

# SINGING THE PAST

## MUSIC AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

2nd International Symposium of the POLIMUS Program.  
Part of the Cluster of Excellence (Labex)  
“Pasts in the Present: history, heritage, memory”

Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas  
University of Lisbon  
Edifício ID. Sala multiusos 2  
27-28 April 2017



# **Singing the Past**

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**Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas**  
**Universidade Nova de Lisboa**  
**Ave. de Berna 26 C. Lisboa**  
**27-28 April 2017**

2nd International Symposium of the POLIMUS Program  
(Christine Guillebaud dir.)  
Part of the Cluster of Excellence (Labex) “Pasts in the  
Present: history, heritage, memory” supported by the  
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LABX-0026-01]

### **SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZERS:**

- Christine Guillebaud (CNRS, Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre)
- Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco (Instituto de Etnomusicologia, Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança, INET-md, Universidade Nova de Lisboa)
- Julien Jugand (Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre)

### **INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS:**

Cluster of Excellence (Labex) “Pasts in the Present:  
history, heritage, Memory”

Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM  
UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre

Instituto de Etnomusicologia, Centro de Estudos em  
Música e Dança, INET-md,

# Presentation

This international conference intends to investigate how songs can constitute means to narrate historical events as well as social and political figures. These narrative songs raise the issue of the relation between the fabric of songs and political authority which has been dealt with in several ethnomusicological publications. They may be official when commissioned or appropriated by a political authority and, thus, be shaped as patriotic songs or praises of a political leader or of a military or political victory. As such, they constitute obvious tools for the building of a nationalist discourse (Mlama 2008). In this context, censorship, content control and, ultimately, rewriting may take place, transforming existing songs in order to fit their new purpose (Trebinjac 2000).

This symposium intends to explore “unofficial” narratives that are clearly distinct from or opposing to political authority. This will allow us to investigate various relations to the past and how those may be performed, often through personal narratives constructing alternative histories. These narratives may often be coined as “popular”. “Popular songs” dealing with history and historical figures relate to many socio-cultural configurations. They range from the caricatures of “great men”, and its inherent ambivalence between mockery and reverence (Bonhomme & Jaoul 2010), to the re-appropriation of a political figure or a political event by one specific group or organisation following a more or less coherent agenda. Songs may directly deal with the past, echoing hagiographical narratives, dealing with the construction of nations, or rather confronting their own present and constituting materials for historical analysis. More than often, songs escape top-down political control and may be considered as sources for counter-historiographies.

As sites of contesting representations, they offer counter-narratives of the nation (Trotman 2007), relate to “discursive battles” over historical figures (Askew 2006), their ideas and legacy (Smocovitis 2009).

But narrative songs do not simply constitute tools or mirrors of discursive and representational spaces. They may also serve wider purposes of social cohesion, whether as praise songs or protest songs. Common struggles, federative leaders, victories and defeats are sung to make the members of a group remember what binds them together. By their programmatic nature, these narratives may blur the sometimes thin line between history and mythology as in the case of singing filiations (Loncke 2009).

Another central issue is the content of the songs. In other words, what in the songs’ material conveys historical and political meaning? Text naturally appears as the main vehicle. Its literary content, the images it generates, the context of its creation and diffusion are all defining elements for understanding the way it interacts with political and historical representations. Nevertheless, it should not be studied apart from the music which conveys its social meaning. The choice of musical instruments, forms and aesthetics as well as musical borrowings or quotations highlights symbols that are superposed to and intertwined with textual content in a complex semiotic structure that needs to be unpacked.

## **Five sessions:**

- 1. Reshaping past struggles*
- 2. Past heroes and counter-narratives*
- 3. From individual to collective memory*
- 4. Reinventing the past traditions*
- 5. Plurivocal memories*

# PROGRAM

## Thursday, April 27

**Morning: 10:00 – 12:30**

**10:00**

Welcome and introduction

### **SESSION 1:**

#### **Reshaping past struggles**

*Chair: Beverley Diamond (Memorial University, St John's).*

**10:30**

Maria Elizabeth Lucas (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul). *Sonic narratives of dystopia-utopia: thinking along with youth performative politics in Brazil*

**[Break: 11:15-11:45]**

**11:45**

Rui Cidra (INET-md). *Questioning Creole pasts: the 'new music of Santiago' and the poetics of the Cape Verdean nation*

**[Lunch: 12:30-14:30]**

**Afternoon: 14:30 – 17:15**

### **SESSION 2:**

#### **Past heroes and counter-narratives**

*Chair: Maria Elizabeth Lucas (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul)*

**14:30**

Jean Lambert (MNHN, CREM-LESC). *The zajal sung poetry in Lebanon: popular historiography and expression of conflicts*

**15:15**

Joël Cabalion (Université de Tours, CEIAS) & Julien Jugand (CREM-LESC). *'If Bhimrao hadn't been there': singing emancipation amongst dalits of Maharashtra (India)*

**[Break: 16:00-16:30]**

### **SESSION 3 I:**

#### **From individual to collective memory**

*Chair: Maria Elizabeth Lucas (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul)*

**16:30**

Ariane Zevaco (CEIAS, CREM-LESC). *From collective recollection to intimate nostalgia. On the musical poetics of memory in Tajikistan*

# Friday, April 28

**Morning 10:00 – 12:45**

## **SESSION 3 II: From individual to collective memory**

*Chair: Iñigo Sánchez (INET-md)*

**10:00**

Leonor Losa (INET-md). *Singing as in the past: the interpretation of traditional fados as vernacular historicity*

## **SESSION 4: Reinventing the past traditions**

*Chair: Iñigo Sánchez (INET-md)*

**10:45**

Christine Guillebaud (CNRS, CREM-LESC). *The world of Pulsator. Reinventing the tradition of church bells tolling in contemporary Kerala (India).*

**[Break: 11:30-12:00]**

**12:00**

Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco (INET-md). *Representing the past: the politics and aesthetics of musical heritage*

**[Lunch 12:45-14:30]**

**Afternoon: 14:30 – 18:30**

## **SESSION 5: Plurivocal memories**

*Chair: Salwa El-Shawan Castelo- Branco (INET-md)*

**14:30**

Maho Sebiane (CREM-LESC, CFASS). *Duplicity in song? Changing words for another history in United Arabs Emirates*

**15:15**

Clara Biermann (CREM-LESC, CREDA). *Candombe's tributes. Musical construction of filiation, counter-narratives and honoring within the Afro-Uruguayan community*

**[Break 16:00-16:30]**

**16:30**

Beverley Diamond (Memorial University, St. John's). *Giving voice when sonic memories are suppressed*

**[Break 17:15-17:30]**

**17:30 – 18:30**

## **Final round-table discussion**

Moderator: Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, Christine Guillebaud, Julien Jugand

The workshop will be followed by a round table wrap-up summarizing the main points of the symposium and initiating ideas for consideration in the context of a project for publication.

**From 20:30 onwards**

Evening in a fado house with all the participants

# Abstracts

CLARA BIERMANN (Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Centre de Recherche et de Documentation des Amériques, CREDA UMR 7227)

*Candombe's tributes. Musical construction of filiation, counter-narratives and honoring within the Afro-Uruguayan community*

This contribution offers an investigation into the construction of a collective Afro-Uruguayan memory through their emblematic musical genre, the candombe. The candombe is central to the history of the Afro-Uruguayan community, in a country known until the 1990's as one of the most European nation in Latin America. I will focus on the songs of candombe, still characterized by a three drums accompaniment. A distinction is made between the "white candombe", played by the white artists as a genre of the música popular uruguaya, and the "black candombe", a large repertoire composed for the Societies of Negros and Lubolos, groups who perform shows of sung theatre in the Montevideo's Carnival. This categorization has to be understood in the intersection of musical patterns, social class and race, space of performance and unequal access to the discographic market.

The place of tributes in this "black candombe" is central: the old candomberos are revered, songs are composed for them, and their names are painted on the drums. Candombe may be considered as a socio-musical space where the black figures are played out and where counter-historiographies are built. With the case study of two songs from the first album of the black activist and singer Chabela Ramírez, I will show different ways for the Afro-Uruguayan community to sing its own past. This will raise the questions of the various levels of meaning, of who the songs are addressed to and how a hidden memory (echoing the notion

of hidden transcripts developed by James C. Scott) contributes to the construction of a sense of belonging around a shared history. It will finally lead us to discuss the role of Afro-Uruguayan musicians as guardians as well as builders of this specific sense of community.

JOËL CABALION (Université de Tours, Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, CEIAS UMR 8564) & JULIEN JUGAND (Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre)

*'If Bhimrao hadn't been there': singing emancipation amongst dalits of Maharashtra (India)*

This contribution proposes to examine the field of cultural production in Western India through the prism of the Mahar, a dalit caste (formerly known as 'untouchables'), and the history of their political and religious hero, Bhimrao Ambedkar. In 1956 the Mahar caste converted to Buddhism in order to embrace a new social and political philosophy conceived as equalitarian and which would enable them to conjure the spectrum of caste and Hindu practices that, for centuries, had kept them at the lowest rung of the social order. If this caste, its hero and this historical sequence of contemporary Indian history have indeed been well studied in the past two decades – including a renewed interest for what is referred to as 'dalit literature' – more rarely have social science studies looked at the transformation which occurred within this caste and around them in the field of musical practices. Mahar people were historically considered to be singing for others as part of their caste occupation. The 1956 conversion to Buddhism thus prompted an important process of cultural and aesthetic reconstruction within this social group who began singing for themselves as well as narrating an alternative history.

Based on a fieldwork made in 2015 and 2016 in various parts of Maharashtra (mostly in the cities of Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur), our analysis will revolve around how and why these designated subalterns sing in the context of Independent India. We will first outline the social space of bhim git singing as well as its connection to a broader musical world and to various aesthetics. We will then discuss how the very textual content of bhim git embodies the narrative of an alternative history centred on the figure of Ambedkar. Finally, we will analyse how certain specific musical and discursive positions within the Mahar caste help questioning the meaning, shape and political efficiency of bhim git as a “popular” medium of social emancipation.

SALWA EL-SHAWAN CASTELO-BRANCO (Instituto de Etnomusicologia, Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança, INET-md, Lisboa)

*Representing the past: the politics and aesthetics of musical heritage*

This paper will discuss heritage as a global phenomenon. Following a brief working definition, some of the processes involved in heritage production will be considered including: selection, recontextualization, exhibition, transformation, categorization, branding and commodification. The notion of post-heritage will be proposed and the processes involved will be considered. The discussion will be illustrated from examples of my research in Egypt and the Iberian Peninsula.

RUI CIDRA (Instituto de Etnomusicologia, Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança, INET-md, Lisboa)

*Questioning Creole pasts: the ‘new music of Santiago’ and the poetics of the Cape Verdean nation*

Following Cape Verde’s national independence (1975), young

musicians based in the country’s capital Praia and in Lisbon’s metropolitan area created new popular music aesthetics’ metropolitan area created new popular music aesthetics reworking expressive genres from the island of Santiago that had been marginalized throughout Portuguese colonial rule such as batuko and funaná. Between the end of the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium these music styles have undergone renewed creative dynamics, especially due to the contribution of Orlando Pantera and other young musicians who succeeded him. Despite being labelled by the Cape Verdean media as “Pantera generation” (geração Pantera) the later came to identify themselves as musicians committed to creating a “new music from Santiago”. The island’s colonial past, its social actors, cultural practices and historical events have occupied a significant place in these creative processes and in the discourses that give them meaning. In this paper I position this relationships with the past in a set of struggles to publicly define the social memory of Cape Verdeans and their self ascribed identities as Creoles— identity formations subsumed under such terms as creolidade and cabo-verdianidade. I argue that these aesthetics and discourses entail a critique of colonial legacies of race and social class still active in the postcolonial present, and propose a poetics of the nation.

BEVERLEY DIAMOND (Memorial University, St. John’s)

*Giving voice when sonic memories are suppressed*

In the genocidal system of Indian Residential Schools that operated in Canada for over a century until the last school closed in 1996, sound/ music played a role, on one hand, in suppressing the memory of family interaction, ceremony, and language. On another hand, however, the school children were able at times to use sound/ music to ease the trauma of sexual, physical and psychological abuse by reconnecting with those suppressed memories or parodying

music they were being taught. More recently, music has served to politicize Indigenous perspectives on these and other colonial institutions. Song has also enabled intergenerational survivors to honour the suffering of their ancestors and to renegotiate past memories. My paper will examine three moments of sonic memory making: 1) instances where sound/music functioned to ease the trauma of students taken far from their families to these abusive schools; 2) two songs from the pre-TRC era that courageously shared memories or urged other survivors to share experiences; and 3) recent musical works created in the era of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (since the Canadian Prime Minister's formal apology in 2008 and continuing beyond the final TRC report in 2015) that commemorate and recast memory to some extent while also critiquing Settler hearings that focus on victimization. The politics of memory are shaped by individual social and institutional regimes, shifting across generations and time. The final section of the paper will reflect on ways that the very concept of "reconciliation" and institutions such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself have influenced some of those shifts.

CHRISTINE GUILLEBAUD (CNRS, Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre)

*The world of Pulsator. Reinventing the tradition of church bells tolling in contemporary Kerala (India).*

Despite a plethora of publications and periodicals devoted to church bells, a major turn in the history of bells has yet to be truly documented: their automation. In Europe, bell towers were mechanised over fifty years ago, with a decline in the job of bell-ringer its corollary. In contrast, this process only began in India in the early twenty-first century. What implications do

these transitions have on contemporary operational techniques? How does the old knowledge of the bell-ringer articulate with the contemporary knowledge of engineers? To what extent does automation transform the acoustic community to which these sound messages were destined? To address these questions, I will focus on the Indian company Pulsator, a pioneer in the field that is headed by a local electronics giant. I will introduce the history of its activities, and then explore how its creator intends to forge new connections between historical, kinetic, and liturgical knowledge at various steps in his work.

JEAN LAMBERT (MNHN, Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre)

*The zajal sung poetry in Lebanon: popular historiography and expression of conflicts*

The jousts of zajal sung poetry are famous for their performance of improvised words in the Lebanese dialect. Pulling their origins from religious epics and village contests in all the communities of "the Mountain", they were reshaped by the appearance of the "stage zajal" at the beginning of the 20th century. This spectacle shape expressed for a long time the ambiguities of the Mount-Lebanon nationalism, dominated by the Maronites. The civil war (1975-1990) having seen the irruption of new political and community actors disputing this hegemony, the zajal reflected these transformations. It expressed divergent visions of Lebanon's historiography, by calling upon the historic heroes whose glorified names fascinate and mobilize a popular public, contributing to create a certain political dynamics. The communication will expose these epic interpretations as well as their performative expressions.

LEONOR LOSA (Instituto de Etnomusicologia, Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança, INET-md, Lisboa)

*Singing as in the past: the interpretation of traditional fados as vernacular historicity*

As an urban musical practice fado has a history of constant experimentation. Considering its poetic orientation as well as its musical approaches, fado is going through a moment of great 'innovation' with a vast new repertoire being produced. Its generic nature confers fado a set of traits and an inclusive predisposition that, in my view, configure a tradition of change. The fact that fado owns a song book that delimits the category of fado tradicional (traditional fado) as a fixed repertoire which has no authorship and as an older authored repertoire, establishes a ground which allows new approaches within the practice. At the same time, autonomous notions of palavras (lit. words, lyrics) and música (music) allow plural combinations based on metrics, resulting on permanent intertextuality between past and presents as a way of embracing novelty within fado orthodoxy.

Parallel to the production of a new repertoire, the interpretation of fados tradicionais is still seen and experienced as an element of confirmation and affirmation of the fadistas in the fado milieu. Usually taken as a way to establish a 'personal style', the interpretation of fados tradicionais must, therefore, differ from former interpretations. At the same time, in order to be validated, fadistas must sonically display their historical references and their aesthetical affinities with fadistas from older generations. In this paper I aim at showing how the interpretation of this repertoire assumes a function of validation and self-inscription of fado singers in the history of the genre.

MARIA ELIZABETH LUCAS (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul)

*Sonic narratives of dystopia-utopia: thinking along with youth performative politics in Brazil*

This paper focuses on the emergence in social media of distinct youth sonic performative responses to the dystopian-utopian dialectics that permeates Brazil's resilient social inequalities. In the aftermath of a "soft" political coup in 2016, which impeached the first woman democratically elected for President, even for the common sense view, the nation is on the verge of disruption. In this context, I selected two cases to discuss how counter-hegemonic practices in song/singing narratives "that are clearly distinct from or opposing to political authority" are set to performative means that mediate "politics of memory". In one, rap narratives on mass incarceration, created some years ago by young black men, born and raised in the urban peripheries, defy the mainstream media discursive power on violence as seen recently, when the nation woke up to the new year 2017 with the crude images and sounds of mass massacres occurring in dehumanized prisons. With neither access to schooling, health, nor public policies to revert poverty, this youth faces trajectories of violence and disempowerment closely tied to the past-ever-present heritage of African slavery in Brazil. Crossing over digital-social media/daily violence/popular musics, they manage to set powerful performances that voice loudly against decades of social apartheid. In the other case - following the global occupy movements - grassroots, resilient actions against the coup d'état and its neoliberal education reforms, took over public schools and universities across the country. During these long collective residencies, daily agendas relied on a variety of sonic-musical performances created on the spot and posted on the web as political acts. Emblematic MPB songs against the military dictatorship (1964-1985) became, under youth agency, new

narratives of resistance crafted through other cultural sonic-visual signs. Some became viral in social media as they fed powerful voco-sonic messages of political energy, thus signifying past crucial national issues into the present and the future of youth groups. De-archiving the voices, the agents as well as the musical and social memories evoked in these two cases means that further reflexive turns on the challenges of doing Ethnomusicology today in Brazil are at stake.

MAHO SEBIANE (Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186, Université Paris Nanterre, Centre Français d'Archéologie et de Sciences Sociales. CFASS USR 3141, Kuwait)

*Duplicity in Song? Changing words for another history in United Arabs Emirates*

My recent research in United Arabs Emirates shows that the leiwah dance popularized as an entertainment practice by local State Cultural Institutions, since the foundation of the nation states in 1971, is an offshoot of a possession rite practiced by citizens of African descent called the Zunûj. They are mostly the descendants of slaves brought from East Africa during the 19th century. The slave status of their ancestors is not represented in the historiography of these nations and references to African ancestry and slavery are banned from the cultural and social space. This situation has rendered this population invisible and the African origin of their culture. Their musics and dances are nevertheless exhibited in festivals and national commemorations, completely decontextualized from their original meaning.

Today, after a half century of patrimonialization, the leiwah is perceived by the younger urbanized generation as a secular and local tradition of Arabic inspiration. This is all the more so as the

official sung text of the main song of this practice -Jumbo leiwah- explicitly praises the father of the Emirati nation: Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (1918-2004). However, this song is the emblem song of the leiwah spirit possession rite and the original text, still sung in Swahili by the Zunûj during their rite, makes explicit reference to the main spirit and its African origin. How did an African ritual song become a praise song for a famous local Arab personality? What are the reasons for this shift in language and meanings? Does this contribute to a local re-reading of history? This is what I propose to explore.

ARIANE ZEVACO (Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, CEIAS UMR 8564, Centre de recherche en ethnomusicologie, LESC-CREM UMR 7186)

*From collective recollection to intimate nostalgia. On the musical poetics of memory in Tajikistan.*

In Tajikistan, a traditional singer is called a hafiz, the original meaning of which is "the one who knows the Qur'an by heart". Singing, in the traditional understanding of a musician's role, is thus considered to participate of an act of remembrance. A hafiz's performance venue of predilection is the tuy, a ritual cycle held for the celebration of rites of passage. During these gatherings of families and their networks, the hafiz is appointed to celebrate ancient times, the moral and ethical values of the elders. In fact, he praises 'Tradition', understood as the transmission of Islamic values and of a common history. This social responsibility of the hafiz underlies his practices in other contexts of performance, such as concert or private sessions. Nostalgia can thus be considered as an integral part of the musical aesthetics at work: it is destined to arouse feelings of remembrance among the audience, and more generally participates of the singer's performance through his poetical work. Depending on the singer's choices of texts and

interpretation, the audience not only recalls universal social and moral norms, but also past national or local events (the Tajik civil war, for example) or historical figures (poets, musicians, political or religious authorities). The poetical and musical performance of the hafiz conjures a common past, a territory and social relationships, participating to the identitary process at work in every performance. As such, it symbolizes the link between the family holding the ritual and its relations and networks, the relationship between the hafiz and his audience, or the audience common identity inscription. That being said, the individual address is also part of the work of the hafiz, with some poems dedicated to a specific person in the public (this address may, however, be implicit). The singer may also choose a poem for personal reasons related to his own history or memory, though the poem can be understood in a larger universal way. Falak (“fate, destiny”) songs are thus designed to combine the expression of a familial loss or a love separation, and the universal misery of human beings. In any case, the need for nostalgia structures poetical and musical choices, as it participates to the definition of the performance’s actors identities at several levels.

The poetics of music then appear to be central to the multi-understandings of the musical performance’s remembrance potentiality. How do the poetical and musical modalities combine to create or symbolize the recollection feeling?

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