



Flamenco Music and National Identity in Spain

William Washabaugh

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Flamenco was transformed into a symbol of Spanish national identity during the Franco's regime. This Andalusian style of music has, during the latter half of the twentieth century, turned from locally performed musical genre into an art form that is appreciated and performed around the world. The musical style has become an artifact that brings Spain groups of tourists who are chasing the authentic flamenco performance of the yesteryears and eager students who want to learn the style and its aesthetics more thoroughly. Yet, this globally known symbol of Spain is now being reconstructed as a non-national, patrimonial cultural marker of Andalusian identity. At the same time flamenco is also being used to oppose the national political interest that it has served in the past.

William Washabaugh's book *Flamenco Music and National Identity in Spain* tackles this interesting turn in the study of flamenco, providing a refreshing insight on 'the cultural and political reverberations that accompany flamenco performance' (2012, xi). Here, Washabaugh 'examines the processes through which flamenco is being cultivated as a marker of Andalusian identity and a patrimonial symbol of Andalusian autonomy' and also 'looks at the steps that Andalusians have taken to avoid transforming flamenco into a fixed and well-defined patrimonial object' (2012, 7). The aim is to pay attention to the future of flamenco rather than towards the past as other works, including his own (Washabaugh, 1996) have done. Through this forward-leaning emphasis, he demonstrates how flamenco provides Andalusians an opportunity to realize solidarity and autonomy.

For researchers in a wider research context, there are two useful themes regarding style and recording. Discussions about style are faced with the difficulty of distinguishing a simple set of stylistic features; flamenco's hybrid nature makes it difficult to say what flamenco is and what it is not, while opinions on the matter vary from one group to the next. Washabaugh uses the idea of musical promise as a way to define the flamenco style, by proposing that musical style should be understood as an aspiration through which musicians create a desirable identity. He is not denying that artists respond to past experiences but argues that they do so in the process of envisioning the possible future, in which an intuitive and organic development towards perfection may be regarded as a teleonomic concept of style. Through this perspective, style is not only connected to the issue of authenticity but also to the search for an ideal of what the art works want to be. The search for authenticity is therefore leaning

forward rather than backward. Similarly to the musical style of flamenco, Andalusian identity may be understood telenomically, striving towards a possible future.

As a response to the question of why some flamenco artists look to the past in order to define the style, Washabaugh refers to three Spanish institutional configurations that continue to promote the authentic flamenco rooted in the past: education, art, and journalism, which are respectively underpinned by Krausism, modernism, and documentarism. These viewpoints have established the backwards-gazing aesthetic that dominates discussions about flamenco while they have also created a situation in which flamenco has remained an essentially unchanged historical treasure and a cultural marker.

Opposed to these conservative stances are the new cinema and studio-engineered audio recordings that promote the teleonomic view. Both involve innovating institutional and non-governmental constraints and force reconstructions of the flamenco style. Film provides a focus on the dance while they also offer the viewer an opportunity to discover how flamenco may feel in the future.

The way recording has affected the flamenco tradition can also provide insightful ideas for music scholars. Washabaugh suggests that the recent studio recording of flamenco invites 'the listener to reconsider old notions of musical truth and authenticity' but also 'to recognize that musical truth has increasingly less to do with the artist's intention' (p.123). In this context, Washabaugh makes an interesting distinction between live performance and 'performance-images'. In a performance-image, a sound is imagined as being performed but is not actually performed at that point, as the artist is not present in the moment that the record is played. The more complete the artist's absence and the further away we are from a performance, the greater the loss of artistic control. The discussion of the performance-image is particularly valid in relation to the digital technology, which allows songs to be compiled with tracks that are not recorded at the same event.

Washabaugh also shows that there is an emphasis in Spain on teaching flamenco in terms of poetry and song, leaving the dance aside. The emphasis on poetry and song is interesting as we consider it in the light of the tourism that is mostly concentrated around the dance. Despite such global interest in flamenco dance, the governmental policies emphasize flamenco as a song-centered art form. Contrary to government motivations regarding the role of flamenco in the creation of Andalusian and national identity, according to Washabaugh, tourists are attracted to the dance because they 'attend to flamenco as way of getting to know themselves better' (p. 91).

When considering the book as a whole, the one down side of it is that it opens up quite slowly to the reader who is not too familiar with current discussions about flamenco. The chapter titles in the beginning of the book are at times misleading, leaving the reader to consider where the book is going. But Washabaugh's well-directed arguments begin to clarify towards the end of the book where he starts to engage more with the wider academic community outside flamenco studies. In the final chapters Washabaugh opens particularly discussions regarding style and recording would be beneficial to scholars working on other fields of popular music and cultural studies.