

Stories of a Transformative Journey: Exploring the Migratory Experiences of Four Andalusian Jazz Singers from a Biographical Perspective

Relatos de uma viagem transformadora: explorando as experiências migratórias de quatro cantoras de jazz andaluzas a partir de uma perspectiva biográfica

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the intersection of jazz and migration in Spain through the life experiences of four Andalusian jazz singers. A biographical approach was employed to investigate the meanings these singers attribute to migration based on their professional trajectories. The study reveals the dual role of migration as both a necessary step for artistic development and a reflection of broader cultural dynamics. Through life narratives, the challenges faced by these singers are discussed, while highlighting the transformative potential of these experiences. The research also engages with theoretical debates on biography as a method, reflecting on the particularities of this form of writing within the field of music studies.

KEYWORDS: Singer; Jazz; Spain; Migration; Biographical narrative.

RESUMO: Este artigo explora a interseção entre o jazz e a migração na Espanha através das experiências de vida de quatro cantoras de jazz andaluzas. Foi utilizado um enfoque biográfico para investigar os significados que essas cantoras atribuem à migração com base em suas trajetórias profissionais. O estudo revela o duplo papel da migração como um passo necessário para o desenvolvimento artístico e como um reflexo de dinâmicas culturais mais amplas. Através das narrativas de vida, discutem-se os desafios enfrentados por essas cantoras, destacando o potencial transformador dessas experiências. A pesquisa também envolve debates teóricos sobre a biografia como método, refletindo sobre as particularidades dessa forma de escrita no campo dos estudos musicais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cantora; Jazz; Espanha; Migração; Narrativa Biográfica



1. Introduction

This article aims to present an ongoing research process that seeks to foster dialogue between two areas of knowledge: ethnomusicology and sociology. The historical intersection of jazz and migration serves as an anchor for reflecting on the experiences of various Spanish jazz singers over recent decades.

Jazz, a genre historically associated not only with innovation and improvisation but also with origins in the United States, poses a particular challenge for Spanish musicians seeking to find their voice and place in the local scene. Even in cities such as Barcelona and Madrid, complaints persist about the lack of support for performers and the scarcity of available performance spaces, despite these urban centers having a significant jazz scene. Moreover, the academic offerings are insufficient, failing to officially cover all stages of training and not implemented in all Spanish provinces (Rolando Eyjo and Prados Bravo 2022). As a result, singers aspiring to professionalize in this genre are compelled to address these institutional and professional deficiencies.

Thus, when the place of origin lacks a necessary educational environment, migration emerges as an option. However, the act of migration is not solely a reaction but is also driven by an ideal. Motivation has been the focus of various approaches in the fields of cognition and, particularly, education. As Allen Norman and Flores Sand (1998) explain, motivation is the process that drives a person to act in a certain way or that generates a tendency towards specific behavior. In this context, the ideal is framed as a matrix connecting various elements of individual experience, where networks of ideas, images, feelings, beliefs, and shared projects exist within an intrinsically defined social and cultural background.

The complexity of this phenomenon leads us to employ the biographical approach, as it aligns with a constructivist epistemological stance that seeks to understand the role of the subject in social practices rather than explaining them causally or structurally (Buitrago Malaver and Arias López 2018). Within this framework, and thanks to the generosity of Andalusian artists Celia Mur, Lara Bello, Pepa Niebla, and Susana Raya, we were able to initiate this research process

2. The biographical approach: limits and possibilities

In this study, the choice of the biographical approach for constructing empirical evidence is grounded, following Kornblit and Beltramino (2004), on the understanding that this methodological tool retrieves a world of meanings while allowing insight into the individual interpretations attributed to experiences within the social context in which they emerge. Thus, the development of biographical narratives offers a privileged approach to the processes of constructing individuals' social experiences and the diverse connections between their reflexivities, contexts, and material and/or symbolic supports (Güelman 2013; Kornblit and Beltramino 2004; Leclerc-Olive 2009; Sautu 2004).

From the perspective of social constructionism, according to Buitrago Malaver and Arias López (2018), narratives are viewed as reflections of the social world that enable individuals to construct their own identities and, through an active process of reflecting on their experiences, to understand the environment in which they live, and the subjective meanings generated through interaction with others. In this context, the researcher's role is to critically engage with diverse perspectives and systematically analyze interactional

processes, thereby gaining insight into the cultural and historical frameworks that underpin and shape the narrative. Thus, from this perspective, language is understood as a symbolic mediator of meanings, and temporality emerges as a dimension of experience.

However, according to Ferrarotti (2007), the biographical method must contend with an inherent danger: interpreting a specific biography as an absolute and irreducible truth. From an opposing viewpoint, Bolívar (2012, as cited in Buitrago Malaver and Arias López 2018) warns that 'a proper narrative analysis must avoid excessive categorical treatment that expropriates the voices of the subjects being studied.' To avoid these pitfalls, it is necessary to apply epistemological vigilance throughout the research process (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 2004), especially during the analysis phase. Thus, the aim is to guide the process towards 'the construction of plots of meaning through the confrontation of simultaneous voices and narratives, avoiding reductionist approaches and maintaining a constant process of comparison to identify recurrences, similar action logics, and related processes' (Buitrago Malaver and Arias López 2018).

For this reason, the following section will outline the process of constructing the life stories that underpin this work, followed by a presentation of initial sketches from the analysis of this experience.

3. Life Stories

First, it is essential to distinguish between the notions of "life history" and "biographical account." The latter concept emerged in France around 1980 to differentiate between a person's lived history (a fact that is scientifically elusive) and the account the subject provides of certain dimensions and events of that history. These accounts are constructed using a particular technique: the semi-structured interview. Positioned between the survey and the in-depth interview, this technique features a guide of topics that the researcher aims to address throughout the interview.

Thus, the selection of the semi-structured interview as a tool for constructing life stories responds to its potential to generate data on the subjects' experiences, exploring their perceptions, practices, meanings, and reflections about themselves and others. This approach allows the researcher to access intimate aspects of the interviewee that are often difficult to reach through other methods or techniques. Further, biographical accounts emphasize polyphony through intersecting and/or parallel narratives, leading to a deeper and broader perspective, as we will have the opportunity to illustrate below.

For the present study, information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with singers from the contemporary jazz scene in Andalusia, an autonomous community in the south of Spain, conducted between 2018 and 2023. The methodological principles were drawn from Enrique Cámara de Landa's (2016) recommendations on fieldwork and interviews, specifically regarding planning, preparation, documentation, and kinesthetic and proxemic aspects.

Criteria were established for selecting the interviewees. Firstly, they had to be professional singers and must have received their training in Spain, regardless of whether they were currently residing in the country or abroad. Ultimately, the decision was made to work with singers born in the same autonomous community to facilitate the parallel polyphony of their constructed life narratives.

The semi-structured interview was an instrument that enabled us to discover and produce descriptive data on the representations of the interviewees. To achieve this, we developed a script with guiding questions, organized according to specific thematic dimensions relevant to the research objectives such as personal history, training, and education, among others. The locations where the interviews were conducted varied significantly, and in all cases, we considered the interviewees' suggestions, including settings like conservatory classrooms, cafeterias, or, in some cases, their own homes. Additionally, some interviews were conducted virtually via Skype or Zoom because the artists were residing abroad. For this reason, the Covid-19 pandemic did not significantly impact our working methods, as we already had experience conducting part of the interviews through virtual channels.

Before each interview, we conducted thorough research. We reviewed the artists' discography and biography, as well as previous interviews they had given, and listened carefully to their recordings and albums to gain a deeper understanding of their style and vocal technique. This preparation provided insights into the singers' backgrounds, networks of relationships, and perspectives. Consequently, the interviews focused on more personal aspects of their training and migratory experiences.

Each interview was recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed for subsequent analysis and discussion. As we carefully reviewed the collected material, we cross-referenced data, identified common themes, and searched for discursive patterns, which were further discussed with the singers to deepen the analysis and validate the representation and interpretation of the material obtained in the interviews. Below, we present a brief biography of each artist and part of the process of constructing and analyzing the life stories. We will then discuss the reflections and conclusions which remain ongoing.

3.1. Pepa Niebla

Pepa Niebla, a singer and composer from Malaga, began her musical career in Granada, the city she considers her artistic cradle. In Granada, she obtained her degree in Music Education from the University of Granada while training in Classical Singing at the Victoria Eugenia Conservatory. During these years, Niebla explored a variety of genres and repertoires, gaining valuable musical experience.

In 2004, she moved to London, where she lived for six years. In 2010, she received an offer from El Pescador and EMI Spain to record her first album, *Jazz al desnudo*, alongside Malaga-born guitarist Ricky Vivar. This project boosted her career and rekindled her interest in jazz, leading her to settle in Brussels, where she currently resides.

In 2019, Pepa Niebla completed her studies at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels with distinction, and that same year, she recorded her second album, *Renaissance*, her first production featuring original compositions. During a tour in Spain, she collaborated with pianist Ignasi Terraza, resulting in her third album, *En la orilla del Mundo*, released in 2023. Pepa Niebla has shared the stage with numerous national and international musicians, solidifying her position as a prominent figure in the music scene.



Figure 1 – La voz de la malagueña Pepa Niebla resucita al jazz contemporáneo neoyorquino.
Reference: CADENA SER, April 29, 2021.

3.2. Susana Raya

Described by American music critic and historian Ted Gioia as “the Andalusian Eva Cassidy”, Susana Raya is a Spanish singer, guitarist, improviser, and composer based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, with a well-established career on the international music scene.

Born in 1976 in Cordoba, Spain, she began her musical training as a classical guitarist at the conservatory of her hometown. During the 2000s, she won numerous prizes in European jazz singing competitions while honing her skills as a jazz guitarist in Amsterdam. In this environment, she developed a distinctive artistic voice that fuses influences ranging from folk to jazz, incorporating elements of her Spanish roots, as showcased in her album *Windrose*.

Susana Raya has demonstrated remarkable musical versatility, exploring diverse genres that include Bach melodies, jazz improvisation, and progressive rock riffs. This diversity has led her to tour Europe, the United States, and other destinations, performing at festivals such as Saitenprünge in Germany, the Holland Festival in the Netherlands, the Südtirol Jazz Festival in Italy, and Pori Jazz in Finland, among others. She has also

been a soloist with the WDR Symphony Orchestra of Cologne in concerts dedicated to Cole Porter and Chick Corea and was invited by Dutch guitarist Jan Akkerman to perform at the Royal Carré Theater in Amsterdam.

Throughout her career, she has been recognized in several international competitions, including the International Young Jazz Singers Competition in Estonia (2006) and the International Jazz Soloist Competition in Monaco (2007).

3.3. Lara Bello

Lara Bello, born in Granada, Spain, in 1980, is a distinguished singer, composer, and instrumentalist, recognized for her ability to fuse jazz with Arabic melodies, Mediterranean roots, and African and Latin American rhythms. Her artistic training includes theater, dance, and music, with a specialization in classical singing and violin at the Conservatory of Granada, where she achieved the highest marks as a soprano in the exams of The Royal School of Music of London.

She studied flamenco singing and dancing in Granada, and in 2005, she joined Mario Maya's Flamenco School. She later expanded her jazz training in Barcelona at the Taller de Músics and attended workshops at the ESMUC. In 2006, she began presenting her compositions in concerts, and in 2007, she was selected for the INJUVE circuit by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Culture. In 2009, she won Second Prize at the National Songwriting Contest in Ceutí, Murcia, and released her first album, *Niña Pez*, which was voted Best Spanish Artist in the European World Music Charts (WMCE) in 2010.

During her 10-year residency in New York, Bello formed a band and performed internationally. In 2013, she released *Por el Agua de Granada: cancionero lorquiano* with the guitarist Eric Kurimski. Three years later, she released *SIKAME*, an album acclaimed by The New York Times and NPR, featuring collaborations with renowned artists. In 2018, she participated in the prestigious Tiny Desk concert on U.S. National Radio and took part in social projects such as the Lullaby Project at Carnegie Hall in New York.



Figure 2 – Los Conciertos de Radio 3: Lara Bello.

Reference: RTVE Play, January 1, 2018.

3.4. Celia Mur

Celia Mur (Granada, May 16, 1970 – Madrid, August 29, 2019) was a prominent Spanish singer and composer whose versatility made her one of the most important voices in jazz in Spain, with forays into flamenco, copla, and other genres. Trained at the Conservatory of Music in Granada and the Centro de Arte Lírico de Granada, Celia developed a solid classical foundation, which she complemented with her passion for jazz from 1989 onwards. She participated in numerous international seminars with renowned musicians such as Sheila Jordan, Perico Sambeat, and Jorge Pardo.

Between 1995 and 2000, Mur established herself in the European and American music scenes, and her discography—including albums such as *Footprints* (2001), *Las flores de mi vida* (2003), and *In a sentimental Duke* (2009)—reflects her eclecticism and ability to fuse diverse musical genres. Her albums *Simpatía* (2008), recorded in New York, and *Gershwin Songs* (2014), in collaboration with Arturo Serra, stand out as milestones in her career.

Beyond her career as a performer, Celia Mur was a dedicated educator, sharing her knowledge at institutions such as Berklee-Valencia, where she served as a voice teacher and ensemble director from 2012. She also taught classes and workshops at various institutions, including the Palau de la Música de València and the Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático de Murcia.

Throughout her career, Mur received multiple accolades, including the Granata Cultural Magazine award and a tribute at the Atarfe Jazz Festival in 2011. It is because of her legacy—preserved in her recordings and the influence she left on her students and colleagues—and the significance of her insights for this research that we sought to preserve her testimony, even though the interview period was necessarily due to her untimely passing.

3.5. Weaving voices

When we began working with the jazz singers, emigration emerged as a common theme in their discourse as a necessary factor in their training, a fact that is reflected in their biographies. Thus, the initial hypothesis that guided part of the research process suggested that emigration was a response to the need to achieve an ideal and to overcome deficiencies in the learning process.

In this regard, the Granada Conservatory saw these four singers pass through its doors, but not for long, as the institution did not appear to meet their expectations. The perceived incompatibility between the life they believed necessary for an opera singer and that of a jazz singer, combined with their disappointment in what seemed to be a lack of teaching quality, led them all to abandon their classical training early on.

Celia said, "In Granada, there wasn't much to learn. When I started, there were practically no jazz singers in Andalusia, and there were very few well-known singers in Spain." Lara and Celia attended the vocal jazz courses offered in Spain, but Celia was more interested in observing the wind instrument classes than the classes for vocalists, "because they knew music, they knew how to read music, whereas the singers just sang in the shower." This statement is not naive; through it, Celia aims to demonstrate that her interest and professionalism have been consistent even from the very beginning of her training.

Although a growing jazz movement was beginning to take shape in Granada, there were no schools for jazz singers like those in Barcelona. If there had been, Pepa assures us that she would have stayed there. All four of them went to Madrid in search of a jazz environment. Lara, for her part, spent a year in Barcelona but returned to Granada with the perception that the dissemination of her music would be limited, as the cultural dynamics of the region appeared to favor musicians who composed and performed in Catalan. Pepa considered both Barcelona and Madrid but weighed the challenges she would have to overcome and decided to go to London where she believed it would be just as tough, but where she could also learn English—something she deemed essential in her training as a singer. In her mind, London was the capital of Europe, the place where the music market was much broader than in other countries and, therefore, where “everything had to happen.” However, after living there for five years, she feels that she knows almost the entire London jazz scene and that it is not as large as she initially thought.

In addition to educational factors, the labor market is also a concern that drives migration. Although all four singers consider themselves professionals, they cannot sustain themselves financially with concert income alone. Therefore, they combine performances with giving singing lessons or seek other occupations to cover their expenses. According to Celia, there are also no professionals to coordinate the work of an artist, as most productions are self-managed.

Regarding the labor market, emigration is driven by the belief that other countries offer greater protection to their artists. This perception aligns with the Plataforma por nuestro jazz movement, which argues that there is a disparity in the programming of performances between foreign and local artists, often to the detriment of the latter. “There is no jazz industry in Spain, only major management for pop, flamenco, and little else” Celia states. “The current jazz situation is complex for Spanish artists because we have not yet disassociated ourselves from the United States”.

When asked how people perceive her since she has been living in the United States, Celia notes that she quickly noticed how the press labels her as ‘the singer who succeeds in the United States,’ which has become a trigger for publicity.

Certain perceptions about the Spanish audience also reinforce the notion of a foreign public that embraces those who perform “real jazz.” This is why Celia says, “The true jazz audience doesn’t exist in Spain.” Statements like ‘people are not used to listening to jazz in Spain’ reflect the reality of Spanish jazz and incorporate other beliefs, such as the idea that Spaniards do not speak English and prefer not to hear singing in English. These notions justify emigration to English-speaking countries and the creation of jazz in Spanish, since, as Pepa states, “flamenco sells, so if you want to enter the jazz market somehow, the option is to create a communion with traditional music and sing in Spanish.”

Pepa further explains, “I knew I had to do it, and part of me was proud because I wanted to cut the umbilical cord. I also wanted to show my family that they didn’t need to worry.” She adds, “You have to go because you need to experience, suffer, compete, and carve your path in these jungle-like cities.” For Lara, “New York is a city with a darker side (...); on the one hand, you like it, and on the other, you don’t, but it remains attractive. Anything can happen here, both good and bad.”

In addition, the singers state that life in London and New York is expensive, and both Pepa and Lara have to work multiple jobs to survive. Pepa, who has been in this situation for five years, says that it is affecting her social life because she feels she no longer has the energy she started with. Having lived in New York for a

year, Lara felt compelled to make a considerable effort to keep pace with the musicians she encounters. She was increasingly concerned about her future, particularly regarding her place of residence, as she experienced a deep sense of longing for her community.

Pepa, on the other hand, feels that London has given her the freedom to no longer be afraid. However, she feels drained and lacks the energy to face a new city. "Right now, I'm burnt out. I need to go home for a while, especially in winter, because winter is going to be tough in Chicago, or wherever. But if you're with your family, with your friends, it's better. I had a mission, and I still have it, but I see that I'm going to need another life, one more life; this one is not enough".

Finally, Lara considers returning to Granada as an option she thinks about every day. 'Sometimes, I think we don't realize what we have, and we keep looking around, moving to one country, then another, and then we come back home, and that's where things happen. It's wonderful. You come back with more peace; you've been exploring the world, and then you get here and see what you wanted to see...'

6. In search of authentic jazz: education and migration

The above discussion can be understood in light of what David Ake (2010) identifies as one of the myths supporting adverse views on jazz education: the belief that real jazz is found in urban centers and specific metropolises. This notion drives artists to think that genuine immersion in vocal jazz can only be achieved by relocating to iconic cities such as New York, London, or Amsterdam. In recent decades, some continental European countries have developed cultural policies that promote both jazz education and performances (Nicholson 2005). Thus, the emergence of a perceived need constitutes the starting point of the motivational cycle that frames migration as an essential step for professional development in jazz singing.

As a field of study, migration has been explored from various disciplines and perspectives. The scope of this work does not allow for a comprehensive review of the extensive literature on the subject. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to highlighting, in line with Gillette and Sayad (1984), that understanding migratory processes is possible only when considering both the society of the destination and the country of origin. This dual perspective allows us to analyze the different components that make up the broader migration system. Massey and colleagues (1999) emphasize the inadequacy of traditional theoretical approaches and the necessity of recognizing the complexity of international migration. They advocate linking individual decisions (micro level) with socioeconomic processes (macro level), shifting the focus towards the migrants themselves and their interactions within their contexts. At this juncture, the biographical approach reveals its potential to guide us toward a more comprehensive understanding.

Bearing in mind the above, we can revisit the idea that, for the artists interviewed, emigrating appeared as an almost unavoidable step in the formative journey of jazz due to the perception of limited promising opportunities in Spain. However, understanding migration solely as the search for an ideal and compensation for formative gaps -particularly cultural and educational - does not capture the full complexity of this phenomenon.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that, beyond being a reaction to perceived deficiencies in the place of origin, migration in the collective jazz imaginary is seen as a transformative journey, where performers

aspire to immerse themselves in “authentic jazz” to return as mature artists. Thus, emigration, especially within artistic and educational contexts, is often shrouded in an aura of idealization, viewed as a path to enrichment and success.

For instance, the discourse of the singers reflects the conviction that immersion in these cultural hubs fosters a higher standard of musical excellence due to intensified competition: “It is necessary to study abroad to get to know the world, to meet people. Going abroad to study opens your mind and translates into your music. Each country has its own particular scene, its own way of playing and feeling jazz”, explains Susana Raya.

The singers also attributed their artistic growth to the motivation to match the talent of prominent U.S. musicians, as mentioned earlier. Within this dynamic, emigration takes on value as a catalyst that elevates musical quality, driven by competition and the quest for recognition in prestigious venues. However, this process also entails a series of challenges that often blur the illusion of a wholly positive experience, as adapting to a new culture involves much more than a simple geographical change: it is a deep process of learning and adjusting to new social norms, lifestyles, and often, linguistic differences.

Despite the challenges and sacrifices, studying or at least traveling to New York and 'drinking from the source,' as Susana Raya puts it, is “something that at some point all jazz singers have to do.” For the singers, it becomes a kind of 'pilgrimage to Mecca.

“Over time, I have realized that studying abroad has reconnected me with my roots. The folklore and spirit of Andalusia have become more present in my music. I believe that only through this stark contrast and distance has this been possible,” Susana Raya tells us.

Regarding the perception of “insufficient training,” it can be said that, quantitatively, it is supported by the limited number of specialized conservatories, particularly noticeable in certain regions such as Andalusia, as well as by educational programs with a narrow and outdated focus. Pepa Niebla, for example, highlights the concerning absence of vocal teachers with a deep and realistic understanding of how the voice functions, and a significant lack of expertise in fundamental areas such as vocal improvisation. This issue is partly attributed to the fact that, while higher jazz education is a relatively recent development in Spain, other European countries have been engaged in this field for decades.

Another topic discussed with the artists was the role of the local labor market in this dynamic. The predominant perception among artists suggests that Spain, despite its rich cultural heritage, does not provide a conducive ecosystem for the flourishing and consolidation of jazz. This perception is intensified by intrinsic cultural challenges and a clear lack of institutional support, which together create a suboptimal environment for the viability and sustainability of this artistic expression.

The testimonies of the interviewed singers indicate that the Spanish music industry not only fails to provide the adequate support and opportunities for those seeking to establish themselves in this genre but that these opportunities also appear to be monopolized by a select group of artists, most of whom are foreign. Celia Mur highlighted what she considers the main issue: the absence of a solid and defined audience for jazz in Spain. In her words, 'the true jazz audience does not exist in Spain.' According to the singer, the Spanish music industry favors genres such as pop and flamenco, styles with established trajectories and

acceptance that benefit from strong management and representation platforms, which significantly restricts the space and resources allocated to jazz.

Adding to this is another challenge related to cultural and linguistic perceptions. As mentioned earlier, many interviewees believe that the Spanish audience prefers music performed in their native language. This has led some artists to adopt cultural adaptation strategies, blending jazz with styles such as flamenco or bolero. This innovation not only represents a search for musical identity but also serves as a strategy to capture the attention of the local audience.

Pepa Niebla emphasizes the importance of this approach, pointing out that by meeting the demand for music in Spanish, it is possible to achieve greater resonance in the national market. In this context, the jazz industry in Spain faces cultural, structural, and perceptual challenges that impact the visibility and development of national artists. For instance, Celia Mur highlights a clear deficit in infrastructure and professional support and notes the limited presence of producers specialized in the jazz genre, resulting in many artists having to self-manage and self-produce their projects, as previously discussed.

Thus, among the interviewed artists, there is a unanimous perception: other countries offer more protection and support to their artists. This view reinforces the feeling that artists receive greater recognition, protection and support abroad compared to the limited recognition and support at home, echoing the old saying that "no one is a prophet in their own land."

Consequently, some artists, when comparing the situation in Spain with that of other European countries, argue that places like Italy or the Netherlands provide more substantial support for local jazz musicians, whether due to a stronger tradition, protectionist policies, or targeted incentives. In the case of Susana Raya, her opinion is informed by her decade-long stay in the Netherlands. This experience allows her to highlight the availability of government support through subsidies designed to encourage local venues to hire jazz musicians, a policy that facilitates the integration and promotion of this genre.

In contrast, Spain faces disproportionately low remuneration and bureaucratic hurdles in the organization and management of jazz-related events. This situation transforms the work of artists into a demanding task that extends beyond musical performance, requiring extensive administrative efforts. Nevertheless, Susana reflects on a unique characteristic of jazz in Spain: despite its lower popularity compared to other genres, the associations and entities dedicated to its promotion and dissemination do so with extraordinary fervor and passion, "with a Quixotic spirit in the midst of a cultural desert."

Thus, emigration is often idealized as an opportunity for a better life, leading to the omission or minimization of the practical and emotional difficulties inherent in adapting to a new country. This mismatch between expectations and the reality of living abroad can create significant challenges. In this context, professional opportunities abroad present considerable difficulties for individuals who rely on regular employment to survive and do not have traditional careers that would allow them to easily integrate into the labor market. In cities like London and New York, characterized by their high cost of living, the economic reality for migrants is often particularly harsh, as previously noted. This situation prevents or at least delays the acquisition of specific formative experiences.

Pepa Niebla stated, "University degrees in England are not accessible to someone who must work, let alone live off music. If you live off music, you can't; you don't have money. This is imperialism in its purest form."

For the singer, working long hours, coupled with linguistic barriers, housing challenges, and financial difficulties, created significant obstacles to formal education. She also felt marginalized and struggled to adapt to unfamiliar cultural norms, which, in her view, hindered her ability to engage socially and professionally, ultimately affecting her physical and emotional well-being.

On the other hand, a factor often underestimated by Spanish singers seeking to integrate into the foreign music scene was the climate. In cities like New York, London, and Amsterdam, extreme weather conditions in comparison to the Spanish climate, including harsh winters, have a tangible impact on daily life and the emotional well-being of individuals. Lara recalls:

"New York is an extremely demanding city; you need a lot of energy to keep up with its pace and dynamics. It is crucial to integrate into its network of contacts, but you must be prepared for how tough it can be. The distances are long, and if you don't put in your maximum effort, there are thousands of other musicians ready to take your place. You need to be very professionally well-rounded because the competition is fierce. For me, winter is particularly challenging, not just because of the distances on the subway but also due to the demands and the high cost of living in such an intense city".

This is why cultural shock can be emotionally exhausting, leading to anxiety, irritability, and depression. Emigration thus involves not only a quest for professional growth but also a test of resilience, requiring notable perseverance from those seeking to thrive (Church 1982).

For all these reasons, we can assert that Spanish jazz musicians who decide to emigrate undergo a complex process of identity reconstruction and deconstruction. This tension between the local and the global, the authentic and the commercial, and the individual and the collective remains a central theme when, in their quest for 'authentic jazz' abroad, they are often encouraged to showcase a distinctly Spanish aspect in their music, sometimes even being asked to sing in a flamenco style or other stereotypical aesthetics.

Additionally, performers who undertake an international journey are often received with notably more favorable publicity upon their return. This media exaltation is not merely a recognition of their individual achievements but also significantly sustains and perpetuates the myth that artistic development and recognition are intrinsically tied to international experience. The perception that 'abroad is better' establishes a cycle that motivates future generations of artists to follow a similar path, based on the belief that their work will only be truly valued and legitimized after an international experience.

This phenomenon underscores an intricate relationship between legitimacy, prestige, and the experience abroad within the collective imagination of the artistic world. In this context, even when artists encounter hardship or disappointment, rather than refuting the myth, they tend to perpetuate the very narrative that motivated them to emigrate, thereby validating the belief that these cultural epicenters, with their inherent challenges, are essential for attaining authenticity and mastery.

Thus, the true challenge lies in reconciling expectations with reality without undermining the substantial emotional, financial, and personal investment that the decision to emigrate entails. Rejecting the perceived intrinsic value of these experiences—imposed by the weight of the collective imagination—could risk stripping their migratory endeavor of purpose and legitimacy.

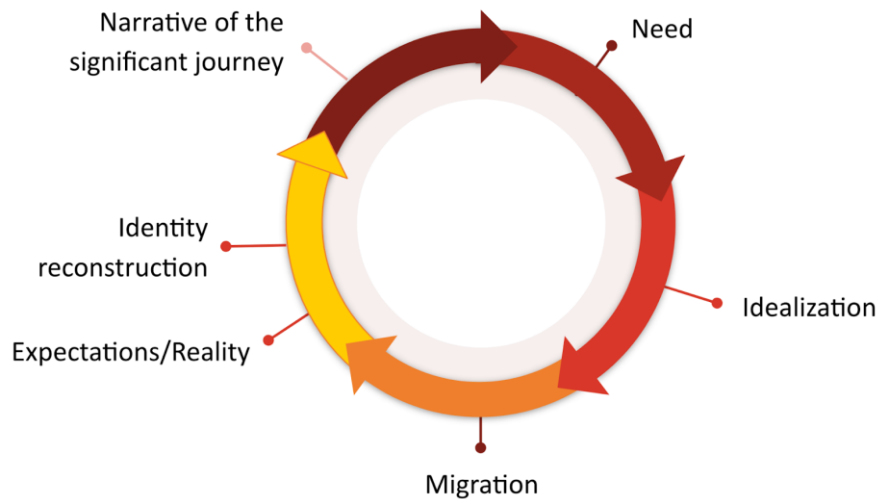


Figure 3 – Migratory cycle.
Reference: ROLANDO AND VILLA. 2024.

Once the potential for growth, experience, and learning available in a given environment has been fully utilized, the individual's imagination adjusts its objectives, necessitating the consideration of new options and the reconstruction of the initial paradigm of progress based on newly acquired skills and knowledge. In this migratory cycle (figure 3), the drive for motivation is defined by the relationship between the value a person assigns to the reward and the expectation of its potential attainment, prompting the individual to evaluate their possibilities and seek an environment that aligns with their ideals, shaped by their perception of personal abilities and limitations.

Thus, migratory movement may re-emerge as a means of fulfilling formative needs, acting as the driving force that guides this process. This phenomenon often becomes a recurring pattern, as the ideal continuously adapts to each specific stage of life, underscoring the continuous and evolving nature of learning.

Thus, the “reverse cultural shock” experienced by emigrants who, after a period abroad, decide to return to their place of origin is comparable to undergoing a second migration, and consequently, processing a new form of grief (Church 1982). This perceptual shift—the feeling of not being the same after that initial migratory experience—can, in some cases, drive individuals toward constant relocation in search of a lost sense of belonging, identified as the 'Ulysses Syndrome' (Achotegui 2009).

As a result, one of the underlying complexities of returning for these individuals is the pressure to sustain a narrative of success, stemming from the intrinsic need to justify the sacrifices made, and striving to uphold a triumphant image that is often detached from reality.

This situation highlights the dissonance between preconceived expectations and the actual lived experience, creating a constant tension between authenticity and the image one seeks to project. Nevertheless, the singers express an underlying desire to reconcile their transformed identities and perspectives with the roots and communities they left behind, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the richness and intrinsic value of local and personal experiences, beyond external validation and international prestige. In this

context, the pursuit of learning often culminates in a paradoxical revelation: that what was sought may have existed in the place of origin all along.

For example, Lara shared with us in one of our meetings:

"For me, being in a state of tranquility enriches my creativity... Granada motivates and inspires me greatly because when you leave a place and then return, you suddenly start to notice things you hadn't seen before (...). I love the people of New York, but it's your family, your friends, the people around you. And I prefer Spain itself for that way of being... I sometimes think we don't appreciate what we have; we go searching around, moving from one country to another, and then we return home, and that's where things happen. It's wonderful; you come back with much more peace, you've been exploring the world, and then you come back and see what you were looking for."

5. Conclusions

The biographical narrative approach enables a rich description of personal experiences and an exploration of the meanings that participants derive from them, facilitating the expression of feelings, thoughts, and other elements that are often difficult to capture through other research perspectives.

From a framework that combines ethnomusicology and sociology, we set out in this article to explore the connections between jazz and migration through the life stories of four Andalusian singers. This approach led us to uncover a prevailing belief in this group of vocalists regarding the necessity of experiencing this musical genre in its purest and rawest form. This belief translates into a form of professionalization that extends beyond traditional academic training, transforming the stage into a formative environment where adapting to diverse audiences and managing frustration in response to unexpected reactions become challenges that legitimize the performer.

On the other hand, these artists perceive limited job and training opportunities in Spain, which leads to comparisons and the idealization of possibilities abroad, particularly in cities such as London, New York, or Amsterdam—often regarded as epicenters of jazz and promising validation and artistic enrichment. Consequently, the concept of "gaining experience" also encompasses a migratory journey that inspires singers to step onto the grand stage, where they must showcase their performance and survival skills.

This research invites us to consider that this imaginary initiates a motivational cycle in which migration is perceived not only as an almost inevitable formative step but also as a transformative journey where performers aspire to immerse themselves in authentic jazz, returning as mature artists.

Thus, migration represents a significant journey, not only in geographical terms but also in the context of personal and professional growth. This phenomenon transcends the simple pursuit of new opportunities, immersing artists in a process of transformation and redefinition of both their personal identity and their professional role within the world of jazz.

From the experience of these singers, migration involves significant work, along with cultural and linguistic challenges, requiring them to reconcile expectations with reality without diminishing the substantial emotional, financial, and personal investment that emigration entails. Success is often measured in their

home country through a narrative of overcoming adversity and sacrifice, which adds further pressure on the artist. This complex process of identity deconstruction and reconstruction is perceived by some artists as a "call of the land", driven by the expectations and originality demands of the local circuit in the host country, which often anticipates that Spanish singers will blend jazz with elements of their own culture.

In this way, returning to the country of origin does not signify for this group of jazz vocalists the end of the migratory experience but rather involves the readaptation and redefinition of the artist's relationship with music and the industry, both locally and internationally, as this experience is often exalted and validated by the media. This dynamic might lead artists to omit experiences that do not align with their initial expectations, and, in order not to undermine the considerable emotional, financial, and personal investment made in the decision to emigrate, they tend to perpetuate migration as a meaningful and essential journey for their training and professional development.

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