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Flamenco: Musical Structure and the Practice of Improvisation

ABSTRACT

Improvisation is a commonly recognised marker of flamenco. Since flamenco is a musical practice that was traditionally transmitted aurally and often acquired rather than explicitly taught, there is no widely accepted teaching methodology for the increasing number of participants in this style, and even less guidance on improvisation.

The aim of this study is to show what the structural aspects of a flamenco piece are, and which of these aspects are open to improvisation. It also examines how improvisation is conceived of by practitioners, and how it is practised and taught. The observations and findings here are drawn from fieldwork centred on learning the flamenco guitar and consequent ethnographic notes.

KEYWORDS

Flamenco
Improvisation
Tradition
Transmission
Guitar

Flamenco: Observations on Composition, Improvisation, and Variation

When I was in my early teens, I was impressed and drawn to flamenco (and Jazz) by the idea of improvisation, which was a distinguishing feature of the tradition. People referred to how the guitarists were excellent improvisers, and this ability to spontaneously compose and play seemed incredible. In my naiveté, I believed that these improvisers pulled all the musical elements together at the time of playing without any thought or previous work; as though by some sort of divine musical inspiration. In this article, I hope to shed some light on this process of creation within the context of flamenco by examining what musical elements are transmitted, and how the tradition is communicated.

First, a discussion of terms needs to be employed because what we — or the practitioners — define as improvisation or consider variation often does not align, and this misunderstanding was an issue during my fieldwork. For example, at what point does variation in a piece of music move from being an issue of performance practice to improvisation to composition? According to Bruno Nettl (2005), “Improvisation and composition are frequently regarded as completely separate processes, but they are also two versions of the same” (29). While we can decide on the outliers, it is the places within the cline that cause the problems.

In a predominantly chirographic (writing) culture, as opposed to an oral culture, it often seems that these lines are drawn around whether the composition is written down before playing or not. As the frequency of notated flamenco increases, we must also be aware that this act of notation has the capacity to alter improvisational practices. Judith Becker (in Rice 2014: 95) gives us an example of this when she claims that when students were trained using musical notation in Indonesian conservatories, improvisation and variation that existed in the aural tradition, disappeared in favour of the more frozen set pieces.

One of my informants during this research, Enrique, illustrates the problems when it comes to defining terms. In our discussions, melody and harmony were foregrounded as the essential components of improvisation. Variations in *rasgueo*, tone colour and attack, or dynamics were not considered as varied enough to be considered improvisation.

Improvisation, you live in Turkey, you know how in modal music and *maqam* it's all improvisation, it's modal improvisation. Flamenco it didn't exist. Improvisation was never a part. We would improvise rhythmic patterns; we

would improvise yeah, in flamenco OK. (Enrique Vargas, personal communication, January 23, 2015)

An interesting point is when a western academic definition of improvisation (in this context Jazz) is internalised by the performer of another tradition: Enrique seems to think that legitimate improvisation is only melodically or harmonically based. For Enrique, improvisation was being able to solo over a chord progression, drawing from suitable scales and arpeggios, and being able to substitute chords within these progressions. Enrique implies that because some musicians can't explain what chords they are playing or what scales they are using to improvise, that what they do is not *proper* improvisation, as though their lack of ability to explain what they do somehow invalidates their work.

But there's no Bona fide improvisation like you have in jazz. Chord progression over which you structure your improvisation. It started seeping into flamenco thanks to Paco de Lucia, which was the first one to collaborate with jazz musicians... In flamenco still people can't read or write, improvise; improvisation is a totally different animal. You have to know your chords, you have to know your scales. (Enrique Vargas, personal communication, January 23, 2015)

It seems that Enrique is heavily invested in an academic approach: he studied for his PhD in the USA, and his musicological writings/analyses reflect this. However, his ability to play and understanding of flamenco came before the academic training: he has a tacit, practical knowledge of flamenco. While he can easily produce variations of tone, dynamics, attack, rhythmic subtleties, etc., by not including these aspects under the umbrella of improvisation, he shows that he supports a different concept of improvisation than is generally accepted in ethnomusicology.

Another point concerning flamenco improvisation is the amount of it found in any single performance. If it is a stylized theatrical presentation, such as a Joaquin Cortez dance extravaganza, or many of the amateur performances by the dance schools in Istanbul (which often use recordings, not live musicians), then it is fully rehearsed and choreographed and leaves little room for improvisation. While the skills of performers who do not improvise are acknowledged, they are generally not considered complete flamenco artists. Another informant, Andreas, reflected this attitude when I asked him how much respect was given in the community to non-improvisers.

I would say little respect. It depends, on the other hand, I'm thinking about Antonio Gades for example. He was like very famous flamenco, did you know him?

-Yeah.

And he for example was the maximum dancer in his generation, but he couldn't improvise, and he couldn't even dance the *bulerías*. He never danced in tablaos or did improvised stuff but he has huge prestige. But I think you have to decide on what you specialize. If you want to do a dancey type of thing and want to get in the contemporary dance world or classical dance world, if this is your background then obviously you will not focus on improvisation, on music, on rhythm patterns, but the true flamenco dance improvisation. (Andreas Daiminger, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

There are, however, many performances where the artists will just turn up, perhaps not even knowing each other, and without any discussion of order of dance or song, and through knowledge of a shared repertoire perform spontaneously. Between these two points of planned to impromptu performance is a range of performance scenarios that are graded as to the amount of improvisation they contain.

The Foundational Elements of a Flamenco Piece

Before I continue this discussion, I must clarify that the examples given in this section are standard patterns that I came across in classes, saw in many performances, heard in countless recordings and found in numerous pedagogical publications. They (and their slight derivatives) are standard musical units within flamenco and are part of the common language. The source of any examples here is not significant, and alternative examples from other publications sources can easily be found.

Any competent improvisation in flamenco begins with knowing the tradition and musical material in depth. The improvisational aspects grow out of a strong base grounded in an understanding of the *palos*. A *palo* is the name given to one of the different flamenco song forms. The main flamenco *palos* are identified by two defining features: *aire* and the *compás*. The *aire* is the character or atmosphere of a song, literally the air, and each *palo* has a prescribed *aire*, whether that be the energetic bounce of the *bulerías*, or the plaintive lament of the *seguiriyas*. *Aire* is one of the terms in flamenco which, when used in different contexts, can have various meanings, and so is rather difficult to define, similar to the use of the word *blues* in blues music: he plays the blues, he has the blues,

he's lived the blues etc. The following definition by Paul Hecht (1968) is as good as any, and contains the customary vagueness.

aire: Any definition of "aire" is approximate. We are talking about musical ineffables. The English words "air" or "aura" are inadequate. With respect to flamenco guitar, it is a particular fusion of rhythm, melody and harmonics which results in a leaping, fluid sound. "Aire" cannot be learned. You have it or you don't. (171)

While it is sometimes not clear as to whether the person or song possesses this quality, we can best interpret it to mean the aspects of a performance needed to elicit the desired affect.

Excepting the few *palos* that are *en toque libre* (Eng: in free time), the other main defining feature of a *palo* is the *compás*: the *compás* refers to the sequence of beats and accents that provide the pulse in the various *palos*. These patterns are repeated end to end throughout the piece, and without this characteristic sense of pulse, the music is not considered flamenco. Each different *palo* is associated with a different *compás*. One of the most common formulas in flamenco is a combination of ternary and binary rhythms, which form a count of twelve. The *soleá* is one such twelve-count *palo*, often referred to as a mother *palo*, because so many other *palos* are based on it (Figure 1).

		>			>			>			>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Figure 1. The *compás* for *soleá*

In the *seguiriyas* we can see a rearrangement of these beats to form a new *compás* (Figure 2).

		>			>			>			>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	&	2	&	3	&	a	4	&	a	5	&

Figure 2. The *compás* for *seguiriya*

A more commonly used alternative count for this *palo* has been included underneath the twelve count.

There are also simple ternary beat *compás* like the *fandangos de Huelva*, and binary *compás*es such as the *tangos* (Figure 3), which, while notated in 4/4, are actually a two bar *compás*.

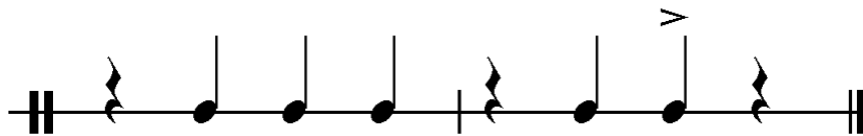


Figure 3. The *compás* for *tangos*

As stated, a flamenco performer first needs a solid feel for the *aire* and *compás* of each *palo*. This is traditionally obtained through listening to and playing the *palos* until the character and pulse are internalized. Although there are pedagogical materials that can intellectually explain the *compás* of the *palos*, my experience is that having an intellectual knowledge is not very useful, and that being able to use them correctly is still only really possible through a route that involves extensive listening and playing until the character and pulse are internalized. Being able to internalize the *compás* and not be tied up with counting seems to be a prerequisite to performing flamenco to any agreeable standard. When I initially began the style, I found that counting the *compás* while playing was too much to deal with cognitively and led to mistakes in the count, which would ruin the piece: in flamenco, the rhythmic pulse and count of the *compás* must be consistent, and a slip from the pattern is considered a grave error, because you will disrupt any other performers you are playing with and disturb any *aficionado* you are playing for. To make mistakes of this kind is to be *fuera de compás*. Experienced flamencos will not take your contribution seriously if you cannot play *a compás* (in *compás*).

Within the framework of the *compás*, there is considerable opportunity for rhythmic variation, whether by internal rhythmic subdivisions (see *rasgueo* examples), moving the accented beats within a *compás* (Figure 3), or even playing rhythms that seem counter to the *compás* (as in *bulerías*).

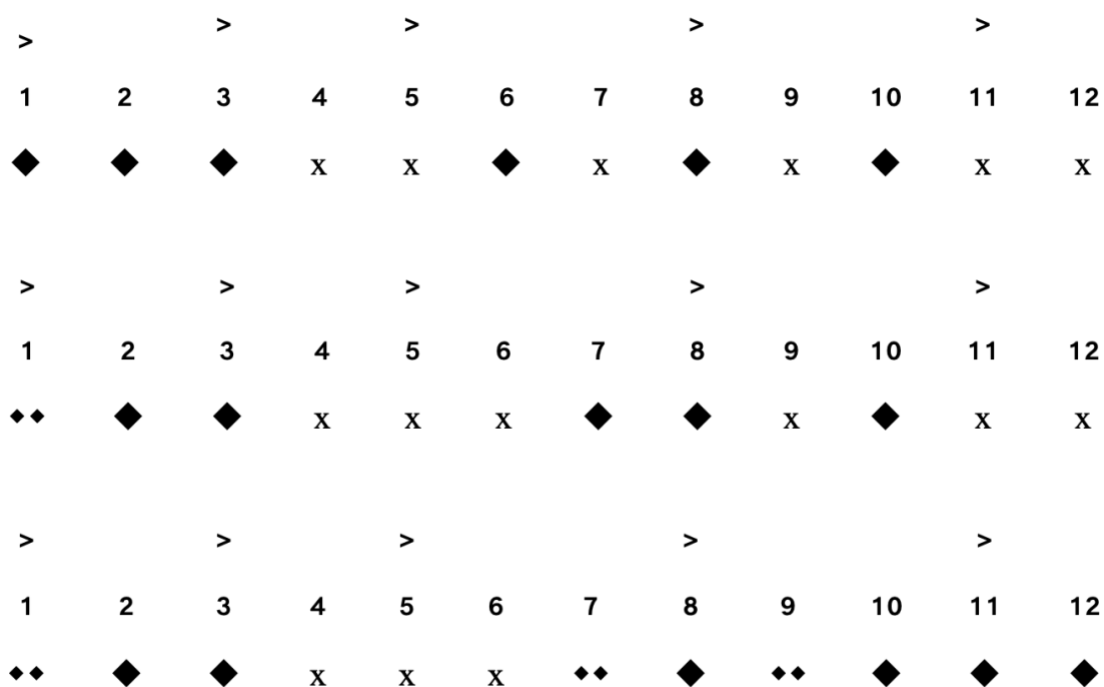


Figure 3. Three examples of common accented beat patterns against the *compás* for *soleá*.

◆ accent
 x silence
 ◆◆=◆ a short duration accent. Two small equal one big.

For the instrumentalist, usually a guitarist, the harmonic basis remains fairly stable for most of the *palos*. For example, if the *palo* is in *por arriba* and in the Phrygian type mode, the descending sequence is based on the A minor, G major, F major and E major chords (Figure 4). The G and G sharp are used interchangeably in the melodic material, but not at the same time.



Figure 4. Chords and scale for *por arriba*.

If the *palo* is in *por medio* and in the Phrygian type mode, the descending sequence is based on the D minor, C major, B flat major and A major chords (See Figure 5). As in the above example, the third step C and C sharp are used interchangeably, but not at the same time.



Figure 5. Chords and scale for *por medio*.

The various positions available on the guitar allows these basic chords to be voiced in numerous ways. In addition to these different voicings, more complicated chromatic harmonies have been introduced, many of which were an outgrowth of the extended chords, naturally occurring on the guitar, with chords using open strings, which creates a flamenco flavour, which was carried over to other voicings. More jazz-influenced harmonies and chord substitutions have also started to appear.

Another musical element characteristic of flamenco guitar is the *rasgueo*. This has two meanings in flamenco. The first refers to the passages of strummed *compás*, which often set the rhythmic drive of the piece, and are commonly used to accompany dancers (usually because the sound of the dancers would drown out the more delicate guitar work if the guitar is unamplified), and are also used as structural units in a piece. The second meaning is the actual right hand technique used by the guitarists to perform the strumming.

There are several factors that contribute to the variety of options open to the guitar player when dealing with *rasgueo*. If a chord is held down by the left hand, the attack will sound differently depending on whether the fingers on the right hand thrust down, aided by gravity and the extension of the fingers, or are drawn up across the strings in a gripping action. The down up action also influences the pitch order, in which the strings are engaged: from low to high or high to low. Although many guitarists strive for an equal attack by each finger, each finger still has a different weight, so choice of fingers to use in any combination will also provide scope for the player to vary the note attack. Figure 6 illustrates only a fraction of the right hand pattern options that are available in a basic *tangos*.

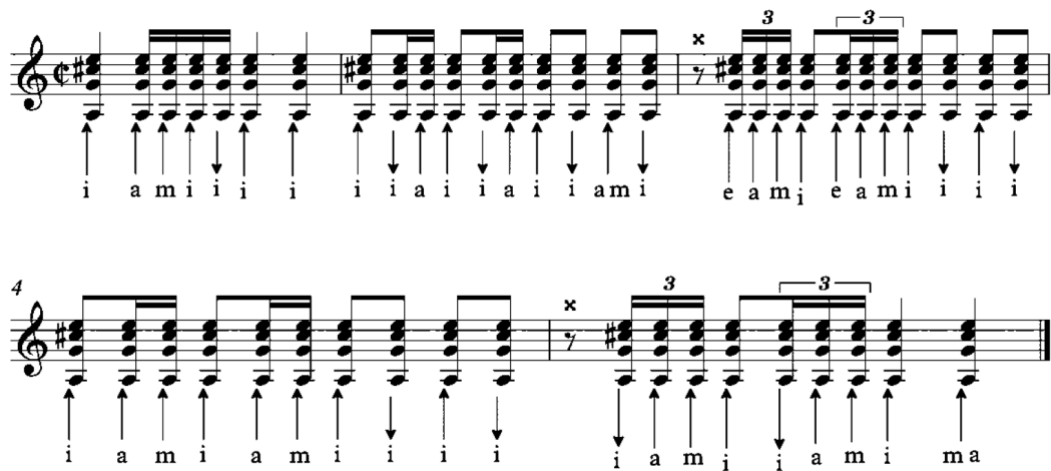


Figure 6. Various right hand *rasgueo* patterns for *tangos*.

An additional type of strumming technique, which is often classified separately from *rasgueo*, is the *tresillo*. This is a triplet-based strum that can be played with various fingers, according to the desired effect and often utilizes the thumb.

So, combined we see a huge variety of options when *rasgueo* and *tresillos* are performed. The different weights of the fingers and thumb in the right hand and the numerous combinations of upstrokes and downstrokes give a very different feel to what would rhythmically be notated as the same note divisions. The selection of which strumming pattern to use at which particular point is not only influenced by the need for variety or a habit of the guitar player, but also by the dynamics required. For example, is the guitarist accompanying a singer, one dancer, or several? Is the guitar amplified, and what are the demands of the venue's acoustics?

Other choices are available to guitarists. Accentuation of certain notes in a phrase is a small-scale area for innovation. The choice of right hand fingering will change this accentuation considerably: the thumb is often used when a weightier accent is required, or the natural inequality in the strength of the index, middle, and ring fingers can be brought into play for a different feel. Figure 7 illustrates how a *basic soleà remate* might be varied simply by changing the right hand fingering.

Figure 7 displays three systems of musical notation for a *soleà remate*. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a guitar line (TAB). The lyrics for the first system are "p i p — i p a p i m a p i p i m a p a p i m a". The lyrics for the second system are "p i m a p i m a p a m i p i m a p a m i p m p m p m". The guitar lines include fret numbers (0, 1, 2) and techniques like hammer-ons and pull-offs.

Figure 7. Seven examples of a *soleà remate*.

Accentuation of notes can also be changed with the left hand, where different combinations of hammer-ons and pull-offs (Sp: *ligados*) can completely change the melodic line's rhythmic feel and, sometimes, speed of a passage. A whole range of more common guitar techniques can be used to vary the mood and texture of a flamenco unit, including *apoyando*, *picado*, *tirando*, *pulgar apoyando*, *tremolo*, as well as more flamenco-oriented guitar techniques, such as *golpe*, *arrastre*, *apagado* and *alzapúa*.

On a larger structural level, there are semi-independent musical units or blocks, which, when placed within a *compás* and assembled, create a piece. These components include

rasgueos (here I refer to the structural unit, which is comprised of the technique mentioned above), *falsestas*, *llamadas* (Eng. call), *cierres* and *remates*. These larger units are not specifically for the guitar, but are understood at some level by all competent flamenco performers, and, using them, they are able to orient themselves within a performance and communicate with each other.

A *falsesta* is a musical unit (usually played on the guitar) that is used to provide melodic interest between either sections of *rasgueo* or verses of a song. Traditionally, the melodic material is derived from that supplied by the *cantaor*. With the advent of solo flamenco guitar performances, many pieces are collections of *falsestas* chained together with short passages of *rasgueo*. Enrique explains this in the context of rock guitar below:

You can combine licks. A lick, meaning that it's a complete melodic pattern, and jazzers operate in terms of licks, rock n rollers too. In flamenco we have *falsestas*. *Falsesta* is a self-sufficient melodic unit and you can combine different *falsestas*, and you always combine them in a different order, they are like bricks in an edifice. They're completely autonomous units. That's another feature in which flamenco resembles jazz. If they talk about licks, we talk about *falsestas*. We can modify *falsestas*, improvise them and play them in a different way. (Enrique Vargas, personal communication, January 23, 2015)

When the *rasgueo* and *falsestas* are put together, the order is often spontaneous, according to the mood and decisions made by other performers. Most guitarists will play *falsestas* that differ considerably in mood and texture from one to the next, in order to maintain interest and provide variation.

In addition to the *rasgueo* and *falsestas*, there are other formal components that can make a flamenco composition: it helps to think of these as framing passages, or, for a linguistic analogy, as punctuation. A *llamada* (Eng. a call) is a signal to other performers that there is going to be a change, or that the next section of the piece is going to be performed. In most forms of dance, it is usually the dancer who dances to the music, however, in flamenco, it is the guitarist who must follow the dancer, and so the *llamada* is a sequence of steps that signals for the guitarist to play the related musical unit. It can be used in the beginning, middle, or end of a piece and can indicate the entrance of the dancer (*salida*) or the introduction of the *cante* or melody (perhaps in the form of a new *falsesta*).

The terms *cierre* and *remate* are often, confusingly, used interchangeably. Here I shall differentiate them. A *cierre* is a type of *llamada* that signals an ending. It often involves an emphatic statement of the *compás*. In a twelve-beat *palo* the *cierre* ends on beat ten, but in a four-beat *compás*, the *cierre* generally finishes on beat three. However, this isn't always the case, and it is for this reason that performers should watch the dancer.

A *remate* is a close to a series of steps, musical phrase, or line of a song. It is on a smaller scale than the *cierre* and often takes place in the last *compás* of a *cierre*. As the *cierre* reaches the tonic on beat ten, the *remate* emphasises the tonic on beats ten, eleven, and twelve. *Remate* (Eng: re-kill) is a term that is borrowed from bullfighting: I assume the *kill* is the tonic, and the *rekill* is the repeat of the tonic. *Remates* have a different structure according to the *palo*, but can generally be felt as the *cierre* builds to a conclusion. The *remate* is vital in finding your place in a *compás*, if you have become lost, and is a reference point for all performers.

Flamenco improvisation generally consists of being able to reproduce and reformulate a wide repertoire of all these formal components within the framework of the *compás*, and this applies to all members of a *cuadro*. When I asked Andreas (a dancer) where his improvisational ideas came from, he tried to articulate how he uses these pre-learnt units and their structural function, but he struggled somewhat, because he has never really had to explain what he does before. I think we can now see what he means:

I don't have a lot of material that's I would call completely my own so it's rather like steps from other teachers. Improvisation comes from combining them or just changing the order of things. A huge part of improvisation is how to interact with the music, the singing especially because in flamenco dance is this concept of *remate* at the end of the sequence to, it's like a and how you organize yourself with the singing, we call that improvisation. That's really difficult. It's one thing that I'm working on. (Andreas Daiminger, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

So, in a group performance, all the players know the structures (though may not be able to label them), and will use them to build the piece, orient themselves within the piece, and communicate with other performers. These components work together along with the choice of *letras* (Eng: lyrics) by the singer to evoke the desired atmosphere.

How Improvisation/Variation is Learnt and Taught

The teaching in the face-to-face lessons I had was based around *falsetas*, without other structural elements being identified. I was usually taught the *falsetas* by having my teacher play them full speed, then repeat them at a slower pace and break them down into pieces, so that I could copy them. How precisely I was expected to repeat the material depended on how patient/impatient my teacher was feeling that day. This method of teaching would often lead to some variance because I had either heard the *falseta* wrongly, changed the right hand rasgueo pattern or fingering out of ignorance, or just altered the passage to make it easier to play. Sometimes I was specifically taught dumbed-down *falsetas* that they thought I could cope with. The only strict stipulation, when performing these *falsetas*, was that playing *fuera de compás* was unacceptable, and this was often met with exasperation and impatience (many good players, who have been exposed to or playing this music for years, find it difficult to empathise with someone playing out of *compás*).

Another difficulty occurred when I asked teachers to repeat a passage (this was usually a part of or a whole *falseta*). When the passage had not been written down, I noticed that sometimes my teacher performed the given passage differently each time they played it. The difference in the variations of the passages would often be exacerbated if I asked my teacher to play at a slower tempo, so that I could grasp it easier. I was often frustrated, thinking that I was copying the passage wrongly, but when I looked back at my videos, I had evidence of the frequent variation of the model I was trying to work from. I never raised this issue with my teachers because they were often unaware of it, and I did not want to embarrass them.

While this sort of inconsistency is extraordinary in the classical world, it is considered perfectly normal in the flamenco world. I was told an anecdote about the frustration a recording engineer had with Paco de Lucia when they needed to record a drop in on a track. Paco could not repeat the *falseta* the same way for the re-recording.

We can modify *falsetas*, improvise them and play them in a different way. Like Paco de Lucia's producer ... Regrosser (*unintelligible*), was constantly going nuts with Paco because Paco would record a *falseta*, and he would have to do a punch in and he does it completely differently, plays different melody, and never repeats himself the same way and so Regrosser (*unintelligible*) would

go nuts. Tomatito once was with Antonio Canales on a tour for forty-two concerts and in these forty-two concerts he had to play this one *falseta*. Not once he would play the same way in forty-two concerts, so that's an element of improvisation. (Enrique Vargas, personal communication, January 23, 2015)

Whether these are true or apocryphal is not important; what is important is that seminal figures in guitar playing are credited and admired for having such an abundance of creativity, even to the point of it, at times, being a burden.

When the *rasgueo* and *falsetas* were put together, the order was often dependant on the mood, and my teachers would often play the *falsetas* slightly differently. In the models I was given, the *rasgueo* patterns were in *compás*, but not predictable. The *remates* would also be varied as they recurred.

One of my lessons with Alvaro was notable. In it he demonstrated an arpeggio sequence with the right hand we had previously learnt for the *alegrías*, but here he applied it to the harmonies of *soleá por bulerías*. What was exceptional about this lesson was that Alvaro said that you could use this pattern with different harmonies and melodies, and that this was how many players improvised melodically. He demonstrated, and it made perfect sense, but it should be noted that the right hand pattern fit over the *compás* we were using. I asked if it was possible to use with other *palos*, and he said that it would not fit. We tried it over *soleá*, and it didn't work. Here we had an example of using limited materials and making them stretch over a variety of contexts, and it dawned on me that I could do this with other material I had learnt. When memorising musical material, there is a limit to what most people can store, and so adaptation of material or techniques for different contexts is an elegant solution. Referring back to our original discussion, the point, at which the use of previous material in a new context is composition, as opposed to improvisation, is open for debate.

On one occasion I saw Aliel and another guitarist jamming over the chord to the Paco de Lucia rumba *Entre Dos Aguas*. They took turns, with one playing this basic chord progression, while the other experimented with melodic ideas, using *picado* and fast runs from the related scale. This type of improvisation is common to most pop/rock styles and was not really flamenco, although they used some flamenco guitar techniques. I am familiar with jazz line improvisation over chord progressions and found their

improvisation unsophisticated, and what you would expect from many guitarists getting together to jam. While this may be representative of what some players do, I am not sure it is representative of a specific *flamenco* practice.

When I asked the dancer Curro de Candega if he set time aside to practice improvisation, he explained his approach:

I prefer to make and breathe flamenco. I prefer to see a friend dancing, and artist singing, playing, I let it go on the stage. There's no way of practicing improvisation. You can practice movements or you can practice parts that help you... If you going on, it makes the show good. The improvisation is a trip, a social, cultural movement. I think it's the best way. There are partners... (Curro de Candega, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

For Curro, improvisation is a social activity that needs interaction between performers to have any relevance. We have seen that many of the foundational musical structures in flamenco are designed to help communication between performers, and so his emphasis on the need for social interaction is not surprising. However, the lack of explicit controlled rehearsal for improvising is.

I think that it is significant that in the various flamenco guitar lessons I have taken, no time was devoted to improvisation. This is in contrast to jazz guitar lessons I received, wherein a large proportion of the lesson and practice time was consciously spent practicing scales, arpeggios, and licks to be played over chord progressions, as well as chordal substitutions. In fact, the only time improvisation was mentioned in my flamenco lessons was when I raised the subject. This absence of explicit improvisational teaching in lessons is also reflected in the pedagogical material I have examined (both videos and books). The elements of flamenco pieces are taught, but there was no explicit teaching of improvisation. I think performers come to an implicit understanding after much exposure, somewhat in the manner of language acquisition.

Summary and Conclusion

We often think of music as being transmitted through large complete units, such as whole pieces, songs, or compositions. While this is true for many musics, flamenco is transmitted through smaller units. A flamenco piece is made up of a collection of middle-level structures, such as the *falsetas*, *rasgueo* passages, and various *llamadas*, which are

tioned to the unvarying *compás*. These mid-level structures are consistent in their use of cadences and overall harmonies (though they may be subject to substitution in more modern pieces, the harmonic patterns are still recognisable). Variation and improvisation can occur at a micro level, often through serendipity: a mishearing of the original material, slips and errors of memory or technique, or expediency for the player, as well as by inspiration. Variation happens within these mid-level structures, but the structures themselves are stable.

Variation and improvisation also occurs at the macro level, in the placement and order in which the mid-level structures are collected together. So, the mid-level structures can act as signposts that recur and hold the pieces together. Without these repetitions and areas of stability, it would be problematic for the music to be transmitted aurally (Nettl, 2005: 295-7), because memory places certain limitations on the constituent elements of what is transmitted. This is a good example of how the aural transmission of music affects the pieces and repertoires themselves. Walter Ong (2012), while discussing oral traditions in general, gives us an insight into what the majority of flamenco improvisation is.

In oral tradition, there will be as many minor variants of a myth as there are repetitions of it, and the number of repetitions can be increased indefinitely. Praise poems of chiefs invite entrepreneurship, as the old formulas and themes have to be made to interact with new and often complicated political situations. But the formulas and themes are reshuffled rather than supplanted with new materials. (42)

The units of flamenco are combined and recombined to create new pieces. This is not just an aspect of flamenco improvisation, but an essential factor in how the tradition has been transmitted in a largely aural culture.

The mid-level structures are also needed as signposts to mediate improvisation in a group context. It is at this level that most interaction between the performers occurs, and the most improvisation occurs within. This is why the stability of the mid-level structures are so strongly rooted in flamenco, and are a clear example of the primacy of social interaction in maintaining a tradition. If the improvisation breaks away from the recognised formal components, these being mostly our mid-level structures, it may be

improvisation, but is no longer considered flamenco. In flamenco, innovation occurs at the macro or micro level, the middle level is constant.

It was while reflecting on the teaching of improvisation, that the following thoughts on flamenco guitar pedagogy in general became clearer. In the teaching of flamenco for the future I recommend teachers concentrate on the high frequency items for the most common *palos*. The *falsetas* should also be taught with an eye on being able to use them, with some adaptation, in different *palos*. When introducing new material, a teacher should introduce one new element at a time, in a context that is already familiar, so as to avoid overload for the student. For example, if introducing a new right hand technique, it should be done within a familiar *palo*, with chords and left hand technique, with which the student is already comfortable. Constant recycling of all material is vital for memory retention. For most guitarists, thorough knowledge of a small amount of adaptable material is more useful than a vast collection of material.

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GLOSSARY

Alzapúa – A flamenco guitar playing technique that involves up and downstrokes of the thumb, which cause a strong pulsation, and, in some cases, syncopation

Apoyando - A right hand technique on guitar that produces a strong clear tone. The finger or thumb does not pluck out the string so much as pressing it down and coming to rest on the next string.

Arrastre – This is a quick dragging of the finger back across the strings from high to low in pitch, hitting each string *apoyando* when playing flamenco guitar.

Compás - the *compás* is the basic rhythmic pattern in Flamenco. This pattern gives the accented beats that provide the pulse in the various flamenco styles. The pattern is repeated end to end throughout the piece. Without this sense of pulse, the music is not considered flamenco. Different flamenco forms (*palos*) have different *compáses*. The harmony and melody of the *palo* are tied closely to the *compás*.

Falsetas - These are passages of solo melodic material, played periodically between passages of *rasgueo* on the guitar. They are played between verses and at the start of songs. With the advent of solo flamenco guitar, many pieces are collections of *falsetas* chained together with short passages of *rasgueo*.

Golpe - A percussive sound made by a right hand finger tapping on the guitar's soundboard.

Letra – a verse of *cante*. Each *letra* stands alone, and songs are chains of these independent *letras* — often likened to pearls on a necklace, in that they are beautiful and precious in their own right, but linked together make a work of art. *Letras* do not usually follow directly on from one another, but are linked by *falsetas*.

Palo – the term meaning a flamenco song form.

Picado - Melodic passages employing only *apoyando* strokes.

Rasgueo - These are the passages of rhythmic strumming that characterise flamenco.

These driving passages set up and secure the *compás*. The term also refers to the various right hand strumming techniques used in flamenco. In the Andalusian dialect it is pronounced *rasgueo*, but in standard Spanish (Castellano) it is referred to as *rasqueado*.

Tirando - A right hand technique that is used to contrast with *apoyando*. The finger or thumb strikes the string parallel to the soundboard rather than pressing it down. The finger does not finish the stroke on the adjacent string.

Tremolo - A guitar technique where a fast succession of notes in the treble register gives the impression of a sustained melodic line, while the thumb plays an accompanying bass line.