

**Gendered Readings of Urban Folk Music:**

*The Cases of Rembetika and Fado*

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This thesis is dedicated to Professor Fernando Arenas, whose scholastic passion for music in the Lusophone world was my first insight into the possibility of pursuing ethnomusicology research. My travels to Lisbon and continued study of Portuguese were rooted in his insistence in my abilities, and the joy with which he encountered music and lyric a source of true delight and inspiration. In light of his recent passing, I am encouraged to continually remind myself that academic work at its best, both in teaching and scholarship, can share generously, inspire, and reflect the joys of discovery.

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### **Abstract**

Greek rembetika and Portuguese fado are traditions of urban folk music which share a variety of historical parallels. In addition to exploring their parallels and differences, this thesis focuses on how attention to gender in lyrical analysis can uncover the nuance of female narrative. The Greek case describes precisely how transgressive categories are framed and challenged in rembetika lyrics, and their historical correspondence with notions of femininity. Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalesque can be used as a framework for understanding the performance and reception of rembetika. The writings of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault lend themselves to analyzing gender as one of the constructed categories of transgression in question. The Portuguese case analyzes lyrical embrace of fatalism through a gendered lens, arguing that feminine fatalism is uniquely shaped through the historically pervasive narratives of the Virgin Mary, as she is perceived of in the Catholic Church, and of Maria Severa, one of the first singers of fado. Susan Sontag's reflections on Camp present an alternative way to appreciate the way that lament and fatalism are expressed in fado lyrics, suggesting that their stylistic manifestations are exalted above narrative elements. Conclusions include reflection on various tiers of musical ethnography, and my subjective experience as it relates to the wider conversation of this music.

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## INTRODUCTION

I had been listening to both rembetika and fado for years preceding this project, mostly just out of aesthetic love of the music. I acquired an Amália Rodrigues CD on my first trip to Lisbon, at which point I hadn't even begun learning Portuguese. Somehow, I still felt the sentiment of the music spoke clearly to me. I would blast it in my 2008 VW Beetle, mouthing along albeit unable to distinguish syllables from real words. Rembetika surfaced not through my Greek grandparents, who I'd later find viewed the music as that of prostitutes and drug dealers, but during my first visit to Greece in late high school. A friend of my family's, an older man who I couldn't communicate with because he didn't speak English, burned me a CD in his basement with some rembetika tracks. They appeared on my computer as "Rembetika 1, Rembetika 2," etc., leaving me confused as to what the term meant, and unable to figure out the titles of the songs. Some of them were modern recordings with a live audience and a community of performers on stage, which thrilled me. There was an immediate sense of community felt through these recordings, and, again in my VW Beetle, I'd listen to them over and over again, without much interest in their objective meaning.

I had heard both types of music classified as folk music and, knowing this, listening felt like a very immediate way to engage with the national psyches of Portugal and Greece. That is, having little knowledge of either culture or language, I could inexplicably feel a part of something larger through them. I say "inexplicably," because the sense of inclusion was very visceral—I couldn't intellectually justify why the music brought me such a sense of social connection in its bouts of joy and sorrow.

Later on, periods of living in both countries exposed me to the nuance of the musical traditions<sup>1</sup>. In Portugal, I ran towards every basement or bar I could find to consume fado performance, devastated to discover that most of my Portuguese friends were completely uninterested in fado, some feeling it was unrepresentative of Portugal altogether. In Greece, my interest in rembetika seemed to thrill and invoke a sense of pride in young Greeks I met in Thessaloniki. One particularly memorable night, I gathered with hundreds of others into a small square in the upper city, called “Tsitsanis Square,” huddling around a makeshift stage as various local groups performed songs to honor one of the greatest rembetika composers, Vassilis Tsitsanis. Not long after, on a visit to my grandfather’s village in northern Greece, my middle-aged aunt crossed herself when I told her I liked rembetika, as a sign of protection from something she considered dangerous, shocked that I would be interested in such music. All of these experiences, and my growing cultural and linguistic competency in Portuguese and Greek, made it clear that I needed to make an effort to understand the traditions for which I’d developed an unbridled love.

### **Why rembetika and fado together?**

As I uncovered various parallels between the two traditions, it became apparent that it was worthwhile to study them in conjunction with one another. I found that their correlation is echoed in a lot of musicology scholarship—there is a tendency to group together genres like Greek rembetika, Argentinian tango, Portuguese fado, American blues, and Andalusian flamenco (Dos Santos 1987, Holst-Warhaft 1998) as having faced similar modes of development and

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word “tradition” as opposed to genre simply to emphasize the lived nature of the creation of these songs. “Tradition” implicates the corresponding communities and histories in a way that the term “genre” does not.

functions in their respective cultures. Below is a table that I have created, largely based on the works of Yona Stamatis and Rui Vieira Nery (Stamatis 2011, Nery 2012), which more succinctly lays out the various parallels between rembetika and fado, and a few of their departures from one another.

	<b>Rembetika</b>	<b>Fado</b>
<i>Main period of tradition (anachronistically designated)</i>	Mid-1800's to mid-1940's	Mid-1800's to 1960's
<i>Female musician of influence</i>	Sotiria Bellou (1921-1997)	Amália Rodrigues (1920-1999)
<i>Main geographic area</i>	Athens, particularly port neighborhood of Piraeus (Later in Thessaloniki and other main city centers)	Lisbon, particularly the neighborhood of Mouraria (Later in Coimbra and other main city centers)
<i>Non-western influence</i>	Rooted in the secular musical tradition of the Ottoman empire	Rooted in Afro-Brazilian dance tradition
<i>Years of government influence on and censorship of music</i>	Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1941) and Military Junta (1967-1974)	Military dictatorship (which became the <i>Estado Novo</i> ) (1926-1974)
<i>Association with prostitution?</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>Association with drugs?</i>	Yes	No
<i>Association with "otherness"?</i>	Yes, in the form of the exoticized East, and in terms of socioeconomic status	Yes, in its association with the urban poor
<i>Years of "elevation" of music to middle class audiences</i>	Late 1940's (giving way to <i>archondorembetika</i> [posh rembetika] and <i>laika</i> [postwar popular songs])	1930's and 40's

For both chapters, my process began by flirting with gross simplification of each musical tradition, perhaps just for the sake of my own mental clarity. I wanted the tendencies of each song to comply cleanly with my knowledge of historical events, and to develop grand conclusions on each tradition, both on music itself and those performing it. What became immediately clear in attempting to pin down each genre was, first, the impossibility of doing such a thing. Further, though, I began to discover the expansiveness of both traditions—that even



the attempt to speak of certain “types” of songs, or of the songs as having decisive attitudes on a given set of themes, seemed a failure to capture complexity of each tradition.

With these things in mind, I really began to embrace the unit of the singular song as an insight into elements of the long traditions. Both types of music revealed themselves as a certain *conversation* unfolding throughout history. Even for performers and composers living at the time, it was nearly impossible to follow the conversation exactly. Attempting to speak generally about either tradition at length would necessitate the extraction of a concise message from hundreds of voices speaking simultaneously—there are composer’s voices and personal experiences, historical events and their nuanced effects, the reception of the songs in those communities affected; the list goes on. There is beauty in this polyphony, in which authoritative voices are many, but it is not easy to simplify. To navigate this, I found that following lyrical pathways into this matrix of complexity was most helpful. Within one song, a singular voice alludes and leads to many. Each narrative or expression of sentiment deeply, and often mysteriously, connected to those around it. In many ways, my research was a lot of speculation into these modes of connection. I tried to be self-aware in my position as someone retrospectively conducting these analyses, and as someone who is a cultural and temporal outsider.

Related to the individuality of perspective is the way I employ the descriptor ‘authentic’ throughout my writing. I choose to embrace the definition that came from the emerging emphasis on individuality of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which notions of authenticity experienced a philosophical shift. Whereas authenticity previously implied an awareness of one’s social limitations, and an earnest attempt to strive against attempts to appear beyond them, this shift welcomed a definition more postured towards the individual, and the act of “being true to oneself

for one's own benefit" (Varga, 2020). So, when I use the term 'authentic' to demarcate certain songs along the historical journey of each tradition, it is to testify to their historical utility and nuance amidst the conversation of each tradition, not simply to state that they contain certain prescribed qualities.

### **Why gender?**

Gender emerges as something manifested with great complexity in each musical tradition, particularly in its moments of departure from the gender dynamics of general society. The interest in gender initially emerged out of a fascination with the biographies of a handful of women whose voices and presences had a deep impact on the music they sang. Chiefly, Amália Rodrigues and Sotiria Bellou were of interest, but earlier figures like Roza Eskenazi and Rita Abatzi (rembetika), and Maria Severa and Júlia Florista (fado) broadened my notions of the narratives that were lived out alongside the music's development. However, the project became less focused on biography, and instead more lyric-centric, when I discovered that, often, the female performers themselves had efficacy over which songs they were singing, and sometimes acted as lyricists themselves. With this considered, lyrics were an important cross section between many driving forces within the traditions—each composition makes manifest not only the perspective of the composer, but also those of the performers and of those watching the performance, as well as the pre-established stylistic and thematic elements of the musical tradition. Thus, despite seeming dominance of men as instrumentalists, composers, and lyricists, it became apparent there was a deeper presence of women in lyric than one would shallowly conceive of.

The effects of the historical marginalization of women are highly specific, personal, and should be spoken of as having a deep effect on wider musical traditions. Often, however, dominant narratives, even if labelled as female narratives, tend to minimize the role of this marginalization, or take it for granted altogether. The biographies of the aforementioned women, as well as the lyrical depictions of women immortalized in song, must be detailed in conjunction with attention to gender construction and the various normalizations which underlie its construction. When I use the term ‘femininity,’ I am noting attention paid to the cultural and societal forces which have historically shaped gender. Between the two chapters, the central question that emerges is, how are women represented lyrically in these two traditions, and to what extent can we abstract meaning from them in terms of how they stylize, frame, and challenge conceptions of gender? Along the way, I will emphasize expressions of female agency, and the lack thereof, and question their role in the shaping of female narrative across these two musical traditions.

### **Methods and Limitations**

This is an exploratory study of lyric as a mean of expressing and perceiving of gender in two traditions of urban folk music. Most of my arguments are derived from close readings of particular songs, integrated with facets of history, musicology, and theory (gender and literary). To be clear, my undergraduate years have been largely devoted to the study of comparative literature and philosophy. For this reason, my interests and competencies as a scholar are grounded mostly in language as a mean of persuasion and expression, and less to musical specificities. Though I am a musician myself, and love to play and perform both types of music, this thesis largely takes for granted, though does not seek to ignore, the music which underlies

the history and lyricism which are detailed. For a musical analysis of rembetika, Yona Stamatis' dissertation provides a highly detailed account of stylistic and structural features of rembetika (Stamatis 2011, 149-194).

The first chapter of this thesis, *Gender Troubles and Gender Victories of Rembetika*, focuses on the function of transgression within the genre and community, mostly inspired by the life of Sotiria Bellou. Fascinated by her seeming transcendence of most expectations of her within her time (Adimidou, 1998), I sought to find these transgressive tendencies in lyric and draw them outward given my historical knowledge of rembetika. What became the most frustrating and simultaneously inspiring facet of rembetika, which I clearly revere in the chapter, is its resistance to decisive attitudes and to cliché. I came into the project believing I could find a sort of alternative theology in rembetika, one with its own dogmas and conclusions, and instead found just the opposite in much of its repertoire. There is a commitment dynamism within rembetika, which perhaps stems from an overarching regard for the sentimental, and a willingness to follow its twists and turns. I also came into the project expecting to encounter the oppression of women in all corners, and found instead in rembetika an often radical potential for liberation from societal constraints, for men and women alike.

The second chapter, on fado, was born mostly out of grappling with a lack of certain analyzable narrative elements in many of the fado songs I most love. There seemed a point at which the music stopped being focused on the experience of urban populations, and rather almost became a type of philosophy in its patterns of conclusion. Of course, I desired to draw clean lines within, and make hard and fast conclusions on, this transition, only to find that my tools as a historian and knowledge of fado repertoire, not to mention my time constraints, were no match for the complexity and nuance of its history. As in the first chapter, I worked in vain to

construct a decisive sort of theology of fado, tracking its reasoning by cherry-picking lyrics from songs across time, but eventually found this a futile effort. Again, my idealized vision of discovering a dogmatized vision of cultural life vis-à-vis this music runs deeply counter to the conclusions I come to in this project. As with rembetika, studying fado led me to question altogether the productivity of trying to find forms of logic and dogma within musical tradition. I was surprised to find solace in Susan Sontag's suggestion of the Camp sensibility, in which the stylization of content is seen as a legitimate process and phenomenon (Sontag 1964). I began to see fado not as simply a genre to be reduced to a handful of lyrical tendencies and types of logic, and instead focused on ways in which one can partake in and, perhaps more importantly, *enjoy* fado. I could thus factor this into my analysis without necessitating focus solely on the lack of certain narrative elements. The reasoning of fado as a genre became less important than the small complexities and paradoxes of each song.

My method of discovering songs was far from systematic. Primarily, it entailed following leads of songs referenced in scholarship, and listening through sections of discographies, particularly those of Amália Rodrigues and Sotiria Bellou. For the rembetika chapter, I did do a somewhat systematic search of the internet song bank "stoixoi.info," in order to find songs written by women. I also scanned the lyrics of songs of prominent composers whose lyrics referenced women in any way—this entailed an exploration of the various female names designating specific characters, including monikers like "boemissa" (bohemian woman), "magissa" (witch), "rembetissa" (female rembetika musician), etc. For the fado chapter, I spent time with many of Amália's own compositions, as well as some of the most canonical fado repertoire.

My intent in this research is to use individual songs as pathways into analyzing the broader traditions. There is admitted limitation of my study—I am not trying to make sweeping statements about the larger body of songs in each tradition. Rather, I am supposing that qualitative research can provide a representative perspective of a musical tradition. This is as opposed to a more quantitative analysis of all the types of songs, which, given my tools and time constraints, I found to be a process that would entail slighting the nuance of each song. So, rather, I selected a few examples which I feel are somewhat representative, and which complicate notions of the “types” of songs that one could vaguely describe to exist with each tradition.

In both chapters, I was surprised to find how the lived nature of these traditions more or less dictated my attempts to wear the hats of a musicologist and literary analyst. The more I read, the messier things became, and the more willing I felt to admit my analyses as speculation with integrity. I could do this knowing that, despite my position completely out of the time and cultural space of each tradition, I am still able to deeply relate to the narrative and sentimental aspects of the songs. Though my position as an outsider is clear on some level, but my commitment to “enter” these two musical traditions via the learning about their respective languages and cultures works to bridge the gap. My experience as a musician and performer also has some bearing on my view point. There is a sense in which this study testifies to the ability music has to travel and communicate between cultures and time periods. Knowing my own lived and dynamic relation to these songs, I feel more certainly the music as living tradition relates to us as humans in itself a rather human way—it is dynamic and changing. It is of great value, then, to attempt to bring them to light some of these moments of relationship—between music and humanity—with more depth and clarity.

### *Anticipating Departures*

Though it may be only marginally evident through the two chapters in their separate forms, there are a variety of ways in which understanding of each musical tradition in effect revealed the other, particularly through their differences. For all the aforementioned parallels between the rembetika and fado, there are marked differences between them, which in part explain the different courses each chapter took. I believe this to be worthy of reflection, as this process involved a great deal of comparative thinking, which did not always come across in writing. Alternatively stated, part of this section will be dedicated to answering the question, “what about the study of rembetika enabled further questioning of fado?” and vice versa. I found that in the realm of perceived gender qualities, and with their respective ties to politics and nationalism, the differences between the two traditions proved mutually revealing.

To begin, their gendered qualities and associations are very different. Fado has a markedly feminine gendered quality, and tends to be most highly associated with its female vocalists as performers. Songs are largely written from female perspective, using female pronouns, as they are most often relayed by women. Vocalists almost never double as instrumentalists, so the fact that instrumental performers are almost exclusively male does not necessitate the exclusion of women. This meant that my analysis was not as much partial to the marginality of women, and rather sought to find nuance in the already prevalent femininity of fado, particularly in its integration of certain narratives and mythologies.

Rembetika, in contrast, is masculine in its gendered quality—its performance, composition, and lyrical perspective revolve primarily around men. In rembetika, it was common for one person to take on the roles of composer, instrumentalist, and vocalist, and, due to their monopoly on these first two roles, men had more versatility and flexibility as musicians and

performers in the community. Thus, the case of rembetika had more to do with unearthing female perspective, which is more marginal at face value. This unearthing entailed discovering the integral tie between women and lament, a tradition dating back to ancient times. The dissonance between rembetika as masculine and feminine thus plays a key role in the resulting analysis.

In addition, there are marked differences in observing the two traditions as victims of government censorship, and forms of national song. Both rembetika and fado are considered forms of national song (Holst-Warhaft 1998), and this project has led me to no longer take for granted the process by which this distinction is given. As I outlined in the introduction, both traditions have similar periods of government involvement and censorship, and also both experienced marked codification as an effect of various historical forces. In the case of rembetika, it was not until the post-war era, thus well after the Metaxas dictatorship, that rembetika audiences began to change (Stamatis 2008). Music that was once strictly reserved for the underground urban scene began to “elevate” itself to middle and upper class venues and audiences. It’s of note that this also brought a change in the music itself—anachronistically, much of the repertoire of this time is categorized as *archontorembetika* (high rembetika) or *laika* (postwar popular songs). Thus, much of the music that does not maintain rembetika’s authenticity as urban folk music has been anachronistically excluded from the genre.

Throughout all of this change, rembetika itself never really ceased to connote otherness—of urban poverty, of Smyrna and the East, of underground dwellers. The censorship and change in audience seemed only to re-establish that rembetika songs belong to these categories. Rembetika was only ever censored, or even banned outright by those in power. Its Greekness, then, does not emerge from a sort of top-down national acceptance. Instead, it remains something



which is used as “a pawn in Greek national identity debates throughout the 20th century” (Stamatis, 20).

In contrast, the events of government involvement and its “elevation” to richer audiences in the case of fado were more seamlessly integrated into the genre. That is, there’s no commonly-recognized distinction between the fado composed for urban populations, versus that composed for upper class audiences. Later songs like “Que Deus Me Perdoe,” or “Estranha Forma de Vida, both of which I’ll analyze in chapter two, were both written very much for the latter audience, are considered as authentic as early fado, and, further, are more widely known and associated with the genre. I will not attempt to make systems of direct cause and effect here, because there are many moving parts. However, one factor that may account for this difference is the embrace of fado by Portugal’s fascist regime, the Estado Novo. The regime made a concerted effort to assert fado as Portuguese national song. Thus, though there is certainly still debate about exactly how fado fits into Portuguese national identity, its connotation as the national song of Portugal was achieved differently.

## **CHAPTER 1: The Gender Troubles and Gender Victories of Rembetika**

The following chapter will consider various aspects of the history, lyrics, and social inner-workings of Greek rembetika music. Specifically, I emphasize the thematic surfacing of duality, and how this functions in the overall social implications of the musical tradition. Of the various dualities within rembetika, I will focus on gender, both historically and as expressed lyrically. The writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler will be used to further clarify these positions. I will argue that the duality within thematic elements in rembetika, and the use of ambiguity to highlight them, becomes a type of multiplicity. That is, an effective alternative to social order is created, while abstaining from self-posturing as overtly against social order.

### **A BRIEF TIMELINE**

In discussion of the collection of songs now known as “rembetika,” it is important not to take for granted what the word has come to signify. Colloquially, rembetika denotes the urban folk music which became popular in Greece in the early to mid-twentieth century. But this is a term applied anachronistically, solidified by the 1968 publication of Elias Petropoulos’ anthology of the rembetika tradition, “Rembetika Tragoudia.” There exists room for musical argument surrounding precisely what distinguishes “true” rembetika from its precursors, its eventual becoming the music of the middle and upper class, and its giving way to the growing popularity of *laika* music during the decades following World War II (Leontis, 151). In any case, there are, very roughly, two major stylistic periods of what we now refer to as rembetika, the understanding of which will be essential in forthcoming analysis of gender.

The first, referred to as café-aman style, Smyrna-style, Asia Minor style, or Smyrneika, is the rembetika that dominated in Athens beginning in 1873, when the first café aman appeared, until around 1934, when the music of the Piraeus Quartet of began to prevail. This first stylistic period, which I'll choose to refer to henceforth as Asia Minor style rembetika, had two major periods within itself. In its early decades, it was played inside cafés aman (colloquially referred to as *tekédes*), which were underground hangouts that doubled as venues for “Oriental” music. This functionally meant music in a type of stylized lament, performed by singers (*amanetzides*), in a style almost indistinguishable from the music of Istanbul and Izmir, and thus a continuation of the tradition of Ottoman secular music. The music of the cafés aman were in indirect competition with the music of the European-style music houses, cafés chantants, which were championed by Western-minded Greek intellectuals of the time.

The second period of Asia Minor style rembetika came with the influx of Christian refugees from Turkey following the Greco-Turkish war (1919-1920), and the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1923). The café aman scene became a space where collective lament was made possible for those newly-arrived in Athens, experiencing the loss and hardship brought on by these events. This invigoration naturally led to compositions that catered specifically to themes relating to refugee experience— nostalgia, loss, and, the most overarching, lament. In terms of women's presence in this period of rembetika, it is important to note that there were different expectations of women in Smyrna than in Athens. In comparison to Athenians, Smyrnians “were more progressive and maintained habits that were more bohemian” (Stamatis, 141). For example, it was completely normal for Smyrnian women to be in public and peruse different hangouts, while Athenian culture would not allow women to be in those types of public spaces even with their husbands. Female identity played varying roles in the songs of this

period— roles not confined to women imply as muses or heartbreakers. The *cafés aman* functioned to mix things that remained separate in formal Greek society, beginning with mixing of the East and West, and extending to gender, allowing women and men to exist in spaces together in ways they could not elsewhere (Sarbanes, 25).

By the mid-to-late 1930's, a new type of *rembetika* music began to rise in popularity, led by four *rembetes* (male *rembetika* musicians), Stratos Pagioumtzis, Markos Vamvakaris, Giorgos Batis, and Anestis Delias, who made up the Piraeus Quartet. Though two of four members were themselves refugees from Asia minor, this phase of *rembetika* distinguished itself from Asia Minor style first and foremost in that it was immediately more masculine, typically written by men and for men. This type of *rembetika* could no longer be considered a direct continuation of Ottoman secular music, instead becoming a more decisive collaboration between both mainland Greek and Ottoman musical traditions<sup>2</sup>.

Women's involvement was different than in Asia Minor style music, which is why female musicians tended to stay in the Asia Minor style scene as this latter form was developing through the 20's and 30's. Additionally, there are musical distinctions between the two types of music: Asia Minor style included an extended vocal improvisation which, in the latter period of *rembetika*, was lessened or even cut altogether, particularly when recording became prevalent (Holst, 54). These improvisations, called *taximia*, gave vocalists a chance to showcase their musicianship, so cutting them later on could be easily said to have lessened women's efficacy within the music making, as women were almost exclusively singers. Later forms of *rembetika* feature a type of *taximi*, but usually one which is shorter and typically just an iteration of the

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth emphasizing that these dates are simply to provide a rough historical outline, and not meant to be making an argument on when exactly musical changes occurred. Certainly, there were decades of collaboration between Greek and Ottoman musicians in the decades prior to the Piraeus Quartet. It is simply that the Piraeus Quartet rose to great prominence, and thus provides a good marker of change.

forthcoming melody. In most cases, the taximi is played by a bouzouki, meaning that predominantly they feature male musicians, who tend to monopolize instrumental roles.

During this second, Piraeus Quartet and post-Piraeus Quartet period of rembetika, Greek women of the rembetika circles were typically limited to being in one of two places: either they were married to *rembetes* and at home having their children, or they were working women (often prostitutes) in Athens who managed to have “a measure of independence that was unusual for Greece” (Holst, 60). This latter detail is somewhat informative in regards to the plethora of songs from this period that depict women as malicious, unfaithful, and heartless. At least in part, this was a commentary on the women able to participate in the scene, who were independent in a way that was marked as transgressive, alternatively defined in music as what “articulates the profane in the contested spaces of the modern world” (Partridge 2017, 8). There was a sense in which women’s expression through rembetika, in its strength and opinionated nature, made women’s involvement in the rembetika worthy of societal condemnation. It is important to note, however, that this was not always the case, and many songs are simply reflections of deeply personal realities of composer’s lives. For example, several compositions of Marko Vamvakaris likely were in reference to his wife of many years (Holst, 48). Whatever the specific reasons that a particular song represents a woman in a certain light—and they are likely many and overdetermined—the salient point is that in the second period of rembetika, female figures assume roles that challenged social norms in ways that call for analysis of the role that female transgression is playing in this song type. The following sections will endeavor to analyze various feminine narratives, as expressed through rembetiko song, in relation to their function socially and within the genre of rembetika.

## TRANSGRESSION AS A TOOL

The following song, “The Nun” (Καλόγρια) was written in 1937 by Vaggelis Papazoglou, and was first sung by one of the most popular café aman singers, Rita Abatzi.

### Καλόγρια—“The Nun”<sup>3</sup>

1937

*Composer and Lyricist: Vaggelis Papazoglou*

*First recorded singer: Rita Abatzi*

Βαρέθηκα τον κόσμο πια  
καλόγρια θα γίνω  
και απάνω σε ψηλό βουνό  
μονάχη μου θα μείνω

I’ve become tired of people now  
I’ll become a nun  
And high in the mountains  
In my monastery I’ll stay

Στα μαύρα το κορμάκι για πάντα θα το ντύσω  
τη φλόγα π’ έχω στην καρδιά ψεύτη ντουινιά  
ίσως και την εσθήσω

I’ll dress my sweet body in black forever  
The passions of my heart, false world,  
I’ll put them out

Καλογριά θε να γινώ  
να μπω σε μοναστήρι  
και θα αρνηθώ για πάντα πια ψεύτη ντουινιά πόρτα  
και παραθύρι

I want to become a nun  
I’ll enter the monastery  
And forever will I refuse, false world,  
Doors and windows

Θα πα να βρω ηγούμενη  
να μοιάζει σαν και μένα  
να κλαίγω εγώ για κείνηνε  
και εκείνη για τα μένα

I’ll find an abbess  
Who is like me  
So I can cry for her  
and she can cry with me

These last two verses are key—the door and window signify insecurity in regards to choice. Doors and windows both make appearances in rembetika lyrics throughout its history, standing to mark duality, thus framing the good and bad, the sacred and the profane, the transgressive and the socially acceptable. Often, and as in the case of “The Nun,” there is not much specificity as to which extreme is assigned to either side. It is not meant to pit the two sides in radical opposition—rather, to be faced with a door is to be faced with the choice of which side

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the translations of songs that appear in this research were done by me.

of the door to be on. And to stand in front of a window is to have to bear witness to potential other realities, outside of one's own—more choice.

In this song, confining oneself to the walls of a monastery and the black garments of monasticism frames radical avoidance of the external, “false” world. It suggests the avoidance of the passions of the heart, and the denial of life which necessitates all that goes on through those elusive windows and doors. Accordingly, there is a sort of dichotomy created, which certainly outlines the sacred and profane—with the sacred on the inside and the profane on the outside. Yet the division in the song breaks down exactly, as it fails to distinguish the two as completely separate from one another. This is clear in the last verse, focused importantly on lament, which also implicitly suggests that even the monastery cannot protect the singer from the suffering she is trying to escape from: *I'll find an abbess who is like me/ So I can cry for her and she can cry with me*. Here, we see the narrator of the song narrating the continuation of suffering and expressing lament, even inside the monastery walls. Likewise the abbess, supposedly the beacon of piety and religiosity within a monastery, will cry for her own sufferings alongside the narrator, presumably sufferings, which are similar. Moreover, the two will bond by sharing their pain inside the monastery of their suffering outside the monastery.

The framing of the sacred versus profane in this lament of the nun, then, seems purposely ambiguous. The narrator of the song will go into the monastery with the intent of putting out the flames of passion in her heart, knowing that they will only continue to torment her, as they have continued even in the abbess' heart. Though the monastery is connoted as a place of social isolation and repose from the world, the song suggests that the lines are not so clean between this immaculate monastery, high on a mountain, and the “false world” below. The song invokes the monastery as an ideal place, but subtly implies that it is actually not so far from the profanity

implicated by the outside world— so much so that not even the abbess can fully escape. Though the “sacred” is not always alluded to in rembetika songs through such an obvious religious reference as in the case of “The Nun,” the blurred line between the sacred and the profane pervades rembetika repertoire. The various mixtures of the two simultaneously frame and push back against cultural constructions of order and duality. This notion of framing and pushing back has analytical potential, as one scholar of popular music observes, suggesting that popular songs may be studied for their “logic of transgression and taboo.” In the following passage, he also mentions the notion of the “impure sacred,” a phrase which encapsulates the decentering of dualistic categories that “The Nun” accomplishes.

While attention to sacred forms as normative and to the profane as a threat to those forms can be helpful in the study of popular music, the analysis of its significance in terms of the “impure sacred” and the fierce logic of transgression and taboo is particularly promising (Partridge 2017, 72).

To understand the way rembetika lives and breathes, it is important to understand how transgressive topics are dealt with. There is a way in which rembetika music does not exactly invert the sacred, but rather plays with it and brings it into question. The preceding passage provides rhetoric that further describes this form of play—the “impure sacred” is itself a contradictory and provocative phrase. In the same way that “The Nun” does not allow a clean break between the sanctity of monasticism and the profanity of the world below, suggesting instead that mourning for the world below continues within the walls of the monastery, to describe the sacred as impure is to contradict what sanctity itself implies. Both encourage departure, through the song’s “fierce logic of transgression,” from a clear separation of the monastery from the world, the sacred from impure, and suggest that the one infuses the other.

The Foucauldian historical reading of sex as discourse may highlight just why this type of questioning is effective in rembetika—the musical tradition that does not become rigid itself to



the categories it is holding in question. To be more specific, Foucault's "History of Sexuality" blames the late nineteenth-century development of a discourse on sex in the West—one which entailed strict guidelines on the acceptable and the unacceptable—for the degradation of what is perhaps most fundamental to sex: desire. The discourse on sex became a way to police desire, marking its limits, and identifying transgressions, thus separating them from norms. In effect, this turned desire itself into a discourse. Perhaps with this historical viewpoint of the discourse of sex in mind, we can further appreciate the lack of hard lines drawn in rembetika. I am compelled to imagine an alternative form of rembetika, in which sacred and profane are reduced into strict and distinct categories. Accordingly, I think under these conditions, the genre would have transformed the root of rembetika music, overarching lament, into something also victim to societal policing. In effect, the music would begin to conform to its own patterns of right and wrong, removing the freedom with which it aims to express lament through the human condition.

Thankfully, in rembetika music, as in the case of "The Nun," the lack of strict categorization of the sacred and the profane allows them to instead find shared ground in the overarching theme of song and lament, which breaks out to fill every space. In other words, rembetika uses the transgressive in a way that does not allow the profane to become itself a type of theology. In the following pages, I will detail as best I can the nuance of the fine line that the tradition of rembetika walks, between sets of oppositions: the real and the fictive, the East and the West, the sacred and the profane, and the masculine and the feminine.

### **MODES OF DUALITY**

The following section will discuss the broader implications of dualism as it is outlined and abstracted, eventually to be used as a cultural and literary tool. It will clarify the mechanisms

by which notions of dualism are employed as a cultural and literary tool by drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptions of the carnivalesque. With Bakhtin's analysis in mind, it will then seek to investigate how these uses of duality take shape in the tradition of rembetika, both historically and lyrically. In the introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explores the historic function of the mediaeval carnival. What ensues is a reiteration of the philosophy of mediaeval folk humor, principles which manifested themselves in ritual spectacles, verbal and written compositions, and forms of interaction between people. Bakhtin argues that the function of the carnival was to suspend the reign of hierarchy which normally predominated all of society—“carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed” (Bakhtin, 1984 10). There is emphasis in the preceding quote on the dynamic; a championing of process and change, rather than conclusion or idealization.

Bakhtin introduces the term “carnavalesque” to identify a discursive or literary mode with a “carnival sense of the world,” a mock sanctification of order that overturns it through ambivalence. True to carnival events, which tend to upend acceptable social behavior temporarily and without obvious long-term social consequences, the carnivalesque does not bluntly oppose societal order or systems of power. Rather, order becomes immobilized in light of the embrace of dynamism. Alternatively phrased, rather than a focus on construction or deconstruction of certain ideals, the carnivalesque concerns itself with the movement and mechanism of social construction. It favors with the means by which certain ideals are constructed, rather than their ends.

Bakhtin identifies ambivalence as essential in the world of the carnival. Ambivalence is the mean by which the dissonance of duality is accepted without the threat of decision.

Alternatively stated, “the rationality of Bakhtin’s carnival is decentered; i.e., it is not oriented towards *the* definition, *the* one truth. It is a rationality of doubling” (Lachmann, 131). Thus, with societal order stripped of its power, the profane is welcomed alongside the sacred, the male alongside the female, and the king alongside the pauper. As mentioned previously, though the analysis of “The Nun” is a preliminary example of how rembetika walks the line between the sacred and profane, there exist many more binary categories within the tradition. But before once again diving into analysis of rembetika song lyrics, it is important to explore how the aforementioned dualities, between East and West, masculine and feminine, and sacred and profane, existed also in the lived, sociohistorical realm of Greece during rembetika’s birth and development.

Rembetika prevailed in Greece at a time of great sociopolitical turbulence and change. In addition to the population exchange, which jostled urban communities in Greece, and the families losing their homes in the now former Ottoman Empire, forced to migrate from Turkey to Greece, there were also enormous political adjustments to be made. The Ottoman empire had just met its end, and political change was also running ramped throughout Europe, and in the Balkan states surrounding Greece in particular as new boundaries were forged. Gender roles were also coming more into question, only augmented by the influx of cosmopolitan Smyrnians into Athens and other major urban centers. Amidst all the upheaval, Greek nationalism was reinventing itself, and doing so with its eyes focused on inclusion in an idealized West, while also wanting to develop a space for its own, Oriental or Romaic version of itself. It had to re-negotiate its position between the increasingly powerful West and the Ottoman East. In Holst’s words, “the tension between the expectations of European philhellenism and the reality of an Oriental past helped stereotype both the European and the Oriental as extreme poles of the Greek

character” (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 88). Thus, looking towards an idyllic future in the midst of various chaotic sociopolitical circumstances, there is a sense of deep insecurity in Greek society at this time, as people struggled to confront various dissonances, in particular the dichotomy of East and West.

It is to this insecurity that Nikos Kazantzakis speaks in the following passage:

What has the dually descended modern Greek taken from his father, what from his mother?... He is clever and shallow, with no metaphysical anxieties, and yet, when he begins to sing, a universal bitterness leaps up from his oriental bowels, and breaks the crust of Greek logic and, from the depths of his being, totally mysterious and dark, the Orient emerges (from Kazantzakis’ *Journey to the Morea: Travels in Greece*, Holst-Warhaft 2018, 87).

Kazantzakis speaks of Greece as if it were a man, describing him as clinging to the order ascribed by the “crust of Greek logic,” only to realize that his descent connects him with something—the Orient— which, gendered as female, presents an immediate confrontation to his masculine orderly appearance. The Oriental springs from the deepest part of him, his bowels, showing itself in the form of “universal bitterness,” and as something “totally mysterious and dark.” There is, then, a sort of real struggle in the confrontation of these two things. More than simply calling the Oriental a dark, mysterious, and bitter, thing, though, Kazantzakis is highlighting that the onset of conflict itself between this man’s Eastern mother and Western father is where things become dark and bitter. The musical tradition of rembetika likewise comes from a sort of mixed parentage, springing forth from a marriage of conflict.

This same sort of dualism presents itself in the deeper history of rembetika, which is descended not just from the mixing of café aman culture and Greek traditional music in the ports of Athens. More deeply, rembetika descends from music of lament, a genre tied deeply to women through the ritual roles that women played historically in mourning the dead and preparing them for burial. The ties between women and lament can be found even in ancient

times, wherein, among other examples, Euripides wrote of Trojan women singing *elegoi*, or “mournful songs of lament” (Nagy, 14). Greece’s more recent past also reveals a long tradition of *mirologistres*, women who sing mournful songs as a sort of funeral rite. Their songs, *mirologia*, have historically been considered a cultural necessity in the rite of death, but often avoided by Greek men. Through the Byzantine period, there was key association between lament, particularly excessive lament, the female, and with Asia Minor (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 89-90). The genre of lament’s lived feminine past creates dissonance between a rembetika culture that was often proliferated by and associated with male instrumentalists and composers.

Rembetika lyrics correspond with the history summarized here in their performance of divided subjectivities, which integrate an exaggerative and radicalized narrative force in a way that recalls Bakhtin’s “carnavalesque.” Bakhtin again becomes relevant, this time for his emphasis on the carnival as an event that is neither fully real nor fully fictitious. As an example, the proceeding lines are sections from a 1931 song, *Λιλή η Σκανταλιάρα* (Lily the Reckless), written by Panagiotis Tountas and sung by Roza Eskenazi, and stand as an example of a plethora of songs written by men describing women, often in first person, in Asia Minor style. The image presented is one of a woman, Lily, who takes on qualities completely counter to societal expectations of women at the time. As narrator of the song, she asserts this image of herself, presenting an emotionally removed, unapologetic, and, frankly, threatening take on her own social standing among men.

**Λιλή η σκανδαλιάρα— “Lily the Reckless”***Composer and Lyricist: Panagiotis Tountas**First recorded singer: Roza Eskenazi**Year: 1931*

Δε με μέλλει εμένα αν είσαι αλάνι  
 απ' τον Κοπανά  
 και τον ντούρο βρε μάγκα μη μου κάνεις  
 και με φοβερνάς  
 Γιατί είμαι εγώ η αλανιάρα  
 η Λιλή η πρώτη σκανταλιάρα

It doesn't matter to me if you're a hustler  
 from Kopana  
 Don't play the hard man with me;  
 or threaten me  
 Because I myself am a hustler  
 Lily the reckless

Και δε φοβούμαι τα μαχαίρια  
 τα νταήδικά σου τα μπεγλέρια  
 και νταμίρα όσο κι αν φουμάρεις  
 βρε αλάνι δε θα με τουμπάρεις

And I'm not afraid of knives  
 Or the worry beads you mess with to show  
 you're a tough guy, even if you smoke,  
 you hustler, you won't persuade me

Μη σε μέλλει αν είμαι απ' τον  
 Περαία ή απ' την Κοκκινιά  
 κι αν μεθάω και κάνω εγώ παρέα  
 με όλο τον ντουρνιά  
 Εγώ είμαι εκείνη η αλανιάρα  
 η Λιλή η πρώτη σκανταλιάρα

It shouldn't matter to you whether I'm from  
 Piraeus or from Kokkinia  
 Or if I get drunk and fool around  
 with the whole world  
 I'm that hustler  
 Lily the reckless

Lily asserts to us that she is unafraid of knives, well connected in the underground scene, and unwilling to be affected by the men she is addressing. While the song is certainly presenting features of femininity that transgress from what was considered conventional female behavior at the time, importantly, it does so in a way that both asserts and reflects upon its own transgressive nature. It is the self-awareness and lack of shame that seems suggestive of caricature, to the would-be delight of Bakhtin and his carnivalesque. To someone listening to this song around the time it was written, it could, on some level, be taken to describe an actual woman who lived. But the song is meaningful to its audience because it represents the type of social freedom that a person might aspire to in the rembetika world, if only for the duration of an evening, or even just this one song. To add to all the things that make Lily unconventional, she's not trying to hide her transgression. She unapologetically professes herself to be a hustler, pushing back against the

notion that this transgressive behavior is wrong. It's a certain call to radical individualism that refuses to rely on the order of any creed, and is thus rather dissociative from normative lines of right versus wrong, masculine versus feminine, holy versus unholy types of thinking.

This song represents a strange blurring of lines, not dissimilar from "The Nun." In "The Nun," the woman speaking is alluding to her transgressive behavior and suffering as leading to yet nevertheless implicated in her desire to enter a monastery. It's a sort of self-sanctioned uncertainty poised between the sacred and profane, and thus a lament for both simultaneously. It uses the performative assertion of "I'm becoming a nun!" to highlight the divide between sacred and profane, but in the end does not itself cleanly abide by the expectations of each side. The monastery is not a place where hearts suddenly become clean, but one where the abbess and nun cry together over the same flames of the heart which they meant to eradicate in entering the monastery.

"Lily the Reckless" does something similar, but on the level of behavior, particularly feminine behavior. The song is certainly doing work in calling attention to the lines between expected and transgressive female behavior. But, interestingly, it does so alongside the belittling of equivalent behavior from a man. The phrase "it shouldn't matter" is repeated throughout the song—Lily asserts that her actions shouldn't matter to this particular man, as his transgressive behavior does not matter to her. The imbalance between her easy tolerance and his anxious intolerance shows her to be the freer, more socially transgressive character. Calling attention to the equivalent male behavior and his unequal treatment of her is a jolt of realism within this song, which brings even more attention to the role that gender plays for Lily as a character. There is further departure from normative behavior that we see in Lily based on the relation she is expressing to the man she addresses.

Of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin states that, in the true medieval humor on which he bases his theory, there can be no separation between the mocker and those she is mocking. “He who is laughing also belongs to it” (Bakhtin, 12)— Lily does seem to mock the legitimacy of the man who exhibits parallel behavior to hers, but this mocking necessarily involves her own identity. Thus, if at all a social critique, “Lily the Reckless” presents a very self-involved social critique on the part of the narrator, whose own identity plays a central role in the attempt to decenter societal expectations, and potentially even allow them to be laughed at, in the way the Bakhtin outlines within the carnival.

To give a counterexample to rembetika-as-carnivalesque, the following song manifests the Eastern and the feminine, but does so in a way that abides by and reinforces lines drawn in opposition, instead of blurring them. This song is called Gülbahar, composed by Vasilis Tsitsanis in 1950, with lyrics by Eftihia Papayiannopoulou.

**Γκιούλμπαχαρ— “Gioulbahar”**

*Composer and Lyricist: Vassilis Tsitsanis*

*Year: 1950*

Κάποια βραδιά μαγική  
μέσα στο Μισίρι την είδα  
ήταν `ξωτική ομορφιά  
η Γκιουλμπαχάρ η γλυκιά

One magical night  
In Egypt I saw her  
She was an exotic beauty  
Sweet Gülbahar

Γιαραμπίμ το γιαχαμπί (Ya Rabbim, ya habi(bi))  
γιαραμπίμ το γιαχαβάχ (Ya Rabbim, ya havah)  
αχ λουλούδι μου Γκιούλμπαχαρ

*(in Turkish/Arabic)* Oh God the beloved  
Oh God of the air  
*(Back to Greek)* Ah, my flower

Αράπ χαβάς (Arap havasi)  
γιαβάς γιαβάς (Yavas yavas)  
μου το `χες πει με φιλιά  
σαν σε κρατούσα αγκαλιά

*(in Turkish)* Arabian Melody  
Little by little  
You have told me with kisses  
As if I were holding you in my arms

Simply put, “Gioulbahar” was written within a world of different circumstances than early rembetika. To begin, it is a quarter of a century removed from the population exchange, and also



in a time when rembetika was ceasing to be of the underground, and beginning to attract the attention of middle to upper class audiences. With these circumstances considered, the social function of rembetika was not exactly the same as that when “Lily the Reckless” and “The Nun” were first performed.

The song gives in to many of the stereotypes of Orientalism—it designates the things of the East resolutely exotic. The song itself, unlike traditional Asia Minor style rembetika, makes a concerted effort to sound Eastern, not in accordance with the tradition of secular Ottoman music, but in an Orientalizing style. “Arabian melody” is even asserted in the lyrics, as if to make sure the musical aspects of the song are not misconstrued as Greek. It thus invokes the duality of East versus West, only in order to distinguish that this song has decided its identity as Eastern. In relation to gender, too, it does not take the opportunity to complicate the dissonance between categories which oppose one another. Further, the song riffs of the age-old fantastical sexualization of Eastern femininity. In summary, this song unsuccessfully attempts to capture the duality of rembetika, but instead of basking in the ambiguity that gives rembetika songs their depth, this song instead codifies the categories it outlines.

### **GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN SONG**

The narratives explored in rembetika songs are part of a collective imagination that was explored through music, song, and sociability in the spaces of rembetika performance. It would be a mistake to suppose that the songs are either decisively real or fictitious—poetry and songs hover between the real and the imagined. As has been reiterated throughout this chapter, and found to be true in the lyrics of “The Nun ” and “Lily the Reckless,” in order to violate the boundaries which mark transgression, it is first necessary to vaguely outline the boundaries of

interest. Judith Butler's essay "Gender Trouble" becomes important to the discussion of how the songs position subjectivity between the real and the fictitious. In this work, Butler calls gender "a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as real" (2489). That is, our notions of gender are constructed via performative acts which are deemed "natural," but are in fact culturally acquired. With this in mind, to present female attributes which challenge our notions of gender is in effect also a challenge to cultural and societal expectations.

Songs like "Lily the Reckless" reveal such an "impersonation" in a particular way. Lily's self-aware assertion of her actions as contrary to what is expected of her suggests that actions associated with gender are not innate, but chosen and performed. Lily's calling attention to mirrored behavior in men—and the fact that his behavior does not impress her—likewise pins down the attachment of behavior to gender, for it is clear that the man and woman are judged differently in each respective case. Lily anticipates resistance to her identity, proclaiming herself as "Lily the reckless," and also seems to anticipate the normativity of male behavior along these transgressive lines, pointing out that the man's version of transgression won't persuade her (as he perhaps could persuade other women).

Instead of taking for granted the set of performative acts that would, combined with physical appearance, impose gender, the disjointedness of the two categories (sex and performative articulations of gender) separate and reveal them. Songs like this one impose the same type of disruption of the assumptions of gender that Butler suggests is achieved with drag performance. According to Butler, drag "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler 1990, 2498).

This type of gendered caricature in rembetika is not reserved just for women. The character of the “mangas” likewise takes on certain amplifications of masculinity, and clear markers of its own performativity. First some background on the word *mangas*. Simply stated, those worthy of being called a *mangas* are “tough guys with great self-respect and dignity who abide strict social codes” (Stamatis, 206). A rough translation of the word would be something like “tough guy.” However, this word pervades rembetika, and its presence extends beyond just an adjective or name to haphazardly throw at someone or use to identify oneself. Rather, it is a set of collective acts— a characterization— and one whose precise definition is always held in question within most rembetika circles. What is consistent in these definitions, though, is that the term *mangas* is separate from *rembetis*, which denotes a rembetika musician or composer. A *rembetis*, according to one source, is someone who has “gone through a lot in life, and feels deeply. One cannot appreciate rembetika if one has not suffered” (Stamatis, 209). A *mangas*, on the other hand, is “the dominant character in rembetiko lyrics, a “legendary outlaw who embodies the ideal rebetiko ‘way-of-being’ in the world... [and who is] identified with a particular behavioral system, ideology, music, dress code, along with other special attributes”” (Stamatis, 208, quoting Nearchos Georgiadis).

What is clear in the distinction between the two is that the designation of *mangas* overtly requires of someone a series of performative acts, while the status of *rembetis* can be achieved by desire alone—for example, the desire to connect with the sensitive subjects that rembetika songs dive into. It is in the returning character of the *mangas*, then, that we see masculinity also called into question in a way similar to that which songs like “Lily the Reckless” question femininity. Specifically, there is a creation of a strange type of utopia, which is somewhat self-aware in its ridiculousness, but also close enough to reality to be comprehensible.

It is on this point that Bakhtin's carnival again becomes relevant through its attention to the "utopian dimension" of carnival acts:

*The inventory of carnival acts, symbols, and signs derives its meaning not only from this parodistic and profane inversion of canonized values, but also from the utopian dimension of the myth—even though the inverted representation of official culture in unofficial culture (the translation of official to unofficial language) determines the overall mechanism of culture. (Lachmann, 125)*

"Lily the Reckless," beyond presenting a "parodistic and profane inversion of canonized values," per the passage above, also supposes quite an idyllic, utopian notion, of the world. In this world, the two genders would interact on even behavioral playing fields. Lily, albeit exaggeratedly, is asserting an alternative reality in which women would not held to a different standard than men, and do not bring disgrace upon themselves in their embodiment of hustler-like qualities. Unofficial culture—the rembetika song—through its momentary inversion of canonized values in showing how an unfettered woman behaves, shines a light on the official culture, prompting a closer look at the mechanism behind it.

Though written in 1979, well after the age of true rembetika, the song "Oi manges den yparhoun pia" ("The Real Manges<sup>4</sup> Don't Exist Anymore") is a retrospective on the *mangas* character, subtly critiquing its exaggerative aspects. That is, the supposedly extinguished race of *manges* were in fact killed off in ways that typify their character—they were run over by trains, "extinguished" by drugs.

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<sup>4</sup> *Manges* is the plural of *mangas*.

Οι μάγκες δεν υπάρχουν πια—  
“The real mangas don’t exist anymore”  
*Composer and lyricist: Nikos Papazoglou*  
*Year: 1979*

Οι μάγκες δεν υπάρχουν πια  
 τους πάτησε το τρένο,  
 με μάγκικο σαλπάρανε  
 με ναργιλέ σβησμένο.

Manges don’t exist anymore  
 They were run over by a train  
 With swagger they took off  
 Extinguished by hookah

Μεγάλωσε ο μπαγλαμάς  
 κι έγινε σαν βαπόρι,  
 παλιοί καημοί στ’ αμπάρι του  
 στο πουθενά η πλώρη.

The baglamas<sup>5</sup> grew up  
 And became like a ship  
 Old pains in its cargo  
 Its bow headed into nothingness

Perhaps the premise of the song is also admittance that there was an age of the *mangas*, so to speak, in which the strange heterotopia of rembetika culture did somehow reflect the real character of the *mangas*, in a way that is no longer possible in the modern day. Outside of the decades of real rembetika, the character of *mangas* is dead—the conditions of rembetika culture, in which the *mangas* was given life, are not met in the modern day. The characteristics of the *mangas* character do not interact with modern day reality in the same way, and without the ability to reflect and invert reality, the character cannot be resuscitated to its living form. Instead, as in “The real mangas don’t exist anymore,” the character becomes one bound to acts of reflection or nostalgia.

**CONCLUSION: Three *Boemisses*<sup>6</sup> considered**

In an attempt to weave all these threads together, three songs will be employed. By threads, I mean those of the duality presented in rembetika, of the ways in which early rembetika

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<sup>5</sup> This is a small version of the bouzouki, the main instrument in most rembetika songs.

<sup>6</sup> *Boemisses* is the plural of *boemissa*, or bohemian woman.

dealt with the gender binaries and possibilities of female transgression fundamentally differently than its post-Piraeus quartet year, and of the fact that, to a highly nuanced extent, the carnivalesque world that rembetika presents does give us unique access to real life. To this latter cause, I will employ details of the life of the late Sotiria Bellou, one of the most prominent rembetika singers from the forties and onward. All of these songs are written about another type of character presented in rembetika, the *boemissa*, or bohemian woman.

The first song, entitled “Boemissa” and written by Spyros Peristeris in 1933 and sung by Roza Eskenazi, is in clear Asia minor style, and presents a narrative very similar to “Lily the Reckless.”

### **Μποέμισσα- “Boemissa”**

*Composer and lyricist: Spyros Peristeris*

*Year: 1933*

Είμαι μια μποέμ μαγκιώρα  
που τα λέγω όλα φόρα  
και μεθώ και οργιάζω  
και λεφτά δε λογαριάζω.

I am a headstrong bohemian woman  
And I say it all the time  
I get drunk and go wild  
And I don't take money into consideration

Όπου μπαίνω τράκες κάνω,  
αχ κι όποιον βλέπω τον ξεκάνω.  
Αχ, γλέντι και μεθύσι, ούζο και χασίσι,  
έτσι θέλω στη ζωή μου  
να περνώ μποέμικα

Wherever I go, I make a big impression  
And whoever I see I devastate  
Ah, revelry and drunkenness, ouzo and hash  
This is what I want of my life  
To embrace the bohemian life

Μέρα νύχτα στις ταβέρνες,  
το πρωί μες στους τεκέδες  
την τραβώ και μαστουριάζω  
το κεφάλι μου μπαφιάζω.

All day and night in the taverns  
The morning in the tekes<sup>7</sup>  
I draw it in and get high  
My head is weary

Έτσι πρέπει να γλεντάμε  
στη ζωή να την περνάμε  
Αχ, γλέντι και μεθύσι, ούζο και χασίσι,  
έτσι θέλω στη ζωή μου  
να περνώ μποέμικα.

This is how we enjoy ourselves  
In life as we take hold of it  
Ah to party and get high; ouzo and hash  
This is what I want of my life  
To embrace the bohemian life

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<sup>7</sup> A *teke* is essentially a hash den.

Similar themes arise as previously discussed—the self-assertion and self-awareness; the reference to being indifferent to, or even denouncing altogether, the opinions of others. Next, there’s Tsistanis’ take on the character of the *boemissa*, in his 1938 composition also entitled “Boemissa.”

**Μποέμισσα—“Boemissa”**

*Composer and Lyricist: Vassilis Tsitsanis*

*Year: 1938*

Μποέμισσα ξανθιά, γαλανομάτα,  
γόησσα αφράτη, ζηλευτή,  
μ’ άναμες καημούς πολύ μεγάλους  
είναι μαρτύριο για μένα η ζωή.

Boemissa, blond, blue eyed  
Big breasted dazzler, envied  
In me, you arouse enormous longing  
Life is torture for me

Ένας μαγνήτης είναι η ματιά σου,  
ζαλίζει, ξεμυαλίζει σαν κοιτάς.  
Μα εμένα χρόνια τώρα βασανίζεις,  
με κοροϊδεύεις κι όλο λες πως μ’ αγαπάς.

It’s a magnet, your glance  
Confusing, enchanting when you’re looking  
But you torture me these days  
Mocking me and all the while claiming you love me

Μες στη καρδιά χρυσό παλάτι σ’ έχω,  
σκλάβο μ’ έκανες, τι θα γίνω;  
Μποέμισσα στο λέγω δεν αντέχω  
τα γαλανά σου μάτια πάντα λαχταρώ.

In my heart, I have you in a golden palace  
A slave you’ve made me; what will become of me?  
Boemissa I declare I can’t stand it  
I always long for your blue eyes

Similar to Gülbahar, this song is hesitant to give the woman it is describing a place outside of the male gaze. Some qualities are described, but only to serve the purpose of describing how they augment the man’s desire. This is not to say that it cannot be qualified as *rembetika*, but instead to note that this song does not make substantial commentary on the feminine outside its status as a term relative to the masculine.

The last song in conversation with the concept of *boemissa* was first recorded in the late 1950’s.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to know when it was written, and even the date of recording is nowhere to be found. However, both music and lyrics were written by Sotiria Bellou, a *rembetika* singer who

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<sup>8</sup> This is an estimate I made based on comparisons of Sotiria Bellou’s voice in various recordings that are dated, as her voice became lower and huskier in tone over time.

rose to prominence in Athens in the 1940's, and the song is entitled “An Eim'Ego Boemissa,” meaning “If I'm a Boemissa.” It seems to join an ongoing conversation on the character of the *boemissa* in rembetika in a hyper self aware, highly nuanced way.

**Αν είμ'εγώ μποέμισσα— “If I'm a boemissa”**

*Composer and lyricist: Sotiria Bellou*

*Year: ~late 1950's*

Αν είμ'εγώ μποέμισσα,  
εσένα τι σε νοιάζει,  
θα κάνω τα καπρίτσια μου  
και να μη σε πειράζει,  
θα κάνω τα καπρίτσια μου  
και να μη σε πειράζει.

If I'm a boemissa  
What does it matter to you?  
I'll do my own bidding  
And don't let that concern you  
I'll do my own bidding  
And don't let that concern you

Εγώ, ποτέ στα γλέντια μου  
αφεντικό δεν βάζω,  
πολλά, ο κόσμος, θα μου πει  
μα δεν τον λογαριάζω,  
πολλά, ο κόσμος, θα μου πει  
μα δεν τον λογαριάζω.

Me, never in my enjoying myself  
Do I allow someone to act as my boss  
Many people will advise me  
But I don't pay them any mind  
Many people will advise me  
But I don't pay them any mind

Initially, it seems more likely that Bellou is directly responding to the boemissa of Peristeris' conception, rather than that of Tsitsanis. The woman, which Bellou is defending in the first person, seems to refer back to the various features of Peristeris' boemissa, beginning with the expression of indifference to other peoples' opinions, and references to “enjoying” oneself, which could easily imply the ouzo and hash to which Peristeris refers. That said, Bellou could well be criticizing the potential implications of both of these songs in different ways. This song was, in fact, written in closer proximity to the Tsitsanis song, and Bellou and Tsitsanis were historically very involved. There is a certain responsibility that Tsitsanis attempts to impose on his boemissa— “you torture me these days,” he says. Perhaps this is the responsibility that Bellou is denying with the conception of the song itself— “if I am a boemissa, what does it matter to you?”



Details of Bellou's life will deepen the conversation still more.<sup>9</sup> Her personal life included a number of features and episodes that were markedly transgressive for a woman of her time, starting with a dramatic departure from her hometown at age seventeen. After an unsuccessful marriage, which ended with her throwing vitriol in her husband's face followed by six months in jail and the subsequent divorce, she returned briefly from Athens to her parents' home. She would go back to Athens a short time later, singing in various taverns and accompanying herself on guitar for money. Eventually discovered for her talents within the rembetika scene, Vasilis Tsitsanis, and the compositions he wrote for her, were central to her rise as a singer. What is most marked about Bellou's life, though, is her identity as an open lesbian, and her ability to somehow penetrate through the masculinity of the post-Piraeus Quartet rembetika scene. Of her most well-known interventions in the rembetika scene, she was the first woman to successfully insist on being seated on stage among the instrumentalists. She also was known for her frankness with men, particularly those who were in love with her despite her sexuality.

In many ways, Bellou's life seemed to actually embody many of the fictional characterizations made of women in the rembetika scene in the Asia Minor style period, despite her living in a highly masculinized post-Piraeus Quartet age of rembetika—one that, as this thesis suggests, very little to engage with gender in the productive way that the decades before were able to. What seems clear about her song is that its taking on this identity as the Boemissa is purposeful in the dialogue with the past it creates. Her female subject, in speaking in the first person and addressing authority in such an ambiguous way—in fact, without really outlining what the authority is at all—Bellou's song places itself closely in conversation with the gender

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<sup>9</sup> This is all paraphrased pages 87-110 of Sofia Adimidou's biography on Bellou.

bending of her composer predecessors of the Asia Minor style. There is an ambiguity in Bellou's writing as in songs like "The Nun" or "Lily the Reckless"; an unwillingness to confine oneself. In this way, too, Bellou's song rejects the confinement of the transgressive woman under Tsitsanis's song's gaze.

Perhaps it could be said that Bellou's embrace of the transgressive in her real life amidst the dominating masculinity of the scene in which she found herself was its own type of decentering of gender and societal values. It is this decentering, in addition to a willingness to dwell in the ambiguities of duality, that, as Butler claims, "suggests an openness to resignification and re-contextualization (Butler 1990, 2499). More simply put, though, it is what keeps the tradition of rembetika alive.

## **CHAPTER 2: Camp, Feminine Narratives, and Queerness in Fado**

Portuguese fado is a musical tradition said to have begun its descent as early as the 15th century. Though its precise origins continue to be highly contested, modern historians make the case that fado is rooted in African musical tradition, as well as Brazilian dance tradition. Hazy historical memory and the conflation of fado with Portuguese nationalism has led to the proliferation of a number of unique origin stories, the most dramatic of which is the claim that fado was first sung by homesick Lusitanian sailors, aboard ships and full of longing for their homes. This myth is even known to draw a parallel between the longing-filled cries of fado and the cadence of the surrounding waves (DaCosta, 4).

With certainty, an attempt to pigeonhole fado's history, one which spans centuries and continents, is a grave mistake. In terms of lyric analysis, modern day conceptions of fado tend to be limited to what Rui Vieira Nery terms "the fatalistic lamentation of predestined amorous infelicity" (Nery, 126). Modern conceptions also tend to tokenize fado, mythologizing its past and making it to stand for the national psyche of the people of an idealized Portugal. This chapter will seek to move beyond these simplifications: to describe fado as a tradition which interacted in a dynamic way with the socio-political realities of Portugal. Understanding the broad changes that fado music underwent, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, unlocks the nuance in its character, and in turn reveals a number of aspects of Portuguese history and culture. This chapter will then analyze some of fado's mythology as it is revealed in lyric, providing a meta-commentary on fado through individual songs. That is, it will use fado's own language to reveal its drive to mythologize itself. Finally, it will discuss fado's relation to the sensibility of Camp as outlined by Susan Sontag. In order to do this, I will first give an account of the history of fado which highlights some of the major modifications it underwent.

## FADO'S HISTORY

There are striking differences between the musical tradition of fado as it was observed in the mid-19th versus the mid-20th centuries. This is true both on a poetic level, and on a functional level. By this I mean that questions of what classes of people were performing and listening to fado, and where fado was being performed changed greatly in these centuries. Political change was of notable affect as well, in particular during the unstable bookends of Portugal's First Republic (1910-1926), and the rise of the Estado Novo, Antonio Salazar's fascist regime, in 1932.

In the mid-1800's, the performance of fado was designated with either the verb *dançar* [to dance] or *bater* [to beat]. In both cases, the singing of fado was accompanied by some sort of movement, be it something of a remnant of the Afro-Brazilian folk dance [dançar], or harsher, more obscene movements, such as the smacking of one's thighs [bater] (Nery, 96). Topics did not discriminate against any form of urban life—often, the songs could even be raunchy, and perhaps with a higher frequency than we can know, due to the retrospective “cleaning up” of early fado anthologies. Many subgenres of fado were performed for the purposes of humiliation, ridicule, or just generally to unsettle people (Nery, 124). Singing fado was not a professional endeavor, and thus all performers had day jobs (Nery, 95).

Before 1870, the major *fadistas* (singers of fado) were almost exclusively prostitutes (Nery, 168). Women like Maria Severa (1820-1846) or Julia Florista (1883-1925) were prominent working-class *fadistas*, all of whom happened to tragically die young. In their embodiment of premature female martyrdom, also a historically Catholic trope, the stories of these early *fadistas* participate in what becomes a variation on a theme throughout fado history.

That is, Catholicism never ceased to be a primary component of fado culture through its entire historical journey.

The late 1800's brought on what would later prove to be a steady ascent of fado's socioeconomic status. In the 1880's, fado was initiated into the world of urban elites, being sung by people who were salaried employees by day, often in taverns that were along commercial roads (Nery, 168). Throughout the years of constitutional monarchy (up until 1926), Fado made gains in participating in civic and political life. Many Fado songs were written in criticism of the government, some even advocating for socialism, and the genre also managed to stir up a great deal of discussion among intellectuals, often in the form of criticism. A great deal of early criticism tends to revolve around the theme of fado music as inferior to other forms of Portuguese music, and thus unworthy of the national significance attached to it. One of the harsher examples of this attitude, made in 1918 by Portuguese musicologist Armando Leça, claimed the following:

Fado has been presented abroad as being typical of us, in complete ignorance of our song repertoire. Thus, it is not surprising that in Europe we are seen as rakes, moaners, and misanthropes. This does nothing for our dignity (Nery, 195).

Despite widespread condemnation by social elites during this time, fado maintained relevance because of its deep roots in traditional communities (mostly urban populations). It did not need the approval of intellectuals in order to self-sustain (Nery, 196). Fado's rootedness in urban life was also responsible for what Nery terms its "political to-ing and fro-ing" in these decades. That is, the politically-charged and politically-neutral manifestations of fado could exist simultaneously without threatening fado's cultural or thematic preferences (Nery, 216). In the years that entailed WWI (entered Portugal in 1916) and the fall of two unstable governments (the

Constitutional Monarchy in 1910, and Portugal's First Republic in 1926, this would prove integral for the survival of the music tradition.

A new theme, the professionalization of fado, would pervade the years of military dictatorship, first with that which existed in 1926-1933, and then exacerbated further by the rise of the Estado Novo in 1933, this time paired with a great deal of censorship. The days of allowing politically-charged fado were over; banned by the regimes, but other themes like poverty, hunger, and personal tragedy were permitted in order to propagate the fetishizing of suffering as virtuous and unavoidable. It is in the 30's and 40's that Fado strayed most prominently from its former self. Attempts to "dignify" fado became ritualization, described by Nery in the following passage:

This heavy ritualization around a dominant stereotype, what of simply singing about anything that was dreadful in life, the growing recourse to certain recurring thematic clichés, this almost obsessive thirst for respectability and the extreme artificiality of the codes of behavior that emerged from this quickly brought about criticism from some of the intellectuals in this period (Nery, 276).

Deeper into the Estado Novo regime, the 1950's were the rediscovery of fado-as-propaganda by the Estado novo. Fado was included alongside futebol (the popular idolization of soccer culture), and Fatima (the Catholic cult-like movement surrounding the apparition of the Virgin Mary to three children in town of Fatima) as the "Three F's," all seen by the regime as distraction via national symbols and thus effective substitutes for political mobilization.

Corresponding with this latter period of fado is the inevitable discussion of the role of Amália Rodrigues, who is still seen as the dominant face of fado music and tradition. Her case will be discussed at length later, but what is important to briefly assert of her presence is her quiet backlash against the insistence on a return to fado castiço, or supposedly "traditional" fado; fado also stripped of any of its early raunchy, political, or unvirtuous qualities, which was

proliferated by the regime as well as other singers of her time (Nery, 332). Though she did sing and record many of the classic fado castiço songs, extensive collaboration with intellectuals brought fado to new poetic levels, and challenged its codification with subtlety.

The following sections will endeavor to analyze stylistic qualities of fado lyrics and culture in relation to this historical background and to gender identity. In doing so, I will seek to prove the lack of separation between content and style in fado lyric, using Susan Sontag's vision of the Camp sensibility as a means of appreciating fado. Next, I will examine the role of female narrative in certain lyrical and stylistic realities in fado, focusing on the historical emphasis on the Virgin Mary and on Severa. Last will be a discussion of the modern re-appropriation of fado through a group called "Fado Bicha," in which fado's stylistic features are repurposed to discuss social issues, specifically LGBTQ issues. In its attention to these specificities of style, there is a heightened sense of fado as a metalingual term, and each song as encapsulating various aspects of the tradition of fado.

### **FADO AS CAMP**

Note on Camp No. 56:

Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of "character." Camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying... Camp is a *tender* feeling. (Sontag, 13)

The embrace of fatalism in fado music is one of its most obvious and pervasive elements. This begins with the fact that the word fado is commonly translated to mean "fate." Additionally, the genre is deeply intertwined with the use of the word *saudade*, the Portuguese word commonly deemed as untranslatable. Roughly, it means a lost kind of longing for something one can't have. This longing could be for the past, or perhaps an imagined past. Amidst all the

possibilities of its application, the key feature of *saudade* is that the tangibility of person, place or thing that causes *saudade* is rendered unimportant. The colloquial way to say “I miss you” in Portugal in “tenho saudades tuas,” which means literally “I have your *saudades*.” To say “I miss you” in English means quite literally to perceive the lack of someone. To have longing of someone is something far less specific—it is to say that your feelings of longing are simply related to someone. It is not to say that the statement wouldn’t still be true if, say, the person is physically present. In other words, it does not contain a condition for satisfaction. British folklorist Rodney Gallop summarizes *saudade* as “...yearning: yearning for something so indefinite as to be indefinable: an unrestrained indulgence in yearning” (Elliot, 28).

All of this said, it would be far too simple to reduce the fatalism in fado up to a semantic consequence. There was, in fact, a significant portion of fado history in which the source of *saudade* was directly referred to, often in the form of specific social realities or causes, often not even relying on the word itself. As I mentioned in the historical section, through the years of censorship during the Estado Novo, fado distanced itself from its historical focus on social injustice and other tangible forms of suffering. Musicologist Rui Vieira Nery argues that this was a resolute effort on the part of the Estado Novo to lessen the ties between misery and social justice, instead framing tragedy as something imminent and unavoidable, simultaneously framing tragedy as a determinedly individual experience.

It is on this point—the historical de-politization of fado—that Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” surfaces as a potentially useful resource in unpacking this song. I then argue that Sontag’s descriptions of the “variant of sophistication” (Sontag, 1) known as Camp provide a helpful lens through which one can process the work that fado does as an art form, and its mode of relation to the human condition. I want to point out that the Camp sensibility is not wholly



dissimilar from Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, in that the two both do away with the established hierarchy of appreciation. As Bakhtin’s ideal of the carnivalesque favors means rather than ends, Camp sees stylistic aspects of art as substantial in themselves, and thus valuable and worthy of enjoyment, rather than as means to an end product. Sontag’s second note on Camp reads as follows:

To emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral in respect to content. It goes without saying that Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical. (Sontag, 2)

Fado’s history as described by Nery and Gray testifies to the “slighting of content” that Sontag points out as a feature of camp. But in order to prove the corresponding emphasis on style, and subsequently a significant element of *artifice*, it’s necessary to turn to the fado lyrics themselves. The following verses are from the song “Que Deus Me Perdoe,” translating as “May God Forgive Me.” Within the emotion expressed through this song, a number of lyrical ambiguities arise which complicate, and convolute, the “realm of emotion” in fado music.

### **Que Deus Me Perdoe**

*Composer: Frederico Valério*

*Lyricist: João da Silva Tavares*

*Year: 1967<sup>10</sup>*

Se a minha alma fechada  
Se pudesse mostrar,  
E o que eu sofro calada  
Se pudesse contar,  
Toda a gente veria  
Quanto sou desgraçada  
Quanto finjo alegria  
Quanto choro a cantar

If my hidden soul  
Were able to reveal itself  
And what I suffer in silence  
Were it to be divulged  
Everyone would see  
How disgraceful I am  
How I feign happiness  
How I cry as I sing

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the following dates presented, unless otherwise noted, are provided by the Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores, or Portuguese Author’s Society. They are dates in which the songs were declared in the SPA system, so they have limited accuracy.

Que Deus me perdoe  
 Se é crime ou pecado  
 Mas eu sou assim  
 E fugindo ao fado,  
 Fugia de mim.  
 Cantando dou brado  
 E nada me dói  
 Se é pois um pecado  
 Ter amor ao fado  
 Que Deus me perdoe.

May God forgive me  
 If it is a crime or sin  
 But I am this way  
 And running away from fado,  
 I would run from myself.  
 As I sing I cry out  
 And nothing hurts me  
 If it is then a sin  
 To love fado  
 May God forgive me

Quanto canto não penso  
 No que a vida é de má,  
 Nem sequer me pertença,  
 Nem o mal se me dá.  
 Chego a querer a verdade  
 E a sonhar - sonho imenso -  
 Que tudo é felicidade  
 E tristeza não há.

When I sing I do not ponder  
 How bad life is  
 Nor even that I belong to myself  
 Nor the bad given to me.  
 I end up wanting the truth  
 And dreaming – an immense dream-  
 That all is happiness  
 And sadness does not exist.

Contained in this song is a meta-analysis and meta-commentary of singing fado. The singer of fado here cries as she sings, but in doing so claims that “I do not ponder how bad life is.” It claims that one’s expression of suffering allows for one’s relief from suffering. It is worth noting, though that within this there is a separation established, between fado and causal suffering. Fado is not a consideration of substantiated suffering, nor even the notion of suffering itself. The singer is rendered unable to even be affected by what is being lamented—the consideration of sadness is replaced by a dream of ultimate truth and happiness. Over the course of the song, there are no events which substantiate the sufferings of the singers “hidden soul.” They are assumed; purported via the fact that a fado is being sung.

The paradox, and complexity, of this song is only revealed given a well-established detail of the fado canon: that God is the one who puts fado into the souls of people. It is well-stated in

the song “Foi Deus,” written by Alberto Janes (1950s)— “it was God/ who gave the skies their voice/ light to heaven/ the seas their blue waves/ spring to the flowers/ and this voice to me.”

Fado is thus a gift from God himself, but “Que Deus Me Perdoe” establishes that the embrace of fado warrants penance and hope of His forgiveness. What is effectively the subject of lament in “Que Deus Me Perdoe” is lament itself. The song laments (that is, sings this specific fado song for the purpose of) lamenting (asking penance for) its lament (whatever unknown thing exists in the singer’s hidden soul).

This last category of lament, which seems to be the only one potentially rooted in describable suffering, is never really addressed. It is lost in being itself subject to lament. The act of lamentation is effectively disengaged from cause. The song begins with a supposition— “*if* my hidden soul *were* able to reveal itself,” but this supposition never actualizes. The singer never reveals the sufferings of her hidden soul, instead just revealing more suffering in the mere notion of the expression of suffering. Camp seems to reveal itself here. Sontag argues that Camp concerns itself with the strongly exaggerated, and thus markedly unnatural: full of artifice. She states that camp sensibility takes things in a double sense, but not simply the straightforward “literal versus symbolic meaning.” Rather, Camp takes the difference “between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice” (Sontag, 5).

The manufacture of reasons for lamentation within “Que Deus Me Perdoe” seem to do just this—the listener has a choice whether or not to engage with the proposed, though unsubstantiated, account of suffering expressed. This choice lies separate from the fact that there is little revealed of human nature through the course of the song. The person singing relates themselves to no other agent or concept in a substantial way. God is invoked, but only to express the possibility that forgiveness is necessary. The singer wants “the truth,” but does not pry

further into what “the truth” is—the conclusion on whether or not one’s love of fado is a sin is never reached within the song. There is thus potential for artificiality—the invocation of God and asking for penance may or may not be relevant here, but is used anyway as a sort of dramatization of an already contrived lamentation.

One Portuguese philosopher points out that there is an innate human tendency to wonder whether things are really as they seem, and argues that some fado songs, in particular one whose title translates to “I know finally,” function to express continued doubt in the line between truth and coincidence. Proof of this exists in the fact that many songs turn not on the feelings of the singer, but on the lack of feelings in other people (Tamen, 1). “Que Deus Me Perdoe” certainly contains elements of these sentiments—it begins with presupposing that “if my hidden soul/ were to reveal itself/ and what I suffer in silence/ were it to be divulged/ everyone would see/ how disgraceful I am.” There is a sense in which it is assumed that others would be unable to relate to the singers suffering; that they would only see her as damned. Later, the singer sacrifices pursuit of truth for “dreaming an immense dream” in which happiness prevails and sadness does not exist. I think these points serve as further testament to the genuine interaction with human nature in this song—the relational and causal thing that it is—is thwarted in pursuit of an artifice of longing.

Another good example, which also entails an attempt at a more generic description of fado, is found in “Tudo Isto é Fado,” or “All of this is fado.”

**Tudo Isto é Fado***Composer: Aníbal Nazaré**Lyricist: Fernando de Carvalho**Year: 1957*

Perguntaste-me outro dia  
 Se eu sabia o que era o fado  
 Eu disse que não sabia  
 Tu ficaste admirado  
 Sem saber o que dizia  
 Eu menti naquela hora  
 E disse que não sabia  
 Mas vou-te dizer agora

You asked me the other day  
 If I knew what fado was  
 I told you I didn't know  
 You were astounded  
 Not knowing what to say  
 I lied, that time  
 And said I didn't know  
 But now I'll tell you

Almas vencidas  
 Noites perdidas  
 Sombras bizarras  
 Na Mouraria  
 Canta um rufia  
 Choram guitarras  
 Amor, ciúme  
 Cinzas e lume  
 Dor e pecado  
 Tudo isto existe  
 Tudo isto é triste  
 Tudo isto é fado

Defeated souls  
 Lost nights  
 Strange shadows  
 In Mouraria\*  
 A pimp sings  
 Guitars cry  
 Love and jealousy  
 Ashes and fire  
 Pain and sin  
 It all exists  
 It is all sad  
 It is all fado

This song presents a layer of artifice beginning with the line “that time I lied/ and said I didn’t know.” One is immediately in question of the singer’s credibility, or at least some level of volatility in regards to content. The listener is thus made acutely aware of the construction of this song—that what follows is description and subjective truth, not reliable fact. What follows is a list that contains, more than anything, the most generically identifiable features of fado music as a genre. “A crying guitar,” for example, is a lyrical trope across a great deal of fado repertoire; one that in itself inherently invokes the name of fado. The notion of “lost nights and graceful shadows in Mouraria” makes reference to details that are associated with fado—the fact that fado is sung in the evening or night, and in a neighborhood in Lisbon in which fado culture thrived,

respectively. There are elements with conceptual substance here, love, jealousy, pain and sin being a few, but they are not expounded upon, nor qualified as anything but “sad.” The descriptor “defeated souls” does do the work of referring to fado’s fatalism, which is certainly a concept beyond mere artifice. However, for the reasons preceding in response to “Que Deus Me Perdoe,” the nature of this fatalism makes its own connections with Camp. In summary, there is a sense in which all of these terms are expected to be self-evident in their relationship to fado. Their generic nature is heavily coded with assumptions.

Facets of fado performance are also layers of stylistic nuance atop that of the music itself—part of Amália Rodrigues’ contribution to the fado cannon is the fixed gestures and body positioning that to this day accompany fado performance. The uniform of all black clothing and placement in front of the instrumentalists are integral elements. Likewise, Nery describes the fadistas head as descending backward, eyes semi-clenched, and arms extended forward, in line with the climax of the music (Nery 2004, 91). In addition, venues where fado is played have strict codes of silence and other mandates of behavior. In an anecdote describing the transgressive act of audience member touching a fadista in song, Gray describes what is acceptable of fado listeners:

The audience might utter exclamations at key moments, sing the refrain, or show appreciation with silence or (for women) with bodily movement (a slightly dreamy swaying body or by swinging the shoulders from side to side). But it is the fadista who chooses whether to touch someone... Even in such close proximity, the fadista in performance, in relation to the listeners, is untouchable (Gray, 174).

These expectations of listeners reveal a resounding culture of fado listening which is inseparable from the genre of music. These stringent social codes could perhaps also be seen as a performative element of fado in itself—listeners are not permitted to react in whatever way they feel, but rather according to those reactions deemed appropriate within fado culture. This is to

say that the overall culture of fado music is in large part cultivated by certain stylistic preferences. The fact that these codes of performance are not dependent upon the lyrical contents of any given song, and are instead held as a general standard for the genre, indicate an artificial quality to fado performance. Sontag's essay qualifies some examples of Camp as such due to "the effortless smooth way in which tone is maintained" (Sontag, 6). Fado manages to maintain a similar "effortless" end in regards to tone, though, upon deeper analysis, this tone is dictated by the way certain behaviors are deemed as acceptable, and others transgressive. In any case, aside from events like the moment of transgression that Gray described, fado performance presents itself, and is perceived as, authentic. It is the artificial and constructed under the guise of utter authenticity that further qualifies fado as Camp.

### **FEMALE CHARACTER: HER INTENSITY AND FATALISM**

To begin, I'll reiterate the quote with which the previous section began— "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of 'character'" (Sontag, 13). Though the feminine character of fado music reveals itself largely via the prevalence of female fadistas and through lyric that assumes female perspective, given the length of fado's history and variance in songs, it would be a mistake to make any sweeping assumptions about the relationship between fatalism and femininity in fado. Nonetheless, in assuming a Camp sensibility, we are called to notice the "awkward intensities of character" that Sontag names, a call which can be easily directed towards the various intensities of character within fado which are uniquely feminine. These iterations of feminine character relate deeply to social and religious attitudes of the time, and are intimately connected to Portugal's history.

What initially struck me most about women's agency in certain fado lyrics was the reiteration of a woman's role as indeterminate in her relation to the contents of her inner lives. In some fado lyrics, it is not only that women are presented as being unable to control the fact that she embodies fado—it is also that she is left completely confused and without understanding of fado's contents. There is a noticeable lack of cognitive relationship to the song—while there is security in women's role as relayer of the sentiment of fado, there is constant reference to a lack of mastery of lyrical or ideological content. Perhaps an overall lack of substantiated reasons for lament, as outlined earlier in the paper, stands as preliminary testament to this theme within fado. Additionally, though, it is something which is directly referenced in lyric. One example lies in the aforementioned song “Foi Deus,” or “It Was God:”

### **Foi Deus**

*Composer/Lyricist: Alberto Janes*

*Year: unknown; based on Janes' life, likely in the 1950's*

Se canto, não sei o que canto	If I sing, I know not what I sing
Misto de ventura, saudade e ternura	A mix of chance, longing, fondness
e talvez amor	and perhaps love
Mas sei que cantando sinto o mesmo quando	However, I know that when singing, I feel
se tem um desgosto	the same as one who is heartbroken
E o pranto no rosto nos deixa melhor	and the weeping brow leaves us consoled

This reiterated theme of not knowing anything outside of feeling itself seems a specific tenor of fatalism—it is not simply that the narrator takes ownership of the sentiment, but emphasizes the inability to have any intellectual relationship to it. It is one thing to not be able to control one's fate or feelings in relation to fate. It is another to lack the intellectual capacity to interact with it. In trying to quantify this specific tenor of fatalism and relate it back to feminine narratives in fado, the ideals of female character, in Portuguese culture and in fado culture, respectively, are contained in the mythologies of the Virgin Mary and Maria Severa. I want to argue that this lack of cognitive capacity established in fado is enabled by the conflicting



narratives of the Virgin Mary and of Maria Severa. It is through the insecurity of this dichotomy, in addition to the fact that both mythologies were constructed and proliferated by male perspective, that female icons are not permitted to know the tenor of their relationship to fado. In addition, the conflict between these narratives enables other types of paradox to arise, such as that seen in the song “Que Deus Me Perdoe.” I will also endeavor to explore ways in which Amália Rodrigues imposes the conflict of these relationships onto her own life, through her lyric writing and through genuine life reflections.

Be reminded of the image of the ideal Virgin Mary—one who, in the Catholic tradition, immaculately conceived the son of God, giving birth to him blamelessly. She is seen as a foil to Eve, whose actions only separated humans from God in Genesis. In contrast, Mary acts as the medium through which others have contact with God, having given birth to Christ without herself committing sin. Keep in mind also that Portugal’s national psyche was deeply affected by the events that transpired at Fatima in 1917, in which 3 shepherd children were supposedly visited by apparitions of the Virgin Mary. These events rose to even greater cultural relevance after the 1930’s, upon receiving full recognition from the Catholic church (Cook, 24). Fatima as a cultural event served to further emphasize the already historically robust Marianist tendencies in Portuguese Catholicism and Portuguese literary tradition (Cook, 24). One example of lyric that directly invokes the Virgin Mary is found in the following verses selected from a song predating the Fatima event, whose title translates to “Song of the Girl Fallen from Grace:”

**Fado da Desgraçada<sup>11</sup>**

*Published in 1893, but written sometime in the 1850's (Nery, 85).*

Fui encontrar a desgraça  
Onde os mais acham prazer.  
Amor que dá vida a tantos,  
Só a mim me faz morrer.

I went and found misfortune  
Where the rest find pleasure,  
Love which gives life to so many  
Only to me brings death.

Quem tiver filhas no mundo  
Não fale das malfadadas;  
Porque as filhas da desgraça  
Também nasceram honradas.

Whoever in the world has daughters  
Speak not of the ill-fated;  
For the daughters of misfortune  
Are also born virtuous.

Das filhas da desventura  
Devemos ter compaixão:  
São mulheres como as mais  
Filhas de Eva e Adão.

For the daughters of misadventure  
We should have compassion:  
They are women like the rest,  
Daughters of Eve and Adam.

Debaixo do frio chão  
Onde o sol não tem entrada  
Abra-se uma sepultura  
Finde o fado a desgraçada.

Beneath the cold floor  
Where the sun cannot enter  
Let a grave be opened, and  
Fate (*fado*) put an end to the fallen girl

E deus, que tudo perdoa  
E a Virgem Nossa Senhora  
Hão de ouvir a alma que implora  
Salvação à pecadora.

And God, who pardons all,  
And the virgin our lady,  
Must hearken to the soul that begs  
Salvation for the sinner

In this song, as the story of the woman who “found misfortune” is told, the reasons for her status as “fallen” are explicitly made, as they are framed alongside explicit references to the ideals of Christian virtue. It is notable that there is more social content and less artifice within this song— when historical implications are considered, particularly the key link between the “fallen girl” and prostitution, there is even more narrative substance revealed. Says Nery of this song,

This overall vision of the phenomenon of prostitution, seen from within the social context from which it emerged, and denoting at the same time a position of both social

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<sup>11</sup> For this song I use Nery's translation, and not my own.

condemnation and humanitarian compassion, also covers, by implication, the story of Severa, (Nery, 86)

Keeping this song and Nery's comment in mind, I'll attempt to relay some of the mythology surrounding Severa. As I mentioned in the historical section, Severa was a prostitute in Lisbon, allegedly having lived from 1820-1846. The true details of her life are historically hazy, and thus the mythology surrounding her life has been largely abstracted from bits of song and other art forms published about her. Her early death is depicted as a testament to the tragedy of martyrdom, and Nery argues that "the popular imagination of this model easily becomes crossed with the constant evocation of images of premature female martyrdom, with which traditional catholic hagiography is so replete (Nery, 87). Additionally, he points out that this comes at a time when Europe is in the throes of Romanticism, when the notion of "lost woman" and their premature death "expiates a destiny that is at the same time one of transgression and one of tragedy" (Nery, 86).

Given these historic postures in regards to the details we know of Severa's life, it is no surprise that the mythology of Severa gained particular traction in popular culture after the publication of the 1901 novel "A Severa," by Júlio Dantas. The novel, in addition playing a role in elevating urban song in the national psyche as it grew in popularity, via writers in the 1930's through the 1970's, gave a specific dramatization of Severa's life and corresponding literary implications of her character (Colvin, 51). Of these literary implications, the most important for this discussion is the equation of Severa with both fado and Mouraria (the supposed birthplace of fado). In Dantas's novel, Severa herself literally attests, "I am the Mouraria... I am the Fado!" (Colvin, 53). In addition, Dantas insists on Severa as "the incarnation of Portugal, an avatar who shares the country's fate to die in the Fado's arms" (Colvin, 57).

The narratives of Mary and Severa thus converge and oppose one another simultaneously. On one level, they are both subject to resolute idealization, Mary in her immaculate status and in giving birth to God, and Severa in her sudden and decisive redemption via her perceived death as a martyr. In opposition, while Mary is merely a mediator between God and the world, rendered somewhat passive in her role as an agent, Dantas's novel paints Severa as not just a medium of fado, but as one who embodies fado entirely. If fado is God revealing his will, then we have two conflicting narratives of the ideal woman in fado. A female fadista must simultaneously be the passive medium through which fado is transmitted, and likewise her very being must indicate fado in all ways. Thus, in order to meet both standards, she is left with the necessity of passivity to more than just the content of fado, but to herself entirely. She is "the fallen girl."

"Song of the Girl Fallen from Grace," as an early fado song, which was written well before the novel by Dantas' novel (1901), through which the mythology of Severa really took flight. It thus makes sense that the two narratives are framed in opposition—fado puts an end to the fallen woman, who can only hope in the salvation provided by the image of the Virgin Mary. Many later songs do not contain this opposition, and instead conflate the expectations of the two. That is, woman is painted both as one who gives birth to fado (in parallel with the Virgin Mother), and one who effectively *is* fado (Severa). Between these two identities, female narrative in fado is projected both to conceive the "sin" of fado immaculately, but is simultaneously seen as wholly inseparable from it—I am fado, and I carry fado. That is, I sing fado (it is siphoned through my body), but additionally my life embodies fado literally. Given this process, the fadista can maintain both identities—as having conceived of fado immaculately, and embodying fado fully—by claiming a lack of cognitive connection to herself and to fado.

In considering these ideas, let us turn to a song for which Amália wrote the lyrics. Its title translates into “a strange form of life.”

**Estranha Forma de Vida**

*Composer: Alfredo Marceneiro*

*Lyricist: Amália Rodrigues*

*Year: 1967*

Foi por vontade de Deus  
Que eu vivo nesta ansiedade  
Que todos os ais são meus  
Que é toda minha a saudade  
Foi por vontade de Deus

It was by God's will  
That I live in this anxiety  
That all woes are mine  
And all of my longing  
It was by the will of God

Que estranha forma de vida  
Tem este meu coração  
Vive de vida perdida  
Quem lhe daria o condão  
Que estranha forma de vida

What a strange way of life  
My heart has  
It lives a lost life  
Who would give it the mental power  
What a strange way of life

Coração independente  
Coração que não comando  
Vive perdido entre a gente  
Teimosamente sangrando  
Coração independente

Independent heart  
Heart that I don't command  
It lives lost among us  
Stubbornly bleeding  
Independent heart

Eu não te acompanho mais  
Pára, deixa de bater  
Se não sabes onde vais  
Porque teimas em correr  
Eu não te acompanho mais

I won't accompany you anymore  
Stop, stop beating  
If you don't know where you are going  
Because you insist on running  
I'll no longer accompany you

Se não sabes onde vais  
Porque teimas em correr  
Eu não te acompanho mais

If you don't know where you are going  
Because you insist on running  
I'll no longer accompany you

What seems essential in relating this song back to the two narratives in discussion is the choice to claim, “what a strange way of life my heart has,” rather than “what a strange way of life I have.” This in itself is a way of physically deferring responsibility for the sentiment which she is referencing. The heart is on one end just an organ, one which we carry as humans, and yet

also something we are wholly dependent on for our survival. On a literary level, the heart is often invoked as signifying our entire inner life. The heart, then, is the perfect way to frame the conflicting notions of feminine character in fado. In this song, the heart is what was given mental power, makes decisions, and experiences fado. The *fadista* carries the heart, and had no choice in doing so, as the Virgin Mary carried Christ, and likewise her entire being is dependent on this heart—it is her entire life, as Severa *lives fado; is fado*. Amália writes “I’ll no longer accompany you/ stop beating,” in a way that must be ironic, in that her heart ceasing to beat would mean certain death. It is in this line that the dependence on the heart, and thus the heart as symbolic of life itself, is revealed.

This discussion also relates back to lines in “Que Deus Me Perdoe”— “may God forgive me/ if it is a crime or sin/ but I am this way/ and running from fado would be running from myself/ as sing I cry out/ and nothing hurts me,” and later, “when I sing I do not ponder/ how bad life is/ or even that I belong to myself.” Though the *fadista* is “this way,” which seems to mean that her life is fado, singing fado—acting as a siphon for fado—does not enable her to connect with fado, or herself, on the level of understanding. This is paradoxical. It makes more sense in its paradox, though, given that it arises from two feminine narratives that are constituted by elements of paradox. A Virgin Birth in the case of Mary, and a woman whose life is able to stand for all sentiment, a city, and for the masses in the case of Severa.

Whether or not a directly causal relationship between these narratives and feminine fatalism throughout fado can be proved, it stands that narrative can do us a great deal of help in unpacking fado lyrics, many of which lack narrative elements. I hope that this section clarified certain paradoxes which arise in suggesting potential places from which they take root historically and culturally.

## **FADO BICHA AND FADO'S RE-APPROPRIATION**

In this last section, I want to discuss a musical group called “Fado Bicha,” *bicha* being a descriptor that can mean both a queer and “faggot.” Re-writing fado lyrics and corresponding performance turns the idealized themes of fado into sexually transgressive narrative. I will frame this specific fado work and its significance as a Camp sensibility. Fado Bicha is a group comprised of a guitarist João Caçador and singer Tiago Lila, who uses the stage name of Lila Fadista. In February of 2019, the group gained traction upon the publication of a Youtube video that remade the classic fado song “Lisboa, Não Sejas Francesa” (Lisbon, Don’t be French), which calls Portugal’s treasured city to return to its identity of essential and idealized Portuguese-ness. Their version is “Lisboa, Não Sejas Racista” (Lisbon, Don’t be racist), and the rewritten lyrics choose instead to recapitulate the colonialist misdemeanors that Portugal committed in Brazil and Africa, and scolds the city for various examples of unadmitted racism. “Lisbon, cleaned by women who you do not even give the right to dream,” says one line. One line even makes reference to the present-day Portuguese politician Joacine Katar Moreira, saying, “Lisbon, Joacine tells you: racism persists because it’s structural.”

Other songs include “Lila Fadista,” which rewrites the narrative of Júlia Florista, a famous early fadista who, like Severa, is often mythologized for her early death. This song paints Lila Fadista as a queer activist, one who faces discrimination and difficulty given her identity on the streets of Lisbon. The song echoes that her story and memory are beautiful and kept by the city, but does not shy away from explicitly stating her struggle. Another song, “O Namorico do André” (André’s Crush) tells the love story between two males, with a very sexually explicit music video attached.

In addition to hearkening back to fado's early days, in which it often contained elements of social justice and raunchiness, the songs of Fado Bicha are a type of re-appropriation of stylistic elements of fado. The fatalistic and idealist ambiguities in fado lyrics are replaced with clear cut narrative elements. Not only is the past not idealized, it is also chastised in Fado Bicha songs. The multi-layered transgression from the fado canon draws attention to the canon itself, acting as the type of decentering that Judith Butler claims, "suggests an openness to resignification and re-contextualization" (2499). Dressing in drag, usually including bright colors and wigs, Tiago Lila transgresses also against the mold of fadistas dressed in all black. Instead of the subtle tilt of the head and arm gestures that fado normally confines itself to, Lila often walks around and incorporates suggestive movements or sounds in performance.

Fado Bicha, though clearly transgressing from the typical model of fado, possesses its own type of Camp which Sontag discusses towards the end of her essay—one which is self-aware. "Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness," claims Sontag (Sontag, 12). Fado Bicha appropriates the musical aesthetics of fado, preserving most of its musical quality precisely while intentionally inverting other essential aspects of the genre. In addition to educating listeners on the social justice issues and narratives-at-large, this act effectively decenters our notions of morality, and succeeds in neutralizing moral indignation, as Sontag states of the Camp sensibility.

I want to end this by emphasizing that, above all, Camp sensibility is meant to be a mode of enjoyment. This discussion of fado is not meant to criticize or demean a genre to which many people, often including me, find much sentimental value, often in a very real way. Rather, I have tried to point out that there is something deeper going on in fado than simply the evocation of a sense of Portugueseness or *saudade*. There are significant narratives and historical effects at play



in the music, and it is worthwhile to question the various ways we can interact with the genre of fado as listeners.

## **CONCLUSION: Choices of Embodiment**

I was struck throughout my research process by the integration of subjective experience in ethnomusicology scholarship, particularly in the writings of Yona Stamatīs, Gail Holst-Warhaft, and Lila Ellen Gray (Stamatīs 2008, Holst-Warhaft 2006 and Gray 2018). Their study of the history of musical traditions had an admitted and deep correspondence with their subject position amidst the communities and specific peoples they were learning in the modern day. As scholars Stamatīs, Holst, and Gray all chose to focus on the intricacies of their personal experiences in of modern performance, and, correspondingly, the intimate relationships they developed with others seeking to embody or in any way authentically continue the musical tradition. This approach corresponds with my discussion in the introduction of the historical conversation and polyphony of perspectives that exist in any given musical tradition. I reasoned that the seemingly singular perspective of one song is something which in effect leads to many voices and perspectives. With the scholarly choices of Stamatīs, Holst-Warhaft, and Gray as testament, I think other types of lived singular perspectives are likewise pathways into the larger conversation, beginning with the ethnomusicologist's own. Their own experience adds a layer to the overall reflection on the music at different historical moments and geographical sites.

These notions are alternatively iterated by ethnomusicologist Paddy League, who, summarizing ethnographer Michelle Kisliuk's framework for integrating the subjective, presents the work of the ethnographer as a three-tiered conversation.

The first tier of this conversation happens between the researcher and the people with whom they interact with in the field; the second between the researcher and the material studied (in this case, music); and the third occurs through the finished ethnography itself, a representation of the first two tiers within a meta-conversation between the ethnographer, all readers, and the material and ideas explored within the ethnography. (League, 372)

At every tier within this model, there is a regard for the relationship of the researcher to some aspect of the musical tradition—with people within the field, with the music itself, and with the meta-conversation connecting these things, respectively. League points out that this three-tiered approach also recalls the performative context of the music itself, which is what a majority of this thesis considers. For rembetika and fado, this means the performers “engage in a performative dialogue” (first tier) through their personal interpretation of music and lyric itself (second tier) while maintaining awareness of the community acting as the audience, receiving their performance (third tier)” (League, 372).

The importance of this third tier, the meta-conversation between performer, content performed, and those receiving the performance, is emphasized in Holst’s detailing of rembetika as performed in upscale bouzouki clubs, as the music moved out of its traditional urban context and into the realm of the upper class and *laika* music.

If you were looking for a kitsch night out and had plenty of cash with you, you may get some enjoyment from a night at the bouzoukis. You could pop balloons, smash plates brought in special piles to the table for the purpose and costing much more than they were worth, drink any imported liquor you liked... Worse still, you could watch a great rembetika singer like Sotiria Bellou sitting tiredly in the midst of the circus, beefing out the songs which had made her famous. (Holst-Warhaft, 2006)

I want to push back against the sort of exclusivity that pervades here—there is a sense in which Holst suggests that rembetika ceases to be rembetika in these contexts. Her verb choice reveals that the inferiority of the meta-conversation between Bellou, the audience, and the content taking place the bouzoukis. Bellou no longer sings the music, she tiredly sits “beefing out” the songs. I think taking note of this change in Bellou’s demeanor and choice of interpretation of these songs speaks precisely to how performers and the content they perform are deeply affected by the audience. Rembetika finds its authentic voice when this meta-conversation between performer, content, and audience refuses to give abide by contrived expectations, but rather when each

performance achieves a unique call and response between the three. The call and response here seems to have arisen naturally based on the nature of having a night out at the bouzoukis. Bellou seems to be responding appropriately to the conversation her audience is provoking—she is giving the sort of emotionally removed, tasteless performance to match those consuming her performance. It is with this model in mind that I emphasize that rembetika can effectively *live* in any context, provided that this meta-conversation arises organically. The music is embodied when its performers and audience interact with it in an active, interconnected way.

Knowing that there is a deep sense of interconnectedness between the various tiers in ethnographic conversation, I feel I'd be remiss if I did not more thoroughly expound upon my own lived experience as someone who has acted as a performer and audience member, effectively becoming a member of the transnational community of both musical traditions. Slowly, my love of these traditions grew beyond meeting those who performed or somehow embodied the music (first tier) and encountering the music itself (second tier), to engaging in the conversation of performance myself, with its subsequent questions of identity and audience (third tier). My own travails in performing and integrating this music into my life, and the languages in which I immersed myself, speak to the process of authentically continuing the conversation of these musical traditions in the modern day. In a sense, my travelling towards and pursuit of this music mirrors the way that has travelled, and continues to travel, transnationally.

I first performed rembetika at a youth hostel in Thessaloniki. This was my first experience with the “first tier” of ethnography—interaction with people “in the field.” I had befriended an Italian expat named Simone, one who shocked Greeks with his bouzouki playing abilities. He introduced me to Yiorgos, also a bouzouki player, from Thessaloniki, who insisted

we join his performance. I knew only two songs, but, perhaps because those in the audience would mostly be foreigners who knew little about Greek music, Yiorgos and the other Greek musicians thought my voice and subpar *baglama* playing worthy of inclusion. I sang the songs I knew alongside the bouzouki and guitar players, quietly faking my way on my instrument through the rest of the set, full of songs I'd never heard. The performance was well received by the wide-eyed German and English travelers, and one could hear the quiet voices of the Greek employees of the hostel, who knew most songs by heart. I was now a *rembetissa*, insisted Yiorgos and Simone. «Λιλή η σκανδαλιάρα μας,» they joked between themselves— “our Lily the reckless.” This comment left me confused, which made them laugh and insist I go home and listen to the song.

When I returned to the US some months later, a chance encounter at a local Greek restaurant again led to another serendipitous performance opportunity. Having revealed my identity as Greek-American by correctly pronouncing the word “spanakopita” (spinach pie) as I ordered, somehow I began conversing with the owner, Stavros, about rembetika. In learning I could sing, he insisted I come rehearse with him and his band that Saturday, and perform with them on Sunday. By this time, I knew four or five songs, and somehow braved my way through the performance alongside the other singers. To be clear, this was all without knowing whether or not I actually had any musical ability. The performance went fine, but the real fruit of this encounter was getting to join Stavros' band.

Over the next months, I found unlikely friendships unfold with Stavros and with the other members of the band, Vaggelis and Phillipas. All three are each at more than twenty years my senior, from Greece, and had known of this music most of their lives. Their radical willingness to include me, in the beginning, felt almost incomprehensible. To be frank, I felt my presence in the

group somehow lessened the authenticity of the performances. How could someone like me, a 22-year-old Greek-American who has to use a dictionary to understand most lyrics, sing alongside Phillipas, a Greek in his 60's who could not help but cry through his performance of certain rembetika songs? Quoting Pavlos Vassiliou, Stamatis makes reference to the deep emotional connection to rembetika as integral to its best instances of performance. Of the great Sotiria Bellou, he said "Bellou couldn't sing without feeling what she was singing. Without crying what she was singing. She sang about certain topics that spoke to her: poverty, society, mothers etc." (Stamatis, 322).

In grappling with the emotional gravity that rembetika songs hold for all of my bandmates, particularly for Phillipas, I've been pushed to reexamine the ways in which my identity interacts with my performance of this music. In particular, the 1950 song by Vassilis Tsitsanis, "San Apokliros Gyrizo" (Like an outcast, I wander), is one that always managed to evoke great emotion from all of my bandmates, particularly Phillipas. The lyrics claim, "like an outcast I wander/ in this hostile foreign land/ nomadic, miserable/ far from my mother's embrace." My bandmates, all of whom have unique immigration circumstances from Greece to the United States, are of course going to interact with this song differently than me, an American, as we sing it on American soil. However, in feeling wary of gatekeeping the performance or connection to any type of music, I no longer believe that our differences in connection necessitate the creation of a hierarchy. I've come to think every voice can seek to place itself amidst the myriad of voices who have in some way taken part in the tradition of rembetika, including my own.

The opinion of my Greek grandparents and great-grandparents has always been that rembetika is the music of the underground; of drugs and prostitutes, so I was never exposed to

rembetika as the music of our heritage. Thus, my connection with this music is not as much a product of my inheritance from my family, as other points of connection with Greece are. Rather, my journey with rembetika has been a sort of uncovering of aspects of Greece which, though inextricably linked to Greece's history and thus indirectly my family, have remained unknown to me. As a testament to this, I have even run into problems with my grandmother concerning my involvement with rembetika, who is strongly opposed to the notion of my singing in any type of music in a bar or restaurant. To her, women singing in public is inseparable from indecency, likely because while she was growing up in Nazi-occupied Greece, a time when Sotiria Bellou was a prevalent singer, in fact, this association was common. It is perhaps for this reason that I take the otherness of rembetika so seriously—I have felt its potency even in my own life, three generations and thousands of miles removed.

A song like “San Apokliros Gyrizo” has various points of access—it is not just making reference to feeling far from one's home. Perhaps the song could even be said to vaguely allude to the transnational and diasporic aspects of the tradition, alongside more explicit titles like, “Mother, don't send me to America” (Μάνα, μην μου στέλνεις στην Αμερική), or “The heist of the American” (Το παιχνίδι του Αμερικάνου). The first recordings of rembetika in fact took place in the United States, setting precedent for the conversation of the tradition to occur not solely on Greek soil. With this in mind, my identity as a member of the Greek diasporic community makes attempts at authentically embodying this music feel less contrived. Certainly, though, performances feel very much co-dependent on my bandmates, whose familiarity with the music's history and nuance (for example, their highly specific opinions on which contexts are appropriate for this music, which types of audiences they're willing to seek out, etc.) further justify and authenticate my ties to the tradition as a performer.

When personally performing “San Apokliros Gyrizo,” I try to follow as exactly as I can the stylistic choices made by Sotiria Bellou in the recording, mirroring her deliberate and often subtle vocal embellishments. I find this attempt to imitate Bellou as a sort of emotional journey in itself—for me, imagining her life brings to mind the unique otherness of womanhood, and the uniqueness of one’s position as a female musician and performer. It also is an act that uniquely recalls the amount of time and study that I have dedicated to rembetika—I am made to appreciate that my connection with this music is not simply a consequence of my Greek heritage or from aesthetic connection with the music. Those things are involved, certainly, but my relationship with and ability to perform this music also rests on a scholastic commitment to its history—Bellou’s music means a great deal more to me having studied the details of her life. Her identity, and the strength with which she carved a space for herself in the rembetika community, are great inspiration to and justification for my own subject position in carrying on the tradition of rembetika.

My relationship to performing fado is different. I have no ties to the Portuguese diasporic community, nor any types of fado performance, here in the United States, but I have spent time living immersing myself with this tradition in Lisbon. There were a few instances during my time in Lisbon where a fado singing opportunities arose—some venues have a kind of open stage, where any person can get up and perform whichever fado song they choose, granted that the instrumentalists have it in their repertoire. In addition to feeling I can’t accurately embody the correct vocal technique of fado (though, this proved to be no obstacle for many of the people who performed), there is a certain individual responsibility one must take in these types of performance settings, which I could never bring myself to seize. Alternatively stated, these contexts, unlike those in which I was singing rembetika alongside other musicians, require that



the singular singer shoulder most of the gravity of the song. The singer stands in the middle of the crowd while performing, while the instrumentalists are off to the side. Albeit my ability to understand and pronounce the lyric of certain songs, I simply could not singularly seek to embody the tradition in an authentic way.

Upon returning to the United States, the only fado song I was willing to perform for an audience is Amália's "Estranha Forma de Vida." I actually recorded my performance of this song and released it on an album alongside songs I'd written myself in April of 2019. I modeled my interpretation after that of Brazilian artist Caetano Veloso, a prominent figure in Brazilian popular music. Though I couldn't bring myself to shoulder the responsibility of embodying the tradition of fado in its traditional form, which entails highly specified instrumental and vocal ornamentation, Veloso's version was more in reach, both musically and intellectually. His voice ornamentation and guitar parts seemed crafted not as nods to the longstanding musical tradition of fado, but rather as humble accompaniments to the basic melody and lyricism underlying the song's sentiment. I could justify the embodiment of Veloso's version perhaps because he had already done the work of removing and reinterpreting the tradition—it was as if he had begun a new conversation, one which spurred off that of the longstanding fado tradition, to which I could now feel secure in contributing.

In analyzing these choices, I think I see value in refusing to embody tradition in certain ways, if wariness proves overwhelming. In these cases, finding alternative pathways which best honor a given tradition are possible. At the same time, the example of Fado Bicha testifies to the fact that deliberate, self-aware transgression from the canon is productive, given that it likewise adheres to the tradition in deliberate ways. In fact, as I argued previously, this type of embodiment can draw out and highlight particular qualities of the tradition, which are taken for

granted in more normative manifestations of the music. In careful consideration of my own subject position in relation to others, I hope my attempts to pay respect to these traditions, both in research and performance, are found to be self-aware and open to collaboration.

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*First recorded singer: Rita Abatzi*

*Year: 1937*

#### **Λιλή η σκανδαλιάρα— “Lily the Reckless”\***

*Composer and Lyricist: Panagiotis Tountas*

*First recorded singer: Roza Eskenazi*

*Year: 1931*

#### **Γκιούμπαχαρ— “Gioulbahar”\***

*Composer and Lyricist: Vassilis Tsitsanis*

*Year: 1950*

#### **Οι μάγκες δεν υπάρχουν πια— “The real manges don’t exist anymore”**

*Composer and lyricist: Nikos Papazoglou*

*Year: 1979*

#### **Μποέμισσα- “Boemissa”**

*Composer and lyricist: Spyros Peristeris*

*Year: 1933*

#### **Μποέμισσα— “Boemissa”**

*Composer and Lyricist: Vassilis Tsitsanis*

*Year: 1938*

#### **Αν είμ’εγώ μποέμισσα— “If I’m a boemissa”**

*Composer and lyricist: Sotiria Bellou*

*Year: ~late 1950’s*

#### **Que Deus Me Perdoe**

*Composer: Frederico Valério*

*Lyricist: João da Silva Tavares*

*Year: 1967*

#### **Tudo Isto é Fado**

*Composer: Aníbal Nazaré*

*Lyricist: Fernando de Carvalho*

*Year: 1957*

#### **Foi Deus**

*Composer/Lyricist: Alberto Janes*

*Year: unknown; based on Janes’ life, likely in the 1950’s*

#### **Fado da Desgraçada**

*Published in 1893, but written sometime in the 1850’s (Nery, 85).*

#### **Estranha Forma de Vida**

*Composer: Alfredo Marceneiro*

*Lyricist: Amália Rodrigues*

*Year: 1967*

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