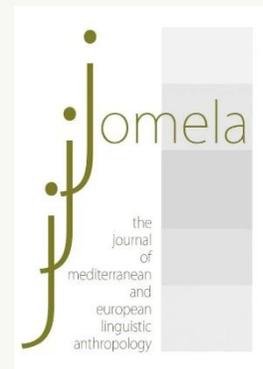


Singing Fado in Contemporary Lisbon: Questions of Boundedness

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Abstract

Castelo-Branco, a significant Portuguese ethnomusicologist, once emphasized that words are the "quintessence" of fado (Castelo-Branco 1997). Similarly, Finnegan pointed out the same thing a few years later saying that «There is something special about sung words. They are removed somehow from the ordinary, somehow distanced from and transcending the present, standing out as art and performance. And even the apparently simplest of songs is wonderfully complex, with words, music and performance somehow remarkably coming together» (Finnegan 2015:85-6). To sing a fado means to tell a story. So, understanding the oral tradition of fado requires a profound engagement with the power of its narrativity and its lyrics, as well as its everyday reality. But how do we tell a fado story and what story can we tell in the context of a traditional musical performance? What is this context and how does it interact with the sung storytelling? What's more, how does fado's binding ritual and the closed community of the fadistas respond to the modern demands of the global music industry? Can the fadistas continue to tell / sing their stories as they used to?

In 2011 fado was recognized internationally as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO. This fact marked a new era for Lisbon's urban song on the global music arena, but divided the local community of the fadistas. During the second half of the 20th century, there had

already preceded a long period of foreign policy to promote this kind of music around the world by Amalia Rodrigues's group. The recognition by UNESCO came about ten years after Rodrigues's death (1999). Ten years during which the "orphan" Portugal struggled to find the successor to the throne of the queen of fado and worthy representative of the country's national identity. The perplexity of not being able to find such a person was reflected in the covers of the press at the time and in the advertising campaigns of the record companies, which rushed in vain to "baptize" every rising fadista as 'new Amalia' (nova Amalia). As part of this search, the term 'new Fado' (Novo Fado) was widely used as an attempt to redefine or renew the fado's identity. An effort and a term, however, that were initially rejected by the local community.

This rejection was evaluated and justified by those who knew and lived the fado in everyday life. An everyday life that was unaffected by all the above facts, continuing the oral tradition of fado from generation to generation. Recognition by UNESCO during the country's big economic crisis, however, came to disrupt this everyday quality as it placed fado in a completely different context by sowing aesthetic temptations within the community. Since then, the reins have been taken by various politics of culture and tourism where the fado has been strongly transformed from a dialogical sound of the city to a monological revival of the sound of the city, that is, from tradition to folklore.

Today, these two formalisms coexist in the city, respectively classifying the venues and the circumstances under which fado is being sung. However, this classification seems to be perceived only from the side of the *oficionados* (initiated fadistas). At the same time, tourists face every fado venue they visit as a museum, waiting to experience a mesmerizing representation of what they consider as a fado¹. Lisbon's strong tourism development in recent years as Europe's 'cheapest destination' has contributed to this, leading to the phenomenon of a 'soft culture' of low-cost listening. In a recent article, Gray (2018) aptly states her concerns about the world of fado and the dangers of mass tourism, noting the impact it can have on both everyday life and on activities of music making and listening.

In my paper I will first analyze the fado languagem through the characteristic case of an emblematic fadista and poet. This case study will be an occasion to unravel the corpus of symbols, signs, indexes, utterances, connotations, vocabulary, repertoire, performances, meanings, metaphors, gestures, styles (articulations, expressions, breathings, divisions), postures, poetic structures and pre-existing melodies that constitute the oral tradition of fado but also its strongly binding character. What is the position of this fadista nowadays and what does he think about the future of the fado? How do young fadistas choose to manage their musical identity? Eventually, can the fado be in dialogue with the contemporary music industry and if so, in what way?

Keywords: *Portugal, ethnomusicology, cultural heritage, fado, UNESCO*

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¹ Their expectations usually include women in black clothes who sing almost shouting their longing and pain, and a mixture of the regime's iconic fados (Salazar), such as "Uma casa portuguesa", "Cheira Lisboa" or "Barco Negro", but also of folk songs (cantigas) - usually polyphonic - and marches (marchas populares) sung on other occasions, danced and framed by colorful fancy costumes.