Japanized flamenco: Sensory shifts in a transcultural relocation of a dance genre

Yolanda Van Ede, University of Amsterdam

Abstract

The indigenization and domestication of foreign (western) culture in Japan has, according to Koichi Iwabuchi, led to an increasing variety of ‘modes of indigenized modernities’. Flamenco dancing, I argue, presents one such mode. Since the 1980s, Japanese women have been appropriating and adapting flamenco, an assumed local, ‘authentic’ Spanish genre turned into a so-called world music/dance, to their cosmopolitan dreams. They have turned flamenco in Japan into modern dance. This case shows that the relocation of a global genre through cultural adaptation should never be taken as a mere act of imitation, since the embedding of the genre into a new sociocultural environment requires adjustments to both the pre-existing ways of learning in the new environment as well as to the new meanings the genre may have for its apprentices. This is so, even in a society as reputed for cultural imitation as Japan. In this case, it is exactly the local social developments concerning femininity and modernity that explain flamenco’s appeal to Japanese women. The genre’s sound-based quality, as identified through a sensory analysis of their learning and transmission processes, revealed itself to be quintessential in terms of these women expressing their newly found sense of self. Adaptation of form and content has rendered a distinct, female and Japanized flamenco.
Keywords
flamenco
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From ‘Imitation’ to ‘Domestication’

‘Japanization’, according to Koichi Iwabuchi (2002: 9), refers ‘to the indigenization and domestication of foreign (Western) culture’. In Japan, post-war transnational flows of popular culture have led increasingly to ‘various modes of indigenized modernities’ (2002: 5). Flamenco, especially in its dance form, is one such modern cultural phenomenon.

Following the release of Carlos Saura’s 1983 film adaptation of Carmen, a flamenco arrangement and performance after Bizet’s opera, flamenco was turned into a worldwide phenomenon almost overnight. The tragic story of passion and deceit combined with flamenco’s expressive dance based on yells, laments, and song (cante), and the stirring rhythms of hand-clapping (palmas) and guitars, touched the hearts of young men and women all over the globe. Thousands found their way to Andalusia and Madrid to follow in the footsteps of Carmen’s dancers, while in their hometowns in Europe and the Americas, flamenco dance and music workshops popped up. Nowhere, however, did flamenco’s immense popularity take root so deeply as in Japan. Within two
decades of the film’s release, the Japanese flamenco scene developed into the largest outside Spain. Over 80,000 registered Japanese aficionados, mainly women attracted to its dance, populated some 500 flamenco studios in Tokyo alone, performed in local tabaôs, read the two quarterlies (Paseo and Farucca), and joined several regional and national festivals and competitions (Otani-Martin 2004, 2005).

Outside Japan, flamenco’s popularity among the Japanese still evokes reactions, ranging from surprise to disbelief, that are often imbued with stereotypical notions of ‘the Japanese character’ as well as with an idealized imagery of flamenco. Together, they seem to make up an incomprehensibly incompatible set when taking flamenco on the one hand, which (like Argentinean tango) is seen as synonymous with passion, and the Japanese on the other, as ‘famously repressed’ and ‘intrinsically dispassionate’ (see also Savigliano 1995: 247, 248). Furthermore, the notion of the Japanese being masters of imitation, geniuses in adaptation and ‘agents of cultural plagiarism’ (Tobin 1992: 3) runs against the cherished ideal of many a flamenco (a flamenco dance/music aficionado) that rhythm and expression have to come from ‘within’ rather than ‘without’. This led many Spanish aficionados to meet the enormous influx of foreign apprentices to ‘their’ flamenco with ambiguity; and when it came to Japanese students, even reluctance. An instructor at Madrid’s famous flamenco studio Amor de Dios, whose classes I joined in 1985 (Ede 2010), in fact explicitly accused those ‘chinos’ of merely ‘copying’, and thus refused them proper attention. In her essentialist view – shared by many of her colleagues in those years – flamenco pulsates through ‘gypsy veins’ and is nursed on Andalusian soil, or Spanish soil at least. Foreigners, they held, may be able to sense its emotive powers, but only the exception may manage to embody and perform flamenco’s essence
(Tieman 1997; Washabaugh 1996), and this would certainly never be a Japanese person. Spanish flamencos are right in rejecting the possibility of imitating flamenco, since nothing can be wholly imitated. People do not copy; their adoption is always an adaptation – to their personal abilities, to their cultural understandings and to the social environment in which they operate.

Almost three decades after Carmen, flamenco in Spain is said to be deteriorating (Calado Olivo 2006). The young seem to be ignoring one of Spain’s main cultural export products of the twentieth century for precisely the essentialist notions and claims of authenticity that guaranteed its marketing as a form of world music and dance. According to these youth, flamenco has to get rid of its gitano and low-class reputation, and be turned from a backward, traditional music into something contemporary and modern. In a world of transnational amalgamation, flamenco was fused with jazz or electronic music, with North African raï or other genres labelled as world music. Older generations have looked on with sorrow at the disappearance of flamenco puro. As they were working towards the acceptance of flamenco with the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage programme, renowned Spanish artists such as the ‘Picasso of flamenco dance’ Andrés Marin were simultaneously rejecting notions of tradition and ownership. In a 2008 interview, Marin stated that ‘Flamenco has no owner’ and promoted ‘freedom of expression’. He makes his living by touring, teaching and performing around the globe (Anon. 2008: 6–7). Meanwhile, Andalusian festivals, including the flamenco stage of stages that is the Seville biennale, have been featuring more and more non-Spanish performers. Among them have been many Japanese dancers, such as Eiko Takahashi, Atsuko Kamata and Keiko Suzuki (Shikaze 2004). Even the most stubborn critics cannot
deny their high level of accomplishment. But especially with the Japanese performances, they hold them to be inexplicably different, and are torn between the feeling that it is ‘still flamenco all right’ and yet not quite ‘the real thing’.

The meaning of the term Japanization ‘changed from “imitation,”’ which connoted Japan’s inferior status, to “domestication” or “appropriation,”’ which emphasized the active agency of the Japanese (see Tobin 1992b)’ (Iwabuchi 2002: 10). This article offers some insight into what this Japanese ‘active agency’ entails in – rephrasing Iwabuchi (2002: 5) – the process of indigenizing flamenco as a mode of modernity against the backdrop of the genre’s contemporary crisis and turmoil. Evidently, this can only be done by refuting the notion of cultural globalization as global homogenization, for two reasons, one sociopolitical and one sociocultural. First, global homogenization implies that cultural adaptations are but simplistic efforts made by (mostly) non-western cultures to imitate western cultural phenomena (Appadurai 1995; Kearney 1995; Iwabuchi 2002). Especially in the case of Japan, such an assumption reinforces a stereotypical imagery of a culture that holds no empirical grounds. Moreover, it suggests an a priori western homogenization where no local orders seem to exist between ‘high culture’ and local genres such as flamenco, and there are no cultural dynamics and ambiguities. Second, global homogenization seems to invoke a modernist presumption that it unavoidably leads to the superficiality and shallowness often related to consumer practices.

Flamenco in Japan, and its dance in particular, has, however, been made significant by a specific cohort of Japanese women, which has led to the development of a distinct Japanese flamenco style. How this style has been developed is shown by a sensory analysis of flamenco teaching and practices in Tokyo studios, as witnessed during
my field research in 2009 and 2010. While a sensuous anthropology has been applied by other dance scholars, either to study the transmission, performance, and significance of one particular genre (e.g. Järvinen 2006; Hahn 2007) or to investigate ‘the dancing body’ cross-culturally (e.g. Cohen Bull 1997; Grau 2011), this research was dedicated to an understanding of a transcultural development of one genre as part of its dynamic global process. The application of the senses and a sensory analysis of a practice, however, only make sense when taking the sociocultural setting in which it gains new social and cultural significance (cf. Franko 1993; Farnell 1999) into consideration.

Comparing sensory modes

Contrary to Tim Ingold (2011) and Sarah Pink (2009; Pink and Howes 2011), who prefer to take human perception in its entire wholeness and un-dividedness (Ingold 2011: 136), I hold that a sensory analysis is an indispensable and fruitful method with which to gain understanding of cultural difference, particularly in cases of the cross-cultural comparison of processes of transmission and learning (see Ede n.d.).¹ I agree with David Howes, in that the senses are typically ordered in hierarchies. In one society or social context sight will be head of the list of the senses, in another it might be hearing or touch. Such sensory rankings are always allied with social rankings and employed to order society. The dominant group in society will be linked to esteemed senses and sensations while subordinate groups will be associated with less valued or denigrated senses. (2006: 164)
However, ‘[t]he commonly understood [Aristotelian model-based] concept of the five senses is an ethnocentric construct’, as Andrée Grau (2011: 5–6, 8) rightly states, and thus should make way for inter- and intra-social comparison of sensory modes of perception; that is, between and within societies. As the case of Japanized flamenco will make clear, it is exactly in its practice of diverging from Japan’s widely applied sensory mode that flamenco’s popularity among a specific cohort of Japanese women is to be understood. In addition, taking it rather as a mode for thought than as some ‘natural’ blueprint for human action, an analysis of sensory frameworks should invite an open mind to the huge variety in human sensibilities and the many qualities of each sense.²

Tomie Hahn, to whose work on *nihon buyo* (Japanese classical dance) I am much indebted, also considers sensory analysis and sensory models indispensable to understanding

how a culture’s transmission processes prioritize practitioners’ attendance to certain sensorial (even particular qualities of sensory experience), and how the transmission of sensory knowledge can shape dancers’ experiential orientation.

(2007: 5)

Hahn justifies her sensory approach by three propositions. First, dance is embodied knowledge, which is to a large extent implicit. Second, there are definite limits to the amount of information a body can process at any given time. An instructor has to follow particular methods and pedagogical devices in order for the apprentice to appropriate
information at the right stage of his/her development (2007: 95). Third, this ‘selection of information in a process of transmission is culturally incentive’ (2007: 95). The information is necessarily structured according to certain sensory emphases that reveal a sensory cultural structure or model. It offers a

path to comprehending cultural aesthetics, social structures, and interactions [that] lies in the process of embodiment, or the methods of transmission. It is a cycle, however, as cultural aesthetics and interactions are also the key to understanding transmission. (2007: 59)

In other words, a certain mode of transmission represents current aesthetic conceptions within a particular culture, and vice versa.

Flamenco in Spain has been (and to a large extent still is) an oral tradition – in the literal sense of the word stemming from tradire, to pass over or transmit. Of old, the singers were in the lead, accompanied by hand-clappers (palmeros) and guitarists, and only additionally by dancers. Still, flamenco’s core characteristic is the compás, the rhythm. The cante and palo (song genre) define the rhythm. Consequently, also for a dancer, flamenco comes foremost with listening to the songs sung, the rhythm clapped and played. Even after flamenco’s move into dance studios, classes are always accompanied by a guitarist, at times even a singer. The musicians, with their melodies and rhythms, make the dance apprentices aware of the subtleties of each cante and teach them to move and stomp in harmony with their sounds and voices. Put into a sensory model, and in tune with the oral tradition that flamenco still has, sound figures at the head
of the list – also for dancers. ‘Copying’ an instructor’s movements of hands, arms, body and head, directly or via a mirror, video or DVD for improvement, only follows a seemingly endless practice of basic stomping to the instructor’s counting and clapping, and learning more complicated footwork in interplay with a guitarist. Instructors hardly ever touch their apprentices to correct gestures or postures. It is only until the *compás* is flawlessly executed and the facial and bodily expressions appear in harmony with the *cante*’s meaning that the instructor may comment on the look of a dancer’s body movements.

Japanese sensory ranking is, however, based on a different order. The Japanese reputation of being ‘masters of imitation’ (Tobin 1992: xx) originates, according to Hahn (2007: 43–44), from a Zen philosophical approach to learning. Learning by imitation – that is, mimesis by sight – has permeated pedagogic and didactic devices in Japan in about every conceivable field, from formal education to academic learning and technological design, from tea ceremony and cooking to sports and dance (Schwartz 1995; Kondo 2005; Ohnuki-Thierney 1987; White 1988; Hahn 2007). One may generalize then that sight has headed the sensory list in Japanese society for centuries. In *nihon buyo*, kinaesthetic complexity is unfolded to the apprentice like a fan (*sensu*), according to a strict sensory pattern. The novice starts with mimicking the body postures and movements of her instructor (*iemoto*). In the following stages of training, learning based on sight is initially complemented by tactile corrections of physical appearance. Only thereafter would the apprentice be permitted to move to music – and dance. Looking at media sources of professional performers in action may finally round up a dancer’s search for perfection.
Based on Hahn’s analysis, I set out for Tokyo assuming that flamenco dance in Japan would be, similar to *nihon buyo*, visually oriented. In that case, it would reflect flamenco’s global development into what Spanish aficionados (Malefyt 1998; Mitchell 1990, 1995; Steingress 2002; Tieman 1997; Washabaugh 1996) fear to be a mere spectacle; superficial because it is deprived of intimacy, of *concert*, and of its ‘true character’ and spirit. Japanized flamenco as a mode ‘of indigenized modernities’ (Iwabuchi 2002: 5) would then be representative not of only a western but also a global modernity, one which claims to favour sight and superficiality (see Debord 1994). In performances on global stages, flamenco’s visually appealing costumes, hats, fans, *mantones* and *mantillas* (shawls and scarves) surely add to its show quality. Although Japanese flamencos do not obviously appear to be more visually oriented on Andalusian stages, I nevertheless wondered whether a sight oriented transmission of flamenco in Japan itself would answer for the distinct Japanese style.

**Stomping steps**

Once in Tokyo, my assumptions of a sensory pattern in flamenco practice in Japan that should have favoured sight were shattered by thunderous volleys of feet hitting the dance floor, hard and fast. From novice to semi-professional level, there was as little that was visually remarkable as there was musically much to enjoy, with a general absence of a guitar or stereo. I felt forced to focus on the transmission processes, as Hahn had done, in order to readjust my sensory expectations.

A class’s year programme would start in September, with the apprentices practicing primarily foot techniques, and then rehearsing step routines until December.
Since these classes took place without the musical accompaniment of a guitarist or even a recording, the apprentices stomped to the counting, hand-clapping or cane-ticking of the instructor only, ever faster and louder. After the holiday break, during the first session in January, the instructor would announce his or her choice of a particular *palo* (song/dance genre) that the class was going to perform at the yearly studio presentation (*happiokai*) at the end of the season, in April or May. This announcement would usually come with the viewing of a dance performance to a particular *cante* from the chosen genre by a Spanish – seldom a Japanese – professional dancer. Thereafter, the class would return to a routine similar to the one established before the New Year holidays. They would learn and rehearse various sets of steps to the instructor’s rhythm marking, which would eventually be put together into a choreography. The instructor would create the choreography to the specific *cante* that the Spanish dancer was seen to be dancing to on the video or DVD, although this was not in imitation of the dancer’s steps and moves in this specific performance. Obviously, it was the song and music that was the instructor’s source of inspiration and adaptation, not the dancer’s dancing. While the apprentices practiced the various step routines, the instructor would hum or even sing the *cante* in order for them to get the routine right in tandem with the melody, the *coplas/verses*, and *silencios*. Neither the video used at the introduction nor any other recorded version of the song was ever played in the class again, nor did any of the apprentices appear to have listened to the music on their own initiative at home.

Until the end of February, hardly any comments would be made on body movement or expression, with the exception of chorus-lining heads and arms, their heights and directions. Only when the feet – the steps and stomping – had been synchronized and the
movements smoothed out would a guitar player enter the studio, some two to four weeks before the show. His job by then was merely to replace the instructor’s humming or singing of the cante, and to contribute to the dancers’ rhythmic feet. In doing so, he needed not only to know the particular cante to which the choreography had been set, but also the particular performance that the instructor had used as a source. In short, he was to adjust to the dancers, not the other way around, as would have been customary in Spain (and elsewhere).

Happiokai would consist mainly of group choreographies, one or two dances for each class, which made it hard – I imagined – to work on facial or bodily expression; most certainly with beginner or intermediate levels. However, when a fairly advanced apprentice was preparing a solo, I wondered at what point her instructor would start to explain to her something of the cante she was to dance to. Eager to hear a personal or cultural interpretation of some sort of the song, I asked this apprentice’s instructor, who replied with surprise

Why? The lyrics are of no importance! It doesn’t matter whether a singer sings about a tree or about a child. It is not that they have to mime the song. Flamenco is not about miming, it is about compás. (personal communication)

It was as if she had some preconceived knowledge of my assumptions, to which she conclusively wished to state that flamenco is not nihon buyo. What was most important to her, as to her colleagues, was the core rhythm that characterizes each palo and which is
often used to express a particular affect (joy, exuberance, loneliness, separation, confidence, sorrow, etc.). The lyrics only tell a story, she claimed.

The reason given for not inviting a guitarist to every class during the entire year was simple: money. The 20,000 yen per hour rate that Japanese musicians ask follows the market mechanism of scarcity. Paying for live music would make flamenco classes too — and unnecessarily — expensive. Playing recordings instead would mean too much running back and forth to the stereo, which, according to most instructors, was not worth the effort when palmas alone would do the trick as well. In the end, the compás was all that mattered. Except for the short introductions during initial sessions geared towards learning a dance for the happiokai performance, which presumably aimed foremost at enthusing the class, I never heard instructors offer any further information on genres and songs. One instructor claimed that she told her students to listen to flamenco music as often as possible, and suggested old and new releases to them on a regular basis, but none of her students ever volunteered the topic of flamenco singers and musicians during their discussions with me. When I explicitly initiated a conversation about flamenco dancers, singers or musicians, they showed very little interest.

The emphasis on steps and speed and thunderous stomping in Japan constitutes flamenco’s fundamental building block; as the basic technique towards the embodiment of its essential compás. Evidently, the process of learning does not end here, but in fact reflects ‘[t]he pedagogical practices of many Japanese traditional arts’, which – based on Zen philosophy – ‘incorporate a reverence for what is inexpressible through words. Learning through practice [rather than through any kind of intellectualization] is vital’,
Yuasa comments that ‘Simply stated this is to “learn with the body,” not the brain’ (Yuasa in Hahn 2007: 46).

It is believed that regular practice of prescribed dance poses and movements reinforces artistic skills in the habitual body, and as movements become embodied, an experience of freedom and realization may occur. From a highly disciplined and structured pedagogical foundation it is thought that the skills of an artist can flow ‘naturally’ or effortlessly from the well-trained body. This fundamental concept of training can be found in artistic practices throughout Japanese history, from theatre to calligraphy to woodworking. (Hahn 2007: 43)

To come to an experience of such freedom – that is, to give way to ‘a flow of kokoro [i.e. heart], or the ability for one’s inner physical/spiritual energy to flow freely in creative expression’ (Hahn 2007: 42) – may take many years. First, one has to master the technique, and only then engage with expression. This seems also to be the case with flamenco in Japan; not surprising considering the fact that most Japanese flamenco instructors have had formal dance education or (particularly those belonging to the younger generation) have themselves been trained by formally trained instructors.³ Differing from the Spanish approach, where the compás has to invite an impassioned connection and personal expression right from the start, in Japan the compás seems to have been essentialized to such an extent that it has become disconnected from the music altogether. Qualities such as a visual aestheticization of body movement, facial and bodily expression, and performance in interaction with – and not merely to – the (live)
music come in at a much later phase in a dancer’s career. Replying to my question about whether or not she felt the happiness and joy of an alegrias, an intermediate flamenco student exclaimed

I can’t! If I would surrender myself to an emotion like that, feeling happy, I would forget my steps. I would start moving like a madwoman, totally out of control. I wouldn’t be dancing flamenco anymore. You know, my body is still that of a child. It doesn’t know anything [about flamenco], it can’t do it by itself. Not yet. I have to practice much more. (personal communication)

It takes time to master the art, and to feel confident that one is mastering it. Upon my return to the field in May 2010, I went to see the instructor of a highly reputed studio perform in a Tokyo tablaô. We had become friends during the nights we spent discussing flamenco in both Spain and Japan over sake and sashimi. On one such occasion, she, a dancer who had received a Japan Culture award for one of her (presumably very much culturally Japanese!) flamenco solos, admitted that she was still afraid of letting go of her pre-set choreography when dancing onstage. She hardly ever dared to improvise to the singer’s songs and the guitarist’s playing, horrified of falling from improvisation into blankness. During that particular performance with one of Japan’s highly reputed guitarists, however, she did improvise. Their soleares did not seem to come to an end as I watched the guitarist’s face shifting from a rather impassive ‘just another gig’ look to visibly joyous. Realizing her daring experiment, he began to concentrate intensely on her dancing feet, arms, body and face. After the show, I overheard him asking her in a
perplexed tone, ‘What happened? I never experienced anything like this! You were marvellous tonight!’ It certainly was not the kind of ‘Japamenco’ another guitarist had derogatorily called flamenco dancing in Japan. This contraction of Japanized flamenco expressed his frustration about the lack of freedom and interplay between him as a musician and the dancers, something that he had experienced in Spain. That night in that tablao in Tokyo, however, a flamenco ‘flow from the heart’ was added to years of training, teaching and embodied knowledge, to the flawless, perfected sense of rhythm and very strong footwork of a master: flamenco all right, but with a distinct Japanese style, for its trajectory had been very different.

Still the question remains as to why the emphasis on stomping persists, in a cultural and sensory setting that favours learning first through imitating the ‘external skills’ (Hahn 2007: 51) by sight. What has urged Japanese flamencos to deviate from the prevailing Japanese sensory mode? Is it a mere appropriation of flamenco’s essence into a situation of too few (male) guitarists and too many (female) dancers?

**Change in the sociocultural environment**

Since the 1980s, Japanese society has been going through some profound transitions (Tobin 1992; Rosenberger 2001; Kelsky 2001). Developments in the social, economic and educational realms have affected gender relations to the core. Marriages are now being postponed, causing birth rates to dwindle, as numerous single young women started to travel abroad for study or work. Once marginalized within Japanese patriarchal society, these women began grasping the opportunities opened to them, dreaming of becoming international and cosmopolitan, and of competing with Japanese men in the ‘Japan Inc.’
labour market. In time, they managed to create a niche for themselves as bicultural and bilingual intermediaries in their home country’s financial and cultural realms. The locus of their dreams had been the West in general, and the United States in particular, where they sought to liberate themselves from insular and outdated Japanese values concerning womanhood and find an international stage for self-expression (Kelsky 2001: 3–4, 2008).

As Karen Kelsky continues to explain, the self-expression that this first generation of women after Japan’s major social change were pursuing was one of discovery and assertion of a new sense of ‘self’ – modern, cosmopolitan – as well as a romantic freedom – that tended to fetishize the white western male, taken to be more sensitive and gentlemanly than Japanese men.

The first cohort of Japanese women who, during the 1980s, felt inspired by the film Carmen, evidently belonged to Kelsky’s ‘first generation’. Some travelled to Spain to learn flamenco, others created a rush to the already established but at the time still marginal studios of earlier Japanese flamenco adepts such as Yoko Komatsubara and Shoji Kojima. When simply questioning these early Japanese apprentices on what the appeal of flamenco dance had been for them, their answers resonated with Kelsky’s listing of ‘western dreams’. Nearly every first answer touched upon flamenco’s reputation of being synonymous with passion. Flamenco expresses emotion, they said, because it is ‘gypsy music’; music of free, passionate, and wandering spirits, who, ‘like all Spanish men’, are not afraid to display their feelings. They would also remark that flamenco is ‘very different, very unlike any Japanese music or dance’. Many loved flamenco for not being a pair dance, like Argentinean tango or ballroom dancing, which would compel them to follow a man’s lead (again). They also admired the beautiful dresses, the
women’s long hair and colourful accessories, and enviously watched Spanish female dancers’ bodily display of strength, power and confidence. Some women, who had in the meantime grown middle aged, added the lack of an age limit for dancing flamenco as being appealing. Finally – and to my own surprise – without exception all of the apprentices replied that they had fallen in love with the music. The music? It was this final statement that held the key to understanding flamenco’s immense popularity in Japan.

As a global music and dance genre, flamenco clearly offers its Japanese apprentices an international/transcultural space for self-expression, with its promise of passion, emotion and femininity, tinged with a romantic sense of freedom; even if these dreams have to wait until the dance has been fully embodied in order to be realized. As such, flamenco holds qualities with which Japanese notions of female subservient behaviour, of women’s prescribed invisibility and modesty, can be countered (Ede 2014). Differing from many other dance genres that these women have encountered, flamenco has one more asset: it is sound based. The footwork, the stomping, gives them yet another mode to contest two particular Japanese values of femininity and traditional culture, namely silence and silencing. In relation to the latter, it is remarkable how much attention soundscape has received and how much acoustic ecological research has been conducted in Japan during the past decades. The immense increase in traffic in the metropoles, the gigantic screens in public places blasting ads with MTV music, megaphones screaming the latest promotions through shopping streets and malls, and the explosive usage of cell phones have intruded upon the once cherished Japanese silence, especially in urban areas. The implementation of noise management schemes have stood high on political agendas
(Imada 2005; Hiramatsu 2006). In concord with these acoustic environmental developments, women’s longing for a new modern self also became noticeable through their sounding, as the voices of young females were found to be changing in pitch and volume, as well as vocabulary (Smith 1992; Rosenberger 1995; Miller 2004). Flamenco stomping, then, seems to be yet another addition to this modernity of sound. Furthermore, the thunderous volleys of feet that had initially taken me aback suddenly echoed the taeko/drums that in the past had led warriors into the battlefield, which I was reminded of when reading Yamamoto’s imagery of a

female ‘warrior discipline’ (musha shugyō) in which women reject the constricting bonds of Japanese tradition and school themselves in self-knowledge on the world stage. (in Kelsky 2001: 98)

While ballet schools in Japan are often located on the second floor so that passers-by can glance at the dancers exercising, I found that flamenco studios are predominantly hidden, in basements and buildings adjacent to railroads, their noisiness tempered. Nevertheless, flamenco dance’s appeal for its women apprentices and their ‘love for the music’ is precisely this: sound, and its whipping up of non-Japanese ‘modern’ rhythms.

Flamenco in Japan is considered to be modern indeed, as it figures in modern dance competitions like Dance Plan and other Japanese joint contemporary dance events, appearing next to jazz and tap dance and recently also hip hop. This outcome of flamenco’s transcultural development in Japan differs from flamenco’s globalizing process in the rest of the world, where its practitioners still label the genre as ‘world
music’, therewith betraying their quest for authenticity and a ‘fetishization of the local flavor’ (Stokes 2004: 53). To these aficionados, flamenco is not supposed to be modern at all, but rather the contrary, as traditional as possible – only to be fused with other so-called authentic ‘world genres’. That the ‘processes of extraction, commodification, appropriation, and exploitation’ (Stokes 2004: 56) of flamenco and flamencos, that these efforts ultimately enact, nevertheless represent a modernist endeavour, falls beyond their scope. It is these processes that lead to what purists perceive to be a deterioration of the ‘real’ flamenco and an emergence of the genre as a mere spectacle. However, the international stage, to recall Kelsky’s metaphor (2001), that these Japanese women crave in their engagement with flamenco seems to have served not only their need to be seen and noticed; they want to be heard too.

**Conclusion**

Primarily, it is flamenco dance’s sound-based quality that, in Japan, has turned it into one of Iwabuchi’s ‘modes of indigenized modernities’ (2002: 5). However, ‘[a]n awareness of cultural difference [that] has’, according to Ann Albright Cooper (2003: 177), ‘shattered any easy assumptions about modern dance as “natural”, “authentic”, or [the] undisputed origin of most 20th century and contemporary dance forms’, has not yet informed flamenco. The question of authenticity and cultural ownership still seems too powerful a discourse for Spanish (and many western) aficionados to accept flamenco’s transcultural transformation in its globalizing process; particularly when relocated to such a dynamic sociocultural setting as Japan. Not only do these aficionados seem to refute flamenco’s development from ‘traditional’ to modern and cosmopolitan, but their ‘easy
assumptions’ (Albright Cooper 2003: 177) about Japanese and Japanese culture prohibit an ear for the new, differing significance that has emerged from flamenco’s relocation.

It was assumed that sight, taken as hegemonic by western philosophers and Christian church fathers ever since Aristotle, would become increasingly dominant during the modern era. An over-emphasis on visual perception and visual engagement would, it was argued, create a world that is superficial and shallow. This view, however, did not take into account the social and economic forces within cultures that imply the contestation of culturally hegemonic sensory modes. In western market oriented societies, for instance, the ever-growing competition among producers and marketing agencies has initiated an abundance of multi-sensorial promotion strategies and applications to lure consumers (Howes 2006). For a century already, sight has in fact been losing its much cherished top position on the sensory scale within western thought. Furthermore, the case of Japanized flamenco shows how the genre has not been submitted to the Japanese hegemonic sensory model favouring sight. Precisely because of the economic and social transitions that touched upon pre-existing gender relations, the genre’s sound-based quality offers ammunition to oppose outdated notions and values. This emphasis on sound, or rather on sound volume, may have emerged unwittingly through learning and transmission practices. The embeddedness of its apprentices within a society that has been entrenched in its use of pedagogical devices in artistic practices, such as the mastering of technique before admitting creative expression, however, makes their ‘tacit’ emphasis on sounding ever more remarkable. It echoes new Japanese society: modern noises and subsequent noise management, explosively growing living environments, and
changing labour and gender relations. This has led to a new transcultural, Japanized flamenco style.

According to Iwabuchi, the Japanese have become Asia’s cultural centre with their ‘[l]ocalizing strategies… selling their “know-how” for indigenizing foreign (Western) popular culture in Asian markets’ (Iwabuchi 2002: 85). For the last decade, Japanese flamenco dancers have been increasingly touring around Asia and are often asked to be instructors for workshops and master classes on the Asian continent as well as Taiwan. Whether their style of flamenco will become the source of other localized flamenco worlds remains to be seen. For now, a younger generation of Japanese women, with new battles to win, seem to have found their own mode of contestation; through belly dancing.

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Contributor details

Dr Yolanda van Ede is Senior Lecturer at the Sociology & Anthropology department at the University of Amsterdam. She received her Ph.D. in 1999 at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) on an ethnohistorical investigation of a Tibetan
Buddhist nunnery in Nepal, and has been publishing on gender, ritual and religion, ethnographic methods, the anthropology of the senses, and writing culture. In 2006 she returned to her initial passion, dance, with a research project on flamenco’s popularity among Japanese women. Her current interest focuses on colonialism, gender, social class and transnationalism in Philippine social/ballroom dancing.

Contact:
E-mail: Y.M.vanEde@uva.nl

Notes

1 In a discussion with David Howes in Social Anthropology, Sarah Pink ventures that a categorization of sensory experiences and perceptions and cross-cultural comparison have lost their value, since comparative anthropology has, since the 1990s, become passé (Pink and Howes 2011: 332). She does not, however, explain her grounds for this claim.


3 It was remarkable that the instructors were very reluctant to mention the names of their Spanish instructors, both to me during my field research and in media interviews. Many explicitly refused to call their teachers of the past their role models, in dance or otherwise.

4 Interestingly, the Japanese are renowned for staying as close as possible to the ‘natural’, ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ forms of dance and music genres. The Orquestra de la Luz,
for instance, is a Japanese salsa band to which Cubans nowadays refer as the most
‘original’ salsa music there is, uncontaminated by other globalizing genres (Hosokawa
1999).