marry in the places to which they travelled nor did they go to places very far away, rather they returned to the family house to help their brothers who were heads of household, and who never emigrated. Their single status and their dependence put these young men at risk to be recruited by the military, but the number of those who left the area in order to avoid military service was much smaller than in eastern Galicia, which explains why they had nothing to lose, or why their importance in the system was decisive in order to sustain the family.

In 1787, 53% of the Galician population lived in very populated areas composed of nuclear families (86.7%) and small families (3.9 persons), with low birth rates and few children. They married late and there was a high level of celibacy in the community. The agricultural properties were small and intensive cultivation was dominated by corn. The division of the inheritance practiced a method somewhat unbalanced due to the fact that the larger share was given in favour of one son or one daughter. The other children who did not receive a mejora were able to establish a new home and create a family with the wealth of their legitimate part of the inheritance, as the communities did not impose limitations. But, given the small size of the majority of the agricultural land, it was necessary to look for other resources, working in
complementary activities – which were very abundant – or emigrating, or both things at the same time. This affected the second-born children as well as the inheritors or the husbands of female inheritors, because only a small minority was safe from poverty. Emigration was a structural element, predominated by the style of temporary and/or multi-annual stays in Castille, Andalucia, and Portugal. More and more, however, definitive emigration with an American destination, was more important (Rey Castelao 1994).

The families which recurred to complementary activities and to emigration were always those of larger size than the others. If the emigration was temporary it was useful because the emigrant could obtain resources and not consume food products of the family home and, if it was permanent, it served to eliminate an inheritor. Within this general pattern of comportment, there were differences between the sexes, within the male sex, and between some men and others. For example, in Pontevedra in 1719 (Sanz González 1994), in a strongly migratory context, one part of the emigrants were single persons less than 24 years of age (pre-matrimonial migration) and the other part were married men between 34 and 40 years of age. The circumstances of the emigrants were also different depending on the activities of the families: a) in rural homes (70.5% of the absentees), singles made up 52.5% of the emigrants, of those, 52.7% were first-born, 30.1% were second-born, 12.9% were third-born, etc.; b) in the homes of artisans, (7.8% of the homes with absentees), 58.9% of the emigrants were single, 43.5% were second-born, 17.4% were third-born, and only 26% were first-born sons, among day workers and seamen. (20.9% of the families with emigrants), only 19.2% of the emigrants were single, of which 80% were first-born, 10% were second-born, etc. That is to say, in rural families, the married men – heads of household or not, constituted the most numerous group of emigrants, but in those families with other activities, young

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1 Of the absentees between 16 and 24 years, 85% were single; of those from 24-39, only 35% were single.
single men emigrated. The different responsibilities of work in situ is what explains these two different patterns and the selection of who should emigrate. Many of the singles opted to marry in their places of destination, but in western Galicia there was a strong tendency to post-marital emigration: with the money obtained, the small patrimony composed of the legitimate portion that pertained to the new husband and wife was reinforced, and that system was repeated in each generation. The fear of military recruitment acted as an important factor in emigration, above all since the year 1837, when military service was general and obligatory: in the lists of the Marines the absentees accounted for more than 24% of the youth in 1719 and 31.2% in 1758-59, and in the levy of 1762 of the Army, 17.7%; these absentee numbers reveal that, different from the singles in interior Galicia, military service was considered to be prejudicial as they had expectations to be independent and to live from their legitimate portion, from complementary activities, and from temporary emigration.

The emigration of married men was habitual in all of western Galicia and given that, for them it was essential to return home with money; they did not emigrate to America. The married men were very young in the areas that practiced early matrimony and they emigrated in the first phase of family life, but this situation was not the most habitual: in 1719, in the previous example form Pontevedra, only 14.9% of those between 16 and 25 years of age were married, and the normal age was more than 25. Among the country people, 35.8% of emigrants were heads of household and 11.5% were married dependents, that is, sons or sons-in-law of other heads of household--; 35.8% and 5.1% among artisans and 75.9% and 4.8% among labourers and seamen. In interior Galicia, married men did not emigrate; they were the stable element of the family.
1.2. The cadets of accommodated rural families

In Galicia there were few professional options in administration, the military, commerce or industry for this sector. Things being so, the clergy was the most secure and least costly destination for rural families that needed to place their second-born children. But in the Church as well it was difficult to enter into the Cistern or the Benedictine monasteries, occupied by foreign monks and by a Galician minority that was urban (35%) in the 18th century. It was more difficult to enter into the monasteries of the clergy that pertained to a cathedral which were also occupied by foreigners or by accommodated urban persons. With those conditions in mind, the lower secular clergy and the mendicant religious orders were the available options for these men.

In 1753 Galicia had 72 masculine convents in which lived 3,173 friars, 3,074 in 1787, 2,811 in 1797...there was a decrease that was due to the crisis of the regular clergy that would end with their suppression in 1833. In order to be a friar, one needed only to have the minimum age (12 to 15 years) and know how to read and to write, for which the rural families with no real concerns of survival in western Galicia had an increasing interest in that their second-born sons entered the convent. In that way, an inheritor would be eliminated and social prestige would be obtained, while they assured the existence of the second-born as well as liberating him from the risk of the military. The offer of the convents was not elastic; it was limited in its capacity to accept new members and its economy, dependent upon the economic evolution of the territory. In fact, the number of monks and friars in the monasteries increased less than the Galician population – between 1591 and 1753, there were 96% as compared to 106%. Moreover, the rural groups had to compete with the urbanites, also interested in this social solution for the cadets. But in the measure that the urbanites were looking for other options, the rural men became more and more numerous in the convents – for example, they
made up 73.8% of the Franciscans between 1710 and 1769 and 81.3% after 1770– (Rey Castelao 1996).

The economically substantial rural families who were not struggling to survive were more interested in having their sons enter in the secular clergy, whose growth, in reality, had no limits. In fact, between 1591 and 1753, the number of ecclesiastics grew 178% although later growth was slower. In 1753 there were 8,532 and in 1797, there were 9,121. In 1753, there was one cleric for every 40 families, a high number, that was even greater in interior Galicia (in Lugo, there was one for every 27 families). Given that there were 3,500 parishes, only a part of the clergy (36.6% in 1797) had a parish and lived by his own means. The majority had been ordained with a title of patrimony or chaplain, they did not have a clerical post and they lived with their families and from the income of them and from performing civil activities. The distribution of the clergy reflects the socioeconomic characteristics of the different zones (Map 2). They were abundant in interior Galicia, in part due to the abundance of hidalgos (16.6%) and above all as a consequence of the large family model typical in the area, as well as to an important number of extended nuclear families and of an inheritance practice that favoured the eldest son, which in turn limited the possibility to inherit and to marry of the second-born children (18.5% male celibacy). The solution for some of them was to enter the clergy by way of the constitution of patrimony. The size of the family properties was much larger than in western Galicia and that allowed a family to officially commit a part of their income to support the living expenses of the new cleric, who was exempt of military service. Those funds remained free from taxation, they were managed by the family and, later, the inheritors for the family trunk. In such a way, nothing was lost, rather social prestige was gained and an inheritor was removed, although he could not marry nor live by his own means.
In western Galicia, the clergy was much less abundant: in the coastal zones and in the valleys dedicated to wine production, where there were fewer noblemen (1.6%), and nuclear families dominated. There were a large number of only children and the division of the inheritance was less unequal. The young men who entered the clergy pertained to a small minority. For example in the area of the Lower Miño (river), an area with 111 inhabitants/km$^2$ in 1753 and a complex agrarian economy based in wine and corn. A study of 300 cases (Pérez García 1999) revealed that the area of compromised surface was 2.60 hectares per patrimony in 1736 to 1774, 2.43 hectares in 1775 to 1799, 1.74 hectares in 1800 to 1824, and 1.61 in 1825 to 1859, which identified them as sons of the CAMPESINO FUERTE in a territory where the average holding was less than a hectare. The 38% reduction between 1736 and 1859 provides information regarding the social descent of the new clergy.

In western Galicia as in the interior, the rhythm of entry into the clergy continued to grow until 1780 when it began to fall ceaselessly. The society and the political institutions felt a sense of ecclesiastic saturation and they took various measures to slow the growth. They reduced the fiscal privileges of the wealth of the ecclesiastics and the exclusion from the military of the minor-aged clergy. At the same time, the progressive difficulties related to establishing patrimonies and chaplains, the appearance and development of new careers and civil professional options, and the influence of the currents of thought that detracted from the attractiveness of a clerical career.

Entrance into the clergy supposed a previous investment in education, and the best situated youth were those with studies, which left the rural people in a less competitive situation. In 1737, in 900 villages within the diocese of Santiago de Compostela in western Galicia, there were students in 1.11% of the houses, 1.05% in 1740, and 1.38% in 1753. This pattern was
homogenous, in general, but it was higher in areas of close proximity to urban areas, which had centres of education, and in the towns where there were tutors. In 1787, after the close of the Jesuit high schools in 1767, there were less than 150 students per 10,000 inhabitants in Galicia, which was below the Spanish average of 182\(^2\). In the province of Pontevedra, they made up 0.29\% of the population, 0.27\% in La Coruña, 0.34\% in Ourense, and 0.40\% in Lugo. That is to say, the percentage was higher where there was a high number of second sons and a high number of noblemen.

Based on a study of the dioceses of Santiago, we know some important information about the students:

a) In the 18\(^{th}\) century, the average age of the students was 19.4 years of age, although the coefficient of dispersion is very elevated. Moreover, there were some “students” in name only and they were dedicated to farming or to jobs with a certain qualification, for example, construction, measurement of territory, negotiation of livestock in the markets, etc. There were minor clerics who either had not wanted to or had not been able to progress as ecclesiastics. In fact, the majority had only non-university studies, which meant that their destination could only be the clergy, although they searched increasingly for civil activities in which to employ themselves.

b) There was an average of 4.1 siblings and they occupied secondary positions in a successive order; only 3\% were only children. In reality, only a minority composed of second sons in the most accommodated families of each town (90\%) whose parents were alive (only 1.2\% were orphans). They were looking for a professional occupation and a way out of the rural area, as well as a means to free the family patrimony from an inheritor as well as from a prejudiced division.

\(^2\) They are 2.2\% of the adult men between 16 and 25 years of age, much below that of Cataluña: 27.7\% in Lleida, 13\% in Vittoria, 10\% in Barcelona and Tarragona (Delgado Criado 1988).
c) One sector entered the University of Santiago de Compostela. In 1751, there were 50 students, 681 from 1865 to 1769, 865 from 1775 to 1769, and 1,175 from 1790 to 1794, reaching a maximum in 1794 with 1,260 students and then decreasing later, e.g., 1,033 from 1800 to 1804 (Gasalla and Saavedra 1998). This evolution had little to do with the economy and the demography, and much to do with the level of cultural education and with the appearance of new possibilities for post-university positions in the civil context. That trend is shown by an increasing tendency for civil law (32.7% of students in 1782/1793; 40.8% in 1794/1804) as opposed to a decrease in theological studies (45.9% to 30.1%) which reveals a strong interest in professions outside of the clergy.

Data concerning the territorial origin of the University students illustrates the reduced weight of interior Galicia (although more and more important). Those from Lugo made up 20% of the Galician population, but it only contributed 10% of the university students in 1751; 12% in 1761 to 1790, and 15.36% from 1795 to 1796. That is to say, it was an area with a larger average number of students than the rest of Galicia but with fewer university students. The second sons of families in the interior could not afford studies far away from home and, for that reason, they conformed themselves to studies of grammar and to being simple clergy. Western Galicia, with 57% of the population in 1787, contributed 57% of the students in 1751-52, 73.4% in 1771-72, 70.8% in 1790-91, and 62.8% in 1795-96. This Atlantic territory, very rich, literate and urbanized, fed the University, although we must keep in mind that close proximity to Santiago was an important factor because it reduced the cost of maintaining children away from home. Socially, among the students from Santiago, there were many sons of urban and rural noblemen but those from accommodated rural families were very important, with no influence nor resources, but very interested to obtain a university title in order to hold ecclesiastic or civil positions.
2. Feminine trajectories

Given that women made up the majority of the population of working age and that the legal norms of inheritance permitted, they benefited from favourable treatment in the division of the inheritance and the transmission of patrimony. They received their legitimate portion, they controlled their personal goods, the dowry and the right to the use of the goods of their husbands and they tended to inherit the position of head of household and the guardianship of the children. In 1753, they were in charge of 19.2% of the households in Galicia and, in many areas of Galicia on the Atlantic, the percentage was 25%, a number which decreased towards the interior, in the same measure as did the number of nuclear families (Dubert 1992).

The family exercised firm control over the women in terms of their ability to marry. In an environment of tiny agrarian properties, celibacy and the late nuptial age were means by which to control biological reproduction and avoid the division of inheritance. In 1787 in Galicia the average female age of matrimony was 25.7 years and celibacy was at a rate of 17%, very superior to Spanish averages with an average female nuptial age of 23.7 years and 11% celibacy (Eiras Roel 1996). In many areas, this problem was mitigated for many single women thanks to the high number of marriage to widowers. In the interior, these marriages were not frequent (5%-7% of all marriages) but in western Galicia it was more than 15% and in the Ulla Valley, 20%. In the rich areas of western Galicia, where there were few possibilities to marry due to high emigration, the elevated proportion of single women was not because they had been excluded from an inheritance, but the small value of same. This translated to an important percentage of women who lived alone, on the wealth of their legitimate inheritance, and dedicated themselves to agricultural work or to labour associated with fishing or with the textile industry. On the contrary, single women in the interior lived with their older brothers, those who had benefited from their inheritance from their parents.
The control of the village community of the resources and the limited possibilities within the agricultural system, made the independent existence of the women and of the female heads of household difficult. In large families in the interior, the high number of single women, and of single men, who stayed in the family home, were part of a necessary strategy to sustain large properties which required abundant workers.

The female celibate was poorly accommodated. There were only two types of labour available to accumulate a dowry, textile production (which was common in Galicia) and domestic service. The last one did not form a part of the prenuptial cycle of Galician women because that possibility was limited to the cities and towns of Galicia which were small and poor, or in the houses of the noblemen or ecclesiastics or rich rural workers, although the necessity to work obliged many women, especially in interior Galicia, to leave their land to work as maids, especially in Madrid. The low levels of illegitimacy (1.8% to 5.5% of births on the cost and 5.4% to 11.7% in the interior, and of premarital births (6% to 12% on the coast, and 9% to 13% in the interior), indicate that the rigid control of matrimony was rarely transgressed (Dubert 1991).

The women that married did so by means of a very controlled system which set the age of marriage (very late), and of blood marriages and exchange marriages. These types of marriages tried to avoid the dispersion of the family patrimony by uniting two families with similar or complementary properties, or inheritances that were balanced between the two partners. In overpopulated western Galicia, with high emigration, and a system in which there was little between the children, these two formulas were frequently practiced, combining them with an advanced age of marriage (more than 26 years of age) and strong celibacy. In the Ulla valley, exchange marriages were 22.3% to 29.8% of the total marriages in the first
half of the 18th century, and 10% to 19.5% in the second half of the 18th century. Blood marriages were more numerous in the mountain areas of the southwest, as in A Cañiza, on the border with Portugal (27.7% in the 18th century and 13.5% in the first half of the 19th century). The two formulas were combined in transition areas such as Tierra de Montes (10% blood marriages before 1740, 16% in 1740 to 1759, 20% in 1760 and onward, and 10% exchange marriages) (Fernández Cortizo 2001). On the contrary, these strategies were not usual in the Galicia of large families and a system that favoured the first-born son, neither in the districts of the interior with small, nuclear families within which there was no important emigration. Not marrying was the way to control these women (Dubert 1989, Eiras 1990, Rey Castelao 1990).

Blood marriages and exchange marriages situated the women on equal footing with the men, as they had the same exchange value for the family, and the dispersion of the family patrimony was thereby avoided. For that reason, those types of marriages did not make sense in areas that favoured the primogenitor. Exchange marriages also avoided the benefit of one inheritor over the others and the condemnation to not marry among those who did receive the mejora. For that reason, agreements were established between two households with similar or equivalent patrimonies, the youth married among themselves and the families interchanged people more than goods and wealth. In that way, if a family had three or more children, it would retain at least two legitimates or one mejora and one legitimate. In the case that both only sons were married in both house, the family retained the entire inheritance. The simple formula of one brother and one sister marrying one sister and one brother of another family was common in regions where males were favoured upon the condition to marry and to head the home. It was the female spouses that changed houses without modifying their conditions of inheritance. The agreements between two brothers and two sisters were most common
(42.8% of the total of the overpopulated Ulla valley in the 18th century) where the agreement between the parents was made with a guarantee of the legitimate portion in favour of the contracting parties. In these cases, a male abandoned the paternal house to become the consort of the daughter who received the *mejora* of the other family, in such a way that second-born or older women and men received identical treatment.

In so far as refers to the position of women and inheritance, what is certain is that the hereditary processes, within the two basic formulas that have been discussed, reflect the necessity to adopt to the scarcity of adult men (Rey Castelao 2005). Except in the interior, women were favoured more in Galicia than in other Spanish territories. Within Galicia, they were more favoured where the male multi-annual or permanent emigration was the highest and it was fundamental that the parents assure that someone would be responsible for their care and would maintain the family property and operations. In the coastal areas, women had a notable independence thanks to complementary work (artisan or commercial) less constrictions within the village community and less presence of men (in part for the high incidence of death in fishing and in the Navy). In districts such as the Morrazo peninsula, the women received at least 80% of the dissimilar divisions made by the parents; 47% of the *mejoras* were conceded to daughters, especially those of minor age. This extended formula shows the compatibility of the women with the succession and inheritance, and recognizes their productive aptitude, their capacity as caretakers and that they were grounded in the land and in the family (Rial García 2001). In the Land of Santiago, also in the west but situated a bit more to the north and a bit more interior, the wills of the parents designated their daughters as inheritors of the *mejora* in more than half of the cases (56.6%), especially to single women (57.8% of them) and to the youngest females in the family. However, by way of other notarial documents (donations, concessions, etc.), the preference was not so clear. The closer to the
interior, the daughters were treated less favourably; nevertheless, in Tierra de Montes (a transition zone), 39.4% of the mejoras went to a daughter, 31.8% went to a son, and 28.8% went to various sons and daughters. In the interior, as said earlier, the females hardly benefited from inheritance and their destiny was to stay at home with their brothers.

Conclusions

In summary, Galician women enjoyed a beneficial position with respect to inheritance, whether or not it is a statistical effect, if compared with other Spanish models. It is difficult to talk about differences between levels of fortune because there were fewer options for women than there were for men as mentioned in the text. The daughters of rural families, even if wealthy, could not enter the convent. In 1800 in Galicia, there were only 25 with 585 nuns, and therefore was not a solution for their daughters in order to assure them a safe, secure, comfortable life outside of matrimony.

As for the men, to be an inheritor in western Galicia, an area of nuclear families and inheritances that were not very dissimilar, did not make them wealthier nor did it assure their future. The small agrarian operation that they received obliged them to search for other activities or to emigrate. The other brothers received their legitimate share and if they married, this was added to that of their spouses, by means of which, combined with emigration, they survived. In western Galicia, the primogenitor received the larger portion of the inheritance and a larger agrarian holding and they married to become head of household, having not emigrated neither before nor after. But the land they received was minimally productive and they had to take responsibility for the entire family, including brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, etc. Of the single brothers who did not manage to wed with inheritors of other families, the majority remained single, or frequently, became clerics, and they saw themselves
obliged to emigrate in order to bring more resources home. It is impossible to know which of these situations yielded more well-being to the inheritors. The only thing that remains clear is that the system, with its different formulas, only intended to ensure survival.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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PEREZ GARCIA, José Manuel, 1979, *Un modelo de sociedad rural de Antiguo Régimen en la Galicia costera: La Península del Salnés*, Santiago de Compostela.


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MAP 1

SOURCE: Dubois