The connections between acts of reclaiming traditional culture and nationalist movements have been the subject of significant theoretical consideration in the last few decades and are often related to concepts such as the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) and the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm 1984). In the case of Spain, the construction of a national identity was a lengthy process that peaked during the nineteenth century, and that was characterized by the difficult coexistence of diverse projects that coalesced around the idea of a “collective we.” Contradictions between the romantic image of Spain that arose in industrialized Europe and the “autochthonous and indigenous” (costumbrista and castiza) image promoted in Spain clashed with the political struggles between conservatives and reformists, creating a “problematic identity” for the country throughout the twentieth century (Juliá Díaz 2004; Álvarez Junco 2003).

Although flamenco was an essential element in these contradictory images of Spain, it only held a peripheral position in debates around the “essence” of Spain. For Andalusian folklorists such as Antonio Machado Álvarez (otherwise known as “Demófilo”), flamenco embodied a collective soul perceived to be at the brink of extinction due to the risqué atmosphere of the café cantantes and a loss in its authenticity (Machado y Álvarez 1996). In contrast, the critical currents of thought that emerged in the wake of the collapse of Spain’s colonial empire in 1898—fed by both prejudiced ideas from outside of Spain as well as internal negative images (Calvo Serraller 1995; Andreu Miralles 2016)—adopted
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an approach to flamenco that was closer to contempt than to the Herderian Volkgeist or nationalist extolling. Literary quotes from Pío Baroja, José Martínez Ruiz “Azorín,” Miguel de Unamuno’s essays, and especially the incendiary texts by Eugenio Noel (1914, 1916) are particularly pertinent in this respect. Not surprisingly, in the context of the 1922 Granada competition, a group of poets and intellectuals tried to restore cante jondo’s attributes of purity and lyricism that had been alienated by previous anti-flamenco criticism. As in many other contexts of flamenco’s history, the competition regarded authenticity as an absolute category rather than a contingent one.

Is the complex and convoluted image of flamenco today a result of these polarized debates? In part, the answer is yes. From the second half of the nineteenth century—arguably the period in which the genre was born—flamenco has been caught up in difficult tensions between appreciation and rejection as well as tradition and modernity. Flamenco continues to be an art form that evokes Gitano identity and is rooted in discourses about primitivism and the perceived otherness of Andalusia as an Orient in Europe. Yet the real experience of staged flamenco is that of an art recreated for daily consumption, far from the entertainment of privileged señoritos (referring to landowners and aristocrats) and libertines and from the dishonor of the flamenco lumpen.

Over the past four decades, scholarly trends confirm the growing recognition of flamenco as an artistic expression and/or an instrument of identity-making as well as an object of the heritagization politics of the Andalusian government. The Junta de Andalucía—the region’s government—owes its approach to the new heritage paradigms that arose from the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003). The postulates of heritagization in this context favor values such as significance, relevance, and representativity as the defining characteristics of intangible cultural heritage against those of exceptionality, monumentalism, and scarcity (Abric 1994; Ballart 1997; Ribeiro 1998). Rather than simply support “conservation,” the Convention embraces the notion of “safeguarding” (UNESCO 2003, Article 2.3) and regards heritage as a socially dynamic concept, devoid of essentialism. The Convention follows the direction previously adopted by the Franceschini Commission in 1964, regarding the need to establish a compatible relationship between changes introduced in the tradition, processes of transmission, identity formations, and expressions of diversity (Article 2.1) (Cicerchia 2002). More importantly, the Convention ascribes fundamental value to the collective agents of transmission, which it no longer regards as objects of preservation but rather as necessary subjects and as active agents in the process of heritagization. The role of nation-states within this framework is oriented towards defining, administering, and regulat-
ing this heritage but not without the prior, free, and informed consent of those communities. At the same time, UNESCO operates at a supra-national level, where it promotes “cultural diversity and human creativity” (2003, Article 21) while evaluating the applications submitted by entities such as the comunidades autónomas (autonomous communities) in Spain.

Although the theoretical underpinnings of the Convention are widely accepted, there has also been criticism of the “double decision” management system whereby states have the final word on selection, inventory, safeguarding, and the selection of submissions to UNESCO. Situations of conflict have been reported, provoked by the reduction of consent to a mere formality, the lack of monitoring of state responsibility, and the use of heritage to acquire political prestige or as an instrument of propaganda. These conflicts arise from the imbalanced distribution of power between, on the one hand, the states and institutions that possess decision-making capacities and the bulk of the material and intellectual resources, and, on the other hand, the limitations that communities face, whose heterogenous nature makes it difficult for them to reach consensus on key issues (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Peralta and Anico 2006; Bortolotto 2011; Harrison 2013; González Cambeiro and Querol Fernández 2014). From a very critical perspective, decolonial theorists warn of the subordination of the goals of the communities to the state politics of representation (Melé 2005; Fanon 2009; Mignolo 2010; Sousa Santos and Meneses 2014). Sen (1999) proposes that the actors directly concerned should choose the modes of development that they want and the cultural traditions that they value. Several authors problematize the idealization and reification of communities involved in processes of administrative objectivation and note that the UNESCO Convention seems to place individuals, groups, and communities in positions that are foreign to their internal hierarchies and heterogeneity (Waterton and Smith 2010; Hertz 2015; Tauschek 2015). Local research demonstrates that UNESCO objectifies the idea of community, often facilitating contradictory views about the same heritage (Villaseñor Alonso and Zolla 2012; Quintero Morón and Sánchez Carretero 2017).

In November 2010, flamenco was included in UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. However, twenty-first-century flamenco has inherited historical controversies in which intellectual reflection, debates about purity, the exchange of views between the agents involved, and the implementation of political and institutional action coexist. This chapter discusses the recent integration of flamenco in public policies in Andalusia and examines the institutional process that led to the preparation of the UNESCO candidature and its campaign of support. Based on the results of interviews I
carried out with thirty-four professional dancers, it also analyzes the extent to which the communities, groups, or individuals referred to in the submission agree with the official discourse, their roles prior to the candidature, what reactions followed, and how they perceived the heritagization process.

The Instrumentalization of Flamenco: From “España cañí” to Regional Autonomy

Franco’s centralist agenda introduced substantial changes into an art that was still clinging to French espagnolade (exotic representations of Spain). From the beginning of the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), regional folklore was drawn upon to resolve the contradictions between unity and diversity, thus turning it into “an aesthetic and emotional element, whereby regional diversity [became] an unproblematic aspect in the composition of a national picture” (Ortiz García 2012, 2). A new process of nationalization (referred to by the term nacionalflamenquismo) turned flamenco into an icon of Spanishness. Flamenco was thus whitewashed, as it was deprived of any links to regionalization and dispossessed of its original attachments to class, ethnicity, and culture.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the ballet español was disseminated widely, a highbrow genre that added a patina of morality to the less virtuous baile flamenco and that avoided the radical, antihegemonic connotations of resistance that flamenco had gained. During the Cold War, Franco pursued a two-pronged strategy, namely, a move towards the institutionalization of flamenco in Spain and its use in the construction of diplomatic ties abroad. He thus organized receptions at La Granja de San Ildefonso palace, as well as the heterogenous Festivales de España, and tours of the regime’s favorites such as Antonio and Pilar López’s touring companies. The academic and stylized bailes-danzas of such touring groups helped polish the pathos and tragedy of the cante jondo (deep song) and transformed the libertarian fiesta, packed with bulerías and tangos, into a decorative and unengaged form void of social references. Singing trends such as crooner-style canzonetismo, fandango, and cantes de ida y vuelta (“roundtrip songs”), all of which had already been in vogue for decades, continued to feature in Andalusian-inspired theatrical and film comedies until the 1960s. Inside and outside the country, representations of Spanishness used flamenco as a metonym for a patriotic and tipista (localist) image of Spain. In the same way as other art forms, flamenco was co-opted into the interventionist policies of Franco’s successive governments, into the government-controlled, hierarchical entertainment-industry union, and into the development-oriented subsidized policies, which were applied to all artistic productions “of national interest.” At
the same time, the echoes of *jondoismo* barely scraped by and were relegated to private parties in inns, corner shops, and salacious taverns, contexts in which *cante gitano* began to be marginalized.

The technocratic turn of the 1960s facilitated the renovation of Francoism's flamenco façade. Between 1959 and 1964, the Stabilization and Economic Liberalization Plan and the Economic and Social Development Plan of Laureano López Rodó dispelled the shadows of post-war autarchy and interventionism. Certain diplomatic and, particularly, commercial barriers that had been present since Franco's Italo-German alliance during the Second World War were finally opened: in 1953 Spain signed bilateral agreements with the United States and, in 1964, it subscribed commercial agreements with the European Economic Community despite the latter's reticence to legitimize the regime. A new kind of politics characterized by economic flexibility and industrial development accompanied the tertiarization of the Spanish economy and the shift of agricultural labor to new economic sectors (García Delgado 2013; Vizcaíno Ponferrada 2015). Tourism spread during the 1960s, a decade marked by emigration abroad, rural-to-urban migration, industrial development, rising consumption, and growing income. With the mass arrival of tourists, flamenco was transformed on the stages of *tablao* (performance venues for flamenco). As Holguín points out, "Once the Franco regime transformed the Spanish tourist industry into one of its top priorities, flamenco became a chief economic engine of Spain's tourist economy and served to solidify flamenco as a major component of Spain's national identity" (2019, 248–49). Meanwhile, the regime cleaned up the image of Spain's backwardness by presenting to German, British, Soviet, and North American audiences attending the International Fair in New York (1964–1965) the flamenco companies of María Rosa, Antonio and Lucero Tena, using them as business cards in an international context increasingly benevolent with the Franco dictatorship.

This political instrumentalization of flamenco coexisted with a more intellectual and engaged strand developed among fans. A few voices called for the rehabilitation of "traditional" flamenco, a style that was behind the making of the films *Duende y misterio del flamenco* (1952) by Edgar Neville and *Antología del cante flamenco* (1954) from Hispavox. Two decades later, the now iconic television series *Rito y geografía del cante* (also *del cante y del toque*) (1971–1973) revived the ethnographic spirit of these two films. The traditionalist approach to flamenco was secured regionally at first and mainly thanks to the landmark publication of *Flamencología* (1955) by Anselmo González Climent, the organization of the *Concurso Nacional de Arte Flamenco de Córdoba* (1956), in which *cantaor* Fosforito achieved a resounding victory, and the awarding of the *Llave de Oro* (“Golden
Key”) to singer Antonio Mairena (1962), who co-authored Mundo y formas del cante flamenco (1963). These publications and events created a canon of flamenco through a process that could be considered, in Eric Hobsbawm’s words, an “invention of tradition.” Mundo y formas del cante flamenco fell into the same contradiction that characterized the dictatorship’s discourse at the time: they both promoted a vision of flamenco anchored in the past but as a salvation for their own “vision of the future” (Bonachera 2015, 212).

Despite the reactionary character of some of its initiatives, the traditionalist revival changed course with the arrival of Spain’s transition to democracy following the death of Franco (1975). The rigors of Mairenismo, referring here to the influence of Antonio Mairena, had to contend with the modernization of customs and urban cultures and the rise in influence of the mass media from the end of the 1960s. Mairenismo also occurred concurrently with the gradual engagement of flamenco with other musics, giving rise to genres such as “rock andaluz,” and “blues flamenco,” the latter of which was performed by Gitanos from marginalized communities in Andalusian cities. As argued by Bethencourt, “there is value in thinking about flamenco during and after the transition not as ‘retraditionalised’ (or, in Biddle and Knights’s terms ‘re-andalusianized’) but as taking up a more fluid (but no less committed) relation to the idea of tradition” (2011, 6). During the Transition, flamenco was freed from its traditional corset thanks to the unprecedented impact of performers such as Paco de Lucía, Camarón de la Isla, and Enrique Morente, born in Andalusia but seasoned in Madrid’s tablaos.

Following the passing of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and the promulgation of Andalusia’s first Statute of Autonomy in 1981, this region confirmed its status as a “historic nationality.” Flamenco became a site of struggle for the pursuit of autonomy in Andalusia and an arena for conflicting interpretations. A section of progressive intellectuals retracted from any cultural expression associated to the dictatorship, including copla and flamenco, while the common people, who were hungry for freedom, turned away from certain Andalusian stereotypes. I remember the feeling of dressing up as flamenca for the Feria de Sevilla in the late 1970s and how it did not seem “modern” for a woman in her early teens. However, while flamenco was still perceived as a remnant of the past, it was also gradually losing its previous attachments to Spanishness. Left-wing political organizations hired politically engaged singers to enliven their rallies in Andalusia and constructed a type of discourse in which “the people” were represented as the true creators while issuing calls to open centers for the study and the dissemination of flamenco.
The 1970s and 1980s saw the blossoming of associations under the protection of laws of freedom of association and the growth of grassroots social movements. Local *peñas flamencas* (flamenco clubs) were either bound to a neighborhood, a performer, or a theme. Together, they established a network of spaces for the preservation and the dissemination of flamenco in Andalusia as well as the areas of Spain where Andalusian immigration was rife. Pre-democracy institutions such as the Chair of Flamencology in Jerez (1958–1960) were reinforced through new initiatives, such as the privately-funded Fundación Andaluza de Flamenco (1985). Summer festivals flourished thanks to local public investment, restoring the dignity of artists who thus gained economic stability, while larger events such as the Bienal de Arte Flamenco de Sevilla presented attractive programs that combined continuity and change. Meanwhile, researchers and scholars turned flamenco into a topic of intellectual discussion. A rise in the production of discographies led to the publication of collections of classic *cante*, young innovators, artists who embraced the *Gitano* brand, as well as the flamenco-protest artists such as José Menese, El Cabrero, and Manuel Gerena, who appealed to field laborers and denounced the inequalities experienced by agricultural workers.

### Between Public Investment and Collective Identity

In 1984, competencies around cultural and heritage-related policy were formally transferred from the Spanish state to the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. From this moment on, flamenco gained more importance than ever before in the design of public policy. This process has been studied with reference to the meanings of flamenco’s institutionalization process, its relationship with power, its exploitation of the past (Washabaugh 2012), its contribution to regionalism and localism (Machin-Autenrieth 2017), and the effect of identity politics at supranational, national, and regional levels (Cruces Roldán 2014). Furthermore, Aix Gracia (2014) has studied the transition from revalorization to institutionalization, showing the ways in which flamenco has become a part of official cultural policy, and has examined the festivalization of the cultural offerings of different Andalusian cities.

The public sector was the crucial agent of this flamenco awakening. From the 1980s, local and provincial councils, as well as the Junta de Andalucía, invested in the awarding of grants to support the promotion and diffusion of flamenco. The policies aimed at the development of flamenco that have been implemented during the four decades of socialist government in Andalusia (1978–2019) have, for the most part, been maintained following the victory of the center-right in
the 2018 and 2022 elections. From the 1980s to the 2010s, a number of institutions have been established, including the Consultancy Office of Flamenco Activities of the Andalusian Government (1982), the Andalusian Centro for Flamenco (1993)—formerly the Andalusian Foundation for Flamenco; currently known as the Andalusian Center for the Documentation of Flamenco—and the creation of the Andalusian Dance Company (1995), which today is the Flamenco Ballet of Andalusia, representing the most recognized form of Andalusian dance on international stages.

In 2005, the Andalusian Agency of Flamenco was created, and after multiple transformations in the public administration, it culminated in the Andalusian Institute of Flamenco. In 2010, the Advising Committee on Flamenco was established. In strictly heritage terms, the Junta de Andalucía listed the shellac recordings of Gitana singer Pastora Pavón Cruz, known as “Niña de los Peines,” in the General Catalog of Andalusian Historical Heritage as Bien de Interés Cultural de Andalucía (“Asset of Cultural Interest of Andalusia”) in 1997. Between 2011 and 2019, the fiesta de verdiales,\(^1\) the Escuela sevillana de baile (“Sevillian dance school style”), the Escuela bolera (“Bolera dance school style”), the zambombas\(^2\) of towns Arcos and Jerez de la Frontera, and the fandango de Huelva were all listed in this catalog. In addition, the Junta pursues other long-term initiatives such as the awarding of grants to flamenco productions, festivals, flamenco networks, book and record publications, festivals such as Flamenco Viene del Sur (Flamenco Comes from the South), the inclusion of flamenco in the conservatory curriculum, and the Flamenco Law of 2022. As Machin-Autenrieth points out, “While flamenco has, in the past, been constructed as a Spanish musical tradition [. . .], its relevance for Andalusian identity has moved to the foreground” (2013, 321).

Two further events fostered the heritagization of flamenco in Andalusia in the early 2000s. The first was the inclusion of flamenco in the reformed Estatuto de Autonomía of Andalusia (“Statute of Autonomy” 2007). Articles 37 and 68 assign to the Autonomous Community of Andalusia the role of safeguarding “the conservation and valorization of cultural, historical, and artistical heritage of Andalusia, especially of flamenco,” and “the exclusive competency (competencia) in terms of knowledge, conservation, research, training, promotion and dissemination of flamenco as a singular element of Andalusian cultural heritage.” These articles received little commentary from artists and the public but have nevertheless captured the attention of intellectuals, who have either supported or dismissed the initiative, depending on their beliefs. The second event was the inclusion of flamenco in UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2010). Branded as opportunist by many, the application consolidated
Andalusia’s position in the Spanish state’s policy on heritage. This process of consolidation had begun in the 1990s when the first Law of Andalusian Cultural Heritage (1991) introduced a clause on Ethnographic Heritage and created the category of Place of Ethnological Interest. Further modifications to the law took place in 2007, including the introduction of the category Activity of Ethnological Interest. From the mid-1980s onwards, a complex administrative structure developed within the Department of Culture of the Junta de Andalucía, with the establishment of the General Directions of Cultural Assets and Institutions, the constitution of the Andalusian Commission of Ethnology, and the Andalusian Institute of Cultural Heritage, which publishes the Intangible Cultural Heritage Atlas of Andalusia.

Following the principles of UNESCO’s 2003 Convention, in 2004 the Andalusian administration started the process leading to flamenco’s nomination, that, if successful, would be interpreted as an administrative success for the autonomous government. Two lengthy documents were prepared in 2004 and 2005 with the intention of submitting them to the Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The first document was a wide-ranging collection of reports that would never be submitted; the second, Flamenco y Música Andalusí, was a joint submission from Algeria, Andalusia, Morocco, and Tunisia and, although submitted, was turned down. The failure of the initiative as described in the UNESCO report was more focused on the insufficiencies in the drafting and justification of the candidacy than its appeal to the living character of an expanding art form that, at least in its commercial form, was not at risk of disappearing, as was publicized in the political discourse (Mellado Segado 2017). The intricacies of political and partisan conflict between institutions that held differing stances—namely, the Spanish Ministry of Culture and the Department of Culture of the Government of Andalusia—also contributed to the failure of the candidacy.

However, Andalusia’s interest in achieving UNESCO recognition for flamenco never disappeared. The growing enthusiasm of some institutional representatives was met by UNESCO’s creation of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The List is an open repository encompassing all cultural expressions that help illustrate the diversity of intangible heritage and that contribute to a wider awareness of its importance. The new call for applications (2009), which simplified the application procedure and forms notably, made it easier for flamenco to be included within the List. The defense of flamenco’s suitability to be included in the List did not face any obstacles because the tradition aptly responds to the definition of intangible heritage proposed in the 2003 Convention and meets the expectations as required through the establishment
of categories in the form: oral traditions and expressions, including language conceived as a vehicle for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftmanship (Article 2.2 of the Convention). Flamenco’s inscription in the List allowed, at last, the joining of the cultural and collective aspects of this heritage with its performative character, precisely as required by UNESCO’s guidelines.

In a gesture that acknowledged flamenco’s optimal suitability for inscription in the List, the Junta de Andalucía looked for inter-regional alliances that allowed flamenco to be promoted in the hierarchy established by UNESCO, which considers both national and multinational nominations. The Andalusian government led a joint submission with the bordering autonomous communities of Extremadura and Murcia (whose presence in the document is rather anecdotal), which required work on three fronts: political (to align the different wishes of multiple administrations, such as proposing motions in regional parliaments and the Spanish Congress as well as motions of support in local councils and meetings between the departments of culture); administrative (with the writing of the submission according to the template established by UNESCO); and social (searching for community support).

The submission of flamenco to the List generated consensus between the committed institutions, the communities, and the actors involved to a greater extent than the consensus around the mention of flamenco in the Estatuto, which was only mildly received. None of the institutions and actors had any strong expectations or agendas, or lobbied in any particular direction, but rather proceeded according to the circumstances. The writing process for the application was quite specific. A basic form had to be completed and put together with a list of available resources, measures and plans for safeguarding, and the agreement of the seven communities involved—Gitanos, flamenco families and dynasties, peñas and associations, artists, critics and researchers, flamenco schools and academies, and flamenco cultural industries—which in fact consisted of about thirty letters of support and references to meetings that justified the demand for flamenco’s nomination (Macías Sánchez 2019). The drafting of the nomination file was coordinated by the then director of the Andalusian Agency for the Development of Flamenco, Francisco Perujo, and was presented to UNESCO’s office in Paris in August 2009 (Junta de Andalucía 2009).

The following months in the Andalusian political cycle were turbulent, with the replacement of several government officials and the departure of Perujo, but this had little impact on the UNESCO nomination as the framework for the support campaign was already in place. María de los Ángeles Carrasco took over
direction of the new Andalusian Institute of Flamenco in June 2010, after being promoted from her former role as coordinator of the same institution, and she managed an effective institutional campaign. Initially the flamenco communities did not organize themselves into interest groups, but, over time, flamencos, public cultural figures, and members of civil society grew more enthusiastic and became increasingly involved in the project. An important factor in this growing involvement was the dynamism of the Flamenco Soy initiative. It was launched in January 2010 to garner as much support as possible for flamenco’s nomination as well as to select the signatories of various actors, such as local figures, those with greater symbolic power, and big names of the flamenco industry. The mobilization of music celebrities and prominent figures from the cultural sector, such as Daniel Barenboim, Alejandro Sanz, Antonio Banderas, and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, all of whom enthusiastically joined the campaign, was just as important. Public presentations in flamenco venues, political headquarters, and relevant theaters such as the Liceu in Barcelona and the Teatro Real in Madrid demonstrated the success of the campaign’s management. The guitarist Paco de Lucía offered a concert at Madrid’s Teatro Real in support of the campaign. Four decades earlier, he had had to endure the disdain from part of the audience at that same theater, which at the time was reluctant to admit the merging of flamenco with lyrical and symphonic music. Finally, flamenco was registered in the UNESCO List at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO in Nairobi (UNESCO 2010), together with other submissions presented by Spain: the Catalan castells, the Sibila chant of Mallorca, the Mediterranean diet, and falconry.

Flamenco Heritage and the Artistic Community

What I know is dancing, not planning a project. My projects are here [touches head], and I bring them out when I am dancing, not on paper. True flamenco cannot be written in a project, flamenco is an art that you have, that has to come out; and it has to come out at a fiesta. And if you are a professional it also comes out well on a stage, and when that is the case, it is the art that must be paid for. If you are a politician and want to say that flamenco is heritage, I am fine with it, but don’t make me write papers. Here I am, what more papers do you want?3

Thus spoke a well-known flamenco dancer during a conversation that we had on November 16, 2010, in the patio of the Andalusian Institute of Flamenco in the Santa Cruz neighborhood of Seville. Gitano and non-Gitano artists, scholars, peñistas, teachers, politicians, and cultural managers gathered there to await the UNESCO verdict and were subsequently able to celebrate flamenco’s inclusion
in the List with a spontaneous fiesta por bulerías. However, in less than a year, some of those at this fiesta and other professionals that the press described as “flamenco indignados”—all of them artists with long careers and who advocated for traditional flamenco—met on the first floor of that very same building to present a series of demands to the then Head of the Department of Culture of the Junta de Andalucía, Paulino Plata. Although the inclusion of flamenco in the school curricula was one of those demands, the fundamental claim was far more practical: to achieve greater equality in the distribution of public resources, particularly in matters directly procured by the Junta. This demand entailed a complete rejection of the model in force, which was based on open competitive grants, and whose calls for applications were seen—as the quote above shows—as the quote above shows—as the quote above shows—as obstacles than guarantees of procedural transparency.

These demands were also raised during a context critical for the making of flamenco identity, in which artists chose three ways to approach the tensions inherent in the binary opposition between tradition and innovation: first, to preserve the aesthetic normativity of what is considered to be “pure flamenco”; second, to take limited risks by introducing certain innovations within a relatively standardized flamenco aesthetic; and third, to introduce experimentalisms that would bring about a true “breakdown of representation” (Rampérez 2004). Since the 1990s, artists born between the mid-1960s and the early twenty-first century revised canonical forms of flamenco dance, employing creative languages and grammars that established new semantic relationships in flamenco, especially in the dance. Relevant figures such as Eva Yerbabuena, Israel Galván, Rocio Molina, Andrés Marín, and Belén Maya, and after them younger cohorts of female and male dancers, have transformed what we know as “baile flamenco” from a traditional form to a reconfigured visual and musical language. The theoretical grounding of this phenomenology, shared globally with other cultural movements, has prompted the use of the term “neoflamenco” to identify this redefinition of the art form.

Although it is not possible to discuss in detail the full contents of the thirty-four interviews I carried out, it should be noted that the understanding of flamenco heritage and the attitude towards the heritagization produced heterogeneous discourses. The interviews were designed according to three different types of male and female dancers. First, ten informants subscribe to a somewhat conservative position when responding to the question of what can be understood by flamenco heritage. They resist innovation and safeguard their savoir faire, in turn defending the creative aspirations and expectations of traditional audiences. Second, nine other interviewees lie at the opposite end of the spectrum: they praise a form of flamenco that embraces reflexive intellectualization,
formal technification, and a type of professional versatility that, while anchored in tradition, is also free from it, because it has abandoned conventional references and performance practice. Last, fifteen informants forming a majority adopt an intermediate position: they call for a reinterpretation or rereading of the past that brings what they consider to be tradition back into the present.

When seven informants from the first conservative group were asked about the utility of flamenco’s inclusion in the Representative List, their statements were unanimous. They congratulated the achievement, but they asked the administration to pursue what they thought was a fundamental goal: to safeguard traditional parameters. They condemned what they called “negligence” or “blame” by inaction towards “pure” flamenco and the excessive promotion of avant-garde creative projects (Statements 1 and 2). Some included specific demands, with proposals that ranged from the establishment of quotas to pedagogical measures and the preservation of oral memory or reclaimed the specificity of flamenco as an art that should not be academicized in dance conservatories (Statement 3).

S1. The UNESCO thing seems fine to me, but they should invest X amount—I don’t know, half of the grants or more—in real [traditional] flamenco performances. Because now it’s difficult to go to a show and see a dancer doing a farruca the way Antonio Gades used to do them, or [a kinetic] arrangement like Mario Maya’s. Now they dance with a hen on their head, or inside a coffin.⁵

S2. Only the youngsters work. The “authentic ones,” the masters, they are not hired. They are at home, with all that they know and have lived, and still with energy, but left high and dry. That’s where the Junta should have started.

S3. What should not happen is that, in the conservatories, the dance teachers are not bailaores [flamenco dancers] because they are told that they don’t have a degree—but in flamenco dance that’s not how things work. That’s where the Junta should be defending a heritage that is ours, and: “No, this flamenco class is going to be taught by so-and-so, despite not having a degree, because they’re the ones that really know how to dance.”

Oddly enough, the most iconoclastic dancers did not suggest that the concept of “flamenco heritage” or heritagization policies be changed according to their own conceptions of the art as a space of hybridization. They agreed on the need to safeguard heritage legacies and at the same time to reclaim a space for creation; or rather, they considered the Representative List as an opportunity to preserve the normative canon (Statement 4) against alternative flamenco, which, they believed, would find support on its own in international markets. Although no informants declined collaboration with the administration in the flamenco heritagization process, and they all valued the safeguarding actions
that had been agreed, they did not show any enthusiasm about creating interest groups to develop concrete aspirations—aspirations in any case that were subsequently thwarted by the collapse of the professional market due to the effects of COVID-19. Before the pandemic, prevailing attitudes had focused more on defending the right to rejuvenate the performance style and aesthetics of dance. This attitude was symptomatic of conceptualization of dance that was understood not as a scholarly heritage held back by transmission and continuity but as a heritage that is open, creative, emancipated, and plural (Statement 5).

S4. For me [the UNESCO List] should stop the flamenco of the past from being lost, because when you go to theaters and festivals outside of Spain, that’s not what people want (expect for two or three).

S5. I know that there are things that we cannot do. For instance, the rounding of the arms, or the point-heel [movement], or to lie on the ground; but I like to search for what is risky and forbidden. My body is not prepared for those exercises, but my head thinks about them and wants to do them.

The participants made references to geographies, genetic ties, style, sexuality, and race, regarding the construction of collective identities in flamenco. They also made reference to a range of legitimating communities: families, neighborhoods, Gitano communities, and the unique aesthetics of localized traditions, such as the “school of Jerez song.” However, twenty-three interviewees claimed that artists should hold the role of tradition-bearers and be the main means of transmission. In this way, they placed themselves above other flamenco communities considered by UNESCO, such as fans, critics, peñistas, or scholars. They felt authorized to establish the boundaries of flamenco and claim that they should be consulted on the design of cultural policy (Statements 6 and 7). By contrast, eleven younger dancers who participated in more transgressive cultural projects did not establish any hierarchy between the different agents (communities) involved in the transmission and formation of flamenco. For these artists, flamenco is a free space and their occupation is an additional layer of identity attachment (Statement 8).

S6. When they did the UNESCO thing, why didn’t they ask us? The politicians did it and then they called us to sign, but they included anything and everything, and flamenco is not just anything [i.e., it has precise boundaries].

S7. Flamenco is like a certificate of origin, and [we] artists know what flamenco is and what it isn’t.

S8. [Who does flamenco heritage belong to?] To Whom? To everyone, to anyone who likes it [. . .] [Where can flamenco go then?] Wherever someone wants it to
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I don’t know—or that we want it to go; well, wherever we want to take it, the artists first of all; but don’t kid yourself, there is also a producer, a director, a journalist [. . . ] And the audience, of course, because it’s the audience that pays, isn’t it? Although often they are people that have no idea of flamenco really.

A prominent aspect of these interviews was the statements by Gitano dancers, who were much more critical and more engaged about their own role in heritage activities than the rest of the interviewees. The submission to UNESCO recognizes that the Gitano ethnicity (etnia gitana) has played a key role in the shaping and development of flamenco. Gitano associations and artists signed letters of support and obtained exclusive agreements through the submission. However, Gitano artists did not create their own platform for the claiming of heritagization rights through the submission. Out of the eighteen statements collected from Gitano informants, only ten made spontaneous references to UNESCO, an organization that informants knew only superficially. Eight of them considered the inclusion of flamenco in the Representative List as an anecdotal matter, to which they had not contributed, and that they believed had no visible effect on their community (Statement 9):

So. If flamenco is UNESCO’s cultural heritage, [we] the Gitanos must have had something to do with it, don’t you think? But I don’t see any changes, there aren’t any more jobs, nor are Gitanos in a better position thanks to it.

Conclusion

The study of flamenco poses a theoretical and a methodological challenge and shows that intangible cultural heritage can be approached from multiple perspectives: as a rich concept, as a component of cultural policies, or according to the understandings of tradition-bearing communities responsible for its transmission. From the nineteenth century on, institutional forces have taken various approaches to bringing about the resignification and even reinvention of flamenco alongside other popular expressive arts while promoting its heritagization as a form of national culture. Although the canon of flamenco established during 1950s and 1960s would dominate throughout the second half of the century, following the arrival of democracy and the restructuring of autonomous communities, the cultural management of flamenco heritage, and the selection processes formerly located at a supranational level have been relocated to Spain. In the context of UNESCO, the successive proposals for flamenco’s recognition as intangible cultural heritage did not arise from the communities themselves. Moreover, from the moment flamenco was included in the Representative List
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the individuals, groups, and communities involved in the administrative process and in the signing of agreements leading to the nomination have stopped being involved in the evaluation, protection, research, training, and promotion of flamenco. The prestige associated with the recognition of flamenco as heritage, or as an art form that has long been dismissed, may have fostered satisfaction privately. The artists’ statements explored above, however, seem to indicate that neither a sentimental attachment nor a utilitarian advantage have been produced through the actions, forms of consent, and expectations fostered by the incorporation of flamenco in the Representative List. This situation highlights the conflicting set of interests that, in the twenty-first century, characterizes networks of heritage representativity such as UNESCO, the nation-states, regions, and communities involved in processes of heritagization.

A decade after the inclusion of flamenco in the Representative List, flamenco artists have witnessed with a certain bewilderment the closure of theaters and tablaos, the imposition of restrictions on capacity in venues, and a recession in cultural consumption forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which unsettle the continuity of the flamenco trade itself. In this context, the flamenco sector has become fragmented, forming a disconnected network of nodes that advance collective strategies only for particular utilitarian purposes. This is the case with the newly established association Unión Flamenca in Cádiz, which reclaims its position as an official interlocutor between the different public administrations and entities. Founded by first-class artists such as Eva Yerbabuena, Arcángel, Marina Heredia, Dorantes, Andrés Marín, Rocío Molina, and Rocío Márquez, Unión Flamenca seeks to represent professional flamenco artists, defend their rights and interests, and demand a legal framework to protect artists against precariousness.

Regarding what the community of artists understands as flamenco heritage, the statements expressed in our interviews reveal conflicting understandings of the nature of flamenco heritage, of what is and is not “authentic” or acceptable, and about whether it is possible to speak of “pureza” (purity) in flamenco. In sum, these debates revolve around the elements that determine flamenco’s differences with other expressions. Moreover, these statements illustrate a paradox: the concept of heritage and the traditionalist imaginary around a “rooted” (de raíz) flamenco art gestures towards the idea of “legacy,” while the experimentation carried out by contemporary artists poses a provocative challenge for the continuation of habits, repertoires, and aesthetics of an inherited flamenco art form.
Notes

This chapter was translated from Spanish by Dr. Raquel Campos. The editors would like to thank Raquel for her hard work with the translation.

1. A folk tradition that combines music, dance, and singing in a proto-fandango modal system, with multiple regional sub-modes.

2. A form of Christmas flamenco fiesta where the zambomba (a drum that has a stick inserted through the skin) is incorporated. Sometimes it includes villancico lyrics and other flamenco-influenced Christmas carols.

3. All translations are from Spanish.

4. Conducted by the author between 2016 and 2020, the interviews took place in seven interactive observation environments and addressed fields of information such as flamenco, profession, and work; tradition and change in the canons of dance; criteria of belonging and identity; and assessment of the patrimonialization processes. They had a semi-structured, directed format, and the testimonies were recorded or transcribed in field notebooks. Secondary selection variables were applied according to gender, age, ethnic identity, professional recognition, and length of professional career.

5. Here the interviewee is referring to Tuétano by Andrés Marín (2012) or El final de este estado de cosas by Isarel Galván (2008), two performances that emphasize the ruptures with traditional practice that characterize contemporary flamenco.

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