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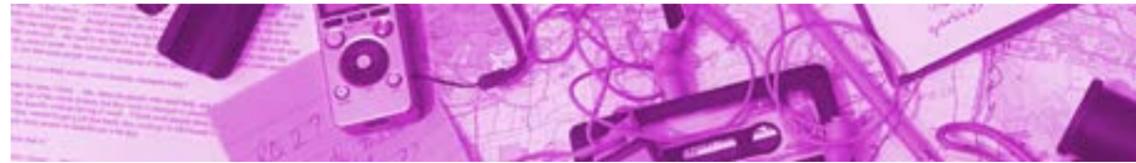
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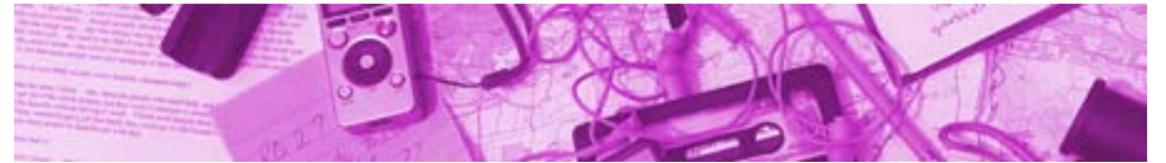


Can I sing a carnival song? Listening to ethnographic sounds at a pasodoble $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythm

Katerina Sergidou

Abstract

This paper briefly presents part of my Fieldnotes' journal on the Cadiz Carnival of Andalusia and more specifically part of the narrations of women who participate in the carnival fiestas. During our online interviews, some of them spontaneously asked me whether they could sing a carnival copla. The fieldnotes concern the forms our online dialogues take on social media, mobile apps and Skype and they include voice messages, photographs, web links and transcripts of recorded conversations. The voice of women, which is marginalized during the carnival contest, is brought forward. Our online dialogues create a unique chronotope which reshapes the distance between the interlocutors. In my fieldnotes I record a series of questions that emerge from this shared experience which gradually shifts my interest from the content to the way the narration is performed. With my interlocutors, I explore the limits between private and recorded conversation, I record the unique ways by which women try to translate their andalusian dialect, and I try to follow the online memory trails our deferred conversation leaves behind, in order to reconstruct their narrations.



More than all the senses, the one that has a central place in my research on the popular carnival of Cádiz in Andalusia is hearing. My research has a very special sound: The sound of carnival songs in a pasodoble rhythm, the sound of the Caditan dialect that, as a carnival song says, “eats the s’s”, turning Cádiz into a unique place called “mi Cáí” (my Cádiz), the sound of the voice messages that women with whom I talk send me through social networks and applications like telegram and WhatsApp, the sound of the conversations recorded on the recorder. Also the sounds I hear in real time during the interview and the sounds I hear again, at a different time, when I transcribe the interview. Above all in this research I learn to hear the different stories of contestation, the different narratives always accompanied by what the inhabitants of Cádiz call “a Caditan proud rhythm”. This hearing experience is accompanied by “rewind and (re)play” movements which I repeat until I write down that one tricky word that is lost along with the final“s”of the caditan pronunciation.

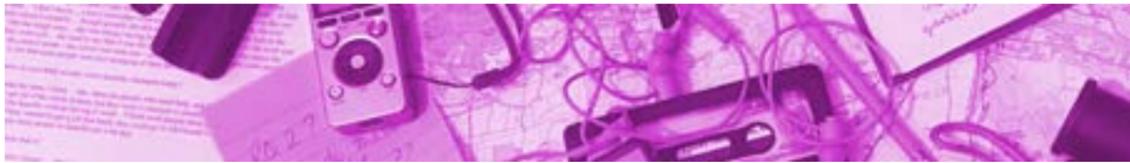
When I asked Carmelita, who directs a carnival comparsa, how she feels when she participates in a carnival contest where the majority of the contestants are men, she answered something that I could not hear at that time. Listening again and again her recorded voice I finally managed to realise that what she was telling me was “it gives you great satisfaction” (te da muchas satisfacciones). Perhaps I could not hear it, not only because she was pronouncing it with that south Caditan accent but also because my ears were prepared to receive only the negative experience of female participation, at least at the beginning of the research.

The words express feelings, and to listen to them you need to recognize the feeling. This was the first thing that I learned by listening to the Caditan rhythm. First, I had to learn to hear the rhythm and then to actually listen to the words. The acceptance that there are words and meanings that always evade my efforts came later and I am only consoled by the fact that as a “stranger” maybe I can also hear something in the Caditan sound that the native speakers ignore.

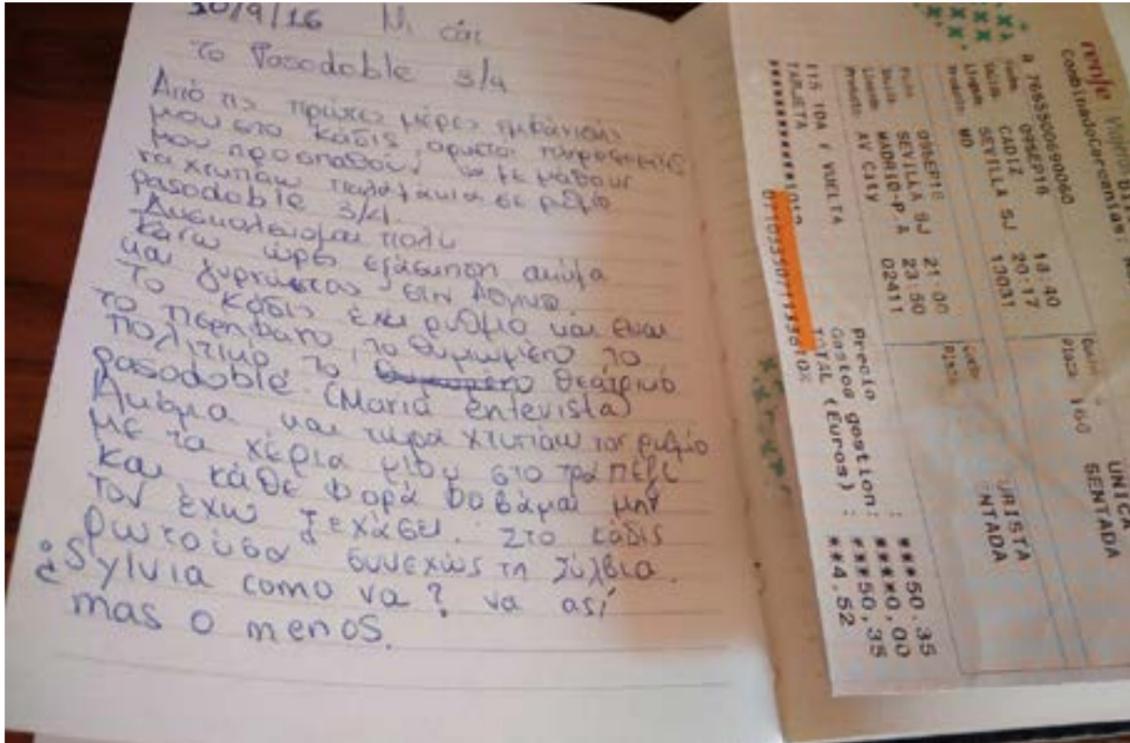
In May 2015, in a state which Spanish anthropologists call *emergéncia ethnographica* (Bullen, 2012; Diez, 1996), I discovered Cádiz in the south of Spain. At a political gathering, I heard the future mayor and member of a carnival band singing a carnival pasodoble which started with the verse “If I were a mayor” (si yo fuera el alcalde de Cádiz). Listening to this song and the “ole” that the citizens shouted, was for me a “small” ethnographic experience, the first acoustic memory of my study, long before I had decided to settle in Cádiz for ethnographic research.



Therefore my research sounds in a pasodoble rhythm from the day I first heard the song sung by the one who later became the mayor and the city’s “son”.



My field notes remind me:

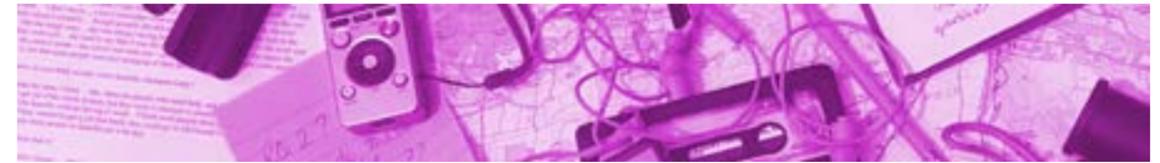


“From my early days at Cádiz, a lot of my informants are trying to teach me how to clap my hands in a pasodoble rhythm, ¾. I’m having a hard time with that, despite practising for hours, even in Athens. Cádiz has a rhythm, and this rhythm is the proud, the angry, the political, the sad, and the theatrical pasodoble. Even now I hit the table rhythmically with my hands and every time I’m afraid I have forgotten the rhythm. In Cádiz, I kept asking Sylvia. Sylvia is that how it goes? Am I doing it right? More or less, she used to reply.”



Jose in our conversation tries to show me the rhythm.

The sounds invade my research, pushing it in new directions. My female interlocutors sing verses spontaneously during the interviews, highlighting the narrative as what Papagaroufali (2002: 13) calls “physical communication”, “multisensory and emotional engagement in the world” and language as “practical experience”. The voice of women, marginalized in the official carnival contest, finds room in our talks, online and not. I am thus lead to explore the different aspects of the narrative’s performance character and to seek the meaning or interpretation not only of the content of what is said but also of how it is called (Abrams 2014: 38) or rather sang to be more accurate.



In the chat we had with Carmelita through skype, shortly before we closed our conversation, she surprises me by asking: “Can I sing a carnival song?”. The distance that separates us since she is in Cádiz and I in Athens is slowly getting smaller and her song becomes a bridge that brings us closer together. The online platform becomes the theatrical stage in which the narrative is performed. In this non-place (Augé 1992) on the Internet, “Mi Cáí” makes its way closer. A new sound-place is created that reminds me of the chronotope of Bakhtin, only now the stabilizing elements are not time and space but sound. In fact, “sound can act as an element of reorganizing the listener’s relation to space and time” (Bull, 2004).



Sometime after our conversation with Carmelita¹, I make the decision to ask myinterlocutors if they would like to sing some coplas during their interviews. Sandra participates in a women’s street band. She says that the voice of women on the street does not sound as good as those participating in the carnival contest. But her song sounds to me very beautiful, just like the story she tells about Lola la pionera: “Long live my friends, death to sexists (machistas)”. Listening again to her song I hear my voice as well, “Very nice thank you” I say laughing.



A few days later our communication continues asynchronous. Sandra sends me a photo of her band from their participation in the street carnival through *telegram*.



Seeing the photo, I hear her singing. The sound is always preceded in my research. It has a rhythm and a name: Pasodoble ¾. I’m still trying to learn how to do this with my fingers.

For decades, the poetics of ethnography has been moving away from the objective “eye of the observer”, the “god-trick from nowhere”. In order to see, you first have to listen. The relation between observation and participation is always dialectical, the senses and feelings are part of the interpretation and the body of the ethnographic text. What the researcher hears as well as what she does not hear can become a research tool. James Clifford’s question (1986) may perhaps be heard more clearly if we try to listen: “But what of the ethnographic ear?”



Notes

[1] All my interlocutors have been informed on the publication of extracts and photos from our interviews.

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Katerina Sergidou grew up in Cyprus and lives in Athens. She studied History at the Department of History-Archaeology of the School of Philosophy in Athens. She completed her MA in Cultural Studies, at the department of Communication, Media and Culture, conducting ethnographic research in the city of Cádiz. She is a PhD candidate in Cultural History and Feminist Anthropology in Panteion University of Athens and the University of the Basque Country, and fellow of the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) of Greece. Her dissertation is entitled "Popular Carnival and Hegemony: Stories of Contestation through women's voice in Cádiz. She has been trying to learn how to clap the passodoble $\frac{3}{4}$ since the summer of 2016.