

"La Radio" – the feminists' Eldorado?

About an autonomous, feminist radio project from Freiburg

The title of my presentation is: "La Radio" – the feminists' Eldorado? This title ends with a question mark, cause I'm not sure, if this is true and plus, my idea of „Eldorado“ is quite vague. Maybe we can figure out later in our discussion, if there can be something like this. In the following, I will talk about the history, the principles and the contents of our autonomous woman-lesbian radio.

Intro: Jingle LaRadio

This is the official jingle of our program. LaRadio is part of the free radio Radio Dreyeckland (the triangle includes Germany, France and Suisse) and it's not the only female editorial staff in the free radio landscape. Almost every free German-speaking radio station has – or once had – a women's program; mainly generated out of the second women movement, at least in west Germany. And other countries (such as Spain, Italy or many Latin-American countries) also broadcast programs for and by women.

Before I come to LaRadio and to our work therein, just a few words to Radio Dreyeckland (RDL). RDL was founded in 1977, motivated by the antinuclear movement and it broadcast illegally during more than ten years; finally as a so called „pirate radio station“. Since 1988 RDL is legal and got the official frequency 102,3 MHz. Germany alone has approximately 30 free radio stations, the "Bürgerfunk," and a wide range of "Offene Kanäle" (public radio stations). RDL is the oldest free radio station in Germany and like most of them it is devoted to certain ideas and principles.

First of all the idea of „Gegenöffentlichkeit“. This means, that groups and people can express their opinions which would not be published by mainstream mass medias otherwise; probably since they were too critical, offensive or left. Applied to LaRadio as a woman lesbian radio, old, poor, lesbian woman or victims of incest for example would be picked out as a central theme. Women, which aren't considered, allegorical in a negative way or as victim otherwise. (Examples of our program: lesbians in seniority, womens' poverty). As a left radio project, LaRadio got an emancipatory idea – in a double sense: relating to social structures of power and within the radio related to patriarchal structures. More on that later.

In general, we want a reporting "von unten", that's to say, a reporting orientated on people's everyday life and reality of life; not just on government politics and prominent personalities. Local reporting is also given special emphasis and classified in the whole political context later. The structure of the radio is absolutely democratic: all members are entitled to vote and to decide about for example positions, budget or projects. There are no hierarchies and everybody can take part – as long as he/she agrees with the focusing. After all, there is also the possibility to use the technical infrastructure for creative work, experiments, features or radio plays. For all that, you should accept the idealist mentioned before and mainly expressed in the following so called „Antis“:

Anti antisemitism

Anti fascism

Anti racism

Whenever this is hurt, we want to react. Furthermore, there are 15 foreign editorial departments which broadcast in 14 languages (Russian, Korean, African, Italian, Portuguese, Kurdish, Polish, Turkish, Romanian, Arabic and Persian).

Anti capitalism

A typical thing for a free radio is its noncommercial character: there are no advertisements (this guarantees independence and credibility of the radio), there are no charges for the realizers of the programs, which normally aren't even professionally skilled as journalists. The radio is financed by the „Freundeskreis“ (the name for the association of all members): bounties, small contributions. Very few money is done by the "Landesmedienanstalt für Baden Württemberg" (the regional public institution for media) and broadcast fees.

Anti clericalism

Religion is a matter of privacy; it doesn't count for the work in the radio and should therefore stay outside.

Anti nationalism

All obvious nationalist tendencies are rejected and even if it's in a festive and peaceful context like at the FIFA Soccer world championship 2006 in Germany: it will be considered critically.

Anti militarism and Anti imperialism

Wars and military invasions as in Iraq are denounced.

And finally

Anti sexism

This plays a central role for LaRadio as you can imagine. Like you all should know there is sometimes a gap between requirement and reality; that's the problem with this principle too: Due to repeated sexist remarks at "Radio Dreyecklandland," LaRadio declared its autonomy in 1989 – the activists wanted to focus on their programs and not waste their time with futile discussions. Although "Anti sexism" is a declared goal of the station and is included in the radio's statutes, the men weren't ready to advocate it in reality. Since LaRadio is still not prepared to take responsibility for enforcing the adherence to this statute today, the staff of LaRadio has decided to remain autonomous.

So, what else is characteristic for LaRadio? What's the difference to the other programs?

In our team we exclusively work with women. We hope for a work atmosphere without hierarchical structures, without sexism, without gender-related division of work, without male „know-it-alls“ (for example concerning technique or music). And we are based on the D.I.Y., - the do it yourself-principle. We are self-organized and do not need external specialists to do our work.

The focus of this weekly two-hour radio magazine is always placed on topics which center women as well as lesbian women and consider them as subjects and protagonists. There is no reduction on stereotypes as housewife, sex object, businesswoman or just „victim“ which are frequently seen in other medias.

In fact, there is a woman who can be asked as an "expert" for just about any topic – not only for social or cultural but also, for example, for scientific or economic topics, in which one typically only hears what men have to say.

The purpose is to provide a critical examination from a feminist point of view; that's to say, the choice of topics, interview partners, etc. is made consciously and has the goal of *Female Empowerment*. In the same way, as in all kinds of contexts women should become visible and hearable, marginalized groups should get a word in edgewise and antiemancipatory structures should be destroyed.

That's why we support different female projects and groups. They get the opportunity to

promote themselves via broadcasting or just to report on their work. In that way we frequently cooperate for example with Amica e.V., last tuesday e.g., we provided accounts of the „Queerflöten“, a gay-lesbian chorus.

Besides the content, exclusively female voices in moderation as well as in music is also a characteristic feature of LaRadio. This is intended as a counterbalance to the male-dominated landscape of radio. Female listeners shall get the chance to identify and feel „save“ of sexist remarks. Last but not least it's a big fun to work together with women; probably due to the pros mentioned before.

All women who get a word in edgewise have to meet our qualitative demands in content (compare with the „Antis“). Especially with music, this is not very easy: we don't check the lyrics consequently and sometimes one wants to play Madonna or ABBA. So, she can do so, we're not 100 percent harsh. But a good solution to avoid sexist contents, is to choose bands and artists with an independent or feminist background, e.g. bands of the riot girl scene.

So far to the principles and the working method of LaRadio. Now some historical documents and one important project on which LaRadio took part.

A milestone in the history of the woman radio is thin seniority international exchange project **Interconexiones** from the beginning of the 90ies. Women of free radios from the North and the South, especially from Latin-America, built an international network with program exchanges, regular meetings and discussions about internationalist and feminist reporting.

The representation of third world countries is often eurocentric and exotist and within these countries, female journalists frequently suffer of national persecution, censorship and poverty. IKX aimed to enforce women, migrants and the esteem of cultural differences.

There's also been a regularly published IKX-letter with meeting results and exchange of new ideas.

Let's come to the conclusion:

After all, you heard before, one could think of LaRadio as a medial „Eldorado“ for feminist motivated women. But is this true?

Besides all the latitudes and possibilities we got, there are some problems too:

Very few women participate at our program. At the moment, we're just four woman editors and even after several advertising tactics, we don't grow. Plus, we're all white academics

what means that we don't represent the female average of society and possibly not everybody wants to identify.

The number of listeners of the whole radio is comparatively small (comparable with a cultural program of a public station). The range of the radio station is about 30 kilometers around Freiburg on an FM frequency. How many women actually listen to LaRadio is unknown. Unfortunately, we don't get much feedback for our programs. Since now, I only got feedback of male listeners. Anyway, there are rumors, that most of our listeners are male (by the way, that's the same thing with women's magazines). At the moment, LaRadio isn't really integrated in other feminist structures and there is less exchange with other woman radios than some years ago; so we do our's own. Maybe as the women's movement isn't that strong anymore – but probably, this is not the only reason.

After all, these problems are not insolvable, moreover LaRadio broadcasts since many, many years and will hopefully go on.

With my presentation, I wanted to show how a radio program for and by women could look like in practice and I hope this gave some good inputs and inspirations to you.

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