

Article

Queering Is Caring: the Revitalization of Galician Language and Culture, Territory, and the Importance of Queer Cultural Products

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Keywords

Galician Culture
Queerness
Linguistic Revitalization
Folk Music
Metronormativity

Palabras clave

Cultura galega
Queer
Revitalización lingüística
Música folk
Metronormatividade

Abstract

In this article, I reflect on how contemporary queer cultural production affects the sociolinguistic and cultural landscape of the stateless nation of Galiza. Focusing on ethnographic research I carried out with new speakers of Galician — or neofalantes — and with self-defined LGBT+ youth from different socio-geographic backgrounds, I discuss the possibilities of a linguistic and cultural revitalization driven by queer artworks, actors, and communities. The music of artists such as Rodrigo Cuevas, Xisco Feijóo, Mondra, Mercedes Peón and As Tanxugueiras, among others, will help us to delineate the possibilities and the problematic aspects of a ‘cosmopolitan alternative’ for minority cultures (Waldron 1992). As we know, the tensions caused by the linguistic substitution of Galician language and the marginalization of Galician culture in the Spanish state cause social movements of ‘normativity rejection’. Do these dynamics rethink the sense of a community? Do they soften the ‘center-vs-periphery’ binary (Colmeiro 2017)? Do they challenge common narratives of belonging?

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Resumo

Neste trabalho, reflito sobre como a produção queer da atualidade afeta o panorama sociolinguístico e cultural da Galiza, nação sem estado. Com foco na pesquisa etnográfica que realizei com novxs falantes de galego — ou neofalantes — e também com pessoas jovens autoidentificadas como LGBTQ+ de procedências sociogeográficas diversas, discuto as possibilidades de uma revitalização linguística e cultural impulsada por obras de arte, indivíduos e comunidades queer. A música de artistas como Rodrigo Cuevas, Xisco Feijóo, Mondra, Mercedes Peón e As Tanxugueiras, entre outres, ajudar-nos-á a delinear as possibilidades e os aspetos problemáticos de uma ‘alternativa cosmopolita’ para as culturas minorizadas (Waldron 1992). Como sabemos, as tensões causadas pola substituição linguística da língua galega e a marginalização da cultura galega dentro do estado espanhol resultam em movimentos sociais de ‘rejeitamento da normatividade’. Estas dinâmicas fazem com que repensemos a ideia de comunidade? Suavizam o binário ‘centro-vs-periferia’ (Colmeiro 2017)? Desafiam as narrativas habituais da pertença?

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The song is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uGN9efcACw>. An English translation of the lyrics can be found on the Internet (Fuster 2021): <https://wiwibloggs.com/2021/12/28/tanxugueiras-terra-lyrics-in-english/268024/>.

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See reactions: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/television/20220131/8023526/polemica-benidorm-fest-congreso-diputados-tercer-puesto-tanxugueiras-chanel-eurovision-2022.html> ; <https://www.lavozdegalicia.es/noticia/sociedad/2022/02/04/fragu-polemica-tras-paso-tanxugueiras-benidorm-fest/00031643972895999372181.htm> ; <https://www.nosdiario.gal/articulo/cultura/que-xurado-do-festival-bedidorm-non-queria-que-ganara-tanxugueiras/20220130100218136526.html> ; <https://spainsnews.com/galicia-in-common-and-bng-want-to-know-how-rtve-chose-the-benidorm-fest-jury/> ; <https://thecanadian.news/the-tanxugueiras-third-place-controversy-reaches-congress-of-deputies/> .



1. Introducing the Unpresentable

The time has come for queer Galician folk music. And we cannot continue to ignore this major shift in the contemporary Iberian Peninsula. In January 2022, Spain held the first edition of Benidorm Fest, a broadcasted event in which several participants competed to be chosen as the next Spanish representative for the annual Eurovision Song Contest. Among the preselected 14 candidates, the Galician group Tanxugueiras stood out as one of the favorites

despite an important fact: their song ‘Terra’¹ was written in Galician except for one of the verses, ‘non hai fronteiras’ (there are no borders), which was also sung in Asturian, Basque, Catalan, and Castilian. Although the three young women of Tanxugueiras made it to the final round, and even though they received the highest score from the audience (an impressive 70% of the votes), the festival organizers did not choose them to represent Spain.

This issue raised critiques of the program’s transparency and accountability, as well as questions of language and cultural discrimination. Since Tanxugueiras is a Galician group singing mainly in Galician, it would be controversial for Spanish nationalism to be represented in one of Spain’s minority, ‘regional’ languages. Following Spanish cultural politics, the state language is considered universal, unmarked, anonymous and well-suited for progress and representation (del Valle 2007; Moreno Cabrera 2008).² However, what is worth noting is the mediatic construction of Tanxugueiras as representatives of an eccentric, exotic, and commodifiable cultural periphery. The abjection that their language and their aesthetics carried — with their Galician traditional costumes, instruments, and lyrics — is best captured by the introduction to their performance during the first semifinal of Benidorm Fest, where one of the presenters likened Tanxugueiras’ song entry with the fact that Belgium had participated in Eurovision in ‘made up languages’ [idiomas inventados] on two different occasions in the past.

What the Tanxugueiras controversy can teach us is that national antagonisms are often also a matter of queerness: the feminization of Galiza as a sentimental, natural territory (Miguélez-Carballeira 2014) is the mandatory condition for cultural recognition and expropriation within the Spanish state. In Tanxugueiras’ queer performativity, specifically in their collection of ephemera to keep ‘o xeito das nosas nais’ [the ways of our mothers], in the oral transmission chains they embrace outside the claws of the nation-state and the capital, we can find ‘world-making potentialities contained in the performances of minoritarian citizen-subjects who contest the majoritarian public sphere’ (Muñoz 2009: 56). They not only contest centralist Spanish cultural politics, the establishment, and representation, but also conservative claims about Galician traditional music in which gender roles and metric issues are cast as sacred. In the Galician case, the connection between traditional music and nation-building processes, from Murguía to Baiuca, has been acknowledged by different authors (Groba González 1998; Costa 2004; Chao Fernández, Mato Vázquez & López Pena 2015; Busto Miramontes 2021; Pérez-Borrajo & Matas de Íscar 2022). When folkloric cultural products transgress the boundaries of that regional traditionalism, especially that which was constructed during the Francoist era (Busto Miramontes 2021), incorporating queer aesthetic and political

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Mercedes Peón is one of the most well-known folk musicians in contemporary Galiza. She mixes traditional lyrics and melodies from her fieldwork during the last decades of the 20th century with global sounds and elements of electronic music. Her important text, titled 'Xénero e creación colectiva' [Gender and collective creation] and first published in the digital journal *Plétora*, is now unavailable online. However, some of the ideas expressed in that text were posted on the Galician Queer Studies Network's webpage — <https://redegalegadeestudosqueer.wordpress.com/2020/12/14/pilulas-queer/> — and recuperated by Peón in an interview for *Cultura Galega* (Hermida 2015) — <http://culturagalega.gal/noticia.php?id=25299>.

All translations from texts originally in Galician are mine unless otherwise indicated.

elements, and trying to broaden the scope of their potential representation (in the case of Tanxugueiras, to include the whole Spanish state), they are automatically constructed as an abjection.

Three female main singers and two male dancers reconfigure the classic colonial representations of Galician folklore and its binary gender and aesthetic roles onstage, where they want to be heard ('que nos escoiten berrar' [let them hear us shout]) in their sororal company for the frenetic *foliada*. No white or red onstage, but rather a mix of black and golden makeup and clothes. Women wearing pants and men wearing skirts. Spectators reading the scene could not equate men with masculinity or women with femininity. Just golden glitter covering ecstatic bodies, black tambourines moving around the stage defying geometry and order. These young artists are putting on the mediatic and political table of contemporary Spain a past that was once forbidden and, when portrayed, is cast as being incompatible with modernity.

However, as queer theoretician José Esteban Muñoz affirmed, 'Utopian performativity is often fueled by the past. The past, or at least narratives of the past, enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity, a conjuring of both future and past to critique presentness' (Muñoz 2009: 106). Tanxugueiras' entry, as well as the work of many other queer folk musicians in contemporary Galiza, performs a *disidentification* as a survival strategy for Galician culture and language after centuries of internal colonization within the state (González Casanova 2003; 2006). In Muñoz's terms, '[d]isidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship' (1999: 4). Although this concept emerged to explore racialized, mixed, queer subjects in the US, it is also useful to understand cultural trends in stateless nations within Spain. As Muñoz also argues, this 'third mode of dealing with dominant ideology [is] one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology' (1999: 11).

Tanxugueiras rework and resignify the traditional ways of dancing and singing from a place like Galiza where capitalist modernity made a late and slow entry, while also trying to avoid a potential pitfall noted by Mercedes Peón, namely that these performative acts 'are not captured by a social elite — the classical music-dance training — or by a sexual elite — man as the center of power'.³ In fact, the Tanxugueiras phenomenon has been captured by another, third elite: it has been progressively commodified since Benidorm Fest by the mainstream market, keeping with broader trends in Spanish cultural politics. The overrepresentation of Galician cultural actors and products in Spain (e.g., the film *As bestas*, the band Tanxugueiras, several 'national' — Spanish — literary prizes awarded to Galician writers, or even the *Xacobeo* touristic project) can be read as a consensus-oriented strategy that deactivates political conflict in terms of national and economic struggles.

Tanxugueiras — as well as artists who entered the scene earlier such as Peón — transgress beyond the marginalized and peripheral space reserved for Galician culture to appropriate traditional representations, and then use them as a stage from which to shout that 'veñen para

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quedar' [they are coming to stay]. They and their many contemporaries in the flourishing new queer folk music scene in Galiza resist dominant Spanish ideoscapes in a disidentificatory move; that is, trying to raise their voices within a state that would prefer them silenced, non-existent and decapitalized. As the prominent twentieth-century Galician intellectual Afonso D. Rodríguez Castelao once noted, tradition is not history, but rather eternity (2004[1944]: 50). Queer folkloric proposals root themselves in the local past in order to forge a path towards a utopian futurity, in defiance of mainstream state-centered Spanish cultural politics. The latter can be captured by Appadurai's description of the cultural politics of the modern state:

States [...] are everywhere seeking to monopolize the moral resources of community, either by flatly claiming perfect coequality between nation and state, or by systematically museumizing and representing all the groups within them in a variety of heritage politics that seems remarkably uniform throughout the world. (Appadurai 1990: 304)

Of course, the main problem Galician folk music faces is the threat of commodification, a question I introduced above, which would lead to its integration into the centralist state's cultural politics, especially under the new multicultural regime brought about by globalization. We could see here an organic continuation of *fraguismo*: Galiza as a cultural nation, not a political one. In Miguélez-Carballeira's words,

A teoría de Fraga da *autoidentificación* constrói-se assim mediante uma calculada combinación de negação do conflito nacional na Galiza e de pseudoracionalização do *sentimento* de galeguidade como um direito civil para todos os Galegos, alimentado pela identificação consciente com a língua, a paisagem e a cultura galegas; esta última descrita por Fraga como cristalização perfeita do legado dos valores romanos e cristãos na região. (2014: 249; italics in the original text)

However, a queer approach changes the equation by adding an anti-identitarian component. Queer artistic proposals do not align with longstanding stereotypes about Galiza, aligned with the state's heteronormative national project more broadly, which means they cannot be (completely) ventriloquized by the Spanish state. The feminine, queer body of the nation now becomes a monstrous mass; its hybridity is not a yoked weakness, but rather a deformed strength.

There are several questions that arise at this juncture: are speaking and creating in Galician in contemporary Spain decentering, queer action, especially when 'postnationalist' globalization has created a renewed Spanish nationalist turn? In the context of Galiza, can linguistic and cultural revitalization be a queer task, when it is both driven by top-down institutional policies intent on normalizing that which is still 'abnormal'? In other words, as Danny Barreto wonders, does 'our obsession with linguistic and cultural normalization leave no room for elements, practices and voices that seek to denormalize' (2020a: 18-9)? What is the place of queerness in processes of language and culture survival whose main rhetoric and planning is rooted in familial transmission (Fishman 1991) and traditional communal values and identifications? And, more importantly, what is the place of queer youth in redefining all these dynamics, in answering all these questions, in maintaining the community while also queering it?

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<https://festivalagrocuir.wordpress.com/>

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<http://www.seteouteiros.gal/>

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https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/o/viewer?mid=11_q9sRHp58tKQajwOEGoxIXS9EbbICNR&ll=42.95733933037776%2C-7.715421308040238&z=8

2. Minoritarian Subjects, Minoritized Cultures

The insistence on a cultural representation tied to conservatism, archaic images of rurality, masculinist patriarchal communal relations and the linguistic lack of access to sexual modernity has constructed a normative representation of Galicianness as being opposed to queer culture. However, queerness in Galiza/Galician can serve as ‘a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin’ (Cohen 1997: 438), both from the perspective of Spanish domination and the perspective of heteronormative Galician nationalism. That space needs to be built on the recognition of ‘multiple and connected practices of domination and normalization’ (Cohen 1997: 441) that, in this case, are not limited to the sexual, but also entail the national, the linguistic, the sociogeographic, and the cultural. In Pereira’s terms, ‘[t]here is no way to separate abject bodies and dissident sexuality from geographic location, from language, from history, and from culture’ (2019: 409).

On the one hand, this multiple oppression model disallows exclusive identifications with queerness by Galician citizens and cultural workers, which could trigger the alignment of queer Galician subjects with Spanish homonationalism (Puar 2017) and their linguistic and social capital in terms of ‘living a queer life’. The term homonationalism refers to the appeal to LGBTIQ people and rights by nation-states in a utilitarian manner, in order to assign appropriate models of citizenship to those subjects who comply with neoliberal nationalist ideologies. On the other hand, the multiple oppression model mentioned above also avoids exclusive identifications with the Galician national cause, which could ignore the ways in which gender, sexuality and class are intertwined and sometimes overlooked in nation-building processes (cf. Yuval-Davis (1997); cf. Fernández (2008) & Mestre-Brotons (2019) for the Catalan case, which holds many similarities to Galiza).

We know that queer counterpublics (Berlant & Warner 1998) in contemporary Spain are tied to the sexual cultures of big cities such as Madrid and are detached from local vernaculars, in a trend towards global codes. Nonetheless, I would like to propose that Galician culture can be currently read from a queer perspective with regard to three different (dis)orientations, which I will explore below: Queer Spatialities (Browne, Lim & Brown 2007), Queer Temporalities (Muñoz 2009), and Queer Codes (del Valle 2000).

Firstly, with regard to queer spatialities, although Galician culture has progressively become more urban during the last decades, queer ruralities (Barreto 2020b; Gray 2009) represent an ongoing project in the 21st century. Among others, initiatives such as the *Festival Agrocuir da Ulloa*⁴ and the free natural retreat for queer and trans people *Sete Outeiros*⁵ (both in the province of Lugo) constitute empirical alternatives to the metronormative hegemony of current LGBTIQ culture (Halberstam 2005). These queer heterotopias (Jones 2009) not only make visible the existence of queer folks in rural places, but also fight against the abandonment of rural lands in contemporary Galiza. As an outcome of collaboration between the Agrocuir collective and the government of the Province of Lugo, Galiza witnessed the publication of a collaborative sound map called *Facémonos escoitar?*, available online.⁶ Different mobile phone audio clips were sent by the participants to populate the map or, as Barreto’s (2017) fortunate expression says, ‘to put queerness on the map’. In one of the

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testimonies, we hear a woman's voice telling of a trip with her lover María and her child Ada. She states:

Recordo unha viaxe fermosa. Recordo os castaños, os bosques, os viñedos imposibles cara abaixo. Sentarnos sobre o Miradoiro da Pena de Matacás. Atravesar o río no catamarán. Andar entre ríos, entre Ourense e Lugo. Entre provincias, entre caudais do Miño e do Sil. Entre bosques. E terminar bebendo viño. E comendo queixo (risas). Terminamos en Monforte de Lemos.

Nesa viaxe, Lugo e Ourense quedan unidos polos ríos. A auga e os ríos, especialmente, forman parte da maxia da nosa terra, e da provincia de Lugo, que se achega polo sur á miña provincia, Ourense. María era manchega —e digo era porque morreume fai cinco anos— e decía que como ía traballar a xente aí, coas uvas, vendimiando. A verdade é que a vendimia, en Lugo e en Ourense, na Ribeira Sacra, é unha obra de corpos entregados ao pracer que chegará despois, que é beber o viño.

I remember a beautiful trip. I remember the chestnut trees, the forests, the impossible vineyards way down. To sit on the Pena de Matacás Viewpoint. To cross the river on the catamaran. Walking between rivers, between Ourense and Lugo. Between provinces, between the flows of Miño and Sil. Between forests. And to finish drinking wine. And eating cheese (laughs). We ended in Monforte de Lemos.

On that journey, Lugo and Ourense are joined by rivers. Water and rivers, especially, are part of the magic of our land, and of the province of Lugo, which approaches my province, Ourense, from the south. María was from La Mancha —and I say 'was' because she died five years ago— and she said how the people were going to work there, with the grapes, harvesting. The truth is that the harvest, in Lugo and in Ourense, in the Ribeira Sacra, is a work of bodies dedicated to the pleasure that will come later, which is drinking the wine.

Throughout her account, the landscape functions as her flesh and as a metaphor of her own sexuality. The remembrance of her deceased lover flows into the river of her memory. The wine from the harvest they witnessed, a Galician labor activity that María (of Castilian origin) did not quite understand, comes to symbolize the passion of their queer love in the Ribeira Sacra region. Counter to such exalting narratives, rural inhabitants have constantly been blamed for and weakened by mediatic, economic and political discourses and policies, to the point that the landscape has become a social site for struggle and representation. The 'ugliness' of Galician rurality due to emigration, urban exodus, and the erosion of traditional ways of life turns the landscape into a matter of (re)patrimonialization. As Santos & Piñeiro Antelo argue, '[a]lthough Galicia is now mostly an urban territory, there is a fetishisation of the rural world' (2020: 9) in which 'an aesthetic and political appreciation of the dominant urban elites in Galicia' (2020) shapes rural landscapes as incorrect, incoherent, and ugly; that is, as disgustingly *queer*.

Along with space, is the question of queer temporalities. The potential for a queer *then* and *there* that goes beyond the hopelessness of the present straight time (Muñoz 2009) — a stance that permeates contemporary cultural production — is in constant tension both with the representation of Galiza as a land stuck in the past and with the actual demographics of this country. Galician youth represent a subordinated and

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This term was originally proposed by Mario Regueira in 2008. See Regueira (2020) for the genealogy of this pioneering proposal in the emerging field of Galician Queer Studies. See also Hermo (2013) for an application to Galician erotic poetry written by women during the 1990s.

marginalized group, given the historic gerontocracy-oriented public and cultural representation, the high rate of youth unemployment (IGE 2022), the general population aging (a 213.54% aging index following the INE (2022a), which means that the number of people over 64 doubles that of people below 16), and the fact that more than 50,000 young Galicians have emigrated from their country during the last decade (Rodríguez 2019).

And lastly, regarding queer codes, Galicians have a heteroglossic linguistic culture: both Galician and Spanish are official languages, but many other languages are spoken and deployed in interaction. This linguistic hybridity has also been posited as a queer linguistic practice in other cultural contexts, such as that of Spanglish in Puerto Rico (La Fountain-Stokes 2006) or the US (Anzaldúa 2007[1987]). Contrary to the description of urban settings as being already and truly multi-, poly-, or translingual, less cosmopolitan latitudes such as Galiza are commonly cast as 'native', 'homogenous', and 'monoglossic' (May 2014). When, in fact, as José del Valle attested:

Galicia is a diffused speech community in which the availability of several norms of linguistic behavior constitutes a source of ethnic identity. Multiplicity of norms and resistance to convergence are the principles on which the popular linguistic culture is based, a linguistic culture that, for the sake of consistency, I will term *the popular culture of heteroglossia*. (del Valle 2000: 128; italics in the original)

3. Queerness as the Language of (the) Community?

In one of the first books to offer a queer analysis of Galician culture, Teresa Moure addressed this three-way characterization of queerness in Galiza along the same abovementioned axes: language, time, and territory. She characterized Galician literature — and we could extend this scope to include Galician cultural products more broadly — as a *literatura maronda*,⁷ a 'queer literature' labeled with a local Galician term that decolonizes the Anglo-Saxon linguistic and cultural hegemony of queer theories (Pereira 2019). Moure states that:

Dun lado temos unha nación sen estado, algo que non se reflicte nunhas fronteiras de seu no mapamundi nin acada recoñecemento no dereito internacional mais que tampouco é unha simple rexión. Ou temos unha lingua que non acaba de saír da situación de diglosia, unha variante que en termos de uso real está sendo interpretada polo pobo que a fala como unha cuase-lingua. [...] E temos, doutra banda, a teoría queer, como unha tradición de ruptura coas categorías de si-ou-non. [...] A literatura galega é unha literatura queer, unha literatura que ocupa un espazo de fronteira, [...] dado que as persoas que a cultivan se comprometen cunha lingua acantoadada polo poder, que deben chuchar a fondo para rescatar toda a súa forza expresiva porque os problemas de transmisión ocasionan que decote lles chegase renga ou incompleta. [...]

A literatura galega é subversiva por definición; está provista de toda a autenticidade de quen se recoñece un individuo raro, unha louca, un suxeito inestábel, apenas constituído no tempo, en perpetua variación. (2012: 46-7)

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‘The process of doubleweaving
—in brief— involves weaving
the inside base and walls of the
basket, then turning the same
splint back down over itself to
weave the outside walls and base.
Doublewoven baskets are one
continuous weave’ (Driskill 2010:
89).

On the one hand, we have a stateless nation, something that is not reflected in its own borders on the world map nor achieves recognition in international law, but which is also not a simple region. [...] We have a language that has not yet emerged from the situation of diglossia, a variant that in terms of actual use is being interpreted by the people who speak it as a quasi-language. [...] And we have, on the other hand, queer theory, as a tradition of breaking with the categories of yes-or-no. [...] Galician literature is a queer literature, a literature that occupies a border space, [...] given that the people who cultivate it are committed to a language cornered by power, a language from which they must suck deeply to rescue all its expressive force because the problems of transmission mean that it often arrives to them lame or incomplete. [...]

Galician literature is subversive by definition; it is provided with all the authenticity of one who recognizes themselves in a strange individual, a madwoman, an unstable subject, scarcely constituted in time, in perpetual variation. (2012: 46-7)

I cite this long reflection because it is inspiring and problematic at the same time. Not all Galician culture is committed to the fight against oppression and to the claim for establishing less heteronormative futures beyond national(ist) standards of authenticity (Barreto 2017). The logics and exigencies of some traditional branches of Galician nationalism have reproduced the same logics of the hegemonic Spanish nation-state from which they want to separate. But it is also true that Galician cultural production on the whole resists normativity by revitalizing an endangered language and by reincorporating erased cultural frames that have been lost throughout history. This double-edged critique, at once internal and external, is a disidentificatory practice. Here, Galician queer theory could find useful and inspirational decolonial models in the concept of *doubleweaving* developed by queer Two-Spirit scholars (e.g., Driskill 2010). The term *doubleweaving*, rooted in Cherokee culture, was developed to think specifically about Native and Queer Studies. Its meaning takes on the Cherokee basketry tradition with origins in river cane weaving.⁸ These doublewoven baskets metaphorically represent ‘a model for articulating the emergent potential in conversations between Native studies and queer studies’ (Driskill 2010: 73-74). Of course, these models serve as an inspiration but cannot be fully applied to the Galician situation, a Western one (Quiroga 2023).

In that sense, I would like to propose contemporary queer folk music as an impetus not for identification nor for disidentification, but for *reidentification with Galicianness*, a Galicianness sensitive to diversity within its own political imagination. While Muñoz talks mainly about us contemporary, mixed culture, the dynamics I analyze in this article are not located within a single, living culture. However, they represent a move away from hegemonic cultural codes and universes (Spanish), and towards often dying, recently recuperated ones (Galician). In such cases, there are not always resources for a mere identification (ones that could reinforce certain normativities) and the precarious situation of that same language and culture disallow complete disidentification. Instead, what we have is a disidentificatory exercise *away from* a cultural and linguistic setting and *into* another, within a conflicted community such as present-day Galiza.

During my research with new speakers of Galician, called *neofalantes* in the literature (O’Rourke & Ramallo 2018), I explore the intersection

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All the interactions from the research cited in this paper were carried out in Galician. English translations are provided for the sake of intelligibility. Galician linguistic features are kept in the transcripts, which follow *reintegrationist* spelling norms.

of sexual non-normativity and becoming a new speaker of a minority language. I consider this one of the main examples of what I have been referring to above as *reidentification*, because it even implies changing your own language for the other one which is less valued in the community. In a focus group discussion with three queer *neofalantes*, one of the participants affirmed that she came out of the linguistic closet and of the LGBT closet at the same time, recuperating the language for cultural, political and professional reasons, displacing the majority, hegemonic linguistic code (Spanish) and reconnecting with Galician traditional culture through contemporary music. Explaining this decision to the other interlocutors, she pointed out the importance of cultural production and what she labeled as ‘vanguards’:⁹

E eu realmente noto duas cousas: primeiro, sinto que... [a música galega] está tendo um certo *boom* entre a gente nova, da minha idade, que me parece mui *guai*. E, depois, realmente, noto que está havendo uma revisão mui grande. O sea, penso que realmente é um momento... bastante bo nesse sentido. [...] Pero bueno [sic], creo que é mui notable. O que passa na música passa um pouco no resto, não? [...]

Realmente hai um montom de gente fazendo vangarda num nivel social, mmm, artístico, um montom de gente involucrada, precisamente, na música tradicional. E é o caso de, tipo, Rodrigo Cuevas [...] ou Xisco Feijóo, toda esta gente, refiro-me... Ainda hai muito purismo, muitos puristas, e gente conservadora, porque “gente retrógrada siempre la hubo en todas partes” [in Spanish in the original] e... Alguma gente dirá que os homes tenhem que bailar só coas mulheres, e tamém que os rapazes tenhem que sacar punto, que as rapazas não podem sacá-los. Pero mira [sic], eu estou mui, não sei, estou mui orgulhosa desse aspeto que se está fazendo dentro do que é a música tradicional nesse aspeto [...]. Porque hai muita gente nova interessada, muita gente diversa, e mui vanguardista em muitas cousas!

And I really do notice two things: first, I notice that... [Galician music] is having a relative boom among young people my age, which I find very cool. And, second, really, I notice that there is a very big revision. That is, I really think it's at a pretty... good moment in that respect. [...] But well, I think it's very notable. What happens in music also happens a little in everything else, right? [...]

There really are a lot of people who are doing avant-garde on a social, hmm, artistic level, there are a lot of people who are involved, precisely, in traditional music. As is the case of, like, Rodrigo Cuevas [...] or Xisco Feijóo, all these people, I mean... There's still a lot of purism, lots of purists, and conservative people, because ‘there have always been old-fashioned people everywhere’ [in Spanish in the original] and... Some people that will say that men have to dance only with women, and that the boys have to lead the dance steps too, and the girls can't lead them. But hey, I'm very, I don't know, I'm also proud of that aspect that is being done within what is traditional in that aspect [...]. Because there are a lot of interested young people, a lot of diverse people, and very avant-garde in many things!

For these new speakers of Galician, the chance to have other cultural models beyond a Galician patriarchal kind of nationalism and to

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merge queer youth culture with traditional cultural forms opens up new opportunities for a *then* and *there* (Muñoz 2009) that extends Galician culture's existence. Such performances stand in direct contrast to more mainstream representations of Galicianness, such as those found in Gadis commercials (one of the main supermarket franchises with a strong focus on publicity; Screti 2013) and Galician Public Television's *Land Rober* (a conservative comedy program). This alternative cultural production allows queer and non-queer young people to leave the culture of 'verbena e chiste fácil' [street party and cheap joke] behind, as the participants made explicit at some points of our conversation:

Eu penso que tamém é mui claro como o galego está sendo usado em cousas que não são tão tradicionais. E, como, com muito êxito, quero dizer, como grupos de música tipo Verto ou essas cousas, em plan... Isso é super necessário para normalizar a situação! Creio que este tipo de audiência é uma audiência crítica cos anúncios de Gadis e o Land Rober, e assi... E é, é, penso que tamém é assi porque nos estão dando essa alternativa!

I believe that it is also very clear how Galician is being used in things that are not so traditional. Also, like, with great success, I mean, such as music groups like Verto or these things, I mean... This is super necessary to normalize the situation! I think that this type of audience is an audience critical of the Gadis ads and Land Rober, like... And it's, it's, I believe it is also so because they are giving us this alternative!

Due to a normalization process that acknowledges heteroglossic ways of engaging with Galician culture (a culture that not only includes traditional music), queer folks can now enter the *national conversation*:

Esta revisão, esta crítica a, a todo o que se está... a esse modelo de cultura galega, e todas as alternativas que nos estão dando, a verdá que eu creio que... que si que dão muito espaço a... à gente LGBT para entrar, nesse... nesse punto, tamém porque a cultura galega é muito mais accessible [sic] que a de Madrid!

So, this revision, this criticism, to everything that is... to this model of Galician culture, and all the alternatives that are being given to us, the truth is that I believe that... that yes, they give a lot of space to... LGBT people to enter, at that... at that point, also because Galician culture is much more accessible than that of Madrid!

Both the romance of community and the romance of singularity (Muñoz 2009), both visibility and erasure, become softened. Especially in the case of queer music, being able to reidentify themselves with Galician values is due to accessible narratives of Galicianness in which sexual and gender diversity are not seen as counterproductive for the 'national cause'. As Colmeiro stated,

Galician folk music has also been an effective instrument to correct Galicia's peripheral condition, contesting its historically subordinate position within the Spanish state and voicing issues that have been integral to Galician history and society, such as the effects of migration, the abandonment of the rural life, the subaltern marginal position of Galicia vis-à-vis the Spanish nation state, the recovery

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of its heritage and cultural roots, and the self-affirmation and construction of Galician identity in dialogue with a global audience. (2017: 292-293)

Young Galicians trying to reidentify with their culture and language — often through new queer and folk projects — are sometimes singled out as deviant, ‘creating a sense of abnormality about their use of Galician, marking it as in some way special or something of an oddity’ (O’Rourke & Ramallo 2018: 103). These queer *neofalantes* of Galician represent a third space (Bhabba 1994) beyond the binary thinking of language, culture, and territory, a third space where a global modernity that speaks Spanish and a traditional authenticity that demands native productions of Galician leave place for negotiation and a playful reconstruction of the ‘ambiguities of life’ (O’Rourke & Ramallo 2018: 105) within that community.

4. The *Agrocuir* Perspective, or the Rejection of Straight Circles

People from cities and large towns (where the majority of new speakers of Galician come from) are also reidentifying with Galician culture, despite the construction of Galiza as a rural community throughout the centuries — and despite the fact that the Galician language is especially conserved and used in rural areas. The intersection of rural and queer approaches has been crucial for cultural revitalization and production, which leads Barreto to assert ‘the radical intersectionality of Galician identity’ (2017: 25). He even talks about a ‘queer Galician subjectivity’ and the fact that ‘Galician national identity at times functions as a “closet” or exclusionary structure that silences non-normative identities and narratives’ (2017: 27). Although there is a strong connection between queerness and the idea of placelessness (Barreto 2017), as well as several examples of this connection in the Galician cultural system, new queer discourses and cultural products in Galiza are trying to go in the opposite direction, appropriating their roots by looking back to the sense of place and belonging and displacing metronormative narratives.



Fig. 1. Saco de Pulgas music video.
Source: Mondra's YouTube channel.

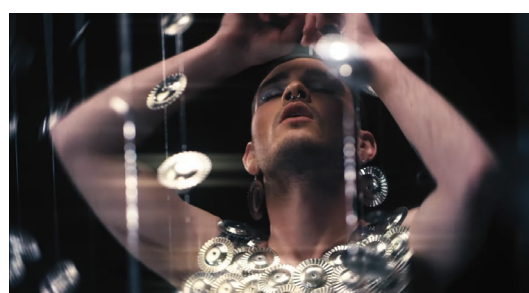


Fig. 2. AGHRÚU music video.
Source: Mondra's YouTube channel.

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[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=7VRpFVIgu-8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VRpFVIgu-8)

11

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=Y9wDJFpodJ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9wDJFpodJ4)

12

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=x4PUDf38E8k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4PUDf38E8k)

A case in point is Mondra, a young artist who merges traditional Galician music with new genres such as trap. In the video ‘Saco de pulgas’,¹⁰ the classic metal box of paprika used as a percussion instrument sets the aesthetics of the production (Fig. 1). Mondra queers the tradition by giving new meanings to rural elements in Galician folklore, such as the sausage belt used as a choker in ‘Saco de pulgas’ and the metallic, shiny jingles of the tambourine as the artist’s dress in ‘AGHRÚUU’ (Fig. 2).¹¹ In the latter song, the lyrics follow traditional music metric models but are also updated to convey new discourses of queer dissent under the eyes of an intergenerational group of spectators, a group that goes from initial skepticism to joining the *foliada* at the end: ‘chamáronme medio home / chamáronmo sen razón / chamáronme medio home / só por ser eu maricón ’ (they called me half a man / they called me that with no reason / they called me half a man / just because I’m a nance); ‘deum’a vida boa fortuna / por ter quen me queira ben / sexa muller, sexa home, / antre as pallas tanto ten’ (life gave me fortune / ‘cause I have who loves me well / whether a woman, whether a man, / between the straws it is the same).

In one of their latest releases, titled ‘Beijos de LK’¹² [LK = ‘licor café’, coffee liqueur], the ancient celebrations of Entroido (Carnival) in the interior village of Laza (Province of Ourense) set the stage for the music video. Different people of different ages, body shapes, gender expressions and sexual orientations, wearing diverse costumes, appear kissing each other under the effect of the coffee liqueur. The video proposes a reappropriation of youth sexuality between rural Laza and the way back to Compostela, the city they do not want to return to because they are enjoying the ecstatic Entroido celebrations so much. The national beverage and the practices performed by the community members around that drinking ritual updates visions of desire tied to urban anonymity and self-branding. In other words, queer performativity allows a reidentification with Galician language and cultural practices beyond ideas of a normative, rural, conservative Galiza. This is an illustrative example of how to avoid metronormative discourses. In addition, ‘Beijos de LK’ creates a continuum between more rural and more urban spaces, connecting the square where the carnival party takes place to pubs and nightclubs in Compostela, mentioned in the lyrics as the continuation of that endless caffeinated celebration of friendship and sensual encounters.

Metronormativity, thus, consists of the discursive construction of urban settings as the only stage for a true and valuable queer culture and existence, equating ‘the physical journey from small town to big city with the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud’ (Halberstam 2005: 37). In Galiza, an *agrocuir* [*agro* ‘land, rural’ + *cuir* ‘queer’] approach has arisen to articulate rurality and queerness in a recognition and defense of non-urban queer world-makings (Berlant & Warner 1998). This *agrocuir* politics can dismantle ‘a politics of visibility [that] needs the rural (or some *otherness*, some *place*) languishing in its shadow to sustain its status as an unquestionable achievement rather than a strategy that privileges the view of some by eliding the vantage point of others’ (Gray 2009: 9). The *agrocuir* perspective embraces the fact that ‘rural and small-town environments nurture elaborate sexual cultures even while sustaining surface social and political conformity’ (Halberstam 2005: 35). Also, it ‘insists on the impossibility of a sexual liberation that does not include a defense of nature, especially for those non-heterosexual people who live in rural areas and who fight against several systems of socio-economic, cultural and

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Pseudonyms substitute the real names of the participants in these transcripts.

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The symbol '#' is used to represent an unfinished word said by the speaker.

sexual oppression at the same time' (Barreto 2020a: 16-7). Sexuality and/ in cultural production must be then included in an account for rurality that is not essentialist and that acknowledges the fact that 'the countryside has always been instrumentalized socially, culturally, symbolically, and productively by various forms of the city' (Ghosh 2017: 3).

The social extension of this *agrocuir* turn that slows down identity and collectivizes queerness was also present in another study I conducted with gay Galician speakers about different issues of sexual identity, performance, and representation. We held a group discussion in which three young participants shared their experiences on queerness in its relationship with their different geographies within Galiza. They commented on the different models of queer life that are available for queer youth in Galiza, highlighting the importance of queer cultural actors to provide non-(homo) normative representations (Duggan 2002). Two participants¹³ discussed the figure of Rodrigo Cuevas, an Asturian singer formerly based in Galiza who draws heavily on Galician traditions in his music (Álvarez Sancho 2022):

Brais: Creou aí um personage, mmm, no momento da música e do teatro, brutal para mim.

Tiago: É um puto ICONO! *Dios*, de verdá [sic], é que... me dá ganas de vivir.

(...)

Brais: Si, fai um cabaret assi com... Representa um pouco a... modernidade rural. E...

Tiago: Em plan, si! E tamém em plan tem que ser em *asturianu*, em plan na...

Brais: Ahá!

Tiago: E em plan como uma mes#,¹⁴ que fai como *mierdas* em plan de superbaile e tal, e com trajes, bueno [sic], trajes!

Brais: Si.

Tiago: Mesclando a sua vestimenta, em plan, trajes *tradicionales* asturianos e em plan *mierdas* [sic] assi em plan, *ligueros* [sic] e *merdas* destas.

Brais: Si.

Tiago: É como... um *icono*, rural, *asturianu*!

Brais: E...

Tiago: QUEER. É como, *Dios* [sic]!, de verdade.

Brais: Ahá, já.

Brais: *He created a character there, hmm, in the music and the theater scene, that is amazing to me.*

Tiago: *He's a fucking ICON! My God, truly, he... makes me feel like living.*
(...)

Brais: *YES, he does like a cabaret with... He represents a little bit the... rural modernity. And...*

Tiago: *Like, yeah! And it also like has to be in Asturian, like in the...*

Brais: *A-ha!*

Tiago: *And it's like a mix... he does stuff like super dance and so, and also like, hmm, costumes!*

Brais: *Yes.*

Tiago: *Mixing his clothing, like, traditional Asturian costumes, and stuff like that, with garters and shit.*

Brais: *Yes.*

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Tiago: *And it's like... A rural, Asturian icon!*

Brais: *And...*

Tiago: *QUEER. I mean, Gosh!, seriously.*

Brais: *A-ha, yeah.*

After highlighting the fact that this artist did live in rural Galiza (at that moment) and defends non-urban ways of life and culture creation (in minoritized languages like Galician and Asturian), one of the participants closes that part of the conversation asserting that Rodrigo Cuevas 'really represents me', unlike other televised models of 'gay life'. That is due to this participant's own experience in a small Galician village where, against metronormative claims, he can live his sexuality openly and where he can feel care and support because what really matters is the work towards the community. To be part of a small community reconfigures one's different identities and their local importance, since the urban value of 'anonymity' is much more complicated to perform. This account challenges the politics of visibility and the closet narrative of mainstream gay politics, a problematic rural-to-urban narrative in which 'the young gay subject lives outside LGBTQ community in a nonurban space, one day realizes he is different, and leaves his rural upbringing to head to the big city where he comes out into adult gayness and lives happily ever after, embraced by his urban-based gay community' (Schweighofer 2009: 227).

As Tiago and Brais explain in their conversation, the local community norms and the expression of queerness are compatible; that is, 'some rural queers may not position sexuality as the "definitive characteristic of the self" [...], because doing so could easily negate other parts of their identity, such as ethnicity, class, and local familial history' (Baker 2012: 45). Tiago says that 'in rural places it's not like in a city, [where] you are seeing a person and then another one two seconds after that'. In rural places 'you are just these people' and social relevance is upon the fact 'that you are a hard worker, that you are kind', as Brais highlights.

While all the participants recognize that there is a lack of what they call 'queer input' in rural areas, where queer referents (such as singer Rodrigo Cuevas and other queer folk musicians and artists) are less common and less visible, they also defend rurality as a path to a queerer life freed from the 'need of labeling' of the cities. In villages and small towns in Galiza you have to be, basically, a *neighbor*. Beyond that role, rooted in social interaction and local philosophies of labor (Roseman 1995: 16-7), there is no need for subcultural categorization and distinction through certain identifications:

Brais: E é como que na cidade te#, tes que sempre etiquetar-te dalgum jeito. Tes que... [...] ser *punkie* ou ser *hippie* ou ser...
[...]

Mmm, sempre te tes que etiquetar, não? E... e no rural não.

Miguel: Si.

Brais: No rural és VEZINHO e punto. Dá igual o que vistas e dá igual o que...

Tiago: Já si claro, em plan, si! E sempre hai um mítico raro em plan (imitando com voz aguda) "Ai tal, puta merda de pueblo [sic]! Eu quero marchar de aqui, quero ir a uma ciudá [sic] toda *guai*, não sei quê"

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Brais: *And it's like in the city you have, you have to label yourself always, somehow. You have to... (...) be a punk, to be a hippie, or to be...
(...)*

Hmm, you always have to label yourself, right? And... and in rural places you don't.

Miguel: *Yes.*

Brais: *In rural places you are a NEIGHBOR, period. It doesn't matter what you're wearing, it doesn't matter what...*

Tiago: *Of course, like... yes! There's always the typical weirdo like (imitating with a high pitch voice), "oh, well, fucking shithole of a town! I want to leave this place, I want to go to a city all cool, blab-blub-blub".*

Since traditional culture and Galician language have been historically tied to rurality, queerness functions as the entrance door for a disidentificatory reidentification with that same language and culture. The discourse surrounding minority languages, as noted by Walsh, 'relates to their perceived suitability for socially and linguistically diverse urban settings removed from their historical rural heartlands' (Walsh 2019: 54), therefore marginalizing urban new speakers and queer subjects who do not fit with this strict ethnic authenticity. Against the mainstream centrist narratives of gay politics in contemporary Spain, Galician queer counterculture — of which new folk music trends are illustrative — merges the deconstruction of sexual privilege with the situated revitalization of Galician values. Queer cultural actors inspire alternative epistemologies and world-making processes, embodied by Tanxugueiras' 'a voz das nosas nais', upon which to construct local critiques of heteronormativity, homonormativity and metronormativity, as, at the same time, they bridge the urban/rural binary; in Colmeiro's words, 'bringing urban and rural Galicia together' (2017: 275; see also Colmeiro 2017: 6; 26; 50).

5. (No) Happy Ending

In this article I have tried to reflect on how the semantic field of the *national* can still be useful to broaden the Galician political imagination, reaching more people, to understand today's cultural practices and change the society of the future — the only time for anti-normative and subaltern subjects (Muñoz 2009). The decolonization and denormativization of Galician culture — its linguistic and cultural revitalization — demands intersectional approaches that allow queer subjects to 'enter the conversation' to renegotiate the centers and peripheries within the Spanish state:

the end of the known world, which we know as the land's end, can also be the beginning of another one. The periphery could be seen then as (...) an area that allows freer experimentation on the fringes of the mainstream, therefore holding a cutting-edge position in the vanguard of cultural (ex-)changes. (Colmeiro 2017: 4)

Every project of cultural and material emancipation necessarily carries dissent. Against the romantic idea of community, queer community logics are activated in contemporary Galiza: a *we* that does not exist yet, between social networks and dance floors, between music and politics,

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advances towards the common through dissent. Queer cultural action goes beyond communitarian and cosmopolitan understandings of (minority) cultures (Waldron 1992) in a move towards a cultural preservation that does not claim national purity, on the one hand, and that does not romanticize individual genuine choices, on the other hand.

However, it is not all good news. The levels of ecological erosion, language loss, and cultural abandonment are alarming (e.g. sociolinguistic data from Monteagudo et al. 2016; IGE 2019; INE 2022b). While the state and other supranational political entities are accelerating the destruction of non-hegemonic cultures and economies, Galician institutional politics and culture management remain static before the progressive dissolution of this Northwestern corner of the Iberian Peninsula's cosmovisions. Including, of course, alternative (hi)stories of gender, sexuality, transgression, and pride, some of which have been collected in historian Daniela Ferrández's *A defunción dos sexos* (2022). A queer agenda from within the contemporary critiques of internal domination in the Spanish state, one that highlights the crucial role represented by queer cultural workers, consumers and speakers, must file in a new policy and a new politics. Culture and linguistic revitalization are, as I wish to have shown, a truly queer task.



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