
Fado as National Allegory: Anachronism and Symbolic Conflict in Lisbon's Fado Scene

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Resumen

This presentation argues that the mainstream performance of fado in Lisbon today involves disquieting anachronisms, which call for critical interpretation. Drawing from ethnographic research centered on Ada de Castro—an eminent Lisbon fado singer who was featured in numerous official performances during Portugal's Estado Novo dictatorship (1933–1974)—this study explores how fado continues to serve as a potent symbolic reference for Portuguese national identity.

The regime's late appropriation of fado, and the resurgence of nationalist rhetoric in contemporary heritage practices, emerge vividly through Ada de Castro's testimony. Her reflections reveal discomfort with the repetition of certain aesthetic and political patterns from her past, now largely absent from official historiographies. Through this lens, fado appears as a long-standing emotional and symbolic resource, mobilized over more than two centuries for the construction of national identity.

Grounded in an ethnosymbolist approach, following the work of Anthony D. Smith, this paper considers how enduring symbols—such as the figure of the fado singer—are reactivated across different historical periods, often generating latent tensions. Ada de Castro's case becomes emblematic of this conflict between memory, performance, and nationhood.

Finally, this research interrogates how the current heritagization of fado, particularly its performative revival of past narratives, creates a paradox of temporal suspension: the reproduction of national symbols in the present tends to obscure the passage of time, inviting critical reflection on the politics of remembrance and representation.

Contraseña: Fado, Lisbon, Ada de Castro, National Symbolism, Ethnosymbolism, Performance and identity

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