

Fields of Despair: Land Property Rights and the Galician Diaspora

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1 Objective

Did Spain's 19th-century land privatisation processes influence international migration?

If privatisation and secure property rights are typically linked to migration, why did Galicia (where the land tenure system most resembled private ownership) experience the highest emigration rates?

A common view in Development Economics connects property rights and privatisation to international migration. However, Galicia is a **puzzle**:

- **Massive overseas emigration (1870-1930)**
- **Communal lands were essential**
- **Land tenure with private-like rights (*foro*)**
- **Economic stagnation and agricultural backwardness**

Hypotheses:

- H1.** Privatisation without redistribution increases international migration
- H2.** The loss of communal lands intensified migration pressures
- H3.** The foro system provided stability but not prosperity
- H4.** The redemption of foros came too late to prevent mass migration

2 What Drives the Process?

- **Liquidity of land:** Secure property rights increase land marketability, enabling sales, mortgages, and financing migration (Valsecchi 2014)
- **Investment anchoring:** Land ownership promotes long-term investment, reducing migration by improving local opportunities (Galiani & Schargrodsky 2010)
- **Displacement effect:** Land reforms, like the Highland Clearances and Enclosure Acts, displaced tenants, with communal land playing a key role (Humphries 1990; Devine 2019).
- **Endowment effect:** Owners may overvalue inherited land, resisting migration despite worsening conditions (Yan, Yang & Xia 2021)
- **Institutional environment:** Weak governance causes legal uncertainty and displacement but can also hinder mobility (Zhao 2024)

3 Empirics

Analysis focused on **Madoz's Disentailment** (1859-1895):

1. Data sources:

- Census data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE)
- Disentailment data from Registry Books of land sold in the Galician provinces, held at the Spanish National Historical Archives and the Provincial Historical Archives in Galicia

2. Dynamic modelling with **municipal**-level data (1859-1900)

$$\text{Emigration}_{i,t} = \text{Emigr}_{i,t-1} + \text{Privatisation}_{i,t} + \text{Communal}_{i,t} + \mathbf{X}_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

- *Emigration* measured as the difference between the 16-40 single male and female population relative to the municipality's total population
- *Privatization* measures the per capita value of auctioned land in each municipality
- *Communal* measures the proportion of communal land among all disentailed land
- **X** is a matrix of control variables (buyer, coast,...)

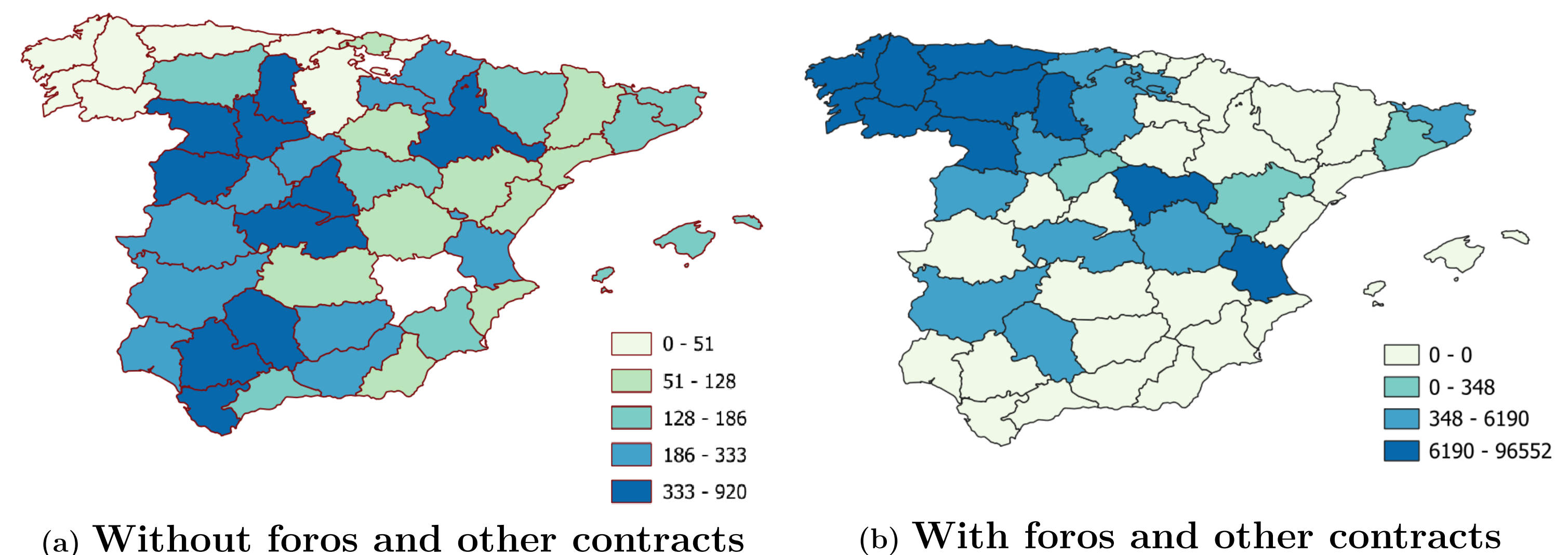
3. Robustness: GMM models to address potential endogeneity issues

- Remittances or returnees' capital were used to acquire land

4 Key Results So Far

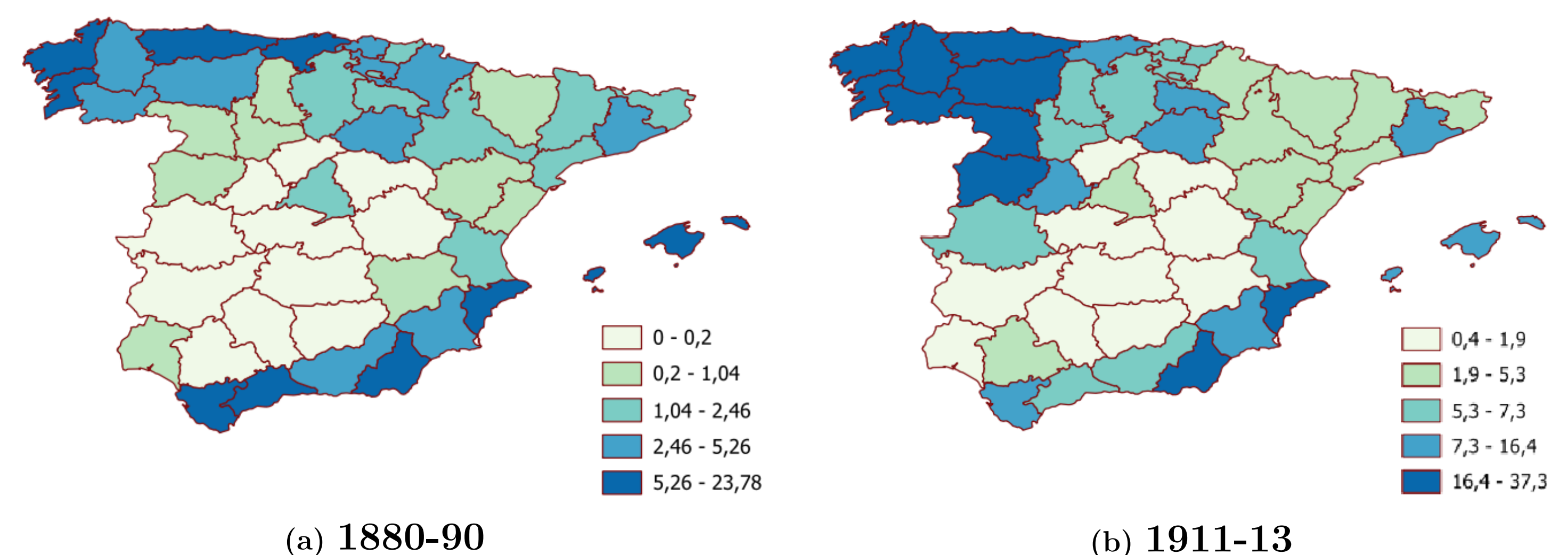
- **Privatisation** without **redistribution** increases migration
- The loss of **communal lands** intensified migration pressures
- **Hereditary** character of foro → **Subdivision** → Stability w/o growth
- **Coastal** regions new industries → Less migration

Figure 1: Per capita value of the properties confiscated during the Mendizabal disentailment (1836-1844), by Spanish provinces



Source: Own elaboration from Simón (1973, 158-59, 261).

Figure 2: Gross emigration rates by Spanish provinces



Source: Own elaboration from Sánchez-Alonso (1995).

FICHA de la adjudicación.			Clase, denominación y procedencia de la finca.		Starting price		Hammer price		FICHA DEL PAGO.	
NÚMERO del inventario.			TIPO DE SUELO para la subasta.		PRECIO del remate.		PRECIO del remate.		6 cuotas de no haberse efectuado.	
Enunciado			NOMBRE DEL REMATANTE.		TIPO DE SUELO para la subasta.		PRECIO del remate.		6 cuotas de no haberse efectuado.	
Date			Type and location		Buyer		Payment date		Payment date	
2947			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		56.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2951			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		125		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2948			Finca terreno en Galicia		Juan B. B. B.		13.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2950			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2946			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2942			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2940			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2938			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2936			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2934			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2932			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2930			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2928			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2926			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2924			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2922			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2920			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2918			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2916			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2914			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2912			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2910			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2908			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	
2906			Finca terreno en Galicia		D. Gabriel Llorca		12.500		Su. 11. Julio 68	

Page from a registry book of Pontevedra province, held at the Spanish National Historical Archive

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