

FADO, SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING: SENSING, EMBODYING AND PERFORMING EMOTION IN LISBON, PORTUGAL

por

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Abstract: Drawing on long-term fieldwork in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon, this article examines anthropologically the practice of fado through a novel prism, that of spirituality and healing. Adopting an auto-ethnographic perspective, and following the biography of a particular fado singer, emphasis is placed on the significant role of sensory perception and emotional embodiment in fado delivery, as well as the dynamic and fluid interaction between fado singers and their audience. While attempting to demonstrate an innovative aspect of fado that is directly linked to “alternative” spirituality and “holistic healing” and which has not been studied before in depth or at all, it shows how fado performance can be perceived as ritualistic and sacred. Fado is approached here as a newly added yet integral part of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, which has been going through a creative transformation, especially in the context of recent and current socioeconomic and global health crises.

Keywords: Fado; Spirituality and holistic healing; Senses and emotions; Performance.

Resumo: Baseado em trabalho de campo extensivo em Lisboa, este artigo examina antropologicamente a prática do fado através de um prisma inovador, o da espiritualidade e da cura. Adotando uma perspectiva autoetnográfica, e seguindo a biografia de um fadista particular, a ênfase é colocada no papel significativo da percepção sensorial e da incorporação emocional na entrega do fado, bem como na interação dinâmica e fluida entre os fadistas e seu público. Ao tentar demonstrar um aspeto inovador do fado que está diretamente ligado à espiritualidade “alternativa” e à cura “holística” que ainda não foi estudado em profundidade, o artigo apresenta como a performance do fado pode ser percebida como ritualística e sagrada. O fado é aqui abordado como um novo mas integrante parte da religiosidade portuguesa contemporânea, que tem vindo a passar por uma transformação criativa, especialmente no contexto de crises socioeconómicas e de saúde global recentes e atuais.

Palavras-chave: Fado; Espiritualidade e cura holística; Sentidos e emoções; Performance.

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INTRODUCTION: FADO, SPIRITUALITY AND THE AFFECT OF AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

In the heart of Lisbon, on one of the main streets of the typical Portuguese neighbourhood of Graça, a melodic sound is coming out of a little *tasca* (small tavern). The lights inside are dim. Portraits of famous fado singers, such as Amália Rodrigues and Fernando Maurício, among others, can be seen on the walls. A diverse crowd, basically a mixture of locals with tourists, can be seen inside. Some, mostly tourists — but also *fadistas* (fado singers) waiting for their turn to perform on the small stage —, are sitting at the few tables, others are standing at the bar; and yet others, mainly Portuguese older men, are cramped at the entrance with a glass of beer in their hands. A *fadista* is singing, through a profound incorporation of feeling the music and the lyrics on his body, passionately yet subtly, with explosions of affective power and tender performativity. A few tourists enthusiastically comment on his act loudly. Silence is immediately required by the owners: “fado is sacred, would you talk in a church? Please have respect”. The tourists go silent again. Emotions are flowing during the *entrega* (delivery) of the *fadista*. He finishes his singing and his embodiment of fado, while everyone applauds excitedly, the typical expression “ah fadista!”, which expresses admiration and encouragement towards the fado singer, is heard from one of the older men standing at the door, and the *fadista* breaks from the sensorially heavy scene, thanks the musicians, takes his beer and returns at the bar, and one of the usual breaks in-between fado performances begins.

When I first moved to Lisbon in 2011 to commence my postdoctoral research on contemporary Portuguese religiosity and spiritual healing, I chose to live in the neighbourhood of Graça primarily because I would have the *Tasca do Jaime* and its fado nearby. Although my anthropological project was not relevant to fado, I began to attend occasionally the fado performances on the weekend afternoons, as a way to feel and understand affectively the Portuguese culture, to capture it more deeply through my own sensory perception and emotive embodiment. Having always been enchanted by the genre of fado, it was my personal — rather than ethnographic — way to perceive the everyday life within a typical Portuguese neighbourhood, through the social interaction with, primarily, working-class individuals. Laura, who owns the *tasca* together with her husband Jaime, welcomed my presence from the beginning. And despite my hesitation to visit the place frequently by myself, I would go occasionally with friends, where I was always made to feel like home, gaining the status of “*a menina grega*” (the Greek girl).

In the autumn of 2018, after spending a year in my home country, Greece, my anthropological path brought me back to Lisbon, and I began once again to

work on the relationship between religion and spirituality, with particular emphasis on the so-called complementary and alternative healing in the Portuguese capital². Fado attendance and discussions with fellow *aficionados* (fado enthusiasts) at the *Tasca do Jaime* had already been part of my life for six years. Yet, it was only when I returned to Portugal that I actually began to slowly but steadily notice the spirituality embedded in fado, the religious symbolism incorporated in the performance of the singers, the mysticism involved in the interaction between the singers and the listeners, and the “sacred” discourse utilized to describe the act(ion) and the environment wherein fado is performed.

This article is based on informal and mainly auto-ethnographic fieldwork, both presential and virtual, during the past decade, especially during the last three years, including the sociocultural and ethnographic perspectives and peculiarities brought by the pandemic. According to Reed-Danahay (1997: 2): “Auto-ethnography synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography (...) and a postmodern autobiography (...). The term has a double sense — referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest”. In addition, auto-ethnography considerably blurs the boundaries between the ethnographic and the individual “I”, especially in cases where the anthropologist relies heavily on autobiographical experiences and reflexive yet personal encounters in the process of making ethnography. However, an auto-ethnographer should not be treated with academic disbelief, for, as Okely (1992: 2) argues, ethnographic autobiographical writing is not about self-narcissism, but about self-awareness.

The “I” here is used in neither a self-narcissistic nor in an individualistic way, but rather as an ethnographic tool to write about a sociocultural aspect of fado that has almost never been touched anthropologically before, which is its relation to spirituality and healing. Furthermore, albeit its autobiographical style at times, the research draws heavily on the life story and profoundly affective singing embodiment of João³, one of the most popular and loved fado singers

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³ Although my usual ethnographic policy is to protect my interlocutors’ real identity by using pseudonyms, in this particular case it would be almost impossible, since I am using both photos and information where my interlocutor’s identity is highly recognizable. Written consent has been sought, in order to be able to use João Soeiro’s real name instead of a pseudonym, as well as his biographic details necessary for the present article’s argument. I am, therefore, indebted to João for his consent, for sharing part of his life-story of and experience with fado, and for the inspiration his profound *entrega* has provided, leading my ethnographic interest to fado and/as spirituality and healing.

at the *Tasca do Jaime*. It was through this *fadista*'s emotive performance, while observing the heavily sensorial reactions of locals and less regular visitors to his *entrega* (performative delivery) as well as to that of a few other *fadistas*, that my anthropological curiosity was initially led into exploring fado and/as spirituality in the first place. It was then I realised that even rich ethnographic works, which analyse fado and its affective performance in detail (see, for example, GRAY, 2013), only mention its connection to religion sporadically, without any further elaboration.

What follows is a rather preliminary and exploratory anthropological attempt to fill in this gap, by investigating the intimate connection between contemporary Portuguese religiosity and fado, with specific reference to spirituality and healing. To better grasp such connection, the rest of the article is divided into two parts. The first one offers a brief account of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, while situating fado in the spiritual landscape of Lisbon, and examining the ritualism, mysticism and sacredness, which are embedded in its performance. While recognizing the analytical significance of the relationship between fado and Portuguese history, place and cultural heritage, which has already been examined extensively and thoroughly by previous works (see, among others, BRITO, 1994; NÉRY, 2004; ELLIOT, 2010; GRAY, 2013), fado will be disengaged here from its normatively attributed status as an inherent historical and sociocultural fragment of Portuguese tradition and instead be approached as a distinctive way to look into contemporary Portuguese religiosity through a creative and innovative cultural lens. The second part will focus on the theme of spirituality and healing, through the activation of sensory and emotional responses to fado performance. It will be examined how fado can be considered as an “alternative”⁴ healing practice, and how, through senses and emotions, a therapeutic route may be created, especially during the recent difficult times of the covid-19 healthcare crisis.

“FADO IS SACRED”: LOCATING FADO IN CONTEMPORARY PORTUGUESE RELIGIOSITY

It is five thirty on a Sunday afternoon, and I am walking towards Rua da Graça, the street where the *Tasca do Jaime* is situated. I no longer live in the

⁴ The term “alternative” is used in the article to define both spirituality and healing that does not belong to institutionalized religion and medicine, equivalently, but can be considered as an alternative way to practice religion, spirituality and healing. This does not signify, however, that “alternative spirituality” and “alternative healing” should be perceived as totally isolated from the institutionalized Portuguese religion and biomedicine. The practices that are characterized as “alternative” can be performed as stand-alone ones or be creatively amalgamated with Christianity and biomedicine, creating a pluralistic religious and healthcare Portuguese landscape.

building opposite the *tasca*, where, every weekend, I used to be able to sensorially feed my sociocultural curiosity by opening the balcony doors and listening to my favourite *fadistas* perform, without necessarily the need to dislocate to “their” space. If I want to appreciate their *entrega*, I now need to “invade” the culturally intimate space of the small *tasca*, usually while someone is singing. This seemingly sociocultural separation I have felt between “them” and “I” is perhaps related to both my foreign and anthropological identity, through a fear of invading their zone(s) of “cultural intimacy” (HERZFELD, 2005), without necessarily fully understanding the politics of their “social poetics” (ibid.). Despite always being made to feel like home by Laura, the *tasca*’s owner, and for not visiting the *tasca* as an anthropologist but as an *aficionada* of fado — not creating, thus any further social obligations in our social interactions there —, my hesitation to enter their “sacred” space persists in each visit. This particular day I am rushing because I do not want to miss the *entrega* of my favourite fado singer. I arrive at the door, the usual men are already standing there, and the place is almost full, dark and silent, everyone focused on the *fadista* delivering his fado. Laura sees me and nods for me to go inside. João has already started singing, his eyes closed, his hands drawing the emotion of the lyrics, in flowing movements of vulnerable embodiment and ritualistic tension, as if performing a fado-inspired prayer.



Fig. 1. João delivering his fado, *Tasca do Jaime*. ©Author, 2019.

João is a sixty-year-old Portuguese man, who has been singing fado for the last fifteen years, at both an amateur and professional level — although in the last few years he is dedicated almost exclusively to *fado vadio*, namely to non-professional fado that is sung for the emotion of the shared performance and not for commercial purposes and/or financial gain. He entered officially the world of fado in 2006, after the encouragement of his family, and he immediately felt as if he belonged in that environment, he felt at home. Although hesitant to perform initially, for he wanted at first to learn, observe and feel how fado is delivered, João gradually developed into an experienced and respected fado singer among his social circles, and is now one of the most loved *fadistas* at the *Tasca do Jaime*, principally due to his humble attitude and deeply emotional performance.

The *Tasca do Jaime*, one of the most popular *tascas* of *fado vadio* in Lisbon, is usually frequented by locals, predominantly men, who stand at the entrance or at the bar, while teasing each other and their *fadista* friends, even while the latter sing, as well as tourists. When João sings, even the louder local men and the non-initiated-to-the-fado-world tourists enter into a silent embodiment, respecting his *entrega*. Besides, as the *tasca* owners have said many times, in different — yet meaningfully similar — variations of expression, in order to urge people to remain silent: “silence, fado, is sacred”, or “fado demands silence, it is like a religion”.

The institutionalized religion of Portugal is Catholic Christianity, where, according to the Census 2011 data, eighty-one per cent of the population belongs to the Catholic Church⁵. At the same time, as Dix (2009: 183) has observed, about sixty per cent of the Portuguese population “declares that they do not actively, or only rarely, participate in religious activities”. Contemporary Portuguese religiosity can be characterized as pluralistic, as Christianity is practised along with Afro-Brazilian and transnational African religions (SARAIVA, 2010; BLANES, 2007), Islamic religious traditions (MAPRIL, 2007), and contemporary spirituality, such as holistic and/or New Age spirituality (FEDELE, 2016; ROUSSOU, 2016), even extending to include “believers without religion” (TEIXEIRA, VILAÇA and DIX, 2019). Perhaps this pluralistic religious landscape is not as surprising for, according to Mapril and Blanes (2013: 4): “in countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece religious pluralism was always present, but simultaneously obscured by hegemonic and repressive regimes with specific strategies concerning religious adherence and manifestation”.

In recent decades, especially in the context of the socioeconomic crisis that had a great impact on Portugal, along with other southern European (and Christian) countries, contemporary Portuguese religiosity has entered a process of active

⁵ Instituto Nacional de Estatística, Portugal, Censos 2011, Resultados Definitivos.

individualization, especially through the appearance of new forms of spirituality (ROUSSOU, 2015).

As far as my ethnographic fieldwork during the last decade in the Portuguese capital has allowed me to observe, the practice of the so-called “alternative”, “New Age” or “new” spirituality⁶ has gained more and more popularity, especially in the city of Lisbon and its periphery (c.f. BASTOS, 2001; SARAIVA, 2010). Alternative spiritual practices such as yoga, transcendental meditation and reiki, holistic therapies, energy healing and spiritual retreats, as well as esoteric material shops, intuitive science and household spirituality are all performed regularly in the everyday life of the Portuguese individuals and groups I have met, and can these days be considered to be part of the Portuguese religious landscape. Especially in the context of crisis, first the socioeconomic one and most recently and currently during the global health crisis, the vernacular practice of these alternative spiritualities has increased consistently, while people revert to them in order to seek spiritual guidance and consolation and improve their mental health and well-being. This is not to say, however, that they have abandoned their religious heritage, that of Catholic Christianity. Even those of my interlocutors who are the most enthusiastic and influential practitioners of new spirituality, and consider themselves as spiritual and not religious, have revealed directly or through their actual performance the fact that, at times only at a minimal level, they have not completely cut their bonds with the Catholic Church; instead, they readapt and transform their Christian religious heritage in novel ways, and thus create a sacred space where they may believe in religion without, nevertheless, necessarily belonging to any religious institution.

*Não fui menino de coro
Nunca aprendi a rezar
Mas aprendi este choro
Que a vida me soube dar
Esta mágoa na garganta
Com que canto os meus revezes
Diz o povo, que quem canta
Reza sempre duas vezes
Cada verso, uma oração*

*I was not a choir boy
I never learned how to pray
But I learned this cry
That life knew how to give me
This hurt in the throat
With which I sing my setbacks
People say that the one who sings
Always prays twice
Each verse, a prayer*

⁶ “Alternative spirituality”, “new (forms of) spirituality”, and “New Age spirituality” have received criticism (see, for example, SUTCLIFFE AND BOWMAN, 2000; WOOD, 2007). Being aware of the complications these terms entail, they are used in the present paper interchangeably, and as umbrella terms, in order to define the more individualized practices in the context of contemporary Portuguese religiosity..

*Um 'Padre Nosso' rezado
E na minha confissão
Vão as rimas do meu fado
Nunca aprendi a rezar
A erguer as mãos aos céus
Mas eu sinto que ao cantar
Estou a conversar com o Deus.⁷*

*An 'Our Father' prayed
And in my confession
Go the rhymes of my fado
I never learned how to pray
To raise my hands in the skies
But I feel that when I sing
I am discussing with God.*

I first heard the above song performed by João indirectly, through YouTube, in a recorded video of his guest appearance at *Rádio Amália*, a radio station dedicated to fado, back in 2013⁸. Contrary to the lyrics he has sung, however, João was a choir boy, for it was through his participation in the local choir of his church that his talent in singing was discovered, and where his choir teacher would frequently give him the protagonist role in the choir's performances. It was also in those times of childhood and later adolescence that he would first get in touch with fado through a religious resource, that of Frei Hermano da Câmara, a Catholic monk who belonged to the Benedictines religious order and who, simultaneously, was a famous fado singer. João has never been religious, as he has told me, in the strict sense of the word. He does not attend Sunday mass or other religious liturgies; sometimes he accompanies his wife to light a candle to the church; his religious identity may be Catholic, but his sense of religious belonging to Christianity is not necessarily strongly evident in vernacular practice.

Like João, many of my interlocutors, who are between thirty and sixty-five years old, and both men and women, demonstrate a certain degree of believing loosely to Christianity, without necessarily reinforcing their bond of religious belonging to institutionalized religion. Above and beyond, as Davie (2002: 8) has pointed out, "many Europeans have ceased to connect with their religious institutions in any active sense, but they have not abandoned, so far, either their deep-seated religious aspirations or a latent sense of belonging". In Lisbon, for instance, even devoted Catholics I have spoken to do not attend Sunday mass consistently or believe in the Catholic Church *per se*, especially in the context of the socioeconomic and pandemic

⁷ The title of this fado is "*A minha oração*" ["My prayer"], written by Mário Rainho and José Joaquim Cavalheiro, and belongs to the repertoire of the famous Portuguese fado singer Fernando Maurício. The Portuguese lyrics were taken from a website dedicated to fado, which is the following: <https://fadodofado.blogspot.com/2008/06/minha-orao.html>, and the translation in English is by the author. Interestingly enough, in this website it is mentioned that "*este espaço foi criado com grande dedicação por alguém que faz do fado a sua religião*" ["this space was created by someone who makes fado his religion"].

⁸ The YouTube video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cHQ-7aspWY>.

crisis. They have expressed their dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church, which has been relatively absent in times of disillusionment during the crisis. At the same time, at a vernacular level they will occasionally light a candle in a church, pray or make the sign of the cross before they go to bed. Even my interlocutors who are avid practitioners of alternative spirituality amalgamate religion and spirituality, by believing, for example, in the power of Jesus, Virgin and the Archangels and evoking them in their meditation or healing performances; or by carrying with them both a cross and New Age objects for spiritual protection against negative energy. Consequently, according to my long-term ethnographic research at least, people in the Portuguese capital “believe without [necessarily] belonging” (DAVIE, 1994), individualize their religiosity and, especially in times of crisis, devise creatively their own spiritual itineraries to get in touch with the sacred; and one of those itineraries is fado.

According to Hunt (2003: 164), “sacred space can be found in traditionally religious places, even for people who are generally dismissive of organized religion.” Such observation is also true in the case of contemporary Portuguese religiosity. At the same time, however, sacred spaces are created in non-traditional religious places, through alternative ways of spi/ritual performance. When João sings, he somatically encounters and performs fado through transmitting his *entrega* in a transcendental, mystical way: his hands frequently raised to the skies, his face interpreting the emotional depth of the lyrics and the music, which many times carry religious elements like the song above, while everyone is watching and listening to him with almost religious devotion. During the last decade of visiting the *Tasca do Jaime*, I have noticed how João’s performance affects people in a different way, compared to most singers there. This is partly due to the fact that his repertoire is mostly songs that are more profound, which hence require a deeper and more intimate level of interpretation. “It is like coming to a church, listen to a sacred chant, and then you leave all ‘clean’ spiritually, it is very cathartic”, “I close my eyes and I feel like I am doing meditation”, or “it is a true spiritual experience” are a few characteristic among many of the comments I have heard after João’s performance. Having spoken to a relatively large number of people who have attended the *tasca* over the years, both Portuguese and foreigners, friends and tourists, regular and one-time visitors, they have often confided in me that listening to fado has been almost a spiritual experience to them; some have had embodied reactions to the performance, such as *arrepios* (chills), a usual bodily sign when an *aficionado* of fado gets caught by the performance, others have become emotional, and yet others have treated fado as a meditative practice.



Fig. 2. The ritualistic hands of fado: sacred embodiment, *Tasca do Jaime*. ©Author, 2020.

João himself does not necessarily identify his performance as spiritual or sacred. Yet, under the dim lights, within the soundscape of alternating demanded silence by the *tasca* owner because “fado is sacred” and his profoundly emotional — and for many spiritual — *entrega*, while his hands are raised to the skies as if in secret prayer, João’s fado creates a liminal space “betwixt and between” (TURNER, 1967: 93-111); a space where *fadistas* and *aficionados* enter a ritualistic threshold, respect the creative spi/ritualism and do not exit until the performance ends, and the lights are back on to allow for a “desacralization” of the atmosphere; then, the sacred space briefly returns to its usual, buzzing, quotidian sociability.

As Shimazono (1999: 125) has asserted: “‘Spirituality’ in a broad sense implies religiousness, but it does not mean organized religion or doctrine. Rather, it is used to mean the religious nature expressed by an individual’s thoughts and actions.” Fado, I argue, can be approached as a form of alternative spirituality, incorporating elements of religiousness and individual spiritual expression. Given that “spirituality differs from religion by the stress laid on subjective experience of great transcendences by ‘ordinary’ people (...) charisma becomes generalized and subjectivized” (KNOBLAUCH, 2008: 145), fado can be considered as a vehicle of subjectively carrying, expressing and negotiating spiritual charisma in everyday life. The boundaries of contemporary Portuguese religiosity are far less rigid and much more porous than they used to be. This porosity has also affected popular

practices, such as fado, which are deeply embedded in Portuguese culture in a more “traditional” way and would hardly be conventionally considered as “spiritual”. It therefore allows enough space for recognizing that fado can be approached from a different sociocultural, ethnographic and analytical angle, being perceived creatively as an integral albeit less explicit aspect of practicing and/or experiencing spirituality in present-day Lisbon.

“SENSING LISBON AND FADO”: NEGOTIATING EMOTION AS HOLISTIC HEALING

It is one of my last visits before the pandemic, and I have just arrived at the door of the *tasca*; inside it is full of tourists sitting on the tables and the usual locals chatting at the door, or standing alongside the narrow bar, together with more tourists. It is too dark inside and because of the crowded space I can only tell that a fado singer will perform a second song, as the lights remain unlit, yet the musicians have already begun to initiate a melody. Laura notices me standing at the door and she comes to grab my hand to rush me inside: “João will sing again now, come on, you need to be in front, to see and feel the fado better”. João begins to perform one of my favourite fado songs, fluctuating between a phonetically deep and emotional interpretation of the lyrics and bursts of almost ecstatic embodiment and ritualistic somatic mobility. I get goosebumps and one of the regulars who is standing right behind me notices and whispers to me “ah, now you are feeling the fado”; he tries to buy me a drink, appreciating perhaps that I have exhibited the correct signs of a fado *aficionada*. The performance ends, the lights are back on once again, and while trying to hide the emotion provoked, I am thinking at that moment how similar I feel to when my alternative healer-interlocutors perform their spiritual healing on me, but also on their other patients, feeding our sensory perception through therapeutic affect.

When I heard João perform for the first time, I immediately realized that his *entrega* had a different effect, compared with listening to other fado singers, to my sensory perception of and emotional reaction towards fado. Being an *aficionada* of fado long before visiting the *Tasca do Jaime*, I had already gained extensive experience in grasping the details of fado delivery, from phonetic competence to feeling the affective depth of the performance. Having heard at a personal level the comments that connected his performance with the sacredness of the experience, as mentioned earlier, I began to notice ethnographically that somewhat

hidden and unexplored aspect of fado, which relates fado to spirituality, on the one hand, and healing, on the other. Especially since the pandemic started, fado attendance at the *Tasca do Jaime* has become for most of its regulars, including myself, a “space like going to church, let’s say, pray, and feeling better” and a “therapeutic” space, as it has been characterized to me, where one “feels good, healthy, normal”. Independently of the pandemic, however, where perhaps the need to escape from the otherwise heavy, quotidian life and feel “healthy” again is experienced as more urgent, fado has always been a practice that is related to the embodied involvement of senses and emotions, which, consequently, can be closely related to healing.



Fig. 3. The tasca’s bar, with Laura serving customers, *Tasca do Jaime* ©Author, 2016.

“*Sentir Lisboa e o Fado*” [“Sensing Lisbon and Fado”] is the title of João’s recorded CD of fado. As the title designates, João bases his fado performance significantly on the involvement of his senses and feeling with fado, the music, the lyrics and the audience, activating their sensory perception and emotional responses. He also creates a distinct context within which a sensorial and emotional link with

the city of Lisbon is created, narrating, with his embodied performance hi/stories, emotions and mnemonic representations of actual, sociocultural, sacred, acoustic, somatic and/or symbolic spaces and places (c.f. GRAY, 2013: 6). Furthermore, as Feld (1996: 97) maintains: “Sound, hearing, and voice mark a special bodily nexus for sensation and emotion because of their coordination of brain, nervous system, head, ear, chest, muscles, respiration and breathing”. Within its “polysensoriality” (HOWES, 2011), fado creates a “sacred reality” (DANFORTH, 1989: 55), where the senses play a vital role in the performative action, accompanied by the fluidity of bodily, personal, spiritual, cultural e/motion. In order for the interaction between the *fadista* and the recipients of fado to be sensorially, emotionally and therapeutically, I would add, successful, a ritualism of fado, which requires a what Csordas (1997 [1994]: 40) has called “pneumopsychosomatic” synthesis, needs to be generated. The spirit (pneuma), the soul (psyche) and the body (soma) co-habituate the space where the fado singer performs, creating a charismatic world, and a “sacred self” (ibid.), though an alternative pathway, namely fado performance, to spi/ritual healing.



Fig. 4. “Sentir Lisboa e o Fado” ©Author, 2016.

*Descalço venho dos confins da infância
Que a minha infância ainda não morreu
Atrás de mim em face ainda há distância
Menino Deus, Jesus da minha infância
Tudo o que tenho, e nada tenho, é teu.*

*Barefoot I come from the confinement of
childhood, and my childhood hasn't died yet
Behind me there is still distance,
God-Child, Jesus of my childhood
Everything I have and I don't have, is yours.*

*Venho da estranha noite dos poetas,
Noite em que o mundo nunca me entendeu
Vê trago as mãos vazias dos poetas
Menino Deus, amigo dos poetas
Tudo o que tenho, e nada tenho, é teu.*

*I come from the strange night of poets
Night where the world never understood me
Look I bring the empty hands of the poets
God-Child, friend of the poets
Everything I have and I don't have, is yours.*

*Feriu-me um dardo, ensanguentei as ruas
Onde o demónio em vão me apareceu
Porque as estrelas todas eram suas
Menino irmão dos que erram pelas ruas
Tudo o que tenho, e nada tenho, é teu.*

*A spear wounded me, I bled in the streets
Where the demon appeared to me in vain
Because all the stars were yours
Little brother of all who wonder in the streets
All I have and I don't have is yours.*

*Quem te ignorar ignora os que são tristes
Ó meu irmão Jesus, triste como eu
Ó meu irmão, menino de olhos tristes
Nada mais tenho além dos olhos tristes
Tudo o que tenho, e nada tenho, é teu.⁹*

*Whoever ignores you ignores the sad ones
Oh, my brother Jesus, sad like me
Oh my brother, boy with sad eyes
I have nothing but sad eyes
All I have and I don't have, is yours.*

“*Entrega*” is one of the fado songs that carry an explicit religious meaning and emotion in their core; it is also the fado that I have been intensely hoping to see João perform during all my visits at *Tasca do Jaime* in the last decade, without, however, any success. When I asked João why he has avoided performing *Entrega* at the *tasca*, despite the additional emotional depth he covers his performance with, his reply was that this is one of those fado songs which create a difficulty for him to sing in public; the reason is that it makes him emotional and, at times, he has actually had to interrupt his performative action in the middle, due to his strong emotive response to the song.

⁹ The title of this fado is “*Entrega*” [“Delivery”], written by Pedro Homem de Melo and Carlos Gonçalves, belongs to the repertoire of Amália Rodrigues, being, however, popularized in recent years by the well-known fado singer Ricardo Ribeiro, whose performance has also influenced João to a significant degree. The Portuguese lyrics have been retrieved from the official channel of Ribeiro on YouTube: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pB1aREuJ6I>>, and the translation in English is by the author.

Emotions are “active, motivating forces of body and mind that register, navigate, and adjust a subject’s relational positioning. We feel our way through life in immersed, embodied engagement” (WOODHEAD, 2018: 2). Fado directly engages with emotions through the body and mind, creating relational positionings within but also beyond the space of performative action. Nevertheless, fado certainly works amidst an “emotional regime”, a field where “emotions are integral to the structured social and material relations that constitute a particular social unit or setting — whether a business, a family, an Internet-based fan club, or a religious community” (RIIS and WOODHEAD, 2010: 10). In addition, fado holds religious emotion, which “has to do not only with social relations in the narrow ‘human’ sense, but with ‘super social’ relations — such as those we may have with sacred sites, landscapes, artefacts, and beings” (ibid.: 6), and which can be expressed through ritual, music or art “precisely because rationalized language does not suffice (ibid.: 13). Fado is approached in the present article as a cultural practice that carries both religious and spiritual emotion, incorporating religious language but also emotions that can be ritualistically connected to alternative forms of spirituality and healing.

When the pandemic began and throughout the challenging months that followed, and while the public health regulations permitted it, of course, the *Tasca do Jaime* became a kind of refuge for the close circle of its regular *fadistas* and *aficionados*. In one of the first times we met there, João confided in me that during this difficult situation, fado gave him a social and performative outlet to breathe, to *feel* better. As Desjarlais (1996: 159) puts it, “healing transformations take place not within some cognitive domain of brain or heartmind, but within the visceral reaches of the eyes, the ears, the skin, and the tongue. Indeed, the *feeling* of rejuvenation (rather than just its idea or symbolic expression) is essential”. Finding themselves inside the space of the *tasca*, the two parts of the fado interaction have been able to feel the em/power/ment of fado and its performance, for through performing, but also through listening, “one enters into the affective, poetic, and performative sound world of fado, mind, body, and soul” (GRAY, 2013: 7).

The triptych mind-body-spirit (sometimes also referred to as soul) and the balance created among the three is one of the most significant characteristics of holistic healing (BAER, 2003: 235). It furthermore refers to “subjective-life spirituality”, or the “mind-body-spirit” spirituality which, as Heelas (2006: 224) explains, is a spirituality that rests on experience. Fado, I argue, is a sociocultural practice and a performative genre that can be thought of as a creative and innovative paradigm of holistic spirituality, namely of “those forms of practice involving the body (...) which have as their goal the well-being of body, mind,

and spirit and shade into the realm of complementary and alternative health care practices” (SOINTU and WOODHEAD, 2008: 259). Just like any other type of alternative healing, fado’s performance is based on a ritualistic embodiment, sensory perception and emotional inter/action. Between the *fadista* and the *aficionado* there lies a space of “radical empathy” (KOSS-CHIOINO, 2006), sensorially palpable or more implicit. In holistic healing, the notion of “radical empathy” refers to a relationship between a healer and his/her patients, which is formed when the former “respond altruistically to persons in distress seeking their help” (ibid.: 878), and where the “individual differences between healer and sufferer are melded into one field of feeling and experience” (ibid.: 877). In the context of fado, and especially in times of physical, mental health and emotional distress, such as the last year(s) of the pandemic, fado performance can serve as a holistic healing space, where all participants enter into a sacred space of radical empathy and a therapeutic involvement of senses, but also of what goes beyond them; as I mentioned in the previous section, some may perceive their visit to the *tasca* to listen to fado as a similar experience to going to church, others can perceive it as a transcendental meditative practice.

Fado permeates the senses, emotions and the mind-body-soul/spirit of everyone involved, sharing common characteristics with New Age and holistic healing: the radical empathy and emotional exchange, the religious emotion and spiritual channelling, as well as the alternative communication with the sacred can all be perceived as novel cultural indicator that fado has creatively extended its boundaries as a Portuguese cultural practice; it has become a holistic and/or spiritual “performance of healing” (LADERMAN and ROSEMAN, 1996: 1), a quotidian “performance process, a dynamic system of action” (SCHECHNER, 1987: 10). Performance, as Csordas (1997 [1994]: 92) has efficiently shown, “has a power to transform experience and social relations”. The fado performances I have ethnographically witnessed in the last decade, especially during the crises, appear to have begun to transform the classic notion of fado and the space in-between the fado singers and their audience into a re-negotiated sensory and emotional space where “the rhetoric of transformation achieves its therapeutic purpose by creating a disposition to be healed, evoking experience of the sacred” (ibid.: 94).

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN ELASTIC LIVED RELIGIOSITY

Um fado terno

Num eco da fantasia.

Explosão transparente.

As mãos sempre em ressurreição.

Uma representação sagrada

Essa Oração Secreta.

A tender fado

In an echo of fantasy.

Transparent explosion.

The hands always in resurrection.

A sacred representation

That Secret Prayer.

It is July 2020 and the first time in the last few months that I hesitantly leave the house to visit a non-absolutely-essential place. The covid-19 numbers in Lisbon have somewhat improved and, under strict measures and having invited only a restricted number of individuals, a fado afternoon is about to occur after a long time. I go to the *Tasca do Jaime* and to my great contentment João is there. In the almost empty *tasca*, João begins to sing a fado I have not heard before. I get goosebumps and teary-eyed; I close my eyes to hide it and I almost immediately enter a state of spiritual travelling. I re-open my eyes and watch João's hands reaching, once again, the sky, in an alternatively performed prayer. For the next couple of fado songs, I consciously maintain my sensory perception alert, while trying to control my affective responses to revisiting a space which, I have come to realize, has ended up becoming sacred for me, symbolically, actually, culturally, anthropologically. Laura comes closer to me and comments how considerably better she feels now that she has had the opportunity to listen to João again. I agree, as I watch João's face being transformed by the emotion of the fado performance. When I return home, I write the italicized words above in my research notebook. In an auto-ethnographic moment, I become aware that the sacred, spiritual and therapeutic aspects of fado need to be perceived not as distant echoes of research fantasy but be treated ethnographically and socioculturally as an active, creative and innovative fragment of contemporary Portuguese lived religiosity.



Fig. 5. The emotion of fado, *Tasca do Jaime* ©Author, 2020.

To quote Ammerman (2014: 190):

Lived religion does often happen on the margins between orthodox prescriptions and innovative experiences, but religion does not have to be marginal to be “lived”. (...) Looking for lived religion does mean that we look for the material, embodied aspects of religion as they occur in everyday life, in addition to listening for how people explain themselves. It includes both the experiences of the body and the mind.

Through performances of fado singers like João, who are able to cultivate — actually and symbolically — a sacred, ritualistic and spiritual space, inhabited through sensory perception and emotional expression, and transmit it to those on the other side of the performative action, it becomes evident that fado is beginning to gradually acquire a new role in contemporary Portuguese religiosity. In its case, fado can be perceived as a practice that happens on the “margins between orthodox prescriptions and innovative experiences”, incorporating discourses that derive from denominational religious ideology (prayer, church, Christian ritualism

and symbolism), while it simultaneously involves significant direct or secondary references to alternative spirituality and healing (meditation, spiritual experience, mind-body-spirit).

The boundaries of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, as it is lived in very recent years, especially within the socioeconomic and global health crises, have become elastic. During their everyday life, the Portuguese in Lisbon negotiate their religious identity in much more creative ways, compared to their mono-religious past, where belonging to Christianity, even if nominally, seemed to be an one-way choice that was imposed socially, culturally and historically. The elasticity in Portuguese lived religiosity these days allows for practices inherent to Portuguese society and culture, which are seemingly unrelated to religion, such as fado, and their practitioners, to claim a novel status within Portuguese religiosity. Moreover, it permits the stretching of the limits of “traditional” fado performance to include, even if implicitly, spirituality and holistic healing. And the more elastic the boundaries, the more diverse the performance of fado turns out to be, creating a dynamic space where the practitioners of fado, both *fadistas* and *aficionados*, can demonstrate considerable sociocultural and spi/ritual creativity, while sensing, perceiving, performing, expressing emotions, moving in and out of spi/ritual spaces, healing and getting healed, and getting in touch with the sacred in alternative ways.

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