

Nery, Rui Vieira.***A History of Portuguese Fado.*****Translated by David Cranmer.****Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2012.**

“Everything ends up coming round full circle” (52), writes Rui Vieira Nery in *A History of Portuguese Fado* (2012), translated by David Cranmer for the English edition, in which he gives a history of the genre from its itinerant beginnings as part of Afro-Brazilian, Black Atlantic repertoire to its instantiation in the mid-eighteenth century as Lisbon’s urban song and then, throughout the twentieth century, as a globally-recognized and particularly Portuguese cultural expression. Nery describes his work as “a broad historical panorama of the genre’s development during a period of almost two hundred years” (22). Laid out over 400 glossy pages of large text with many full color images and reproductions of illustrations, photos, booklets, posters, and other works of art, he pieces together a historical narrative through an archive of varied material taken from travelogues, fado histories, representations of fado in literature and art, promotional artwork, printed musical notation, critical reception, and fado recordings and compositions. Notably, this English version of Nery’s monograph comes with a new introductory essay by the author, covering developments in fado practice and distribution that had occurred during the eight years since the original Portuguese-language publication in 2004: the increased proliferation of fado performers through recorded and mass-distributed media (CDs and DVDs), and the changing contexts of fado performances unmoored from traditional fado houses and turning up ever more frequently in concert halls and global theatres. Writing the previous sentence today in 2021 feels quaint if not completely outdated. Streaming and social media sites and applications, such as YouTube and Spotify, have transformed the consumption of popular music, consequently making CDs and DVDs seemingly relics of a long-gone past, while during the decade since publication of this English edition, Lisbon has experienced a boom of international tourism that have made amateur fado performers and fado houses permanent fixtures on tourist itineraries, as essential as a daytrip to Sintra and a mouthful of *pasteis de Belém*.

Yet, against the rapidly changing contexts of fado performance and reception, Nery's history remains a rich and necessary resource for scholars of fado and Portuguese culture, with its mission to rescue the genre from nationalist mythology and sedimented perceptions as the ever-eternal expression of Portuguese *saudade*, now made more urgent in light of Lisbon's contemporary Instagram-able iteration. Nery tells us early on of his concern to avoid the pitfalls of fado histories and misconceptions of fado origins:

I have tried throughout to give substance to [fado's] historical manifestations and to run, like the devil from the cross, from the airy-fairy vocabulary that separates abstract concepts from the practices and real objects which embody them, and which give them their only tangible existence (in words like *saudade*, melancholy and fatalism), because I know all too well that the latter is the most direct route to the Pandora's box of pseudo-Celtic, pseudo-Arab, pseudo-troubadour myths and such like which for more than a century have overshadowed a genuinely rigorous study of Fado. (22)

Most compelling and perhaps surprising, even if not altogether new information, is the beginning chapter, innocuously entitled "From its origins to 1840: establishing the genre," that firmly places fado's beginnings in Brazil as Afro-Brazilian dance, locating the first mentions of the word *fado* (fate) linked to music as designating cultural practices witnessed in colonial Brazil as particular Afro-Brazilian dances and musical expression (33-38). The circle that Nery refers to, in which all things fado end up coming round, is what Paul Gilroy has demarcated as the Black Atlantic, what Joseph Roach calls the circum-Atlantic, and Portuguese anthropologist Miguel Vale de Almeida has dubbed the Brown Atlantic to more directly address the histories of Portuguese-speaking cultures of the Atlantic rim and beyond that were affected by Portuguese settler-colonialism, trans-Atlantic slave-trading, and Luso-Brazilian discourse on race. In this churning of power and time, Portuguese fado emerges as a repertoire of the Black Atlantic, a product of the forced displacement and transformation of African people and their cultures in the Americas. A decade before Nery's original Portuguese edition, however, Brazilian scholar and music critic José Ramos Tinhorão stated this fact outright in his book *Fado: dança do Brasil, cantar de Lisboa, o fim de um mito* (1994). Tinhorão states definitively his desire to put an end to the same fado mythology that Nery's is still contending with in his work, one which locates fado only ever in tones of Portuguese nationalist ethos and pseudo-historical claims, rather

than in the encounter of Afro-Brazilian dances that included *fados* and *lumduns* with more Luso-Brazilian song forms such as *modinhas*.

The power of the myth seems to have endured, however, at least from the 1990s to 2004 and again to this English edition of 2012, as evidenced by Nery's new preface essay on changing *fado* contexts that do not include, despite the available historiography, a widespread acceptance of *fado*'s Black Brazilian roots. Indeed, even Nery's title suggests his is but one history of Portuguese *fado*, seemingly among several potential others, belying his extensive research, and sounding more like a trepidatious claim rather than historical fact. As to *fado*'s Afro-Brazilian origins, he further provides the disclaimer that "this *Fado* danced in colonial Brazil... is still distant from being the Portuguese *Fado*," even as he adds that it is "without a shadow of a doubt... a central starting point, from which emerge innumerable aspects that persist uninterruptedly amid Portuguese *Fado* practice" (38). Despite his reassurances, readers can take his research at face value and need not see these two as separate expressive forms, but rather as two points of a genre whose history is tied up in a past yet to be fully reckoned with in Portugal: the centrality of racism and violence to the machinations of Portuguese empire and contemporary society; and the permeance of this history in cultural practices and heritage subsumed as uniquely Portuguese.

Though he is cautious of his claims, Nery gives us a clear and detailed narrative of *fado*'s development from the colonial period to present day. He traces how danced Afro-Brazilian *fados* turn up in Lisbon through the transit of the circum-Atlantic, and how this expressive song and dance moors itself in Lisbon's periphery and underbelly in taverns and whorehouses. Beyond musical analysis and close readings of literary references, Nery also provides historical context for *fado*'s many transformations, showing how political upheavals and cultural changes rippled down to popular practices, and how *fado*'s affective repertoire was attuned to the expression of quotidian experience. Through historical and visual references, Nery's outlines how, from the mid-eighteenth century on, *fado*'s popular domain affects its practice in Lisbon and how the danced aspect of its repertoire changes as *fado* becomes more staged, its music annotated, its poems transcribed, and its audience more mixed, meshing Lisbon's working class with petite bourgeoisie and aristocrats. Nery also shows *fado*'s expansion through male university students to Coimbra; its transformation through musical theatre and public shows; the effect of Portuguese political change at the turn of the twentieth century on *fado* practice; its popularity in Brazil as part of

revues; and its codification under the Estado Novo regime's fascistic scrutiny. While fado is imprinted with the voice and life of Amália Rodrigues from the mid-twentieth century onward, and Nery gives Amália and other fado stars their due credit, the reader will be well into three hundred pages of large text and captivating images before we reach the year of 1945 in this history.

Other published works may delve more deeply into fado's divas and its iterations as fascist appropriation and political resistance. Yet, the strength of Nery's book is in the early history it establishes against what Nery describes as "the silence of the historical sources" (31). More fado silences have been contested recently, with artists Fado Bicha reviving fado's queer history and refiguring its canon into bawdy expressions of queer and trans desire in tunes that are boldly antiracist and anti-homo- and transphobic. Importantly, and resonating with the global Black Lives Matter movements, activists in Lisbon have pushed back against long-enduring systemic racism, racist violence, and revisionist Portuguese history, and there is renewed interest in fado's origins as Afro-Brazilian dance. The Batoto Yetu Portugal Association, a non-profit that targets youth and underserved communities with programs on African culture, launched the Fado Dançado initiative in 2014, with recitals, lessons, and various video projects that resurface fado's early beginnings. In this way, Nery's history of Portuguese fado does begin to come full circle, and though he claims that such a definitive history is impossible, he proves otherwise in this work, unsettling a profound investment by many of fado's gatekeepers in its claim as national heritage. His work provides the ground for welcomed research that would consider what remains in today's fado of its Black Atlantic beginnings. Though the dance may have receded, the genre's expressive repertoire—one of desire and distress—stirs up a history that continues, determinedly, to resonate through Portuguese society and culture as a fado yet to be sung.

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