

Brussels, Belgium **CRISTINA ROSAL**

## SILENCE, FADO IS GOING TO BE SUNG

**figure 1**  
Brito (1994, capa)



According to Vieira Nery (2004, 17) “The first aspect to be verified in the search for the historical roots of fado is that until the end of the 18th century we do not know a single Portuguese written source in which this word is used with any musical connotation”.

Before the beginning of the 19th century the word fado was only used with the meaning of its Latin root *fatum*, which means destiny or fate. With this meaning it appears in texts of poets and writers. As an example, the beautiful poem of Luís de Camões (1524-1580/ Camões, 1994, 123):

At what voice shall I weep my sad fate,  
who in so harsh a passion has buried me.  
May the pain not be that left me time,  
of my well-despondent

Or like in this one from Bocage (1765-1805/ Bocage, 1968, 378):

But in the voracious bosom of misfortune,  
Monster by whose mouth I was swallowed  
Part of a thought pain heals me  
The unfortunate (not by fault, only by fado)  
In those hearts where there is tenderness  
It's more interesting, it's more loved

The earliest references to the word *fado* being associated to music were described in the early 19th century by scholars who visited Brazil at the time.

The Venetian geographer Adriano Balbi (1822), quoted by Nery (2004, 19), considers that “*O chiú, chula, fado and volta e meio* are the most common and most remarkable dances in Brazil”.

**figure 2**  
Nery (2004, 28)



Also quoted by Nery (2004, 19), Frenchman Louis-Charles Frecynet (1827) reports that “There are five or six [dances] that are very characteristic: *Lundu* is the most indecent, then there are the *carangueijo* and the *fados* [...] sometimes they are interspersed with very free sung melodies. Various types of figures are in these songs, all of them very voluptuous”.

Nery (2004, 20) quotes the German Carl Schlichthorst (1829), who emphasises: “The favorite dance of the blacks is called fado, it consists of a movement that gently swings and shakes the body, expressing the most voluptuous feelings of the person in a manner that is as natural as it is indecent”.

## THE FADO OF LISBON

My intent here is not to dwell on the origins of fado, since it is a theme that creates very diverse thesis and causes great controversy. I cannot say if the origins are in Africa, in the Arab world, in Brazil, or in the coastal communities of mainland Portugal. I am not a musicologist or a historian. I am a singer who loves to sing and talk about fado as if it were a friend. Furthermore, given the context we are, to me it seems more relevant to speak of fado itself: of its social framework since its existence; of its most striking characteristics; of the contents sung; the musical base and the instruments used; traditional fado and the improvisation. With the experience I have, I will try to explain the strange consistency of a genre that all Portuguese people recognise as their own, which the whole world recognises as Portuguese.

Joaquim Pais de Brito (1994, 15) reminds us that:

Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), in response to the survey carried out by the *Notícias Ilustrado* with intellectuals and artists in 1929, gave the following poetic formulation of approach to fado: “Fado is neither joyful or sad. It’s an interval. It formed the Portuguese soul, when this soul did not exist, wishing everything without the strength to wish it [...] Fado is the weariness of a strong soul, the contempt of Portugal upon the God in whom it believed and whom it was abandoned./ In fado the Gods return, legitimate and far away”. In its hermetism, this sequence of images presents some of the signs of “belonging” that are projected on the practices and representations of fado – fate, the Portuguese soul, weariness, desire, closeness to sadness –, at the same time it reveals the plurality, uncertainty, variation and the temporal, cultural and social depth that accompany this phenomenon.

Fado emerged as a recognisable musical form in Lisbon. Seaports have always been places of departure and arrival of people and goods, the same boats carried other cultures, sounds and songs. The sound of lundu and modinhas hovered in Lisbon, it was the musical fusion arriving and leaving.

According to Nery (2012, abstract):

The history of Portuguese Fado is a long process of intercultural exchanges. African rhythms and dance patterns mingled with European harmonies and forms in the multicultural context of colonial Brazil creating a heavily sensual dance also sung by the participants, which crossed the Atlantic to settle in the popular neighbourhoods around the port of Lisbon. The interaction between the Brazilian model and the local Portuguese song traditions gradually led to the disappearance of the element of dance and to the attenuation of the original syncopated rhythm. These changes privileged a mourning and nostalgic atmosphere, with a strong rubato in the declamation of the poem.

The first references to the fado of Lisbon date back to the first decades of the 19th century. On July 26, 1820, Maria Severa Onofriana (1820-1846) was born, thus, fado gained its emblematic “foundational figure”, the Severa.

**figure 3**

Brito (1994, 142)



Severa was a prostitute by profession and revered by her talents as a singer, she became one of the mythical characters in the history of fado. Severa was a significant representative of the environment to which fado was associated during its first phase: prostitution, along with all the social and physical environment around it, the taverns, brothels, sailors, vagabonds and pimps, the fado singer perfectly fits this context. The *fadista* was associated with the immorality, the marginality – a *scoundrel*.



**figure 4**  
Nery (2004, 223)



Fado emerged among the poorest groups of the population, from those who had no regular job in the older, degraded and almost mazy districts, where the lack of light hid the marginality.

**figure 5**  
Ramos  
(1955, private  
collection).



Fado lyrics were transmitted orally and their themes were the episodes of a marginal daily life: crimes, announced deaths, natural catastrophes, as well as the neighborhood life or the evils of love.

With a very simple melodic structure, fado valued the interpretation of who sang/recounted, appealing to the communion between the interpreter, musicians and listeners. Hence the phrase we still hear today: “the person who listens is as much of a *fadista* as the one who sings!”

Between the sad and sorrowful Fado Menor (figure 6) and the rapid, ironic and rascal Fado Corrido (figure 7) with quatrain, quintain or sestet stanzas and decasyllable verses, popular poetry had its place and fado was happening.

figure 6



**OS MEUS OLHOS SÃO DOIS CÍRIOS**

Linhares Barbosa, Fado Menor  
(LISA/USP, 3', 2017)

image and sound: Rose Satiko Hikiji

edition: Leo Fuzer

link password: fado2017

figure 7



**SONHO ANTIGO**

Pedro Fortes Figueira, Fado Corrido  
(LISA/USP, 3', 2017)

image and sound: Rose Satiko Hikiji

edition: Leo Fuzer

link password: fado2017

Allow me to note that the Menor and the Corrido are part of a famous “triad” along with the Mouraria (figure 8), a kind of *fadista trinity*.

figure 8



**O MEU AMOR ANDA EM FAMA**

João Ferreira Rosa, João Mário Veiga, Fernando Pessoa, Carlos Conde, Fado Mouraria (LISA/USP, 3', 2017)

image and sound: Rose Satiko Hikiji

edition: Leo Fuzer

link password: fado2017

Most of these fados have two tones, the most basic *fadista* repertoire. Mouraria is the best style to improvise *fadista* battles, to sing “à *desgarrada*”. Due to the simple musical structure of these three fados (allowing any musician to accompany them, even with a guitar only) and the lyrics being sung “in quatrain” (the most popular poetical form), they became a “mandatory reference” to everyone who participates in the “Fado act” – singers/story tellers, musicians and the public. Despite being extremely basic, a *fadista* night nowadays without the Menor, Corrido or Mouraria is highly improbable, which takes us directly to the beginnings of fado.

To close this note; I must highlight that in the distant past the tobacco, the wine, the hoarse and rough voice were associated with fado. Fado, more than anything that was about singing a story or something improvised.

Political events that occurred during the last decades of the 19th century, such as the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic in 1910, caused important changes on national level and on the city of Lisbon.

For example, an emerging working class appears and begins to distance itself from the poorest groups of the population, wanting to show its own identity and characteristics.

Spaces and situations for meetings start to multiply during this period, and fado becomes a vehicle of sociability.

Fado is absorbed by this new and emerging class, not only as a pretext to meet people, but also as a way to narrate their lives, becoming a form of social and moral criticism (for example, showing the contrast between the rich and the poor, between the just and the unjust).

According to Nery (2012, abstract):

When the bohemian aristocracy and the urban middle classes “rediscover” this genre in the 1860s and 1870s, fado starts being played in light musical theatres, being published in leaflet editions, and eventually becoming a favorite of the emerging record industry.

Thus, fado is no longer enjoyed only by a very specific and marginal group, but by the general population, appearing in small publications, charity parties, etc.

**figure 9**  
Nery (2004, 81)



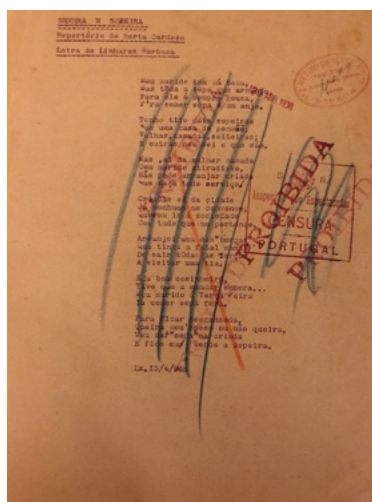
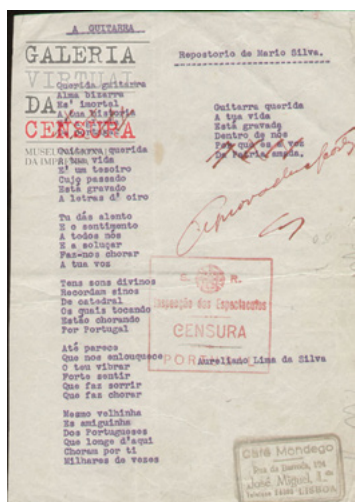


From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, places and situations where fado occur proliferate, such as taverns, cultural and recreational societies.

However, the main transformations in fado occur with the political regime established by the military coup of 1926, which ends the first Republic and marks the beginning of a dictatorship.

The regime imposes prior censorship, establishing laws regarding the conditions and places where fado could happen in public. The lyrics sung by *fadistas* were censored by the established authority.

figures 10 and 11  
Brito (1994, 221)



*Fadistas* were obliged to have a professional card to sing in public; to obtain it they had to prove that they had no criminal records.

figure 12  
Brito (1994, 95)





This caused fado to lose its spontaneity, its characteristics and its improvising style, changing from an everyday gesture to a spectacle full of limitations and rules.

At the same time the radio contributed to spread the genre, it also promoted the subtlest forms of censorship, selecting the voices and forms of singing that were socially accepted by the regime. Censorship reigns supreme.

The repression also increased through police action on the places where fado was sung, limiting it to fado houses or specialised and over-homogenised restaurants.

Thus, fado moves from the marginalised groups where it was born, to be constituted as a form of stable and institutionalized manifestation, which was very well accepted by the dictatorship.

One of the consequences of the transition from the “everyday-fado” to a “spectacle-fado” was how *fadistas* dressed. In the past, the image had no importance, when it became a spectacle the fadistas began to dress with pomp, and a colorful shawl became a fundamental prop for any woman singing fado.

During the dictatorship and within this context, Amália Rodrigues (1920-1999) surfaces. If the dictatorship forced deep transformations in the places where fado could be sung and defined who could sing it, emptying it of spontaneity and improvisation, Amália Rodrigues was undoubtedly the great landmark and who most revolutionized this Portuguese musical expression. In my opinion, which is shared by many, there is one fado before and another fado after Amália.

Amália Rodrigues gave to fado the poems, the voice and black as a color. She also dared to sing new melodies that went completely beyond the traditional canons of fado. “Standard fados” were abandoned for the notion of a “fado with its own music”. These melodies were mostly written by the Frenchman born in Portugal, Alain Oulman (1928-1990) (figure 13).

**figure 13**



**VAGAMUNDO**

Luís de Macedo, Alain Oulman  
(LISA/USP, 3', 2017)

[image and sound](#): Rose Satiko Hikiji

[edition](#): Leo Fuzer

[link password](#): fado2017

**figure 14**  
Santos  
(1987, 234)



Amália is a fundamental reference, as she dared to change and changed almost everything. She was criticised by the purists due to her style of singing – said to sing with Spanish style or to sing “operas” instead of fados – she received a lot of criticism, but nothing stopped her and Amália won.

Amália Rodrigues started singing the poems of great Portuguese poets during the decade of 1950. From Luis de Camões to the erudite poets of her time: David Mourão Ferreira, Pedro Homem de Mello, Alexandre O’Neill, among others. She also sung poems by the Brazilian Vinícius de Moraes. Due to Amália, poems reach a status they had never had in the history of fado.

Amália and her new form of singing fado were very successful, thus, the dictatorship used fado – and especially Amália Rodrigues – as a business card for the country. For this reason, fado and Amália Rodrigues were criticised after the end of the dictatorship on April 25, 1974, since for many Portuguese they were the image of the regime. Nowadays, this issue is completely surpassed, and the image of both fado and Amália Rodrigues has recovered.

From the 1990s onwards, a generation of *fadistas* with significant national and international recognition appeared. Due to the strength of the market, everything must be catalogued to be sold, this generation became part of the category named World Music. The presence of fado became almost mandatory at these types of events. In 2011, Fado was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

The fado played nowadays has lost a lot of its narrative character, of describing the daily or contradictory aspects of society, the intention of a “final” moral conclusion has also disappeared. What remains is a lament, a murmur, the imminence of a tear, the pain being performed, joy, exultation, a way of feeling shared by those who interpret, accompany or watch.

## A NIGHT OF FADOS

The silence and complicity of those who listen are expected when fado is going to be sung. When there is noise in the room hearing “the person who hears is as much of a *fadista* as the one who sings!”, or “Silence, fado is being sung!”. For those who sing fado, the silence in the room is more important than the applause after the performance. This characteristic is what makes a fado performance a collective act of celebration, it is in this sense that we can also speak of emotional sharing, rather than spectacular art.

**figure 15**  
(Brito, 83)

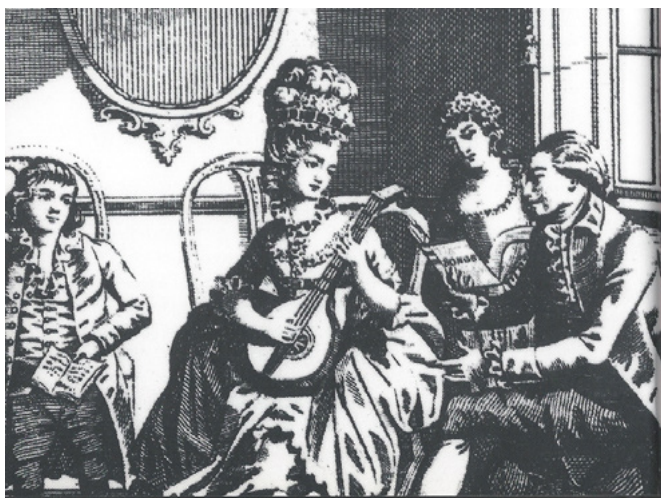


There is no sound amplification in a fado house, it is sung “dry”. Silence is fundamental for the emotion expressed by the *fadista* during the performance, but also for the instruments that accompany the voice to be heard, allowing the dialogue between the voice and the Portuguese guitar.

Fado is traditionally accompanied by a regular guitar and a Portuguese guitar, which is a fundamental instrument in fado.

The Portuguese guitar is a very probable evolution of the English guitar, since its disappearance. Introduced in Portugal from the English colonies through Lisbon and Porto, the English guitar was widely known in the European salons during the 18th century. This instrument is pear-shaped and derives from the zither, it had 10 strings grouped into four pairs, plus two loose strings. This guitar was used exclusively in the bourgeoisie circles and by the nobility of the urban salons, being associated to the accompaniment of Italian canons of a more erudite character.

**figure 16**  
Nery (2004, 33)



The designation “Portuguese guitar” was given on the beginning of the 19th century and refers to the model with six pairs of strings, a change probably made in Portugal. Reports of this guitar being associated to the *fadista* performative context appear only in the 1840s, from this moment on it assumed a role of absolute centrality.

**figure 17**  
Brito (1994, 189)



Sometimes the acoustic bass and, more recently, the double bass can be used in a fado session.



The guitar provides the rhythmic and harmonic base of the song, and the Portuguese guitar improvises phrases sustained by rich harmonies, thus, dialoguing with the voice. The Portuguese guitar rarely plays the same fado the same way. I must emphasize that very recently some written scores were created and more importantly, at the start of the 21st century the Portuguese guitar was accepted on the National Conservatory of Lisbon, with the same status as the other musical instruments taught there. Until then, it was considered a popular instrument, devalued and associated only with fado. Carlos Paredes (1925-2004) contributed passionately and excellently to the appreciation of the Portuguese guitar as an autonomous instrument, travelling the world with his Portuguese guitar and his original instrumental compositions<sup>1</sup>.

**figure 18**

*O Fado do Público* (2004, CD n° 16, 49)



The taste for fado by younger generations (and by the older *fadistas* and instrumentalists) allows this musical genre to continue to happen in a free and improvised way, like certain instances of tango, blues, or flamenco.

The city of Lisbon is home to a great variety of fado houses, some of them directly aimed at tourists - where there is no room for improvisation -, and others in which fado happens in a free and true way, the houses of the so-called “Fado vadio” (“vagabond Fado”). This means that there is a Portuguese guitar and a resident guitar player. Usually there is a *fadista* hired by the house and then there are the clients, neighbors and friends of the house who like to sing fado, so they ask to sing, always with a certain triage made by the owner of the tavern, restaurant or fado house.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <<https://goo.gl/YmBgW5>>. Access on: Dec. 4, 2017.

And how is it possible that fado happens in these environments without the *fadistas* and the musicians knowing each other? Without rehearsals or previous preparation?

The reason is that the Lisbon Fado has at least 150 melodies/traditional fados – the fado *Tango*, the *Margaridas*, the *Sem Pernas*, the *Maria Vitória*, the *Santa Luzia*, the *Alberto*, etc. A good guitar player of fado should know them all in all tones, remember that a lot of traditional fado melodies are simple. Above all, the interpretation of who sings and the dialogue with the musicians are what gives the fado richness.

Therefore, when the *fadista* is asked to play, he/she asks the musicians for the “*Fado Alberto*” in la or the “*Fado Georgino*” in mi. The singer must tell them whether the pace is slow or “choppy” (fast). The *fadista* chooses the poem of their preference, it can be an erudite or popular poem (figure 19). On a same night of fados, we can hear the same melody being played several times, with different poems and interpretations. To detect that the melody being played is of the same fado, the person must have an extensive knowledge of fado.

figure 19



#### NÃO PASSES COM ELA À MINHA RUA/QUASE

Carlos Conde (poeta popular) e Quase, Mário de Sá Carneiro (poeta erudito), Fado Alberto (Miguel Ramos) (LISA/USP, 5', 2017)

image and sound: Rose Satiko Hikiji

edition: Leo Fuzer

link password: fado2017

Usually, each *fadista* sings three or four fados and there are several intervals during the night so the people can engage in conversations and the clients can be served, because while the fado is being sung the absolute silence must reign. The owner of the house is critical for the control and request of silence. Furthermore, the more attentive and experienced public will not hesitate to insist on silence if there is someone disturbing the performance.

The fados “with their own music” that Amália Rodrigues and Alain Oulman introduced – and which are very common among younger *fadistas* – are rarely played in this type of environment. They are fados with elaborate melodies, which are more difficult to transpose and that require rehearsals, which is not compatible with this type of environment where the “Fado vadio” occurs.

This form of singing fado in which improvisation is fundamental, can make some nights not very memorable, but others can be absolutely glorious. On several occasions I have entered a fado house where the singing began at 10:00 PM, only ending at 4:00 or 5:00 AM. The fingers of the guitar players can barely resist in these circumstances, despite playing every day.

### TO FINISH...

For a type of dance to become a song format is not impossible, this is probably what happened to fado. Therefore, questioning how a dance could have gained song form in an urban context (Lisbon) crossed by multiple traditional musical genres, is legitimate at the very least. Or questioning how the musical basis of a syncopated choreography may be the origin of the musicality of fado.

Therefore, fado will have a “beginning, middle and end” where the songs present in the popular districts of Lisbon during the 16th and 17th centuries intersected. This is what we can call the “musicality of fado”.

The fixation of this musicality on what we would call a “genre” is a long process in which each “tale-teller adds a detail”; or if we prefer, each *fadista* adds a fado, each guitar player adds a melody or a harmony.

The contemporary musicality of fado can be understood as a combination of all factors that were added and multiplied for over two centuries. The musical picture we have nowadays is the result of this creative plurality.

We may try to define regularities, harmonic patterns, rhythmic structure, and we will certainly be confronted by something recognisable in its own singularity. However, it is also true that several other musical forms could be recognised as fado by these same characteristics. This could be the reason for so many songs being easily “*afadistáveis*” (sung in the mood of *fado*).

The context of the fado ritual is composed by the other part of the fado – the one in which even those who are not singing or playing participate voluntarily, adopting the same cultural register of the artists.

As I said before, “the person who listens is as much of a *fadista* as the one who sings!”

Silence, which is a strong signal of the fado performance, may have been one of the forms of ritualising it.

Initially recited or sung in “noisy” environments (such as a tavern), it would not be surprising if anyone who wanted to understand the story told by the *fadista* asked for less noise (or even silence).

I would not be surprised if this was one of the characteristics of the “dynamic crystallization” of various elements of what was conventionally called fado in its earliest days (this is only a speculation with no scientific basis).

In my opinion, silence is a key element in the musicality of fado. Without silence, *dado* does not happen.

Silence, fado is going to be sun...!

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Movimento perpétuo – Carlos Paredes - Available from: <https://goo.gl/YmBgW5>

Não passes com ela à minha rua – Carlos Conde (poeta popular) e Quase – Mário de Sá Carneiro (poeta erudito)/ Fado Alberto (Miguel Ramos). Image and sound: Rose Satiko Hikiji. Edition: Leo Fuzer. LISA/USP, 2017, 5 minutos - Available from: <https://vimeo.com/lisausp/quase>

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In the English version of this text, all terms that derive from the word fado were kept in Portuguese. Namely, the word “*fadista*”, which is recurrent throughout the text. Translating this term to “fado singer” would greatly narrow its sense. A “*fadista*” sings fado; but as for other performing arts, the unique fadista’s attitude, feeling, emotion, life story, convictions, ... are prominently present during what one may call a “celebration”. Singing is virtually the added value of the fado happening. Therefore, only the first mention of “*fadista*” in the text was translated to “fado singer”(page 5) for ease of reference.

Furthermore, the names of traditional/standard fados were not translated.

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Cristina Rosal, Portuguese, born in Mozambique in 1960, has a degree in Sociology from the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), lives in Brussels – Belgium, is an international worker (European Union), a singer when the soul demands and a lover of fado.

