

Women's History Today

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Articles by:
Yu Wang
Vanessa Jackson
Sonia Robles
Andrea Smith

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Within the 'Doing History' section of this journal featuring Women and Broadcasting, on the occasion of the celebration of the centenary of the BBC, is an article I have written about my 1983 directory of women in community broadcasting in Europe: ***'Women on the Air': A Contribution to the History of Women in Community Radio in Europe.***

Excerpt from the journal follows.

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Doing History

'Women on the Air': A Contribution to the History of Women in Community Radio in Europe

Birgitte Jalloff looks back at the 'Women on the Air' directory she produced in 1983 – now an historical document in its own right

Women on the Air was the title of a directory of women in community radio in Europe that I produced in 1983. At that time the notion that 'women were, actually, on the air' carried some pioneer feeling to it. Since then, numerous publications and networks have carried that same title, but in 1983 it was a first.

The directory is the earliest known attempt to systematically document women's engagement with community radio in Europe in the early 1980s. It was based on a first-hand collection of information and presented, in some depth, the situation in ten European countries with attempts to cover six more. In total, it encompassed the experiences of 26 radio stations.

For each of the ten main countries, I gave information about the status of the women's movement in that country, followed by short details about the general media situation including developments in community radio. This was followed by brief profiles of the radio stations and the women's collectives that I met and their work methods, ending up with a quick look at their finances and the future.

The document was prepared as background for

the very first international meeting of community radio broadcasters, 'AMARC', in Montreal in 1983—the 'World Communication Year' (WCY).¹ In a world without internet and social media, the WCY was seen as an opportunity for a 'quantum leap' in the development of a complete world communication network which would leave no one isolated from his or her local, national or international community. Today, this may sound like an antiquated notion, but actually at the time, it was visionary: the people and organisations behind the WCY wanted to create exactly the kind of networked life and work we experience today.

Why did I engage in this work?

I was active in the women's movement in Copenhagen, Denmark and, inspired by the many women visiting Copenhagen for the 1980 UN Women's Conference, I decided to take up an invitation to become an intern at the 'Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press' (WIFP) in Washington D.C. for six months in 1982-83. Prior to my departure, I had been engaged in the budding community radio movement in Denmark so I decided to spend some of my time at WIFP diving into what was happening in the US.

One of the organisations I researched and worked with was the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB), where preparatory work was taking place for the upcoming 1983 first ever international meeting of community broadcasters. The NFCB were working closely with their counterparts in Montréal, Canada, where the event would take place, searching for

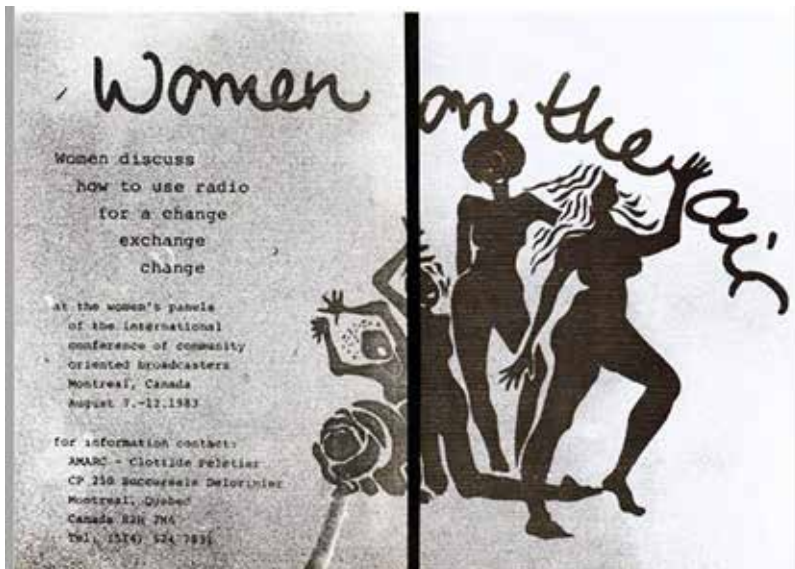


Fig One: Women on the Air

ways to tell the world about it and to invite participants to join. The (French-speaking) Canadian organisers had some contacts with French community broadcasters, who had agreed to do their best to map the community media landscape of southern Europe. With my special interest in, and focus on, women in the media, I was then asked to do the same in Northern Europe.

I returned from my internship in early 1983 with my two new hats and responsibilities—all unpaid of course. Once back in Denmark, I needed to complete my Communication Studies MA. For the final ‘production-focused’ semester it was agreed with my teachers at the Roskilde University that my ‘production’ could be: a publication—a ‘Directory of Women’s Community Radio in Europe’; a half-hour radio programme telling that story, and a poster.

The production process – how did the directory come about?

As a steering committee member for the AMARC conference, my responsibility was to coordinate the mapping and outreach of as many community radio stations and networks in Northern Europe as possible, and to invite them to come. Furthermore, I was to map the field of ‘Women in Community Radio in Europe’ to ensure that there was good representation for the women-focussed panels that would be part of the international event taking place in Montreal that summer.

In 1983 there was no internet, no international or all-European community media mapping or networks in existence, so I was really starting from scratch, on my own. But I was fired up by the desire to find out, and I had the backing of a very supportive, activist University.² Without internet – or fax – I started by carrying out a documentation search. With the assistance of the university librarians and my university advisers, I contacted the networks and people who we could collectively come up with. I telephoned and sent letters. But the outcome was quite meagre. I realised that I would have to travel to the capital cities I could reach.

With funds from the university for the train-rides, I embarked on a journey of discovery with my

notebooks, recorder, camera and my sleeping bag under my arm. When I arrived in a capital city, I went straight to the telephone booth at the central station where I called the Ministry of Culture, the national broadcaster or a women’s documentation centre, and asked – do you have community radio in your country? In 1983, this information was not centrally available anywhere. Any women’s stations or collectives known? I visited them all, slept on the floors in the squatted communes or apartments of the women – and moved on.

Mapping the women’s community radio landscape, collecting the stories

Personally, I started this voyage at a time where our own women’s community radio collective, ‘Women Waves’, was about to go on air in Copenhagen, Denmark. This was part of a coordinated three-year community radio experiment, initiated by the Danish state. At ‘Women Waves’, we had worked intensely on how to bring the working methods of the new women’s movement into the studios and our work. But what would feminist journalism look like? And in our organisational work with the other civil society organisations, joining hands and sharing a frequency—how would each of us maintain our full independence? We agreed that each partner should have full autonomy within the working collective.

It was these observations that I took with me into my research work around Northern Europe, as I systematically mapped the stations I encountered. With an aim to share stories, I looked for what we had in common, and what distinguished us. And what I found was that the ways in which we organised, the ways in which we worked and our experience of what was important, were all quite comparable. So, who did I meet?

The first wave – filled with thousands of pirates on the airwaves, in the South of

Europe

The emergence of community radio in (Western) Europe could be described as coming in three waves. The first wave consisted of the thousands of pirate stations that appeared in the late 1970s in Southern Europe: Italy, France and Spain as well as in Belgium and Holland. A few examples of these pirate stations, or at least those that were not initially legal, were presented in the 'Women on the Air' directory. They are shared here to provide a glimpse into that time pocket. The full presentations can be found in the directory, itself.³

Vrouwenradio, Amsterdam. Through my contact with a well-stocked women's documentation centre in central Amsterdam, I received information that there was, indeed, a local women's radio station in town. They found the address for me, and I was welcomed by the women who made up the core of *Vrouwenradio*, who were living together in the top apartment of a squatted house. Here I could, indeed, roll out my sleeping bag and stay in their place for the day I spent with them. The women told me that the women's movement in the Netherlands was, at this point in time, very diverse. As lesbians and squatters, they considered themselves to be 'anarchist feminists', who belonged to the more radical part of the movement. They accepted illegal actions might be necessary – just like their radio station was illegal too.

The media in the Netherlands at the time was dominated by eight religious and politically oriented broadcasters covering different parts of the country, all of whom made up 'Dutch Radio and TV'. Similarly, there were four regional stations. Some of these stations carried regular women's programmes—once a week or

once a month – none, however, feminist. The broadcasters in *Vrouwenradio* broadcast their programmes once a week for 1-2 hours, with a repeat the following morning. The programmes were planned a month in advance at weekly planning meetings. Besides reporting on issues of importance to women, they covered culture and often, themselves, played music live on air. They worked to develop new ways of communicating, mixing different programme formats. The funding for the station came from an organisation they had established called 'ease your conscience' where better-off feminists could donate. Besides this, they sold posters and held fundraising concerts and events.

The *Vrouwenradio* women could tell that there were five other (pirate) women's radios in the Netherlands at this point in time in Utrecht, Delft and Den Bosch; stations much like themselves. In Rotterdam the women's radio was not necessarily feminist and the fifth, in Nijmegen was taking a break to decide which way to go forward.

Radio Donna (Radio Woman), Rome. This was an underground feminist radio station created in 1976. The feminist programme was totally managed by women, although it shared a radio frequency with 'Radio Città Futura' (Radio Future City), the first subversive radio station in Rome, which had been founded by activists of a New-Left organization called 'Avanguardia operaia' (Working class Avant-garde). *Radio Donna* was the first women's radio station in Rome to broadcast programmes for working-class women every morning between 9 and 11am, for about two years. They brought the methods of the women's movement into the studios and involved listeners in their programmes, and they had in general a very strong neighbourhood engagement focus. *Radio Donna* broadcast from the women's house in the centre of Rome and was very popular. When I visited the women's house and station in the summer of 1980, in the planning stages of our Copenhagen woman's radio collective, it was very active. However, it was later closed down because of attacks on it from right-wing militia.

Les Nanas Radioteuses, Paris. 'The radio-chicks' were part of a mixed radio station and broadcast a variety of women's programmes once a week for six hours. They worked as a real collective, wanting to be a platform for women from all the different parts of the women's movement. Because the station held these collective aspirations, they did not have a management structure or a coordinator. Instead, they shared responsibilities as well as the various functions of 'journalist' and 'technician'. This required dedication, which was also seen in the rule that to have a say at the weekly planning meetings in the women's house (where they did all of their preparatory work), you had to be active in the life and production of the radio station.

Describing themselves in their station's pamphlet (1983) they wrote:

Every day we are confronted with the nature of the destructive oppression of our opinions. The annihilation of the identity of women is happening particularly by stifling our



Fig 2: *Vrouwenradio*

discussions and voices. That is why it is so obvious to us that these discussions should be listened to, should be passed on by other means of communication than the written word, by faster means of communication. A feminist radio in Paris is an irreplaceable tool: an opening of the feminist movement and for discussion about real change of the gender-roles.⁴

Les Nanas Radioteuses had a high-powered start in 1981 but lost impetus and went off the air in 1985. This was partly due to new legislation that opened the way for commercialisation, which increased competition for airtime on the limited number of frequencies.

Radio Pleine Lune. 'Radio full moon' broadcast one night a week into Geneva, from neighbouring France, as part of a mixed grassroots radio station called 'Radio Zones'. *Radio Pleine Lune* was a feminist radio programme that was launched originally by a few women in Geneva who broadcast four pirate programmes between 1979 and 1980 on full moon evenings – until they were jammed by the Swiss Postal Telegraph and Telephone agency which was responsible for providing frequencies to radio stations.

Following the movement to liberalize the airwaves in France, a group of Genevans created 'Radio Zones' in the French border-town of Ferney-Voltaire, adjacent to Geneva, in order to circumvent the state monopoly still in force in Switzerland. A group of women took up the beautiful name of the feminist programmes that had been broadcast in Geneva earlier, *Radio Pleine Lune*. They had, like many of the other feminist community radio collectives who were included in *Women on the Air*, a weekday that was theirs on the mixed 'Radio Zones' station, but where they actually, usually, only broadcast for a few hours. The aim of the collective was to give space to as many different groups of women as possible – not necessarily feminists. At the core of their work was women speaking for themselves. The most common format for their programmes was to broadcast important news items, followed by a debate in the studio, and a phone-in with listeners. *Radio Pleine Lune* lived longer than most of the comparable stations. It started in November 1981 finally closing down on 15 December 1999.

Libre à Elles, Brussels. This was the weekly women's slot on 'Radio Air Libre', one of the few progressive and independent local stations, called Radios libres (Free Radio) in Brussels and Belgium. At the time, most of these stations were commercial music ones, with a few stations wishing to inform and spread 'social and political consciousness' as it was expressed at the time. Radio Air Libres was one of those and the women's collective *Libre à Elles* played on the pun of the space being 'free to them' or 'it's up to them' or, as was at the core, 'free for women'. They had been on air since December 1982 and the women, when I met them, told me that their programme had an effect. Their dedicated weekly slot was filled with relevant issues for women in Brussels such as how to work against victimisation, developing methods to find solutions. Their programme was followed by another one-

hour programme called 'Les Margherites' with a more feminist profile. Women had become much more engaged in the life and programming of the station since *Libre à Elles* went on air. They worked on the morning shows and on the news and they positively influenced both the style and the content of the broadcasts, opening it up more, becoming freer and more fun.

The second wave – searching for how to best break the state monopolies in the Nordic countries

A second European wave was the state-initiated three-year trial period of community radio in three Scandinavian countries at the beginning of the 1980s. The initiative was preceded by a limited amount of pirate activity, partly due to Scandinavian traditions that provided some access slots for ordinary people's programmes within the national monopolies. These 'Tape workshops' were more open to listener engagement, participation and influence and they broadcast the voices and views of women, environmentalist and workers.

Radio Klara, Stockholm. This was one of the first community radio stations in Sweden, which started in the spring of 1979. The development of women's programmes in Sweden was very different to most of the other countries profiled in the directory. This was because all the stations that belonged to the 'Swedish Radio' broadcasting corporation, both national and regional, had strong feminist programming, so the need was not felt as urgently among the feminists of *Radio Klara* as it was in most other countries. The women's collective of *Radio Klara* in Stockholm, which I did not visit, but telephoned, covered feminist issues with a focus on all that was related to a woman's body, patriarchy, culture and how to create a new and different future.

Women's Waves (Kvindebolgerne), Copenhagen. This autonomous collective within 'Sokkelund Radio' finally went on air on 31 May 1983 with a ninety-minute programme in the evening which was repeated the next morning. I was a part of this collective, which was formed in 1981. We spent the two years that it took to get on air, developing our own feminist journalistic approach, training each other and other women. As in Rome and Paris, this took place in the women's house, which was our base. We arrived at Sokkelund Radio on Tuesdays, ready to go on air from the shared studio. At the time that the *Women on the Air* directory went into press, only one programme had been aired by *Kvindebolgerne* which dealt with how to build up the strength of a woman's body through bodybuilding and the discussion focused on whether this was liberating – or just another way to suppress women. The second part of the programme dealt with peace, reporting from a recent demonstration and then debating the strategies used.

RadiOrakel, Oslo. Norway went its own way. With a media landscape and legislation similar to Sweden



Fig 3: Kvindebolgerne

and Denmark. Norway's period of state-initiated experimentation started in 1982, and with it *RadiOrakel*. Instead of founding a women's collective within a mixed grassroots station, they started a separate women's radio station. *RadiOrakel* was different in many ways. They were on the air every day, not once a week; they allowed men on their staff as long as at least two-thirds of the staff were women. Furthermore, they created a professional structure with many specialised editorial groups and functions including editors, who were often paid rather than working on a voluntary basis. Also, the work methods were less related to those of the women's movement. *RadiOrakel* was at the time – and remains – a professional radio station. Moreover, *RadiOrakel* competed with both the national broadcasting station and the other community stations, producing smooth music radio. *RadiOrakel* is still going strong today.



The Fruit of my Labours

The three weeks' of travel to meet the women and their radio stations, followed by the process of writing up the 124-page directory, the production of the half-hour radio programme and the development of a poster, was intense. But it worked. Many of the women I met, travelled to Canada to take part in the AMARC conference. There were five women's panels where experiences were shared around ownership, feminist journalism, listener participation and how to transform communication to become our own. The voyage and all the hard work was worth it. After Montréal the women's networks took on a life of their own, planning research, co-production – and fun. The *Women on the Air* directory and report was produced as a part of the extensive preparations for the conference. It was the most extensive mapping exercise of its time and was then – as now – used as a source of unique information. The contact list at the end, which covered all the initiatives included in the original research, was used as the starting point when, 13 years later in 1996, AMARC's Women's International News (WIN) asked me to do it again. This time to prepare a directory of women's community radio in the newly shaped Europe that had emerged after the fall of the iron curtain.⁵

'Women on the Air' – a directory in its own right then, an historical document now

Women on the Air provides a peek into a 'time pocket'; an era when the feminist movement of the early 70's in Europe was still at its height, and we were searching for other 'true' ways of moving into the public sphere and engaging on the cultural stage on our own terms. Almost 40 years on, it offers a first-hand account of what it was like to be part of that movement of impatient, fired-up women in radio studios and with mics in the streets, hoping to change the world.

Notes

1. 'Assemblée Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires—AMARC' was the title of the 1983 conference, which four years later became the acronym for the l'Association ... or in English, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.
2. Roskilde University opened in 1972, inspired by the student revolts of 1968 and with a clear activist focus. It was in no way hidden that the 'University Centre' (as it was called originally) was a forum for political thinking, with Habermas, Adorno, Horkheimer and not least Marx as the basis for the critical theory and with the Frankfurt School defining the starting point for RUC's sociology. The education was organised with a project focus and carried forward through group work. Lecturers were advisors, coaches and mentors to the groups.

CONFERENCE REPORT

Women & Community Radio

by Eliza Moore

I recently had the opportunity — through CKMS-FM, Kitchener-Waterloo's alternative music station — to attend the first World Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters, held in Montreal in August. This was an unusual event in a number of ways; it was the first time that so many people (over 500) from such a wide variety of countries (from Sweden to Sri Lanka to El Salvador) had gathered together to attempt to find some common ground in the realm of community radio. The event was intended to be accessible to as many as possible, which meant that not only was the registration fee unbelievably low (\$45 for 5 days) but also that translation was available in three languages (English, French and Spanish). Cheap accommodation was provided in a local youth hostel, and so all that was necessary was transportation to Montreal (no small matter, you might argue, from some place like India, but nonetheless many did attend from very far away). There was no representation from communist countries — rumour has it that they don't have community radio there — but people from all parts of western Europe, Africa, Latin America, India, Australia and North America attended; community radio has as many different interpretations/applications as there are stations who broadcast it.

I learned all kinds of interesting facts about what is happening in other countries. For example, there is a collective of about 70 women in Oslo, Norway which produces 10 hours per week in broadcast time. I found it hard to imagine a "collective" of 70 doing *anything!* They are split into sub-groups which each contribute a couple of hours a week



Birgitte Jallof, a resource person at the conference and author of "Women on the Air", a report concerning Women's Community Radio in western Europe.

— some deal with women's issues, others with broader social change concerns.

A great deal of general knowledge changed hands at the conference. Among the fascinating facts that I garnered were the following: West Germany is a very repressed country, and all non-state radio is suppressed. People are forced to broadcast from outside the country, or in a clandestine manner — radio to them is a radical political statement. In El Salvador, Radio Venceremos finds a US ship parked in the harbour jamming their frequency in an attempt to keep them off the air; it doesn't work (revolutionary communications types are very tricky people) but it makes life more difficult; this station plays a crucial role in revolutionary army communications.

Many women attended, and although the special section of women's workshops had been split up into other more general topics such as "technology" and "audience", many of the same women showed up for the various workshops on women's issues. This group of about 20-30 women put together a resolution to the conference plenary; it dealt with urging UNESCO (or another similar organization with money and no definite political ties) to set up an inter-

national clearing house for the exchange of information and tapes about women's issues. Most workshop discussions had brought out the need for an increased awareness about what women are experiencing in other places on some kind of ongoing basis.

The usual conference concerns of "how can we organize another conference — one just for women?" and "how can we keep all these women informed and in touch with one another?" were raised, and it was unfortunate that nothing more concrete than the above suggestion could be implemented. Lack of money, lack of time — both these will contribute to frustrate our efforts. It's a common problem of conferences: nothing is really resolved, although everyone had a good time meeting everyone else, and all are in agreement about the need for another future meeting. But now what?

Although I am not directly involved in community radio, I found the experience very useful in my work with *Hysteria*. Women from Europe and the United States use community radio in much the same way we use the print media — to publish our own stories, to print information we think women

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HYSTERIA

Fig 4: Report of the AMARC conference from *Hysteria* magazine, including a photograph of Birgitte Jallof

3. <https://empowerhouse.dk/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Women-on-the-air-1983-womens-CR-in-Europe-Birgitte-Jallof.pdf>

4. Quoted in 'Women on the Air', RUC, 1983 — based on a pamphlet received personally when visiting the station in 1983.

5. Women's Voices Crossing Frontiers: <https://tinyurl.com/mrx8mp4f>

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