“Shout out to my friends Shazi & Ladoo”

Dr. Eleanor Shember-Critchley, Manchester Metropolitan University

Biography

Eleanor Shember-Critchley is Lecturer for Digital Media and Web Development within the Department of Languages, Information and Communications. She is a member of the Institute for Humanities and Social Science at MMU, the Chair of MeCCSA’s Radio Studies Network and also a member of European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). Her research interests revolve around radio, its communities, audiences, identity and developing research methodologies for practitioners.

She recently completed her PhD entitled ‘Ethnic Minority Radio: Interactions and Identity’. This examined ethnic minority radio stations from across the UK, from public to illegal broadcasters. She worked with the staff and DJs to understand how identity and ethnicity were mediated as part of everyday life within each station and its community.

Abstract

As part of a thesis on ethnic minority radio and identity, this paper presents an analysis and discussion of the role technology facilitated interaction plays at one station in creating a sense of community between the DJs and listeners. In particular, the paper focuses on the context and rules of on-air interaction that enables a reproducing of shared narratives but is also the setting for community learning and change.

The paper takes a qualitative approach utilising interview, observation and programme analysis. Giddens’ theory of Structuration (1984) is employed alongside Moores’ (2005) work on identity and Karner’s work on ethnicity (2007) to address the two main aspects of the paper:
1. An examination of the DJ's use of broadcast technology and situated rule use for community interaction.

2. How such interaction forms a continuing dialogue for the building of individual, station and community structures.

In this paper, ethnicity is situated in daily interactions where ‘knowledgeable and potentially reflexive individuals...are subject to potential re-negotiation and historical change’ (Karner, 2007, pp. 27). This re-negotiation of ethnicity is shown through the DJs’ active involvement with listeners through situated moments of interaction that in turn reflects, reifies and contributes to their multi-faceted identities.

The paper

1. Introduction

The past thirty years has seen a growth of ethnic minority radio stations. They occupy spaces in the public, commercial, community and pirate broadcasting sectors and are seen to provide valuable services for marginalised listeners. Yet, little is known about the practices of broadcasting within these stations and the role staff and their programmes play within their communities.

This paper explores how DJs use a variety of technologies and situated rules to enable interaction between the stations and their communities. In particular:

1. An examination of the DJ's use of broadcast technology and situated rule use for community interaction.

2. How such interaction forms a continuing dialogue for the building of individual, station and community structures.

The paper presents one case study, Asian Fever, a community radio station based in the mainly South Asian inner city district of Harehills, Leeds that began broadcasting in 2007. The station broadcasts predominantly in English, Punjabi and Urdu with afternoon programmes set aside for specialised Punjabi dialects such as Mir Puri, DJs play a variety of Bollywood, Lollywood (Lahore as Pakistan's
film capital), bhangra, Punjabi hits and some British Asian acts. Speech is provided in the form of community conversation with the DJ interacting directly with listeners. On Fridays the station dedicates programmes to religious spoken word provided for by visiting Molanas (religious clerics from the community).

In this paper the following theoretical concepts are used:

**Structures** (Giddens, 1984) are the radio station, collectives of agents drawing upon the ordering of broadcast rules for programmes, the performance of being a DJ, the cyclical structures of back office operation, and the related institutional structures the station utilises. Structures are also reflected in ethnicity and identity. They are the languages spoken, the rules of presentation the DJ adopts with different members of the community or shared religious beliefs that structure an agents’ day. These are all drawn upon not only to reproduce the station everyday through agent-to-agent interaction, but structures constitute the identity of the stations, their programmes, the staff and the communities of which the station is part. Many of these structures are momentary, existing in the doing of action. Structures are both internal to the agent, who draws on their own practices and experiences, but also external, shared by others and existing independently.

**Position-practice** (Stones, 2005) is a way of placing agents (station managers, administrators, DJs, technicians and marketing teams and also community, religious and creative figures) in relation to each other, as a network, whether in immediate co-presence or as part of the wider community.

The paper draws on Karner’s (2007) use of structures for ethnicity that similarly views ethnicity as processual, rather than reified or fixed. There are three related theoretical lenses:

**Structures of seeing** concern the ways in which someone interprets the positions they allocate to themselves and others in their social world of the station and its community. Such structures are found in the narratives of the agents involved at the station and their position in relation to others within their communities.
**Structures of feeling** shows ethnicity to be ‘rooted in...the most familiar experiences and practices that clothe people’s (early) lives, about sounds, sights, and smells that surround us’ (Karner, 2007, p. 34). For the paper these structures are be in the expressed emotions, observed behaviours and vocalised thoughts of agents within the stations.

**Structures of action** reflect the heart of structuration theory and bring together the structures of feeling and seeing. Ethnicity as part of the toolkit of structures that the agent calls upon, and is also constrained by, with an agent’s inner sense of the self created and maintained through situated dialogues with those around them.

**Cultural competences** (Moores, 2005) assume the listener is ‘capacity built’ in a similar sense as the broadcaster; able to share a depth of understanding not superficially achieved. Issues of identity are often subtly expressed where those equipped with a shared background or cross cultural understanding will notice certain phrases, turn of words, the meaning of the music being played.

2. An examination of the DJ’s use of broadcast technology and situated rule use for community interaction

The daily emphasis on interaction at Asian Fever meant they had invested in computerised text message and email within the studio so that the DJ at the mixing desk could handle participation. Calls came through a virtual telephone switchboard and if the caller were registered on the database, their details would flash up on screen as the phone silently rang. This enabled the system to be used for two purposes; silent ‘flash’ in between songs to prompt the DJ to ‘shout out’ their name or ‘flash’ during songs that indicated the caller wished to speak with the DJ. These interactions provided the cyclical and routine rhythms of the programmes with listeners using email, text and phone to take part in the programmes as unseen participants. The ‘flash’ up of registered users would also indicate approval of the music or a comment being made on air. These negotiated interactions would be incorporated into the speech of the DJ with names called out such as ‘oh I see Mrs Roys is up this morning, and Shazi is too’ (Co-Manager, 2008).
The phone system enabled listeners to be incorporated into air chat, performance and for more serious discussion of relevant mainly British based issues. It played host to an on-air talent show where listeners called in to perform songs, tell jokes and recite poetry or religious readings. This culminated in a live talent show at a local arts centre where many of the regular on-air participants attended to compete and finally meet each other.

3. How such interaction forms a continuing dialogue for the building of individual, station and community structures

The facilitated interactions had the effect of building up complex narratives between listeners over time. The station became a stage for position-practice of a shared community identity. Broadcast meaningful interactions created a ripple effect of ‘reproduction, learning and change’ (Coad and Herbert, 2009) of community structures.

For many, certain programmes were a daily event that had enabled listeners to become aware of, and interact with, positioned others of their community. The two managers felt this went some way to reduce the isolation felt by many in the area. Listeners would often listen throughout the day from their homes, in kitchens, at the takeaways or as taxi drivers at work. These participants would ‘flash’ throughout the day and in some cases would listen out for other pseudonyms of listeners so they could engage in ‘conversation’ through the DJ.

The text message system augmented the quality of DJ facilitated chat so that listeners would compose messages and dedications for fellow listeners they had never met but had got to ‘know’ from regular shout outs. One text message read ‘Slaam baji hope ur wel plz cud u play a nyc trk 4r my best mate shazi an ladoo an glub jaman! 4rm kyla’. This text message, typical of those received at the station, captured several structures being reproduced through the station. Examples such as particularised ‘text speak’ shared amongst younger members of the community, a reproduction of imagined friendship groups that only operated through the station and shared ‘cultural competences’ (Moores, 2005) of words such as ‘Gulab Jaman’ (a South Asian sweet) used, along with others, as pseudonyms.
These interactions and richly constructed narratives facilitated by the radio station had two outcomes. First, the subjects dealt with and the interactions mediated through the station subtly changed community structures. Second, the interactions, priorities and narratives of the listeners gradually changed the station’s structures of broadcasting and agent identity.

The meaningful dialogues that were built up over time were sometimes personally enabling. Here, the listeners viewed some DJs as trusted constants in their lives. One intensely shy listener was known on the telephone system as ‘Anonymous’ in Punjabi. The interaction with a particular female DJ meant ‘she’s come out of her shell, has started to go to college to learn to write English and maths and has started a business catering for weddings’ (Co-Manager, 2009). These small changes were part of a greater focus on personal agency within the South Asian community. By widening familiar cultural and familial structures during broadcasts, listeners were enabled to start accessing and interacting with wider communities in Leeds.

Perspectives within the community were explored through the phone-in discussion. The phone-in, hosted by a male and female of different age, views and background, employed shared collective cultural, religious and ethnic schemas to set the context of the debate. The male presenter recalled how ‘I’ve had callers call in and shout abuse because they don’t agree and I’ve had callers who agree…the community have changed a lot, they’ve opened up so much more, today we’re talking about Islamic culture, a year ago we couldn’t even touch the subject matter…people would not allow us because they would feel that it should be a scholar’ (Phone-in Presenter, 2009).

4. Conclusion

This paper explored how one ethnic minority radio station reaches and interacts with its audience. The outcomes of these interactions formed a duality, that is, an intertwining of mutual reproduction and change of station and community structures through the medium of radio.
Daily interactions, bound tightly into the programmes structures, played a significant role. Despite sometimes-meagre resources, the station had developed highly sophisticated structures of communication and rules of engagement for which ‘cultural competences’ and the use of the structures of feeling and seeing were crucial elements. The frequency and depth of these interactions demonstrated how important the station and its DJs were for the reproduction of shared narratives and as a conduit for position-practice across the community. These interactions were not always implicitly about the reproduction of community structures but as much about challenging boundaries, capacity for change and exploring new narratives.

Whilst the maintenance of the station and its community were a high priority, station agents were attuned to the enablement that a single, sustained conversation could have for individual members of their listenership. Lastly, the interactions often signified the deeply felt and experienced histories shared between the presenters and listeners.

References


