

1 Introduction

<i>La bulería te mueve</i>	<i>The bulería moves you</i>
<i>A ti el soniquete te mueve</i>	<i>Its soniquete moves you</i>
<i>Si tú no tienes soniquete</i>	<i>If you don't have soniquete</i>
<i>Pa qué te metes</i>	<i>Why would you get into it</i>

These are the lyrics from ‘Soniquete’, a composition by the world-renowned flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucía that is named after a term commonly used in flamenco parlance to define rhythmic ‘air’ or ‘feel’. Soniquete moves you, sings the young vocalist Potito before the guitar comes in; but if you don’t have it, you might better stay away. As Bernat Jiménez de Cisneros notes, these lyrics were meant to subtly mock the foreign audiences that de Lucía encountered on his international tours and who dared to clap along to his music despite being unfamiliar with the rhythms (2020, 323n35). As such, these lyrics illustrate what a traditionally localised genre like flamenco can do in international settings, not only for those who know it well but also for those who lack in-depth knowledge about flamenco but feel enthused nonetheless by its technical and rhythmic sophistication. In this Element, I will explore the musical and cultural work achieved by rhythm in increasingly transnational contexts of musical performance and pedagogy. Using modern flamenco guitar as a case study, I will start with the premise that concepts of rhythmic air, feel, and skill are dependent not only on a musician’s ability to successfully navigate the metric structures and sedimented musical knowledge of a genre like flamenco but also on the broader discourses that envelop musical practice. In the context of flamenco, ‘having’ rhythm, as alluded to in ‘Soniquete’, is commonly seen as a sign not only of musical skill but also of a guitarist’s successful participation in artistic and cultural identities, lineages, and affiliations. To examine the relation between rhythm and such broader cultural identifications in a systematic manner, I here propose to combine an analysis of rhythm in modern flamenco guitar with a critical discussion of musical heritage.

In recent years, heritage has become a highly visible concept in flamenco studies, especially since this music was inscribed into the list of Immaterial World Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in November 2010. To be sure, most scholarly responses to the recent ‘heritagisation’ of flamenco have been critical rather than positive. One of the main challenges highlighted by scholars is that bureaucracies of heritage management – represented, in the case of flamenco, by institutions such as Andalusia’s regional government (Junta de Andalucía) and the European Union – tend to be more focused on advancing economic

benefit than on stimulating social participation (Cruces Roldán, 2023, 268–269; Venegas, 2017, 223–226). Scholars have also raised concerns about the lack of improved socio-economic opportunities for the Spanish Roma, more commonly known as Gitanos.¹ While Gitanos were acknowledged in the UNESCO bid as crucial contributors to the development of flamenco, they have often not benefited from funding allocations (Cruces Roldán, 2023, 279–281; Periañez, 2019). Furthermore, prior to 2010, Andalusia’s regional government had already attributed itself ‘the exclusive competency (*competencia*) in terms of knowledge, conservation, research, training, promotion and dissemination of flamenco as a singular element of Andalusian cultural heritage’ (qtd. Cruces Roldán, 2023, 274) in its updated Statute of Autonomy from 2007. This claim, as José Luis Venegas has noted, leaves little room for grassroots communities in Andalusia and beyond to participate in the construction of flamenco as cultural heritage – let alone to interrogate what *inheriting* this music might actually mean (2017, 223–226).

In the context of this debate, the present study explores how rhythm is constructed as cultural heritage through interrelated uses of musical discourse and practice. Firstly, I examine how artistic and pedagogical discourses about rhythm in flamenco guitar are structured around concepts of heritage – in other words, how discourses about rhythm in flamenco are also, to an extent, discourses about heritage. While existing flamenco scholarship tends to focus on institutionalised heritage discourses and agendas, I aim to show how, in the unofficial settings in which flamenco is commonly taught, performed, and discussed, heritage is part of a broader conceptual constellation where it interacts with cognate terms such as ‘tradition’, ‘lineage’, and ‘ancestry’. Analysing such unofficial or, as I will name them, ‘tactical’ identifications with heritage helps me develop a better understanding of the artistic, cultural, and political implications of flamenco’s associated discourses and imaginaries.

Secondly, I will explore how such identifications are established not only on a discursive level but also through practices of flamenco guitar. As Joshua Brown notes, flamenco is thoroughly shaped by ‘notions of, including feelings and values connected to, local sites, settings and performance spaces in Andalusia’ (2014, 9). Similarly, Matthew Machin-Autenrieth has examined how institutional measures to promote flamenco as cultural heritage have impacted on flamenco practices in the city of Granada. Based on local fieldwork among teachers and performers of flamenco guitar, Machin-Autenrieth observes that, when comparing notions of heritage in flamenco song and guitar, ‘musical localism is more

¹ In this Element, I use the terms ‘Spanish Roma’ and ‘Gitanos’ interchangeably. I acknowledge that the term ‘Gitanos’ is more common in Spanish, but also wish to underscore that the word ‘Roma’ was adopted as the preferred endonym (instead of ‘Gypsy’) at the First World Romani Congress in London in 1971.

“tangible” when it comes to *cante*, remaining an allusive concept in guitar performance’ (2017, 158). Contrary to this scholar’s assessment, I will argue that rhythm, as practised in flamenco guitar, has strong and clear ties with concepts of cultural heritage. Highlighting such connections requires a theoretical framework that moves beyond the common notion that rhythm is an inherited musical skill – whether transmitted along racial or sociocultural lineages. Instead, I will argue that rhythm can bring about open-ended identifications with sedimented musical knowledge. Thus, I explore a semantics of rhythm that moves beyond notions of ownership and possession – which also underpins the concept of ‘having rhythm’ that I began with – towards a dynamic where rhythm partially resists inscriptions into recognisable lineages and identities. In this way, I argue, rhythm gestures towards emergent and open-ended concepts of heritage.

I hope that this new way of thinking about the dynamic between rhythm and heritage gives a stimulus to debates about the artistic, racial, and cultural lineages of rhythm spanning most of twentieth century; but also, that it enables new views about the transnational ramifications of a traditionally local genre like flamenco. As Ana María Ochoa noted over two decades ago, the relations between music and local territories are no longer self-evident as they are now negotiated in increasingly transnational contexts (2003, 46). This view certainly applies to the flamenco guitar, which, today, is at the heart of a global industry. Aspiring flamenco guitarists from virtually every corner of the world dedicate vast amounts of time, energy, and resources to travel to Spain and study with eminent maestros; international students spend hours per week on online platforms in search for useful guitar content to support their journeys of musical learning; flamenco guitar teachers, moreover, are offering lessons in virtually every mid-sized town across all continents; and guitar makers (*guitarreros*) are attracting growing numbers of tourists and buyers to their physical workplaces and web stores, thus contributing to the emergence of transnational ‘guitar-scapes’ (Dawe & Dawe, 2001). This broad variety of practices, pedagogies, and imaginaries around the flamenco guitar raises questions about the ways in which traditional flamenco discourse, structured around notions of purity, authenticity, and ancestral continuity, acquires new meanings for new audiences and practitioners beyond the local level. Indeed, if we aim for a truly global meaningfulness of flamenco *as* heritage – which appears to be what transnational heritage agendas envision – then careful attention needs to be paid to the ways in which modern practices of flamenco guitar overflow, and thus have the potential to challenge, traditional identifications with this music on a local level.

Throughout this Element, I will build on the work of various musicologists who have provided detailed classifications and analyses of the metrical structures of flamenco, known as *compases* (Jiménez de Cisneros, 2015; Sainz &

Mbengue, 2022), as well as of a variety of rhythmic phenomena such as embodied percussion, footwork, and *palmas* (handclapping) (De la Torre, 2019; Jiménez de Cisneros, 2020; Romero Naranjo, 2008). I will also engage with various non-academic sources about the flamenco guitar, such as analyses of the stylistic features of individual guitarists and local guitar traditions (among others, see Faucher, 1996; Worms, 2011). However, my analysis of rhythm and heritage in flamenco guitar is not strictly musicological and takes inspiration from a variety of other disciplinary fields, such as cultural studies, performance studies, and heritage studies. Thus, my exploration of rhythmic heritage dialogues with cultural analyses of the Afro-diasporic lineages of rhythm (Diouf & Kiddoe Nwankwo, 2010b; Feldman, 2006) and with a growing body of historically inflected scholarship that has examined the influence of Afro-diasporic traditions on flamenco (Castro, 2020; Goldberg, 2019; Núñez, 2021; Rodríguez, 2014). From the perspective of cultural studies and ethnography, my understanding of rhythm and heritage as inter-related musical and discursive categories builds on Lila Ellen Gray's study of Portuguese fado, which starts with the premise that the 'poetics about music making are inseparable from music's social life' (2013, 6), as well as on Kevin Dawe and Moira Dawe's suggestion that guitars, like other musical instruments, 'are empowered, not only by their sound but also by the written word, verbalizations, visual imagery, gestures and movements imbued with values and ideals that are created and maintained within specific social, cultural, political and economic settings' (2001, 64).

My analysis of modern flamenco guitar is interdisciplinary as well as practice-based. I have been a flamenco guitarist for over twenty years and have spent long periods in Andalusia, where I have studied and performed in a variety of formal and informal settings. My double background as a cultural scholar and flamenco musician has given me a keen interest not only in the intricacies of the rhythms of flamenco but also in the discourses that shape musical learning. Thus, the challenges and moments of musical fulfilment that I have experienced as a flamenco guitarist will be key points of reference here, as they have helped me navigate, and also challenge, ingrained perceptions about flamenco long before I started thinking about this study. Furthermore, my ways of observing and examining the embodied processes of flamenco guitar playing are informed by uncountable hours of guitar practice that have been a crucial part of my life for many years.

The argument of this Element is divided into four analytical sections and a conclusion. In Section 2, I build the theoretical framework for subsequent sections. I provide an overview of existing theoretical work on rhythm and heritage in a variety of contexts and discuss how rhythm operates at the intersection of

musical discourse and practice. At the end of Section 2, I explore how rhythm builds on sedimented elements from the flamenco repertoire associated with a living past; but also, how it is a fluid and open-ended form of musical practice that has the capacity to resist identifications with pre-established frameworks of meaning. Thus, I theorise rhythm as a practice that hovers between identification and open-endedness and will suggest that this dynamic can also help us rethink concepts of musical heritage. Building on this framework, in Sections 3 and 4 I examine the intersections between rhythm and heritage in two local flamenco guitar traditions commonly associated with a distinctive type of rhythmic playing: Jerez de la Frontera (hereafter Jerez) and Morón de la Frontera (hereafter Morón). In these sections, I analyse historical discourses about rhythmic distinctiveness in both localities, as well as relevant features of the poetics, pedagogies, and musical practices of some of these traditions' most eminent representatives. In both sections, the tension between identification and open-endedness already alluded to informs my reading of rhythmic discourses and practices in Jerez and Morón, and here I will also interrogate my own ways of 'inscribing' rhythm into recognisable frameworks of meaning. Finally, Section 5 draws on examples from an online flamenco guitar contest launched during the Covid-19 pandemic to explore how contemporary rhythmic concepts are shaped by the new realities of a transnational and digitally mediated flamenco industry.

Throughout this Element, I will use the term 'modern' not as a reference to a rigid temporal framework, but rather in the way that this adjective is commonly used in flamenco parlance, where modern guitar practices are often counterposed to more traditional ways of playing. The arrival of a modern style of flamenco guitar playing can broadly be attributed to the great advances in technical skill and harmonic and melodic richness made during the second half of the twentieth century. While eminent guitarists such as Niño Ricardo (1904–1972) and Sabicas (1912–1990) are among the first who initiated these developments, Paco de Lucía (1947–2014) is unanimously considered as the most revolutionary flamenco guitarist of all times.² For the purpose of this study, I will focus on developments in flamenco guitar in the wake of Paco de Lucía's ascension to fame in the late 1960s and early 1970s – especially after the release of his *rumba* 'Entre dos aguas' in 1973. Later generations of guitarists have largely built on the technical and compositional advances made by Paco de Lucía and his generational peers, such as Manolo Sanlúcar (1943–2022) and Serranito (1942–). On later pages, I will occasionally use the term 'contemporary' when referring to some of these younger guitarists, such as Diego del

² For the sake of brevity and readability, in this Element I will identify all flamenco artists by using the artistic names under which they are commonly known.

Morao and Dani de Morón. My analysis of their work does not pretend to be exhaustive, and inevitably I will not be able to cover the contributions of some of these very influential guitarists with the attention each of them deserves. I hope, however, that this study will succeed in developing an analytical framework that can inform future critical work on the flamenco guitar.

A comment on translation seems in order. As this Element moves at the intersection of theoretical work, musical analysis, and cultural analysis, it dialogues with numerous publications and other sources in Spanish that have not been translated into English. All English translations of these sources are mine. Occasionally, when the original wording seemed particularly important, I have elected to print the original quotation alongside the English translation to allow the reader to capture the implication of certain terms, comments, or lyrics in the original language. Due to the brevity of this format, there is no scope for an exhaustive discussion of some of the terminology that I will employ throughout this Element. I offer brief working definitions of such terms when they first appear in the body of the text and have added a glossary as a separate document, where I expand slightly on relevant terms and signpost the reader to the work of other scholars who have discussed them in more detail. The reader is also invited to consult a Spotify playlist with an overview (where possible) of the compositions and recordings that I examine on later pages.³

The musical transcriptions that have been included in later sections were all created for this Element and have not been published elsewhere. While no single method for flamenco guitar notation exists to date, popular conventions in existing methods have been followed to convey some of the idiosyncrasies of flamenco guitar playing. Thus, taps on the guitar soundboard, known as *golpes*, are marked in the transcriptions with an asterisk.

2 Rhythm and Heritage

2.1 Rhythm, Metre, and Accentuation

In this Element, I broadly define rhythm as referring to the organisation of musical time. In the field of musicology, various theorists have observed how rhythm is reliant as much on structure as on a certain degree of irregularity. Pierre Sauvanet, for instance, defines rhythm as ‘a fluid but constructed totality’ (‘un ensemble fluid mais construit’) (2000, 144), a definition that encapsulates how rhythm is a way of ordering musical time that can also suggest tension, change, and movement. Roger Scruton’s definition of rhythm points to the same

³ The playlist is entitled ‘Rhythm and Heritage in Modern Flamenco Guitar’ and can be retrieved here: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7qx81ufHfEPDgj2USobrMW?si=0991d50bba4b43f5&pt=527dad6c1121e9ba17efe935159f6e12>.

dynamic; he notes that '[r]hythm plays with regularity, but is not reducible to it: the pulse is both counted and discounted' (Scruton, 1997, 24). For Scruton, rhythm does not automatically result from the regular statement of the beat or pulse; rather, it emerges when musicians 'animate' the pulse by suggesting that beats bring each other into being instead of merely following one another (Scruton, 1997, 35). In a similar vein, the Spanish guitarist José María Gallardo observes that, in the context of flamenco, not playing the pulse can be a greater sign of rhythmic feel than performing it mechanically: "[h]aving feel" or "playing with feel" isn't but [having] a pure and authentic understanding of rhythm in all its magnitude, without overemphasising the metric pulse, as the great majority of academically trained performers tend to do' (qtd. Torres Cortés, 2020, 143).

As can be seen, these scholars agree that rhythm reflects a musician's ability to creatively navigate an overarching temporal framework. Some theorists have indicated that rhythmic creativity is subject to a series of procedures that are musically and culturally specific. In other words, forms of rhythmic tension or discrepancy need to draw on a repertoire of recognisable strategies to become meaningful. Kofi Agawu, in his discussion of the concept of 'African rhythm', names a variety of 'culturally relevant habits' used by musicians to generate new content within existing musical structures; for instance, 'play, maneuver, tease, withhold, extend, disguise, exaggerate' (2016, 189). Such habits, adds Agawu, only become truly meaningful when they operate successfully within an existing cultural framework or 'thought regime' (190). For instance, forms of rhythmic teasing can only be appreciated if the audience has a certain understanding of the directions that a musical phrase would normally take. In other words, the expectations that shape perceptions of music, as studied in more detail by scholars such as Leonard Meyer (1956) and Maria Witek (2016), cannot exist without an understanding of musical context.

Two specific areas of musical practice in which forms of rhythmic tension and freedom commonly appear are, on the one hand, tonal movement, and, on the other, accentuation, which refers to forms of musical emphasis or stress. According to Victor Zuckerkandl, tones can suggest various forms of movement within musical time; they can overstate or understate the continuity of what he calls the 'time wave', contradict it, cross it, and also 'produce all sorts of combinations of these possibilities by doing the same or different things in the different areas' (1959, 119). Other theorists have expanded the concept of temporal movement beyond the tonal level towards other types of accentuation. Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, for instance, distinguish between three types of accentuation in music: a phenomenal accent, which refers to any way in which a musical moment is made to stand out; a structural accent, which refers to a 'point

of gravity’ within the context of a phrase or section; and, thirdly, the metrical accent, which points towards the relative strength of a beat in relation to its metrical context (1983, 17). Building on the work of these scholars, Bernat Jiménez de Cisneros (2015) has provided a detailed analysis of the ways in which the performance and perception of pulses and accents at different levels contributes to the complex rhythmic experiences in flamenco.

Thus far, my discussion has outlined various musical procedures associated with rhythmic tension and freedom without considering the sociocultural dimensions of rhythm. Indeed, rhythm is often not produced by one single musical voice but rather results from the highly coordinated distribution of interlocking voices and layers of musical meaning (Denning, 2015, 194–195). Matthew Butterfield suggests, for instance, that jazz ‘swing’ is not only an aesthetic but also a social-interactive process, as it tends to be hard for musicians to play rhythmically without a minimal level of personal attunement (2010, 318–335). In the context of modern flamenco guitar, such divisions of rhythmic labour can be seen as both an internalised and an externalised process. In live performances and recordings, for instance, modern flamenco guitarists usually rely on a rhythm section comprised by a group of *palmeros* (clappers) alongside a modest number of percussion instruments (most commonly cajón) to lay out the basic pulse of a certain style. The presence of a rhythm section affords modern guitarists with greater freedom than previous generations of players to create tensions within the rhythmic context provided by their fellow musicians. On an individual level, however, such divisions of rhythmic labour are also reflected by the guitarist’s body. For instance, guitarists can switch between different footwork patterns to evoke a specific pulse and feel (also see Jiménez de Cisneros, 2020, 210–220). Some guitarists use soundboard percussion or emphatic bodily movements and gestures to accentuate moments of rhythmic tension, especially when performing the cadence (known in flamenco as the *remate*). Recent examples are Dani de Morón’s frequent uses of soundboard percussion towards the end of the cadence (see Section 4.3); Diego del Morao’s typical nods with the head as a substitute for the cadence (see Section 5.3); or Yerai Cortés’s movements with the right arm to build up tension before the end of the cadence.⁴ In these different scenarios, then, rhythmic playfulness can emerge out of the interactions between a flamenco guitarist and other musicians, but also due to the interlocking roles of different embodied aspects of flamenco guitar playing.

Most flamenco styles, also known as *palos*, are structured around metrical forms of twelve beats. Two key styles that I will discuss in this Element are *soleares*,

⁴ See the following performance by Yerai Cortés: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Feolgrj3aAY.