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Flamenco: Contemporary Research Dilemmas

Flamenco: współczesne dylematy badawcze

Summary: Contemporary vantage points on various types of flamenco differ vastly. This disparity is visible among flamenco aficionados, performers and while analyzing academic attitudes. The paper explores some of the recurring discrepancies in the scholarly flamenco disputes. It dwells on the role of the discussed genre in ethnic debates and its place in Spanish culture. The article also looks at the antagonism between traditional and contemporary or “pure” and commercial display of flamenco. These discussions are part of – as a dance scholar Michelle Heffner Hayes (2009: 4) phrases it – “conflicting narratives of flamenco’s history” and contribute to a complex and multi-faceted image of this art form.

Key words: Flamenco research, Andalusia, Gypsy culture, music studies

Streszczenie: Współczesne postrzeganie różnych typów flamenco jest znacząco zróżnicowane. Ta rozbieżność widoczna jest wśród miłośników flamenco, wykonawców i w postawach akademickich. Autorka analizuje niektóre z różnic, które powtarzają się w dyskusjach naukowych dotyczących flamenco. Rozważa rolę omawianego gatunku w debatach etnicznych i jego miejsce w kulturze hiszpańskiej. Zwraca również uwagę na antagonizm między tradycyjnym i współczesnym lub „czystym” i komercyjnym pokazem flamenco. Dyskusje te są częścią – jak wyjaśnia to choreografka Michelle Heffner Hayes (2009: 4) – „sprzecznych narracji o historii flamenco” i przyczyniają się do złożonego i wieloaspektowego obrazu tej formy sztuki.

Słowa kluczowe: badania flamenco, Andaluzyja, kultura cygańska, studia muzyczne

Tłumaczenie: Autor

Introduction

Flamenco manifests a variety of research-related conundrums. It is enmeshed in former ethnic conflicts, entangled in genre controversies, burdened with notion as both national and local symbol. Such complexity translates to a variety of academic viewpoints. Some scholarly discrepancies include discussing the origins of flamenco or determining which specific forms can be included within the genre. Other disputes favor regional, local or national stance on this art form. Researchers endorse either emotional engagement or academic distance and sobriety within the flamenco studies. The aim of this

paper is to address these most evident differences. I will reiterate the heated debates after grouping them into four subsequent categories.

Traditional and Contemporary Flamenco – Genre Controversies

It is believed that flamenco originated among groups of marginalized gypsies¹ and persecuted low class Andalusians (Manuel 1989; Cruces Roldán 2002 etc.). Flamenco scholars and artists alike acknowledge the ethnic distinction between gypsy (*gitanos*) and non-gypsy Andalusians (*payos*). Fernando C. Ruiz Morales asserts:

Although with some significant exceptions, gypsy artists hailing from Andalusia or Spain tend to be more militant in setting borders and referring to flamenco as their heritage against the “guiris” who are not even gypsy but “payos”, hence employing a double ethnic classification used to gain legitimacy at the expense of others (Ruiz Morales 2011: 298).

Michelle Heffner-Hayes adds: “while Andalusians and gypsies have shared the same soil for centuries, the two groups are regarded as racially and socially distinct from one another” Heffner-Hayes (2009: 32). Whilst the issues of cultural and ethnic ownership of flamenco will be explored later, it is worthwhile mentioning here this sociocultural tension. The Andalusian, marginalized *payos* were known as day workers – *jornaleros* and *majos/majas* – “working class, picaresque denizens of street culture” (Chuse 2013: 16). The lower class Andalusians and gypsies were either unemployed or performed low-paid jobs such as mining, blacksmithing, repairing kitchen appliances, making baskets etc. (Manuel 1989; Álvarez Caballero 1998). These groups gathered and articulated social injustice, poverty, and ostracism through *gritos* (“screams”). Such early forms of flamenco expression were rather rough, unpolished. Later on, they became a framework for traditional flamenco. Private, intimate character of performances, “rawness” of expression, heart-stabbing vocals, interest in arduous subject matters such as death, exploitation, poverty, crime, unrequited love, social exclusion – all became the desired attributes of genuine flamenco.

Romanticism era in Western Europe initiated interest in exotic, raw, “primitive” forms of expression. That contributed to the increase in flamenco popularity among foreign audience (Washabaugh 1998). Flamenco seized to be practiced exclusively in private contexts. It was now an entertainment form displayed in public, touristic places called *cafés cantantes*. The popularity of flamenco contributed to the trend of professionalization.

¹ The term “gypsy” is used intentionally. I am aware that it might carry a certain political burden and evoke unfavorable connotations. It is, however, a standard term used by a great number of flamenco scholars (Michelle Heffner Hayes, Lou Charnon-Deutsch, Loren Chuse, Peter Manuel etc.). Andalusian Roma people call themselves *gitanos*. The term “gypsy” is a direct translation of that referent. It therefore recognizes, endorses and respects terminology preferred by the *gitanos*.

The status of the performers changed – they could now achieve national and international fame. Flamenco guitar emerged as a solo concert art; in the 19th century it was used primarily as an instrument accompanying vocal or dance performance (Manuel 1989). The professionalization of flamenco provoked its expansion to settings such as theatre and opera. It was now being manufactured as a commodity consumed by the elite. Theatre realm enforced specific genre-related alterations (Álvarez Caballero 1998; Heffner Hayes 2009). Twirls, ballet-like spins and pivots became an acceptable element of flamenco stage performances. Throughout the 20th century other touristic, commercial venues such as *tablaos* began to mushroom. They were introduced with the aim of replacing former *cafés cantantes* and sprouted during the regime of Francisco Franco.

The presence of flamenco in theatres and its increased popularity influenced the development of yet another musical phenomenon. Since the 1980s flamenco aficionados have been observing the growing demand for *nuevo flamenco* (“new flamenco”). This genre evolved from the elements of traditional flamenco merged with a variety of musical styles. The conglomerate includes types of dance and aesthetics such as rumba, jazz, ballet, world music and contemporary dance. According to Manuel (2010) such hybridity is also a result of marenista orthodoxy, which emerged in the 1960s. The orthodoxy advocated allegiance to relatively few, fixed, and highly structured flamenco forms. The purist insistence on codified styles hindered creative efforts. *Nuevo flamenco* appeared partially as an innovative insurgency, which opposed the restrictive, purist orthodoxy.

The concept of hybridity raised several theoretical concerns – previous century saw abundance of such discourses. Some of the most prominent notions of cultural hybridization and postcolonial interpretations of hybridity were proposed by Néstor García Canclini (1995) or Homi Bhabha (1994). Hybridization has also been presented as a research paradigm, helpful in ethno- and socio-musicological studies. This is particularly visible in an interdisciplinary volume edited by Gerhard Steingress: *Songs of the Minotaur – Hybridity and Popular Music in the Era of Globalization: A Comparative Analysis of Rebetika, Tango, Rai, Flamenco, Sardana, and English Urban Folk*. One of its contributors: Wolfgang Holzinger (2002) explored the epistemological status of the concept of hybridity while attempting to divide it into several subcategories. The author advised against the wording such as “fusion” or “mix”, which derives from natural sciences domain. Humanities and social sciences should acquire their own, appropriate terminology and typology, which acknowledge the plethora of hybrid forms. Holzinger proposed five humanities-specific categories: coalescence, combination, *mélange*, unification, and emergence. The concept of “fusion” implies a perfect “mix” of components, in the sense of camouflaging the elements of compositional structure. The word “combination”, for

example, allows for the coexistence of recognized heterogeneous elements in uneven proportions. Following this logic *flamenco nuevo* should not be referred to as a fusion.

Flamenco's hybridity with respect to its world music influences illustrates the de-territorialization of contemporary, globalized world (Steingress 2002a). Hybridization can also be a consequence of elemental musical transculturality. I detect a paradoxical status of contemporary *flamenco nuevo*. As territorialized as flamenco is (being born in Andalusia), it is also intrinsically transcultural as the region embraces abundance of foreign influences. We could say more: the hybridization of flamenco is, to an extent, a product of its Andalusian territorialization. Flamenco-hybrid is thus simultaneously territorialized and de-territorialized.

Present-day eclectic forms of flamenco can be further divided into several categories. Andalusian gypsies who emigrated to Barcelona and Madrid are credited with the creation of *rumba catalan* – a hybrid of Cuban rumba, flamenco and rock (Manuel 1989). It is a product of their interactions with other migrants residing in *bairros* (urban neighborhoods). Another contemporary hybrid is known as *flamenco árabe* – a subgenre that “represents a reaffirmation of Andalusia's distinct cultural heritage in the form of a celebration of its Moorish ties” (Manuel 1989: 59). It combines flamenco with Moroccan-style instruments and songs performed in Arabic. We can also identify flamenco pop subgenre. Some scholars include *rumba catalan* within a broader description of this category (Manuel 1989). Arguably the most prominent representative of flamenco pop was Paco de Lucía. His eclectic, guitar compositions combined flamenco with other popular music styles.

The coexistence of the traditional flamenco and its contemporary, altered forms is a source of tension among aficionados and scholars alike. Naturally, groups of traditionalists perceive flamenco performed in private gatherings as superior and more authentic than the “disingenuous” commercial version. The purists disregard any genre alteration, including the use of guitar as a solo instrument: “the essence of flamenco is singing” (Manuel 1989: 57). Michelle Heffner Hayes (2009: 42) states: “As dancers trained in traditional flamenco perform in tourist productions or experiment with hybrid forms, purists insist upon the preservation of the tradition”. Insisting on the preservation of flamenco's purity stems from the fear of the loss of its “ownership”. Flamenco is as an increasingly popular entertainment form, hence the attempts to protect it and secure it for the generations to come.

Contrary, modernists support the evolution of flamenco. They encourage embracing plurality of influences within a *nuevo flamenco* concept. Christopher Paetzold (2009) stresses the imperative of musical evolution. The researcher describes traditional flamenco as a “sterile musical tradition that reenacts and invents perceived innocent ages”

(Paetzold 2009: 207). This argumentation deems the attempts to preserve pure flamenco as desperate and artificial. Peter Manuel (1989: 59) perceives *flamenco árabe* as a “vehicle of social identity”. With that statement he emphasizes the importance of honoring Andalusian’s cultural diversity. Flamenco pop and *rumba catalan* are defended on the premise of their potential to reflect “the new urban consciousness” (Manuel 1989: 62). One of the reasons behind their creation was mass migration of low class Andalusians to Barcelona and Madrid. The new urban social class uses these eclectic musical forms as an arena of contestation, interchange and social dialogue. George Lipsitz (1994) asserted that popular culture echoes and creates reality. Hybrid, contemporary forms of flamenco would then be natural extensions of evolving cultural reality. Such music is also a maker of new polyphonic sociocultural dialogue.

The modernists (Pérez 2015) argue that flamenco is a hybrid by default. It did, after all, derive from a variety of musical traditions including Andalusian folklore, Moorish rhythmic elements, Jewish sounds, gypsy influences etc. (Cruces Roldán 2002, Heffner Hayes 2009 etc.). From that vantage point, *flamenco nuevo* would be a reiteration of flamenco’s original hybrid nature. Its traditionally (sic!) heterogeneous character embraces plurality of influences. Insisting on flamenco’s purity could be seen as imposed and habituated.

It is difficult to establish with absolute certainty what constitutes traditional form of flamenco. There is a general consensus that flamenco performed in a *tablaó* should not be classified as a genuine one. Peter Manuel (2010) stresses the importance of singing (*cante*) as a foundation of traditional flamenco. He mentions less than 40 traditional *palos* (styles) of singing, which serve as a benchmark for defining authentic flamenco. *Palos* comply with the requirements of specific rhythm (*compás*), musical tonalities, conventional – yet open to interpretation – melodies, and poetic pattern. They include *copla* – a 3 to 5 lines lyrical verse. Each *palo* can have multiple variations or styles of singing as it acts as a framework for the traditional flamenco. It therefore invites spontaneous interpretations and improvisations, while *flamenco nuevo* relies on a predetermined melody and “jingle-like refrains” (Manuel 2010: 115). In that sense *tablaos*, which tend to focus on *baile* (dance) and underestimate *cante* (singing) would fail to conform to the requirements of the traditional genre. Its authentic version “can sometimes be found in the classroom of a very old teacher, but more likely in the company of other aficionados, at a *juerga* (jam session) sponsored by a private flamenco club (*peña*)” (Heffner Hayes 2009: 41).

Antonio Gades and Joaquín Cortés are among the most prominent figures of “new flamenco”. If one examines the ferocity of their performances, it could be argued that they encompass qualities traditionally associated with genuine flamenco: passion, pain,

and roughness. Consequently, several scholars assert that *nuevo flamenco* should not be perceived as less authentic than the one performed during private, intimate gatherings (Matamoros 2008; Pérez 2015). On the other hand, Cortés became famous for highly atypical in flamenco components such as “Martha Graham-style pelvic contractions, footwork that include kneeling before the audience, or balletic lifts and pirouettes” (Heller 2015: 245). Antonio Gades incorporates into his flamenco-based choreography elements of “ballet, modern dance, *escuela bolero*, and pantomime” (Heffner Hayes 2009: 42). For that reason traditionalists tend to classify them as ballet or contemporary choreographers rather than flamenco dancers *per se*.

Ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel does not regard contemporary, eclectic forms of flamenco as alien or incongruous subgenres. He recognizes them as a “continuum of styles” or a “flamenco complex” (Manuel 1989: 47). Through that, he proposes a holistic reading of Andalusian genre. He argues that in order to fully comprehend contemporary flamenco, one must take into consideration an array of substyles as they now “form an intrinsic part of Spanish culture” (Manuel 1989: 47). Insisting on preserving exclusively “pure” forms of flamenco would then be unnecessary if not irrelevant. Manuel argues that the above-mentioned hybrids contributed to the transformation of the society. Since they gradually became an inherent part of Spanish culture, one could study them as an intrinsic component of flamenco aggregate.

Andalusians versus Gypsies – Ownership Debate

Deciding whether flamenco is an inherently Andalusian or gypsy art form might be a futile exercise. Scholars tend to identify themselves as *gitanistas* (supporters of the gypsy origin of flamenco) or *Andalucistas* (believers in its purely Andalusian roots). There are also more balanced approaches such as that of Peter Manuel. He perceives flamenco as an expression of suffering “of the persecuted gypsies, but in a more general sense, of Andalusians as a whole” (Manuel 1989: 48). In another publication, however, he declares: “Although several non-Gypsy (*payos*) have excelled as flamenco performers, the genre has traditionally been cultivated primarily by Gypsies – specifically the sedentary, relatively assimilated Gypsies of the towns of Seville and Cadiz provinces” (Manuel 1986: 46). Sociologist and flamenco scholar Gerhard Steingress (1998) argues that original, early forms of flamenco combined elements of Andalusian folk music, types of Spanish national dance and gypsy aesthetics. From that vantage point flamenco would be a manifestation of quintessentially Andalusian cultural melting pot.

Flamenco as a marker of contested social identities and persecuted social classes mirrors the contested character of Andalusia. The expulsion of Andalusian Jews and

Muslims (*moriscos*) after Spanish Inquisition falls in with the sociocultural ostracism and persecution of the gypsies. The southern part of Iberia has had a long history of exploitation resulting in its description as a “colonized region of Spain” (Chuse 2003: 15). After the Christian *Reconquista*, once prosperous Andalusia began to lose its prominent status. Economic mismanagement, Madrid’s profiteering of Andalusian’s resources contributed to gradual marginalization of the region. The participation in Napoleonic Wars in the 19th century further contributed to the belittling of the region. While the effects of the Industrial Revolution became noticeable in Western Europe, agricultural Andalusia remained fairly unaffected. The impeded progress and persisting periods of famine contributed to the spread of banditry in the region. Throughout the 19th century Andalusia fulfilled the Romantic fantasies of tormented, unspoiled, “primitive”, and “underdeveloped” land. Similarly to the marginalized status of Andalusia, flamenco historically lacked the intrinsic prestige associated with social elites. Both: the oppressed region and the afflicted music genre were commodities devoured by the affluent foreign establishment. Both were subject to asymmetrical, disproportional power relationships.

Assuming the gypsy provenience of flamenco leads to deeming gypsy performances as pure, genuine and, ultimately, traditional. During my fieldwork research in Andalusia (several stays in 2010 and 2011)² I frequently heard people shout *Qué gitano!* (“How gypsy!”) while observing flamenco shows. It was used as a sign of approval acknowledging a notably passionate and pure depiction of that art form.

When analyzing many flamenco lyrics, one can detect their gypsy provenience. The themes address the harshness of gypsy life, social ostracism or imprisonment. Researchers associate these subject matters with the concept of *gitanismo* – Gypsy ethos (Manuel 1989; Chuse 2003). The following translated excerpt from one of the songs is an example: “The horseman on the corners, with lanterns and torches were shouting *Kill him, he’s a gypsy*” (Manuel 1989: 52). On the other hand, there is also an abundance of lyrics that contemplate hardships faced by the Andalusians *in toto*, irrespectively of their ethnicity.

As mentioned above, Gerhard Steingress insisted that flamenco is a particularly prominent exemplification of the Andalusian ethnic diversity. This musical genre would then be an extension of many folklore traditions, which contributed to the non-homogenous nature

² The author’s ethnographic engagement in flamenco research is further elaborated in a book recently published in Polish (Wieczorek 2018). While its primary focus is within the field of semiotic anthropology, it discusses fieldwork experiences in contrasting contexts of *peñas* (private flamenco gatherings) and *tablaos* (restaurants, bars etc. where flamenco performances take place). The book touches upon the intrinsically different nature of ethnographic engagement within the realm of touristic flamenco festivals and intimate gatherings. During the fieldwork practice in Andalusian cities, greatest emphasis was placed on participant observation. On various occasions I also carried out interviews with flamenco practitioners, performers and aficionados.

of Andalusia. *Andalucistas* often emphasize the cosmopolitan character of their region, portraying it as a conglomerate of cultural influences. Peter Manuel provides another argument supporting Andalusian provenience of some flamenco forms. He enumerates songs, which stem directly from the non-gypsy, hence Andalusian folk traditions. Among these he includes: *malagueñas*, *granadinas*, *cantes mineros* (Manuel 1986). Adding to his rather equitable narrative, he then spells out subgenres deprived of non-gypsy components. The following group in an example: *siguriyas*, *soleares*, *bulerías*, and *tonás*.

Michelle Heffner Hayes argues that an overtly enthusiastic emphasis on entirely Andalusian origins of flamenco can mirror profound ethnic tensions. The popular pre-conception of gypsies as thieves can result in the assumption that “there is no such thing as original gypsy culture” (Heffner Hayes 2009: 34). From that viewpoint flamenco would be a conglomerate of Andalusian music traditions, gathered and integrated by gypsies. In the past Spanish gypsies were placed at the bottom of social ladder, “ranked below even the most impoverished Andalusians” (Heffner Hayes 2009: 32). Therefore, crediting them with the invention of something so meaningful could be rather inconvenient. One conducive “fix” for such association is emphasizing Moorish components of flamenco (through referencing the Muslim occupation of the region between 711 to 1492). *Andalucistas* tend to, for example, trace rhythmic similarities between Andalusian art form and ancient Arab oral poetry. I detect a certain degree of logical incoherence within an extreme version of *Andalucistas* narrative. Their perspective acknowledges the inclusion of gypsy culture and its impact on the multicultural landscape of the region. At the same time it distances itself from the gypsy element in the debate over the origins and the “ownership” of flamenco.

One of the most prominent publications, which marked the beginning of *gitanistas* narrative, is *Mundo y formas del cante flamenco*. It was written by Antonio Mairena and Ricardo Molina and published in 1967. That book, being one of the early manifestations of formal flamenco studies, paved the way for the *gitano* narrative. It has since become a primary reference point for the supporters of the gypsy provenience of flamenco. Mairena and Molina identified the purity and authenticity of flamenco as equivalent to its exclusively gypsy affiliation. Several scholars have since criticized this assertion (Mitchell 1994; Steingress 2005). The authors declare that the music form emerged within intimate ambience of gypsy families in the 19th century. They insist that through subsequent processes of commercialization, flamenco became andalucianised. The public, touristic display of flamenco would then be a mere derivative of the original gypsy art form. Similar dogma can be observed in James Woodall’s (often criticized) book *In Search*

of the Firedance: Spain through Flamenco (Woodall 1992). The author reiterates the exclusively gypsy ability to generate a genuine and pure flamenco performance.

Some other scholars such as Isidoro Moreno Navarro identify gypsies as Andalusians, emphasizing their gradual process of cultural adaptation to the region (Moreno Navarro 1996). To further complicate this debate, Timothy Mitchel suggests yet another hypothesis on the origins of flamenco. He associates the emergence of flamenco with a lifestyle of a multicultural group within Andalusia, rather than with a particular ethnic affiliation. The scholar argues that the art form “was the collective result” (Mitchell 1994: 67) of low class miners, panhandlers, Moorish people who converted to Christianity etc. These social groups practiced flamenco as a means to challenge social inferiority and to confront their suffering. He recommends that flamenco is a product of a “lumpenproletarian style” (Mitchell 1994: 39) practiced among “subcultural others” (Mitchell 1994: 39) rather than of the gypsies or the Andalusians. Therefore flamenco would be born among lower class men of various ethnicities and not amidst gypsies or Andalusians – exclusively.

Regional, National and Global Culture – the Optics Problem

Another ongoing dispute within the realm of flamenco studies amounts to asserting what culture flamenco, in fact, represents. When we say that flamenco mirrors social norms or when we analyze flamenco music within the context of culture – what culture do we have in mind? As will be demonstrated below, music can enunciate both regional and / or national cultural values.

Arguably the most evident period during which flamenco officiated as a manifestation of Spanish national culture was Francisco Franco’s regime (1939–1975). During his dictatorship, all forms of flamenco expression were subject to a political suppression. The identification of flamenco as an Andalusian, regional style was eradicated. The official narrative recognized flamenco as yet another symbol of Spanish unity. These homogenizing attempts were mirrored by the creation of politically charged system of *nacionalflamenquismo*. Music activities (and all other cultural activities for that matter) were closely examined and meticulously censored.

Washabaugh’s take on flamenco’s role in Franco’s politics is, in my opinion, one of the most concise, accurate and explicit depictions of *nacionalflamenquismo*:

Flamenco events were orchestrated in such a way as to give tourists the experience of sampling different facets of Spain’s one diamond, different instantiations of the one body of Spain, all united in the same mystical way that the body of the Church is united (Washabaugh 1996: 162).

Flamenco was therefore manufactured so as to reiterate the message of the country's unity, while eliminating regional references. The "united body of Church" remark might be hinting at the mystical union of the Holy Trinity. Washabaugh could also be calling attention to the metaphor of the Body of Christ. The union of all Christians under one spiritual entity resembles the plurality of body parts united within one organism. His statement undoubtedly ties the Spanish state and the Church, mirroring the relationship between *nacionalflamenquismo* and *nacionalcatolicismo*. The latter refers to the mutual support between the Catholic Church and Franco's political agenda, the union between religious ideology and extreme right propaganda.

Franco's attempts to depict the unified Spain as an attractive touristic destination resulted in the use of flamenco as a promotional tool (Bennahum, Goldberg, Heffner Hayes 2015). That being said, this touristic, official version of the art form had to be purged off all its former befouled associations. During the "Golden Age of Flamenco" (second half of 19th century until early 20th century), this musical form was often romanticized, Orientalized, exoticized and eroticized (Heffner Hayes 2009; Washabaugh 1998 etc.). As was mentioned earlier, westerners travelled to Southern Spain, led by their romantic fantasies of pristine landscapes, exotic culture, and passionate flamenco. Female performers frequently practiced prostitution in the commercial, touristic *cafés cantantes* thus embodying the Southern fervor and satisfying romantic longing for the exoticized, "primitive", raw stimuli. Naturally, Franco's catholic propaganda had to clean flamenco off its former sexual connotations. Such hygienic version was used as an official political, promotional instrument. The political tone of *nacionalflamenquismo* manifested patronizing narrative of flamenco, presenting it as a "harmless", adorable, buoyant and unified form.

Politicization of flamenco was endorsed via Francoist media. One of the examples of such attempts: documentaries *Rito y Geografía del Cante*, aired on Spanish television between 1971 and 1973. That series' content was scrutinized so as to fulfill the nationalist agenda. William Washabaugh's analysis of *Rito y Geografía del Cante* (Washabaugh 1997) provides an opportunity to understand the mechanisms of political appropriation of flamenco, practices of censorship as well as the struggle to overcome the nationalist doctrine. Under the superficial portrayal of flamenco as a unified form, the series managed to contraband hidden content. Through endeavors to portray that music form as a diverse hybrid of genres and influences, its Andalusian roots were exposed. The makers of *Rito y Geografía del Cante* partially succeeded in attempts to empower Andalusia. Shortly before the end of Franco's dictatorship, more artistic attempts challenging the official nationalist status quo started to emerge. Michelle Heffner Hayes mentions efforts

undertaken by filmmakers Carlos Saura and Luis Buñuel, whose movies showcased merely Andalusian components of flamenco (Heffner Hayes 2009).

After Franco's death, gradual decentralization process was initiated. In 1980 Andalusia gained its day: *Día de Andalucía*. It is celebrated until now as a commemoration of a referendum granting sovereignty to the community. A year later Andalusia became officially recognized as one of the Spanish autonomous regions. With these transitions, flamenco could steadily reclaim the role of the symbol of regional identity. The scholarly literature immediately reflected the commencement of the regionalism trend. In his book *Memoria del cante flamenco*, Félix Grande clearly depicts flamenco as a cultural "merchandise" of Andalusia (Grande 1979). He emphasizes the fact that as a hybrid combining diverse influences, it could not have been born anywhere else than in this particular region. Andalusia could then be perceived as a community, which embodies collective memories. These memories would also encompass the history and social meanings of flamenco.

Since Grande's publication, several academics addressed the role of flamenco in reflecting a unified regional identity as opposed to homogenous nationalism. One of the most prominent scholars invested in the dispute of regionalism is Cristina Cruces Roldán. She states that it is absolutely essential to recognize "and to appreciate flamenco as an important indicator of our cultural identity and as the shared heritage of all Andalusians³" (Cruces Roldán 2002: 193). The anthropologist is actively engaged in the promotion of flamenco as a key element of regional heritage and she encourages participation of Andalusian government in achieving that goal. On the institutional level, several initiatives supported the regional growth of this art form. The Andalusian government efforts materialized in launching *Agencia Andaluza para el Desarrollo del Flamenco* in 2005. This authority aims at the development of the music form, with a particular emphasis on the activities taking place within Andalusia. The recognition of flamenco as the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2010 was of particular significance. Such acknowledgement, while implying global potential of flamenco, also recognized its regional significance.

Cruces Roldán perceives flamenco as a key component, which contributes to Andalusian distinctiveness. Gerhard Steingress, on the other hand, embraces an entirely different vantage point and he openly confronts female researcher's argument. The scholar argues that Cruces Roldán, perhaps unwillingly, promotes a nationalist (sic!), politicized version of flamenco (Steingress 2002b). In his opinion, by advocating Andalusian autonomy and distinctiveness, the female researcher endorses a semi-nationalist approach. The

³ All translations from Spanish language are done by the author.

sociologist believes that by considering flamenco as an extension of “Andalusian-ness”, she wrongfully displays a homogenized outlook on the region. He objects to the perception of Andalusia as a community and the view of flamenco as a manifestation of regional identity. The article’s title: *El flamenco como patrimonio cultural o una construcción artificial más de la identidad andaluza* suggests the reading of flamenco as an “artificial construction of Andalusian identity” (Steingress 2002b: 43), if Cruces Roldán’s perspective is adopted. He argues that some Andalusians might not perceive flamenco as their distinctive identity indicator. He believes that by emphasizing the role of flamenco as a solely regional heritage and stressing its homogenous, “Andalusian” character, the innate development of flamenco is hindered. The contrived (in his view) adherence to regional, uniform version of flamenco impedes any genre related alterations, intrinsic to flamenco’s hybrid nature. William Washabaugh’s book *Flamenco Music and National Identity in Spain* provides an opportunity for a balanced examination of Steingress’ and Cruces Roldán’s viewpoints (Washabaugh 2012). Summarizing Steingress’ critique of Cruces Roldán’s argumentation, Washabaugh affirms that the “Andalusian community” and “the musical heritage that grounds it” are artificial creations (Washabaugh 2012: 37).

Another source of tension between the two scholars lies within their different perception of flamenco’s nature. The female researcher believes that the current public character of the genre is a byproduct of its evolution. It is not integral to flamenco’s core. For Steingress, however, the commercial component of flamenco became intrinsic to its nature. In other words, the public display of that art form became an inevitable element of flamenco’s growth and development. We could add that the commercialization and the increasing popularity of the genre could also be a factor facilitating the nationalization process. The emergence of flamenco bars in touristic cities such as Madrid or Barcelona corresponds with the abandonment of flamenco’s solely Andalusian association.

We could try to demonstrate how the dispute pertaining to flamenco’s role in culture, especially nowadays, reaches even wider circles. As a commodity “consumed” around the world, flamenco is not only a regional or national product but, increasingly, global too. The, originally, Andalusian art form is nowadays practiced and admired in abundance of cultural contexts. This music is particularly popular in Japan where, as of 2016, more than 80 thousand students participated in flamenco classes (Millán Vázquez de la Torre, Millán Lara, Arjona Fuentes 2016). The past decade saw a few research endeavors, which acknowledged the status of flamenco as a global phenomenon (Aoyama 2007; González 2008; Ruiz Morales 2011 etc.).

Distance versus Intimacy – Academic Debate

Peter Manuel declares: “flamenco musicians are generally uninterested in theorizing about their music”⁴ (Manuel 1986: 46). This statement could open another significant debate within the realm of flamenco studies. The specificity of that art form, its emotional character, its significance for national/regional identity etc. results in the approval of engaged, impassioned descriptions of flamenco. This is often allowed even within the world of academia. Emotional involvement in that art form and the experience in practicing it can be equally important to an academic, methodic precision of analysis. The “insider’s” know-how often is, in fact, a factor, which validates the truthful, solid and accurate quality of some publications within the realm of flamenco studies. While expounding methodology used in her research Loren Chuse (2003: 20) states: “The focus on subjectivity and personal experience that forms the basis of psycho cultural anthropology is valuable in the examination of an expressive form like flamenco”.

There are, however, different approaches to the subject matter. Timothy Mitchell in his monograph *Flamenco Deep Song* declares:

Let me stress that I am not a flamenco artist nor a flamenco aficionado in a traditional sense of this term. For those readers seeking an insider’s account of flamenco or the flamenco way of life, alternative reading is available in English (Mitchell 1994: 4).

Mitchell is not, unlike many other flamenco scholars, a flamenco practitioner; he is not even particularly fond of that art form. His neutral approach is presented as an asset, which should guarantee academic objectivism. The academic distance allows, in his opinion, refraining from the romanticizing of flamenco. And that is a sin, which Mitchell finds majority of scholars guilty of: “Although such works have their charm, they are often beholden to romantic or mythical notions of flamenco, that can actually impede a true understanding of the music in its overall social and cultural contexts” (Mitchell 1994: 4). The researcher’s insistence in exposing the “truth” about flamenco is rather remarkable if not surprising in the post-truth era of the fading of the metanarratives (Lyotard 1984).

Even some methodologically strong scholarly works on flamenco, such as that of Cruces Roldán or Gerhard Steingress, display a highly engaged tone. As mentioned earlier, Cruces Roldán is an avid advocate of the regionalization of flamenco. The applied anthropologist actively promotes a greater engagement of Andalusian government in recognizing flamenco as a regional heritage. Her works carry a political message. Steingress

⁴ This trend prevented me from relying primarily on ethnographic interviews while carrying out my research in Andalusia. For that reason I decided to, whenever possible, prioritise participant observation.

supports a contrasting view to the female researcher, yet his emotional investment in the topic of flamenco is also visible. Both scholars exhibit conspicuous academic rigor. Mitchell would argue, however, that any element of personal, intimate engagement in that musical art form is a weakness and could potentially hinder “a true understanding of the music” (Mitchell 1994: 4). He also criticizes flamenco scholar Félix Grande for an overly emotional portrayal of social injustice and discrimination within Spain. Mitchell adds: “my approach is scientific in the broadest sense of the term” (Mitchell 1994: 4). He distances himself from the position of the “insider”, often perceived by other scholars as an invaluable advantage, while studying flamenco.

Conclusion

The article discussed several moot points integral to flamenco research. It looked at the formation and development of cultural politics surrounding flamenco studies. Furthermore, it revealed the status of Andalusia as a tumultuous region, which embodies ethnic, racial, and national disquiets.

As for the recurring academic debates, the emotional engagement in the flamenco topic was contrasted with scholarly detachment. While the latter approach stems from the fear of replicating former romanticizing and exoticizing mechanisms, the intimate engagement is closer to representing an intrinsic nature of flamenco. As an anthropologist who engaged in participant observation of flamenco in Andalusia over the period of two years, I support emotional involvement in flamenco research. My previous publications on flamenco endorsed ethnographic engagement. This comparative study aims primarily at grouping, organizing, and commenting on the existing flamenco-related disputes rather than the issues of sociocultural praxis.

The conflict between the supporters of traditional or “pure” flamenco and the followers of *nuevo flamenco* is grounded in the perception of flamenco inherent character. The purists emphasize the intimate, private nature of original flamenco performances; the modernists highlight the inherently eclectic character of that music genre. The *nuevo flamenco* supporters favor the evolution of the genre, acknowledging its public manifestations and touristic consumption initiated in the 19th century.

The debate between *Andalucistas* and *gitanistas* is, undoubtedly, one of the most impenetrable and inscrutable ones. I believe that determining the ultimate ethnic ownership of flamenco might be an exercise in futility. Instead, I see the direction of future flamenco studies in reiterating, deepening and updating the status of Andalusia as a challenged and contested region.

I believe that the regional – national – international/global debate in particular requires further elaboration. We could try adding another level of interpretation. Gerhard Steingress (2002b) claims that flamenco could be perceived as a human universal. Its transgressive character and extensive application would erase the regional versus national conflict. We could argue that the inclusion of this art form in the UNESCO list of intangible heritage showcases its universal potential. With this recognition, flamenco became an element of humanity's legacy, rather than merely Spanish or Andalusian art form. William Washabaugh (1997) recalls Spanish artists': poets' (such as Federico Garcia Lorca) and composers' (Manuel de Falla) universal view of flamenco:

(they) opted for an alternative strategy for legitimating Andalusian and ultimately all of Spanish culture by projecting its music onto a higher stage of universal aesthetics. As they saw it, flamenco "deep song" was a transcendental experience that could carry the aficionado beyond the shallowness of politics and ethnicity (Washabaugh 1997: 53).

In this perception, conflicts over ownership of flamenco or establishing which culture it represents would seem irrelevant or petty.

Ideally, this topic should be included in an extensive, all-encompassing study, preferably in a form of a book. However, until such publication is launched, this comparative paper could serve as a way to organize the multiple debates. It examines and contrasts existing disagreements between scholars as many of them have not been included under one broad in scope study. In my contribution I focus on analyses rather than polemic.

All in all, the outcomes of these debates are, naturally, inconclusive. These saturated substantial differences reveal the tensions within the cultural reading of flamenco. Michelle Heffner Hayes (2009: 31) states: "When considering the debates in flamenco, it is imperative that one recognize the distinction between the categories of Spanish, Andalusian, and gypsy". It is essential to acknowledge the potential of flamenco as an arena for discussing topics as diverse as race, ethnicity, social class, identity, cultural ownership, politics of dance or the status of traditional music in the contemporary world.

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