Hi there, welcome to Seedling for Change Over the Radio. My name is Cody McMahon, and I am a Researcher working in partnership with Seedling for Change in Society and Environment.

I want to introduce you to a podcast series. Over the course of a couple episodes, I will be exploring the role of radio in Social Movements in Latin America. I want to better understand the role this technology has played in social movements. But in the process, I must admit I have a larger goal. I want to demonstrate, through an appreciation and understanding of radio, that Latin America is not some distant place. That wherever you may be, there are ways in which we can connect with the rest of the world and realize that these experiences aren't as foreign as we may believe. I am recording this in St. Catharines, ON – and this might sound a bit out there for anyone that has been to the Niagara region, but in fact Latin America is all around me.

A quick disclaimer before we get going. I'm relying on a number of primary and secondary sources to inform our discussion today. If this were an essay, I'd have eloquent footnotes full of all the information necessary to track these sources down and allow you to explore more about them if you so desire. However, this is a bit more challenging in an aural medium – it interrupts the flow of dialogue to have to read out all of the information about a given source. (As a side note, this process has taught me about my subject matter as well – words on the radio are far different than words on the page, so one must consider this in terms of what is said.) I've come up with a solution – I'll attach a copy of my transcript with citations to the podcast page on the Seedling for Change website. If you're listening from the website, you can find them below. If you're listening on the radio, please head over to seedlingforchange.org to find a full transcript. On to the content. Before I go any further, I want to take this episode and pull back the curtain a little bit. I want to break down the finer details of what this podcast is.

What you are experiencing right now is aurality – a-u-r-a-l-i-t-y. In other words, you are experiencing information in an auditory fashion. You can't see me, and I can't see you – all you can do is listen. But in reality, the interaction we are having is far more complex than that.

I want to introduce this concept of aurality, because I think it allows us to consider radio broadcasting as far more comprehensive than we might imagine it. As a researcher myself, I am indebted to the work of those who have come before me – not just scholarly work, that exists inside and for academia, but the work of individuals actively learning about the world around them. Throughout the podcast, I will attempt to show my gratitude and acknowledege these individuals. In this case, the work of Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier provides a valuable framework. Gautier describes this process of aurality as "about ontologies and epistemologies of the acoustic, particularly the voice, produced by and enmeshed in different audile techniques, in which sound appears simultaneously as a force that constitutes the world and a medium for constructing knowledge about it."[1] In other words, auditory expressions not only make up the world in which they are created, but help us create knowledge about it. When we think about it this way, sound becomes quite the force. It not only forms the basis of many of our interactions, but is often used to dissect said interactions. In this podcast, I will be talking about the use of radio in social movements across Latin America – I'm examining the use of sound to create part of our world, and am using my voice in the process to create knowledge about this world. In other words, I am directly engaging with this concept of Aurality.

Not only am I embracing this concept, but my larger subject matter is as well. I'm looking at the use of a specific technology, in this case radio, in Latin America throughout the

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[1] Gautier, 3.

20th century. More specifically, I'll be looking at the idea of social change, and see how one movement in particular has been shaped by radio. Next episode, were heading to rural Bolivia in the mid 20th century to understand the experience of mining communities. But I want to suggest that in reality these men and their families are not far apart from where we are now. Radio, and its role in this social movement are brought together with this notion of aurality. Radio is fundamentally about the transmission of audial sounds – using sounds to create knowledge about the world. Social movements that use radio embrace the power of sound as a force – perhaps implicit, these individuals and groups recognize that sound forms a significant portion of our world, and are using a technology to amplify it to reach a greater audience. But how successful is radio in reaching a large audience?

I previously noted, there is a fairly complex interaction going on here. You see, in order to hear my voice right now, you have to have something – whether that's a radio or a computer, it wasn't free, and it required a specific set of skills. You also need the physiological ability to hear. So is radio really accessible? For all its simplicity, there are working parts that means it isn't accessible to everyone. So when we think about social change and radio in Latin America, we need to recognize these limitations.

But at the same time, radio *is* a remarkably accessible technology. The technology that forms radio is relatively straight forward – without delving too much into the science behind oit, all that is really needed is electricity, a transmitter and a receiver. It sounds complicated, but this technology is all cheap and accessible. Radios, which are the receiving aspects, are available throughout the world at a minimal cost, in part because the technology is so straight forward. The broadcasting side is a bit more challenging – it requires a microphone, transmitting devices which are more expensive, and the ability to sustain a significant amount of energy. Simply put,

it's very easy to receive radio waves, it's more difficult but still fairly easy to produce these

waves. Radio is also an accessible technology given its format. Because it is an audial form, it

allows more people to access it. Especially in countries with low literacy rates, radio becomes a

crucial form of information exchange – one may not be able to read what is going on, but

listening to someone else describe it is far more accessible.[2] So at the end of the day, there is a

tension that exists – radio is to a certain extent limited in accessibility, but is also quite accessible

when taken in consideration with other forms of mass communication. Despite its limitations, the

accessibility of radio as a communication tool with the ability to reach a critical mass of a given

locality led to the prominence of community radio stations across Latin America as crucial

aspects to social change.

We often think of radio in terms of major broadcasting stations, but in reality the ability

to broadcast on the radio is relatively straightforward and often very localized. Community radio

stations exist across the world – in fact, I'm sitting in one to record this podcast. Right now I'm

sitting in the studios of Brock Radio, a small community broadcaster in St. Catharines. CFBU is

a member of the National Campus and Community Radio Association, a network of community

broadcasters across Canada. It is also involved with a broader organization that expands

globally. Community radio is everywhere. And such localized radio stations are particularly

adept to engage with and empower social change.

As author Stefania Milan contends in her book, *Social Movements and Their*

Technologies: Wiring Social Change, community radio has the remarkable ability to empower

marginalized peoples. She argues that audiences and producers of community radio "are often

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[2] Peter M. Lewis, "Radio Theory and Community Radio", 50-51. In Jankowski.

disempowered or minority communities to which community media offer a means for

participation and empowerment."[3] In other words, radio is a tool that can be used by a group of

people to retain and obtain power – this is fundamentally what social movements are about.

Taken into consideration with our earlier discussion about the relative accessibility of radio,

community radio stations are not only powerful but valuable way of attracting public attention.

Community radio is also powerful because it brings people together. They establish what author

Charles Fairchild calls "social solidarity," a form of social organization that galvanizes people in

specific situations with a certain worldview.[4] In other words, by acting as a tool to connect

people, they often connect people's ways of thinking towards a specific goal or outcome – this is

something we'll explore in depth in the case of Bolivian miners. Given the nature of community

media, this solidarity is often in opposition to oppressive power structure. As author Kevin

Howley argues, "community media likewise manifest an intense desire to reassert local

autonomy and defend particularistic identities in the wake of transnational media flows and the

attendant homogenization of cultural forms."[5] Howley is suggesting that community media,

including small local radio broadcasters, often challenge the social status quo. So not only does

community radio bring people together, it has the power to bring people together and create

social change. This brings us to the idea of radio and its impact.

An important aspect that Stefania Milan stresses is to think of radio as a two-way

communication device.[6] However, this seems a bit confusing, seeing as community radio is one

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[3] Milan, 43.
[4] Fairchild, 24, in *Understanding Community Media*, Howley.
[5] Howley, 33.
[6] *Ibid.*

way – I'm talking right now, but unfortunately you can't interject with your own comments. However, when we think about it as a two-way street, we are recognizing community radio as an opportunity for peoples to broadcast a sentiment to a larger group of people, and that larger group respond somehow. This is the framework of how radio influences social change – by providing people with a voice in a relatively accessible way, and planting the seeds for others to engage with those ideas. Radio is a tool of mass communication, and the power it has simply by allowing people to hear other people shapes social movements in important ways. We will explore more of this idea with specific case studies in the coming weeks.

If you think about it, the fact you can hear my voice right now is pretty impressive – I'm not in the same room as you, in fact I'm not even saying this words in real time. And don't forget that my voice isn't just coming out of thin air. You are accessing this somehow, whether it is over the air waves or on your computer. So, in its simplest form, I'm just talking and you're just listening. I think we often take for granted how many working parts are involved in such a seemingly simple process. It is this complex process that I want to engage with over the next couple episodes. More specifically, I want to understand this intersection between aurality and the radio. I believe the best way to do this is through creative thinking. This is a concept that comes to me from author Patrick Finn. In his book *Critical Condition: Replacing Critical Thinking with Creativity*, Finn challenges scholars, particularly in the university setting, to replace the increasingly judgmental form of critical thinking with a more creative approach that embraces new methods and forms to scholarship. This form of creative thinking does not

disengage from "reasoned examination", but rather seeks to challenge the type of critical

thinking that allows us to think we are "separate and objective" from the work we create.[7]

This podcast aims to substitute critical thinking for creative in both subject matter and

form. There has been plenty of great work done on studying these events using traditional

historical methods – the types of critical works that Finn is talking about. So how can we bring

history into this? What can we do hear, on a podcast, that other mediums cannot achieve in the

process of studying history? I want to suggest that the main thing is that it allows us to think of

sound culture. It makes perfect sense for historians to study, let's say, the history light fixtures –

different types of gases and purposes, etc. There is a physicality to this that makes sense to us,

we can see changes over time. But we often don't treat sound the same way. What if we thought

about how things *sounded* in the past. Or how sounds influenced the past. It opens up an entirely

new avenue of historical exploration. We could write about sound, but what if we talked about it

– in the process I think we'd learn a lot about how sound works in the present and in the past and

gain a deeper empathy for those in the apst. This is exactly what authors Alenjandra Bronfman

and Andrew Grant Wood ask us to do in their edited collection, *Media, Sound & Culture in Latin*

America and the Carribean. They seek to explore what they called aural history – not oral with

an o, but with an a-u – which in turn will allow three things. Appreciating the relationship of

sound to authorship, consider the act of listening as a practice that is both bodily and

disembodied, and assessing relationship between media, technology, and power.[8] These are all

historical tools that transcend both time and place, and are valuable resources for historians. This

is the theoretical framework I want to suggest we work with when we look at the case study of

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[7] Finn, xii-xiii.
[8] Bronfman and Wood, xiii.

Bolivia next episode. What I'm suggesting instead is that rather than a critical assessment of radio and social movements in Latin America, I want to use specific case studies to demonstrate shared connections. To connect Latin America in the past, with Niagara in the present. To engage our community and communities that are geographically separated, to understand the continuity of history and the importance of community engagement.

Doing this in podcast forms seems particularly appropriate – what better way to create knowledge about radio use in history than on the radio itself? I want to be as transparent as I can in this process. As part of this, I want to acknowledge those who I am working with and incredibly grateful for. Deborah Cartmer at CFBU, for her patience in teaching me how to use this technology and accommodating me using this space. To Seedling for Change in Society and Environment, for providing me with the inspiration to explore Latin America and for encouraging me to think about the ways in which Latin America is all around me. To all the people, whether they are community members or academics, whose valuable research provides me with the building blocks to form my own ideas. Grateful for all. Next week, we'll be exploring the use of radio by Bolivian tin miners. Thank you.

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