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Local event, family and music: The rootedness of cultural heritage

Ana Gonçalves

Abstract

By examining a singular case – the Rua Joaquina party in Lisbon (Portugal) –, this chapter raises questions about the role of small-scale and locally-based events in shaping feelings of togetherness, musical attachment, and family affiliation. In particular, it explores how such events are meaningful settings for families, neighbours, and their guests to meet up, jointly appreciate or perform music they value, and engage beginners in musical pathways. Accordingly, an approach of this kind also seeks to illustrate and understand the living aspects of cultural heritage. The data used came from long-term fieldwork conducted in Lisbon's fado scenes.

Introduction

The phenomenon of events has the particularity of being highly diverse and in permanent expansion (Andrews and Leopold, 2013; Richards, Brito, and Wilks, 2013). In addition to mega and major events, there is today the proliferation of a myriad of small and niche events, often arising from local communities' voluntary initiatives (Page and Connell, 2012). The focus of this chapter falls on this latter type of event, which tends to be more organic and may involve a handful of individuals that are socially relevant to each other, whether intimates or acquaintances. While smaller community events occur commonly, their role and significance within the events literature remain relatively marginal (Jepson and Clarke, 2016).

This chapter presents an analysis of a specific event that is conceptualised as a celebrative social occasion (Goffman, 1983). The outline of this notion arose only in the last article that Erving Goffman wrote some months before his premature death. Nevertheless, the topic of social occasions began to emerge in his works which approached face-to-face interaction as a subject matter in its own right (Wynn, 2016). Goffman considered social occasions to be the wider unit of interaction, in counterbalance to other, more limited, fleeting and improvised daily interactional engagements that he terms as encounters, situations, gatherings (Goffman, 1967). A general characteristic of these social occasions is the co-presence, in a specific place and for a fixed period, of a selective group of individuals, possibly for different reasons, but on the pretext of some shared interest. These occasions may cover, for example, social meetings, parties, ceremonies, festivals, fairs, etc. They generally revolve around a core activity, often of the type that Goffman designates a platform performance (such as a live music performance), and a set of adjoining activities, whether planned or occurring spontaneously (like food practices or conversations). As Goffman noted, the simultaneous unfurling of multiple social interactions does not affect the integrity of the event in itself.

It is through this prism that I explore one event in particular: the Rua Joaquina party in Lisbon (Portugal). There are, though, two additional concerns behind it. On the one hand, the chapter deals with family-based questions, specifically how different generations connect, forge intimate relationships, and preserve family cultures at this event. On the other hand, I intend to take up musical questions, which above all relate to the ways musical affiliations undergo strengthening, consolidate social networks, and bring about music cooperation.

These aspects become even more relevant when restricting the analysis to a single event, to a greater or lesser extent, bound up with the socio-musical worlds of fado. Fado – a name derived from the Latin etymon *fatum*, which means destiny, fatality, predestination – is a popular urban music developed in Lisbon around the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Initially, this musical genre was the expression of a marginalised subculture strongly associated with certain of the oldest neighbourhoods of Lisbon. While the early formative years of fado related to bohemia, prostitution, and social marginality (Pais, 2008), the genre has spread rapidly through popular, bourgeois, and aristocratic sociability venues in nineteenth-century Lisbon. In the meantime, the earlier historical background has cast a discrediting shadow on this music, which progressively dissipated over the twentieth century (Gonçalves, 2018). The conversion of fado from the margins of society into a national symbol in large part took place under the influence of political-ideological orientations of the Portuguese dictatorship (1926-1974). In more recent decades, this musical form has experienced a revival and obtained wide-reaching recognition that crossed national borders, partly due to its inclusion in the World Music global circuits and record markets (Nery, 2004) and on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Nery, 2012). In other words, over almost two centuries, fado became a cultural marker for the city and the country it is the capital of.

Accordingly, the chapter draws upon empirical materials (i.e., a short documentary, photographs, and an intergenerational family interview) from long-term fieldwork conducted in Lisbon's fado scenes.

The Rua Joaquina: An urban enclave

Rua Joaquina is a discreet alley located on the slope of Santana Hill with a panoramic view over the valley through which runs Avenida da Liberdade, the main thoroughfare of Lisbon. It is flanked by eleven semi-detached, single-storey homes, with their doors and windows facing each other. The street is integrated into an original working-class *vila* – Vila Serra Fernandes – located in the vicinity of a former minor palace (*palacete* hereafter) and the Ramiro Leão textile manufacturer of the late nineteenth century. These designated *vilas* are multi-family constructions, privately built in the closing decades of the nineteenth century to overcome housing needs in the city for the less advantaged strata of the Lisbon population, especially the working class (Pereira, 1994). Most of them were located on empty plots of land, within the blocks, in the immediate surroundings of

factories. They generally contained a compact type of house, terraced, and reached along a narrow alley, with access to the public conditioned sometimes by an iron gate that bore a placard identifying the name of the *vila*.

Through the first half of the twentieth century, the houses on Rua Joaquina were given over to housing factory workers. Nevertheless, within a few decades, the local community had undergone notable changes. The working households had progressively left the area to be replaced by tenants with greater economic, social and cultural capitals, including professionals from the arts sectors who valued living in the historical and central zones of the city. More recently, the high level of external attractiveness of this residential area, which comprises the *vila*, the *palacete* and the industrial buildings, is interlinked with the advent of mass tourism and a new wave of gentrification, facilitated by neoliberal inspired urban policies (Barata-Salgueiro, Mendes and Guimarães, 2017). Adjoining the entrance to the *vila*, the dignified *palacete*, where the business owner Ramiro Leão (1857-1934) formerly resided, and the industrial facilities that housed the ironing operations, are now destined for a luxury housing complex. On the inside of this neighbouring area, Rua Joaquina is today a gentrified urban enclave.

Among the current residents on the street are relatives of Amália Rodrigues (1920-1999), recognised as the most important Portuguese singer of the last century and the iconic voice of the fado musical genre.¹ One of the houses is inhabited by the family of her great-nephew, Diogo Varela Silva, a cinema director and producer who, among other works, has directed various musical documentaries, mostly about fado. One of his works is ‘A Minha Rua’ [‘My Street’] (Varela Silva, 2010), winner of the documentary category at the 2011 edition of ShortCutz Lisboa, an initiative dedicated to short-length films in new Portuguese cinema. The film captures Rua Joaquina and the party that takes over the street every year with the guiding thread of testimony provided by some of its residents. One of these accounts describes the social profile of the neighbours and the close relationships that characterise them:

My street, which was a dead street, has become a living street due to the good neighbours, the wonderful neighbours that we have here. Neighbours that are not the usual type to see in Lisbon. This is not a neighbourhood, [...] but really a street that gets transformed by these neighbours. With a French neighbour, an American neighbour, with a musician neighbour and another from the theatre. Well, this all changes, and the people are different. (Rosa Gaspar, resident on Rua Joaquina) (Varela Silva, 2010).

Another resident details their personal experiences on the street:

My family and I have lived in Portugal now coming up to nine years. We feel very, very privileged to live here on Rua Joaquina because this is a place like no other. We have a little village, a little *aldeia*, here in the middle of Lisbon, right on top of the very centre of town. Here, we are packed in together with our neighbours in this beautiful, colourful, international village. It is just a fantastic opportunity for us. [...] We wanted to get to know the Portuguese

culture, and there is nowhere else that we could get acquainted with Portuguese culture in the way we do here on Rua Joaquina. Because it is like living in just one big house with a bunch of families, mostly Portuguese families, but a bunch of other Lisbon families right here in the same space. People wander around here in their pyjamas, walking their dogs, just having their coffee at the beginning of the day, having their wine at the end of the day. It is a very intimate little place, and we can hardly believe that we found it; we can hardly believe that we have the privilege of living here. We feel very blessed to be a part of it. (Jordan Kleber, resident on Rua Joaquina) (Varela Silva, 2010).

The overall impression that emerges from these two testimonies, which open the documentary, is that Rua Joaquina is perceived as being simultaneously cosmopolitan and Portuguese, contemporary and historical, adulterated and authentic. Both accounts give an inside perspective. Within these, the street is mainly described from the web of relationships and daily routines therein. What is pointed out as characteristic of the *vila* is the fact of being an urban segment closed in upon itself, which to a certain extent smooths the passage between the street and the houses. Hence, inside the *vila*, there does not prevail the sharp separation usual to the domains of public life (the street) and private life (the home). On the contrary, there occurs a certain complementarity between the two. Currently, some of the daily routines and rituals (such as having meals, receiving visits) transit from within the homes out into the common space in the open air. Most probably, this is what gave the street its domestic and familiar character.

The French anthropologist, Michel Agier (2015), observed this same phenomenon. In *Anthropologie de la Ville* [Anthropology of the City], he identified a sense of familiarity that goes beyond the domestic realm and takes over specific local urban spaces, such as micro-neighbourhoods, alleys, or courtyards. According to Agier, relatively bounded living spaces – eventually with uniform architecture, narrow corridors and restricted entrance – tend to be appropriated by the inhabitants for their purposes and become a sort of interface between the private and the public.

The Rua Joaquina party: Gathering together and playing along

Rua Joaquina encapsulates a zone of confluence for the families living there. The festive phenomenon of this street stems from this. The original pretext for the now annual party was football. In 2006, the men's Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup took place, a competition in which Portugal finished in fourth place. The event was followed live on television in many Portuguese households. The sporting success of the team drew enthusiasm and audiences well beyond the usual fan base. Inside the *vila*, goal celebrations would often spill out onto the street. Given the general level of excitement, the Rua Joaquina residents began watching the televised coverage of the event in the very street. This led to an outdoor gathering among families, which included a shared meal improvised with food and beverages brought by each household, and

interspersed with moments of live musical performance. The musicians were recruited from among the family members of residents and based on their personal ties to the professional world of fado. Indeed, it was Diogo Varela Silva who asked his grandmother, the fado singer Celeste Rodrigues (sister of Amália Rodrigues), to join in and perform. They also brought together other fado musicians, picked up among the available professionals from their network of contacts.

In other terms, we may say that the neighbouring families were primarily motivated by the desire to spend time together, cooperating in a form of celebration of the local social well-being. Another resident captured well the convivial character of the street in the documentary:

It is rare to live in a city, in a European capital, where the doors of houses are left open, where children can go from house to house. Well then, because of all those ‘good vibes’, we decided to have a party after the World Cup, now already four years ago and, step by step, the party has become ever more important. We created a monster. In any case, it’s always music, sardines, friends, and good cheer. (António Matos, resident on Rua Joaquina) (Varela Silva, 2010).

This account indicates the idyllic vision of social interactions within neighbours at the heart of the documentary. There seems to be convergence in terms of the regularity and closeness of the local relationships articulated by residents. More than neighbours, with whom there are occasional meetings or are known only somewhat vaguely, the street residents here describe each other as friends. These close relationships seem to be bound up with mutual knowledge, lasting bonds, trust and support. While David Morgan (2009) tends to include neighbours in the category of acquaintances, the author draws attention to the different types of neighbourly relationships and forms of urban life. In his incisive study about acquaintanceship, he presumes that the border between intimates and non-intimates might be somewhat blurred. In effect, the social characteristics of the population and urban design may shape different patterns of social engagement and influence how proximity and distance are perceived among neighbours.

So, the street party began as a spontaneous social happening, which only later turned into an annual get-together among kin, neighbours, friends and peers, accompanied by a sociable meal and live fado performances from sundown to sunrise. This form of celebration displays characteristic features of the popular urban festivities that sprout up all over the city of Lisbon in June, even while clustering more in the alleys, small squares, flights of stairs, and churchyards located in the historic neighbourhoods. In his book, *A Sociedade de Bairro [The Neighbourhood Society]*, the Portuguese sociologist António Firmino da Costa (1999) generally associates the practice of fado in the streets of Lisbon to the nights celebrating the city’s popular saints or to social gatherings organised by groups of neighbours. Firmino da Costa suggests that these gatherings generally occur in the immediacy of the residences of renowned performers and enthusiasts, grass-root

associations that regularly organise fado sessions or any of the emblematic locations to the fado community. The Rua Joaquina has become one such place.

In the words of one of the residents, fado plays an important and integral role on this festive occasion:

Fado is very important because it's a night-time party, it's a popular party ... But, essentially, [the party] emerges from the desire to imagine a space. I think that cities, neighbourhoods, and houses do not exist if they are not imagined. People have to imagine something in them and make that something happen. And we imagine in this way: we imagine, suddenly, what it would be like to hang up balloons and garlands and if we were to cook together and if each house was then to make a particular speciality, a homemade dessert, a custard tart, a rice pudding, any of those good things. And it's this, I mean, the party is what we were able to imagine for the street, and the street was transformed and became a fantastic place that reflects the good people that live in it, the good vibrations, the friendship, the camaraderie, the desire to make pleasurable things for the others, the ties there are among the kids who live here ... Our doors open up onto the street. Therefore, every time that you open the door, you are already heading into my street. (André Gago, resident on Rua Joaquina) (Varela Silva, 2010).

Following the common popular tradition, in readiness for the party, the street gets decorated. High above, the neighbours hang garlands and bunting with colourful flags running between the roof eaves. This does not happen without some work during the preceding days. The same holds for the cooking of the communal meal. Each house contributes with its own culinary speciality. The dishes are brought to the table after their preparation by the host families, potentially alluding to a regional culture or a particular family identity. Generally, there is no shortage of charcoal-grilled sardines, one of the most traditional of all Portuguese dishes. Indeed, the strong smell of sardines grilling on the barbecue is a strong sign that the party is approaching. Prepared according to the logic of differentiation and reciprocity among families, the dishes ensure a very well-laden table. The exchange and sharing of food and drink play a crucial role in fostering a social ambience favourable to the conversation and social interaction, which lasts many hours (see Bloch (2005) on how food practices generate proximity).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The party is held on the doorsteps, in clear articulation between the interior of homes and the main axis of local social life, the alley. Effectively, Rua Joaquina is a corridor of circulation used exclusively by residents and their visitors, which thus makes it a sort of home territory, whereby the attendees experience a relative level of relaxation and a sense of intimacy and over which they hold some kind of control (Cavan, 1963;

Lyman and Scott, 1967). The doors to houses remain open or ajar, not so much as a gesture of hospitality, but rather for reasons of logistics for the party. Between their homes and the street, the hosts continually take and bring tables, chairs and other types of implements, whether plates, cups or cutlery, as well as food and drink, to the party. Other party participants may be given more or less sporadic access to the interiors, such as for storing or collecting personal belongings or using bathroom facilities. In turn, intense social connectedness occurs in the outdoor zones, where the physical closeness of the partygoers and the face-to-face interactions between them may fill a meaningful and intimate setting.

Family heritage in the making

Right from the start, the Rodrigues Varela² family has been in charge of the main cultural attraction of the party: fado. Until recently, this meant that, temporarily, Diogo Varela Silva's family circle (consisting of himself, his wife Teresa and their sons Sebastião and Gaspar) expanded beyond the boundaries of co-residence. His grandmother, Celeste Rodrigues – who lived nearby, outside the *vila* – was a frequent attendee at party nights through to her death in 2018 at the age of 95. Therefore, the local party also motivated family reunions. The simple co-presence of various generations who would meet up to spend some good time together is in itself notable (Singly and Ramos, 2010). At the same time, the party enables members of the family group to affirm their sense of belonging, strengthening (or complicating) and displaying the relational bonds that mutually interconnect each other (Finch, 2007; Dermott and Seymour, 2011). As these shared experiences take on affective meaning, they may be especially significant for each one of them and, as such, gain a greater chance of becoming part of the family stories that deserve to be told to others.

Some years ago, when I interviewed the family (Gonçalves, 2016), Celeste Rodrigues highlighted the importance of the Rua Joaquina on the musical enculturation of her great-grandson Gaspar Varela:

Ana: And what was your story? Was it your own choice?

Gaspar: I liked listening.

Celeste: When he was little, he would listen to the records of Carlos Paredes³ He would be still. It was the only thing that would make him still. He was quite a spark, never stopped still, and had a level of energy that I don't know where he got it from. [...] Diogo began getting involved in the festivities of Saint Anthony or Saint John, the street parties here, and he [Gaspar] began listening to music with a little plastic guitar in his hand, and he would take up position and accompany them. Sometimes, he was there until seven in the morning. We'd put him to bed, and he'd get up and, a short while later, there he was all over again. So, I think it's kind of something innate, I suppose.

Ana: Anyway, he already had a family history connected with fado...

Celeste: That one, yes. He'd (Gaspar) go a lot to the fado even when very small.

Diogo: Yes, he was always there.

Celeste: And once he came right up to me and told me: '– I'm going to learn to play the guitar to accompany you'. I answered: '– oh, by the time you are able to accompany me, I'll have already gone travelling' [euphemism for 'having died']. And he said back: '– ah, I will wait [until you return]'. [Laughter].

Diogo: In truth, he has already accompanied you.

Celeste: Various times already. Now, imagine my emotion on going on stage with a little great-grandson. The first time [that happened], he must have been eight or nine.

Gaspar: Seven! I was ready for the first [fado], when I learned Fado das Horas. (Excerpts from an interview with three generations of the Rodrigues Varela family, held in Rua Joaquina in December 2014).

Born into a family in which music was so very present, Gaspar discovered it early in his childhood. The memories raised by his great-grandmother, Celeste, in the interview, reveal how he became absorbed by any exposure to music and embarked on a relationship with a particular musical instrument closely connected to fado: the Portuguese guitar. This is a chordophone with a pear-shaped body and usually six double steel strings, whose origins are still open to debate. Currently, among the most common are the models from Lisbon and Coimbra, both of which serve as a solo instrument or for accompanying fado.

Gaspar's mimetic gesture of musical performance with a toy during the Rua Joaquina party did not go unnoticed. The family and surrounding community witnessed Gaspar's repeated imitation and labelled this intuitively as a marker of musical potential (perhaps even innate, as Celeste vaguely suggested in the interview). Most probably, such a ludic act would not have gone without symbolic reward and encouragement.

Over the following years, the Rua Joaquina party would be included among a variety of opportunities for the musical training of Gaspar. As his great-grandmother Celeste never stopped singing until her death, it was quite common for the family to accompany her to regular fado venues and other performance settings. Gradually, Gaspar would fully develop endemic notions of musicality, auditive skills, ability to memorise repertoire, dexterity in the technical gestures, social disinhibition. For the most part of his apprenticeship in those family outings, Gaspar would be mediated by several agents of socialisation (above all, family and non-family musicians), possibly without having grasped any particularly explicit educational purpose. These informal practices of musical learning (Finnegan, 1989; DeNora, 2003; Green, 2003) were supplemented by private lessons with the professional guitarist Paulo Parreira, initiated during Gaspar's childhood (for a detailed analysis of those tacit learning processes in fado, see Gray (2013)).

In addition, music is frequently interwoven into the social occasions in which the family participates, like in the Rua Joaquina party. Playing music is a pleasurable activity

that Gaspar engages in together with other family members and relevant others. It represents far more than something prescribed and to be learned rigidly and practised under parental pressure. However, most importantly, sharing the family's musical interest provides an opportunity for doing things together. Performing fado with his great-grandmother (see figure 2), within the audience gaze, represents a particular form of family practice and family display (Morgan, 1996; Finch, 2007). These live performances are enmeshed in webs of meaning: they show family members engaged in music-making activities, which may be crucial to defining who they are, and demonstrate their commitment to maintaining a lasting family tradition that they find worthwhile.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Further, each year, the Rodrigues Varela family would draw on their own networks in the local music scenes to contact and recruit other music performers for the party. These relational family resources reflect a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), interconnected with the reputation they hold within the microcosm of fado. Indeed, the Rua Joaquina party constitutes a relational setting that annually brings together a selective group from durable network ties of the residents, where persons nurture mutual recognition and create resources through social relations and sociability. It is possible and even likely that social connections unlock potential opportunities for creative cooperation between the attendees. But, above all, the event remains an intimate affair, where many of the people involved experience a broad sense of familiarity and cultivate, to a large extent, family-like connections with each other (Fletcher, 2020). The Rua Joaquina party, after all, has, over time, developed a quasi-family nature.

Though, during 2020 and 2021, events, gatherings, and gigs were drastically restricted, postponed or cancelled worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These unsettling circumstances also have led to the temporary suspension of the Rua Joaquina party. Even while the future remains unclear, it is relevant that, in recent years, this festive occasion has been anchored in a small-scale urban place, has brought together the local resident families and their close networks, and has fostered a series of significant personal, familial, and social experiences, through which knowledge, skills, emotions, and practices has circulated between generations. It is for these reasons that the party will endure.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, I argued that Goffman's (1983) notion of celebrative social occasions constitutes a valuable sociological lens for understanding events. While Goffman never actually managed to deepen the specific characteristics of this *sui generis* reality, he set out an analytical path revealing in more detail a key area in the social lives of our times. In order to duly grasp it, we need to pay attention to what happens when,

outside of the usual routine and for reasons assumed to be shared, various people enter into mutual and direct interactions with others, in configurations of involvement, to a greater or lesser extent, spatial, temporal and socially limited.

Immersed in the particularities of a specific case, this chapter suggests that family life and its social events seem to benefit from an approach incorporating a broader arena of personal relationships. Very commonly resulting from the meeting of social groups that extend beyond the family, celebrative social occasions may serve as the catalyst for family reunions, deepening the bonds of intimacy and ensuring the intergenerational transmission of expressive forms of culture. Hence, a festive event, such as the Rua Joaquina party, very much remains an important context for interaction and induction within the family sphere and its most immediate and relevant connections, among them, proximate neighbours, intimate friends and close working or leisure partners, with whom family-like relationships are often shaped.

In focusing on the local community and their internal celebrations, this chapter has sought to explore the vital role that music performs to create senses of connectedness and commonality and how people interrelate with it. This places in the foreground the discussion around what may happen when community, family and music intermingle. Therefore, this chapter also emphasises the importance of paying due attention to events where music is central to the extent this casts light on the forms of integration into communities of musical practices, processes of informal socialisation and social recognition. The exploration of the nexus between a party – such as that on Rua Joaquina – and the social circle surrounding a family – such as Rodrigues Varela – well illustrates how such processes may indeed occur.

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¹ Regardless the cultural relevance of Amália, it is worth noting that the Portuguese poet and writer David Mourão-Ferreira labelled her ‘the feminine heteronym of Portugal’ in a text originally published in *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias* in 1990 and re-published in 1999 on the occasion of her death (Mourão-Ferreira, 1999).

² In a photo essay by Henri Kisielewski entitled Lisbon’s back-alley fado legends, published in the British daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, this same family is presented as fado royalty (Kisielewski, 2020).

³ Carlos Paredes (1925-2004) was a Portuguese musical virtuoso who popularised the Portuguese guitar as a solo instrument.