Vocal In-roads: Flamenco, Orality and Postmodernity in *Las 3000 Viviendas: Viejo Patio* (Dulcimer and EMI, 1999)

PARVATI NAIR

In 1999 EMI distributed *Las 3000 Viviendas: Viejo Patio*, an anthology of flamenco music produced by Paco Ortega through his own company Dulcimer Songs. The project showcased the music of a community of gypsies relocated to *Las Tres Mil Viviendas* during the Franco regime in Spain from their traditional barrio of La Triana in Seville. Although retaining a predominantly oral culture, these gitanos had also begun to assimilate other musical forms and to adapt their creative and performance styles to new technologies. The disk produced by Paco Ortega circulated in the international market as yet another example of “world music.” It included a variety of flamenco forms, from the traditional to the more recent, performed by the inhabitants of *Las Tres Mil Viviendas*, ranging from the elderly to the very young, and was intended to represent the collective lives of the community. This combination of elements raises several questions about the creation and circulation of such cultural products in a globalised cultural economy. Hence, the purpose of this essay: to identify some of the issues that surface and to consider them in relation to the production and circulation of *Las 3000 Viviendas: Viejo Patio*.

Few place-names in Andalusia can match Triana in its power to arouse fantasies of musical authenticity for ardent flamenco purists, *gitano* and *payo* alike. Surrounding the *gitanos* who together feature in the compact disc *Las 3000 Viviendas: Viejo Patio* (The 3000 Homes: Old Patio) is this legacy of fame arising from their long-term connections to this locality.¹ Triana, as “the most famous *gitano* neighbourhood of all” (Mitchell, 73), enjoyed for over two centuries an unchallenged status in the evolution of flamenco as the musical expression of an ethnically diverse urban underclass.

¹All translations in parentheses are mine.
Previously, members of the flamenco community of Triana in central Seville, these gypsies, together with their families, were forced to relocate to Las Tres Mil Viviendas (The Three Thousand Homes) in the 1960s as part of a Francoist plan to “embellish” Triana. With few skills other than the musical spontaneity acquired largely through oral transmission from their elders and implicit in the connotations of Triana ancestry, the gitanos have now witnessed their inherited cultural form turn into globally transmitted world music. Situated on the southern fringes of Seville, next to a dusty railtrack and the highway to Cadiz, is a conglomeration of 624 prefabricated homes, better known as Las Tres Mil Viviendas. Approximately 50,000 people live in this run-down zone of unsightly asphalt and dust roads. The most striking features here are the high rate of unemployment, absenteeism from school, difficult access to any facilities and, most of all, the feverish drug-related activities of a considerable minority. This is now home to the 50 singers and musicians who have collaborated in *Las 3000 Viviendas: Viejo Patio*, a compilation of local gypsy talent put together by the established producer, talent-scout and singer-songwriter Paco Ortega. In their enforced move from Triana to the cramped, flimsy homes that had been allocated to them, the gitanos took with them the orally transmitted musical expression central to their communal identity. In the face of the considerable socio-economic problems which face such an urban underclass, flamenco provides these gypsies with both an occasional means to a living and a forum for the musical performance of shared cultural inheritance.

My aim in this essay is to examine the complexities of residual orality within an overall context of postmodernity. When talking of oral cultures, there is almost always the implication of defined communal borders. By examining the socio-cultural contexts surrounding the commodification of orally transmitted musicality in *Las 3000 Viviendas: Viejo Patio*, I hope to show how the gitano engagement with a globalising project relies upon a mode of orality which is multi-dimensional and ambivalent. In particular, even as the shared song of an ethnic group offers itself as cultural commodity for global consumption, it also provides the means of constructing communal alliances across national boundaries and so defies the totalizing drive of globalization. By placing the residually oral culture of the gitanos against the backdrop of globalization, the cleft between celebratory perceptions of globalization as a “multi-ethnic festival” and the more pessimistic views of it as an economic leveller of culture comes into view. On a second level, an examination of the modes of persistence of orality in postmodernity will bring into focus the subtle political alliances made possible by the global commerce of world music. The theoretical