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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# History of Struggle: The Global Story of Community Broadcasting Practices, or a Brief History of Community Radio

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Embracing the de-Westernizing debate in communication research (Wang, 2013) and the call to decolonize media studies (Thussu, 2009), this article contextualizes the practices of contemporary community radio stations through internationalizing the history of community broadcasting. In contrast to other histories of community media (Lewis, 1984; Milan, 2013; Rennie, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001), this research reflects on the growth and spread of community radio practices analysed in four distinct periods of development. These periods organize the activities and efforts of communities (social movement actors, non-state/corporate actors) deploying radio technology to create media by and for the community. This analysis assembles a longer timeline and global (internationalized) landscape for mapping the development of community radio. This article contributes new analysis that indicates the spread of community radio as an institution is rooted in a history of struggle and media activism engaged among disparate movements and actors who often captured the airwaves in defiance of state-run and for-profit broadcasters.

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**Keywords:** community radio; broadcasting; community media; communication history; de-Westernizing communication research; decolonizing media studies

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The formation of community radio as participatory media seeking to democratize media and political landscapes was not initially conceived of by regulators. The evolution of community radio as a media institution serving the community is the result of a history of struggle and media activism engaged among disparate movements and actors who often captured the airwaves in defiance of state-run and for-profit broadcasters. Embracing the de-Westernizing debate in communication research (Wang, 2013) and the call to decolonize media studies (Thussu, 2009), this article contextualizes the practices of contemporary community radio stations through internationalizing the history of the evolution of the development of community broadcasting.

The practice of community radio varies worldwide, as Buckley, the former president of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (known by its French acronym AMARC), acknowledges: 'There is no single definition of community broadcasting, and there are almost

as many models as there are stations. Each ... is a hybrid, a unique communication process shaped by its environment and the distinct culture, history, and reality of the community it serves' (Buckley, Duer, Mendel, and Siochru, 2008, p. 207). Studies and definitions of community radio must account for how local practices and different definitions of community radio are shaped by specific contexts. While the practices of community media institutions are determined by local realities including regulatory, legal, and economic environments (Coyer, 2011), community radio stations worldwide generally have similar missions to serve the community. Some community radio stations maintain a board of directors alongside a mix of paid staff and volunteers who operate the station, making the organisation a 'media institution' (Downing et. al., 2001) as well as a non-profit organisation (Coyer, 2011).

In addition, the programming and production practices of community radio stations are often mandated to serve the needs of listeners, with some stations specifically serving groups under-represented or marginalized by state and commercial media institutions. The founding statutes of AMARC, an organisation with 4000 members in over 130 countries, offer an international perspective on the definition of community radio, which is defined in section 1.3 as: 'a non-profit radio broadcaster who, in accordance with the fundamental principles of AMARC, offers a service to the community in which it is located or which it serves, while promoting community expression and participation' (AMARC, 2003). AMARC's statute builds upon its principles declaring community radio broadcasters support 'the expression of different social, political and cultural movements' and advance 'peace, friendship among peoples' (AMARC, n.d.). My own definition of community radio, as non-profit, participatory media institutions that are largely volunteer-run and provide a service to a specific community of producers and audiences, situates these contemporary practices of community radio within the global history of struggle by non-state and non-corporate actors to access the airwaves.

Existing research on the history of community radio starts in different places and time periods. Some scholars define the beginnings of community radio practices geographically, while others begin in specific communities, and more recent historical work focuses on the policies that regulate community broadcasting. For example, Lewis (1984) and Rennie (2006) look to the Americas in the 1940s to trace the origins of community-inspired radio broadcasting. This point of origin is further specified by Rodriguez (2001) as beginning among Indigenous groups in the Americas to emphasize the Indigenous roots of community broadcasting. Kidd's account (1998, p. 70) begins with insurgents and revolutionaries who temporarily took over radio infrastructure in Europe during World War I. Milan (2013) is among researchers (Coyer and Hintz, 2013; Hintz, 2011; Rennie, 2006) who focus on community media policy activism. These histories centre on policy development begin typically in the 1970s, when countries like Australia and Canada moved to regulate community media, or start at the international level with the debates at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that enshrined 'communication as a human right' (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980).

Another starting point for constructing the history of community radio could focus on the development of the technology, an approach favored by communication historians like Harold Innis (Buxton, Cheney, and Heyer, 2014). Compiling technological innovations to construct a history of community radio could start in 1906 when Quebec-born Reginald Fessenden broadcast transmissions of voice and music over radio waves (Regal, 2005, p. 32). While some may call Fessenden the 'Father of Radio Broadcasting,' he was only one among many other inventors, entrepreneurs, and radio hobbyists around the globe who contributed to the development of radio broadcasting technology (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 66). Fessenden's own well-touted achievement of sending sound over radio waves was first patented by Father Roberto Landell de Moura, a Brazilian priest nicknamed the 'Marconi of Brazil' (Sterling, 2004, p. 310).

For the present reflection on the history of community radio, the growth and spread of community radio practices will be analysed in four distinct periods of development. These periods assemble a longer timeline and global landscape for mapping the development of community radio. These periods, illustrated in **Figure 1**, organize the activities and efforts of communities (social movement actors, non-state/corporate actors) deploying radio technology to create media by and for the community. Each period of development casts a wide net to include instances of community broadcasting from around the world in an effort to map the development of community radio in both practice and regulation. This methodology takes up debates for decolonizing communication studies (Thussu, 2009; Wang, 2013) by working to globalize this history through internationalizing the locations and experiences that inform this timeline. Whereas previous histories have overemphasised Euro-American community broadcasting traditions, the periods offered here construct a more inclusive narrative by drawing together secondary sources, including relevant historical scholarship and grey literature.

Unlike other histories of community media that document the origins of community radio broadcasting (Lewis, 1984; Milan, 2013; Rennie, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001), this article reviews the evolution of community radio practices through compiling a diversity of community-based broadcasting practices. I draw on a complex ecology of actors, policies, and processes (Raboy & Padovani, 2010) that have contributed to the development of community radio; these include community, union, clandestine, exile, liberation, and revolutionary organisations alongside activist groups, Indigenous nations, social movements, non-profit organisations, and regulators. This chronology is organized and analysed temporally. I feature over 100 years of community-based broadcasting practices to illustrate how the radio medium has always been used as a social change communication technology.

As the first broadcast technology of the industrial period, the radio spectrum, like other new technologies and resources of the time, was quickly colonised by imperial powers for political and economic profit, even before the wireless telegraph enabled voices to be broadcast over the airwaves (Kidd, 1998, p. 61). In 1903, at the first international radio conference, and again in 1906, under the first international radio convention, imperial states and their allies divided the radio spectrum amongst themselves (Smythe, 1981). The countries that signed the resulting International Wireless Telegraph Convention included Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Persia, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Uruguay, and the United States (ITU, 2006). These national efforts to restrict radio to a resource for state and corporate broadcasters did not consider provisions to accommodate community-based broadcasting activity. However, the presence of military and commercial broadcasters on the overcrowded radio dial inspired amateur radio enthusiasts to continue broadcasting and working to improve the technology. This experimentation by radio hobbyists contributed to the development of radio technology and motivated their claims of community ownership over the radio spectrum (Kidd, 1998, p. 68).

This history of struggle by non-state and non-corporate actors to access the airwaves shapes my own definition of community radio stations as non-profit, participatory media institutions that are largely volunteer-run. Defining the contemporary practice of community radio requires acknowledging no single model exists due to local regulations, laws, and economies (Coyer, 2011). Indeed, the orientation of community broadcasters to provide community access and involvement is shaped by a shared history that has cultivated community radio practices over time. This article traces this common history through four periods to situate the development of this form of community media within a global context. This timeline



**Figure 1:** Periods in the evolution of community radio.

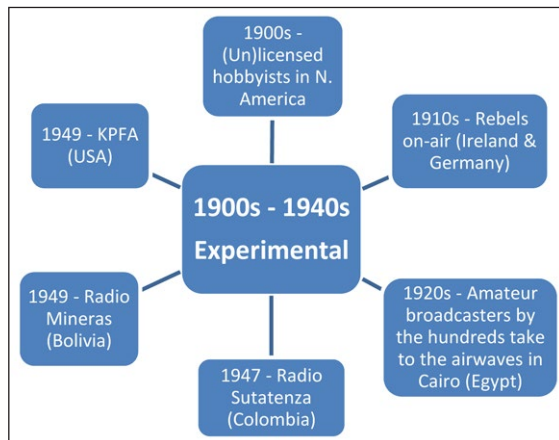
organizes the historical development of community radio into four periods, as seen in **Figure 1**: 1) Experimental; 2) Wildfire; 3) Solidarity; and 4) Resurgence. This mapping of the history of community broadcasting exposes scholarly neglect for the global story of community radio within media studies and facilitates reflection on how the development of community radio is rooted in a diversity of tactics among practitioners.

### Tracing the History of Community Radio

Communities seeking to access the latest communication technology started to take to the airwaves just before the First World War. During this 'Experimental' period, disparate instances of community-based broadcasting took to the radio dial in Europe and the Americas. In the early days of radio broadcasting history, individuals experimenting with community-based broadcasting contested state (or military) and commercial domination over the airwaves. Among the early radio broadcasters reclaiming radio technology intermittently and temporarily were individuals not affiliated with the state or commercial broadcasters. For example, in North America, thousands of radio hobbyists and hundreds of radio clubs on both sides of the United States-Canada border jammed the radio dial. Later, when all licences were revoked because of war-time restrictions, these radio enthusiasts refused to be silenced and became defiant unlicensed broadcasters (Kidd, 1998, p. 69). In Europe, Irish and German rebels, in 1916 and 1919 respectively, took over radio infrastructure to broadcast their points of view (Kidd, 1998, p. 70). In addition, Boyd's (1999) account of broadcasting history in the Arab world reveals that, in the 1920s, hundreds of amateurs were also experimenting with radio broadcasting in Cairo (p. 16).

For some, these early activities of community-based radio broadcasters make community radio one of the original uses of the medium (Douglas, 1986; Kidd, 1998). Indeed, Kingston, Ontario (Canada) is home to CFRC 101.9 FM, a campus-based community radio station that first went on the air in 1923, making the organisation part of one of the longest continuous histories in radio broadcasting (Redmond and Zimmerman, 2012). In this way, the practice of community broadcasting precedes the licensing and regulation of community radio, which began in the 1970s, and the formation of scholarly interest in research and theorising community radio, which prior to the 1980s was 'scattered' (Hadl and Dongwon, 2008, p. 82; Lewis, 1984, p. 21).

By the 1940s, experimental insurrectionary broadcasting was complemented by another model when community radio advocates began to set up their own more permanent infrastructure including stations in Colombia in 1947 (Radio Sutatenza), and in Bolivia (Radio Mineras) and the United States (KPFA) in 1949 (Lewis, 1984; Rodriguez, 2001), as illustrated in **Figure 2**. During the Experimental period, the practice of community radio was refined from isolated broadcasts by radio mutineers, pirates, or hobbyists to communities building radio stations. Radio Sutatenza was founded in Colombia by a Catholic priest and set the stage for the development of what is now a substantial network of educational community radio stations throughout Latin America (Rodriguez, 2001). Soon after the 1949 launch of Radio Mineras in Bolivia, new stations were established and in 1952 twenty-six community radio stations supported by the Miners' Union formed a network as a functional and fundamental part of labour organising and social resistance (Dagron, 2001; Huesca, 1995).

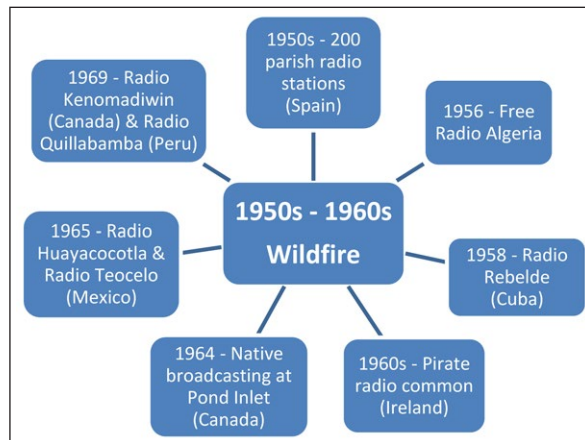


**Figure 2:** Experimental period of community radio (1900s–1940s).

During 1946 in the United States, Lewis Hill, a fired radio news broadcaster and a conscientious objector during the Second World War, established the Pacifica Foundation dedicated to peace and justice reporting. To sustain independent, non-profit broadcasting, Hill proposed a new funding model based on listener sponsorship. In 1949, KPFA in Berkeley became the first non-profit community radio station founded by Pacifica and Hill using this funding model. Pacifica would eventually expand the listener-sponsorship model to build a non-profit, community radio network consisting of five stations broadcasting from Berkeley, Los Angeles, Houston, New York, Washington, D.C., and hundreds of affiliate stations across the United States (King, 2002).

At the same time as these community radio stations were being mandated to be accessible to the communities they served, many community-based broadcasters operated clandestine stations underground out of necessity, or otherwise faced the risk of station closure and/or broadcaster imprisonment. Clandestine stations included the Voice of the Revolution transmitting in 1949 from the Dominican Republic (Soley, 1982, p. 165). The location and source of these types of revolutionary stations were often unknown (Boyd, 1999). In the Middle East, radio was a valued resource in Palestine even before the war and occupation that created the state of Israel in 1948. While Zionist terrorist organisations such as the Irgun were operating radio stations as early as 1938, Palestinians reported atrocities and resisted occupation through broadcasting on Sawt al-Falestin (Soley, 1982, p. 169). Similarly, from 1948–1950, radio broadcasting was used as a tool of political communication across Europe and on both sides of battles for power. For example, several pro-communist and anti-communist groups broadcast over the air in Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Spain (Soley, 1982, p. 168). Basque separatists also set up radio broadcasting during this period, establishing Radio Euzkadi, followed by anti-Franco broadcasters on Radio Claridad in Spain. Anti-fascists in Portugal also set up stations, including Radio Free Portugal and Voice of Freedom (Soley, 1982, p. 168).

These proliferating political groups operating clandestine stations to capture the airwaves may have developed in isolation, but collectively they acted as a propellant expanding community radio practices to several continents. These activities in the 1950s marked the beginning of the ‘Wildfire’ period of community radio’s history that resulted in the rapid spread of community broadcasting across North and South America, Europe, and Africa (Milan, 2013), as illustrated in **Figure 3**. These early non-state, non-corporate broadcasters did not have licences. They set up independent, community-based broadcasting that challenged colonial



**Figure 3:** Wildfire period of community radio (1950s–1960s).

media models put in place through post-war ‘modernization programs’ (Curran and Park, 2000, p. 5). These programs created national media infrastructure and practices that typically furthered colonization and justified the actions of repressive regimes (Sosale, 2004, p. 34).

Despite the new nationalizing media landscapes, resistance radio proliferated in Latin America in regions experiencing independence struggles and revolutionary activity (Soley, 1982, p. 171). Stations like Radio Rebelde, set up in Cuba by Che Guevara in 1958, were also established in Nicaragua and Honduras. Radio use in revolutionary and independence movements helped to cultivate the spread of technology throughout the Middle East and Africa during 1958–1960. In Africa, *la Voix de l’Algerie* went on air in 1956 to aid the Algerian struggle for independence (Fanon, 1994). Indeed, the use of radio to aid peoples’ struggles stimulated the creation of even more stations, including stations broadcasting for liberation set up in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Algeria, Jordan, Syria, and the Congo. From 1965–1967, radio broadcasting continued to spread to war zones in Asia, including Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia (Soley, 1982, p. 175). Challenging radio broadcasting by state and colonial interests, unlicensed stations went on air by the hundreds in several countries including Spain in the 1950s and Ireland in the 1960s. In countries experiencing political and economic conflict, stations were set up in solidarity with workers and students on strike, such as Radio Scorpio and Radio Sylvania in Belgium (Rodriguez, 2001). In other communities, radio stations were established through familiar networks, such as the aforementioned Miners’ radio, growing to 26 stations in Bolivia in 1952 (Light, 2011, p. 53), the beginnings of Indigenous radio in Canada (Minore and Hill, 1990; Roth, 1993), and the spread of community radio through relations in Indigenous and *campesino* communities in Mexico and Peru (Girard, 1992).

While the 1950s–1960s saw the emergence of local community broadcasting networks, the next period extended across the 1970s–1980s and represented a new era of ‘Solidarity’ in the history of community radio, as defined by new funding mechanisms, the successful passing of supportive legislation and regulation in several countries, and the growth of regional, national, and international networks. This Solidarity period also marked the development of new opportunities when postcolonial demands converged to balance and correct the flow of global communication (Milan, 2013, p. 21). A series of gatherings facilitated by UNESCO took place throughout the 1970s among supporters of restructuring global media flows, producing the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Just as non-aligned governments of the time were demanding a new political and economic order at the United Nations, NWICO similarly challenged the information order to rectify inequalities due to the

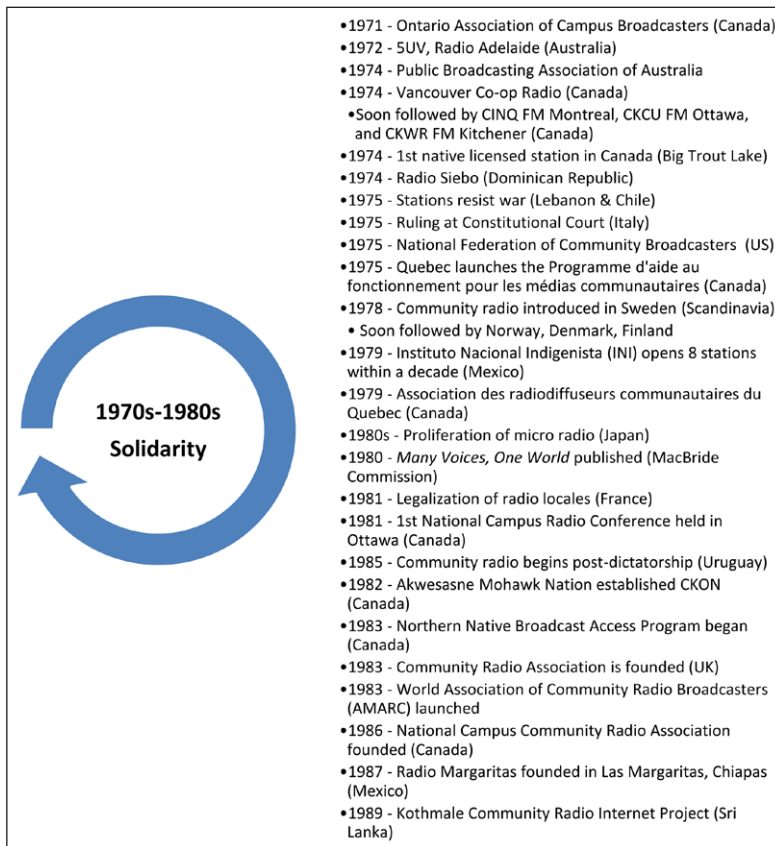


proliferation of Euro–American content dominating the global flow of media and information. This new forum exemplified the internationalization of community media activism. NWICO created for the first time global recognition of the importance of local and alternative media. The deliberations also established the international acknowledgment of ‘communication as a human right’ and revised communication development practices to emphasise the value of participatory and local media infrastructure, such as community radio stations (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980; Kidd and Rodriguez, 2009, pp. 3–4; Milan, 2013, p. 23).

The Solidarity period also saw the organisation of community radio associations that shared resources, built up sector capacity, and collaborated in policy advocacy initiatives at the regional and national level, including the Ontario Association of Campus Broadcasters (OACB), formed in 1971 to lobby the regulatory commission in Canada, the Public Broadcasting Association of Australia (later the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, or CBAA), founded in 1974 to organize advocacy for community broadcasting (Jolly, 2014), and the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB) initiated in 1975 by a dozen non-profit community stations in the United States (Raboy, 1993). The NFCB defined its membership as non-profit stations, controlled by the community, and providing community access (Lewis, 2002). In France, the Association pour la libération des ondes (ALO) was formed by free radio stations (Raboy, 1993, p. 132) and soon after in Canada in 1979 the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec (ARCQ) was established by community-licensed broadcasters (NCRA, n.d.). Later in Montreal in 1983, AMARC became the first international organisation run by community radio stations that advocated for community radio development. Both AMARC and the Canadian National Campus-Community Radio Association (NCRA) were eventually incorporated as non-governmental organisations, the former in 1988 and the latter in 1986. However, before being established as a NGO, the NCRA was a young solidarity network functioning as the National Campus Radio Conference bringing together stations annually since 1981 for workshops, collaborative project development, and panel discussions (NCRA, n.d.). These associational developments led to an increase in advocacy by and for community radio practitioners. Indeed, several nations moved to recognise community radio in legislation in the 1980s, including several Scandinavian countries, France (Howley, 2005) and Sri Lanka (Weerasinghe, 2010). In some countries, community broadcasting spread rapidly after supportive legislation, as was the case in Italy and France, the latter of which saw 16,000 local radio stations broadcasting only four years after licensing began (Rennie, 2006). This increase in networking activities and legislation during the Solidarity period is illustrated in **Figure 4**.

At the same time these new associational affiliations and the rise of collective demands for community broadcast licences, new clandestine stations kept opening where liberation struggles continued and community radio remained illegal. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, pirate or unlicensed radio permeated the airwaves in Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Namibia, and Indonesia. In 1973, shortwave radio enthusiasts compiled a list of stations on air, revealing broadcast activity by clandestine, exile, liberation, and revolutionary organisations in at least thirty-eight countries (Soley, 1982, p. 166).

However, revolutionaries broadcasting from stations that existed above or below ground did not always evade repercussions. For example, in 1940, two clandestine radio operators from the Irish Republican Army were sentenced to prison for illegal broadcasting (Soley, 1982, p. 166). Innovative broadcasters modified the technology to avoid getting caught, like technicians at Radio Sandino in Nicaragua who, in 1978, relied on mobile transmitters to keep the authorities at bay (Raboy, 1993). The audiences of clandestine radio broadcasts also faced difficulties from authorities. After the appearance of *la Voix de l’Algerie* in the 1950s,



**Figure 4:** Solidarity period of community radio (1970s–1980s).

radio tuners and even batteries were prohibited from being sold (Fanon, 1994). Later, in Vietnam, listeners faced difficulties tuning in to the broadcasts of Liberation Radio, which were jammed by the South Vietnamese government most of the time (Soley, 1982, p. 176). Such counter measures may limit the participation of community members in stations. In some cases, after the revolution, several stations devolved into 'party radio' or a platform for the government's voice (Raboy, 1993, p. 131). Even where unlicensed stations may have limited participation, evidence shows audiences still got involved. For example, during a police raid in 1978 on a clandestine radio station in Belgium, listeners surrounded the station and equipment, successfully blocking police from entering the station (Raboy, 1993, p. 132). After years of insurrectionary radio practices, laws in Germany and South Africa declared listening to unlicensed radio broadcasting an illegal act, resulting in the confiscation of an audience member's radio listening equipment (Raboy, 1993, p. 134).

Where some laws effectively criminalized community-based broadcasting and its listeners, regulations in several countries during the Solidarity period of the 1970s–1980s also fostered the licensing of community radio stations, the first being Australia in 1972, followed by Canada in 1974. In some cases, community radio made it onto the FM dial before commercial stations. This happened in much of Scandinavia where, even before advertising was allowed on the radio dial, private radio licensing created non-commercial community radio stations in Sweden (1978), followed by Norway (1981) and Denmark (1983). Later, in 1985, Finland introduced private licences as well, but at first only for stations supported by advertising



revenue (Ala-Fossi, 2008). At the same time, community radio spread rapidly in Quebec after 1975 when the provincial government began financially supporting the operation of community radio stations through the Programme d'aide au fonctionnement pour les médias communautaires (Light, 2013). In countries without community radio legislation, media activists and communities marginalized by other private or public media continued working to get stations on air. For example, the Catholic Church expanded the network of educational community radio by opening new stations in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Radio Siebo, which went on air in 1974 in the Dominican Republic (Radio Seibo, n.d.). In this way, community radio broadcasting in the Americas persisted even in the absence or slow development of supportive legislation and funding mechanisms.

By contrast, the first ruling that immediately enabled the large-scale development of community broadcasting was the Italian Constitutional Court decision in 1975, which declared the state's monopoly of the airwaves illegal. Soon after this judgement, unlicensed broadcasting proliferated in Italy with some 300 stations broadcasting by 1976 (Raboy, 1993, p. 132). This was followed by new unlicensed stations established in the Netherlands (Vrije Keizer Radio), West Germany (Radio Dreyeckland), Spain (Radio Luna), Denmark (Radio Sokkeland), France (Radio Libertaire and Radio Verte), Belgium (Radio Air Libre), and the United Kingdom (Radio Arthur) (Sakolsky, 2001, p. 9). Many of the stations established during the Solidarity period, like Radio Pirata and Televerdad in Mexico, were temporary experiments that broadcasted to counter state violence, defend human rights, and promote political alternatives (Silva, 2003).

The proliferation of stations broadcasting with and without licences throughout the 1970s resulted in an upsurge in solidarity broadcasting continuing through the 1980s that actively resisted militarization, war, and occupation in El Salvador, Chile, and Lebanon (Scarone Azzi and Sánchez, 2003, p. 54). In Europe at this time there was a wave of anti-nuclear broadcasting by unlicensed stations (Downing, 1988) and by the 1980s, Japan's FM dial also experienced a surge of low-powered micro broadcasters addressing neighbourhood concerns (Sakolsky, 2001, p. 9). Other communities moved to establish stations broadcasting in their own languages. These included the first Indigenous station broadcasting in Navajo in the United States in 1971 (Browne, 1996) and another station transmitting in Gaelic in Ireland in 1972 (Rodriguez, 2001). Across Russia, the 1970s represented a period for organising Indigenous broadcasting through committees (GTRK) administered autonomously and devoted to serving the interests of Indigenous communities. However, since the 1990s, budget cuts have reduced Indigenous language broadcasting and program hours (Diatchkova, 2008).

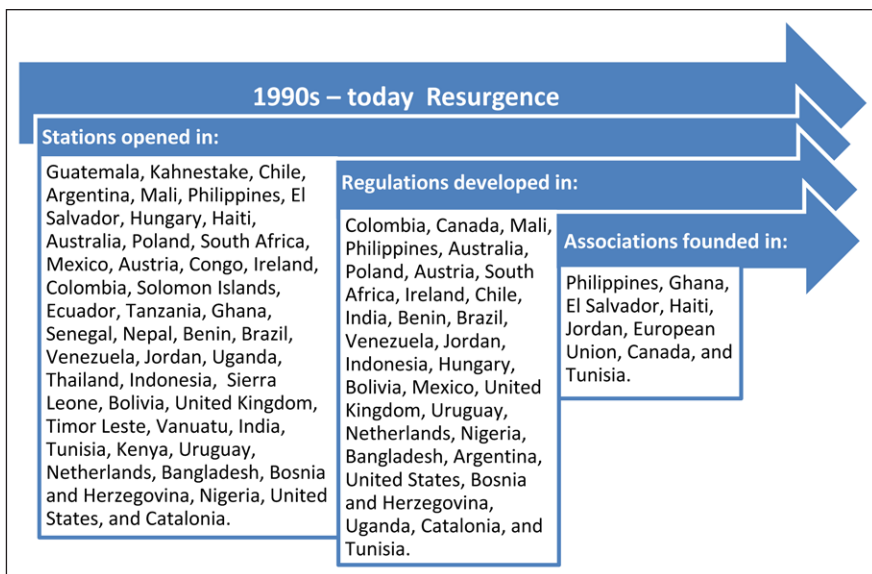
Indigenous communities in Canada, also seeking to broadcast in their own languages, opened the first community-owned station on Indigenous land in 1974 (Minore and Hill, 1990). Resulting from an initiative by the Wawatay Communications Society in Big Trout Lake, the experimental station launched initially to serve an Oji-Cree speaking reserve of approximately 700 people, and today Wawatay operates a community-owned radio network serving over 30,000 Indigenous people in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Treaty 3 areas (Wawatay, n.d.). A few years later, Quebec became home to Indigenous radio with the establishment of CKRK, the Kahnawake Mohawk Radio Broadcasting system, in 1978 (Roth, 1993). Indigenous radio also surged in Mexico after the establishment of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in 1979, opening eight stations within a decade (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 30). The spread of Indigenous radio was similar in the United States, which saw twenty-two stations operating by 1991 (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 29).

Despite the gains of community broadcasters in acquiring licensing, regulatory status, or otherwise evading government shutdowns, the 1990s marked a shift in media policies in many countries due to neoliberalization of media markets. Scholars of communications history have noted that the first stage of national media policy development was shaped

by values of public service and international cooperation. As a result of this orientation to policy making, many countries developed strong public or national broadcasting systems, leaving community media unrecognized, unsupported, and unlicensed (Siochrú, Girard, and Mahan, 2002; van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003). By the 1990s, new market-based priorities in policy development shifted media regulations towards emphasising private or commercial media, creating new challenges for the growth of community media (Calabrese, 2004, p. 324; Siochrú et al., 2002, p. 27).

Even though neoliberal priorities limited or excluded community media in policy, community radio experienced a 'Resurgence' beginning in the 1990s that is continuing through to today. The Resurgence period in the development of community radio included the opening of new stations in nearly 50 countries, the development of community radio regulations in almost 40 countries, and community radio associations founded in eight countries, as illustrated in **Figure 5**. In Chile, community radio stations were established across the country even in the absence of supportive regulations (Jarroud, 2012). Additionally, after a new law in Jordan opened the airwaves to private licensing in 2002, community radio joined the FM dial in 2005 to break the state's monopolization of the broadcasting system held for over five decades. While no community licensing was offered under the new regulations in Jordan, this did not prevent Radio al-Balad 92.4 FM from securing a private FM licence to operate a non-profit community radio station in Amman (Pintak, 2007). In other places, such as Hungary, Argentina, and Mexico, unlicensed radio persisted in the presence of neoliberal agendas. For example, in Hungary, youth founded Tilos Rádió in 1991 and other pirate stations followed soon after (Gosztonyi, 2009, p. 298).

Community radio during the Resurgence stage of development continued to spread to new places, including a psychiatric hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Colifata, n.d.), and occupied Kahnestake, surrounded by the Canadian Army just outside of Montreal (Roth, 1993). In addition, La Voz de la Comunidad opened in Guatemala City, first broadcasting in 1990 with 'a simple system of six cone speakers, a small amplifier and a couple of turntables', and expanding in 1999 to several neighborhoods (Dagron, 2001, p. 101). In 1991, Mali became the first African country to license community radio stations (Buckley, Duer, Mendel, and Siochrú,



**Figure 5:** Resurgence period of community radio (1990s–today).

2008, pp. 209–210). In the 2000s, the revitalization of community media was evident in the opening of stations for the first time in Thailand (Ramasoota, 2013), Sierra Leone (UNESCO, 2013a), and Timor Leste (Coyer, 2011, p. 172). In addition, Radio Mang'elele became the first community radio station in Kenya started by a women's network in 2005 (Sterling and Huyer, 2010) and CRST FM104 began serving the islands of Vanuatu in 2004 (UNESCO, 2013b).

Throughout this Resurgence period, more community radio associations were formed, including the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada in 1991 (NCRA, n.d.), Asociación de Radios y Programas Participativos del Salvador in 1992 (Scarone Azzi and Sánchez, 2003, p. 90), and Ghana Community Broadcasting Services in 1995 (Scarone Azzi and Sánchez, 2003, p. 45). These network activities further increased in the 2000s with associations like the Uganda Media Women's Association opening 'Africa's first women's radio station' in 2001 (Fallon, 2013), the Community Media Forum in Europe established in 2004 to lobby European Union institutions (Milan, 2013), and the establishment in Tunisia of the General Union of Free Radio Stations in 2005 to advocate for unlicensed community radio stations (HRW, 2010). Within three decades, AMARC also grew rapidly into a network of more than 4,000 community radio stations in over 100 countries, and produced a number of documents, including ten principles that proposed democratic regulatory standards to promote community broadcasting (AMARC-ALC, 2008).

In addition, the 1990s saw an increase in the number of countries passing legislation or decrees to open their first community stations, including the Philippines, Poland, Colombia, Congo, Ireland, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Senegal, Nepal, Benin, and Ghana (Buckley et al., 2008; Howley, 2005; Purkarthofer, Pfisterer, and Busch, 2008; Scarone Azzi and Sánchez, 2003; Willum, 2003). Canada's Broadcasting Act passed in 1991, defining community media as an 'element' of the broadcasting system (Government of Canada, 1991). In countries without legislation, illegal community broadcasters continued to seize the airwaves, as was the case in Hungary and Mexico. In South Africa, where unlicensed stations like Radio Zibonele and Bush Radio broadcasted in support of the movement against Apartheid, new media regulations were eventually proposed in 1993, making licensing for community radio broadcasting one of the lesser-known outcomes of the struggle to topple Apartheid in South Africa. By 1999, South Africa had sixty-five community radio stations on air (Olorunnisola, 2002).

Similarly, in the 2000s, countries across the globe continued to pass legislation that enabled community radio to flourish, including Bolivia in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2010; the United Kingdom in 2004 and 2011; India in 2005 and 2011; Uruguay in 2007; Chile in 2008; Bangladesh in 2008 and 2011; Argentina in 2009; Nigeria in 2010; and the United States, Tunisia, Uganda, and Catalonia in 2011 (Coyer, 2011). Some of these regulations supported the proliferation of community radio through funding mechanisms, as was the case in Canada in 2007 and the Netherlands in 2008: the former provided project funding and the latter mandated municipalities to fund hundreds of local broadcasters (Buckley et al., 2008). Other regulatory reforms were ineffective, as was the case in Indonesia, where community radio has been legalized since 2002 but remains stagnant today (Coyer, 2011). In Mexico, constitutional reforms in 2006 declared Indigenous communities could operate their own radio stations, but without additional legal reforms, Indigenous people in Mexico cannot exercise this right (Pastrana, 2013). The case is similar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where community radio licensing exists without a funding mechanism and thus there persists a lack of interest in community broadcasting (Coyer, 2011). In Morocco, community radio stations are allowed to broadcast over the internet only, keeping community voices off the FM dial (UNESCO, 2013c). In countries such as Russia and China, laws still do not permit community radio licensing (Arutunyan, 2009; Traynor, 2012) and in the latter, state practices have criminalized promoting independent, community-owned broadcasting (Foxwell-Norton, 2012). By

contrast, in counties such as Venezuela and Hungary, regulations introduced in the 2000s resulted in new community radio stations going on air; the latter saw more than 70 stations on-air in less than six years (Hargitai, Szombathy, and Mayer, 2012).

An additional factor aiding the rapid growth of community radio during the Resurgence period was the increasing accessibility and affordability of radio production and distribution technology. Prior to the 1990s, radio stations or producers wanting to share content either required an expensive connection (typically via satellite or high-grade phone line) or relied on shipping recordings through the mail. With the spread of the internet, new websites were launched like Radio4all.net and Archive.org, which went online in 1996, and Indymedia.org, created in 1999, for the free uploading and immediate distribution of audio files. The same was true for the impact of software innovations for editing digital audio. Prior to the 1990s, audio editing was a slow and laborious task due to the methods required (such as a steady hand and razor blade skills) to edit analogue tape recordings. With the introduction of digital audio editing programs in the 1990s, some of which, like Cool Edit, offered trial versions for free download, anyone could edit audio on multiple tracks and mix in scripting or music easily (Home Recording Forums, 2007). Once the audio file was edited, compressed, and saved on the computer, the producer could send the file through a website like Radio4all.net, Archive.org, or Indymedia.org. In 2000, Audacity, an open source digital audio editing software, was launched for free download and use (Audacity, n.d.). These advances in internet distribution websites and digital audio editing software complemented the increasing affordability of professional portable audio recorders.

Indeed, community media and grassroots activism experienced a common renaissance beginning in the 1990s. It continues through to today due in part to a common struggle against injustice and for the advancement of democratic media and communication technology (Milan, 2013). Resembling the revolutionary activity of insurgent broadcasters during the Wildfire period, the reclamation of media by activists during the Resurgence period is best represented by the struggle of the Zapatista National Liberation Army against corporate globalization and for self-representation. Deploying creative tactics in the face of state and military power, the Zapatistas mobilized media across platforms from internet communiqués to unlicensed radio broadcasting. For some, the mobilization of multimedia tactics by the Zapatistas in their liberation struggle inspired a new generation of media activism (Kidd and Rodriguez, 2009, pp. 7–8).

Community media theorists such as Kidd and Rodriguez (2009) observed a shift during this time from the struggle to democratize mass media flows, which took prominence at the NWICO debates in the 1970s, to organizing for democratic media in the 1990s–2000s (Ferron, 2012). Also noted by Milan, the development of community radio was aided by this new wave of media activism, in addition to the spread of the internet to households for the first time (Milan, 2013, p. 34). Such technological advances ensured that radio, although an old medium, remained a preferred platform as an accessible communication technology made possible through the increasing simplicity and affordability of the production and broadcast technology (Dunbar-Hester, 2008, p. 203). Indeed, in countries such as Australia, community radio stations on the FM dial are competing with commercial and public broadcasters, especially in rural areas (Kidd and Rodriguez, 2009, p. 14). Since the first broadcast of voice over the radio spectrum, radio broadcasting has been transformed by radio enthusiasts and media activists worldwide from a medium for the transportation of mysterious dots and dashes of Morse code to a communication technology that has the potential to empower communities to represent and hear themselves; and in the case of Australia, community broadcasters are increasingly attracting radio audiences who reject commercial and state broadcasters (Foxwell-Norton, 2012; Meadows et al., 2009).

## Conclusion

In summary, the above timeline analyses the history of community broadcasting by organizing the development of community radio practices into four distinct periods. Analysed above, these four periods trace the development of community radio around the globe with two goals. The first engages the decolonization debate in communication research by internationalizing the history of community radio to acknowledge the different origins of the practice and view the common roots of community radio. The second goal emphasises the diversity of practices through compiling a multitude of experiments advanced by a complex ecology of actors, policies, and processes that underpin the spread of community radio. Unlike other histories of community media (Lewis, 1984; Milan, 2013; Rennie, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001), this timeline features stations, policies and regulations, as well as associational development, starting in the early 1900s with the first attempts to establish radio broadcasting as a means of self-representation and liberation.

The history of community broadcasting compiled here begins in the Experimental period from the 1900s–1940s to position community radio as one of the original uses of radio broadcast technology (Douglas, 1986; Kidd, 1998). This first period saw revolutionaries and social movements working locally to mobilize radio technology as a tool for grassroots political communication. In addition, this phase saw different types of development, including experiments that advanced radio technology, the building of community-accessible radio studios, and the creation of new funding models through listener donations, church or union support. This foundation was extended during the Wildfire period in which radio broadcasting by non-state, non-corporate, and social movement actors spread across several continents. During this period, radio became a necessary feature of national and regional liberation struggles and independence movements. Thus, radio as a weapon of resistance was a common feature in war zones, and unlicensed stations went on air by the hundreds. These stations supported students and workers, and united other familiar networks like Indigenous and *campesino* communities.

During the next period, community radio stations organized into networks, shared resources, and created advocacy bodies for the first time, making the 1970s–1980s the Solidarity period. In these two decades, community radio was supported by new funding initiatives and legislation. While unlicensed radio was still pursued as a necessity and/or a right by communities in 37 countries, this period also saw communities accessing licensing for the first time, such as Indigenous nations in the United States and Canada. An additional outcome of the Solidarity era was the internationalization of community media activism at the NWICO gatherings that enshrined communication as a human right and promoted the value of participatory media.

These gains met new challenges during the Resurgence period that began in the 1990s when neoliberal development agendas prioritised commercial media and the privatisation of communication infrastructure over the development of community radio. Despite this push-back, community media continued to spread at a fast pace to many countries for the first time. When countries such as South Africa and Hungary opened up community radio licensing, nearly 100 community broadcasters went on air in just a few years. While the Resurgence period saw the increased accessibility of radio production and distribution technology due to developments in digital editing software and internet audio sharing portals, community radio stations still faced challenges due to local media regulations.

After a global survey of community broadcasters conducted in 2007, AMARC concluded that the continuing lack of supportive legislation was the most significant impediment to increasing the civic impact of community radio (AMARC, 2007, p. 10). In the face of these challenges, community radio advocacy increased during the Resurgence period, in part due to the mutual renaissance experienced by community radio and grassroots activism around



the start of the twenty-first century. The story of community broadcasting compiled here and the current Resurgence reveal that the development of community radio as an institution has roots in the global South and among non-state, non-corporate and social movement actors everywhere who took to the FM dial to break through sound barriers created by capitalism and the State.

Surveying the international English language literature on media research, Hadl and Dongwon are critical of the historic approach to 'thinking about media' (2008, 82). For Hadl and Dongwon, community media studies 'must tackle the unequal development of research and practice, reconcile the differences in approaches, and account for differences in cultural and linguistic contexts' (2008, p. 103). This article's approach to historicizing community radio practices is informed by a global compilation of brief histories and experiences, building an international context to position community media as an institution shaped by a history of struggle to access the radio spectrum (Smythe, 1981).

Further expanding the history of community broadcasting through the lens of internationalizing communication studies requires research that situates the timeline presented here within local/regional political and economic contexts to deepen this brief story of community radio. Such an effort can also reveal where community radio is under threat today, especially for those community broadcasters who face jail time, violence, and even death. Indeed, AMARC's most recent campaign aims to organize community radio stations against impunity for 'crimes against freedom of expression' and for the safety of journalists (2016), because the struggle to access the airwaves continues.

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### **Additional File**

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### **Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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