

Recovered memory: The use of biographic stories in the second and third generation of Valencian emigrants to the United States of America in the early 20th century

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Abstract

When making use of the biographical method, it is quite common to collect stories directly from those who lived the narrated events. Those stories can be focused on either their entire life or specific aspects that the researcher considers relevant or important. There is an unwavering fact related to the research carried out on the recovery of the memory of Valencian immigrants to the United States of America during the first two decades of the 20th century: those who emigrated have already passed away.

One may think that their stories have also disappeared with them. However, thanks to exhaustive work with their descendants (sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, nephews and nieces) making use of techniques that are closely related to this methodology (biographical interviews, analysis of correspondence and other documents such as photographs), it is still possible to recover assets that otherwise would have ended up disappearing.

The work presented here is organised around several specific issues. If someone narrates another's a life, what do they really remember? How do they remember it? How do they transmit it?

Key words: biographical method, Valencian immigrants in USA, recovered memory, emigrants' descendants.

1. Introduction

The emigration of Valencians to the United States of America in the early 20th century and its social, economic, cultural and other consequences, both

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individually and collectively, are virtually unknown.¹ It has never been the subject of investigation, research or study in academia.² With the exception of a handful of local or county publications in books for festivals and similar publications,³ a rigorous study has never been performed to situate this phenomenon among other better-known ones which shared the same temporal and spatial contexts, such as Alicante natives in Algeria.⁴ The 2012 publication of the text by Teresa Morell, *Valencians a Nova York. El cas de la Marina Alta (1912-1920)*, is the most rigorous attempt to explain and show what happened almost 100 years ago in part of Valencia from a quantitative and descriptive standpoint. The other attempt to give this phenomenon shape and body is a study framed within research journalism, the documentary series entitled *Del Montgó a Manhattan* from Info TV, which premiered in 2014 and was directed by the journalist Juli Esteve.

The fact is that there were many fewer emigrants from Valencia to the United States of America than to other destinations,⁵ but for some towns in the counties of Marina Alta, Marina Baixa and El Comtat, there was a veritable exodus of people which had many consequences at all levels. One example is Benilloba, a town located in the inland mountainous region in the province of Alicante. According to the 1913 town census, the town had 1,086 inhabitants, 620 of whom were males. Between 1916 and 1920, 150 people left for the United States of America. Almost all of them were men (99%), and 76% were aged 30 or younger (Morrió 2014). Very few stayed permanently in the USA since the majority came back home after a period of time. And thus appears one of the main characteristics of this emigration: generally speaking, it mostly included males engaged in what has been nicknamed “oroneta” (swallow) emigration,⁶ that is, young men on a two-way journey seeking much higher salaries than those found at home, with the intention of returning home with their pockets full so they could get married, buy a house or a plot of land or set up a business. Yet it is also possible to follow the travels of the handful of women who were part of this migratory movement as they accompanied their husbands or brothers. And as mentioned above, even though it was not very common, the journey was one-way for some emigrants, who ended up establishing their families in that North American country.

¹There are also very few studies on Spanish emigration to this North American country. We can find the pioneering work by Rueda (1993), which is almost the only one, and more recently a doctoral thesis from the University of California by Varela-Lago (2008).

² In the proceedings of the Workshops of the Emigration of Valencians to America held on the occasion of the Centennial of the Discovery in 1993, there is one lecture, occupying two pages in writing, by Joan Francesc Mira, which provides an overview of the topic.

³Just to cite a few: García-Hernandorena (2013), Ortuño (2013), Morrió (2014).

⁴ Menages & Monjo (2007), Bonmatí, (1988).

⁵A few figures to quantitatively contextualise this phenomenon: between 1906 and 1920, around one million Spaniards emigrated to Argentina; around 300,000 went to Algeria and around 140,000 went to the United States (Sánchez 1995). The Valencians who chose the USA were tallied in the aforementioned show by Info TV (2014): 15,600 of the Spaniards who entered the USA via New York harbour between 1906 and 1920 were Valencians.

⁶ On the other hand, this was the traditional kind of emigration from the counties of Alicante to La Mancha and Castile, and to other Valencian counties such as La Ribera and Xúquer, following the cycles of crops and harvests (grains, grapevines, rice). Emigration to Algeria also tended to be temporary (Bonmatí 1988).

The participants in the events we are recounting died years ago, but their experiences live on, and we have sought their direct descendants in order to bring them back to life, spotlight them and share them. Our goal is to compile the stories of past events recounted by the direct descendants of those emigrants in order to revive an important part of the history of our land and its peoples. Yet we also want to see how these migratory experiences have somehow shaped the individual and collective identity of our towns and our peoples. Given the characteristics of the subject of our study, the approach we are taking is based on subjectivity, with the goal of reviving “particular stories (on gender, class, country, lineage) [which] strive to carve a niche for themselves in the canonical discourses of history” (Marinas & Santamarina 1993: 11), as these authors point out, given our interest “in the processes of individual, group and collective memory” (Ibid: 11). Using the biographical approach, we report on the complexity of human behaviour, its motivations and its subjectivity, plus since this is a diachronic topic, it has evolved over time and been transformed. From this perspective, we are incorporating the point of view of the object of research, plus we are accessing information that cannot be gotten any other way.

On a general level, Carles Feixa surveys the application of the biographical method and the materials that it uses throughout a series of studies produced by the social sciences during the 20th century, which “have used personal narratives to generate academic discourses on social change” (2006:4). On the other hand, the application of this procedure in research on migrations could be regarded as classic since the Thomas and Znaniecki publication *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*,⁷ which came out in the 1920s. It is one of the most widely read publications which strives to reconstruct the trajectories of immigrants. Joan Prat offers a holistic overview of the narratives and life stories related to migratory processes that have given rise to seminal works in the social sciences which have used “individual or multiple autobiographical stories, and within them what are called parallel and/or crossed stories (Pujadas 1992: 41 and forward)” (2007b: 22). The first ten pages of his article “En busca del paraíso: historias de vida y migración” are devoted to those who emigrated to America in the early 20th century. The majority are emigrants who went to Central America (Cuba) or South America (Argentina), even though he also cites the case of the Basques in the United States⁸ (2007b). In our study, we follow this author in his definition of emigrants: “an emigrant is one who departs or embarks on his exodus from the vantage point of their home”, and of the act or action of migrating as “a spatial change which involves at least a new residence and often a new society, different customs, etc.” (Prat 2007a: 221); however, we have not directly interviewed these emigrants but instead their descendants,⁹ and our goal was not so much the migratory processes per se but the direct

⁷We have a translation into Spanish edited by Juan Zarco, with a prologue by Ken Plummer, which was published by CIS in 2004. It is a selection from the original work and does not include Wladeck's life story.

⁸ This may be the best-known and most widely examined case when discussing emigration from Spain to the United States. The case of the Basque shepherds who emigrated to the western United States has even given rise to the existence of a Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, which conserves and stewards their legacy.

⁹And obviously, the status of emigrant is not inherited (Moncusí 2007).

consequences of this emigration on the life course of many families, communities and towns.

2. Methodology

The use of a qualitative methodology, the biographical method, has been shown to be a powerful tool for rescuing events that have been concealed by the passage of time from oblivion, events that are unknown and forgotten in many of the counties and towns where they occurred and are only accessible from the information squirrelled away in the drawers of many dressers and many memories. Within the biographical approach, we have used the technique of multiple and parallel biographical stories (Pujadas [1992] 2000). This technique is used when the unit of analysis is broad enough, yet there is a feature that shapes a certain collective identity. In our study, what provides the characteristics of the universe to be studied is the phenomenon of emigration to the United States of America in the early 20th century.

The first job in our research design was to define the criteria which we would use to choose the informants. We came up with four criteria: place, time, kinship and gender. Regarding place, we chose the informants that were going to be part of our study in two specific sites: first, the Valencian counties from which those emigrants left, where we have looked for their descendants; and secondly, the states in the USA where they established residence and where the presence of Valencians can still be traced. This article presents the results of the study carried out in four counties of Valencia: two in the province of Alicante and two in the province of Valencia. The province of Alicante was the origin of the first emigrants to North America (Canada and the USA) in 1906,¹⁰ and it was also the origin of the largest number, and where this emigration has been more prominent and well-known among its inhabitants. Within this province, we chose two counties: Marina Alta, where we made the first contacts and interviewed the first informant; and El Comtat, a county which also witnessed many of its villages left without men as they all went to America (such as the aforementioned example of Benilloba). In the province of Valencia, we chose the county of Safor, which bounds Marina Alta to the south and Ribera Alta to the north, the latter being the other county from the province of Valencia that was included in this study. In Ribera Alta, emigration to the United States of America occurred somewhat later and was less intense. It was highly localised both spatially and temporally: it basically affected three towns (Alginet, Carlet and Guadassuar), and all the emigrants left there in 1920.¹¹ Regarding those

¹⁰ The choice of this date is neither coincidental nor arbitrary. In 1906, the first expedition of workers from Alicante left for Canada from the village of Orba. From there they went to the United States, where they seem to have been the start of the migratory waves to this country (Morell 2012).

¹¹ In 1921, the Congress of the United States approved a law called the Emergency Quota Law which restricted the entrance of immigrants into the country (3% of the population of each nationality, according to the 1910 census). This restriction primarily affected those from southern and eastern European countries. This would explain why the greatest influx of immigrants occurred in 1920, for fear of the enforcement of this law. In 1924, another law, the National Origins Act, lowered the percentage of immigrants to 2% and based the calculations of the quotas on the 1890 census. This left out practically any Valencians because, according to that law, only 131 Spanish emigrants could enter the USA (there were practically no Spaniards in the 1890 census).

who remained in the USA, we conducted interviews with the descendants of the Valencians who moved to the states of Connecticut and New York.

Continuing with the second criterion, time, we sought and chose informants whose ancestors had emigrated to the United States of America between 1906 and 1920. Thirdly, regarding kinship, we first interviewed the children of the emigrants, which somehow determined the gender of our informants. We found a majority of women; given the advanced age of these descendants, it was easier to find women than men (women have a higher life expectancy). Likewise, our interviews with women tended to be longer than those with men. Therefore, gender is a factor worth bearing in mind when discussing the conservation and recovery of memory (Comas d'Argemir et al. 1990). We interviewed nieces and nephews since we believe that relationships with aunts and uncles have been fluid and their history matches a history of the extended family beyond the simple nuclear family.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the narrations were inspired by visual and personal materials (photographs, postcards, passports, period magazines) and objects (trunks, suitcases, coins, cameras) carried by the emigrants. These materials were supplied by the informants and carefully conserved by them. The materials and objects thus became prime tools for perceiving and understanding the practices of memory (Dornier-Agbodjan 2004). According to Dornier-Agbodjan, family photographs (in our case, the objects as well) contain the three social frameworks of memory as defined by Maurice Halbwach, namely language, time and space, although we would also add family, gender and social class. They are stable and collective, and their purpose within the family is to serve as a reminder, a spark of memory. Therefore, the photographs and other documents jealously guarded by the families were scanned and added to the stories to become part of the research.

3. Ethnography and results

Table 1 shows the profile of the informants according to the aforementioned criteria.

The first phase in our fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2014 included 19 stories. According to the regional distribution, we gathered 47% of them in the province of Alicante (33% in Marina Alta; 67% in El Comtat) and 53% in the province of Valencia (20% in Safor; 80% in Ribera Alta). Eighty-four percent of the informants are the descendants of emigrants who returned home; the remainder are the descendants of those who stayed. The same percentage corresponds to the sons/daughters, grandsons/granddaughters (84%) and nephews/nieces (16%). By sex, 79% of the interviewees were female. Finally, at the time of the interview, 79% were age 70 or older.

The average length of the interviews was an hour and a half. Most of them were conducted in the informants' homes (16). Of the remaining, 3 were held in a café and 1 at the interviewee's workplace. The language of 100% of the interviewees was Valencian, which was also the native language of all the interviewees.

Table 1. Informants according to research criteria

Province	County	Town	Sex	Age	Kinship	Date of emigration	Date of return	
Alicante	Comtat	Benilloba	Female	85	Daughter	1919	1921	
			Female	82	Daughter	1920	1930	
			Female	74	Daughter	1920	1922	
	Marina Alta	Orba	Male	85	Son	1916, 1920	1980s	
			Female	53	Daughter and granddaughter	Before 1933	1980s	
		Pego	Male	74	Son	1920	1923	
			Female	55	Daughter and granddaughter	1920	1930	
			Female	55	Niece	1917	Did not return	
	Valencia	Safor	Bellreguard	Female	85	Daughter	1920	1921
			Palmera	Female	75	Niece	1920	Did not return
Ribera Alta		Carlet	Male	70	Son	1920	1922	
			Female	92	Daughter	1920	1921	
			Female	91	Daughter	1920	1922	
			Female	80	Daughter	1920	1922	
			Female	80	Daughter	1920	1922	
			Male	74	Son	1920	1933	
		Guadassuar	Female	50	Daughter and granddaughter	1920	1960s	
			Female	74	Daughter	1920	1921	
		Female	74	Daughter	1920	1932		

Once the interviews had been transcribed, they were analysed in order to establish a series of categories of analysis. The establishment and definition of analytical categories extracted from our interviews allows us to theorise and validate the initial hypotheses of our research. They provide information that is often descriptive, but they also show an entire symbolic and interpretative world of a phenomenon such as emigration to the United States of America, which reveals not only how it was experienced but also what it was like and still is like today from the vantage point of the family members of those who emigrated.

Within the categories, the one referring to social-family contexts and the causes of emigration are two of the first to emerge from the stories. The kind of family that traditionally lived in Valencia (as opposed to those who tended to live in the centre and south of the Iberian Peninsula) was a nuclear family associated with a neo-local residence. The system of passing on assets (if there were any) was distributive, so the inheritance as divided equally among the children of a family. For practical purposes, this gave rise to the fragmentation of the inherited assets, which in the case of land led to smallholder farming that was insufficient and scarcely profitable (Comas d'Argemir, 1992). At a time when the demographic transition to a modern society was not yet complete, the birth rate continued to be quite high while the death rate was gradually declining. A large number of children, coupled with the lack of patrimony and adverse socioeconomic conditions, prompted emigration. What is more, if we add to this causes like family trauma (widowhood, orphanhood, illness), the situation could become unsustainable for the nuclear family.

“My father, his father died when he was young and the same happened to my mother, her mother died much earlier...” (Man, 84 years old, Orba)

“It’s what happened when they had no father, my grandmother was left without a husband and at the age of 11 he had to leave school and go to work, three daughters and a son.” (Woman, 80 years old, Carlet)

“My father had another brother and a sister and his mother was a widow.” (Woman, 85 years old, Benilloba)

“My father was one of seven siblings. Three of them emigrated to North America, by the way they went to Washington, and to New York.” (Man, 74 years old, Pego)

“They weren’t too bad off economically, but the problem was that my grandfather got ill and my grandmother didn’t know how to run the business, and they spent money on doctors... And apparently my father, who had married my mother when she was already expecting my eldest sister, said, I’m leaving to make money. (...) My grandmother spent it all, shall we say, all of it. They spent money on my grandfather’s illness. And later, I mean, when my father got married they came home, but they also went to the markets in cart, the market of Benissa, the market of... to sell rice, all kinds of grains. And my father, well, that’s what he did. And so my grandmother was left hanging and the shop closed.” (Woman, 85 years old, Bellreguard)

“My grandfather was the eldest son of a mixed couple [*Blended marriage: This refers to the fact that his great-grandfather was widowed with 3 or 4 children and married a woman who was also a widow with children*]. Together they had more children. His grandfather was the eldest and noticed that there was not enough to go around. My grandfather, his father liked to drink. (...) Because his father did have enough, he did have a house there across from the town hall which belonged to his father, plus... but if they have a slew of children from one woman and from another woman, and they drink and...” (Woman, 74 years old, Guadassuar)

“They had six children, they had six children. That man died before he reached fifty, you know? And so they were left fatherless and then after that...” (Woman, 55 years old, Pego)

“My father was left fatherless when he was very young. There were six or seven siblings, he was the youngest one and when his father died I don’t know if he was two or three years old. And in his home they owned land, but apparently his mother was a gambler, I mean she liked gambling and we know that she gradually lost everything, squandering it and getting indebted.” (Man, 74 years old, Carlet)

These circumstances, coupled with the overall economic and political situation, appear in the majority of cases as the reasons and motives for emigrating. Even though this is not the place to examine the historical context on the national, provincial or even county level, we should note that during the time when emigration to the USA happened, there was a widespread socioeconomic crisis, which was further aggravated in the second decade of the 20th century by the repercussions of World War I on the economy of Valencia. The environment which the emigrants left was an agricultural society besieged by a severe crisis. In the interviews, this situation is expressed in a variety of ways. The bulk of emigrants were people who had no land and worked as day-labourers.

“In my father’s home they owned no land.” (Woman, 91 years old, Carlet)

“At home they owned no land, they worked as day-labourers. He went to America with a family member when he was 17 years old.” (Woman, 72 years old, Guadassuar)

“Well, because they were all poor. Here in the village there were only a few rich folks, almost all the land belonged to a few rich folks (and the others worked as day-labourers). And a day’s work back then was not like it is today. My grandfather did not want to live like that, my grandfather wanted to live on his own. And when he went abroad for the first time he didn’t get enough, so he went again to live the way he wanted to.” (Woman, 74 years old, Guadassuar)

Emigration was also one of the strategies used to adapt to the market, and in some cases to resist the state (in the case of those who evaded doing their military service in Africa, for example) which normal, everyday families used to survive and try to improve their living and working conditions. The desire to leave stemmed from their desire to be prosperous; it was a personal incentive to secure better working conditions and a higher quality of life.

In other cases, men of marriageable age undertook the journey with a very clear goal in mind: to earn enough money to be able to get married.

“(He went to America) because there was no work here and he was going to get married and he went there to earn money so he could get married.” (Woman, 91 years old, Carlet)

“My father went to save money so he could get married. He courted and courted but had no money to get married.” (Woman, 80 years old, Carlet)

“And he said: if I get married with the meagre savings that my mother has I’ll take them. And so he said I’m going to America and whatever I bring back is so I can get married.” (Woman, 85 years old, Benilloba)

Despite all these economic explanations, there are also some that are in quite a different vein, namely men who were better off economically who undertook the journey as an adventure or with the desire to see the world and leave the village.

“My father was a butcher and he went with uncle X, who was an electrician. They both had a good life, they wanted for nothing. They ended up installing electricity in the village and that man had earned lots and lots of money. And they said, hey, well let’s go abroad and see what we find there.” (Woman, 92 years old, Carlet)

“[...] Because it wasn’t out of need because they had a means of living at home, the only thing was it was for adventure and... abroad, young people.” (Man, 70 years old, Carlet)

Even though the vast majority of emigrants to the United States of America were men, some women yearned to emigrate as well, and not just trailing behind their father or husband. It was the expression of a craving to leave a farming society where progress and social mobility were virtually impossible. This was expressed by the niece of one of those women.

“I heard from my grandmother that her sister (Dolores) wanted to leave and... and her mother, that is, the grandmother Dolores said: You want to go there?! And she says: I’m going because I want to wear a sombrero!” [laughter] (Woman, 55 years old, Pego)

Along with the social and family economic reasons, the establishment of networks beyond the unfavourable circumstances in the home or the attraction exerted by a country like the USA reinforced and stimulated emigration. Everything in our research seems to point to the fact that Valencians’ emigration

to the USA was not an isolated phenomenon of just a few people with a hankering for adventure. By that time, the USA was a huge magnet for millions of people from all over the world and, as mentioned above, even though it was not a very common destination for Valencians, a series of chains or networks got started in the Alicante county of Marina Alta, which then spread throughout the neighbouring counties until they even reached Castellón.

“And there was a very important place called “La valenciana”. “La valenciana” was owned two partners. One was Manuel Ivars. The name Ivars is from Benissa. And the other was Francisco Sendra, who was my father’s uncle. He had his business there, “La valenciana”. And every weekend, well, we lived nearby and we went to see how the business was going. What surprised me is that when the postman came, in the centre of the store... everything was men’s clothing... for sale. And they sold tobacco, shoes, trousers... and above “La valenciana”, above it they had two flats for rent for men who wanted, who had jobs nearby and slept there. So... I was shocked to see when the postman came he just grabbed a cigar box and put the letters in there. I thought, how can he do that? Letters are an individual, private thing and he just put them there. So all the men who worked around there went to check every now and then, to see if there was a letter from their mother or father in Spain.” (Man, 84 years old, Orba)

“But my mother had a job there somewhere else, she worked at different factories: making hats, fabric. In Manhattan there was, there is a neighbourhood where it’s all clothing, especially for women, and today it’s all exported to China and other places. And my mother, well, she was very lucky. When we left from New Jersey to Manhattan, she had met many friends who were from Oliva, Pedreguer, Ondara, Benigembla and they asked her: you work with us? And she says: yeah, yeah.” (Man, 84 years old, Orba)

Our informants told us about how there, their parents, grandparents or aunts or uncles found people from their villages or went wherever Valencians were living and working. This was even further reinforced by the custom, so common in the Valencian countryside, to work in groups or gangs (Mira 1982; Cucó 1992). Sometimes the entire gangs emigrated together, following in the footsteps of other groups with whom they might have shared fieldwork.¹²

“[...] at the age of 19 they must have said let’s go. They may have heard of a gang of men who were going there...” (Man, 70 years old, Carlet).

¹² A review of the files from Ellis Island shows how the ships in which Valencians were sailing, they tended to grouped together by towns (www.libertyellisfoundation.org).

”[...] it says it there, there I thought there were more. Yes, several went together. Yes, there you can find several names from Benilloba: Francisco, Silvestre...” (Woman, 85 years old, Benilloba)

“[...] My aunt married a man from... my Uncle Pedro, who is from Benigembla. And then... Benigembla is a village up in... in the part of Orba, over there. And that village was a tiny little village. If it had 2,000 inhabitants, and I’m not even sure it had that many, more than half of them went there. And so my Uncle Pedro went first, and by the way he got married to go to America because his parents had already gone. So that must have been in around 1916. And they went first. And he was there for two years, after that my Aunt Joaquina went [...]. And once they were there they insisted that my father and another sister go, too. But of course, she was the second to the youngest and she was too young to go (Joaquina) and when they had been there two years, it must have been around 1918, she came and my father went there with her in 1920.” (Man, 74 years old, Pego)

“But fortunately he was in a house full of Spaniards. He did, he said, if I eat over there I haven’t eaten, because he ate as if he were here! Because it was a Spanish couple. It was the brother of uncle X, from the same village too.” (Woman, 85 years old, Benilloba)

“[...] Yes, yes, don’t you know they all went together to the same places? Since they were Catholic, they all went to the Catholic church. After that they went, they danced, all the Spaniards gathered and if they were Valencians, so much the better. Because the language made things a lot easier.” (Woman, 55 years old, Pego)

“Dolores, who went later (she already had a brother there) because she went with her husband and her husband didn’t want to go. And she says, well, if you don’t come I’m going myself and she said, ‘Well, Pasqual, we’re attached at the waist’ and he had to go with her.” (Woman, 79 years old, Pego)

“And they already had a cousin there...” (Woman, 55 years old, Pego)

4. Conclusions

According to the anthropologist Marie-José Devillard, “the use of life stories is justified because they are a relevant, effective instrument for highlighting and uncovering deeds and processes (travel, work, marriage, etc.) that have genetically marked the life course of the social agent in question [...], and to find out (via comparison) the regularities that allow us to ascertain the ways of life and action” (2004:168). Despite this, we are aware, just as this author is, of the

limitations of past research. We do not expect or even try to assume that in-depth biographical interviews restore all the dimensions of the social genesis of past events. Even though the biographical approach to studying past migrations is nothing new today, its application to recover virtually forgotten processes is novel, processes which in other parts of Spain (Galicia and Asturias) have been thoroughly studied and always present, but which in Valencia have gone virtually unnoticed.

The intention of this article was to show how emigration to the USA in the early 20th century is remembered, expressed and interpreted by some of the descendants of the original emigrants. We have only shared a tiny sampling of the information gathered, but it already reveals the potential harboured by a qualitative technique like biographical narrations and the richness of this information. Combined with other techniques like keeping field diaries, analysing personal materials and documents such as correspondence and photographs, and examining consular archives, they provide social researchers with essential information. First, they offer a highly descriptive level to help us reconstruct historical deeds which were never reflected in the official of traditional historical sources. Secondly, they allow us to grasp how past events have shaped the individual and collective identity of some of the towns and counties in Valencia through cultural, social or economic changes. It opens up the door to applying new theoretical currents in migration studies, such as transnationalism,¹³ when studying past events. It allows us to understand how the emigrants who left their villages, which were still immersed in a backward, traditional, agricultural society, joined worldwide currents towards a society in the process of a modernising transformation towards an urban and industrial society, and that they were capable of conveying knowledge, capital, culture and values to their homes and families through objects, letters and photographs despite the limitations of the period. The importance of transnational ties therefore becomes visible through an entire web in which the networks established by and comprised of Valencian emigrants reveal themselves to be the source of economic, labour social and even emotional support for those men and women who made these networks the fundamental factor in their survival far from their homes. These bonds extend beyond territorial boundaries and have repercussions on the daily lives of each member of the networks, in both the emigrant's home country and in the new country where they are trying to build a life, and they even affect members of the different generations. Thus, the concepts of transmigrant or transnational fields, which have been defined to study contemporary migrations, may successfully be applied to the emigrants of the past as well.

“I remember that when they came back they always brought presents, especially clothing and necklaces. I still have it because I do theatre and so I save all that stuff. But I remember that I was little and they brought a lollipop that was a pen for all the little kids. And we'd never seen that before. I went to school with that and was a hit! It was such a hit! A pen that looked like a lollipop. And we were so excited! I

¹³As it has been defined by GlickSchiller, Basch & Szanton Blanc, (1995) and GlickSchiller (2013).

mean, they had brought it to me from America. That was amazing!”
(Woman, 55 years old, Pego)

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