“Living like Queens”: Gender Conflict and Female Counter-Hegemony in Contemporary Cádiz Carnival

Katerina Sergidou

Panteion University, Athens, Greece and University of the Basque Country, San Sebastián, Spain

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the feminist mobilization that has characterized Cádiz Carnival since 2011, leading to the elimination of the *Ninfas y Diosas* (Nymphs and Goddesses) custom, a variant of the *Reina de las Fiestas* (Queen of Traditional Fiestas) ceremony introduced under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1939–75). By calling into question the representation of women in Carnival celebrations, female festive organizations have challenged the old, male-dominated festival traditions and transformed Cádiz Carnival. Their activism has carried over into everyday life, as female Carnival groups have created their own community and translated the artistic manifestations of their desire for equality into public policy. Using oral testimonies and archival material gathered during ethnographic fieldwork in the city, I trace the history of the *reina* and *ninfas* customs and analyze a variety of material related to their birth, evolution, and recent discontinuation. The ultimate purpose of this article is to map the tensions embedded in both the festival and contemporary Spanish society and to show how the Carnival stage can become a space where embodied feminist counter-hegemony is performed, thus contributing to the slow democratization of Spanish society.

1. James W. Fernandez notes that "anthropology begins with revelatory incidents," in his *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), xi. Based on this note, Margaret Bullen and Carmen Díez Mintegui describe this revelatory incident as ethnographic emergence (*emergencia etnográfica*), in *Fiestas, tradiciones e igualdad*, Kobie Serie Antropología Cultural, no. 16 (2012), 19. This moment of revelation is also described by Ruth Bejar as "anthropology's epiphanies" in "Anthropology Epiphanies: Some Things I Learned from James Fernandez," *Anthropology and Humanism* 25, no. 2 (2001): 183–88. All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2. A *pasodoble* is a fairly long song without a chorus, sung by *comparsas* (Carnival group of lyric style) and *chirigotas* (street Carnival humorous groups). A *pasodoble* is usually serious and topical.

3. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

4. Katerina Sergidou, "Can I Sing a Carnival Song? Listening to Ethnographic Sounds at a Pasodoble ¾ Rhythm," *Entanglements* 1, no. 2 (2018): 62–66.

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The Carnival of Cádiz took me by surprise. I often think that, although I was not doing fieldwork at the time, my first experience of Carnival was a "revelatory incident" or a moment of "ethnographic emergence."¹ While visiting the Andalusian city during the 2015 municipal election campaign, at a political rally, I heard the main contender for the mayoral office (fig. 1) begin his speech with a *pasodoble* titled "If I Were mayor."² I was both impressed and moved, and suddenly felt the desire to learn more about the city's history and music. Cádiz, Spain, seemed to be one of those "small places" where "large issues" emerge, in the words of anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen.³ The idea of researching Cádiz Carnival had appeared out of the blue and hit a nerve through sound. From that moment on, listening would become an essential part of my research methodology.⁴

Figure 1. 2016, the Mayor of Cádiz José María González is wearing the costume of Los Mendas Lerendas ("crazy men" in the local dialect). It is the same costume he was wearing back in 2008 when he performed as a mayor before actually becoming one. Source: Cata Zambrano, *El Mundo* February 2, 2016, <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2016/02/07/56b64c7b46163f50498b4582.html>.

A year later, as I was conducting ethnographic research on municipal politics and popular participation in public policy, I witnessed an inter-Carnival and inter-community conflict around a Carnival custom known as *Ninfas y Diosas* (Nymphs and Goddesses), inspired by a former custom from Francisco Franco's times called *Reina de las Fiestas Típicas* (Queen of Traditional Fiestas). A group of female Carnival participants and feminist collectives had come together to demand the elimination of this tradition, creating a political platform titled *Iniciativa Social: Por un Carnaval igualitario* (Social Initiative: For a Carnival of Equality). This conflict was more than

5. Teófila Martínez was the city mayor from 1995 to 2015. She was a member of the right-wing People's Party (PP) and she was mentioned in songs and oral histories as a "bad witch."

6. Marta, interview by author, July 2016, Cádiz. All interviews were conducted in Cádiz between 2016 and 2020. Since conversations were held in Spanish, quotes were translated into English by the author. Most interviewees' names have been changed. Real names are used only when women insisted that the author use them.

7. Archivo Histórico Municipal is the municipal archive located in the center of Cádiz. During research, I focused on the digitized collections that concerned Cádiz Carnival from 1950 to 1974.

8. The Unicaja Foundation building in Cádiz hosts a collection of photographs, Carnival *libretos* with lyrics, and all issues of the *Diario del Carnaval* newspaper, a special edition of *Diario de Cádiz* published every year during the three months of Carnival.

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968); Julio Caro Baroja, *El carnaval análisis histórico-cultural* (Madrid: Alianza, 2006); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising at Romans 1579–1580* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981); Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); and Victor Witter Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1992).

just my second entry into the Carnival world: it revealed a whole new reality to me. I discovered the Carnival of Cádiz to be not only a popular cultural event but also a gendered space, a place where feminists were demanding equality. Some women were singing proudly about their sexuality, while others were narrating the difficulties they had faced when previously entering the male-dominated Carnival during the 1980s and 1990s. All these different Carnival stories made me realize that Carnival was anything but an apolitical ritual. Marta, a fifty-two-year-old janitor, especially reminded me of its political and social significance:

It lasts all year long. We sing Carnival songs at weddings, political meetings.... You know, we were singing Carnival songs when we kicked Teófila out of city hall.⁵ Mark my words. Those in power always fear what people will say. You only have to listen to four Carnival groups to know the political mood of the city each year.⁶

Desiring to further investigate the connections between Carnival and politics, I decided to write a doctoral thesis on women's participation in the Cádiz Carnival festivities, drawing on the twin disciplines of gender history and feminist anthropology. Part of my research would entail recovering buried aspects of local history, and part of it would mean creating the circumstances of an ethnographic present, which would allow me to study the Carnival in Cádiz as an insider. This is how I came to join a Carnival group two years later, in 2019.

Methodology and Theoretical Background

The present article focuses on the gender dynamics at play during Cádiz Carnival and analyzes their change over time. Specific emphasis is placed on how these dynamics have led to the disappearance of certain practices, such as the Reina de las Fiestas custom, as well as the birth of new ones, such as the Ninfas y Diosas. To tell that story, I rely on interviews I conducted between 2016 and 2020 with three generations of women, some of whom experienced Carnival prohibition during the dictatorship while others joined Carnival groups during the transition to democracy or in the early twenty-first century. I also include archival material for the years 1950 to 1974, which I collected at the Municipal Historical Archives of Cádiz (Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cádiz).⁷ Other primary sources were taken into consideration, such as the collections of the Center of Unicaja Foundation in Cádiz.⁸

The theoretical starting point for the present analysis is that Carnival and other festivals are not sacrosanct places that remain unchanged through ancient, medieval, and modern history. Historians and anthropologists, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Julio Caro Baroja, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Victor Witter Turner, to name but a few, have underlined their deep connections with expressions of everyday life as well as the political realm, seeing it as space where power relations are played out.⁹ Others, like Jerome R. Mintz, have understood Carnival as the theatricalization of life.¹⁰ In "Rethinking the Festival: Power and Politics," Alessandro Testa managed to relay the playful and at the same time radical character of festivals when he offered this description:

Festivals, conceived as deeply codified and meaningful moments in the social life of a given community, are obviously charged with tensions embedded in social expectations, political claims, religious passions, individual emotions and so on; tensions whose force can either support or destabilize the hegemonic order and its functional imaginaries. Thus, the playground of festival is a catalyst of power, and history has shown us that,

10. Jerome R. Mintz, *Carnival Song and Society Gossip, Sexuality, and Creativity in Andalusia* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).
11. Alessandro Testa, "Rethinking the Festival: Power and Politics," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 26, no. 1 (2014): 66–67.
12. Teresa del Valle and Joxemartin Apalategi Begiristain, *Mujer Vasca: Imagen y Realidad* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1985).
13. Margaret Bullen and Carmen Díez Mintegui, *Fisiones/Fusiones: Mujeres, feminismos y orden social* (Donostia-San Sebastián: Ankulegi Antropologia Elkartea, 2010).
14. David D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol, and Status in Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.
15. Valeria Sterzi, *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival: A Cross Cultural Investigation of a Social Ritual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 15.
16. Kim Vaz-Deville, *Walking Raddy: The Baby Dolls of New Orleans* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018).
17. See especially Raymond Henry Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, vol. 392 (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1977); and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishard, 2005).
18. During the 2008 San Fermin festival in Pamplona, a twenty-year-old student named Nagore Laffage was brutally murdered when she refused to have sexual

in the very moment of the "play" on the ground, this charge of power may be discharged, often with dramatic results.... The outcome ... of festivals is inherently unpredictable in spite of the usual fixity and apparently indolent, perpetual return of festivals in the circular time of seasons, culturally ratified by the calendar.¹¹

Bearing Testa's words in mind, my purpose is to spotlight the expressions of gender power relations performed on the Carnival stage, using the history of the Ninfas y Diosas custom as an illustration of the tensions embedded in the festival.

My approach has been considerably influenced by the feminist anthropologists teaching at the University of the Basque Country, including Teresa del Valle and Margaret Bullen. Research conducted by Teresa del Valle, especially, has inspired many young researchers who work on the interactions and intersections of national and gender identities.¹² As for Bullen and Carmen Díez Mintegui, they have shown the fundamental role played by festival practices in the creation and recreation of collective identities.¹³

On the role of Carnival in the construction of gender, I have also used studies by anthropologist David D. Gilmore, sociologist Valeria Sterzi, and feminist art scholar Kim Vaz-Deville. Gilmore, after many years of ethnographic inquiry, came to the conclusion that "Andalusian ideas about sex, gender, and status are best and most accessibly expressed in the rituals of the February carnival."¹⁴ Sterzi has argued that Carnival is not only a space of gender inequality but also "the medium through which intimacy, the unvoiced marginalization and violence, the 'natural' exclusion from the public becomes a political act, whose aim is to 'feminize' and 'equalize' the public male domain."¹⁵ Finally, Vaz-Deville has highlighted the importance of Carnival spaces and ritualized cultural practices in expressing racialized women's desire for freedom and social justice.¹⁶ Scholars from different parts of the world thus seem to understand Carnival as a space full of potential for challenging race, gender, and class inequalities.

One final reference has been crucial to my thinking: Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and interpretations of his work that evolved into the notion of the counter-hegemony of subaltern groups.¹⁷ In the wake of the 2016 San Fermin sexual assault case, feminist movements called for the transformation of Spanish fiestas into safe places for women.¹⁸ Scholars and activists, such as Alejandra Castillo and Hester Eisenstein, have used the term "feminist hegemony" to describe the global movement designed to challenge masculine hegemony.¹⁹ Feminist demands at Cádiz Carnival may thus be framed as part of a global counter-hegemonic movement, albeit performed in a singular, unique way.

Three Hypotheses and One Clarification

Besides reconstructing the history of the Ninfas y Diosas custom (and analyzing reactions thereto), this article will explore three hypotheses:

1. Carnival is a stage where power relations are expressed and experienced. This stage can become a space where embodied feminist counter-hegemony is performed. Through this process, women become creators of pleasure instead of objects of desire.
2. By challenging male-dominated Carnival rituals, women create a "generic chronotope"—a notion Valle adapted from Russian scholar Bakhtin's concept of chronotope—which may expand from Carnival time and

intercourse with José Diego Yllanes. Eight years later at that same festival, a woman was gang-raped by five men calling themselves *la manada* (the wolf pack). A great wave of support developed under the slogan "I believe you, sister." In June 2018, the rapists were sentenced to nine years in prison by the Court of Navarra, which nonetheless cleared them of charges of sexual aggression and only found them guilty of sexual abuse. This led to a new wave of feminist demonstrations. One demand concerned safe spaces in festivities, and scholars and activists have come to refer to such demands as the "San Fermin Effect."

19. Alejandra Castillo, *Nudos feministas: Política, filosofía, democracia* (Santiago: Palinodia, 2011); and Hester Eisenstein, "Hegemonic Feminism, Neoliberalism and Womenomics: 'Empowerment' Instead of Liberation?" *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 91 (2017): 35–49.

20. Teresa del Valle, "Procesos de la memoria: Cronótopos genéricos," *Revista internacional de ciencias sociales*, no. 19 (1999): 211–26.

21. Laura Muelas de Ayala, "Una mirada a las fiestas desde la antropología feminista: El placer como proceso creativo y espacio político," in *Etnografías feministas: Una mirada al siglo XXI desde la antropología vasca*, ed. Mari Luz Esteban and Jone Miren Hernández García (Barcelona: Edicions bellaterra, 2018), 273.

22. Carnavaleros are people who systematically participate in Carnival festivities. Carnavaleros

space to everyday life and activism until it is translated into actual public policy.²⁰ In the words of anthropologist Laura Muelas de Ayala: "The personal is political, festivals are political, pleasure is political."²¹

3. By negotiating female representations in Carnival festivities, women and feminist groups contribute to the democratization of Spanish society.

Though the term "women" will sometimes be used generically in this article, my intention is to treat women not as a single social and natural category but as individual subjectivities expressing different ways of being female, feminists, and *carnavaleras*.²² I will therefore consider Cádiz Carnival as a ritual in which women act, dramatize, and negotiate conflicts with other women as much as with men.²³

The Long History of Cádiz Carnival²⁴

In his 2002 monograph on Cádiz Carnival, Caro Baroja reminds us that Carnival was originally a Christian creation dating back to the Feast of Fools (Fiesta de los locos) that was celebrated by the European clergy in medieval times.²⁵ The urban Carnival of Cádiz, however, was mostly a creation of Genoese merchants who chose the port of Cádiz (fig. 2) to trade with the north and south of Africa in the sixteenth century.²⁶

Figure 2: Map of Cádiz, 1849. Source: Instituto Geográfico Nacional, <https://www.ign.es/web/ign/portal>.

It also has its roots in the rhythms brought by African and Cuban slaves and workers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁷

and carnavaleras (female) are also famous local singers and songwriters.

23. The idea of women dramatizing and negotiating conflicts with other women during ritual time is mentioned in Christina Vlachoutsikou, "When Women Have Differences: Inhibitions and Openings," in *When Women Have Differences: Oppositions and Conflicts between Women in Contemporary Greece*, ed. Laurie Kain Hart and Christina Vlachoutsikou (Athens: Medousa-Sellas, 2003), 14–104.

24. So far, the history of Cádiz Carnival has mostly been told by local historians, such as Alberto Ramos Santana, Cuadrado Martínez, Felipe Barbosa, Ana Barceló, Santiago Moreno, and Marta Ginesta.

25. Baroja Caro, *El carnaval análisis histórico-cultural*, 29.

26. Ramos Santana, *El Carnaval secuestrado o historia del carnaval*.

27. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Cádiz was one of the biggest ports that connected Europe with the New World. See Ubaldo Cuadrado Martínez and Felipe Barbosa, *Orígenes y evolución del Carnaval de Cádiz, siglos XVI–XIX* (Cádiz: Publicaciones del Sur, 2002); and Amedeo Lepore, "The Port of Cadiz between the Modern and Contemporary Ages (17th and 18th Centuries)," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2012), 10.2139/ssrn.1979886.

28. Antonio María Galiano-Alcalá, *Recuerdos de un Anciano* (Madrid: Luis Navarro, 1878), quoted in Julio Caro Baroja and Antonio Carreira, *De etnología*

In the nineteenth century, Cádiz residents came to be known for their perpetual desire for fun and laughter, even under painful circumstances. It is said that during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), they continued celebrating Carnival. In the popular imagination, the 1812 victory that ended Napoleon's occupation of the Iberian Peninsula (1807–14) has been peppered with stories of strong winds that pushed French cannonballs away and with tales of Cádiz women singing the following verse in the streets:

Even if the French bring in artillery cannons,
they will not take away my good mood and my desire to sing *alegrías*.
With the bombs that the braggarts drop,
Cádiz women curl their hair into ringlets.²⁸

I discovered this song in 2019 after a conversation I had with Libertad, a woman who had been working in a tobacco factory for thirty years. She was trying to explain to me that the women of Cádiz (*gaditanas*) are defiant, strong, and happy, and she used the lines to illustrate her own determination to juggle long hours at the factory, family life (she was raising two children on her own), and Carnival participation (she told me she never missed a single celebration).²⁹

Over the course of the nineteenth century, a more modern Carnival emerged in the city of Cádiz, whose liberal spirit had largely inspired the first Spanish constitution, promulgated in 1812. As anthropologist José María Manjavacas explains, "A decisive historical key [for understanding the contemporary Carnival of Cádiz] is the tension between popular, autonomous, transgressive participation and the institutionalization and officialization of the festivity."³⁰ Such tension especially developed in the second half of the century, when repeated interventions by bourgeois city officials, the church, and the Spanish Crown and legislators tried to refine the Carnival and eliminate some of the old customs. The anarchist bent of the city's population can be traced to lyrics of the time and to disobedient actions of Carnival groups who refused the restrictions of the municipal authorities. It carried on during most of the Second Republic (1931–39) and the early days of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).

Up until the 1930s, women's Carnival groups occasionally appeared in the festivities but their participation was limited. These groups did not have a singing repertoire; they were dressed in traditional costumes and participated in Carnival parades known as *cabalgadas*. Women's participation increased noticeably during the Second Republic, while the king was in exile. Many women started working, participated in politics, and fought for suffrage, and a small number of them even joined the republican army. At that time, Carnival enjoyed greater freedom of speech and tolerance from the municipal authorities, although there were still cases of censorship and some acts were banned.³¹

The status of women deteriorated when the dictatorship came into force.³² The Franco regime imposed strict sexual ethics that were reflected in many song lyrics, such as these: "The old hairstyles are gone, what a shame. How lovely my grandma used to look in the old days, with her hair tied at the back.... Our women are to blame, that this beauty is gone, for they copy the women from abroad."³³ Meanwhile, the celebration of Carnival was banned throughout Spain via a 1937 governmental order of prohibition.³⁴ Although oral testimonies do mention some festivals in underground taverns, "outward expressions of joy" were mostly suppressed until

andaluza (Málaga: Servicio de publicaciones, Diputación Provincial de Málaga, 1993). I translated this song from the Spanish "Con las bombas que tiran los fanfarrones se hacen las gaditanas tirabuzones."

29. Libertad, interview by author, March 2019, Cádiz.

30. José María Manjavacas, *Documentación técnica para la incorporación del carnaval de Cádiz en el catálogo general del patrimonio histórico de Andalucía como bien de Interés Cultural, Tipología Actividad de Interés Etnológico* (Córdoba: Universidad De Córdoba, 2018), 33.

31. Santiago Moreno Tello, *La clase obrera gaditana (1949–1959): Una historia social a través de las fuentes populares* (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2006).

32. Ibid.

33. For the entire text of this 1959 pasodoble, titled "Los peluqueros de la señora," see *ibid.*, 85.

34. Governmental order, March, 2, 1937, Federal Law Gazette (BOE).

35. Ramos Santana, *El Carnaval secuestrado*.

36. Maria, interview by author, November 2018, Cádiz.

37. Jacques Le Goff, *Enciclopedia Einaudi: Monumento-Documento* (Porto: Imprensa Nacional/Casa da Moeda, 1984).

38. The *Gran Teatro Falla* is a theater in the city of Cádiz. Located on the Plaza Frágela, it was built in Moorish style in 1910 and was named after the great

1947, when an explosion at the mines led to the reauthorization of festivities by civil governor Carlos María Rodríguez de Valcárcel. From 1948 to 1967, Carnival celebrations were replaced with "choral festivals" (*fiestas de coros*), later renamed "traditional festivals" (*fiestas típicas*). The lyrics of songs had to be submitted to what was known as "the red pencil," a term describing the censorship of the time. This period has been described by historian Alberto Ramos Santana as the era of "undercover Carnival."³⁵ Sixty-five-year-old Maria confirmed: "We always called it a Carnival. We used to say, in a couple of days, Carnival begins."³⁶ In 1967, the festival was moved from February to spring for "touristic" reasons. This decision provoked a reaction recorded in Carnival lyrics, reminiscent of historian Jacques Le Goff's study of subaltern resistance to calendric reforms.³⁷ In 1977, with the end of the dictatorship, the carnavaleros of the town laid fiestas típicas to rest in a symbolic ceremony in which they carried "the corpse" of the old festivity in a coffin. (fig. 3) That same year, Carnival was reborn and returned to its roots, once again being celebrated in February.

Figure 3. The funeral of the fiestas típicas, 1977. Source: Archivo Diario de Cádiz.

Today, what is extraordinary about Cádiz Carnival is its ability to dominate the time and space of the city. The Carnival festivities begin with gastronomic events in the middle of January and continue with the Carnival contest at the Falla theater, which lasts beyond Mardi Gras, until mid-March.³⁸ Meanwhile, the "real" (in local parlance) street Carnival known as the *ilegales* begins at the end of February and lasts until a few days after Palm Sunday, when Witch Piti (*Bruja Piti*) is burned.³⁹ Although Cádiz Carnival ends before Easter, its calendric boundaries exceed the mid-January/Palm Sunday period, as small-scale concerts, group rehearsals, and other Carnival events happen all year long. As a result, Carnival continuously moves from liminality to the heart of everyday life, when it takes over central urban spaces with its numerous activities. In this way, the town is converted into a stage where art and reality meet, intertwine, and become inseparable, a scene where political discourse is performed to a Carnival rhythm.

Although the politically rebellious character of Carnival is apparent through the topical lyrics created by performers since the 1970s, the festival has retained a very traditional structure that is hardly prone to change. This strict form includes the virtual exclusion of women from the official Carnival contest held at the Falla theater. In 2016, none of the Carnival groups that participated

Spanish composer Manuel de Falla (1876–1946), who was born in Cádiz. Every year for a month the Falla theater hosts the artistic competitions (*concurso*) of Cádiz Carnival.

39. *Ilegales* (illegal) or *callejeras* (street) is how people refer to the street Carnival. At the beginning of my research, I considered Carnival to be the entirety of the celebrations, that is, the official Carnival contest (*concurso oficial de agrupaciones del carnaval de Cádiz*) plus the parades and the street Carnival. However, all my informants insisted that what people actually mean by “Carnival” is just the street Carnival.

The ilegales last ten days and feature groups of men (and now increasingly women) dressed in original costumes, drinking alcohol, making jokes, and chatting in the narrow streets. We should not imagine this performance as a big, compact parade but as small, dispersed Carnival groups that stand on street corners singing their *coplas*, surrounded by spectators.

40. Figures taken from the manifesto of the movement for Carnival equality.

41. Carmen Guerrero Quintero and Abel Al Jende Medina, *En la calle nos vemos: Agrupaciones callejeras del carnaval de Cádiz* (Seville: Atrapasueños Editorial, 2012).

42. Figures taken from the Patronato de Fiestas del Cádiz City Council database.

43. The first female band to set foot on the stage of the Falla theater during the Carnival contest was El Show de Wald in 1969.

in the contest was 100 percent female.⁴⁰ Even when women participate, only a handful of them write lyrics as *autoras* (authors), in other words, songwriters, directors of Carnival performance, and leading figures of the Carnival group. In 2007, only 3 of the 297 members of the Association of Songwriters (Asociación de Autores del Carnaval de Cádiz, or AACC) were women.⁴¹ In 2018, among the 135 Carnival groups that participated in the contest, only 3 were led by female *autoras*.⁴² The Carnival group Coro mixto (1981–97), which was at the vanguard of the fight for equality in the contest, and Adela del Moral, the songwriter for this now-extinct group, remains an exception as far as women’s participation in the Carnival contest is concerned.⁴³ When I inquired about this situation, many male participants—musicians especially—explained that the female voice is inadequate for the contest due to its being one octave higher than the male voice on average. A musicologist during an interview said that “the voice of women does not sound like Carnival, does not sound like it is from Cádiz ... although it sounds beautiful, well, our ears are not accustomed to this sound.”⁴⁴ This naturalization of gender differences constitutes the biggest ideological obstacle to the feminization (and therefore democratization) of Carnival. It also testifies to the way the social order and culture are perceived as well as to what most people think of as “tradition.”⁴⁵

Women are nonetheless making inroads into the Carnival schedule. Since 1984, the year when the municipality of Cádiz took on the responsibility for organizing and financing most of the Carnival festivities the number of female-led street Carnival groups has steadily increased. At the same time, other women and men describe their participation in mixed Carnival bands as a very positive experience. Jesús, one of the most famous *carnavaleros* in the city, told me how proud he was of being an author for the first band to have included a woman.⁴⁶

The 2016 Controversy over the Ninfas y Diosas Tradition

In December 2016, a majority of the Cádiz municipal council decided (fig. 4) that the local government would cease to sponsor the Ninfas y Diosas contest, which it had been organizing since 2002 through the Carnival Commission (Patronato del Concurso Oficial de Agrupaciones Carnavalescas y Fiestas del Carnaval de Cádiz). It also decided to create an open and participatory commission that would work toward a better representation and integration of women into Carnival.

Figure 4. Municipal ordinance approved on December 30, 2016. Source: Secretariat of the Municipality of Cádiz.

Molondritas followed in 1980 and, in 1981, the legendary group Coro mixto appeared on the Falla stage.

44. Guerrero Quintero and Jende Medina, *En la calle nos vemos*, 63.

45. Bullen and Díez Mintegui, *Fisiones/Fusiones*.

46. Jesús, interview by author, August 2016, Cádiz.

47. Si Se Puede (Yes You Can) was the name of the Podemos municipal group and Ganar Gádiz (Let's Win Gádiz) was that of the United Left municipal group (Izquierda Unida).

48. Historian Ana Barceló, especially, has located a photograph of a woman with a crown in the 1920s festivities. Ana Barceló, "Mujeres en el Carnaval de Cádiz: Reina y damas, Diosa y Ninfa" (presentation given at the initial "Platform for Carnival Equality" press conference, Cádiz, December 2016).

This decision largely owed to the lobbying of two left-wing municipal groups, Si Se Puede Cádiz and Ganar Cádiz.⁴⁷ It also testified to the influence of the "Carnival of Equality" manifesto, which a feminist coalition had sent to all municipal groups. The left-wing groups had clearly incorporated the feminists' arguments, converting their motion into a political proposal to be voted on.

One of the main arguments formulated in the feminist proclamation was that the Ninfas y Diosas custom was a remnant of the dictatorship, a mere variant of the Reina de las Fiestas Típicas custom of the 1940s–70s. Photographic material that exists from the Second Republic actually shows that the custom of a female figure representing Carnival and taking part in official festivities already existed prior to Franco.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it was indeed under his regime that the custom of Reina de las Fiestas Típicas was institutionalized. From 1954 on, a queen was selected locally, along with several ladies-in-waiting, thus reviving the old institution of the Spanish Damas de la Reina. The custom not only extended to adult women but was also duplicated for younger girls.

The Reinas Tradition and the Patriarchal Power Structure

The majority of the girls and women chosen to reign over the celebrations were part of wealthy or powerful families. And yet, the first Reina de las Fiestas was actually a woman of humble origin: Rosa Terrada Doncelmoriano. (fig. 5)

Figure 5. Rosa Terrada Doncelmoriano, the first reina, 1954. Source: *Diario del Carnaval*, February 2, 1994, from the collections of the Center of Unicaja Foundation in Cádiz.

49. Maria, interview by author,
November 2018, Cádiz.

50. *Reina en tiempos difíciles*,
February 2, 1994, interview pub-
lished in the *Diario del Carnaval*.

51. Memo, 1955, 4. C. 6261,
Archivo Histórico Municipal.

Indeed, in what may have been a philanthropic gesture, the Festivities and Propaganda Committee (Comisión de Fiestas y Propaganda) selected its first reina among students of the city's educational institutions. Sadly, members of her family recall that she was soon forgotten because she was the daughter of a docker. As sixty-five-year-old Maria reasoned during our interview, "Those were daughters of the rich, the businessmen, the generals, we had nothing to do with them, as we were a family of workers."⁴⁹ As for Terrada Doncelmoriano, here is how she described her reign in a 1994 interview with the local newspaper *Diario de Carnaval*: "The whole family experienced that event with a lot of joy and expectation. For example, I remember that my high school classmates made the crown I wore with pieces of mirrors." Her sister Ana remembers how people called her names and insulted her because she was of humble origin. They were saying that she was the daughter of nobody but I was smiling thinking that my father was a proud dockworker."⁵⁰ More in line with the spirit of the tradition was the 1962 selection of María del Carmen Martínez Bordiú Franco, granddaughter of the head of the state, to be the child queen of Fiestas Típicas.

Regarding the reina's physical appearance, in the archival material, one can find a note from Casa Brotons, who organized the parades during which the reinas made their grand appearance. The memo, dated 1955, is addressed to the municipal government and advises the authorities to choose "good-looking women."⁵¹

Figure 6. The reina of 1957, attending the grand ball at the Falla theater.
Source: Archivo Histórico Municipal.

What exactly were the duties of the festival queen? They seem to have included visiting poor neighborhoods and distributing alms, attending church services and laying wreaths for the Virgin Mary, and attending society dinners at city hall. The reina was also expected to attend at least two festive events: the ball held at the Falla theater (fig. 6) and the big parade. The instructions (fig. 7) sent to her and to her damas in 1971 give us a sense of the strict program the young women had to follow for nine days.

INSTRUCCIONES PARA LAS DAMAS DE LA CORTE DE HONOR DE LA REINA DE LAS FIESTAS TÍPICAS DE 1.971.-			
MARTES 18.-	22 horas.-	En el Ayuntamiento, para hacer ensayo general del acto de la Coronación.-	
MIÉRCOLES 19.-	22,30 "	En el Gran Teatro Falla, a fin de presenciar la final del Concurso de Coros y Chirigotas.-	
JUEVES 20.-	10,30 "	En el muelle de Ciudad, para embarcar en el vapor Adriano II, y efectuar el Paseo por la Bahía.-	
	18,30 "	En el Hogar del Niño Jesús, para tomar parte en el desfile de coches veteranos y entrada triunfal de la Reina.-	
	22,30 "	Cena ofrecida por el Sr. Alcalde en el Real Club Nautico.- A continuación visita a las casetas premiadas.-	
VIERNES 21.-	10, "	En el Ayuntamiento, para la salida de coches veteranos participantes en el II Rally Fiestas Típicas.-	
	11 "	Visita a centros benéficos acompañando a la Reina.-	
	13 "	Visita al Palacio de la Excm. Diputación Provinc. -	
	13,30 "	En el Torreón de Puertas de Tierra, Homenaje al Comparsista.-	
	20,30 "	En el Ayuntamiento, entrando por la puerta de la calle S. Antonio Abad, para el acto de Coronación de la Reina e imposición de Bandas a la Corte de Honor.-	
	23 "	En el Ayuntamiento.- Cena ofrecida por la Corporación Municipal, a la que deberán asistir acompañadas de sus padres o personas que las representen. (Estos acompañantes, deberán asistir, las señoras con traje de cocktail y los caballeros de smoking).-	
SÁBADO 22.-	10 "	En el Ayuntamiento para ser trasladadas a Jerez de la Frontera, donde serán obsequiadas por la Bodega Gonzalez Byass.-	
	18 "	En la Cueva del Pájaro Azul, para acompañar a la Reina en su recorrido por los barrios populares.-	
	20,30 "	En el Ayuntamiento, donde en su salón regio se proclamará el fallo del premio "Rodríguez Valcarlos".-	
	23 "	En la caseta que haya obtenido el Primer Premio, la fiesta del Gran Carnaval, donde deberán asistir disfrazadas.-	
DOMINGO 23.-	11 "	Misa en el Santuario de la Patrona.-	
	12 "	Estadio Ramón de Carranza, para presidir el III Festival de Majorettes, Hispano-francés.-	
	17,30 "	En el Hogar del Niño Jesús, (Avda. Fernandez Ledrada) para en la carroza Trono, presidir la Cabalgata Magna.-	
MARTES 25.-	23 "	Baile de disfraces en el Real Tennis Club de Cádiz.-	
JUEVES 27.-	23 "	Fiesta en honor de la Reina y su Corte en el Real Club Nautico.-	
SÁBADO 29.-	23 "	Gran Baile de Gala en el Gran Teatro Falla.-	
PARA LA MEJOR ORGANIZACION DE LOS ACTOS SE RUEGA LA MAS EXACTA PUNTUALIDAD.-			

Figure 7. Instructions to the damas of the reina, 1971. Source: Archivo Histórico Municipal.

Participation in festivities was considered an honor for the queen's family, but there are recorded incidents of the family refusing the distinction. For instance, the 1962 *Diario de Cádiz* article that announced the selection of María del Carmen Martínez Bordiú Franco as child queen of the Fiestas Típicas also specified that the adult queen would be Milagrosa Moral Cabeza, a choice that was not accepted by her family:

The queen's father strongly objects, yet [Mayor Ramón de] Carranza confirmed that, with or without his permission, Milagrosa Moral would be the queen for 1963. This is a public display of gratitude to Moral's

52. The text of this decision was originally published in a December 1962 issue of the *Diario de Cádiz* and was republished fifty years later in the same newspaper. "1962 Una nieta de Franco, reina infantil de las Fiestas Típicas," *Diario de Cádiz*, July 12, 2012, https://www.diariodecadiz.es/efemerides/Franco-reina-infantil-Fiestas-Tipicas_0_650035007.html.

53. Barcelo, "Mujeres en el Carnaval de Cádiz." Jiménez and Páramo have both published their thesis on Cádiz Carnival while Ginesta is currently writing her dissertation on women and Carnival in Cádiz. For more details, refer to Estrella Fernández Jiménez, *La final del Falla: Un estudio sobre la realización televisiva del COAC (Concurso Oficial de Agrupaciones Carnavalescas)* (Cádiz: Editorial UCA, 2018); and María Luisa Páramo, *El carnaval de las coplas, un arte de Cádiz* (Madrid: Izana, 2017).

54. Local students to Vicente Del Moral, 1973, C. 7268-09, Archivo Histórico Municipal.

decisive and enthusiastic work from the *Fiestas Típicas* organization. Finally, the mayor asked the band directors to preserve good taste in their lyrics and forget about vulgarities that insult morals.⁵²

Unfortunately, we cannot know whether this refusal was motivated by hostility to the dictatorial regime or to some other personal or political feeling.

The vocabulary that accompanied the young women's existence as queens remained virtually unchanged from the 1940s to the 1970s. In letters, newspaper articles, and speeches, we come across such phrases as "during her reign," "the coronation of the Queen," the "triumphant entrance of the Queen," or "the ball is organized in honor of the Queen and her Court." The reina and her damas may not have had real power, but as the daughters of ministers and granddaughters of Franco himself, they were symbols of the regime. Their presence in the festivities testifies to the fact that Fiestas Típicas were more of a propagandist celebration of military men in power than a real carnivalesque display. Historian Ana Barceló—one of the few women who have researched Cádiz Carnival, together with María Luisa Páramo, Estrella Fernández Jiménez, and Marta Ginesta—suggests that the selection of the reinas was also a way for the municipal authorities to ensure the funding of the celebrations by the city's leading families.⁵³

However, the popularity of the custom should not be underestimated. In a letter written in 1973 (fig. 8) and addressed to the councilor in charge of festivals, Vicente Del Moral, a group of young female pupils asked the municipal authorities for their teacher, Teresa Nuñez, to be chosen as reina. They did not describe her as good-looking, but set their own criteria: "She is 23 years old, she is very kind to us, and we love her a lot.... We want to see her happy for a few days."⁵⁴

Figure 8. Local students to Vicente Del Moral, 1973. Source: Archivo Histórico Municipal.

55. Estrella, interview by author,
November 2018, Cádiz.

56. Miguel, interview by author,
July 2016, Cádiz.

Núñez, however, was never crowned queen of the Fiestas Típicas. We can assume that she was the daughter neither of a minister nor of a member of the military or of a wealthy businessman. She was just a teacher to her loving students, Julia, Antonia, Dolores, Otilia, Juana, and Concepción.

Sometimes, the regime favored more modern traditions to rejuvenate the festival and provide “bread and circuses.” For instance, an impressed sixty-seven-year-old Estrella mentioned a municipal initiative to bring a group of French cheerleaders from Montpellier in 1968. (fig. 9) “We had never seen such short skirts. A few years prior, the authorities used to measure the length of our skirts in the streets!”⁵⁵

Figure 9: Cheerleaders from Montpellier, 1968. Source: *Diario de Cádiz*, republished on May 21, 2018, https://www.diariodecadiz.es/cadiz/anosDomingo-grande-cabalgata-Fiestas-Tipicas_0_1247275425.html.

Such innovations, however, never challenged the primacy of the reinas tradition under Franco’s regime.

Democracy Comes to Carnival

After the first democratic municipal elections in 1980, the local sections of the Communist (PCE) and Socialist Parties (PSOE) introduced reforms to democratize the Carnival festivities. Pepa Mena, the new councilor in charge of festivals, replaced the Reina de las Fiestas Típicas custom with a tradition named Ninfas y Diosas. Women of all classes could now participate equally in the contest. Miguel, a Communist member of the municipal government, recalled the importance of this change and also revealed the way men in power perceived the change: “The goddess of the Carnival was an invention of ours so that we could substitute the bourgeois image of the Cádiz woman and convert her into a real woman.”⁵⁶

The transformation of the one and only “queen” (reina) into the pagan “nymphs and goddesses” (plural) was politically symbolic, as it originated from a desire to abolish rituals that smacked of

57. On the uses of pagan symbols of antiquity in times of revolution, see Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

58. Katerina Sergidou, "Thoughts about Feminist Methodology in Historical Research" (paper presented at the 23rd annual meeting of the University of Crete post-graduate students in modern and contemporary history, University of Crete, Rethimno, July 2018).

59. Estrella, interview by author, November 2018, Cádiz.

60. Marta, interview by author, November 2018, Cádiz.

61. Several types of Carnival groups and songs are associated with Cádiz Carnival. The *comparsas*, *chirigotas*, *coros*, and *cuartetos* are the best known. *Comparsas* consist of singers who sing critical songs and perform in groups of around twelve to fifteen people. *Chirigotas* are humorous groups of around seven to ten people which perform satirical and carnivalesque pieces. In the Falla theater contest only men can participate as a *chirigota*. On the streets, however, most of the *chirigotas* that perform as *ilegales* are female. *Coros* are larger groups from twelve to forty-five people which perform both serious and humorous pieces. *Cuartetos* perform improvised comic scenes. They can be groups of three, four, or five.

62. Domingo Acedo Moreno, *Agrupaciones callejeras en el Carnaval de Cádiz* (Cádiz: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Diputación de Cádiz, 2014).

the *ancien régime* and to restore republican imagery (the symbolic association between antiquity and republicanism is an old one indeed).⁵⁷ The goddess still wore a crown, however, much like Spain remained a monarchy after 1975.⁵⁸ "The selection process [from 1980 and on] was less elitist, but [ninfas were] still beautiful figures who played supporting roles in parades and in other social settings," a member of the Carnival equality movement recalled.⁵⁹ During our conversation, Estrella expressed similar feelings about the change from one custom to the other under the local socialist government:

This custom was a little bit fairer. Okay, I never saw it positively because the women who participated were standing there, just being pretty. But still, all the girls could go, and instead of paying for the theater, they could watch all the theater performances for free. I sent my daughter when she was a little girl. And she won. When you are young, you do not think of all this. You know, we all signed for this custom to disappear. Everybody. My daughter, my coworkers. Everybody I know.⁶⁰

Carnival was not just democratized from the top down. Women also occupied the festive arena by joining existing Carnival organizations or creating their own. During my fieldwork, a neighbor insisted that I talk with the members of the oldest feminist *chirigota* (humorous street Carnival band) in Cádiz.⁶¹ Surprisingly enough, their story is mostly absent from the collective memory of Carnival and they are not even mentioned in local researcher's Domingo Acedo Moreno's book about the Carnival of Cádiz, which provides an impressive list of the *chirigotas* that performed between 1979 and 2013.⁶² Herein is my attempt to reconstruct their history.

In 1986, a group of young women formed a band named Las Oh! Diosas (fig. 10), which became quite successful. It was not their first artistic endeavor. In 1984, they had sung during Carnival with a group named Las Brujas (The Witches). The band's name was an elaborate pun: they were the *diosas* (queens) but also the *odiosas* ("the odious ones" in Spanish). The exclamation "Oh!" was also meant to anticipate the audience's surprise when seeing their costumes and hearing their lyrics. As Maria Luisa and Puri explained during my interview with them, "we were not just *diosas*; we were the Oh! Diosas. There is an antithesis, an element of surprise, before our name. Because our name was *diosas*, and we dressed like *mamarrachas*."⁶³ At that time, the Ninfas y Diosas custom was not criticized, as it was considered a democratic transformation of the Reina de las Fiestas Típicas custom. Yet they daringly presented themselves as obnoxious women who teased men through their lyrics and costumes:

Si tu sueño es participar / If your dream is to participate

Candando con un disfraz / To sing in disguise

Pasa del jurado / To perform in front of a jury

Pasa del Diario, / To be featured in the *Diario*,⁶⁴

Móntate tu Carnaval. / Create your own Carnival.

Con unos años mas, / A few years from now,

Hasta barba tender / I'll grow a beard

Y mientras jugaré a ¡Oh Diosa! ¡Oh Diosa! / Until then, I'm playing with the Carnival Goddesses.

They explicitly emulated the ninfas custom by wearing the same sashes the queen and her maids did. Instead of a wand, however, they carried a toilet brush, and their crown was a handmade helmet.

63. Maria Luiza and Puri, interview by author, April 2019, Cádiz.

"Mamarracho" is a term used to refer to someone's funny, ridiculous, or messy appearance.

64. The *Diario* (*Diario de Cádiz*) is the biggest local newspaper. It was founded in 1867.

65. M. Huguet, "Sólo ocho candidatas a ninfa un día antes del cierre del plazo del concurso," *La Voz de Cádiz*, November 26, 2008, <https://www.lavozdigital.es/cadiz/20081126/cadiz/solo-ocho-candidatas-ninfa-20081126.html>.

66. Marta Ginesta Gamaza, "Proyecto de tesis doctoral: Las mujeres en el Carnaval de Cádiz. Análisis de roles, espacios, estere-

Figure 10. The Oh! Diosas in 1986. Source: Maria Luisa de la Torre Villarica's personal archives.

Meanwhile, *ninfas* and *diosas* continued to wear reina crowns during the celebrations. Every year, the outgoing goddess passed on her crown to the new goddess. The way they were elected was similar to beauty contests, as women were selected for their beauty and communication skills. *Ninfas* and *diosas* attended Carnival events and the Carnival contest at the Falla theater as members of the audience, and they were seen as a symbol of beauty and tradition. A 2008 local newspaper report in *La Voz de Cádiz* offers a detailed description of the selection process:

In the meantime, and for as long as the current system lasts, everyone should know how to dance the *tanguillos* and get to know the fiesta, as well as the history and current affairs of Cádiz.... The selected women will be submitted again to the choice of the jury, which will choose the nine nymphs. From the moment they are chosen, they are in the running to be nominated Carnival Goddess. A group of specialists will accompany them to each event in which they participate and will assess which of these young women is best suited to play this role. The name of the chosen one will be announced on February 21 in San Antonio Square. In addition to a cash prize of 500 euros for the nymphs and 800 for the Goddess, the Cádiz women will be given a *piconera* costume. They will also be given a sash to be worn at all events.⁶⁵

According to the report, the contestants were supposed to know how to dance, to have some basic historical knowledge, and to understand what "their role" entailed. They were taught by specialists and given a traditional *piconera* costume (fig. 11). What is not mentioned in the report, although it was mentioned to me during some of the conversations I had, is that they were expected to be good-looking and smiling. Their duties as *ninfas* and *diosas* would last a whole year. According to Ginesta, "the creation of a specific Carnival role for women has been the product of the desire to control them. Indeed, the more prestigious the role artificially created for women, the more they cling to it and the kinder public opinion is."⁶⁶

Figure 11. Nymphs and goddesses dressed in the traditional female costume of the piconera, 2012.
Source: *Diario de Cádiz*, February 2, 2012, from the collections of the Center of Unicaja Foundation in Cádiz.

Moving toward the Elimination of the Ninfas y Diosas Custom

Calls for the abolition of the Ninfas y Diosas custom appeared in public discourse in 2011, that is, a few months after the emergence of the *Indignados* movement, which, according to one of my informants, began in Cádiz with a Carnival band marching toward the central square.⁶⁷ The demand to abolish the custom was accompanied by a request to eliminate another remnant of the dictatorship, the burning of the Witch Piti, which, in Trebujena, a province of Cádiz, dated back to 1961.

In 2012, four years before the eventual elimination of the custom, the female Carnival *comparsa* Living Like Queens (Las que viven como Reinas) (fig. 12), dressed as queen bees, sang the following lines from the song “Con toitos mis respetos” (“With All Due Respect”) on the stage of the Falla theater during the official annual Cádiz Carnival contest:

Con toito mis respetos pa esas ninfas sandungueras / With all due respect to these charming nymphs
Hoy le canto a otras mujeres / Today I sing to other women
Que yo llamo compañeras, / Whom I call comrades,
Que no quieren ser las diosas, / Who do not want to be goddesses,
Que gobierne estas murallas. / Who govern these walls.
Sólo sueñan una cosa / They dream of only one thing
Y es cantar aquí en el Falla. / And that is to sing here at Falla (theater).
Son compañeras de desengaños, / They are my comrades in frustration,
Carnavaleras que por sus bocas mi Cádiz habla, / Carnavaleras through whose lips my Cádiz speaks,
Y no requieren ningún enchufe pa estar aquí / Who do not need the right connections to be here
Pa subirse cada año en estas tablas. / To get up on this stage every year.
Son las mujeres de este Carnaval, / They are the women of this Carnival,
Aquellas que yo llamo compañeras / Those whom I call comrades

otipos y letras del Carnaval oficial y callejero,” in *XX Congreso del Carnaval, Diversión, prohibición y libertad en la fiesta de Febrero*, ed. Santiago Moreno Tello (Cádiz: Libro de Actas, 2017), 56.

67. Sandra, interview by author, July 2016, Cádiz. The *Indignados* or *Movimiento 15-M* was the name of the anti-austerity movement that emerged in Spain on May 15, 2011, in other words, one week before the local elections. The movement occupied central squares all over the country and resembled the Occupy Wall Street movement taking shape in the United States. There is a growing

literature about this movement.
See, for instance, Óscar Pereira-Zazo and Steven L. Torres, eds.,

Mujeres orgullosas de nacer, / Who are proud to be born women,
Coristas, comparsistas y chirigoterías / Women who sing in coros, comparsas, and chirigotas
Sin un palquito en el que figurar, / Without a balcony to show off from,
Y sin lucir el traje de piconera, / Who do not wear the piconera costume,
Tan sólo con su voz y su disfraz, / Who only have their voice and their costume,
Todavía sin la Gloria, / Who remain unrecognized,
Todavía sin un nombre. / Who remain unnamed.
Y a pesar de las derrotas, / And despite the defeats,
Una y otra y otra más, / One after the other, over and over again,
Siguen cantando a su tierra / They continue to sing about their land
Como le cantan los hombres, / Like men do,
Sólo con su voz y su disfraz, / Only with their voice and their costume,
Compañeras que se mueren por su fiesta soberana, / Comrades who die for this sovereign celebration,
Y sin banda y sin corona. / Without an orchestra or a crown.
Representan de verdad / They truly represent
A la mujer gaditana, a la mujer gaditana. / The women of Cádiz, the women of Cádiz.⁶⁸

Figure 12: Living Like queens on the Falla theater stage, January 28, 2012.
Source: Video archive, local TV channel Onda Cádiz, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCYzNcvvIE>.

Members of Living Like Queens used the words “respect” and “comrades” as they addressed the nymphs and goddesses. Although their criticism was harsh, they used inclusive vocabulary, treating all women of Cádiz—be they “charming nymphs” or “comrades in frustration”—equally. All they “dreamed” of was to sing at the Falla theater as men did. They did not need crowns, an orchestra, or the traditional piconera costume uniform that ninfas and diosas wore, only “their voices and their costumes.” They were “proud to be born women.”

As soon as they finished their pasodoble, the whole theater got to its feet in a standing ovation. In the recorded visual archive of Cádiz’s local TV channel, one can see the “other” women elected as ninfas and diosas for the year 2012, sitting at the balcony and watching the stage nervously. The story of the comparsa’s performance can be seen as a moment when feminism took over, leaving a specific embodied imprint on the stage of the male-dominated Falla theater. Through the song, we understand the way particular groups of women felt about this custom long before its elimination.

Three years later, following the victory of the political party Podemos in the municipal elections, women of the city contributed to the movement for Carnival equality (fig. 13), collecting thousands of signatures and demanding that the municipal government stop financing the Ninfas y Diosas contest.

Figure 13. Feminist poster designed for the Carnival equality campaign and posted on social media. The witch says, "I do not want to pose. I want to write, play music, and sing." Source: Facebook page of Iniciativa Social Por un Carnaval Igualitario.

They faced opposition not just from men but also from "other" women who supported the continuation of the contest or its reform. During my participation in a feminist protest at the Falla theater, I met a young woman, Alicia, whom I recognized from an interview she had once given. She was the 2016 diosa, meaning she had been the first to be elected under Podemos's left-wing municipal government. She and her friend, Laura, who was one of the previous ninfas, positively described their experience and surprised me with their arguments in defense of a transformation rather than an elimination of the custom. During their participation in the contest, they explained, the municipal government had had the opportunity to witness a different way of being a ninfa or a diosa. During the selection process, they had not been obliged to dance the traditional piconera dance as used to be customary or to answer "silly questions," such as "which is your favorite color?" Instead, they were asked about Carnival culture and the history of the city, and they were not interviewed separately but in groups. They also had the freedom to present a Carnival performance of their choice, a *romancero* (Spanish folk ballad) or a play. Finally, they were given the possibility to attend the various Carnival fiestas, including the contest that takes place at the Falla theater, wearing any costume they liked, instead of the traditional piconera costume. During the selection process, Alicia remembered being relieved that someone from the jury told them that they could take off their high heels so that they could feel more comfortable. "We are also feminists," she explained. "But we wanted to enter the Falla theater every night and to be present for the final round of the contest. It was the price we had to pay."⁶⁹ It seems therefore that the left-wing municipal government experimented with a more democratic and progressive model of the custom after 2015. Despite these efforts, the tension remained unresolved.

One year after the elimination of the Ninfas y Diosas competition in 2016, some of the women who had supported the custom used their Carnival group to expound their arguments. They

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named their band *Las que salen de Luisita*, meaning “Those who come from Luisita’s” (the name of a famous flower shop in Cádiz). They dressed as flowerpots (fig. 14) to criticize the way they believed feminists saw them, which was as “ornamental flowers.”

Figure 14. *Las que salen de Luisita* on the Plaza de los floreros, 2017. Source: *Las que Salen de Luisitas* private archives.

Through their lyrics, they spelled out their take on the event:

De Cádi Cádi señores / From Cádiz, Cádiz, gentlemen

De toa la vida de dios / Of a lifetime oh my God

La Piconera goyesca / The goyesque Piconera

Ha representado con gran honor / Represented with great honor

A la mujer gaditana con arte y gracia y buen humor, / To the woman of Cádiz with humor and art,

Aunque algunas gente / Although some people

Se está empeñando en romper la tradición / Are set on breaking this tradition

Y eso no va a pasar / And this will not happen

Pa eso aquí estoy yo / This is why I am here

Ya llegaron las mujeres floreros / The female flower pots are here

Que tanto en Cadi han dado por culo. / The ones that were fucked up in Cádiz.

Que somos unos ornamentos / They say we are ornaments

Mu guapa y sin argumentos, / Beautiful and without arguments,

Pa colarnos en el Teatro Falla / That we just stand in the line for the Falla theater

Para lucir los bonitos cuerpos. / To show off our beautiful bodies.

Y si veo a un comparsita ay / And if I see a fellow comparsa, oh!

Que calor que me entra por dentro y mira lo bien que quedo yo aquí. / How hot I feel inside and look how nice I am standing here.

Y al Kichi y a la concejala / And to Kichi [the mayor's nickname] and the female councilor [who eliminated the custom]

Una cosita le voy a decir: / There's only one thing I want to say:

Que me van a comer el madroño. / They will eat my pussy.

Porque al final estamos aquí, / In the end we are here,

(London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

68. The song can be listened to at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCYzNcvvIE>.

69. Alicia and Laura, interview by author, June 2019, Cádiz.

70. Quote from an official website dedicated to Andalusia, "Andalucía información," <https://andaluciainformacion.es/cadiz/642527/la-asociacion-de-ninfas-la-piconera-entra-en-la-guerra>.

71. Encarna Franco Piferrer, "Mi reinado representó el cambio y nada tenía que ver con el papel de las ninfas de ahora," interview by N. Agrafojo, *La Voz del Carnaval*, October 2015, <https://carnaval>.

Y aunque digan las progresista y las feministas lo que quieran decir, / *And whatever the progressive and the feminists say,*

Yo me quiero y me adoro, / *I love myself, I adore myself,*

Y mira lo bien que quedo yo aquí. / *And look how nice I am standing here.*

To further defend the custom, the "Flowers" joined other women in creating an association of former nymphs named La Piconera. One of their main arguments was that "it is a contest that generates employment and supports many professionals."⁷⁰

Halfway between both sides in the debate, the first Carnival goddess (elected in 1980) espoused an interesting position. She recalled her experience from the perspective of the present discussion, in 2017. She defended the tradition while admitting that in the old days, "under [her] reign," things were different. Her narration is particularly relevant because her memories made room for a different interpretation of the tradition's original intention, which, in her view, was to democratize the festivities, in contrast to the feminist collectives that saw it exclusively as a remnant of Francoism:

All sides respected us. Everyone in the streets admired and supported us. We would only go where we wanted. The municipal authorities invited us, and we decided whether to go or not. We would dress in any way we liked, and we self-organized. Of course, we did not wear the *Piconera* costume or anything. Nobody was laughing at us. My reign was evidence of political change.⁷¹

Adela del Moral, one of the most admired Carnival songwriters, also understood why some women supported keeping up the custom but argued that it should not be financed by the city: "It would be a different matter if private sponsors supported the contest. Many women are in favor of the contest, and they have the right to find funding and support by sponsors. I am not interested in whether this is right or wrong, as far as it is not funded by public money."⁷² This reasoning placed equality firmly in the public sphere, demanding that society through its authorities make a stand by refusing to fund discriminatory activities, while at the same time recognizing different points of view and allowing for their continuity.

Meanwhile, at a press conference organized by feminist collectives on December 19, 2016, the movement for Carnival equality referenced Barceló's idea of the Carnival song being the true ruler of Carnival by appointing a new Carnival goddess: "*la copla*." Silvia, a young woman from Seville who has been living in Cádiz for the last four years, recalled:

We collected more than three thousand signatures, and they collected around seven hundred. They did not have reasonable arguments. We expected that they would organize the contest themselves, but they did not do anything at all. A custom that had lasted decades was forgotten within a year. We also wanted to stop the burning of Witch Piti and change her role. But in the end, we could not do it; we lost in the city council vote. The burning of witches will not disappear so quickly.⁷³

In 2017, the Ninfas y Diosas contest was effectively eliminated through the withdrawal of public subsidies, which, according to the municipal authorities, amounted to more than 35,700 euros. The rationale behind this decision was that it formed part of the Francoist tradition and that it had nothing to do with the "real tradition" of Cádiz Carnival—which, ironically, precluded women's participation. The argument of "real (masculine) culture" thus formed part of a counter-hegemonic feminist discourse that managed to convince the majority of the municipal council that the custom should be terminated.

lavozdigital.es/noticia/mi-reina-do-represento-el-cambio-y-nada-tenia-que-ver-con-el-papel-de-las-ninfas-de-ahora/

72. Adela del Moral, interview by author, April 2018, Cádiz.

73. Silvia, interview by author, July

As ambiguous as it was, this “victory”—as many women referred to it—led to new changes in the Carnival community. In 2017, members of the movement for Carnival equality created a new award called the Antifaz Violeta (Purple Mask), in reference to the Golden Mask award that is presented to the best Carnival street band. They also chose to wear armbands and defend themselves from sexist attacks. Every time someone would harass a woman in any way, women wearing armbands would protect her. These “safe spaces” were created with the collaboration of the municipal government. The incorporation of the organization’s demands into public policy could be considered as another indication of a new feminist counter-hegemony.

Today more than ever, women are creating their own spaces, their language, their hierarchies, their Carnival. “We decide together on the lyrics of our songs. Men need a man to write the *coplas*. We do not. We help each other and decide together. We will soon have our goddess Moma, in place of god Momo,” a twenty-five-year-old comparsa member named Sara explained.⁷⁴ It is too early to assess whether women’s groups have lived up to their democratic promise, but what is certain is that through them, Carnival has been politicized along new lines.

Conclusion

In the third section of this article, I mentioned three hypotheses, which the stories presented in this article could serve to explore. The first was that Carnival is a stage where power relations are expressed, experienced, and challenged. As a result, it can become the space where, at times, feminist hegemony is performed. The second was that women and feminists do not simply challenge the male-dominated Carnival rituals, they also create a “generic chronotope” that can carry over into public policy. The third hypothesis was that women’s Carnival participation and their everyday activism contributes to the democratization of Spanish society.

The various stories concerning the Ninfas y Diosas custom convincingly show, I think, how Carnival time and place can be gendered. Street Carnival is a space full of possibilities, in which the “odious goddesses” (Oh! Diosas) express their opinions or, to paraphrase the words of French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous, in which women write themselves.⁷⁵ The Falla theater is a different space, more confined, where women manage to speak, singing about those “living like queens.” On both occasions, women manage to perform their embodied opposition to gender inequality, using their voices and costumes. Feminist social anthropologist Teresa del Valle describes this conjuncture of time, space, and gender (where gender includes the body) as a “generic chronotope,” borrowing from Bakhtin’s work. She writes:

By *generic chronotopes* I mean in the first place the points where time and space imbued with gender appear in a dynamic convergence. As powerful links charged with reflectivity and emotion, they can be recognized on the basis of the following characteristics: they act as syntheses of broader meanings; they are cathartic, catalytic; they condense creativity and are subject to continuous modifications and reinterpretations. They are temporary enclaves with complex activities and meanings in which identities are negotiated, where new interpretations of actions, symbols that create inequality, may be in conflict. Inequality can be negotiated and/or reaffirmed, expressed.⁷⁶

Following this line of thought, we could say that women’s efforts to create spaces of debate and resistance result in generic chronotopes, in which feminist hegemony is expressed in-body and performed on stage. As scholar Ib Johansen notes in his essay “The Semiotics of Laughter”

2016, Cádiz.

74. Sara, interview by author, July 2016, Cádiz.

75. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875.

76. Valle, "Procesos de la memoria," 213.

77. Ib Johansen, "The Semiotics of Laughter," in *Signs of Change: Premodern -> Modern -> Postmodern*, ed. Stephen Barker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 14.

78. About the transition process (*Transición*) from dictatorship to democracy, see Emmanuel Rodríguez López, *Por qué fracasó la democracia en España: La Transición y el régimen del '78* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2015).

79. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

referencing Cixous, female laughter is correlated to the breakdown of patriarchal hegemony: culturally speaking, women have wept a great deal, but "once the tears are shed, there will be endless laughter."⁷⁷ Through carnivalesque laughter, women have rejected the name given to them by Father Franco: Reina de las Fiestas. They no longer want to be called "queens" nor "nymphs" nor "goddesses" nor "ladies of honor." Neither do they want to be called "ornaments," even when they wish the Ninfas y Diosas custom had been maintained. Differences in opinion between women are acted out on stage, but they all claim the feminist mantle, regardless of their specific stance concerning the elimination of the custom. In this sense, feminism has become hegemonic within all the different groups of women.

Beyond the Carnival setting, women have instigated significant change in public policy. For instance, the grievances formulated in the "Platform for Carnival Equality" were integrated into the municipal council's political agenda. More recently, Andalusian institutions, including the University of Cádiz's decisive involvement in the Municipality of Cádiz, have built on the "No Means No. Carnival without Violence" (*No es No. Carnaval sin Violencia*) campaign (fig. 15) to implement a series of measures to prevent violence against women and to transform festivals into safe spaces.

Figure 15. Poster for the municipal campaign "No Means No. Carnival without violence."

By eliminating a symbol that they considered a remnant of the dictatorship, women have also accelerated the transition from dictatorship to democracy, which many political scientists argue is still ongoing in Spain.⁷⁸

All in all, female Carnival participation shows that feminism can become hegemonic, albeit temporarily (Marxist theorist Raymond Williams would say such hegemony can only be temporary), all while strengthening democracy and challenging Caro Baroja's assumption that Carnival is dead.⁷⁹ Through their conflicts and demands, through the transformations of their bodies, through the laughter provoked by their lyrics and costumes, women have injected new life into Carnival. They have proved that it can be alive, popular, subversive, and even feminist.

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AUTHOR BIO

Katerina Sergidou grew up in Cyprus and lives in Athens. She studied history at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She completed her MA in cultural studies at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, conducting ethnographic research in the city of Cádiz. She is currently a doctoral candidate in social anthropology and feminist and gender studies at Panteion University and at the University of the Basque Country in San Sebastián. Her dissertation investigates women's participation in Cádiz Carnival. Her PhD research is supported by the "Strengthening Human Resources Research Potential via Doctorate Research" (MIS-5000432) action of the Operational Program "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning," implemented by the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) and co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund, ESF).

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