Nodes that Bond Podcast – Episode 5
"The Building of Territories"
Portal sem Porteiras, Monteiro Lobato – São Paulo, Brazil.
April, 2021.

A soft song plays with women's voices in chorus and the Narrator, Marcela, starts speaking:

Welcome to one more episode of the Nodes that Bond podcast. This is the second episode of a trilogy that will tell the story of our neighborhood's community network, the Portal sem Porteiras, ou PSP.

To tell the story of why we created this autonomous communications network, we must talk about the issues that brought us here. On the first episode, we made a parallel between the Mantiqueira Mountains territory, and the virtual territory, while discussing the occupation of lands, the pathways, and how a very recent creation called the Internet has been following the old recipe of Capitalism, where eveything has a price and an owner, who calls the shots on how things happen.

In this second episode, we will continue our conversations on the occupation of both physical and virtual spaces. But this time, we will turn our gaze to the social dynamics that build the territories. During the episode we will listen to women from our neighborhood, interviewed by Simone Cavassi.

Ana

One of my favourite places in the neighborhood is the central square. The square is where we have the parties, it's where we meet people… whenever you're passing by there, there's always someone to chat with…

Cida

My favourite place is the central square. It's where we meet our friends, coworkers. We sit and have some beer, the kids can play as much as they want, because we are close and watching…

Mukta

People use the square to have some festivals, then we have the Balacobaco street fair, then that was over, and then we started the Mandioca street festival… and we gather in the square and have the parties there: birthdays, christmas, it all happens in the square.

Sirleide

What I miss are the street parties that we had in our streets, when everybody would gather and have fun…

A song plays, an the Narrator 2, Luísa, begins to speak

In the Souzas neighborhood, the square is the heart of conversations and exchanges. But it's not only here that the square is an important place. As it is said, the public square is a symbol of democracy. The square is an opened space, where ideas circulate, and possibilities to speak your mind, express yourself, participate, cooperate, and also for conflicts. To be there, one must be

opened to frequent conversations. It is a place where we can put to practice the principles of democracy.

To contribute in our conversation, we invited Anita Vaz, who lives in the neighrborhood and came to talk to us about the points of view from psychology and social work on the building of territories.

A sweet song plays, Anita Vaz's voice enters

We are reflecting on ourselves in this territory, but not only reflecting, but also practicing, and so being involved in the way we relate to this territory: how we eat, how we obtain the food we eat, how we work, how we manage to get what we need in order to survive, to live and to create other possibilities for living, more collective, horizontal realtionships with other people and living beings who are seeking to live together in cities, neighborhoods...

The countries, or towns, are territories that get defined from historical disputes, colonial, imperialistic disputes, with the massacre of indigenous peoples… and these are borders that today are defined by law, a law that will determine the destiny of so many lives, borders that will forbid the circulation of so many bodies – but these were all built. Several peoples were there long before such borders even existed – and they had their territories.

We really can simply undo this idea that a territory is a map that someone will handle to you and that it is finished, or that we can't transform something we dislike about the place where we live, because that is outside of ourselves. I believe that the idea of a territory is precisely something that envolves us and our relationships. We start to see that we actually make and build the places we live in, and we are made and built by them, and these places interfere in our life choices.

Adelita

I came here searching for more quality of life, with more connection with nature, simplicity and quality for my kids, my family. I had always lived in São Paulo…

Kátia

I was gone form here for a while, but it is obvious that the neighborhood is more well taken care of. There is a lot of new people, people I don't recognize, a lot of people that had left and came back! I also noticed that the amount of houses in the neighborhood increased so much! So many people moved in here, so many people arriving… a lot of people coming from big cities! And, like everything in life, they bring a lot good things, and also not such great things come along… but, good and bad are relative, right? What isn't good to me, might be good for someone else. Mutual respect.

Mukta

I loved living in São Paulo, but when I had my baby, it just seemed só agressive, such an unfit place for a baby! I got nervous just seeing him breathing the air there. So we would spend a lot of time at the Água Branca Park *[a very green park in the city of São Paulo],* it was the only place where we felt good in the city. We couldn't afford the big city rent anymore. And here, there was the Pandavas school *[local alternative school in the neighborhood],* our son was going to grow up and it was a good school for him. Here we found a safe, clean, accessible place, in the middle of nature, a good to live… it was a good choice, I'm glad we came here. Each day I like it here more and more.

Anita Vaz

I like to think that a territory is not only a physical space, but the relationships that exist in a certain space and time. When we think about territories, it is interesting to really see them as something relational. When we think about our territory, we are actually also thinking about ourselves, on how we affect and get affected in these relationships – in a certain place, between certain people – who are also from different places, who have different stories. How do these differences are sewed together and create a diverse territory? And, mostly: what are the possibilites that arise from this process? How can we take care of the collective health involved in having so many differences in only one territory – like a neighborhood, or a community?

Ana

A good thing that has been happening in the neighborhood over the last few years is that a lot of new people moved in here, people from different places… and I don't see bad outcomes from this, I just see things that we can improve, but nothing negative.

Cida

In the old days, there used to be a lot of activities here, there was the Rodeo, the Horses Festival… these were events in our town that we liked. Nowadays, this culture is dying and people who are moving in here don't like our culture, they want to change everything. I believe they should first arrive here, see the kind of things we enjoy. Those who don't like our culture – fine, they don't have to. But they also shouldn't criticize *our* culture. *We* were born here, *we* grew up here, *we* are from the neighborhood. I'm not saying there shouldn't be more people. The neighborhood is opened to everyone – it's good that people move in, the neighborhood grows, there are new people… but the people who arrive need to show respect for our culture. I see a lot of things around here that are not okay – they want to take over, they criticize the things we do, anything that happens becomes gossip, people blowing the whistle…. This is a negative point to me.

Anita Vaz

A territory can have many shapes, but it always has borders, limits – which define it as a territory. We might play with this idea and see that borders differ from limits, as they might be more permeable, while a limit is more hermetic.

We may perceive our bodies, the body of any living being, as a territory. It has it's borders, it has its own way of relating to other territories that pass by it. And if we perceive things this way, the dispute of territories is also happening with the body – cisgender women's bodies, in our patriarchal society, are continuously in dispute. Women, transgender people, people who are not occupying the same place as the dominant white male bodies are, are continuously defending the territory that their very own bodies are.

For instance, why does a body that has breasts – be it female, male or non binary – why can't this body be without a shirt on at the beach or at a waterfall – as a dominant male body can? So, bodies that express themselves as territories that don't want to be attacked, for example, by sexual harassment or even the stares from others, are in a constant dispute, always resisting. This can serve as an example of the notion of the body as a territory that is related to other territories, and that wants to express itself in the most free and fair way as possible – right?

Mukta

"If there was something in the neighborhood you could change, what would that be?"... I don't think that this is specific from this neighborhood, but something that I was not familiar with and saw here was the domestic violence – that not only women suffer, but also children. Hitting children is something I thought didn't even exist anymore… I don't think this is specific from here, but it is something I would like to change. That people had more respect for children, that they wouldn't be violent with them. Just like men can't be violent with women, nobody can be violent with children.

Katia

If I could change something in the Souzas neighborhood… I would say less is more: people's gossip! I don't know if there's a possible change, but… people seem to have an opinion about everything, a lot of prejudice… it feels like it is rooted here. Things change, things evolve, but the prejudice remains rooted to the ground. And people say some things are historical, no way, man! When something is not good, is not okay, we have the time to change it! You know? People say: oh, but we have our own ways, this is what we do… well, it is being done wrong, it's as simple as that! It's like a child: if you spoil them, there is no good time to put an end to it.

Narrator - Luísa

Every body is a space. Every body, without exception, has already lived at the primordial space of all life: the womb of a woman. The objectification of women's bodies is the certainty of bodies in tension in its relations with other body-spaces. Here, power relations play out. It is in the body that one suffers the punishment of repression, the consequences of poverty, the wear and tear of work. The body can be violated simply by existing. It is the body that must be covered, that must limit its ways, that must stay within the secluded homes or even simply die to cease to exist. It is in the body that one carries fear.

The body cannot be treated in a universal way. It has color, sexuality, gender and socioeconomic class, and all these factors are determinants in the relationships we establish. The body produces and is produced by the territory it inhabits.

Ana

Twenty years from now, I believe the neighborhood will be much better than it is now. So many new people arriving, bringing new ideas… so I think in twenty years things will be even better.

Sirleide

I imagine that, in twenty years, the neighborhood will be very quiet and empty, because of the pace at which things are evolving. Young people won't be able to thrive living here, they will go somewhere bigger. There's not much for a young person to do here, starting by the internet signal. I really think this makes a big difference, there should be internet antenas for everyone to be connected… even the television signal works poorly.

Ana Serrinha

Oh, I hope the neighborhood gets better, it should have betther things, because right now we don't really have the best structure.

Mukta

Wow, I see so many people arriving, I believe that twenty years from now it will be a much bigger place, with a lot more houses, sewer system, tap water everywhere… I'm not sure if the arrival of so many new people is something that will only grow and grow. Perhaps it is a cyclic process… people might come and people might leave as well…

Cida

You know, I don't even like to think about it, if right now it is frightening, imagine it in twenty years!

Narrator - Luísa

As Anita said, the notion of territory takes place in the relations between people, between media, between all beings. So, the internet, which is an infrastructure of relationships, of communication, can be thought of as territory. And as a territory, it has several types of (inter)relations.

Today we want to talk about the "body" of the internet. What is the physical, spatial structure necessary for the internet to function? And what power relations are implied in the internet's body?

Our dear tutor, Tania, our digital potato, who is exploring not only the roads withing the cyberspace, but also the the roads of Uruguay, will tell us a little more about this story…

Tânia

If you leave São Paulo and go to Monteiro Lobato, you must take a road. You might take one highway, then enter São José dos Campos, and then go up the mountain. Or you might take another highway, go all the way to Santo Antonio do Pinhal up the mountains, and then go to Monteiro. There are different possibilities of roads, but the idea is that you should always get to your final destination, right?

The internet also works like this. For a message to go from one place to the other, it has to follow roads… The whole thing happens so fast that, if the person you text is right next to you, in only a second your text shows up in their screen. How does that happen? Does the message jump from one phone to the other, like a flea, or like lice? *[laughs]* No, whats app doesn't work like lice – it spreads easily, but not in quite such a jumpy way *[laughs]*.

If we imagine the text we send from whats app as a package…

A song plays, the Narrator Marcela enters for a foot note

Package, in this case, is the data package. Do you remember that, in our last episode, we talked a bit about what data was? We said that, in a nutshell, they could be described as zeros and ones. Well, then – a package, a data package, are a sequence of the data. This sequence is trasmitted by a network. When we send out a piece of information, it is usually divided into several packages – this

is how it gets to be sent and received. Then, at the other end of the line in the network, these pieces are put back together – the packages – gathering back the piece of information that was sent. This happens with a text, a hyperlink, a picture of a dog – it is all broken into smaller pieces and put back together again.

Tânia

This package is meant to arrive at a certain destination. And which way will this package take to arrive at its destination?

If we are both using the same wifi, in the same house for instance, and texting each other through whats app, the text will leave your phone, get connected to the wifi router. This wifi router is probably connected to the internet of the company you pay to provide the internet in your home. The company will verify wether you payed the bills or not. If you did pay, your text will get out there, take a road to the internet company's central, where it will be analysed – what kind of package is this?

It will be checked that it is a Whats App package. And where does the Whats App company reside? In the United States. It's servers and computers are in the US – and in other places around the world – but not in Brazil. And so the internet company will send the package to one of these servers – which means this message will leave Brazil - arrive at the Whats app central, check who it must be sent to, look for the person – oh, it's Marcela! So, the package will take to entire road back, to arrive at Marcela's phone – who was right next to me all along. *[laughs]*

Narrator - Marcela

While this package is traveling back and forth, you must be imagining a flying package. And yes, we might imagine that, since the packages, somewhere between sending and receiving, use the spectrum, a property of the air to propagate, because the internet propagates via radio frequencies – but that's not the only way it does so. What brings the internet's stability and power are the fiber optic cables.

The fiber optic cables spread information via cables, which are deep under the ocean, a super infrastructure that works on a global level, making use of various concession policies. A company, to use the path, the cable, of another company, needs permission. If you have the opportunity, put in your search engine: map of fiber optics in the world and see this artificial skeleton of the earth - it is super shocking.

Tânia

The speed at which data travels through the internet cables is far faster than a car in a highway. It's so fast that the very moment you text someone who is next to you, they receive the message. It really gives us the impression that the text jumped from one phone to the other, but actually that text went through a whole other country. And we can't be sure exactly what "pathways" our messages will take. But, cutting a long story short, the messages go round and round to long distances.

An interesting point of view is that, looking at the way we use infrastructure of the internet, and seeing the use of internet as a universal human right, these structures should be public assets, shouldn't it? But that is not our reality. It's the same as water. Without water there's no life. But while living in any city, who can drink water without paying for it?

Ana

A place where I used to go when I was a kid, and it was so good, and now we can no longer go, is right behind the sports field. There was a swimming pool, all the kids would go, but the owner closed the doors for visitors.

Katia

It was both a farm and a hotel, well known around here, and the people from the neighborhood had free access to go there anytime. We would go swimming, we had school activities there… it was a place that I would go very, very often. Nowadays, we can't even stand by their gate anymore.

Narrator - Marcela

One thing I had always heard was that the water had no owner, and that it was the land around the water that had ownership, and that if you entered the waters through the water itself, no one could complain that you were there. The Internet also has this characteristic of being a common good Narrator - from humanity. So the information that flows on it belongs to all of us. It so happens that the land, the cables, the infrastructure, are not ours, and this can indeed interrupt the flow of our water-communications and create dams, cause floods... the functioning of the internet today is super tied to the logic of capitalism.

Tânia

When it comes to the internet, this infrastructure, these cables, they used to be public. And they were privatized, at the same historical moments as several other public structures were also privatized. The telecommunication companies now own these structures and they create gates, making it necessary for our connection to the structure to be payed for, just like toll stations. If we look at the matter in in a technical point of view, these tolls are not really necessary. The way in which the internet was structured over the past decades, all the information we get from there, this web of international pathways through which our information passes and we don't even know about – they are all unnecessary. The internet was taken over by all these companies and they created structures that are not necessary.

We could work towards an infrascrature made of several local, small strcutures. The local structure could then connect to each other – and only then we would build a large infrastructure, a large internet web. That's how the internet actually started… and with time, it somehow got corrupted.

Narrator - Marcela

Meanwhile, there are many initiatives fighting for and creating a less centralized internet. As Tânia mentioned, it is not a matter of the technique, but of the choices of the paths to the development of these techniques. The new technologies are developed based on factors such as speed and profit, extractivist logics that ignore community wellbeing and monetize all exchanges.

Today we have several non-centralized initiatives. There are social networks, there is file storage, with the same functions as Whats App or Google Drive. Instead of storing the information in a proprietary center, they store it in a distributed way. One of the ways to decentralize the information is by storing it in the computers of those who use it. Then, these computers will update each other. Another application of decentralized internet is community networks, like PSP, which uses a mesh topology made out of a lot of nodes, but this will be discussed in the next episode…

Narrator - Luísa

In this episode you heard the voices of Ana, Cida, Mukta, Adelita, Sirleide, Katia and Ana Serrinha. Who interviewed them was Simone Cavassi. Our guest was Anita Vaz. You also heard Tânia Mara, tutoring us about how the internet works. The narration, script and editing were made by Marcela Guerra and me, Luísa Bagope. We'll meet in our next episode.