SINGING BENEATH THE ALHAMBRA:
THE NORTH AFRICAN AND ARABIC
PAST AND PRESENT IN
CONTEMPORARY ANDALUSIAN MUSIC

Over the past thirty years, new and innovative music has echoed Spain’s intense
political, social, cultural and economic changes. In the case of Andalusia, this
transformation may be observed in flamenco and its frequent re-encounters with
North African music. Flamenco has easily lent itself to the creation of hybrid, yet
accessible music. It forms the base of popular music in Andalusia and transcends class,
ethnic and generational boundaries. For musicians, both inside and outside Andalusia,
flamenco has served as a medium for artistic experimentation and innovation, as well
as a vehicle for cultural expression. Flamenco emerges as a reference point and
political ground where heritage and identities are disputed and political and social
change are rehearsed.

As I argue in this article, encounters between Arabic–Andalusian music and
Andalusian flamenco music are important tenets in the development of a multiply
claimed Andalusia. This occurred as Andalusia asserted its regional identity in the
early twentieth century and has continued during the years leading up to and
following the Spanish transition to democracy until the present. At the same time,
flamenco continues to grow and adjust, refusing to become a sterile musical tradition
that reenacts and invents perceived innocent ages. Indeed, flamenco musicians often
examine new issues concerning postmodern loss and shifts of identities, urban
alienation and a search for cultural authenticity. Moreover, with the advent of
immigration in the early 1990s, Andalusian identities are being tested once again and,
not surprisingly, explored through flamenco. In this article I will consider this fertile
combination of history, identity politics and music and suggest that contemporary
flamenco music and its fusions expose deeper cultural traditions of ambiguous
identities, transculturalization and tolerance within Andalusia as well as in Spain and
the wider Mediterranean region.

Background

North Africa and the Arabic world transverse Andalusian society on historical,
cultural, linguistic and social levels. The links between Andalusian folk traditions and
its Arabic past, traditional music, song, and dance can be observed in its Middle
Eastern characteristics. Most notably, flamenco has an unquestionable resemblance to
eastern music that follows the Phrygian tonality or “E” mode. This minor E chord (in
contrast to the Gregorian Phrygian mode in the major) is best understood as a modal
harmony, having developed within a modal system—the Arab maqāms—dominant in
the Arab, Turkish and Maghreb worlds (Manuel “Flamenco” 95–7). While acoustic
similarities exist, flamenco’s origins cannot be completely ascertained (Cruces
Flamenco 121–7). Nonetheless, the most feasible explanation is that flamenco arts
emerged out of the cultural mix of morisco refugees and gypsies on the fringes of early
modern Andalusian society and through subsequent cultural exchanges.1 These
centres emerged in the “flamenco triangle” between Sevilla, Jerez, and Cádiz and in
other centres such as Córdoba, Granada, Málaga and the Alpujarra region of Granada
and Almería. Related regional folk music, such as the trovo alpujareño and its dance, the
fandango, have also persisted (Fernández Manzano and Fernández Manzano). In the
Arabic world, most notably along the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the
musical legacy of al-Andalus is preserved and celebrated in Arabic-Andalusian musical
traditions (or música andaluza) in Morocco, Tunisia and Syria (Hassan Touma; Davies
2–3; Guettat “The Andalusian Musical Heritage”; Shannon 309). A parallel tradition
is also found in Ladino musical heritages amongst Sephardic Jews (Serouzi 1038).

Whose Andalusia? Identity politics and Andalusia’s
Arab past

Interest in the historical legacy of moriscos and mudéjares is telling of contemporary
Andalusian society and culture. Key to this is how the moro or noble Arab is narrated
in the present. The Arabic past is not simply an aspect of contemporary Andalusian
culture; it is its founding base, which legitimizes current cultural and political projects
and their historical metaphors, relations and games (Garrido Peña 393–4). Al-Andalus
then becomes an icon, larger than itself, deeply embedded with mythology and fabled
histories, representing a golden era and a lost paradise (Cortés García 95; Alaoui “El
Cante 286–7”). The moro and al-Andalus are transformed into the utopian, feminine
and romantic while, at the same time, hidden and mysterious. This relation between
want and pleasure is found in the rhythm and form of flamenco and exemplified by
the Alhambra as a familiar, but exotic “palace of desire” (Garrido Peña 401).

The ideal of al-Andalus resonates with “imagining”, “dreaming” and “inventing”
the nation. While the remnants of the Arabic past are visible and alive in Andalusian
architecture, language, customs and music, the perception of this past is vital for its
continuation. In both Andalusia and the Arabic world, journalists, politicians and
scholars of al-Andalus romanticize an age of culture, science, arts, religious tolerance
and music (Guettat “La música” 10). Consequently, the ideal of al-Andalus/Andalusia
assumes overlapping meanings and narratives. It is at once a geographic space and the
historical, social and cultural meanings projected onto it, as well as the political
messages and the national and pan-national discourses (on mestizaje, fusion, absence of
purity and tolerance) through which those meanings are articulated. For others,
particularly in the Arabic world, it symbolizes a paradise lost, followed by Arab
decline, decadence and the beginning of a period of subservience to Europe and the
West.

Popular culture, as George Lipsitz reminds us, not only reflects reality, but
actively participates in its creation. Thus, music empowers people—often
aggrieved—to express political positions and test identities and social relations that may not be acceptable in mainstream society. Music’s link to politics is elusive, despite its frequent political consequences. Artists disregard or avoid official discourses, borders are ignored, the state is eschewed and politicians reviled (Lipstiz 136–7). Daniel Barenboim, director of the Seville-based West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, proposes that music bridges different views, opinions and, ultimately, cultures. While considering the political consequences of music and Edward Said’s idea that music is a form of dissent, Barenboim reflects on its discursive nature:

Edward Said said music is a little bit subversive. That too of course speaks about how we perceive it, and not about the music itself. But he was unquestionably right. In music, different notes and voices meet, link to each other, either in joint expression or in counterpoint, which means exactly that—counter point, or another point. And yet the two fit together. (Barenboim)

Many of the encounters between Andalusian, Maghreb and Near Eastern folk and popular music fit this description. Tradition mixes with subversion while at the same time it seeks dialogue to draw out and resolve distinct visions of history, religion and progress. In Andalusia, fandango and el cante jondo have traditionally been used for social and political protest. Likewise, flamenco—distinguished as traditional folk music—serves as a cultural link, joining medieval al-Andalus with contemporary Andalusia and Spain. Attempts at flamenco fusions have allowed for the celebration of local roots and a living “folk” tradition, while maintaining an open door to the world where alliances can be built (Pérez 77). This is not strictly musical orientalism but, to extend a metaphor, a semi-reflective window used to explore one’s own heritage, while considering the other’s musical traditions and art forms. The fusion of flamenco with Arabic and Maghreb rhythms within mainstream culture is the Andalusians’ willingness to assert and recuperate their past, challenging dominant national and international discourses of identity and culture (Steingress “Hibridicación”).

In general terms throughout the twentieth century, the flamenco arts have provided an outlet for reclaiming a regional Andalusian identity and promoting regional pride, often in jealous contrast to the “privileged” regions of Catalunya and the Basque Country or the centralized power radiating from Madrid. Influential early twentieth-century Andalusians such as Manuel de Falla, Federico García Lorca and Blas Infante (the “father” of the Andalusian nationalism) sought ethnic and cultural links that joined the Islamic–al-Andalus legacy with contemporary Andalusia. Infante, for his part, wrote a series of essays between 1929 and 1933 (eventually published together in 1980) arguing that Andalusia’s collective identity was linked to its Arab history, with flamenco music being one of the major threads joining the past with the present.

After the Spanish Civil War, interest in Andalusian identity issues quickly faded as Spanish folklorists and ethnographers, such as Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós or Pascual Carrión, faced repression and closure of their institutions or went into exile as research into folklore and popular culture came under suspicion, particularly in rural Andalusia, which had been predominantly socialist or anarchist during the Second Republic (Rodríguez Becerra 29). At the same time, Andalusia’s Arabic legacy and the exotic nature of flamenco were absorbed into a broader Spanish national identity. The
regime, eager to appropriate unifying Spanish images, quickly adopted flamenco into the Francoist nationalist discourse known as la Hispanidad (essentially a reformulation of early twentieth-century nationalism) through a process that came to be known as nacional-flamenquismo. In this period flamenco was deregionalized, as William Washabaugh notes, through internal migrations from Andalusia to northern provinces, especially Barcelona and Madrid (205). A network of peña bars across Spain (where women had a crucial role) and early flamenco television programmes such as Cantares supported this unofficial nationalization of flamenco (Chuse 268). As an extension of the new Francoist narrative, Spain was promoted as an ideal sun destination, exotic, mystical and different through Andalusian stereotypes of bullfights, exotic women, alegre festivals, an Arabic past and, of course, flamenco music (Lorente Rivas 141–8).

Despite the regime’s efforts, the subversive nature of flamenco defied official discourse. Throughout the 1960s, well before the Spanish transition officially began, traditional and folk music in Spain became synonymous with renovation and rejuvenation, protest and liberation as well as regional identities. Facing censorship and indifferent record companies alike, Spanish folk musicians organized meetings, poetry recitals and conferences. In 1961, for example, the “Sesión extraordinaria dedicada a la Poesía de la Nova Cançó” took place in Barcelona and included the work of Joan Salvat-Papasseit that led to the Nova Cançó Catalana and “Els Setze Jutges” (Torres Blanco 236). In the following years, poets, students, activists and musicians began discussing social and political issues, as well as themes of regional identities, and included groups such as “Ez dok amairu” in the Basque County (1965–1972) and “Voces Ceibes” in Galicia (1968–1974) as well as events such as “Canción del pueblo” in Madrid (1967). In Andalusia, a similar cultural workshop took place at the University of Granada in 1969, leading to the publication of Manifiesto Canción del Sur by Carlos Cano, Antonio Mato y Pascual and the poet Juan de Loxa. The Manifiesto broke with attempts to make flamenco universally Spanish and argued instead that flamenco was essentially Andalusian, echoing thoughts on Andalusian identity considered by a previous generation in the 1920s and 1930s (Shea 25–6; Torres Blanco 236).

Flamenco arts also challenged censors in public arenas. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, flamenco music and dance (now firmly entrenched in Spain’s national musical consciousness) became a vehicle used by artists to overcome Francoist stereotypes and confront the dictatorship’s restrictions through pushing social limits, rediscovering regional identity and, ultimately, demanding political change. Televisión Española’s series Rito y Geografía del Cante, broadcast in the early 1970s, often parodied Francoist family values though by drawing upon flamenco’s inherent ambiguity, such as feminine sensuality and tablao social life (Chuse 270; Washabaugh 152). Even popular icons, such as Lola Flores, gitana and surely morena, were able to insert/assert their identity and sexuality into their lyrics: “tú lo que quieres/es que me coma el tigre/ mis carnes morenas” (1970).

Further tensions between art and censor arose from mixes of flamenco jazz, rock and blues. During the dictatorship, fusions began with Miles Davis and Gil Evans’s Flamenco Sketches (1959), a recording inspired by flamenco’s Arabic tonalities. This also brought flamenco’s eroticism to jazz and inspired a younger generation of talented flamenco musicians such as Paco de Lucia, José Monje (Camarón de la Isla) and Enrique Morente. By the late 1960s, flamenco–rock groups and artists on the
acceptable fringe of Spanish music such as Triana, Smash and Guallerto emerged as early and popular examples of flamenco–rock fusion that were seen as being “counter-culture” and a means of subverting the Francoist regime (Clemente 135–8). Moreover, by corrupting flamenco (or nacional-flamenquismo’s version of it), these groups resisted imposed versions of culture, cultural identity and cultural heritage. In this process, flamenco’s social boundaries were redrawn, through either caricature or experimentation, allowing for further fusions and change. In particular, flamenco artists sought out Arabic–flamenco blends, where the history and ownership of the genre could be opened. It was also a conscious effort by Andalusian flamenco artists to simultaneously look within the region—and beyond Spain—for its roots and identity in flamenco fusions (Manuel “Andalusian” 59).

Central to this exploration was Lole’s (Manuel Dolores Montoya Rodríguez) introspections into flamenco and Maghreb sounds during the 1970s, which were central to both Arabic–flamenco fusions and, on a wider scale, the general ambiance of change, protest, regional identity and gitano pride (Washabaugh 48–9). Lole, arguably a Spanish postcolonial figure, moved easily between the Arab, gitano and Spanish worlds. Daughter of Antonia “La Negra” (who sang tango in Arabic) and born in Melilla, she was immersed in Maghreb and Arabic culture from childhood and developed a natural interest in the Middle Eastern, which was readily available at home (Chuse 291). In 1972, Lole joined with Manuel Molina Jiménez (of Smash fame) creating the duo Lole y Manuel. The couple, self-identified as Sevillian gitanos, are best known for explicitly introducing Arabic–Spanish fusions in the years directly before and after Franco’s death on a commercial and popular level. Lole’s 1973 appearance on El Rito y Geografía del Cante with an Arabic–flamenco song brought the recently reawakened andalucismo antifranquista to national television. As Washabaugh suggests, the tolerance granted by Francoist censors to Lole was a result of choosing lesser evils. Lole’s Arabic lyrics, though interpreted as subversive, could fit into a large Francoist plan of promoting Andalusia as an exotic tourist destination (48). With the release of Lole y Manuel’s 1975 recording Nuevo día, “hippy” optimism and notions of liberty found a following among Spanish youth. Pasaje del agua (1976), Lole y Manuel (1977) and Al alba con alegría (1980) complemented Spain’s hopeful transition. Within these recordings, songs such as “Pasaje del agua” illustrate a celebration of Lole’s roots and an affirmation of Andalusian identity.

Arabic sounds also emerged in rock andaluz, which attempted to assert regional identities through North Africa and Middle Eastern rhythms mixed with electric guitars. The influence of Smash, Triana and Guallerto had an obvious link to two groups, often identified as rock sevillano, Imán Califato Independiente and CAI. Imán Califato Independiente released Tarantos del Califato Independiente (1978), mixing flamenco palos with Arabic-sounding keyboard, resulting in an overall sound reminiscent of the early work of the British group Genesis. As Luis Clemente observes, Imán Califato Independiente produced some of the best music at large summer bullring concerts in the late 1970s, much of which was composed of improvised jamming (150). An equally important observation is that Imán was able to attract large numbers of people to live concerts, generating important social events (150).

During the 1980s, musicians moved from vulgarly sampling Arabic sounds to seeking authenticity that could be interwoven into the historical musical traditions of
the cante jondo as Lole y Manuel had achieved in the previous decade. Through direct collaboration with andalusi orchestras, such as the Andalusian Orchestra of Tangiers, flamenco artists were able to blend guitars, lauds and vocal orchestrations, while minimalizing possible orientalistic tendencies. Macama jonda, directed by José Heredia Maya (El Polanco), is one landmark effort. Heredia began the live concert with traditional flamenco palos and lyrics concerning hunger, weddings and sorrow, and then slowly incorporated andalusi rhythmical and vocal similarities. The performance included a stellar musical line-up: Moroccan musician Abdessadeq Cheqara, Antonia La Negra (born in Oran and Lole’s mother), Enrique Morente (substituted in the recorded version by Heredia), Manuel Santiago Maya (Manolete), Maria Guardia Gómez (Mariquilla), as well as three cantaores, five bailaores, a flautist and the seven members of the Andalusian Orchestra of Tetuan. Here, flamenco and Maghreb musicians sought to find a musical common ground between flamenco and Arabic sounds. It is considered one of the finest examples of flamenco-andalusi musical encounters.

Juan Peña Fernández’s (El Lebrijano) work on the roots of flamenco has been a central reference in flamenco-andalusi encounters since the transition. Beginning in the 1980s in Andalusian flamenco festivals, El Lebrijano began a series of shows and recordings that explored North African sounds and rhythms and their (re)incorporation into flamenco. El Lebrijano’s endeavour was a larger interpretation of Andalusian history—Encuentro (1985, with the Andalusian Orchestra of Tangiers), Reencuentro (1993), Casablanca (1998) and Puertas abiertas (2005, in collaboration with Moroccan violinist Faïçal Kourrich)—in which he examined the link between flamenco and Arabic music, while Tierra (1992) contemplated New World discoveries and conquests. For El Lebrijano, experimenting with Arabic music has been about self-discovery and artistic freedom. Political considerations (at least in his public interviews) are sharply denied (González Ramírez 26).

Other artists and groups during the 1980s experimented with flamenco–Arabic–Maghreb–andalusi mixes. Gitamoraima produced I Thri, a flamenco–Berber blend, released in Spanish and in a bilingual Berber–Spanish version. In both editions, the band drew in references to tainted heroin (“caballo blanco” and “caballo líquido”), not uncommon in Spanish urban rumba. The band Fussion, led by Granada guitarist Rafael Hermosilla, is another example of flamenco–Arab experimentation. Lole also returned in 1989 with the El Hilah orquestra in Madrid, as special homage to the Egyptian female vocalist Om Kalsoum. Equally noteworthy were spontaneous sessions of flamenco–andalusi “encounters” that began during the 1980s, as Amina Alaoui recalls (“Interview”). Reaching further afield—and seeking the Indian roots of flamenco—Encuentros was recorded by the group Almagama, and consisted of seven gitanos and payos, the Indian Karnataka College of Percussion, as well as the participation of flamenco artists such as José Mercé and Charo Manzano, among others (Clemente 62–3). Caught in the fervour, many flamenco musicians such as Juan Peña (El Lebrijano), José Cortés Jiménez (Pansequito), Anita Parrilla, Paco Cepero and Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia (a gitan politician) travelled to India (Busnó Puró 23–4).
The influence of world music

The question of fluid boundaries and an extended Andalusia is well represented by flamenco–Arabic fusions and their inclusion in the world-music scene. By the mid-1980s, through world-music programmes such as Peter Gabriel’s WOMAD (World of Music and Dance) and similar concert series, ethnic musical traditions became accessible, popularized and optimistic. Indeed, folk traditions lend themselves well to an internationally recognizable alternative to dehumanized, urban global societies (Díaz Viana 36). A more pessimistic view would suggest that they are highly commercial events, smacking of “enlightened colonialism” and neo-liberal opportunism, disjointed from their cultural roots and settings (Pareless). Similarly, on an academic level, debate on world music and its effect on local culture has normally departed from the critique of Walter Benjamin, Theodore W. Adorno and Alan Lomax that ethnomusic or “world music” is consumed, supermarket-style, while invoking a series of postmodern and postcolonial interpretations (Bohlman; Mitchell; Feld; Lipsitz). For the musicians included in world music, reaction ranges from fear to exuberance. Steven Feld believes these outlooks can broadly be placed in two categories: “anxious narratives” that rally against globalization’s cultural imperialism and “celebratory narratives” that attempt to normalize globalization’s wake (152–4).

Spain’s transition to a democratic state and its inclusion into the European Union in 1986 has unquestionably transformed the country. General markers of standards of living, education and literacy have indicated broad improvements, especially as Spain has converged with other European states. This process has also corresponded with a change in mentality and an increased interest in North–South issues, “authentic” culture and attraction to primitivist representations (Feld 154). A logical continuation has been an increased interest in ethnomusic or world music, a shift which has affected traditional music throughout Spain. In terms of flamenco, the genre found itself in the dual position of being considered an exotic (and highly marketable) “ethnic” music that the world-music label implied, while at the same time, adopting (if not appropriating) music from around the world (Molero de Blas). For flamenco musicians, world music has provided an outlet to be heard on the world stage, alongside international musicians and international sounds.

This process has been met with scepticism within flamencology. Flamenco fusions (especially during the late 1980s and early 1990s) renewed concerns about maintaining the genre’s purity and historical roots. Indeed, a debate has often been framed between flamenco purists (often referred to as mairanistas, after the flamenco maestro Antonio Mairena) who lament the loss of purity, and those in favour of innovation and the flamenco nuevo (Martín 27–9; Hernando, Carcases and Gómez 30–4). More recently, the debate has shifted with flamenco’s inclusion as a world-music genre, a standing that invariably involves a certain amount of cultural voyeurism by international audiences. Indeed, concerns over flamenco’s marketing and fusion outside Spain and the use of the music without an explicit understanding of its cultural meaning have been raised. The inclusion of flamenco as a “world music” could be seen as detrimental to local Andalusian identities that risk losing their purity (Cruces “Flamenco” 49–50; Cruces Antropología 27–9; Cruces “Flamenco como objeto” 148–50), a perspective not unlike Walter Benjamin’s assertion that the mechanisms of
mass production and consumption degenerate folk traditions for the benefit of
globalized corporate and consumer interests (Lipsitz 161).

Yet, this debate has been largely artificial from the beginning, as Cruces admits
(Antropología, 23–4). Flamenco is a mix of practices, techniques and styles including
Indian musical systems, Castilian musical forms, Jewish songs, Mozarabic instrument-
alization, vocals and dance, as well as their respective cultural elements included over
the centuries. From another angle, accusations of orientalist musical appropriations
from those concerned with maintaining flamenco’s purity might seem naïve, if not
patronizing. Fusions occur on several levels, with multiple meanings and different
perspectives beyond efforts to satisfy consumer interests. Fusions exist as artistic
endeavours to express and, within flamenco, extend the tradition of cultural
exchange. An argument could also be made that purity has been externally imposed
and conditioned, starting with nineteenth-century flamenco café musicians and
solidified with Manuel de Falla’s 1922 Concurso de Cante Jondo in Granada, which, it
should be remembered, also sought to preserve the “primitive”.

In terms of flamenco’s encounters with North African and Arabic music,
suggestions of musical debasement are often considered short-sighted by the artists.
Andalusí and North African music and sounds are not selected from the supermarket of
“world music” but consciously (re)found and (re)encountered among the relics of
Andalusian/al-Andalus history (if they had ever been lost at all), and address and
touch upon themes and issues found within the layers of Andalusian culture. Lole y
Manuel were clearly conscious of this aspect: in a review of their February 1984
concert in Granada, journalist Miguel Ángel González explained:

Se trata de conservar unos pilares básicos al tiempo que se aprovechan corrientes
musicales de nueva aparición—no en balde dice Manuel: “Soy joven y tengo que
transmitir la experiencia de mi época”—, y se propicia la recuperación o el
acercamiento a formar cantoras—tal [como] la arábigo andaluza—emparentadas
y aún entroncadas con los orígenes del flamenco; ahora bien, añade Manuel: “No
nos acordamos ni de los árabes ni de los chinos, sino de nosotros mismos”.  
(González 22)

Likewise, Juan Peña (El Lebrijano) expressed that the sum of his work was about
exploring the roots of flamenco and recuperating something that was inherently
Andalusian (Grimaldos). In contrast, the introduction of world music into the
flamenco music scene indicated a slight but important shift in motivation and
perspective. While Lole y Manuel and El Lebrijano considered Andalusian identity
through flamenco–Arabic mixes, recent flamenco–world music sounds have allowed
flamenco to evolve and continue as a dynamic art form and to add to the region’s
 cultural depth and complexity.

Flamenco artists have also found inspiration for fusions and mixes while
performing and recording abroad. In October 1985, the flamenco group Ketama
(of the Habichuela family) gave five concerts in London, resulting in the encounter
with Malian musician Toumani Diabate and the recording of Songhai, a landmark
flamenco fusion album. By the early 1990s, fusion sounds and experimental
instrumentation became common. The introduction of instruments such as the
oud, darbuka, violins and flutes and the inclusion of Cuban, Brazilian and African
instrumentation brought exotic sounds to flamenco, while jazz, rock and rhythm and blues were adopted by artists such as Kiko Veneno, Pata Negra, Ketama, Ray Heredia and Raimundo Amador. Moreover, these provided inspiration for a new generation of musicians experimenting with new sounds and music. In this sense, musical fusions have opened possibilities and new forms of expression which allow flamenco musicians to move beyond traditional flamenco themes involving social marginalization, the trials of everyday life and drugs to other themes such as the beauty of gitano culture (Marín).

Radio Tarifa stands out among commercially successful flamenco-fusion groups. The band developed its name with the idea of a radio station fictitiously placed on the southernmost point of Europe that receives—and broadcasts—radio signals from North Africa to Europe. The group, consisting of well-known fusion artists such as Raphael “Fain” Sánchez Dueñas, Vincent Molino, Benjamín Escoriza (songwriter), vocalist Javier Ruibal, guitarist Gerardo Núñez and wind instrumentalist Javier Paxariño, began in the early 1990s with its important experimental debut album, Rumba argelina (1993), and continued with Temporal (1996), Cruzando el río (2000) and Fiebre (2003).

On one level, Radio Tarifa celebrates Mediterranean heritage by mixing sounds and rhythms from across the region. In the group’s opinion, the tag ‘flamenco nuevo’ given to them was erroneous:

Nosotros no hacemos ni folklore ni flamenco, pero sí respetamos el concepto (en el flamenco original no había acordes). Aunque el cantante sí es flamenco, étnico puro, la mayoría de los músicos somos urbanos, que hemos escuchado y tocado de todo y, en algunos casos, música antigua. De todo ellos surge un sonido que es de ahora, pero que hunde sus raíces en principio... se nos ha dado conocer como nuevo flamenco, mientras que allí [en Europa] se nos incluyen en categorías de nuevas músicas. (qtd. in Martín Chancón “Opiniones” 28)

The group’s uses of a pop–flamenco base mix Arabic and Castillian medieval scores with a variety of flamenco palos such as bulerías, rumbas, tangos, of milonga, la mosca and Camarón de la Isla’s pregón del uvero, which undoubtedly creates an exotic mixture (Clemente 152–3). Radio Tarifa’s political and social messages are clearly distinct from fusion bands of the previous decade. Assorted within these reclaimed identities are messages of globalism, postmodernism and miscegenation. On another level, with samplings of Middle Eastern radio broadcasts (in, for example, Rumba argelina) Radio Tarifa could be seen as responding to the “violence of noise” first proposed by Jacques Attali, which can be civilized through music (Attali 25–36). Similarly, Radio Tarifa “tames” Arabic noise and draws it towards an understandable context, thereby civilizing it, perhaps an undesirable outcome.

**Festivals and live music**

Live music venues reflect the changes that flamenco has undergone, particularly well in the cool and hip atmosphere that world-music events produce. In Andalusia, major
music festivals that focus on Third World issues and intercultural exchanges have been particularly successful. A well-tested formula for these events during summer music festivals in the region mixes Kasbah-type markets, free shows and alternative lifestyles with messages of racial and cultural tolerance, producing a lively, if saccharine, atmosphere and often with the irony of having genuine Maghreb and African vendors set up not far away along seaside boardwalks, in village markets or in the streets. Indeed, while a strong critique could be made that these events promote a crude orientalism or are staged experiments where people can “play tolerance” in controlled settings, the benefits are nonetheless important.

As in any artistic forum, such as theatre, art galleries or cinema, social boundaries are pushed, new social relations are tested and, ultimately, redrawn in world-music concerts and music festivals. A frequent theme in Andalusian live music events has been the expression and exploration of Andalusia’s Arabic roots and Andalusia’s place as a bridge between North Africa and Europe. Some examples include such festivals as the Etnosur annual concert in Alcalá Real (Jaén) or the Tatata concert in Conil de la Frontera, Cádiz. One festival that conscientiously highlights Arabic–Andalusian connections is “Frigiliana 3 Culturas”, which began in 2006. This festival draws together the twin pillars of tourism and regional identity politics. Set in Frigiliana (Málaga)—the village where the last stand of the morisco rebellion took place in 1569—this festival seeks to promote an understanding of the area’s Muslim, Jewish and Christian heritage while at the same time drawing visitors to the inland village. At this festival, groups that experiment with flamenco–Arabic–Sephardic music fusions, such as Radio Tarifa, the Barcelona flamenco–world music group Ojos de Brujo and Mallorcan singer–songwriter Maria del Mar Bonet. Also present have been musicians such as ladino singer Rosa Zaragoza as well as musicians from the Maghreb and the eastern Mediterranean such as Hames Bitar, Taqtoqa Jabalia and Mariem Hassan. Often at these festivals, issues within the Arabic world are highlighted, such as Iraq or the plight of the Palestinian and Saharawi peoples.

**Prospects of flamenco and Arabic–Andalusian exchanges**

In Arabic–flamenco fusions the weight of the past has mixed with the uncertainty of the immediate future. With the arrival and inclusion of new immigrants from Morocco and other Mediterranean Arabic countries, important Maghreb and Arabic communities in Andalusia (such as in Granada) have been formed and new identities imagined and created. Generally, the immigrant community in Andalusia follows musical trends in North Africa, with raï being the most obvious influence. North African musicians in Spain, often professionally trained andalusí performers, frequently express mixed emotions of wanting to preserve their cultural heritage while wanting to express the reality of their situation. Not surprisingly, Maghreb musicians residing in Andalusia are willing to embark on musical encounters, fusions and experimentations. The Granada-based group Al-Tarab prefers andalusí nubas, but often performs live with flamenco musicians out of popular demand. Moroccan-born Amina Alaoui, an important figure in Arabic–Andalusian music (and traditional
andalusi vocalist, one of the first women to have studied andalusi music in Fez), is also active in Andalusia. Other groups attempting Arabic–andalusi–flamenco blends from the perspective of the Moroccan community in Andalusia encounters include Al-Turath, Al-Baraka and the Abdel Karim Ensemble, whose work has appeared in the recording Joyas de la música culta árabe produced by Eduardo Paniagua.

An interesting trend is the mix of religion and music in the public sphere, with concert series being organized by the Muslim community. In July 2007, the Festival Andalusi was held in Granada’s Mirador de San Nicolás, famous for its views of the Alhambra and Bill Clinton’s memorable 1998 return to the plaza. On this occasion, the Festival Andalusi celebrated the fourth anniversary of the controversial Albaicín mosque and the eight-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Rumi, a Sufi mystic and poet, with andalusi Al Tarab as the main attraction (Guajardo 42).

In contrast to traditional andalusi musicians in Andalusia, the commercially successful singer Hakim, born in Casablanca, seeks a wider audience by combining pop–flamenco with established andalusi scores. In Hakim’s case, popularity came quickly, propelled by an early contract from Sony and appearances on television. The single “Como suena” (1998) was his first success, while his album Entre dos orillas became a double platinum album, with over 200,000 copies sold. While promoting his album Alahabibi in 2004, the Moroccan-Spanish artist offered the cross-cultural understanding that was the focus of his artistic labour: “[c]uando vine a España empecé a notar que había mucha conexión entre el flamenco y la música árabe, entre la copla y la canción clásica egipcia, similitudes que me llamaron la atención. Era algo que debía unirse y así unir también las culturas” (Lopez).

The international success of flamenco has led to its progressive deterritorialization (Skounti 75). With more flamenco artists emerging from outside Andalusia, questions of ownership and purity are increasingly elusive. Moreover, as Arabic–flamenco sounds are drawn into fashionable trends in mainstream pop music around the world, another metamorphosis can be observed. Almería native David Bisbal’s “Torre de Babel” (2007), sung with Puerto Rican reggaeton singers Wisin (Juan Luis Morera) and Yandel (Llandel Veguilla), mixes reggaeton, pop–rock, flamenco and Arabic instrumentalization to illustrate the results of a destructive war. The video, set in an unspecified Arabic country (with the Alhambra used as a scenic backdrop), depicts a pessimistic if not apocalyptic scene of what could be easily interpreted as the American intervention in Iraq. It has also helped move flamenco, Latin rap and Arabic mixes into the international arena, surely to have a return impact on the Andalusian and Spanish music scene.

Chambao, a flamenco/electronic group based in Malaga, indicates the confidence of a new generation of Andalusian flamenco-fusion groups. Reaching early popularity with their album Flamenco chill, their track “Ahi estás tú” (used by the Junta de Andalucía to promote the region) experiments with a variety of complex flamenco, techno and Arabic beats. Incorporation of North African music and vocals continued with Chambao’s 2007 album Con otro aire. Their single “Papeles mojados” explores tragedies surrounding immigration to Spain from North Africa and beyond, blending flamenco guitar and lauds as well as vocals in Spanish and Arabic. The compassionate and humanistic perspective taken by Chambao in “Papeles mojados” captured part of the general Spanish mood on the issue of immigrants arriving in open boats (pateras), with the song reaching the top of Spain’s Cuarenta Principales by January 2008 (Listas).
Chambao’s song also fits into a wider trend of Spanish musicians who have been moved by both immigration and the xenophobia that continues to trouble Spain (Bermúdez).

Enrique Morente’s vision on flamenco and its future reflects the maturing debate involving flamenco fusions. Morente, winner of the 1978 Premio Nacional de Música Popular de España (awarded by the Ministry of Culture), suggested that “[e]l mundo era más grande que Andalucía y el flamenco ya no estaba reducido al lugar de las raíces campesinas sino que se había trasladado a la ciudad y había que confrontarlo con otras culturas, músicas, personajes e ideologías” (qtd. in Fernández de Castro and Turtos 748). This optimistic sentiment comes across clearly in his recent video recording Morente suena la Alhambra, directed by José Sánchez Montes. In a vision similar to Feld’s concept of “celebratory discourses” (152), Morente sidesteps the mairinista question of purity and ownership of flamenco by simply affirming its multiple heritages and futures, as well as its inherent resilience. To make this point, Morente unites a variety of musicians including singer Ute Lemper, Algerian rai legend Cheb Khaled, guitarist Pat Metheny, dancer Israel Galván and flamenco artists such as Pepe Habichuela (guitar), Estrella Morente (cante) and Blanca Li (dance). Throughout the film, Morente affirms his commitment to the deep traditions of flamenco. His participation in the Semana Santa saeta of Granada’s Jesús de los Gitanos (a flamenco palo whose melodic contours are not unlike the Muslim adhan, or call to prayer [Blum 105]) leaves the purity of Morente’s flamenco unquestioned. Simultaneously, he examines flamenco’s resilience and ability to respond to new social realities. Flamenco can be an ancestral tradition that seeks out its Semitic roots and influences through Khaled and Lemper while remaining capable of experimenting with new possibilities. As a result, Morente’s vision of flamenco rejects attempts to sterilize and embalm this art, while finding musical truths between its passionate and intimate past and its cosmopolitan future.

**Government intervention and sponsorship of culture**

Soon after the 1978 referendum on the Spanish constitution (which mandated cultural matters to Spanish regions) the Junta de Andalucía, along with various levels of provincial and municipal governments, began to directly sponsor and promote Arabic music events, especially as the five-hundredth anniversary of the reconquista of al-Andalus neared in 1992. For the Junta, reclaiming Andalusian identity from the Francoist regime was an early priority. Flamenco traditions have helped develop a sense of regional difference, not unlike differentiating cultural traits promoted in other Spanish regions, such as language. Arguably, part of the benefit of mixing flamenco with identity politics is that “soft power” is created, which in turn can be projected and used within Spain and internationally. Another motive for reclaiming flamenco arts is related to Andalusía’s tourism industry, a central pillar of the region’s economy. Here, the importance of flamenco as a highly marketable cultural asset has been understood and used since the 1960s and continues to be adapted to changing tastes and trends (Calado Olivo 51–2). An obvious example of this is the 1992 World Exposition in Seville, where the regional government showcased flamenco as a
musical backdrop to the event, promoting the sensuality and mystery of the region (Álvarez Caballero 72–6).

Not surprisingly, in recent years, the Junta de Andalucía has steadily increased its direct intervention in supporting and “protecting” the flamenco arts with the goal of promoting regional identity. Another important consideration for government officials has been the widespread public opinion on the purity of the flamenco arts as a folkloric tradition. A common view is that flamenco arts, not unlike opera or classical music, should receive public funding and be preserved for their value as an art form and cultural heritage, as discussed above. As a result, the Junta de Andalucía has created a number of institutions. The Centro Andaluz de Flamenco in Jerez has the responsibility of “safeguarding” and promoting flamenco, while the Agencia Andaluza para el Desarrollo de Flamenco in Seville is in charge of coordinating policy related to flamenco in Andalusia and further afield (“Mayor union” 42). In Granada, the Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía (CDMA) has been given the task of cataloguing the region’s musical heritage. The Junta de Andalucía also promotes flamenco on television, through the state-owned regional television station, Canal Sur.

The Junta de Andalucía entrenched its role in the flamenco arts through the negotiation and approval of the 2007 “Estatuto de Autonomía de Andalucía” (Spain). This legislation, written in coordination with Spain’s central government, delegates a wide array of responsibilities from agriculture to healthcare. Importantly, article 68 continues devolving culture (deemed as theatre, film, literature and music) to Andalusia, with article 68.1 giving the autonomous region exclusive responsibility over flamenco with the region given the “... competencia exclusiva en materia de conocimiento, conservación, investigación, formación, promoción y difusión del flamenco como elemento singular del patrimonio cultural andaluz” (Spain 11885). While the law raised heckles throughout Spain regarding the possibility of the Junta de Andalucía stewarding flamenco across the country, it points toward into a larger pattern of government intervention in traditional arts and its use for political ends.

The Junta de Andalucía also promotes Arabic–flamenco links and Arabic–Andalusian history, which is channelled through semi-official and official institutions. El Legado al-Andalus, a Granada-based foundation, commemorates the caliphates of southern Spain, broadly promoting intercultural tolerance and respect, organizing concerts and producing andalusi musical recordings. One notable example of this outward perspective is the Junta de Andalucía’s 2004 proposal that UNESCO include flamenco and andalusi music on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (or living heritage) sites (Andalusia; UNESCO). The Andalusian proposal was submitted with the support of the Spanish, Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian governments, the European Union and several organizations, agencies, foundations and programmes, such as the Council of Europe, the Agencia de Cooperación Internacional Española (AECI), El Legado al-Andalus and the Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía, among others (Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura 3–7).
Conclusion

Spain’s profound transformation since the end of the dictatorship has brought about important changes in culture and the performing arts. Amongst flamenco musicians, the search for a romantic Arabic past observed during the 1970s and 1980s has evolved. The genre has moved beyond justifying its origins in the shadows of a controlling regime to having significant freedom to consider difficult social questions. With Andalusia’s musical heritage safely reclaimed, both artistically and institutionally, the region’s musicians can now safely move towards new barriers to cross and break down. One prominent example is the cultural hybridity resulting from globalization and immigration that is often evident through Arabic and world-music fusions and encounters. While sometimes artificial and forced, world music encompasses issues concerning race, immigration, multiculturalism and pluralism as well as integration. In the past, North African sounds were maintained as an intellectual and spiritual exercise to recover Andalusian roots and to confirm contemporary identities. The familiar other has crossed the Mediterranean, changing once again the social and cultural fabric of the region. The desire to contribute to Andalusian history, culture and music, and to the experiences, sounds and sensations that immigration has brought to the region, is the logical future of Arabic, North African and Andalusian fusions and mixes.

Note

1 This issue has been discussed in depth by Infante, Barrios, Domínguez Ortiz, Molina and Mairena, Geraldo Navarro and Fernández Manzano, Alaoui and Reynolds.

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