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The Blues and Flamenco: An Intermusical Approach

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## ABSTRACT

In their trips to New York and Spain respectively, Federico García Lorca and Langston Hughes observed a similarity between the African-American and Gypsy communities. In their views, this similarity was also expanding into the musical realm between the prevailing musical genres of these communities, *the blues* and *flamenco*. The aim of this study is to explore this musical relationship, defining the points they have in common and contextualizing it within the work of both poets. To this end, the first part of the research focuses on the analysis of the travels of both writers, comparing their poetic work and orienting it towards the comparison of these musical genres. The examples taken show that there is a great affinity between them; that their cultural proximity is not circumstantial but real, objective. This relationship became even more evident as the 20th century progressed, when many musicians mixed these styles into innovative creations.

Keywords: *flamenco*, *the blues*, Langston Hughes, Federico García Lorca, African-American, gypsies.

En sus viajes a Nueva York y España respectivamente, Federico García Lorca y Langston Hughes observaron una similitud entre la comunidad afroamericana y gitana, la cual descubrieron que también se expandía al ámbito musical entre los géneros musicales reinantes de dichas comunidades, *el blues* y *el flamenco*. El objetivo de este estudio es explorar esta relación musical, definiendo los puntos que tienen en común y contextualizándola dentro de su obra poética. Para ello, la primera parte de la investigación se centra en el análisis de los viajes de ambos escritores, comparando su obra poética y orientándolo hacia la consiguiente comparación de dichos géneros musicales. Los ejemplos tomados muestran que hay una gran afinidad entre ellos; que su proximidad cultural no es circunstancial sino real, objetiva. Esta relación se hizo aún más evidente a medida que avanzaba el siglo XX, cuando muchos músicos mezclaron estos estilos en creaciones innovadoras.

Palabras clave: *flamenco*, *los blues*, Langston Hughes, Federico García Lorca, afroamericanos, gitanos.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the analogy between two musical genres that had not been studied together before, although the similarity had been captured in the works of two authors who can be considered the central figures of the movement and the generation to which they belong: Federico García Lorca and Langston Hughes. Lorca, within the Generation of '27, and Hughes, in the Harlem Renaissance, were considered as the most relevant and admired figures of the time, as both cultural movements are practically contemporary. Likewise, the relationship between these two artists goes beyond being circumstantial and their lives become even a simile, both literary and personal. In their poetic work, apart from other literary genres that they also worked on, they coincided in focusing attention on and speaking out in favour of the most underprivileged, consecrating a literature devoid of any vestige of elitism and with a popular character. They showed the cold and bruised face of the marginalized people, of a community ignored and isolated by society, persecuted and helpless. In his poetry book *Gypsy Ballads*, Federico García Lorca protests against the situation of gypsies, who, trapped in their poverty, live the harsh reality of contempt. Langston Hughes does the same in his works, defending the dignity and freedom of the black population against the abuse of power by authority, while calling for the complete abolition of racism and racial segregation—facts that were common at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States. As we can see in one of his most famous poems, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, Langston Hughes tries to inspire and unite the African-American community, praising his primitive and profound soul, and connecting the history of the black community with the strength and wisdom they possess.

This fact corresponds to an important point in common between the two writers and conforms the prelude to what the comparison between *the blues* and *flamenco* will be like, as these musical genres are deeply rooted in the communities in which they became cultural references. Music is a crucial factor in the development of the literary work of both writers, and they will constantly appeal to musical elements in their works, becoming

great experts and admirers of the typical music of their region or community. Many of Hughes' poems are strongly linked to the folklore of the African-American population, among which *the blues* stands out. *The blues* is a musical genre native to the African-American slave communities from the South of the United States, and it is characterized by a melancholic and sad nature. The North American poet gave a musical theme to his poems, which were adapted to a rhythm and musical terminology typical of the African-American culture of that time. Those types of music were mostly *the blues*, *jazz*, and *gospel*. For his part, Lorca uses many *flamenco* motifs and themes, even his poems have been transferred to music and sung by cantaores such as Camarón de la Isla. The attraction of *flamenco* to Lorca's texts is a consequence of this reciprocal relationship between the Grandian poet and the *jondo*, and his interest in popular poetic forms, such as the romance, a poetic form born from the people that leaves aside any elitist trait. He was a great promoter of *flamenco*, fomenting among other things a Cante Jondo Competition in 1922 in Granada together with other artists such as Manuel de Falla or Juan Ramón Jiménez. The essence of *flamenco* also has to do with sadness and pain, like *the blues*, and Federico García Lorca reflects it in a sublime way in his work, where music and poetry conform a whole as is the case in Hughes' poems.

However, the element that definitely links Lorca and Hughes was that the two poets admired each other. This admiration was definitely evident when they visited the other poet's country respectively. Lorca first visited New York and there he experienced the American culture and especially the Harlem Renaissance, which was in full swing at the time. Among the many interpretations he made of his visit, he wrote *Poet in New York*, and of course enjoyed local music, comparing it to his country's own, *flamenco*. All the details about this visit were gathered by Carlos and Francisco Javier Rabassó in their book *Granada-New York-La Habana. Federico García Lorca entre el flamenco, el jazz y el afrocubanismo*. In this volume they analyze the poet's experiences in the great city, how he reflects them in his work *Poet in New York* and how they affect his personal life. They also compare his literary creation with that of his contemporary Langston Hughes. The same



goes for Langston Hughes. When the African-American poet came to Spain as a war correspondent, he was also able to appreciate the art of Spain, including *flamenco*. After attending several concerts, performances or dances, he establishes a link between *flamenco* and *the blues* of his country, just as Lorca did when he heard *the blues* or *jazz* in Harlem pubs. Many years after he passed away, the essays he wrote during his life were collected and published in the book *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs (Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Vol 9)*. This more essayistic and critical version of Langston Hughes was something new at the time it appeared, as his poetic side was the most popular. Through these essays he discusses the most controversial issues during different stages of his life, including a radical critique of economy, society, racial exploitation, and the oppression of the black community. Among the many essays, the ones written during his time in Spain are the most relevant to the development of this research. In them, he demonstrated his affinity with the revolutionary socialism of the 1930s, immediately opting for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the fight against fascism. However, the most surprising aspects of these essays in Spain have to do with his personal life. Here he gathers the experiences that he shares with Spanish art, including *flamenco*, which serve as the basis for the comparison of the two musical genres. These texts illustrate the existence of a striking duality between *the blues* and *flamenco* within the relationship between Lorca and Hughes that confirms that this relationship also embraces the musical field. They therefore discover a musical kinship that goes hand in hand with literature.



## II. LANGSTON HUGHES AND FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

It was 1937 and Europe was in an era dominated by economic, social, military and political instability. Fascism rose to power in some countries putting into practice aggressive foreign policies that ultimately led to World War II. One of the countries impacted by the rise of fascism during this time period was Spain. From 1936 to 1939, a brutal war broke out leaving hundreds of thousands of people murdered and disappeared. A fascist dictatorship, whose Head of State was Franco, came to power and maintained this power for over forty years in Spain. Moreover, this fascist regime not only infringed the civil rights of Spanish citizens, but also tried to quash artistic freedom.

People from all over the world expressed their solidarity with the poor and devastated Spanish people, in their effort towards defeating fascism. Many foreigners enlisted in the republican ranks to fight on the frontlines, forming battalions known as "International Brigades", as was the case of George Orwell, for example; others helped with economic or diplomatic aid. And many foreign artists helped as journalists or war correspondents, or simply as what they were, artists. These foreign artists were people like Ernest Hemingway (*For Whom The Bell Tolls*), Paul Robeson or John Dos Passos. This thesis focuses on Langston Hughes, an African American poet. After becoming one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, the author of "The Weary Blues" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Langston Hughes arrives in Spain to participate in the struggle against the Franco regime as a war correspondent. Far from feeling strange, separated or threatened by the constant pressure of war, Langston Hughes lives in a relatively lively, exuberant and cheerful way during his stay in Spain. In his favour he already knew how to speak Spanish with ease, since he had lived for several years in Mexico and also had a great knowledge of Spanish literature: he had read *Don Quixote*, Blasco Ibáñez, García Lorca, from whom he translated the *Gypsy Ballads* into English, as well as *Blood Wedding*, thanks to the help of Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre and the brother of the poet himself, Francisco García Lorca. Between these two poets, Langston Hughes and

Federico García Lorca, there is a certain symbiosis that, although there is no concrete proof that they met, reveals some similarities between their lives. Both led a generation of young artists within their own countries, specializing in the field of poetry without renouncing others such as prose in the case of Hughes or theater in the case of Lorca. In addition, they traveled all over the world, sharing their work and absorbing new cultures, in a constant desire to learn. This led them to travel, curiously, Hughes to Spain and Lorca to New York, as we can appreciate in his work *Poet in New York*.

Although Federico García Lorca traveled before Hughes, the two trips share many similarities, but not the same final result. This chapter emphasizes the artistic circles in which they moved and the relationships they established with artists of the time: it is known that Federico García Lorca had Nella Larsen as cicerone, while Langston Hughes lived in the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura in Madrid. We will also center on the results and appreciations of the visits and especially on the music: the point in which they both agree on is the need to experience and to live the musical culture of the country in which they were, whether it be Langston Hughes with *flamenco* or Lorca with *jazz* and *the blues*. Moreover, both agreed that these two genres, despite appearing so distant and different, actually share many characteristics, as we will see in the next chapter.

Langston Hughes arrived in Spain on September 1937, spending less than a year in Madrid, Valencia and later in Barcelona, until he finally decided to leave the country in August 1938 before the victory of the fascists. He lived this experience along with Nicolás Guillén, who helped him greatly, both in his literary work and as a translator. Even before traveling to Spain, his ideological position was clearly defined. He defended the Spanish Republic, with a strong militancy but also with anti-war ideology, knowing that who really suffers the terrors of war are the people, mostly poor and working class, as we can see in his poem "Song of Spain". His intention was clear, he tried to make people aware of the harsh reality of war and also make the American people stand in solidarity with the Spanish people. Langston Hughes believed that if fascism triumphed in Spain, it would

quickly expand throughout Europe and turn into a true global threat. In Spain, the germ against freedom that fascism constituted could be stopped. For this, he contributed this collective aim with many stories based on his own experiences, on historical figures or others that were not so well known, although they were heroic in a certain way; and he reflected on the war from many points of view, such as that of American Brigadists, among which several African-American standouts, Spanish combatants like Enrique Lister, Moors who were fighting on Franco's side despite the astonishment of Hughes himself, and also from the point of view of the intellectuals of that time. This last group includes a great part of Hughes' company while in Spain. After having settled in the Alianza, he met great Spanish artists. He conversed with Alberti and María Teresa León, or with Miguel Hernández, among many others. He also showed the work of the Alianza and how they used their privileged situation within art to promote an anti-fascist and pro-freedom message. However, the Alianza not only fought with art. Several members participated in the fight from the battle fronts, some even losing their lives. The North American poet was amazed with the work of the Alianza, as reflected in a radio speech in 1937 published later by *Volunteer for Liberty* under the title *Madrid's House of Culture*:

It is a place where creative miracles continually happen. It is a place where now, today, art becomes life and life is art, and there is no longer any need of a bridge between the artists and the people—for the thing created becomes immediately a part of those for whom, from whom, it was created. The poem, the picture, the song is only water drawn from the well of the people and given back to them in a cup of beauty so that they may drink- and in drinking, understand themselves.

That is art in Loyalist Spain. And that is the function of Madrid's Alianza, the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas (Hughes, 1937).

His love for Spanish literature became even more real during his stay, and especially for one author, Federico García Lorca. His attraction to the Granadian poet is due to several factors. In the first place, his tragic murder attracted not only the attention of Hughes, but of many foreign readers; also the approach of his poetry, as a vehicle capable of uniting people and art. For this, he used romance, a type of poetry very common during

those years that Lorca perfected. Romance was an extremely common art form due to the poverty of the people, mostly illiterate; romance is based on traditional songs and oral transmission, easy to digest by the people. Romance conveys a simple message of hope and sensitivity. Romance gave a voice to the most marginalized and underserved communities. This ended up captivating Langston Hughes, whose work intended to give voice to African Americans in the United States who were also poor and marginalized.

Langston Hughes ended up discovering a greater social discrimination, classism. The social gap was widening everywhere, distancing the poor from the rich, regardless of the color of their skin. In the *Gypsy Ballads*, Lorca expresses the marginalization of people in their struggle against the tyranny of a system that is pushing them away, building in turn a devastating critique that demonstrates his willingness to stand for the people, as we can see in his poem “Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard”. The same happens in the case of Hughes, who also reports the joys and misfortunes of the African American community that aspired to have total freedom. Both approaches are similar and strengthened the admiration of Hughes towards Lorca. The last element that could contribute to this attraction were the relationships that Hughes established in the Alianza. Most of the friends he met told him a lot about Lorca’s works. Those friends were Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre or María Teresa León among others.

Although the poet spent only a few months in Spain, Spain left an identifiable mark on Hughes. He arrived as a war correspondent, and left enjoying the homeliness and kindness of the Spanish people despite the war. Here, he discovered a love and affection that he had not seen in many other places in Europe or even the world. From the first day, he felt how Spanish people were without prejudice; where racism had no place in the hearts of people who, far from succumbing to their misery, never lost hope or sight in a better future. Langston Hughes lived the daily life of the resistance, the hardness of the front, the heartrending atmosphere of the bombings. He enjoyed the night, the theaters and the Spanish music, as well as the culture and art. He reflected all this not only in his

journalistic articles, but also in his poems. He wrote a series of poems with combatant nature and full of emotions, as we can see in “Madrid (1938)”:

In the darkness of her broken clocks,  
Madrid cries NO!  
In the timeless midnight of the Fascist guns,  
Madrid cries NO!  
To all the killers of man’s dreams,  
Madrid cries NO!

To break that NO apart  
Will be to break the human heart.

As mentioned above, there is something else between Lorca and Hughes, like a kind of symbiosis between their lives. In 1929, many years before Hughes arrived in Spain, Federico García Lorca had traveled to New York and then to Cuba, creating and compiling some poems in one of his best poetry books, *Poet in New York* (1940). The reasons for that trip were initially to give some talks in New York and Cuba, as a special guest brought by the University of Columbia. However, he saw that opportunity as an occasion to escape from an oppressive environment that surrounded him in Spain. It is known that at that moment he was suffering from depression, caused mostly by his doubts about his sexuality. He was in need of a change of scenery. *Poet in New York* includes a fierce criticism of modern American society, based on free mercantilism and industrialization, towards which he expresses disgust. He also shows his anger at the racial discrimination suffered by the black minority, denouncing their situation and the injustices they suffer, as in the case of the gypsies in Spain. In his poem “El Rey de Harlem” Lorca expresses that complaint:

¡Negros! ¡Negros! ¡Negros! ¡Negros!  
La sangre no tiene puertas en vuestra noche boca arriba.  
No hay rubor. Sangre furiosa por debajo de las pieles,  
viva en la espina del puñal y en el pecho de los paisajes,  
bajo las pinzas y las retamas de la celeste luna de cáncer.

The work contrasts nature and civilization, while the poet faces the dehumanization of modern society, proposing a return to nature and an exaltation of freedom and love. All with a personal feeling, externalizing his emotions; it is not a mere description of the city, but an external projection of his inside. Unlike Langston Hughes, Federico García Lorca experienced the worst face of humanity, with a deep pessimistic reflection of the course taken by modernity, which was leaving aside a society that lived completely alienated to the new system. Nevertheless, he found his experience in the big city useful. He had the opportunity to move among artistic circles of that time. He maintained contacts with African-American poets such as James Baldwin, Romare Beardem, Alvin Ailey and Albert Murray, usually redirecting their conversations towards Langston Hughes, the epicenter of African-American poetry and the Harlem Renaissance, which was in full swing. In addition, they reviewed this versatile artistic period from several points of view, exchanging ideas and appreciations. The admiration that Hughes felt for Lorca was therefore somewhat reciprocated; the Granadian poet wanted to learn about the most popular figure of African-American culture of those years. That group of artists and intellectuals accompanied him on his raids through the Harlem pubs. Even though not all was fun. Lorca also visited Methodist churches for the worship of African-Americans, and poor and humble neighborhoods of the city.

His friendships went beyond literature. An example was his relationship with the music critic Olin Downes or with John Crowm, who introduced him to the *jazz* musical trend; such was the impact that African-American music caused in him that he came to establish a parallelism with the music of his people, *flamenco*. Between both genres he could appreciate some links that not only include the musical but also the spiritual, which implies the soul of the music. This appreciation was also made by Langston Hughes when he came to Spain, amazed by *flamenco* dances and songs, especially by La Niña de los Peines, a *cantaora* whose voice he could delight in during his stay in Spain. Langston Hughes himself tells in his memoirs that he was a regular at flamenco concerts, and also



establishes a close relationship between *flamenco* and *the blues*, something unseen until that moment.

Two different genres, belonging to two distant cultures: it presupposes something strange and difficult to understand. But both writers had a great knowledge of music, which was a common element in their works (many poems by Lorca were sung, as the "Romance del Amargo" sung by Camarón or Manzanita singing the "Romance Sonámbulo", even Lorca himself composed some songs like "La Tarara"). This knowledge helped them to expand their tastes and enjoy new genres so unknown in their cultural environment. The points in common that both writers establish between *flamenco* and *the blues* are not profound. For that reason, we will focus more on them, but keeping the initial ideas of the two writers as references.



### III. THE BLUES & FLAMENCO

There are actually many features and elements that the blues and flamenco share: origins and roots, context, form that they are played, emotions, feelings and issues expressed among others. These similarities are illustrated in these fragments from *Essays on Art, Race, Politics and World Affairs* by Langston Hughes:

Flamenco is to Spain, I suppose, what the blues are to America- I mean the real Negro folk blues. And the flamencos seem to have the same effect on their audience as blues do when sung in the Negro theatres of the deep South. People yell and cry out and stamp their feet. Flamencos are the kind of Spanish songs that make folks shout, *Ole!*

The Afro-American poet expresses as well:

The flamencos are like blues in that they are sad songs, with a triumphant sadness, a vital earthiness about them from which life itself springs.

As we can appreciate from Hughes' experiences, both genres are closely related and it is not only mere coincidence. Thus, we will go further and analyze all these features that they have in common. Firstly, we will focus on the origins of both and how they are somehow similar from their roots; which involves the process they have gone through to become what they truly are, and of course the two ethnic communities and locations where they originated. Traces lead us to Africa. As we know, *the blues* clearly presents African influences, in particular from the West. That is because part of the African population was captured as slaves and transported to America, where they suffered from severe hardships, punishment and cruelty. Their only 'possession' was the culture they brought with them, mainly consisting of ancient forms of music and native heritage, always transmitted orally. In this case similarities are not so evident, but it is true that *flamenco* has always been transmitted orally; and although it does not belong to gypsies, its appearance and development could not be understood without taking them into account. It is only when they arrive in Andalucia that they mixed their culture with the one that was there at that time, influenced by various African ethnic groups: Jews, Moorish and *Andalusians*. The birth of *flamenco* is the result of the constant friction among gypsies and these

communities. This kind of association also happens in the case of *the blues*, when black workers (ex-slaves) after the Emancipation Proclamation interact with the white society from the South, triggering this new genre. So, they are not the exclusive inventors of *the blues* and *flamenco* respectively, but they set the path that these genres would follow.

For a long time, many generations of gypsies and black people had gone through many trials. They were persecuted, assassinated, or even thrown out from their original lands. Therefore, we have two different groups in a place where they do not belong and forced to live in misery. Their conditions in the new country did not get better: both communities were abused by authorities, suffered from injustices, segregation, poverty and social isolation. Most of them were secluded and kidnapped, feeling disconnected with their family ties. Tragedy was the key element on their everyday life. They were powerless and at the mercy of a dominant white society from which they sought approval (despite the bulla of Carlos III, which relieved the legal situation of gypsies in Spain, and the Emancipation Proclamation). It is also in this environment where the figure of the individual takes strength. In the case of *the blues* we find the lonely black individual (so called *Negro* at that time) who goes back and forth with his music; the same occurs with the marginalized and isolated gypsy and his romantic and charismatic image.

The socio-historical context was crucial for the form that music adopted. *The blues* emerge, as we have seen, through the interaction of free black workers and white society, but there was some previous background: many ancient patterns and expressions brought from Africa were developed during slavery. The African custom of *call & response* (one initiates the topic and a chorus responds), is very popular in African-American religious songs, the spirituals and the importance of gospel, and monodic chants boosted the blues born during the last decades of the XIX century in the rural areas. Nevertheless, one of the most important clues in the shaping of *the blues* were the *hollers*: very short songs half sung half shouted, stated by only one man, commonly a laborer, singing his life with a deep voice and an intimate and intensive sentiment. Amiri Baraka, in his book *Blues*

*People*, writes down: “But the small farms and sharecroppers’ plots produced not only what I think must have been a less self-conscious work song but a form of song or shout that did not necessarily have to be concerned with, or inspired by, *labor*. Each man had his own voice and his own way of shouting- his own life to sing about” (1963:61). This simplistic expression is curiously also in the early origins of *flamenco*. The first impressions came from the first shouts or echoes of suffering. Chocolate, one of the best *seguiriyeros* ever, said “el *cante* viene del grito” (quoted in *Guía del flamenco*, 1999: 38).

All of these circumstances resulted in a way of expression that, together with many influences, contributed to the creation of two artforms that would feel extremely personal, passionate; something that cannot be explained, something that you have to live in order to feel. They also affirm that they have an inner state, an inner feeling which can only be inherited and holds all this artistic essence. For the African-American this would be their *soul*, whereas for *flamenco* it would be the *duende*. Rabassó explained in 1998: “existen muchas analogías entre el duende flamenco y el *soul* de la música negra: El alma andaluza es la consecuencia de una cultura milenaria que tiene en la tradiciones tartésico-cretenses su punto de partida. La música negra llevará arropada detrás de sus cantos toda una sapiencia, una religiosidad, un culto particular”(1998: 371). Both are mundane expressions of a community that has been isolated socially and geographically from their natural environment, and that musically expresses the cultural memory of a collective past.

Secondly, we are going to explore two fields where they are closely related and their similarities become more evident: the way that they are played and the emotions, sentiments and issues they express. Among a wide variety of subgenres and disciplines, we will only focus on the pure and primitive forms, which correspond to the *country blues* or the most primitive artistic expression from *the blues*, and within the discipline of *cante*, the types that are known as *seguiriyas*, *tonás* and *fandangos*, again the most ancient ones. The most immediate feature of both genres is the high emotional content of their works. They present a personal and very intimate passion, something that *cantaores* and flamenco

lovers have managed to describe as *cante jondo* (*hondo*: deep), with a deep feeling that comes from within the heart, from the soul. There is frequently a single voice, a monodic chant who is drawn over a poetic structure: they recite verses, they are a sort of a literary vehicle, a musical representation of poetry. The individual is a reflection of society itself. In both cases, the composition has an unplanned or spontaneous order; there is no formality, lyrics are not written nor reflected on any paper. They just sing or howl by memory, basing their interpretation on their own experiences. As Manolito el de María said: “Canto porque me acuerdo de lo que he vivido” (quoted in *Guía del Flamenco*, 1999: 38). They merely needed their memory. However, the main voice was not alone. In the case of *the blues* it was accompanied by a guitar, played by the singer himself; and in the case of *flamenco*, *cantaores* did not use to play the guitar, although in many cases there was a guitarist with them. But, what is more remarkable is the interaction between voice and guitar. They flow in a consonant succession called *call & response*.

*Call & response* can be understood as a conversation between guitar and vocals, where the guitar acts as an extension of the voice. Ideas are stated and followed by a guitar lick that responds or merely affirms. It is the basis for *the blues*. One of the most famous examples might be B.B. King, who seems to be having a conversation with ‘Lucille’ instead of singing the *blues*. Of course the guitar solo is improvised as well as the ideas the singer expresses. They pass, change and develop continuously. Everything is performed spontaneously and creates a rational and perfect unexpected flow. This method was not new, it was typical of the African-American work songs and their religious rituals, where as we have seen, a preacher led the voice and a chorus responded. It comes from the primitive African tribes. They brought it with them into the New World, as a part of their culture. This pattern of *call & response* was used by them in many aspects of public everyday life: religious rituals, public gatherings for the discussion of civil affairs, and surely in music.

The distinctive sound of a *Spanish guitar* or *guitarra flamenca* along with a *cantaor* or *cantaora* becomes very popular at the end of the XIX century. Since then, the importance and appearances of this instrument have grown significantly. Guitar players are called *tocadores* and their function is more or less similar to a *blues* guitar, even though the act of *call & response* is not so clear. Guitars accompany the main voice (not in the case of the *tonás*, where the soloist plays without any backing), with whom they interact. Normally, the sound of the guitar is lower than the voice and flows within the rhythm the *cantaor* establishes. They are melodic most of the time excluding some parts at the end or beginning of songs, where they perform single, introducing or concluding the *cantaor* lyrics, as occurs in *the blues*. The guitar orders and regulates the *cante* schemes. This could be considered the most evident example of *call & response* in *flamenco*. It is important to remark that many guitarists have earned a significant reputation during the last decades as soloists (Paco de Lucía, Vicente Amigo) and even some of them have innovated mixing with other genres such as *the blues*, *funk* or *heavy metal*, creating new forms of musical experimentation. Raimundo Amador is a clear example of the mixture between *flamenco* and *the blues*. He has composed many albums (“Noches de flamenco y blues” among others) and played with artists of the caliber of B.B.King.

Improvisation is an extremely important role. As happens in *the blues*, *tocadores* play hearsay, since *tocadores* usually can't read musical notation. They play by intuition, improvising over what they are listening to, following the *cantaor*. They even add their personal touch, their own contribution full of personality: what is known as *falsetas*, variations that the *tocaor* brings, modifying and enriching the melody, in which every note produces its own meaning.

The emotional part is always significant for both genres, regardless of the form in which it is expressed: singing, playing the guitar, or even by dancing. Dancing also constitutes an important discipline in this practice. Dancing focused on improvisation and sensuality, prioritizing the need to externalize internal feelings. In this instance, *flamenco*

is more extroverted than *the blues*. It requires particular abilities that not everybody has. You are either born with the *duende* or not.

Finally, none of the above could be understood without explaining what both cultures really wanted to express. Everything converges on the same vortex, around which all the forms and ways in which art is defined are articulated. We are, of course, talking about the issues that they deal with. Their reason for existing is born from within, from the depths of the soul. Themes are none other than the consequence of their existence, which is the purest and most sincere tragedy. Unhappiness and sorrow mark the individual from the beginning of his days, an individual who laments his way of being. Tía Anica la Piriñaca portrayed in a visual way this emotional state when she said: “Cuando canto a gusto me sabe la boca a sangre” (quoted in *Memoria del flamenco*, 1999:21); she believed that a great *cante* is the one that hurts, that comes from pity. They shall face a tragic destiny from which they cannot escape. One of the greatest *cantaoras* ever, Camarón de la Isla, sings to this unfair destiny reproducing an extract from Federico García Lorca's *Romance del Emplazado*. The song is called 'Romance del Amargo' and included in 'La Leyenda del Tiempo' (1979).

El veinticinco de junio  
le dijeron al amargo  
ya puedes cortar si quieres  
las adelfas de tu patio.  
Pinta una cruz en la puerta  
y pon tu nombre debajo  
porque cicutas y ortigas  
nacerán en tu costado,  
y agujas de cal mojadas  
te morderán los zapatos.  
Será de noche en lo oscuro  
por los montes nantaos,  
donde los bueyes del agua  
beben los juncos soñados.  
Pide luces y campanas.  
Aprende a cruzar las manos,  
y a gustar los aires fríos  
de metales y peñascos,



porque dentro de dos meses  
yacerás amortajado.

Federico García Lorca faithfully exposes this destiny in his work, as Claus Schreiner states in *Flamenco*: "García Lorca's plays reflect this same sense of futility in the pursuit of individual happiness. The moral conventions or material interests, which always lie in the way, are so powerful that no man dare oppose them. His characters become accomplices to the very powers that oppress them by foregoing any expectation of their own happiness"(2000;50).

This lament is manifested because of different motifs, either because of their precarious social situation or because of the individual's own personal punishments. In the first case, lyrics are sad and cruel, reflecting a harsh reality to which they are subjected as oppressed people. Gypsies will regret their poverty, the injustices and torture of the police, the difficult times, their bad luck or despondency in songs like *tonás*, *seguiriyas* or popular *soleás* like the one below:

Señorito a caballo  
que no das los buenos días  
si el caballo tropezara  
otro gallo cantaría.  
Obrero, por qué trabajas  
si pa tí no es el producto  
para el rico es la ventaja  
y para tu familia el luto.  
La tierra pal señorito  
p'al obrero las fatigas  
¡Cuándo pensará el obrero  
deshacer estas injusticias  
que ayudan los manijeros!

African-Americans will also sing about the oppression of the whites and the police, their poverty and misery, with very realistic lyrics, just as Skip James felt on *Hard time killin' floor blues*:

Hard time's is here  
An ev'rywhere you go  
Times are harder  
Than th'ever been befo'

Here there is an example of another regretting *blues* from Ma Rainey's *Slave to the blues*:

Ain't robbed no train : ain't done no hanging crime  
It's that i'm a slave to the blues : even 'bout that man of mine

Blues do tell me: do i have to die a slave  
Do you hear me screaming : you're going to take me to my grave

If i could break these chains : and let my worried heart go free  
Well it's too late now: the blues have made a slave of me

You see me raving : you hear me crying  
Oh lord: this wounded heart of mine

An atmosphere of uprooting, of non-belonging and disapproval on the part of the oppressors will inspire these sad songs.

In the second case, tragedy depends solely on the individual and his sufferings. The artist expresses his pain or impossible love, for the loss of a loved one or the acceptance of something impossible, assimilating his pathos from the beginning. A popular *seguriya* recites:

Si algún día yo a ti te llamara  
y tú no vinieras  
si la muerte amarga a mí me llegara  
yo no la sintiera

At the same time, Son House sings on his *Death Letter Blues*:

You know it's so hard to love when someone don't love you  
Don't look like satisfaction, don't care what you do  
It's so hard to love someone that don't love you  
You know you don't get no satisfaction  
Don't care what you do

You know love had a fault  
Make you do things you don't want to do  
Love sometimes leave you feelin sad and blue

Love had a fault, make you do things you don't want to do  
Love sometimes leave you feelin sad and blue

Although regret is the most recurrent theme, not all songs have to be sad. Within flamenco there is also a plurality of themes. In songs like the *saeta*, issues are religious; *bulerías* or *fandangos* can be joyful and celebratory, as well as *sevillanas*. *Blues* in turn may present religious songs (*Gospel blues*), humor or themes such as sex, as well as quick and cheerful compositions.

Another element in common between *flamenco* and *the blues* is religion. It is a very important experience in their life. They look to religion for a spiritual refuge that transcends the mundane and helps them in their sorrows. They are very dedicated to the faith and they have been devotees from the origin of their communities. Religion is an inheritance that they have modeled and made their own over the years. Their songs are very different from those of other communities, as well as their references. They sing to a spiritual and earthly liberation from a very melancholic existence. Even that modeling has caused them to be reflected in Christ and his martyrdom, 'appropriating' him and including him as one of them. For example, 'La Saeta', written by Antonio Machado, tries to make us see a joyful, liberated Christ, instead of a penitent one. It tries to take away the suffering of Jesus from his agony, representing it as the faith of the gypsies, of the Andalusian people.

¡Oh, la saeta, el cantar  
al Cristo de los gitanos,  
siempre con sangre en las manos,  
siempre por desenclavar!  
¡Cantar del pueblo andaluz,  
que todas las primaveras  
anda pidiendo escaleras  
para subir a la cruz!  
¡Cantar de la tierra mía,  
que echa flores  
al Jesús de la agonía,  
y es la fe de mis mayores!  
¡Oh, no eres tú mi cantar!  
¡No puedo cantar, ni quiero

a ese Jesús del madero,  
sino al que anduvo en el mar!

Blind Willie Johnson, one of the most representative artists of *Gospel blues* prays in his masterpiece 'Dark was the night - cold was the ground':

Dark was the night, and cold the ground  
On which the Lord was laid;  
His sweat like drops of blood ran down;  
In agony he prayed  
"Father, remove this bitter cup  
If such Thy sacred will;  
If not, content to drink it up  
Thy pleasure I fulfill."  
Go to the garden, sinner, see  
Those precious drops that flow;  
The heavy load He bore for thee;  
For thee he lies so low  
Then learn of Him the cross to bear;  
Thy Father's will obey;  
And when temptations press thee near  
Awake to watch and pray

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Even though there are barely a few textual and scholarly analysis of the relationship between these two genres, the situation is pretty different in musical terms. Many albums were released in the 20th century mixing influences and sounds from both musical genres. Probably the most famous and the first ever released was “Sketches of Spain” by Miles Davis. It was recorded between 1959 and 1960 and though he did not intend to make a Spanish album, the final version presented much of Spanish musical culture. The opening piece consists of an arrangement of the second movement of Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* (1939) by Davis and Gil Evans, where they stick to the melody all along the song but with some jazz sounds' incorporations. The rest of songs from the album are again arrangements of Spanish folk songs: "Will o' the Wisp" is taken from Manuel de Falla's ballet “El amor brujo” (1914–1915); "The Pan Piper (Alborada de Vigo)" is referring to a Galician folk style; “Saeta” is a religious song, as “La Saeta” by Antonio Machado, written to be sung during *Semana Santa*; and the last one, “Solea”, is a subgenre of *flamenco*. A year after that “Sketches of Spain” appeared, John Coltrane, one of the most significant saxophonists in music history, released “Olé Coltrane”. Probably thrilled by Davis' "Sketches of Spain", he borrows many elements from Spanish folk songs to perform his ninth album. There are many African-American artists who have got in touch with *flamenco* through the years, whether they are *jazz* or *blues* referents such as Marcus Miller or B.B.King, who performed ‘Bolleré’ together with Raimundo Amador in his album “Noche de flamenco y blues”. Raimundo Amador is actually considered a *flamenco* revolutionary, being able to interpret pure *flamenco* songs and to create new albums where he combines the best of *flamenco* and *the blues*. Another Spanish artist very popular for producing this mixture of genres is Javier Vargas. In 2008 he released *Flamenco blues experience* with Vargas Blues Band, demonstrating his intention to unite these two musical genres in a continuous search for a definite style. The examples of this musical crossbreeding are very wide, both of African Americans adding elements belonging to

flamenco to their works and of Spanish artists adapting their music to traditional African-American music, in this case *the blues*.

Over the last few decades, music has undergone a development that has generally tended to open frontiers and mix styles, which has further encouraged this union. Many *jazz* and *blues* groups have emerged especially in Spain as a result of this global evolution of music (Pata Negra, Caledonia Blues Band) and have innovated in their work to fuse many influences and styles. In his album "Omega", Enrique Morente sings his deepest flamenco accompanied by the rock group Lagartija Nick, or jazz artists have even worked with Hip-Hop singers as in Kase.O's "Kase.O Jazz Magnetism" featuring JazzMagnetism.

We can therefore say that *the blues* is not an isolated and exclusive musical genre of a community. It is true that it was created by African Americans and that it may originally belong to them, but it would be unfair to say that it remains so. Its possibilities, varieties, subgenres, combinations are so many that it is one of the most influential genres of the 20th century, inspiring authors such as Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan. That's why I enjoyed writing this work so much, because it's nice to discover how *the blues* finds so many similarities with *flamenco*, a genre that despite not having the same global recognition that *the blues* has, it has the same magic. At the same time, the fact that two of the greatest writers of the 20th century, Langston Hughes and Federico García Lorca, saw this relationship before anyone else and projected it in their writings so that everyone could appreciate it, motivated me to a great extent to reflect on it. Also the vehemence with which they both related these unknown musical experiences contributed. Despite the external or internal factors that surrounded them, when they talked about music they left all problems behind. Hughes lived his stay mostly besieged by the bombings and still recounted in wonder how the actors of a play sang a *Copla Andaluza*; although Lorca showed a deep rejection of the city of New York, and felt a deep emotional and sentimental depression and a strong empathy for the African-American population that suffered racism and marginalization, he still frequented Harlem's pubs enthusiastically. This very active way of experiencing music also encourages the reader, as it has been in

my case, producing an enormous interest in knowing the reasons that led them to enjoy these apparently very different musical forms, to know them and to establish a connection between them; and if you're a fan of these genres, doing so will be a very rewarding experience.





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