Epitomising the Modern Spanish Nation through Popular Music: *Coplas* from *La Caramba* to Concha Piquer, 1750–1990

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Music is an important language of the emotions which can arouse strong passions in its performance and representation both from the individual's perspective of personal identity and for their sense of belonging to a given community. This article examines the role that a particular and under-studied version of womanhood played in the creation of the idea of a Spanish nation, namely the female singer--performer in the world of entertainment. Specifically, I have chosen to study women's performances of a particular form of popular music called *la copla* because it best epitomises this role. The *copla*, originally a poetic form in the troubadour tradition, has developed since the mid-eighteenth century into a theatrical or performative musical show in which women are the main protagonists. The main premise underlying my research is that popular music should be regarded as the product of an ongoing conversation with the past,[1] and specifically that *coplas* when considered in

this way help us to understand Spanish women's history as a process of negotiation within particular historical moments.

If we agree that modernisation is a basic condition for nation building and that a nation cannot be built without a gender dimension, we can usefully begin researching the development of the musical form of the *copla* from the exact moment when Spain started to move towards becoming a modern or enlightened country. According to Mary Nash, the transition from the image of 'Angel in the House' to the 'New Modern Woman' happened during the early twentieth century as a consequence of the process of modernity, and translated in practice into women accessing 'specific areas of public activity such as education, culture, social welfare, and new sectors of the labour market'.[2] It is within the new sectors of the labour market, specifically the sector of leisure that I would place these women singer--performers.

My focus is on the life histories of two women singers who lived through two other historical moments that, I would argue, coincided with the most thorough discourses on nation building in modern Spanish history. The first of these women is *La Caramba* - María Antonia Vallejo Fernández - who lived during the latter part of the eighteenth century when the Enlightenment project of nation building got underway in Spain as in other parts of Europe.

The second is Concha Piquer who made *coplas* into national songs during the Franco regime (1936-75), when *copla* performers came to embody the essential values and traditions that had made Spain an empire and that were necessary to make the Francoist project of a 'new nation' credible. In order to understand the synergy between the lives of two women who after all lived more than a century apart, it must be appreciated that Piquer's singing career began, like *La Caramba*'s, at a crucial turning point in Spanish history: the so-called 'crazy twenties' when Spain underwent rapid economic growth due, among other things, to its position of neutrality during the First World War. In particular it is clear that economic expansion allowed the world of entertainment to flourish in cities across Spain and that audiences were increasingly made up of female spectators. The discourse of the nation during the 1920s was based on positioning Spain as modern country within Europe. Piquer and other women performers played an important role in giving credibility to this modernisation project as they simultaneously represented modernity *and* tradition, a telling combination which was opposed to the progress which in Francoist terms had made Spain so 'weak' during the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century.

However, these women were far from being passive elements in two different discourses of the nation. They were actively involved in the modernisation process through their public performances, during which they continually negotiated their positions by using their performative power to subvert and resist monolithic versions of gender, including those propounded by Francoists. We could say that these women learnt to form alliances with the dominant discourses of power in order to create counter-hegemonic discourses of resistance. Following Gramsci, hegemony is only reached through 'consent in the life and activities of the state and civil society'. Hegemony is essential in the conception of the state and in the '"accrediting" of the cultural fact, of cultural activity, of a cultural front as necessary alongside the merely economic and political ones'.[3] In order to establish hegemony, a group has to form alliances with other groups, creating counter-hegemonic powers that try to resist those oppressive constructs. This constant process of negotiation is vital for historical constructions of the nation, since the different meanings of the nation are in constant mutation.[4]

The origins and definitions of *coplas*

Coplas have a long tradition in the Spanish cultural arena. [5] They originated in the Middle Ages as poetic compositions sung by *juglares* or troubadours who used them to share with their audiences love, humour, sadness and happiness, or to express philosophical and religious ideas. They were also a vehicle to narrate stories about people, their myths and heroes. It was not until the eighteenth century, however, when a musical composition with its origins in the medieval form appeared in Spanish theatres. Its name was *tonadilla* and it was originally sung or recited by women singers, often the actresses themselves, in the form of a prologue or during the interval of a play. It was accompanied by music, although it also had lyrics, usually humorous, that captivated the audience who sang along with them. *Tonadillas* soon became as important as the plays themselves and grew into a new form called *tonadilla escénica* or short play that would be used as a chronicle of society.

According to Manuel Román, '*la tonadilla* appeared spontaneously as a reaction against the musical dictatorship of Farinelli'.[6] Farinelli (1705-82) was a very well-known Italian opera singer, a *castrato*, who settled in Madrid. Through him, Italian opera became a major form of entertainment that soon replaced the most popular Spanish *zarzuelas*,[7] particularly in the royal court and among the upper classes.

C*opla* could be defined as a three-minute *tonadilla* which contains a whole story with introduction, body and conclusion. It tells stories about love, jealousy and deceit, and it does so in a very passionate way. According to Román, *coplas* 'were born to protest against the abuse of the powerful, to talk about historical moments, to highlight traditions, landscapes or religious motives; but the most common theme is love'.[8] Similarly, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán writes that *la copla* 'was a non-commercialised protest song, a protest against the human condition, against women's condition as *Cármenes de España,* women waiting for husbands who had been condemned by history'.[9] As we can see, these scholars argue that the *copla* and its big sister the *tonadilla* were born either as a spontaneous reaction against what was seen as a foreign dictatorship or as a form of protest against the abuse of the powerful. In order to understand the first suggestion - the reaction against 'foreignness' - we need to look briefly at the moment in which this type of song first appeared in the cultural arena in the person of *La Caramba*. To grasp the second point - the argument that sees the *copla* as a protest song - the figure of Concha Piquer provides the best example. Both reactions, against foreignness and against abusive power, helped to create a gendered version of the Spanish nation.

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La Caramba

One of the most important *tonadilleras* (singers of *tonadillas*) of the eighteenth century was María Antonia Vallejo Fernández, also named *La Caramba* ('Good Heavens!') after her most popular song (Figure 1). She became a legend because after a life of excess and success, she 'repented' and dedicated the rest of her life to charity until she died alone in 1787. In the words of José Blas Vega, she:

> maintained by herself the memory of the *tonadilla escénica.* She entered the world of legends and romances by repenting and dying. The history of her life was sung by *ciegos* and *copleros* [blind and male *copla* singers] and it was also reinterpreted in literature, theatre, cinema and in the voice of another unforgettable *tonadillera*: Concha Piquer.[10]

The two centuries of Spanish history separating *La Caramba* from Concha Piquer were repeatedly characterised by attempts to construct an imagined community of shared values that could be named as Spain.[11] This imagined community, however, was based on specific 'notions of both "manhood" and "womanhood"'.[12] *La Caramba* and Concha Piquer are examples of how these

productive versions of womanhood were constructed in their respective periods as representative of national values. *La Caramba* transformed the original *tonadilla* into a *tonadilla escénica* that subsequently became *canción andaluza* (Andalusian song), each form a different version of the same basic original that encapsulated different historical notions of 'womanhood'. Concha Piquer, would later transform those earlier versions into the *copla* which came to be regarded as the most characteristic form of 'Spanish song' or 'national song', and therefore she is main focus of this study.

La Caramba lived in Madrid during the reign of Charles III, during the so-called *Siglo de las luces*, a widely-used Spanish translation of the English concept of the Enlightenment. The cultural revolution led by this Enlightenment monarch seemed a hegemonic project from above that provoked a very strong counter-hegemonic popular reaction, as can be exemplified by the famous *Motín de Esquilache* (Esquilache Revolt) of 1766. This was a revolt against the imposition of a particular dress code regarded as 'foreign' when compared with the traditional Spanish costumes. We could say, however, that it was just the tip of the iceberg of a wider protest against the foreign turn that Spanish politics were subjected to at this time and in which both the people and the aristocracy participated.[13] Another example of this reaction could be seen

when the *toreo* (bull-fighting), although banned in 1787, continued to be performed under different guises such as charity, and reached its greatest popularity after its prohibition.[14]

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The fact that both the people and the aristocracy participated in the same protest against 'foreign' ways of life could be due to what Milagrosa Romero Samper calls the 'plebeian-ism' of the Spanish aristocracy; a tendency to share with the lower classes a taste for popular entertaintment.[15] This 'plebeian-ism', however, could be explained by looking at the construction of the Spanish nation as a conscious project whose imposition 'did not come directly from the political power but from the political elites who supported the changes of modernity, starting with the constitutionalists from Cádiz who came after the enlightenment reformers'.[16]

As already explained, the nation needs to be understood as a consensual process more than as an imposition. It was this fact which forced the enlightenment reformers, embedded with the idea of progress and more liberal politics, to exploit the popular reaction against 'foreignness' for their own benefit. In order to find an appealing consensual version of the nation, they needed to highlight 'essential' values and traditions that could be identified as Spanish by both foreigners and Spaniards alike. These invented traditions and

values, already voiced in the *Motin de Esquilache*, would find a more definite form during the War of Independence and the subsequent development of romanticism.

Drawing on the facts of *La Caramba*'s life history as presented in Antonina Rodrigo's biography of her, we can see her life as a vindication of freedom and frivolity. In line with the new liberal ideas of wealth and progress which characterised the period, she was a 'star' of the eighteenth century and as such she was not only a leader in fashion but also demonstrated how the star system 'markets lower-class females as the most interesting figures to consume' as exemplified by the contemporary sculpted representation of her in Figure 2.[17] Her shows were crowded with a public of differing social status who saw in her performances a rebellion against the foreignness of the Italian Farinelli. Her death, according to Antonina Rodrigo, 'offers us a snapshot caught between the picaresque and the mystique of a legend, very much in tune with the incipient Romanticism'.[18] *La Caramba* epitomised the discourse of the nation promoted by the enlightenment reformers in consensus with the rest of society: both the liberal discourses of money, freedom and independence through self-sufficiency and hard work, the liberal discourse of 'becoming' in a more flexible society, and the traditional discourse of Catholic repentance and

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self-sacrifice for women who '"de-classed" themselves by acting and who schemed to climb socially by exploiting the self-advertising vehicle of the stage before the upper classes could sympathise with or respect them'.[19] Antonina Rodrigo also suggests that María Antonia was the creator of her own legend, suggesting that in the gendered construction of the nation women were active agents of society. *La Caramba* took part in that creation by living the life she lived and dying a romantic death that would immortalise her as part of Spanish cultural history.

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The *tonadilla escénica* reached its greatest popularity between 1711 and 1790 and disappeared between 1811 and 1850 mainly due to the appearance of the Andalusian song and the reappearance of the *zarzuela.*[20] The disappearance of the *tonadilla escénica* in favour of a more localised Andalusian song coincides with the aftermath of the Peninsular War and the ideas of romantic writers living outside Spain like Lord Byron and Victor Hugo. They characterised the Spaniards by their 'bravery, pride, dignity, intense religious feelings, closeness to death and scorn for it ... All this was epitomised in Mérimée's *Carmen*'.[21] The Andalusian song could be defined as a *tonadilla* in terms of musical and lyrical structure but the main characters of the stories came from Andalusia. The music was more in line with flamenco and there was

a certain exploitation of the stereotype of the gypsy represented by *Carmen*. According to Serge Salaün, although the presence of gypsies and Andalusian clichés has accompanied the whole history of the Spanish theatrical scene, it was during the eighteenth century when the first massive exploitation of that typology took place.[22] The Andalusian song became a way of imagining history within the romantic parameters of the passionate and emotional Carmen. Although the twentieth century would bring a modern version of Spanish women, as Mary Nash has suggested (see above), the idea of Carmen would remain in the imagined community. In the new version of the Spanish nation of the twentieth century, the combination of distinct features of *La Caramba* and *Carmen* would be the bases for a very productive version of Spanish nationalism.

The *copla* at the turn of the twentieth century

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the once-popular form of Andalusian song lost some of its appeal due to the processes of industrialisation and modernisation and the appearance of a vast middle class with surplus cash to spend on leisure. This was the moment of the *café cantante*, a kind of music-

hall that was very popular in the most Spanish cities around that time. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new musical show called *variétés* had developed in France (*variedades* in Spanish), which included a type of musical act named *cuplé.* According to Blas Vega, the first *cuplé* was performed in Madrid in 1893.[23] The performer, a minor German star called Augusta Berges, sang the popular song *La Pulga* (The Flea). The performance consisted of singing the song while searching for supposed fleas in her clothes as a pretext to stripping off. The immense success of Berges's performance encouraged the Spanish singer Consuelo Bello (1884-1915), nicknamed *La Fornarina*, to try the new style and in the process, becoming one of the most important figures of the Spanish *cuplé* and an artist of international acclaim (Figure 3). By 1911, when Concha Piquer was only three years old, Aurora Mañanós - known as *La Goya* (Figure 4) - was interpreting a *cuplé* in a way that made the genre more 'Spanish'. According to Blas Vega:

> *La Goya* dignified the genre, which became more honest, that is to say, 'not only for men'. This new genre moved *el cuplé* out of the way and became artistically stronger and commercially better, attracting better

prepared and more experienced actresses who came from the world of *revistas* and *zarzuelas*.[24]

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The appearance of this seemingly more Spanish version of *cuplé* was characterised by a less sexualised appearance of the performers and resulted in the resurrection of *la tonadilla* as a 'pure' Spanish form to be substituted for the foreign *cuplé*. It dealt with more serious themes of love and other emotions than the *pícara* (cheeky) versions sung up until that time. Women would now appear in 'more decent' attire, with longer skirts and smaller cleavages, and they changed their dresses with every song to make the performance as a whole more credible. By changing their dresses with each song to match lyrics and music (feelings and attires), they suggested that their performance was more theatrical than just a 'simple' musical number and therefore more credible in terms of what they wanted to communicate. From then on, the Spanish version of *cuplé* would reach its peak, attracting bigger audiences both in Spain and abroad with increasing numbers of women among its habitual public.

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Raquel Meller (1888-1962), for example, made two songs part of the cultural heritage of Spain: *El relicario* (The locket) and *La violetera* (The violet seller) (Figure 5). Both songs are representative of a new type of

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sentimental love song, combining the *tonadilla* as developed by *La Caramba* with the romantic Andalusian elements of *Carmen* and the performative features of *cuplé*. The result was arguably a style more appropriate to early twentieth-century national discourse in the sense of being in tune with a more 'decent' version of women as we can see if we compare the representations of Meller and Aurora Mañanós in Figures 4 and 5. In Figure 5, the long black dress with the typical Spanish *mantilla* decorating Meller's head is very different from the attire of Mañanós in Figure 4. The poses of both women are also very different. Whereas Meller displays seriousness and looks directly to the camera, Mañanós appears much more uninhibited. This new sentimental song form as popularised by Raquel Meller was better suited to a gendered discourse of nationalism, particularly as it was performed by Concha Piquer, a discourse which came to highlight tradition, Catholic values and decorum as its most important features.

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In 1898 Spain suffered what is known in Spanish historiography as 'the Disaster', on losing the last fragments of its empire - the colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines - to the United States. This loss brought a crisis of identity that has been very substantially documented historically and was expressed in literary and philosophical terms by a group of mainly male

thinkers who formed the so-called 'Generación del 98'.[25] This generation of writers belonged to the cultural elite and expressed their preoccupation with the loss of Spanish identity caused by 'the Disaster' as though it had only concerned the elite and left the majority of the Spaniards unaffected.[26] For them the crisis expressed itself as a need to revise old values, for instance the political ideology of the Restoration, and the need to relocate Spain in the wider world.

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Jaume Aurelli comments that at the end of the nineteenth century Spanish intellectuals could adopt one of three attitudes towards the image of Spain.[27] First, an ultraconservative view that defended the Spanish tradition of monarchy and Catholicism which was supported by Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo. Second, a liberal and populist view based on the idea that the popular classes were the defenders of national sovereignty, supported by Benito Pérez Galdós. Last, the regenerationist view defended by Joaquín Costa for whom there was a need for a revolution from above together with a Europeanisation of Spanish life and culture.

For Menéndez Pelayo, Pérez Galdós and Costa, the debate about possible solutions to the 'Spanish problem' was eventually polarised between traditionalist and liberal perspectives. The traditionalists believed that the

solution could be found by looking back to the Spain of the Counter-Reformation, and the War of Independence when the popular classes had an important input. This view promoted the pre-capitalist way of life as a reaction against the supposed Americanisation of Spain by appealing to an aesthetic of poverty. In this vision, national sovereignty would be exercised more culturally than politically. The liberal Europeanist view, defended by Costa, saw the solution to the problems of Spain in a revolution from above, what Gramsci would call some years later a passive revolution. According to Gramsci, a passive revolution is managed from above, and reinforces 'the hegemonic system and the forces of military and civil coercion at the disposal of the traditional ruling classes'.[28] However these liberals, despite alluding to Europe as an example to follow, do not seem to have envisaged a democratic solution for the country.

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Yet both views coincided in highlighting the importance of the 'national values' which were believed to reside within 'the people'. In this political context, the 'national values' that women performers seemed to embody became a very necessary adjunct to the need for regeneration. These women in their performances literally embodied the view of Spain - its people, traditions and cultural values - which prioritised an aesthetic based on romantic ideas.

However, at the same time they also were part of the modern European capitalist structure of progress that allowed them to become stars and the owners of their own businesses. Their independence and freedom to move and act did not seem to be in contradiction with the traditional view of women as passive sexual and emotional beings. In this way *La Caramba* negotiated her own legend in the latter part of the eighteenth century by living a life of freedom for which she had to repent in time to die a lonely death. A century later, *La Fornarina*, *La Goya* and Raquel Meller lived lives equally characterised by freedom and independence but they, unlike *La Caramba*, negotiated their place in Spanish cultural history by appealing to the traditions and romantic ideas embodied by *Carmen*.

Concha Piquer

The case of Concha Piquer invites us to think of culture as the site of a struggle, a 'double movement of containment and resistance',[29] resistance that comes from the ability of her performances to negotiate with the same discourses that oppressed women. We could say that she learnt to form alliances with the

dominant discourses of power in order to create counter-hegemonic discourses of resistance. According to Margarita Rivière,

> *La Piquer*, who sang that she would rather dream than know the truth, was always on the radio, and in her own way, she gave recipes to make life more bearable for those women who were represented in other *coplas* almost as in a tourist guide: 'sun, wine, women and song' … The *coplas* of that radio introduced very precise models and images: under their apparent happiness and their deep abnegation, there was a terrible feminine world.[30]

Concha Piquer was born in Valencia on 8 December 1908. Her singing career started at a very young age in the Park Theatre of New York, in September 1922. As a *tonadillera*, she sang a song called *El florero* during the interval of Manuel Penella's opera *El gato montés*. Her performance was so successful that she recorded twenty-two songs with the major company 'Record' (now CBS). She remained in America until 1927 singing in the most important theatres and variety shows in the style of the 1920s explored above. She even 'represented' Spain by posing nude with a Spanish *mantón* around her body

(Figure 6). On her return to Spain, she became an icon and embraced all the media she could master: radio, cinema and later television. She continued her theatre and variety performances, although this time, the settings and the songs were created exclusively for her and her company. She was well known for her strong personality and she engaged with a big repertoire of anecdotes about her character. She even refused to sing for Franco because it coincided with one of her own shows. She died in 1991.[31]

In order to understand the complexities of that 'terrible feminine world' alluded to by Rivière in the above quotation, I would like to use the notions of complicity and performativity to analyse in some detail two of Piquer's songs: *No me mires a la cara* and *Ojos verdes*. Judith Butler's assertion that 'we can consider gender as a *corporeal style*, an "act" as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning' is essential to my analysis.[32] In a very real sense, Concha Piquer was an accomplice to the gendered discourses of the nation with which she negotiated throughout her many performances. She performed her gender as part of a national representation and constructed meanings that can be read in terms of resistance. In this way she made songs written by men her own in order to reassess the world of women under Franco.

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‘Don’t look at me’

No me mires a la cara (Don’t look at me) is a *zambra*, a kind of song that has been flamencoised, and was written for Concha Piquer by the male artists Ochaíta, Valerio and Solano. She first performed it in 1948:

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I don’t know what wicked tongue

Blew that name in my ear

Your that house I left

While you were still in bed

Another beau at the door

Was expecting my downfall

God denied me bread and help

And even drinking water

Because in a little moment of madness

I betrayed a decent man

Don’t look at me

Because I don’t deserve it

And if you look at me, despise me

Because I am dirty with other kisses

Don’t feel any pity for me

Hammer iron bars into your door

Don’t let the wedding sheets

Be warmed by my body

Don’t look at me

Because I don’t deserve it

I don’t know what decent tongue

Made me see reason

He who much loves forgives

To forgive is manly

In the name of Christ’s thorns

I ask for your forgiveness

With a lump in my throat

At your feet I throw myself

Till you demand I stand

Stand up fallen woman

Come and look at me

Although I don't deserve it

And if you look at me forgive me

Let my remorse count

Take pity on me

And clean me with your kisses

So that my body shines

As a mirror shines

Come and look at me

Although I don't deserve it.[33]

Comment [KHA16]: Please indicate your source of this lyric.

The first striking thing about this song is its tone of sadness and complaint by the performer; both feelings caused by the unfairness of a situation that is different for women than for men. Her position as active agent of her actions, places her as sufferer of the consequences of these actions. Her plea is for repentance and forgiveness, all securely wrapped up in a religious discourse, which no doubt would have gone down very well in the context of the Franco regime:

Don't look at me

Because I don't deserve it

And if you look at me, despise me

Because I am *dirty* with other kisses (my emphasis).

This melodramatic song as performed by Concha Piquer reminds us quite intentionally of a picture of a *dolorosa* (the sorrowful Virgin), such an important part of Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary in Spain (Figure 7). The religious imagery of the song is very suggestive. As a woman, the singer asks for God's mercy and forgiveness by identifying herself with the agony of Jesus Christ himself: 'God deny me bread and help…In the name of Christ's thorns I ask for your forgiveness'. However, whatever happens, she knows that she will be forgiven, possibly by the audience to whom she is talking and surely by God, far superior to the man she has deceived. This leaves men in a position of inferiority. It is the precise use of a religious discourse which gives the song credibility and makes the 'sin' forgivable.

The song, then, claims that one of the features of masculinity is to forgive: 'to forgive is manly'. The performer's advice seems to me to be directed not only at women but also at men. By using the same religious discourse that puts her in the position of the sufferer, she reverses the situation

hence questioning men's precious masculinity, since those who cannot forgive are not men. Moreover, despite the constraints of traditional societies for women, the performer committed the sin 'in a little moment of madness', knowing what the consequences would be. This act gives her a huge amount of power. She defies society and recognises it publicly. By using the very same discourse of repentance and self-sacrifice that had created the legend of *La Caramba*, Concha Piquer suggested alternative versions of masculinity and liberated herself from the burden of the traditional representation of women.

When looking at these songs, we should not underestimate the censorship that the Franco regime imposed on the Spanish people under the auspices of the Press and Propaganda Office set up in 1936. The censorship that this office imposed, as Jo Labanyi indicates, interfered with people's lives at the most trivial and persistent levels and, in its concern as much with trumpeting the glories of Spain as with defending the nation's morals from possibly titillating images, betrayed its treatment of all forms of social communication as 'text'.[34] This overwhelming censorship, however, while aiming to promote an idea of 'eternal Spain', still incorporated elements from the polity against which Franco had established his regime, namely Republicanism. As Álvaro Ferrari has suggested, censorship was based on both

a kind of 'scientific neutralism' and the institution of 'correct' traditional thinking.[35] In this way, for a cultural artefact to be popular during the Franco regime, it needed to come across as 'neutral' and 'correct', something that *coplas* managed to do most of the time. However, *la copla*, despite its continued popularity and national appeal during both the liberal and semi-revolutionary Republican period and the Civil War, paradoxically came to epitomise the 'eternal' features of supposedly unchanging tradition for Francoist Spain. *La copla*, in this way, managed to span each of these different political moments as a cultural form that was part of the texture of Spanish identity, in particular during the Franco regime when, as Labanyi highlighted above, it took the shape of a 'text' that showed different aspects of women's lives, as we are seeing by analysing these songs. The tone of sadness and the portrayal of the *dolorosa* in the song *No me mires a la cara* places women on the side of the sufferer and demonstrates how this traditional image could be subverted by performing a different version of gender.

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The second song, *Ojos verdes* (Green Eyes), could, however, be considered openly transgressive. It was written for Concha Piquer by Valverde, León and Quiroga and performed by her in 1940. On this occasion Piquer as

narrator does not employ an apologetic tone or suffering mood but instead fashions the maker of her own desire and destiny:

Leaning on the brothel's doorjamb
I watched the May night ignite
Men passed and I smiled
Till at my door your horse stopped [36]

The narrator has also adopted the discourse of pleasure: 'come and take it from my lips and fire I will give you', and self-assurance: 'and I replied you've already paid, you don't have to give me anything'. This song toys with the opposite side of the coin in the characterisation of women's images in a patriarchal society. Instead of the suffering woman of the previous song, we now have the whore, the challenger, the unreachable, and ultimately the desirable woman, a woman in control of her life:

Green, green eyes
With the glint of the blade
Your eyes penetrate my heart

For me there are no longer suns, stars or moon

There is only a pair of eyes

Which are my life.[37]

Concha Piquer performs gender with this song: she 'alienates' the icon of women as whores exposing the idea of gender. She 'naturalises' the idea of female desire and invites the audience to see the performance as a sign system.[38] Although *coplas* were written by men, they were mainly interpreted by women. For this reason the songs need to be analysed in relation not only to the lyrics but also to the extra-textual elements of voice, music and public persona. In other words, we need to consider not only the significance of the songs but also their *signifiance*.[39] The *signifiance* appears when the text can be read as a game of signifiers that might not refer directly to any fixed significance. This *signifiance* lies in this case in the timbre of the voice: 'voice of velvet and bronze, short in extension and rich in mysterious sounds … *voice of a Spanish woman, voice of the Spanish land* … beautiful voice, the unconfused voice of Concha Piquer'.[40] It also lies in the music, which belonged to a traditional repertoire, and in the use Concha Piquer made of her own biography in performance.

Comment [KHA18]: Please confirm that you are citing 2 separate works, one by Diamond, and one by Counsell and Wolf. Or is Diamond cited in Counsell and Wolf? If the former, please provide page span of Diamond article, n.35.

The importance of Concha Piquer's performance lies in the fact that she was not only the interpreter of the words of the male artists who wrote the lyrics for her. She created, or rather recreated, the lyrics with the voice ('the Spanish voice'), the gaze, the attire and the use of her public persona to break the boundaries between the intellectual middle-class milieu that had originated them and the working-class world that she represented. She blurred the boundaries between a nation understood by the romantic features discussed above and the 'universal' appeal of her presence.

Unlike *La Caramba*, she did not repent before dying to gain middle-class respectability and become a legend. She became Doña Concha and has carried the title despite her long lasting relationship with a married man with whom she had her only child. Her way of gaining that respectability was through negotiating with ideas rooted in class and gender stereotypes. For example, Piquer came originally from a very poor background in Valencia. Martín de la Plaza claims that on her return from the United States in 1927 she started a race against the clock to learn Spanish since she only spoke Valencian and English.[41] However, some years later she would become the epitome of Spanishness and the most acclaimed representative of *la copla*. She managed to appeal to 'national' features in order to increase her popularity and widen her

Comment [HD19]: please give her Spanish title

Comment [HD20]: please give ref in endnote

horizons by adopting the metonym of representing Spanishness as Andalucianness, and in most of her songs she performed in a very well studied Andalucian accent. She used musical forms well known by Spanish audiences like *zambras*, *tonadillas* and *pasodobles*, and she dressed with the very bright and evocative Andalucian objects: *mantilla* and *mantón*, flowers, jewels, fans and castanets (Figure 8). In this way, she slowly transformed herself from the 1920s Conchita into the 1940s and 1950s Doña Concha, coming to represent what Anne McClintock has described as the 'atavic and authentic "body" of national tradition'.[42]

Equally, during her public appearances and interviews in different media she adopted the discourse of identification with the 'apolitical' institution of the family, performing the role of a good mother and highlighting the importance of family life, while living as an independent and unmarried businesswoman. In other words, she 'performed' the discourse of the family in a moment when defining the role of the 'new women' was one of the aims of the Franco regime through its women's institution, the Sección Femenina (Feminine Section):

> The new woman does not have to be either the 'modern woman', that denies femininity, avoids maternity, is a good friend of her husband,

> ending up being a nice colleague and sharing his virility, or the 'good lady' impossible as a mother, bad tempered as a wife and boring as a companion. The new woman should be a woman of her time, happy in being a mother, educating her children, showing a feminine interest in her husband's matters and giving him a quiet refuge against the problems of public life. In two words: *cleanly* modern.[43]

Comment [KHA21]: Please confirm that these are Scanlon's words, or is she quoting someone else?

It is a discourse of femininity that I have elsewhere defined as baroque in the sense of being traditional, authoritarian, Catholic, passionate and powerful, intense, hyperbolic and sentimental.[44] It plays with notions of cleanliness and dirtiness as we see in the passage above. Women, as carriers of national values, have to appear to be clean in the performance of their role as mothers and wives of the nation. The protagonist of *No me mires a la cara* 'betrayed a decent man in a little moment of madness' and that is why she should be despised because 'she is dirty with other kisses'. However he 'who much loves, forgives' because 'to forgive is manly'. Therefore, 'if you look at me, forgive me' and 'clean me with your kisses'. As discussed above, this song shifts the responsibility of the cleansing process from the woman to the man, thereby subverting the Francoist insistence that burdened women with sole

responsibility for a cleansing modernity. On the contrary, the protagonist of *Ojos verdes* is 'leaning on the brothel's doorjamb', and she does not seem to feel dirty, quite the opposite. The song is full of brightness and light: the May night 'ignites', the woman offers 'fire with her lips'. For her, his eyes 'glint like a blade' and they are brighter than the stars, the sun or the moon. Her own pleasure is sufficient payment: 'you don't have to give me anything, you have already paid'. This story surely openly subverts Francoist discourse but in this case, it is the 'acting of gender' which helps to construct a meaning that allowed the song to be performed and escape censorship. The singer might have used the knowledge that the audience had of her biography - she was living with a man married to another woman - in order to make the song more credible whereas her public defence of Catholic values and family ties would have distanced her from the putative protagonist of the song.

Comment [KHA22]: I think we need to cut this sentence about it being 'just a performance' since it undermines the whole argument that performance is significant.

Concha Piquer, like *La Caramba*, *La Goya* and others before her, played with a version of femininity that would allow her both to become a national icon and at the very same time, to be a window onto women's lives. That is why these women always played within the parameters of patriarchy, the same patriarchy that they tried to challenge. However, Concha Piquer finally managed to locate Spain within the discourse of a modern European nation

beyond the Francoist definition of it. She successfully combined tradition and modernity, working- and middle-class values. Her life story and legend combined romantic elements, passionate and unmarried love, with a happy ending, fame and acceptance as a Spanish national icon for the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

As a feminist I feel that I need to validate positively what women are and what they achieve in the sphere of the world to which they have been confined. Women's marginality from power structures suggests that there is a greater need to see themselves mirrored in representations.[45] I have drawn attention to these songs and performers precisely because they are popular, because they are for and about women or rather femininities, because they are not prestigious. The popular has always been placed close to the world of women because of its identification with the world of feelings and emotions. Despite its characterisation as national song, *la copla* is not as well-known outside Spain as flamenco, for example. One of the reasons for this might be its categorisation as a minor (popular, women's) musical form. To illustrate this

point, Manuel Román mentioned the singer Juanito Valderrama as one of the best 'flamenco *cantaores*', a real maestro, adding that during the 1970s he was invited to sing in the most prestigious flamenco festivals, 'although the purists never forgave him his betrayal for having dedicated so many years to singing *copla*'.[46]

Some feminists have interpreted these songs in a negative way. According to Carmen Alcalde:

> Once the *cuplé* died and with it the good sense of humour and grace of those women who, despite having been born in misery, had enough self-esteem to avoid prostitution, the *copla*, Andalucist and flamenquist, appeared. It was a song favoured by censors and protectors of the family.[47]

In this article I have reassessed that view. If we follow Alison Light in her analysis of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, women's romance reading is 'as much a measure of their deep dissatisfaction with heterosexual options as of any desire to be fully identified with the submissive versions of femininity the texts endorse. Romance imagines peace, security and ease precisely because

there is dissension, insecurity and difficulty'.[48] I believe that these songs, like romance reading, allow both the expression of dissatisfaction with heterosexual relations and the provision of a medium through which to identify with the same roles that patriarchy creates for women. From repentant sinners to independent subjects, these roles seem to transmit some sort of peace, security and company throughout the identification of the audiences with their performers.

I have also chosen these songs because I believe that these performers brought to their audiences both pleasure and knowledge. I wanted to explore why they gave (and still give) pleasure to so many people, and to relate all this to their ideological effects. The narrative structure of these songs is very simple and their power seems to have come from the fact that the performers enacted rather than explored problems that other people faced whilst they performed gender roles which allowed them to distance themselves from the stereotype. Moreover they did all this publicly and they provided solutions, so they became a type of reassurance for listeners. It is a form of knowledge that comes from the emotional component of the songs, since we can assert that emotions 'always involve appraisal or evaluation'.[49] These songs are very intense, emotional and whole-hearted and this emotion is shown without holding back

which makes the performer appear sincere to the audience. During the performance, with their strong voices, their gestures and their outfits, the singers manage to concentrate the intensity and depth of the song on themselves rather than on the music.

Finally, the songs and the women discussed in this study comment on the nation. They draw on the shared knowledge of folklore and collective musical memory. The use of well known musical styles, such as *zambras* and *pasodobles*, supplies a sense of familiarity, safety and, ultimately, pleasure. The idea of community is important because the performance makes a personal story a matter of the community. Brian Currid, in his interesting article about House music, talks about a sense of family or community in a specific way: 'House argues that communities should not be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness, but rather by the style in which they are imagined'.[50] In a similar fashion, I would argue that the style that *copla* performances displayed throughout their long history imagined a community made of specific musical rhythms that could be identified as Spanish.

In the *copla* performances examined here, apart from the utopian feelings of love and happy endings, there is the utopian image of wealth, colour and splendour of the performers, that is to say, of their power; a power that

allows them as women to suggest, or rather prescribe, more fluid versions of masculinity which favour a more androgynous construction of partners and include great capacity for tenderness and concern for feelings.

The Spanish nation in these *coplas* is a nation that positions men on the receiving end of adultery and a nation that when manufactured by women adopts a very different view of those same infidelities despite its discourse on marriage and children. These singing women with their traditional looks, their potent vocalities and their 'experience' of life were both carriers of a particular patriarchal hegemonic discourse and at the same time holders of the tools to create a counter-hegemonic one. In this way, these women's performances helped to construct a more realistic image of 'their' nations.

Notes

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[1] George Lipsitz, *Time Passages, Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 90.

[2] Mary Nash, 'Un/Contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain', in

Victoria Lorée and Pamela Beth Radcliff (eds), *Constructing Spanish Womanhood. Female Identity in Modern Spain* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 25-51.

[3] David Forgacs (ed.), *The Gramsci Reader*. *Selected Writings 1916-1935* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), p. 194.

[4] Duara Prasenjit, 'Historicizing National Identity', in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds), *Becoming National*. *A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 151-3.

[5] References about the history of Spanish Song used in this article are: Manuel Román, *La copla* (Madrid: Acento, 2000) and *Memoria de la copla* (Madrid: Alianza, 1993); José Blas Vega, *La canción española* (Madrid: Taller El Búlgaro, Colección Metáfora, 2, 1996); Rosa Peñasco, *La copla sabe de leyes* (Madrid: Alianza, 2000); Serge Salaün, *El cuplé (1900-1936)* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1990). All translations from Spanish into English are my own unless otherwise stated.

[6] Román, *La copla*, p. 6.

[7] *Zarzuela* can be defined as a musical play, a light opera played by popular characters that alternate spoken and sung parts. It is often set in the eighteenth

or nineteenth centuries, in the provinces or in a rural version of Madrid and it usually represents an idealised society.

[8] Román, *La copla,* p. 16.

[9] Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *Crónica Sentimental de España* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1998), pp. 39-40.

[10] Blas Vega, *La canción española*, p. 13, my emphasis.

[11] As is well-known, for Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), Earnest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), nations are not universal or essential phenomena but rather constructed and imagined communities that exist as a product of historical developments.

[12] Nira Yuval-Davies, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 1.

[13] José Manuel Souto Rodríguez, *El siglo XVIII español*. *Cultura, ciencia y filosofía* (Madrid: Mileto, 2004), pp. 18-19.

[14] Carlos Martínez Shaw, 'Los límites de la Ilustración' *Historia de España* 19 (1996), pp. 88-102, (p. 99).

[15] Milagrosa Romero Samper, 'La crisis del Antiguo Régimen', in Javier Paredes (ed.), *Historia Contemporánea de España*. *Siglo XIX*, pp. 3-38.

[16] José Álvarez Junco, *Mater Dolorosa* (Madrid: Taurus, 2001), p. 192.

[17] Eva Woods, 'From Rags to Riches: The Ideology of Stardom in Folkloric Musical Comedy Films of the Late 1930s and 1940s', in Antonio Lázaro Reboll and Andrew Willis (eds), *Spanish Popular Cinema* (Manchester: University Press, 2004), pp 40-60, here p. 51.

[18] Antonina Rodrigo, *María Antonia La Caramba. El genio de la tonadilla en el Madrid goyesco* (Granada: Albaida, 1992), p. 203.

[19] Tracy C. Davis, 'The Social Dynamic and "Respectability"', in Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (eds), *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 70-4, here p. 71.

[20] Blas Vega, *La canción española*, p. 12

[21] José Álvarez Junco, 'The Nation-Building Process in Nineteenth-Century Spain', in Claire Mar-Molinero, and Ángel Smith (eds), *Nationalism and the Nation in the Iberian Peninsula* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp. 89-107, here p. 94.

[22] Serge Salaün, 'España empieza en Despeñaperros. Lo andaluz en la escena nacional', in Yvan Lissourges and Gonzalo Sobejano (eds), *Pensamiento y*

literatura en España en el siglo XIX. Idealismo, positivismo, espiritualismo (Tolouse-Le-Mirail: Presses Universitaries du Mirail, 1998), pp. 211-21.

[23] Blas Vega, *La canción española*, p. 9.

[24] Blas Vega, *La canción española*, p. 2.

[25] Examples from the substantial literature written about this subject are, Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *Medio siglo de cultura española (1885-1936)* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1971); José Carlos Mainer, *La Edad de Plata (1902-1931)* (Barcelona: Libros de la frontera, 1971); Donald Shaw, *La generación del 98* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1977), original English edition *The Generation of 1898 in Spain* (London, 1975).

[26] José María Jover Zamora and Guadalupe Gómez-Ferrer, 'Cultura y civilización: la plenitud de la Edad de Plata', in José María Jover Zamora, Guadalupe Gómez-Ferrer and Juan Pablo Fusi Aizpúrua (eds), *España*: *Sociedad, Política y Civilización (Siglos XIX y XX)* (Madrid: Debate, 2001), pp. 575-634, here p. 580.

[27] Jaume Aurell, 'La regencia de María Cristina (1885-1902)', in Paredes (ed.), *Historia Contemporánea de España, Siglo XIX*, pp. 407-28, here p. 421.

[28] David Forgacs (ed.), *The Gramsci Reader*. *Selected Writings 1916-1935* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), p. 267.

[29] Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "The Popular"', in John Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. *A Reader*, 2nd edn (London: Prentice Hall, 1998) , pp. 442-53.

[30] Margarita Rivière, *Serrat y su época*. *Biografía de una generación* (Madrid: El País, 1998), pp. 55-6.

[31] Martín de la Plaza, *Conchita Piquer* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001).

[32] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 139.

[33] My own translation from the CD *A tu vera*, published by EMI-Odeón in 1999.

[34] Jo Labanyi, 'Censorship and the Fear of Mass Culture', in Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (eds), *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), pp. 207-14, here p. 207.

[35] Álvaro Ferrari, 'La vida cultural. Limitaciones, Condicionantes y Desarrollo. El franquismo', in Javier Paredes (ed.), *Historia Contemporánea de España. Siglo XX*, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Ariel, 2004), pp. 860-85.

[36] Apoyá en la quicio de la mancebía/Miraba encenderse la noche de mayo/ Pasaban los hombres y yo sonreía/ Hasta que en mi puerta paraste el caballo.

[37] Ojos verdes, verdes/ Con brillo de faca/ Que están clavaítos en mi corazón/ Pa mí ya no hay soles, luceros ni luna/ No hay más que unos ojos/ Que mi vida son.

[38] Elin Diamond, 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism', in Carol Martin (ed.) *A Sourcebook on Feminist Theatre and Performance*: *On and Beyond the Stage* (London: Routledge, 1996); pp. 120-35, in here p. 123.

[39] Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), pp. 262, 266.

[40] My emphasis. Blas Vega, *La canción española*, p. 57 mentions these comments which the critic Quijano and the writer Felipe Sassone made in 1935 and 1936 respectively about Concha Piquer's voice.

[41] Martín de la Plaza, *Conchita Piquer*, p. 38.

[42] Anne McClintock, '"No Longer in a Future Heaven": Gender, Race and Nationalism', in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds),

Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 92.

[43] Geraldine M. Scanlon, *La polémica feminista en la España contemporánea 1868-1974* (Madrid: Akal, 1986), p. 324; my emphasis and translation.

[44] Mercedes Carbayo Abengózar, *Buscando un lugar entre mujeres. Buceo en la España de Carmen Martín Gaite* (Málaga: University of Málaga Press, 1998), p. 41; Mercedes Carbayo Abengózar, 'Shaping Women: National Identity through the Use of Language in Franco's Spain', *Nations and Nationalism* 7 (2001), pp. 75-93.

[45] Richard Dyer, Terry Lovell and Jen McCrindle, 'Soap Opera and Women', in Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (eds), *Studying Culture*: *An Introductory Reader* (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 35-41.

[46] Román, *La copla*, p. 119.

[47] Carmen Alcalde, *Mujeres en el franquismo* (Barcelona: Flor de Viento, 1996), p. 129.

[48] Alison Light, '"Returning to Manderlay". Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class", in Terry Lovell (ed.), *British Feminist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 325-44.

[49] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*: *The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 23

[50] Brian Currid, '"We Are Family". House Music and Queer Performativity', in Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett and Susan Foster (eds), *Cruising the Performative*: *Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 165-97, here p. 166.