

A Brazilian Fairytale: Stories of a Conflicted Past
An Experiment in Interactive Podcasting

Caio Colagrande Castro

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By: Caio Colagrande Castro

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Dr. David Secko _____ Chair

Chair's name

Prof. Amélie Daoust-Boisvert _____ Examiner

Examiner's name

Dr. Andrea Hunter _____ Supervisor

Supervisor's name

Approved by Dr. David Secko _____

Chair of Journalism

_____, 2021, _____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, *Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science*

Abstract

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Caio Colagrande Castro

This research-creation thesis explores and experiments with interactivity in a journalistic podcast that combines narrative journalism and history. Most of the focus to date in interactive journalism has been on web-based tools and video (Usher, 2016). To the best of my knowledge there isn't any academic research focusing on interactive podcasts, even though this format has become more common and popular recently. Now that companies like Google, Amazon, and Spotify are starting to pay attention to interactivity in audio, the time has come for us to rethink the way we understand podcasting in the context of the internet.

In an effort to fill this gap, this research-creation thesis uses theoretical and practical approaches to analyze how to make podcasts interactive. I created and coded an interactive podcast series that allows listeners to navigate through episodes, choosing the order in which each episode will be played. The podcast series tells the ancient history of Brazil, how facts from a remote past still resonate and influence today's life in the country, and what needs to be done to overcome such historical wounds. The journalistic 'hook' is the history of my own family, whose past I have been researching for three years and provides connections with some of the essential moments of Brazilian history.

Over the course of the research, I focus on the challenges of creating narrative journalism that combines history. This work also focuses on ideas of accessibility in podcasting and discusses the challenges of producing a podcast during a pandemic. In the end, this research-creation thesis intends to provide some clarity and guidance for future studies in interactive podcasting.

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Introduction

Podcasts have been around for two decades, but only recently has their popularity increased considerably. Advanced access to the internet and mobile networks, along with the popularity of smartphones and applications focused on radio and audio productions, has helped podcasts earn a fair share of loyal fans. In seven years, between 2013 and 2020, weekly podcast audiences grew 236 per cent in the United States, from around 19 million listeners to 64 million (Edison Research, 2020). Perhaps unsurprisingly given these numbers, Spotify, one of the top on-demand audio platforms, bought two big podcasting outlets in 2019: Gimlet Media and Anchor. In Brazil, there is still room for the podcast industry to expand; while 28 million people listened to podcasts regularly in 2020 (a 33 per cent growth rate compared to 2019), this figure represents only 17 per cent of the Brazilian population (Kantar Ibope, 2021). Canadian statistics also indicate a small rise in the number of consumers; monthly listeners grew from 26 per cent of the Canadian population in 2019 to 27 per cent in 2020 (Vidler & Ulster, 2020).

Perhaps one of the best-known journalistic podcasts is *This American Life*, produced by National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States. While almost 20 years have passed since *This American Life's* first broadcast as a radio documentary program, little has changed in terms of narrative use in audio journalism, even when journalists try to distinguish themselves from the program crystallised by Ira Glass (Lindgren, 2016). The program has had a huge influence on how podcasts and radio documentaries sound (Wolfson, 2020). On the other hand, technological advancements have radically transformed the way people consume content, including news (Pavlik, 2013; Santana & Dozier, 2019). This shift creates possibilities for journalists to innovate their work. Innovation can be understood as "the process of taking new approaches to media practices and forms while maintaining a commitment to quality and high ethical standards" (Pavlik, 2013, p. 183; Planer & Godulla,

2021). One possible new approach is interactivity. Jensen (1998) defines interactivity as "a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication" (p. 201), enabling journalists and news outlets to experiment with innovative formats. Usher (2016) considers interactivity a solution to poor engagement with journalistic content and static web pages. She even calls interactives – informative pieces that rely on interactivity – “critical” for traditional journalism if it intends to succeed in the 21st century (p. 9).

Some non-journalistic podcasts are actively incorporating interactivity. *Solve* and *Escape Room: Frequency*, both launched in 2019, put the listener at the centre of the action. The former consists of one crime story per episode, in which the audience must follow the narrative, including police interrogations, the victims’ perspectives, and flashbacks, and solve the case. *Escape Room* has the audience unlocking codes based on the tips provided in the story, which in the right order will allow the person to navigate through the different episodes and "escape the room," that is, finish the podcast. In addition to these innovations, Spotify announced in September 2020, that the platform will start testing a poll feature allowing users to interact with creators. The aforementioned experiments with interactivity in the non-journalistic field are time-consuming processes that are technically complex and involve a lot of scripting and editing. Creating something similar for journalistic purposes would be impractical in a newsroom environment where reporters and editors need or demand a quick turnaround. It is perhaps not surprising then that while this sort of intense interactivity is being tested in fictional stories, newsrooms continue to produce more traditional linear podcasts. It is common for news programs to repackage their regular content for the internet and call it a podcast. For example, news and current affairs programs on the CBC are regularly edited for the internet and available for download through podcast subscription sites. That said, some podcasts that operate outside of legacy newsrooms, but are still news-

oriented, have experimented with interactivity that incorporates limited feedback from audiences. Often what they have done mimics what news organizations, particularly current affair shows, have done in the past, even pre-internet, incorporating listener feedback through email, letters, or phone calls. For example, the podcast [Verified](#) asks listeners to text them and then uses stories from their listeners in following podcast, the podcast [Reply-All](#) uses phone calls from listeners, and the podcast [Every Little Thing](#) starts with questions from listeners and builds the podcast from there. There are also some podcasts that are making more use of digital technology and the capabilities inherent in the internet to create new types of content. The podcast [Note to Self](#) incorporates voice memos from listeners, but also encourages listeners to take part in online quizzes and tests related to material in the podcast. Inkyfada, [Les sons du 14 janvier](#), uses a map that the listener can click through and choose what they'd like to listen to. In a similar manner, the podcast [CDS Shortwave](#) has the listener actively participate by turning a dial to go to the next piece of the podcast they want to listen to.

It is in this context that this research aimed to investigate how interactivity can be used in a journalistic podcast. At the same time, this research also experimented with how narrative journalism can be effectively used in a podcast, along with interactivity, to tell historical stories. Lindgren (2016) argues that the use of narrative techniques in storytelling can have a profound effect. As Lindgren writes, "the human brain is hardwired for empathy and the empathic response increases as we learn more about each other" (p. 27). Lindgren furthers that "narratives spark feelings of empathy in much the same way, which is why stories have the power to influence minds and motivate action" (p. 27). The power generated by the combination of narratives and journalism has been largely explored by Ira Glass and his team at *This American Life* (Lindgren, 2016, p. 25). Glass' journalistic approach has made *This American* an influential program since 1995 when it first aired as a radio program, to today where it is largely consumed as a podcast. In 2020, *This American Life* was the recipient of

the first Pulitzer Prize ever awarded to an audio program. Even though the process of making one episode could take up to "three or four" months (Abel, 2015, p. 14), Glass' vision of the whole product was – and still is – very simple (Yoked, 2020).

We're making *stories*. But like, you know, that's what the BBC calls the report coming in from Dubai on the market fluctuation. [...] I think you might be stuck with 'narrative journalism' if you want to call it something. I just want to make something that is compelling to me. (Abel, 2016, p. 11)

By "making something that is compelling," Glass means finding stories that make people stay tuned in, or, as he says, create "driveway moments," when a driver gets to their destination but doesn't get out of the car because they don't want to miss the end of the piece (USF, 2020). Glass' personal narrative style was evident from the very first episode of *This American Life*, on November 17, 1995, where he inserted himself in the story by interviewing his parents. The show has inspired a plethora of productions, especially podcasts launched by former *This American Life* producers and journalists. *Invisibilia*, *The Mystery Show*, *Planet Money*, and *Serial*, all have employed this highly intimate version of narrative journalism – personal narrative journalism.

In a similar manner, this research-creation work used the concept of personal narrative journalism to drive the storylines. The findings about the history of my family served as a starting point to make connections with the history of Brazil and present social issues. In my career as a journalist, I was not used to putting myself into a story, as such this research-creation podcast was also an experiment that reflects on the process of moving from being a journalist who is accustomed to telling other people's stories to experimenting with how my story, my family's story, can be told in this type of format that mixes personal narrative with the participation of experts, who will appear in a more traditional way, that is, in interviews about Brazilian history.

To summarize, the main focus of this research-creation thesis was to explore the intersection between interactivity in a journalistic podcast, personal narrative journalism, and historical research. Therefore, the main research question is: How can a journalistic podcast combine interactivity with narrative, personal journalism and historical research?

This main research question can be broken down into the following sub-questions:

1. What possibilities does interactivity open up for journalists who are creating podcasts and what are the limitations?
2. What possibilities does a narrative approach open up for journalists who are creating podcasts and what are the limitations?
3. How can an interactive, narrative podcast use historical research to create journalism? What are the possibilities and limitations?

In order to explore these questions, I created an interactive podcast which allows the audience to navigate through episodes – *The Brazilian Fairytale: Stories of a Conflicted Past*. A website entirely coded by myself was built that allows the listener to pick and choose which episodes they want to hear, in the order they prefer. The tracks on the website that connect the episodes give a visual clue to the reader as to where episodes connect through subject matter. Once they click on the desired circle, a box containing the podcast pops up. I have experimented with what I am calling “audiolinks”. Within the podcasts themselves, listeners will hear sounds indicating connections to other podcasts. They can then listen to a “sneak peek” of the related episode in the “audiolink” that is featured inside the box. This way, users are provided another option to choose their own narrative. The podcast content was designed so that no matter what path the listener chooses a ‘picture’ of Brazilian history and its connection to today’s social issues can be built in their minds. This journalistic product, that analyses how Brazilian history relates to social issues experienced nowadays, uses the history of my family to make connections between the past and the present. For the past three years, I

have been researching the stories of my ancestors – gathering information from archives, official sources, and newspapers. From this, I have been able to identify several people who actively participated at some point of fundamental moments of Brazilian history, including colonisation, slavery, Italian immigration, and the exploitation of natural resources. I have talked to experts in these areas to help me not only situate what happened in the past, but also how these moments are still felt today. This reflection on Brazilian history showed that there are many sensitive and violent occurrences over time that helped shape today's society; these occurrences are often hidden behind a notion that the country has always lived in peace. Hence, the title of this thesis: A Brazilian Fairytale.

Literature Review

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) argue that journalism has several functions, but its primary purpose is to "provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (p. 12). Waisbord (2019), in a more recent analysis, follows a similar principle when it comes to defining the field. For him, digital journalism is "the networked production, distribution, and consumption of news and information about public affairs" (p. 352). But in defining what journalism is, and what it isn't, the discussion heads into a grey area when it comes to production. Journalists are no longer the sole gatekeepers of information anymore. Instead of the traditional pipeline model, in which there was a one-way flow from source to audience, news media is now one dot in a network of intertwined players: audience, social media, government, websites, databanks, sources, and more (Gasher et al., 2016).

To better understand where communication professionals stand in this new world, Waisbord (2019) repurposes the 5Ws and 1H of journalism. The "who" question is essential: "although not everyone fits conventional definitions of 'journalist,' anyone can potentially play one on the internet" (p. 353). This is the reason why he employs the term "producers," a

blend of professional producers and users. This term denotes a paradigm shift, from passive readers to active users who not only consume the news, but help journalists and media organizations shape the news by sharing ideas, suggesting pitches, and participating in production. Even though content control is not solely in the journalist's hands – or, at least, not at the same level as before – is not necessarily bad news for journalism. It has helped to accelerate critique and a new look at journalists' roles (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018), and the development of a deeper relationship between professionals and audience, especially due to social media (Zúñiga et al., 2016). The literature shows that, while there is a need for studying major implications of this augmented participation, there is no going back to where journalism once stood in the past.

It's in this spirit, that this research-creation work aims to experiment with interactivity and narrative journalism as applied to a historical podcast, using personal stories as a starting point for debates and ideas for opening up novel formats of storytelling. This literature review will begin by discussing interactivity in journalism, and evolving relationships between journalists and audiences. It will then move on to discuss personal narrative journalism, and the debates around objectivity in journalism.

Interactivity in Journalism

In 2011, a short video of a one-year baby flipping through a magazine went viral. In one minute and 25 seconds, her father recorded the child's attempts to, unsuccessfully, "click" and "pinch" the pages, as if they were a tablet. In the last message of the video, the father says: "For my one-year-old daughter, a magazine is an iPad that does not work. It will remain so for her whole life. Steve Jobs has coded a part of her OS [operational system]" (UserExperiencesWorks, 2011). This silly video exemplifies how future generations will likely incorporate technology into their lives. The smartphone has already become the

preferred way to get the news in the United States. According to a recent Pew Research Centre report, 57 per cent of respondents said they use a mobile device, but among young adults between the ages of 18 to 29, the rate rises to 72 per cent. Meanwhile, desktop or laptop use has declined to 30 per cent (Pew Research Center, 2019).

At the same time, journalism has been urged to adopt innovative gathering and reporting methods as part of the solution to connect with citizens and encourage growth in the industry, something that legacy media has not seen in a while (Hunter, 2021; Pavlik, 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). Fortunately, the emergence of digital media, and the new technology that the internet has enabled, has helped journalists come up with new ways to tell stories. As Pérez-Montoro (2018) notes, "these new narrative forms have not only been consolidated by the advances in web technologies, but also by the evolution undergone by the devices used to consume that technology and those contents" (p. 2). With the advent of social media and other collaborative platforms, and the advancements in the telecommunications technology, people are consuming more and more news digitally on phones and mobile devices. Users are able to access content whenever they want, and consequently have an expectation of control over their news consumption.

Jensen (1998) defines the central aspect of interactivity as the relationship between sender and receiver that can assume a myriad of formats. Usher's definition of interactive journalism focuses on user control: "interactive journalism is...a visual presentation of storytelling through code for multilayered, tactile user control for the purpose of news and information" (Usher, 2016, p. 20). The publication of *Snowfall* (New York Times, 2012) marked the birth of a new era in online journalism and established a model that has been reproduced many times (Dowling & Vogan, 2014). *Snowfall* showcased how a multi-media approach could be taken to create content for the internet and open up different ways for the user to experience the story. The influence of the intense use of graphics, the intertwining of

photos, videos, sounds, and text can be seen in today's journalism (Planer & Godulla, 2021). As Gutsche (2021) writes Snowfall "with its responsiveness and its narrative and immersive scenery and sound" had a profound effect and "created a craze among convergent newsrooms, sparking creativity and agency in journalists to try new things, and giving themselves something to sell to audiences" (para 2). As Planer and Godulla (2021) describe, since Snowfall "further media outlets have produced comparable digital longforms, including multiple chapters in their stories, adopting a rather non-linear structure, and letting the user explore the topics on their own" (p. 567). Interactive journalism has also evolved through the use of interactive maps based on data (Usher, 2016), social media (Zúñiga et al., 2016), newsgaming (Dowling, 2021; Foxman, 2015), and the emergence of virtual and augmented reality (Dowling, 2021). One interesting recent example of how information can be conveyed in interactive ways is the Brazilian project "No epicentro" ("At the epicentre"), a piece done in July 2020 [by Piauí magazine](#) in partnership with the Google News Initiative and [translated into English by The Washington Post](#). In this piece, the user inserts their address to visualise how their neighbourhood would look if all COVID-19 deaths were their neighbours. Then, the page returns a map in which each white dot represents one COVID-19 death recorded since the beginning of the pandemic. Using a button to advance in time from the first COVID-19 case in the country until the current day, more white dots are added to map as the pandemic worsened, representing the increasing death toll over time. That way, the reader is able to visually understand the extent to which deaths caused by COVID-19 happened in their country. It helps to contextualise what the death toll means in a way that is easier to understand than simply using numbers. This work fits in the concepts that Usher (2016) uses to evaluate interactivity; the reader can choose how many addresses they want to try and discover what the death toll would like like in various locations without interference from journalists – that is, "the user is free to exert an influence on the content" (Jensen, 1998, p.

201). It also comprises two dimensions in one: at the individual level, this journalistic piece shows what is directly related to the user; at a broader level, and at the same time, it tackles the same topic nationally, showing country numbers and facts. This work has received so much attention that it has been granted two awards at the 2020 Digital Media Awards. By the time this thesis was written, “At the epicentre” was competing for the title of best data visualization project in the world.

But why are these new formats and projects necessary for journalism, if at all? Batsell (2015) answers this question using three major arguments. First, it is a general consensus that as the years have gone by, the news consumer has not only changed but also demanded enhanced experiences. In other words, “in the digital era that basic expectation of interactivity has become one of the most essential components of effective journalistic engagement” (p. 105). Second, the new approach has proven financially valuable for newsrooms as companies. At the same time that journalists are producing accurate and meaningful content, adopting interactivity has driven revenue for several news organizations (p. 2). Finally, engaging with the audience through interactivity revitalizes the journalistic work. Most journalists Batsell interviewed for his book “have come to approach audience engagement as not only a necessity but also an opportunity to reinvigorate their careers and bring more relevance to their work” (p.146).

The examples above in this literature review demonstrate that journalism is adopting new methods to innovate and evolve. However, this is largely a level of interactivity not seen in podcasting as of yet. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw from other media experience when considering how interactivity might evolve in audio journalism. Usher’s (2016) and Batsell’s (2015) work focuses on multimedia, web-based productions when they state that interactive journalism broadens the user experience. I believe the same concept can be applied to audio; interactivity in audio can enhance the way listeners consume podcasts by providing users with

"the ability to tell himself or herself a story" (Usher, 2015, p. 21) and this will promote audience engagement.

There have been attempts to achieve this goal using the tools available today. Podcasts like the aforementioned *3D Escape Room* and *Solve* are two examples that show us there is a way for journalists to think about radio under alternative logics. They promote some choice and freedom for listeners to get immersed and participate in the episode and the narrative, even if it is limited due to the platforms they use to host their shows. Focused research on the junction between interactivity and audio projects is scarce, even though commercial developments aiming to create new experiences for listeners have just recently been announced. As mentioned earlier, in 2020 Spotify, the top on-demand audio platform, announced a new function to present users a poll on specific parts of a podcast (Carman, 2020). The advancement of voice assistant technology may also provide new platforms for advanced audio interactivity in the future, enabling new features like real-time interaction between listener and device (Ward, 2019). This type of technology, however, is still in development.

While several of the news-oriented audio productions cited in the introduction – *Verified*, *Reply-All* and *Every Little Thing* – explore interactivity by employing direct contact with listeners, none has changed how the narrative of their shows work. Narratives are one-directional and linear, organized in episodes that must be listened to in a certain order pre-determined by the news organization. On the other hand, *Inkyfada* and *CDS Shortwave* are two news-oriented podcasts that give the listener some choice in how they will listen to the programming. It is in the spirit of these two types of experimental podcasts that my work takes its cue. Theoretically I am borrowing from what Pérez-Montoro (2016) calls the main characteristic of interactivity: that "both the system and its user can alternate their roles as sender and receiver in that dialogue" (p. 3). The challenge here is allowing the listener to

share control over the narrative, thus generating a singular experience for each person that listens to the podcast. As such, this research deals with interactivity in the context of how users can become “producers” (Waisbord, 2019). While they will not create content in this research-creation experiment, they will be able to choose and explore their own narrative, based on their choice of the listening order – which may be in line with what they deem to be important or perhaps even completely random.

The journalistic podcast produced in this research-creation project experiments with interactivity in two manners: first, it will give audience agency by choosing the order in which they listen to the podcast through a web page; and second, it will make links between narratives in the podcast so the listener sees connections regardless of the preferred order of episodes and can quickly jump to the sections in these other episodes that address similar content. As in other audio productions, user control will be limited due to the lack of specific podcast technologies that allow for enhanced interactivity, a pitfall that will be addressed later in the “Findings” section.

Narrative Journalism and Audio

As opposed to traditional, hard news journalism, narrative journalism tackles topics of the world under a completely different logic. As van Krieken and Sanders (2016) argue, the fundamental distinction between both lies in the questions journalists ask. When it comes to narrative journalism, the "how" and "why" are the primary concern, while hard news pieces will focus on "what", "when", "why", "who", "where", and "how" (p. 1367). The answers to those questions are also presented differently; traditional journalism will take an inverted pyramid approach (Clark, 2000, p. 11), while narrative journalism will describe news "through the eyes and minds of real persons involved in the events, who become characters with whom readers can empathize and identify" (van Krieken and Sanders, 2016, p. 1367). It

is crucial to make the distinction clear because when we consider podcasting, this media has enabled the emergence of a myriad of genres, from informal and amateur monologues by hobbyists to audio documentaries crafted by seasoned journalists (McHugh, 2016, p. 66), and not every podcast will use narrative journalism.

Although there has been recent research that looks closely at the use of personal narrative journalism (Lindgren, 2016; Neveu, 2014; van Krieken & Sanders, 2016), it is not a new format. Coward (2013) links its roots to the New Journalism movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but when it comes to audio, McHugh (2016) argues that we can go back in time even further: "The genre has its origins long before the advent of podcasting. Indeed the first 'radio features' emerged at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the 1920s and 1930s" (p. 67). Still, in recent times with the rise of podcasting, this genre is clearly changing the way journalists inform people and ultimately tell stories.

Lindgren (2016) advocates for using this approach, stating that "using your own life material in storytelling can be a powerful way to connect in ways that resonate with listeners." (p. 189). However, she points out the risks posed to journalists who want to insert themselves into the storytelling based upon her own experiences with the podcast *Losing My Identity*, which explored the loss of her Swedish citizenship. She says journalists need to think carefully about the choices they make in storytelling, and whether they are being "authentic" and "truthful."

Autoethnographic journalism poses the risk that friends and family members may be hurt or in some way harmed through personal exposure (...). However, in breaking the rules, I was acutely aware that my documentary needed to be a balanced account of the story, told in a way that was authentic, truthful for listeners, and with care paid to the risk of self-exploitation and abuse of my family members. (p. 195)

Others have discussed how addressing personal stories is usually avoided in more traditional newsrooms. Still, there is some room to work with emotions in such an environment, as Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) says:

[A]lthough some aspects of the story-telling conventions – such as journalists refraining from discussing their own emotions – are consistent with ‘objective’ practices, others – such as the fact that emotional expression rarely relies on evidence in the form of quotes from sources – are not. The excellence of award-winning journalism appears to give journalists the license to experiment with both form and evidentiary basis when enlisted in the cause of making important stories come alive for their audiences. (p.142)

Keeping these cautions in mind, the journalistic podcast produced in this research-creation thesis draws from personal narrative journalism techniques – especially foreshadowing, cliffhangers and a near/far approach. The goal was to use these techniques to make the podcast more enticing for listeners, in order to keep them engaged

Objectivity

In this podcast I have experimented with personal narrative journalism and will reflect on how objectivity is challenged in narrative journalism, and how subjectivity and impartiality can (or can't) intermingle. Objectivity and impartiality have been subject of broad debate in journalism for decades and largely critiqued by academics in the field (Hunter, 2015; 2021). The discussion between critics and defenders of neutral practices in the profession becomes even more passionate when narrative journalism is included in the mix (Hanson, 1997).

Deuze (2005) explains that the term "objectivity" – a flagship norm of journalism in the United States that has been adopted in many places worldwide, including in Brazil

(Sponholz, 2004, p. 152) – has been defined using words such as "fairness," "professional distance," "detachment," or "impartiality" (p. 448). However, some are critical of this concept, suggesting it is impossible and even undesirable (Cunningham, 2003; Deuze, 2005; Hunter, 2021; Tuchman, 1972). Journalists such as Chowdhury (2020) challenge the concept of objectivity at its very core; pointing out that ideas of impersonality and unbiasedness do not work for journalists coming from historically marginalized backgrounds who find it “impossible” to dissociate themselves from the story being covered:

As my education went on, I internalized it as a personal failing, that inability to dissociate from myself when I was on the job. These days, it feels like Canadian journalism asks something almost impossible of people of colour. It asks them to set aside the traumas they face on a daily basis for the sake of an industry largely created by white people. To legitimize viewpoints that denounce their very existence in the name of balance. To be less human in the most important ways they know how. And I don't know how to do that. (para 3)

The Black Lives Matter movement has also generated intense debate in the journalism field. As noted by Lowery (2020):

Black journalists are publicly airing years of accumulated grievances, demanding an overdue reckoning for a profession whose mainstream repeatedly brushes off their concerns; in many newsrooms, writers and editors are now also openly pushing for a paradigm shift in how our outlets define their operations and ideals. (para 4).

Dhillon (2018) and Hunter (2019) have been drawing attention to inequalities imposed on Black people and people of color, and women, respectively, in Canadian media outlets. Hunter argues that “because of the vital role that journalism plays in society, it is also important to have people from diverse backgrounds working in newsrooms, as reporters, editors, and managers” (Hunter, 2019, p. 288).

Tong and Zuo (2021) point out that the validity of objectivity is open to debate and skepticism around this journalistic value seems to be growing.

Some scholars (such as Glasser and Ettema 1989; Merrill 1990) regard objectivity as only applicable to certain types of news reporting, such as “straight news reporting” (e.g., hard news reporting) but inapplicable to investigative journalism or advocacy journalism (Gauthier 1993). For example, in the context of environmental reporting, which is often seen as advocacy journalism, objectivity is criticised for being inauthentic, as paying equal attention to both sides of arguments may lead to the inaccurate representation of reality and a loss of meaning in reports (Bavadam 2010).

Other scholars (such as Tuchman 1972; Carlson 2007; Boudana 2011; Lewis 2012) see the claim to objectivity as a strategy used by news organisations to control journalists or a tactic employed by journalists to avoid bearing the responsibility for conveying opinions in their reports or to defend their journalistic authority. Even in the context of the United States, more recent research has revealed that journalists may not necessarily embrace objectivity as the most important journalistic principle. (p.154)

Warhover (2017) argues against a formal objectivity, turning instead to the notions of transparency, verification, truth-telling, and sense-making. In addition, Warhover claims that the lack of sentiment and the intense focus on impartiality have served to distance audiences and journalism, as opposed to what fake news does when it plays with emotions. In his opinion, news people need to “pay more attention to telling great stories of the human condition” (para 35). Hanson (1997) goes further when addressing narrative journalism, saying that journalists should focus on conveying “meaning”:

The goal of the reporter should be to go beyond the simple presentation of fact to the creation of an understandable world for the reader where the meaning intended by the author is brought to completion by the experiences of the reader. But the reporter must

remain grounded in the world of actual occurrences and not take flight into the fabricated world of art. (p. 393)

Hanson (1997) also sees no conflict between narrative and what he calls "objective journalism," stating that both are complementary, with narrative accounting for "how" the content will be presented, and the latter, where the information comes from. Deuze (2005) argues that, although true objectivity may not be possible, journalists should at least pursue this ideal.

The evolution and massive adoption of social media in recent years has played a significant role in reshaping journalists' relationship with objectivity and the audience as well. If in the past readers, listeners, and viewers were deemed distant entities, today they exchange not only newsworthy information, but also personal details of private life in a movement that has proven positive for many professionals, news organizations, and the audience (Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis, 2018). As Brems, Temmerman, Graham, and Broersma (2017) write, the sharing of the journalist's intimate life

...can make a tweet more attractive to read for the audience, as is the case with adding attachments such as links and pictures. These details can give the virtual performance of the journalist multiple layers that appear to be close to who the user really is as a person. (p. 453)

This exchange of information, providing the audience with the ability to learn more about the "person, rather than only the journalist" (p. 452), is also subject of this research as I delve into family stories, backgrounds, and details.

Over the course of my professional career, I have been taught that concepts such as objectivity, fairness, balance, and impartiality are unbreakable rules in journalism. As both a reporter and editor, I defended these values as important and fundamental to the profession, and I strove to adhere to them. However, the aforementioned literature has provided me with

new perspectives that I wanted to put to the test in this research-creation thesis, including positioning myself in relationship to the stories I tell in the podcasts. This departure from a more traditional format of journalism will be addressed in the findings.

Methodology

This research-creation thesis consists of two components. First, I created a podcast series telling the history of Brazil through a contemporary lens, discussing how facts from the past keep resonating in the present day. The journalistic hook was the stories that happened to my family in the past that hold a link to the country's current situation. The main objective of this research was experimenting with intersections between interactivity, narrative journalism, and history within journalism.

The use of narrative fits in what Usher (2016) calls a "far-near" approach characteristic of interactive journalism. "By near, it is not just the local that is imagined, but actual data relevant to a person—data that is individually specific. Far journalism speaks back to the larger picture of the story, which may be international, national, and local" (p. 190). Even though Usher is speaking specifically about interactivity for web and data, this concept also applies to other formats. The intersection between audio and history is a subject of study in academia as well. Smith (2017) argues that "a vivid sense of 'being there' is the objective for radio history programs," adding that a well-crafted piece of audio reporting has the power to transport listeners to a different world – the world and the places from the past (p. 182).

Second, I have produced this written report to reflect on how interactivity and narrative journalism can be applied to a podcast that draws on history. Throughout the findings I will discuss the possibilities for audio in this field, as well as restrictions due to the actual lack of technology focused on audio productions.

Podcast

To enhance interactivity, this podcast is hosted on a dedicated website. Listeners are able to navigate through the content and create a unique narrative. It is designed to look like a map of metro lines, containing stations related to the subjects that are covered. Each one represents different origin points of my family. At some points these lines cross each other, indicating common topics. In each podcast, there is the sound of a bell that rings at various points, indicating that the audience can pause the podcast and go to the ‘sneak peek’ of the related episode that is provided at the ‘station’. This adds a new layer to the interactivity aspect of the work.

The series begins with an episode that introduces the overall topic and explains how the experience works. Then the listener can choose where to start and how to navigate through the remaining episodes. These four episodes are comprised of some of the most fundamental events in Brazilian history:

- Colonisation and Indigenous People
- Exploitation of Natural Resources
- African slavery
- Immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries

Along the way, the listener comes across six of the family members, whose stories I tell sourced by the research done based on records that are publicly available. To provide historical context and a diversity of points of view (considering that the genesis of this podcast was my family’s stories), I interviewed Brazilian experts with research backgrounds in these topics so that the podcast can build a bridge between facts from the past, the present, and the consequences of those events for the future, adding another journalistic component to this work.

The interviews were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese and translated into English subtitles, in order to maintain the original voices and tone of the interviewees. The reasons for this are explored in the findings.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, audio capture proved to be a challenge due to internet connectivity and the different devices each interviewee used to talk (laptops, microphones, and smartphones). While I had hoped to visit the interviewees in person and capture clear, rich sounds, because of pandemic restrictions all interviews were done remotely. I made do with the equipment the interviewees were working with and focussed on the content of the interviews. The podcasts also use recordings publicly available from recent events like the Black Lives Matter movements and television news conferences. Sound effects and music also helped to build the atmosphere throughout the podcasts.

Report

This thesis report reflects on what has been learned from creating an interactive podcast that incorporates personal narrative journalism and history. Given the novelty of the subject, in addition to what went right, in the findings I also discuss where and how this endeavour went wrong – or, at least, what could be done differently in future occasions – and suggest areas in which future researchers can look into. It is important to note from the outset that this work does not rely on audience-reaction, which means its main intention is to explore possibilities for interactivity, incorporating narrative journalism and history, from the point of view of the journalist. Once the podcast is live, metrics tools such as Google Analytics will be able to provide statistics that may help to assess in the future how audiences navigated the episodes and which order they have chosen to listen to them, among other insights.

Another component applied to this work is the concept of autoethnography. According to Lindgren (2017), it is a useful technique that "allows researchers and producers to

reflexively explore their personal experiences and interactions with others" (p. 184), that is, a technique for reflexive analysis done by the author themselves. Autoethnography also combines "characteristics of ethnography and autobiography" (Pace, 2012, p. 2). Since this research-creation relies on my own annotations, investigation, and examination of a podcast that tells the story of my own family, and my own story consequently, autoethnography serves as a tool for reflective analysis. The task of keeping track of my own work focussed on the following areas:

Self-reporting

Even though, as explained in the literature review, I employed classic journalistic interview techniques in this podcast by interviewing experts who provided historical context for each episode, the final product experiments with narrative storytelling, where I, as the journalist, insert myself in the story.

Given this, a portion of the findings consists of sharing the insights gleaned from the following questions:

- What was it like putting my family story, and in effect myself, into a piece of narrative journalism?
- How was it different from the so-called objective and impartial journalism I was used to typically practicing in traditional newsrooms?

While these questions may sound unnecessary for some, they represent real-life moral discussions in which journalists find themselves when they move away from more established professional standards (Richards & Rees, 2011). Lindgren (2017), for instance, in her autoethnography analysis of her radio production *Losing my Identity*, reflects on how strongly she reacted to the fact that her Swedish citizenship had been revoked, noting that the same fact had not disturbed the rest of her family with the same intensity (p. 194). She would

ponder about the boundaries between the journalistic value of that intimate story and the potential consequences on her relatives – husband, children, and parents – of such narrative being publicly aired (p. 195). Considering that my podcast takes a similar approach to Lindgren's, a reflection on self-reporting is crucial.

Interactivity and History

This report also addresses technical aspects of the production (the process of enabling interactivity in audio) and how I was able to combine history with personal stories from my family's past. Again, because I wanted to analyze my process through all those components, the autoethnographic approach was suitable.

Throughout the process I reflected on the following questions:

- What sort of interactivity was I able to put into this podcast series? What did I think about when I was doing this? What were the limitations?
- How did I incorporate history into my family stories? What issues did I face when I was doing this? How challenging was it to connect the larger historical events/issues to my family's particular story? Or did I find it a good way to bring these larger issues/events "to life"? Or some combination?

Throughout the process of creating the podcast I wrote down my thoughts, observations, and challenges. I then analyzed my notes, grouping them into themes of interest and selected the most relevant ones for an in-depth reflection that forms the findings section of this thesis report.

Findings

The findings are divided into two main sections Interactivity, and Narrative Journalism that incorporates History. Even though it was not foreseen when this research was conceived,

accessibility issues and translation challenges came up throughout the process and they will also be addressed in this chapter. The findings will also address the challenges of producing a research-creation podcast during a pandemic.

Interactivity

Initially, inspired by the aforementioned podcasts *Solve* and *Escape Room*, I envisioned this work – both the podcast and the website, coded entirely by myself – as providing the listener an opportunity to navigate through the episodes without a specific order. Due to the unusual format, the only mandatory step would be to listen to the first podcast, an introduction explaining how the podcasts as a whole work. The connections between the topics addressed and timeless scripts, which did not need a specific order to be understood, would then make it possible for listeners to choose their own path and create their own narrative. The tracks on the metro line would give users indications of how episodes connected to each other.

While this initial idea is used in the final project, as I was putting it together it still felt somehow insufficient. I wanted to push the current boundaries of interactivity and try something new. I felt there should be a way to connect those episodes in a deeper manner, maybe intertwining the content, like the hyperlink does in textual news pieces on the Internet. You can't read an article online without running into a hyperlink, or several, connecting you to other articles or places on the internet that have something to do with the story you're currently reading.

That was when the concept of the audiolink was born. I wanted to be able to provide the listener with an option to jump from episode to episode, connecting not only the broad theme tackled in each podcast, but also connecting to internal parts of them.

The Audiolink

When it comes to interactivity, the first question that needs to be addressed is: how? When I was trying to figure out the ‘how’ in terms of the audiolink, I needed to look closely into what was possible for developers, and the possibilities and limitations of the technology available to me.

First, as mentioned earlier in this report, one issue I ran up against is that there is a blatant lack of resources for researchers, creators, and general audiences to explore interactivity in the audio medium at the same level as there is for text and video. For example, let’s start with a very basic element of the Internet: Hypertext Markup Language, commonly known as HTML. In HTML, each element has a given number of intrinsic properties, which modify that element. The element “video” has 15 attributes, while the “audio” element has eight (Mozilla). Also, HTML has a built-in function that allows videos to display subtitles and captions, while there is no HTML function providing podcasters with the ability to display the audio transcription. These differences are an indication of how audio is lagging behind compared to other media. Virtual and Augmented Reality, volumetric video, and holographics are just three examples of the level of development video productions have achieved.

The second aspect to take into consideration is that this lack of resources limits what producers are able to do. To use video as an example one more time, YouTube, the biggest video platform in the world, launched “cards” in 2015 to allow users to click on the screen while the video is playing and visit another page – a related video or website (Fingas, 2015). These cards were – and still are – the visual correspondent of what hyperlink means to text.

That same concept of the hyperlink is the key to this experiment: the goal was to make podcasts navigable and interactive in a way that you can refer to another audio file, listening to the episodes back and forth. However, how would it be possible to create such an experience when the resources for this do not exist or are, at the very least, currently reserved

for big private companies such as Amazon, Google or Apple? The solution I came up with was to borrow elements from HTML to mimic what it might *feel like* to browse episodes without restrictions.

Even though I'm not a programmer, in order to build this project I taught myself the languages I needed to know. All the website coding, including source code, animation, and styling, was built by myself using HTML, JavaScript, and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). Learning how to navigate these languages and built the website was a timeconsuming process, but an interesting one, as I was very invested in seeing how it would feel to build something from the 'ground up' and experiment with this idea of the 'audio hyperlink'.

In order to produce this experience, I had to create a system to allow for a raw form of interactivity: What I came up with was that when a given sound – in this case a bell chime – is heard during the podcast, it means that topic being discussed also appears in a different episode, tackled from a different viewpoint. Now, the listener can jump back and forth between episodes.

From a technical perspective, I had to create two separate audio files: one was the episode itself, and another being the excerpt from the podcast in which the related topic is addressed. Both audio files are featured inside the same box, labeled in a way that makes it clear which is which. The user is provided with instructions before listening to the episodes so that they understand the concept and enjoy the experience.

I decided to include only one excerpt from each episode to put this proof of concept to the test without compromising the website and the listening. Too many audiolinks could disturb the overall experience; there was the risk the listener would lose attention with so many options to stop, and also that too many links would compromise the website layout. Ideally, if/when the technology is available, it would be best for the podcasts to have multiple audiolinks that bring the listener seamlessly, either on the same page or in a different window

as textual hyperlinks do today, to multiple points in other podcasts. However, due to the limited technology, this experiment contains one audiolink per episode.

The outcome is promising; the audiolink seems to work well on the website. It helps to not only add a new perspective to the content, but I believe it will encourage the user to listen to the other episodes. By presenting listeners with brief excerpts from the related content, the podcast gives the opportunity of controlling the experience in a deeper manner, allowing for interactivity.

Even though the experimental prototype has been created successfully, there are some limitations worth mentioning. First, the website format may not be the most intuitive and inviting environment for this type of media. It worked well for the sake of experimentation and as a “workaround” to allow audiolinking back and forth, but smartphones and voice assistants are the preferred devices to listen to podcasts on, so this design would have to be adopted to mobile technology. Second, some users may not want to keep their device’s screens on for so long and might want to turn their screens off and listen to the podcast while doing some other activity. This might impede the use of audiolinking. Also, because the interviews were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese, the use of captions for an English speaking audience was imperative. As will be discussed in the next section, while it might seem as if captioning poses a limitation at first glance because the audience needs to be looking as well as listening, it also offers an opportunity to make the podcast more inclusive.

In summary, there is a need for new technologies and programming languages to allow for new types of experiences in audio. The popularization of the voice assistance could end up being a starting point to build an audio-based solution providing interactivity in a similar way to the experience I have created using HTML, JavaScript, and CSS. Those programming languages are mainly visual-based, while audio productions need something different.

Translation and Accessibility

I decided to conduct the interviews in Brazilian Portuguese, because this was the language the interviewees were most comfortable speaking. I wanted them to feel as free as possible when they were speaking to me, so they could focus only on the message they wanted to convey, rather than searching for the correct words in English. After making this decision, I was faced with how best to make these interviews accessible to an English-speaking audience. In pre-pandemic times it might have been easier to just record a voice-over with the translation. However, as will be addressed later in the findings, I was living in isolation in Brazil during the production of this podcast, and it would have been very difficult to find people to voice the translations and then coach them through the recordings of these translations. My supervisor has a lot of experience with voice coaching for these types of productions, and after many discussions about how we might approach this, it was decided that even if I was able to find people who would help, it was simply impossible during the pandemic to produce something of the quality that was needed, as I would want to have control over the recording and do in-person voice coaching of the translations. As well, during these discussions I realized that one of the podcast's intentions is to bring a Brazilian atmosphere to the listener and keeping Portuguese in the podcast would be one way to do this. Also, considering that some of the interviewees come from minority groups I was not comfortable putting someone else into the podcast to speak over their voices, worried that this might be in some way silencing them. The solution I came up with was to use English subtitles so that I could keep the interviews in their original language and not lose the importance that their tone and timber bring to their words.

However, once I came up with this idea, I found it surprisingly difficult to address this issue technically. As mentioned in the interactivity section, there is no built-in solution in HTML allowing captioning, and even specialized companies like Spotify have just now

started to test the use of subtitles for podcasts. This makes accessibility for podcasts basically non-existent, except maybe for hypothetical workarounds.

The solution I found was, again, borrowing from the tools offered to other media and applying them to the podcast. I uploaded the episodes to YouTube and added the subtitles there. I had to manually adjust the timestamps, but the outcome was intriguing. It was the first time I had listened to a bilingual podcast and I was surprised by the feelings and emotions that came from the interviewees. The problem with voice translation over interviewees' voices is that the tone can be lost. In this case, we were discussing topics that were, at times, very personal for the experts, and the tone of their voice, along with their words, were part of the answers to my questions. Adding the subtitles helped to give the listener an accurate sense of what a given topic meant for the speaker.

Although I wasn't thinking about this at the beginning, this whole process brought up some very interesting discussions around accessibility. For those who have hearing disabilities, captioning means opening access to content they previously had been denied. As a hearing-impaired person myself, I know how subtitles can help us understand the world, especially when we share the same space with non-impaired people. I know that many hearing-impaired people – in Brazil and around the world – desire captioning for podcasts, so that this medium is open to them.

In terms of limitations, it is worth mentioned that the video format is not ideal for displaying podcasts subtitles. It was provisional a way I came up with to make it possible to use captioning, but video adds an unnecessary complexity to an audio-based podcast.

Translation from Portuguese to English also proved to be a challenge at times. Not only because the languages are different, but because sometimes the expressions used in Portuguese would have no direct counterpart in English. My supervisor and I would have

discussions about how best to portray meaning in English, without losing the intent behind the Portuguese words.

Narrative Journalism and History

Throughout the course of this research-creation work, I have had my journalistic sensibilities challenged several times. Working in a podcast format that is attempting to use narrative techniques and using my family as part of the stories was a very different approach for me. This section brings examples and analysis of these moments, using an autoethnographic approach where I look closely at my own experiences through the podcast creation.

First person: I Must be Doing Something Wrong

In many newsrooms journalists are still expected to work with a high level of neutrality, or as it is commonly known in the field, objectivity, or fairness and balance. In order to achieve this, scholars and professionals in the business have built a set of principals over time. Probably the most fundamental of them is the need to use the third person in text because “the writer should not be a part of the story” (Melton, 2008). This requirement proved to be especially difficult when writing and producing a narrative piece, especially one that uses personal framing. Over the years, both in academia and as a professional journalist I have been taught to abolish the first person. It was so ingrained in me that I prohibited the use of words like “I”, “my”, or “mine” when I led a newsroom.

The first impact of how it felt to go against this training came even before I started doing the research-creation production. Because I was going use my family’s history as a background for the interactive podcast, invariably it would be necessary to write the proposal in the first person. While I tried to avoid doing it by rephrasing the sentences – replacing “I”

with “the author”, for example – at some moments it was just not feasible and it was necessary to use the first person. When my supervisor read over the proposal, she changed “the author” to “I”, encouraging me not to hesitate to put myself into the piece. At times though, it still felt just wrong, even though I knew this was an experiment, and a chance for me to try different types of writing and production.

Writing the script in the first person, on the other hand, was easier than expected. I tried to make it the most conversational possible, and the first person is a strong way to achieve the feeling of intimacy and closeness that comes through conversation. At the same time, it also became glaringly apparent that it was going to be impossible to be “neutral” while speaking of my own history. And in all fairness, I did not want the text to be too impartial; after all, I wanted to tell my family’s history, and placing myself far from the narrative not only would make little sense but also would hurt the listener’s experience.

This finding could – or will – be target of criticism among some researchers or more traditional journalists. However, the most important goal in every production is to deliver the best journalistic product possible while following principles that ensure trustable reporting. In some cases, and this podcast seems to be in this category, the best alternative is to break some of the conventions.

Memories Cannot be Erased

In 2019, I travelled to Portugal as part of a brief Eurotrip. In one of the museums I visited, there was a table made out of “pau-brasil,” one of three species largely exploited by the Portuguese crown in the beginning of the Brazilian colonisation, between 1500 and 1530. Even though rationally I knew that table represented facts from a very ancient past, my emotions spoke louder as I became more and more upset at seeing furniture made of exploited

Brazilian wood exhibited at a Portuguese museum. If I could, at that moment, I would have taken that table back to Brazil.

This anecdote may sound silly but describes very accurately a similar feeling that arose during the script writing. When I started to write the episode on colonisation, the museum memory came to mind almost instantly, and the same upsetting emotion emerged. The reaction was not expected, as I have deemed myself impartial enough to control such feelings, perhaps an overconfident self-assessment. Still, my journalist side took over and tried to balance the situation out. If I was going to have such a reaction, how could I ensure the report's accountability? How could I make sure the final product would not be a mere personal rant?

I arrived at two answers to that question: first, I would have to read and edit the script several times, adding statistics, documents, and experts' takes, until I felt the final version was as accurate as I could make it. Second, I needed to be frank with the listener and give some personal context. I began in the first paragraph after the intro: "If you were born in the 1990s, like me, chances are that one of the first things you've learned in school is that Brazil was discovered on April 22nd, in 1500, by Pedro Álvares Cabral." Three paragraphs later, I wrote the following: "If you feel like it's difficult to believe in such a scene, yeah, you're right. But that's still the way a great deal of Brazilians think History unfolded."

It was important to situate the listener within my educational background. I have been taught one History, while the truth behind some of the 'facts' I had been taught, was actually very different. And that goes for a great deal of Brazilians, whose education relied on the same schoolbooks. The episode is not only about the audience's journey, but also my own path of discovery. In summary, the best solution I found to work around my feelings was to share with listeners my own background, while making sure the final draft was historically accurate.

There are Different Levels of Family

Prior to this research-creation work, I believed I should give the same treatment and care to all of my relatives. However, what I found to my surprise, is that there are different levels of families, and different levels of bias and commitment. I felt a deeper connection with the episode on Italian immigration, for instance, than I did with the colonisation one. The reason upon reflection is clear: I have always maintained a much closer relationship with my mother's side of the family. Therefore, it was considerably easier and pleasant to collect stories and facts from this part of my family tree. I had many discussions with my mother and my mother's side of the family as we went back and forth discovering stories about our relatives. On the other hand, nearly all information I gathered from my father's side was retrieved from newspapers, documents, and books, that is, it was more impersonal.

However, even within different sides of families there are sub-groups. While what I discovered about some people on my father's side of the family tree did not cause me much reaction, others were subject to therapy – literally. Unveiling the background of the relatives mentioned in the African slavery episode was troubling. First, the revelation that some people in my family were slave owners was shocking, aggravated by (1) the fact that there were documents proving their participation in that activity and (2) the timing of the discoveries, right after the first Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

This variation in treatment and regard among different family sub-groups was unexpected but helpful to understand that the level of objectivity and impartiality one has can differ depending on how much a given subject is close to the journalist, even within a broader theme. Some sub-topics may generate a high interest – both because of the feelings they arouse or how appealing they look, while others do not instigate the same emotions. Journalists need to be self-aware and prepared to flag subjects that turn out to be sensitive, affecting them personally, and be prepared to adjust and deal with this when it happens.

Narrative Techniques

From a narrative standpoint, I wanted to use techniques to make the podcast dynamic, especially taking into consideration this type of audio production usually does not rely on visual elements. To that end, three main narrative techniques were used in this podcast: foreshadowing, cliffhangers, and the near/far approach. In terms of foreshadowing, every episode starts with an introduction to the theme, which ends after three or four paragraphs. The idea is to spark the listener's curiosity by delivering the content slowly, over time, while at the same time I explain how a member of my family was involved in that event.

The scripts were designed to keep developing, with cliffhangers or hints of what is to come intertwined throughout as I introduced new facts and new ideas. The background music selection was an important part of this technique. I wanted the sound effects to express suspense and create a feeling that there is always something lying ahead in the story.

In addition, I used the near/far approach throughout, a narrative technique that uses one person, or personal story, to exemplify a larger issue. The goal of focussing on one or two specific people can help the listener envision these characters as living, breathing humans in the world. At the same time, their actions help the listener understand how similar people, in similar situations, would behave.

Inserting myself as a character, an active player in the story, proved to be challenging. In the episode on immigration, where I more heavily share the process of finding the information related to my ancestors, I had to go back and forth in editing to make sure I was not focusing too much on myself but also bringing in the historical context and the interview with the expert in a way that it made sense to include my personal story. Having an editor to review the scripts and give a second opinion on whether I was going in the right direction, as I did with my supervisor, was essential.

In other episodes, though, my role and my connection to the stories was smaller, either because the history took place in a very distant past or because it involved a side of my family with whom I have less familiarity. When that happened, I felt as if I was telling someone else's tale, not so much my own story, which made easier for me to develop the scripts.

Interviewing Experts

As expected, the experts were immensely important to the podcast for several reasons. First and foremost, they brought their expertise, trusted and relevant information, to the episodes. There is a noticeable difference between what kinds of content a well-informed journalist and an expert in their area can provide. Fortunately, they understood what I was trying to do with the podcast and were able to not only bring their knowledge but also create the connections between past and present with ease, in a straightforward way. Second, they added something dynamic to the podcast. Having a multitude of voices is not only good for the public debate, but a variety of voices is engaging and helps people pay attention to a given subject.

Since I had spent some months researching Brazilian history prior to the interviews and read the research of the people I wanted to interview, I had a fair notion of how they would answer my questions. That said, some of their answers were completely new to me, but overall, I would not say I had to change the course of the narrative I had imagined. What was needed was to re-write some parts of the script, mainly to include these new pieces of information.

The hard part was cutting up their interviews. The experts shared so much useful information, that it was difficult to select which parts to use. Nevertheless, I had to balance their appearance in the podcast with my narration, so that it did not become tedious to just hear one person speaking. Also, my goal was to select the audio in a way that it felt like they

were talking directly to me throughout the podcast. This was challenging and time-consuming.

The only major issue I faced when interviewing experts was trying to reach out to Indigenous researchers for the episode on colonization. My original idea for this episode was to interview several Indigenous scholars who are experts in the history of what has happened to Indigenous people in Brazil as well as their present struggles. However, right now in Brazil there is legislation before the Brazilian Congress aimed at making it more difficult to Indigenous peoples to have their territories recognized. Although I was able to make contact with the people I wanted to interview they told me their attention was, rightfully so, focussed on fighting this bill and they were not able to participate in an interview. I completely understand and support their efforts. It is my hope that at a later time I will be able to talk to them, when they are not so busy, or when I can travel to them to meet them myself. I plan to redo this portion of the podcast when I have a chance to speak to them.

Producing a Podcast During a Pandemic

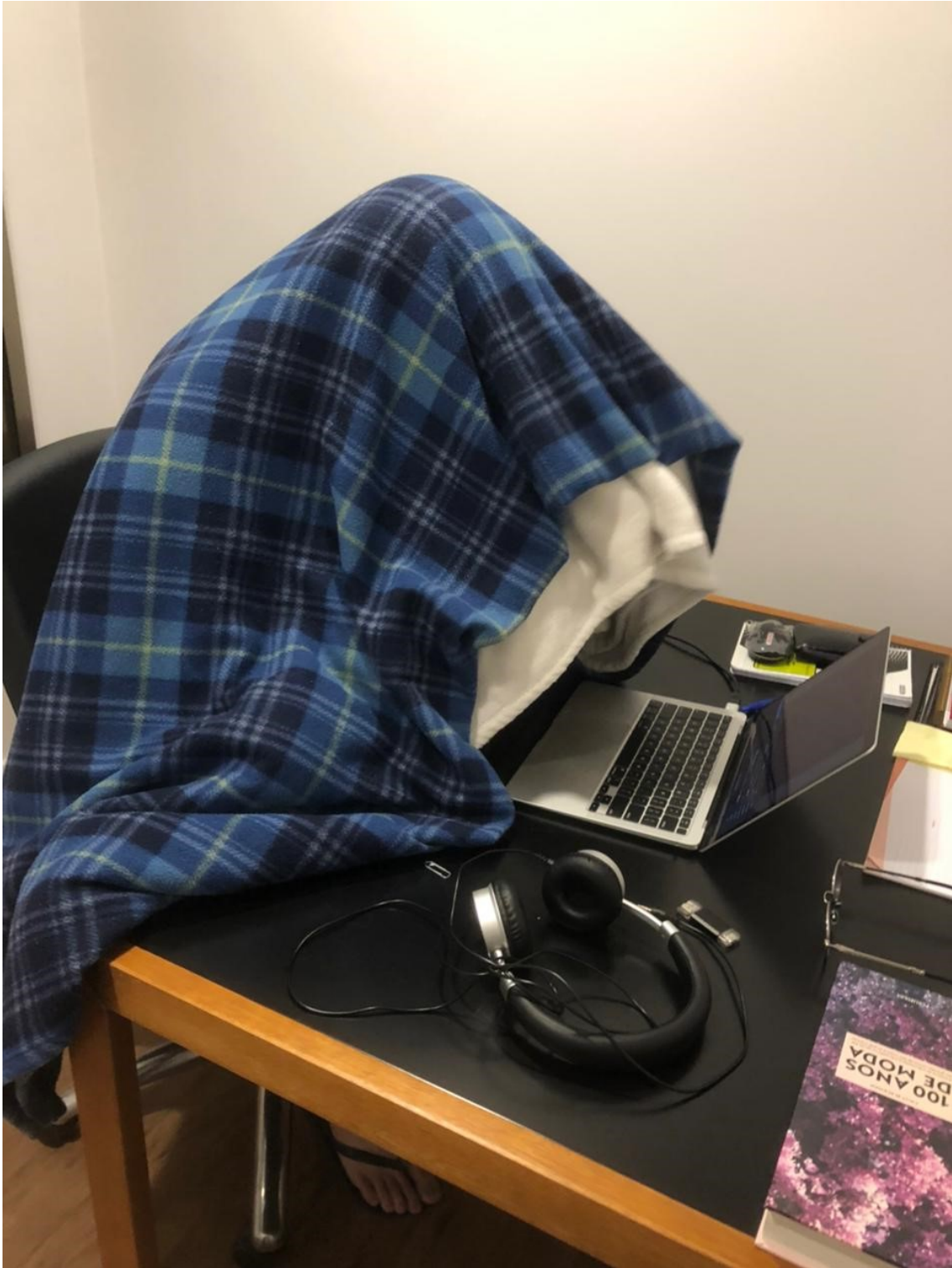
Writing a thesis or producing a Master's project is a demanding task at the best of times. But researching and producing this thesis during the covid pandemic, made it even more challenging to record, conduct interviews with the experts, and even complete the production of the podcast. Although I wasn't going to talk about this in my report, my supervisor believes it is important that we recognize the times we are living through and the challenges this brings, and has encouraged me to document this. Therefore, I want to briefly address these challenges, in order to put into context some of the choices that were made in the production of the podcast.

From a personal perspective, the pandemic turned my life upside down. With the Canadian borders closed indefinitely, my family could not visit me, and I could not visit them

with confidence that immigration officials would let me into Canada again. So, I had to change plans and go back to Brazil to reunite with them. It took around three months of negotiation to get the green light from the company I work with to move. Once I had it, for legal reasons I needed to move quickly back to Brazil in early March, while simultaneously working on the thesis.

After settling in, I had to stay confined because of how serious the pandemic was in Brazil, with the number of new cases and deaths breaking records daily. That meant I could not interview the experts in person. I had to make do with the recording equipment I had in my apartment, and deal with a construction site in front of the building I live in. This situation restricted my ability to record the voice-overs, given the fact that, during daytime, the noise generated by the workers made it impossible to work with audio.

Also, my original initial intention was to record the voice-over in Concordia's audio studio with my supervisor as my voice coach. With this option ruled out, I tested different solutions and came up with some creative, although amateur, ideas to create higher audio quality. I could not afford a high-end microphone, and therefore bought a simple one that would be sufficient. The solution I found to decrease the amount of echo I had in my office was using a blanket, as you can see in the picture below. While it looks a bit funny, I'll admit, it did the trick. My supervisor also has a lot of experience reporting from the field, and we talked about different ways to create make-shift studios out of what you have around you.



From a technical perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic was especially troubling. Each interviewee had a different device, with a different quality of recording, using a different Internet connection. While I don't think this hugely compromise the final product, I often

experienced lagging, both from my and the interviewee's end, during the calls, which resulted in some cut audio. While it did not deeply affect the overall quality of the work, but it was still an obstacle to overcome.

Conclusion

The main research question asked in this research-creation thesis was 'how can a journalistic podcast combine interactivity with narrative, personal journalism and historical research?' This main question was broken down in to three subquestions that will be addressed one by one in this conclusion.

Question 1: What possibilities does interactivity open up for journalists who are creating podcasts and what are the limitations?

The addition of interactive components in podcasts allows creative storytelling where the audience has some level of control over the experience. In this case, the control includes the possibility of creating their own narrative by choosing which episodes to listen in whichever order they like, and having the possibility of going back and forth through the audiolinks. For journalists, interactivity in audio opens up ways for innovative storytelling, by allowing them to focus on links between stories. For the sake of imagination, the type of interactivity I have experimented with in this project could allow segmented podcasts, in which journalists take advantage of voice assistants, like Google Assistant, Siri, or Alexa, to create narratives based on the listeners' choices, for example. The main limitations I ran into were technical. As of now, platforms and coding languages designed for audio products and for creating those links between audio files are lacking, and the companies experimenting with this concept, like Spotify, are not open source.

One could argue that there is no need to create audiolinks, that including the related interview clip in the episode itself, instead of as a separate component, would be enough. The problem with this argument is that the journalist is then choosing how the audience will consume the content. As discussed in the literature review, the role listeners play in the news pieces has grown, and interactivity promises to be one of the solutions for bringing the audience closer to the newsrooms.

Question 2: What possibilities does a narrative approach open up for journalists who are creating podcasts and what are the limitations?

Using a narrative approach to journalistic podcasts opens up possibilities for embedding personal stories, when they are relevant to the narrative and interesting enough to make it to the podcast, which creates potential to build connections with listeners through the use of the first person. It allows for creating conversations instead of just sharing information. On the other hand, I still feel that journalists who decide to insert personal narrative journalism into a podcast need to regularly assess whether the story being told is accurate and acknowledge their position in the story. Several times I had to step back and rewrite the scripts, concerned that I was not telling a story accurately enough because of my feelings toward a topic. Having outsiders like other journalists reading through the scripts, or experts explaining more intricate subjects, also will help to produce a better product. While I appreciate what narrative journalism and personal storytelling brings to an audio piece, I believe that having other eyes on a script, and bringing in people who have thought seriously about a topic for many years, is important.

Question 3: How can an interactive, narrative podcast use historical research to create journalism? What are the possibilities and limitations?

Every journalist is part of history, be it because they shape reality by reporting the news which influences our lives, or because they are also humans who have opinions, and change the world every day with personal actions. Thus, bringing history and a personal narrative together not only make sense but also seems like a natural fit. Every personal story happens in the light of a broader context that others lived or live. And every story can be told.

However, I still feel that for these stories to jump from just curiosity to having a journalistic importance, and therefore being useful for a general audience, it is imperative to interview historians and related experts. As initially imagined, the experts added another journalistic layer to the podcast, either because they could talk about specific topics in detail, delivering more context and helping the audience – and myself – to understand struggles throughout the Brazilian history; or because they added a much-needed diversity, particularly in relation to the episode on slavery, providing the listener with not only information but a perspective coming from a minority group. As discussed in the literature review, this diversity in narratives is overdue in the journalistic field.

This diversity was a key factor for choosing the experts to feature in the podcast. Beside their knowledge and accomplishments, my intention was to provide space for underheard communities to talk about historical, social, and economic issues from their perspective rather than just repeat the “same old” narrative I was taught at school. I was able to achieve this goal in the episode on slavery, however it proved to be a challenge in the episode on colonization and Indigenous people. I had difficulty finding an Indigenous researcher who could speak to me during the pandemic and during their current fight against the bill being discussed in the Brazilian congress to do with land rights.

Finally, the biggest limitation of this approach is that there is so much to history, so many small important occurrences over the course of a period, that it becomes difficult to condense such complex stories into short podcasts.

Closing Remarks

Producing a journalistic, interactive podcast about my own family and discussing the facts I unveiled throughout personal research has proved to be an enriching experience. From a professional perspective, it was an opportunity to experiment with technology and think beyond what is currently being done in the podcasting industry toward something that could be adopted in the future. Further research is needed to develop audio-first, open-source technologies that will enable producing deep interactivity between podcast/audio file and listener/user. One field where I personally see value and heavy use of such solutions is in the voice assistant sector, where the likes of Google Assistant, Siri, and Alexa are already experimenting with interactivity through voice in areas other than journalism.

From a personal perspective, this work has allowed me to explore journalistic boundaries around objectivity and narrative journalism in ways that I could not before in my previous professional experience. This exploration is the culmination – so far – of three years of personal research on my family, and has given me the opportunity to understand where I came from and the responsibilities I have nowadays now that I know what my ancestors did in the past. That is particularly true with regard to slavery and colonization. Learning that two members of my family were enslavers in the past and helped to eradicate the Indigenous population in a way, was, quoting my own words in the podcast, “a punch to the gut.” My family members were also shocked by the nature of my discoveries and have been very supportive of this work. I see this work, as do they, as an opportunity to spark discussions about what we, as citizens, can do to repair the past by looking ahead in the future, and what concretely can be done to put an end to inequalities. I hope this podcast is part of the solution. As I mention in the podcast, the history told in this research-creation thesis is very different

from the history I learned at school, and I hope it contributes in some way to correcting our record of the past.

This is an ever-going project, though. I envision creating a Brazilian Portuguese version of the podcast, as I want this podcast to be widely accessible to people in Brazil. I also plan on interviewing more people, especially for the episode on colonization and Indigenous peoples, and continuing to search through documents to see if I can unveil more information.

That's just the beginning.

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