

## Chapter Twenty

### *Carmen at home: between Andalusia and the Basque provinces (1845–1936)*

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Bizet's *Carmen* has been at the centre of many lively debates on Spanish national identity since its Paris premiere in 1875. Its local colour has made it an emblem not only of French exoticism but, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, also of staged Spanishness.<sup>1</sup> Praised abroad for its original Spanish melodies, Bizet's work could hardly be taken as authentic in the country where Mérimée had set his 1845 novella. With the passage of time, both France and Spain would adopt the work as canonical of *their* traditions, a process characterised by debates about whose Spain was being represented.<sup>2</sup> This chapter approaches the notion of Spanishness from *Carmen*'s 'homes', from the region where Mérimée set his novella, Andalusia, and from the Basque provinces, which both protagonists claimed as their native region. By doing so, it demonstrates how the local discourses around *Carmen* – and the exoticising portrait of Spain that the opera helped consolidate abroad – were or were not accepted within the political and cultural processes that shaped the transition of Spain from a transoceanic, imperial monarchy to a peninsular nation state.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Christoforidis and Elizabeth Kertesz, *'Carmen' and the Staging of Spain. Recasting Bizet's Opera in the Belle Epoque*, New York and Oxford, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. A. Clark, 'South of North: *Carmen* and French Nationalisms', in Claire Sponsler and Xiaomei Chen eds., *East of West: Cross-cultural Performance and the Staging of Difference*, New York, 2000, 187–216; on issues on Spanish identity and authenticity see Samuel Llano, *Whose Spain? Negotiating Spanish Music in Paris, 1908–1929*, New York and Oxford, 2012.

Both works, the novella and the opera, are articulated around the opposition between north and south. Don José is described as a Basque from Elizondo in Navarre, and Carmen, although working in Seville, claims to have her origins in the village of Etxalar in the same region.<sup>3</sup> In the view of author José María Salaverría, close to the ‘Generación del 98’ and the spirit of *regeneracionismo*, the Basques and the Andalusians had a good mutual understanding. Both peoples had, according to Salaverría, the tendency to ‘lose their heads’, and the northerners easily succumbed to ‘Andalusian temptation’.<sup>4</sup> Don José proves this particular ability in the final murder scene when he stabs Carmen, but also at the very beginning of the plot as his arrival in Seville was the result of a crime committed in his native Navarre. The libretto, through its mixture of northern and southern elements, maps control and chaos, emotions that seemingly spiral out of control, onto the north–south divide.

The Spain that Mérimée knew in the 1830s and that of the 1880s, when Bizet’s work first arrived in the country, were in many respects different worlds. *Carmen*’s resonances abroad have been the subject of far reaching echoes, as this volume and its accompanying online resources illustrate. A closer look at the current affairs of *Carmen* ‘at home’ demonstrates the problematic notion of Spanishness that has underlined a vast

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<sup>3</sup> Geographically, Euskadi or Euskal Herria is a cultural area spanning both sides of the Pyrenees, consisting of seven historical territories: Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa, Alava, and Navarra (in Spain) and Lower Navarre, Labourd and Soule (in France). Navarre is not part of today’s autonomous region of the (Spanish) Basque Country. On the birth of Basque separatism on 16 August 1893 during the tribute to the Orfeón Pamplonés in Gernika, see Esther Calzada del Amo, *Germán Gamazo, 1840–1901: poder político y redes sociales en la Restauración*, Madrid, 2011, 264. In the *Carmen* libretto, Etxalar is spelt Etchalar.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Hay pueblos que irremediabilmente se han de sentir atraídos por la tentación andaluza; son los pueblos que “saben perder la cabeza”. [...] De estos pueblos es [...] el vasco.’ José M<sup>a</sup> Salaverría, ‘Paralelismo Vasco-Andaluz’, *Hermes*, Bilbao, 11 November 1917, 16–18.

portion of *Carmen* scholarship. When *Carmen* was first staged in Spain, on 2 August 1881 in Barcelona, intense debates over national – and most importantly, regional – identity were about to unfold across the country.<sup>5</sup> The different responses that the opera created in the north and in the south speak of different realities, of the lack of consensus as to what the essence of a Spanish identity might be. Spanishness was, as *Carmen*'s history in Spain illustrates, anything but easy to define.

### **The south**

The Parisian premiere was followed closely in Andalusia. In Cadiz, *La Moda elegante* informed of the 'absolute success' of the 1875 premiere at the Opéra-Comique. Despite the novelty of the new opera, an anonymous critic was left underwhelmed, as it was perceived as nothing but a reworking of worn-out subject matter, played out by monotonous and sad characters (with the exception of Galli-Marié's incarnation of Carmen).<sup>6</sup> The first performance of *Carmen* in an Andalusian city was given in Seville on 27 July 1889 by the company of Guillermo Cereceda at the Teatro Eslava, inaugurated two years earlier. The work was staged again that same year in the same city, at the Teatro de San Fernando in November, in alternation with Verdi's *Ernani*, another story of two men fighting over a woman's love, again set in Spain.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after, Cereceda's company went to Cadiz,

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<sup>5</sup> See Josep M. Fradera, 'The Empire, the Nation and the Homelands: Nineteenth-Century Spain's National Idea', in Joost Augusteyn and Eric Storm eds., *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building, Regional Identities and Separatism*, Basingstoke, 2012, 131–48.

<sup>6</sup> X. X., *La moda elegante*, Cadiz, 30 March 1875, 8.

<sup>7</sup> That same year *Carmen* was also staged on 5, 10 and 25 December. *Carmen* was performed by Consuelo Montañés, Don José by Pinedo, Escamillo by Alfaro, and Micaëla by Mariscal. See Andrés Moreno Mengíbar, *La ópera en Sevilla en el siglo XIX*, Seville, 1998, 295; Mónica Barrientos Bueno, *Inicios del cine*

where they were the first to present *Carmen* to the public, with Bianca Montesini in the title role. In this case, the role of Carmen was described as that of a ‘gypsy cigar-maker’ (*cigarrera gitana*); it would only be later and in specific performance conditions as those described in the last chapter that she would come to be seen as the epitome of the Andalusian woman. The critics of the Cadiz premiere argued that the opera had missed an opportunity to characterise the local customs and music.<sup>8</sup> When the company led by José Tolosa staged the opera in Córdoba in 1890, this same idea was reported by the press. An article signed by ‘an amateur’ lamented that, despite its ‘excellent orchestration’, such good music should be wasted on *Carmen*, as ‘especially in Andalusia [...] we need authentic bullfighters, bandits and *manolas*, otherwise they [...] become terribly ridiculous.’<sup>9</sup>

Méndez Vedillo, a local commentator, was also unenthusiastic about the Granada premiere of 1890. In his view the libretto lacked inventiveness, seemed anachronistic and wasted in the hands of Bizet; had a Spanish master of musical theatre been able to work on such a text, the result would have been a *zarzuela* comparable to *El barberillo de Lavapiés* (1874) by Francisco Asenjo Barbieri.<sup>10</sup> Not only was *Carmen* inauthentic, but the subject matter and the music showed little interconnection. In this sense, Act IV was particularly criticised as the librettists would have infused some real local colour, Méndez Vedillo argued, had they ever witnessed a Spanish bullfight.

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*en Sevilla (1896–1906). De la presentación en la ciudad a las exhibiciones continuadas*, Seville, 2006, 83, 386, 387.

<sup>8</sup> *La Palma de Cádiz: Diario de avisos, mercantil, industrial, agrícola y literario*, 30 July 1889.

<sup>9</sup> ‘[S]obre todo en Andalucía [...] necesitamos que los toreros, los contrabandistas y las *manolas*, sean auténticos, pues de otro [...] caen fatalmente en lo ridículo.’ *Diario de Córdoba de comercio, industria, administración, noticias y avisos*, 18 June 1890.

<sup>10</sup> M. Méndez Vedillo, ‘La temporada teatral’, *Boletín del Centro Artístico de Granada*, 16 May 1890, 124.

Examples of how Andalusian critics commentated on the flagrant lack of authenticity of the opera abound. Following its premiere in Granada, a commentator in *El Defensor* spoke of it as:

a series of senseless and illogical events, jumbled together with a deep disregard for the art of drama and a complete ignorance of the nature of the characters present in the story. *Carmen*'s Andalusians are more French than Spanish, which comes to show how little some writers of the neighbouring republic know about what goes on here.<sup>11</sup>

By 1907, the libretto was considered to be based on 'utmost falseness'.<sup>12</sup> However ludicrous it was considered to be, most of these reviews concurred regarding the charm and beauty of Bizet's music.

In some other smaller Andalusian towns Bizet's opera was known first through *Carmela*, the parody of the opera that the Catalan Salvador Granés had premiered in Barcelona in 1890.<sup>13</sup> This was the case in Almería, where *Carmen* was staged for the first time on 17 April 1901, and where Granés's show had toured previously.<sup>14</sup> *Carmela* received mixed reviews in Cadiz. For some it had 'wonderful numbers', whereas others lamented that the comical effect was lost and that as a result it seemed to possess the

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<sup>11</sup> '[e]l libro de Meilhac y Halévy, basado en una novela de Mérimée, es una serie de hechos sin ilación ni lógica, amontonados unos sobre otros, con profundo desconocimiento de la dramática e ignorancia completa del carácter de los personajes que figuran en la fábula. Los tipos andaluces de *Carmen* son más franceses que españoles, y prueban lo poco enterados que andan de las cosas de por acá algunos escritores de la vecina república.' *El Defensor de Granada*, 4 June 1890.

<sup>12</sup> '[E]l libro está cimentado en la falsedad más absoluta [...].' *El Defensor de Granada*, 17 October 1907.

<sup>13</sup> On the parody by Granés see Christoforidis and Kertesz, '*Carmen*' and the Staging of Spain, 118–38.

<sup>14</sup> A. J. S, 'Carmen', *Crónica Meridional: diario liberal independiente y de intereses generales*, 18 April 1901. Other Andalusian cities were also on the circuit of *Carmela*'s tour, see *El Defensor de Granada*, 29 March 1891.

pretensions of a serious *zarzuela*, only resulting in a rather dull one.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that Granés understood very well the way in which the original story played out issues of alterity and inner exoticism. Bizet's *Carmen* and Don José were identified with the two extremes – north and south – of the Iberian Peninsula. In the 1845 novella, the polyglot *Carmen* has a brief exchange with Don José in Basque, the only isolated language in Europe with no connection to any Indo-European root, and which is still spoken in both the north of Spain and the south of France: 'Laguna ene bihotsarena' ('friend of my heart') are the exact words with which *Carmen* seeks Don José's attention.<sup>16</sup> Granés's parody re-centred *Carmen* by turning Carmela into a working-girl from Madrid (*manola*) but located Don José again on the periphery by portraying him as a Galician, a native of the most north-western region of Spain. In this way, the work – which Granés had originally devised for a Catalan audience – covered all the regions of the country where forms of historical nationalism had grown. This proves that the regional issues already explored by Mérimée became central to the early Spanish reception of *Carmen*. Abroad, *Carmen* was the *espagnolade par excellence*. But the opera arrived 'at home' when Andalusian culture was becoming associated with Spain as a whole. By exchanging one region for another, Granés was making a point about certain regional references which could only with difficulty become diluted in an all-encompassing idea of Spain.

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<sup>15</sup> 'tiene números preciosos', *La Palma: Diario de avisos, mercantil, industrial, agrícola y literario*, 16 October 1891; 'El principal defecto de la ejecución es que no resulta parodia, es decir, que resulta la zarzuela más sosa del mundo.' *La Palma*, 23 October 1891.

<sup>16</sup> Prosper Mérimée, 'Carmen', *La Revue des deux mondes*, vol. 12, nouvelle série, 1 October 1845, 24.

*Carmen* contributed to ‘a *sevillanisation* of Andalusia as arbitrary as the *andalusisation* of Spain’, in the words of historian Antonio Domínguez Ortiz.<sup>17</sup> Scholars of Andalusian culture claim that until the last third of the nineteenth century it was foreigners who characterised Andalusians as a collective, which they equated with the quintessence of Spain.<sup>18</sup> The local sense of a shared ethnicity only developed in the 1880s. El Folclore Andaluz, the first folklore society of Spain, for instance, was founded by Antonio Machado y Álvarez in 1881. But unlike the Basque and Catalan cases, the blooming of an Andalusian sense of ethnicity did not lead to a separatist political movement: on the contrary, the local oligarchy supported the identification of Andalusian culture with Spain at large precisely as a strategy to eliminate local grassroots tendencies. Thus *Carmen*’s anarchism, and her pretending to turn Don José (the Basque of noble ancestry) into a bandit, could have been interpreted locally as an apology of the anarchist movement that was spreading across the Andalusian country.

The nationalisation of Andalusian folklore as the *soul* of Spain has been thoroughly studied: it was through a neoclassical turn that figures such as Manuel de Falla or Federico García Lorca made the gypsy the ‘national hero’ in the context of the post-1898 *desastre*, when Spain lost its last overseas territories in the Americas and the Pacific.<sup>19</sup> As more

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<sup>17</sup> ‘[U]na sevillanización de Andalucía tan arbitraria como la andalucización de España’, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, ‘Andalucía ayer y hoy’, in Isidoro Moreno Navarro ed., *La identidad cultural de Andalucía: aproximaciones, mixtificaciones, negacionismo y evidencias*, Seville, 2008, 171–86, 182.

<sup>18</sup> Exceptions to these rules are Serafín Estébanez Calderón (1799–1867), who corresponded with Mérimée, and his *Escenas andaluzas* (1847), or exiles such as Joseph Blanco White (1775–1841). See Isidoro Moreno Navarro, ‘Primer descubrimiento consciente de la identidad andaluza (1868–1890)’, in Navarro ed., *La identidad cultural*, 29–46, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Llano, ‘Public Enemy or National Hero? The Spanish Gypsy and the Rise of Flamenquismo’, 1898–1922’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 94, no. 6, 2017, 977–1004.

reviews of the opera were published in Spain, it became harder to discern whether Carmen was a Basque gypsy as she pretended, a Sevillian cigar-maker or the epitome of the Andalusian or Spanish woman. As already noted by Christoforidis and Kertesz, the Seville-born singer Elena Fons created her *flamenquista* version of the opera, which toured Spain and Mexico at the turn-of-the-century including the *malagueña* dances that had been added to the entr'acte which gave the opera an 'absolutely Spanish' sound.<sup>20</sup> Yet Seville-born composer Joaquín Turina pointed out the confusion and arbitrariness that characterised this vision of Spain tinted by Andalusian exoticism, known commonly as 'tambourine Spain' (*la España de pandereta*). While acknowledging that Mérimée had been the initiator of a journey into *música españolista* (a monolithic and unified Spanish music), *Carmen* remained for Turina an example of the Andalusian imagination from abroad, even if 'tambourine Spain' was as much seen as an invention of the Spanish themselves.<sup>21</sup> Thus the development of a Spanish national identity was shaped by local ideas of self-perception (just as it had been in Spanish America), whereas the exoticising *hispanisme* of neighbouring France also shaped, to an extent, the search for the Spanish within Spain.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Lénica Reyes Zúñiga, 'Las malagueñas del siglo XIX en España y México', PhD diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015, 186–88.

<sup>21</sup> Joaquín Turina, 'El Canto andaluz en el arte de la Música', conference at the Madrid Liceo Andaluz, 10 June 1936, in *La música andaluza*, Seville, 1982, 59–77. Mariano de Cavia's preface to Mérimée's *Cartas de España* (*Lettres d'Espagne*) affirms that *la España de pandereta* was the invention of Spaniards themselves. Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen; Cartas de España: una corrida de toros, pena capital, el bandolerismo*, trans. Eduardo del Palacio, Madrid, 1918, ix.

<sup>22</sup> Celsa Alonso, 'La construcción de España en el siglo XIX', in Celsa Alonso, Julio Arce and Teresa Fraile eds., *Creación musical, cultura popular y construcción nacional en la España contemporánea*, Madrid, 2011, 51–76, particularly 59.

Before *Carmen*, numerous Spanish composers of the nineteenth century, such as Ruperto Chapí, Tomás Bretón, Felipe Pedrell, and of course Albéniz and Granados, had already contributed to an Orientalist discourse, for instance through the elaboration of the Moorish picturesque of the Alhambra in the movement known as *Alhambrismo*. In Spain, numerous actors sought to further develop *Carmen* as an archetype of Spanish authenticity, such as the author and translator Rafael María Liern or the acclaimed singer María Gay.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, the opera as a whole would be appropriated in Andalusia and even used in diplomatic affairs. At the premiere of 1875 the Spanish ambassador in Paris had not been invited to the Opéra-Comique whereas in 1958, when *Carmen* was staged as part of Charles de Gaulle's celebrations after the proclamation of the Fifth Republic, his counterpart was given a seat of honour.<sup>24</sup> Later on, at the Universal Exposition of Seville (Expo '92), the opera was staged lavishly to great success with Plácido Domingo as conductor and Teresa Berganza in the title role.<sup>25</sup> In the north, however, *Carmen*'s fate differed significantly.

### **The north**

Dumas (*père*) famously stated that Africa started just south of the Pyrenees. Not only did this idea homogenise the rich cultural variations within the Iberian Peninsula, it also exoticised the European south.<sup>26</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, the absence of the

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<sup>23</sup> On the local contribution to the *espagnolade* see Christoforidis and Kertesz, '*Carmen*' and the Staging of Spain, 205–35; on the Madrid stagings and Liern see their article 'Confronting *Carmen* beyond the Pyrenees: Bizet's Opera in Madrid, 1887–1888', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20, no. 1, 2008, 79–110.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, 'South of North', 208.

<sup>25</sup> Agustí Fancelli, "'Carmen' seduce a lo grande en la fábrica de tabacos y la plaza de La Maestranza', *El País*, 25 April 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Allen Josephs, *White Wall of Spain. The Mysteries of Andalusian Culture*, Pensacola, 1990, 8.

Moors in the Basque regions was becoming an important trope of Basque historiography as well as a pillar of the development of Basque nationalism, the beginnings of which scholars situate in 1876, a year after *Carmen* was premiered in Paris.<sup>27</sup> As we shall see, the response of the Basque cultural elite to what *Carmen* represented was twofold. On the one hand, those invested in the creation of a Basque national music had different priorities on which to concentrate. On the other, those unaligned with the nationalist agenda were accused of not being truly Basque.

Ignacio Zuloaga, who had created the stage designs for a 1905 *Carmen* staging in Berlin, painted in 1908 the portrait *Lucienne Bréval as Carmen*. Resurrección María de Azkue, the prominent Basque philologist and folklorist, accused unfitting figures like him of being *soi-disant* Basques. Indeed, much of the local art criticism of the first third of the twentieth century endlessly debated the (im)possibility of Basque-born artists to engage with Spanish *costumbrismo* while maintaining their Basqueness.<sup>28</sup> Painters such as Zuloaga and Darío de Regoyos were accused of looking at Spain with foreign eyes, an idea that Bilbao-born philosopher Miguel de Unamuno found unacceptable.<sup>29</sup> Azkue even went as far as to suggest the repudiation of intellectuals such as the writer Pío Baroja, the son of

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<sup>27</sup> Javier Corcuera Atienza, *La patria de los vascos: Orígenes, ideología y organización del nacionalismo vasco 1876–1903*, Madrid, 2001, 42.

<sup>28</sup> The critic Juan de la Encina admitted to having suffered hours of patriotic sadness in the presence of Zuloaga's canvasses. Juan de la Encina, 'El exotismo y el arte vasco. Algunas aclaraciones', *Hermes* 5, 1917, 330–332, at 332.

<sup>29</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, 'El arte de Ignacio Zuloaga', *Hermes* 8, 1917, 515.

Serafin Baroja who had written the libretto for *Pudente* (1894), the first Basque-language opera.<sup>30</sup>

Pío Baroja penned ‘La sonrisa de Iradier’ in 1936, arguably the first biographical account to have noted the paradox that Andalusian songs such as Sebastián Iradier’s *habanera* ‘El Arreglito’, that Bizet had arranged for *Carmen*, should have been composed by a Basque.<sup>31</sup> Iradier (1809–1865) was born in the Alavese village of Lanciego, and had a successful musical career in Paris, the United States, Mexico and Cuba. By the mid-1860s, many of his songs had appeared in Paris, including the anthology *Fleurs d’Espagne* (1864), which contained a number of his popular *habaneras*. ‘La Paloma’, for example, is amongst the most rearranged, if not plagiarised, compositions of all time, and ‘La Negrita’, was reworked into Edouard Lalo’s *Symphonie espagnole* (1874). Inserting Iradier’s *habanera* ‘El Arreglito’ instead of a *tarantella*, as Bizet had originally devised, was a ‘masterstroke and a landmark in operatic history.’<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested that it was Galli-Marié (the creator of the role of Carmen) who proposed the inclusion of this particular song to Bizet. Iradier and the French composer may have discussed Spanish music in person, as according to Pío Baroja, they met when the former was approximately twenty-five years old.<sup>33</sup> Pablo Sarasate, Navarrese violinist and creator of the *Fanstasia sobre Carmen* which became so popular before the full opera was ever heard in Spain, also occasionally visited Bizet at his home and may have sparked his interest in Spanish

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<sup>30</sup> See Natalie Morel Borotra, *L’opéra basque (1884–1937) : et l’art basque descendit des montagnes*, Saint-Étienne-de-Baigorri, 2003; Hervé Lacombe and Christine Rodriguez, *La habanera de Carmen, Naissance d’un tube*, Paris, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Pío Baroja, ‘La sonrisa de Iradier’, *Ahora*, 3 March 1936.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Langham Smith, ‘Preface’, in Georges Bizet, *Carmen. Opéra en 4 actes*, vocal score, London, 2013, x.

<sup>33</sup> José Andrés Álvaro Ocariz, *Sebastián Iradier*, Fuente de la Reina, 2016, 72.

music.<sup>34</sup> After his *habanera* had made *Carmen* so popular across the globe, Iradier's editors tried suing Bizet's publisher Choudens, but to no avail.

The trans-Atlantic hybridity of the *habanera* did not pose identity problems to the Alavese composer during his lifetime when Cuba was still part of the Spanish monarchy and therefore these pieces, based on creole rhythms, were examples of *the exotic within*, at the same level as his Andalusian songs, some of which included words in *caló* (the language used by gypsies in Spain).<sup>35</sup> Yet when *Carmen* began to tour the Spanish stages in the 1880s and 1890s, and particularly after the opera took on new flamenco elements, Iradier's eclecticism became problematic (see also Chapter Nine), as critics honed their awareness of regional, national and transnational idioms.

Basque music critic Ignacio Zubialde, who in 1896 had founded the *Revista Musical* in Bilbao stated that '[t]here shall never be a Hispanic art as long as Andalusian and Spanish music continue to be mixed up.'<sup>36</sup> In 1914 the journal was transferred to Madrid and despite counting Miguel Salvador among its contributors, who admitted to having read Mérimée's *Carmen* several times, the journal did not devote any articles to the opera during its Bilbao period. It is rather telling that *Carmen* should have gone undiscussed in the pages of one of the main specialised musical publications of Spain. What we do find in the *Revista Musical*, however, is a greater sensitivity towards the problems of stereotyping European minorities, for instance with the people of Corsica.

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<sup>34</sup> María Nagore Ferrer, *Sarasate. El violín de Europa*, Madrid, 2013, 186.

<sup>35</sup> On *habaneras*, transnationalism and exoticism see Celsa Alonso, *La canción lírica Española en el siglo XIX*, Madrid, 1998, 261.

<sup>36</sup> '[L]a eterna confusión entre música española y música andaluza que continua ofuscando el verdadero concepto de arte hispano.' Ignacio Zubialde, *Revista Musical*, Bilbao, December 1909, quoted in Celsa Alonso, 'La música española y el espíritu del 98', *Cuadernos de música iberoamericana* 5, 1998, 79–107, 95.

Miguel Salvador hoped, when reporting on the premiere of *Colomba* (based on another novella by Mérimée) by Amadeu Vives (1910), that Mérimée had not done with Corsica what he had done with Andalusia.<sup>37</sup>

So why did Mérimée conceive the origins of his two protagonists to be from the extremes of the north and south? In his time it was believed that the Basque language had originated in Navarre. Elizondo and Etxalar are located in the Navarrese valley of the Baztán. The first known Basque literary work, Bernat Etxepare's *Linguae Primitiae Vasconum* (1545), was precisely written in the lower Navarrese dialect. Whether Basque or gypsy, Don José and Carmen had in common the mystery that surrounded the origins of their ancestral culture. Together with the philological interest that Mérimée showed for both the Basque language and Iberian Romani, the author also pursued in this novella his interest in the anthropological study of their cultures, having corresponded with the scholar Francisque Michel about Basque popular mores. The French philologist eventually published his own research on Basque gypsies, whose presence in the region is documented since at least the fifteenth century, and who described them as 'the most shameless amongst all animals.'<sup>38</sup>

Just as in the novella, in the libretto (Act I), Carmen discloses her Basque origins to Don José letting him know that she is from Etxalar, in the vicinity of his native

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<sup>37</sup> Miguel Salvador, 'Estreno de Colomba', *Revista Musical* 13, January 1910, 11–13. It was in the pages of his journal that Zubialde also enlivened national debates on Spanish opera by proposing to give further presence to regional languages. On the issue of the Basque and gypsies being an ambivalent form of the exotic see, José F. Colmeiro, 'Exorcising Exoticism: "Carmen" and the Construction of Oriental Spain', *Comparative Literature* 54, no. 2, Spring 2002, 127–44.

<sup>38</sup> '[L]e bohémien basque est [...] le plus éhonté d'entre les animaux.' Francisque Michel, 'Les bohémiens du Pays Basque', *L'Athenaeum français. Revue universelle de la littérature, de la science et des beaux-arts*, 8 December 1855, 1060.

Elizondo. Her supposed Basqueness appeared reconverted into the character of Micaëla, the northern, sweet, childlike-woman who is everything that Carmen is not. She embodies the ‘suitable companion’ figure and reminds José of both his home and of his mother, as demonstrated in their duet when they sing ‘il revoit sa mère, il revoit son pays’. As we know, Mérimée found in George Borrow’s *The Zinçali, or An Account of the Gypsies of Spain* (1841) a most important source for his work. One of the main discrepancies in the approaches of the two men lay in the issue of gypsy women’s chastity, defended by George Borrow and criticised by the French author. The promiscuous woman that Carmen represented was thus counter-balanced with José’s childhood companion, who was neither a *femme fatale* nor the archetypal coquette of the *opéra-comique* tradition.<sup>39</sup> Micaëla in fact fitted rather well with the description of Navarrese women offered by Carlist Francisco Navarro Villoslada in 1881, for whom they were pious, obedient, austere and worked so hard that they had no time left for either jealousy or infidelity.<sup>40</sup>

Inspired to follow in the steps of Mérimée, the author and archaeologist Gaston Deschamps travelled to Etxalar with the aim of capturing the atmosphere of *Carmen*’s home. He was struck by the colour contrast between the lavish greenery of the mountains and the pink skies of the Baztán valley. Deschamps feminised the landscape, describing it as ‘so pure, so light and soft that in order to express its sweetness one needs to borrow hues from peach blossoms, mother of pearl and the virginal complexion of blonde girls.’<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hervé Lacombe, ‘The writing of exoticism in the libretti of the Opéra-Comique, 1825–1862’, in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 2, July 1999, 135–58.

<sup>40</sup> Francisco Navarro Villoslada, ‘La Mujer de Navarra. Conclusión’, *Euskara* 4, 1881, 314–324. Villoslada was also the author of the novel on which Guridi’s opera *Amaya* was based.

<sup>41</sup> [L]e ciel est rose, d’un rose invraisemblable, si pur, si léger, si suave, que j’aurais besoin, pour en exprimer la douceur, d’emprunter des nuances à la fleur du pêcher, à la nacre des coquillages, au teint virginal des

According to this description, one of the few in the first third of the century to have noticed the Basque element of the work, there seems to be something in Micaëla's character directly absorbed from the landscape of the Baztán valley.

If in the Andalusian cultural sphere an awareness of collective ethnic belonging was starting to develop when *Carmen* arrived on the stage, the same was happening in the north, where the blooming of Basque culture was later referred to as a Basque renaissance (*Euskal pizkundea*). It was also during the late-nineteenth century that the major music societies, bands and orchestras were founded. The Sociedad Coral and the Banda Municipal of Bilbao were created in 1886 and 1894, respectively, the Sociedad Filarmónica de Bilbao in 1896, and the Orfeón Donostiarra in San Sebastián in 1897. As demonstrated in Chapter Nine in relation to Spanish America, large-scale staged works were heard most often by most people in some partial form or arrangement ahead of a first full performance.<sup>42</sup> This was the case of *Carmen* in Spain also. When the Bilbao audiences listened to Bizet's *Carmen*, or excerpts of it, it was most often to outdoor performances by its Banda Municipal, rather than in the consecrated musical spaces of the city. On 20 April 1895, shortly after its foundation, the band performed the *Fantasia Carmen* at the Gran Café Arriaga, in all probability arranged by its director José Sáinz Basabe. After that, the piece became a fixture of its repertoire.<sup>43</sup> The vast proportion of the concert repertoire of

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jeunes filles blondes.' Gaston Deschamps, 'Au pays de Carmen', *Le Figaro*, 1 September 1904. The article appeared translated as 'En el país de Carmen', *La Baskonia*, Buenos Aires, 406, 1905, 152.

<sup>42</sup> See also Jann Pasler, 'Contingencies of Meaning in Transcriptions and Excerpts: Popularizing *Samson et Dalila*', in Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall eds., *Approaches to Meaning in Music*, Bloomington, 2006, 170–213, 207.

<sup>43</sup> *El Nervión*, Bilbao, 20 April 1895. The Banda Santa Cecilia had officially turned into the Banda Municipal de Bilbao on 4 May 1894. See Carmen Rodríguez Suso, *Banda Municipal de Bilbao: al servicio de la villa del Nervión*, Bilbao, 2006, 27.

the band consisted of airs and fantasias elaborated from French programmatic compositions, notably by Massenet and Dukas.<sup>44</sup> It would only be in 1935 that the Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao gave the opera in full; their second staging of *Carmen* took place during the 1939 opera festival, after the victory of Franco's troops in the Spanish Civil War.

On the operatic stages, ensembles such as the Sociedad Coral were invested in the 'fostering of *Basque opera* in its widest and most modern sense.'<sup>45</sup> The year 1910 marked the beginning of an era of splendour of Basque opera through Guridi's zarzuela *Mirentxu*, adapted as an opera by the Sociedad Coral de Bilbao in 1912. Alongside *Mirentxu*, and against the *espagnolade* of *Carmen*, there were other eponymous heroines that filled the pages of the local cultural press: *Maitena* was premiered in 1909 (libretto by Étienne Decrept and music by Charles Colin), and *Malvina* in 1914 (by Oscar Rochelt). Most importantly in 1920 Jesús Guridi, the most prominent Basque composer of his generation, premiered his *Amaya* based on a libretto by Francisco Navarro Villoslada, set in seventeenth-century Basque provinces and Navarre.<sup>46</sup> In these regions, works of Basque atmosphere or theme were at the centre of the debate, and Basque *costumbrismo* took the place that its closest sibling, the *espagnolade*, was occupying in other spaces.

Mérimée had based his novella on a set of binaries: good and evil, nobility and marginality, female and male, love and jealousy, familiar and foreign. The two cardinal points of north and south served to locate the two main characters of *Carmen* and Don José at the extremes of the Iberian Peninsula. On the one hand, the Basque from Elizondo

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<sup>44</sup> Rodríguez Suso, *Banda Municipal*, 45. Pablo Sarasate had composed his *Fantasia sobre Carmen* in 1882.

<sup>45</sup> '[L]a implantación y el cultivo de la *ópera vasca*, en su forma más amplia y moderna.' *Memoria de la Sociedad Coral de Bilbao*, Bilbao, 1911, 13.

<sup>46</sup> See Morel Borotra, *L'opéra basque*.

functioned as the author's alter ego, a man who arrived in Seville and discovered gypsy and Andalusian culture. Carmen, on the other, epitomised the exotic and the unpredictable. The adaptation that Meilhac and Halévy made of the work of course had a different public in mind, and their *Carmen* became the most successful *espagnolade*, which represented a stereotypical Spain, of bullfights and flamenco, also known in Spain through the derogatory turn of phrase *la España de Mérimée*.

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As Andalusian culture gradually became a hegemonic form of Spanishness, *Carmen* began to be described more often as Andalusian than as Spanish. After the crisis of 1898, part of the movement of *regeneracionismo* sought to 'cure' the country through decentralisation and by empowering regional cultures.<sup>47</sup> It was in this context that the privilege of Andalusian culture and *flamenquismo* as quintessentially Spanish was challenged, most notably by Catalan and Basque intellectuals. Basque nationalism sought to define a national art, a project to which *Carmen* served no purpose. On the other end of the political spectrum, the non-nationalists were more aligned with Castile, also a critical locus of national identity, which gave rise to vivid debates on Basque art in the blooming specialised press of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After its arrival in Spain, *Carmen* was a difficult piece to integrate into the puzzle of Spain, as each region was developing its own cultural map and canon. The responses to the opera varied from north to south, in accordance with the political and cultural heterogeneity of the country.

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*L'Athenaeum français. Revue universelle de la littérature, de la science et des beaux-arts*

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<sup>47</sup> See Juan Antonio Lacomba, 'Regionalismo, regeneracionismo y organización regional del estado: los planteamientos de J. Sánchez de Toca', *Estudios Regionales* 51, 1998, 229–54.

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