

Chapter Eight

Reframing Materiality in the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*

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Introduction

In this chapter we explore the way in which ideas of materiality can inform an understanding of podcasting as a cultural phenomenon, with a particular focus on the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*. The series focuses on the exchange of migration stories which offer an alternative narrative about Caribbean nationals living abroad. The podcast series, produced by one of this chapter's authors, Rachel-Ann, aims to explore alternatives to historical, mainstream narratives about the Caribbean Diaspora community in the UK, which mainly provide a negative portrayal often built around themes of illegal residence status, deportation, and criminal behaviour.

Podcasting and podcast listening became one of the boom cultural activities in the lockdown public health response to the Covid pandemic. Podcasters found innovative ways to record their episodes, even using their cars and 'pillow forts' as makeshift studios (Arbuthnot 2020). There has been a growing body of literature that investigates the production and listening practice around podcast, which includes published works by Berry (2006) Crofts, Dilley, Fox, Retsema, and Williams (2005) Menduni (2007), McClung and Johnson (2010), and Markman (2011). However, this literature does not even provide us with an agreed definition of the podcast, and we are some way off a developed framework that would allow us to understand the core production, distribution and listening practices of podcasting.

The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* is built around regular audio programmes. Thirteen episodes were produced by Rachel-Ann between July 2020-January 2021, to engage with this widely-dispersed global community. The audio is accessible through online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Soundcloud, Apple, Spotify, and the Website. The analytics overview, from all the online platforms, demonstrates that audiences have been engaging with the podcast content in multiple ways. For example, there have been 545 views, with 180 visitors on the *Caribbean Diaspora* website. These views were made by persons living in the United Kingdom, United States, China, Trinidad and Tobago, Ireland, Netherlands, Guyana, Jamaica, France, Dominican Republic, Belgium, Finland, Russia, and Barbados.

Promotions for the podcasts, states that the series is:

centred around all of the things that matter to those within the Caribbean Diaspora community. In each episode, members of the Caribbean Diaspora community talk about their experiences living abroad and discuss topics such as Identity, Belonging, Entrepreneurship, Art, Music, Food, Festivals Publishing, Sexuality, Education and Grief.

<https://caribbean-diaspora.org/about/>

A podcast that explores such major ideas has much to tell us about identity in the contemporary society. As Goulbourne and Solomos (2004: 534) have argued,

more than any other part of the contemporary world ... the Caribbean world has been a precursor of several themes in the energetic pursuit of modernity: capitalism/industrialism, de-tribalization/individualization, plural identities, transnationality, the disruption and transformation of cultural domains and boundaries.

As Rachel-Ann explains it on her podcast's Soundcloud page:

Together with highlighting the way that nationals have been representing the Caribbean flag while living abroad, ultimately, the aim of this podcast is to capture the rich history and wisdom within these untold stories through the voice of the person telling the story.

<https://soundcloud.com/rachel-ann-d-charles>

In the analysis below, we argue that the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* demonstrates the construction of a virtual community through the processes of podcast preproduction and production, and that the relationship between listeners and the material culture generated in the content of these podcasts is critical to the formation of this virtual community. As we show, the preproduction and production steps for the podcast are guided, following Whitaker et al. (1997: 137), by the recording of stories as a shared activity.

Testing the insights in wider discussions and between Rachel-Ann's insider status (member of the diaspora culture and producer of the podcast) and Tim's outsider status (white British male, radio studies academic) has been particularly productive.

Through emerging themes surrounding podcasting as a form of audio media, and the specific nature of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*, we demonstrate that the materiality of podcasting extends the conventional notions used to discuss such issues in media and cultural studies.

This is particularly apt for a media form often seen as ephemeral or immaterial. We present an analysis of both the distinctive cultural materials out of which the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* is built, and of the very different pre-production, production, and post-production processes that create both a global virtual listening community and a distinctive material product of black diaspora sound culture.

In the context of this book, the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series enables us to explore four central notions of the materiality of podcasting, which can be generalised into a mature analytical structure to understand this cultural phenomenon. In the first, we critically explore ideas of materiality in relation to attempts to define podcasting as a form of institutionalised media production and distribution. We set out the limitations of such approaches, including the suggestion that the defining quality of sound media is the absence of any materiality and the reductive case that audio media is in essence, determined by its technological form. Second, we also note the neglect of the materiality of listeners and listening in the main approaches to podcasting, radio and other sound media. When applied to podcasting, we highlight the importance of ideas of virtual communities and how we can move beyond the idea that both sound media and digital media somehow lack materiality. In doing so we trace the emergence of specifically black cultural podcasting. The core area of primary research is set out in an ethnography of podcast production. By focusing on Rachel-Ann's work on the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series, we reveal the distinctive differences of production when compared to mainstream media production processes and the importance of her place within this diasporal culture. In doing so, we open up the final area of discussion: the significant themes of Caribbean diasporal discourse which have emerged in the contributions from a variety of interviewees. We conclude with some suggestions for further work in the materiality of sound media, internet enabled global communication and diaspora cultures.

As such, this chapter therefore responds to the need for increased research on podcasts, and theorisation of podcasting. As Llinares, Fox, and Berry (2018: 123-145) have identified, we know too little about 'the culture of podcasting, podcast audiences and listening practices, the format's technological properties, and podcast aesthetics and style'. It also focuses our attention on important ideas of diasporal identity, here in relation to these linked to a wider Caribbean culture, and the way practice-based research through podcast production can reveal important aspects of such an identity, especially in the unusual situation of public health lockdown.

The materiality of podcast production, distribution and listening

Discussions of podcasting, and of the mobile listening associated with podcasts, are rooted in debates about the materiality of sound media in radio studies and sound studies. Over a series of articles and chapters, one of this chapter's authors has established a core argument about these debates (Wall 2004; Wall 2016; Wall 2018; Wall and Webber 2015). We draw on this analysis here, proposing that we need an approach to studying audio media that: i) integrates the institutionalisation of audio media with the experience of consuming it; ii) is attentive to the historical and cultural locations of podcasting as a media form; and iii) avoids metaphors from our physical world that privilege the absence of the visual of the immateriality of sound media. In doing so we need a renewed sense of how podcasts, and other sound media develop notions of time and space.

Guardian journalist, Ben Hammersley coined the term podcast in 2004 (Mollet, Brumley, Gilson and Williams 2017) as a portmanteau word blending the words 'iPod' and 'broadcasting' to signal a medium that enables time-shifting listening of audio obtained via the internet as an alternative to over-the-air radio. In the same article Hammersley also offered up 'Audioblogging' and 'GuerillaMedia' as alternative terms, although each emphasised very different characteristics of the emerging medium with roots in online citizen journalism and alternative media. Harris and Park (2008) re-enforce the 'iPod' mobile listening / 'broadcast' distribution factor when they identify 'audio playback' as the defining material characteristic of this (then) emerging form of audio media. They contrast the fact that listeners can play podcasts at their chosen time with the broadcast model which usually assumed simultaneous distribution and consumption. For Bottomley (2015) and Potter (2006: 97-112) these 'time-shifting' and 'place-shifting' elements in podcasting are differentiating material factors from what they construct as other 'ephemeral' media platforms. Berry's (2006) adds an emphasised on the role of subscription, which he sees as transformative of the way listeners access podcast in time and place.

These basic definitional frameworks are useful in recognising at least some of the characteristics of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series. The international nature of the audience means that being able to listen at a time chosen by individual listeners is important. For diaspora communities, 'time-shifting' and 'place-shifting' are not just matters of personal convenience, they are central to ways of establishing a shared experience. Likewise,

subscription allows geographically and temporally disparate listeners to bring patterns of regularity to their listening.

Beyond these basic points, though, by definition of podcasting in relation to over-the-air sound broadcasting, the authors often carry forward many of the essentialist ideas about the material nature of audio materiality which have bedevilled our understanding of radio. For instance, scholars in radio studies too often looked for, and crudely applied materialist metaphors to understand radio, and by extension all audio media. Radio is presented as “blind” (for instance, Crisell 1986: 3; Chignell 2009: 4), or “invisible” (Lewis and Booth 1989)². Or seen as having essential material nature that determines not only their form, but by implication, the way they operate culturally for their listeners. Andrew Crisell’s (1986: 43) characterisation of the materiality of radio as “simply of noises and silence and therefore use time, not space” is a particularly good example of this. We can discern other metaphors of absence in the early days of radio that call on the ideas of ‘invisibility’ or even ‘intangibility’ materiality. Noakes (2016), for instance, has pointed to the interest in radio technology amongst early-twentieth-century spiritualists for building ‘psychic telegraphs’ that it was felt would exploit these shared characterises of intangibility in radio and the spirit world.

In other approaches, the cultural form of sound is understood to be determined by the materiality of the technologies which enabled its existence. Most studies of both radio and podcasting commence with a historical survey of their enabling technology, presented as the history of the medium (see, for instance Shingler and Wieringa 1998; Berry 2016). This conflation of the cultural form of audio media with its enabling technology is encouraged in the very naming of the media. The term ‘radio’, for instance indexes the transmission form used for broadcasting, and ‘podcasting’ draws on the playback machines used to listen and the use of the internet to disseminate programming from the production centre outwards to those listeners.

As we show in our analysis of The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series, the relationship between enabling technology, material form and listener experience are more complex than these simple metaphors suggest. For a start, as the programme podcasts of major broadcasting organisations shows, audio media can be distributed at distances as easily along wires of the internet as the radio waves that constitute over-the-air models. Of course, the technology is not irrelevant. However, it is the political economy of audio media enabled

² Although we recognise that Lewis was playing with the idea of invisibility to highlight the neglect of radio studies within the broader subject of media studies, the authors do contrast radio with television by the material absence of visual content.

by particular technologies, and the political, economic and cultural priorities, which decide how and for whom these technologies are used; not the other way round. In traditional radio, it is the selection of a central-producer-to-mass-audience model that gives us the ‘broadcasting’ metaphor. As cell phones show us very clearly, the technology can be adapted for very different relationships between ‘producer’ and ‘listener’ up to the point that these concepts become redundant. Likewise, it is the political decision to organise radio at a national level, and to strictly licence who can transmit, that determines the over-the-air form of radio available to us. As we will show, the ability to use the internet as both a distributor of sound programming and a facilitator of interaction *is* centrally important to the potential of podcasting. However, we need to understand these material relationships as opportunities afforded, rather than cultural forms determined, by the available technologies.

As Kate Lacey (2018: 119-120) notes, such positioning often places radio (and we would argue, by extension, podcasting) as immaterial, which ignores ‘the materiality of the technologies... involved in the production, transmission, and reception of radio... and the ecological implications of airwaves’. But she also counsels caution in constructing this material nature as another form of essence, noting that the term ‘radio’ (and again by extension, we suggest ‘podcasting’) is “called upon to describe any number of different things – material, virtual, institutional, aesthetic, experiential. And, in turn, each of these meanings unfolds over time and in different contexts” (2018: 110).

By contrast, Hilmes and Loviglio (2013: 49) argue that the practices of podcasting, and the material form of distribution of the podcasts themselves, may distract us from the fact that they are based upon the ‘serially produced programming’ found on radio. Can we, therefore, go as far as suggesting that, while materially different in the technologies of distribution, radio and podcasting are not different in material form as programming? In many ways this would provide a new example of Marshall McLuhan’s proposition that new media take as content the forms of media that preceded them (1964). Berry, in his earliest writing on podcasting at least, provided an extended example of these technologically-determining models, suggesting that there would be an explosion of streaming and modern technologies within the radio industry, that there would be a convergence of multimedia platforms and that this would impact on podcast delivery. Again, such propositions about the materiality of radio usually emerge from the assumption that new technologies drive change, and that radio and podcasting are homogenous activities and forms within and across these audio media.

Yet a decade after his original discussion, Berry's (2016) reflected that these changes had not been realised. Certainly, major broadcasters like the BBC simply adopted podcasting, along with other forms of audio streaming and downloading as new forms of their previous over-the-air broadcast model. By contrast, the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series, like most podcast programming are of a very different nature: produced from outside mainstream broadcast organisations, often using very different production processes and engaging their communities of listeners in very different ways.

To understand any audio media, we need to move beyond what Sondergaard (2011) has termed a 'pure realist' conceptualisation of materiality which relates to a physical matter. Of course, these matters are not limited to discussion of audio media, and there are questions about intangibility in discussions of other digital artefacts. Morizio (2014), for instance, locates digital materiality as an emerging concept within the 'information systems' field, and a series of writers have discussed the digital in terms of immaterial or intangible forms (Latour 2005; Orlikowski and Scott 2008; Suchman 2007). Likewise, Pearce (2010) has noted the way museum studies scholars vary their engagement with the term digital materiality. More productive, are discussions in this field of the use of digital technology to access cultural objects. Dudley's (2010) work highlights that materiality is found beyond the physical, when people experience these museum artefacts using their sensory system.

At the same time, those debates about 'form and content' that emerged in the 1960s are still relevant (see Hong 2003), and discussions about connections between content and its underlying structure (McLuhan 1964), as well as the creativity behind the form (Hegel 1998) remain important. Conceptualising audio media as aethereal, distract us from important questions about the social practice of podcast (and radio) production and the cultural material produced by the listening communities generated by podcasts like the *Caribbean Diaspora*. More helpfully, Leonardi (2010) views materiality as both physical and non-physical, which he terms 'practical instantiation and significance'.

More generally, then, technologically-determinist, essentialist and ahistorical approaches neglect the complexity of podcasting (or any other audio medium) as material products of particular cultures. As we go on to show in our analysis of The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series, the materiality of podcasting is to be found in its relations of production and cultural purpose and not in an essence or technological form. Put another way, we need to embrace Hammersley's identification of 'audioblogging' and 'GuerillaMedia' as central parts of what we have called podcasting. 'Audioblogging'

certainly signals a form of community-rooted, or citizen journalism, very different from the traditions of radio news journalism established by the BBC or CBS, and adopted and adapted by Caribbean national broadcasters. Blogging of all sorts not only responds to communities of interest it is central to the formation of those communities and the identities they create. Likewise, the alternativeness (in programme-making practice, content and producer-listener relationship) are seriously neglected, when we solely utilised the technologically materialist concept indexed by 'podcasting' to understand what was new in this new audio medium.

Our study contrasts the material relationship between mainstream radio and podcasting within diaspora communities. The first is built upon a commitment to national identity, dominated by ideas of broadcasting as a distribution metaphor, and still based on over-the-air transmission as their primary artefactual form. The second, responds to and creates a diaspora identity within a transnational community, pushes the broadcast metaphor so that the materiality of the podcast breaks new ground, and uses the affordances of internet distribution. It is to these investigations that we now turn.

The materiality of podcasting in virtual communities

One of the critical components of podcasts, therefore, is their positioning within the logic and organisation of online spaces, which alerts us to ideas of virtual communities. Rheingold (1993), pioneer and oft cited author of this term, defines it as 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough... to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (Rheingold 1993: 5). Here, Rheingold alludes to a type of social interaction occurring online between the public and online spaces. Given that radio studies has been a major space for exploring such ideas, most notably in the study of the community radio movement (see for instance, Halper 1991; Lewis and Booth 1989; Partridge 1982; Price-Davies and Tacchi 2001), it is surprising that this aspect of the material culture of podcasting is relatively neglected.

In subsequent years, Dennis, Pootheri, and Natarajan (1998), perhaps more straightforwardly, defined virtual communities as people with common interests who interact primarily through electronic means. Whitaker et al.'s (1997: 137) and Preece's (2001: 347-356) characterization of a virtual community as one that has a shared purpose, policy and computer system deftly links material culture to the materiality of communication technology. In this conceptualisation, virtual communities have a 'shared goal' with audiences who actively engage in 'shared activities,' they also have access to the focus of the

community, ‘reciprocity’ occurs, and there are similarities in terms ‘shared context of social conventions, language, and protocols’ (Whitaker et al. 1997: 137). For Ren, Kraut and Kiesler 2007: 381 and Fonseca, Borges-Tiago, Tiago, and Silva (2021: 165), such communities develop common identity and common bond.

Within these frameworks, we need to understand The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series as producing a non-traditional, virtual community, because as Wang et al. (2002) have proposed, they looked beyond meanings of geography, borders, and territories. In this context, the virtual community offer a framework that is quite intimate and personal for understanding the relationships between producer, podcast and listener. Certainly, Wrather (2016: 43-44) has illustrated the use of podcasts within online spaces such as fora, social networks and blogs. The findings from this research show that podcasts encourage audience participation and promote online and offline communities.

There are, of course, still debates on whether there is a material culture in online spaces. Some, like Barlow (1996) suggest that virtual spaces do not have material culture. However, as Lehdonvirta (2010) has insightfully pointed out, presenting the virtual as devoid of material culture requires that we accept the same sort of essentialist notion of ethereality for that has confounded discussions of the material culture of radio listening. Certainly, as Lehdonvirta points out, virtual spaces contain an architecture that is tangible; and that governs how people use online spaces and gain access. Further, though, they argue that virtual cultures are functional and symbolic. We follow Lehdonvirta, therefore, in working with the notion that the virtual spaces created by the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series create an online community and afford its members the opportunity to engage with ‘real artefacts’ through use of ‘senses.’

Although an evaluation of the podcast audiences is outside of the confines of this study, material culture is an energising force within the communication process through its provision for its audiences. Taachi’s (1997: 47) work indicates that radio sound aids in building a social community for listeners. It is through this process that radio sound can contribute to material culture for listeners. Material culture overlaps as it simultaneously provides an architecture for the radio while providing one for audiences.

Finally, in exploring ideas of materiality in virtual communities, it is worth noting that the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series is part of the wider emergence of podcasts centred around black sociocultural and political ideologies from 2010. Fox, Dowling, and Miller (2020) note the importance of the greater access to new media technologies such as

smartphones in enabling the success of these alternative forms of audio media. They include productions such as *This Week in Blackness!* (TWiB) (2000), *The Combat Jack Show* (2010) and *For Colored Nerds* (2014). For Giroux (2011: 25), these black podcasts promote representation of ‘new voices’. These formats are characterised by humour, discourse on black identity, history, and storytelling. The production formats are typically open-ended, and unscripted, which we contend aims to allow for black audiences to find value in black podcast content. Certainly, Florini (2015) has analysed black podcasts as performative spaces that complement in-person conversations that are typically heard in black salons or places of worship. The outcomes of these podcasts relate to what Leonardi (2010) refers to as “materiality seen as practical instantiation and significance”. Essentially, this perspective of materiality explores the ways artifacts impact on cultures or everyday life.

Podcast production and the materiality of diaspora culture

Here we want to make the argument that the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* is a conduit for types of material culture which have emerged within the cultural locales of the Caribbean diaspora more generally, and that this cultural material is particularly well-suited to the artefactual form of the podcast and the architecture of distribution, most often implied by the use of the term. Further, that the very national, centre-to-periphery and transmitted-as-live models of traditional over-the-air sound broadcasting are not well suited to deal with global, time- and space-shifted diaspora cultures, and so the potential audiences been poorly-served by more traditional media, most notably over-the-air radio.

In accounting for the distinctive characteristics of programming like the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series as a material product of one diaspora culture, we have taken a broadly ethnographic approach. For Atkinson (1997) and Barnes (1996), ethnography is a careful study of culture, in this case allowing for a view of the podcast through the eyes of those engaged in this study. To achieve this Rachel-Ann used a virtual ethnographic approach allowing us to deal with a podcast that primarily operates online, and allowed her to reconstruct the podcast she had produced, this time through a researcher's lens. In building on this approach, we navigate the roles of researcher, theorist, producer, and audience member. Following Tilley (2001: 262), we have been attentive to the “space and place and landscape and the way they encode, produce and reproduce, alter and transform patterns of sociability”, and from Given (2008: 337) and Hart (2017) we have explored the social interactions occurring in the production of the podcast. In both the wider discussion of podcasting cultural materiality, and this more focused ethnographic exploration of the

Caribbean Diaspora Podcast series, we have been cognisant of positionality. In particular, we have applied Salazar, Crosby and DiClemente's (2015: 458) sense of reflexivity as "examining both oneself as a researcher and the research relationship". Being a member of the Caribbean diaspora community herself, this positioning shaped the way Rachel-Ann conceptualised, created, and executed the podcasts, as well as it shaped how she conducted the ethnographic research.

We need to understand the pre-production and production of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* as editorial and technological processes that reconstruct pre-existing cultural material into a new form: the podcast episode. And the processes themselves are bound within the overall aim of using pre-existing identities to create media content for the Caribbean diaspora community. For Rachel-Ann, her identity as a podcast producer and a member of the diasporal group informed the planning stages involved in mapping the focus, audience, and the choice of online media platforms for the podcast series. The podcast offers listeners diverse content from Caribbean migrants living around the world. Central to this is imagining the needs and interests of the audience as Caribbean nationals living outside the islands. As a Caribbean migrant in the United Kingdom, Rachel-Ann envisaged that many people within this community are living in a state of uncertainty, a state exaggerated by limitations on social engagement during the Covid-19 global health crisis, and looking for ways that digital platforms can enable them to communicate with friends, families, and colleagues.

Rachel-Ann contacted approximately thirty potential guests, and over half of them confirmed they would participate. The podcast conversations were semi-structured, with initial conversations with each guest to get background information, which formed the basis for questions for the recording. However, even with the structured questions, interviewees could guide the discussions, too. To improve the quality of the podcasts, Rachel-Ann sought feedback on the concept and the experiences of the participants. To prepare for the recording, Rachel-Ann created a script for each podcast episode which included a list of questions and prompts for the guest. She also briefed the guest(s) about the recording process and the purpose of the podcast prior to the recording session, giving the guest an opportunity to include any additional points for discussion.

The production process determines what finished product is published and audiences have access to. As a first-time podcast producer and with the stay-at-home mandates, Rachel-Ann recorded the interviews at home, which led to several technical challenges. She utilised a headset with built-in microphone when recording the first interview via Zoom, which was

easily accessible for the guest and host. However, the quality was poor, and there was difficulty in retrieving the recording from Zoom. Subsequent recordings were made using a mobile application called Anchor. However, for technical reasons, the audio volume was unbalanced. Fortunately, issues using Zoom were resolved and returned to that platform to record the remaining episodes in the first season. Whilst recording, Rachel-Ann observed that most of the guests felt more comfortable having the questions ahead of time and doing a pre-interview. One aspect that requires further work is resolving the technological challenges of podcasting to ensure the best quality.

Recording the podcast episodes becomes, in Whitaker et al.'s (1997: 137) words a process of 'shar[ing] context of social conventions, language, and protocols'. Rachel-Ann recorded thirteen episodes between July 2020-January 2021. Once the Initial episodes were recorded, she then mapped out the order of the episodes, as there were connections across the conversations. The conversations covered issues such as identity, belonging, entrepreneurship, music, food, festivals, publishing, and grief, amongst a few other topics; but these were specific to their country of origin. However, as the conversations increased, Rachel-Ann observed that the Caribbean migrants' dialogues recorded were mainly centred around migration anecdotes. This raises interesting questions about how listeners want to access the conversations.

After much experimentation with structures with the initial recordings, the chosen format for this podcast is a conversational interview featuring a single guest or guests along with the host who also fulfils the role of an interviewer. Rachel-Ann drew on her own experience as a member of the Caribbean diaspora community, and utilised Butler's (2005) notion of 'giving an account of oneself' during the discussions. This allows the interviewer to present the podcast from an insider's perspective, whilst also exploring unfamiliar topics. The format of the podcast also differs from mainstream media which, as with the latter, guests are typically allowed to share their stories for fifteen (15) minutes. Although developing this podcast was very encouraging, one lesson learnt, based on the production processes, is allocating time for open conversations and a natural flow outside of the prepared and discussed questions.

All supporting audio was created and edited by Rachel-Ann as the producer. The creative and expressive works used in the podcast, such as the performances and scripts, the interviews, the musical works, and any other type of sound recording were used in keeping

with copyright laws, and approvals were negotiated from the interviewees to use the recorded content. For example, the podcast music was purchased from Shutterstock.

Another significant process was the demonstration of power which was negotiated between the producer and interviewees during the production phase of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*; which is another building block of the material culture found in this podcast. In Rachel-Ann's capacity as the producer of the podcast, audience members were given the opportunity to become co-creators. Interviewees were invited to share their full story, understanding all the risks involved and knowing what the role entails. Overall, this podcast is supported by a participatory and community-centred approach that provides participants from the Caribbean Diaspora community with control over the stories they want to share. In this way, the power remains in the hands of those (the audiences) telling their stories. The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* focuses on social gain and community benefit; they are owned by, and accountable to, the communities they seek to serve.

Although a survey was conducted to understand listening preferences, further work in this area is required to identify the needs of the target group. Drawing on the content the guests shared on the podcast, stories were intense, yet light-hearted, and because of this Rachel-Ann felt audiences would prefer to listen to the content in smaller time frames. Therefore, each episode was divided into three or four instalments.

In reflecting on this production process of the podcast, it demonstrates the way a podcast can create a virtual space for the Caribbean diaspora community and its existing material culture, as well as act as a medium for the production of new material culture. Through the host and the guest interviews, as well as the migration stories and topics that are exchanged within this virtual space, both through the discussions and in the minds of listeners these are connected to offline identities and histories. In many ways the websites, social media platforms, and other user interfaces through which the podcasts were made available reproduces the space and time coordinates of the Caribbean diasporal experience lived beyond the podcast itself.

Caribbean diasporal discourse

The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series also reveals the significant of the role power within the discourse of the contributors. In this sense, audio media like this series offers interviewees new domains through which power can be exercised, and demonstrates the way that

podcasting production can be utilised to align with diasporal discourse. This alerts us to Foucault's (1972: 49) sense of discourse as "the production of knowledge through language which gives bonded meanings to material objects and social practises". Typically, a 'discursive formation' is achieved when language methodically gives meaning to "material objects and social practises" (Edgar and Sedgwick 1999: 117). This was evident in the way contributors related their Caribbean heritage to their experience of living in other nations, including those that had held imperial power over the islands when they were colonial owners. Particularly interesting, were the anecdotes shared by contributors. As part of their stories, most of the interviewees discussed how they integrated Caribbean traditions and cultural objects within their countries of residence, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Canada, and United Arab Emirates. Several themes emerged that questioned feelings of belonging. This process is critical in establishing wider knowledge about Caribbean migrants living abroad whilst reliving and constructing past historical moments.

For example, one theme discussed across interviews is having a sense of belonging, particularly as traditions differ between the country of origin and country of residence. One podcast interviewee made distinctions between 'home' versus 'back home' which Grossman (2019) refers to as transnational connections within the diaspora. Matching Grossman's formulation, a podcast interviewee referred to the ways she maintained connections with family members from her homeland and her involvement with the cultural aspects of her homeland. The interviewee also talked about her connection to local activities within her place of residence, particularly volunteering, which has provided a sense of community. The podcast dialogues reveal this constant negotiation of cultural identities and/or dual identities, consistent with the discussions of *Old and New Identities* in Hall (1990: 41-68).

There were some striking similarities across the topics discussed in the thirteen podcast interviews. The discursive constructions of the contributors were primarily built around ideas of representation, identity, gender, race, and equality. Some of the podcast conversations connect to discourses of race and gender inequalities as a political process. Such a framing echoes the discourses Dufoix (2015) found within the African Diaspora community. As such the podcast series constructs narratives of resistance which are critical to the material culture framework of diasporal identity. There were various calls to action regarding the treatment of social issues in the migration anecdotes. In addressing some issues faced particularly by Afro-Caribbean people, a second-generation Caribbean migrant said:

It is about self-empowerment and self-determination because I am not waiting for white people to free us... I am not waiting for anybody to stop being racist because... we've been waiting for 400, 500, 600, 700 years why is... suddenly things going to change... overnight.

(Participant 1: 2020)

While another participant (2: 2020) stated: 'I am a black person and if there is brutality in my neighbourhood, I'll be on the streets.' This comment relates to his passion for exercising his human right to resist the racist injustices encountered in his country of residence. As such, he resists the mainstream narratives and methodically reconstructs an alternative narrative about Caribbean migrants living abroad.

The other benefit of this is that wider members of the Caribbean diaspora community can feel represented in the stories which then heightens the material culture. In Taachi's (1997: 43) work about *Radio Text between Self and Others* she discusses 'the use of radio sound in the home' which contributes to the material culture through 'social relationships,' relating to what Feld (1990) calls a lived work (Feld 1990). This also connects with Hall's (1990: 226) work about constructing the past through historical narrative. When applying those collective ideas to the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*, it has the potential to strengthen the material culture of the audiences.

Based on the migration stories guests shared, and level of freedom they exercised through co-production, these dialogues reflected a meaningful form of power. In particular, it points to Florini's (2015) discussion of black podcasting as 'alternative media' and 'audio enclaves'. Within these niche communities or closed audio spaces, black podcasters freely discuss the issues affecting them and these issues are told through their lens. There is a similarity as it relates to the intention of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* as the construction of an alternative virtual space that affords its members with the ability to speak on issues that affect them because of the agency that is afforded within the production process. It is through these narrative and co-production discursive practises that the contributors participate in a virtual community. Though the conversations they move from educational modes, to light humour, and critical discourses emerge, particularly with challenges around Caribbean identities. For Fris (2018: 322-323), this positions such discussions within socio-cultural

understanding; exemplified in all of the episodes in the way they represent common traditions, patterns, beliefs, issues, and challenges that the Caribbean community faces within the Diaspora. Listeners, nevertheless, may also take away different messages from the podcast episodes based on their sociocultural backgrounds.

The relationship between the form and content of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* highlights the technological affordances and material constraints discussed by Fris (2020: 322-323) and Hutchby (2001). Users can access the content on various platforms, and can subscribe, comment, and engage with the podcast and with the production team. However, discoverability of the podcast may not be straightforward for those within the target audience if these platforms are unfamiliar to them.

An examination of the podcast shows themselves a moving away from the physical notions of material as conventionally defined to a wide range of non-physical material. Following Lacey (2018), we need to “acknowledge the materiality involved in the production and transmission and reception of radio”. This includes the materiality of sound within any audio media. Lacey herself maintains that there is a ‘materiality to sound’. Although this argument was posed within a radio context, within the conventional ways of thinking about material, this notion may be problematic as sound requires a medium for its transmission. Perhaps more than in traditional over-the-air radio, podcasts can provide content for audience’s interaction.

For example, posts on Facebook reached 700 viewers and 206 users engaged with the content. The podcast clip with the highest engagement on Facebook featured one of the migration stories of a Trinidad and Tobago citizen living in the United States. This post reached 499 viewers with 72 users engaging by clicking, reacting, commenting, and sharing. The post with the highest engagements is on migration stories or facts. On the Instagram social media platform, the comments on Instagram were much more engaging than Facebook:

They view this podcast as a need in response to the pandemic. It is a really wonderful idea. I am now thinking back to when I first moved to the US and that disconnect that I felt... It is good to see other stories to know they did this to make a connection, or they did that to make a connection.

(Participant 3:2020)

The *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* constructs a virtual community centred around discourses of migration. In thinking about the role of the virtual community as one that promotes a

common identity and bond, some comments suggest the podcast content is helping to construct such. For example, one commenter on Instagram expressed appreciation for the spelling of a French-Creole term used by Caribbean migrants ‘Thanks. I know the term but did not know how to spell it’ (Participant 4: 2020). Using French Creole terms in the Caribbean is a common tradition in many islands. However, most traditions have been dying and weakened within diaspora context.

Conclusion

This chapter has enabled us to explore four central notions of the materiality of podcasting. At the same time, we have used this as an opportunity to critique existing approaches to studying podcasting, expanding beyond the limitations of approaches that connect it too closely to mainstream audio production or essentialist ideas of sound media. In doing so, we return to a developed idea of the way materiality can be useful in the field more generally.

We set out the limitations of approaches that suggest that the defining quality of sound media is the absence of any materiality or the deterministic idea that audio media’s materiality is somehow rooted in its technology. We explored the usefulness of ideas of virtual communities for the study of podcasting to replace more traditional models based upon centralised models of over-the-air broadcasting. We also located the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast* series in a wider context of specifically black cultural podcasting. This context is particularly apparent in Rachel-Ann’s auto/virtual ethnography of the distinctive differences of production she utilised, and in the differences from mainstream radio production approaches which dominate podcasting. Significantly, this reveals how important discourses of diaspora culture are to the contributors, and to the more open, conversational, shared nature of the discussions.

As a modest ethnographic reflection and deck-clearing engagement with ideas from radio studies, sound studies, digital online media studies within the broader field of media and cultural studies, we seek to open up debate, rather than provide definitive answers. There remains some important work to be done in the materiality of sound media, internet enabled global communication and diaspora cultures. In particular, we argue that we need to move away from essentialist approaches to look in detail at the nature of production and the discourses that run through particular examples of audio media programming.

We are also particularly conscious that we did not look at the lived experience of the listener experience the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*. We hope that discussions of the critical role material culture plays in building a virtual community for diasporal cultures is useful. Producing the podcast series certainly seems to address these matters directly. As one commenter stated: ‘this pressure is hard on the mind and soul of the migrant so many times. Thank You for this work’ (Participant 5: 2021). However, much more of these comments need to be captured to examine the audience reception.

This study set out to determine the relationship between materiality and podcasts using the case of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*. The investigation of the *Caribbean Diaspora Podcast*, through an ethnographic approach, indicates that the podcast allows for readers to imagine materialism beyond the typical conventions. The study has shown that material culture lies at the core and provides structural support for podcasts. These structures appear as human access, input, technological processes, and policies and within processes of discourse and power. Ultimately, material culture of a geographically and temporally dispersed community united by a sense of diasporal identity forms the content of the podcast and the podcast itself has become new cultural material for, and of, that community.

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