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The American dream in the airwaves. The beginnings of Portuguese radio in the United States

Abstract

This work is an approximation to the beginnings of Portuguese radio in the United States, a phenomenon associated with the Lusophone immigrant community scattered throughout the United States. Starting from the hypothesis that radio was an innovative communication instrument that could have altered the perception of the reality of the Portuguese diaspora in a delocalised and transmediatic context, the object of the study focuses on describing and analysing some of the relevant aspects of the beginnings of this sound medium within the Portuguese community in North America in the 1930s, when the Portuguese began to produce their own programmes. As the use of radio as a means of communication became more popular, several Portuguese-language radio stations called “Portuguese hours” appeared, which were housed in local radio stations in population centres with a significant presence of Portuguese, especially in New England and California. Some Portuguese journalists took up

the challenge of devoting themselves to radio journalism with great success, while others interpreted the enormous interest aroused by radio programmes among immigrants as a threat to the advertising income of the press. Through the use of dispersed documentary and newspaper sources and the use of qualitative techniques of content analysis, the main objective of this research is to explain the characteristics of the first Portuguese-language radio programs in the United States, how the immigrant press reacted to their potential threat as a competing medium, and who were their pioneers.

Keywords

Radio, History, Portuguese immigration, United States, Journalism.

1. Introduction

To understand how Portuguese-language radio develops in the United States, it is necessary to situate it in the context of Portuguese immigration, a phenomenon that goes back several centuries (Cardozo, 1974). The first Portuguese colonies in North American territory appeared in 1640, when some groups of Jews of Portuguese origin settled in New Amsterdam (present-day New York) (Pap, 1981). Subsequently, contacts between the American and Portuguese whaling industries led to the arrival of an increasing number of Azoreans in the mid-19th century (Warrin, 2010; Bertão, 2006). This influx of immigrants, attracted primarily by the development of the textile industry in New Bedford, Fall River and other cities in southern

Massachusetts, increased in subsequent decades until it reached its first massive cycle between 1900 and 1920, in which more than half of the total number of Portuguese immigrants arrived between 1870 and 1930 is concentrated (Williams, 2007, p. 29-45).

Estimates indicate that about 250.000 Portuguese immigrants (most of them from the Azores) settled in the United States between 1870 and 1921 (Baganha, 2009; Williams, 2007), a quarter of whom would return to Portugal at some point (Fausto, 1981, p. 159). Although the numbers are not completely reliable, according to official data from the Portuguese embassy in Washington, in 1930, when the first radio broadcasts in Portuguese began, the Portuguese-American colony consisted of 376.893 people, of whom approximately 150.000 resided in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, 20.000 in and around New York, and 100.000 in California.¹

The arrival in the United States of thousands of disoriented Portuguese people anxious to be informed about what was happening in their places of origin and, above all, within the immigrant community, is what stimulates the creation of media for an audience with very concrete needs. For many immigrants, the Portuguese-language media became a strong link between longing for their country of origin and expectations of thriving in the new world. This phenomenon, known in the United States as “ethnic media” or “ethnic press,” because of its marked link to immigrant minorities, can be observed in several foreign communities living in North America, which especially before the digital era have founded hundreds of newspapers, radios and televisions to satisfy the specific interests of their audiences (Rhodes, 2010; McDonald, 2007; Blanchard, 1998; Miller, 1987).

Over the course of history, the causes that drove the production of this type of media were essentially three: the need to maintain an emotional relationship with their roots through news and information in their own language that nourished the emotional and spiritual bond with their land; the desire to affirm their cultural identity and language in a new environment, in which they were unaware of local customs and language; and their role as a public service to inform about colony life and to help integrate immigrants into a diverse and complex society. As a consequence, this type of communication media created a true sense of community belonging among immigrants, stimulated economic and cultural activity, increased their influence and political participation, promoted social or business projects, and were dynamic agents of their education, orientation and social integration (Rhodes, 2010, p. 37-51).

The Portuguese community, with its nearly 1.2 million people (Vicente, 1998, p. 61), has not been alien to this great media phenomenon, especially relevant in the stages with greater migratory flows (Taft, 1969), with a strong concentration in areas of Massachusetts and California (Mayone Dias, 2009), where 68 and 49 periodical publications were founded, respectively, in addition to 16 in New Jersey, 12 in Hawaii, 11 in New York, 7 in Rhode Island and 4 more titles in as many states. Between 1880 and 1930, the number of newspapers founded by Portuguese immigrants was exactly one hundred, most of them nondaily and of little longevity. In the 1930s, the decade in which the object of study of this work is situated, another 30 new titles were founded, many ephemeral (Pena-Rodríguez, 2019).

According to a Portuguese government report, in mid-1933, when Portuguese radio began to expand as a new media channel among immigrants, 13 newspapers were published in the United States in Portuguese: in Massachusetts, *O Popular*, *Diário de Notícias*, *O Colonial*, *O Independente*, *Novidades* and *A Voz da Colonia*;² in New York and New Jersey, *O Portugal* and *A Tribuna*, and in California, *A União Portuguesa*, *A Liberdade*, *O Jornal Português*, *O Portugal*

¹ Historical Diplomatic Archive (AHD), Embassy of Portugal in Washington (EPW). Box nº 18. Official letter sent by the secretary of the embassy, João de Deus Ramos, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, nº 117, process 9/34, f.s. [1934].

² AHD, EPW. Box nº 14, Official letter nº 211 of the Director of the Secretariat of National Propaganda, 10 November 1933. File with attached report titled "List of existing associations, schools, libraries, newspapers, etc. in New England".

and *O Progresso*.³ In direct competition with the press, the appearance of radio meant a notable change in the communicative panorama, not only because of its significance as a revolutionary and “hot” mass medium (McLuhan & Fiore, 2009), but also because it provided, in fact, informative immediacy, spontaneity, narrative tension, a certain mystery associated with waves and allowed for the development of novel and spectacular narrative models or contents.

As the use of radio became popular during the 1930s, Portuguese immigrants in the United States, like those from other minorities (Barknow, 1966; Hilmes, 1997), found in this new medium an effective means of strengthening ties between the different distant diaspora nuclei. Many immigrants, persuaded by the fascination of the medium and the “magical” diffusion of words through the hertz waves, were immediately seduced by the programs in Portuguese, as a kind of spiritual breath that emotionally linked them to their roots, helping to create a common social imaginary. In different parts of the United States, but above all California and Massachusetts, some Portuguese immigrants with scarce resources and knowledge of the environment, but with great motivation, started different programs in Portuguese. In the beginning, many radio spots were mere experimental diversions developed with more motivation than professionalism, without a clear content structure or true journalistic routines. But little by little, in a process of experimentation with the medium, mixing news and entertainment with a certain technical and narrative skill, they acquired the necessary confidence to produce attractive programming for their audience, initially based on folkloric musical performances, brief news bulletins, theatrical representations, novelized stories and abundant commercial messages, within a universal program format, 60 minutes long, which was popularly known as “the Portuguese hour.”

This work, based on original documentary and newspaper sources scattered in several North American and Portuguese archives, is an approximation to the beginnings of the history of Portuguese radio in the United States, when pioneering and self-taught journalists such as Arthur Vieira Ávila or Affonso Gil Ferreira Mendes transformed radio into an informative, didactic, cultural and entertainment medium for the Portuguese community in the United States.

The approach is based on the hypothesis that the disruptive change represented by radio as a new communication tool could become a new resource at the service of the Portuguese diaspora in a delocalised and transmediatic context. The main objective of the research is to reveal the most significant elements of this phenomenon in its early years: to know how the use of radio spread among immigrants, what its role was as a new means of communication in competition with the immigrant press and to highlight the biographical profiles of the pioneers of Portuguese radio journalism in the United States, with data on its origin, its life history, its journalistic dynamics, as well as the influence of its radio programs. In a way, the narrative of Portuguese immigrants through radio and newspapers, as well as their mutual resonances or media echoes, the transfer of information, the exchange of ideas and contents and even of journalists between one medium and another, can also be observed as a transmedia phenomenon in the context of immigration.

Through a methodology that essentially applies descriptive and qualitative techniques, the work carries out a content analysis of the few existing documentary sources and some scattered issues of Portuguese newspapers from the 1930s in the United States, from the Ferreira Mendes Portuguese-American Archives (FM-PAA) of UMass Dartmouth, the Freitas Library of California, the Bancroft Library of UC Berkeley, the Widener Library of Harvard University and the Diplomatic Archives of Lisbon. Fieldwork has focused on reviewing sections and opinion pieces on radio published during the 1930s in the few remaining copies

³ AHD, EPW. Official letter nº 21 (proc. 37-34) of the General Consul in New York, Verdades de Faria, to the ambassador of Portugal, 20 February 1934.

of Portuguese American immigrant newspapers, such as the *Diario de Noticias* (1927-1973), the biannual *O Heraldio Português* (1925-1976) and the weekly *O Jornal Português* (1932-1997), *A Colonia Portuguesa* (1924-1932), *O Colonial* (1925-1945), *O Independente* (1897-1945) or *A União Portuguesa* (1887-1942). It has also been possible to study some copies of the satirical fortnightly *A California Alegre* (1915-1940) and two ephemeral publications dedicated to the world of radio, such as the magazine *Rose & Albert Magazine* (1933-1934) and *O Clarim* (1934-1935). The information and opinions of immigrants gathered in these newspapers constitute the corpus of the sample from which this article is developed, which is also nourished by some documents found in the FM-PAA.

In the bibliographic compilation developed in the libraries and archives cited, various searches have been carried out that have made it possible to find books of memoirs and radio experiences of various immigrants that provide original and interesting data to approach the object of study. A review of scientific publications on Portuguese radio and immigration in the Americas has also been carried out, although with limited results. In fact, no specific study could be found on the emergence of radio in the diaspora, nor in the specialized studies on the history of radio in Portugal (Santos, 1992, 2005; Ribeiro, 2005; Maia, 1995), nor on Portuguese immigration (Pena-Rodríguez, Mesquita & Vicente, 2015; Holton & Klimt, 2009; Williams, 2005; Barrow, 2002; Pap, 1981; Cardozo, 1974). Only a few indirect mentions have been found in several works that provide interesting data (Duarte Mendonça, 2007; Cardozo 1974), but do not allow us to know either the patterns or the relevance of the phenomenon. Hence the importance of this research in order to understand the reception and characteristics of radio in the Portuguese diaspora in the United States.

2. Voices from Portugal. First Portuguese radio programs in the U.S.

Although the first experimental broadcasts are earlier, the 1920s was the period in which radio began its rapid expansion as a means of mass communication in the United States, Europe and Latin America (Douglas, 2003, p. 292-295). Unlike the other two great media of the time, such as the press or the cinema, whose production and diffusion had a certain technical complexity, as it required paper, printing machines, film cameras, projection rooms, etc., radio, which developed quickly and disorderly in North America, was broadcast openly via airwaves, at any time of the day and with lower production costs (Gomery, 2008, p. 38-57). Its technical characteristics and technological capabilities turned it into an innovative instrument of great attraction for many governments or individuals, who observed in the new invention an instrument of enormous narrative potentialities, as an informative, persuasive, entertaining and commercial medium (Hilmes, 1997, p. 75-96).

As the use of radio expanded in North American society, immigrant communities tried to take advantage of the communicative, but also social, economic, cultural or educational advantages offered by the new channel. During the 1930s, the enormous receptivity and curiosity produced by radio, coupled with the ease of disseminating programs in other languages aimed at the diverse ethnic minorities that populated the United States, led to the rapid flourishing of numerous Portuguese-language radio stations broadcast from different cities in Massachusetts, California, and New York, some of which would soon achieve a certain prestige and fame in the colony (Sterling & Kittross, 2002, p. 105-141).

Radio broadcasts in Portuguese broadcast all kinds of news about Portugal and the lives of immigrants in North America, entertained with musicals, novel stories, theatre or poetry, promoted advertisers, disseminated traditions and values of Luso-American culture, stimulated debate on issues of concern to the Lusophone minority, put distant immigrants in contact with each other and, above all, meant a powerful emotional bond with their country of origin through their vernacular language.⁴

⁴ "O Radio e a Hora Portuguesa". *Diario de Noticias*, 20 April 1933, p. 4.

The radio *shows*, especially the theatrical dramatizations and musical performances in Portuguese, became so popular that the theatres and concert halls experienced a decrease in audience.⁵ Meanwhile, the irresistible attraction produced by the broadcasts through the waves due to their emotional stimuli, their enveloping and sensational way of communicating and their high audiences, made that some speakers, actors or singers who worked in the radio acquired soon a special aura and became celebrities, as the chronicles of the time testify.⁶ A paradigmatic case was the 9-year-old singer Alice Neto, whose regular participation in a program on the local radio station WNBH had turned her, according to the *Diário de Notícias*, into a “estrela da radio” (Mendonça, 2007, p. 337).

The first fully Portuguese-language radio program in the United States that is known to have emerged on 18 May 1930 in San Diego, when *A Colonia Portuguesa* correspondent in that city, M. H. Gama, addressed a letter to his director informing that he had just created a radio section called “Hora Portuguesa,” which was broadcast between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. every Tuesday on the KGB station.⁷ The program began by broadcasting marches, waltzes and Portuguese songs sung live by guitarists Manuel Santos and António Bravo, accompanied by M. H. Gama himself as the singer.⁸

The impact of this new mass medium on the Portuguese community in the United States was especially significant in California. Probably, due to the existence of groups of immigrants scattered throughout the most rural areas of the state, where they worked in the agricultural and livestock sector, and where the Portuguese-Californian press barely arrived, radio became an ideal medium for information and entertainment. According to some sources in the colony, it is believed that over the past century more than 150 radio programs in Portuguese were broadcast in California.⁹

To get an idea of the radio dynamism of Portuguese immigrants in their beginnings in Californian lands, according to records taken from the immigrant press, in 1938 the following programs in Portuguese (housed in different radio stations in the state) worked: “Voz dos Açores,” with broadcasts from Modesto and Visalia, directed by José Vitorino; from Oakland “Castelos Românticos,” created by Arthur Vieira Ávila, and “Ecos de Portugal,” directed by Leonel Soares de Azevedo; Thomaz Dias directed “Voz de Portugal” in San José and Oakland; in Stockton, M., in the city of San José; and “Voz de Portugal” in the city of Stockton. C. Leal produced “Português-Americano”; in Modesto there was also “Voz do Vale,” by J. Cabral, and “Memórias de Portugal,” by Gabriel Silveira Sacramento; José Gil broadcast “Portugal-America” in Wastonville; Anthony Souza was the director of “Memórias Internacionais,” in Visalia; in the town of Merced, four programs were broadcast: “Memórias de Portugal e Açores,” directed by J. S. Marques, “Voz de Merced,” presented by Betty Santos, “As cruzadas,” by Raimundo Silva, and “Ares Lusitanos,” by George Costa; and finally, from Monterrey, “Cabrilho” was broadcast, a program that claimed the figure of the Portuguese navigator José Rodrigues Cabrilho, discoverer of California (Cardozo, 1974, p. 82).¹⁰ Also, some religious organizations, particularly Catholic Action, opted to transform the radio into a primary means of communication in order to establish a more agile and warm contact with their parishioners and make religious propaganda.¹¹

In the other states with a Portuguese immigrant presence, mainly in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey, but also in Hawaii, where there was a community of Portuguese

⁵ “Programa Radiofônico Português ‘Voz de Portugal’”. *O Heraldo Português*, April 1936, p. 2.

⁶ “Quem são?”. *Rose & Albert Magazine*, edition of January 1933, p. 16

⁷ “Na Rádio KGB”. *A Colonia Portuguesa*, 18 May 1930, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Fernando M. Soares Silva. *A Tribuna Portuguesa*, 15 February 2012, p. 19.

¹⁰ “Os Portugueses da California no Radio”, by Alberto Moura. *A União Portuguesa*, special issue of 28 March 1938, p. 16. See also: “Pioneiros Portugueses no Radio”. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1938, p. 125.

¹¹ Read: “A Acção Católica Portuguesa na Rádio em East San Jose”. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1947, no page.

immigrants who worked in the sugar cane industry, there is no news of regular radio programs in Portuguese in the past, although there were some occasional broadcasts. Among the precedents, on 2 May 1930, John A. Perry issued a philosophical lecture entitled “Livramento de toda a opressão” on New York’s WNBH radio station.¹² Little by little, radio broadcasts in Portuguese are gaining ground in the Hertz spectrum, with diverse projects and contents, ranging from the creation of a musical section in Honolulu (Hawaii) in May 1931,¹³ to spaces dedicated to social causes, such as the one initiated in December of the same year in Stockton (Cal.) for the realization of public costs in favor of charitable institutions of Terceira Island (Azores) and other humanitarian actions.¹⁴

With the sponsorship of the Sociedade de Cultura Portuguesa and directed by João de Mello and Laurindo Carreiro, on 29 January 1933¹⁵ would start in Massachusetts, through the WLOE station in Boston, the first “Portuguese Hour” in New England, which the *Diario de Noticias* describes as a “[...] a spiritual pleasure, by its magical power of evocation [...]”¹⁶ After that first experience on the East Coast, other initiatives followed. According to *Diario de Noticias*, around March 1933, Serafim d’ Oliveira would start a new “Portuguese Hour” in New Bedford on Sunday afternoons,¹⁷ while Francisco Ferreira starts another program on WAAM station in Newark (New Jersey). Shortly afterwards, in the interest of his compatriots for radio, F. Ferreira decides to find the Portuguese Radio Club of Yonkers¹⁸ and, in November, Manuel Carvalho begins a broadcast directed to the Brooklyn colony (N. York) from the WBBC radio station.¹⁹

As the use of radio spread among immigrants, news, cultural variety or simple entertainment in Portuguese became consolidated with longer and more regular radio productions, such as the morning “Diário de Noticias do Ar” or the evening program “Voz de Portugal,” both inaugurated by Thomas Dias at KWRB Oakland in 1938.²⁰ Despite the rapid increase in Portuguese programs on dozens of radio stations, it is important to keep in mind that, since it was a fragmented and minority audience that depended on the constant arrival of new waves of immigrants, the Lusophone community did not manage to develop a radio station with programming exclusively in Portuguese until the 1970s, coinciding with the massive influx of Portuguese into the United States.²¹ The first station with programs entirely in Portuguese, “A Onda Amiga,” was inaugurated by António Alberto Costa in New Bedford on 12 April 1970 through WBSM (later WGCY), owned by George Gray, which broadcasted on FM frequency 97.3, with daily broadcasts of 20 hours. Today, this radio station uses the acronym WJFD (which includes the initials of Jacinto Ferreira Dinis), who bought the station from Gray Communications (Mendonça, 2007, p. 340; Cardozo, 1974, p. 87-89).

3. Fear of the radio. The impact of radio broadcasts on the immigrant press

In general, the appearance of the radio was an event celebrated by the opinion leaders of the Portuguese colony because they believed that it would contribute to the development of the Lusophone community and culture in the United States. However, not all immigrants saw the birth of the radio as an advantage. Paradoxically, some Portuguese emigrants who had made journalism their livelihood, achieving a certain prosperity by publishing periodicals aimed at

¹² “Conferência pelo Radio em Português”. *Diario de Noticias*, 1 May 1930, p. 7.

¹³ “Os Portugueses no Rádio em Honolulu”. *Jornal de Noticias*, 22 May 1931, p. 1.

¹⁴ “Manuel C. Leal”. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1938, p. 74.

¹⁵ “Os Portugueses atravez do Radio”. *Diario de Noticias*. Boston Edition, 2 February 1933, p. 1.

¹⁶ “O Radio e a Hora Portuguesa”. *Diario de Noticias*, 20 April 1933, p. 4.

¹⁷ “Portugueses no Posto Emisor de New Bedford”. *Diario de Noticias*, 8 January 1934, p. 2.

¹⁸ “Secção Semanal de Newark”. *Diario de Noticias*, 28 July 1933, p. 5.

¹⁹ “Programa Radiofónico de Brooklyn”. *Diario de Noticias*, 10 November 1933, p. 2.

²⁰ “Escutai os programas portugueses”. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1946, no page.

²¹ According to the *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* 2012, 104,704 immigrants entered the United States in the 1970s and 70,568 in the previous decade.

the Portuguese public, interpreted the emergence of the new medium as a threat to their survival. The owners of these newspapers believed that radio could jeopardize their existence because, with a few exceptions, their circulation did not exceed 10.000 and their subsistence depended on their small audiences and their ability to attract advertisers from the colony. The seduction of immigrants by radio broadcasts led some print media to fear a drastic decline in readership and a consequent loss of advertising revenue, their main livelihood.

Illustration 1: Ad of radio receivers. *O Herald Portugal*, 25 December 1929, p. 8.



Source: Portuguese American Digital Newspaper Collection, Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives, Claire T. Carney Library, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

In the radio sections, popularly known as the “Portuguese Hours,” whose duration did not usually exceed one hour per day or per week, news about Portugal and the colony, political speeches, conferences, serial novels, music and lyrical declamations were broadcast. But many programs had a clearly commercial purpose, broadcasting advertisements for businesses run by Portuguese immigrants, who sponsored the radio broadcasts with confidence in their persuasive effectiveness. The proliferation of these kinds of commercial sections, with crushing self-promotion campaigns, irritated some newspaper editors, who complained about the pressures that broadcasters exerted on advertisers to attract their advertising claims. To persuade sponsors, some newspapers argued that print ads were more effective than radio because “words fly while writings remain,” as some newspapers argued:

[...] Está mais que provado que o anúncio da imprensa sempre foi, e sempre será o que melhor resultados pode trazer. Não quero dizer que o anúncio pelo rádio não traga resultados. Traz, sim, sabemos-lo muito bem, mas é como que um complemento ao anúncio impresso, uma boa lembrança por assim dizer, poisque lá diz o ditado... ‘As Palavras Vão, os Escritos permanecem’, e ainda... muitas vezes, entra por um ouvido e sai pelo outro. Grandes companhias gastam rios de dinheiro no anuncio dos seus produtos, mas, por cada dollar gasto em rádio, gastam centenas com os jornais. Porquê?

Porque êles bem sabem que a Imprensa foi sempre a maior alavanca do progresso duma nação [...]”²².

The rapid penetration of radio among the immigrant public caused some newspapers to suffer from its loss of popularity and leadership by criticizing the programmes and radio presenters of the Portuguese colony, whom they accused of “mistreating” the Portuguese language. One of the headlines that most judged the radio broadcasts was the Sacramento *A California Alegre* satirical newspaper, which tried to delegitimize and discredit them by attacking the way some speakers spoke in Portuguese, pronounced in a “mestizo and shameful “ way, in a style and a way of narrating “almost African.”²³ Criticism of the language used by some commentators led to lively polemics between radio stations and newspapers, which were reflected in the most widespread headlines among Portuguese immigrants, the weekly *Jornal Português* (Oakland and São Paulo, 1932–1997) and the *Diário de Notícias* (New Bedford, 1927–1973).²⁴

However, some more realistic and pragmatic newspapers in the colony highlighted the extraordinary value of radio for teaching the language of Camões to the children of immigrants born in the United States, for educating immigrants in general, and for commercially dynamizing their businesses. In this sense, *A União Portuguesa* de San Francisco argued that the technological evolution was unstoppable and should be matched with the use and enjoyment of the new possibilities offered by radio and its programs in Portuguese: “[...] Well oriented, they can be strongholds of great value between us. This is the truth! The world goes by, and we cannot date our eyes and be alluded to great and useful modern inventions [...]”²⁵ Meanwhile, the Sacramento *O Progresso* weekly, while acknowledging the idiomatic errors of some *speakers*, makes a plea in defense of Portuguese radio journalism compared to that of other minorities:

[...] Condenam-se os programas porque deviam desaparecer da circulação; porque não têm nada de aproveitável; porque são uma vergonha; porque seus directores são uns ‘comilões’; porque...valha-nos Deus! Que os programas têm alguns defeitos, isso sabe-se. Também os programas americanos, italianos, espanhóis, etc. os têm e bem frizantes, e bem palpáveis! [...]”²⁶.

When the fear of the radio dissipated, some journalists working in the press, seeing the opportunities it offered professionally, decided to experiment with the new medium. One of them was Affonso Gil Ferreira Mendes, who while working for the newspaper *O Popular* (Mass.) made the radio section “A Voz de Portugal,” broadcasted from New Bedford from July 1933.²⁷ And a year later, the director of the weekly *O Independente*, João Rodrigues Rocha, inaugurates his own space at the WPRO radio station in Providence (Rhode Island), with the help of Frank Machado as coordinator of the artistic part.²⁸ Faced with the informative and

²² "Aos Leitores da 'California Alegre'. *A California Alegre*, 1 January 1939, p. 4. Free translation of the quotation: ["It is more than proven that the press advertisement always was and always will be the one that gives the best result. I don't mean that the radio ad doesn't work. We know very well that it works, but it is like a complement to the printed ad, a way of remembering it so to speak, because we already know that 'Words Fly, Writings Remain', and in addition... many times they enter by one ear and leave by the other. Big companies spend rivers of money promoting their products, but for every dollar spent on radio, they spend hundreds on newspapers. Why? Because they well know that the Press has always been the greatest lever for a nation's progress."].

²³ "Falar Bem Português". *A California Alegre*, 23 May 1936, p. 4. See also: "A Rádio e a Língua Portuguesa", by Arthur Vieira Ávila. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1946, no page.

²⁴ "O rádio e a difusão das baboseiras portuguesas". *Diário de Notícias*, 11 October 1933, p. 1. And also: "A Linguagem na Rádio". *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1948, no page.

²⁵ "Os Portugueses da Califórnia no Rádio", by Alberto Moura. *A União Portuguesa*, special issue of 28 March 1938, p. 16.

²⁶ "Programas de rádio portugueses". *O Progresso*, 7 June 1937, p. 1. Free translation of the quotation: ["Programs are condemned because they were to disappear from circulation; because they have nothing of profit; because they are a disgrace; because directors are 'eaters'; because...wow! That the programs have some flaws, that's already known. Also the American, Italian, Spanish, etc. programs have them, well evident and well palpable!"].

²⁷ "A Voz de Portugal". *Diário de Notícias*, 25 September 1933, p. 2.

²⁸ "WPRO". *O Colonial*, 16 November 1934, p. 1.

persuasive power of radio and its strength as a business platform, there were Portuguese newspapers that made the need a virtue and, in order to maintain the loyalty of their readers and attract new audiences, sponsored their own radio programs, as did the weekly *Jornal Português*, which in 1940 inaugurated in Santa Rosa the “Hora de Arte Radiofónica” (Radio Art Hour), broadcast by KSRO.²⁹

The use of radio as a means to promote the press was initiated by the Massachusetts daily *A Alvorada*, predecessor of the *Diário de Notícias*, which on December 15, 1925 organized the live broadcast of a concert from New Bedford in which artists Alfredo Mascarenhas, Teófilo Rusell, Augusto Mesquita, Albino Melo, Manuel Magano and tenor madeirense João Pestana participated. The success of the audience was such that the newspaper decided to re-edit the organization of the event only three weeks later (Mendonça, 2007, p. 337).

The stimuli produced by radio as an innovative technological medium capable of making words and human sounds travel long distances through the ether instantly and with great warmth, modified the sensory perception of immigrants, who were attracted by the capacity of the new medium to transport them to another dimension (Pérez Ayala, 2012). By its evocative force, the *Diário de Notícias* understood that radio was a “work of universal fraternity,” an inspiring instrument that could provide a great service to immigrants, so the press would have to learn to live with it.³⁰

4. Echoes of the American dream. Pioneers of Portuguese radio in the diaspora

As seen in the introduction, the Portuguese-speaking radio phenomenon in the United States must be seen in relation to the history of the Portuguese immigrant press, which began in 1877 with the foundation of *O Jornal de Notícias* in Erie (Penn.) and covers more than a hundred and a half periodicals (Pena-Rodríguez, Mesquita & Vicente, 2015, pp. 211-261; Carvalho, 1931). The relationship between the two media is not only determined by competition for limited advertising income or by the fact that the press and radio ended up creating a symbiosis as sources of mutual information between immigrants, but also because the experience and professional learning acquired by many editors and journalists in Portuguese newspapers would facilitate their transition to a career as radio broadcasters.

In this framework of analysis, it is important to emphasize that the trajectory of many of the immigrant communicators represents a history of effort, overcoming and dignity in the attempt to fulfill their American dream by doing journalism, even if it was a “business of poets” for João Brum,³¹ founder in San José de *Notícia* (1984-1986) and *Portugal-USA* (1986-1987), or they worked in a “quixotic” way, according to the observation of the writer Vamberto A. Freitas.³² Newspaper owners often served as editors, directors, editors, administrators and printers at the same time. In the beginning, some were typographers who wanted to increase their income by publishing a newspaper. But others tried to develop a quality Portuguese journalism, with the edition of some very successful titles, such as the weekly *Jornal Português*, the *Diário de Notícias*, the weekly *Portuguese Times* (1971) or the biweekly *Luso-American* (1939), the latter two still published today in Newark (NJ). These newspapers were schools of journalism for those who would later become pioneers of Portuguese radio in the United States, such as Arthur Vieira Ávila or Affonso Gil Ferreira Mendes, the two most paradigmatic cases, whose historical relevance will be profiled below.

Arthur Vieira Ávila was born on 5 March 1888 in Lajes (Pico Island), from where he emigrated in October 1909 to California,³³ where he achieved a great reputation among

²⁹ “Novo Programa de Rádio”. *A California Alegre*, 1 November 1940, p. 2.

³⁰ “A Rádio e a Hora Portuguesa”. *Diário de Notícias*, 20 April 1933, p. 4.

³¹ João Brum. “Saudação”. *Notícia*, no. 1, 5 December 1984, p. 1.

³² Vamberto A. Freitas. *Portugal/USA*, 7 January 1987, p. 3.

³³ “Pioneiros Portugueses no Rádio”. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1938, p. 125.

immigrants as a journalist, radio broadcaster and film producer.³⁴ His first newspaper, founded on 3 December 1912 in Leemore with the help of João de Simas Melo Jr. and Constantino Barcelos, was the weekly newspaper *O Lavrador Português*, widely distributed among Portuguese peasants and ranchers who worked in the Californian fields. A. Vieira Ávila was its sole owner between 1915 and 1926, in addition to working as a publisher and editor. Subsequently, in an effort to offer a new newspaper to immigrants who lived in coastal towns, especially in the urban belt of San Francisco, on 18 March 1924, he also created and directed the biweekly newspaper *A Colonia Portuguesa*,³⁵ which in 1932 merged with the *Jornal de Notícias* and *O Imparcial* to create the *Jornal Português*.

When radio becomes the fashionable medium, A. Vieira Ávila decides to change the rotary press for the waves. On 17 July 1930, together with his brother João, he founded *Latin-American Broadcasting Company*, a radio production company that began broadcasting the “Portuguese Hour” daily (except Sundays) on Oakland’s KTAB and KROW stations.³⁶ Although, shortly thereafter, in order to convert the space into a programme of varieties with a pedagogical style of Catholic values,³⁷ in which entertainment based on dramatic and musical performances would have a central role, the programme was renamed “Castelos Românticos” (Romantic Castles), whose broadcast lasted until 14 May 1962 (Cardozo, 1974, p. 82).³⁸ The initiative was celebrated by many immigrants who sent joyful letters to the director of *A Colonia Portuguesa*, *O Imparcial* and *Jornal de Notícias*, who supported and promoted the “risky” adventure of the Ávila brothers.³⁹

Little by little, thanks to the publicity of *A Colonia Portuguesa* and the incorporation of prestigious collaborators, such as the journalist Mário Bettencourt da Câmara,⁴⁰ the president of Morton Hospital de San Francisco, Carlos Fernandes,⁴¹ or the lawyer and journalist Alberto Moura, the program gained popularity and influence.⁴² The radio section of the *Latin-American Broadcasting Company* also gives voice to fraternal immigrant organizations, which use the radio program to publicize their projects and report on their activities,⁴³ and broadcasts monologues, classical music and fados by local artists⁴⁴ that deeply touched immigrants in California.⁴⁵

To promote its broadcasts, the *Latin-American Broadcasting Company* launched several initiatives through the press. First, he created a radio section titled “Waves of the Air” which was broadcast in *A Colonia Portuguesa* and *Jornal de Notícias*. And, in January 1933, A. Vieira Ávila, with the help of his wife Celeste Alice dos Santos, a native of Trás-os-Montes,⁴⁶ founded the monthly magazine on radio content *Rose & Albert Magazine* (1933–1934), which reported on Portuguese radio programs in the United States, promoted the use of radio among immigrants and included short sections with cultural, social or historical information, as well as poetry, letters to the editor, condolences, announcements about events and anniversaries, among others.

³⁴ "O filme Gado Bravo." *O Independente*, 14 January 1937, p. 1.

³⁵ "A Colonia Portuguesa Encorpóra-se em \$50.000.00 no Estado de California". *A Colonia Portuguesa*, 3 November 1925, p. 1.

³⁶ "Os Fundadores da Hora Portuguesa da América". *Rose & Albert Magazine*, edition of January 1933, p. 3.

³⁷ "Crónica Ligeira. Os programas da Radio". *Jornal Português*, special issue, 20 August 1943, p. 12.

³⁸ See also: Silva, Fernando M. Soares. "Os medios de comunicação social em língua portuguesa na Califórnia". *Tribuna Portuguesa*, 15 February 2012, p. 19.

³⁹ "Os portugueses no Rádio". *Jornal de Notícias*, 6 August 1930, p. 4.

⁴⁰ "O Sr. M. B. Da Camara Falfa Pelo Radio da Estação KTAB". *A Colonia Portuguesa*, 24 October 1930, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Idem*, p. 1.

⁴² "A Hora Portuguesa na KTAB". *A Colonia Portuguesa*, 29 August 1930, p. 1.

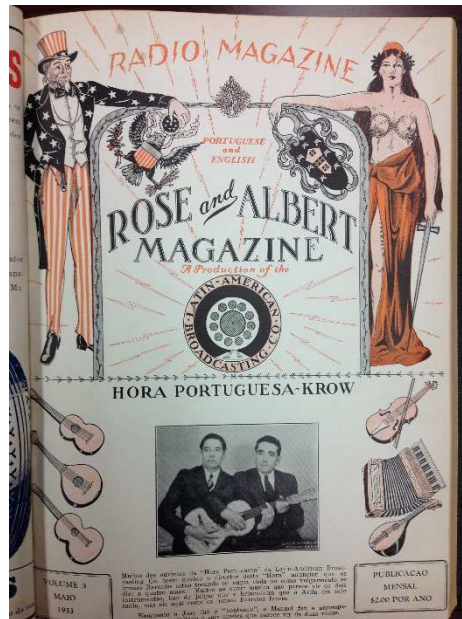
⁴³ "A I.D.E.S. na KTAB." *A Colonia Portuguesa*, 5 September 1930, p. 1.

⁴⁴ "Os Nossos Artistas". *A Colonia Portuguesa*, 12 September 1930, p. 1.

⁴⁵ "A Hora Portuguesa" *Jornal de Notícias*, 13 August 1930, p. 1.

⁴⁶ See: *Rose and Albert Magazine*, edition of January 1933, p. 4.

Illustration 2: Cover of *Rose & Albert Magazine*, edition of May 1933, published by Latin-American Broadcasting Company, owners Artur Vieira Ávila and Celeste Santos..



Source: Freitas Library of San Leandro (California).

After its closure, A. Vieira Ávila created the weekly newspaper *O Clarim* (*The Clarion*), an illustrated weekly in tabloid format, written in Portuguese and English, which became the spokesman for “Castelos Românticos,” which had a network of clubs of which, according to the newspaper, more than 10.000 members were part.⁴⁷ *O Clarim*, published between 5 October 1934 and 15 August 1935, also published various news items, *folletins*, letters from immigrants, small announcements and an editorial section. As a result of the merger of *O Clarim* and *Ecos de Portugal*, Arthur Vieira Ávila, together with Leonel Soares de Azevedo, *O Portugal da California*, distributed irregularly until 1937 in Oakland and Alameda (Cal.) as the official organ of the association Castelos Românticos and the Club Ecos de Portugal under the slogan “Pela Pátria e pelo Bom Nome Português, pela Raça e pela Língua” [For the Homeland and for the Portuguese Good Name, for the Breed and for the Language]. A statement inspired by the authoritarian regime of Novo State, officially founded in 1933 (Torgal, 2009). Salazar stimulated the patriotic cult of a racial and national ideal through different campaigns among immigrants to develop an emotional identification with salazarism as a catalyst of the new Portugal, with imperial vocation (Cairo, 2006). The passionate commemoration of the country’s independence, the glorious period of exploration by sailors, its status as a colonial power, among other symbolic and mythological topics, were arguments used by the Portuguese dictatorship to legitimize itself among immigrants, emotionally captive to appeals to the historical honour and dignity of the Portuguese nation (Pina, 1945).

Arthur Vieira Ávila published some of his works as an announcer in works such as *Rimas de Um Imigrante*, *Desafio Radiofónico* or *Écos do Ar*, which gathers the radio challenges (lyric genre sung to two voices on different subjects) between A. and A. Vieira Ávila and Manuel Carvalho, with whom he shared dozens of broadcasts sung between 1931 and 1932 in the “Hora Portuguesa” (KROW) of the *Latin-American Broadcasting Company*. Arthur V. Ávila and Celeste Santos also created a film division called “Castels of Romance Films,” which screened dozens

⁴⁷ “Os Castelos Românticos”. *O Clarim*, 25 July 1935, p. 1. The header is adorned by the following promotional notice: “The Clarion is the mouthpiece of the Castels of Romance of California, a Radio Organization with more than 10.000 members. What a grand médium to advertise your business!”.

of Portuguese-language film titles in the United States. In 1946 alone, he managed the screening of more than 40 films for the Portuguese colony in California.⁴⁸

The other great pioneer of Portuguese radio in the United States was Affonso Gil Mendes Ferreira, known by his listeners as “Ferreira Mendes.” He was born on 23 January 1889 in Barroca do Zêzere (Beira Baixa) and arrived in Providence (Rhode Island) on 6 August 1920 on board the ship “Canada” from Lisbon, where he had worked in commercial activities.⁴⁹ He settled in the town of Taunton (Mass.) and, while working in a textile factory, in 1925 he began to publish the half-yearly commercial newspaper *O Heraldo Português*, which he edited until December 1976.⁵⁰ Shortly thereafter, he became a correspondent for the main Portuguese newspapers on the East Coast, the *Diário de Notícias* and the weekly *O Popular* (New Bedford, 1914–1937).⁵¹

Affonso Gil Mendes Ferreira began broadcasting on July 23, 1933 from the WNBH station in New Bedford “A Voz de Portugal,”⁵² which would remain on the air for more than half a century and was one of the radio programs that most contributed to developing community awareness and strengthening the identity ties of Portuguese immigrants in New England, in defense of Portuguese traditions and culture in the United States.⁵³ News, musical performances, social and cultural reports, advertorials on Portuguese trade, interviews with prominent members of the colony and donation campaigns for various social causes were part of the contents of their broadcasts, initially in collaboration with Leopoldo Conde. On 24 November 1934, to increase its coverage in the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, it began broadcasting from Providence’s WPRO and WRIB stations,⁵⁴ later from Fall River’s WSAR, Cape Cod’s WOCB and Taunton’s WPEP.

The growing success of “A Voz de Portugal” made it the only daily Portuguese-language radio program in North America between 1952 and 1967. One of the most significant moments of his work as a broadcaster was when he launched a campaign to ask President John F. Kennedy for help during the eruptions and earthquakes that devastated the Azorean people during the volcanic crisis of Os Capelinhos in 1958. Kennedy ordered to modify the legislation, through the enactment of the *Azorean Refugee Act*, to allow the entry of refugees fleeing the disaster, for whom A. Mendes Ferreira organized several aid costs broadcast by his radio program. This humanitarian work and his long career as a radio journalist earned him recognition from the Portuguese and U.S. authorities.⁵⁵

Therefore, as it has been possible to verify, the Portuguese radio in the United States, besides having been a useful means for the social, economic and cultural progress of the immigrants, was an instrument of communication that allowed the professional development of journalists like Arthur Vieira Ávila or Affonso Gil Mendes Ferreira, who would see their American dream come true doing journalism in their own language through the airwaves.

⁴⁸ “Saudações de ‘Castelos Românticos’ e dos seus Directores”. *Jornal Português*, special issue of 1948, no page.

⁴⁹ Part of the data in this biographical profile has been collected from the documentation stored in the “Affonso Gil Mendes Ferreira Papers” archive (MC 92/PAA), stored in the archives bearing his name in the Ferreira Mendes Portuguese–American Archives (FM–PAA), at Claire T. Carney Library, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. [The author would like to thank Otília Ferreira for the information provided on his father’s professional career, Affonso Gil Ferreira Mendes.]

⁵⁰ FM–PAA–UMD. MC 92/PAA.

⁵¹ *O Popular* was the first Luso–American newspaper to create special local editions, with an autonomous editorial direction, administration and orientation. The owner of each edition or section was a tenant who paid the newspaper a percentage of the advertising profits. *O Popular* had editions in Boston, Bristol, Fall River and Providence. Other newspapers, such as *A Alvorada*, imitated this commercial strategy in the 1920s.

⁵² “A Voz de Portugal”. *Diário de Notícias*, 25 September 1933, p. 2.

⁵³ See: “Horas Portuguesas. Estará o ‘Polvo Britânico Esfacelando a Nossa Língua?”. *O Heraldo Português*, April 1936, p. 13.

⁵⁴ “Programa Radiofónico Português ‘Voz de Portugal’”. *O Heraldo Português*, April 1936, p. 4.

⁵⁵ FM–PAA, MC 92/PAA. Speech of Senator John F. Parker in the “Testimonial Dinner–Affonso Ferreira Mendes” of the Portuguese American Civic Club, 11 September, 1983.

5. Conclusions

Portuguese radio in the United States is a phenomenon associated with migratory flows from various regions of Portugal, mainly from the archipelago of the Azores, which settled in various areas of North American geography, especially in New England and California, where the first radio experiences began in the thirties, produced in Portuguese by and for immigrants, who received the new media with great expectation, seduced by the magic of the waves, which linked them to the same feeling and socio-cultural imaginary.

The first programmes were born under the generic name of “The Portuguese hour,” which consisted of the production of a 60-minute variety space combining information with entertainment, hosted on a local radio station where the Portuguese colonies lived. After the creation of the first “Portuguese hour” in San Diego (CA) in May 1930, the radio broadcasts made by Portuguese immigrants increased exponentially in a few years, with the creation of dozens of programs throughout the country that altered the perception of the Portuguese community in the United States and contributed to the development and dynamization of communication among immigrants, in addition to stimulating the realization of new professional activities related to the innovative medium. Little by little, the programs became longer and more regular, and soon consolidated as spaces that spread all kinds of news about Portugal and the lives of immigrants, entertained with musical spaces, novel stories, theater, poetry, debates or conferences.

However, the power of attraction and persuasion of the Portuguese-language radio sections was seen as a threat to the survival of some immigrant-edited newspapers, whose owners feared a decline in readership and a sharp decline in advertising revenues. As its use became popular, the Portuguese press learned to coexist with radio, using it to promote itself and create business strategies by promoting its own radio programs to attract new audiences. Some journalists even saw in radio communication an opportunity to grow professionally, as happened with the directors of *A Colonia Portuguesa* de Oakland (CA) and *O Heraldio Português* de Taunton (MA), Arthur Vieira Ávila and Affonso Gil Mendes Ferreira, two of the pioneers of Portuguese radio journalism in the United States, who produced successful programs that remained on the air for dozens of years.

Radio thus became a communicative tool that changed the sensory perception of immigrants, altered their customs, helped them create community awareness, created new spaces for information and entertainment, encouraged commercial or journalistic activity and, in short, meant a lever of progress for Portuguese residents in the United States.

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