

Florian Homann

## **Las Gitanas and the Female Perspective in the Rewriting of Spanish History: Oral Tradition and New Meanings in Flamenco Lyrics by Romnja Performers**

### **Abstract**

In flamenco singing, the music is considered the primary aspect according to which individual components are assembled into sets, often causing the connections between individual verses to be ignored. But the lyrics have always been a central aspect of flamenco, and many lyrics originated from coherent longer poems that were later simply fragmented. This explains why romances performed by women play such an important role in flamenco, especially in the highly esteemed singing performed in private. Romnja performers have not yet been appreciated as tradition bearers, although they have actually kept alive the legacy of the old storytelling ballads. Into the present times, singing in specific modalities texts about the cruel pogroms of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that destroyed Gitano family structures by separating men from women and children, among other atrocities, maintains collective memory and avoids oblivion, and thus becomes a form of rewriting official history by female voices.

### **1. Flamenco Lyrics and Spanish Romani Collective Memory**

If today's feminist Romnja advocacy aims to speak out and be heard in order to rewrite history, one way is through music, with flamenco in particular giving voice to all Spanish Roma. In Spain, there exists a great interest in flamenco poetry since Antonio Machado y Álvarez published his collection of self-heard flamenco lyrics under the pseudonym 'Demófilo' in 1881. From today's perspective, however, the flamenco texts of that time are considered very misogynistic, or it is said, not entirely wrongly, that they at least silence female experiences (López Castro 2007, 512–513; Buendía 2001). The almost exclusively male perspective

of the first-person articulated in the texts is based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century prejudices that only men could express themselves. Yet female singers have always tried to deconstruct these old stereotypes about music and their minority. Just one example among many is the songs of the most famous female singer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *gitana* Pastora Pavón 'La Niña de los Peines', who created her own lyrics and changed the gender of the speaking entity.

Although the relationship between flamenco lyrics and the collective memory of Spanish Romani people seems obvious, it is complex. This complexity lay in the importance of an oral tradition in flamenco, depending to a great extent on the reinterpretation of older models that are considered original. In Granada, intellectuals like Federico García Lorca organized the famous singing competition Concurso de Cante Jondo in 1922 to save the 'true' deep flamenco from oblivion, admitting only some basic modalities that will become important for this essay. There are particular modalities of flamenco, sung *acapella*, that are linked to the Romani collective memory. This study aims first to answer some basic questions in this regard. How did the lyrics of these modalities emerge? And what is the relationship between these lyrics, their production and later oral transmission, and, finally, the collective memory of Spanish Roma? On the one hand the origin in *romances*<sup>1</sup> can explain why the lyrics of these modalities actually tell the story of the persecution of the Romani people on the Iberian Peninsula. I argue that the original texts of the modality *martinetes*, which are still sung today or rather sung again in a highly fragmented form, were produced by Roma who used formulas of epic Spanish romances; Roma had been one of the most important transmitter groups of these romances since the Spanish Golden Age. Therefore, in this case, the Gitanos' heritage of flamenco is not primarily explained by the musical performance, but by the literary thesis that the mentioned modalities indeed stem from narrative and extensive romances. Such romances function in the sense of epic-based ballads using an oral form of transmission that makes them both news bulletin and media of collective memory in the Roma community. On the other hand, the contributions of women in creating and transmitting these *martinetes* in oral performances have not yet been studied in

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<sup>1</sup> By *romance* I mean the verse form and thus the literary genre of the same name that has existed in Spain since the Middle Ages.

depth: To what extent can these lyrics, in the case of performance from a female perspective, be considered a rewriting of Spanish history?

After providing this background on the development of flamenco modalities and the role of oral performances in the collective memory of Spanish Roma, I first argue that some of the original texts may have been composed by Romnja, although these were not literary writers, as they were composing on the spot using formulas and formulaic techniques in their oral composition (cf. Lord 1960, 24) and subsequently transmitting in the oral tradition to the present day. Moreover, I argue that women have been essential transmitters in the long chain of oral tradition, keeping alive the memory conveyed in the lyrics. The cultural heritage of many of these texts can be attributed to women, who were transmitters, to a certain extent, giving these women the means to modify the texts according to their interests.

## 2. Flamenco: World Music and Literature

Flamenco culture is primarily a musical culture that can be categorized into numerous—one may even speak of hundreds of—*palos* and *estilos*, which are different musical modalities. These are arranged in a genealogical tree that hierarchizes the basic modalities that were promoted, for example, in the abovementioned singing competition Concurso de Cante Jondo in 1922, such as the *soleá*, *seguiriyas* or *martinetes*. In traditional flamenco there are no songs in the strict sense, but kinds of improvised pieces or sets made up of several old stanzas, performed in one of these modalities. In their live performances, the artists assemble these pieces from several possibly autonomous text elements, which thus do not necessarily have to be thematically related:

Thus, a typical rendition of a *soleá* (one of the *palos*) might consist of a string or 'set' of four or five *coplas* or verses, which would probably be in different *estilos*, punctuated by guitar interludes (*falsetas*), all conforming to the characteristic twelve-beat *compás* and familiar chordal progressions of that *cante*. (Manuel 2010, 107)

This example of *soleá* as a typical basic modality is usually generalized in flamenco, although many texts also have a coherent context, at least in their origin. These will be of particular interest for this study, but seem to stand out as exceptions in flamenco, where the emphasis is mostly on combining short textual elements to create the musical items:

a typical traditional flamenco item, whether in concert or on a commercial recording, has few of the essential attributes of a ‘song’ or composition, being instead a ‘set’ of two to five coplas, which each constitute thematically unrelated and wholly independent and complete lyric statements. (Manuel 2010, 108)

My research, however, contradicts this absolute independence of the individual elements, which seems to be, nevertheless, the standard in flamenco today.<sup>2</sup> These lyrical texts come from a long oral tradition, in which the complete original texts have been forgotten and the concentration on selected elements is responsible for the reduction to the extremely short lyrical statements used now (Homann 2021, 44). The name of the original author was also lost in the process. Subsequently, however, these lyrical texts are attributed to the so-called *creadores*, mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century artists, as apparently their own inventions, due to these mechanisms of appropriation of older texts and their particular musical performance style. These mythical artists are in many cases Gitanos, which is why flamenco as a musical culture was first attributed to members of this ethnic group. Already here, the contributions, mostly performed in a private context and closer circle of friends, of female artists become essential. Mercedes Fernández Vargas ‘La Serneta’ (1837–1912) created up to seven of her own styles of *soleá* singing, which are still performed thanks to her followers like La Niña de los Peines, since there are no recordings of La Serneta’s original versions.

Some of the basic modalities are even ascribed exclusively to Roma, namely the acapella modalities, the so-called *cantes a palo seco*, and of these particularly *tonás* and *martinetes*. The reason for this belief, if it is rooted in the textual origins of the lyrics, is well-founded; earlier arguments, however, which were based on the assumption that only Gitanos had biologically the necessary depth in their bodies to perform this type of music—what Mairena called “razón incorpórea” (quoted in Soler/Soler 2004, 244), that is, embodied reason—, have now been refuted. The dominant explanation, which existed until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for the connection between Roma and acapella modalities existed only because Demófilo stated in the foreword to his collection of song texts from 1881 that his informant, Juanelo, a Gitano singer from

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<sup>2</sup> My argument therefore relates particularly to the period of origin of various modalities, some of which predate the emergence of flamenco as a musical culture and modern art form. However, numerous examples of longer coherent texts can be found even today (Homann 2021, 330–335).

Jerez de la Frontera, had mentioned Gitanos as originators for these particular modalities and that these were sung in the forges to the beats of the hammers. This opinion was held without opposition, reinforced by the singer Antonio Mairena when, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he reevaluated the ‘original’ deep singing called *cante jondo*, based on the 1922 singing competition and then published his canonical book in 1963, in collaboration with the Gadge poet Ricardo Molina. In any case, these theories are rejected nowadays. As recently as 2013, Cáceres and Campo dismantle two preconceptions, namely “the widespread idea that gypsy blacksmith’s trades have constituted [...] mythical places where gypsy tradition would have remained pure” and the related assumption that *martinetes* would have been always “performed with the rhythm of the hammering on the anvil” (Cáceres/Campo 2013, 445). In agreement with these scholars, however, I do not want to contradict that *martinetes* and other related flamenco forms are intimately linked to the Gitanos and that they were often performed in forges. Rather than ascribing the origin of *martinetes* entirely to the Gitano blacksmith working with the hammer, however, I see the blacksmiths’ shops as centers where Romani could gather and sing after work.

To break down the cemented thesis about the supposed origin and preservation of primitive ‘pure gypsy’ singing, known as *primitivo cante gitano*, Steingress (2013, 168) considers the fact that flamenco culture emerged instead in a specific sociohistorical context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Flamenco as we know it today emerged as an urban art form performed by members of the lower social classes (Steingress 2013, 201). Rural workers migrated to cities such as Seville and Cadiz, where the traditional chants, the popular *cantares* they brought with them, were perceived as a new musical style and identity-forming creations (Steingress 2013, 359). Thus, the folkloric basis, existing as raw material since centuries ago, must be distinguished from the ‘new’ art form. The theater of the time played a major role in this process, as audiences in the Late Romantic period were particularly interested in the habits of characters from lower social classes as well as Roma (Steingress 2013, 291). In this context, the Cafés Cantante, in which the proto-flamenco developed into a modern art form, could prosper in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

But apart from this development into a public spectacle, Cruces (2014, 828) as an anthropologist emphasizes that flamenco has lived since then in two different contexts, for which Cruces employs the Marxist distinction between exchange-value and use-value of commodities. One type

of flamenco is the more commercial, shown in public, while the other is practiced at home, by some families or Romani clans in their private spheres and daily habits, even before it came into fashion. Both types are still being practiced. Today, after this development, flamenco is known mainly as World Music. In this sense, the lyrics—the literary components of music—can be considered a special form of World Literature, related to the collective memory of an ethnic group.

### 3. Flamenco and the Appropriation of Traditional Poetry

Flamenco singing is linked on a literary level to centuries-old cultural expressions, such as the interpretation of ancient Spanish romances, among others. All researchers of different directions, such as the sociologist Steingress (2013, 285) or the lawyer Suárez Ávila (1989), who takes the position that the flamenco origin must be attributed exclusively to the Gitanos, agree on one observation: Since their arrival on the Peninsula, the Gitanos have been known for being striking interpreters of this Spanish tradition that had its heyday right in the Golden Age (Piñero 2008, 21). Numerous literary texts bear witness to this, not only Cervantes's exemplary Novel *La Gitanilla*. The *romancero*, since its own origin, through the fragmentation of the medieval epics, lives from the dynamics caused by an oral tradition that appropriates and modifies the most popular texts (Piñero 2008, 16–19). Although the fashion for *romances* had died down in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Romani population of Andalusia, in the century of the Enlightenment, completely adopted *romances* as their own cultural heritage, which they kept alive orally until the renewed upsurge during Romanticism. Thus, it is no coincidence that the first informants from whom interested intellectuals transcribed in writing for their *romances* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Romani. Serafín Estébanez Calderón 'El Solitario' tells in his famous text "Un baile en Triana" from the collection *Escenas andaluzas* (1847), which contains all kinds of picturesque scenes and local customs, that the Rom Antonio Monge Rivero 'El Planeta' performed the "Romance del Conde Sol" at an event he actually attended. The writer does not yet use the term flamenco, while he does describe a type of *romance* singing that was performed in this particular form mainly by Romani musicians. The versions of the Gitanos, which in the following years became part of the repertoire of

the flamenco singers, differ greatly in length, form, and content from the general Andalusian folklore repertoire as it was interpreted among the rural population. A notable example of this is the non-professional interpreter and worker of a tobacco factory Juan José Niño, born in the province of Cádiz, who in 1916 performed his unique repertoire of ancient and rare *romance* texts in front of Manrique de Lara in Triana (cf. Catarella 1993).

Both forms, those with exchange-value and those with use-value, of singing *romances* and later flamenco are connected: The private form is the model for the publicly exhibited art form, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is still predominantly executed by male artists. That is why we cannot yet find documented performances of singing women, which did exist, especially in private settings.

Flamenco lyrics, both from the oral tradition and from new textual productions, are easily said to form the collective memory of the Spanish Romani people. However, since the old theories of the exclusive Gitano origin of the genuine<sup>3</sup> singing have been disproved, it has not yet been conclusively demonstrated why the lyrics of the *cantes a palo seco*, especially the *martinetes*, can in fact be attributed legitimately to Gitanos.

The Gitanos play an essential role in the development of any entertainment art that existed before flamenco. While José Cadalso in the *Cartas marruecas* speaks already in 1789 of a party with Gitano entertainers, Zoido presents a poster from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century announcing *bailes jitanos* [sic!]. While the term flamenco became common only from about 1850, the *tonás*, for example, were already known in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, associated with the Rom Luis Montoya Garcés ‘Tío Luis el de la Juliana’. Since the name *tonás* is simply a linguistic deformation of *tonadas*, a way of singing certain narrative texts, it is

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<sup>3</sup> The expression genuine singing refers to the theory that only the singing of the gitanos is original, ‘pure’, authentic flamenco, because they are the only ones who can present it unadulterated, in other words, ‘primitive’ in the positive sense, especially when they perform it in private settings. These ideas are the basis of the projects to valorize the ‘old’ original singing forms carried out both by Mairena and Molina (1963, cf. Cenizo 2004) and by the organizers of the Concurso de Cante Jondo competition in 1922, who focused on reorienting performances to this idea of a *primitivo cante gitano* that commercialization threatened to dilute, as taken from Demófilo’s preface (Luna López 2012, 103).

easy to conclude that this person was simply a flamboyant performer of *romances*, from whose recitations later flamenco styles stemmed.

Due to the mechanisms of orality, the continuous traditional transmission over the years generates new meanings in both the *romance* texts and subsequently the flamenco lyrics. Since flamenco singers take over older texts whose exact origin and authorship are no longer known, each performer in the chain can call himself a new creator of the text, since the collective heritage of the text allows him to change it. Thus, many texts can be adapted to the communicative needs of the minority. The most outstanding example is the adaptation of the medieval Spanish hero Bernardo del Carpio, already a great model for Don Quixote, whom the Gitanos have made one of their own over the centuries by modifying the *romance* about him, in addition to naming their children frequently Bernardo del Carpio and other identity-forming measures (Suárez Ávila 1994). Still today, fragments of this *romance* are sung in different flamenco styles and renowned flamenco families bear the surname Carpio. The Gitanos cultivate the *romancero* with its own use-value, that means, they also incorporate this medium, which in the Middle Ages was primarily a suitable form of communication and propaganda, into their daily lives and its most famous verses into their normal speech. Therefore, besides the recitation of the old traditional texts, they are also able to compose new texts, quite simply with the assonant rhyme type, in order to preserve for posterity certain messages and information in their culture, which was presumably still highly illiterate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. That is why many flamenco texts—mainly of the *cantes a palo seco as tonás and martinetes*—, fragments from earlier *romances*, may be considered a form of Romani self-representation.

#### **4. The *Martinetes* as Storytelling Lyrics of Roma Persecution**

Today, the composition of a musical piece of *martinetes* also works according to the mechanisms of the connection of three to five possibly even independent four-line *coplas* (Martín 2011, 187). Literary and thematically, however, these elements are by no means to be considered completely separate: They almost always speak of the persecution of minorities, in most cases explicitly of the persecution of Romani peoples (Homann 2020). For the same reason, offering oppressed minorities



and their collective memory a voice they otherwise do not receive, these chants become important to Romani women.

In this vein, Cáceres and Campo (2013, 462) conclude their review of the genesis of the *martinetes* with the fact that these are structurally related to the *romances*, while the main difference between the traditional *romances* and the *martinetes*, besides musical interpretations, are theme-related; in the lyrics of *martinetes* the protagonists are the Gitanos themselves: the texts narrate specific events that occurred to Gitanos. Furthermore, the two anthropologists explain that etymologically, it was not the hammer of the blacksmith, but hydraulic tools of the same name that led to the naming of today's *palo* (Cáceres/Campo 2013, 459–460). This explanation provides a direct link to one of the most significant events in the history of the Romani people and their persecution on the Iberian Peninsula. Fragments of texts that speak of the persecution of the Romani demonstrate a direct relationship of the verses with La Prisión General de los Gitanos of 1749<sup>4</sup>.

During the reign of King Fernando VI, the Marquis of Ensenada organised a raid, planned in secret and set in motion simultaneously throughout Spain at dawn on July 30, 1749 (Jiménez 2020, 225), with the aim of arresting all people considered Gitanos a difficult term to define, which led to an extremely chaotic situation. This designation could have referred to anyone who belonged to the ethnic group but might have been well integrated into Spanish society (e.g., employed as a blacksmith); in the raid, these integrated Roma were captured first. In colloquial language, the term Gitano could pejoratively also refer to all vagabonds, smugglers, and minor criminals, regardless of their ethnicity, who lived just what was called a 'Gypsy lifestyle'. Although the vagabonds and minor criminals were to be captured first, they were still free after this initial raid, which could only be directed against the members of the ethnic collective who were settled and had been reported in censuses (Martínez 2014, 29–44). The confiscated goods and forced labour of the Gitanos were to cover the costs of the operation.

The action, called today, among other designations, the "attempted extermination" (Jiménez 2020, 221) of all Romani people, failed and was omitted from Spanish documentaries and history books. Most of the

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<sup>4</sup> While the translation of Gómez Alfaro (2014) is The Great 'Gypsy' Round-up in Spain, sometimes simply called The 1749 Great Round-up, Martínez (2014) speaks of The General Prison, La Prisión General, as an 'extermination' project.

captured Roma did not live as vagabonds, but those who had no abodes were still free because they had no home where they could be captured. Therefore, a second raid took place in the autumn, and, as a result, many individuals caught in the first raid were released back into freedom to make room for the new prisoners. More than 2,000 Romani individuals remained in prison until in 1763, when “the general pardon was decreed” (Jiménez 2020, 226). Nevertheless, according to the latest estimates, a total of twelve thousand people lost their lives, a quarter of the Spanish Roma population in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Matache/Bhabha 2021, 257).

Families, women and children were particularly affected. To avoid procreation, the captured Gitanos were separated after the first raid, which brought terrible consequences as “family structures were destroyed and, therefore, the traditional channels of cultural transmission were broken” (Jiménez 2020, 227). The female members of the family were forcibly deported with their children under the age of seven to hospices and houses of mercy in Saragossa, Valencia and Malaga, while the male convicts were transported to labour camps such as La Carraca Naval Arsenal in San Fernando, harbour of Cádiz (Martínez 2014, 55–59). The male Roma were abused like the galley slaves in the centuries before. However, since galley slavery had been abolished in 1748 they had to rebuild the arsenal, working in the mud provoked by a flood in 1737 (Zoido 1999, 168). The work of rebuilding the shipyards required the hammering in of thousands of bolts by a machine called a *martinete*, which worked by repeatedly dropping a weight lifted by more than 20 forced laborers. Campo and Cáceres (2013, 459–460) explain that the term *martinetes* refers to such hydraulic hammers of pre-industrial ironworks, generally used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a machine to nail stakes. Today, many short stanzas, often combined with other ones, speak of this forced work. Demófilo has divided the *martinetes* of his collection into two sections. Besides the typical *coplas* with a single stanza, which can be combined seemingly at random, we find, and this is the important point here, the longer and connected *martinetes corridos*, which have more than one stanza with four verses and really tell coherent stories of the Romani collective memory (Machado y Álvarez 1975, 149). The beginning of the coherent *martinete* number seven from the collection by Machado y Álvarez (1975, 152) is also used by historian Antonio Zoido (1999, 203) as evidence of how those who were affected themselves reported the horrific historical event: “A ciento cincuenta hombres nos

llevan a La Carraca”<sup>5</sup>. The forced workers operated with half their bodies in water (Zoido 1999, 168), showing that there exists a common formula in a variety of contemporary *martinetes*, such as the one performed by singer David Carpio in Jerez on April 30, 2017: “con el fango hasta las rodillas y las enaguaitas remangadas vinieron...”<sup>6</sup>. The catastrophic working conditions are reflected in the texts.

Many reasons exist for the failure of the entire action to capture Gitanos. In the naval bases, the older men were not able to do the work they were supposed to do. Another problem was that the young men were needed in the towns where they had previously settled. The problematic consequence was an extremely chaotic situation, because no one could know who could be freed and who still had to wait for their freedom. Since the goods of all Gitanos were confiscated, the freed persons could no longer pursue their previous regular professions, e.g. as blacksmiths. Separated families had great difficulty reuniting when their members were set free at different times. A stanza that is still performed today, among others by El Capullo de Jerez in the *martinetes* of his 2003 album *Este soy yo*, informs about the problems caused by the separation of Romani males and females:

Sentadito estaba yo en mi petate  
con la cabeza echada para atrás.  
Yo me acordaba de mi madre  
¿Mis niños como estarán?<sup>7</sup>

The large number of further relevant examples, which cannot be discussed in detail here, has already allowed me to conclude that the primary texts of the *tonás* and *martinetes* must have been *romances* about the Great Round-up, its aftermath, and the subsequent forced labor (Homann 2020). Thus, this present-day literary form of Roma self-representation must have been composed in its genesis—as a news medium—by illiterate Gitanos who used the techniques of oral formulaic composition and revisited the formulas of traditional *romances*. Parry and his disciple Lord (1960), studying the formulaic character of the Serbo-Croatian epic

<sup>5</sup> 150 men of us are sent to La Carraca (own translation).

<sup>6</sup> They came back with mud up to their knees and the rolled-up petticoats (own translation of own transcription and recording).

<sup>7</sup> I was sitting on my mat / with my head thrown back. / I remembered my mother / How are my children? (own translation).

in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and applying it to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, demonstrated the exclusively improvised oral composition of the epic ballads, based on the use of a repertoire of memorized formulas and themes, which allows performers to improvise and orally shape the text at the moment of performance. The Gitanos, as perfect connoisseurs of the *romancero*, were able to create the ballads with their storytelling content in the same way and improvise the assonant rhymed lyrics directly in oral form by using the familiar *romance* verses, paralleling what Parry and Lord identified for the Serbo-Croatian storytellers: “the formulaic style enters into the consciousness of a young singer as he learns to use it for the telling of tales” (Lord 1960, 45).

However, the exact moment of the creation of each text cannot be reconstructed, since the consequences of the Great Round-up continued, and new texts must have been created until Carlos III erased the previous and failed policy from all documents and, from 1783 on, relied on new means of forced integration, when “the King of Spain Carlos III enacted the last Royal Order for the control and assimilation of Gitanos or Calé” (Gamella/Gómez Alfaro/Pérez 2014, 147). As a result, they were forbidden to call themselves Gitanos and to dress as such. The ban on the term Gitano paved the way for forgetting the intended genocide in the official national memory. The oblivion prevailed until the rediscovery of documents such as, in 1994, the *Libro de la Gitanería de Triana de los Años 1740 a 1750*, a book written under the pseudonym The Bachiller Revoltoso and not for publication in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>. Thanks to the subsequent research of historians, the Great Round-up is again a topic in Spanish memory culture, where the survival of details in short flamenco verses is highly valued. These texts resulting from a long oral tradition since 1749 are extraordinarily important.

However, nearly all 19<sup>th</sup> century singers who are known and whose performances of *romances*, *cantes a palo seco*, and *martinetes* are documented in any way, are male. The contribution of Romani artists who keep these texts—some of which may have even been composed by women—alive by transmitting them or, where appropriate, modifying from a female point of view the lyrics that had been transmitted by male

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<sup>8</sup> We can see this in the title of the book *Libro de la Gitanería de Triana de los Años 1740 a 1750 que escribió el Bachiller Revoltoso para que no se imprimiera*: Book of the Gitanería Triana of the Years 1740 to 1750 that the Bachiller Revoltoso wrote so that it would not be printed (own translation).

singers, has not yet been appreciated. Therefore, I now examine the extent to which these texts, when performed by Romnja singers, can be considered rewritings of official history.

## 5. Romnja Contributions to the Collective Memory: Rewriting of Spanish History

Jiménez (2020, 229) highlights several rebellions and successful escape attempts by women in the Great Round-up to conclude that Romani of both sexes “have not been apathetic and passive in the face of our own historical destiny” (Jiménez 2020, 230). For example, 52 of the 600 Romnja imprisoned in the Royal House of Mercy in Saragossa escaped in January 1753 after following the legendary leader Rosa Cortés. The women were important actors in the struggle against the imprisonment, oppression, separation of their families, and, last but not least, in the fight against forgetting the racist discrimination. Matache and Bhabha (2021, 265), in supporting the case for reparations to Roma, note that while memory can serve as a political tool for victim groups, its counterpart, oblivion, is a powerful tool for oppressors. The authors regret that European institutions do not promote public awareness and mobilization to improve the situation in the way they should (Matache/Bhabha 2021, 270).

In the case of Romnja, the concept pair about the values of a product or an activity—like singing flamenco or *romances*—in combination with the concept pair about the different dimensions of collective memory help to explain why women have not yet been appreciated as tradition bearers, although they have actually kept alive the legacy of the old storytelling ballads in a domestic setting.

The attempted genocide in Spain, which remained forgotten on an official level, could survive only in Romani collective memory. According to Jan Assmann’s categorization of memory, collective memory consists on the level of communicative memory—a dimension of the recent past, connected to the living bodies of the transmitting persons—and on the level of cultural memory, which is detached from the necessity of communication through contemporary witnesses and secured in stable media. According to the Egyptologist, the transition of a remembered event from one dimension to another takes about 80 to 100 years (Assmann 2010, 117). The more or less complete *romances* about the raid and its consequences must have been transmitted in private singing between the

middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. After that, a transition to the cultural dimension was necessary to maintain the memory. This was exactly the moment when flamenco culture emerged as a musical art form. The singing of flamenco in public, with its exchange-value, implies the adaptation of the musical pieces and lyrics to the desires of the public, which in the Romantic period wished a lyrical expression of genial subjects expressing their individual emotions: The paying audience would not have been as interested in monotonously recited and lengthy narrative stories about past persecutions as in short and musically sparkling expressions of strong personal feelings such as pain or heartbreak. Accordingly, *palos* such as the *soleá*—deformation of *soledad*, meaning loneliness in Spanish—became part of the musical canon. This motive also explains the evolution towards short stanzas, given that the flamenco lyrics in the Cafés Cantante of the 19<sup>th</sup> century generally must have lost their narrative elements. Fragmentation led to the excision of concrete details and data about the historical event and, as a result, the origin of the lyrics of *martinetes* as storytelling texts was ignored.

Thus, the only setting in which the old texts could survive in a longer and narrative form is the daily private singing, the performance of flamenco with use-value in the Romani family. Here the women who were often described as excellent singers, but who rarely allowed to show their talent in public stand out. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular, women singing, especially in the disreputable ambience of Cafés, was frowned upon and associated with activities such as prostitution. The women performing at the time, mostly in dance, though there were some examples of singers, turned their backs on show business as quickly as possible once they were married. This negative view of public performance opportunities for singing women persisted in part until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pedro Peña (2013, 35) relates that his mother María Fernández Granados ‘La Perrata’, with whom he recorded the *romance* of Gerineldo on a family project album in 1999, was not desired by her husband to sing in public, despite her appearances on the television series *Rito y Geografía del Cante*. The fact that she sang *romances* and was known for her talent—as evidenced by her invitations to the television series—testifies to the reality that women were the main bearers of this tradition, including in Roma families.

In the general folkloric *romancero* of Andalusia, the main transmitters since the 18<sup>th</sup> century have been the women, who used the texts for entertainment, for example, in the shared housework, transforming the

texts and giving them new meanings according to their interests (Ruiz 1991, 30–35). Cervantes' protagonist Preciosa, who claimed to be a Gitana, was not accidentally a young woman who performed with other female singers. In Roma families of the more recent past, the older women, given their higher position, were responsible for the flamenco modalities that were not performed by the men in public (Suárez Ávila 1989, 574). These are interpretations of old *romances* with two different musical moods and functions. On the one hand, there are the *romances* sung in a festive tone to celebrate the bride's virginity at the wedding celebrated behind closed doors (Suárez Ávila 1989, 581). On the other hand, there are the tragic *tonás* and *martinetes* that keep the aforementioned remembrance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century alive. Although Demófilo emphasized that his informant particularly appreciated the *romances*, he indicated as early as 1881 that these were rarely sung in public. They only became known again with the 1922 singing competition in Granada. Highly praised by Lorca, they were also recorded from that time on and have been part of the fixed canon of flamenco since Mairena's project of reappreciation. Since then, it has also been documented that they are likewise performed by women who are almost exclusively Gitanas, which is remarkable since the singers otherwise try to cover almost all styles. The *martinetes* and *tonás* based on *romances* are very suitable for social engagement and self-empowerment of the Romnja by singing their lyrics when they talk about their traumatic experiences of persecution. Singing acapella, without guitar accompaniment or dance, the female artists can raise their voice and claim their right to finally be heard after centuries.

When Amparo Agujetas performed the following lyrics in Seville on November 24, 2017, she immediately recalled the separation of families and the forced deportation of women in the 1749 Great Round-up with this six-line stanza:

A la puerta llaman,  
me metieron en una sala.  
Y me llevaban de conducción  
y yo le dije a la partida  
que me aflojara los cordeles,  
que los brazos a mí me dolían.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> They knocked on the door / they put me in a room / and they were driving me / and I told the leader / to loosen my ropes / that my arms were hurting me (own translation of own transcription and recording).

Due to syntactic irregularities, all verses seem to be fragments of earlier narrative texts that were subsequently reassembled. The frequently repeated formula about knocking on the door, often with the addition of nocturnal hours, alludes to the raid in which the Roma were surprised at night in order to arrest them at home. Confinement in a large hall refers to the improvised places of assembly before the separated women and children were taken to their destinations. During the deportation on foot, the women, who had not knowingly committed any crime, were tied together in long rows and treated very badly (Zoido 1999, 150–172), in this case by tying their hands too tightly. In this case, one can certainly speak of a coherent narrative text, which in the concrete performance of Amparo Agujetas is framed by two thematically related stanzas that speak of her bad state of mood as a consequence of the Round-up.

Also, I recorded *martinetes* from Rocío Parrilla in Jerez on 25 of March, 2017. In her case, she recites a short text that can also be interpreted as part of the descriptions of the cruel operation, during which all the confined prisoners are ordered to be quiet and then to stand up, presumably to be deported to their destinations:

Y suena un toquecito de silencio,  
Ya nos mandan a callar,  
y entonces al toquecito –primo mío– de Diana  
que nos mandan a levantar.<sup>10</sup>

The bugle call used in the military to wake the soldiers is called El toque de Diana. Considering that the entire raid was carried out by the Spanish military, it is not far-fetched to conclude that these verses stem from narratives about the Great Round-up from the perspective of the victims. All captured Roma were taken directly to confinement centers at dawn, where they were ordered to keep quiet, only to be awakened again early in the morning to begin their path of forced deportation.

Rocío Parrilla combines this text with a stanza about the consequences of the Round-up in a Romani neighborhood like Triana in Seville, where some of the liberated Roma returned, but with their family members still in detention and contact interrupted due to the lack of resources:

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<sup>10</sup> And there sounds a call for silence / and we're told to be quiet / and then at the little call—my cousin—of Diana / they send us to stand up (own translation of own transcription and recording).



En el barrio de Triana  
ya no hay pluma ni tintero  
para yo escribirle a mi madre:  
que hace mucho tiempo que no la veo.<sup>11</sup>

In this case, a lyrical I at least rudimentarily literate expresses itself, but has neither ink nor pen to write to the mother, in all probability still in captivity in a faraway place. Countless situations are reported in which Roma have tried to legally claim the liberation of their family members (Jiménez 2020, 229), often with the help of written documents, which certainly in many cases must have been drafted by an assisting literate person. In these cases, too, obstacles were put up for Roma, and the lack of material documentation will logically have led to personal oral communication through informants, for which *romances* have been suitable since the Middle Ages. The simplicity of the assonant rhyme *e-o* in the second and fourth verse indicates its probable descent from an orally improvised *romance* text.

Rocío Parilla concludes her musical piece with a very typical verse of *martinetes*, in which she swears by the truthfulness of what is said, which is another indication that these texts were originally narrative in character and were concluded with these vows:

Si no es verdad,  
Eso lo que yo digo,  
Que Dios me mande la muerte  
Si me la quiere mandar.

Thus, what female interpreters of *romance* fragments in the musical style of *martinetes* are doing today can be considered a ‘new’ interpretation of 18<sup>th</sup> century reform politics, inasmuch as the goal of many researchers and activists is “to create a counter-narrative of the history of Roma people” (Jiménez 2020, 221).

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<sup>11</sup> In the Triana neighborhood / there is no more pen or inkwell / for me to write to my mother: / I haven’t seen her for a long time (own translation of own transcription and recording).

## 6. Conclusion

The primitive texts of *tonás* and *martinetes* really told—or rather must have told earlier—the stories of the persecution of Roma with terrible events like the 1749 Great Round-up, and etched those events into their communicative memory. The texts about the terrible raid have also survived as cultural memory, but not really in their complete narrative form of the former *romances*. Modifications and especially an extreme kind of fragmenting occurred when passing from one dimension to another during Romanticism and the emergence of flamenco as a modern art form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mainly the collective of Romani women kept the communicative memory alive by singing *romances* in a private and non-commercial context, or flamenco with use-value. This collective uses the ancient texts to share and transmit their memories of the horrific 1749 raid that separated families and represents attempted genocide. Any form of singing *martinetes* consciously can be considered a form of rewriting Spanish history that makes a forgotten event known again. Given the circumstances in which Romnja have had the opportunity to practice their art publicly in the last centuries, the mere act of singing these modalities through publicly accessible flamenco appears as a verbal feminist commitment and political self-empowerment to speak and be heard. In this way, today's female singers can contradict the prejudice that maintains they are merely reproducing old lyrics, which, moreover, would have an androcentric or misogynic content.

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