

The role of consumption and globalization in a cultural industry: The case of flamenco

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Abstract

The rise of cultural industries is in part facilitated by the rise of leisure and entertainment in the advanced industrialized economies. This article explores one such example, taking ‘ethnic’ art, flamenco, and examining the role of consumption in shaping flamenco, both as an art form and as an industry. The global reach of the flamenco industry is assessed by focusing on two major markets, Japan and the United States. It suggests the presence of a geographic paradox in contemporary cultural industries, which, on the one hand, points to the need to retain their place-based identity, and on the other hand, indicates the need for regional cultures to establish links to export markets for their survival. It also shows that contemporary cultural change is not a unilateral process of the global invading the local. Rather, it is a process of consumers interpreting, appropriating, and adopting a cultural commodity in their own terms.

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1. A geographical paradox in the age of globalization

While art and culture have been a subject of economic inquiry since the 1960s (Baumol and Bowen, 1993; Kamanian and Martorella, 1983; Heilbrun and Gray, 2001), economic geographers have only recently begun acknowledging the importance of cultural industries as a source of employment in advanced industrialized economies (Pratt, 1997a,b; Scott, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2005; Coe, 2000; Power and Scott, 2004). Production in cultural industries, comprised of learning, display, and sale of literary and visual arts, crafts and music, is largely grounded in uniquely place-specific cultural heritages, and therefore has become viewed as relatively resistant to the perils of off-shoring (see, for example, Aoyama and Izushi, 2003; Izushi and Aoyama, 2006; Gibson and Connell, 2003). Skills in cultural industries are often based on tacit and uncodified knowledge, and as a result, proximity and agglomeration

still matters for cultural industries (for example, see Pollard, 2004).

The rise of cultural industries is in part facilitated by the growing popularity of leisure and entertainment activities in the advanced industrialized economies. Cultural industries provide an ‘experience’, a new and growing source of value in the economy, in commodified and uncommodified forms. While globalization is frequently viewed as synonymous to cultural homogenization, demand for distinctive cultural experiences is on the rise, through tourism, ‘food tourism’ (visiting local restaurants serving ‘ethnic’ cuisines), as well as consumption of World Music, festivals and cultural performances (Connell and Gibson, 2004; Dunbar-Hall, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Nash, 2000; Waterman, 1998). This further reinforces the need for regional cultures to establish links to export markets for their survival, thereby introducing awkward global–local tensions which are often paradoxical to their place-based identity.

To better understand the contemporary geographic paradox of cultural industries, in this article I will take the case of the flamenco industry from Southern Spain. Flamenco, which typically includes singers, dancers, guitarists and

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most recently percussionists, has been referred to an ‘art complex’ and involves a particular form of music, dancing (which includes stomping of the feet), singing and hand clapping (Manuel, 1989). It originated from the most economically and socially marginalized gypsy¹ communities in Andalusian cities of Cadiz, Seville, Granada and Jerez de la Frontera. Its humble origin makes the survival and the growth of this regional culture particularly intriguing. Their humble origin resembles that of blues music in Memphis, USA which, according to Hall (1998, p. 605), represents the birth of a “popular art ... created bottom-up”. He further claims that blues shows how “the music of an underclass could literally become the music of the world” (Hall, 1998, p. 602), and that “there is no previous parallel at all in the history of music ... for this was a music created by a desperately poor and exploited rural underclass ...” (Hall, 1998, p. 602). Flamenco arguably is the parallel to blues that Hall had looked for but did not find. The similarities between the blues and flamenco go beyond their origin to their art form as well, starting with the participation of all those present. Hall (1998, p. 561) characterizes blues as “the competition in singing or playing; the strong dance rhythms; the over-emphatic repeated beat to produce a state of trance; the lyric improvisation and variation; the use of everyday objects like pots and pans and spoons as instruments; the use of call-and-response principle, wavering of pitch, the great complexity of rhythms, rhythmic counterpoint between voices, between instruments, or between voice and instrument” which are all characteristics of flamenco as well.

Research on flamenco has so far been almost exclusively focused on its art form, in areas of music, ethnomusicology, and dance (Manuel, 1989). Also, numerous studies have been conducted on Andalusian identity, the gypsies, and its socio-cultural aspects (Charnon-Deutsch, 2002; Douglass, 1992; Gay y Blasco, 2001; Leblon, 1995; Mulcahy, 1989; Nair, 2002; San Román, 1975; Yoors, 1974). Yet, production, consumption, and the survival of the flamenco industry remain largely unexplored. This is particularly perplexing in view of other prominent studies on Jamaican, Brazilian, Balinese, Swedish and Australian aborigine music industries (Gauthier and Yúdice, 2002; Kozul-Wright et al., 1998; Dunbar-Hall, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Perrone and Dunn, 2002; Power, 2002). International policy makers in various agencies such as UNESCO, UNCTAD, and the World Bank have begun exploring how supporting creative industries would lead to local economic development in both the developed and developing countries

(Gibson and Connell, 2003; UNCTAD, 2004; World Bank, 2002; Van den Borg and Russo, 1999).

In this paper I will explore the origins and development of flamenco art complex, with a particular emphasis on the role of consumption in shaping this art complex. The objective is to come to a better understanding of how a cultural activity with a particular geographic identity is sustained through links to both the locality and the global markets. I show how the diffusion of a cultural product interacts with contemporary globalization and ends up transforming itself from a regionally embedded art to a viable export commodity through tourism, as well as through the rise of consumerism of the ‘exotic’ products in advanced industrialized society. Cultural characteristics of consumption that pertains to exoticism, which involves aspects of orientalism as well as occidentalism, will also be explored by taking the cases of Japan and the United States. Participant observation of the students of flamenco dance was conducted in Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan in 2002 and in Atlanta and Boston in 1998 and 2003–05.

2. The role of consumption in a cultural industry: from regionally embedded art complex to export commodity

In *Cities of Civilization*, Hall (1998) refers to the importance of the affluent, new generation of consumers who facilitated the diffusion of Chicago blues. He also claims that “the union of art and technology and commerce is one of the most complex and therefore most difficult in the history of human ingenuity” (Hall, 1998, p. 603). Music is perhaps the most prominent information ‘content’ that emerges out of geographic mobility of people. The diffusion and popularity of music has been reinforced by technologies, starting with the radio waves to recording media to now the Internet. Just as in any other industry, for a music genre to gain popularity, it necessitates an expansion to an export market near and far. To successfully move beyond the initially intended target audience, a music genre needs to be carefully packaged and marketed. Consumers seeking leisure and entertainment in the developed world are increasingly oriented toward discovering the unique, distinctive, and sometimes personalized ‘experience’ in return for their time and money, and often as an expression of class and ideology (Bourdieu, 1984; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005; Katz-Gerro, 1999; Warde et al., 1999). As a result, a bundle of art form which falls into the category of ‘foreign’ and ‘exotic’ are highly sought after today (Haynes, 2005; Kassabian, 2004). The popularity of *Indie-rock* (independent rock’n roll bands) among American youth, or the popularity of Korean actors formerly completely unknown among the Japanese audience are contemporary examples. The Internet played a major role in facilitating the rise of popular culture, as well as the counter mass-media and mass-culture in the age of mature consumer capitalism.

While the origin of Flamenco has long been attributed to the Spanish gypsies who arrived in Iberian Peninsula in the 15th Century, its emergence as an art form remains highly

¹ Gypsy is the term used by Europeans as they were misunderstood to be originally Egyptians. They are today increasingly referred to as ‘roma’ or ‘romani’, the word that means people in their language. However the roma population of Spain is often regarded as distinctive from the rest as they long ceased to be nomadic (forced settlement) and lost the language. I will therefore use the term gitano or the Spanish gypsies to address this population and also distinguish them from the recent roma immigrants from Romania to Spain.

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