**In Conversation: Alejandro Postigo and Naz Yeni**

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Abstract

In April 2018, *7 Husbands for Hurmuz (*7 *Koclai Hurmuz)*, a popular musical comedy farce from Turkey, was staged by Arcola Alaturka, a Turkish-speaking theatre group based in East London. This production was performed by migrant actors and musicians with a predominantly migrant audience in mind. *7 Husbands for Hurmuz* is a popular classic of modern Turkish theatre, and a film version – directed by Ezel Akay – was released in 2009. [[1]](#endnote-1) A stage production of 7 *Koclai Hurmuz* was included in the Ankara State Theatre’s 2017-18 season, and another large scale production has, at the time of writing, been selling out in Istanbul.

Set in a time when a man was permitted more than one wife, the plot of *7 Husbands for Hurmuz* is a reversal of this situation: the central character is a woman (Hurmuz) who has married six husbands – none of whom knows about the others – as way of solving her money problems. She sees each husband on a different day of the week, but mayhem ensues when Hurmuz falls in love with a seventh man, and then all seven turn up to see her on the same day. Farce, slapstick and absurdity combine in what can be argued to be a quasi-feminist satire which is also an extension of folk theatre forms relating to specific Asian performance styles – drawing on both *ortaoyunu* and *meddah* traditions. *7 Husbands for Hurmuz* has caused controversy because, although the play features an array of strong female characters, it has been perceived as both feminist and anti-feminist.

The following piece is based on a conversation between Naz Yeni, the director of the Arcola production, and Alejandro Postigo, author and performer of *The Copla Musical*, a tribute to the anti-Franco Spanish drag artist La Gitana. *The Copla Musical* explores an intercultural adaptation of the early twentieth-century Spanish folkloric song-form of *copla*, merged with elements found in Anglo-American musical theatre structures such as book musicals, revues and jukebox shows. *Copla* ceased to develop during Franco’s regime (1939-1975). Forty years later, *The Copla Musical* aims to rejuvenate *copla* interculturally. The show is supported by academic research that questions how to share the Spanish experience of *copla* with an international audience of diverse cultural backgrounds, and how to introduce *copla*’s background as a storytelling form, a folkloric genre and a subversive tool beyond the Spanish twentieth-century zeitgeist. The conversation explores the many challenges of translating songs and theatre works from one language to another for a multicultural and multi-lingual audience.

**Keywords**

7 Husbands for Hurmuz

The Copla Musical

theatre

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translation

song

**Introduction**

Like Naz Yeni, Alejandro Postigo *The Copla Musical*’s author and performer is a theatre artist and researcher based in the UK. *The Copla Musical* mainly involves the translation and integration of Spanish early twentieth-century *copla* songs into a theatre narrative. The songs have been rarely translated before nor presented in a theatrical context outside Spain, and his creative practice examines the adaptation of these *copla* songs into a new historical and geographical context. The development of *The Copla Musical* has involved the collaboration of an international team who has transformed a culturally and socially charged artistic form into a contemporary theatre production by tapping into the intercultural potential and subversive queer nature of the original material. *The Copla Musical* takes place in 21st century London, a multicultural site of convergence that allows to revaluate *copla*’s position in history and to contextualize its potential role in developing an intercultural strand of musical theatre.

Naz and Alejandro came together to discuss the points of convergence of their projects which are both based primarily on the idea of bringing culturally charged material from abroad to new audiences. They were interested in examining the idea of intercultural adaptation from a process of translation to live cultural exchange, from the performer’s undertanding of the material to their interpretation for audiences unfamiliar with the hitorical and sociocultural contexts of the original pieces and folkloric materials. They decided to turn their discussion into a publication by bringing into the table the ideas of other scholars that have researched widely the topics of cultural exchange. The fact that two different migrant communities have been involved in the presentation and reception of both of these pieces of theatre has emerged as an issue also worthy of dicussion.What follows is the expanded conversation with links to some of the critical discussions that have taken place in the field.

**Naz Yeni (NY):** I’m aware of the process of intercultural adaptation for foreign audiences in *The Copla Musical* but to get us started, I think that in order to understand the cultural significance of *copla*, it would be useful to comment on how these songs acquire different meanings in Spanish and English.

**Alejandro Postigo (AP):** *Copla* songs were mostly written and reached their peak of popularity during Franco’s dictatorship in Spain (1939-75). However, the meaning that these songs might achieve in 21st century England and beyond is unlikely to be charged with the historical references that influenced the creation of the songs. Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti asserts that translators receive minimal recognition for their work, and that praise occurs by operating in an unnoticed manner (2012: 1). The transparency that Venuti refers to is, in most cases, challenging to achieve and, if taken too literally, can possibly be counter-productive. In order to attempt this illusion of transparency, one must question how to convey the contextual messages of *copla* songs, but also reflect on whether they can they stand alone without their historical premises, beyond the context in which they were first created. Ultimately, I must consider the relevance of those historical premises when the songs are presented in a new language, out of their original context.

Margherita Laera argues that ‘a translation must above all “create a context” for the foreign text in the target-language performance. […] The creation of a new context is necessarily achieved in collaboration with the director of the new theatre version’ (2011: 215). In *The Copla Musical* there is a double adaptation at play: first there is a translation of the lyrics of the songs, addressing the easy readability that adheres to current usage Venuti talks about. Secondly, there is the insertion of English *copla* lyrics into a dramatic narrative. This wider ‘adaptation’, while it has its own dramatic agenda, also provides some context of the original meanings and significance of these lyrics.

**NY:** So is the historical significance of *copla* songs evident to international audiences in *The Copla Musical*?

**AP:** Cultural theorist Stephanie Sieburth talks about the enduring power of these songs, but it may not be immediately apparent to audiences that *copla* songs offered a subversive tool of resistance to the Franco regime. A translation that could reproduce the infatuation that Spanish audiences felt towards those songs should most definitely include some contextualisation to the realities people experienced at the time, whether of a repressive nature, or cultural attraction and identification with social political and sexual symbols of freedom. In this context, for dramatist Steve Gooch translating plays can only be an ‘act of love’ that relates to discovering in the original play some new and slightly exotic quality that the home audience should know about: ‘like a love affair with a fascinating foreigner whom you feel compelled to introduce to your family’ (Gooch 1996: 13).

My challenge when translating *copla* songs is to assume the position of the foreigner, and present and share my cultural background to the new culture I am embracing. So effectively, and in reverse to Gooch’s process, I want international audiences to love *copla*, but my question remains ‘how can I share my Spanish experience of *copla* and make the British (or international) audience feel or understand what I feel?’ This question prompted the development of *The Copla Cabaret* in 2015, an iteration within my Practice-as-research that revolved around the translation and presentation of *copla* to foreign audiences in relation to other cultural manifestations. Any translation is subjective to a personal view, and as Gooch suggests, I want audiences to see what I regard as the best of *copla*. Within my subjectivity, I have chosen for the project some of my favourite songs and fit them within a narrative through which I have also tried to enhance the qualities of these songs. In addition, I have channelled them through a performative style in which my personal interpretation of the songs is even more latent. All of it a labour of love, entirely personal and subjective, but as Venuti observes, legitimate and unique ‘in its own right’ (2012: 17).

For Patrice Pavis, theatre translation primarily involves a transfer of culture, in both its textual and its gestural codes. Pavis writes that theatre translators are frequently asked to take on the role of mediators between two unknown contexts of performance: the ‘original situation of enunciation’ (which might be historically or geographically distant), and the yet-to-be-devised mise en scene in the target culture (1992: 137).

Naz, the translation elements in *7 Husbands for Hurmuz* are limited and functional. To start with, translation is just provided in the form of subtitles and, for example, you opt for not translating many of the songs, and to perform in Turkish. Why?

**NY:** One of the initial aims of the show was to offer a production in Turkish to a Turkish-speaking audience. Bearing this in mind, it might be easy to jump to the conclusion that a non-Turkish speaking audience has never been a concern for this kind of production. While there might be a certain element of truth in this for a number of theatrical activities taking place within the Turkish community in London, this is not necessarily the case. Perhaps, in the early 90s, this was more so. But we also need to remember that technology was not on the side of theatre in those days. With the wonderful possibility of using surtitles on the stage, I have observed an incredible change take place since then.

So for productions in languages other than English, whether these be by international companies touring to London or local multicultural groups, it is now possible to embrace the multilingual nature of London-based artists and audiences wholeheartedly. In spite of all this potential to reach to new audiences, the job is not necessarily any easier, because there is now the increased responsibility of finding the best way to make things as translateable as possible while keeping their functionality. In other words, if you have subtitles, you now need additional people in your production who have the ability to relate to your production both linguistically and culturally in order make any kind of translation possible. I am not even going into the complexities around the issue with familiarity of the source text and communicative competence in the target language. In our show, we were lucky enough to have these multi-skilled people who were excited about making the cultural transfer possible via the language, but only to a certain extent. On the other hand, we did not set out to make the ‘translation’ you’re talking about simply because we were connecting with a specific migrant audience made up of the Turkish-speaking community.

**AP:** Your production involves a heavy adaptation. Gooch says on adaptation: there is no reason why a play shouldn't be 'adapted'. One should consider whether this is in order to say something slightly different from the original, or to apply the play to some particular new context, (which is your case) it is essentially different from translation. Too often translation and adaptation are thought of synonymously, and this can lead to false expectations. But there is always the danger (as with setting a classic in a period different from that conceived, dressing up a new play) that you wrench it so far away from its 'engine' that its internal dynamic is lost. What was your intention in adapting the original text? Your production maintains the original set up while it mixes the narrative components with modern reincarnations of songs and newly devised musical aspects.

**NY:** I think the aim of the adaptation was, firstly, to appeal to a contemporary audience. But also, it was important for me to exist within more contemporary forms of performance making. In twenty-first century London - which for many is the theatre capital in the world - there is an incredible variety of stylistic practices and aesthetic concerns. For this reason, I find it impossible to resist these theatrical discourses and stick to the classical and the historical. I’m not saying it can’t be like that; but for me, this is what makes my work interesting and exciting. So a way of relating to the contemporary theatre vernacular around me is always too much of a temptation. But it might also be an ill-founded belief that in order to communicate with contemporary audiences, a certain level of adaptation always appears to be the norm, whether it is a conscious decision or unconscious on the part of the creative and the performers.

With the songs, this was even more obvious in *Hurmuz.* Although the songs were still mostly traditional folk songs, they were not played or sung in a traditional way. So a fun and upbeat song such as ‘Shake Your Handkerchief’ was turned into a romantic love song between the two leads. Or the chorus songs, which were very popular songs from the early twentieth century, were performed with contemporary choreography accompanying them. The fact that one of the actor-musicians was playing an accordion was also quite unusual as this is not a traditional instrument in the history of Turkish music. As for the female actor-musician who was playing the drum called a *darbuka*, this was equally unexpected because it is usually men who play this instrument. So the music had a contemporary feel to it in spite of the traditional nature of the songs.

And this is why I relied on the idea of the narrative happening to an unexpected group of people, since everything that was part of the performance was stemming from the imagination of these characters, who were living in current times. As a result, historical accuracy was irrelevant. So we could say that this is also adaptation in itself.

How did the process of translating and adapting *copla* songs came about for you?

**AP:** The social relevance of *copla* songs in Spain is evident. They are part of the collective memory of Spanish society, and a key component of popular culture throughout a difficult period in the country’s history. As *The Copla Musical* advanced through its research stages, I sought permission from Manuel López-Quiroga, son of the prolific composer of the same name, and inheritor of the copyright of his father’s songs. Sixteen of these songs have been part of the different versions of *The Copla Musical*. Permission was granted and I proceeded to undertake the translations in collaboration with a team of British lyricists. The translation of these songs has been a collaborative effort in which I have provided a first version in verse, more of a direct translation from the Spanish original, that my British collaborators have then modified to achieve a greater connection with English rhyme, prosody and general idiosyncrasy. This team activity helps in approaching a transparent discourse and the illusion of authorial presence that Venuti talks about. As there is no single authorial voice dominating the translation of the lyrics, these translations remain obliging to the original *copla* songs as well as to the narrative of *The Copla Musical.*

**NY:** So did you manage to maintain an authorial voice in the translation?

**AP:** As co-translator of the *copla* songs, and author of *The Copla Musical*, I am responsible for the compromises made in the interpretation and choices in the translation of the songs. Venuti aims to present a theoretical basis from which translations can be read as texts ‘in their own right’, with an aim to demystify transparency (2012: 17). Following his theory, it would be fair to say that *The Copla Musical* is a text of its own, that departs from well-known but also historically and geographically localised sources, and reinterprets them in a new context, where a new set of signifiers applies to accommodate and strengthen the value of the original sources. As such, the piece was created out of a negotiation between my love towards the original work and the pragmatic idea that translations must function dramatically in the particular context of a UK theatre audience. Translation in this case must fulfil the objective of connecting with the audience, and the sense of authorial presence is not a priority. *Copla* songs must, however, try to evoke the historical function they originally intended, as that might be the key to facilitate the connection with the audience. But Venuti identifies some violent effects of translation that could apply to this project[[2]](#footnote-1). One of the biggest risks of translating *copla* songs in this context is to distort their original idiosyncrasy to fit a constructed image of Francoist Spain. International audiences run the risk of framing and classifying *copla* within the parameters of their own historical knowledge, therefore creating an image of *copla*’s cultural identity that accommodates to a fascist ideology. This risk is also very much present in the national interpretations of the form, and to think of crossing national boundaries to export a controversially politicized genre only maximizes the challenge. Other concerns responding to Venuti’s violent effects of translation relate to the characteristics of the form: the metrics of the songs, type of rhyme, semantic considerations, and how those are reinterpreted in the new language. Spanish is a syllable-based language, as opposed to English, which is stress-based. The regularity of Spanish rhythm, like most Romance languages is very different from the irregularity of English rhythm, and this affects the structuring of the language of songs.

**NY:** British translator JM Cohen remarked that ‘20th century translators […] have generally concentrated on prose-meaning and interpretation, and neglected the imitation of form and manner’ (Cohen, in Venuti 2012: 6). Would this be relevant to *copla*?

**AP:** With *copla* songs, form and manner are of an essential nature, as these songs are framed by their musical structure and there are no opportunities to occupy further or lesser space in the new language. The parameters are given by the metrics of the song, and the relationship of music and lyrics works differently in English and Spanish. The process of making *The Copla Musical* depended on finding a balance between the exchanging cultures, so that elements from both remain visible and sensitive to the receptivity of a cosmopolitan and multicultural English-speaking audience. In the process of translating these songs, I worked together with a team of British lyricists who helped me negotiate cultural representation and authority to establish that balance. However, music integrated into a strong visual field is not easily disassociated from its original intentions, since it contains meta-dramatic elements that signify dramatic intent. Musical elements from *copla* songs (such as modes, pitches, chords, ornaments and motifs) help contextualize situation and characters, and create additional layers of subtext that may guide an audience’s perception of the various dramatic elements in a musical.

**NY:** As Laera notes, theatre translators metaphorically pull in two opposite directions: on the one hand, the source (con)text, and on the other, the target (con)text (2011: 214). The opposing worlds of source and target feature at the centre of Lawrence Venuti’s definition of domesticating versus foreignizing translation strategies. Where does *The Copla Musical* sit in this dichotomy?

**AP:** Throughout the writing of *The Copla Musical* I often questioned whether I should try to maintain the idiosyncrasy of the original lyrics, or prioritise accessibility in the new language. This dichotomy is often present in any translation work at the beginning of the process.   *The Copla Musical* needs an audience in Britain, where the project is being created, and this audience needs to understand the contents of the show in order to engage with it. Alternatively, other strategies must be put in place to appeal to the emotions the original lyrics stimulated. Throughout the development and various international presentations of *The Copla Musical,* different strategies have been attempted to try and find the right balance between foreignization and domestication. In the English performances of the show, songs often combine verses in English and Spanish, thus maintaining a small percentage of the original Spanish lyrics. It is assumed that untranslated verses will remain inaccessible to audiences in terms of dramatic content. However, the English translation provided before or after offers a sense of the song, telling enough of the story so that the English-speaking audience can still follow the general narrative; audiences are also offered a glimpse of what the song sounded like in its original language. I have experimented extensively with this idea: in some performances songs have been performed fully translated while in others they have mixed English and Spanish. This has been the case as well when the show has been presented in Spanish-speaking countries: the songs have been sung in their original versions, but sometimes English verses have been slipped onto those songs to test the audiences’ acceptability.

**NY:** What about the position of *The Copla Musical* in a globalised cultural market?

**AP:** Translation theorist André Lefevere argues that the distribution and regulation of cultural capital by means of translation depends on the needs of the audience, the patron or initiator of the translation and the relative prestige of the source and target cultures and their languages (1998: 44). In making *The Copla Musical*, I am rebelling to some extent against the current impositions of musical theatre in Spain, which is heavily influenced by Anglo-American imports and uniform globalizing tendencies. In exploring the potential of Spanish *copla*, a cultural form of the Spanish past that did not cross Spanish-language boundaries, I am attempting to subvert this uniform tendency. In this project, I examine a song genre that creatively managed to slip past censorship at a time of dictatorial control, popularised at both ends of a divided country and society. By doing so, I challenge the normal market flow of many Anglophone musical theatre imports to Spain but few Spanish exports abroad.

**NY:** German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher argued that there are only two methods of translation: either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him (Lefevere 1977:74). Does your translating approach fit into one of these categories?

**AP:** In *The Copla Musical* I have often veered from one extreme to the other. While I consider it key to preserve the original meaning and context of the songs, I found it also essential to try and speak ‘culturally’ to the reader (or spectator) in terms of language and cultural referents, as the acceptance of this project partially depends on its relationship with its audiences. To a certain extent, I want to send the spectator abroad (and this is the case with many current cultural products, including musicals with high components of orientalism), but to do that I need to be able to ‘anglicize’ those foreign universes. There is inevitably some ethnocentric reduction of the songs as Venuti suggests. My fear is that untranslated concepts in songs remain impenetrable to non-Spanish audiences, and this might result in a lack of dramatic appeal to those audiences without a very specific interest in the Spanish folkloric culture developed during the dictatorship. By compromising some details, such as argots and manners of expression, the spectator will be more drawn into the narratives told in the songs. But then again, they will miss some original references, so it seems impossible to win on both fronts. For instance, the protagonists of some *copla* songs were often gypsies that spoke a language named *caló*. *Caló* words are likely to remain completely inaccessible to foreign audiences, even though those are commonly accepted in the Spanish versions of the songs (although their meanings are not always understood). As Ivo Buzek points out, *copla* is generally written in an Andalusian-flavoured Spanish and seasoned with a few words from *caló* language to give the folklore a slightly exotic taste (Buzek 2013:39).

**NY:** Moving to performance concerns: accents and modes of speech are also something to take into consideration in translation. For instance, Eugene Nida argues that transparency and accuracy in translation depend on generating an equivalent effect in the target-language culture (Venuti 2012: 22). This implies that communication is then by the target-language culture, and for Venuti therefore it seems less an exchange of information than an appropriation of a foreign text for domestic purposes. How does this arrangement work in copla?

**AP:** When thinking of applying these methods to *The Copla Musical*, I could argue that if Andalusian words/accents were, for instance, translated into Northern English words and expressions, that would compromise characters’ backgrounds and distance the songs from their cultural heritage. In a way, this would be a distinct attempt towards domestication that I choose not to engage with, and that is one of the reasons this project sits in the middle of the debate. However, according to French translator and theorist Antoine Berman, ‘an otherness can never be manifested in its own terms, only in those of the target language, and hence always already encoded’ (Berman, in Venuti 2012: 20). So that implies as well that the Andalusian character or heritage might provide unreadable to the target audience. For Berman, a defender of domestication, the priority is the effect of the text in the target culture. In theatre, this might happen even more prominently, as words are heard as opposed to only being read.

Gunilla Anderman, in turn, also distinguishes between two approaches to translation for the English stage: ‘either the translator brings the playwright to the audience, that is, the text is Anglicised; or alternatively, all foreign aspects of the play are left intact and the English audience is asked to travel abroad’ (2005: 8). Your *7 Husbands for Humuz* is a clear example of the latter: the translation is just a functional tool for the non-Turkish speakers in the space to be able to follow the narrative. Do you think it is an effective tool to bring your non-Turkish audiences to you, or is it rather a production which is conceived for Turkish communities in London? Would your show change at all if it was to be performed in Turkey? This also leads to a necessary question of objectives: who is your target audience and is there cultural exchange involved?

**NY:** There has been a growing Turkish-speaking community in the UK, starting in the 1980s and mainly based in London. The members of this community all have different ethnicities, which seems to be a crucial part of their cultural identity. Modern Turkey, as an extension of the Ottoman Empire, has been a multi-cultural society but language has played an important role because the country was founded as a secular nation state. Therefore, language seems to be an even bigger unifying factor for such a migrant community, which has been displaced for a variety of disconnected reasons, some political, some financial and some personal. It is through this language that the Turkish-speaking community becomes present and connected to each other. At the same time, through the absence of English usage as the dominant form of communication (in spite of it being the language of the host culture) Turkish is an essential feature in defining this community.

It is no wonder that various artistic endeavours have been forming and continue to do so, and a considerable number of these are encouraged by community centres rather than being commercial enterprises. According to the website of Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, ‘most of this work is not funded and is run by the resources of the centre and the energy and dedication of vounteers.’ *476 Players*, a theatre company founded by Umut Ugur in 1994, and which ceased to exist in 2000, is noteworthy as an attempt to achieve a professional standard both artistically and commercially.

Arcola Theatre was set up in year 2000 in Dalston, London. This is an area that hosts a large section of the Turkish migrant community in London. Mehmet Ergen, the founder and artistic director of the theatre, emigrated to London in the early 1990s. When Arcola Theatre opened, Ergen was aware of the Turkish-speaking community and was hoping for the members of this community to use the theatre and its facilities. As most of the theatrical activities in the area were happening in community centres, he decided to set up Arcola Alaturka (the espression ‘a la turka’, means in the Turkish style) as an alternative theatre group. The idea is for the group to have a changing membership and perform modern and classical plays as well as the recent devised ones. Mehmet describes the current activities of the group as ‘focusing on established pieces from Turkish theatre as well as female directors’.

So to answer your question about cultural exchange: I can only say, yes, but only to a certain extent and most definitely indirectly. As you can see the performance we have created has mainly been aimed at a Turkish-speaking audience. In fact, having been away from the Turkish-speaking community for sixteen years, I was amazed at the number of non-Turkish speaking audience members we have had. I would guess it was a less than 1 in 10 for the very first production of Arcola Alaturka in 2001; for *Hurmuz,* it was more like a quarter. But of course, having surtitles accompanying a production in a language other than English was a huge advantage in making this possible. With such a social and historical context dependent performance, it was a pleasant surprise. So, although we didn’t necessarily aim at cultural exchange as such, nevertheless we achieved it.

**AP:** Schechner started to use the term ‘interculturalism’ in contrast to ‘internationalism’, advocating exchanges among cultures that don’t obey national boundaries (Schechner, 1996: 42). Erika Fischer-Lichte believes that intercultural performance is constituted by ‘the relationship between the continuation of the own traditions and the productive reception of elements of foreign theatre traditions’ (1990: 5). Do you think there is an exchange between cultures in your production: is there anyone or any elements which are non-Turkish - other than the show taking place in England - that would indicate a possible cultural exchange, or incorporation of any non-Turkish traditions?

**NY:** The most obvious thing would be the actual form of the performance, which would be facilitating this kind of cultural exchange. The most non-Turkish element should be the act of watching a piece of theatre in a theatre building and in a formal manner. Don’t get me wrong: westernised forms of performance are the most established forms in Turkish theatre - certainly since mid-twentieth century, if not earlier with the setting up of a form of state theatre *Darulbedayi* in 1914 in Istanbul. This contrasts with traditional Turkish theatre which has its roots in folk performances, improvisation, audience interaction and the like. Therefore, we could say that the cultural exchange has already happened by making these audience go into closed up theatre buildings and darkened rooms with raised curtains to watch silently during the show and then clap politely at the end. On the other hand, traditional forms of performance have been revived, adapted and reworked, and their traces are most noticeable in modern Turkish plays. For example, with *Hurmuz* *ortaoyunu* (play in the middle) is the dominant genre, even though the play has not been written as a piece of *ortaoyunu.* It is these ghostings which seem to open up the possibilities for cultural exchange.

**AP:** Lo and Gilbert make a classification of multicultural theatre in which they distinguish small ‘m’ multiculturalism and big ‘M’ Multiculturalism. ‘m’ theatre does not draw attention to cultural difference and uses devices such as blind casting, pluralism and folkloric displays in its productions to showcase specific cultural art forms. ‘M’ theatre is, on the other hand, counter-discursive, and it aims to promote cultural diversity. Under the ‘M’ umbrella they group: ghetto theatre (concerned with origin and loss, nostalgia, mostly monocultural in-house productions), migrant theatre (concerned with migration, hybridity and ethno-specific languages to denote cultural in-between-ness) and community theatre (made by, with and for a community).

How would you classify your show and would you label it Multicultural under these parameters? There are some elements of ‘m’ in your show too, such as the folkloric displays showcasing Turkish popular music.

**NY:** I think most theatrical activities within the Turkish speaking community seem to have ‘M’ theatre in mind.  *7 Husbands for Hamuz* it was ‘m’ theatre almost by accident; we were not trying to create a ‘migrant show for migrants created by migrants’ on purpose, but this was what were doing. However, we were not acknolwledging this; we simply carried on with our production as if we might have been prducing it in Turkey for the State Theatres, or even producing a standard West End musical. On the other hand, the whole concept of staging this show seems to point at ‘Multicultural theatre’, as this was a piece of migrant theatre. But maybe we were normalising it for ourselves, and trying to take it out of its genre of being a ‘marked form’ and rather than that, exhibiting a museum piece from another culture.

**AP:** *The Copla Musical* neither necessarily fits into either of these, although it could be argued that it contains elements of both: the concepts of nostalgia, migration, cultural in-between-ness, and the presence of the Spanish community have been a constant in the work.

**NY:** Klaudyna Rozhin writes about ‘the difficulty presented by the cultural context of foreign plays, and claims that although there are ways of domesticating foreign concepts, these are likely to undermine the otherness of the text’ (in Aaltonen 2000: 256).

**AP:** There is a significant challenge in presenting *copla* out of its historical context. *Copla* songs are not really ‘transparent’ or amenable to fluent translating, following Venuti’s strategy. This is maybe why this translation has not been fully attempted before, or if it has been attempted in Spain it has been mainly for comedic purposes (on TV shows and similar). The thought of providing an accurate translation of a genre like *copla*, that is so historically charged, often results in parodic gestures aimed at Spanish audiences that reinforce the idea of *copla* being ‘untranslatable’ as no culture would have the history and tools to fully understand all the layers of these songs. *The Copla Musical* makes a non-exhaustive (as there are thousands of coplas), but research-led attempt at trying to recreate the value of a selection of songs in a new context, and even if presented out of their time and place, their context is also recreated in the narrative and dramaturgy of the play.

Lo and Gilbert make a classification of the working methods employed in intercultural theatre, from more collaborative to more imperialistic. They understand collaborative interculturalism as community-generated and without a focus on maintaining the purity of the various cultures for exotic display, but rather on exploring ‘the fullness of cultural exchange in all its contradictions and convergences for all parties’ (2002: 39). *The Copla Musical* does not follow a specific line or practice or perspective, nor does it take sides in intercultural debate. Its intention is for British and Spanish cultures to merge and exchange content and form on an equitable basis. Although *The Copla Musical* is grounded in material realities of social and historical difference, the project aims to be face audiences under free from social and cultural predeterminants, and not with an interventionist agenda. The idea is to facilitate a blend of Anglophone and Spanish musical theatre features, which prompts the basis of an emerging global culture.

Even though the incipient extinction of *copla* might be affected by an impending process of globalization - as suggested by the ‘McDonaldization´ of musical theatre (Rebellato 2009) - *The Copla Musical* is not an attempt to protest against that. Rather, it is an experiment that, contrary to most anti-imperialistic views, uses a major Western culture (Anglophone musical theatre) to help reimagine a less known Western cultural artform that I argue is in need of invigoration: *copla*. Unlike Bharucha, I do not fear the ‘wrong’ presumption of Spanish culture following a viewing of *The Copla Musical*; I am using interculturalism precisely to enhance the visibility of the eclipsed Spanish *copla* in the context of other cultures. *The Copla Musical* does not present the original Spanish songs, but dramatic adaptations in the frame of a musical theatre piece that is subject to Anglo-American standards of the form. In this sense, I cannot anticipate a risk of a ruling culture unduly appropriating other cultures and traditions without offering anything in return: *copla* offers musical theatre little-known and narrative-driven S Spanish music, and Anglo musical theatre offers *copla* a new platform that favours its re-enactment and readability outside Spanish boundaries. I would classify this project as an example of collaborative interculturalism, since its focus is not on maintaining the purity of the various cultures for exotic display, but rather on exploring and testing the limits and possibilities of this cultural exchange.

Intercultural practice is often involved with globalization and the deterritorialization of the social, cultural, and political boundaries in the developed world. Was there ever a wish to appeal to British or non-Turkish communities to approach Turkish culture through your show?

**NY:** Not really, if anything, it was the exact opposite. I imagined that we would not get any non-Turkish speakers in the audience; I even went as far as to say that if we had done, they would need to be very familiar with Turkish history and culture to make sense of the performance. I completely rejected his argument of making the show appealing to a non-Turkish audience; and this is something I regret now and my next project will most definitely have this aim at its core.

**AP:** *The Copla Musical* suggests exchanges beyond national boundaries, as exchanging cultures do not only co-exist in the project but rather mould and affect each other. However, the exchange could arguably involve a partial disculturation, since the merging of *copla* and Anglophone musical theatre has the potential to transform both artistic traditions. Lo and Gilbert argue that ‘narrative content, performance aesthetics, production processes, and reception’ are products of a site-specific cultural context (2002: 31). They believe that cross-cultural theatre involves a process of encounter and negotiation depending on the artistic capital brought to a project as well as the location and working processes implicated in its development and execution. The development of *The Copla Musical* takes place in London in the frame of an academic institution, with almost no capital but an international team working voluntarily in an exploration of cultural exchange. Artists are participating for different reasons: some Spanish artists are interested in seeing *copla* move beyond Spanish physical and cultural boundaries, some British artists are interested in the qualities that *copla* brings to musical theatre. According to Pavis, transcultural practitioners are interested in particularities and traditions only insofar as they enable them to identify aspects of commonality rather than difference (1996: 6), and that is the ultimate goal of *The Copla Musical*: to blend two cultures by emphasizing similarity and compatibility rather than focusing primarily on cultural difference.

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1. See <http://www.bostonturkishfilmfestival.org/2010Festival/films/7kocaliHurmuz-7HusbandsforHurmuz.html> for a brief synopsis and short ‘teaser’ selection of scenes, which conveys very effectively the farcical nature of both play and film. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)