

Abstract: Being today a discreet presence and perhaps not so much as a foreground means of communication, radio has, however, been playing a key role in building sound communities in the Lusophone space. Closely linked to the music industry, more than any other medium, radio has manifested in this field an exceptionality not always well acknowledged. At a time when we are all centered in the image as almost the absolute form of expression, we seem to forget that a very significant dimension of our identity is made of sounds existing in things and places. Recognizing, therefore, that lusophonies are also constituted by this invisible soul, we will intend to defend in this paper an argument about the potential of radio for the enhancement of historic and symbolic ties. A particular attention to the concept of community radio will be developed, taking as an example the Rádio Ás, an online station that results from a partnership between three municipalities – Aveiro (Portugal), Santa Cruz (Cape Verde) and São Bernardo do Campo (Brazil) – and is defined as a vehicle lusophony. The main goal is to think radio stations as like colonies of sounds inhabited by a spirit that only the ear can meet.

Keywords: Radio; Community; Lusophony; Identity

1. Radio and daily life

The history of radio has been the history of a discrete but persevering medium. Unlike many of the apocalyptic announcements of its disappearance, the radio has resisted to what has been generally recognized as some of its weaknesses: the lack of image and the support on sound resources exclusively. To these difficulties especially relevant in an era that is defined as a civilization of image, radio has always taken advantage of a set of virtues: technical simplicity, portability, discretion of its presence, whose listening does not require exclusivity (Portela, 2011: 27) and an extraordinary flexibility to adapt to new platforms, new devices and new ways of listening (Jedrzejewski, 2007: 11).

If in the early years of radio broadcasts, the radio came from large 'boxes' of sound, it is now integrated into everyday devices, the mobile phone and the car, where it became part of the components / core applications. It is also available on computers, especially through streaming websites of the stations as part of many workplaces, shops, public institutes, cafes and even public transport environment. Although it has lost the centrality in the media landscape – which actually it only had until the advent of television – radio has not exactly registered a loss of audiences. According to data from Bareme Radio Marktest (that is a regular study aiming at studying the medium of radio and measuring the

Colonies of Sounds: The role of radio in the sound expression of lusophony

Madalena Oliveira¹

Communication and Society
Research Centre/University of
Minho, Portugal

¹ Assistant Professor at Social Sciences Institute at University of Minho and integrated member of Communication and Society Research Centre. Principal Investigator of the project 'NET Station: shaping radio for web environment' (PTDC/CCI-COM/2010/122384). Coordinator of the Radio and Audio Media Research Group of Sopcom and vice-chair of ECREA Radio Research Section.

madalena.oliveira@ics.uminho.pt

audience of Portuguese stations), at the end of 2013, almost 80 % of the Portuguese population (at the age of 15 years or more) listened to radio at least once a week¹, which means that radio is still one of the more present means of communication, if not the most present of all, in everyday life.

Considered “one of the most democratic and more open media to users’ intervention” (Alcudia Borreguero, 2008: 124), radio is, on the other hand, perhaps the most generous and kind medium within the landscape of social communication. Made of a language that is as rational as emotional (Balsebre, 2004), it is, both in technical and in literacy terms, the less demanding mass medium. That is why, in underdeveloped or developing countries, it has a particularly high penetration. It is estimated, for example, that in Mozambique radio reaches approximately 60% of the population, while the television is available at less than a fifth of Mozambique homes.

Based on four fundamental narrative elements – word, music, silence and sound effects (Balsebre, 2004) – radio has an undeniable relevance in terms of information (it is said that it is the first to give the latest news), but also from the perspective of aesthetic productions, it has played a very important function not always well recognized. In addition to being a medium adapted to the protection of language, it is also a sensitive source of cultural productions and the most important agent of diffusion and promotion of music.

Although contemporary society tends to value very little listening experience – one of the reasons why radio has been a means neglected in terms of research – the relationship of human communication with the ear is extremely deep. Because sound keeps an indexical nature², it is vibration and not only a representation of something which it is sound of, the sound experience is an experience of connection to the world. In a book on the history of sound and hearing, David Hendy considers that modernity is noisy, but he also recognizes that “the sound can help us understand human history in a new and enlightening way” (2013: x). Being sound a way of touching at distance, and being radio essentially made of sounds, it is, as we will reflect further on, also a means of cultural identity and connection, expression, in our context, of invisible lusophonies.

2. Radio and the sense of community

Being today not only the channel of information transmission invented by Marconi, radio is communication in the sense communication should be understood as contact, relationship and interaction, sharing not only ideas, but also emotion, sensation and affection. However, comprising all these actions, the spirit of radio is essentially to build community. From families that used to get together around itself, in the golden years, to listen to shows, music and theater, to the groups of audiences it reaches today, radio has intrinsic to its nature an aggregation effect, which is expressed in the intimate relationship it promotes. Although the contexts of listening are now much more defined by practices of individuation, tuning in a radio station is still a way to integrate a community, a community of listeners who share interests, habits, musical preferences and even, in many cases, humorous sensibilities.

The concept of community is usually associated with a set of socio-demographic characteristics and geographical delimitation which hides the cultural and symbolic side that communities can have. As far as the radio is concerned, it can be said that, in Portugal, the idea of community has also been reduced somehow to the idea of locality. For legal vacuum, there is not in the country a tradition of community radios (or community media, in the broadest sense of the concept). According

¹ Data available at Marktest website <http://www.marktest.com/wap/a/n/id~1c89.aspx>

² Andrew Crisell suggests that sound “seems never to exist as an isolated phenomenon, always to manifest the presence of something else” (1994: 43)

to the Portuguese law, radios are defined mainly by a categorization of programming, generalistic or thematic, and by the geographical scope of the broadcast, international, national, regional or local.

According to the Law on Radio (Law 54/2010 of 24 December), access to radio activity is an exclusive of “collective people whose principal object is the exercise of radio” (Art. 15). According to this principle, the access to the activity is not possible to other organizations or associations of citizens who could find in this medium a non-commercial way to promote communication³, training and promotion of a more committed citizenship. Unless this activity is performed through the Internet, which does not exactly require a license, but only a register, radio broadcast does not include, in Portuguese legislation, educational and / or cultural function not concerned to business activity. But the sense of community is much wider, not being in other countries connoted with commercial radio.

Although community radio stations are usually local and more or less thematic, since they are targeted to a more specialized audience, these categories do not sufficiently reflect the idea of community. A reflection on seven equivocal conceptions regarding community communication, Marcos Palacios suggests that it is inaccurate to consider that “the community is a social small-sized unit, characterized fundamentally by the physical proximity of their members” (1990: 106). According to the author, the concept of community has to be taken outside the ties of local communities, because “community is not only a place on a map” and “people can have diversified experiences of community no matter they are living close to each other or not” (1990: 107).

Thought from the radio experience, the idea of community should be taken in its multiple expression: affective, linguistic, cultural, symbolic, geographical, associative. With a vocation for the proximity, widely understood in terms of space and intimacy, the radio can be, in the Lusophone space, namely because the new opportunities created by the Internet, a medium of promise and linking.

3. Rádio Ás: an innovative project

Extinct in early 2014, by order of the Municipality of Aveiro, one of its promoters, Radio Ás was born as a pioneering project, which was also an exploratory design project on the utility radio can have for the promotion of culture and Lusophone solidarity . In accordance with Portuguese law, Radio Ás appeared as an online broadcaster with exclusive broadcast on the Internet, being its initiative of a partnership between three cities: Aveiro (Portugal), Santa Cruz (Cape Verde) and São Bernardo do Campo (Brazil). It was perhaps the first radio project based in Portugal to promote this type of connection between Portuguese-speaking countries.

According to its editorial project, Radio Ás had the following objectives: :¹ (a) “to motivate the civic participation in public space and to open the programming to associative organizations of citizens’; (b) ‘to reinforce the communities’ cohesion and to sponsor programming related to community life’; and (c) ‘to deepen the approach to urban culture and local identity and to promote the diffusion of tradition trends and local modernity through this medium”. In the scope of its mission, the radio was intended to (a) “consolidating the mutual knowledge, the cooperation and the friendship relation between populations from the three involved partners”; (b) “fostering the value and the multiculturalism experience”; (c) “supporting the diffusion of Portuguese language, by intending to be a vehicle of ‘Lusophony’”; and (d) encouraging “innovation and creativity”.

Based on a collaborative scheme, Radio As programming resulted of a dynamic participation of listeners, associations and other social organizations which took up the role of content producers.

³ According to Cammaerts (2009), community radios constitute an alternative to commercial and public models of radio broadcast.

Dependent, therefore, on the contribution of the communities themselves, this project was defined by an irregular programming concentrated especially in the evening hours. The majority of programmes was produced in Portugal, only one programme was made in Brazil, which is still broadcasted in other Brazilian radios. Apart from several individual producers and animators, Radio Ás programming also had the participation of some associations and other public bodies, such as the Portuguese Association for Environmental Education, the Section of Basketball Beira-Mar, the Library Network of Schools Group of Aveiro, the Aveiro Municipal Assembly, the Association of Immigrant Support and Mon on Mon, Association of Friends of Guinea-Bissau.

Besides a set of more or less institutional nature programmes, Radio Ás also included several musical proposals. From the initiative of individual authors, in general, these programmes presented themselves as dedicated to various types of music spaces, from jazz to hard rock, through punk and avant-garde. The music was actually one of the most frequent topics of programming of Radio Ás, whose frequency could vary between weekly and fortnightly biweekly. At registration for the provision of programmes, the authors were invited to present the proposal detailing the objectives of the programme in terms of theme, target audience, approaches to local cultures and local identities and referring concerns with multicultural themes and the promotion of Portuguese language and Lusophony.

Radio Ás has been online for two years, albeit with excessive flicker in terms of broadcast and regularity of its programming. Despite the initial enthusiasm, the project failed apparently due to lack of resources to support it and probably due to the fragile and little significant involvement of partners. Virtuos on the idea, the project of this community radio did not work to constitute an example to replicate. At least Three reasons contributed to the originality of this pioneering project: (a) the intersection of three partners from different countries; (b) the collaborative structure based on contributions from individual authors, associations and other social groups; and (c) the investment on exclusively audio content (beside the institutional information, the website contained only a kind of button to listen to the streaming).

Working as a kind of ‘colony of sounds’, the Radio Ás had the purpose of being a station produced by three communities for another target community, a community built by the contribution of the three partners. In this sense, although without having fully achieved the goal, this community radio was meant to be not a radio to the community, but a radio made by the community, thus pursuing the adage of the World Association of Community Radio according to which the “radio community has not to do with making up something for the community but to the community to do something for itself” (Mtimbe 1998: 34).

Constituting itself as a editorial project freer when compared with other commercial radios, this model of community radio, dedicated to the expression of cultural identities, presents itself as an opportunity for the dissemination of productions appropriate to the values and needs of communities (Peruzzo, 2006), but also as a vehicle of different sounds of the Portuguese language. Without obligations regarding phonetic standardization of the language, this kind of projects is permeable to the diversity of accents and the variety of rhythms characteristic of each region or country.

4. Lusophony and sound identity

Within the assumption according to which it is in diversity that unit can be recognized, it can be said that the model of community-based radio is not only desirable but essential to fight against the effects of globalization that tends to make everything homogeneous and undifferentiated. For radio in general and community projects in particular today it is expected a particularly important role in the

defense of linguistic identity concerns. Establishing itself as an alternative to the creative industry, it also increasingly adjusted to the imperatives of an alleged global language, the radio has here also one of the reasons for its resilience. Based on the word – which is its dominant plastic element – it offers a chance to insist on linguistic differentiation, which is a matter not only of grammatical code, but also of the sounds, rhythms, materialization of affect.

Understood as a space of culture (Martins, 2006: 50), Lusophony is built up in the area of visible elements, symbols, colours, landscapes, but it is also made of the music that exists in words, in literature, in songs and in the voices which acquire, despite the common language, sounds very expressive of ways of living and of feeling. It is in this dimension that radio is, or may be, complicit in the construction of an identity that, although invisible, because essentially acoustic, expresses the soul of communities that history and language made becoming like brothers. With the added advantage of overcoming the constraints of terrestrial space and no longer confined to a territorial definition thanks to the Internet, radio offers the debate on Lusophone the possibility of linking distant places in the intimacy that only the sound can provide (Oliveira, 2013: 187).

Trends in radio studies show a particular focus from research to technological challenges, the journalistic discourse, the dynamics of participation, themes of regulation and political economy of the sector and the promotion of the music industry. But radio is also space for aesthetic creation and the construction of narratives able to trace geographies of sounds. In a society not much stimulated for listening, researching and developing the role of radio for broadcasting the sound that there is in places and also do what we could call the soundscape is a challenge not only for studies of radio but for Lusophone studies too. David Hendy recognizes that “by its nature it is difficult to sound to be entirely owned or controlled” because “its natural tendency is to move freely through the air” (2013 : xiv). If a sound history of Lusophone is not possible, at least its exercise is at the reach of a bet on the radio and colonization of the ear.

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