

**MUSIC AND HUMAN MOBILITY
REDEFINING COMMUNITY IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT 2016**

Guest edited by Maria de São José Côrte-Real & Pedro Moreira
“Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy Publishing House

**FOLKLORE, FADO AND RADIO: MEDIATING PORTUGUESE
IDENTITIES IN PARIS**

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***Abstract:** The role of media in diasporic experiences is central to understand the identity construction of migrant communities in relation to the uses of their expressive culture, shaped by a connection to the motherland. This article addresses the case of Radio ALFA, a radio station targeted at the Portuguese community in the Paris region, and focuses on the ways in which Radio ALFA imagines this community through both its programming grid and the discourses of its main interlocutors. The heterogeneous and dynamic community conception of this medium is central in understanding the role of expressive mediated cultural practices such as Fado or Folklore in the construction of a more fluid identity. The use of such expressive practices in the broadcastings are central to Radio ALFA's survival strategies, constantly (re)defining the very notion of “Portuguese community” in trying to reach different audiences that include both first-generation migrants and luso-descendants. In this linkage between community, motherland and host country through radio, a rather dynamic process emerges which nurtures a better understanding of the relation between media, music and migration in this specific context.*

***Keywords:** Radio, Migration, Community, Music.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, I address some questions regarding the case of Radio ALFA, the radio of the Portuguese and lusophone community in the Paris area, broadcasting via FM, internet and satellite.

The main issues raised by my research are: What kind of community does Radio ALFA imagine? What is its role, from a production perspective, in the construction of a community identity through radio? What are the dynamics of self-representation of this community with regard to Folklore and Fado? How do these dynamics affect both the programming policy and the relationship with the community?

The reality of radio in the context of migrant communities (Ferreira, 2013; Peterson, 2003; Dayan, 1999), especially their relationship to music (Toynbee and Dueck, 2011), is clearly marked by insufficient studies in the social sciences. In a wider context, the approach to different types of media and migration has shown a tendency to avoid crystallized analyses of media as mere mirrors of expressive practices (Alonso and

Oiarzabal, 2010; Karim, 2003; Sánchez, 2008). The self-representation of migrant communities in the media, and in this case, in radio, reveals the mediated construction of community identities, imagined throughout broadcasts, discourses and expressive practices as dynamic processes (Kosnick, 2007). As anthropologist Ferreira synthesises: “The content produced and disseminated by these social institutions contributes to the politics of identity of migrant communities and fosters reflection on their strategies of integration, resistance, creation of traditions, and the commodification and objectification of culture” (2013:203).

The works of scholars such as Riggins (1992), Kosnick (2007) and Peterson (2012) reveal several dimensions that interfere with self-representation of migrant communities in the media, enlightening the heterogeneity of such imagined communities, their local involvement with the host country, relationship with the motherland and transnational industries of culture, amongst other contingencies. As stated by Kosnick: “Migrant media are of prime importance as arenas for producing and circulating

identity claims in order to intervene in the politics of representation” (2007:2-3) Therefore, it is relevant to consider the mediated discourses and expressive practices beyond the ideas of “cultural preservation” or identity defence. A non-deterministic approach to identity, constructed through “transformation and difference” (Hall, 1990:235) should unveil the ways in which musical genres are mediated, and how this reflects the very notion of “community” as imagined by the media.

2. A RADIO FOR THE COMMUNITY

Radio ALFA was founded in 1987 in a context of broadcasting policy changes in France. The rise of pirate or free radio broadcastings since the early 1970’s, as in other European countries, allowed the foundation of several illegal radios as a reaction to the state monopoly of FM waves. The legal framework came after the election of François Mitterrand, who promised to review the situation once elected, which eventually happened. The Fillioud Act, from 1982, named after the Communications Minister of Communications Georges Fillioud, liberalized FM waves and allowed radio stations to start the legalization process (Kuhn, 1995:77 et seq.).

In the early 1980’s, three Portuguese pirate radio stations were operating in the Paris region: Radio Églantine, Radio Clube Português (RCP) and Portugal no Mundo, closely linked to the associative movement. The legalization process was still complex as the National authority asked for some paperwork, which postponed the requests. As Kosnick states, in a broader analysis: “migrant media tend to flourish in the marginal and often unstable spaces opened up by the erosion of public service and state broadcasting monopolies, by the development of new communication technologies, and by the uncertainties of political regulation that often still characterize new transnational media infrastructures” (2007:3).

It was in this space of wider representation, helped by the associative movement and concern for the second generation (children of the emigrants), that Radio ALFA was created, uniting a group of Portuguese emigrants with connections to the pirate radio movement (Laureano, 2011). The main purpose was to create a hybrid radio designed to give voice to the experiences and daily lives of the Portuguese emigrants in the Paris region, instead of emulating a Portuguese radio in Paris, as some of the interlocutors stated.

In 1987, Radio ALFA’s radio license was granted, but this legal permit only included 12 hours of broadcasting, with the other 12 hours to

be shared with Tabala FM, an “African” radio station. The first broadcast took place on October 5, 1987 at 2:00 p.m., celebrating the Portuguese Republic Implantation day. As one of the founders stated, the radio station’s main purpose was “to remind the French that we were, back then, the largest foreign community in France. A radio that, personally, I wanted to enter the homes of the Portuguese who listened to us, so that our mother tongue was not forgotten and could be transmitted to our descendants.” (Carmo, 2014:697). Radio ALFA’s aim was to rethink the scope of the Portuguese community in the Paris region as well as the very purpose of its medium. According to Fernando Silva, one of the station’s founders: “The radios that existed were very nostalgic, a kind of “Saudade” (nostalgic) corner. They considered neither the evolution of the Portuguese community in France, nor the youth of Portuguese origin. We wanted the Portuguese to assert themselves as citizens here in France. (...) we wanted to show that there was another Portugal, another Portuguese music, and that the Portuguese living in France, were not the clichés cultivated within the community by elder emigrants.” (Interview, 6/11/2014)

The association ALFA struggled with financial problems until the 1990s and was afterwards acquired by a Portuguese emigrant-owned financial group, becoming a commercial radio station. After 1992, Radio ALFA was on air 24 hours a day, without sharing the 98.6 frequency with Tabala FM. Five years later, Radio ALFA entered the satellite channel, broadcasting nationally and worldwide, expanding in 1999 to the internet, with several web radios, mainly thematic in their nature: ALFA Fado (dedicated to Fado), ALFA Pop (dedicated to Pop and Rock), ALFA Sat (Lusophone music) and ALFA FM. At present, Radio ALFA FM covers about 70 km of the Paris region, albeit with some variation (approx. 30 km), having approximately 800.000 potential listeners, including Portuguese emigrants, their descendants, and other lusophone emigrants.

3. RADIO ALFA AND ITS PROGRAMMES

The construction of the radio programming materializes several intentions, values and negotiations of power in a context of technological, legal, regulatory and financial contingencies (Riggins 1992; Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010; Karim, 2003). The role of the media in migration contexts has been analysed from a dual perspective: maintaining notions of cultural tradition and practices, on the one hand, and unintentionally encouraging the assimilation by its

audiences of dominant values of the host society, on the other (Riggins, 1992:4).

In my first interview with Radio ALFA's director, Fernando Lopes, he stated that "the role of Radio ALFA is to inform about Portugal and the Lusophone countries, to talk about daily practical questions in the country in which they live, which is France, and to give them world news. (...) Portuguese news can be delivered by a Portuguese radio, the French news, by a French radio, but the news to the Portuguese community living in the Paris area can only be delivered by Radio ALFA" (Interview, 6/11/2014). Essential to the programming policy is the question posed by Radio ALFA's director: "to whom do we broadcast?" which is central for the survival of the radio station. The imagined mediated community shapes the radio programs and the discourses about the role of Radio ALFA in the context of Portuguese migration in Paris.

According to the director, the morning programs are target the first-generation emigrants, especially those who are at home, defining them as a segment largely aimed at workers and "housewives". Two programs are highlighted during the weekdays: *Está na Hora!* (It's time), from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., by Ester De Sousa and Carlos Manuel, and *Ponto de Encontro* (Meeting point) from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. by Anabela Cunha. The first program includes traffic news, anecdotes, ephemeris, prizes, weather forecasts, and information blocks, making it one of the most attended programs. *Ponto de encontro* (Meeting point) covers other types of content, from legal topics that matter to the community, news, riddles, music, studio guests, press releases, etc. Paulo Salgado continues the broadcast with *Só entre nós* (Only Between us) from 12 a.m. to 3 p.m., a program with varied contents. From 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., Vítor Santos presents *Nunca é tarde* (It is never too late) with music novelties and news; while the broadcast *Está na Onda*, from 6 to 9 pm is presented by Eduardo Lino, including daily news updates, games and music. Other programs, depending on the day of the week, focus on different audiences, such as *Nuances do Brasil*, on Tuesday, with Marluce Campos Perrollet or *Só Fado* (Only fado), on Fridays, by Fernando Silva, Odete Fernandes e Manuel Miranda. On Saturday, several volunteers secure the station's broadcasts, with programmes about Lusophone associations and interviews with Portuguese artists, as well as sports programs and other broadcasts. One of the web radio channels broadcasts ALFA FM worldwide, whereas the other webradios broadcast thematic music programmes 24 hours a day (more info: <http://radioalfa986.net/grille.php>)

According to the radio director, Radio ALFA now faces a major challenge: broadcasts have to change because the younger generation and new emigrants want different things compared to their parents or grandparents: "The new emigrants are very interested to hear about Portugal, they will, for sure, listen to Radio ALFA. The great challenge is keeping the luso-descendants interested, particularly those who have married a non-Portuguese wife, for instance. Why should their children listen to us?" (Interview, 6/11/2014). The way in which this community is imagined (Anderson, 1983) through radio is a challenge for the programmers, which must adapt their broadcasts and main thematic lines: to promote Portugal and its traditions, on the one hand, and to show a new and modern Portugal through music, like Fado, Pop/Rock, etc, on the other.

4. ON THE MARGINS OF TRADITION

In this section, I would like to discuss how Radio ALFA's FM broadcasting mediates folklore. As a symbol of Portugal expressive culture, its discourses about folklore are not only rooted in words such as tradition or authenticity, but also show a rather dynamic process of resignification. *De Terra em Terra, nas margens da tradição* is one of the most relevant broadcastings regarding the dissemination of folklore in Radio ALFA's program grid. Beyond representing tradition "as the past", the current Radio ALFA director stated that this program wants to show Portugal's living traditions, the true roots of those who are outside their country: "This is what makes us feel Portuguese, our traditions, our origins... not the stereotypes associated with folklore and emigrants, as if we only consume that!" (Interview, 6/11/2014). We can assume that for him, the connection to the imagined motherland through nostalgia and memory (Agnew 2005) reinforces the very essence of an imagined community of shared beliefs, habits and, in this case, experiences, which are still alive today.

The programme *De Terra em Terra* was first aired in 1989 by Guilherme Alves, an emigrant that went to France in 1972 and started his carrier in Radio Clementine. In 2008, he retired and returned to Portugal, leaving the program's presentation to Manuel Moreira e Marylene Martins. The broadcast aims to

Inform and advise folklore associations on everything related to folklore, namely: dances, songs, costumes, research, historiography of customs and regional customs represented with the

support of the Federation of Portuguese Folklore (*LusoJornal*, 20/03/2008).

The program has had several formats, with different moments that focused not only on music, but also on other “traditions”, such as gastronomy, religious traditions, handicrafts, showing ALFA listeners different popular traditions according to the civil calendar. The collaboration by telephone, from Portugal, of musicologist José Alberto Sardinha started in 1992, presenting the results of his personal research on traditional music. Poetry has also had its part in this broadcast, with the participation of Amélia Gomes, also from Portugal. Gastronomy, personal experiences, interviews with folkloric groups have equally been included.

One of the main aspects of *De Terra em Terra* is the relationship with local ethnographic groups (*Ranchos Folclóricos*) from the associative movement in France, trying to influence them to choose “a Portuguese region, making it easier to maintain the folkloric tradition of the chosen region” (idem). For Guilherme Alves and other Radio ALFA interlocutors, the number of *Ranchos Folclóricos* in France was not always equal with “quality”, because some of them had no information about traditional music and/or dance. As a result, they started mixing dances, or danced the wrong music with the wrong outfit, which was not correct, according to them. For the author of the program, this impact is reflected in the “improvement of the quality of the folklore of some Portuguese associations in France” (idem). Judite Cruz, who has collaborated with the program for 20 years, reports in her book “The Portuguese Traditions in France” published in 2012, that there are *Ranchos Folclóricos* in France that do not represent the region accurately:

This is not a criticism from my part, just a comment, incidentally they are aware that for example the costumes they wear are not appropriate to the region they represent. Some were not well advised and spent fortunes and now have to dress in another way (*LusoJornal*, 28/03/2012).

With this program, Radio ALFA assumes a dynamic role between “tradition” and the community, aiming to advise local associations and groups about the “authentic” way of representing the Portuguese nation and its specific regions. We can argue that identity and authenticity play an essential role in constructing a dynamic radio programme that want to show the “typicality” of Portuguese regions, on the one hand, and to convey a pedagogical approach to serve local associations based in France, on the other.

5. FADO, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Fado is considered to be the “National Song” of Portugal and has a central role in Radio ALFA FM’s programming. Its visibility, after UNESCO’s recognition as Intangible World Heritage in 2011, as well as its status in the World Music circuit and the rise of the so called New Fado (Nery, 2004:266-272), made it the perfect identity card. As the musicologist Nery affirms:

Faced with this evident dynamic, to the impressive number of new Fado singers and Portuguese guitar players that continue to grow, and to the variety of tendencies and aesthetic postures that underline them (...) one can only see the renewed vitality that Fado reveals entering the 21st century (Nery, 2004:272).

The director of technical service and responsible for Fado programmes, Fernando Silva, says that the Portuguese who are now retired in France, and who are 70 or 80 years old, like to listen to (old) Fado singers or folklore. But the role of Radio ALFA FM and ALFA Fado is also to broadcast the most recent singers of new Fado, those who are from Portugal, such as Ana Moura, Cuca Roseta, Carminho or Camané, as well as fadistas from the Portuguese community. New Fado and its new (re)presentation constitute a perfect product to show a more modern Portugal with younger singers and different repertoires. This does not mean that traditional Fado and its more formal presentation has no audience, but according to several interlocutors, it is easier for the new generations in France to like the new Fado singers. Even within the community, performers such as Diane Santos, Shina, Jennyfer Rainho or Cláudia Costa, search for a more open conception of Fado, ranging from traditional repertoire to new forms. The new generation of *fadistas* is also an emergent phenomenon in other Portuguese diasporic contexts such as Canada or the United States (Côrte-Real, 2010; Holton, 2006). In this context, the media representations of expressive practices such as Fado aim to leverage an image of a “renewed tradition”, of a country distant from old stereotypes and willing to show a modern image of Portugal and the community itself.

For the director of Radio ALFA, Fado is a musical genre that also creates a strong connection between Portugal and France because both the Portuguese community and the French people themselves have come to particularly appreciate Fado after its recent visibility: “*Fado in France is regarded as a part of Portuguese identity: Fado is Portugal, Portugal is Fado... that’s it!*” (Interview, 6/11/2014). As a result, Fado always

fills concert halls, especially the Radio ALFA concert hall “Sala Vasco da Gama”, with a mixed public of both Portuguese and French.

Radio ALFA sustains Fado as symbol of Portuguese identity and (renewed) tradition, allowing it to direct itself to a younger audience that includes the second generation or luso-descendants, as well as French listeners. The impact of Fado broadcastings, mainly through the program Só Fado (ALFA FM) and the webradio ALFA Fado goes beyond the Paris region and France. According to the ALFA Fado programmer, more than 50% of the listeners are located in other countries, mainly Portugal, Canada, USA, Japan, etc. The internet-based Fado radio reaches both Portuguese communities and non-Portuguese listeners. When considering both webradios and FM, ALFA Fado is the most listened radio station from the ALFA group, only surpassed in attendance by the broadcasts of Portuguese football matches.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have tried to highlight how radio in the context of migration reveals complex dynamics of self-representation, as identity processes influence the construction of an imagined and mediated community. When the director of Radio ALFA asks, “to whom do we broadcast?”, he evokes a major problem that shadows the very notion of community. The processes included in mediating the notions of community throughout radio disclose a constant search for audience, as well as different ways to construct the identities of this imagined group, which depends upon several contingencies such as programming policy, different commercial targets, personal choices, emigrant generations, etc.

As shown in the section dedicated to programming, more generalist broadcasts try to combine different “units”, from news, to games, musical novelties, in order to target a broader community audience. More specific programs, such as *De terra em terra*, attempt not to lose the contact of radio with the notion of “tradition”, contributing to the maintenance of the “roots” of this imagined community, also considering the impact on local associations and the spreading of “correct” information about expressive practices.

As for Fado, one the main genres mediated by Radio ALFA, the modernization of this genre, as stated by Nery (2014), has been of major importance to renew the image of an “old Portugal” and to construct a more up-to-date notion of community. Fado appears here as an example of how music plays a major role in the negotiation of identity between tradition and

novelty, between the first generation of emigrants and their descendants. The survival of Radio ALFA in this context depends on its ability to constantly imagine its surrounding community and mediate symbols of identity, as shown by Folklore and Fado.

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