

**BETWEEN TRADITION AND SUBVERSION.  
TREATMENT OF FOLKLORISED MUSICAL REFERENCES IN  
THE EARLY FEATURE FILMS OF PEDRO ALMODÓVAR**

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ИЗМЕЂУ ТРАДИЦИЈЕ И СУБВЕРЗИЈЕ.

ТРЕТМАН ФОЛКЛОРИЗОВАНИХ МУЗИЧКИХ РЕФЕРЕНЦИ У  
РАНИМ ДУГОМЕТРАЖНИМ ФИЛМОВИМА ПЕДРА АЛМОДОВАРА

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**ABSTRACT**

The subject of this paper is the unconventional and highly subversive treatment of musical material of folkloric origin in the films of Pedro Almodóvar: *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, 1980) and *Labyrinth of Passion* (*Laberinto de pasiones*, 1982). These films are representative examples of the director's experimental artistic poetics based on the interweaving of local and global cultural features. The focus is, therefore, on the folkloric elements of the Spanish and Catalan musical tradition and their transformation and recontextualisation in relation to the socio-political reality of post-fascist Spain. Consequently, well-known theatrical musical pieces and dances such as the pasodoble, zarzuela and sardana acquire transgressive qualities through an unusual play with traditional and postmodern signifiers, aimed at overthrowing conservative patriarchal authority under the Francoist regime.

**KEYWORDS:** Pedro Almodóvar, film music, musical folklore, *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*, *Labyrinth of Passion*.

## АПСТРАКТ

Предмет истраживања у овом раду јесте неконвенционални и крајње субверзиван третман музичког материјала фолклорне провенијенције у филмовима Педро Алмодовара – *Пеји, Луси, Бом и друге дјевојке са њомиле* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, 1980) и *Лавириниј сѝрасѝи* (*Laberinto de pasiones*, 1982). Ријеч је, дакле, о оним филмовима који се могу сматрати репрезентативним примјером редитељеве експерименталне умјетничке поетике, засноване на међусобном преплитању локалних и глобалних обиљежја културе. Нагласак је, притом, на фолклорним елементима шпанске и каталонске музичке традиције, и њиховој трансформацији и реконтекстуализацији у односу на друштвено-политичку реалност постфашистичке Шпаније. Тако и препознатљиви музичко-сценски и плесни облици попут пасадобла, зарзуеле и сардане, кроз несвакидашњу игру традиционалних и постмодернистичких означитеља, попримају транспресивна својства којим се у значајној мјери поништава конзервативни патријархални ауторитет у доба франкизма.

Кључне речи: Педро Алмодовар, филмска музика, музички фолклор, *Пеји, Луси, Бом и друге дјевојке са њомиле*, *Лавириниј сѝрасѝи*.

Pedro Almodóvar began his career as a director by producing his first short films in the 1970s, during the final moments of General Francisco Franco's police, military and cultural repression. Franco's Spain was politically and culturally isolated from other European countries, with a firmly established fascist regime that abolished political pluralism, ethnic equality and public freedom of expression. Shortly after the end of Francoism, Spanish civil society began to open up and take an interest in the contemporary art of marginalised artists. However, the revolutionary subcultural and countercultural movements of the time, such as *nueva ola* ("new wave") and *movida madrileña* ("Madrilenian scene"), offered a more open attitude towards intangible cultural and folkloric heritage. Thus, the newly emerged Spanish collective preserved its own cultural and national identity, despite the strong influences of transculturalism, commercialisation, global politics, multiculturalism, identity politics and other globalisation trends.

Under the strong impact of Franco's political and cultural hegemony, Spanish directors such as Florián Rey, Benito Perojo, Juan de Orduña, Luis Lucía, Basilio Martín Patino, Carlos Saura and many others often employed material from folk culture. During this period, indigenous music and dance were used as a strategic and tactical artistic tool to build and affirm a strong Spanish national and cultural identity, which classifies it as politically engaged art.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the *Movimiento*

2 Among many other authors, José Antonio Muñoz-Velázquez and Joaquín Piñeiro Blanca have

*nacional* (National Movement) – the main governing institution of Francoist Spain – both classical and popular music of folkloric origin were included in several Spanish films, albeit carefully purged of national controversy. However, this was not an egalitarian model of musical nationalism, but a more traditional one used to support the increasingly homogeneous Spanish culture.<sup>3</sup> Does this mean that Spanish folk music provided a consistent reflection of the politico-ideological and cultural landscape of Francoist Spain?

Although Carl Dahlhaus explicitly states that folklore is “the clearest expression of musical nationalism”, he contradicts the exaggerated claim that folk music is necessarily the music of a nation (Dahlhaus 1980: 92). By equating the function of exoticism, folkloristic elements and historicism (*ibid.*: 99),<sup>4</sup> it is quite possible that Dahlhaus wanted to point out that what makes folk music special in comparison to European art music is actually its exoticism or another form of sonic Otherness. Therefore, the artistic transposition of musical folklore should not necessarily be interpreted as a politico-ideological strategy to consolidate nationalism, while expressive, folk oriented melodies were obviously used by well-known nationalist composers such as Francisco Asenjo Barbieri (1823–1894), Felipe Pedrell (1841–1922) and Manuel de Falla (1876–1946).<sup>5</sup> This also raises the question of whether the folk elements in Almodóvar’s films are really vehicles of national and cultural associations or if they were used to present a rich palette of tonal colours and the inner dynamic potential of the Spanish musical tradition.

Pedro Almodóvar broke almost completely with earlier Spanish film traditions (D’Lugo 1991: 48), but without resorting to a radical artistic move to eliminate distinct national topics. Although this controversial director categorically refused to leave even a memory or shadow of Francoism in his films (Strauss 2001: 30),<sup>6</sup> it was precisely the inclusion of traditional Spanish musical references (along with many visual features of the narrative) that made it impossible to completely negate

written extensively about music as an ideological and political propaganda tool in the Franco era (see Muñiz Velázquez 1998; and Piñeiro Blanca 2013).

3 In this particular context, it is important to emphasise that General Franco presented the Spanish cultural heritage as dominant, superior and authoritative over other minority cultures in Spain.

4 Dahlhaus argues that 19<sup>th</sup>-century exoticism was a stronger emotional force than “the craving for the exotic” (Dahlhaus 1980: 100), because “the process of collecting heterogeneous material from exotic sources and incorporating it into the here and now in art is aesthetically and technically exactly the same, regardless of whether the remoteness of the sources is regional, social or historical” (*Ibid.*). Although Dahlhaus discussed historicism and exoticism primarily in 19<sup>th</sup> century music, his discourse has strongly influenced a postmodern view. This is worth considering, as exoticism remains an essential category of musical Otherness in Almodovarian postmodern style.

5 These composers also had a major impact on the promotion of Spanish music, i.e., the Spanish national identity beyond its territorial borders.

6 Following the thought of Noël Valis, Marvin D’Lugo also emphasises that the underlying cultural logic of Almodóvar’s first two films is “the refusal and inability to come to terms with the past” (D’Lugo 2006: 23; see also Valis 2002: 282). In his later films, however, especially in his last feature *Parallel Mothers* (2022), Almodóvar explicitly dealt with a very sensitive historical memory: the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).

the remnants of Franco's regime. This cineaste, as Alejandro Yarza argues, parodied central elements of traditional Spanish iconography by subverting the Francoist ideological codes that sought to define national identity (Yarza 1999: 17). By maintaining recourse to the traditional folkloric past, Almodóvar adapted it to his work, which became a mirror of the liberal civil society of post-fascist Spain. This also explains why he did not apply contemporary Spanish musical themes in the conventional way that, for example, artists interpellated by conservative ideologies did. Rather, the popular folklorist-tinged audio-visual fragments Almodóvar used in his early films are almost completely stripped of artistic elitism, passionate patriarchal nationalism and marginal stereotyping of human Otherness.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in the spirit of Bakhtin's carnivalisation, he destabilised normative principles and authoritative worldviews, constructing a new "(g)local" sound that belonged to all ethnic, cultural, sexual and other minorities, but also to non-conservative civilians who valued Spain's intangible cultural heritage. Almodóvar, however, did not resist the romantically obsolete notion of Spain as an "exotic" country that was also portrayed in the post-Franco era.<sup>8</sup> Instead, he ambivalently chose not to eliminate this feature of essentialised exoticism, at least not completely. Since Spain, in the early 1980s, had an extremely rich and diverse musical tradition, from which flamenco stood out as an expressive autochthonous dance, Almodóvar attempted to essentialise various exotic folkloric elements and present the audience with historical, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multinational features of Spanish music.

It is, therefore, fair to say that the post-Franco Spanish identity in the first author's films succeeded thanks to the unity of conventional models of classical and folk music (traditional Spanish melodies and Spanish cultural and national symbols) and avant-garde and commercial artistic values contained in Anglo-Saxon,<sup>9</sup> Spanish<sup>10</sup> and Latin American<sup>11</sup> popular music. The connection between "traditional" and "new" forms of artistic expression is particularly evident in the intertextual and intermedial interweaving of their poetics, as the composite score of Almodóvar's films from the 1980s is based on the collaboration of punk ideology, art music, pop

7 It is important to point out that it was not exclusively men who spread traditional values in the Franco era. For example, women in the "Female Section", which was part of the fascist right-wing party "Falange", actively promoted features of the Spanish folklore tradition (see, for example, Atero Burgos 1990: 31).

8 As Alejandro Yarza writes, even Franco's Spain drew on the image of Andalusia as an exotic space modelled on European romanticism (Yarza 1999: 16).

9 For example, Anglo-Saxon pop songs from the 1950s (*Sail Along Silvery Moon*) and garage punk-rock songs from the 1960s (*Going all the Way*) and 1970s (*Going Away Baby* and *The Young Ones*) are incorporated in Almodóvar's first feature film.

10 In addition to traditional Spanish melodies, his first feature film also includes alternative Spanish pop and punk-rock songs with a highly subversive quality, such as *Muy cerca de ti*, *Tu loca juventud* and *Murciana marrana*.

11 The musical reference played during the last film scene and the end credits of the film *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* is the song *Estaba escrito*. This is merengue, a popular Latin American dance sung by Monna Bell.

art, camp aesthetics and Spanish or Latin American popular folklore. His first feature-length projects, however, consist largely of pre-existing music imbued with a transgressive aura, for it was not until his fourth feature film—*What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984)—that Almodóvar (temporarily) consolidated his professional relationship with Spanish film composer and musician, Bernardo Bonezzi.<sup>12</sup> Following Claudia Gorbman's concepts, one could say that the director from La Mancha presents himself here as an "auteur director" and "méloman".<sup>13</sup> Pedro Almodóvar is indeed the complete *auteur* of his film projects. He was involved in the script, in the production and occasionally even as an actor and musical performer. Above all, it was he who eclectically assembled an inherently postmodern musical collage of different genres and styles that form a crucial aspect of his initial cinematic language. Over time, the director's attitude towards traditions and folkloric-tinged musical references became less subversive, especially in the mid-1990s when he began a successful collaboration with composer Alberto Iglesias. However, despite more sublime aesthetics, his films from the 1990s and 2000s retain a recognisable carnivalesque artistic style that makes his "Almodramas" special. This article, however, focuses on classical and popular music inspired by Spanish or Catalan folklore, with an emphasis on the transgressive potential of folkloric expression in its applied form.

### TREATMENT OF TRADITIONAL AND FOLKLORIC MUSIC IN ALMODÓVAR'S EARLY POSTMODERN FILMS

The melodico-thematic structures and the rhythmic backbone of folk music themes were subjected to various subversive artistic practices in postmodernism, which differed markedly from the contemplative aesthetic regulative of modernism. Sometimes, the processing of folklore quotations obscured the original musical text to such an extent that their sonic representation resulted in complete sensory unrecognisability.<sup>14</sup> It is fairly certain that Almodóvar's feature film projects from the 1980s and 1990s were strongly influenced by the postmodern worldview when he used folkloric material to retroactively sound urban and rural landscapes of Spain

12 It is important to note, however, that Bernardo Bonezzi composed two highly subversive songs, *Suck it to me* and *Gran Ganga*, for Almodóvar's film *Labyrinth of Passion*. These songs were featured on Pedro Almodóvar and Fabio McNamara's album *¿Cómo está el servicio... de señoras!* (1982–3) shortly afterwards.

13 According to Claudia Gorbman, music is a platform for the idiosyncratic expression of many filmmakers' tastes and, thus, conveys meaning not only in terms of plot and theme, but also meaning as a signature of the author himself (Gorbman 2007: 151). For this reason, Almodóvar could be called a "méloman", because he reuses the fragments of pre-existing music (and in his later films the original music as well) according to his own ideas and models. In this way, he succeeds in giving the necessary depth of expression to the visual environment in which his exaggerated characters with torn identities reside.

14 This trend was almost paradigmatic in the postmodern era.

and bring them closer to global spectators. However, the unusual visual representation of folkloric content, steeped in kitsch, camp, irony and travesty, inevitably altered traditional musical logic and took on the idiosyncrasies of anachronistic and eclectic postmodern aesthetics. It is quite possible that the director from La Mancha saw in the folkloric references a commercial potential, accessible above all to a mass audience outside the Spanish-speaking world who, like many Romantic artists, were fascinated by its exoticism.<sup>15</sup>

In Pedro Almodóvar's films from the 1980s, one can perceive musical examples with dominant and residual elements of the folklore tradition, which can be classified into four categories:

- literal or slightly altered quotations of traditional Spanish melodies:
  1. *Capriccio Espagnol* and the symphonic suite *Scheherazade* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988)
  2. Catholic religious chants: *Dueño de mi vida* (*Dark Habits*, 1983) and *Oh, Virgen más pura* (*Law of Desire*, 1987)<sup>16</sup>
- traditional and popular Spanish and Catalan musical folklore:
  1. excerpts from the Andalusian Funeral March,<sup>17</sup> the zarzuela *La revoltosa* and the pasodoble *España cañí* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*)
  2. sardana *Dolces carícies* (*Labyrinth of Passion*)
  3. copla *La bien pagá* (*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*)
- sounds of imaginary folklore and their stylistic innovations:
  1. original melodies by Bernardo Bonezzi composed in the spirit of Spanish and Cuban folklore (*Matador*, 1986 and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*)<sup>18</sup>
  2. Bonezzi's pseudo-folkloristic sonic painting of the Eastern Orient (funk-pop song *Gran Ganga* (*Labyrinth of Passion*))

15 Indeed, Manuel García Matos and Carmen García-Matos Alonso have pointed out that even 19th century Russian composers (such as Mikhail Glinka or Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov) partly consolidated their own nationalism thanks to the heritage of traditional Spanish music (García Matos and García-Matos Alonso 2012: 531), i.e., its exotic quality.

16 The religious ambience in Almodóvar's films, characterised by camped sacred melodies, spiritual instrumental music and popular songs with provocative textual content, will be given special consideration in some of the author's later works.

17 This is a musical fragment from the Italian opera *Jone, or The Last Days of Pompeii*, which, especially in this Madrilenian comedy, does not have an exclusively religious function. However, it has an extremely transgressive quality that requires separate study.

18 For more details on Bernardo Bonezzi's musical language in Pedro Almodóvar's feature films from the 1980s, see Buljančević 2022.



- popular Latin American songs with folklore material:
  1. merengue *Estaba escrito* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*)
  2. salsa *Salí porque salí* (*Dark Habits*)
  3. boleros *Lo dudo* (*Law of Desire*) and *Puro teatro* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*)
  4. ranchera ballad *Soy infeliz* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*)

By choosing fragments from the zarzuela,<sup>19</sup> the sardana and the pasodoble as folkloric signifiers of the collective musical identity of the Spanish nation, the director from La Mancha has clearly recognised the broad potential of folk music texts, whose cinematic adaptation is worth considering from a musicological perspective.

#### FOLKLORIC COLOUR OF THE SPANISH PASODOBLE AND ZARZUELA IN THE FILM *PEPI, LUCI, BOM AND OTHER GIRLS ON THE HEAP*

In Almodóvar's first feature-length film, elements of musical folklore are mixed with an experimental and avant-garde aesthetic that incorporates musical references from traditional, artistic and popular music alike. The fragments of classical music, on the other hand, were composed under the strong influence of traditional Spanish and Gypsy chants and military marches. It can, therefore, be said that academic music is an important Spanish national and cultural asset, thanks to genres such as the zarzuela, the jota and the stylised pasodoble. In a way, Spanish art music in Pedro Almodóvar's first films is also traditional, in contrast to genres such as Andalusian copla,<sup>20</sup> which, despite its stylised elements, belongs primarily to the sphere of popular (folk) music. One should keep in mind Stuart Hall's perspective that no form of culture is completely static or (clearly) defined, when even high culture can eventually become part of popular culture (Hol 2012: 317).<sup>21</sup> In a way, this

19 As a traditional musico-scenic work depicting the folklife and customs of the Spanish population, zarzuela (especially the costumbrista) can be considered an example of authentic Spanish folklore, whether or not it contains quotations from folkloric melodies. Moreover, in such a context, even non-folkloric musical references take on folkloric cultural traits.

20 The copla is a traditional Spanish song of folkloric origin that is especially widespread in Andalusia. Interestingly, Pedro Almodóvar himself was involved in the filming of coplas such as *La bien pagá* (a playback performance in the film *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*) and *Tetuaje*.

21 The blurred line between popular and cultivated music could also be explained by the semiotic approach. In quotations from folk music, for example, Eero Tarasti notes an attempt to anchor iconic signs in music (Tarasti 2012: 40). National iconicity, Tarasti writes, became a very important category of signs in music, which, among other things, made it possible to establish connections between folk and art music (*ibid.*). This connection is particularly evident in the examples of classical music with highly stylised folkloric elements that Almodóvar carefully selected for his 1980s feature films such as

confirms the reason for the “Almodovaresque” transfer of musical references from traditional and classical music into the sphere of popular and mass culture, with the unconventional treatment of the pasodoble and zarzuela being particularly salient.<sup>22</sup>

Although the pasodoble was created under the influence of artistic and traditional music, it is generally assumed that, as a product of the Spanish musical tradition, it belongs more to the realm of popular Spanish folklore.<sup>23</sup> It is usually associated with the dance performed at the cruel manifestations of bullfighting, which is still considered a “traditional cultural asset” of Spain in radical right-wing political circles, despite numerous petitions and activism. However, this lively and theatrical gypsy dance was performed as a traditional military march in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, confirming how different kinds of knowledge about the structures of disciplinary and institutional power are woven into its folkloric melody. It can be recognised by its very energetic, dignified and lively music in duple time, the sound characteristics of which have been preserved to some extent to this day.

Pedro Almodóvar first used the sound of the pasodoble in his short film *Salomé* (1978),<sup>24</sup> while a fragment of the popular pasodoble *España cañí* appears in the film *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*. It is an instrumental composition composed by Pascual Marquina Narro and performed by an unknown orchestral ensemble. There are various arrangements of this musical work, often enriched with castanets—a representative Spanish folk instrument that had been part of the repertoire of art music since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the folkloric material of this dance was adapted in such a way that the original thematic gesture was subjected to different rhythmic patterns.

*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap and Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown.*

22 A conventional treatment of these forms can be found in Francoist cinema.

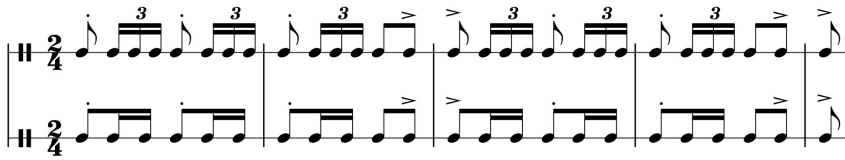
23 Of course, this does not mean that pasodoble cannot also belong to the repertoire of art music in a stylised form, like stylised dances from the baroque suite. The pasodoble, for example, is often danced to music from Bizet’s *Habanera* from the French opera *Carmen*, enriched with the sounds of castanets. This should not be considered an unusual artistic procedure, considering that the opera is set in Seville and one of the main male roles is assigned to the bullfighter. After all, Carlos Saura made the film *Carmen* (1983) based on the novel of the same name by Mérimée, as well as a ballet performance with the famous Spanish choreographer and flamenco dancer Antonio Gades, in which the choreography of the pasodoble is clearly recognisable.

24 This is a pasodoble that originally appears in the three-part opera *El gato montés* (*The Wild Cat*) by the Spanish composer Manuel Penella Moreno. In the film *Salomé*, a woman dances the pasodoble in a grotesque and parodic manner (de la Torre Espinosa 2020: 16), which, in combination with biblical elements, reinforces the transgressive treatment of religious and traditional signifiers.

25 The Spanish baroque guitarist and composer Santiago de Murcia, for example, composed for castanets.



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**Figure 1.** Proposal for two methods of rhythmising the basic thematic gesture from the pasodoble *España cañí*

The above treatment of the pasodoble points to the principle of improvisation within a clearly structured formal conception and a continuous musical logic. Models of stylisation of a particular segment of Spanish folklore can be discerned in the aestheticised, functional and colouristic means of expression of the trichord of the Phrygian scale, with which Almodóvar successfully releases the exoticism of the Spanish sound.<sup>26</sup> One of the popular variants of the pasodoble *España cañí* has a generated textual content, although Almodóvar uses an instrumental version in the film. This choice could be interpreted as fidelity to traditional cultural assets, but not necessarily to the conventions upheld by the dominant social institutions.

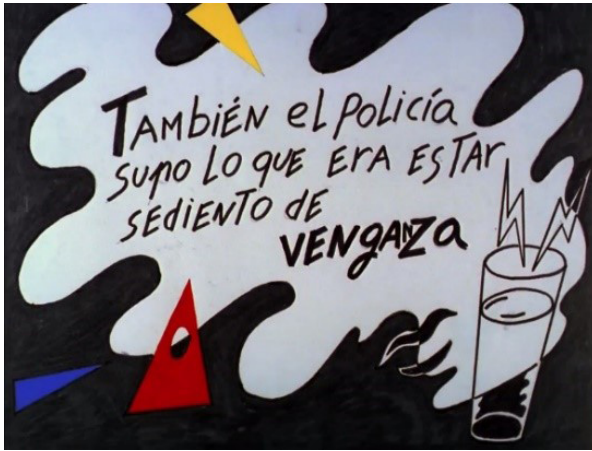
Although there is no direct allusion to Spanish bullfighting in Almodóvar's first feature film, the sensual musicality of the nationalised pasodoble latently refers to its manifesto and to the cultural and ethnic identity of Spanish Gypsies. In this context, Juan Silva Berdús argues that the Spanish dancer and choreographer Encarnación López Júlvez, better known by her stage name "La Argentinita", is responsible for the title—*España cañí* (Berdús 2008: 97). Berdús explains it further by quoting the following words of this esteemed artist:

*«Maestro..., mi querido y admirado don Pascual, tiene usted que cambiarle el título a su precioso pasodoble. Compréndalo usted. Con ese título de El patronista cañí, los americanos no me dejan salir al escenario. ¿Por qué no lo titula usted España cañí? Se me antoja que con tan gitano título, el pasodoble se nos ofrece más español..., más nuestro... y adquiere un cierto matiz de gitanería, resultando, incluso, más torero... porque su pasodoble, maestro, desprende un aroma de torería como pocos.»* [Maestro..., my dear and admired Don Pascual, you must change the title of your precious pasodoble. You must understand this. The Americans will not let me go on stage with this *El patronista cañí* title. Why don't you call it *España Cañí*? It seems to me that the pasodoble with such a gypsy title is more Spanish..., more ours... and acquires a certain nuance of gypsyism, resulting in even more Toreadorian... because this pasodoble, maestro, exudes an aroma of bullfighting like few others.] (2008: 97; author's translation).

26 The Spanish Phrygian (or Gypsy) scale is often used in flamenco music, various traditional Spanish songs and even classical music. It is stereotypically seen by Western listeners as exotic and sensual. Even Marcos Ortiz Casas argues that Western culture ascribes to the Phrygian mode the connotations of mystery, exoticism and sensuality (2014: 268).

On the one hand, the traditional sound of the pasodoble essentialises the collective self and the marginal Otherness of the Roma nation; on the other hand, it evokes the folkloric “dance of death” as a paradigm of the anthropocentric distribution of power. What artistic practices emerge from Almodóvar’s humorous realisation of the pasodoble with a highly provocative and controversial filmic imaginary?

We should bear in mind that the traditional sound of this folk dance in this film has an idiosyncratic imprint, coloured visually by travesty, mockery and ironic parody. The visual elements of camp<sup>27</sup> and kitsch are particularly striking, deepening the comic didascalia in the form of a photo novel.



**Figure 2.** Still frame from the film *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* © VIDEO MERCURY FILMS, S.A.U.

Rather than glorifying Spanish national identity through the dramatic quality of the pasodoble, Almodóvar humorously undermines the police officer’s deviant behaviour, i.e., his unsuccessful act of vengeance.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, *España cañi* appears as a musical response to the policeman’s ridiculous outburst before and after he has been outwitted by a female subject. While the sound of the pasodoble is introduced in the non-diegetic background of the audio-visual field, the policeman watches Pepi from his flat through binoculars as she waters a plastic pot, mistakenly believing it to be real marijuana. The emphasis on the decorative use of folklore transgresses traditional musical logic, while the mockery of the repressive police state apparatus boldly violates institutional taboos. Even more, Almodóvar’s adaptation of *España cañi* retains characteristic folkloric themes that conceptually point to an associative link between the (defeated) bullfighter and the body of a policeman. Thus, the pathological phenomenon of the explicit manifestation of violence is revealed through visual and auditory cinematographic means. While the traditional sound of the pasodoble

27 Nevertheless, Alejandro Yarza points out that, in contrast to the film *Labyrinth of Passion*, the camp component is more latent in Almodóvar’s first feature film (1999: 41; 44).

28 The elaboration of Pepi’s (Carmen Maura) revenge plan at the beginning of the film, on the other hand, was set to music with the *Tango Tzigane* by Jacob Gade, immediately after she was raped.

at bullfights emotionally and sensually supports (mimics) the acute victimisation of the animals, in this comedy it reveals, in an ideologically veiled yet obvious enough way, the systemic forms of violence of a fascist-interpellated Madrilenian policeman, especially his sadism, sexism and nationalism.<sup>29</sup> However, the director reveals an even more fascinating rebellion against the police institution by choosing a fragment from zarzuela as a representative genre of Spanish music, i.e. a Spanish musical identity based on the folkloric characteristics of romantic Spain.

The duet of Mari-Pepa and Felipe *¿Por qué de mis ojos...?*, which, according to Michael Christoforidis and Elizabeth Kertesz, is reminiscent of Bizet's opera *Carmen* (Christoforidis and Kertesz 2019: 215), belongs to the one-act zarzuela *La revoltosa*.<sup>30</sup> The zarzuela (though not the part Almodóvar used in the film) contains a guajira dance in which elements of Andalusian folklore appear as an ingredient of strong aesthetic appeal (Barce 1995: 220). In Almodóvar's film version of a clichéd love duet, folkloric traits are expressed through both musical and visual means, with witty costumbrist elements of folk tradition. The folkloric Spanish exoticism, adapted to the spirit of the waltz, is first recognised aurally in the melismatic wave of the Phrygian tetrachord as an exemplary model of Spanish national folklore, defined by Derek B. Scott as a "favo[u]rite 'Spanish' signifier" (Scott 1998: 319; or Scott 2003: 166).



**Figure 3.** Duet “¿Por qué de mis ojos...?” from the zarzuela *La revoltosa*, Bars 42–9.

In this way, the Phrygian tetrachord, with its attenuated functional tonality, essentialises the folkloric Otherness of Spanish urban spaces. However, the appearance of Phrygian harmony in the tragicomic, ridiculous and bizarre film scene has achieved an unexpected result: the paradoxical simultaneity of affirmation and negation of traditional folkloric pathos. This is partly due to the generally ambivalent nature of the film medium, i.e., the discrepant audio-visual structure of the scene based on the interplay between authentic sounds of Spanish music and the visual decontextualisation of folkloric features of Spanish culture. In other words, Almodóvar transgresses the authoritarian boundaries of traditional folkloric practices through unusually conceived visual narratives, while sonically validating them through the aesthetic beauty of folkloric musical expression.

29 The sadistic behaviour of the policeman towards his wife Luci (Eva Siva) is particularly evident at the end of the film, when her sadomasochistic pleasure is all the more intriguing.

30 This zarzuela was composed by Ruperto Chapí, while the libretto was written by José López Silva and Carlos Fernández Shaw. It is also known as a lyrical sainete, because a zarzuela in one act (defined as *género chico*) is often equated with a sainete.

The musical component of the revenge scene, which operates as a folk based narrative agent, takes on transgressive features, especially when it emphasises female sexuality, subversive sadistic pleasure and enjoyment of physical aggression, tempered by sardonic humour. Indeed, Almodóvar uses Romantic music to depict the poorly executed vengeance plot with a comedic element of body doubles that takes place in the deserted streets of Madrid in the late evening hours.



**Figure 4.** Still frame from the film *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* © VIDEO MERCURY FILMS, S.A.U.

Pepi, one of the film's main characters, observes with great satisfaction from around the corner the physical altercation between her friends from a punk rock band and the twin brother of a drunken policeman. Dressed in traditional Spanish costumes,<sup>31</sup> which resemble the look of *chulos/chulapos* and *majas/manolas* from Tomás Bretón's zarzuela *La verbena de la Paloma*, the masked actors gradually approach the body of the false subject they do not even know. Perhaps the visual allusion to *La verbena de la Paloma* led film theorists Isolina Ballestros and Mark Allinson to hastily assume that the members of the fictional group Bomitoni sing an excerpt from this *género chico* (cf. Ballestros 2009: 72; Allinson 2001: 197). On the other hand, Antonio Holguín, Álvaro Yebra García and Mario de la Torre Espinosa identified this theme as part of the zarzuela *La del manojito de rosas* (Holguín 2006: 208; Yebra García 2007: 683; and de la Torre Espinosa 2020: 201), possibly because the name was taken from the work of Pablo Sorozábal from the stanza of Chapí's love duet.<sup>32</sup>

31 According to Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, however, Pepi wears a kind of flamenco outfit consisting of a long, wide skirt, a polka-dotted blouse and a white silk stole (2007: 11).

32 **Felipe:** La de los claveles dobles,  
la del manojito de rosas,  
la de la falda de céfiro,  
y el pañuelo de crespón;  
la que iría a la verbena  
cogidita de mi brazo...

This audio-visual example, as Alejandro Yarza points out, reflects the iconoclastic use of figures from traditional Spanish life, which is one of the representative examples of the ironic reconfiguration of traditional iconography (Yarza 1999: 40). Moreover, the entire sequence is highly stylised to emphasise the theatricality of the action (Ibid.: 41). In this way, through the theatrical performativity of music, Pedro Almodóvar succeeded in subverting the Francoist aesthetic by using its most important instrument: Spanish tradition. According to the Spanish composer Sergio Camacho Fernandez, the parodic image of an obsolete Spain then comes to the fore (2017: 496),<sup>33</sup> or, in other words, the peculiar distortion of traditional Spanish cultural symbols.

The disguised characters sing the lyrics of a love duet from the zarzuela in playback, while the voices of a professional male and female singer are heard in their place. Elements of distortion and ambivalence are inscribed in the narrative density of the scene itself, further undermining the visual and auditory folkloric features of this musical fragment. The clarity of the diegesis is also obscured to a certain extent and placed in a liminal (in-between) narrative.<sup>34</sup> As Mónica Tovar Vicente argues, the diegetic sounds of this duet do not exactly match what is seen in the moving image, as the scene contains additional voices that likely originate from the environment of the filming (2016: 332). The transgressive feature of traditional folklore is reinforced by the narrative musico-dramaturgical devices of false diegesis, capricious disregard for traditional conventions, gendered inversion of patriarchal behavioural models and audio-visual discontinuity, with the breathing sounds of the attackers and the victim interrupting the continuity of the musical flow. By inverting

¡Eres tú!... ¡porque te quiero,  
chula de mi corazón! [*La revoltosa*: Duet “¿Por qué de mis ojos...?”]

33 This is Camacho’s conclusion from the text *La zarzuela no es cosa de Franco: consideraciones sociales e identitarias en la difusión de la zarzuela en el siglo XX*, in which the author tries to defend zarzuela from prejudices that exclusively link it to the archetype of Spanish nationalist identity being core to Francoism. Cultural or historical particularism is the opposite of evolutionary theories, which exclude from critical consideration elements of discontinuity or interruption in the development of a culture. On this occasion, Sergio Camacho Fernandez mentions cultural particularism in the Spanish socio-historical context, which had a decisive influence on the fate of the zarzuela (2017: 496–98). Indeed, the composer notes that the new institutions that emerged after the political redistribution of the 1978 Constitution caused the shift of the *tabula rasa* to the recent past and the propaganda of Spanish nationalism, which affected the future of the zarzuela by suddenly labelling it as an old and decadent genre (Ibid.).

34 In this particular case, audio-visual liminality could be explained by the concept of false diegesis. According to Spanish film theorist Conrado Xalabarder, false diegesis strategically leads the spectator to the (wrong) conclusion that the characters in the film are listening to music that they objectively cannot hear (2013: 39). This is to be distinguished from a fluid meta-diegetic level defined by Claudia Gorbman (see Gorbman 1987: 22–3), for although the scene manifests a clash of different narrative musical spaces in the film, it does not resemble an internalised saturated sound that belongs exclusively to a particular character and the film audience. The use of this pre-existing musical fragment also differs from Robynn J. Stilwell’s “fantastical gap between diegetic and non-diegetic” (see Stilwell 2007), as the music (before it was narratively dislocated in Pepi’s flat, leaving the possible sound sources open) was heard as diegetic all along. Exceptionally, perhaps, the cinematic adaptation of this zarzuela could be classified as ambi-diegetic music—a term coined by Morris B. Holbrook (2004).

patriarchal behavioural patterns, Almodóvar transfers the power from the male to the female subject. According to Mora Díez, this is a mechanism of radical change in the national popular imaginary (2015: para. 11).

It is clear that the provocative and frivolous use of folkloric material, especially traditional costumes, will not be accepted by conservative thinkers who favour patriarchal thinking, whereas these spectators are not Almodóvar's target audience. The Ukrainian folklorist Oksana Mikitenko claims that imitation of folklore, i.e., pseudo-folklore, leads to alienation because it degrades the artistic and aesthetic criteria of folklore work (1997: 213). Mikitenko is not alluding here to the class-based Marxist concept of alienation, but to alienation as the cultural and spiritual distance between man and his original folklore tradition. Although the love duet *¿Por qué de mis ojos ...?* is closer to imaginary folklore than the stylisation or adaptation of a recognisable traditional song, it should not be considered a trivial imitation of folk tradition, like Bonezzi's pop-funk song *Gran Ganga*, based on a hybrid sound simulation of Eastern exoticism and its Oriental folkloric Otherness. However, the original stylistic coordinates of the zarzuela fragment are compromised in that the overemphasised elements of trivialisation, camp and kitsch inevitably require an alienation from traditional cultural heritage. This does not mean that Almodóvar's grotesquely seditious, even vulgar, narrative mechanisms are directed against Spanish tradition, regardless of the fact that they are based on the visual-aesthetic and ideologically crude-comic undermining of the late Romantic folklore idiom.

If one were to interpret this creator's first feature film as symbolic revenge against the dictator (Mora Díez 2015: para. 11), then the director's ideological deviation from the national and folkloric homogenisation of culture and other universalist norms of evaluation is undeniable. However, as Alberto Jiménez Arévalo points out, even the ideology of Franco's totalitarian regime was not (completely) homogeneous, as the Spanish dictator pursued national and international policies depending on the circumstances most favourable to him in order to ensure his survival on a purely adaptive level (2020: 443). Considering the socio-cultural circumstances of post-fascist Spain, which was still transiting to democracy in the early 1980s, and bearing in mind that Almodóvar's film *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* is a humorous and parodic reflection of this newly emerging democracy, then Almodóvar's unconventional attitude towards the folkloric heritage is not fundamentally nihilistic, but rather whimsical. It is precisely through the humourisation of violence and the carnivalesque transposition of traditional cultural traits that Pedro Almodóvar has perceptibly strengthened the parameters of gender and social emancipation. This is a form of emancipation that could not be consistently realised in Franco's humanist totality. The director's resistance to this political regime is also evident in his choice of music for the opening credits of the second feature film: the Catalan dance sardana.





While the traditional sardana, as a harmoniously organised dance, is ideologically and symbolically linked to the idea of Catalan togetherness and collectivity, in the film *Labyrinth of Passion* it reinforces the atmosphere of chaotic urbanisation.<sup>38</sup> To convey the unique musicality of this instrumental work, the cineaste used the visual background of a Madrilenian flea market *El Rastro*. If sardana is a folk dance of a homogeneous group, as Antonio Holguín claims, then the flea market would correspond to the spirit of this folkloric, rhythmic and mimetic scene (Holguín 2006: 209).

Folkloric elements of the sardana, deprived of the pastoral landscape of Catalonia, are perceptually blurred by provocative close-ups of the male groin and certain fashionable details and objects such as conspicuous sunglasses.<sup>39</sup> It is introduced as a musical background for the busy streets of Madrid through which Almodóvar's intriguing protagonists walk: Sexilia (Cecilia Roth) and Riza Niro (Imanol Arias). Sexilia is a nymphomaniac band singer who has frequent sexual relations with a variety of men, while Riza, an escaped Iranian prince, turns to homosexual romance due to unresolved childhood emotional conflicts and constant sexual harassment from his stepmother. Nevertheless, it seems that the popularised folkloric sound of *Dolces carícies* sensually amplifies rather than conceptually reconstructs the transgressive potential of their personal Otherness. Their subversive bodies manage to find a common path despite all trivial-humorous obstacles, but not through the sounds of this sardana, but through Riza's unexpected playback stage performance of a kitschy and highly subversive pseudo-folkloric song *Gran Ganga*.

The instrumental sounds of sardana revive the geographical spaces that territorially pertain to Spain but conceptually retain their own cultural and national characteristics of Catalan culture. One might think, then, that with this very peculiar combination of Catalan musical folklore and the bold civil liberties of Madrid's youth subculture, Almodóvar was able to symbolically consolidate the rich cultural diversity of the Catalonia region and figuratively relocate it to the centre of Spain. Since the film audience is presented with only a brief fragment of Catalan tradition, the retroactively exhibited musical past of the sardana loses its original inherent value of affirming Catalan cultural and national identity. There is, thus, no subliminal consolidation of a democratic peripheral nationalism that demands the recognition of Catalans as a nation within Spain, to which they belong. Marsha Kinder, on the other hand, recognises in this sardana a reminiscence of bullfighting that "underscores the Spanish bravado of this sexy location" along with its blatant crusading

38 As a form of non-verbal communication, the traditional interplay of music and body movement can potentially strengthen collective national identities. Since sardana is a well-known Catalan group dance for a large number of performers, the fascist dictator saw in this circle dance the danger of reinforcing the ideologies of the Catalan separatists. It should not be forgotten that Franco's discrimination against Catalans and stigmatisation of other national identities on Spanish territory went so far as to ban the use of the Catalan language both for official purposes and in public.

39 These sunglasses were not inserted into the initial narrative sequence by chance, for they signify Sexilia's particular kind of visual impairment: the fear of exposing oneself to the sun with the naked eye.

rites (2013: 287). This association, unusual at first glance, is not entirely unexpected, as bullfights in certain Spanish regions occasionally featured a once-banned patriotic sardana—*La santa espina*—<sup>40</sup> performed to the applause of *aficionados*.<sup>41</sup> However, these cruel and extremely violent practices do not appear in this “Almodovaresque” screwball comedy and have been banned in Catalonia since 2011. If we consider the sardana *Dolces carícies* as a cinematic camp adaptation, it serves, above all, to sensually depict the richness of the regional diversity of Spanish folklore and to reinforce the transgressive aesthetics of the Madrilenian scene.

The discrepancy between the music and the visual environment resonates in the archaeological camp<sup>42</sup> that the director used to conceptualise the memory of the established canon of prohibition. In this ambivalent kind of camp, the patterns of clashing power relations oscillate between the musical Catalan cultural heritage (the sardana) and the transgressive aspects of humour that preserves the unique sensibility of Almodóvar’s early film poetics, characterised by trivialisation, ironic value and exaggerated visual narratives. This highly unusual combination of kitsch, archaeological camp and folkloric tradition is no exception in his films, where an almost paradoxical dichotomy between traditional cultural values and the irony of bad taste can be explicitly observed. Even more, the cultural identity markers of Catalonia are visually deprived of the creative corporal expression that was originally inscribed in the core of this folkloric dance. The absence of a visual dramaturgy or a dance functionality of music is rather replaced by a subversive musicalisation, strongly imbued with a trivial erotic charge.

\* \* \*

In addition to a variety of classical musical material and popular songs, the composite score of Almodóvar’s feature films *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* and *Labyrinth of Passion* consists of representative national tunes used in a highly arbitrary manner. The director’s penchant for camp artificiality, simplification and derisive exaggeration has, thus, captured musical references from classical, traditional and popular music. These authentic Spanish sounds, combined with an explicit visual environment, operate as a subversive folkloric signifier and take on a whole new associative meaning through cinematic listening. As a matter of fact, the excessive elements of subversion, kitsch, camp and trivial aesthetics do not correspond to the poetico-aesthetic and stylistic principles of high or folk art. Without delving into the

40 Sardana *La santa espina* is part of the zarzuela with the same title. Ángel Guimerá wrote the libretto, while Enric Morera i Viura composed the music.

41 This musical reference is usually played before the departure of the last bull (cf. García 2010: para. 2; and Martínez 2019: para. 12).

42 The term archaeological camp comes from Joseba Gabilondo, which the Spanish historian uses to describe, among other things, the fetishistic memory of Francoism in Marxist and Freudian terms (2005: 295). This unusual form of camp, thus, represents a sentimental memory of Francoism, albeit not the memory that secretly desires or affirms it, but an audio-visual postmodern and camp realisation of memory through the remnants of the archived past.

intellectual depth of folkloric material, Pedro Almodóvar adapted popular folk music to a heterogeneous audience that recognises the affective and sensory potential of traditional, sometimes even ethnic, musical patterns. This was made possible by the eclectic postmodern aesthetics during the democratic transition in Spain, a period strongly influenced by a pluralistic subcultural environment. In conclusion, the “Almodovaresque” bold break with cinematic taboos made his experimental poetics so provocatively unique: ambiguously situated between tradition and subversion.

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## РАСТКО БУЉАНЧЕВИЋ

ИЗМЕЂУ ТРАДИЦИЈЕ И СУБВЕРЗИЈЕ. ТРЕТМАН ФОЛКЛОРИЗОВАНИХ МУЗИЧКИХ РЕФЕРЕНЦИ У РАНИМ ДУГОМЕТРАЖНИМ ФИЛМОВИМА ПЕДРА АЛМОДОВАРА

## (РЕЗИМЕ)

Терор диктаторске политике и културне хегемоније Франциска Франка у великој мјери су утицали на развој шпанске кинематографије. Међутим, велика прекретница у историји шпанског филма догодила се средином седамдесетих година 20. вијека, када се контроверзни редитељ и сценариста из Ла Манче придружио мадридској супкултурној сцени. Служећи се методом претјеривања и крајње неконвенционалним хумором, Педро Алмодовар је у филмовима *Пеји*, *Луси*, *Бом* и *групе гјевојке са ѿмиле* и *Лавириниј сѿрасѿи* неочекивано посегнуо за музичким материјалом фолклорне провенијенције. Ријеч је, дакле, о оним филмовима који на јединствен начин одражавају стварност постфашистичке Шпаније. Кршећи бројне табуе и етаблиране моралне кодексе, Алмодовар је анахроне музичке фрагменте из зарзуеле, пасадобла и сардане обликовао упечатљивим, често вулгарним елементима тривијализације, кемпа и кича. Међутим, визуелним онеобичавањем фолклорног музичког материјала Алмодовар није покушао деградирати умјетничке квалитете шпанске фолклорне ризнице, већ је на духовит, трагикомичан и крајње бизаран начин трајно раскинуо с конзервативним кинематографским праксама. Идеолошким помјерањем тадашњих граница хуманитета препознатљиве фолклоризоване музичке теме престају обављати функцију репрезентативног означитеља патријархата. Умјесто тога, традиционалним обиљежјима шпанског фолклорног мелоса подвлачи се визуелни идентитет друштвено маргинализованих група, као и њихове несвакидашње активности и различити облици ненормативног понашања.