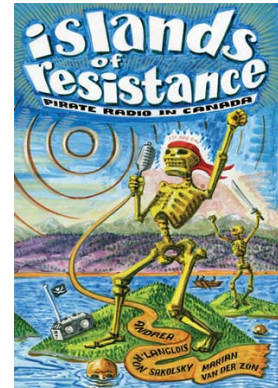


Andrea Langlois, Ron Sakolsky, and Marian van der Zon, **Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada**, Newstar Books: Vancouver, 2010, 256 pp., \$21.00 (paperback).

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Pirate radio is the illegal or unregulated transmission of radio signals over AM, FM or other forms of radio frequencies, often for entertainment or political purposes. In Canada, radio stations are regulated by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission. The editors of *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada*—Andrea Langlois, Ron Sakolsky and Marian van der Zon — have carefully selected stories, essays, and interviews by Canadians that reveal the true nature of illegal broadcasting within Canada. Their focus is on the use of pirate radio for social justice and radio art, its two most popular uses, and they make the case that regulators are quite careless on the issue.



Right from the start, the authors take an in-depth look at the history of pirate radio and how it has been used by fringe and underrepresented groups around the world to promote or combat the powers that hold them to their social class and place in society. The early chapters explain the differences between pirate radio and the socially just “free radio,” and compare their use in Canada and elsewhere around the world. The editors (and other authors throughout the book) reveal that, in particular, the position of campus/community radio within Canada is designed to allow for alternatives to mainstream media and news. This lessens the need for illegal broadcasting because alternate views are legally voiced through these stations. However, the authors are quick to point out that these regulated free-speech outlets are still very restrictive in terms of what can and cannot go on the air, and that sometimes a voice from outside this medium is necessary for the message to be communicated effectively. Broadcasting illegally often is intended to make a bold statement: We are willing to stand up to the powers that be and risk personal danger in order to be heard.

We also learn early in Chapter 3 that free radio is a key element to social revolution and revolt over an oppressive country or laws. This chapter highlights some of the key struggles faced by oppressed groups or individuals around the world, illustrating the importance of using free radio to fight injustice globally. It can be interpreted that the purpose of this information is to remind Canadians that their relatively quiet landscape of broadcast and freedoms are something to cherish.

From Chapter 2 onward, the editors of *Islands of Resistance* focus on the stories and essays written from the viewpoints of 15 individual authors. Each chapter is written from personal experience in storytelling or essay format. For example, Sheila Nopper writes about her experience with campus/Canadian radio, both in Canada and during her travels to the United States, and the resulting harsher climate that Canada’s southern neighbors have to operate when broadcasting content on the air.

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Her experiences help us understand the differences on either side of the border with respect to licensing requirements and systematic freedoms. Nopper returns us to Canadian pirate broadcasting with the example of Tree Frog Radio, an illegal community-based station on an isolated island in British Columbia, which is further explained in detail by Ron Sakolsky in Chapter 7. Sakolsky presents readers with their first stark contrast to social rebellion and radio art, as his story describes the uniting powers that community radio can produce.

Chapters 5 and 6 vibrantly depict the use of pirate radio to build community. Neskie Manuel and Charles Mostoller tell the story of two Native Canadian reserves that use pirate radio to communicate, provide entertainment and information to remote areas, and act as a way to preserve culture through the use of stories in native languages. Manuel and Mostoller highlight the fact that Canadian regulations were not designed for small communities; they were intended to build corporate power and connections while providing an outlet for governmental control (as shown through the use of TV Ontario and CBC Networks). Manuel and Mostoller's insights are some of the most important points to the argument for change within the broadcasting industry with respect to those who are often underrepresented, or in this case, left on their own. The cases presented by Mostoller help to highlight the plight of the Native Canadian people and their struggles to remain a culturally diverse community amongst an ever-globalizing nation and world.

We are introduced to pirate radio as a protest tactic in Chapter 8. Andrea Langlois and Gretchen King talk about the importance of Free Radio Tent City in Montreal. Langlois and King—well-known voices in the campus/community and social justice sector—compare the use of radio as resistance in occupying land in Montreal during the 2003 protests. They effectively highlight the hardships of the homeless and later the WTO summits in Quebec City and compare that with the resistance by Mexican communities in Oaxaca when combating corruption and drug lords. Their argument is that taking back the airwaves is another way that oppressed and forgotten individuals can achieve a stronger voice when engaged in public displays of disapproval such as marches. In the case here, it is shown that a necessity of resistance must be created in order to educate the public about social injustice. A collection of legal alternative media sources and illegal stations was able to accomplish this when "Rock the WTO Radio" helped close the gap between protesters in the march and those listening elsewhere. It is appropriate that Langlois and King were able to carefully construct the scenario and necessity of the 2004 WTO broadcasts as a means of using pirate radio without pressuring the reader into "converting" to a social reformist view. Their reporting on the subject is open and honest. Although their anecdote depicts a pro-social change view, it does not criticize those who may not hold an identical view. I believe this chapter also encourages social reform through campus/community radio by opening the airwaves to more discussion about injustice. This would help to provide the Canadian broadcast landscape with a stronger outlet for social justice through campus/community radio and thus reduce the necessity for illegal broadcasting. As a result, there would be fewer people in Canada needing pirate radio compared to other areas under different broadcast and social regulations.

Chapters 9 and 10 introduce us to the idea of "narrowcasting," or broadcasting for specific audiences. Marian von der Zon tells us about her use of narrowcasting for women's rights and Temporary Autonomous Radios—her low-powered station known as TAR. But her underlying and important focus is

on the idea that women can be innovative leaders in communications and technology as well. She notes that many of those involved in the TAR broadcasts were women, and these collaborations have encouraged other women to become contributors. In turn, this approach helped to break down the social and gender barriers constructed by local cultures. Subsequently, Bobbi Kozinuk's essay skillfully explains the male-female binary connection in "gendered pirate," using nonregulated pirate radio to break down the stereotypes of gender on radio within mainstream society. Kozinuk successfully argues that gender pirates use this format to express themselves outside the binary pairing and to challenge basic assumptions, but she fails to provide specific examples of how this can be completed. In other words, Kozinuk does explain the different stereotypical labels that gender pirates look to change, and offers great insight into the necessity for change, but she neglects to expand on how to create this change.

The remaining six chapters (with the exception of Chapter 12, in which author Christof Migone explores ways in which pirate radio can be used to change our conceptions of what is considered standard and proper broadcast terms), delve into using pirate radio and broadcasting as an art form. Each of the authors highlights a specific project or use of radio airwaves to express creativity and explore technology use as it was not necessarily intended to be. However, the authors fail to remind us how much trouble an individual could face if he or she was caught broadcasting illegally, even for artistic reasons. However, from an artistic standpoint, these chapters provide great insight into postmodern forms of expression through the creative use of technology. This is of particular interest for individuals fascinated with unique art forms and ways of sharing ideas and thoughts in a nonstandard format.

Individuals who are interested in radio as art are not the only readers who will be attracted to this book as it also written for people who are looking for creative ideas and a means to get their social justice and rights messages heard by the larger public. It also could be read as a message to the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, a reminder that what is typically broadcast on pirate radio fills in the gaps in broadcasting opportunities that are not covered by the current industry practices. The book is a great and easy read for any individual or academic interested in broadcasting, the role of campus/community as an alternative media source, and historical broadcast buffs fascinated by the study of technology.

My first impression is that *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada* is a collection of stories about different groups of pocketed and typically separate uses of pirate radio across Canada. Often the context and authors alluded to, or directly connected with the same topic or incident, but there seems to be little crossover between subjects and topics. This conforms to my initial assumption that because Canada is so large, and our broadcasting regulations are open in comparison to other nations, there is not a strong pirate radio presence in the country itself. The editors remind us that these are only some of the examples used by those who are willing to announce their illegal acts to the public. I, however, find it hard to believe that there would be many more cases to be explored within Canada, especially those of major impact on our social environment due to the other broadcasting options available to citizens. I have only come across or heard of one instance of pirate radio broadcasting in my 10 years' experience in broadcasting on campus/community radio, working in both commercial and campus/community radio as well as from my educational background.

Overall, Langlois, Sakolsky and van der Zon bring to light the relatively dark and previously unexplored world of pirate radio within Canada. I would once again strongly recommend this book to those in the campus/community industry as a way to better understand their role as a provider of alternative media. The hope would be to encourage more open content on the air, as well as for stations to adopt a united cause to push the boundaries of social programming, rather than leaving it to individuals who risk their own safety to broadcast their messages illegally. We must determine to what degree our free speech is truly free, and thus announce it to the world—not as pirates, but as mere citizens with our tongues wagging and our ears to the airwaves.