

# SOUND CITIZENS

## THE PUBLIC VOICES OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN BROADCASTERS, 1923-1956

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own original work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

Catherine Fisher

Date

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# ABSTRACT

In 1954 Dame Enid Lyons argued that radio had ‘created a bigger revolution in the life of a woman than anything that has happened any time’ as it brought the public sphere into the home and women into the public sphere. Taking this claim as its starting point, this thesis examines how a cohort of professional women broadcasters, activists, and politicians used radio to contribute to the public sphere and improve women’s status in Australia between 1923 and 1956. There is a small, but growing, body of scholarship on the history of women’s broadcasting in Australia, however the medium’s role as a key part of the broader history of women’s citizenship and advancement has been given little attention. This thesis contributes to Australian women’s and feminist history, the international historiography on women’s broadcasting, and Australian radio history by revealing a much broader and more complex history of women’s contributions to Australian broadcasting than has been previously acknowledged. Using a rich archive of radio magazines, station archives, scripts, personal papers, and surviving recordings, this thesis traces how women broadcasters used radio as a tool for their advocacy; radio’s significance to the history of women’s advancement; and how broadcasting was used in the development of women’s citizenship in Australia. It argues that women broadcasters saw radio as a medium that had the potential to transform women’s lives and status in society, and that they worked to both claim their own voices in the public sphere and to encourage other women to become active citizens. Radio provided a platform for women to contribute to public discourse and normalised the presence of women’s voices in the public sphere, both literally and figuratively.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC – Australian Broadcasting Commission

AFWV- Australian Federation of Women Voters

AIIA – Australian Institute of International Affairs

ALP – Australian Labor Party

AWNL – Australian Women’s National League

AWW – Australian Women’s Weekly

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BCL – British Commonwealth League

CL – Coolbaroo League

CPA – Communist Party of Australia

CWA – Country Women’s Association

HA – Housewives Association

ILO – International Labour Organisation

IPC – International Peace Campaign

IPR – Institute of Pacific Relations

JCB – Joint Coal Board

LWV – League of Women Voters

MP – Member of Parliament

NAA – National Archives of Australia

NBC – National Broadcasting Company

NCW – National Council of Women

NLA – National Library of Australia

POW – Prisoner of War

PPWA – Pan-Pacific Women’s Association

RHA – Racial Hygiene Association

UA – United Associations/United Association of Women

UAP – United Australia Party

WAAAF – Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force

WCTU – Women’s Christian Temperance Union

WILPF – Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom

WIZO – Women’s International Zionist Organisation

WRANS - Women’s Royal Australian Navy Service

WSG – Women’s Service Guilds



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# INTRODUCTION

In a 1954 interview with radio magazine the *ABC Weekly*, Dame Enid Lyons, then a former politician and member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), stated that she had noticed a marked change in women's confidence in their abilities and men's acceptance of them as equals over her lifetime. She attributed this shift to the influence of radio, which had 'created a bigger revolution in the life of a woman than anything that has happened any time' as it enabled women to engage with world affairs while doing the housework. This, according to Lyons, had given women the 'confidence' to accept 'responsibility in public affairs.'<sup>1</sup> Taking this claim as my starting point, in this thesis I examine how a cohort of women used broadcasting to contribute to the public sphere and improve women's status in Australia from the introduction of radio in 1923 until the introduction of television in 1956. I trace the changing role of radio as a tool for women's activism, and its wider significance to the history of women's advancement in Australia.

Australian women broadcasters were active citizens who contributed to public debates on a range of issues, worked to educate and empower their listeners, and normalised the presence of women's voices in the public sphere, both literally and figuratively. While women broadcasters were often given roles, timeslots, and programs that continued to perpetuate women's lowered status in the workplace and public life, many recognised the potential of the medium and used it to advance women's status by strengthening their claims to a public voice. Women's equality requires real cultural change, which includes the opportunity for women to be heard and have a chance to influence society. From the 1920s radio provided a platform for Australian women to speak and be heard in public on a scale not before experienced. Furthermore, radio bridged the public and private spheres as it was

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dame Enid Lyons: ABC Commissioner', *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1954, 20.

a public medium heard primarily within a domestic setting, and women made up the majority of listeners, especially during the day. The ability to reach a large, diffuse audience of female listeners made the medium especially suited to advancing women's position by providing them with a tool to integrate themselves into the public sphere. This thesis focuses on professional women broadcasters who used the medium to improve the status of women, as well as leading women activists and politicians who used broadcasting as a platform for their advocacy. These women used their skills and the tools at their disposal to contribute to public discourse and break down barriers to women's participation in the public sphere.

### **Australian Radio: A Brief Overview**

The first official radio broadcast in Australia occurred on 13 November 1923 under the sealed set system, which restricted listeners to only one pre-set station. After a substantial amount of pressure from radio dealers, enthusiasts, and the general public, coupled with the low take-up of sealed set licenses, the Australian Government abandoned this policy in 1924 and it was replaced by the dual system of A-Class and B-Class stations. A-Class stations received their revenue from listeners' licence fees, although in the earliest years they were allowed small amounts of advertising to improve their ability to produce quality content. B-Class stations were financed privately, which by the 1930s was largely through advertising.<sup>2</sup>

As Lesley Johnson has argued, radio played a significant role in twentieth-century life and culture in Australia due to its size, and as such Australian radio 'must therefore stand as a major example in the study of the medium.'<sup>3</sup> Radio's impact on country areas was promoted as revolutionary, as it provided up-to-date information about the prices of agricultural products, the latest news and current affairs, as well as an array of entertainment options.

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<sup>2</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 6–15; John Potts, *Radio in Australia* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1989), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988).

Radio was a life-changing technology for regional Australia, and as I will show in Chapter Seven this was especially so for women in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

In 1932, the Australian Government set up the ABC which took over and nationalised the A-Class licences, ostensibly to redress the dearth of quality programming in the smaller states. Radio was largely a middlebrow cultural form which featured programming that fell between high and popular culture, and often aimed to cultivate the general population.<sup>5</sup> However, what constituted the right balance between education and entertainment became a locus of disagreement between A- and B-Class stations and their audiences. The ABC aimed to broadcast programs which ‘educated, enlightened and entertained,’ and they projected their claim to cultural authority through the use of announcers with cultured voices.<sup>6</sup> But many listeners appreciated the light-hearted approach of the B-Class stations over the ABC, and the number of commercial stations steadily increased over the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> Australia’s dual system of commercial and public broadcasting also meant that radio developed differently than in Great Britain, which only had public broadcasting until the mid-1950s, and the United States, which had a commercial network system.<sup>8</sup> Australian listeners could easily switch between the authoritative style of the ABC and the intimate style of commercial stations, which placed the divergent styles of commercial and public broadcasting in close proximity.

The unique conditions of World War II stimulated Australian commercial radio throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1939, the Australian Government banned the importation of non-essential goods from non-sterling countries. This meant that copies of American programs, which were largely dramas and comedies, were no longer available. The

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<sup>4</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Johnston, ‘Becoming “Pacific-Minded”’: Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts’, *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017), 91.

<sup>6</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the radio industries of the United States and Great Britain see: Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

Australian radio industry had to develop its own programs and production infrastructure to make-up the shortfall, which led to significant growth in the industry during the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, newsprint rationing meant that advertisers flocked to commercial radio at a time when audiences also came to rely more heavily on radio for news and entertainment, particularly in regional areas. The production of locally made dramas, including a large number of daytime soap operas, continued to grow in the postwar years, and many of these programs were exported internationally.<sup>10</sup> However the introduction of television in 1956 changed many types of radio programming, as soap operas, quiz shows and even women's sessions moved onto the new medium, and music increasingly became the dominant form of radio programming.<sup>11</sup> Some talk radio remained, and the legalisation of talkback radio in 1967 provided a boost to the genre, however these programs were presented by provocative, and usually male, hosts.<sup>12</sup> By the 1970s, the role of radio as a central space for women to perform citizenship had receded, replaced by the very public and transformative activism of the women's liberation movement. Nevertheless, its importance to earlier generations of women was significant, and deserves historical attention as a key part in the fight for women's equality in Australia.

### **The Australian Woman Citizen**

This thesis contributes to the substantial work on the history of feminism and women's citizenship in Australia, especially the work of Marilyn Lake, Susan Magarey, Judith Smart, Marian Quartly and Ellen Warne.<sup>13</sup> As Eva Cox has observed, at the time of federation,

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<sup>9</sup> David Goodman and Susan Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World: Re-Writing and Re-Voicing American Radio for an International Market', in *Radio's New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era*, ed. Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes (New York & London: Routledge, 2013), 163–179.

<sup>10</sup> Potts, *Radio in Australia*, 70–73; Goodman and Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World'.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788* (Melbourne: Longman, 1995), 212.

<sup>12</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 383–86.

<sup>13</sup> See: Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999); Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001); Marian Quartly, 'Defending "The

citizenship had a broad definition that encompassed social contributions to the wellbeing of the community. Women's ability to have an equal stake in Australian society was at the heart of the movement for women's suffrage in the late nineteenth century. They were taking equal part in the religious and moral development of the people, and doing more than half of the education, charity, and philanthropic work of society, and as a result suffragists pointed to their already extant roles as social citizens as the basis for their enfranchisement.<sup>14</sup> Through campaigning for the vote, divorce law reform, the right to education, and economic independence, first-wave feminists sought to claim their equality with men as citizens.<sup>15</sup> Suffrage-era feminists believed that women's enfranchisement and equality would bring much-needed new perspectives into civic decision-making which would result in the betterment of society.<sup>16</sup> But non-white women were left out of this vision of female citizenship. For example, as Patricia Grimshaw has observed, white activists completely ignored non-white women during the campaign for women's suffrage in South Australia in the 1880s and 1890s. Although the South Australian Constitution (Female Suffrage) Act did enfranchise Aboriginal women (unlike those in Queensland and Western Australia), it would take several decades before white feminists would recognise and begin to address the unique and substantial oppressions experienced by Aboriginal women.<sup>17</sup>

As Magarey has argued, the opportunities for women to be integrated into the equal citizenship of the independent worker were curtailed by the 1910s, replaced by a new

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Purity of Home Life" Against Socialism: The Founding Years of the Australian Women's National League', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 2 (2004), 178-193; Judith Smart, 'A Mission to the Home: The Housewives Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920-1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 13, no. 28 (1998), 215-234; Ellen Warne, *Agitate, Educate, Organise, Legislate: Protestant Women's Social Action in Post-suffrage Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Eva Cox, 'Feminism and Citizenship', in *Rethinking Australian Citizenship*, ed. Wayne Hudson and John Kane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56-65.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 176; Lake, *Getting Equal*, 19-45; Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, 172.

<sup>16</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, 'Reading the Silences: Suffrage Activists and Race in Nineteenth Century Settler Societies', in *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (Melbourne: University of Melbourne and the Australian Network for Research in Women's History, 1999), 30-42.

conceptualisation of citizenship based on women's status as the mothers of the white race who could secure Australia's future as an Anglo-Celtic nation.<sup>18</sup> Thus, maternal citizenship excluded and further oppressed Aboriginal women and non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants.<sup>19</sup> Although maternal citizenship 'was for suffrage-era feminists a constricted and limited version of the citizenship for which they had struggled,' in the post-suffrage era many feminists saw maternal citizenship as the means to free women from the violation of their bodies and their subjugation to men.<sup>20</sup> By emphasising their value as mothers, rather than wives, they lobbied the state to pay them a motherhood endowment to reward them for their work and protect them against destitution.<sup>21</sup> They argued that their work as mothers was equal to men's paid work, and they should enjoy the same financial security and independence that was available to working men. Although they were unsuccessful in winning a motherhood endowment, Lake has argued that:

Post-suffrage feminists' major political achievement was to create a maternalist welfare state—with an array of infant and maternal welfare centres, women's hospitals, children's courts, maternity benefits and eventually child endowment.<sup>22</sup>

Traditional women's organisations such as the Housewives Associations (HA), the Country Women's Association (CWA), and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), enacted the ideal of maternal citizenship in a collective capacity. The Australian Women's National League (AWNL), for instance, believed that women's 'civic duty was the defence

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<sup>18</sup> Magarey, *Passions of the First-Wave Feminists*, 173.

<sup>19</sup> Joan Eveline, 'Feminism, Racism and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Australia', in *Women As Australian Citizens: Underlying Histories*, ed. Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 147.

<sup>20</sup> Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, 173.

<sup>21</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The Revolution in the Family: The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia', in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), 379.

<sup>22</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 12.



of the home and the private sphere, and autonomy could only be won within these limits.<sup>23</sup> Smart has observed that these organisations sought to bring the principles of Christian homemaking into the community, and as such they saw no contradiction in entering the public sphere to promote the home.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Warne has argued that Protestant women's organisations such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the WCTU and the Mothers' Union, 'considered themselves social mothers of the community' and lobbied to reform what they saw as the social problems of modernity to create a better world.<sup>25</sup> Maternal citizenship provided the impetus for the activism of these large organisations, and was characteristic of women's sense of their unique responsibility in the post-suffrage era.

Difference was a key feature of white feminists' conceptualisation of citizenship in the interwar years. If equality meant that women were the same as men, they reasoned, then they would need to articulate their demands in the same way as them. Yet understanding women's claims to citizenship as gendered acknowledged their difference to men, which in turn enabled women's voices to be heard in a limited way as they were not perceived as a threat to male superiority but as representatives of women's niche interests.<sup>26</sup> The centrality of difference to feminists' conceptions of the woman citizen resulted in women being viewed as representatives of their sex, rather than as fully-fledged citizens.<sup>27</sup>

Although the interwar years saw the dominance of maternal citizenship as an ideology, it did not go unchallenged. As Lake has argued, in the 1930s the 'feminist platform began to be reformulated to accommodate the new emphasis on women's right to work, the sameness of women and men as human beings, as workers and as citizens.'<sup>28</sup> Much of this

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<sup>23</sup> Marian Quartly, 'Defending "The Purity of Home Life"', 179.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Smart, "'For the Good That We Can Do': Cecilia Downing and Feminist Christian Citizenship', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994), 41.

<sup>25</sup> Warne, *Agitate, Educate, Organise, Legislate*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth van Acker, *Different Voices: Gender and Politics in Australia* (Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia Pty Ltd, 1999), 194–95.

<sup>27</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Personality, Individuality, Nationality: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship 1902-1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994), 30.

<sup>28</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 173.

rhetoric was a continuation of the vision of first-wave feminists to integrate women into equal and independent citizenship. Zora Simic has pointed out that World War II was the first serious test for Australian feminists, who sought to capitalise on women's contributions to the war effort by pushing for permanent rights in the new postwar society. But as the politics of the Cold War set in, the feminist movement became increasingly divided and its potency as a mass movement lessened as many adherents focused on their own interests.<sup>29</sup>

Formal equality in public life became a key focus of feminist activism in the 1950s. Campaigns for women's right to work and receive equal pay, women's right to sit on juries and women's representation in parliament were all fought in the period before the advent of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>30</sup> This change over time has not been adequately explained; rather, there is a sense of inevitability about the shift in focus from maternalism to equality from the 1930s onwards. Simic has observed that between 1919 and 1969 feminists utilised a dual rhetoric which emphasised both women's equality as citizens and 'the special contributions of mothers.'<sup>31</sup> They wanted to legitimise their movement by demonstrating that it could be incorporated 'into the political, social and cultural fabric of society.'<sup>32</sup> Radio was an important part of the political, social and cultural fabric of society in this period. Women's use of it to spread their messages and to speak directly to a large audience of other women was key to the legitimisation of feminism as a political movement as well as the legitimisation of women's voices in the public sphere more generally. The women I examine in this thesis believed that broadcasting could effect a deeper cultural change that would encourage and support women's social, economic, and political advancement in Australia, and they worked to help it live up to its promise.

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<sup>29</sup> Zora Simic, 'A Hall of Selective Mirrors: Feminism, History and Identity, 1919-1969' (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2003), 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 206.

<sup>31</sup> Simic, 'A Hall of Selective Mirrors', 1-2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Recent work on the history of women's leadership is fruitful for understanding the position and agency of women broadcasters.<sup>33</sup> Amanda Sinclair has defined leadership as a process of influence aimed at mobilising people towards change. Feminist scholars, Sinclair argues, need to recognise and deconstruct how 'women influenced and changed the public agenda and improved the life experiences of the people around and following after them.'<sup>34</sup> By using this conceptualisation of leadership it is possible to uncover how the agency and work of individual women shaped the development of women's citizenship. For example, in her work on women who campaigned to regulate film viewing in the 1920s, Mary Tomsic has argued that these women claimed 'public space for themselves as enfranchised citizens' and publicly presented themselves as having authority on the issue due to their status as mothers.<sup>35</sup> Conceptualising women broadcasters as leaders in this way highlights their agency in claiming their voices as active citizens on the airwaves.

There has been some scholarship on the role of different forms of media in representing and furthering women's citizenship in Australia. As Louise Poland has argued, feminist cultural production has been 'a significant way of creating and sanctioning a feminist cultural space within a male dominated public sphere.'<sup>36</sup> The journals of suffrage-era women's organisations, such as *The Dawn* and *Woman's Sphere*, played an important role in fostering a feminist consciousness among their readers and promoting their cause to society large.<sup>37</sup> These journals also enabled women to represent themselves visually. Marian Quartly has analysed the discursive work of photographs of the members of women's organisations

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<sup>33</sup> See for example: Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein, and Mary Tomsic, eds., *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014); Rosemary Francis, Patricia Grimshaw, and Ann Standish, eds., *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities* (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, The University of Melbourne, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Amanda Sinclair, 'A Feminist Case for Leadership', in *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present*, ed. Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein, and Mary Tomsic (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 18.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Tomsic, 'Entertaining Children: The 1927 Royal Commission on the Motion Picture Industry as a Site of Women's Leadership', in *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present*, ed. Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein, and Mary Tomsic (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 253–267.

<sup>36</sup> Louise Poland, 'Printing Presses and Protest Banners: Feminist Presses in Australia', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 10 (2001), 121.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

printed in journals dedicated to their interests. Through their poses, clothing, and expressions, the women in these photographs presented themselves as ‘modern citizens of a modern nation.’<sup>38</sup> Tomsic’s work on the role of film in the second-wave feminist movement further demonstrates the importance of the media as a tool for promoting women’s equality and enacting an alternative vision of society. As she argues, feminist filmmaking was a ‘historically specific form of cultural activism that claimed the popular medium of film for an explicitly feminist cause.’<sup>39</sup> As I show in this thesis, Australian women broadcasters similarly claimed the medium of radio to articulate and enact their visions of women’s citizenship in the mid-twentieth century.

Australian women won the vote much earlier than their compatriots in other countries, except New Zealand, and were the first to be able to stand for parliamentary election. Despite these early successes there has been a perception that Australian women had done nothing with the vote, based largely on the slow progress of Australian women’s parliamentary representation.<sup>40</sup> However, women’s activists often worked within non-party political organisations to advocate for women’s interests, which they believed could not be adequately served within a party-political structure and, as Lake has pointed out, they were successful in using their new political clout to bring about a maternalist welfare state. Because their vision of political success did not accord with normative ideals of individualistic leadership, however, their achievements have often been neglected or belittled.<sup>41</sup> The advent of radio in 1923 provided Australian women with a new opportunity to further expand their horizons and shape society in the post-suffrage era.

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<sup>38</sup> Marian Quartly, ‘Women Citizens of the New Nation: Reading Some Visual Evidence’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 11 (2002), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Tomsic, “‘We Will Invent Ourselves, the Age of the New Image is at Hand’: Creating, Learning and Talking with Australian Feminist Filmmaking”, *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (2007), 289.

<sup>40</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 12–13.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

## Theorising Citizenship

The concept of citizenship has been subject to much theorisation and contestation over time and across regions. The classical liberal citizen—an individual who was free to participate in government—was a status predominantly embodied by elite, white men, and thus excluded more people than it encompassed.<sup>42</sup> More recent developments in citizenship theory have put forward contested understandings of citizenship as an exclusive status which perpetuates inequalities. In the 1950s British sociologist T. H. Marshall defined citizenship as a process through which citizens gained civic, political, and social rights, and as a status which denoted equal membership of the community.<sup>43</sup> Other theorists have pointed out that potential citizens embody a range of identities, which complicates any notion of citizenship as a neutral process and of all citizens as equal beings. These critiques have resulted in recognition of the alternative ways in which marginalised groups have understood and performed citizenship to challenge their exclusion from the hegemonic nation state on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender.<sup>44</sup>

In this thesis I am adopting a pointedly feminist approach to citizenship, which emphasises that the universal ideal of the citizen is inadequate, as the citizen is modelled in the image of the middle-class white male. Feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young has argued that the concept of universal citizenship seeks to ensure that everyone prioritises acting for the greater good of society over their own specific viewpoints and interests. She highlights, however, how this ideal ignores that there are a myriad of social groups with significant inequalities between them. The supposedly universal norm reinforces white, middle-class, and male experiences and interests, which in turn excludes and oppresses other

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<sup>42</sup> John Hoffman and Paul Graham, *Introduction to Political Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 120.

<sup>43</sup> T. H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (New York: Anchor, 1965).

<sup>44</sup> See for example: Wayne Hudson and John Kane, eds., *Rethinking Australian Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Gerard Delanty, *Citizenship in a Global Age: Culture, Politics and Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000); Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner, 'Citizenship Studies: An Introduction', in *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage, 2002), 1–10.

groups.<sup>45</sup> Notably, Young emphasises the centrality of the ‘right to speak and be heard in public’ to the social and economic privileges of citizenship.<sup>46</sup> This presents an interesting implication for radio, which is a medium based on concentrated speaking and listening. Women’s participation in spoken-word broadcasts was therefore a direct challenge to the exclusivity of the masculine universal citizen, as women asserted their own right to speak and be heard, and thus also be included in citizenship.

Citizenship is not only about equal political, economic and social rights, but is also based on the acceptance of responsibility and participation in the public sphere. The women in this thesis undertook citizenship responsibilities by performing a range of charitable and social justice work, by engaging in debates on major national issues, and by using their platform to educate and encourage other women to do the same. They exhibited what Diemut Bubeck has described as a ‘thick conception of citizenship,’ which emphasises the complex and multifaceted potential of citizenship activities.<sup>47</sup> That is, citizenship encompasses not only rights, but responsibilities and identities. It is not only enacted in the public political sphere, but also in social and individual life. A ‘thick’ approach therefore focuses on ‘the interrelations between the political, social and individual life in a political community and their import for citizenship.’<sup>48</sup> It is useful to adopt Ruth Lister’s distinction between being a citizen and acting as a citizen here. To be a citizen, she argues, ‘means the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship necessary for agency and social participation,’ while to act as a citizen ‘involves fulfilling the potential of that status.’<sup>49</sup> Through their broadcasting, the women in this thesis fulfilled the potential of their citizenship status by contributing to

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<sup>45</sup> Iris Marion Young, ‘Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship’, *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989), 250–74.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>47</sup> Diemut Bubeck, *A Feminist Approach to Citizenship* (Florence: European University Institute, 1995), 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Lister, ‘Feminist Citizenship Theory: An Alternative Perspective on Understanding Women’s Social and Political Lives’, in *Women and Social Capital*, ed. Jane Franklin (London: London South Bank University, 2005), 20.

public discourse, integrating other women into the public sphere, and validating the sound of women's voices in public space.

The ability to act as a citizen requires a sense of agency—the confidence to participate in social and political life and to claim one's voice in the public sphere. As Lister has observed, to 'speak in one's own voice and put forward one's own views in the polity' is an important aspect of this participation.<sup>50</sup> Susan James has argued that the ability to 'speak in one's own voice is central to democratic liberalism' and 'almost a defining characteristic of being an individual.'<sup>51</sup> To be able to do this, one must possess both 'a stable sense of one's own separate identity and a confidence that one is worthy to participate in public life.'<sup>52</sup> Airing the voices of female broadcasters normalised the sound of the woman citizen, thereby demonstrating that women could speak in the polity as individuals.

To be able to speak freely in the polity, one must be free from coercive threats to physical safety and financial security—conditions that have often not been present for women.<sup>53</sup> Women's ability to fully participate as equal citizens has also been curtailed by the burden of domestic labour and care work, making barriers to equal participation especially strong for women who experience intersecting oppressions, such as Aboriginal women.<sup>54</sup> Although the women in this thesis vary in their backgrounds, politics and aims, they were mostly white, middle-class women who had the status, connections, education, and domestic support to be able to secure their positions on the air. As such they often focused on issues that may not have been the primary concerns of Aboriginal women, working-class women or migrant women, although broadcasters on commercial radio were better able to reach working-class women than those who spoke on the ABC. Some regional, rural, and remote

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Susan James, 'The Good-Enough Citizen: Citizenship and Independence', in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, ed. Gisela Bock and Susan James (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 50, 59.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>54</sup> Bubeck, *A Feminist Approach to Citizenship*, 14.

women were represented on the air, and indeed one of the benefits of radio was its ability to reach audiences in rural and remote communities.

Before moving on, it is worthwhile to briefly interrogate the term ‘voice,’ which is often used as a convenient shorthand for voting, protesting, writing or other non-spoken types of political expression. Feminists have also tended to use the word ‘voice’ to refer to efforts to articulate their own knowledge and experience, particularly through writing. As Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones observe:

Feminists have used the word ‘voice’ to refer to a wide range of aspirations: cultural agency, political enfranchisement, sexual autonomy, and expressive freedom, all of which have been historically denied to women. In this context, ‘voice’ has become a metaphor for textual authority, and alludes to the efforts of women to reclaim their own experience through writing or to the specific qualities of their literary and cultural self-expression. This metaphor has become so pervasive, so intrinsic to feminist discourse that it makes us too easily forget (or repress) the concrete physical dimensions of the female voice upon which this metaphor was based.<sup>55</sup>

By conflating the term ‘voice’ with textual authority, the sonic aspects of the female voice have been neglected, and its political importance has been undervalued.<sup>56</sup> Women on the radio were claiming their political voice through the use of their sonic voice, and the importance of hearing the sound of women’s voices—of making women audible—should not be underestimated. This is a key difference between radio and print media—radio

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<sup>55</sup> Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, eds., *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*



enabled women to not only add their ideas and opinions to public debate, but their audible voices.

## **Radio, Modernity and Public Spheres**

The concept of modernity is important to understanding the significance of the introduction of radio. Defining modernity is difficult as it can exhibit a range of potential timeframes and features. As Jill Matthews has observed, it was ‘variously ruled by science and instrumental reason; by the centralised technocratic, bureaucratic State; or by chaos and paradox.’<sup>57</sup> Positioning radio at the centre of my analysis, I take Kate Lacey’s definition of the modernity as ‘those economic, social, political and cultural forms that characterise fully industrialised society’ in the twentieth century. She argues that radio, as a dominant type of mass communication from the 1920s until the 1950s, was a key facet of modernity.<sup>58</sup> Foregrounding radio as a key feature of modernity challenges Liz Conor’s argument that modernity centred on the visual, which was privileged above the other senses, and that it was through spectatorship that women ‘gained modern subjectivity’ in the 1920s.<sup>59</sup> As Steven Connor has argued, the auditory in fact played a crucial role in the construction of modern subjectivity as it provided a way to interact with a shifting world through sound technologies.<sup>60</sup> Radio was therefore the ‘quintessence of modernity,’ a scientific wonder which exemplified the social, cultural, technological, and communicative shifts of the age.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jill Julius Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace: Sydney’s Romance with Modernity* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>58</sup> Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 3–5.

<sup>59</sup> Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 6, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Steven Connor, ‘The Modern Auditory I’, in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. R. Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 203–23. See also Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, ‘Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio’, in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ed. Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 123.

Historians have also begun to examine sonic sources using a variety of other categories of analysis, and the increasing digitisation of sound recordings provides exciting new opportunities for historians to engage with sound.<sup>62</sup> However, as explained later in this Introduction, historic sonic sources remain difficult to access and analyse, resulting in a reliance on textual evidence to recover the sonic meanings of the past. Some recent work based on documentary evidence of the varied sonic experiences of the past includes Jonathan Sterne's work on the history of sound technologies, Peter Bailey's exploration of the importance of noise in shaping past societies, and several edited collections on sound and Australian history.<sup>63</sup>

There has been significant work on the history of broadcasting across the world, including in Australia, where Bridget Griffen-Foley has produced a substantial work on the history of commercial radio, and K. S. Inglis has done likewise for the ABC.<sup>64</sup> Histories of radio audiences and the construction of the listening subject have also been published in recent years, most notably the work of Lesley Johnson for Australia and Susan Douglas for the United States.<sup>65</sup> Some histories of radio have recognised the importance of radio magazines in educating listeners, particularly Johnson's work on interwar Australian radio, and Lacey's work on women's radio in Weimar and Nazi Germany.<sup>66</sup> Although limited source material makes researching the responses of radio audiences difficult, there has been

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<sup>62</sup> Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 77–97; Jacob Smith, *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 50–77; Martin Thomas, 'The Rush to Record: Transmitting the Sound of Aboriginal Culture', *Journal of Australian Studies* 90 (2007), 105–21.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003); Mark M. Smith, 'Making Sense of Social History', *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003); Peter Bailey, 'Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Historian Listens to Noise', *Body & Society* 2, no. 2 (1996), 49–66; Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon, eds., *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2007); Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton, eds., *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*; K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 78; Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 11.

some fruitful work done on this topic in recent years. For example, Elena Razlogova has shown the significant role that listeners played in shaping interwar American radio programming, while Anne F. MacLennan has examined the ways in which Canadian audiences shaped their own ways of listening to the radio in the 1930s.<sup>67</sup> Rebecca P. Scales has examined the intense debates that accompanied the rapid spread of broadcasting in France following the First World War. She has argued that France began to understand itself as a ‘radio nation’ where radio listening became an important, if contested, citizenship practice.<sup>68</sup> Several historians have examined the role of radio in the construction of American culture and notions of citizenship in the interwar years, including Douglas Craig and David Goodman.<sup>69</sup> However, such a study of Australian radio has yet to be undertaken.

The gendered development of radio has also received considerable attention both in terms of women as the major audience and target of advertisements, as well as the place of women as announcers and actors.<sup>70</sup> Many historians have argued that women were relegated to traditionally feminine roles on the air, including as presenters of women’s and children’s sessions, as soap opera actors, and as singers.<sup>71</sup> Several historians, including Damousi and

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<sup>67</sup> Elena Razlogova, *The Listener’s Voice: Early Radio and the American Public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 55–72; Anne F. MacLennan, ‘Learning to Listen: Developing the Canadian Radio Audience in the 1930s’, *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 20, no. 2 (2013), 311–326.

<sup>68</sup> Rebecca P. Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 15–20.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); David Goodman, *Radio’s Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jason Loviglio, *Radio’s Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> For discussions of women as radio audiences see: Razlogova, *The Listener’s Voice*; Donna Halper, ‘Speaking for Themselves: How Radio Brought Women into the Public Sphere’, in *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, ed. Michael C. Keith (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 77–93; Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London, New York: Continuum, 2012). For discussions of women as announcers and actors see: Donna Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Christine Ehrick, ‘“Savage Dissonance”: Gender, Voice, and Women’s Radio Speech in Argentina, 1930–1945’, in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 198–205.

<sup>71</sup> Griffen-Foley, ‘Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio’, 124–5; Ehrick, ‘“Savage Dissonance”’; Halper, *Invisible Stars*, 44; Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women’s Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 18.

Inglis, have identified instances of women's radio voices being criticised.<sup>72</sup> However, as I demonstrate in this thesis, the focus on these criticisms has obscured the ways in which women broadcasters themselves claimed their voices on the air and built careers as broadcasters.

American broadcasting historian Michele Hilmes has questioned these interpretations of women's roles on radio, and she has argued that women played a much greater role in the development of the American radio industry than has been recognised. She has argued that the women's sessions themselves were not solely vehicles for reinforcing a domestic ideal of womanhood, but in fact contained serious discussions about social and political issues and provided spaces within which women's dissatisfactions with domestic life could be aired.<sup>73</sup> Hilmes used the concept of the counterpublic sphere to describe American women's radio programming, showing that this concept is useful for understanding the place of radio as a medium which bridged the private and the public. Jürgen Habermas argued that the public sphere was created by private individuals as a space for rational discussion and debate.<sup>74</sup> The public sphere is therefore a space created and sustained through communication—it became the 'designated theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk.'<sup>75</sup> However, as Nancy Fraser has pointed out, this sphere is exclusionary; despite an assumption that all subjects can function *as if* they were equal, or somehow put aside their oppressions, this is not possible in practice. Thus, for Fraser, the hegemonic public sphere is a bourgeois, masculine, and white ideal which masquerades as a space for all.

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<sup>72</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 199; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251.

<sup>73</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 131–32.

<sup>74</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>75</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), 70.

This does not mean that other groups have not constructed alternative public spheres. Fraser has posited the existence of a plurality of publics, or ‘counterpublics,’ which can allow subordinated groups to create and disseminate alternative discourses ‘to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.’<sup>76</sup> Several scholars have highlighted the existence of feminine counterpublics in modern media sources, including Miyako Inoue on Meiji and Taishō era Japanese women’s magazines, and Hilmes on daytime radio programming for American women.<sup>77</sup> Hilmes’ use of the counterpublic sphere is useful in explaining the significance of daytime programming as a space for women to discuss issues of importance to them and provide support to one another. However, the concept does not fully explain the broader significance of their broadcasts as contributions to public discourse nor their place in the broader story of women’s advancement. As I argue in this thesis, women broadcasters also used their position to claim their own space within the hegemonic public sphere, and to encourage their female listeners to do the same. Radio therefore provided not only a space for women to discuss their opinions amongst themselves, but a platform for them to reshape the gendered hierarchies of society.

Although much of the work on the history of women’s radio is very recent, debates over the impact of radio on women’s political and social advancement have been around for several decades. In 1974 cultural historian Walter J. Ong suggested that voice amplification technologies, such as the microphone, were a catalyst for women’s entry into the public sphere as they remedied their supposedly natural vocal deficiencies and allowed them to be trained as effective public speakers.<sup>78</sup> Anne McKay challenged Ong’s argument through reference to oft-quoted arguments about the incompatibility of women’s voices with the microphone and the barriers faced by many female announcers in radio’s formative years, which demonstrate that radio did not result in women’s speech becoming authoritative.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 56-80.

<sup>77</sup> Inoue, *Vicarious Language*, 110–1; Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 159–60.

<sup>78</sup> Walter J. Ong, ‘Agonistic Structures in Academia: Past to Present’, *Daedalus* 103, no. 4 (1974), 233–34.

McKay rightly points out that Ong's argument also assumes that only men have the capacity to speak publicly without technological help, a position which reinforces and naturalises male hegemony in the public sphere.<sup>79</sup> However, McKay's work denies that radio had a significant impact on women's participation in the public sphere, as she argues that women's right to use radio was challenged if they used it in ways that could change gender roles in society.<sup>80</sup> In this thesis I demonstrate that Australian women broadcasters did use the medium to effect change to the gendered order and that focusing on their work, rather than on the criticisms of others, reveals a far more complex and important story.

Several historians of radio in the United States, Western Europe and South America have pointed out that radio marked the emergence of a new type of public sphere which brought women into civic culture in new ways and changed how women's voices were heard. Donna Halper has argued that radio's importance in the United States lies not in its focus on a female audience, as the print media had already been doing this for decades, but rather in how it raised the profile of women broadcasters, who became well-known public figures.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, radio provided a public space in which various women could discuss their work and ideas, including controversial topics, with a wide audience.<sup>82</sup> In her study of women and radio in Weimar and Nazi Germany, Lacey has argued that the advent of broadcasting bridged the public and the private and in doing so brought women into a new public sphere, albeit one in which women were often confined to performing traditional forms of femininity, particularly in the Nazi era.<sup>83</sup> In her research on women's voices on Argentine and Uruguayan golden age radio Christine Ehrick focused on case studies of a small number

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<sup>79</sup> Anne McKay, 'Speaking Up: Voice Amplification and Women's Struggle for Public Expression', in *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping in Touch*, ed. Cheri Kramarae (New York & London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–88.

<sup>81</sup> Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves', 86–7.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 89–90.

<sup>83</sup> Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies, 1923-1945*.

of women who used different types of radio speech and the ways in which they challenged the gendered hierarchies of the public sphere through their broadcasts.<sup>84</sup>

British scholars have begun to uncover the crucial roles that women played on British radio. According to Kristin Skoog, during the postwar era British women were expected to participate in public discourse and did so through broadcasting.<sup>85</sup> Maggie Andrews has argued that the concerns of the female listener, as the radio stations imagined her, influenced the development of interwar broadcasting. The medium crossed the boundaries between the public and private, and the feminine realm thus effectively ‘domesticated the airwaves.’<sup>86</sup> Kate Murphy has produced a comprehensive history of early women at the BBC in both behind-the-scenes roles and in front of the microphone. The BBC was ‘unusually enlightened’ as an organisation that allowed women to rise into senior roles, and in some cases continue working after marriage if they were outstanding performers. Senior female producers, and the speakers they recruited, could also use their talks to engage in public debate. As Murphy argues, by researching the interests and agendas of the producers and speakers, as well as the working culture of the BBC, the choice of topics, presenters, and speech styles can be better understood.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, much of the work on women’s radio has largely examined the role of women’s programming in creating an alternative public sphere for women over the airwaves, the criticisms of women’s radio voices, and the extent to which women in radio were able to forge successful careers and produce progressive programs. Less attention has been paid to the medium’s place as a key aspect of the struggle for women’s rights in the twentieth century,

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<sup>84</sup> Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>85</sup> Kristin Skoog, ‘Striving for Editorial Autonomy: BBC’s Woman’s Hour’, in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 99–112.

<sup>86</sup> Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves*, iix-x, 4-7.

<sup>87</sup> Kate Murphy, ‘From Women’s Hour to Other Women’s Lives: BBC Talks for Women and the Women Who Made Them, 1923-39’, in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 31–45; Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

although there have been some brief considerations of this topic. Ehrick, for example, has argued that criticisms of women's radio voices in the United States were a backlash against their federal enfranchisement in 1920. As such, arguments about the unsuitability of their vocal range sought to legitimise an argument for women's natural deficiencies in public speaking and political engagement, thereby reinforcing male hegemony in the public sphere. In Argentina, where women did not win the vote until 1947—over two decades after the introduction of radio—less emphasis was placed on the sonic qualities of women's voices and more on their excessively emotional and irrational ways of speaking.<sup>88</sup> Richard Butsch has also argued that, in the period immediately following women's enfranchisement in the United States, there was significant optimism that women's rights could be extended to other areas, including new technologies such as radio. However, he notes that this moment quickly faded due to a political backlash against women voters, and radio developed as a masculine technology and soundscape.<sup>89</sup>

There is also exciting work currently being done on women's radio in Australia, including Kylie Andrews' research on ABC women producers, Jeannine Baker's project on the history of women in Australian broadcasting, and Justine Lloyd's project on mapping the geographies of women's radio.<sup>90</sup> These scholars have begun to reveal the stories of women in the Australian radio industry who actively used the medium to challenge the status quo. For instance, Linda Littlejohn, one of the founders of feminist organisation the United Associations (UA), was also a professional broadcaster—a position that was not incidental

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<sup>88</sup> Ehrick, "Savage Dissonance", 76.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Butsch, 'Crystal Sets and Scarf-pin Radios: Gender, Technology and the Construction of American Radio Listening in the 1920s', *Media, Culture & Society* 20, no. 4 (1998), 559.

<sup>90</sup> See for example: Kylie Andrews, 'Don't Tell them I Can Type: Negotiating Women's Work in Production in the Post-war ABC', *Media International Australia* 161 (2016), 1–10; Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s-1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017), 292-308; Justine Lloyd, *Intimate Geographies: Gender and Media in the Broadcast Age* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming 2018).



to her feminist work, but central to it. Through broadcasting, she reached thousands of women daily, and claimed her place as a leading media personality and public figure.<sup>91</sup>

The UA made use of broadcasting as part of its activist toolkit and trained many of its members to be effective broadcasters. One such member, Irene Greenwood, went on to have a notable radio career in Western Australia. In her analysis of Greenwood's program *Woman to Woman*, broadcast in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Baker has argued that Greenwood drew on her experiences of feminist broadcasting from her time in the UA to promote feminist messages and encourage her audience to actively participate in shaping the program's content.<sup>92</sup> Baker's work demonstrates that Australian feminists made use of commercial radio to disseminate their message in opposition to the 'narrow characterisation of women's interests and activities' supposedly found on most radio women's sessions.<sup>93</sup> This thesis builds on her work to show that the avowed feminists who used radio to fight against patriarchal norms were in fact part of a large and diverse cohort of Australian women broadcasters who were heard not only on commercial radio, but also on the ABC. Rather than seeing feminists such as Greenwood and Littlejohn as a radical few who challenged the supposedly restrictive norm of women's broadcasting, I argue that many Australian women broadcasters used radio to contribute to public discourse, enact social and political change, help their communities, and legitimise themselves as informed and persuasive leaders in their chosen fields. Most importantly, by regularly speaking on the air they legitimised the sound of women's voices in the public sphere as active citizens. This thesis therefore reveals a much broader and more complex history of women's contributions to Australian broadcasting than has been previously acknowledged.

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<sup>91</sup> Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 297-98.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 299-300.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 298-99.

## Source Material and Methodologies

Like many historians of radio before me, my thesis is based largely on textual evidence, particularly radio periodicals, scripts, and institutional and personal correspondence. These sources provide important information about women's programming on Australian radio, as well as listener and management attitudes to women speaking on the air. As the majority of radio programs themselves have not survived, radio periodicals are invaluable to anyone researching the history of Australian radio as they provide comprehensive program guides, news on radio stations, programs, and presenters, as well as letters from listeners. They also demonstrate the close connection between broadcast and print media and, as Johnson has shown, they taught Australians how to 'listen in' to the new medium.<sup>94</sup> The periodicals used in this study include the *Listener In*, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, *ABC Weekly*, *Broadcaster*, and *Broadcasting and Television*. For magazines with complete or near-complete holdings, such as the *Listener In* and *ABC Weekly*, I sampled editions published in January, March, May, July, September, and November from every five years from 1925 until 1955 to gain a comprehensive picture of the programming of the given year and to trace change over time. After identifying key figures, events and programs I then performed additional research in these periodicals throughout the other years. For magazines with patchy holdings, such as *Radio Pictorial*, I researched all available editions. In the issues I sampled, I looked for any content related to women's sessions, talks given by women, and notable female broadcasters. I also read the program guides and recorded the times, stations and titles of identifiable women's sessions and talks given by women. While the early magazines published in the 1920s were largely focused on wireless experimentation, the periodicals published in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s contained sections dedicated to broader women's interests such as fashion, recipes, and homemaking, and most featured advertisements aimed at female

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<sup>94</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 70.

audiences. The feminisation of the content of radio magazines indicates the importance of radio as a medium which had a significant influence on the lives of women.

I have also located a large number of scripts in the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and in a number of personal and organisational papers held in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and London. These sources provide valuable evidence of the topics women spoke about over the air and the phrases and styles they used. Without recordings of their broadcasts, scripts are often as close as we can get to capturing the nature of women's speech on mid-twentieth century radio.

Personal correspondence and pre-recorded oral histories have also been useful sources for recovering the perspectives of women speakers and occasionally listeners. These include the correspondence in the Irene Greenwood archives at Murdoch University, and the papers of Dame Enid Lyons, Bessie Rischbieth, Ruby Rich, and Jessie Street at the National Library of Australia (NLA). These women were chosen as they had left radio scripts in their archives and were also leading public women of their time. The ABC archives held in the NAA also contain internal correspondence and information regarding the production of programs, which provides crucial evidence about what radio executives prioritised and valued in broadcasts and presenters.

As is common in radio histories, there is limited evidence about audience responses to women broadcasters. The available sources comprise letters to radio periodicals and some letters to broadcasters themselves (especially in the Dame Enid Lyons and Irene Greenwood collections). The history of the female audience for radio is also currently being researched by Baker, who has already shown that they were not just 'passive receivers,' but were sometimes actively involved in content creation.<sup>95</sup> Thus, while this study incorporates listener responses as much as possible, due to the source constraints and the work being done by other researchers this is not a core focus of the thesis. There is evidence that men were often

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<sup>95</sup> Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 302.

listening to women's sessions and would occasionally feel compelled to write to female broadcasters. However, while recognising the likely diversity of the real listeners to these programs, the women broadcasters in this thesis largely conceptualised their audience as made up of other women, and as such focused their messages to this imagined group of listeners. As Susan Douglas has observed, the production of broadcasts is not a one-way process as the broadcaster is always in dialogue with the 'imaginary listener.'<sup>96</sup> This thesis explores how Australian women broadcasters used radio to communicate with other women and cultivate a public space that would support the development of women's citizenship.

The nature of my source base, particularly the radio periodicals, means that there is often more evidence for Sydney and Melbourne than other locations, particularly in the earlier years of the study. I have tried to counteract this as much as possible by locating sources from other capital cities, especially Perth, as well as sources from regional areas. I have also dedicated Chapter Seven of the thesis to exploring the ways in which women in areas outside of Sydney and Melbourne used radio to foster local communities, articulate regional identities and bridge the urban/rural divide.

Listening to surviving recordings of programs from the time is also important, as radio was a sonic medium that imbued this period of Australian history with a novel, consistent, and specific sound. I have attempted to locate recordings of women's radio broadcasts; however, as most early radio programs were not recorded, and women's sessions were often not deemed worthy of preservation, my selection has been limited. I have been fortunate that a number of recordings of Lyons' radio broadcasts have survived in the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA). I have also located recordings of Street and (Dame) Dorothy Tangney (both held at the NFSA) as well as some other women's sessions including Newcastle women's session *Heart to Heart* (held at the NFSA) and a small number of ABC women's sessions from across Australia (held at the NAA). Additionally, I have

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<sup>96</sup> Susan Douglas quoted in Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves*, x.

listened to a selection of soap operas from the period of my study held at the NFSA to gain a sense of the sound of women's speech on radio during this time.

## **Chapters**

The chapters in this thesis are organised both chronologically and thematically. The thesis begins by outlining the history of women on radio during the period from 1923 until 1956, before tracing the ways that specific women broadcasters articulated the value of radio and used it as a tool to contribute to politics and society. I cover the use of broadcasting by interwar feminists, women announcers and women's radio clubs during the troubled years of the Great Depression, and then examine the broadcast activism of women horrified at the rise of fascism and the role that women broadcasters played in boosting morale and disseminating propaganda during World War II. Next, the thesis assesses the medium's role in the political careers of early female parliamentarians before examining the decline of women's talk-based programming in the face of increased prosperity, new types of programming and finally the introduction of television. The history of Australian women's broadcasting reveals much about how women expanded their role as citizens within the context of major social, economic, and geopolitical shifts during the turbulent decades of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Chapter One explains why a focus on radio is so fruitful for understanding the development of women's citizenship during this period. It challenges the dominant scholarship on women and radio, which primarily focuses on criticisms of women's speaking voices and the domestic focus of many women's sessions, by demonstrating that it was in fact a space for women to claim their public voice. I argue that the opportunities for women to speak on Australian radio were much greater than previously thought, and that women used radio to publicise their causes, share their experiences, and disseminate their expertise. The criticisms of women's speech on radio formed part of a more nuanced discourse of ideal

speech in Australia, which was influenced by shifting notions of class, race and national identity, and a gendered discourse that positioned women as the guardians of correct speech. Radio provided a space for women to speak, while radio speech provided women with a cultural ideal that gave their broadcasts a measure of authority.

Chapter Two examines how radio became established as a platform for women to contribute to the public sphere in the interwar years. As a new medium, radio was a public space that had yet to develop clear norms and boundaries, and this flexibility provided opportunities for women to claim space on the airwaves. The leaders of radio clubs, women's session comperes, feminists and women's organisations all used the medium to foster communities of women and integrate them into public citizenship. The increasing number of professional women broadcasters expressed their belief that they possessed the authority to contribute to public debate. Furthermore, during the Great Depression women broadcasters used their positions on the air to help the community by providing practical support and empathy to their listeners. Women's sessions became an important public platform from which feminists and other women's activists could contribute to public discourse and perform active social citizenship during the interwar years.

Chapter Three examines women's broadcasts on international political and social issues in the 1930s. During a decade when the Great Depression limited the ability of many to travel, and the increasing calamity of the rise of fascism and the descent into World War II brought foreign affairs to the forefront of public debate, discussion of foreign topics on the air provided both a form of escapism and an important means by which women stayed abreast of international developments. Women broadcasters, including Constance Duncan, Irene Greenwood and Ruby Rich, saw it as their responsibility to use broadcasting to educate other women and contribute to public debate on major world issues. They believed that women needed to become more active on the world stage in order to shape a more peaceful and cooperative global order and used their broadcasts to encourage their female listeners to become active and engaged world citizens. Radio was a medium which bridged vast distances

and thus had the potential to reduce barriers between countries, and as such they saw it as an ideal medium to foster internationalist sentiment.

Chapter Four argues that broadcasting was an important means by which Australian women contributed to the nation as patriotic citizens during the World War II. Through radio talks women encouraged each other to participate in the war effort and relayed their own experiences of the conflict. They gave shortwave broadcasts to American and Pacific listeners to elicit public support for and faith in the Allied war effort. Women speakers on radio were the vocal embodiment of the ideal patriotic female citizen, actively supporting Australia's war effort at home and abroad.

Chapter Five examines how women in federal parliamentary politics used broadcasting to shape their engagement with the electorate and develop their public profiles. It particularly focuses on the years surrounding the 1943, 1946, and 1949 federal election campaigns, and three women who were major figures at that time: Lyons, Tangney, and Street. These women used broadcasting as a key part of their election campaigns to legitimise their positions as political candidates and, in the case of Lyons and Tangney, elected representatives. This chapter also closely analyses surviving recordings of their election broadcasts, which provides a rare insight into the complex relationship between gender, sound, and content on radio during this period.

The 1940s and 1950s are often remembered as a golden age of Australian radio due to the proliferation of Australian serial dramas and light entertainment on the air, especially on the commercial stations. In many cases these programs displaced talk-based women's sessions in their traditional mid-morning and mid-afternoon timeslots. Chapter Six considers how three broadcasters—Catherine King, Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, and Irene Greenwood—continued to view broadcasting as a platform from which they could exercise leadership to combat what they saw as the threat of the increasing popularity of serial dramas to women's exercise of citizenship. They believed that radio was still a medium which could empower

women and they used their programs to promote their ideal of the postwar woman citizen, with mixed success.

Chapter Seven uses several case studies of women's broadcasting in areas outside of Sydney and Melbourne to examine the role of women's broadcasting in fostering distinctive regional identities and cultures, and as a tool for strengthening local communities. Women in regional areas used radio to meet their specific needs, such as bridging long distances between each other, fostering distinctive identities, and providing information and intellectual stimulation. Radio thereby integrated into the public sphere women who would otherwise have been left out of it due to their location and provided opportunities for them to engage in active citizenship in their local communities.

The thesis concludes with a brief consideration of the impact of the introduction of television in 1956 on the importance of women's radio speech as a central aspect of female citizenship. This study aims to restore a key part of female experience and political action in the mid-twentieth century to the historical record by focusing on the intersections between broadcasting, gender and citizenship. Radio was a transformative technology that had a significant impact on the lives of women and helped them to claim their voices as citizens in mid-twentieth century Australia.



# CHAPTER ONE

## Women, Speech, and Australian Radio

As a sex we were not considered suitable for the onerous duties of announcing that “the next item would be a song by Miss So-and-So,” or that the forecast for the evening was “Fine and Mild.”

These called for masculine effort and ability!

What a change has taken place! The increasing number of women announcers at the stations shows the trend. Indeed, it is noticeable that some of the leading stations employ male and female announcers during a session to introduce dialogue and so make their advertisements more attractive.<sup>1</sup>

In 1934, eleven years after the introduction of radio to Australia, Muriel Sutch wrote ‘Broadcasting from a Woman’s Viewpoint’ for the annual radio publication *Broadcast Year Book*. In the above epigraph, Sutch argued that there had been a shift towards an acceptance of women’s speaking voices on the airwaves over the past decade and emphasised that announcing was no longer considered to be solely a masculine role. It is also notable that Sutch argued that women’s voices in these roles were needed to make ‘advertisements more attractive,’ thereby indicating that women’s voices had newfound commercial value. This suggests that by the 1930s women played a significant role on Australian radio, and that their voices had complex and changing meanings. This chapter sets up the rest of the thesis by

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<sup>1</sup> Muriel Sutch, ‘Broadcasting from a Woman’s Viewpoint’, *Broadcast Year Book* (Sydney: C. C. Faulkner, 1934), 89.

tracing the history of women's roles on Australian radio from the 1920s until the 1950s, and by demonstrating why the medium was a useful one for women's active citizenship in these years. Until recently, the small literature on the history of women and radio in Australia had largely focused on the extent to which radio constructed and reinforced ideals of traditional womanhood, particularly through women's sessions.<sup>2</sup> Jeannine Baker's recent work on feminist uses of broadcasting has begun to challenge this focus on the domesticity of women's broadcasting, however much more work needs to be done.<sup>3</sup> While it is true that women were predominantly heard on women's sessions, they were by no means exclusively heard on these programs, and there are many notable examples of women speaking during the evening on a wide range of topics. Furthermore, solely focusing on the ways in which women's programming reinforced domesticity does not fully represent the character of many women's sessions. While some certainly focused on childrearing, home science, and beauty, there were many others which gave women airtime to speak on a broad range of social, political and intellectual topics. These included the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) women's sessions and various commercial women's sessions across Australia.

Further, the debates over radio speech during this period demonstrate that women not only spoke on the airwaves, but that their radio speech was a powerful tool for challenging the gender hierarchy of the public sphere. Placing women's radio speech within the context of other ways in which women's voices were broadcast—particularly singing and acting—demonstrates that by using particular forms of radio speech Australian women were able to speak on a wide range of issues with a measure of authority. In doing so, they were able to claim their place as active citizens in the early to mid-twentieth century. This chapter

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Rebecca Jones, "Listening-In": The Constructions of Femininity by Australian Radio in the 1930's (Honours Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1991); Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988); Bridget Griffen-Foley, 'Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio', in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ed. Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 123–32.

<sup>3</sup> Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s-1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017), 292-308.

adds greater complexity and character to our understanding of Australian radio and suggests that radio provided opportunities for women to speak publicly in new ways and for the public to hear women's voices on both a much larger scale and in a more intensive way than ever before.

### **Radio's Educative Function**

Radio had the potential to be used for entertainment, education, and communication, but its primary utility was not immediately apparent upon its introduction to Australian consumers in 1923. It was not until the 1930s that its social purpose as a domestic companion became the dominant way in which the medium was used in Australia. A competing usage in the interwar years was radio's educative function as a medium that could inform and civilise the population.<sup>4</sup> The educational uses of radio influenced programming across the world. According to David Goodman, American radio's status as a medium of mass entertainment was hotly contested by those who believed in the potential of radio to educate American citizens. These advocates worked to mould a more engaged audience through on-air talks and debates, which exacerbated the tension between radio's dual purposes of entertainment and civic education. The presenters of such civic-minded programming reinforced gendered, raced, and classed ideals of authority, as American radio stations often recruited white male college graduates to be announcers in order to impart authority and decorum, due to the belief that their high level of education meant that they spoke correctly. However, as American radio was a commercial industry, they still used a more intimate mode of address than their counterparts on public broadcasters in other nations.<sup>5</sup>

Public broadcasters were especially concerned with education over entertainment. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), for instance, was 'often accused of being

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 1–2, 202–4.

<sup>5</sup> David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xiii–xviii; 24–31.

undemocratic and elitist in its programming policy' as its aim was to provide the 'best' of everything it put to air.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in the 'best' reflecting upper and middle-class tastes and values. The BBC believed that everyone could appreciate high culture if given the opportunity. As such the aim of public broadcasting was, as managing director John Reith stated in 1924, to 'give the public what we think they need—and not what they want.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Patrick Day has argued that the New Zealand national stations were defined by elitist standards and aimed to educate and cultivate the population.<sup>8</sup> In Australia, the ABC also adopted an educative approach to its programming, in contrast to the more entertainment-focused commercial stations. In its earliest years it was 'a body setting out to enlighten the nation' through well-selected music, informative talks, church services and the occasional play.<sup>9</sup> Talks were seen to be an avenue for adult and children's education, although they often caused controversy for the conservative ABC administrators due to politically sensitive topics, including the living conditions of Aboriginal people and the Sino-Japanese conflict.<sup>10</sup>

There has been a perception that listeners associated accurate information and persuasive opinion with an 'English or Anglo-Australian and male' voice.<sup>11</sup> While ideals of authority and the norms of media employment meant that announcers on the ABC were often male, this perspective only interprets radio's educative function in a very narrow way and neglects the role that female speakers played in educating fellow women to be citizens. That they often did so within the confines of the daytime women's sessions has led to their work being neglected. However, as I argue in this thesis, women's programming provided a

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–30.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Day, *The Radio Years: A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>9</sup> K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 25–29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

platform from which women could contribute to public discourse in this period and were therefore a key component of their citizenship activity in the interwar years.

In contrast to the ABC, Johnson has argued that Australian commercial radio's educative function in the interwar years was geared towards fostering a new type of citizen who sought fulfilment in the private realm of domestic consumption. Although radio provided new opportunities for these citizens to learn about politics and high culture, for Johnson they were still consumers of that culture rather than active participants.<sup>12</sup> This was particularly so in the case of women. Radio addressed women as a united group with common interests, which Johnson argues belatedly contributed to women's awakened public consciousness in the 1960s, as by that point they had been publicly addressed as a unified group for over thirty years. In the interwar years, however, women's ability to be more informed about politics through radio reinforced the divisions between the political public sphere and the consumerist private sphere—women could only eavesdrop on political conversations, but could not take part in them.<sup>13</sup> In this thesis I challenge Johnson's argument by demonstrating that women were, in fact, active participants in radio's education of new citizens in the interwar years on both the ABC and the commercial stations. This argument complicates her conclusion that radio reinforced the separation of the public and private spheres and considers radio as a space within which women could expand notions of citizenship. One way in which they did this was through their involvement with classical music programming, which formed a key part in establishing radio's educative function as well as women's presence on the air in the earliest days of broadcasting.

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 203–05.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–05.

### **'Bell-Like Notes': Women Singers on the Air**

Music has been a mainstay of radio programming since its inception, even though the type of music played over the air was often subject to intense debates. Many stations, both A- and B-Class, believed that the duty of radio was to provide culturally uplifting classical music, and thus to teach the Australian people to appreciate highbrow culture. Other commercial stations, however, were more inclined to play popular hits, including jazz, crooners, and later rock 'n' roll.<sup>14</sup> Musical programming provided an early opportunity for women to be heard on radio. They frequently performed on the air as live musicians and were also musical directors from the earliest years of radio; in 1925, for example, Jess Prideaux and Ruth Phillips arranged evening concerts on Melbourne station 3AR.<sup>15</sup> Female singers were also present, as sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, and contraltos performed in early radio concerts.<sup>16</sup> Singing continued to be a popular feature of radio programming for decades, and listeners regularly tuned in to their favourite songstresses. The popularity of women singers was demonstrated in 1935 when the *Listener In*, in conjunction with Melbourne commercial station 3UZ, ran a 'Golden Voice of the Air' competition in which listeners could vote for their favourite singers. The winner was soprano Irene Bennet, who beat out both male and female competition.<sup>17</sup> By the 1940s, talent shows such as *Australia's Amateur Hour* and *Radio Auditions* became popular evening entertainment, reflecting a wartime desire for light entertainment. Once again women singers formed a large proportion of the talent on these shows.<sup>18</sup>

The language used to describe women's singing voices in the radio press was detailed and developed, and from the mid-1920s radio magazines contained numerous references to

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<sup>14</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 245–48.

<sup>15</sup> 'Next Week's Programs', *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 30.

<sup>16</sup> See for example: 'People in the Programs', *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 21.

<sup>17</sup> 'Golden Voice Winner', *Listener In*, 28 September 1935, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 215, 260–61.

women singers with ideal voices. These descriptions referenced clarity, enunciation and tone to evoke the quality of their performances. For example, in January 1925 the *Listener In* described contralto Jessie Shmith as having ‘a perfect radio voice, and a clear, bell-like enunciation which makes her items very attractive,’ while soprano Veronica Cox’s ‘bell-like notes and perfect enunciation have given much pleasure to listeners.’<sup>19</sup> In 1935 soprano Molly Byrne’s voice was praised ‘almost as much for its wayward grace as its pure tone and very fine balance.’<sup>20</sup>

Amy Lawrence has argued that, in the United States, singing was connected to an established tradition of theatrical performance in which women were entrenched, which thus made it acceptable for women singers to be heard over the air. Singing had also long been considered part of the accomplishments of a genteel young lady, which made it a respectable activity for women.<sup>21</sup> It is clear from radio magazines such as the *Listener In* that the presence of women singers on Australian radio were also seen as acceptable. Women singers were popular entertainers. The acceptability, and even desirability, of women’s singing voices on the air undermines the commonly repeated argument that the natural pitch of women’s voices was distorted by radio technology; if a high-pitched voice did not ‘carry’ as well over the air, then how was it possible for a soprano’s ‘bell-like notes and perfect enunciation’ to be heard?<sup>22</sup>

### **‘Everything Depends on Your Voice’: Actresses on the Air**

The stage career of Australian actress, writer, and future broadcaster Mary Marlowe represented the ‘steady rise to respectability’ of acting as a job for middle-class young women during the 1910s. At the beginning of her career, the stage ‘was still tainted with the Victorian

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Jessie Shmith’, *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 21; ‘Won Over Forty Prizes’, *Listener In*, 10 January 1925, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Georgia Rivers, ‘Sings with Her Brain’, *Listener In*, 30 March 1935, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women’s Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32.

stigma of questionable propriety and was connected with the scandal and vice of the popular imagination.<sup>23</sup> Recognising this, Marlowe worked to present herself as a woman of impeccable personal morality who performed public charity work, which worked to associate acting with genteel femininity. Marlowe began broadcasting on Sydney commercial radio in 1934 and carried this moral mindset into her interviews with notable stage actors and actresses. Through these dialogues she continued to promote her passion for the theatre while also emphasising respectable femininity through her discussion of homemaking with female interview subjects.<sup>24</sup> In an interview with South African-born actress Marjorie Gordon in 1939, Gordon's career was clearly shown not to impede her role as a good wife:

Marlowe: Now did you play here in "Rose Marie". You slipped away after the Melbourne season and Violet Carlson replaced you here.

Gordon: I slipped away for good wifely reasons. I came to Australia believing that my husband, Paul Vernon, would be able to get leave from the B.B.C. in London, and come out for six months' visit to Australia. Then he found he could not be released and so I shortened my own engagement and went home.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1930s, when a number of women were performing in various forms of radio theatre, live theatre was seen as compatible with a middle-class ideal of femininity. Most radio actresses in mid-twentieth century Australia were also involved in live theatre, with a number having successful careers in both. Lyndall Barbour, for example, won the Sydney Theatre Critics' Circle award for best actress in 1955-56 for *The Rose Tattoo*, at a time when she was

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<sup>23</sup> Deborah Campbell, 'From Theatre to Radio: The Popular Career of Mary Marlowe', in *Australian Popular Culture*, ed. Peter Spearitt and David Walker (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1979), 86.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Marlowe, Interview with Marjorie Gordon, Script, 1939, MLMSS 735, Mary Marlowe Papers and Manuscripts, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.



also recording dozens of episodes of radio serials each week, including the popular and long-running soap opera *Portia Faces Life*.<sup>26</sup>

Silent film acting also predated radio, and was recognised as a new professional opportunity for the ‘modern girl’ in the 1910s.<sup>27</sup> The advent of talking pictures in the late 1920s, however, proved a significant threat to the film actress, as production companies turned to stage actresses who had competence in speaking dialogue.<sup>28</sup> The arrival of sound films also sparked anxieties about the quality of the voices they presented, and this was a particular concern in Australia. American accents were heard as a form of obscenity which would corrupt young people’s speech. This moral panic was particularly aimed at actresses, whose voices were deemed by the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail* to be ‘for the most part, not so good,’ compared with the more consistently acceptable speech of their male counterparts.<sup>29</sup> This demonstrates that modern technology brought with it new anxieties over the place of women’s speech, and that the increasing audibility of women became a focus of criticism. However, these anxieties manifested differently in the example of radio, which unlike film has always been based on the sound of the voice. Women’s dramatic performances on radio were understood to be closer to live theatre, and as such the presence of their voices in these programs was more acceptable than in film.

The earliest years of Australian radio contained a paucity of radio drama, with only a small number of radio sketches broadcast.<sup>30</sup> However, women were present even from these early days, as they acted in and even wrote some of these programs. In January 1930, for example, the *Listener In* reported that two women, Ivy Davis and Courtney Ford, were to

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<sup>26</sup> Martha Rutledge, ‘Barbour, Lyndall Harvey (1916–1986)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2007), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/barbour-lyndall-harvey-12172/text21813>, accessed 26 February 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Christine Gledhill, ‘The Screen Actress from Silence to Sound’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 193.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Joy Damousi, *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 265–6.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama, 1923-1960: A History Through Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 4.

perform their ‘bright and breezy’ sketch called *Romance and Typewriting*.<sup>31</sup> Ford was described as ‘one of our most popular radio artists’ and Davis ‘a character actress of much ability.’<sup>32</sup> By 1931 groups of radio players were broadcasting in Sydney and Melbourne on the fledgling Australian Broadcasting Company, the privately-owned precursor to the ABC, which was established in 1932. The ABC’s Head of Drama Lawrence H. Cecil and writer Edmund Barclay began to develop radio drama by adapting stage plays and books for broadcast. Commercial radio stations also began to broadcast a greater amount of radio drama during this time.<sup>33</sup>

Radio acting presented significant challenges. Gladys Moncrieff, a very popular actress and soprano known affectionately as ‘Our Glad,’ became an icon of Australian radio and stage in the mid-twentieth century, and regularly appeared on the airwaves and in the pages of radio periodicals.<sup>34</sup> In an article for the *Listener In* in 1925, she reflected on the significant differences between stage acting and radio acting, noting that the studio was a ‘depressing’ counterpart to the colour of the stage, and that ‘everything depends on your voice...the slightest tremor or mistake is magnified where it might not be noticed on the stage.’<sup>35</sup> This statement underscores the importance of the sound of the voice to radio broadcasting. Actors could not rely on facial and bodily gesture when performing for radio, but instead had to signal the entire range of emotion and nuance through their speech without it becoming overwrought. The risk of sounding overdramatic or hammy was ever present, particularly in the early days of radio theatre when actors were still adjusting to the new medium.

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Romance and Typewriting’, *Listener In*, 1 January 1930, 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama*, 4–5.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Burgis, ‘Moncrieff, Gladys Lillian (1892-1976)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1986), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/moncrieff-gladys-lillian-7621>, accessed 9 May 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Gladys Moncrieff, ‘Facing the Microphone’, *Listener In*, 21 November 1925, 7.

The rise of serial dramas in the 1940s and 1950s produced a number of female radio stars, including Lyndall Barbour, Dinah Shearing, Muriel Steinbeck, Queenie Ashton, and Margo Lee.<sup>36</sup> These women became celebrities known for the sound of their voice. In 1945, the *ABC Weekly* reported that Barbour ‘considers the greatest asset a radio actor or actress can have is a neutral voice—one with no special accent, mannerisms, or eccentricities of tone or quality.’<sup>37</sup> Indeed, these actresses employed remarkably similar styles of speaking on the air. This vocal archetype was marked by the use of a received accent, relatively low pitch, rolled ‘r’s’ and aspirated ‘h’s.’<sup>38</sup> In *Portia Faces Life*, Barbour’s voice is a medium-high pitch, very melodious, and uses rolled r’s.<sup>39</sup> In *A Woman Confesses*, the lead character Kathy Miller is supposed to be an eighteen-year-old raised in an orphanage, however she too employed the same received Australian accent as the upper-class characters.<sup>40</sup>

Many Australian-made serials were based on American scripts, and these stories sometimes had characters or plotlines that were too specific to the American context to be easily modified. As a result, American accents were also used by Australian actors in many Australian soap operas in this period, including *When a Girl Marries* (1946-1965), one of the most popular and longest running soap operas. Listening to the program, however, indicates that these accents were of varying quality, and the ubiquitous affected Australian accent often broke through, such as in Marie Clarke’s performance as the lead character Joan Field.<sup>41</sup> Australian actors’ use of American accents also revealed their limitations, particularly when

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<sup>36</sup> Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama*, 130–33, 192–95, 215–18, 244–48, 287–90.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret MacCallum, ‘How Lyndall Barbour Started Her Career in Radio’, *ABC Weekly*, 25 May 1945, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Australian accents are typically divided into three types: cultivated or received, which most closely resembles the received pronunciation of British English; broad, the accent seen as the most Australian and which features flat vowels; and general, which falls between these two extremes and is now used by the majority of the population. For more on Australian accent types see: Jonathan Harrington, Felicity Cox, and Zoe Evans, ‘An Acoustic Phonetic Study of Broad, General and Cultivated Australian English Vowels’, *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 17 (1997), 155–84. For more on debates over Australian speech and the influence of radio see: Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251; Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 100–12.

<sup>39</sup> *Portia Faces Life*, episode 1945, September 1963, 205340, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>40</sup> *A Woman Confesses*, episode 1, 239835, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>41</sup> *When a Girl Marries*, episode 1593, 81523, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

playing black characters. In *When a Girl Marries*, Queenie Ashton played an African-American maid, and her performance was an exaggerated caricature of a black American accent.<sup>42</sup> American accents could also signal negative character traits. *Love's Twin Sister* told the story of identical twins separated during the World War II, when one twin was sent to live in the United States, while the other remained in the United Kingdom. Year later, the American twin Mary Anne, played by Bettina Kaufman, attempts to ruin the life of her English sister Barbara, played by Judith Thompson. In this series Mary Anne's brassy American drawl signals her conniving nature and sexual allure, while Barbara's soft English voice signals her virtue and innocence.<sup>43</sup>

Michele Hilmes has argued that American daytime serials 'attempted to open up the restricted sphere of public discussion to topics usually dismissed as "women's issues".<sup>44</sup> By placing female characters at the centre of their plots, and having those characters speak directly about controversial yet not uncommon issues such as divorce, sexual desire, dissatisfaction with domestic life, and careers, serial dramas provided an important space for women's voices to speak about issues which affected women's lives.<sup>45</sup> As Australian serials were often based on American scripts, it is likely that they functioned in a similar way by giving voice to a range of issues and desires, and allowing audiences to eavesdrop in on the private worlds of the characters.

It is important to differentiate between acting and speaking, as they had very different meanings on radio and performed different functions. As Lawrence argues, a speaking woman places herself in a position of authority, which breached the rules of gendered propriety. Radio cast the speaking woman as a problem to be resolved.<sup>46</sup> However, acting

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<sup>42</sup> *When a Girl Marries*, episode 1593, 81523, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>43</sup> *Love's Twin Sister*, episodes 1, 2, 207, 208, 239138, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>44</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 159–60.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus*, 18.

women were acceptable; thus, the sound of women's speech was not a problem, but rather the intent behind it. This does not mean that radio actresses were not criticised, but rather that this criticism usually focused on their acting ability, not their right to speak on the air in the first place. Furthermore, radio actresses can be placed within a longstanding theatrical tradition. Their presence on the airwaves was less revolutionary than women who gave talks or participated in interviews or debates espousing their political and social views, or even the women who announced the women's sessions, speaking daily to other women and fostering a community over the airwaves.

### **Women's Sessions: Food, Face, and Floors?**

Women's radio programming has largely been presented as reinforcing domesticity, and restricting women's roles to those of wife, mother, and homemaker. Johnson has argued that, through designating separate women's programs, Australian radio 'worked to produce a sense in which all women were commonly defined by one thing: their relationship with the private, domestic sphere of family life.'<sup>47</sup> Through the women's sessions, Johnson argues, women were taught to be efficient household managers. Their daily routines were structured around the radio program by creating set times for breaks.<sup>48</sup>

While women's sessions certainly did devote airtime to talks on mothercraft, cookery, homemaking, fashion, and beauty, the assessment of the women's sessions as solely reinforcing domestic ideals of womanhood neglects that they provided platforms for various women, and men, to speak on a wide variety of topics. Baker has shown that Australian commercial radio enabled some women broadcasters to create space for women to engage with a range of social and political issues, although she presents these broadcasters as a minority that contested 'rigid expectations' about their roles on the air.<sup>49</sup> Donna Halper has

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-04.

<sup>49</sup> Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 293.

noted that in the United States, radio stations provided women with opportunities to publicly discuss their work and ideas, and even advocate a range of causes. The subjects they discussed included supposedly controversial feminist issues such as family planning and keeping one's own surname upon marriage.<sup>50</sup> Susan Ware has observed in her biography of influential American women's session host Mary Margaret McBride that 'radio encouraged women to think of themselves as individuals with a stake in modern life and the public sphere.'<sup>51</sup> In her work on the history of postwar women's programming on the BBC, Kristin Skoog has shown that the iconic program *Woman's Hour* broadcast a high degree of political content, and as the years went on the program was promoted as specifically women's interest material less regularly. Through broadcasting talks from women Members of Parliament (MPs), *Woman's Hour* engaged women in the political process and emphasised the importance of being responsible citizens.<sup>52</sup>

As my research shows, women's programming on both Australian commercial radio and the ABC during the early-mid twentieth century was complex and varied in its content. This was demonstrated in the response to an opinion piece by Eva Linn published in the *ABC Weekly* in February 1941. In the piece, titled 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour,' Linn bemoaned the domestic focus of many women's sessions, and asked: 'Are all women (except me) exclusively interested in Food, Face, and Floors? Would it not be a pleasure to hear about some other subjects and objects than our daily work?'<sup>53</sup> This article sparked a strong response from readers, some of whom wrote to the *ABC Weekly* to point out that many women's sessions did, in fact, include discussion about topics other than 'Food, Face, and Floors.' Gladys Moore, compere of the ABC national women's session, wrote that 'our

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<sup>50</sup> Donna Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves: How Radio Brought Women into the Public Sphere', in *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, ed. Michael C. Keith (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 89.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Ware, *It's One O'Clock and Here Is Mary Margaret McBride: A Radio Biography* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 12–13.

<sup>52</sup> Kristin Skoog, 'Neither Worker nor Housewife but Citizen: BBC's Woman's Hour, 1946-1955', *Women's History Review* 26, no. 6 (2017), 962-63.

<sup>53</sup> Eva Linn, 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 10 February 1940, 20.

material includes the latest news from overseas, and items of general interest for women. Very little “domesticity” finds a place in our Women’s Hour.<sup>54</sup> A listener wrote to describe the women’s session on Sydney commercial station 2KY: ‘Eva Linn wouldn’t be turned sour if she discovered the woman’s session which is my daily tonic. The announcer speaks in a clear, quiet, unaffected voice and doesn’t assume that we are either snobs or nit-wits.’<sup>55</sup> Another listener wrote of the 3LO women’s session in Melbourne: ‘In this Session I have heard talks by a Woman Journalist, Talks on Life in Holland, Life in an Indian Reservation, Other People’s Studios... One should not condemn all women’s sessions, because of a few.’<sup>56</sup> As these letters indicate, the hosts of the programs were especially important to their success, as a good compere both selected good content and presented it in a professional and engaging style.

While it is widely believed that the opportunities for women to have careers as radio announcers were very limited, there is evidence to suggest that there were greater opportunities than previously recognised. John Potts has argued that, in the interwar years, there was a bias against women announcers because the announcer’s voice was seen to be a public one, and the public sphere was a masculine domain.<sup>57</sup> But this definition of the term ‘announcer,’ which Potts and others have restricted to presenting news or current affairs commentary or inter-program announcements, is problematic. Evidence from the time suggests that the term ‘announcer’ had a much broader application, and simply referred to the presenter of a program. For example in 1940 the *Broadcaster* ran a seven week series of profiles of ‘women announcers’ who hosted women’s and children’s sessions, which noted their education, professional history, the length of time they had been broadcasting and the details of their regular programs.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, in 1934 Muriel Sutch noted that there were

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<sup>54</sup> Gladys Moore, ‘Women’s Sessions Turn Me Sour’, *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Emily’, ‘Her Ideal’, *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Another Housewife’, ‘Women’s Sessions Turn Me Sour’, *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 63.

<sup>57</sup> John Potts, *Radio in Australia* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1989), 106.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Women Announcers...No. 1.’, *Broadcaster*, 3 February 1940, 13; ‘Woman Announcers...No. 2.’, *Broadcaster*,

increasing numbers of women announcers who were no longer considered to be unsuitable for the job.<sup>59</sup> Announcing was certainly a highly gendered activity, and women announcers were predominantly heard on daytime radio sessions, but the claim that announcing was a male preserve neglects that the women who presented women's sessions were very much considered to be announcers as well.

The opportunities for women to have careers on the air increased in the 1930s, albeit largely in women's programming. In 1933, for instance, the *Australian Women's Weekly* (*AWW*) published an article which gave advice to young women considering a career in radio. It noted the increasing opportunities for women to announce on the women's sessions:

The ever-increasing popularity of radio has opened up a new avenue for the brilliant girl with outstanding qualifications, and with the projected increase in the number of broadcasting stations the limited field for women radio announcers will soon be considerably extended.<sup>60</sup>

The speaking voice was emphasised as being of paramount importance for those considering radio careers:

[T]he gift of a suitable speaking voice is of first importance—the announcer must be possessed of what is known in the radio world as a non-irritating voice—women will simply not listen to a voice that palls on them.<sup>61</sup>

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10 February 1940, 12; 'Women Announcers...No. 3.', *Broadcaster*, 17 February 1940, 12; 'Women Announcers...No. 4.', *Broadcaster*, 24 February 1940, 12; 'Women Announcers...No. 5.', *Broadcaster*, 2 March 1940, 12; 'Women Announcers...No. 6.', *Broadcaster*, 9 March 1940, 12; 'Women Announcers...No. 7.', *Broadcaster*, 16 March 1940, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Sutch, 'Broadcasting from a Woman's Viewpoint', 89.

<sup>60</sup> 'There's Opportunity in Radio', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 19 August 1933, 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



Prospective announcers were also advised to cultivate a friendly personality and be able to connect with their listeners in an intimate and pleasant manner. The importance of women announcers was further underscored by reference to the needs of female listeners—the largest segment of the audience:

It is well recognised that radio enters more into the lives of women than men. The average man is satisfied to tune in to a short musical program of an evening, or follow the form of the elusive racehorse on Saturday afternoons, but the lives of women are spent in the home, and radio is becoming more and more a part of their lives.<sup>62</sup>

The article further emphasised that women must possess a high standard of education to be able to answer the multitude of questions put to them by listeners on childcare, cooking, health, and interior decoration while also giving book reviews and possessing a wide general knowledge. The woman announcer was therefore required to possess a pleasant speaking voice, friendly personality, and a broad general knowledge to be successful.<sup>63</sup>

The importance of education for a radio career was also emphasised by 2SM women's session announcer Doreen McKay in an interview with *Radio Pictorial* in 1937. When she applied for an announcing position after her final examinations at the University of Sydney, the 'deciding factor that led to her engagement on 2SM was simply the realization by her employers that because of her University background her mind was active, plastic and adaptable.'<sup>64</sup> McKay was further described as a 'gifted young announcer who combines charm of manner with a keen intellect and understanding,' thereby embodying the advice of the *AWW* article.<sup>65</sup> Women broadcasters on a variety of programs, including women's

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> 'Interviewing the Stars: Is a University Career Helpful?', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 October 1937, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

sessions, were therefore considered to be announcers, who were expected to be educated and possess an appropriate radio voice. Just what was deemed to be an appropriate voice for an announcer, however, was influenced by complex and shifting understandings of the connection between speech and Australian identity.

### **Debates over Radio Speech**

As I show in this thesis, Australian radio provided women with a range of opportunities to speak over the airwaves, which was a crucial way in which women participated in the public sphere as citizens during the mid-twentieth century. The sound of the voice differentiated radio speech from the written word, and this sonic dimension made radio especially significant for women's advancement as it normalised the sound of women's voices in the public sphere. The proliferation of newspaper women's pages in the nineteenth century and women's magazines in the twentieth century certainly created important spaces for women in the mass media and new careers for women in journalism.<sup>66</sup> Print media publications created communities of women through the use of specific types of language that signal membership of a particular group. As I have argued elsewhere, in the postwar era Australian women's magazines such as *New Idea* utilised colloquial language to construct a community amongst their readers that simulated conversations over the back fence.<sup>67</sup> However, the addition of the sonic voice made radio a more intimate and immediate medium that captured the personal qualities of oral communication. As such, listeners praised both the content and the style of the speaker's presentation and appear to have viewed the quality of both as crucial to meeting the criteria for a good radio talk. The following letter published in the *Listener In* in 1935 demonstrates this clearly:

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<sup>66</sup> Patricia Clarke, 'Women in the Media', in *A Companion to the Australian Media*, ed. Bridget Griffen-Foley (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, 2014), 495–98.

<sup>67</sup> Catherine Horne Fisher, 'Let's Talk it Over: Colloquial language and Women's Print Media Cultures in Australia, 1950–1966', *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge* 36 (2017), 1–18.

May I also add my appreciation for Mrs Hogan's delightful talk on Virginia, and the pleasure of knowing that Jane is to be back with us...Women with clear, rich radio voices are rare, and, in addition to Mrs Hogan and Jane, I would like to mention Miss Gwen Varley...Her midday talks to women are rich in personality and interest.<sup>68</sup>

Western Australian broadcaster Catherine King was also praised as having 'that quiet, intimate and friendly manner that makes her the friend of every woman,' while Irene Greenwood was described as having a 'cultured and friendly voice.'<sup>69</sup> Another listener wrote to the *Broadcaster* about Greenwood and women's session announcer Daphne James: 'Both Mrs. Greenwood and Mrs. James rank among the best speakers from Perth National, from the point of view of both men and women listeners.'<sup>70</sup>

The history of Australian speech has attracted substantial scholarly attention, mostly in terms of the development of an Australian lexicon that is characterised by colloquialisms, as seen in the work of Graham Seal, Bruce Moore, Amanda Laugesen, and others.<sup>71</sup> As Joy Damousi has argued, speech has been central to the construction of Australian identity, from the cultivation of a public vocal culture strongly aligned to elite British values to the rising acceptance of an Australian form of English in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> Eloquence and spoken etiquette were key components in the construction of middle-class identity in the

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<sup>68</sup> 'Appreciation', 'Women Talkers Please', *Listener In*, 4 May 1935, 14.

<sup>69</sup> 'Housewife' to Irene Greenwood, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>70</sup> 'Endorsement', 'Women Speakers Praised', *Broadcaster*, 28 November 1936, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Bruce Moore, *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008); Graham Seal, *The Lingo: Listening to Australian English* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999); Amanda Laugesen, *Furphies and Whizz-bangs: Anzac Slang from the Great War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2015); Alan Atkinson, *The Commonwealth of Speech: An Argument about Australia's Past, Present & Future* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, 2002); Julie Coleman, *The Life of Slang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nancy Keesing, *Lily on the Dustbin: Slang of Australian Women and Families* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books Australia, 1982).

<sup>72</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 104, 216-219.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while many other speech traits, such as dropped h's, were seen as markers of working-class and less educated backgrounds.<sup>73</sup>

Damousi has explored the gendered implications of the construction of a discourse of ideal speech. Oratory was central to the construction of public masculinity, while a discourse of genteel vocal femininity was constructed in colonial Australia through the use of etiquette literature, pedagogy and advice columns.<sup>74</sup> Other historians have also analysed the connection between oratory and political masculinity, including Marilyn Lake's work on the oratory of Alfred Deakin, Bethany Phillips-Peddlesden's analysis of the role of oratory in the construction of Australian prime ministerial masculinity, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson's analysis of the deification of 'manly' speech in American politics.<sup>75</sup> Mary Beard has argued that oratory and public speaking were 'exclusive skills and practices that defined masculinity as a gender' from ancient times.<sup>76</sup> A good physical performance, dignified manner and low speaking voice redeemed poor content and marked the speaker as a masculine leader. By contrast, weak oratorical performances were criticised as effeminate, demonstrating that women's speech was seen as delicate and thus more suitable for the private sphere.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, spoken propriety was a signifier of ladylike femininity in contexts as diverse as nineteenth century Britain and Japan.<sup>78</sup> Speech is thus crucial to the construction of both masculinity and femininity in a variety of contexts and the performance of manhood or womanhood has historically required the use of gendered speech styles.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid; For the British context see: Lynda Mugglestone, *Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as a Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 111–13, 230.

<sup>75</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Sounds of History: Oratory and the Fantasy of Male Power', in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ed. Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 49–58; Bethany Phillips-Peddlesden, "'A Stronger Man and a More Virile Character': Australian Prime Ministers, Embodied Manhood and Political Authority in the Early Twentieth Century', *Australian Historical Studies* 48, no. 4 (2017), 513–14; Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in the Electronic Age* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>76</sup> Mary Beard, 'The Public Voice of Women', *The London Review of Books* 36, no. 6 (March 2014), 11–14.

<sup>77</sup> Phillips-Peddlesden, "'A Stronger Man and a More Virile Character'", 513–14.

<sup>78</sup> Mugglestone, *Talking Proper*, 135–72; Miyako Inoue, *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

In the early to mid-twentieth century, the voice was identified as a key marker of beauty, grace, and charm, and many articles in women's magazines provided advice as to how women could cultivate an ideal speaking voice. Women were exhorted to adopt a 'low and nicely modulated' voice to signal their gentility and femininity. The voice could be worked on, and during the nineteenth century men and women learned elocution and spoken etiquette through classes and advice books.<sup>79</sup> Women were also expected to be the guardians of language and 'mould' future men by using 'proper' language in front of their children, and many elocution experts were also women.<sup>80</sup> Elocution was therefore constructed as a feminine activity long before the advent of radio, and positioned the speaking voice as a key part of performing genteel femininity. When women first began to speak on the radio this cultivated feminine speaking voice was predominantly used. The ideal female radio voice was pitched quite low and used a cultivated Australian accent or an English accent. Elocution training was promoted for women as a way of cultivating a vocal style which referenced an ideal version of genteel, British femininity. This was an embodied performance of colonial identity, and inflected with gendered, raced and classed meanings.

The advent of radio in 1923 provided a further focus on the voice as a signifier of identity in Australia. Radio provided 'a new benchmark of correct Australian English,' and broad Australian accents were generally not heard on the airwaves.<sup>81</sup> As Damousi observes: 'as radio became more widespread, it imparted a sense of self and identity across the continent, not just by virtue of the content of the programs but also through the type of speech used to deliver them.'<sup>82</sup> This resulted in radio speech becoming the subject of intense scrutiny in Australia. The advent of radio reinvigorated the obsession with good speech, as never before had there been 'such a concentration on the voice alone.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 101.

<sup>80</sup> Mugglestone, 'Talking Proper', 160.

<sup>81</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 240.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 240–44.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

There was a divide between the formal voices of the ABC, and the more intimate and conversational style of the commercial stations. When the ABC was set up in 1932, the voices heard on its stations were primarily ‘English or near-English voices.’<sup>84</sup> However, accents which were overly aristocratic were not ideal; rather, the type of voice most suited to ABC announcing was a more middle-class sounding version of the southern English accent. It was also thought to be male. K. S. Inglis argued that announcer Charles Moses was ‘manly, personable, and spoke the King’s English in a manner that commanded respect out here. His voice was quiet and strong, free from the patrician drawl which to colonial ears had long sounded provocatively affected.’<sup>85</sup> In contrast to the authoritative King’s English of the public broadcaster, Johnson has demonstrated that by the 1930s the commercial stations had wholeheartedly adopted an informal, friendly style of address, which fostered a more intimate relationship between presenters and listeners. The ABC, meanwhile, remained wary of such a style, as it was believed that such intimacy would undermine its role as a cultural authority.<sup>86</sup> However this distinction between the overly formal ABC and the intimate commercial stations has been somewhat exaggerated, as all radio speech in this era exhibited a level of formality.<sup>87</sup>

The radio voice also has a complicated relationship to the body. As Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones have observed, ‘as a material link between self and other, the voice is the locus of articulation of an individual’s body to language and society.’<sup>88</sup> Although radio voices always came from real people, the inability of listeners to see the speaker caused concern during the early days of broadcasting. Allison McCracken, for example, has argued that the supposedly disembodied voices heard on the radio could be perceived as discomfiting or even

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<sup>84</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 22.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>86</sup> Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 73.

<sup>87</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 244.

<sup>88</sup> Dunn and Jones, *Embodied Voices*, 2.

threatening as they emphasised ‘unnatural separation of the voice from the body.’<sup>89</sup> Yet this notion is problematic as it ignores that a voice must always be embodied—even if that body is not visible to the listener.<sup>90</sup> Broadcast networks and the print media did substantial work to promote announcers and actors as celebrities in order to remind listeners that radio voices originated from living, speaking bodies.<sup>91</sup> Thus, as listeners could view pictures of radio stars and read about their lives, they were able to connect the voices they heard to a ‘flesh and blood’ person to the point that the voice could be heard as embodied without a visual referent.<sup>92</sup>

Debates over Australian radio speech therefore centred on appropriate accents, the level of formality, and vocal embodiment. These issues also had gendered implications. It has been argued by Australian radio historians, including Damousi, Inglis, and Johnson, that criticisms of women’s voices on radio were similar to those in the United States and Britain, which emphasised their supposed female deficiencies in tone and pace as being naturally displeasing to the ear.<sup>93</sup> However the Australian evidence presents a more complicated picture, as broader Australian debates about speech, identity and culture led to some listeners closely focusing on the voices in the ether and criticising both male and female speakers for a range of spoken infractions. Female speakers who demonstrated ideals of speech could be praised over the slovenlier speech of some of their male counterparts.

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<sup>89</sup> Allison McCracken, ‘Scary Women and Scarred Men: Radio Suspense Drama, Gender Trouble and Postwar Change (1943-1948)’, in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 184.

<sup>90</sup> Christine Ehrick, ‘Vocal Gender and the Gendered Soundscape: At the Intersection of Gender Studies and Sound Studies’, *Sounding Out!*, 2 February 2015, <http://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/02/02/vocal-gender-and-the-gendered-soundscape-at-the-intersection-of-gender-studies-and-sound-studies/>, accessed 1 July 2015.

<sup>91</sup> See for example: ‘Doreen McKay, Real Outdoor Girl’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, November 1, 1935, 14; ‘Radio Pictorial Goes Eavesdropping’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, September 1, 1936, 24; ‘Popular Broadcasters: Shirley Dale and John Moore’, *The Wireless Weekly*, May 4, 1934.

<sup>92</sup> ‘The Spoken Word’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, August 1936, 2.

<sup>93</sup> See for example: Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251; Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 100–12.

With the exception of Baker's recent work, much of the scholarship on Australian radio has so far given insufficient attention to the medium's role in enabling women to claim their public voice. Damousi has argued that radio reinforced the male voice as having authority and power, and women's voices were 'projected within a domestic setting.'<sup>94</sup> John Potts has also argued that Australian radio was a public arena which led to a bias against women's voices on the air.<sup>95</sup> However, as Bridget Griffen-Foley has shown, by the 1930s radio was 'conjuring up the everyday, ordinary, intimate world of home life' through fostering intimacy between presenters and audiences.<sup>96</sup> This suggests that there was a tension within radio's function as a public medium broadcast into private settings, and raises questions about the place of women on a medium which blurred these boundaries. Radio was a sonic medium, and hearing women's voices in the public space of the broadcast was a profound challenge to the gendered hierarchy of the public soundscape. As Christine Ehrick has observed in her work on South America, radio introduced a new platform from 'which to speak and be heard at a time of significant renegotiation of gender roles.'<sup>97</sup>

Attitudes to women's speech in the early days of radio have a complicated international history. A controversy erupted in the pages of an American radio magazine in 1924 about the suitability of women's speaking voices on radio, but it was fuelled by just one male radio executive.<sup>98</sup> In the early days of British broadcasting women were caught in a double bind as high-pitched female voices were associated with demureness or attacked for being annoying, while low-pitched female voices were seen as too sexual.<sup>99</sup> In Weimar Germany women countered claims of the unsuitability of their voices for radio through reference to women's 'essential' qualities of responsibility, empathy and adaptability, and

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<sup>94</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 50, 251.

<sup>95</sup> Potts, *Radio in Australia*, 106.

<sup>96</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 118.

<sup>97</sup> Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape*, 15.

<sup>98</sup> Donna Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 40–41.

<sup>99</sup> Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice: The Story of a Remarkable Talent* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 158.



suggested that ‘the personal tone of the radio talk suggested by the domestic location of most radio reception’ was better suited to a female speaker, who could perform the role of the ‘hostess.’<sup>100</sup>

Damoussi and Inglis, among others, have observed that the perception of women’s voices as too shrill or lacking in authority was also common in the early decades of Australian radio.<sup>101</sup> Such criticisms were sometimes reported by the press, particularly if made by a notable commentator or overseas visitor. For example, in 1936 Miss Lorell Parker, the director of the women’s division of the largest radio station in Canada, visited Australia on a speaking tour. The Burnie *Advocate* reported her comments on women’s radio speech: ‘Most women talk too fast and have a tendency to become shrill with the slightest excitement.’<sup>102</sup> Similarly, some listeners had strong opinions about women’s radio voices, writing to radio magazines that ‘I can only understand about one word in ten that she says’ and that ‘[w]omen’s voices do not suit radio unless they are songstresses.’<sup>103</sup> One listener wrote to the *ABC Weekly* in March 1945: ‘She bites her words, her intonation is execrable, and she cannot pronounce the English language correctly.’<sup>104</sup>

Yet from my research it is apparent that these criticisms formed part of a more nuanced discourse of appropriate radio speech, which was closely linked to changing notions of Australian identity, particularly in terms of the creeping Americanisation of popular culture and, later, resentments over the influence of visiting American troops during the World War II.<sup>105</sup> This evidence indicates that women’s voices on the air were criticised by those who believed that there was a decline of spoken English in Australia, and that they

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<sup>100</sup> Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 199.

<sup>101</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Damoussi, *Colonial Voices*, 251.

<sup>102</sup> ‘The Speaking Voice: Need For Self-Control’, *Advocate* (Burnie), 31 December 1936, 4.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Wake Up 3SH’, *Listener In*, 10 November 1945, 21; Phil O’Brien, ‘Women’s Voices’, *Listener In*, 22 January 1955, 29.

<sup>104</sup> E. Box, ‘Women Announcers’, *ABC Weekly*, 3 March 1945, 27.

<sup>105</sup> Coleman, *The Life of Slang*, 218; Pam Peters, ‘Australian English’, in *Americanization in Australia*, ed. Philip Bell and Roger Bell (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998), 32–44.

were by no means the sole targets of listeners' ire. This is particularly well demonstrated by the frequency of letters decrying the use of faux-American accents on the air, particularly from the mid-1940s, as well as the regular contributions of listeners correcting the pronunciation of specific words and even particular vowel and consonant sounds, such as the 'cult of the extra r.'<sup>106</sup> A listener wrote to the *ABC Weekly* about announcer Heath Burdock's pronunciation in 1945: 'his distasteful and obviously incorrigible habit of putting a terminal "r" on such words as saw, law, quota, area and even Australia, definitely rules him out as a good and entirely acceptable announcer.'<sup>107</sup> Another wrote to the *Listener In* to criticise supposedly American accents in 1955: 'Why is the latest trend in Melbourne radio to have an American voice and not what one would consider a trained voice, compering our feature programs and news services?'<sup>108</sup>

Not everyone was so critical, however, and some listeners perceived those who criticised announcers' speaking styles and pronunciation errors to be pedantic. One listener wrote to the *ABC Weekly* in 1940: 'The incessant charges of mispronunciation, levelled at radio announcers, are both stupid and unfair. English is a peculiar language, devoid of rules and forms, and governed entirely by usage. None of us possesses an accurate knowledge of it. We all err frequently and flagrantly.'<sup>109</sup> Another reader wrote to the *Listener In* in 1945: 'Why do some people sit by their radio receivers listening for some unfortunate announcer to make a slip in grammar or to appear a little conceited, or even something dreadful, such as an affected manner of speaking. After all, they are only "announcers".'<sup>110</sup> These letters indicate that by no means were all listeners glued to their sets, listening for every slip or affectation, and indeed that some listeners, at least, understood that announcers were doing the best they could. These letters also demonstrate that listeners were not just criticising

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<sup>106</sup> J. T. Fawcett, 'The Cult of the Extra R', *ABC Weekly*, 20 January 1945, 8

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> 'Time Marches On', 'That Accent Again', *Listener In*, 15 January 1955, 21.

<sup>109</sup> Frank Walford, 'Announcers Championed', *ABC Weekly*, 19 March 1940, 19.

<sup>110</sup> Ern Jordan, 'I Often Wonder', *Listener In*, 17 November 1945, 21.

women but also men. In line with the expectation that women would be the moral guardians of correct speech, they were also often the ones criticising announcers, both male and female. Indeed, although rarer than overtly gendered criticisms of women's voices, at least one female listener even criticised male voices as taking up too much airtime: 'May I raise an objection to the monopoly of male voices on the air?... "Book Review" is spoiled by some male enthusing about this or that book he has read.'<sup>111</sup> This letter indicates that some female listeners resisted the entrenchment of male authority on the air.

Women speakers could, and did, exhibit good radio voices, and were even heard on the air giving elocution lessons in the 1920s and 1930s. Cora Jensen, for example, was described in the *Listener In* in 1925 as an on-air elocutionist of 'exceptional ability.'<sup>112</sup> Elocution provided women with a way of speaking on the radio which conformed to accepted cultural standards. Furthermore, radio elocutionists were tasked with improving the speaking voices of their listeners. As radio elocutionists, women sought to ensure that 'listening to good speech enhanced good speech.'<sup>113</sup> Speaking in a voice which was cultivated using elocution techniques was a key aspect of the early success of the first woman announcer on Australian radio, Stella Hume, who ran station 5DN along with her husband Ernest from their Adelaide home. The Humes began the station in 1924, when they were granted a B-Class licence.<sup>114</sup> Hume played multiple roles on the station, as an announcer, children's session compere, and elocutionist.<sup>115</sup> The *Listener In* described her as 'one of the best announcers in Australia' which was 'largely explained by her elocutionary skill and meticulous care in her position at the microphone.'<sup>116</sup> The station was popular beyond South Australia

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<sup>111</sup> 'Two Stop at Homes', 'Monopoly by Men?', *Listener In*, 21 May 1955, 25.

<sup>112</sup> 'Miss Cora Jensen', *Listener In*, 25 July 1925, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 254.

<sup>114</sup> Nancy Robinson Whittle, 'Hume, Stella Leonora Hariette', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, first published in hardcopy in 1996), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hume-stella-leonora-hariette-10571>, accessed 9 May 2016.

<sup>115</sup> 'Have You Heard These Stations?', *Listener In*, 23 May 1925, 12.

<sup>116</sup> 'A Visit to 5.D.N Adelaide', *Listener In*, 7 November 1925, 12.

and was heard by Victorian and New South Wales residents.<sup>117</sup> Hume's cultivated voice was central to her being one of the 'best announcers,' which demonstrates that women could be perceived as expert broadcasters, so long as they utilised an ideal speaking voice.

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, Dame Enid Lyons became a prolific speaker on radio from the 1930s, and her voice was a defining feature of the soundscape of Australian radio during its first few decades. She received elocution training as a child and even performed in elocution competitions.<sup>118</sup> The influence of this training is apparent in surviving recordings of her radio broadcasts, in which she speaks with a moderate pitch, measured pace, and controlled intonation, and modulation. She used a cultivated accent which sounded almost English and articulated almost every letter when she spoke.<sup>119</sup> Lyons' radio voice was regularly praised as she was viewed as one of the best orators of her time.<sup>120</sup> As the *Adelaide Advertiser* observed in 1937, Lyons had a 'direct and disarming sincerity of speech which any orator might envy.'<sup>121</sup>

The ideal feminine voice was also considered to be a form of beauty, and even of equal importance to physical appearance. Women's magazines regularly gave advice promoting the importance of the voice to beauty in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>122</sup> In July 1939, the *AWW* published an advice article which argued that:

A harsh, unpleasant voice, monotonous and cold, will completely spoil the effect of an otherwise attractive personality. On the other hand, many a plain woman, with little or no dress sense even, gains

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<sup>117</sup> Whittle, 'Hume, Stella Leonora Hariette'.

<sup>118</sup> Enid Lyons, *So We Take Comfort* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 32–33.

<sup>119</sup> See for example: 'Dame Enid Lyons: Maiden Speech' (The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1944), <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dame-enid-lyons-maiden-speech/clip1>, accessed 16 December 2017.

<sup>120</sup> See for example: Mrs W. J. Carr to Dame Enid Lyons, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>121</sup> 'Adelaide Women Welcome Dame Enid Lyons', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 1 October 1937, 9.

<sup>122</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 230, 251.

a reputation for charm because of her soft, beautifully modulated voice.<sup>123</sup>

The connection between the voice and feminine beauty was also strong for women broadcasters. 2GB announcer Dorothea Vautier wrote in the *AWW* in 1934:

A voice with musical cadence is part of a woman's charm, and it is seldom that the possessor of such a voice resorts to nagging. Pitch the voice to a low, soft, key and it is impossible to give vent to angry and insulting language.<sup>124</sup>

Radio magazines frequently made mention of the speaking voices of stars, as did listeners who wrote to them. For example, one listener wrote to the *Broadcaster* in 1945 about a woman announcer: 'It is not very often we have the pleasure of listening to such a beautiful voice. May we hear her often, and I hope "The Broadcaster" will find space to publish a picture of the "girl with the beautiful voice."' <sup>125</sup>

Listeners assessed women speakers using these criteria of ideal feminine speech. For every listener who criticised a female announcer, there were usually several others who wrote in to defend and praise her, and even compare her favourably to male speakers. For example, one listener wrote to the *Listener In* in May 1945: 'More orchids to a recent lady announcer of 3AR at an 8p.m. session. Her diction was good and very pleasing. She differed from the often stilted utterances of many male announcers.'<sup>126</sup> In March 1945, the *Listener In* published a letter which criticised a woman announcer on the ABC: 'Axes to Jane for her loud voice and the affectation of her broadcast at the welcome to Melbourne of the Duke and Duchess

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<sup>123</sup> 'Janette,' 'Your Voice...Keep It Soft and Low', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 1 July 1939, 57.

<sup>124</sup> Dorothea Vautier, 'More Important Than Your Face: The Colour of Your Voice', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 19 May 1934, 10.

<sup>125</sup> 'Licence No 347359', 'A New Announcer', *Broadcaster*, 15 August 1945, 8.

<sup>126</sup> 'Omega', 'Mispronunciation', *Listener In*, 12 May 1945, 19.

of Gloucester.<sup>127</sup> Two weeks later, the magazine published a letter from another reader, who defended Jane's broadcast: 'Imagine anyone calling Jane of the A.B.C. affected. I don't know of any more natural or unaffected announcer on the air. I considered that she was the only one worth listening to in the otherwise dreary repetition that we heard from the male announcers on the occasion of the arrival of the Duke and Duchess.'<sup>128</sup> The following week another letter was published: 'A special axe to "Anti-Jane" for his/her most unkind comments about Jane, who is as fine a woman as ever breathed.'<sup>129</sup> Understanding attitudes to women's speech on the air needs to take into account the broader discourses of ideal speech. If they used speaking styles which conformed to certain ideals, women could use radio to disseminate their ideas, experiences and agendas to a receptive audience—both male and female. A pleasant speaking voice could therefore help women to engage in public discourse and to have their place taken more seriously.

## Conclusion

Radio's educative function was a key part of the medium's social use in the interwar years, and as discussed in the following chapters female broadcasters contributed to this project by making use of the medium for serious, civic-minded broadcasting. The women broadcasters in this thesis did so within a broader context of women's activity on the air. Singers and actresses drew upon a longer cultural tradition of female performance in their regular appearances on radio, and their presence helped to normalise the sound of women's voices on the airwaves. Women also hosted women's sessions, many of which featured complex and varied content. The announcers of these sessions were vital to their success, due to both the content they put on the airwaves and their ability to conform to ideals of radio speech. Contrary to previous arguments, women announcers exhibited a measure of authority and

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<sup>127</sup> 'Anti-Jane', 'Voicing a Protest', *Listener In*, 10 March 1945, 18.

<sup>128</sup> 'Mary Jane', 'Jane of the A.B.C.', *Listener In*, 24 March 1945, 17.

<sup>129</sup> 'Sunny Jim', 'Unfair Attacks', *Listener In*, 31 March 1945, 18.

could command an audience, making radio a powerful medium from which astute and well-spoken female broadcasters could claim their public voices and reach out to other women.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Establishing the Platform: The Interwar Years

When asked about the future of broadcasting Mrs. Couchman said she visualised it as a growing tree which would increasingly shelter all sorts of service to the people of our scattered Commonwealth, and which in conjunction with other great public services would have great influence in the future development of our national life.<sup>1</sup>

Public broadcasting arrived in Australia with the establishment of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) on 1 July 1932.<sup>2</sup> It was governed by five commissioners, including one woman: May Couchman, president of the Australian Women's National League (AWNL)—an organisation committed to non-labour politics and aligned with the United Australia Party (UAP)—and vice-president of the National Council of Women (NCW).<sup>3</sup> As the only woman commissioner on the ABC board in the 1930s, she was the 'only woman with any power to affect ABC programs' and used her position to push for better quality talks for women to lift them 'from the atmosphere of the gas stove and ironing board.'<sup>4</sup> Couchman believed that broadcasting had significant power to improve society. The above quote, taken from an interview with the *Sydney Mail* upon her appointment to the Commission, demonstrates the centrality of public service to her conceptualisation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Enid Baumberg, 'Mrs. Claude Couchman: Member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission', *Sydney Mail*, 29 June 1932, 8.

<sup>2</sup> K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Smart, 'Couchman, Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay (1876-1982)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2007), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/couchman-dame-elizabeth-may-ramsay-12359>, accessed 26 February 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32.



role of broadcasting.<sup>5</sup> This view was influenced by her role as a leading figure in a number of women's organisations that agitated for greater female participation in politics and society.<sup>6</sup> Couchman argued that women had a civic duty to perform and that 'women have before them countless opportunities of rendering a continually growing contribution to the solution of our national problems.'<sup>7</sup> These two aims—the social potential of broadcasting and women's civic duty—were central elements which shaped the development of women's broadcasting as a key platform for women to contribute to the public sphere. The importance of radio to women's civic lives became so profound that by 1936 Portia Geach, president and founder of the Housewives Association (HA) of New South Wales, could claim that radio had 'opened up an enormous field for women.'<sup>8</sup>

This chapter examines women's broadcasting in the interwar years. During this formative period a number of women came to believe that radio could effect a deep cultural change that would improve women's lives and their status in society. These women worked to establish the medium as one that could facilitate women's active participation in the public sphere. Their work was in many ways embedded within the broader activism of the period. As Marilyn Lake has described, the interwar period was a high point of the activist woman citizen due to a significant number of large and active women's organisations.<sup>9</sup> During the 1930s, women broadcasters used radio to perform their civic duty of supporting their communities by using sincerity and empathy in their broadcasts, by creating communities of women working together, and by highlighting the importance of women's collective action. Feminists used broadcasting to assert women's right to financial independence to counter attacks on women workers within the context of high male unemployment. Professional

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<sup>5</sup> Baumberg, 'Mrs. Claude Couchman.'

<sup>6</sup> Smart, 'Couchman, Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay (1876–1982).'

<sup>7</sup> Baumberg, 'Mrs. Claude Couchman.'

<sup>8</sup> 'Radio Likes and Dislikes,' *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, August 1936, 43-44.

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 9.

women broadcasters exhibited the confidence, standing, and expertise necessary to contribute to public debate, and in doing so further opened up the public sphere to women.

### **Women's Organisations in Interwar Australia**

The widely-held notion of feminism as occurring in two 'waves'—the movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the 1960s and 1970s—has led to a characterisation of the interwar years as a dormant period for women's activism. In fact, as Lake has argued, this period was a high point for Australian feminism as many women's organisations were founded or expanded and the female 'activist citizen came into her own.'<sup>10</sup>

As we have seen, Couchman was a leading example of this activist citizen who developed a significant public profile from her senior roles in the AWNL and NCW.<sup>11</sup> As Judith Smart and Marian Quartly have observed, the NCW was an umbrella organisation which brought together a diverse range of women's organisations to give them greater clout in influencing political decision-making, including the AWNL, the Women's Service Guilds (WSG), The Feminist Club, the United Associations (UA), Women's Non-Party Leagues in South Australia and Tasmania, along with professional women's organisations. Many of these organisations emphasised the commonalities of women's experiences which went beyond party politics, thereby constructing women as a collective with coherent and uniform political goals.<sup>12</sup>

Many feminists in this era argued that citizenship was the key to securing women's freedom from the violation of their bodies and their oppression at the hands of 'masculine

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<sup>10</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The Inviolable Woman: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship in Australia, 1900-1945', *Gender & History* 8, no. 2 (1996), 197-98.

<sup>11</sup> Smart, 'Couchman, Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay (1876-1982)'.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Smart, 'Christian Women and Changing Conceptions of Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities in Interwar Australia', in *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (Melbourne: Department of History, University of Melbourne and the Australian Network for Research in Women's History, 1999), 190-92; Marian Quartly and Judith Smart, 'The Australian National Council of Women: Its Relations with Government to 1975', *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 82 (2014), 352-53.

tyrannies.<sup>13</sup> Citizenship rights would secure women's status as self-possessed individuals, and feminists campaigned for women's economic independence, child endowment, and motherhood endowment to secure their freedom from male dominance. They constructed an ideal of maternal citizenship which was conceptualised 'as a two-way contract through which mothers would be paid for their service to the state: this was their citizen's right and would secure their economic independence.'<sup>14</sup> The ideal of maternal citizenship, however, was also one which emphasised women's inherent difference as citizens due to their reproductive potential; in this way, feminists reinforced the status of women citizens as 'other' and constructed them as sharing common values and interests due to their sex.<sup>15</sup>

It was not only avowed feminists who advocated women's citizenship in the interwar years. There was a significant rise in membership numbers of other types of women's organisations during the 1920s, such as the HA, the Country Women's Association (CWA), and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Judith Smart has argued that these organisations sought to bring the 'well-run Christian home into community life,' and as such they saw no contradiction in entering the public sphere to promote the home.<sup>16</sup> Their view of using the principles of moral home management to improve the public sphere complicates any notion of the separation of public life from domestic life in this era. These women conceptualised good citizenship values as a way in which the feminised private sphere would improve the masculinised public sphere.<sup>17</sup> If these women saw citizenship as crossing the divide between the private and the public then radio, which also blurred the boundaries between them, was the ideal medium through which to articulate this feminised citizenship.

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<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Personality, Individuality, Nationality: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship 1902-1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994), 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-28.

<sup>15</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Smart, "'For the Good That We Can Do': Cecilia Downing and Feminist Christian Citizenship', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994), 41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-45.

Hilary M. Carey has argued that these conservative women's organisations constructed an ideal of 'female collectivism' which emphasised the 'good which could be achieved by women acting together.'<sup>18</sup> Under the umbrella of the NCW, these women's organisations 'confidently pursued a wide range of political, social and welfare goals for the benefit of women and children and, as they argued, for the nation.'<sup>19</sup> Women belonged to these organisations because they produced tangible benefits for their communities, such as poverty alleviation and spaces to socialise with other women, which meant that the organisations needed to have a wide appeal based on practical action and camaraderie. This collectivism was envisaged to bridge sectarianism and political allegiances, although in reality the members of these groups were largely middle-class, Protestant, and non-labour women. Working-class women and Catholic women were less likely to be active participants in these conservative women's organisations, instead participating in the male-led Labour movement or forming their own rival organisations, although working-class women were often the recipients of their charity.<sup>20</sup>

This concept of female collectivism has parallels with how the radio audience of women was conceptualised by station owners, advertisers and the radio press, as they were assumed to have shared interests, listening habits and purchasing power which painted the female listener as a middle-class housewife.<sup>21</sup> Members of these women's organisations contrasted their ideal of collectivism against masculine individualism, which would only achieve personal greed rather than broad social good.<sup>22</sup> This notion of female collectivism also intersects with Lake's concept of maternal citizenship, as both emphasised ideals of women's difference as citizens on the basis of essential feminine attributes and were

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<sup>18</sup> Hilary M. Carey, "Doing Their Bit": Female Collectivism and Traditional Women in Post-Suffrage New South Wales, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* 1, no. 2 (1996), 108.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Carey, "Doing Their Bit", 108.

<sup>21</sup> Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988), 22.

<sup>22</sup> Carey, "Doing Their Bit", 109.

articulated and performed by women's organisations. Female collectivism was therefore an alternative, feminine form of citizenship which emphasised complementary values to those rewarded in the masculine public sphere.

As Lake, Smart, Quartly, and Carey have all demonstrated, interwar women's organisations provided middle-class women with an opportunity to actively engage in civic duties and to see themselves as active citizens, but these organisations also tended to emphasise particularly feminised forms of citizenship. However, this does not explain why an increasing number of feminists agitated for equality with men in more typically masculine domains such as employment and politics. A number of these women broadcast their arguments for women's equality during women's sessions, and the increasing number of professional female announcers legitimised the place of women on the airwaves as informed citizens. In this way, radio became an important platform from which feminists could begin to break out of the strictures of maternal citizenship, and through their radio speech act as citizens by contributing to public debate and reaching out to other women.

### **Early Women's Talks**

Although radio programs were broadcast from 1923, it was not until the end of that decade that the medium began to be fully established in Australia. There is a dearth of sources relating to the earliest years of Australian radio, especially prior to the establishment of the ABC in 1932. Programs were almost always live to air, meaning that there are no existing recordings to listen to. Scripts are also difficult to locate and have not been collected in any consistent way. The best sources for these early years are radio magazines, particularly the Melbourne-based *Listener In*, started in 1925. There were only three stations in Melbourne when the *Listener In* started: 3LO, 3AR and 3UZ. These stations did not broadcast for the entire day, often not starting until 11am or midday, closing down for a few hours in the late

afternoon, and finishing at 10pm.<sup>23</sup> Due to the relatively small geographic size of Victoria, most homes could receive radio signals, which was not the case for regional listeners in other states. Victoria boasted the highest take up of radio licences in the 1920s, potentially providing listeners with access to multiple radio stations. Furthermore, as K. S. Inglis has argued, Melbourne radio 3LO in particular boasted high-quality programming at this time.<sup>24</sup> Victorian listeners therefore had the best access to quality programming during the earliest years of radio in Australia.

From the weekly program listings, it is possible to unearth what types of programs were being broadcast in these years. As discussed in the previous chapter, talks became a mainstay of radio programming as they were cheap and easy to produce.<sup>25</sup> They also fulfilled what many regarded as radio's responsibility to educate the populace.<sup>26</sup> Analysis of the program guide for Melbourne radio from the *Listener In* in 1925 indicates that musical performances and talks dominated the programming schedule. Unsurprisingly, men formed the largest number of speakers, however there were also a number of women speakers. In March 1925, for example, there were sixty-two talks by identifiable male speakers, compared with thirty-five talks by identifiable female speakers, while in May 1925 there were fifty-nine talks by identifiable male speakers, compared with thirty-three talks by identifiable female speakers. Occasionally a speaker used a pseudonym which prevented certain gender identification.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See for example: 'Next Week's Official Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 31 January 1925, 21-24.

<sup>24</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> See: 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 7 March 1925, 16-20; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 14 March 1925, 18-22; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 21 March 1925, 18-23; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 27 March 1925, 18-23; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 2 May 1925, 20-21; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 9 May 1925, 19-24; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 16 May 1925, 19-21; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 23 May 1925, 24-25; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 30 May 1925, 23-25.

Male academics and scientists often used radio to communicate with the general public, not to promote their research findings but to discuss popular topics broadly related to their discipline. Radio was a way to boost their public profiles and for them to fulfil their duty as public intellectuals. For example, geologist Clive Loftus-Hills gave regular talks on popular science on Tuesday evenings on 3LO, naturalist J. A. Leach broadcast a long-running series on Australian birds on Saturday evenings, and educationist Meredith Atkinson gave a regular talk on Sunday nights about current affairs.<sup>28</sup> Public servants were also regularly heard over the air. J. T. Sutcliffe of the Commonwealth Census Office gave a talk on child endowment, H. Barkley of the Meteorological Bureau discussed weather and business cycles, and Mr Sheehan of the Education Department broadcast on the value of school committees.<sup>29</sup>

Female speakers were largely broadcast during the daytime, although there were some notable exceptions. A pseudonymous woman named 'Radiette,' for example, broadcast a weekly talk on 'Women's Work and Play' from May to July 1925 at 7.15 pm on Monday evenings.<sup>30</sup> May Cox gave a talk about the place of swimming in school at 8pm on a Tuesday in March 1925, while social worker Edith Onians gave a talk titled 'the men of tomorrow' at 10pm in the same month.<sup>31</sup> The women who spoke were often professionals in their chosen field who were presented as experts on their topics—more so than the average housewife. Matron Moreland, for instance, gave weekly talks on infant welfare on 3LO on Mondays at 3.40pm, while Sister Peck, of the Victorian Baby Health Centres Association, gave regular talks on mothercraft on Wednesday afternoons.<sup>32</sup> Flora Pell, supervisor of the domestic arts

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<sup>28</sup> 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 9 May 1925, 20; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 7 March 1925, 16; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 21 March 1925, 18.

<sup>29</sup> 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 21 March 1925, 19; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 5 September 1925, 31; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 30 May 1925, 25.

<sup>30</sup> See: 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 9 May 1925, 19; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 16 May 1925, 20; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 25 July 1925, 27.

<sup>31</sup> 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 7 March 1925, 17; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 21 March 1925, 22.

<sup>32</sup> 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 10 January 1925, 14; 'Next Week's Broadcasting

at the Victorian Education Department, gave regular talks on cooking and cleaning.<sup>33</sup> These women spoke from a position of professional authority and were imparting their expert, scientific knowledge to the housewives listening at home.

By 1930, radio had matured and there were several more stations broadcasting a wider variety of programs for longer hours. Dedicated women's sessions were also now a regular feature of the programming schedule, a change from 1925 when women's programming had been largely talks of interest to women broadcast on an ad-hoc basis. For example, Iris Turnbull hosted the *Women's Radio Service* on Melbourne B-Class Station 3DB which was broadcast on weekday afternoons. Each day of the session was dedicated to a different theme, for example Wednesday was the book and garden session, while Friday was the diet and cookery session. Turnbull's program featured a number of guest speakers each week which was advertised as giving the session greater interest.<sup>34</sup> The Australian Broadcasting Company, who were contracted by the Federal Government to run the A-Class Stations from 1929 until June 1932, also consciously scheduled women's talks in the mid-morning, when they assumed that housewives stopped for a break.<sup>35</sup>

Talks on traditionally feminine topics received a significant amount of airtime. In September 1930, for instance, Pressy Preston gave weekly talks on fashion, including descriptions of the latest fashion parades from Paris. Her talks were praised for sparking the listener's imagination so that it was almost like they were in Paris themselves.<sup>36</sup> Many talks were still focused on domestic science. In July 1930, for example, a talk on the modern woman and her home was advertised with the following description:

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Programs', *Listener In*, 7 March 1925, 20.

<sup>33</sup> See for example: 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 21 March 1925, 19; 'Next Week's Broadcasting Programs', *Listener In*, 16 May 1925, 20.

<sup>34</sup> 'Both Sides of the Microphone', *Listener In*, 3 May 1930, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 6 September 1930, 15.



Whereas a few years ago the girl who married became a slave to the home, in these days she introduces the latest hygienic labour-saving devices, and has time to go to tennis, golf and bridge. With the advent of vacuum cleaners and electric washers she is no longer too tired to go out at night with her husband. Thus the slave to her house has become the happy mistress of the home.<sup>37</sup>

Childcare was another common topic of discussion. The 3DB *Women's Service Session* ran baby welfare days on Thursdays and would get in guest speakers, including representatives from local kindergartens and the Baby Health Centres Association.<sup>38</sup> The talks on domestic science and childrearing were part of a broader modernisation of domesticity, which promoted scientific principles as the ideal methods to effectively run home and family.<sup>39</sup> The supposedly scientific basis of their talks gave them a level of authority that was rooted in the zeitgeist of the period. Women could listen to a range of different talks about modern domestic science in their homes through the modern and scientific technology of the wireless.

The arts were another area in which women were able to demonstrate their expertise. Stephanie Taylor gave a series of talks on Melbourne radio in early 1930 about the different types of beauty in the landscape and the famous artists of Venice, and the *Listener In* noted that few 'young artists are better qualified to deal with this subject than Miss Taylor, who is a past gallery student, and recently held an exhibition of her own work.'<sup>40</sup> Patricia Dawson gave a series of talks on famous authors whom she had met, following a previous series of talks she had given on tennis.<sup>41</sup> Turnbull, who compered the 3DB *Women's Service Session*, was

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<sup>37</sup> 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 19 July 1930, 19.

<sup>38</sup> 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 13 September 1930, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Rebecca Jones, "'Listening-In': The Constructions of Femininity by Australian Radio in the 1930's" (Honours Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1991), 1.

<sup>40</sup> 'People in the Programs', *Listener In*, 1 January 1930; 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 19 July 1930, 19.

<sup>41</sup> 'What's in the Air for Us Women', *Listener In*, 15 January 1930, 70.

reported to have both a Diploma of Music and experience as a librarian, both of which were said to be helpful in her broadcasting.<sup>42</sup> Women also gave talks on women's history, in which they demonstrated the significant contribution that women had made to Australia. On 23 July 1930, for example, Hilda Bridges, a poet and author, spoke on 'pioneers in petticoats.'<sup>43</sup> The following week, on 30 July, broadcaster Gwen Varley gave a talk on women pioneers of Australia, and the blurb in the *Listener In* program guide noted that were it not for the 'courageous women who so gallantly faced the outback' Australia would not have developed into the country it was.<sup>44</sup>

There were also a number of women who gave talks on civics and citizenship. On 1 August 1930, Britomarte James, a justice of the peace and political reformer, spoke on the 3DB *Women's Service Session* on 'A Woman's Responsibility to her Government.' James was the president of the Victorian Women Citizen's movement and planned to stand for the South Melbourne municipal council later that year.<sup>45</sup> In 1935, Gwenda Lloyd, senior history mistress of the Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School, gave a weekly talk program titled *Civics and Current Topics* to senior school students on 3LO at 3pm on Tuesday afternoons. Lloyd attempted to stimulate a 'general interest in current affairs, and a realisation of the international point of view' in her young listeners.<sup>46</sup> Her broadcasts included descriptions of parliaments and law courts, including information on elections.<sup>47</sup>

As explored in the previous chapter, the speaking voice was seen as key to a good radio talk in these years, and a woman utilising ideal forms of speech was much more likely to be accepted as an expert speaker over the air by station managers, listeners and the radio press. For example, secretary of the Victorian Baby Health Centres Association and justice

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<sup>42</sup> 'People Who Make the Programs', *Listener In*, 29 January 1930, 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 19 July 1930, 19.

<sup>44</sup> 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 26 July 1930, 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> 'Women and the Microphone', *Listener In*, 9 March 1935, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

of the peace Mrs C. O. White was praised by the *Listener In* as an outstanding speaker: “To be a successful broadcasting talker one must undoubtedly let one’s personality shine through the voice; for it is the voice alone which the radio speaker has to keep the audience interested.”<sup>48</sup> Humour was also helpful as it enabled the speaker to project confidence and a strong personality. Thus, White was able to ‘hold the attention of the unseen public’ through her use of humour and the personality of her voice.<sup>49</sup>

During the early years of radio women’s talks developed slowly, and often (but not always) focused on traditionally feminine topics such as childcare, domestic science, and fashion. But by understanding radio within the broader context of the active citizenship performed by women’s organisations in this period, it is apparent that radio provided new opportunities for women to speak publicly and to present themselves as experts. This had implications for women’s advancement more broadly, as a number of women broadcasters recognised the potential of the medium to improve women’s lives and their position in society in many different ways.

### **Broadcasting Feminism**

Interwar feminists recognised the potential of radio as a medium which they could use to speak directly to women and advocate a range of issues, including married women’s nationality rights, women’s right to careers and political representation, and women’s legal rights. One radio program which featured these feminist messages was the *Australian Women’s Weekly’s* (*AWW*) session, titled *The Woman’s Hour* and broadcast from 1934. The *AWW* was launched in June 1933 and would become a national institution which was read in one in four homes in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>50</sup> In its earliest years the *AWW* promoted a feminist

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<sup>48</sup> ‘A Tour of the Studios’, *Listener In*, 15 November 1930, 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Susan Sheridan et al., *Who Was that Woman?: the Australian Women’s Weekly in the Postwar Years* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), 1.

agenda by offering a platform for a re-evaluation of women's role in society.<sup>51</sup> Crucially, the magazine also 'gave Australian women a redefinition of Australianness that included them in it.'<sup>52</sup> This reassessment of Australianness extended into broadcasting.

The magazine was, in fact, first introduced to the public through radio. In June 1933 a mystery serial called *The Bamboo Bangle* was broadcast simultaneously over all six of Sydney's commercial stations at 7.30pm each evening. The *AWW* was the sponsor of the program and a large advertising push involving billboards and press advertisements made sure that listeners were aware that this new publication was responsible for the interesting new serial. Each episode of the serial was purported to be introduced by founding editor George Warnecke, although in reality he was played by an actor.<sup>53</sup> This was a new and exciting method of launching a magazine—and the central role of radio demonstrated that Warnecke understood the importance of the medium in capturing a female audience as well as the potential for a close association between print and broadcast media. This was significant at a time when many print media outlets were wary of radio's threat to their advertising profits and public influence.

The *AWW*'s radio session was announced in the magazine on 24 February 1934. The program was promoted as something 'entirely new in women's radio sessions' which would extend the magazine's policy of giving women the best possible service in broadcasting.<sup>54</sup> The sessions were to be overseen by feminist leader Linda Littlejohn, who also gave regular talks on the program, and presented by Dorothea Vautier, an announcer from New Zealand who had made a name for herself on the Sydney radio scene. The *AWW* emphasised Vautier's outstanding experience and attractive voice—'one of the finest broadcasting voices in Australia'—which equipped her to take the helm of their women's sessions in 1934.<sup>55</sup> Her

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<sup>51</sup> Denis O'Brien, *The Weekly* (Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 1982), 21.

<sup>52</sup> Sheridan et al., *Who Was that Woman?*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> O'Brien, *The Weekly*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Women's Weekly Links Up with Station 2UW', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 24 February 1934, 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

voice was a key part of her popularity; Vautier was trained in elocution and wrote in 1934 that a pleasing tone of voice was of greater importance than a beautiful face, as it would leave a greater impression on the audience.<sup>56</sup> She also gave her listeners ‘something to think about’ and an opportunity for them to express their opinions by writing to her.<sup>57</sup> The choice of Vautier to be the regular announcer for the session therefore ensured that the feminist message would be regularly delivered by an ideal radio voice.

The radio program aimed to present the same popular content as the magazine, only every day. The session was launched on 26 February by feminist Jessie Street, Littlejohn’s colleague in the UA, at the 2UW studios. In her speech Street articulated her perception of radio as a transformative medium for women, as she ‘congratulated the directors of 2UW and The Australian Women’s Weekly on their arrangement for a link-up, which she thought would do much to help Australian women realise their proper status in life.’<sup>58</sup> The radio



**Figure 2.1: Linda Littlejohn (L) and Jessie Street (R) at the opening of the Australian Women’s Weekly’s Radio Session, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 3 March 1934, 21.**

<sup>56</sup> Dorothea Vautier, ‘More Important Than Your Face—Color for the Voice’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 19 May 1934, 10.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Should a Woman Tell Her Age?’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 20 June 1936, 40.

<sup>58</sup> ‘2UW’s New Women’s Sessions: Successful Opening at the New Studios’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 3 March 1934, 21.

session complemented the magazine enabling women to engage with its content every day and hear the voices of other women, which in turn would influence their own conceptualisations of their abilities, responsibilities and place in the world.

The drive to use the radio session to raise the feminist consciousness of women listeners had much to do with Littlejohn. She was one of the leading figures to promote radio's role in fostering women's citizenship in the interwar period as she used her position and knowledge as a professional broadcaster to promote the feminist message. Born in Sydney in 1883, by the 1920s she had become well-known in Sydney feminist circles, serving as an executive member of the NCW of New South Wales and the Feminist Club, founding the League of Women Voters (LWV) in 1927, and co-founding the UA with Jessie Street in 1929. Like many feminists at that time she was also an advocate for eugenics and involved in the Racial Hygiene Association of New South Wales (RHA). She was also involved in the transnational feminist organisation the British Commonwealth League (BCL). Littlejohn's broadcasting career was also prolific.<sup>59</sup> She was a well-known and well-regarded broadcaster who worked for a range of stations including the BBC, 2UW, 2UE, and 2GB.<sup>60</sup> As Jeannine Baker has observed, by the late 1920s 'Littlejohn was participating in on-air debates and delivering radio talks about women's engagement in public life, such as the need for women jurors.'<sup>61</sup>

During the early 1930s, Littlejohn became one of the most vocal advocates for women's equality with men—a shift away from the feminist focus on women's maternal difference as citizens that dominated during the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> It is notable that she was a leading figure in this rhetorical shift at the same time that she was regularly hosting a women's session

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<sup>59</sup> Meredith Foley, 'Littlejohn, Emma Linda Palmer (1883–1949)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1986), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/littlejohn-emma-linda-palmer-7208>, accessed 26 February 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.; Lake, *Getting Equal*, 171.

<sup>61</sup> Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s-1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017), 298.

<sup>62</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 171.

on 2UW, as she was able to make use of her platform to spread her message and encourage other women to engage with ideas of equality and agitate for their rights.<sup>63</sup> The active citizenship of feminist leaders like Littlejohn was often made possible by their independent incomes and domestic help.<sup>64</sup> This was certainly true for Littlejohn, who was from a wealthy background which enabled her to take up many leadership positions with feminist organisations and travel extensively. Her radio work provided both a supplement to her income and, more importantly, a platform from which to promote her agenda and recruit new women to the cause. Littlejohn was a practised and eloquent speaker, a skillset she made use of to promote women's equality and model active citizenship on the air.<sup>65</sup> In the *AWW* Littlejohn was described as having 'many years of journalistic and broadcasting experience, which makes her eminently suitable for this work.'<sup>66</sup> Radio was an ideal medium for Littlejohn, as she could utilise her polished speaking voice to directly address women listening in their homes. She was well-suited to taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the new medium of radio to advocate the feminist cause.

Littlejohn had been associated with the *AWW* since its inception, writing an article on the need for equal social rights between the sexes for the front page of the magazine's first issue.<sup>67</sup> In 1934 she regularly wrote for the *AWW* about the radio sessions and emphasised the potential of radio to improve women's position in society. In April 1934, for example, she argued that radio had enabled time-poor housewives to learn about a wide array of topics:

Actually it would be impossible to exaggerate what broadcasting has done and is doing for women, for there are women to-day who,

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<sup>63</sup> 'Personalities at 2UW', *Broadcast Year Book*, 106.

<sup>64</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>66</sup> 'The Women's Weekly Links Up with Station 2UW', 2.

<sup>67</sup> Linda P. Littlejohn, 'Equal Social Rights for Sexes', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 10 June 1933, 1.

amidst their multitudinous household tasks, their tennis, or their bridge, have time to discover for themselves the never-ending novelties in fashion, in cooking, in the wider range of world news, travel, books, or the newest music.<sup>68</sup>

In March 1934, she wrote of the ‘close alliance’ between radio and the press, as radio expanded on the news ‘with special talks by experts on affairs of interest for which a newspaper could not spare the space.’<sup>69</sup> This, in turn, resulted in a more educated populace. Littlejohn therefore promoted her belief in radio’s ability to expand women’s horizons and worked to cement its role as a key tool for feminist activism.

From its inception, the UA used broadcasting in its publicity campaigns and encouraged its members ‘to become proficient public communicators.’<sup>70</sup> During this period the organisation campaigned vociferously for equal rights for women including for the employment of married women teachers, married women’s nationality rights, divorce law reform, equal pay, women’s jury service, and women’s representation in government.<sup>71</sup> These themes were reflected in the topics discussed on the *AWW*’s sessions. The week of 10 March 1934, for example, featured a talk on needlework, several book reviews, a talk by Littlejohn on whether women should be employed in industry, a talk on advertising as a career for women, one on music of other countries, and another on whether prosperity or adversity had the most influence on personality development.<sup>72</sup> The week of 12 May 1934 featured talks on legal pitfalls for women, women and war, life in Russia, women under Christianity and news of women across the globe.<sup>73</sup> Another feature of the program was its on-air debates

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<sup>68</sup> Linda P. Littlejohn, ‘2UW Highlights for Readers’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 28 April 1934, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Linda P. Littlejohn, ‘Radio and the Written Word: A Close Alliance’, 3 March 1934, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Baker, ‘Woman to Woman’, 296.

<sup>71</sup> Winifred Mitchell, *50 Years of Feminist Achievement: A History of the United Associations of Women* (Sydney: United Associations of Women, 1979), 12–22.

<sup>72</sup> ‘The Women’s Weekly and 2UW’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 10 March 1934, 16.

<sup>73</sup> ‘2UW Highlights for Readers’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 12 May 1934, 8.



between women and men on issues related to women's equality. These included debates on whether women should propose, whether women's work should be restricted to purely feminine avenues, and whether wives should have salaries.<sup>74</sup> Through talks such as these the *AWW's* sessions thus promoted a distinctively feminist agenda, shaped as they were by Littlejohn and the UA. The eloquent voices of women who featured on the program, including Vautier and Littlejohn, gave the program a respectable veneer which helped to deliver their message of women's equality. The sessions provided a forum for women's voices to talk about feminist issues on daytime radio, which was a significant step in moving beyond the ideal of maternal citizenship towards a clearer recognition of the importance of formal equality between the sexes for women's ability to be fully fledged citizens.

Personal networks were often key to getting a number of feminist voices on the air in the 1930s, as women like Littlejohn drew on their connections in various associations to fill the airtime on their shows with feminist messages. After moving to Sydney in 1931 Irene Greenwood joined the UA on a recommendation from Bessie Rischbieth, whom she had known from her time in the Western Australian Women's Service Guilds (WSG). Greenwood recalled that Littlejohn and her UA co-founder Jessie Street enthusiastically inducted her into the organisation, promoting her to key roles in the public speaking and broadcasting committees.<sup>75</sup> Littlejohn was a particularly strong influence on her, and Greenwood often filled in for Littlejohn on her women's sessions when she was out of town.<sup>76</sup> Greenwood also often participated in the regular debates on the *AWW's* sessions, including one in April 1934 on taxing unmarried men, and another in August 1934 on why women chose to marry.<sup>77</sup> The example of Littlejohn and the *AWW's* sessions demonstrates

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<sup>74</sup> '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 26 May 1934, 8; '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 23 June 1934, 7; '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 24 March 1934, 35.

<sup>75</sup> OH 1094, Interview with Irene Greenwood, Feminist, 1 August 1982, State Library of Western Australia, Perth.

<sup>76</sup> Kaye Murray, *A Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood (1898-1992)* (Perth: Kaye Murray Productions, 2005), 42.

<sup>77</sup> '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 25 August 1934, 8; '2UW Highlights for Readers',

that broadcasting was a key way in which the shift in emphasis from emphasising women's difference as citizens to agitating for their equal rights with men was articulated by Australian feminists. The daily women's session carried the message of equality and aimed to foster regular engagement with feminist broadcasting. Feminists such as Littlejohn, Street, and Greenwood believed that broadcasts could encourage women to think of themselves as equal citizens and become more active in movements for political, social, and legislative change. They also claimed their own spaces within the media by demonstrating that women could intelligently contribute to public discourse.

### **Raising the Status of the Housewife**

Radio broadcasts were embraced by a wide range of women's organisations to communicate with their members and to promote women's collective power as a political force. While many of these organisations did not adopt the feminist label, their work nevertheless places them within feminist activism. In her work on the British Women's Institute movement, similar to the Australian CWA, Andrews has argued 'for a perception of feminism that incorporates women who do and do not describe themselves as feminists, to argue for a definition that includes any women who, in whatever ways they see fit, struggle for improvements in women's lives or against male domination.'<sup>78</sup> In a similar way, while Australian organisations such as the CWA, the HA, and the NCW primarily focused on domestic issues and did not identify themselves as feminists, they nevertheless demonstrate how feminism can 'operate as a practice.'<sup>79</sup> These women's organisations recognised the role of radio as a tool which was especially well-suited to raising the political consciousness of

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*Australian Women's Weekly*, 21 April 1934, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 2015), 27.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

women in the home, even if they often focused on different issues in their broadcasts than more overt feminists such as Littlejohn.

Smart, for example, has noted that one of the most important reasons for the Victorian HA's rapid growth in 1937 and 1938 was the institution of 'radio broadcasts aimed at raising the public profile and status of the housewife.'<sup>80</sup> The 1936 annual report noted that the executive decided to begin broadcasting that year and acquired a morning session on commercial station 3XY, as well as a weekly slot on Monday mornings on 3AW. The HA used the sessions to give reports of its activities to members. This endeavour was rewarded with a significant increase in membership applications, most notably from regional areas of the state. The HA also established a radio club, the Morning Tea Club, for its members.<sup>81</sup>

The HA articulated a concept of women's citizenship based on Protestant Christian values which were secularised and practical, rather than overtly spiritual. As Smart has argued, the HA promoted women's domestic role in language of 'modernity, efficiency, science and progress' which was 'a language that claimed power, and this claim reinforced the many assertions of feminine citizenship that grew louder and stronger' in the interwar years.<sup>82</sup>

The HA was notable for its use of broadcasting to promote active citizenship to women in the home. Through their broadcasts they promoted an image of the civically engaged housewife, who made problems such as the price of bread and milk into political issues. They also emphasised the importance of women acting collectively to improve women's lives. For example, the vice-president, Alice Speedie, gave a radio talk on equal pay for women in 1936. She argued that women were now achieving in a range of fields, but that they 'should not be satisfied with the mere glory of attainment' and that they 'should not be denied the right to claim equal payment for the services they render, otherwise [their] claim

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<sup>80</sup> Judith Smart, 'A Mission to the Home: The Housewives Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920-1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 13, no. 28 (1998), 223.

<sup>81</sup> 'Housewives Association's Annual Report', *Housewife*, May 1936, 9.

<sup>82</sup> Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', 216.

to equality is a valueless one.<sup>83</sup> She argued that women needed to fight for equal pay, and should do so collectively:

I do not think that women are aware of the great power they hold, nor do they think as collectively as they should in the general interests of their sex. There are many women's Associations in our midst which naturally work for particular aims in politics, welfare, charity, etc., but none of them seem to advocate and work generally for the principles of women's equality...If women thought and acted collectively the reproach could not lie on us, that with an equal franchise with men in the politics of the country, there is no single woman representative in our houses of legislature.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, for Speedie, collective action was the key to female emancipation. Her broadcast demonstrates the centrality of the advancement of women's equality to the HA's, outlook, as well as the role of radio in promoting this concept to women in the home and encouraging them to become actively involved in the organisation.

Earlier in 1936 Mrs J. Salter Watts, then vice-president, gave a broadcast which examined women's responsibility to engage in civic activities through associations and charities. Watts argued that a woman's first responsibility was to look after her own family, but when a woman had sufficient help at home she had a responsibility to get involved with societies and charities. She argued that women proved their capacity for organisation during the First World War, which brought out hitherto dormant talents. She did not 'approve of too much "Stay-at home" when we can do so much and help so many.'<sup>85</sup> Cecilia Downing,

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<sup>83</sup> 'Over the Air—Mrs A. B. Speedie, Vice President Speaks of Equal Pay for Women', *Housewife*, August 1936, 6.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> 'Mrs. Watts Broadcasts to Members', *Housewife*, June 1936, 4.

senior vice-president, broadcast on the role of the HA as a nucleus of women's citizenship activity. She argued that 'the housewife's interest is not merely looking after the house as a place of residence, but she has a wider interest in the physical, moral, social and spiritual care of the home...she is a citizen interested in the conditions under which she and her family live.'<sup>86</sup> Women, according to Downing, could not improve things on their own but rather needed to 'seek the assistance and co-operation of women like-minded, and thus a Society is formed of those who feel that union is power and strength.'<sup>87</sup> The HA was this society.

The HA also used broadcasts to advocate particular issues, often relating to the prices of necessities. For example, in 1936 Speedie broadcast on the price of public transport fares and the dismal level of service.<sup>88</sup> In 1937, the organising secretary, Rachael Robinson, broadcast on the price of bread, a longstanding issue for the HA, and outlined the organisation's advocacy of this issue on behalf of poorer members of society, a 'portion of the community least able to fight for itself, and to whom the price of bread is of very great importance.'<sup>89</sup> The HA therefore recognised that radio was a medium which could be used to communicate with housewives, publicly advocate for issues on their behalf and encourage collective action. In doing so, they demonstrated that radio was not only used as a medium for overtly feminist activism but provided a platform for a range of women to increase their influence and adopt new methods of influence.

### **Women's Radio Clubs**

Radio's ability to enable women to claim their voice as citizens in these years was not limited to relatively well-connected women giving talks and organising women's sessions. From the late 1920s, radio clubs began to be formed, which brought listeners together in real life to

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<sup>86</sup> 'Broadcasts by Mrs. John Downing, Senior Vice-President', *Housewife*, March 1936, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> 'Broadcast by Mrs A. B. Speedie, Vice-President', *Housewife*, May 1936, 4.

<sup>89</sup> 'A Subject That Affects All Housewives – The Price of Bread: A Strongly Worded Protest Through 3AW by Miss Rachael Robinson', *Housewife*, October 1936, 5.

foster communities and perform charitable works, especially in response to the suffering caused by the Great Depression. These were associations of largely female members, who listened to the same daily radio program and would regularly meet in person to socialise and fundraise. The radio program was central to the activities of these clubs, as it provided a daily point of interaction for members. The activities of the clubs were arranged through the broadcasts, and the compere was often also the club president.

The Great Depression had a profound effect on Australia. Although unemployment figures from this era are significantly underreported, at least one-fifth of wage and salary earners were out of work between 1930 and 1934, and unemployment reached a high point of thirty per cent of union members in mid-1932.<sup>90</sup> Stuart Macintyre has estimated that in 1932 up to one million people, in a total workforce of two million, lacked stable full time employment.<sup>91</sup> While the economy began to recover by late 1933, it was only by the end of the decade that real domestic product per capita reached the same level as 1920-21 (seventy pounds).<sup>92</sup> Although women's employment tended to be more stable than men's because female workers were concentrated in less exposed industries with lower wages, for many women the loss of their husband's jobs placed considerable strain on their ability to manage their households and care for their families.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, as Macintyre has observed, middle-class people keenly felt the loss of self-esteem that came with unemployment, and they did not have the support systems to draw on that were well established in working-class communities (although working-class families experienced poverty more acutely).<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, charity was strongly stigmatised, with people turning to charitable organisations only when they could not get assistance from friends and family.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 4 1901-1942: The Succeeding Age* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 275.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 286–87.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

Unemployment drastically disrupted the routines of life, family relations, and financial security.

Within this context, radio played an increasingly important role as a reliable source of entertainment and assistance. During this period listeners were exhorted to ‘tune out the gloom’ by listening to their wireless.<sup>96</sup> In an oral history in the 1970s, ‘Sheila,’ a 3KZ advertising scriptwriter in the mid-1930s, remembered that one of the functions of radio during the Great Depression was to help people. Radio programs that directly canvassed for support for destitute listeners were seen as a public service, while radio clubs were ‘weapons against loneliness.’<sup>97</sup> In this way radio became a cohesive social force during the fractured years of the 1930s. As Sheila noted: ‘Radio was one of the success stories of the Great Depression.’<sup>98</sup>

Radio clubs were a key way in which many women dealt with the hardships imposed on them by the Great Depression, especially middle-class women who found a supportive social network over the airwaves. According to Bridget Griffen-Foley, these clubs functioned as a way in which radio stations fostered intimate communities amongst their listeners. Stations set up clubs ‘to enhance the industries’ civic reputability, insinuate themselves in the lives of consumers, engender goodwill and facilitate tie-ins with business.’<sup>99</sup> Through these clubs radio became more than entertainment—it became a social movement, although it should not be forgotten that many of the clubs operated at least partly for commercial reasons.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless the clubs allowed for personal contact with radio hosts and other listeners, which fostered a greater sense of intimacy amongst audiences.

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<sup>96</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, ‘Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio,’ in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ed. Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 123–32.

<sup>97</sup> Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930’s Great Depression in Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1978), 285–9.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>99</sup> Griffen-Foley, ‘Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio’, 127.

<sup>100</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 129.

Griffen-Foley is correct that these clubs were certainly a result of the commercial radio industry's desire to craft intimacy and prove its legitimacy as an alternative to the ABC, however they also provide one of the clearest and most widespread examples of how women's citizenship was expanded through radio in the interwar years. As Eva Cox has argued, feminist conceptions of citizenship in the early twentieth century centred on women's contribution to society through charitable and philanthropic works; their political enfranchisement was a recognition that they were already citizens in these ways.<sup>101</sup> Radio provided them with a new way of performing these citizenship duties by communicating through the airwaves each day. These women conceptualised the role of radio as a social good which could bring others together and help them through times of struggle. Radio clubs around the country ran regular get-togethers for their members and numerous charity drives. Through these activities they enacted a type of citizenship based on altruism and social justice.

The largest and most well-known radio club in the 1930s was the 2GB Happiness Club, run by Eunice Stelzer. This club promoted a 'brand of self-help, selflessness and sisterhood' that was of great comfort to listeners during the difficult years of the early 1930s.<sup>102</sup> Stelzer began the Happiness Club in 1929, when she was giving regular talks on Sydney commercial station 2GB. She noticed that she was receiving a large amount of mail from unhappy women, who were lonely, neurotic, or suffering in poverty. Stelzer attempted to answer these women via letter, but eventually felt that this was a poor way to communicate with them and believed that she could have a greater impact on their lives if she could talk to them personally. She arranged for an afternoon tea at Sydney department store Angus and Coote's and advertised it during one of her radio talks. Stelzer expected perhaps a dozen people to turn up and was surprised and delighted when 250 crammed through the tea

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<sup>101</sup> Eva Cox, 'Feminism and Citizenship', in *Rethinking Australian Citizenship*, ed. Wayne Hudson and John Kane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57–58.

<sup>102</sup> Griffen-Foley, 'Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio', 127.



room's doors. With such overwhelming attendance Stelzer decided to turn the gathering into an official club, with the aims to make others happy, prevent loneliness, and work for charity.<sup>103</sup> The Happiness Club grew exponentially and spawned multiple branches across Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, the Central Coast, and even as far afield as London and New Zealand. By 1936, it had 11,000 members and fifty-five branches.<sup>104</sup> It was a phenomenon which brought women together to perform their civic duty.

While there are no surviving recordings of Stelzer, analysis of radio magazines from the 1930s provides an indication of the importance of her radio speech to her public persona. It is clear from these sources that much of the appeal of the Happiness Club's radio sessions was Stelzer herself, who was revered by her listeners for her sincerity over the air—a 1936 article in *Radio Pictorial* announced that 'Sincerity is Keynote' in her sessions.<sup>105</sup> Stelzer became a darling of the radio press, and her image confirmed her vocal persona as a kind and hardworking woman free of pretence.<sup>106</sup> Yet the importance of her vocal presence should not be underestimated; she broadcast daily at 2pm and used her broadcasts to make the Happiness Club central to its members' lives. The following quote from *Radio Pictorial* illustrates the importance of the radio sessions to the club's activities:

The whole secret of the success of the Happiness Club is the amazing way in which Mrs. Stelzer manages to keep all the different branches united in a spirit of co-operation with herself—the chief president. This could never have been accomplished without broadcasting, for she used her session over 2GB as a means of advertising all the various activities of the club's various branches, and in that way secures the support of the listening public. For instance, busy person

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<sup>103</sup> 'Sincerity is Keynote', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 February 1936, 6.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 126.

that she is, Mrs. Stelzer could not possibly attend all the functions that occur in the different branches, but, with the help of a wireless set installed in the hall where the function...is being held, she can quite easily give an opening speech during her session, and she has, on a number of occasions, presented cheques by proxy through this means.<sup>107</sup>

Stelzer made innovative use of radio to run her growing network of Happiness Clubs. An article reported that when a call came through that a woman who had just given birth to twins was completely without babies' clothes, Stelzer immediately stopped reading out a recipe to send out a call for assistance for the woman. This was apparently just one of many such instances where Stelzer was able to make use of the radio session, as 'without radio the Happiness Club could never have been able to function with such remarkable results.'<sup>108</sup> Through the club Stelzer used radio as a technology that could improve women's lives by creating a sense of community and providing practical assistance in times of hardship. Furthermore, through her media engagements she developed and articulated a rhetoric of radio's role in improving society.

Hundreds of other clubs soon sprang up throughout the country, and these became a central aspect of women's radio in the 1930s. The 3DB Woollies Friendship Club run by Iris Turnbull brought women together to knit warm items for donation to health centres and crèches. The club also held regular afternoon teas for its members.<sup>109</sup> Radio clubs were also formed to promote women's sporting activities, such as the 2CH Women's League, formed in 1936 'for the physical advancement of the women of to-day.'<sup>110</sup> The 3AW Women's

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<sup>107</sup> '2GB Happiness Club Activities: Brings More Revenue for Charities', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 2 March 1936, 12.

<sup>108</sup> 'Radio's Important Role', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 April 1936, 19.

<sup>109</sup> 'Women's Club Notes', *Radio Times*, 13 June 1936, 7.

<sup>110</sup> 'Australian Women's League', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 2 March 1936, 22.

Association held regular outings and sporting events, including hosting an ice skating club. Their motto was '[h]old on to health and you will hold on to Youth.'<sup>111</sup>

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, radio clubs took on an additional importance in regional areas as a way to foster communities of women without the need for them to travel into town, a journey which many women were not able to make on a regular basis. 2WG in Wagga Wagga, for example, established its Women's Club in 1937 and within three months it had a membership of over 500, and over 3,500 by 1938. The radio sessions were broadcast each morning and played a crucial role in building a community amongst members both in town and in the more remote parts of the Riverina. For the many women who were unable to travel into town regularly, the sessions were their only link to the club. Charity was still at the heart of the 2WG Women's Club's activities, as evidenced by the club's slogan: 'Let us be as happy as we can and happiness comes through service.'<sup>112</sup>

### **Women Announcers**

Donna Halper has argued that radio's key difference from print was not in focusing on a female audience, as women's magazines had been doing this for years. Rather, it was that radio raised the profile of the women hosts, who became well known personalities in their own right, unlike magazine writers who were often anonymous and did not have the same ability to project their individuality.<sup>113</sup> In Australia during the 1930s, the personalities of announcers were constructed in the radio press in terms of their sincerity and empathy, which became sought after qualities for ideal female broadcasters. Their broadcasting expertise and position as respected public figures validated the place of women on the airwaves. Women

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<sup>111</sup> 'Women's Club Notes', 7.

<sup>112</sup> '2WG Women's Club', *Wagga History*, <http://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/library/wagga-history/radio-station-and-2wg-womens-club/2wg-womens-club>, accessed 30 September 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Donna Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves: How Radio Brought Women into the Public Sphere', in *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, ed. Michael C. Keith (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 86–87.

announcers anticipated that radio could improve society and worked to make this reality through their own programs.

Rebecca Jones has argued that Australian women announcers in the 1930s became symbols of true womanhood, as they modelled a domestic ideology of womanhood for their listeners to emulate. Although these women presented a challenge to the gender hierarchy by appearing in a supposedly masculine role, Jones argues that they used that position to reinforce the ideal of domestic femininity.<sup>114</sup> The contradiction between challenging gender norms through performing the masculine role of announcing, on one hand, and espousing a domestic ideal of femininity, on the other, demonstrates the complex roles that women announcers played on radio at this time. However, only emphasising the domestic component of their work neglects the significant meanings of their roles as regular speakers on women's radio and how this promoted women's citizenship. Indeed, this duality opened up the potential for radio to become a space of political engagement.

The example of Perth ABC women's session presenter Dorothy Graham demonstrates the complexities of their position. Graham conducted the *6WF ABC Women's Session* from 1929 until 1940. She attracted a large audience and established the ABC Women's Association, a radio club which organised a range of social and sporting activities.<sup>115</sup> Her program focused on recipes, home hints and beauty tips, and Graham also wrote a weekly column for *West Australian Wireless News and Musical World* giving yet more recipes and home hints.<sup>116</sup> The content of the session was therefore largely domestic in focus. But it is important to recognise that Graham also did much to promote radio as a necessity in women's lives which would broaden their outlook. She argued for the importance of radio

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<sup>114</sup> Jones, "Listening-In", 10–11.

<sup>115</sup> Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 29.

<sup>116</sup> See for example: Dorothy Graham, 'The Housewife's Corner', *West Australian Wireless News and Musical World*, 16 June 1930, 34.

in educating listeners in music and the importance of home happiness for good citizenship.<sup>117</sup> In her session she also broadcast talks by a range of women, including Dr Eleanor Stang, who gave weekly health talks in 1930 and, from 1936, Irene Greenwood's talks on *Women in the International News*, which were often overtly feminist and left-wing, as will be explored in the next chapter.<sup>118</sup> Thus, while Graham's program included a significant amount of domestic content, it should not be forgotten that it also educated women to be informed citizens by airing a range of topics.

The women who became famous as women's session comperes in the 1930s were key to radio's redefinition of female citizenship as they actively performed this new ideal on their shows every day. Once again although recordings of these women do not survive, analysis of radio periodicals from the time demonstrates that their broadcasts were discussed in a particular way and presented as offering something different to that of male announcers. Women announcers were described as employing sincerity and empathy in their broadcasts, and thus using the medium to help their listeners and society. This ideal of citizenship as performing one's civic duty with empathy needs to be understood in relation to the dominant ideologies of women's organisations in this era, many of which were agitating for significant change to women's position in society. Women comperes were also central figures in this task, as they modelled engaged citizenship through their broadcasts and directly addressed women in their homes.

Myra Dempsey was one announcer on Sydney radio renowned for her genuineness and empathy. In her session, *Smilin Thru*, she covered a diverse range of topics, from fashion, to theatre, sports and motor cars.<sup>119</sup> She was a 'forceful, dominating personality' with an

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.; Dorothy Graham, 'The Housewife's Corner', *West Australian Wireless News and Musical World*, 1 July 1930, 35.

<sup>118</sup> Dorothy Graham, 'The Housewife's Corner', *West Australian Wireless News and Musical World*, 16 April 1930, 33; Lewis, *On Air*, 29.

<sup>119</sup> 'Winner of Myra Dempsey's 2UW Competition', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 February 1936, 28.

‘absurdly soft heart that is always melting at the silly little sentimental things of life.’<sup>120</sup> In an interview with *Radio Pictorial* in 1937 Dempsey highlighted the importance of authenticity for women announcers, and noted that listeners ‘can immediately detect sincerity in a voice.’<sup>121</sup> She was scathing in her assessment of men who criticised women announcers, arguing that they had never listened to a woman for more than five minutes and that their prejudice had absolutely no basis as a result. These criticisms were also ridiculous, she said, as plenty of women announcers had managed to keep their jobs, presumably in some part due to their ability to command an audience. She nominated sincerity as a key reason why women announcers were popular and successful:

It has been proved that the sincerity of the women on the air in Sydney has brought happiness and comfort and cheer into many people’s lives. And believe me, it’s not always realised just how the women are feeling themselves. No matter how tired or out-of-sorts they may be, they know that if they can’t be pleasant and cheerful they had better not broadcast at all. It’s only their courage and sincerity that keeps them going in the face of so much adverse criticism.<sup>122</sup>

In this statement, Dempsey presented the sincerity of women announcers as hard work that they performed for the betterment of society. As a result of their efforts, Dempsey argued, the public were loyal to these sincere women announcers, noting that her own listeners enthusiastically welcomed her back after a year-long absence from broadcasting.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> ‘Smiling Thru’ With Myra Dempsey’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, October 1937, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Dorothy Jordan was one of the first women announcers in Australia, starting on Sydney commercial station 2BL in 1925 before joining 2GB in the late 1920s. Before she became a broadcaster, Jordan was the women's representative on the 1921 Basic Wage Commission and was one of the first women to be appointed a justice of the peace in New South Wales. These positions clearly demonstrate that Jordan was an active citizen before she began her radio career, and she took this commitment to civic duty into her broadcasting work. Jordan hosted the 2GB *Women's Radio Service* between 9am and 10am on weekday mornings, and believed that the success of her session was because she was 'always able to see the other person's point of view' and she therefore demonstrated great empathy to her listeners.<sup>124</sup> In an interview with *Radio Pictorial* in 1936, Jordan nominated health talks as one of the most important benefits of radio, as they ensured that women had a much better standard of medical knowledge, which could help prevent the early death of children.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the impetus for her beginning her own women's session was the desire to reduce maternal and infant mortality, as she had lost her own three-year-old son to diphtheria and believed that this tragedy could have been averted had radio talks on children's illnesses been available at the time.<sup>126</sup> Jordan fought against the perception that such talks were inappropriate for radio and was vindicated by the overwhelming response she received from her listeners.<sup>127</sup> She also reportedly had expertise in psychology and health, and used her 'magical, mystical power' to bring 'healing and comfort to thousands of women daily.'<sup>128</sup> Once again, Jordan articulated her own vision of radio's potential and used her platform as an announcer to provide a social service and improve the lives of her listeners.

Women such as Dempsey and Jordan were motivated by their belief in the social role of broadcasting and worked hard in their positions. The hard work of running a women's

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<sup>124</sup> 'Mother and Daughter in Radio', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, November 1935, 43.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> 'How Australia's Pioneer Woman Announcer Started', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 30 March 1935, 22.

<sup>128</sup> '2GB—The Theosophical Broadcasting Station', *Broadcast Year Book* (Sydney: C. C. Faulkner, 1934), 111.

session was also demonstrated in the example of well-known watercolour artist Gladys Owen, who ran the women's session on ABC station 2FC in the mid-1930s and gave weekly book reviews and overseas news reviews in order to give her listeners an idea of current literature and world affairs. This required her to read widely and extensively, including foreign newspapers.<sup>129</sup> Owen's job also required her to seek out interesting speakers for the women's session, as she outlined in an interview with *Radio Pictorial* in 1935:

I might trace one prospective speaker fairly quickly and arrange the whole thing on the spot, whilst another might prove very elusive. Having traced my prospects to earth, in some cases I'm faced with the difficulty of getting them to speak, particularly when they've never before faced the "mike". Some prefer to give straight talks, while others like to be interviewed and answer leading questions over the air. My advice is often sought regarding the type of talk that would be of the most interest, and the subjects are frequently based on my suggestions. Occasionally I find a most interesting person with a fund of information with a voice that doesn't register well over the air; which, to say the least, is most disappointing.<sup>130</sup>

Here, it is apparent that Owen exercised considerable control over what went to air in her sessions, and she was considered by *Radio Pictorial* to be an expert on broadcasting. It is also clear that both interesting content and a good radio voice were required of potential speakers, although there was flexibility regarding the format that their presentation might take. This expertise, and the professional control and standing that went with it, opened up possibilities for women to shape programming and content, as the example of Owen demonstrates.

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<sup>129</sup> 'A Day in the Life of Gladys Owen', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, November 1935, 2-3.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*



Although women announcers primarily spoke to other women in their sessions, they did sometimes address men. Goodie Reeve was a long-time announcer who presented children's and women's sessions on 2GB. Reeve's appeal was her 'extraordinarily sympathetic nature,' which she put down to her recovery from a life-threatening illness and subsequent desire to spread kindness in the world.<sup>131</sup> In 1937 she began a unique session titled *For Men Only*, broadcast on 2GB on Saturday afternoons at 4pm. In this session Reeve responded to men's requests for advice about their personal issues—a format usually reserved for women's radio. *Radio Pictorial* reported in October 1937 that the session had secured jobs, clothing, shelter, and pen friends for men and their families. When asked about the significant responsibility she was undertaking in this session, Reeve responded:

I'm keenly alive to the responsibility of it, don't worry. Sometimes it nearly gets me down. Particularly when they say they are about to commit suicide. There are some I worry terribly about. Of course, I can't do much but I talk to them and try to help them in the most practical way I can.<sup>132</sup>

In this session, Reeve made use of a type of programming usually aimed at women listeners to create a space for men to explore their intimate lives and give voice to their suffering. This session highlighted the gendered social disorder of the 1930s; as Stuart Macintyre has noted, the performance of wage labour was central to Australian masculinity, and an 'affirmation of [a man's] very identity,' the loss of which led to a crisis of masculinity for many.<sup>133</sup> It is especially notable that it was a woman who created and conducted such a session; it is clear that women could perform an important duty on radio through providing comfort and

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<sup>131</sup> 'Miss Radio,' 'For Men Only—And That's Why Women Listen!,' *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 October 1937, 7.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>133</sup> Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia*, 276.

empathy to their listeners. In this program Reeve performed active citizenship by working for the broader social good, and this included looking out for men's wellbeing in the difficult years of the 1930s.

In 1939, Reeve started another unique program, the *Glow-Worm Club*, a special session for blind listeners. Reeve argued that radio belonged 'more to the blind than to anyone else' and that they ought to have programming specifically dedicated to them, including having blind speakers and musicians performing on the air. The audience, however, was as much 'sighted' listeners as blind listeners, as Reeve hoped to demonstrate that people could assist the blind in simple ways and, in return, blind people would entertain them through the radio session.<sup>134</sup> By helping a marginalised group Reeve again performed civic duty and social justice through her radio work.

## **Conclusion**

The interwar years were a period that saw the rise of a particular type of woman citizen, whose commitment to civic duty emphasised collective empowerment and social good. This concept of citizenship was articulated and enacted by many women's organisations across the political spectrum during these years. At the same time, broadcasting was viewed as a tool which could educate the modern citizen, and together these factors enabled the emergence of radio as a new space in which women could enact active citizenship and contribute to the public sphere, both collectively and as individuals. During this period a number of women identified radio as a technology that could help integrate women into the public sphere and improve their lives. These included feminists such as Linda Littlejohn and Jessie Street, women's organisations such as the Victorian Housewives' Association, as well as radio club comperes and announcers. Through their broadcasting these women helped to create a community amongst women and establish radio as a platform that could be used to

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<sup>134</sup> 'The Glow-Worm Club', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, March 1939, 10, 48.

advance women's position in society. As will be explained in the next chapter, this was further developed by women's broadcasts on international affairs during the 1930s.

## CHAPTER THREE

### World Citizens: Women's Broadcasting and Internationalism

Miss Beegling has travelled considerably, and it was her travel chats and talks on her experiences in Hollywood which first made her popular 'on the air.'<sup>1</sup>

In October 1930 Rockhampton's *Evening News* reported that few 'women have experienced more unusual adventures than Miss Helen Beegling, radio announcer.'<sup>2</sup> Beegling became well-known as the compere of 2GB's women's session in the late 1920s, and gave many talks on her extensive travels in the United States, the Pacific Islands and Asia during the interwar years.<sup>3</sup> Her experiences were exciting—she fell into a crocodile-infested river in Papua New Guinea, stayed with a Batak community in Sumatra, and took part in the Thaipusam festival in India.<sup>4</sup> As her broadcasts show, by the 1930s radio had become a medium through which women could share their experiences of the world. During a decade when the Great Depression limited the ability of many to travel, and the increasing calamity of the rise of fascism and the descent into World War II brought foreign affairs to the forefront of public debate, radio provided an opportunity for internationalist women to contribute to public debate on major world issues and encourage women at home to become engaged citizens.

This chapter examines how Australian women broadcasters used radio to claim their own voices as experts on international affairs and encourage other women to become active world citizens in the 1930s. World citizenship refers to beliefs and practices that can be used

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<sup>1</sup> 'Miss Helen Jean Beegling', *Brisbane Courier*, 5 June 1930, 20.

<sup>2</sup> 'Adventures in the South Seas', *Evening News* (Rockhampton), 25 October 1930, 2.

<sup>3</sup> 'Miss Helen Jean Beegling'.

<sup>4</sup> 'Adventures in the South Seas'; 'Adventures on Her Travels', *Sum*, 20 May 1938, 11.

to transform political communities and the global order so that they conform to universalistic moral commitments. Advocates for world citizenship seek to persuade members of national communities that they have moral responsibilities to outsiders that are not overridden by national interests.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I argue that, during a period when feminist internationalism experienced a high point of activity and theorisation, internationalist women broadcasters sought to promote Australians' responsibility to world by giving talks about their experiences abroad, their knowledge of various foreign countries, and about international feminism and peace activism. As this chapter shows, broadcasting was a key tool that internationalist women used to educate their female listeners about the world beyond Australia's shores, promote their causes and encourage others to become actively involved in shaping the global order.

### **Australian Women Abroad**

Feminist history has seen a transnational turn in the last twenty years which has generated an increased focus on international women's organisations. In her path-breaking 1997 book *Worlds of Women*, Leila Rupp argued that the interwar period was a high point of feminist internationalism, as World War I had provided an impetus for women's organisations to consider international relations as part of their platforms. Moreover, there was an increasing number of enfranchised women across the world, many of whom were enthusiastically internationalist, an outlook which shaped their identities as fully engaged citizens.<sup>6</sup> Peace activism was central to women's internationalism in the years following the carnage of the First World War, and many women's organisations believed that it was their responsibility to advocate for alternatives to the masculine concept of war—a sense of responsibility often

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Linklater, 'Cosmopolitan Citizenship', in Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (eds.), *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* (London: Sage, 2002), 331.

<sup>6</sup> Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

rooted in their sense of maternal citizenship.<sup>7</sup> As Jo Vellacott has observed, feminist pacifists such as those in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) performed their activism with a 'sophisticated feminist understanding' that made this peace work central to the development of transnational feminism in the interwar years.<sup>8</sup> Much of the scholarship on this period of feminist internationalism and peace activism has focused on European and North American organisations and figures.<sup>9</sup> There has been some work on organisations which sat outside the European-American hegemony, including Fiona Paisley's history of the Pan-Pacific Women's Association (PPWA) and Marie Sandell's work on regional women's organisations, such as those in the Middle East, Asia, and South America.<sup>10</sup>

There is also a burgeoning literature that considers the important role that Australian and New Zealand women played in these international bodies.<sup>11</sup> Lake, for example, has argued that internationalism 'as both ideal and practice exerted a powerful appeal for Australian women activists' in the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> In the years immediately following women's federal enfranchisement in 1902, Australian women were greeted on the world stage as 'pioneers of democratic rights,' and were sought after in the United States and United

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<sup>7</sup> See for example: Jo Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', *Women's History Review* 2, no. 1 (1993), 23–56; Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, 'Women's International Activism during the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', *Women's History Review* 26, no. 2 (2017), 163–72; Julie V. Gottlieb, "'The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning?': British Feminists, Pacifism and the Politics of Appeasement", *Women's History Review* 23, no. 3 (2014), 441–462; Dagmar Wernitznig, 'Out of Her Time? Rosika Schwimmer's Transnational Activism after the First World War', *Women's History Review* 26, no. 2 (2017), 262–279; Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890-1940* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory', 23–24.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Mona L. Siegel, 'Feminism, Pacifism and Political Violence in Europe and China in the Era of the World Wars', *Gender & History* 28, no. 3 (2016), 641–59; Katherine M. Marino, 'Transnational Pan-American Feminism: The Friendship of Bertha Lutz and Mary Wilhelmine Williams, 1926-1944', *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 2 (2014), 63–87.

<sup>10</sup> Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Marie Sandell, 'Regional versus International: Women's Activism and Organisational Spaces in the Inter-war Period', *The International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011), 607–625.

<sup>11</sup> Angela Woollacott, 'Inventing Commonwealth and Pan-Pacific Feminisms: Australian Women's Internationalist Activism in the 1920s–30s', *Gender & History* 10, no. 3 (1998), 426; Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*; James Keating, "'An Utter Absence of National Feeling?': Australian Women and the International Suffrage Movement, 1900–14", *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016), 462–81.

<sup>12</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Women's International Leadership', in *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present*, ed. Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein, and Mary Tomsic (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 71.

Kingdom to speak about their experiences as enfranchised women.<sup>13</sup> James Keating has examined Australian women's suffrage internationalism in the years between 1902 and 1914, when feminists such as Vida Goldstein attended international conferences and joined international organisations.<sup>14</sup> Nationalism, however, was still central to those international ties; as Paisley has observed, national institutions were the building blocks to international cooperation.<sup>15</sup> For Australian women delegates, who were representatives of a newly federated nation, the 'norms for international participation required extensive domestic reorganisation to realise their desire for international solidarity.'<sup>16</sup> Clare Wright has argued that during the period between federation and the Great War 'the new nation of Australia was pleased to the point of self-righteousness with its unique "experiment" in political equality between the sexes.'<sup>17</sup> During these years Australia was not peripheral to broader global concerns but rather garnered an international reputation as a political innovator, which shaped its identity as a nation and its position within the international order.<sup>18</sup>

The end of World War I saw an upswing in internationalist sentiment worldwide and activism as a result of the formation of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as well as a widespread sentiment that war should be prevented from recurring. The transnational networks of women's organisations from the late nineteenth century demonstrate what Lenore Coltheart terms 'associative citizenship,' a concept based on a relationship 'not of individuals to government, but a relationship between the governed.'<sup>19</sup> The relationships between women were central to their activism. The establishment of the League of Nations in Geneva proved to be a catalyst for a golden age

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Keating, "An Utter Absence of National Feeling".

<sup>15</sup> Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Keating, "An Utter Absence of National Feeling", 464.

<sup>17</sup> Clare Wright, "A Splendid Object Lesson": A Transnational Perspective on the Birth of the Australian Nation', *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 4 (2014), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Lenore Coltheart, 'Citizens of the World: Jessie Street and International Feminism', *Hecate* 31, no. 1 (2005), 185.

of women's international activism as it resulted in the establishment of a number of international women's organisations which were the precursor to today's international non-government organisations. In Australia, there was a movement of 'local organisations towards national and international affiliation' which, as Judith Smart and Marian Quartly have argued, reflected 'a growing sense of global identity for Australian women.'<sup>20</sup> For instance, the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV) was founded by Bessie Rischbieth as an umbrella organisation which aimed to liaise between Australian women and the League of Nations and the ILO, also headquartered in Geneva. By 1930, after a decade of lobbying, women had forged strong networks across national boundaries and within the League itself. This resulted in these women exerting a significant influence over international affairs through major international bodies and by association with a range of other organisations and individuals.<sup>21</sup> Forging close associations with organisations such as the League also had domestic political benefits; as Zora Simic has observed, many Australian feminist organisations, including the United Associations (UA), appropriated the 'liberal democratic discourse of the League of Nations' to imbue their cause with greater legitimacy.<sup>22</sup>

Other international women's organisations worked towards cross-border solidarity outside of Geneva. These included the British Commonwealth League (BCL) and the PPWA, organisations which challenged the Euro-American hegemony of large international feminist organisations. The BCL, for example, promoted women's leadership across the dominions, while the PPWA's members were all from outside of Europe, then the centre of internationalism.<sup>23</sup> Creating unity between Eastern and Western women was the key to achieving the PPWA's feminist pacifist aims.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Australian delegates to PPWA

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, 'Mainstream Women's Organisations in Australia: The Challenges to National and International Cooperation after the Great War', *Women's History Review* 21, no. 1 (2012), 74.

<sup>21</sup> Coltheart, 'Citizens of the World', 185.

<sup>22</sup> Zora Simic, "'Mrs Street—Now There's a Subject!': Historicising Jessie Street', *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 48 (2005), 292.

<sup>23</sup> Woollacott, 'Inventing Commonwealth and Pan-Pacific Feminisms', 426.

<sup>24</sup> Fiona Paisley, 'Cultivating Modernity: Culture and Internationalism in Australian Feminism's Pacific Age,'



conferences saw themselves as mediators between the East and the West; as a British dominion located in the Asia-Pacific region, they felt that they were ideally positioned to facilitate intercultural unity. Australian delegates came at this role from a position of Western superiority and often did not understand the perspectives of Asian delegates, whose dissent they viewed as ‘nationalist recidivism.’<sup>25</sup> However, this example does demonstrate that there were Australian women who were not only actively engaged in Asia-Pacific affairs but saw themselves as international leaders on these issues. It was this perspective which permeated the views of many Australian women who broadcast on Asia in the interwar years—they used radio to inform their Australian sisters at home about the region, so as to further consolidate Australia’s role as a mediator between occident and orient.

Women also participated as world citizens through their travel. A significant number of Australian women travelled to London in the early twentieth century, as Angela Woollacott has revealed. In colonial Australian discourse, the place of London as the centre of Empire, the place where talented colonials would naturally want to go, lessened concerns about the unfeminine connotations of independent travel. Women were able to exploit this opening to voyage to the other side of the world and further their educations and careers, immerse themselves in culture, and experience travel and adventure. Moreover, these women were agents of a globally connected modernity through their movement around the world, their expanded ‘life options,’ and their embrace of new internationalist subjectivities.<sup>26</sup>

Anne Rees has also unearthed a significant number of women who made the journey to America to seek adventure, stardom and professional opportunities. These women perceived the United States as a paradise with more modern gender relations, greater professional opportunities and a faster pace of life than Australia. Rees argues that these women were ‘agents’ in the development of Australian-American relations. A key aspect of

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*Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 3 (2002), 113.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>26</sup> Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7–8.

this was their role as ‘communicators and educators,’ sharing their experiences and knowledge of the United States with Australians. Broadcasting was a significant method used by returned ‘transpacific travellers’ to disseminate their knowledge of America, and women who gave radio talks ‘gained the opportunity to sway the thinking’ of women listening at home.<sup>27</sup>

The technological changes in communication brought on by the advent of broadcasting in the early 1920s provided a method of connection which could reach women beyond the elite circles who normally attended international conferences.<sup>28</sup> Radio enabled an increased flow of information to a much larger audience of women, and gave the cosmopolitan women at the helm of these transnational networks a public platform from which they could build their movement and consolidate their positions as leading voices for feminist internationalism. Radio was a modern technology which annihilated time and space and transformed how Australians informed and entertained themselves. Through broadcasts, women were able to shape new lives and subjectivities by publicly sharing their experiences of foreign lands and cultures, and by listening to other women do so. Radio broadcasts helped to open up the world to women and enabled them to more fully participate in it as global citizens.

### **Connecting the World via Wireless**

A focus on flows has emerged as a key theme of transnational history, which highlights how media, information, and people moved between nations. Visual and aural sources, as well as new communication technologies, can reveal new stories about the flow of information between different cultures, and the history of radio in Australia reveals a decidedly

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<sup>27</sup> Anne Rees, ‘Travelling to Tomorrow: Australian Women in the United States, 1910-1960’ (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Jocelyn Olcott, ‘A Happier Marriage? Feminist History Takes the Transnational Turn’, in *Making Women’s Histories: Beyond National Perspectives*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell and Kate Haulman (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 240.

international outlook.<sup>29</sup> For example, Australian radio soap operas were syndicated to other nations, including New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Canada, and were the dominant form of this genre in the Caribbean in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Further, many presenters, actors, and producers moved between different countries and took with them the ideas and experiences they were exposed to as they travelled, and this had significant impacts on Australian radio programming. The American soap operas that were revoiced in Australia provide a particularly interesting case study for the influence of transnational media flows. Despite their distinctly American origins, stories, and tropes, the presence of Australian accents on many of these programs meant that they were not recognised as imported content and thus escaped criticisms of excessive American influence that were levelled at other types of media.<sup>31</sup>

Transnational media flows also played a role in the construction of national identities. In her work on the transnational connections which developed between American and British broadcasting, Michele Hilmes has argued that without understanding the flow of information, ideas, people, and technologies between the two countries it is not possible to understand how their distinctively different broadcasting industries developed, how they were cast as the antithesis of each other and the effect this had on their respective cultures.<sup>32</sup> In Australia, too, broadcast media became a focus for debates over what it meant to be culturally Australian, including political and legislative interventions to set quotas for Australian content on the air, and the conscious establishment of a 'hybrid' radio industry

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<sup>29</sup> Madeleine Herren, Martin Rüesch, and Christiane Sibille, *Transcultural History: Theories, Methods, Sources* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2012), 55–56.

<sup>30</sup> David Goodman and Susan Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World: Re-Writing and Re-Voicing American Radio for an International Market', in *Radio's New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era*, ed. Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes (New York & London: Routledge, 2013), 174.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>32</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

which incorporated both a British-influenced national broadcaster and American-style commercial stations.<sup>33</sup>

From its introduction in 1923 radio was promoted as a medium which could connect Australia to the rest of the world. In January 1925, for example, the *Listener In* reported that Australian listeners would soon be able to hear broadcasts from New Zealand and America, and that Californian audiences were tuning in to Australian radio plays.<sup>34</sup> Feminist leader Jessie Street also believed that technology had ‘made the world a neighbourhood’ where isolationism was no longer possible.<sup>35</sup> Due to its ability to traverse borders, radio was an ideal medium through which women could enact and promote international citizenship, and many women broadcasters saw the medium as a key to the development of a new era of international cooperation.

### **Travel Talks**

Women at home in Australia experienced different countries and cultures, as well as international movements, through listening to the radio and reading newspapers and magazines. *Walkabout*, published from 1934 until 1974, was a popular magazine that published accounts of travels across Australia and the world. Travel writing in accessible, middlebrow forums such as *Walkabout* magazine provided an easy way for the public to experience other cultures, as Anna Johnston has argued:

When readers engaged with professional travel writers, they experienced an emotional and empathic response that brought them into an intimate form of relationship within the text’s author and

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<sup>33</sup> Nick Herd, *Networking: Commercial Television in Australia* (Sydney: Currency House, 2012), 98; Bridget Griffen-Foley, ‘Australian Commercial Radio, American Influences—and the BBC’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 30, no. 3 (2010), 335–355.

<sup>34</sup> ‘In the Air!’, *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 18; ‘Listening-In to America’, *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Coltheart, ‘Citizens of the World’, 187.

subject [sic]. In doing so, middlebrow travel writing sought to inculcate a particular kind of interpretative and imaginative community, one characterized by engagement and a sense of the opportunities available in the Australasian world in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>36</sup>

Many women wrote accounts of their travels for this magazine, including Ernestine Hill, Mary Durack and Patsy Adam-Smith.<sup>37</sup> Popular travel writing held particular significance for women writers, as they often positioned their experiences in relation to the societal expectation of feminine domesticity. As Robyn Greaves has observed, Adam-Smith ‘sought to break free from the restrictive feminised space of the home’ and used travel writing ‘to legitimate her presence in masculine space and as a reason to keep on the move outside the domestic realm.’<sup>38</sup> Travel articles were also published in women’s magazines, such as the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, thereby demonstrating both their popularity amongst the readers of these publications and the enthusiasm of the women who wrote them.<sup>39</sup> Radio travel talks were another manifestation of this genre which imbued the tales with the intimate and sensory experience of oral storytelling.

Travel talks were a popular form of programming in the first few decades of radio. They usually featured descriptions of journeys to far off places, the cultural experiences of the traveller while there, and sometimes information about the culture and history of the particular country. These talks capitalised on a desire by women to experience the world, even if it was not feasible for them to undertake the long journeys from Australia’s shores. As the *Listener In* opined in 1935: ‘Most of us have the inclination to travel, even though the

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<sup>36</sup> Anna Johnston, ‘Becoming “Pacific-Minded”’: Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts’, *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017), 91.

<sup>37</sup> Robyn Greaves, ‘Footloose in Tasmania: Patsy Adam-Smith and Middlebrow Travel Writing, 1950–1973’, *Studies in Travel Writing* 20, no. 1 (2016), 69.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Elder, ‘Travel Reporting’, in *A Companion to the Australian Media*, ed. Bridget Griffen-Foley (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, 2014), 476–477.

state of finances do not permit our doing so, so that an instructive travel talk per the medium of the loud speaker is typically very welcome.<sup>40</sup> In October 1937 Taree's *Northern Champion* published a brief notice of upcoming travel talks on the 2FC women's session, and observed that:

When lack of funds or lack of time prevent their indulging in travel by boat, or plane, or train, women travel by imagination—take a train of thought, in fact—helped by the talks from 2FC, and from other broadcast glimpses at other lands.<sup>41</sup>

As indicated in the above quote, travel talks such as these fulfilled an important role in women's radio by connecting female listeners to the world beyond Australia's shores. The broadcasts on 2FC for that week covered countries across four continents, including Italy, Panama, China, and South Africa.<sup>42</sup> An examination of program guides from the *Listener In* reveals the number of travel talks given by women on radio during this era. For example, the issue published on 1 January 1930 listed four different talks for that week on two stations, while the 5 March 1930 issue listed seven different travel talks for that week on three different stations.<sup>43</sup>

Travel talks provided information about foreign cultures, as well as a sense of adventure and romance. In April and September 1936, for example, *Radio Pictorial* advertised Janet Austen's daily travel talks on Sydney commercial station 2CH, and 'women listeners' gained 'a certain feeling of travel and romance, although having by force to sit at home.'<sup>44</sup> Central to a successful travel talk was the ability of the speaker to utilise both her voice and expression to paint a vivid picture in the imaginations of listeners. For example, Leila Pirani

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<sup>40</sup> 'A Page for Women', *Listener In*, 20 September 1930, 62.

<sup>41</sup> 'Travel By Happy Thought', *Northern Champion*, 9 October 1937, 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> See *Listener In*, 1 January 1930, 41-45; *Listener In*, 5 March 1930, 22-53.

<sup>44</sup> 'Travel Talks Appreciated', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 April 1936, 18.

gave a series of three talks on her experiences in China on Melbourne Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) station 3AR in 1935, in which she gave anecdotes, or ‘quick pictures,’ of amusing things which happened to her while over there:

Miss Pirani sees a good story wherever she looks. She has a natural drollery and the sort of manner for which the wireless studio is always on the lookout. I should say she would have an unusual knack of bridging invisibility, and of giving her listeners that chatting across-a-table feeling.<sup>45</sup>

According to this author, Pirani’s talks were therefore successful due to her intimate style of presentation and ability to weave an engaging story for her listeners. Hers was a skilful use of broadcasting ability which demonstrated the importance of the interaction between sound and content, and the advantages of radio talks over print media.

It was also common for women who travelled overseas for conferences, research trips, or other official business to give talks about their impressions of the countries they visited upon their return. These talks highlighted how women used their international travel to perform active global citizenship. The Australian Federation of Women Voters, founded by Bessie Rischbieth in 1921, strongly embraced internationalism as a core part of its mission, and members regularly attended international conferences. Rischbieth’s regular contributions to both print and broadcast media ‘typically displayed a sense of drama and emphatic significance,’ a nod to her involvement with the Theosophist movement and its characteristic ‘flowery pronouncements about universal brotherhood, justice and a special kind of moralistic spirituality.’<sup>46</sup> Rischbieth’s broadcasts on her international travels are filled with this kind of language, such as a talk on her impressions of New York in 1936. She emphasised

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<sup>45</sup> Georgia Rivers, ‘Shoe Repairs While You Wait’, *Listener In*, 9 November 1935, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Zora Simic, ‘A Hall of Selective Mirrors: Feminism, History and Identity, 1919-1969’ (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2003), 37.

its enormous scale, its modernity, and the ingenuity of its buildings and infrastructure: 'New York is an amazing city—a city where man is applying the latest scientific knowledge for material comfort. I felt rather awed as everything is on such a stupendous scale.'<sup>47</sup> The script contains a sense of wonder: 'This magic city however takes on its fullest glamour at night, when resplendent in light New York is like some great fire works display.'<sup>48</sup> Rischbieth sought to capture the magic of the American metropolis through her radio speech, using terms like 'magic,' 'glamour' and 'resplendent' to evoke the ethereal qualities of the city. In 1936, Rischbieth began another talk about Australian women at the League of Nations and the ILO with a travel talk-style portrayal of Geneva, which she described as a 'very beautiful city surrounded by mountains built on the edge of a lake' which was 'full of flowers and sparkling sunshine.'<sup>49</sup> The example of Rischbieth's travel talks shows how these word pictures were constructed, with evocative language that emphasised the beauty and wonder of international destinations.

Unsurprisingly, Europe was a popular topic for travel talks, and this is apparent in the program guides in the *Listener In* during the 1930s. For instance, Miss C. S. Montgomery spoke on travelling to Greece, Italy, and Denmark in 1935, while Miss Whyte spoke on her travels in France in the same year. Valerie Paling detailed her experiences in France and Czechoslovakia, which she found to have notable similarities to Australia, as both had a 'new country feel,' easy-going citizens and physical diversity.<sup>50</sup> Actress and playwright Catherine Duncan gave a series of talks on 3LO in 1935 in which she used her skills in French and German to read foreign newspapers and present the latest news from Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and various other European cities.<sup>51</sup> The focus on European countries in the 1930s often

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<sup>47</sup> Bessie Rischbieth, 'Above the Clouds', Script, 1936, MS 2004, Papers of Bessie Rischbieth, Series 2, Box 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Bessie Rischbieth, 'Australian Women at Geneva', Script, 1936, MS 2004, Papers of Bessie Rischbieth, Series 2, Box 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>50</sup> Georgia Rivers, 'Women and the Microphone', *Listener In*, 25 May 1935, 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> Georgia Rivers, 'Women and the Microphone', *Listener In*, 6 July 1935, 23.



spoke to increasing anxieties over the heightened geopolitical tensions of the period and Duncan's language skills gave her the ability to uncover insights directly from the countries involved.

Australian women also spoke about destinations beyond Europe, and indeed their travel talks were particularly notable for their engagement with Asia, at a time when most Australians were suspicious or ignorant of their near neighbours. Agnieszka Sobocinska has argued that travel and tourism to Asia was a crucial aspect of developing Australian impressions of the region and its inhabitants:

In their busy everyday lives, few people have the time or the inclination to carefully consider their views on international relations. An overseas journey has long acted as a catalyst that spurred Australians to think about the nation's place in the world...fragmentary impressions contributed to broader ideas about what Asia was like and helped shape individuals' attitudes towards the region.<sup>52</sup>

Women who had travelled to Asia were an anomaly in the 1930s, thus the act of women broadcasters telling their stories and impressions of the region over the airwaves was powerful in promoting both the region as a hospitable neighbour and women as engaged pacific citizens. Although it is not possible to ascertain the veracity of their accounts, it is likely that audiences would have believed that they were mostly accurate. As Sobocinska has observed, eyewitness accounts are often taken as trustworthy sources of information without

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<sup>52</sup> Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2014), 4.

further verification.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, talks were often vetted by the producers for impartiality and accuracy, especially those on the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC).<sup>54</sup>

Analysis of radio magazines from the 1930s reveals that many women discussed Asia on the air. Japan was an especially popular destination for these intrepid women. Miss Punshon, for example, gave a talk on her experiences in Japan during cherry blossom season in January 1930, and had 'lots of interesting information regarding Japanese customs.'<sup>55</sup> In May 1935, Mrs Carlyle Smythe discussed the Japanese tea ceremony, and gave another talk on ikebana (flower arranging) the following week, while in November 1935 Margaret Conlan gave a talk on a restaurant in Kobe.<sup>56</sup> Women travelled far and wide within Asia, however. Later in January 1930, Punshon gave a talk on Korea, where the 'Japanese annexation has rapidly brought better conditions.'<sup>57</sup> Miss V. Robertson, who arrived back in Melbourne in 1930 after fourteen years in India, gave talks on life in India in the same month. The *Listener In* reported that '[t]o meet and converse with her is to be transported to the land of adventure.'<sup>58</sup> Doreen Berry similarly spoke on her experiences in Malaya in January 1930, 'a subject which in the hands of this much travelled young lady, should be of great interest.'<sup>59</sup> Margery Pulsford gave a series of talks on ABC national stations in 1936 about her experiences in Asia, which included 'a motor tour of 1,000 miles in Java, a trip in Malaya on a newspaper delivery car, a visit to Siam during the revolution, and a stay of two months in China.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>54</sup> K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 30–31.

<sup>55</sup> 'What's on the Air for Us Women', *Listener In*, 1 January 1930, 34.

<sup>56</sup> 'Talks to Tune To', *Listener In*, 4 May 1935, 4; 'Talks to Tune To', *Listener In*, 11 May 1935, 4; 'Summary of Talks from the National Stations', *Listener In*, 30 November 1935, 8.

<sup>57</sup> 'People in the Programs', *Listener In*, 29 January 1930, 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> 'People in the Programs', *Listener In*, 8 January 1930, 16-17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> 'Margery Pulsford', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 February 1936, 19.

Although evidence of listener reactions to these talks is limited, there are some letters which demonstrate their opinions on them. Travel talks were mentioned as one of the key attractions of women's sessions in a series of letters published in the *ABC Weekly* in March 1940. Listeners described being carried to distant lands, hearing talks about life in Belgium and Holland, and that radio provided a 'window on the world' for women—especially those in country areas.<sup>61</sup> These letters indicate that women appreciated not only learning about the world but virtually travelling to other countries by listening to the broadcasts. Not all listeners loved travel talks, however. In December 1935, the *Weekly* reported that a listener had written to a Sydney B-class station to register that they 'hate[d] travel talks the most' as they were 'just second-hand impressions of places I probably shall never visit.'<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the continued programming of these talks and the number of different women who gave them indicates that there was a substantial audience for them. The number of women's travel talks broadcast in this period demonstrates how radio enabled women to expand their horizons, become world citizens and, notably, engage with the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Radio and the League of Nations Union**

Constance Duncan was a leading radio voice who engaged with international affairs in the 1930s. She was appointed Australian secretary of the YWCA after graduating with a Master of Arts from the University of Melbourne in 1922. The missionary movement, of which the YWCA was a leading organisation, was another incarnation of globally-focused women's citizenship activity in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Duncan worked for the YWCA in Japan as a foreign secretary (a type of missionary) from 1922 until 1933, where she taught English at a girls' high school in Kyoto, became fluent in Japanese, and travelled the country extensively. Her experience in Japan led her to become an expert in Japanese

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<sup>61</sup> 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63; 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 63.

<sup>62</sup> 'Personalities Behind the Dials', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 14 December 1935, 28.

affairs and a key figure in Australia-Japan relations in these years. She was one of a very small number of Australians with an in-depth knowledge of Japan and Japanese language skills. She researched the country and communicated this information to the public, and through her connections to policymakers had unofficial input into their decisions.<sup>63</sup>

As David Walker has argued, in the interwar years 'it had become a common complaint that Australian interest in international affairs was slight' but, as he observes, there was a notable group of internationalists who understood the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and worked to promote this to the public. Chief among these were a group of intellectuals associated with the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), who became 'missionaries' for the cause of promoting the Asia-Pacific region to Australians.<sup>64</sup> The IPR, originally established in Honolulu, was one of a number of international organisations which established Australian branches in the interwar years, and which 'demonstrated a growing concern about Australia's evolving status towards independence and its position in the Pacific.'<sup>65</sup> Other notable bodies included the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), the local branch of the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs, and the League of Nations Union (LNU), which also originated in Britain. The Australian branches of these organisations attracted many high-profile and influential members, and who were often involved with several groups.<sup>66</sup> Broadcasting was a key method that the members of these international associations used to increase Australian awareness of the region in the interwar years. Nora Collisson, Secretary of the Bureau of Social and International Affairs, an organisation that coordinated research on international affairs for other organisations including the League of Nations Union (LNU), gave regular radio talks

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<sup>63</sup> Hilary Summy, 'From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor: Constance Duncan and Australia-Japan Relations 1922-1947', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 54, no. 1 (2008), 28–29.

<sup>64</sup> David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 226.

<sup>65</sup> Summy, 'From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor', 31.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

on 3AR in 1930. She discussed varied topics, including English women peacemakers, the importance of a united world, and the relationship between Egypt and the League of Nations.<sup>67</sup> Jean Stevenson, general secretary of the Melbourne branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) spoke on the organisation's activities in Czechoslovakia and Poland to demonstrate its wide international reach.<sup>68</sup>

Following her return to Australia, Duncan compered the *League of Nations Union Radio Club*, which was broadcast at 10.45am on Tuesdays on Melbourne ABC station 3LO from May 1934.<sup>69</sup> Established in Britain towards the end of World War I, the LNU was an international organisation which promoted the aims and work of the League of Nations and pressured governments to uphold the principles of its covenant.<sup>70</sup> The LNU was initially seen as a respectable organisation in Australia and was led by prominent establishment figures, although this changed in the 1930s as it became associated with communist sympathisers.<sup>71</sup> The radio club was a key part of the LNU's outreach activities. Georgia Rivers, in her weekly column on women's programming in the *Listener In*, wrote in July 1935 that the purpose of the *League of Nations Union Radio Club* was to 'foster international understanding by providing listeners with information regarding international problems and the aims and work of the League.'<sup>72</sup> Duncan invited guests on the program who could speak about women in other countries and international affairs more generally, and also spoke on her own areas of expertise:

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<sup>67</sup> 'Broadcasting Programs of the Australian Stations', *Listener In*, 5 March 1930, 52; 'Broadcasting Programs of the Australian Stations', *Listener In*, 5 July 1930, 23; 'Broadcasting Programs of the Australian Stations', *Listener In*, 26 July 1930, 28.

<sup>68</sup> 'Broadcasting Programs of the Australian Stations', *Listener In*, 5 March 1930, 23.

<sup>69</sup> 'League of Nations Union', *Argus*, 24 May 1934, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Hilary Summy, 'Countering War: The Role of the League of Nations Union,' *Social Alternatives* 33, no. 4 (2014), 15.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Georgia Rivers, 'Women at the Microphone', *Listener In*, 27 July 1935, 19.

Miss Duncan herself speaks as a rule on current international events or special features of the League's work, and it is difficult to imagine anyone better suited to the control of this session.<sup>73</sup>

The speakers on the program were invited not to present their unique perspectives on international relations theory, but to lend their knowledge and voices to promote the goals of the LNU. Even so, the club was popular, with a 'steadily lengthening membership list,' and was especially attracting listeners from country areas who wished to hear about world affairs.<sup>74</sup> Rivers reported that countries which had recently featured on the program included Germany, Japan, Belgium, Turkey, and Greece. The *League of Nations Union Radio Club* was a 'fine opportunity' for time-poor listeners to glance 'across at other countries' as it brought women together to learn about international affairs and discuss their viewpoints on a range of issues.<sup>75</sup> Duncan created a space on the airwaves for women to build their knowledge and conceptualise their roles as global citizens, so that they could support and contribute to the world peace movement through the League of Nations.

Duncan's role in promoting radio as a medium for international understanding went beyond her radio club. In 1936 she was an Australian delegate to the IPR conference in California, and while there participated in an on-air discussion on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) about the value of language in promoting international understanding.<sup>76</sup> Following the conference, the ABC sponsored her to tour China and Japan to assess the reception of Victorian ABC shortwave station 3LR in those countries and give a series of broadcast talks on the region upon her return.<sup>77</sup> Her experiences of broadcasting in Asia

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Summy, 'From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor', 36.

<sup>77</sup> 'Publicity for Australia: Broadcasting in the East', *Sum*, 2 December 1936, 21.

demonstrated the medium's capacity for enhancing mutual engagement and understanding, as reported in the *Age* upon her return in December 1936:

To hear a broadcast from one's own country when in a foreign land must be very thrilling to a traveller, and Miss Constance Duncan, who returned to Melbourne yesterday after her journeyings in the United States, China, Japan and Manchuria, confessed that she was frightfully thrilled when, in China, she heard Australia broadcasting through 3LR (Lyndhurst). In turn, her own family enjoyed hearing her broadcast from ZBW station in Hong Kong, when she spoke on *Broadcasting in the Far East*.<sup>78</sup>

The *Age* noted that 'she made a survey of broadcasting, making contacts with broadcasting authorities, and obtaining as much information as possible on the broadcasting situation.'<sup>79</sup> It was, apparently, the 'first time Australia had sent anyone to the East for such a purpose.'<sup>80</sup> Duncan reported that while the current reception was relatively poor, there was significant potential for Australia to develop a regular program of shortwave broadcasting to Asia, as English-speaking expatriates and 'educated Chinese' were eager to listen to Australian broadcasts.<sup>81</sup> The time difference between Australia and China—only two hours—made Australia ideally placed to break into this huge market, especially in comparison to European and American stations. Duncan argued that Australia should take advantage of this opportunity to 'exert our influence' over Chinese society and culture to help develop an export market for Australian goods.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> 'Broadcasting in the East: "Undreamt of Possibilities"', *Age*, 5 December 1936, 9.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> 'China Likes Australian Broadcast Programs: Travellers from the East', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 1936, 20.

<sup>82</sup> 'Broadcasting in the East'.

Duncan actively tried to establish broadcasting as a medium to enhance international understanding, but her influence would not last beyond the 1930s. Hilary Summy has argued that her association with the IPR and LNU, both of which were associated with various socialist organisations, tainted her as a communist sympathiser from the late 1930s.<sup>83</sup> The IPR in particular has been ‘virtually excised from public memory, leaving behind an impression of its supporters as a suspect fraternity of naïve idealists and dangerous leftists.’<sup>84</sup> The ABC discontinued Duncan’s session in 1938, ostensibly because international affairs were covered by other programs, although a report later revealed objections to Duncan’s association with communist organisations and her own political views, labelled as ‘Christian communism’ and ‘anti-British’ by ABC broadcast monitors.<sup>85</sup> Her listeners, the LNU and other left-wing activists protested the decision. For example, the Communist Party of Australia’s (CPA) newspaper, the *Worker’s Weekly*, reported on the discontinuation of Duncan’s talks in 1938 and opined that the ‘Broadcasting Commission has followed up its reactionary actions of the immediate past against anyone likely to give out progressive thoughts over the air,’ and argued that her silencing was part of what they saw as a larger pattern of left-wing censure.<sup>86</sup> Her talks were reinstated on a less frequent basis until the beginning of the World War II, after which she worked as a welfare officer for war workers, unsuccessfully ran for parliament and served as a United Nations liaison officer in Korea.<sup>87</sup> Although Duncan’s position as an on-air advocate for the LNU was short-lived, her radio program provided an important space for women to discuss and receive information about international affairs during the mid-to-late 1930s.

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<sup>83</sup> Summy, ‘From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor’, 40.

<sup>84</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 232.

<sup>85</sup> Ellen Warne, ‘Constance Duncan: Translating Women’s Leadership in Australia, 1922-1958’, in *Founders, Firsts and Feminists: Women Leaders in Twentieth-Century Australia*, ed. Fiona Davis, Nell Musgrove, and Judith Smart (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2011), 295–96.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Radio Censorship’, *Workers’ Weekly*, 30 September 1938, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Warne, ‘Constance Duncan’, 300-01; Summy, ‘From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor’, 40; ‘Broadcasting—National Stations’, *Argus*, 8 August 1940, 2.



During its time on the air the *League of Nations Union Radio Club* hosted numerous notable women guests. Rischbieth, for instance, gave a talk on the program in 1936 about women's influence at Geneva which demonstrated the centrality of Theosophist discourse to her public relations work. She provided a detailed summary of the different organisations women were involved in and their work for creating a 'happy world family' by influencing global public opinion and supporting the League of Nations:

You realise, don't you, that public opinion is one of the few weapons left to the people of the world and you realise how valuable it is that we must so organise essential decency and commonsense of humanity as a solid wall of world-wide opposition to war while there is yet time.<sup>88</sup>

Her radio broadcasts were one important aspect of influencing public opinion in Australia. Rischbieth argued that Australian women's organisations were a vital 'bridge' to the League of Nations and thus through their membership of national organisations women were participating in international relations and working for peace. In 1935, Rischbieth was the Australian delegate to the League of Nations assembly in Geneva, an experience which she described in this talk as 'the landmark of my life'.<sup>89</sup> She noted that there were over one thousand women who 'came to secure better opportunities for women inside the machinery of the League of Nations as promised in the Covenant'.<sup>90</sup> Rischbieth provided insight into some of the leading figures and issues that were discussed at the assembly, and especially emphasised the centrality of women to the League of Nations decision-making and peace work. She then exhorted her listeners to join women's international efforts:

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<sup>88</sup> Bessie Rischbieth, 'Women's Influence at Geneva,' Script, MS 2004, Papers of Bessie Rischbieth, Series 2, Box 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Women have a position of influence, respect and power in Geneva and contributed largely to the formation of public opinion on universal problems like disarmament. Their combined Peace Committees have twice won the Nobel Prize. Listeners! Do let us know at this office if you are interested in the whole question of “Peace or Poison Gas” and what women are doing for World Peace.<sup>91</sup>

Rischbieth gave another talk on 3DB at 7.50pm on Saturday evening about Australian women at Geneva—a prime-time timeslot. She described the delegates of other nations and the spirit of unity she found there: ‘You can imagine of course that it is an inspiring experience to look round and see people of all races, all creeds and colours, struggling for closer world co-operation.’<sup>92</sup> She then described her work on the League’s Child Welfare Committee, including addressing the committee about Australian childhood standards and submitting a resolution on behalf of the Australian Government, which was carried. She emphasised how well the ‘collective action’ of this committee worked and argued that this same community spirit was required to tackle ‘world economic problems that are the root cause of war.’<sup>93</sup> Rischbieth argued that a fairer distribution of resources was a key step in securing world peace, and that tariffs and nationalism were separating the world ‘like never before.’<sup>94</sup> In this broadcast, Rischbieth thus provided insight into international conferences, which enabled listeners to experience the spirit of international cooperation that she found so exhilarating.

The LNU was a global organisation, and the broadcasts on the League’s activities by women like Duncan and Rischbieth were also part of the broader international advocacy of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Rischbieth, ‘Australian Women at Geneva’.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

the organisation. This international reach was further extended in 1938 when former British suffragist leader, peace campaigner, and anti-fascist Kathleen Courtney broadcast on the ABC's morning women's session in Melbourne during her visit to Australia to speak at the National Women's Peace Conference.<sup>95</sup> Courtney was actively involved in the LNU in the 1920s and 1930s and used her organising skills and international networks to promote anti-fascism. She had an 'impeccable feminist internationalist pedigree, backed up by a lifetime of dedicated work for various key women's organisations' as well as an extensive international network.<sup>96</sup> Like many other British feminists, she also broke with pacifism (particularly the WILPF) in the mid-1930s, believing that such a position would only lead to the victory of fascism. By this point feminist internationalism was therefore no longer synonymous with feminist pacifism, and there were competing views on what should be done.<sup>97</sup>

In her Australian broadcast Courtney explained the precarious international situation in the months just prior to the outbreak of war. She examined the expansionism of Nazi Germany and its alliance with Fascist Italy, the dire risk that Francoist Spain would pose to Europe's security (especially France's), and the 'crime' of Japan's invasion of China. She then explained two conflicting theories of international relations, which were 'of vital importance to every citizen.'<sup>98</sup> The first was nationalism, the doctrine which caused the Great War and which the Fascist countries had revived 'in its crudest and most violent form.'<sup>99</sup> The second choice was internationalism, which 'recognizes the underlying unity which exists between nations' and 'maintains the doctrine of international rights' through the League of Nations.<sup>100</sup> She argued that the only way to avert war without capitulating to fascism was for nations to come together to maintain 'the principle of international right and collective security' and to

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<sup>95</sup> 'International Peace Worker: Miss Kathleen Courtney's Visit', *West Australian*, 4 April 1938, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Gottlieb, "The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning", 452.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Kathleen Courtney, 'The Present International Situation', *Script*, 1939, 7KDC, Papers of Kathleen D'Olier Courtney, Series D/5, Box FL455, The Women's Library at the London School of Economics, London.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

assert their moral commitment to peace while productively engaging the Fascist countries so that they did not feel cornered into a war.<sup>101</sup> She emphasised the importance of citizens in this choice:

But if the doctrine of international right and collective security is to be maintained it needs the understanding and the support of every citizen; every citizen, not only in Great Britain, but in the Dominions overseas of the British Commonwealth of Nations.<sup>102</sup>

Courtney argued that Australia, and the other Dominions, did not realise the influence that they could wield in the British Commonwealth of Nations, and that it was important to realise that the ‘policies of the Dominions’ and the ‘attitude of their citizens’ were also important in promoting peace.<sup>103</sup> Courtney, a leading and well-respected figure in the international peace movement, specifically addressed the role that Australian women could play at such a critical time for global security by voicing their opinions and lobbying the Australian Government, which could then influence decisions at Westminster.<sup>104</sup>

### **Irene Greenwood: Women in the International News**

Like Constance Duncan, Irene Greenwood also had to contend with ABC censorship of her talks on international affairs. She became active in the Perth women’s movement in the 1920s, following her mother into the Women’s Service Guilds (WSG) and developing her extensive network, which included feminist leader and the WSG’s founder, Rischbieth. During her family’s few years in Sydney in the early 1930s, Greenwood joined the recently formed United Associations (UA) and became an officer, council member, and secretary. As

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

discussed in the previous chapter, she worked closely with Linda Littlejohn and Jessie Street in the UA's debating team and on the broadcasting committee, giving radio talks in support of the organisation's aims. In 1936, following the family's return to Perth, she began a series of talks on the ABC called *Women in the International News*. Greenwood's vast archive held at Murdoch University contains the scripts of this series, correspondence with the ABC, and numerous newspaper and magazine cuttings related to the talks. It is a treasure trove of information regarding Greenwood's role in using radio to promote internationalism in mid-twentieth-century Western Australia.<sup>105</sup>

John Andrew Richardson, who has researched the unique body of texts that are Greenwood's broadcast scripts, has argued that she occupied a space of resistance within broadcasting and fought a 'guerrilla action' to turn the radio into an apparatus of social reform. The significance of her broadcasts being heard in Western Australia is of note, as the 'social arrangements' of the West in the mid-twentieth century were distinct from those in the East. Western Australians were more attached to the United Kingdom than to their compatriots on the other side of the country, and the incoming steamship traffic at Fremantle port meant that Perth often received international visitors and news well in advance of Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>106</sup>

Greenwood's weapon was her 'concerned, informed, warm, educated, and cultured voice.'<sup>107</sup> During her time at the Perth Modern School she received formal voice training to improve her debating skills from Lionel Logue, most famous for training King George VI. This training prepared her to speak effectively in public, and also provided her with skills which would prove useful when she began her radio career.<sup>108</sup> The UA chose her to be the

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<sup>105</sup> Catherine Horne Fisher, 'Greenwood, Irene Adelaide (1898–1992)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published online 2017), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/greenwood-irene-adelaide-25528/text33876>, accessed 26 February 2018.

<sup>106</sup> John Andrew Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship: The Radio Broadcasts of Irene Greenwood, 1936–1954' (Honours Thesis, Murdoch University, 1988), 4.

<sup>107</sup> Kaye Murray, *A Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood (1898–1992)* (Perth: Kaye Murray Productions, 2005), 69.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

secretary of their broadcasting committee on the basis of her deep knowledge of feminist history and her well-developed speaking skills—especially her professionally trained speaking voice. Greenwood used her radio speech to promote the aims of the women’s and peace movements to thousands of listeners. Her collection of radio scripts is a testament to her role as a leading broadcaster who made use of radio to publicly engage in political debate and speak to other women.<sup>109</sup>

Greenwood used her broadcasts to publicise women’s equality, peace, and socialism, all of which were presented as international issues. Richardson has argued that her broadcasts on the ABC were primarily heard by educated, urban middle-class women—probably the same women (or at least the same type of women) that comprised the women’s organisations with which she was heavily involved.<sup>110</sup> Yet there is also substantial evidence that her ABC broadcasts were heard by rural women, who appreciated the talks as a way to remain connected with world events and to mentally travel beyond their isolated properties.<sup>111</sup>

Greenwood’s talks were broadcast during Dorothy Graham’s women’s session, at 11am on Friday mornings. As stated in Chapter Two, this session was primarily domestic in focus, although it should be noted that Graham did believe in the potential of radio to educate listeners and the placement of Greenwood’s talks is one example of this. The ABC enforced a policy of impartiality to protect itself from political interference, and as Greenwood’s talks were broadcast on an ABC session her scripts had to be vetted prior to broadcast and then strictly followed. This posed a challenge for Greenwood, whose sympathies lay with left-wing internationalism and who wished to use radio to promote this cause to Western Australian women. She became adept at navigating ABC editorial policy to broadcast her material in forms which flew under the radar.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>110</sup> Richardson, ‘The Limits of Authorship’, 41.

<sup>111</sup> See for example: E. Box, ‘Talks for Women’, *Broadcaster*, 9 November 1940, 39; ‘Farmer’s Wife of Berkshire Valley’, ‘Talks for Women’, *Broadcaster*, 2 November 1940, 13.

<sup>112</sup> Richardson, ‘The Limits of Authorship’, 47.

In one of the first talks in the series, Greenwood outlined her rationale for developing the series as a response to Rischbieth's description of Australian women as 'being behind British women in our attitude to International Affairs.'<sup>113</sup> Greenwood argued that it was 'vitally necessary' for women to understand international affairs and 'take their part in shaping our Brave New World.'<sup>114</sup> She argued that technology had eradicated the distance between Australia and the rest of the world: 'cables and radio throw a girdle about our Earth and so the frontiers of human interest are widened with the shrinkage of the world's surface.'<sup>115</sup> Greenwood subscribed to a range of international newspapers and magazines which reported on 'the achievements of women, their status, civil and political, and the organisations by which they endeavour to better the conditions of life for women as a whole,' and she planned to use these publications as sources to tell her listeners 'of women who are in the news, who are helping to write the pages of history in our day.'<sup>116</sup> She wanted to give her listeners 'a living, breathing picture of women' who they only knew as 'names in cold print.'<sup>117</sup> Here, Greenwood articulated her vision of the role of radio in improving both the status of women and the state of international relations. As a technology that had brought the world closer together and enabled a more intimate connection with the stories of leading women, radio could encourage Australian women to become more actively engaged with global challenges and inspire them to forge their own paths.

Greenwood's approach to ensuring that radio fulfilled this potential was to regularly broadcast interesting news items concerning women from around the globe. She often reported on international feminist and peace conferences, on notable women and their achievements, or on the status of women in various nations. Appendix One lists the wide

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<sup>113</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

variety of topics she discussed on the program in 1937 and 1938. Some of the nations she spoke about in these years included Japan, China, the Philippines, India, Brazil and Norway. One broadcast focused on the status of women in Latin American nations, whose progress Greenwood noted was 'generally considered to lag behind' that of European women.<sup>118</sup> She gave a detailed broadcast about Spain, which focused on the history of women's oppression there, its economic and political climate, and the conditions which gave rise to the Civil War.<sup>119</sup> She also discussed the Middle East, including reforms in Persia (Iran) to relax requirements for women to be veiled in public, and the changes in women's lives under Kemal Ataturk's leadership in Turkey.<sup>120</sup> She presented a broad range of countries and topics to her listeners that aimed to increase their knowledge of world issues and their affinity with other women across the globe.

Through her *Women in the International News* series, Greenwood sought to emphasise women's own agency in breaking free of their oppression by focusing on an array of accomplished women who had fought against the odds to achieve great things. Richardson has argued that Greenwood relied on these 'heroines' in her scripts to provide an example to her audiences of how women could attain 'utopia.'<sup>121</sup> For Greenwood, internationalism was a key component of this feminist utopia. By bringing her listeners news from across the world and constructing a sense of female solidarity across international boundaries, she positioned internationalism as key to women's emancipation. Greenwood often looked to the past for examples of these notable women (see Appendix One). Some of the famous women in history she discussed included Nobel Prize-winning scientist Marie Curie, British nurse Edith Cavell, nineteenth-century English social reformer Elizabeth Fry, and Irish

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<sup>118</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 28 August 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>119</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 30 October 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>120</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 20 November 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>121</sup> Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship', 72–88.



nationalist revolutionary Constance de Markievicz.<sup>122</sup> The achievements of notable women from across the world were also a regular focus of her broadcasts, such as physical culture leader Prunella Stack, physician Edith Summerskill, aviator Jean Batten, and many more listed in Appendix One.<sup>123</sup> She similarly broadcast about women who had achieved positions in various occupations across the globe, such as in aviation and politics.<sup>124</sup> The impressive list of broadcasts provide a clear picture of Greenwood's vision of a world in which women were active contributors and worthy of public attention.

The role of engaging stories in promoting women's status internationally was a subject that Greenwood felt was important. In a talk in November 1937 she emphasised the role of travel tales in illustrating the changing status of women across the world:

Did you see in this week's papers a report from Geneva on a League of Nations' discussion on the status of women? And if so, did you read it? Or did you turn over the page with a muttered "status, that's something dry as dust about legal standing – what's that got to do with me? Now this account of Lady So and So's world travels is much more interesting!" You'd probably be quite surprised if I, or someone else, were to suggest that there was a lot about status in the much-travelled-lady's tale of place and people of interest she had

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<sup>122</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 9 October 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 2 September 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 17 January 1937, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 19 February 1939, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>123</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 6 January 1939, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 10 June 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 19 August 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>124</sup> See for example: Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 3 February 1939, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 28 October 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

visited. The only difference between the report and the interview was a difference of the impersonal and the personal, the difference between blue-books and novels. Facts and figures may seem dull things. Actually if one has imagination they take on form and colour and life.<sup>125</sup>

Greenwood believed in the importance of women's contribution to foreign affairs, and argued that their continued exclusion from official positions had resulted in the loss of their abilities and perceptiveness to the world: 'Diplomacy remains one closed door, and who will not say that a little of woman's wit and wisdom might not have been valuable in some of the political situations that have arisen lately in international affairs?'<sup>126</sup> Greenwood therefore used her position to promote internationalism and to publicise the work that women were doing across the globe during the 1930s. She worked to broaden the outlook of her listeners and integrate them into a feminist internationalist community through her broadcasts. There is evidence that some of her listeners were receptive to her message. As one rural listener wrote to the *Broadcaster* in 1940:

To my mind Irene Greenwood was doing wonderful work in this session and doing much to foster international friendship, without which the world is in a sorry mess today. She always managed to take us away from the daily round of common tasks and gave us much food for thought.<sup>127</sup>

Greenwood would give more talks in this series, on and off, until 1946. However, as will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter, the war altered what internationalist feminists

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<sup>125</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 26 November 1937, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>126</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 31 December 1937, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>127</sup> 'Farmer's Wife of Berkshire Valley', 'Talks for Women', *Broadcaster*, 2 November 1940, 13.

like Greenwood could say on the air, leading her listeners, such as the one quoted above, to look back on the late 1930s as a golden era of women's international engagement.

### **Ruby Rich: Women in World Peace**

Ruby Rich was another leading feminist and peace activist who made significant use of broadcasting to contribute to international affairs. Raised in a wealthy Sydney Jewish family, she became politically active in 1923 after meeting Millicent Preston-Stanley, then president of the Feminist Club of New South Wales. Rich became vice-president of the club and campaigned vigorously for feminist issues, which led to her developing excellent public speaking skills. In 1926, she co-founded the Racial Hygiene Association (RHA) of NSW with Marion Piddington and became its first president. The RHA was an organisation that incorporated and promoted eugenic thought; as Anne Rees has argued, Rich's perspective was representative of many feminists of the interwar era who fused their progressivism with eugenic thought.<sup>128</sup> From 1929 Rich lived abroad in London and became heavily involved in the international peace movement, before returning to Australia in 1935. She continued to be involved in international peace activism and became involved in Jewish activism, including the Zionist movement.<sup>129</sup> She was the Australian president of the International Peace Campaign (IPC) co-founded by British politician Lord Robert Cecil, and through this position publicly promoted a range of solutions aimed at averting war (and later reducing the impact of the war) including opposing the private manufacture of armaments, and promoting the use of sanctions, boycotts, and arbitration instead of Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policies.<sup>130</sup> During this period, she regularly broadcast on these issues in daytime timeslots

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<sup>128</sup> Anne Rees, "'The Quality and Not Only the Quantity of Australia's People': Ruby Rich and the Racial Hygiene Association of NSW", *Australian Feminist Studies* 27, no. 71 (2012), 71–72.

<sup>129</sup> Audrey Tate, 'Rich, Ruby Sophia (1888–1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), <http://adb.biography/rich-ruby-sophia-14202/text25214>, accessed 26 February 2018; Lysbeth Cohen, *Beginning with Esther: Jewish Women in New South Wales from 1788* (Sydney: Ayers & James Heritage Books in association with the Australian Jewish Times, 1987), 218–224.

<sup>130</sup> Ruby S. Rich, 'International Peace Campaign', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 6 January 1938, p. 5; 'Australia's Ruby Rich: Creates Stir in U.S.A. with Speech', *Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts*

aimed at women to promote the positions of the IPC and the Zionist movement and encourage other women to become active contributors.

Rich's papers contain over twenty broadcast scripts from the 1930s and 1940s, which demonstrate her use of the medium to communicate her message. Her broadcast scripts are some of the best examples of the evocative power of radio speech as a form of social activism. She underlined or capitalised words which needed to be stressed, included numerous exclamation points, noted where she should pause to breathe with a forward slash, and most importantly wrote them in a conversational and engaging style which brought the scripts to life. Although there are no surviving recordings of Rich's broadcasts, the scripts she left behind are a useful substitute.

Rich believed in the power of talking to a female audience. In a broadcast describing the 1936 People's World Peace Congress in Brussels, she noted the importance that this event held for women, and that her female listeners had a duty to disseminate the information in her broadcast far and wide:

Of course, at this hour of day my listeners are necessarily women – but that doesn't matter. I've always understood that if you want a thing to be quickly known – you must TELEphone TELagraph [sic] or TELL a woman. So I just hope that you'll live up to this reputation of our sex, and tell everyone you know what I am now going to tell you.<sup>131</sup>

In another 1936 broadcast detailing the proceedings of a conference on women in world peace, Rich asked her listeners to give 'concentrated attention' to the talk so that she could

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*Advertiser*, 27 January 1939, 4; Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 4 June 1975, DeB 835-839, Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>131</sup> Ruby Rich, 'World Peace Rally', Script, 1937, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

get through a wealth of information in the ten minutes allotted to her.<sup>132</sup> This instruction demonstrated that these talks were serious education, not light entertainment. Rich considered radio talks to be an opportunity for women to learn about international affairs, and she understood radio as a key medium of public engagement which had significant influence over public opinion. As such, she took exception when she heard broadcasts that criticised the issues she was so passionate about. In March 1938, for example, she wrote to the director of commercial station 2GB to object to a talk by a news commentator in which he criticised the Women for Peace movement. Rich argued that the criticisms were not 'based on a knowledge of what is being done by organised women.'<sup>133</sup> She noted that 2GB had broadcast many talks on women and world peace, including her own, scripts of which she enclosed with the letter as 'proof that our movement is a serious one and that we are not asking for peace at any price.'<sup>134</sup> She requested that she be allowed a right of reply on the air, which was granted and broadcast two days later. In this talk she excoriated the announcer for stating that there was '[t]oo much prattling on peace, especially by women,' which was distracting them from their primary duty of motherhood, and that peace was not something that could be studied. Rich highlighted the work of the Women for Peace movement, arguing that 'we must study intensely the causes of war' in order to establish peace.<sup>135</sup> This example clearly shows the value that Rich placed on broadcasting as a key method of public engagement, which women could use to publicly argue their position and agitate for change.

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<sup>132</sup> Ruby Rich, 'Miss Rich's Talk on 2.G.B. Broadcasting Station', Script, 5 March 1936, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>133</sup> Ruby Rich to The Director, Station 2GB, 3 March 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ruby Rich, Script, 5 March 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

# Miss Ruby Rich in Brisbane

## *Noted Feminist A League of Nations Believer*

Miss Ruby Rich, who is justly regarded as the possessor of one of the keenest feminine intelligences in this country, arrived in Brisbane this morning on the Orion. She has come at the instigation of the Queensland League of Women Voters, and during her three weeks' stay in Brisbane will lecture and broadcast on a variety of subjects which her wide experience in women's affairs both here and abroad should render particularly interesting, covering as they do such vital matters as social hygiene and the preservation of peace.



MISS RUBY RICH.

a decided step in the right direction in which all sane minded people are heading.

While abroad, Miss Rich was a member of the executive committee of the British Commonwealth League (London) and of the International Committee of British Social Hygiene, and in April last year, attended a congress at Istanbul which was conducted under the auspices of the International Alliance of

Figure 3.1: Coverage of Ruby Rich in Brisbane, *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 24 October 1936, 10.

She demonstrated this viewpoint in 1938, when she gave a series of four weekly talks on 2GB on the subject of whether or not world peace could be influenced by women, broadcast at 11am on Thursday mornings. Her aim was to persuade those who believed that Australia was 'too far away from other countries...to have any interest' in foreign affairs that Australian women could and should seek to influence world peace.<sup>136</sup> Rich made good use of the medium to construct this series of talks as a discussion amongst women. To this end

<sup>136</sup> Ruby Rich, 'Can Women Influence World Peace?', *Script*, 3 February 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

she invited a guest named Jean McLagan, who ‘welcomed the opportunity for knowledge and for work directed to help the movement for Women and Peace,’ to join her on the air to represent the thoughts held by the ‘average woman.’<sup>137</sup> McLagan posed questions to Rich, who then explained the important role that women could play in preventing war and the practical activism that all women should undertake to this end. Rich clearly viewed broadcasting as an important part of women’s peace activism. In the first of these broadcasts, Rich exhorted her listeners to ‘[l]isten often to the radio programs, on world affairs, and discuss them afterwards to your friends.’<sup>138</sup> When asked what women could do to prevent war, Rich nominated increasing women’s influence in broadcasting as one prerequisite, along with gaining positions within diplomacy and the League of Nations.<sup>139</sup>

In the third broadcast, Rich explained the ways in which mothers could train their children’s minds for peace, rather than war. She highlighted the importance of removing all war-like toys and promoting sharing and compassion. Teachers could also assist by working against racial and religious prejudices, doing peace-centred activities in class, and educating children about the work of the League of Nations and peace activists. This, she argued, would challenge the dominance of war heroes by promoting peace heroes. Rich highlighted the central role that women could play in preventing war by moulding the minds of the next generation through their roles as mothers and teachers: ‘I believe that in training the child towards an international outlook women are making an important contribution to Peace.’<sup>140</sup>

In the final broadcast in the series, Rich and McLagan discussed the international manufacture of armaments, placing an emphasis on the behaviour of private firms profiting from manufacturing them. Rich referred to the Covenant of the League of Nations, which gravely objected to the private manufacture of armaments, and the report of the League of

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ruby Rich, ‘Child and Peace’, *Script*, 17 February 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Nation's committee on arms traffic, which reported that armament firms had 'adopted war-like policies,' bribed officials, circulated false reports and attempted to influence public opinion through the media.<sup>141</sup> She sought to shake her listeners out of any complacency caused by their distance from the unfolding crisis in Europe by using evocative language: 'against modern weapons of warfare, both the brave and the coward, the combatant and the civilian, women and children, will all be equally vulnerable to extinction.'<sup>142</sup>

At the end of this series of four talks, McLagan indicated that her discussions with Rich had influenced her opinions and those of her friends:

The thing that got the women's back up was the letter you showed me from a man saying "women should keep to their washtubs," that "we weren't able to understand affairs of the world, that we should only attend to our homes". One woman said "We'll have no homes if the bombs come". Another said "Men have always made wars in the past – so we women must make the peace of the future."<sup>143</sup>

McLagan also explained that her friends also relished using their role as the main household shoppers to boycott Japanese goods in protest of Japanese expansionism, demonstrating the ways that women participated in internationalist activism at the local level. McLagan highlighted the importance of radio talks for educating women about international affairs and encouraging them to take action by stating that she now believed 'that women can influence World Peace, and that these talks have helped us understand how.'<sup>144</sup> Broadcasting was therefore an important method by which women engaged with international affairs, as it expanded the purview of women's influence to incorporate the difficult problems facing

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<sup>141</sup> Ruby Rich, 'Private Manufacture of Arms', Script, 24 February 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



the world. As McLagan noted, Rich's careful explanations of the factors influencing world peace and the role that women could play in ensuring that war was averted, or at least that its impact would be reduced, emphasised that women were the key to the world's future.

Rich's radio talks, broadcast during a time when the European situation slid ever closer to war, were a critical way in which she contributed to international and national debate over the response to Fascist expansionism. In a broadcast on Brisbane station 4QY in 1936, Rich outlined why internationalism was not opposed to 'sane' nationalism—only the destructive nationalism of fascism. This sane nationalism was based 'in our British Traditions and heritage, and the courage of our pioneers, on the sound development of our nationhood, on our cultural and scientific achievements' and, most importantly, in contributing towards world citizenship and world peace.<sup>145</sup> The future of internationalism, she argued, required the defeat of 'bigoted nationalism' such as that present in Nazi Germany.<sup>146</sup> Like Kathleen Courtney and many other feminist peace activists of the late 1930s, Rich understood that a pacifist position was not tenable in the current geopolitical climate as it risked a fascist victory.<sup>147</sup> Jewish persecution by the Nazis also led many Jewish feminist peace activists across the world to abandon pacifism, including Rich.<sup>148</sup> Although she believed that averting war was the ideal outcome, it should not come at the cost of fascism and Jewish persecution—she was a peace activist, not a pacifist.

Rich was a leading figure in the Australian Jewish community in this period, and from the mid-1930s was an increasingly vocal advocate for the establishment of a Jewish state. She visited Palestine on her way back to Australia from London in 1935, where she met Rebecca Shieff, the founder of the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) and was greatly impressed by the work of the organisation. She became the founding president of the

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<sup>145</sup> Ruby Rich, 'Is Internationalism Opposed to Nationalism?', Script, February 1936, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Gottlieb, "The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning", 452.

<sup>148</sup> Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace*, 187.

Australian branch of the WIZO in 1937, a position she held for three years. As Suzanne Rutland has argued, Jewish women were at the forefront of Zionist activism in Australia in the interwar years, a period during which anti-Zionist sentiment ‘strongly prevailed’ in the Jewish community and the general public.<sup>149</sup> Anti-Zionists tended to be prominent Anglo-Jewish figures in Australian society, such as Governor-General Sir Isaac Isaacs. Due to their position they set the terms of the debate, which generally centred on the impact of Zionism on Jewish loyalty to Australia and the British Empire, rather than on the merits of Zionism as a solution to continued persecution.<sup>150</sup> Other Jewish feminists, including Dr Fanny Reading, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women, and Rieke Cohen, founder of Ivriah (which later became the Australian arm of WIZO), were ‘eloquent advocates’ for the Zionist cause.<sup>151</sup> Analysis of Rich’s broadcast scripts on the issue show that she was also a leading public advocate, and that she especially worked to influence non-Jewish women who listened to daytime women’s sessions and thereby gain wider public support for the Zionist cause.

During the 1930s, Rich gave detailed talks on Palestine, outlining its history, administration under the British mandate, and the division of land ownership. She sought to emphasise to her listeners that Jewish settlement in Palestine was a positive development for all its inhabitants. In one 1937 broadcast, for example, she exclaimed: ‘Has the immigration of Jews endangered the existence of the Arabs? Not a bit of it!’<sup>152</sup> She argued that the Arab population had benefited enormously from Jewish immigration and the prosperity and development that had come with it.<sup>153</sup> Rich also made use of the rhetorical devices common

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<sup>149</sup> Suzanne Rutland, ‘Perspectives from the Australian Jewish Community’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 11, 87-101 (2002), 92.

<sup>150</sup> Peter Y. Medding, ‘Zionism and the Australian Jewry Before 1948: The Battle for Ideological and Communal Supremacy’, *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18, no. 3-4 (2006), 99-118.

<sup>151</sup> Rutland, ‘Perspectives from the Australian Jewish Community’, 92.

<sup>152</sup> Ruby Rich, ‘Palestine: The Land Question’, *Script*, 14 February 1937, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

in the travel talk genre to impart her impressions of Palestine on a morning women's session on Melbourne national station 3LO in 1937. She described the wonder of its history and its melting pot of cultures, languages, and religions. She emphasised the development that had supposedly occurred as a result of Jewish settlement, the growth of Tel Aviv into a city with an 'Opera House, Theatres, Cinemas, Exhibition building, and numerous factories,' the significant growth in the building and manufacturing industries across the protectorate, and its attendant growth in exports and economic prosperity.<sup>154</sup> Rich's broadcasts on Palestine represented the Zionist perspective to the audiences of women's sessions. These broadcasts provided very detailed overviews of the region's history, governance, and current political, social and economic state for listeners who would likely not have been particularly familiar with it. In doing so, she brought the issue of Zionism out into general public debate. The presence of this topic during morning women's session broadcasts refutes any contention that such programs were only being focused on domestic issues—in both senses of the word.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on Australian women broadcasters who contributed to public debate on foreign affairs and educated their female listeners about international affairs. Many of these women gave travel talks, evoking exoticism and romanticism through their descriptions of their experiences in foreign lands. Other women, involved with a range of internationalist organisations, gave broadcasts outlining current issues in foreign affairs and encouraging like-minded women to become involved. Several women stand out as leading advocates for internationalism on the airwaves, including Constance Duncan, Irene Greenwood, and Ruby Rich. These women were dedicated public voices for issues as diverse as international feminism, peace activism, Asia-Pacific relations, and Zionism. Although they advocated for different issues, all believed in the importance of women contributing to

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<sup>154</sup> Ruby Rich, 'New Palestine', *Script*, 22 April 1937, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

international relations and the role of radio as a medium which could facilitate it. By contributing to public discourse and demonstrating their expertise in foreign affairs, these women showed themselves to be well-informed, engaged world citizens, and encouraged their listeners to be the same.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Voicing the War Effort: Women's Broadcasts during World War II

[T]here is no reason—now that the men of Empire are called to a more serious service than that of words—that women should not lead the way in this new profession.<sup>1</sup>

During the World War II women 'took on a new prominence' in Australian society as they joined the auxiliary forces, worked in factories and became the heads of their households.<sup>2</sup> They also took on a new prominence in broadcasting with the appointment of Margaret Doyle as the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) first female general announcer in late 1940.<sup>3</sup> This promotion extended the 'professional orbit' of women on radio, as many were already running women's sessions, 'the most popular regular sessions on the air.'<sup>4</sup> Male announcers were required in the armed forces, which necessitated the appointment of women to positions for which they had previously been ineligible. The *ABC Weekly* presented an optimistic take on Doyle's appointment as a newsreader to assure readers who were less convinced of her ability. The magazine noted that female announcers on British and American radio had built 'a crustacean shell of mannerism about them that makes them sound theatrical,' thus inhibiting their success in those countries.<sup>5</sup> However, the *ABC Weekly* believed that Doyle would not fall into this trap, and would instead perform the 'arduous

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<sup>1</sup> 'Women's Voices on the Air', *ABC Weekly*, 18 January 1941, 49.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Macintyre, 'Women's Leadership in War and Reconstruction', *Labour History*, no. 104 (2013), 66.

<sup>3</sup> K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 104.

<sup>4</sup> 'Women's Voices on the Air'

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

duties' of announcing to meet the high standard of achievement that characterised Australian radio 'in comparison with the wireless programs of the world.'<sup>6</sup> Doyle's example demonstrates both the new opportunities available to women broadcasters during the war, as well as how they used their time on the air to contribute to the war effort and become leading examples of patriotic citizenship in these years.

Radio became a tool of modern warfare during the World War II as its ability to quickly convey information and stir emotion through the expert use of speech made it indispensable for disseminating news and propaganda. Women played a particularly notable role in the radio war, as enigmatic international female propagandists, such as Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally, became widely known and feared. The impact of World War II on the gender order in Australia has been well documented, however the role of broadcasting in this history remains unexamined. During World War II Australian women again demonstrated that they could respond to the demands of citizenship through their participation in the auxiliary services, as nurses, and in industry. As Marilyn Lake has observed, feminists 'argued their right—as able-bodied citizens—to contribute to the active defence of the country.'<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next chapter, feminists began a renewed push for female representation in parliament during the war, which they argued was their right as citizens who actively contributed to the nation.

This chapter argues that radio played a key part in the development of women's citizenship during World War II as women broadcasters used their skills and positions to actively participate in the war effort. Many women were offered more opportunities to enter traditionally male-dominated areas of broadcasting, although in some cases they had to fight cuts to women's programming. Through radio talks some women encouraged others to participate in the war effort and relayed their own experiences of war work and trauma.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 187.

Others gave shortwave broadcasts to American and Pacific listeners to elicit public support for the Allied war effort. Just as they did during the Great Depression, women broadcasters also provided emotional support for their listeners and in this way worked to improve public morale. Women broadcasters were recognised as effective and necessary to the war effort and were actively sought out by the government and radio stations to contribute to the nation by speaking on the radio.

### **The Radio War**

Radio mediated the experience of World War II for many, as it became a powerful companion that bridged the gap between those at home and their loved ones at the front. Maggie Andrews has argued that British wartime radio linked the domestic sphere to ‘spaces, places and individuals displaced from radio’s hearth, while the national significance of the home in a sense shifted the public nature of the war firmly into the domestic sphere.’<sup>8</sup> Listening to news bulletins and shared programs, like troop concerts or forces programs, were ways that separated families could feel connected by envisaging themselves listening to the same program at the same time.<sup>9</sup> Radio also took on renewed importance in the lives of German women during the war. Broadcast updates from the front gave them more immediate access to news of the latest developments and the wellbeing of their family members. Consistent with pre-war Nazi ideology, however, women were primarily addressed as wives and mothers rather than citizens engaged in the war effort. Kate Lacey has observed that, during the war, radio became a ‘mediator between the home front and the front lines, in effect a mediator between women and men.’<sup>10</sup> The continued address of women in terms of their roles as wives and mothers caused problems for the Nazi government, as years of

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<sup>8</sup> Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London, New York: Continuum, 2012), 113.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–113.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 127.

ideological domestication coupled with confused messaging and generous loopholes hindered Germany's efforts at increasing female workforce participation during the war years.<sup>11</sup>

Broadcasting was also central to Australia's war effort, which in a sense began via radio. At 8pm on 3 September 1939, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made a short-wave broadcast declaring that the British Government was at war with Germany. The Australian Government, who had been waiting for an official telegram to this effect, instead decided to accept the broadcast as 'authoritative evidence' of the declaration, and at 9.15pm that evening Prime Minister (Sir) Robert Menzies broadcast over all stations that Australia was also at war.<sup>12</sup> Like other nations, the Australian Government established a Department of Information to administer censorship and, eventually, disseminate propaganda. This department closely scrutinised broadcasts, and all scripts on all stations had to be cleared prior to broadcast and then strictly followed by the speakers.<sup>13</sup> The number of talks on the national stations increased, yet speakers were required to ensure that they did not utter any statement which could be perceived to undermine the war effort. To comply with this rule, from July 1940 all ABC scripts were checked by Talks Director B. H. Molesworth before being scrutinised by the official censor. The Department of Information also made regular use of ABC airtime to disseminate messages intended to boost national morale. Far from resenting this intrusion into his division, Molesworth recognised that the war effort was in fact strengthening the position of Talks within the ABC, as the public demonstrated a renewed desire for information from their leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Radio took on even greater importance as a medium which promised fast access to information during the 1942 crisis over the threat of Japanese invasion. By June of that year

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

<sup>12</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 84.



half the population had increased the frequency of their radio listening to hear the latest news. The ABC was able to report many events ahead of the newspapers, which made it a valuable resource during a trying period. But the Department of Information exerted even greater control over ABC Talks during this time, choosing to promote an ‘Australia First’ message and approving talks which vilified the Japanese people. These overtly propagandist broadcasts were less popular with listeners, many of whom thought them to be in poor taste.<sup>15</sup>

Although many listeners were evidently astute enough to recognise and even reject the propagandistic messages they heard over the airwaves, these messages were nevertheless used in all theatres of the war and became psychological weapons. Broadcasts were used to both bolster home front morale and break enemy morale, and listening to enemy broadcasts was common amongst both troops and civilians. Many citizens heard about the broadcasts from their friends and neighbours, a trend that alarmed the British government. Loyal citizens were often the source of statements attributed to enemy broadcasters, and they unwittingly spread rumours which perpetuated myths and spread fear. This posed a danger to the war effort as authorities became concerned that citizens would become cavalier about security if they believed that the enemy already knew everything.<sup>16</sup> During the Blitz, broadcasts from Germany were listened to by many British civilians, who hoped to gain information about the location of bombings—information which the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) purposefully withheld to prevent the Luftwaffe from learning if their attacks were successful. Anglo-Irish fascist William Joyce, known on-air as Lord Haw Haw, gave propaganda talks for the Nazis that were listened to by many Britons, much to the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 96–8.

<sup>16</sup> Ann Elizabeth Pfau and David Hochfelder, ““Her Voice a Bullet””: Imaginary Propaganda and the Legendary Broadcasters of World War II”, in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 55–63.

dismay of British authorities, who began a press campaign to discourage civilians from listening to him on the grounds of disloyalty.<sup>17</sup>

As Christine Ehrick has argued, female radio propagandists had a special power due to the dissonance of the female voice on the public space of the airwaves. This had a ‘profound’ yet ‘contradictory’ impact on listeners, evoking ‘fear and fantasy simultaneously’:

With the capacity to evoke the comforting voice of the mother, the devoted voice of the loyal wife, or the enticing voice of the seductress—separately, consecutively, simultaneously—the combination of the culturally disturbing qualities (of especially acousmatic) female speech with the uncanny intimacy of radio and the technique of modern propaganda represents a key moment in twentieth-century sonic history.<sup>18</sup>

Two of the most the most prolific female radio propagandists of World War II were popularly known as Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally. These names were applied to English-speaking female broadcast propagandists for Japan and Germany respectively, although after the end of the war individual women were charged with being the supposedly true voices of these figures.<sup>19</sup>

The woman who became associated with Tokyo Rose was Iva Toguri, a second-generation Japanese-American who became trapped in Japan following the Pearl Harbour attack and, needing money, took a job at Radio Tokyo. Known as ‘Orphan Ann’ (short for Orphan Announcer), from 1943 Toguri was a disc-jockey on a show called the *Zero Hour*, presenting music in a lively style.<sup>20</sup> Her scripts were written by prisoners of war (POWs) and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 58–59.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 116.

<sup>19</sup> Naoko Shibusawa, ‘Femininity, Race and Treachery: How “Tokyo Rose” Became a Traitor to the United States after the World War II’, *Gender & History* 22, no. 1 (2010), 170.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

produced by Australian Captain Charles Cousens, a POW who had previously worked as a radio announcer on Sydney commercial station 2GB.<sup>21</sup> Tokyo Rose took on a mythic status as broadcasts she was rumoured to have given spread amongst troops and the American public. Troops in the Pacific, for example, came to believe that she had warned them not to take anti-malaria tablets as they caused impotence, however there is no evidence that any such message was ever broadcast.<sup>22</sup> Popular images of both Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally were influenced by erotic pin-up girls, and Tokyo Rose's voice was described as 'soft,' 'smooth,' 'sultry' and 'sexy.'<sup>23</sup> During Toguri's treason trial in 1949, the press focused closely on her ordinary appearance and voice, which did not fit with the image of the seductress that they had previously painted her to be. Although she did not look nor sound like a seductress, her ordinariness was instead presented as part of her deception. According to Naoko Shibusawa, hostility to women's influence in the public sphere also played a part in her trial and the media's coverage of it; a woman wielding too much influence through her speech needed to be punished.<sup>24</sup>

Mildred Gillars, an American expatriate and aspiring actress, was the woman who became associated with the 'Axis Sally' moniker, although she called herself Midge on air. Unlike Toguri, who often subtly made fun of the Japanese propaganda she was tasked with presenting, Gillars did aim to demoralise Allied troops and aid the Nazi war effort. She played on the soldiers' sexual anxieties, taunting them that the girlfriends they left at home would not be interested in damaged men. She played the role of the seductress and incited fear through her emotional broadcasts.<sup>25</sup> The dissonance of women's voices presenting propaganda on national, and international, radio was a defining feature of the gendered

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<sup>21</sup> Ivan Chapman, 'Cousens, Charles Hughes (1903–1964),' *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1993), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cousens-charles-hughes-9842>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Pfau and Hochfelder, "Her Voice a Bullet", 54.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Shibusawa, 'Femininity, Race and Treachery', 181–83.

<sup>25</sup> Pfau and Hochfelder, "Her Voice a Bullet", 50–51.

experience of World War II. Although the wartime roles of women broadcasters have been recognised by many international scholars, the role of women broadcasters in the Australian war effort has not yet been examined. This chapter aims to address this gap.

### **Opportunities for Women?**

During World War II nearly one million Australian men joined the armed forces, leading to an increasing need for women to temporarily fill usually male-only positions, including in the broadcasting industry.<sup>26</sup> There was some public support for this measure. For instance, after noting that the Postal Department was looking to free men up for active service by employing women in their stead, a reader of Port Pirie's *Recorder* suggested in June 1940 that announcing was another job that women could perform just as well as men:

If the Government is looking for avenues to release men here surely is one. Women could do their work equally well, and they would give good, plain, unaffected English which Australians would welcome.<sup>27</sup>

As discussed in earlier chapters, a key criterion for a good announcer was polished, unaffected radio speech. Although some believed that women's radio speech was naturally inferior, many others believed that good speech could be displayed by either sex. As women could exhibit good radio speech, this reader reasoned, they could also take up more prominent roles in the broadcasting program, freeing male announcers for active duty.

By 1942, More than twenty per cent of all ABC staff had joined the armed forces. To fill these gaps the ABC began to employ women as general announcers from 1940, and by 1942 nineteen women were engaged as general announcers across the country, including two newsreaders—the job usually reserved for only the best announcers. The ABC's policy

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<sup>26</sup> 'Enlistment statistics, World War II,' *Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial), <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww2>, accessed 23 November 2017.

<sup>27</sup> 'Sister', 'Women in War Work—Service as Radio Announcers', *Recorder*, 21 June 1940, 2.

that married women should resign their posts was relaxed so that they could continue in their jobs after marriage or even return to the ABC, often in higher positions than they had held previously. Word of these new opportunities attracted interest among many hopeful broadcasters.<sup>28</sup> In July 1940, for example, Irene Greenwood wrote to the Acting Manager of ABC Perth to offer her services as an announcer after reading a report in the *Broadcaster* that the Commission was prepared to receive applications from women for the role, however her application does not appear to have progressed any further.<sup>29</sup> Women also performed work as technicians, sound officers, journalists, record librarians and producers.<sup>30</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, women announcers were expected to uphold the same standards of professionalism as their male counterparts, and as such they ‘sounded as English as the men whose places they were occupying.’<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates that women’s radio speech was expected to conform to a broader ideal of speech which sought to position the ABC as an authoritative broadcaster. If women broadcasters conformed to these standards, they could become voices of the war effort.

Wartime conditions also helped women in commercial radio to advance their careers. South Australian Beryl Beard, for instance, began her career in 1937 as a typist for Adelaide commercial station 5AD, which was owned by the *Advertiser* newspaper. Due to a shortage of staff, she soon got the chance to present a Sunday morning hymn program, and this experience made her determined to become a full-time announcer. Beard got her chance in 1940 when one of the main announcers on the station joined the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and she took over his position. She worked full day shifts presenting and commenting on music, which she believed was important for boosting morale. Notably, she also got the opportunity to read the news on the station, which she recalled was very difficult

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<sup>28</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 104-05.

<sup>29</sup> Irene Greenwood to A. N. Finlay, 25 July 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>30</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 105.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

due to the unfamiliar international place names she was required to pronounce. She married in 1942, but continued living with her mother and working at 5AD while her husband was on active duty.<sup>32</sup>

A new opportunity came her way in 1943 with the relaunch of station 5KA. This station had previously been run by the Jehovah's Witnesses, and was shut down in 1941 due to government suspicions that they were using the station to pass messages to the Germans. The station was subsequently bought by the Methodist Church and the Labor Party (ALP), and reopened in December 1943.<sup>33</sup> The new 5KA needed announcers, and they contacted Beard to offer her a position at two and a half times her current salary. Not wanting to leave 5AD, she attempted to negotiate a pay rise commensurate with the offer, but 5AD was not able to match it and she accepted the new position. Beard later recalled the while she loved working at 5AD and did not wish to leave, the pay rise provided a significant boost to her ability to save for a house, which was her primary goal at the time.<sup>34</sup>

5KA was a similar station to 5AD in its style of programming, although it had a much smaller array of records and fewer staff. The reduced resources meant that the staff had to be more innovative, which presented an opportunity for Beard to learn about all aspects of radio production and take charge of her own programs. In 1944, Beard became pregnant and tendered her resignation, however the station's manager instead offered her six weeks of maternity leave. When she returned to work she left her baby with her mother during her shifts. The station was remarkably supportive of her as a working mother, sending taxis to pick her up and drop her home, and letting her work the evening shift so that she could spend time with her child during the day. Beard quit 5KA after her husband returned from the war in 1945, and spent the next decade bringing up her family. Financial stress

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<sup>32</sup> Beryl Beard interviewed by Paul Linkson, 26 July 1995, 316981, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>33</sup> 'Who's Been Sleeping in My House: The 5KA Story', Adelaide Remember When, <http://www.adelaiderememberwhen.com.au/multiple-paragraph-post>, accessed 12 November 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Beryl Beard interviewed by Paul Linkson.

necessitated her return to work in the 1950s, where her previous experience enabled her to find a senior position in radio very quickly—she accepted a job as a record librarian at station 5DN in 1954.<sup>35</sup> Beard's story demonstrates some of the opportunities that opened up to women broadcasters during the war, especially on commercial stations which relied on their female staff members to keep things going and were more flexible in their policies. She was able to step into a full-time general and news announcing role because a male announcer had joined the armed services. Her experiences of being headhunted, salary negotiations, maternity leave and supportive work practices are especially notable and demonstrate the esteem with which Beard was regarded by her bosses—a situation that may not have happened had she not had the chance to become a full-time announcer. Although Beard's resignation at the end of the war fits with the so-called return to the home, this held special significance for her as it was a home mostly financed with the money she herself had earned.

While women broadcasters like Beard were often able to take on new roles due to wartime conditions, on the national broadcaster their established roles giving talks to women came under fire. In the lead-up to the federal election in September 1940 the Menzies government reduced radio licence fees from twenty-one shillings to one pound, and the ABC's share from twelve shillings to ten, as a sweetener for voters. This resulted in a significant reduction in the funding available to the ABC, coming at a time when the funding from licence fees had virtually ceased growing as almost all households now owned radio sets. The organisation was forced to implement cost saving measures, one of which was to cut state-based women's talks and instead relay one daily national women's talk from Sydney.<sup>36</sup> This caused significant consternation amongst women in the other states, especially in Western Australia, as they believed that state-based programming was more relevant and relatable to women listeners than the daily national women's talk.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Irene Greenwood to Jessie Street, 2 October 1940, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Greenwood, whose regular talks as part of the Perth ABC women's session were affected, was incensed at the ban and wrote to her friend Jessie Street, who was then president of the United Associations (UA), to ask her to lobby her government contacts and other connections to reverse the decision.<sup>37</sup> Greenwood also wrote to John Curtin, then Opposition Leader and a fellow West Australian, to request his assistance. She noted that Western Australia now only had a 'skeleton' women's session run solely by Dorothy Graham which did not contain talks by other speakers (formerly a central part of the session). There was also a national women's talk relayed from Sydney once a day, which due to the time difference was heard in Perth at 1.30pm—a time when women were usually having lunch with their families and unable to listen. Greenwood appealed to Curtin's status as a Western Australian by arguing that the arrangement 'disregards the special needs of West Australian women listeners, who are more dependent on their radios than those of the Eastern States.'<sup>38</sup> She further argued that it was 'another example of domination from the East by persons who do not know W.A. conditions' and that there were other ways for the ABC to save money.<sup>39</sup> Curtin was unable to meet with Greenwood but made some suggestions for people she could contact and forwarded her complaint to Harold Thorby, then Postmaster-General.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, no action was taken on the issue and Western Australian women continued to be underserved by ABC programming until the establishment of Catherine King's women's session in 1944, discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

In contrast to the experience of women on the Western Australian ABC stations, in February 1940 Perth's commercial Whitford's network increased the number of women announcers and implemented both a morning and afternoon women's session, so that

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Irene Greenwood to John Curtin, 1 November 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Curtin to Irene Greenwood, 6 November 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; H. V. C. Thorby to John Curtin, 18 October 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.



‘women’s voices will be heard for more than a quarter of the total 12 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> hours of daily broadcasting.’<sup>41</sup> Whitford’s provided an alternative for female listeners, although the station was generally only heard in the Perth area and did not reach the very rural areas that the ABC did. As such, the decision to cut women’s talks on the ABC particularly impacted regional women. Greenwood’s listeners, many of whom were located in rural areas, keenly felt the absence of her talks. One wrote to the *Broadcaster* that ‘women of culture, education and intelligence have been cut off the air on the score of economy.’<sup>42</sup> A farmer’s wife wrote that Greenwood’s talks were essential in keeping her connected to international affairs:

[L]et us obtain a wider vision and promote international friendship by hearing of these wonderful women of other lands. Let us have our women speakers on the air again, particularly Irene Greenwood. The men have made a fine old mess of things up till now, anyway.<sup>43</sup>

These listener letters demonstrate that Greenwood’s talks provided a crucial link to the outside world for rural women, and were an important means by which they could become actively engaged world citizens. Without the talks these women risked further isolation at a time of global conflict, and when newsprint restrictions and petrol rationing had already limited their ability to keep up to date with world affairs.

The decision to discontinue women’s talks in Western Australia was greeted positively by some men as a welcome relief from female voices. One man wrote to Perth’s *Daily News* in October that women commentators’ voices were ‘thin and weak, lacking in timbre,’ ‘affected’ and ‘pedantic’ and that this must have been the real reason for their retrenchment.<sup>44</sup> Another ‘male of the species’ wrote to the newspaper later that same month

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Woman Announcers for a Quarter of the Broadcast’, *Broadcaster*, 3 February 1940, 18.

<sup>42</sup> E. Box, ‘Talks for Women’, *Broadcaster*, 9 November 1940, 39.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Farmer’s Wife of Berkshire Valley’, ‘Talks for Women’, *Broadcaster*, 2 November 1940, 13.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Broadblast’, ‘Women and Radio’, *Daily News* (Perth), 11 October 1940, 4.

and congratulated the ABC on their decision, musing that enjoyable music broadcasts would no longer be interrupted by ‘the continual chipping in of a high-pitched female voice minus any original microphone chatter.’<sup>45</sup> Greenwood, clearly annoyed that such opinions were published, wrote in to the *Daily News* to clarify that the reason for women’s retrenchment was not due to their radio speech, but was rather a financial decision made in a climate where women’s work was seen as secondary to men’s:

Some of your correspondents seem to think that women speakers have been got rid of because of their voices, views, or some such other considerations...I was told that the question of merit does not arise. All women speakers have been put off all National women’s sessions in Australia.

This hits Western Australian women hardest because of their isolation, and petrol rationing will make it even harder for them to get to their centres and will throw them back on their radios for the programs which it is the business of the A. B. C. to provide.<sup>46</sup>

Greenwood and others continued to lobby the government and ABC management for state-based women’s talks to be reinstated. This resulted in some limited success, as Greenwood resumed her *Women in the International News* talks in late 1940 on a semi-regular basis as part of the national women’s talk broadcast from Sydney. Greenwood had to pre-record these talks, which were then sent to the Sydney studio for national broadcast. Although she was still not satisfied at the outcome for West Australian women and her finances had suffered

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Male of the Species’, ‘Women and Radio’, *Daily News* (Perth), 26 October 1940, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Secretary W.C.R.U to The Editor, *Daily News* (Perth), 14 October 1940, QB 24 Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

due to the loss of her weekly income, the arrangement did provide her with national exposure for the talks, which were previously only broadcast in Western Australia.<sup>47</sup>

Greenwood continued to give talks over the national session throughout the remainder of the war and also gave shortwave talks for the Department of Information. She tried to obtain other broadcasting work, including expressing interest in organising the women's sessions for an ALP station that was being set up in Perth in 1941, but this appears not to have gone anywhere.<sup>48</sup> In 1944, the ABC revived the Western Australian women's session with Catherine King as compere. Greenwood was considered for the role and very much wanted it, revealing in the 1980s that she felt that she was entitled to the job because she and the Women's Service Guilds (WSG), of which she was a senior member, had campaigned for the session's reinstatement. Despite Greenwood's anger at the decision she resumed giving her *Women in the International News* talks on King's session until she began her own commercial session in 1948.<sup>49</sup>

### **Voicing the War Effort at Home**

Many of the commercial women broadcasters who benefited from new career opportunities during the war years used their positions on the airwaves to model active patriotic citizenship for their listeners. For example, in 1942 Shirley Haffner took over the women's session on Sydney commercial station 2UW when the previous compere left to take up a full-time position in the war effort overseas. Her session ran from 9.30am to 12.30pm six days a week, which was a significant increase on the time allotted to the same program prior to the war, when Hilda Morse presented a ten-minute session on weekday mornings.<sup>50</sup> Haffner was

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<sup>47</sup> Kaye Murray, *A Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood (1898-1992)* (Perth: Kaye Murray Productions, 2005), 70–71.

<sup>48</sup> Irene Greenwood to O. Walters, 12 February 1941, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>49</sup> John Andrew Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship: The Radio Broadcasts of Irene Greenwood, 1936-1954' (Honours Thesis, Murdoch University, 1988), 49–50.

<sup>50</sup> 'Broadcasting Programs', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 July 1939, 60.

trained in elocution, had been broadcasting in the children's session for four years and, as she told *Radio Pictorial*, 2UW had originally hired her because her voice broadcast very well. Her 'voice and personality were attracting notice' from other stations, and she received an offer from a regional station for an announcer position.<sup>51</sup> However, she felt that she would have more opportunities in metropolitan radio and was eventually rewarded with a promotion at 2UW. Haffner's trained voice made her an ideal announcer, and her actions reinforced the connection between radio speech and citizenship.<sup>52</sup> She was actively involved in the war effort, ensuring that her male colleagues serving overseas received support from home:

Certainly Shirley-Anne is a busy young woman these days; an indefatigable knitter, she has made many pairs of socks for the 2UW men overseas with the A.I.F. and she also belongs to the letter-writing club which has been organised amongst the staff to ensure that the 2UW men will regularly receive letters from old associates. Considering Shirley-Anne is an active member of the station's anti-bomb squad and is attending first-aid lectures, these activities leave her precious little spare time.<sup>53</sup>

Other commercial women's session comperes also performed war work and used their platform to contribute to the war effort. 2KY's Myra Dempsey volunteered at the Women's All Services Canteen.<sup>54</sup> Meg McSpeerin ran a session on 2CH at 9.15am for servicemen to send greetings to their mothers, wives or girlfriends at home, thereby using radio as a way for families to communicate with each other during separations.<sup>55</sup> Doreen McKay hosted a

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<sup>51</sup> 'Shirley Haffner: Now in Charge of 2UW's Women's Session', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 March 1942, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> 'Myra's War Work', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 March 1942, 26.

<sup>55</sup> '2CH Session Appreciated', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 October 1943, 27.

program in 1941 which featured four American female social scientists discussing the social problems that would need to be solved for Australia's postwar reconstruction 'in spite of blitzkriegs, bombings and diplomatic manoeuvres'.<sup>56</sup>

Australian journalists in Europe kept citizens at home informed during the early period of the war. According to Jeannine Baker, there were three accredited Australian female war correspondents in Europe during World War II—Anne Matheson, Elizabeth Riddell, and Margaret Gilruth—and over one hundred Allied women correspondents, despite opposition to their presence from the British War Office.<sup>57</sup> Australian women also reported from the British home front during the Blitz, and were 'exposed to fear and devastation' at close range.<sup>58</sup> Being in the midst of the crisis additionally meant that these reporters had to help with the war effort in practical ways, including assisting with the evacuation of children, once again rising to their civic duty.<sup>59</sup>

Women broadcasters often focused on women's and children's experiences of the war, an angle that was not well-covered in mainstream news reporting and was often emphasised as part of women's unique contributions to the media coverage. In March 1940, Edith Waterworth, president of the Tasmanian Women's Non-Party League, wrote to the *ABC Weekly* that women had much to contribute to broadcasting:

Though we are aware that broadcasts of International Affairs must be done by experts, there is a human side to these questions which is particularly the concern of women and in that field they could give valuable assistance in obtaining an all-round national outlook.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 'Social Science Session', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 September 1941, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Jeannine Baker, *Australian Women War Reporters: Boer War to Vietnam* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 144.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 148–49.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Edith A. Waterworth, 'Women Should Talk on the Human Side', *ABC Weekly*, 16 March 1940, 66.

Waterworth's argument positioned women's broadcasts as wartime continuations of the travel talk genre which valued women's firsthand experiences. Many Australian women in London during this time broadcast to audiences in Australia about what they had seen and experienced. Singer Dorothy Helmrich, for example, gave an ABC talk in July 1940 about the experience of children during the Blitz, based on her experiences volunteering in an evacuation centre.<sup>61</sup> Artist Alleyne Zander broadcast her observations of the tenacity of English women 'under German bombs' and her experience of camaraderie and physical discomfort in air raid shelters on the ABC in September 1940.<sup>62</sup> In another talk on the ABC in October of that year Zander outlined her experiences in an English village:

Many thousands of Australians, our sons, husbands, and brothers, are now seeing England for the first time...under strange conditions.

In my own South-of-England village unfamiliar sights speak of war—farm implements behind a hedge, ready to become a barricade; a defence post of camouflaged sandbags piled at a road intersection; trenches dug on the outskirts; hundreds of men drilling in civilian clothes, or a youth marching smartly up and down, rifle on shoulder, at a main road junction.<sup>63</sup>

Zander used her talk to paint a picture of the situation in England, using the perspective of Australian troops as a device to highlight the relevance of her talk. The details were also evocative of a travel talk, the genre that women had pioneered in the 1930s.

Talks on women's sessions mostly fell into this theme of the 'human side,' although they did occasionally give more politically-infused commentaries, as much as was possible

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothy Helmrich, 'Babies in the Blackout', *ABC Weekly*, 6 July 1940, 47.

<sup>62</sup> Alleyne Zander, 'Wail of the Banshee', *ABC Weekly*, 28 September 1940, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Alleyne Zander, 'Villages Go to War', *ABC Weekly*, 2 November 1940, 45.

without falling foul of censorship restrictions. Jessie Street, for example, saw World War II as an opportunity to demonstrate that women were fully engaged and active citizens, and Zora Simic has observed the war years were the peak of her influence, both nationally and internationally.<sup>64</sup> Street was active in organising aid for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the war in her roles as the president of the Australian-Soviet Friendship Society and chair of the Russian Medical Aid and Comforts Committee.<sup>65</sup> She used her position in these organisations to educate interested Australians about the USSR, including with radio broadcasts. She gave a talk on Sydney Labor station 2KY following the signing of the twenty-year Anglo-Soviet Treaty in June 1942, about the positive impact of the pact on eliminating ‘fears and suspicions’ about the USSR amongst ‘liberal-minded’ individuals.<sup>66</sup> She claimed that any lingering distrust of the Soviets was only the opinions of ‘disappointed fascist sympathisers’ and that the USSR has successfully united ‘150 races’ in mutual advancement, which Australia could learn from in order to address its ‘racial problem.’<sup>67</sup> She argued that the Anglo-Soviet pact would prove to be ‘one of the most important events in history’ if it could live up to its potential of eliminating ‘racial and national minority problems’ in Europe.<sup>68</sup> Street was a high-profile campaigner during the war, who aimed to mobilise women to fully participate both in the war effort and in the planning of the postwar future, while also continuing to campaign for equal pay and improved workplace conditions.<sup>69</sup> She used her public position to demonstrate the key role that women played in defending Australia and to encourage women to perform their citizen duties. In late 1942

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<sup>64</sup> Zora Simic, “‘Mrs Street—Now There’s a Subject!’: Historicising Jessie Street,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 48 (2005), 291.

<sup>65</sup> Heather Radi, ‘Street, Jessie Mary (1889–1970)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2002), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/street-jessie-mary-11789>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Jessie Street, ‘Anglo-Soviet Pact’, Script, 1942, Series 3, Box 10, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Radi, ‘Street, Jessie Mary (1889–1970)’.

she gave a broadcast encouraging women to take up liberty loans, urging them to put in their 'last shilling to win the war.'<sup>70</sup> Street emphasised that the 'country has got to have ammunition, and guns, and tanks and planes' which could only be obtained if citizens contributed as much as they could.<sup>71</sup>

Although the image of women joining up to auxiliary forces and working in factories is closely associated with the memory of the war, the reality was more complicated. The obstinacy of employers refusing to increase women's rates of pay—and even refusing to pay them the rates set by the Women's Employment Board—meant that difficult factory jobs were undesirable for all but the most desperate. The arrival of United States troops in 1942 led to the implementation of the Lend Lease agreement, which stipulated that the United States would supply munitions and heavy materials, while Australia would provide food, clothing and provisions. This shifted the need for women workers in munitions factories to more traditionally female—and low paid—places of employment such as textile factories and service jobs.<sup>72</sup> In January 1943, the Manpower Committee's powers were extended to order childless women into work, resulting in many mostly working-class women being directed into factories, although many women still avoided working. The number of women participating in employment and joining the auxiliary forces continued to fall below requirements for the remainder of the war.<sup>73</sup> Within this context, radio was used by the military and the government to promote the importance of women's war work and encourage them to get involved in whatever ways they could, such as by joining the auxiliary services or performing volunteer work. The use of women's radio speech was a friendly,

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<sup>70</sup> Jessie Street, 'Liberty Loan', Script, MS2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Lynn Beaton, 'The Importance of Women's Paid Labour: Women at Work in World War II', in *Worth Her Salt*, ed. Margaret Bevege, Margaret James, and Carmel Shute (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982), 91.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 93–95.



intimate way to present these messages, and was therefore deemed useful to the national interest.

For instance, Margaret Curtis-Otter, second-in-command of the Women's Royal Australian Navy Service (WRANS), gave talks on commercial women's sessions in 1942 organised by the Department of Information. In one of these broadcasts she urged women to be prepared for the possibility of attack. She argued that it was crucial that women were prepared to hold 'the lines behind the lines' by working in 'home, office or factory' to ensure that the country continued to run, and to also train themselves in civil defence so that they would 'never become a drag on the community.'<sup>74</sup> Having a knowledge of first aid and safety procedures during a bombing could save lives, and would be a crucial aspect of the ways in which women could perform their civic duty in a moment of crisis.<sup>75</sup> In another talk, Curtis-Otter discussed how the 'older woman' could contribute to the war effort in an attempt to combat the perception that older people were not wanted in a 'young people's war.'<sup>76</sup> She suggested that older women could manage the homes or take care of the children of younger women engaged in war work, volunteer as an Air Raid Patrol Warden, or volunteer rooms to billet families left homeless should air raids come. Curtis-Otter reminded these women that their 'poise and experience' were valuable assets, and that the whole community looked to them for 'strength and courage.'<sup>77</sup> Curtis-Otter's broadcasts demonstrate how the government used women in official positions to propagandise and recruit through the popular medium of radio.

The ABC's Melbourne women's session also broadcast interviews between its compere, 'Jane', and women involved in the war effort in an official capacity. For example,

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<sup>74</sup> Margaret Curtis-Otter, 'Be Prepared', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Margaret Curtis-Otter (Jan 1942) [transcripts], 1942, AWM80, 1/121, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Curtis-Otter, 'War Jobs for the Older Woman', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Margaret Curtis-Otter (Jan 1942) [transcripts], 1942, AWM80, 1/121, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

in May 1944 'Jane' interviewed Kitty McEwan, the Victorian Superintendent of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA). 'Jane' asked her guest to assure mothers that their daughters would be well looked after in the AWLA, and to explain whether the girls were mostly from the country or the city, what kinds of jobs they performed and if they enjoyed the work. McEwan painted the AWLA in a positive light, as an experience that would benefit girls throughout their lives, not just a way to contribute to the war effort. Jane ended the interview by asking McEwan if she would like her own daughter, if she had one, to join the AWLA, and McEwan answered:

Yes, most certainly I would, because I know it has been the women of Australia who showed the courage and grit in the early development of the country, long before the towns had grown. The women have made Australia and the Girls of to-day have the same qualities as the pioneers, and must carry on the tradition by helping feed Australia when she is in need.<sup>78</sup>

McEwan both reassured mothers that their daughters would be well cared for and emphasised the importance of their contribution to the war effort and their place within a longer history of Australian women's contributions to the nation. The message was presented in the style of a normal women's session interview with a notable guest, discussing women's experiences and potential careers—all normal topics of discussion for such a program.

During 1944 and 1945, as the war began to turn in the Allies' favour and the Labor government was taking renewed steps towards postwar reconstruction, talks on the postwar future began to be regularly broadcast. Stuart Macintyre has shown that women's leadership in designing postwar reconstruction had mixed success. Many women asserted their equality

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<sup>78</sup> [Radio] talk script – Women's Session – Interview by Jane with Miss Kitty McEwan State Superintendent Women's Land Army – [Radio] 3LO - 8 May – 10.30am, 1944, MT395/1, 250, National Archives of Australia, Melbourne.

with men as a key part of the new postwar order but were often met with a lack of enthusiasm from the government, despite a vague recognition that women needed to believe that they had a stake in the future postwar society. Women instead took matters into their own hands and campaigned for their place in the new social order.<sup>79</sup> On the Sydney ALP station 2KY, Eileen Powell presented a regular session on postwar planning on Monday afternoons in 1945. In an interview with *Radio Pictorial* she espoused the need for community planning by the people—‘from below.’<sup>80</sup> Community centres, in particular, would provide places for young people to congregate and take part in activities, for adults to learn about a range of different subjects and for community bonds to develop. She argued that citizens ‘need to practice democracy by managing our local affairs—by participating in social and community life.’<sup>81</sup> Active citizenship was therefore seen as key to the postwar society that Australians were fighting for.

Just after the end of the war Australian women in Europe broadcast on their impressions of the shattered continent, again tapping into the travel talk genre that had proved so popular in the 1930s. In 1945, Jessie Street travelled to San Francisco as part of the Australian delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations. Following the conference she travelled extensively around the United States, then visited London before travelling to the USSR via Berlin.<sup>82</sup> During this trip she made a broadcast for Australian audiences about the state of Berlin, which she described as a nightmare and ‘like Pompeii.’<sup>83</sup> She described women working to clear the streets of rubble, the evacuation of children to the German countryside, and the nascent re-democratisation of the country.<sup>84</sup> In a broadcast

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<sup>79</sup> Macintyre, ‘Women’s Leadership in War and Reconstruction’, 66-67.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Post War Planning’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 March 1945, 19, 34.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Jessie Street, *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography*, ed. Lenore Coltheart (Sydney: Federation Press, 2004), 176–204.

<sup>83</sup> Jessie Street, ‘Broadcast by Mrs Jessie Street’, Script, 1945, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

on the Melbourne ABC women's session in November 1945, Aileen Palmer, the daughter of writers Vance and Nettie Palmer and a member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) who served as a medic in the Spanish Civil War, gave a talk on her impressions of Paris. She had visited the city in April of that year while on a break from her job at Australia House in London—after the city's liberation but before the end of the war.<sup>85</sup> She noted that Paris had survived more intact than London and was very much the same as she remembered it, although the stories of people returning from concentration camps and the continued struggle to obtain basic goods gave the city a grim feeling. Parisian women, however, were 'infinitely resourceful in their determination to keep up the best possible appearance,' and Paris life was still vibrant and cultured.<sup>86</sup>

Amelia Bradley, who was interned as a prisoner of war by the Japanese in Manila, gave a talk on her wartime experiences on the Melbourne ABC women's session in June 1945. She described the scarcity of food and how the internees ensured that the children always received the best rations, and how they made sure to grow as many fruits and vegetables as possible.<sup>87</sup> The Perth radio magazine the *Broadcaster* published a number of extracts from women's talks on their wartime experiences in 1945. Artist Elaine Haxton spoke about her time in New Guinea in April, Mrs Lyall Dixon spoke of her experience of 'precarious living' in London in June, soprano Willa Hokin relayed her stories of entertaining troops in the Pacific in July, and Dr Christine Morrow spoke of her time living in Vichy France that same month.<sup>88</sup> These talks were broadcast on both commercial and ABC stations

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<sup>85</sup> Sylvia Martin, 'Palmer, Aileen Yvonne (1915–1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/palmer-aileen-yvonne-15015/text26211>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>86</sup> [Radio] talk script – Women's Session – A Glimpse of Paris – Aileen Palmer – 19 November [no time noted], 1945, MT395/1, 478, National Archives of Australia, Melbourne.

<sup>87</sup> [Radio] talk script – Women's Session – How we made do in a concentration camp in Manila – Mrs M Bradley – [Radio] 3LO – 25 June – 10:30am, 1945, MT395/1, 449, National Archives of Australia, Melbourne.

<sup>88</sup> 'Experiences in New Guinea – Elaine Haxton to Speak', *Broadcaster*, 25 April 1945, 16; 'Women of England', *Broadcaster*, 20 June 1945, 6; 'Experiences in the Islands – Willa Hokin's Army Concert Tour', *Broadcaster*, 11 July 1945, 6; 'Experiences in France', *Broadcaster*, 19 July 1945, 6.

and gave these women a platform to share their experiences. Many of these talks emphasised harrowing details of wartime suffering. Dixon described the difficulties of food shortages, blackouts and bomb damage in London, while Morrow described the German army machine-gunning its way through ‘masses of French civilians,’ the heartbreaking separation of families, the streams of refugees she witnessed in Normandy, and the ruthlessness of the Gestapo.<sup>89</sup> These women thus highlighted their own experiences and observations of the suffering of war, and were astute observers of the events and impacts of the conflict.

### **The Voice of Australia**

Australian women also participated in international propaganda broadcasts using shortwave transmissions, becoming part of the voice of the Australian war effort abroad. Shortwave transmissions can travel long distances, meaning that programs broadcast using shortwave frequencies could be heard by listeners in other countries, although at a much lower quality than the medium wave AM frequencies heard in Australia. In late 1939, the Department of Information began shortwave broadcasts in several languages under the control of W. Macmahon Ball, a professor of political science. His broadcasting division also performed important work listening to foreign shortwave broadcasts—a task which exposed the woefully small numbers of Asian language speakers in Australia at the time. The shortwave service was placed under the ABC’s control in 1942, and by mid-1943 there were sixteen daily broadcasts in seven languages, heard mainly in Japanese-occupied countries, the United States, and by Allied and Japanese forces stationed in the Pacific.<sup>90</sup> This service included a number of broadcasts given by Australian women, who were chosen to speak directly to the women of these countries as part of the ‘Voice of Australia’ series. Although Australia’s shortwave broadcasts were not as prolific as their British, American, German or Japanese

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<sup>89</sup> ‘Women of England’; ‘Experiences in France’, 19 July 1945; ‘Experiences in France’, *Broadcaster*, 25 July 1945, 6.

<sup>90</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 97.

counterparts, the Department of Information (and later the ABC) did commit to a regular and varied program of talks and other material which disseminated Allied propaganda as well as information about Australia.

Greenwood was recruited by the division to give some of these talks due to her well-known broadcasting ability.<sup>91</sup> She first broadcast a talk on women under Nazism as part of a shortwave series called *Hitler's World and Ours* in September 1940. When Ball's assistant Colin Badger approached her to give this talk, he explained that the series aimed to combat Nazi propaganda in the Pacific by 'showing what the effect of the Nazi thing has already been on Germany and Europe,' but stressed that it was important that the talks should not be too 'bitter in tone, but rather reasonable and persuasive' and to avoid 'a too violently propagandist tone.'<sup>92</sup> To meet these requirements Greenwood emphasised women's achievements during the Weimar Republic as a benchmark against which to measure how far they had fallen under Nazism, before comparing German women's supposedly low standard of living to that of Australian women:

Home, as a haven and a refuge, as we know it, has ceased to exist in Germany. Supplies of food, clothes, household equipment, are in such short supply that housewives must stand for hours to queues for merest necessities...To contrast a happy Australian home with that of the German woman, is to realise that here is the means and the measure of her degradation – for it was for a home that she sold her birthright of freedom.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> C. R. Badger to Irene Greenwood, 16 August 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Women Under Nazism', Script, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

She then emphasised the importance of democracy, and thus the allied war effort, for securing women's freedom:

German women have lost both their worlds. We still have ours. The lesson, surely, is plain. We must guard jealously our democracy, which alone guarantees us our freedom and standards of life, and we must help break the regime which holds German women in bondage. For only then can they win back their former position among the civilised women of the world.<sup>94</sup>

Following this talk, Greenwood gave shortwave broadcasts directed at American women in an attempt to cultivate public sympathy for the Allied war effort. This series formed part of a broader British-led propaganda campaign to shape American public opinion to support the United States' entry into the war on the side of the Allies.<sup>95</sup> Ball wrote to Greenwood in October 1940 to notify her that the Department was especially interested in arranging for her to give shortwave talks for North American listeners 'without any specific war reference, in which we try to describe in as picturesque a way as possible some distinctive feature of Australian life.'<sup>96</sup> These talks aimed to emphasise the close ties between Australia and the United States, and encourage an appreciation of Australian society amongst American listeners that would lead to them supporting American involvement in the Pacific to protect Australia. The *Broadcaster*, clearly proud of her achievement, reported on upcoming broadcasts by declaring that a 'West Australian will Broadcast to the World.'<sup>97</sup>

The first of these talks was a profile of Western Australian author Katharine Susannah Prichard. Greenwood discussed how Prichard was a prolific and well-regarded

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> For more information on this campaign see: Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American 'Neutrality' in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>96</sup> W. Macmahon Ball to Irene Greenwood, 2 October 1940, Box 91, Irene Greenwood Collection, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>97</sup> 'West Australian Will Broadcast to the World', *Broadcaster*, 14 September 1940, 10.

writer, thus establishing her impeccable credentials in order to legitimise her as a subject, before moving on to discuss Prichard's close relationship with the United States. Greenwood noted that Prichard had a 'deep interest in the American people' and that her 'appreciation for American literature and writers is built upon a belief that they have had a great influence on Australian literature, particularly in its early stages.'<sup>98</sup> She went further to directly address Prichard's views on American women: '[S]he has the very warmest admiration for American women in their organisation of their social services, their cultural and intellectual interests, and their work generally.'<sup>99</sup> The choice of Prichard as a subject provides an example of how Greenwood subtly inserted socialist content into her broadcasts, as Prichard was an 'unremitting worker of the Communist Party.'<sup>100</sup> Greenwood even alluded to Prichard's communist sympathies through her mention of the New Theatre Movement, the dramatic group associated with the CPA. However, Prichard's literary pedigree meant that she was also an ideal representative of Australian womanhood and commitment to global justice, an example which could be used to garner public support for Australia in the United States by emphasising the esteem in which Americans were held by Australians.

Anna Johnston has argued that Australian literature was part of the 'wartime mobilization of books and writing,' and has noted that a common strategy was to emphasise the commonalities between Australia and the United States, such as being able to 'travel thousands of miles in a straight line and still be in their own country.'<sup>101</sup> The American West was often used as a reference point for soldiers to understand Australia, which was often presented as another settler society with a history of frontier expansion.<sup>102</sup> Greenwood also

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<sup>98</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Katharine Susannah Prichard', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Irene Greenwood (Nov 1940 – Jan 1941) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/190, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> John Hay, 'Prichard, Katharine Susannah (1883–1969)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1988), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/prichard-katharine-susannah-8112>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>101</sup> Anna Johnston, 'Becoming "Pacific-Minded": Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts', *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017), 89.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



made use of this trope in a series of shortwave talks she gave on the everyday lives of Western Australian women. These broadcasts were intended to foster empathy for Australia amongst North American women which, it was hoped, would increase their support for United States' involvement in Australia's defence. Greenwood began the series by describing her own life in Perth, where she emphasised the city's beauty and serenity, and only briefly addressed the war when she wondered whether the horrors visited upon Europe could also reach Western Australia.<sup>103</sup> She then gave talks about women in more remote parts of the state, including on a wheatbelt farm and in a timber town.<sup>104</sup> For example, she described the Western Australian wheatbelt as a 'vast strip of territory' that had only been developed in the last few decades by brave and hardworking pioneers:

It needed stout hearts, broad backs, and willing spirits to carve these farms from the inhospitable land found here by the earliest settlers, and the women of the outback stood side by side with their menfolk in that struggle.<sup>105</sup>

These talks therefore gave a sense of Western Australia's array of industries, environments and lifestyles; the central role that women played in the economic and social activities of the regions; and hinted at the similarities between the Australian and American western frontiers.

While Greenwood had to respond to specific requirements, she wrote these talks herself and based them on her own knowledge and experiences. She drew on her own understanding of female audiences and broadcasting principles to craft what she believed

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<sup>103</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'A Day in the Life of a Woman in Perth', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Irene Greenwood (Nov 1940 – Jan 1941) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/190, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>104</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'A Day in the Life of a Woman on a Wheatbelt Farm', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Irene Greenwood (Nov 1940 – Jan 1941) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/190, Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Irene Greenwood, 'A Day in the Life of a Woman in a Timber Town', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Irene Greenwood (Nov 1940 – Jan 1941) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/190, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>105</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'A Day in the Life of a Woman on a Wheatbelt Farm'.

would be powerful messages in support of the Australian war effort. Like her wartime talks on *Women in the International News*, these talks were recorded in Perth and then sent to Sydney to be broadcast via shortwave frequency. She did not particularly like recording her talks, as she believed that it removed ‘the spontaneousness which is the heart and soul of good broadcasting.’<sup>106</sup> The Sydney technicians apparently ‘did not think [her] voice suitable for short-wave broadcasting,’ which Greenwood was ‘surprised’ about given her successful track record.<sup>107</sup> She was defensive about this criticism, noting in a letter to the ABC’s Sydney headquarters that her broadcasting skills were held in high regard in Western Australia:

[T]omorrow I am to make a double sided record of two talks for the A.B.C. Women’s Session on “Women in the International News” which I have given over local National Stations for the past 4 years, and which are notable I am told for their clarity and distinctness. All members of the technical staff here agree on that, and my correspondents also mention it invariably.<sup>108</sup>

Greenwood’s defensiveness at criticisms of her radio speech, and her citation of her many years of experience and numerous compliments on her abilities, demonstrate the importance of skilled radio speech to her professional identity and as a key reason why she was chosen to take part in the Voice of Australia series.

Senior women from the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) also gave shortwave talks to North America to emphasise the commonalities between Australian and American women and explain how Australian women were actively engaging in the war effort. These talks again aimed to highlight that Australia was a country worthy of America’s

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<sup>106</sup> Irene Greenwood to Mr Shaw, 1 December 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Canberra.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

help. Clare Stevenson, the Director of the WAAAF, gave a shortwave talk to American women about the organisation in October 1941. She emphasised the commonalities between the two countries, stating that ‘we love our country as much as you love yours’ and that ‘we have many of your ideals, and we don’t like Fascism.’<sup>109</sup> Stevenson described the sacrifices that airwomen made in service of the war effort, which they hoped would ‘help keep this side of the Pacific free from Nazi domination.’<sup>110</sup> In this way she aimed to make a connection with American women in order to convince them to support their country’s entry into the war.

Helen Palmer, the sister of Aileen and daughter of Vance and Nettie, was the flight officer in charge of education services for the WAAAF. She broadcast on the education facilities of the WAAAF to American audiences in September 1943, and explained how the organisation wanted its recruits to gain something more from their service than the satisfaction of helping their country—education and training to help them secure good jobs in the postwar world. This included a high standard of training in any service job they engaged in, attending technical college courses, and participation in the government’s Reconstruction Training Scheme after the war. The WAAAF ensured that they kept ‘in touch with the more feminine, domestic, and practical interests which they all have’ through the formation of cooking, dressmaking, and craft groups, but also considered it important to train their recruits to be good citizens.<sup>111</sup> Palmer argued that they wanted ‘women to take a fuller part in the organisation and planning of our community life after the war than before’.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Clare Stevenson, ‘The Women’s Auxiliary of the Australian Air Force’, [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Wing-Officer Clare Stevenson (Oct 1941) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/386, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Helen Palmer, ‘Education Facilities for W.A.A.A.F’, [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Helen Palmer (Sep 1943) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/332, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

These are the airwomen whom you will find forming the audience for “talks”, or organising their own discussion groups—formal and informal—or debates...[a] curiosity about other countries and peoples, the desire to know why things happen, what forces control the events that touch their daily lives—aren’t these the beginnings on which intelligent participation in the future depend?<sup>113</sup>

Palmer highlighted the importance of women’s auxiliary forces in educating women to be postwar citizens, which would be crucial if Australia was to be a better society than before the war. In this way she emphasised that Australian women were active participants in the Pacific war effort and were committed to being active and engaged citizens. Far from letting American troops do all the heavy lifting, they were actively contributing to their own defence and were therefore worthy of protection.

### **The Meaning of Radio Speech in Troubled Times**

Women speakers on radio provided important information about the war effort, and their polished radio voices gave authority to their broadcasts at home and abroad. One particularly high-profile woman who used her broadcasting abilities to boost morale, provide comfort, and crucially to demonstrate the importance of women’s contributions to public discourse was Dame Enid Lyons, the recently widowed wife of former Prime Minister Joseph Lyons who, as will be discussed in the next chapter, would become the first woman elected to the House of Representatives in 1943. Lyons began broadcasting in the early 1920s, when her husband was the Education Minister in the Tasmanian Labor government. She continued to be a frequent platform speaker and broadcaster during Joe’s political career, which saw him become Labor Premier of Tasmania in 1923 and, after moving to federal politics and

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

defecting to the United Australia Party in 1931, serve as Prime Minister of Australia from 1932 until his death in office in 1939.<sup>114</sup> The Lyonses were regular fixtures on Australian radio in the 1930s and their radio talks became a central plank of their political strategy. In 1933, for example, Joe began giving fifteen-minute talks on Sydney's 2CH each Thursday night, which were then relayed to Brisbane's 4BC and Adelaide's 5DN.<sup>115</sup> Weeks before the 1937 federal election he broadcast a so-called chat with the people over all Sydney stations six nights a week in the vein of United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chats, which were broadcast to the American people several years earlier.<sup>116</sup> Through radio, the Lyonses were able to present themselves as an everyday family, sharing both the day-to-day struggles of the Great Depression and the simple joys of family life.<sup>117</sup>

Joe Lyons died on 7 April 1939, and this prompted an outpouring of grief and sympathy for Dame Enid from the Australian public.<sup>118</sup> His death placed a significant burden on her, as she was now the sole provider for her seven children still at home. Within this context she was approached by the Macquarie Network, then Australia's largest network of commercial stations, regarding the possibility of a weekly Sunday night broadcast in May 1939. She agreed to a fifteen to twenty-minute broadcast each week with the possibility of a repeat broadcast. They would be recorded live from her home, or elsewhere if she was travelling, and were to begin in August or September and run for twelve months.<sup>119</sup>

However the declaration of war, as well as Lyons' own health issues in the immediate aftermath of her husband's death, meant that the broadcasts were delayed until 3 December

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<sup>114</sup> Diane Langmore, 'Lyons, Dame Enid Muriel (1897–1981)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-dame-enid-muriel-14392/text25465>, accessed 28 February 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 358.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 358–9.

<sup>117</sup> Anne Henderson, *Enid Lyons: Leading Lady to a Nation* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2008), 188–89.

<sup>118</sup> 'Nation Mourns with Dame Enid Lyons', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 15 April 1939, 3.

<sup>119</sup> Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 264–65.

1939.<sup>120</sup> The original contract had been shortened from twelve months to four to six weeks of talks due to the difficulties of finding commercial backing during the economic uncertainty of early World War II, but due to their popularity the Macquarie Network continued the broadcasts for over six months on a week-to-week contract.<sup>121</sup> During this time Lyons gave talks on a wide variety of topics, including memories of her mother, letter writing, the difficulties of the war, and her impressions of Europe.<sup>122</sup> However, Lyons' deteriorating physical and mental health meant that the weekly talks became a burden. As she later stated in her autobiography: 'Long before I was fit to do so, I began a series of broadcasts, which I carried on with increasing difficulty for several months while I struggled with the problems of the family's future.'<sup>123</sup> The talks were finally terminated on 3 June 1940, and although H. G. Horner, the general manager of Macquarie Broadcasting Services, wrote to Lyons that he hoped the break would only be temporary, they were not revived.<sup>124</sup>

The Macquarie Network talks appear to have hovered between being considered to be a series of talks for all Australians and a series specifically for women. The timeslot of the talks, 10pm on Sundays, was far outside the usual weekday morning or afternoon sessions specifically targeted at female audiences.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, Horner expressed concerns over the talks sounding too much like a daytime women's session:

I noticed in your last broadcast that you acknowledged a letter received from a listener...[t]his is a practice sometimes indulged in by Women Announcers when dealing with mail of a purely local

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> See: MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>123</sup> Enid Lyons, *Among The Carrion Crows* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1972), 37.

<sup>124</sup> H. G. Horner to Dame Enid Lyons, 20 June 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>125</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, 'Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio', in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ed. Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 124–25.

nature. Member stations of the Network, however, and the public generally look upon your broadcasts as a most important feature in the week's program, and we would therefore suggest that mention should not be made of individual letters received.<sup>126</sup>

In this directive, then, Lyons was painted as not a 'Woman Announcer' but an important drawcard who should not indulge in unprofessional feminine practices. Indeed, a number of male listeners of these broadcasts also wrote to her to express their pleasure at hearing her once again, which indicates that they made up a significant proportion of the audience.<sup>127</sup>

Yet it is also clear that the network did conceive of Lyons' talks as of particular interest to women, and this is apparent in the way the talks were marketed and in the ongoing negotiations over sponsorship. The series was originally conceived as a 'series of talks addressed to the women of Australia by an outstanding personality' and there were several proposals for the series to become part of the programming of the Macquarie Women's Guild, the Network's women's radio club, although this did not eventuate.<sup>128</sup> In January 1940, the *Australian Women's Weekly* (*AWW*) requested a copy of a talk on Lyons' impressions of Anne Chamberlain and the interior of 10 Downing Street, which she had visited in 1937. Extracts from the script were published in the *AWW* on 13 January, along with the caption: 'Dame Enid Lyons broadcasts to the women of Australia every Sunday night at 10 o'clock over station 2GB and the other stations of the Macquarie Network.'<sup>129</sup> This was a major publicity boost; as Horner wrote to Lyons prior to the article's publication: 'we hope it will be the means of increasing your Sunday night audience even beyond its present limit.'<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> H. G. Horner to Dame Enid Lyons, 31 January 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>127</sup> See for example: G. H. Watkins to Dame Enid Lyons, 4 June 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra; John E. Shuhan to Dame Enid Lyons, 7 April 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>128</sup> Horner to Lyons, 19 October 1939.

<sup>129</sup> "Like the Queen," says Dame Enid of Mrs Chamberlain', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 13 January 1940, 34.

<sup>130</sup> H. G. Horner to Dame Enid Lyons, 4 January 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Indeed, the *AWW*'s statement that Lyons was broadcasting to the 'women of Australia' is interesting, given the unusual timeslot of the talks and the Network's wariness at presenting the series as exclusively for women. It seems, in this case, that the publicity potential of appearing in the *AWW* overrode concerns over the talks being seen as a kind of women's session, and that Lyons's particular appeal to women was also recognised. Indeed, several months later the *AWW* was approached as a potential sponsor for the talks.<sup>131</sup> Lyons, therefore, spoke specifically, but not exclusively, to women, not as a daytime woman announcer but as a key feature of the Network's more prestigious evening schedule.

Lyons' listeners appreciated her presence on the air and regarded her as one of the leading broadcasters of her time. Her papers contain a rare archive of letters from listeners of the Macquarie Network Talks, many of which express their gratitude to her for broadcasting again after her husband's death. For example, one listener wrote that 'Tonight, I listened to your voice over the air and was so pleased to hear your voice back in public life again.'<sup>132</sup> Mrs W. J. Carr wrote on 10 April 1940: 'May I offer my congratulations on your most delightful talk last Sunday evening; and permit me to express the hope that your very interesting talks may continue indefinitely, as they are a delight to the ear, spoken in your beautifully modulated speaking voice.'<sup>133</sup>

These letters demonstrate the importance of Lyons' radio voice to her public persona and to her audiences, and Lyons herself recognised this. In the Macquarie Network talks she discussed the importance of speech to her personal life and public profile. For example, in a talk on 'Conversation,' she noted her 'love of words' and that 'talk I think is my hobby.'<sup>134</sup> She further argued that speech 'is a tremendous force in the shaping of public opinion, and

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<sup>131</sup> H. G. Horner to Dame Enid Lyons, 9 February 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>132</sup> Kathleen A. Pratt to Dame Enid Lyons, 7 January 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>133</sup> Mrs W. J. Carr to Dame Enid Lyons, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>134</sup> Dame Enid Lyons, 'Conversation', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.



as such carries power for good or ill, that we seldom recognise.’<sup>135</sup> She believed that speech was a potent force in the public arena, and used the sonic medium of radio to promote the virtues of speech to her listeners both through the subjects of her talks and her own vocal performance.

The many listener letters sent to her during the Macquarie Network series indicate that she was seen as a motherly figure by many. During their time in the Lodge the Lyonses deftly used the media to promote the image of Enid as the devoted mother of eleven children. Indeed, when she first began campaigning with her husband in the early 1920s, she spoke of politics as they related to ‘pots and pans and children’s shoes.’<sup>136</sup> Motherhood had therefore been central to Lyons’ public identity for nearly two decades, and this continued throughout her wartime broadcasting.<sup>137</sup> In their letters to her, listeners explicitly described her radio speech as maternal, writing that: ‘Your voice is so sweet and clear over the air. The talk brought back happy memories of my darling mother...I think you are a lovely mother,’ and ‘Your opening was intensely human and deeply moving. Only a mother could have done that.’<sup>138</sup> Her radio speech appears to have been a key part of her performance of maternal femininity, and audiences responded well to this audible motherliness. Her role was as a ‘mother to the nation,’ speaking to the public through the radio and assuaging their fears.<sup>139</sup>

But Lyons was more than just a feminine figure—she exemplified leadership during the war. As Anne Henderson has observed, these talks marked ‘the re-entry of the Lyons voice into the public arena just as the nation was looking for leadership as it faced the throes of a global conflict.’<sup>140</sup> Her status as the nation’s pre-eminent maternal citizen meant that her

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Langmore, ‘Lyons, Dame Enid Muriel’.

<sup>137</sup> Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 188–89.

<sup>138</sup> Annie E. Maas to Dame Enid Lyons, 25 February 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Reverend Alfred R. Gardner to Dame Enid Lyons, 12 May 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>139</sup> Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 188–89.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 264.

views on the war effort were influential, and she addressed the war in a number of broadcasts. In one of these talks, entitled 'The Hard Road,' she began with her reflections on her happy experiences in Belgium and France before the war and the tragedy of their current suffering, and then moved on to discuss the hardships being faced by Australian women, whom she described as 'the most capable and versatile women in the world, and however hard the road ... they will follow with resolution to the end.'<sup>141</sup> In another broadcast she noted the sacrifice that Australians had made in 'giving their sons' to the war effort, and also emphasised that listeners should not 'let fear or hatred overcome' them.<sup>142</sup> Lyons linked the demands of the war to the demands of citizenship. She emphasised personal responsibility, sacrifice, relationships and the joys of life, and presented this message to her audience in her well-practiced and charming radio voice. In 'Getting Things Done,' for example, she addressed both men and women regarding their responsibilities to be active citizens, and not to leave everything to government: 'To institute any scheme of municipal improvement, it isn't necessary to overthrow the existing town council. The starting point of such a scheme might well be and indeed must be one person. It may be you.'<sup>143</sup>

Many listeners expressly appreciated hearing Lyons' voice regularly during the uncertain times of early World War II, such as Catherine Cock who wrote in February 1940: 'In these very troubled times you are able in your own charming way to help our Country and our Nation. You have a wonderful opportunity and have so much experience to recall.'<sup>144</sup> Another woman named Lola Stewart wrote in December 1939: 'Such talks as yours are indeed refreshing in this welter of war and despair.'<sup>145</sup> Other listeners felt that the impact of

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<sup>141</sup> Dame Enid Lyons, 'The Hard Road', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>142</sup> Lyons, 'P's and Q's', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>143</sup> Dame Enid Lyons, 'Getting Things Done', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>144</sup> Catherine Cock to Dame Enid Lyons, 19 February 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>145</sup> Lola Stewart to Dame Enid Lyons, 17 December 1939, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

her talks were more than just ‘refreshing’ during the upheaval of late 1939 and 1940, and some wrote to her to express their deep affective reaction to regularly hearing her on the radio. Part of this was due to the fact that she had been a high profile public figure during the 1930s in a unique way. The love story of the Lyonses captured the imagination of the Australian public, many of whom intensely felt for her following her loss.<sup>146</sup> As a result her grief and health were often commented upon by listeners who wrote to her following the Macquarie Network talks, some of whom professed to hearing distress in her voice. For example, Olive E. Knight wrote in April 1940 that ‘I listened to your voice last night and heard the tears behind it,’ while Isabel M. Brockett wrote in January 1940 that ‘all the time you were speaking I just knew that you were missing your beloved one.’<sup>147</sup> It is apparent that listeners emotionally connected with Lyons’ experience through the sound of her voice.

Indeed, they also considered the routine presence of her voice on the radio as akin to a real friendship. As Knight wrote to Lyons in April 1940: ‘Next Sunday when you speak will you think of me sitting here alone, listening to your beautiful voice, my heart swelling with the thought that you may count me one of your friends.’<sup>148</sup> Elsie Hankins wrote in February 1940: ‘I have a very lonely life, therefore my radio friends become very dear to me.’<sup>149</sup> These examples demonstrate one of the most important functions of the radio voice: its capacity to alleviate loneliness. Lyons’ frequent presence on the air made her well-suited to becoming a ‘radio friend’ to some listeners, and this was of particular importance in context of early World War II when women were increasingly finding themselves without their loved ones at home. Hearing her voice, which had been a major part of the soundscape of Australian radio for years, appears to have provided a measure of familiarity and comfort

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<sup>146</sup> Kate White, *A Political Love Story: Joe and Enid Lyons* (Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 1987).

<sup>147</sup> Olive E. Knight to Dame Enid Lyons, 29 April 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Isabel M. Brockett to Dame Enid Lyons, 1 January 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>148</sup> Knight to Lyons, 29 April 1940.

<sup>149</sup> Elsie Hankins to Dame Enid Lyons, 29 February 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

for listeners during a difficult period. This was especially because Lyons had recently suffered the loss of her husband, and had credibly relatable experiences of grief and suffering.

Lyons continued to broadcast after the end of the Macquarie Network series, and gave regular talks on the ABC in late 1940 which were sometimes published in the *ABC Weekly*. Once again these broadcasts demonstrated Lyons' role as a leading public figure who modelled engaged citizenship for all Australians. She emphasised Australia's close ties to



Figure 4.1: An excerpt from one of Dame Enid Lyons' radio talks, *ABC Weekly*, 30 November 1940, 45.

Britain and empathised with the plight of British civilians suffering under air raids. In October, for example, she mused on her feelings for England's plight while in her quiet and safe Tasmanian garden by imagining that an 'incendiary bomb fell in my own garden, setting alight the pines' and then burning her house—a thought that made the attacks on London seem more real to her.<sup>150</sup> In another talk in November Lyons emphasised Australia's cultural and emotional ties with England:

<sup>150</sup> Enid Lyons, 'In the Quiet of My Garden I Thought of Bombs', *ABC Weekly*, 26 October 1940, 45.

How would we face the rain of bombs that nightly falls on London?

How should we act if our homes were smoking ruins and our children dead within them?

Let us realise the full heroism of the people of our blood.

It is no small thing that we should have sprung from such as these, no small thing that thousands of our own Australians should have gone voluntarily to share their lot, no small thing to feel that neither fear nor agony nor the threat of death can break the spirit of our people fortified by faith in a great cause.<sup>151</sup>

By emphasising Australians' blood ties to Britain and encouraging her listeners to place themselves in Londoners' shoes, she deftly played on her listeners' feelings of patriotism and empathy. Lyons regularly highlighted British courage and the need for Australians to exhibit the same fortitude in the face of war to support their kin and to steel themselves for whatever may come.

## **Conclusion**

During World War II Australian women broadcasters publicly demonstrated that they were committed, engaged citizens on air, and this showed that they could contribute to the nation and that they had a stake in a new postwar order. Radio was an official tool of propaganda which played a major role in improving home front morale, increasing allied support and demoralising enemies. Many women broadcasters were able to step into new roles due to the increased need for female labour, and, although the ABC reduced women's programming in 1940 due to budget constraints, on the commercial stations many women were engaged as

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<sup>151</sup> Enid Lyons, 'How Would WE Face Bomb Raids?', *ABC Weekly*, 16 November 1940, 45.

higher-level announcers and their sessions put on air for longer hours each day. In these roles they encouraged women's mobilisation, shared their own experiences and validated their listeners' emotions within a framework of complete commitment to the war effort. Some women also gave official overseas shortwave broadcasts, where they fostered support for the allied war effort and directly combatted Axis propaganda. It is not surprising that when women were finally elected to Australian Federal Parliament during this period, broadcasting was a key part of their political strategy.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## ‘An Epoch Making Event’:

### Radio and the New Female Parliamentarians

In April and May 1944, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) ran a series of broadcasts which dealt with Australia’s postwar future titled *After the War: Then What?* These talks were part of a listening group series, a type of program where listeners formed discussion groups to debate the issues raised in a broadcast.<sup>1</sup> The topics debated in this series included whether workers in various industries would be better off, whether the constitution should be amended to retain the wartime powers of the Australian Government for five years after the war, and whether women would be able to achieve equality with men. The centrality of equality to the conceptualisation of women’s status in society was clearly articulated in the booklet that the ABC distributed to the listening groups, which outlined that women had ‘proved themselves able to share equally with men the burden and the danger of front-line duty or of duty at the factory bench’ and they had ‘emancipated themselves in the teeth of man’s conservatism, if not hostility.’<sup>2</sup> The presence of this topic as part of the ABC’s listening group series is significant, as it demonstrates both the importance of women’s equality as a topic of public debate at the time and the role of radio as a forum where it could be discussed and advanced.

The speakers for the series on women’s equality were chosen as high-profile women who could represent each state, including feminist Jessie Street (New South Wales), National

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about radio listening groups in Australia see: David Goodman, ‘A Transnational History of Radio Listening Groups II: Canada, Australia and the World’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 36, no. 4 (2016), 627–648.

<sup>2</sup> *After the War Then What?* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1944), PWR [Postwar Reconstruction] – ABC Broadcast Series:– “After the War then What About Equality for Women”, 1944, A989, 735/710/8, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 4.

Council of Women (NCW) president Elsie Byth (Queensland), lawyer Winnie Levy (South Australia), playwright Catherine Duncan (Victoria), and politicians (Dame) Dorothy Tangney (Western Australia), a senator for the Australian Labor Party (ALP), and Dame Enid Lyons (Tasmania), a United Australia Party (UAP) member of the House of Representatives. The inclusion of Lyons, Tangney, and Street is notable, as all three women stood as candidates for major political parties in the 1943 election, and Lyons and Tangney became the first women elected to Australian Federal Parliament—one of the most significant advances in women’s equality at that time. These three women contested the next two elections, and over this period they used radio as a key part of their political strategies, directly addressing women voters who were often left out of political discussion.

In the *After the War* broadcasts, Street, Tangney, and Lyons each expressed the need for greater numbers of women in public affairs. Street began the series on 7 April, arguing that women should not be forced back to the home following the end of the war, although they should be free to return there if they wished. She linked the talk of forcing women out of the professions and the factories to fascism, observing that this was one of the ‘first things the Nazis did’ and that ‘I can’t help thinking that if any attempt is made here after the war to force women back to the home, it will be proof that fascism still has strong roots in Australia.’<sup>3</sup> Street strategically emphasised that the ‘greatest happiness for a woman is to care for a home and raise a family,’ but that many women needed to work out of financial necessity and working before marriage helped women to develop a diverse skillset and broadened their outlook.<sup>4</sup> She also noted the importance of women holding jobs for their political representation: ‘because of the lack of opportunity to gain experience they’re denied the opportunity of exerting any influence in framing politics or directing public affairs.’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jessie Street, ‘Is It To Be Back to the Kitchen?’, PWR [Postwar Reconstruction] – ABC Broadcast Series: “After the War then What About Equality for Women”, 1944, A989, 735/710/8, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



Thus, for Street, women's workforce participation was the key to increasing their political participation.

On 16 May, Tangney gave a talk on the need for more women in parliament. She argued that any woman wishing to be a member of parliament (MP) must be a good citizen, and that through the war effort women had proven their worth in this regard. Furthermore, the administrative and organisational experience gained by women during the war should not be wasted but put to good use in parliament. Tangney also believed that women brought positive benefits to parliamentary representation, and she described how many of her constituents, particularly women, came to her to get political assistance about a range of issues because they perceived a female representative to be more approachable and empathetic:

I, because, I am a woman, have been able to penetrate many of these problems and bring them to the light of the public knowledge...They have come to me because I am a woman in particular, and not because I am a better parliamentary representative than the men.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite the positive results of being woman politicians, Tangney stressed to potential women candidates they should 'never put your sex before your citizenship,' as it 'is as Australians not as women you will take your rightful place in Parliament.'<sup>7</sup> Tangney's own experience as Australia's first female senator informed her perspective on the need for more women in parliament, whose presence would also enfranchise women voters to a greater extent. However, women were not sex-specific representatives, rather they represented all their constituents, just like their male colleagues.

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<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Tangney, 'More Women in Parliament', PWR [Postwar Reconstruction] – ABC Broadcast Series: "After the War then What About Equality for Women", 1944, A989, 735/710/8, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

On 22 May, Lyons broadcast on the role of women in preventing war. Although she did not unequivocally believe that women could prevent it, she did believe that ‘the greater part women play in public life, the more they influence public opinion, the less frequent wars are likely to be.’<sup>8</sup> Like Street, Lyons linked the exclusion of women from public life in Nazi Germany to the warmongering of that regime: ‘It is not for nothing that the Women of Hitler’s Germany were denied of all share of Government. It was not for nothing that the whole of their energies and their abilities were directed into the domestic sphere and their wills subordinated to the wills of men.’<sup>9</sup> The importance of having a substantial number of women at the postwar peace conference was paramount, as women ‘may not be able to prevent war, but their equipment is such that their influence in the international sphere may be counted on to promote peace rather than war.’<sup>10</sup> Each of these women clearly articulated the value of increasing the number of women in public affairs, and particularly the positive feminine influence that women would have on decision making. That they did so by speaking on the radio was not coincidental but, as this chapter explains, was a crucial aspect of the public engagement of female parliamentarians in the 1940s.

This chapter will examine the significance of broadcasting to the political careers of Lyons, Tangney, and Street. It particularly focuses on the 1943, 1946, and 1949 elections, as women were finally successful at achieving federal representation at these elections and the use of radio to appeal to voters matured in Australia during these years. These women ran in all three campaigns and made extensive use of radio broadcasts. It is fortunate that recordings of all three women from these election campaigns are still in existence and held at the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), and the scripts are held in the collections

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<sup>8</sup> Enid Lyons, ‘Can Women Prevent War?’, PWR [Postwar Reconstruction] – ABC Broadcast Series:– “After the War then What About Equality for Women”, 1944, A989, 735/710/8, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

at the National Library of Australia (NLA). This enables a rare close analysis of both the content and sound of their broadcasts.

Participation in formal politics has long been a part of citizenship that has largely excluded women.<sup>11</sup> As I have shown throughout this thesis, broadcasting was a significant aspect of the development of women's citizenship in the mid-twentieth century as it enabled women to contribute to the public sphere on a much larger scale than ever before; it normalised the sounds of their voices in public space and reduced the barriers to women's participation in society by reaching into the domestic sphere. During the 1943 election campaign the United Associations (UA) noted in their weekly newsletter that 'many seemed to think the only training necessary for possible leaders of the country was experience in the art of public speaking.'<sup>12</sup> Indeed a movement aimed at getting women elected to the Federal Parliament, Women for Canberra, recognised the importance of public speaking for political candidates and provided special training on public speaking to women who wished to become involved in political life.<sup>13</sup> The UA, one of the key sponsors of the Women for Canberra campaign, underscored the role of radio as a platform for public speaking in a broadcast made just after the 1943 election, noting that 'radios blared' and 'oratory rent the air' during the campaign.<sup>14</sup> Public speaking, including broadcasting, was therefore a central aspect of formal politics in the 1940s. Women politicians claimed authority and legitimacy in the public sphere through broadcasting and this aided their acceptance as elected representatives.

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<sup>11</sup> Ruth Lister, 'Feminist Citizenship Theory: An Alternative Perspective on Understanding Women's Social and Political Lives', in *Women and Social Capital*, ed. Jane Franklin (London: London South Bank University, 2005), 20–21.

<sup>12</sup> 'Women for Canberra', *Woman's Cause* (Sydney: United Associations of Women, 15 June 1948), 3–5, MLMSS 2160, United Association of Women Records, Box Y4481, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> 'United Associations of Women Broadcast', Script, 26 August 1943, MLMSS 2160, United Association of Women Records, Box Y4481, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

## Radio and Women's Political Advancement: International Perspectives

International scholars have examined the role of radio in the construction of the female parliamentarian and in familiarising women with parliamentary processes. Although not a politician per se, one of the most notable political women to use radio was United States First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She began broadcasting in the 1920s, and her 'broadcasts over major networks both enlarged the concept of radio performance by individuals in public life and affirmed the right of married women to earn money on their own.'<sup>15</sup> While First Lady her broadcasts generally did not deal with controversial topics, however she used them to stress the importance of women actively participating in public affairs. Her voice was also an important aspect of her broadcasting, as it 'had a patrician quality and carried well on the radio; she had clear, upper-class, East Coast diction.'<sup>16</sup> Roosevelt used radio to communicate with the American public, to promote a range of causes, to both develop her own profile and to normalise the participation of women's voices in public discussion.

Donna Halper has observed that radio enabled women politicians in the United States to take their message directly to voters, and particularly to women voters listening at home.<sup>17</sup> This also occurred in the United Kingdom. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) talks producer Hilda Matheson inaugurated a series of talks to newly enfranchised women voters in 1928, in which female MPs, councillors, jurors, and magistrates described their jobs. From 1929 *The Week in Parliament*, a program which featured women MPs reporting on the workings of Westminster, was broadcast on Wednesday mornings.<sup>18</sup> Former independent political candidate, feminist and writer Ray Strachey also gave regular broadcasts during

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<sup>15</sup> Paul S. Belgrade, 'Radio Broadcasts', in *Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*, ed. Henry R. Beasley (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 425.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 425–29.

<sup>17</sup> Donna Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves: How Radio Brought Women into the Public Sphere', in *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, ed. Michael C. Keith (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 90.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Murphy, 'From Women's Hour to Other Women's Lives: BBC Talks for Women and the Women Who Made Them, 1923-39', in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 31–45; BBC Genome, 'Mrs M. A. Hamilton, M. P.: The Week in Parliament', <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/98f5192937574a18863e5dd1da9e8d67>, accessed 16 December 2017.

daytime slots on politics and citizenship, and many of her scripts survive in the Women's Library at the London School of Economics. In the lead up to the 1929 election, for example, Strachey discussed the ways in which the political parties were trying to attract newly-enfranchised women voters, and noted that 'politicians are paying careful attention to anything any young women may happen to say in their hearing between now and the early summer so that, if there is anything political they want, now is their chance!'<sup>19</sup> The BBC's status as a public service broadcaster meant that it was amenable to giving airtime to women to educate their peers on the requirements of citizenship and, in doing so, it provided a public space in which women began to articulate their own perspectives on political issues.

Kristin Skoog has also examined the role of women MPs on the postwar BBC program *Woman's Hour*. The program aimed to make women more aware of parliamentary processes and political issues and invited women MPs such as Lady Megan Lloyd George and Leah Manning to give regular talks. The talks given by women MPs on *Woman's Hour* 'aimed to make women aware of their political power and parliamentary processes,' and thus more engaged and informed citizens.<sup>20</sup> Although many women politicians were at pains to emphasise that they were representatives for all constituents, including men, they did play a special role in addressing women's political interests and in engaging women in the political process through giving radio talks.<sup>21</sup>

In her work on women on Argentine and Uruguayan radio, Christine Ehrick has raised the question of whether women's suffrage shaped responses to women's voices on the new medium. Women did not win the vote in Argentina until 1947, over two decades after the introduction of radio, while in the United States women's federal enfranchisement was roughly parallel to the advent of broadcasting. Ehrick argued that this difference influenced

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<sup>19</sup> Ray Strachey, 'A Woman's Commentary', Script, 7BSH/5/1/2, Strachey Family Papers, Box 9, The Women's Library at the London School of Economics, London; Kate Murphy, *Behind The Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 230–33.

<sup>20</sup> Kristin Skoog, 'The "Responsible" Woman: The BBC and Women's Radio 1945-1955' (PhD Thesis, University of Westminster, 2010), 156.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–67.

how audiences reacted to women's voices on the air. In Argentina, criticisms focused on women's emotional or irrational ways of speaking, and thus their inability to contribute to rational public discourse. These arguments were similar to those made against women's enfranchisement; that is, women were incapable of contributing to public and political debate, whether through voting, standing for parliament, or speaking on the radio. In the United States, on the other hand, the criticisms centred on the more 'aesthetic' qualities of women's voices on the air, such as a shrill pitch.<sup>22</sup> The quarrel was presented as not so much about women's contribution to public discourse as citizens, but rather with the ways that their voices disrupted the gendered soundscape. In both the United States and Argentina women's increasing public audibility was seen as a threat. However, the different criticisms raised in United States and Argentina do indicate that there are important questions to be asked regarding the relationship between women's political advancement and the new soundscape of radio, both of which were hallmarks of interwar modernity.

### **Radio and Australian Politics**

By the start of the World War II, radio had become an important tool for politicians seeking to communicate with the broadest possible audience of voters. As seen in the last chapter, Joseph and Dame Enid Lyons made extensive use of the medium during his prime ministership in the 1930s, and Dame Enid continued to regularly appear on the airwaves after her husband's death in 1939. It was not just the Lyonses who made political use of radio in the 1930s. In 1937, Labor leader John Curtin decided to broadcast his election policy speech from Perth after realising that radio had superseded local meetings as the best method of communication with the electorate. The Country Party similarly broadcast a series of

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<sup>22</sup> Christine Ehrick, "'Savage Dissonance': Gender, Voice, and Women's Radio Speech in Argentina, 1930-1945", in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 76.

question and answer sessions on regional New South Wales stations during this election.<sup>23</sup> The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) also used radio to communicate with their supporters, and CPA member Freda Brown was known as the ‘Voice of the People’ in her weekly broadcasts on Labor station 2KY in the 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

During the war radio’s importance to Australian politics grew even greater. Prime Minister Robert Menzies gave his now famous declaration of war via radio broadcast in 1939, using ‘grandiose’ and ‘statesman-like’ language and his ‘thick and low’ voice.<sup>25</sup> As Carla Teixeira has observed of the recording of this speech, Menzies’ English was ‘refined and reminiscent of a time when the British Empire lived on in the voices of the Australian people.’<sup>26</sup> In 1941 Prime Minister John Curtin also used radio to announce war with Japan, however his voice provided a clear counterpoint to the refinement of Menzies. Maryanne Doyle has noted that Curtin used an ‘unmistakable Australian accent’ which contrasted with the English or near-English accents which predominated on the airwaves at that time.<sup>27</sup> Thus Menzies, on the one hand, vocally represented Empire loyalty, while Curtin, on the other, represented the voice of the common people.

After the UAP’s departure from office in 1941, Menzies turned to radio to remain publicly visible and to begin to change the minds of the electorate following his party’s electoral defeat. Notably, he believed that any relevant politician should make use of both commercial stations and the ABC. He began a weekly series of radio talks in January 1942 which included the famous ‘Forgotten People’ broadcast, made on 22 May 1942. In this broadcast Menzies promoted the Australian middle class as the backbone of the nation, yet

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<sup>23</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 358–59.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa Milner, “‘A Key Person Internationally’: Towards a Biography of Freda Brown”, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, 22 (2016), 28.

<sup>25</sup> Carla Teixeira, ‘Menzies Speech: Declaration of War’, *Australian Screen Online*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/menzies-speech-declaration-war/clip1/>, accessed 16 December 2017.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Maryanne Doyle, ‘Curtin Speech: Japan Enters World War II’, *Australian Screen Online*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/curtin-japan-second-world-war/clip1/>, accessed 16 December 2017.

a majority so often overlooked in policy decisions. In this talk he articulated the political vision that would come to define the Menzies era, and that the ‘Forgotten People’ are still so closely tied with the Menzies prime ministership attests to the strong power of radio at this time.<sup>28</sup> As Andrew Lee has argued, this series of talks marked the beginning of the revival of ‘non-Labor morale’ and the construction of a forward-looking image for both the UAP and Menzies, although there would still be many years of this publicity to go before their success in the 1949 federal election.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Judith Brett has argued that Menzies specifically spoke to women through these broadcasts. His rhetorical focus on the home as the centre of middle-class life made room for women’s experiences in public debate, and this was in contrast to the ALP who focused on primarily male experiences of workplace relations.<sup>30</sup> It is also important to recognise the fact that the ‘Forgotten People’ was first given as a radio talk, as women were the primary audience for radio and its status as a medium which blurred the public and the private spheres provided a space for women to enact active citizenship. Menzies helped to legitimise the role of radio as a political tool that could be used to reach women effectively.

Radio continued to play a key role in the opposition tactics of the newly rebranded Liberal Party. In 1947 the party began broadcasting the *John Henry Austral* series, which featured sketches of everyday life situations, which John Henry would then interpret in terms of the Labor government’s failure and even the influence of communism. As Ian Ward has observed, dramatisations had been used in political advertisements since the mid-1930s, but the scale of the *John Henry Austral* series led to it having a particularly substantial influence. Arthur Calwell introduced new legislation in 1948 to stop these advertisements on the basis that they contained impersonations of Labor ministers. The series ended after the passage of

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<sup>28</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 368–69; Andrew Lee, ‘Nothing to Offer but Fear? Non-Labour Federal Electioneering in Australia, 1914-1954’ (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1997), 290–96.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, ‘Nothing to Offer but Fear?’, 295.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Brett, ‘Menzies’ Forgotten People’, *Meanjin* 43, no. 2 (1984), 253–65.



this legislation and subsequent elections returned to a more traditional style of electioneering.<sup>31</sup>

Within the context of the increasing use of radio to appeal to the voting public, the female candidates in the 1943, 1946, and 1949 election campaigns made use of the medium to appeal specifically to female voters. Speaking directly to women through the airwaves further emphasised the role of radio as a medium through which women could claim their voices as citizens in Australia. As Lee has observed, in this period most party publicity ‘usually appeared to be addressed either to a man, or to an archetypal voter assumed to be a man.’<sup>32</sup> The presence of women in the Australian Federal Parliament from 1943 marked a shift in the major parties toward conceptualising women as political citizens. During the 1943 election campaign both Menzies and Curtin took the unusual step of responding to questions put by the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, which was a rare occurrence for male political leaders.<sup>33</sup>

### **Women in Australian Parliaments**

Although women won both the federal franchise and the right to stand for Federal Parliament in 1902, it was not until 1943 that the first women were finally elected to federal parliament. Many women stood as political candidates, and state legislatures had seen some, albeit limited, progress in female representation. In 1921, Edith Cowan became the first female parliamentarian when she was elected to the Parliament of Western Australia, and she was followed by Labor candidate May Holman in 1925. Millicent Preston Stanley was elected as a Nationalist MP in the Parliament of New South Wales in 1925, Irene Longman was elected to the Queensland lower house in 1929, and Ivy Weber was elected as an Independent MP in Victoria in 1937.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ian Ward, ‘The Early Use of Radio for Political Communication in Australia and Canada: John Henry Austral, Mr Sage and the Man from Mars’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45, no. 3 (1999), 313–20.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, ‘Nothing to Offer but Fear?’, 300.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 300-02.

<sup>34</sup> Marian Sawer and Marian Simms, *A Woman’s Place: Women and Politics in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin,

In December 1943, Kathleen Sherrard wrote an article which explored the reasons for the lack of women in both state and federal parliaments, and observed that the ‘relative ease’ with which women won the vote in Australia meant that they had not been ‘stirred by a long struggle’ and were therefore not eager to vote women into office.<sup>35</sup> However, for Sherrard, the major reason was that women were absent from other posts of authority, such as councils, juries, and magistrates’ benches, and few women were connected with powerful industry and business groups. As a result, Sherrard argued, women were unknown to voters who were inclined to elect candidates which fit the status quo—that is, men.<sup>36</sup> Marian Sawer and Marian Simms have also observed the reluctance of the major parties to endorse women, and the converse problem that the majority of women who were elected in these early years were endorsed by the major parties. Although there were a number of women who stood as independents, they usually had little electoral success.<sup>37</sup>

The 1943 election proved to be a watershed for a number of reasons. Marilyn Lake has argued that women’s lack of representation in the Federal Parliament became an increasingly obvious denial of their equal rights as citizens, within the context of the significant increase in women in the paid workforce between 1939 and 1943. Furthermore, by this point the election of women to the Federal Parliament was no longer seen to be solely a necessity for women’s public citizenship, but a potential career option for women.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the 1943 election saw a renewed push by feminists to gain parliamentary representation through the Women for Canberra movement, which supported and trained women to stand for election. Nineteen independent candidates were sponsored by the movement, including the movement’s leader Ivy Weber, who had resigned her seat in the

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1993), 85–110.

<sup>35</sup> Kathleen Sherrard, ‘The Political History of Women in Australia’, *The Australian Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1943), 49.

<sup>36</sup> Sherrard, ‘The Political History of Women in Australia’.

<sup>37</sup> Sawer and Simms, *A Woman’s Place*, 45–47.

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 188.

Parliament of Victoria to run. Although none of the Women for Canberra candidates were ultimately elected, the movement provided an impetus for renewed scrutiny of the lack of female representatives, and the election delivered its first ones: Lyons, UAP (later Liberal



**Figure 5.1: Senator Dorothy Tangney and Dame Enid Lyons enter the House of Representatives, 24 September 1943, Australian War Memorial.**

Party) member for the Tasmanian seat of Darwin, and Tangney, ALP senator for Western Australia.<sup>39</sup>

Lyons was reportedly convinced by her daughter, Enid, to run for the seat of Darwin in the 1943 election. On paper, it would seem that she was an ideal candidate; she was the widow of a former Prime Minister, a party elder and a well-regarded public figure, especially in her home state of Tasmania. Yet the UAP also ran two other candidates in the electorate, which indicates that there was still a significant amount of unease about a female candidate, even one with the standing of Lyons.<sup>40</sup> She won the seat despite this competition and went on to successfully contest the 1946 and 1949 elections. In 1949 she was appointed Vice-President of the Executive Council in the newly elected Menzies Liberal Government, making her the first woman in Federal Cabinet. In 1951, in poor health, Lyons resigned from parliament.<sup>41</sup>

Tangney's election was also not assured, as she was placed fourth on the Senate ticket and would likely not have been elected if not for the landslide swing to the ALP at that election. However, in the years following her election Tangney proved to be a popular representative amongst voters, and she headed the ballot at the 1946, 1951, 1955, and 1961 elections. In 1967, after a change in procedure giving the all-male State executive control over the Senate ticket, she was placed fourth and was not elected.<sup>42</sup> Indeed it appears that the ALP was especially uneasy with running women candidates, and Lyons later noted that Tangney did not receive the respect she deserved in her party room.<sup>43</sup>

Jessie Street also knew this attitude all too well. She joined the ALP during the Great Depression and was endorsed as the ALP candidate for the safe UAP seat of Wentworth, in

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<sup>39</sup> Sawer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 108–12.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Henderson, *Enid Lyons: Leading Lady to a Nation* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2008), 274–77.

<sup>41</sup> Diane Langmore, 'Lyons, Dame Enid Muriel (1897–1981)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-dame-enid-muriel-14392/text25465>, accessed 5 March 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Sawer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 120.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

Sydney's Eastern Suburbs, at the 1943 election. Despite Street gaining a twenty per cent swing towards the ALP and the largest number of overall votes (31,048), incumbent UAP candidate Eric Harrison retained the seat after preferences. In the 1946 election the ALP again endorsed her for the same seat, and this time she recorded a small swing against her and did not win the majority of overall votes. Street believed that after her strong result at the 1943 election she deserved to be given a safe Labor seat to contest, and after the 1946 election she left the party as she did not believe that they had any intention of running her in a winnable seat. After rejecting the ALP's ultimatum that she end her association with the Australian Russian Society, an organisation with Communist affiliations, she then ran as an Independent Labor candidate in the 1949 election for the newly-formed electorate of Phillip, again in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. She polled less than six per cent of the vote, and she did not again stand for election.<sup>44</sup>

### **Dame Enid Lyons**

As discussed in the previous chapter, Lyons was a frequent presence on the airwaves from the 1920s in support of her husband's political career and became a well-known broadcaster in her own right.<sup>45</sup> When she began her campaign for election in 1943 it was therefore not surprising that she made extensive use of radio. Lyons' strong public image meant that her suitability for public office was well-recognised long before she decided to stand for election. In January 1940, on the one-hundred-and-fifty-second anniversary of 'being ruled by men,' the *Australian Women's Weekly* published an article by Elizabeth Wilmot which detailed her picks for a government run by women. Lyons was selected as the ideal Prime Minister, as Wilmot argued:

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<sup>44</sup> Jessie Street, *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography*, ed. Lenore Coltheart (Sydney: Federation Press, 2004), 150–53, 217.

<sup>45</sup> Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 188–89, 264–65.

Dame Enid learned much in seven years working with a Prime Minister husband. Few women have a greater grasp of public affairs allied with such compelling charm. Gifted speaker and broadcaster, poised yet homely. Mother of eleven.<sup>46</sup>

Wilmot's reasons provide a concise explanation of how Lyons was perceived by the public, and particularly by women. The mention of Lyons working with her husband is particularly important, as it indicates a recognition that Lyonses were a team, with Dame Enid her husband's equal. Many women have entered politics through association with their family members, especially husbands and fathers, making this route a conceivable one for Lyons.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the direct mention of Lyons' skills as a speaker and broadcaster indicates the importance that was afforded to them as important requisites for the position.

The ABC had keen interest in ensuring that the historic moment of Lyons' and Tangney's entry into parliamentary politics was documented. Following her election victory Lyons was the 'guest of honour' on an ABC national radio session on 19 September 1943. The broadcast, which discussed the role of women in the postwar future, was listened to by a large audience and widely reported in newspapers the following day.<sup>48</sup> Tasmanian Labor MP Claude Barnard questioned the appropriateness of the broadcast on the floor of the house, citing the ABC's policy on not broadcasting speeches by MPs and asking whether other politicians would also now be afforded the same opportunity.<sup>49</sup> The Postmaster-General, Bill Ashley, responded that Lyons and Tangney had been invited to broadcast due to the public interest in the first women elected to the Australian Parliament. He further

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Wilmot, 'If Women Ran Australia', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 27 January 1940, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Pamela Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes, 'Women as Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Government Ministers', in *Gender and Women's Leadership: A Reference Handbook*, ed. Karen O'Connor (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 323–4.

<sup>48</sup> 'Dame Enid Lyons M.H.R.: Last Night's Broadcast—The Role of Women', *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga), 20 September 1943, 2.

<sup>49</sup> 'ABC Policy: Dame Enid Lyons' Broadcast', *Mercury* (Hobart), 8 October 1943, 3.

noted that he did not agree that this special invitation should be extended to other MPs as the election of Lyons and Tangney was an ‘epoch making event.’<sup>50</sup>

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the ABC invited both Lyons and Tangney to give talks as part of the series *After the War* in 1944. It appears that during the recording of this program the ABC also took the opportunity to record each of them reading their maiden speeches, which were originally given in September 1943.<sup>51</sup> The recordings of both speeches have been preserved and were added to the NFSA’s Sounds of Australia registry in 2011.<sup>52</sup> This honour demonstrates the importance of hearing these speeches for Australian history. The recording of Lyons is an excellent surviving example of her radio speech, and as such it is worthwhile analysing how the sound of her voice and the content of the speech interacted to produce a sonic ideal of the female parliamentarian.

In order to analyse sonic sources, I have developed a methodology for reading the gendering of speech based on the social semiotics of sound, which I have written about in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> This has enabled me to comment on the sound of recordings at relevant points throughout the thesis. My methodology rests on three major tenets: Media, Historical Context, and Vocal Focus.<sup>54</sup> Media refers to anything which enables the sound

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<sup>50</sup> ‘No Objection to Dame Enid’s Broadcast’, *Newcastle Sun*, 25 September 1943, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Tangney’s maiden speech was recorded on 21 April 1944 according to an annotation on the recording, although there is no specific date noted on the recording of Lyons’ speech. However, I have researched ABC national broadcasts from 30 September 1943 until the end of 1944 in the *ABC Weekly*, and have not found any evidence that Lyons’ speech was broadcast during this period. Based on the date of Tangney’s recording, I have found that both Tangney and Lyons recorded talks for broadcast in May 1944. As such, it appears that the ABC also recorded their maiden speeches at the same time for posterity. The NFSA also states that the speech was distributed to radio stations which indicates that it was probably broadcast, at least in part, at some stage. See: Maryanne Doyle, ‘Senator Dorothy Tangney: Maiden Speech, Curator’s Notes’, *Australian Screen Online*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dorothy-tangney-maiden-speech/notes/>, accessed 16 December 2017; Maryanne Doyle, ‘Dame Enid Lyons: Maiden Speech, Curator’s Notes’, *Australian Screen Online*, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dame-enid-lyons-maiden-speech/notes/>, accessed 16 December 2017; Department of External Affairs [II], Central Office, ‘PWR [Post War Reconstruction] - ABC Broadcast Series:- “After the War then what about equality for women?”’, 1944, A989, 1944/735/710/8, 185607, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>52</sup> National Film and Sound Archive, ‘2011 Registry Additions’, <http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/sound/sounds-australia/2011-registry-additions>, accessed 16 December 2017.

<sup>53</sup> For a more detailed explanation of this methodology please see: Catherine Horne Fisher, “‘The Too Vigorous Use of a New Broom’: Towards a Methodology for Analysing the Gendered Meanings of Sound in History,” *NewMac Humanity Journal* 3 (2016), 8–26.

<sup>54</sup> The methodology was adapted from Theo Van Leeuwen’s concepts of Figure, Ground and Field. See:

recording to be produced and disseminated. This includes any relevant technological context, presentation styles or conventions, or how the audience is identified and addressed. Historical Context refers to the necessary historical research performed prior to analysing recordings semiotically. Vocal Focus refers to the sound of the voice that is being analysed and can be broken down into three analytical categories: audible vocal signs, language and discussion topics, and distance. Audible vocal signs refer to the sounds of speech which hold spoken language together, such as pitch, intonation, stress, and accent. Language and discussion topics provide a second, interrelated way in which the voice can be heard as gendered, through recognising the use of particular language traits or topics which have been coded as feminine or masculine. Distance is important for signalling how a particular voice should be heard and related to, firstly through perspective, whereby different sounds are placed at different 'distances' from the listener, and secondly through social distance, whereby different types of speech signal different levels of formality. Theo Van Leeuwen has identified a continuum of five types of social distance: intimate, personal, informal, formal and public. Intimate and personal distances are characterised by softer, quieter and lower voices, while formal and public distances are characterised by louder and higher-pitched voices.<sup>55</sup>

This methodology recognises that sound recordings cannot be analysed in isolation but require significant contextual research to make sense of what the sounds we hear now meant in the past. As my work is largely focused on radio recordings, some particularly relevant questions relate to the programming of the broadcast, such as which station(s) it was played on, what time and date it was played, and its length. When focusing on the speech of a specific person, relevant biographical research, such as using private papers or print media representations of their life, is required to be able to analyse their vocal performance. There are potential problems with this approach, such as the risk of privileging textual

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Theo Van Leeuwen, *Speech, Music, Sound* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Routledge, 1999), 16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



material over sound or erroneously using sound to reinforce assumptions gleaned from textual sources. However, while bearing these issues in mind, I suggest that this approach can allow for sound recordings to be more fully integrated into historical analysis.

Lake has observed that Lyons sought to emphasise her femininity throughout her political career, and that she was there particularly to represent women.<sup>56</sup> Throughout her maiden speech she made reference to topics of particular interest to women, including child endowment and the importance of motherhood. She also emphasised her expertise as a woman, wife and mother, and intimated that these new perspectives would be useful to political decision-making. The following quotation from Lyons' speech demonstrates the centrality of gender to how she positioned herself within Parliament:

I know that many honourable members have viewed the advent of women to the legislative halls with something approaching alarm; they have feared, I have no doubt, the somewhat too vigorous use of a new broom. I wish to reassure them. I hold very sound views on brooms, and sweeping. Although I quite realize that a new broom is a very useful adjunct to the work of the housewife, I also know that it undoubtedly is very unpopular in the broom cupboard; and this particular new broom knows that she has a very great deal to learn from the occupants of—I dare not say this particular cupboard. At all events, she hopes to conduct herself with sufficient modesty and sufficient sense of her lack of knowledge at least to earn the desire of honourable members to give her whatever help they may be able to give.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 189.

<sup>57</sup> Enid Lyons, *Among The Carrion Crows* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1972), 169–70.

In this segment of the speech Lyons used feminine language, particularly through her references to brooms and sweeping. She also deferred to the experience of her male colleagues and hoped that they might help her in a chivalrous manner. Notably, she also directly addressed their concerns over the entrance of women to parliament and sought to alleviate them by assuring her colleagues that she intended to behave in a modest fashion.

Lyons employed particular vocal styles, including pitch, intonation, and stress, which worked to emphasise her femininity in specific ways and, crucially, to differentiate herself from the male MPs. The sound of Lyons's voice, by this time familiar to radio listeners and carrying a range of embodied meanings, provided a direct, interpersonal link between Lyons and the public. In the recording of her maiden speech she utilised a moderately high pitch, cultivated accent and the elocution techniques that defined her broadcasting style. As such, only reading the Hansard transcript of her speech does not fully illuminate the complex gendered meanings of this historic moment.

Lyons received elocution training as a child and even performed in elocution competitions.<sup>58</sup> As Joy Damousi has argued, the 'intellectual refinement' that defined genteel femininity was associated with the voice, and particularly with the cultivation of a balanced, melodious style of speaking.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, as Deborah Cameron demonstrates, elocution has been seen as a feminine activity due to its superficiality but, like many other superficial or cosmetic practices, it was made normative for women.<sup>60</sup> Thus, by speaking in the cultivated style promoted by elocution training, Lyons conformed to ideals of vocal femininity. Indeed, her cultivated vocal delivery was an important focus for much of the media commentary of her speech. The *Adelaide Advertiser* described her as speaking with 'great emotion and clarity of voice,' the *Burnie Advocate* described her as an 'attractive

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<sup>58</sup> Enid Lyons, *So We Take Comfort* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 32–33.

<sup>59</sup> Joy Damousi, *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 119.

<sup>60</sup> Deborah Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*, Revised Edition. (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 170.

speaker', and the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated that she spoke 'clearly and fluently.'<sup>61</sup> In her autobiography Lyons herself described how the press was 'unanimous in praise' of her oratory, and mentions one report which praised her 'control of inflection and phrasing.'<sup>62</sup> Lyons' style of speaking, influenced by her elocution training, was therefore crucial to her performance of femininity, and the radio broadcast would have aimed to capture the vocal quality that was considered to be such a feature of the original speech.

In her analysis of the oratory of the feminist Vida Goldstein, Damousi has argued that a feminine vocal performance was essential for Goldstein to 'disarm her critics' and legitimise her position as a female political leader in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Crafting a feminine persona through the voice provided one way in which Goldstein could mitigate the 'threat' of her public speech by appearing to conform with ideals of femininity.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, although Lyons was speaking several decades later, I suggest that her public speech had a similar effect. By making use of her elocution training, cultivated accent and feminine language she projected an ideal of the female parliamentarian.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, and certainly foreshadowed in her maiden speech, Lyons' place in parliament was largely defined by her maternal femininity. As discussed in the Introduction, during the first half of the twentieth century a concept of maternal citizenship was developed which promoted white Australian women as the mothers of the race, who should have citizenship rights bestowed on them on that basis.<sup>64</sup> As Lake has argued motherhood was promoted as a service to the state, equal to men's paid work, and white women's value to the nation lay in their capacity to rear children.<sup>65</sup> Cathy Jenkins has analysed

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<sup>61</sup> 'Notable Maiden Speech: Dame Enid Lyons Impresses House', *The Advertiser*, September 30, 1943, 2; 'Dame Enid Lyons An Attractive Speaker', *The Advocate*, September 30, 1943, 2; 'First Speech in House: Dame Enid Lyons Impresses M.P.s', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 30, 1943, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Lyons, *Among The Carrion Crows*, 39.

<sup>63</sup> Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 179–81.

<sup>64</sup> Joan Eveline, 'Feminism, Racism and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Australia', in *Women As Australian Citizens: Underlying Histories*, ed. Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 141.

<sup>65</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The Revolution in the Family: The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia', in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and

representations of Lyons in major Australian newspapers and has noted that, compared with her male counterparts, she was represented as an ‘abnormal’ figure in politics due to the press focus on her status as a wife and mother.<sup>66</sup> As Henderson has argued, her radio broadcasts during the Great Depression years of her husband’s Prime Ministership cast her as a ‘mother to the nation,’ a role which she would continue to embody for many years.<sup>67</sup> During her own political career she drew on maternalist discourses when articulating her rhetoric and policy positions.<sup>68</sup> It was a common refrain that Lyons would bring a ‘motherly’ approach to Cabinet when she was made Vice-President of the Executive Council in 1949.<sup>69</sup> Dame Enid’s citizenship and political position was dependent on her contributions to the state as a mother, and both she and the media emphasised this point.

Lyons’ political rhetoric exhibited this notion of maternal citizenship through her promotion of the importance of the mother, support for child endowment, and role of the state in supporting the family unit. Lyons’ radio talks were central to her political participation and public citizenship, and through these speeches her voice was a sonic index of her maternally feminine body. Yet it is important to emphasise that this was a white body, and it is not coincidental that Lyons’ speaking style was a performance of a white, British ideal of femininity.<sup>70</sup> As such her role as a mother to the nation, speaking to the public through the radio, potentially reinforced exclusionary discourses of women’s public citizenship by highlighting a white, middle-class ideal of who should occupy public space.

During the 1946 election campaign, Lyons recorded a series of political advertisements for radio on topics related to the family, including rationing, social security,

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Sonya Michel (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), 379.

<sup>66</sup> Cathy Jenkins, ‘A Mother in Cabinet: Dame Enid Lyons and the Press’, *Australian Journalism Review* 25, no. 1 (2003), 181–196.

<sup>67</sup> Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 188–89.

<sup>68</sup> See for example: ‘Dame Enid Lyons: Maiden Speech’ (The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1944), <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dame-enid-lyons-maiden-speech/clip1>, accessed 16 December 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Jenkins, ‘A Mother in Cabinet’, 194.

<sup>70</sup> Eveline, ‘Feminism, Racism and Citizenship in Twentieth-century Australia’, 147.

and the housing crisis.<sup>71</sup> In these broadcasts she emphasised how these issues impacted upon the lives of women, and in doing so reinforced the primacy of the home for the Liberal Party's voter base. For example, in one broadcast criticising the Gift Duty Act, which taxed gifts over 500 pounds in value, Lyons emphasised how this tax impacted upon family relations:

Do you realise that no man may put the family home in his wife's name unless he is prepared to pay tax on its value... Already the difficulty of providing for many children serves to put dangerous limits upon the size of Australian families. How then can a tax be justified that adds still further to the burden?<sup>72</sup>

Through focusing on the family Lyons promoted the Liberal Party's agenda of smaller government, reduced regulation, the free market and private ownership. She also emphasised this worldview in another broadcast for the 1946 election in a more theoretical sense: 'We believe in personalised ownership against social ownership. It is part of a basic human need that people have possessions...a principal aim of the Liberal Party is to extend to all Australian people the means to achieve this end.'<sup>73</sup> According to this rhetoric, reduced government interference in economic and social relations therefore benefited the middle-class home and made for stronger, happier families.

The centrality of women to this vision of governance was implied in the focus on home and family, however Lyons also explicitly addressed women through political broadcasts. In an undated script titled 'Women's Rights,' she outlined the Liberal Party's

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<sup>71</sup> Enid Lyons, 'Gift Duty Act/Too Much Power', 1946, 339308, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra; Enid Lyons, 'A Liberal Plan for Social Services/Homes for the People', 1946, 339215, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra; Enid Lyons, 'The Meanness of the Means Test/Is Rationing Rational', 1946, 339220, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>72</sup> Lyons, 'Gift Duty Act'.

<sup>73</sup> Enid Lyons, 'Democratic Ideal', Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

commitment to boosting women's participation in public affairs and her own personal experience of the need for women's perspectives on policy development, including broadcasting policy:

Sitting in Parliament as I do, and having been married to a Member of Parliament, I am intensely aware of how much women can contribute to a real understanding, in Parliament and in the public mind, of those problems which so closely affect the lives and happiness of women and their families. Social services, health measures, rural amenities are only a few of the subjects that spring to mind as needing the thought of women to ensure a sound development.

Wireless programs, too, are very much the concern of women, and these become more and more a matter of public policy. Whatever you do, as women, don't think you have no interest in politics. Your vote is your weapon to use for better living.<sup>74</sup>

Lyons' point about radio programs demonstrates both the importance of radio to women's lives and its centrality to political culture during this time. She inferred that women's interest in radio programming, demonstrated through their listening to this very broadcast, was in itself a political act.

### **Senator Dorothy Tangney**

Tangney had also broadcast for many years prior to her election in 1943, mostly in support of the Western Australian branch of the Labor Party. In 1940, for example, she broadcast to

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<sup>74</sup> Enid Lyons, 'Women's Rights', Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

voters in Victoria in support of a candidate in a federal by-election. In this broadcast she emphasised the national unity of the Labor movement: ‘We do not meet as West Australians and Victorians, but as fellow Laborites working for a common cause—the social betterment of all working people...the vast majority of Australians.’<sup>75</sup> Tangney articulated Labor’s vision for Australia and did not specifically focus on women voters, although the broadcast was eventually republished in the women’s section of the *Westralian Worker*. Tangney also made a broadcast as part of a series of talks by the Labor Party on 6KY in 1942, titled ‘Lovers of Australia,’ which aimed to promote Labor’s positive vision of Australia’s history and its postwar future. In this talk Tangney discussed coastal explorers of Australia, who she argued faced ‘hardships, dangers, and terrors of the vast unknown that we who come after them may inherit the land.’<sup>76</sup> Her earliest broadcasts were often aimed at a general audience of both men and women, and fit into what Brett has identified as the ALP’s rhetorical focus on the working male breadwinner and industrial relations.<sup>77</sup> However, when Tangney was elected to the Australian Senate in 1943 she shifted towards speaking specifically to women through her broadcasts. During the 1943 election campaign, her broadcasts featured in early evening timeslots and discussed more general issues, particularly regarding the Labor government’s leadership during wartime.<sup>78</sup> The broadcasts from the 1949 election, however, were predominantly heard at 11am: a daytime slot targeted at housewives.<sup>79</sup> These broadcasts focused on issues perceived to be of specific relevance to women voters, and they featured

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Miss Tangney’s Broadcast’, *The Westralian Worker*, 1 March 1940, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Labor Party of Western Australia, *Lovers of Australia: A Series of Talks* (Perth: People’s Printing and Publishing Co. of Western Australia, 1942), 18–23.

<sup>77</sup> Brett, ‘Menzies’ Forgotten People’.

<sup>78</sup> Dorothy Tangney, ‘Untitled: 31 July 1943 (broadcast at 7.35 pm)’, Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>79</sup> See for example: Dorothy Tangney, ‘Untitled: 23 November 1949’, Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Dorothy Tangney, ‘Women and Banking’, Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Dorothy Tangney, ‘Women and Free Medicine’, Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

titles such as ‘Women and Free Medicine’ and ‘Women and Banking.’ By 1949, therefore, Tangney was using radio to speak directly to women voters.

Tangney had stood for election three times prior to her eventual success in 1943, twice in the Parliament of Western Australia and once for the Australian Senate. She had been a member of the State Executive of the Western Australian branch of the ALP for several years. Despite her relative seniority, she was positioned fourth on the Western Australian Senate ticket in the 1943 election, generally considered to be an unwinnable position. The landslide to the ALP at that election meant that she got over the line, however this was not solely due to the luck of circumstance—Tangney campaigned hard and her approach resonated with voters.<sup>80</sup> This included a prolific use of radio to canvass her message. The *Worker* reported that Tangney had made sixty broadcasts during the 1943 election campaign.<sup>81</sup> It was also reported that she received good training for this ‘oratorical marathon’ during her time as a schoolteacher in Perth, which would put her in good stead to handle the ‘long winded’ male senators.<sup>82</sup> Tangney’s experience as a teacher and her university education were often highlighted as evidence of her qualification for the position. Teaching was an acceptable profession for women, an alternative mothering role through which women raised the nation’s children, and it also apparently gave women skills which could be called upon in parliamentary settings. Tangney was often seen to be a school matron, coming in and instilling order on the unruly male senators, in a similar way to Lyons being the ‘mother in the house.’<sup>83</sup>

Tangney’s relative youth at the time of her election—she was thirty-six—was also emphasised as an asset. The *Australian Women’s Weekly* stated in 1943 that while Lyons

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<sup>80</sup> Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman’s Place*, 120.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Miss D. M. Tangney Is Australia’s First Woman Senator’, *Worker*, 30 August 1943, 3.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Our First Woman Senator’, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 17 September 1943, 3.

<sup>83</sup> See for example: ‘Keen Interest in Woman Senator’s First Speech’, *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 25 September 1943, 5; ‘Will Help Farm Wives: Our First Woman Senator’, *Mail* (Adelaide), 28 August 1943, 11. For more on teaching as a feminised profession, see: Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 76–81.



represented 'the older generation, who have combined family life with an interest in public affairs,' Tangney represented 'the younger generation, whose lives have been shadowed by the economic stress of the decades between two wars. Like so many of the thoughtful women of this period, she has become sharply aware of the way in which broad national and international problems affect everybody's life.'<sup>84</sup> Tangney was represented as a battler who had overcome adversity to make history. At the time of her election, it was widely reported that she was part of a large family who struggled by on a meagre income and had survived beyond infancy despite her low birth weight. She was a 'bright, ambitious girl' who began working at age fifteen to supplement the family income but worked to graduate from the University of Western Australia and became a teacher.<sup>85</sup> According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tangney's was a 'story of the triumph of courage, character, and hard work over adversity.'<sup>86</sup>

Tangney was unmarried and had no children, and as such it was difficult for her to embody the ideal of maternal citizenship that Lyons did so effectively. Instead, Tangney adopted the position of a professional ally for wives and mothers, one who would work tirelessly in support of their interests. Sawyer and Simms have observed that Tangney always promoted the primacy of the maternal role for women, even though she campaigned strongly for equal pay and did not embody this role herself.<sup>87</sup> In this way Tangney recognised that working was often a necessity for women, but motherhood was the ideal state, and the goal of policymaking was to provide the conditions to make this possible for all women. Her policy priorities aligned with this view, as she championed increased government expenditure on social security, housing, health, and education.

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<sup>84</sup> 'Two Women Go to Canberra', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 25 September 1943, 10.

<sup>85</sup> 'Will Help Farm Wives: Our First Woman Senator', *Mail* (Adelaide), 28 August 1943, 11.

<sup>86</sup> 'Career of Miss D. Tangney: Inspiring Battle with Adversity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1943, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 121–22.

Tangney articulated this position in her broadcasts. In one undated postwar script she addressed girls of school-leaving age about the need for workers in the clothing trade. Tangney stated that a large number of women had left the clothing trade following the end of the war, which resulted in a serious shortage of personnel required to produce clothing for returning servicemen, many of whom had no choice but to continue wearing their uniforms. She acknowledged the stigma attached to factory work such as clothing production, but then emphasised its practical benefits to women both as a skill which could be used after marriage and as a secure career path:

In the Clothing Trade, girls receive good training, which will stand them in good stead right throughout their career, both as homemakers, and should necessitous circumstances unfortunately arise after marriage, good needlewomen need to have no fear for the future.<sup>88</sup>

Tangney clearly placed value on marriage and homemaking as the preferred life path for women, however recognised that economic circumstances and the needs of industry often required women to work, and that wartime conditions continued to necessitate women's participation in the workforce.<sup>89</sup>

Tangney was also particularly concerned with the welfare of rural Western Australian women, who faced special hardships due to their isolation in a harsh environment. As the *Adelaide Mail* reported in August 1943, '[o]ne of her strongest characteristics is a crusading spirit on behalf of country women living on marginal wheat areas, whose conditions horrify her.'<sup>90</sup> In an undated script titled 'The North-West,' Tangney imparted her impressions on

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<sup>88</sup> Dorothy Tangney, 'Broadcast by Senator Dorothy Tangney in Connection with Girls Required by the Clothing Trade', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> 'Will Help Farm Wives: Our First Woman Senator', *Mail* (Adelaide), 28 August 1943, 11.

the vast northern outback of Western Australia and the hardships faced by women in these isolated communities:

[A]t Onslow I met my first group of women of the north, some from distant homesteads, others the wives of employees in the little township where...they must be school teacher as well, for there is no school in Onslow...here the North-West housewife is at a great disadvantage, not only for food, as she is unable to augment her rations from a delicatessen or restaurant, but also the clothing position is very acute.<sup>91</sup>

Radio was of particular importance to rural Western Australian women during this time, as wartime newsprint restrictions virtually ceased the already patchy distribution of newspapers and magazines, while petrol rationing significantly impeded their ability to travel.<sup>92</sup> Radio became a crucial link to the outside world, and this placed special importance on Tangney's broadcasts. By broadcasting the experience of rural Western Australian women, she gave them a voice in the public sphere.

Tangney also sought to emphasise the importance of women to the labour movement. In a broadcast about the Western Australian Labor Women's Conference in 1945, Tangney highlighted the outsized role Western Australian women had played in this regard: 'Since the dawn of the Labour movement in Australia, women have done a magnificent job in the pioneering work so essential to its progress.' She then clearly outlined the policy priorities for ALP women in the postwar era: social security, employment, housing, education, and health. The importance of including women in the peace process was also

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<sup>91</sup> Dorothy Tangney, 'The North-West' Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>92</sup> Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 31.

emphasised: 'Women have played their part nobly in the war itself, we labour women say they must have some voice in the making of peace.'<sup>93</sup>

Like Lyons, Tangney's election campaign broadcasts often focused on the impact of her party's policies for women. For example, in 'Women and Free Medicine' she explained the ALP's health care policies which aimed to reduce the cost burden of doctor's visits and medicines on families, while in 'Broadcast to Women' Tangney outlined what she had delivered for women during her three years in the Senate:

Thus, from this necessarily very brief review of the immediate benefits you, as women, have received from Labor, and from the fact that a fellow woman has been given the chance of legislating for you on these humanitarian lines, I trust that you will show your appreciation by permitting the Labor Government to continue its work for you and your children, permitting me as your direct representative to continue to advise the Government on matters pertaining to YOUR welfare.<sup>94</sup>

According to Tangney, a female presence in Parliament had resulted in tangible benefits to women's lives and voting for a woman would ensure that women's concerns would continue to have a central place in government priorities.

Tangney also promoted Labor's pro-woman policies through her broadcasts. In a broadcast on the 1946 Social Services Referendum, she urged women to vote 'Yes,' as the ALP had 'shown its honesty of purpose in raising your endowment' and 'will assist you further in giving you REAL and not imaginary benefits.'<sup>95</sup> In 1949, Tangney broadcast on

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<sup>93</sup> Dorothy Tangney, 'Collie', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>94</sup> Dorothy Tangney, 'Women and Free Medicine', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Dorothy Tangney, 'Broadcast To Women', Script, MS 7564 Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>95</sup> Dorothy Tangney, 'Child Endowment', MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10,

‘Women and Banking’ in support of the government’s proposed bank nationalisation, and she argued that the ‘wives of farmers in Western Australia have a very deep and personal knowledge’ of the destructive potential of private banks, which forced many families off their land during the Great Depression.<sup>96</sup> Tangney’s political rhetoric emphasised the importance of women’s lived experiences to policy development.

As previously mentioned, in 1944 Tangney recorded her maiden speech for the ABC and this recording is held by the NFSA, along with Lyons’.<sup>97</sup> In this recording Tangney uses a medium-high pitch and a received Australian accent. She speaks quickly, and her sentences sound quite flat until she intones down at the end of the sentence. Tangney has a clear, practiced voice and does not stumble, however the recording sounds like she is reading off the page, rather than an intimate conversation as can be heard in Lyons’ speech. Although Tangney does not exhibit the same skill as Lyons, she does sound very clear and practised. Like Lyons, her speaking style was praised by the press. Following her maiden speech, for example, the *Canberra Times* stated that ‘she spoke confidently and did not betray the nervousness to which she afterwards confessed.’<sup>98</sup> The *Worker* described her as a ‘cultured speaker, energetic, and good humoured.’<sup>99</sup> In 1944, it was reported of a speech she gave in Adelaide: ‘Miss Tangney has a well-controlled voice. Whereas three men who spoke before her used a microphone and amplifying system to carry their voices to the large audience, she put these aside—and the audience did not miss a word.’<sup>100</sup> Once again, these descriptions show that the use of a cultured, well-controlled voice was a crucial condition of being accepted as a parliamentarian in the 1940s. Tangney was perceived to be an excellent public speaker, which helped to present her as a competent legislator.

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National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>96</sup> Dorothy Tangney, ‘Women and Banking’, Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

‘Senator Dorothy Tangney: Maiden Speech’ (The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1944), <http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dorothy-tangney-maiden-speech/clip1>, accessed 16 December 2017.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Senator Tangney’s Debut in Senate’, *Canberra Times*, 24 September 1943, 2.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Miss D. M. Tangney Is Australia’s First Woman Senator’, 3.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Hustler’, *Bruce Rock Post and Corrigin and Narembeen Guardian*, 1 June 1944, 1.

## Jessie Street

As noted in Chapters Two and Three, Jessie Street saw the potential of broadcasting to improve women's position and to engage them as citizens from the early days of radio. Consistent with this position, Street's electoral broadcasts particularly focused on the role of women in political decision-making and addressed them as citizens who had a responsibility to carefully consider which party they would support. In a September 1940 'Broadcast to Women' on behalf of the ALP, Street clearly outlined the importance of politics for women's lives:

The government of the country affects every phase of your life, and the lives of your husband and children. A woman's first responsibility is her home and children. The way she is able to carry out this responsibility depends on circumstances controlled by politics.<sup>101</sup>

In this broadcast Street described the failure of the UAP in terms of the increasing difficulties faced by women, including rising food and clothing prices and the lack of suitable housing, and she urged women to '[t]hink well before you vote.'<sup>102</sup>

Street emphasised the importance of focusing on the issues that affected women's lives, even—or especially—during wartime. In 1940, she made another broadcast to 'speak for the women of Australia' because the 'men have had their innings, we have heard their views.'<sup>103</sup> Street discussed the sacrifice made by women sending their husbands and sons off to fight, and the additional economic burden caused by small military pay packets. She then described women as more forward-thinking citizens: 'To men, perhaps, the winning of a war

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<sup>101</sup> Jessie Street, 'Broadcast to Women', Script, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Jessie Street, Untitled Broadcast Script, 1940, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

is an end in itself. To women, that is not enough. We bear children; our mission is to think and work for their future.<sup>104</sup> This forward-thinking citizenship aligned with Labor's vision: '[Labor] is determined to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion because, after victory, provided Labor is in power, will come a new order.'<sup>105</sup> Notably, once again Street broke out of the mould of Labor rhetoric to speak directly to women and to emphasise the importance of their experiences and expertise.

In her election broadcasts Street implored voters to carefully consider the issues before them, such as in this one from 1943:

This is the most important election we have ever had. You must examine the policies of the parties, the record of the parties, the characters of the leaders of the parties, and the record and characters of the candidates. You must also try to analyse and understand the forces that control and direct the different political parties, the interests they represent, and the people they serve.<sup>106</sup>

Street also emphasised the amount of thought she had given her own political positions, membership of the ALP, and decision to stand for parliament. In the same 1943 broadcast she explained:

After giving the matter a good deal of thought, I decided that the only likelihood of any of these [social and economic] reforms being achieved was through the medium of the Labor party... That is why

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Jessie Street, 'Broadcast—1943 Federal Election', MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

I joined the Labor party, and that is why I speak to you today as the endorsed candidate for Wentworth and ask for your support.<sup>107</sup>

Through her political broadcasts, Street emphasised the importance of considered deliberation, both for voters and for candidates. Her explanation also indicates that she saw radio as a crucial medium to deliver her treatise on good citizenship, and indeed the importance of citizenship was a key feature of her broadcasts on many political issues.

In a broadcast on the 1944 referendum on Postwar Reconstruction and Democratic Rights, Street couched the choice in terms of citizenship, asking voters: ‘Do you think of yourself more important as a citizen of Australia, or more important as a citizen of the State in which you live?’<sup>108</sup> Street went on to criticise the ability of the states to handle the big issues facing Australia, and implored women to think back to the impact of the states’ mishandling of the Great Depression and the personal toll this had taken. She then reinforced her message of women’s complementarity as citizens: ‘Women are as vitally concerned in these national and international interests as men, for upon satisfactory conduct of these matters depends the great problems of prosperity and peace, and who are greater victims of war and want than women?’<sup>109</sup>

The NFSA holds recordings of several of Street’s election broadcasts from 1949, when she ran as an independent.<sup>110</sup> In a broadcast titled ‘The Need for Women in Parliament,’ Street specifically addressed the need to elect more women MPs: ‘I am asking you to vote for me for what I consider the most important reason, and that is that I am a woman.’<sup>111</sup> She argued that women compliment men, and that having women in parliament would address

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Jessie Street, ‘Broadcast on the Referendum’, Script, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Jessie Street, ‘The Need for Women in Parliament; Why I am Independent’, 490665, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>111</sup> Street, ‘The Need for Women in Parliament’.



many issues which had been allowed to continue unaddressed, such as the housing shortage.<sup>112</sup> In another broadcast from this campaign Street addressed why she left the ALP, arguing that the mainstream political parties did not want women candidates and consistently placed them in unwinnable seats.<sup>113</sup>

Although Street employed strong rhetoric in her broadcasts and has been described by Zora Simic as a persuasive public speaker, the recordings reveal that Street stumbled over words, cleared her throat, and sounded as though she was stopping and straining to read the script in front of her.<sup>114</sup> She adopted a fairly flat tone, failing to intonate and modulate her voice. She does not sound convincing in the way that Lyons and Tangney do, and this undermines her message. Her approach also increased the distance between her and the listener, thereby not fostering the intimacy that radio broadcasts can do so powerfully. However, Street does speak quite loudly and forcefully, which gives her broadcasts an air of passion and even fury at the current situation. Unlike Lyons, whose soft, motherly approach was adored, and even Tangney, whose teacherly style also commanded a level of admiration, Street's unpolished exasperation did not accord with the ideals of radio speech, feminine speech, and politicking at the time.

I do not suggest that her lack of broadcasting skills resulted in her lack of electoral success, as the considerable swing towards her at the 1943 election indicates that she did command voter support. Nevertheless, the role of radio as a medium through which politics was increasingly being conducted at this time rewarded speakers who could maximise its potential for creating intimacy with listeners. By her own admission Street did not conform to the ALP's notion of an ideal candidate and listening to her broadcasts indicates that she

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Street, 'Why I Am Independent'.

<sup>114</sup> Zora Simic, "'Mrs Street—Now There's a Subject!': Historicising Jessie Street', *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 48 (2005), 296.

also did not match the sonic ideal of the female parliamentarian cultivated by Lyons and Tangney.

## **Conclusion**

By the 1943 election radio had been established as a medium through which women had been claiming their voice as politically engaged citizens for close to two decades. By appealing to women through broadcasts, female parliamentarians addressed women within a space that women were already using to participate in public discourse, and expanded this to include formal politics. In doing so, they employed rhetoric which emphasised the home and family as the primary political concern of women, but which also required informed and active citizenship. This is notable when placed in the context of the differing approaches of Labor and non-Labor politics. Lyons' rhetorical focus on the nation's value lying in the homes of its people fitted in well with the broader political message of the UAP/Liberal Party at this time. The messaging was trickier for Labor women, who had to adopt a similar rhetoric to appeal to women voters and to legitimise their own position as political candidates while the broader messaging of the party was very much focused on industrial relations and primarily male experiences and needs. Furthermore, public speaking was seen as an important prerequisite for a political career, and thus by demonstrating their skills through broadcasts these women established their legitimacy and authority as political representatives. In particular, Lyons' and Tangney's use of ideal speech styles worked to position them as competent orators, and thus competent legislators.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Fighting Soap: The Postwar Years

How radio has enlarged the horizon of the woman at home is one of the talking points Dame Enid Lyons has developed since she became an A.B.C. Commissioner in 1951. Now a woman can do two things at once: cultivate her mind and do her housework.<sup>1</sup>

In July 1951, Dame Enid Lyons was appointed as a Commissioner of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), replacing Western Australian Labor activist Ivy Kent. This was a fitting post-parliamentary career for a woman who had long been associated with broadcasting. Lyons' appointment was greeted warmly by senior ABC management and the public at large, although the Australian Labor Party (ALP) attacked Lyons' appointment as a 'case of political patronage' that demonstrated the Menzies government's intention to make the ABC a 'propaganda medium of the Liberal and Country Parties.'<sup>2</sup> ABC Chairman Richard Boyer wrote to her following the appointment to express his delight that she had agreed to accept a position as a member of the Commission.<sup>3</sup> He believed that her 'career and stature in the public mind' meant that 'all of women's interests' would be satisfied by her appointment and, moreover, the regard with which she was held by the population would increase 'public confidence' in the ABC's personnel.<sup>4</sup> As a leading woman broadcaster, Lyons had done much to establish radio as a platform for women to contribute to public discourse,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dame Enid Lyons: ABC Commissioner', *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1954, 20.

<sup>2</sup> 'Dame Enid Lyons Appointed to A.B.C.'; Charles Moses to Dame Enid Lyons, 13 July 1951, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Boyer to Dame Enid Lyons, 13 July 1951, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra; 'Dame Enid Lyons Appointed to A.B.C.', *Canberra Times*, 14 July 1951, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Boyer to Lyons, 13 July 1951.

and now she could use her skills and status to shape the direction of the national broadcaster. As noted in the above quote from the *ABC Weekly* in 1954, Lyons used the position to continue to promote the interests of women in broadcasting and emphasise the impact of the medium on women's lives and ambitions. However, despite Lyons' advocacy of the importance of radio to women's status, the postwar period saw the decline of talk-based women's sessions as a key platform for the advancement of women's equality. Lyons represented an older generation of women who had come into their own through broadcasting during the crisis years of the 1930s and 1940s—a perspective of decreasing relevance in the era of aspirational postwar prosperity.

The 1940s and 1950s has been described as the 'golden age' of Australian radio by Richard Lane due to the proliferation of Australian serial dramas and light entertainment on the air, especially on the commercial stations.<sup>5</sup> In many cases these programs displaced talk-based women's sessions in their traditional mid-morning and mid-afternoon timeslots. The ABC, however, continued to broadcast women's sessions which tackled complex social, cultural and political issues. Although the listening figures for these sessions were relatively low and they tended to attract educated middle-class women, they do provide evidence of the role that the ABC played (and saw itself playing) in encouraging women to be active and engaged citizens in the postwar world. Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, for example, compered the ABC national women's session in the 1950s and discussed a range of social and political issues. Larger audiences were found in Western Australia, where Catherine King's state ABC women's session attracted a loyal following. The West also bucked the trend in terms of commercial women's programming, as Irene Greenwood additionally ran a session on Perth's Whitford's network during this period which included an array of social and political content alongside well-cloaked advertising. Amanda Sinclair has urged us to 'interrogate and contest received wisdom about leadership' by considering how women have sought to

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama, 1923-1960: A History Through Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

change the public agenda and mobilise others.<sup>6</sup> This chapter considers how these women continued to view broadcasting as a platform from which they could exercise leadership to combat what they saw as the threat of the increasing popularity of serial dramas to women's status as engaged citizens. They believed that radio was still a medium which could empower women and they used their programs to promote their ideal of the postwar woman citizen. However, their efforts were met with mixed success. While they were able to claim space on their airwaves and broadcast programs which emphasised engaged citizenship, and there is evidence that some listeners at least were receptive to their efforts, the increasing airtime given to serial dramas during daytime hours eroded the traditional audience for women's sessions and marked a shift away from this style of talk-based programming.

### **Postwar Australia**

During the war years, the coming postwar era was conceptualised as a time of social and economic reconstruction, the reward of a better society following years of sacrifice. This was somewhat realised through the tangible improvements to Australian living standards during the 1950s and 1960s. The average worker's weekly income rose at approximately four per cent per annum in real terms, and access to consumer durables became more widespread with the rise of hire purchase.<sup>7</sup> But the prosperity of the era was also haunted by the spectre of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear weapons. This touched Australia directly as the British tested atomic bombs in northern and central Australia, with disastrous effects on the local Aboriginal communities.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Amanda Sinclair, 'Not Just "Adding Women In": Women Re-making Leadership', in *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities*, ed. Rosemary Francis, Patricia Grimshaw, and Ann Standish (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, The University of Melbourne, 2012), 15–16.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia: The Middle Way, 1942-1988* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 89–90.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–95.

The demographic make-up of Australia was also shifting as millions of migrants arrived following the end of the World War II. Although just under half of these were from Britain—attracted by the assisted passage scheme—a substantial number of Southern, Central and Eastern European migrants arrived and shaped the future of Australian society.<sup>9</sup> Until the 1970s, however, these migrants were encouraged to assimilate as much as possible, a process intended to be helped by the adoption of the term ‘New Australians’ to refer to them and the establishment of Good Neighbour Councils to integrate migrants into their new communities.<sup>10</sup> An ABC program, called *Making Friends: A Program for New Australian Women*, even used radio to demystify Australian culture for migrant women by presenting sketches of everyday interactions they could expect to encounter and explaining the intricacies of Australian colloquialisms.<sup>11</sup>

The 1950s has received a reputation as a period of social conservatism characterised by women losing the autonomy they had gained during the World War II. But despite the vision of the postwar return to the home, the proportion of women engaged in paid work remained steady at twenty-five per cent between 1947 and 1961 and increased in raw numbers; by 1961 there were over one million women engaged in paid work in Australia, up from 717,200 in 1947 and 845,400 in 1954. The most notable change was the increase in the number of married women in the workforce, which went from 109,800 in 1947 to 405,500 in 1961—an increase from 15.3 per cent of all working women in 1947 to 38.3 per cent in 1961. This represented 17.3 per cent of married women, still a minority but a significant increase which foreshadowed the changes to come in the following decades.<sup>12</sup> The gendered division of labour was still stark, however, and women were generally employed in low-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 106. For more information see: Alexandra Dellios, *Histories of Controversy: Bonegilla Migrant Centre* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2017); Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia*, 107.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Making Friends – Program for New Australian Women [box 18]’, 1958-1969, SP1687/1, R13/3/3 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>12</sup> Stella Lees and June Senyard, *The 1950s...How Australia Became a Modern Society, and Everyone Got a House and a Car* (South Yarra: Hyland House, 1987), 74–75.

paying, feminised jobs such as shop assistants, waitresses, typists, textile workers, teachers, and nurses.

The postwar era also saw significant changes in domestic life. Stella Lees and June Senyard have argued that young wives were ‘the key to taking the modern world into the home: they were a major link in translating modernisation into a better standard of living at the most basic level, the family.’<sup>13</sup> A new array of household products and whitegoods eased the burden of domestic chores and cemented the position of the housewife as consumer.<sup>14</sup> A consumerist beauty culture flourished during the 1950s and advertisers targeted women of all ages.<sup>15</sup> Lesley Johnson has looked at the ways in which a ‘modern’ sense of self, predicated on consumerism and beauty, was promoted as a desirable goal for girls growing up in the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Ideals of glamour and comportment were democratised through advertising and the increasing availability of affordable products, so that all young women were expected to conform to feminine beauty standards.<sup>17</sup> This continued once they were married; advertisers stressed that keeping one’s husband meant defying age and keeping slim to continually project feminine allure.<sup>18</sup>

The growing suburbanisation of Australian cities also positioned the detached suburban home as the locus of family life and national character. As Fiona Allon has argued, following the trauma of the war years owning a suburban home and raising a family became ‘the very definition of the good life and the promise of personal and collective happiness.’<sup>19</sup> This ideal was based on the gendered division of labour which made women responsible for

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 75–76.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Hutchings, ‘Beauty begins at 7am: Cosmetics, Fashion, Consumer Goods and Beauty Mythology in 1950s and 1960s Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 24, no. 64 (2000), 43–52.

<sup>16</sup> Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 147.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>18</sup> Hutchings, ‘Beauty Begins at 7am’, 51–52.

<sup>19</sup> Fiona Allon, ‘At Home in the Suburbs: Domesticity and Nation in Postwar Australia’, *History Australia* 11, no. 1 (2014), 15.

the work of making a home, even though they usually could not own their houses due to continuing restrictions on women's access to finance.<sup>20</sup>

According to Nicholas Brown, the 1950s was a contested decade as old ways of thinking and being gave way to new ones. This was the decade that saw a 'fundamental break between the Australia of class, hardship, Empire and assertive nationalism' and the liberations that would characterise the 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Far from being a conservative period, the 1950s was a decade of contestation and transition that shaped how postwar prosperity was governed. Individual subjectivity increasingly became a site of social intervention which stressed the need for stability and adjustment. Postwar social commentators emphasised personal responsibility as the solution to the potential risks of unfettered affluence to Australian society.<sup>22</sup> Alison Mackinnon and Penny Gregory have argued that this focus on the self was of special significance for graduate women, whose experiences of higher education gave them the 'confidence, vision and intellectual tools to successfully negotiate the opportunities and challenges of the 1950s,' although combining family life with subjective development was still a process to be carefully navigated.<sup>23</sup> Education 'enabled them to be more engaged as citizens and as political subjects,' and they 'embraced a notion of citizenship that accepted family life combined with a vigorous belief in political and social equality between the sexes.'<sup>24</sup> These women negotiated the complex boundaries between their family life and their professional careers, claiming new roles for themselves in the process and laying the groundwork for the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Within this context of consumerism, modern family life, and increasing levels of education, radio's role

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Brown, *Governing Prosperity: Social Change and Social Analysis in Australia in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 1–5.

<sup>23</sup> Alison Mackinnon and Penny Gregory, "'A Study Corner in the Kitchen': Australian Graduate Women Negotiate Family, Nation and Work in the 1950s and early 1960s", *Australian Historical Studies* 37, no. 127 (2006), 79.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 64.



as a primary platform for women to contribute to public discourse and educate themselves began to shift. Supported by advertising, serial dramas increased in popularity over the period while talk-based women's sessions declined, and the introduction of television to Australia in 1956 signalled the end of radio's primacy as a broadcast medium.

### **The Golden Age?**

In her work on postwar British radio and women's citizenship, Kristin Skoog has argued that the iconic program *Woman's Hour*, broadcast from 1946 until the present, had an ambition to broaden the interest of its listeners and to encourage them to actively engage with social and political issues. The British postwar woman was conceptualised by government, policymakers, and the media as a citizen with a stake in, and responsibility for, rebuilding Britain. According to Skoog, this differentiated British women's radio from women's magazines as the latter tended to consistently treat women as consumers without reference to their civic duties.<sup>26</sup> The dominance of public service broadcasting in Britain meant that, compared with Australia, there were far fewer serial dramas broadcast over its airwaves in the same period, and talk-based broadcasting continued to play an important role in shaping and promoting women's citizenship. Indeed, the popular serial *Mrs Dale's Diary*, which was the first significant soap opera broadcast in Britain, premiered only in 1948. This program caused significant moral concern as commentators criticised it for being syrupy, dramatic and addictive. Others, especially within the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), defended it as a representation of a middle-class North London family navigating the hardships of life in austerity Britain. As Skoog has argued, serials like *Mrs Dale's Diary* represented the complexities of women's lives as they negotiated marriage, motherhood and

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<sup>26</sup> Kristin Skoog, 'The "Responsible" Woman: The BBC and Women's Radio 1945-1955' (PhD Thesis, University of Westminster, 2010), 183.

work—they therefore represented many of women’s complaints with domesticity more effectively than a radio talk could.<sup>27</sup>

Radio serials were broadcast in Australia from the 1930s, including the popular Australian serial *Dad and Dave* which featured on the ABC from 1937.<sup>28</sup> *Big Sister*, the first nationally-sponsored women’s serial to be broadcast in Australia, went to air in 1942, and a large number of plays were broadcast on both the ABC and the commercial stations during the 1940s. Radio drama was also produced to promote war bonds and increase morale and patriotic sentiment during World War II.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, as David Goodman and Susan Smulyan have shown, American serial scripts began to be lightly re-written and completely re-voiced in Australia during the war, when transcription discs from non-sterling areas faced import restrictions. This resulted in a growing radio serial industry in Australia, as local actors and production staff produced local versions based on the American scripts, including the popular serials *When a Girl Marries*, *Portia Faces Life*, and *Doctor Paul*.<sup>30</sup>

There was a ‘frenzy’ of production of radio serials in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which transformed morning and afternoon schedules on commercial radio.<sup>31</sup> The rise of these programs caused some controversy for their subject matter and perceived vapidness, and this continued over several decades. The voices of serial stars were also singled out for criticism, usually in terms of their overwrought acting or the sameness of their voices, which is apparent when listening to a number of these programs. Phil O’Brien wrote to the *Listener In* in January 1955: ‘In the numerous serials [women’s voices] are usually incomprehensible

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<sup>27</sup> Kristin Skoog, ‘“They’re “Doped” by that Dale Diary”: Women’s Serial Drama, the BBC and British Post-war Change’, in *Renewing Feminisms: Radical Narratives, Fantasies and Futures in Media Studies*, ed. Helen Thomham and Elke Weissman (London: I.B. Taurus, 2013), 124–26.

<sup>28</sup> K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 55.

<sup>29</sup> Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama*, 201–02.

<sup>30</sup> David Goodman and Susan Smulyan, ‘Portia Faces the World: Re-Writing and Re-Voicing American Radio for an International Market’, in *Radio’s New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era*, ed. Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes (New York & London: Routledge, 2013), 163–179.

<sup>31</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 234–35.

especially when they attempt the sentimental or dramatic episodes.<sup>32</sup> Gladys Vane wrote to the magazine in July 1955: ‘I have listened to all the serials and there isn’t one fit for adult intelligence, not to mention hearing the same dreary old voices in them all.’<sup>33</sup> However, many listeners appreciated serials, as seen in this letter to the *Listener In* in 1945: ‘It seems ridiculous to call them trash, as such a word is both untrue and impolite. These serials are listened to by thousands all over the State who find in them a little recreation.’<sup>34</sup> Once again, the voices of the actresses were of special note, as seen in this letter from 1940: ‘Orchids to the actresses playing...Julie and Cathy in “Crossroads of Life”. They speak really well and surely the casts of other serials should take notice.’<sup>35</sup>

Australian serials were still often Australianised versions of American scripts, continuing the trend which had begun during the war years.<sup>36</sup> In some cases they remained American stories and the Australian actors used American accents, as in the case of the enormously popular *When a Girl Marries*.<sup>37</sup> The talk-based women’s sessions which had dominated in the 1930s and early 1940s were increasingly replaced by soap operas, which proved lucrative for the commercial stations. A 1951 2UW advertisement in the trade magazine *Broadcasting and Television* boasted that:

Having given our vast feminine audience complete satisfaction with a top-line parade of morning serials—we’re branching out into the afternoon serial field from the beginning of the New Year—IT’S SOUND PSYCHOLOGY—SOUND SELLING—WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THAT WOMEN BUY 90% OF GOODS SOLD!<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Phil O’Brien, ‘Women’s Voices’, *Listener In*, 22 January 1955, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Gladys Vane, ‘Anti-serial’, *Listener In*, 30 July 1955, 29.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Disgusted’, ‘Serials Defended’, *Listener In*, 9 September 1945, 21.

<sup>35</sup> ‘English Lass’, ‘Crossroads of Life’, *Listener In*, 14 January 1940, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Goodman and Smulyan, ‘Portia Faces the World’, 170.

<sup>37</sup> See for example: *When a Girl Marries*, Episode 413, 81523, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>38</sup> 2UW Advertisement, *Broadcasting and Television*, 5 January 1951, 10.

In 1955, 2UW's advertisements in *Broadcasting and Television* continued to boast that the station reached 'more women every day than any other Sydney station' and their female audience's emotional connection to the characters on their favourite serials made them more susceptible to advertising messages.<sup>39</sup> In August 1955, 2UE also argued that its new line-up of eight morning serials 'promised immense sales potential.'<sup>40</sup> The sessions which had provided women with a platform to contribute to public discourse were disappearing in favour of radio dramas which treated women as listener-consumers who took in advertising messages along with addictive storylines, rather than listener-citizens who wanted to engage with social and political commentary.

Serial dramas even became a common fixture on the ABC. From 1944 it began airing Gwen Meredith's serial *The Lawsons*, a drama which followed the lives of a tight-knit community in regional Victoria. In 1949, *The Lawsons* turned into *Blue Hills*, and this program became one of the most successful radio serials in Australia, running until 1976 and attracting huge audiences. Michelle Arrow has argued that the program was appealing to audiences for its rural setting, which tapped into the romanticised notions of the country that were central to Australian national identity, and because its storylines were centred on popular romance.<sup>41</sup> Yet while the ABC did broadcast popular serial dramas like *Blue Hills*, it should be stressed that the national broadcaster did not wish to emulate its commercial rivals and program back-to-back soap operas during the morning—it still recognised the value of the talk-based women's session.

Soap operas became a source of anxiety for governments and many cultural commentators due to the belief that these programs were a negative influence on engaged listener-citizens. As such, the remaining talk-based women's sessions consciously positioned

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<sup>39</sup> 2UW Advertisement, *Broadcasting and Television*, 11 March 1955, 4

<sup>40</sup> 2UE Advertisement, *Broadcasting and Television*, 24 August 1955, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Michelle Arrow, "'The Most Sickening Piece of Snobbery I Have Ever Heard': Race, Radio Listening, and the "Aboriginal Question" in *Blue Hills*", *Australian Historical Studies* 139, no. 38 (2007): 244–48.

themselves against soap operas, and the organisers of these sessions often wanted to provide an intellectual alternative to what they viewed as a vapid form of programming. This was especially so for the ABC, which had a philosophy similar to the BBC's citizen-shaping ethos. Kylie Andrews has researched women producers in the postwar ABC and has shown that there was a 'dual system' for women in the ABC hierarchy; while the majority were corralled into supposedly feminine support jobs, there was a small minority who were valued by the Commission as 'exceptional contributors' and were given greater opportunities to advance their careers and influence ABC programming and policy.<sup>42</sup> These exceptional women were generally highly educated, middle class, and notably 'conceptualised themselves as citizens rather than feminists...they saw themselves as capable and culturally superior, and felt confident to speak for others and make judgments about what was best for society.'<sup>43</sup> The ABC, Andrews argues, was the 'preferred venue for their activism' as its major role was to educate its listeners.<sup>44</sup>

According to Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd the ABC women's sessions were a forum for postwar housewives to air their frustrations with domesticity. The ABC believed that the increased ownership of modern domestic appliances meant that housewives now had more free time, which women were using to listen to serials. While these programs satiated their boredom, they did not help their development as citizens. To address this perceived problem, the ABC sought to air programming that encouraged women to make productive use of their time by engaging with social and political issues and contributing to public discourse. Johnson and Lloyd argue that radio, and especially the ABC, 'was the medium that would make women full "citizens" in a democratic nation by taking them out of their own world and relating their personal domestic problems to those of others.'<sup>45</sup> As

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<sup>42</sup> Kylie Andrews, 'Don't Tell them I Can Type: Negotiating Women's Work in Production in the Post-war ABC', *Media International Australia* 161 (2016), 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford and New

they point out, by recognising that women's experience of domesticity could be improved by engaging with public affairs, the ABC also intimated that it was possible for women to step out of the private domestic role.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Western Australian ABC Women's Session**

Catherine King's Western Australian *ABC Women's Session* began in the final months of World War II and would prove to be one of the most popular women's sessions of the postwar era. As noted in Chapter Four, due to budgetary constraints the ABC decided to cut its state-based women's sessions in 1940 and replace them with a daily national talk broadcast from Sydney. Due to the time difference between the east and west coasts this national talk ended up reaching Western Australia at lunchtime, which was inconvenient to many female listeners. Dorothy Graham, who had previously compered the state session, was still allowed to give a short chat each morning, but these were stopped in 1943. The decision left rural women, who were out of range of Perth's commercial stations, without access to a convenient women's program. This situation began to cause significant disquiet by 1944. The ABC Commission regularly travelled around the country to provide listeners with an opportunity to give direct feedback to the organisation, and when it was due to sit in Perth in May of that year a number of women's organisations used the opportunity to advocate for the return of the Western Australian women's session. The Modern Women's Club, for example, pointed out the session's utility to both country and metropolitan women.<sup>47</sup> The Women's Service Guilds (WSG) wrote that they believed in 'the Women's Session being restored in the interests of the women listeners of W.A. particularly those in the outbacks [sic].'<sup>48</sup>

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York: Berg, 2004), 130.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 131–41.

<sup>47</sup> S. Blockley to ABC Chairman, 6 May 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>48</sup> C. M. Bond to ABC Chairman, 5 May 1944. Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38],

Their work seems to have paid off, as the ABC General Manager returned and set in motion the administrative work to reintroduce a women's session on the ABC's Western Australian stations.<sup>49</sup> A morning timeslot was suggested for the program, and Perth Manager Conrad Charlton argued that the compere of the session 'should be chosen both for her cultural ability and for her place in the respect of female sorority.'<sup>50</sup> Talks Director B. H. Molesworth nominated Greenwood, who had been recording talks in Perth for broadcast over the national women's session during the war years and had clearly impressed him with her ability.<sup>51</sup> However, this suggestion offended Charlton, who saw it as an encroachment by head office, and he put forward Catherine King instead. Charlton noted that King was 'very well informed in all women's affairs, is head of the Kindergarten Union in this state' and also possessed 'good administrative ability.'<sup>52</sup> King had been involved with broadcasting for several years, as a children's book reviewer for the *ABC Women's Session* in the 1930s, and an organiser of the successful children's program *Kindergarten of the Air* in the early 1940s.<sup>53</sup>

King was the daughter of Sir Walter Murdoch, an academic at the University of Western Australia and a leading public intellectual. Murdoch recognised the role of broadcasting as an educational medium early on, and regularly gave talks about a range of intellectual, social and political issues in the 1920s and 1930s. He believed that education and entertainment were not mutually exclusive, and that broadcast standards should be high. Murdoch's broadcasting philosophy influenced his daughter, who was committed to ensuring that her session would be of high quality.<sup>54</sup> This dedication was in evidence during

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SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>49</sup> Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 16 May 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>50</sup> Conrad Charlton to Keith Barry, 24 May 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>51</sup> B. H. Molesworth to Keith Barry, 18 May 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>52</sup> Conrad Charlton to Keith Barry, 9 June 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>53</sup> Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 17–24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

negotiations over the start of the program, which was allotted forty-five minutes per day. King requested that it be reduced to thirty minutes, as she believed that this length would ensure that the program would be able to consistently meet quality standards without the need for superfluous ‘padding,’ and because busy women could not listen for such a long time.<sup>55</sup> However, Molesworth decided that the extra fifteen minutes was to be devoted to music, and the session remained at forty-five minutes.<sup>56</sup>

The session premiered on 4 September 1944. The *Broadcaster* enthusiastically reported on the new program, and noted from the beginning that the session would be focused on intellectual engagement: ‘It will be a session which will provide not only knowledge and news but will present ideas of a sufficiently controversial nature to set listeners thinking.’<sup>57</sup> The magazine reported that the session would include talks on science, women in careers, infant health, women’s organisations, and literature.<sup>58</sup> The announcement of the new session generated a very positive response from prospective listeners. Several women wrote letters to the *Broadcaster* to express their gratitude that the Western Australian *ABC Women’s Session* was being reinstated, noting that ‘good interesting talks will fill a longfelt want among women listeners.’<sup>59</sup> This relief was keenly felt in the context of wartime Western Australia, when print restrictions, petrol rationing, and long distances left many women isolated and feeling cut-off from the outside world. The program was welcome listening during the end of the war and encouraged women to take an active role in their communities and local government in the postwar future.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Catherine King to Conrad Charlton, 10 August 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>56</sup> B. H. Molesworth to Conrad Charlton, 21 August 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>57</sup> ‘ABC Women’s Session: Begins on Monday’, *Broadcaster*, 30 August 1944, 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> ‘Mrs. M. J.’ ‘Women’s Session Welcome’, *Broadcaster*, 13 September 1944, 8.

<sup>60</sup> ‘A.B.C. Women’s Session: Wide Range of Subjects’, *Broadcaster*, 21 March 1945, 6.



In August 1945, one year after the program's launch, the *Broadcaster* reflected on the impact of the session, noting that the core of the program's output was at least ten talks per week on a variety of subjects. The intellectual stimulation that women had received through the session was a major reason for its popularity:

[A] very large number of Australian women are keen to improve their knowledge, particularly where fuller understanding of current developments will assist them in doing the best they can for their homes and families.<sup>61</sup>

The positive response to the intelligent content of the program continued throughout the late 1940s. In January 1948, for example, the *ABC Weekly* reported that King had 'built up a session that is not only popular—evidenced by a large correspondence from listeners—but has made it an intelligent and educational feature, covering a comprehensive range of subjects.'<sup>62</sup> These subjects included education, science, girls' careers, local government, women in international affairs, books, news commentary, marriage and parenting.<sup>63</sup>

One of the most popular series of talks on King's program was titled 'Life is an Art,' which featured Reverend Brian MacDonald reading a series of talk scripts about faith and life originally written for the BBC. King was a committed Anglican who deeply considered the philosophy of life and believed that her listeners were also seeking spiritual and philosophical nourishment.<sup>64</sup> Reporting on this series of talks, the *Broadcaster* asked whether women were 'natural highbrows' and if there was an 'unexpected fund of seriousness in the women of Western Australia':

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<sup>61</sup> 'The Feminine Angle', *Broadcaster*, 29 August 1945, 6.

<sup>62</sup> 'Her Women's Session Covers a Wide Field', *ABC Weekly*, 10 January 1948, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, *On Air*, 57.

There used to be a theory that women wanted to hear about things which would help them run their houses. So they do—but they can get that from friends and neighbours. In addition what they want from radio (and what they continually assert that they want) is talks which will widen their world...And so the talks for which they write in continually to the ABC women's session are those which deal with education, those which help them in their choice of books, those which tell them of recent discoveries in science in many different forms, those which give a current comment on events of importance in community life, those which discuss adolescence...life in other countries, talks on politics and local government, talks by visitors from overseas, and, perhaps most popular of all, those which deal with life itself.<sup>65</sup>

This 'seriousness' may have been unexpected in the eyes of the *Broadcaster's* editors, but it can be seen as a continuation of earlier trends in women's programming that I have examined throughout this thesis. What is perhaps different is that women's interest in 'serious' issues was more openly recognised and talked about in broadcast media and by the ABC in particular. Keen to distance itself from vapid commercial soap operas, the ABC appears to have placed greater importance on its women's sessions during the 1940s and 1950s as a vital method of citizenship education for women. This was due to both its own self-conception as a bastion of cultural education and the tireless advocacy of women like King, who used her position to organise talks which focused on a range of social issues.

King regularly sent reports about her session to Molesworth in Sydney, and these accounts provide an insight into the session, what topics were discussed, and what King felt was and was not working. She clearly believed that the compere was key to the success of a

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<sup>65</sup> 'Are Women Natural Highbrows?', *Broadcaster*, 4 April 1945, 6.

radio session. In one report, written after she had left the show in the hands of another host while she travelled to the east coast, King lamented the impact of the absence of the regular compere on the session. She noted that ‘a great deal of the value is lost if there is no one there to hold it together as a sort of integrated whole’ as having the regular compere introduce the talks made the audience ‘more ready to listen and “take in” what is presented.’<sup>66</sup> She argued that successful programs needed one ‘continuous’ person in charge of it with a ‘consuming passion,’ although she did stress that she was not the only broadcaster with these qualities and any suitable person would do.<sup>67</sup> Molesworth agreed with her about the importance of the compere, whose ‘personality, intelligence and point of view’ were very important.<sup>68</sup>

King’s fierce belief in using radio to engage women as active citizens was apparent in her response to a script called ‘Adventures in Fashion’ sent to her by Molesworth. King took exception to some aspects of the script, especially a statement that buying ‘a new spring hat’ was the female equivalent to male adventure:

You see, the whole trend of our session is to prove that life, whether in war or peace, is every bit as full of exciting possibilities, whether in local government or science, or art, or literature, or education, or exploration, as life for men. And while I’m far from being a feminist, or an exponent of ideas of the equality of the sexes, it would certainly put this session in a queer position if we were suddenly to suggest

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<sup>66</sup> Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 6 February 1945, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>67</sup> Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 1 March 1945, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>68</sup> B. H. Molesworth to Catherine King, 16 February 1945, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

that to men, belongs the high adventure, for women, the dashing accessory to her wardrobe.<sup>69</sup>

Here King disavowed the feminist label, arguing that she was not an advocate for women's equality. However, at the same time, she was passionate about expanding the horizons of her listeners' lives, stoking their interest in a wide range of topics and encouraging them to think of the ways that they could participate in society, politics and the paid workforce outside their roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. She therefore practiced feminism, even though she did not identify as a feminist.

King discussed her experiences and motives for her long broadcasting career in an interview on ABC radio in Perth in 1982, and admitted that she did not like television as radio was all she believed in. She argued that it was possible to be more honest and interesting on radio as it was an intimate medium through which you could talk person to person, and this intimacy activated her. Her session established that women were interested in a wide range of subjects and that women broadcasters could craft intellectually engaging sessions.<sup>70</sup> King used her position to improve the lives of women and integrate them into the public sphere, and the longevity of her session and the legacy it left in Western Australia indicate that her approach was a popular one—more so than the ABC national women's sessions.

### **The ABC National Women's Sessions**

With the exception of the Western Australian session, the separate state-based women's sessions were replaced by a Sydney-based national session in 1946, organised and compered by Clare Mitchell. This iteration did not last long as Mitchell resigned in late 1947, complaining that what she had been asked to do was 'wishy-washy'.<sup>71</sup> Following Mitchell's

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<sup>69</sup> Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 14 October 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>70</sup> Catherine King interviewed by Des Guilfoyle, July 1982, OH572, State Library of Western Australia, Perth.

<sup>71</sup> Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 169.

resignation ABC management undertook a review into the women's session and made suggestions for how to improve it. The format in which the 'Compere spoke herself and then introduced three or four other speakers' was 'now outmoded'; they suggested instead that the program be recast as a twenty-minute magazine with a daily serial and content 'more slanted on things of special interest to women.'<sup>72</sup> Female listeners had provided feedback that 'the magazine should include on at least one day a week, an item which provided more solid mental food, not depending on topicality or domestic interest.'<sup>73</sup> In April 1946, a listener named D. K. Horton wrote to the *ABC Weekly* to outline what she believed women preferred in their radio sessions. She nominated varied material: information on childcare, health and cooking, chats about beauty and fashion, and book reviews and short stories. Above all, however, the session required a competent presenter to run it:

She needs wide culture, an interest in almost everything, a knack of contacting fascinating personalities in art, social activities and science, and presenting these either by interview or through their writings to the audience. She must avoid like poison the schoolmistress or impersonal approach—women have to be talked down to, and even good material loses its appeal if a reader is aloof and uninterested, except in her own powers of elocution.<sup>74</sup>

Horton wrote in again in September 1947 to complain about Mitchell's session, which she argued had the 'taint of the lecture hall' about it and which was not 'friendly and personal'

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<sup>72</sup> Keith Barry to Charles Moses, 20 January 1948, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>73</sup> Extract from Minutes of Conference of National Talks Advisory Committee Held at A.B.C. Building, 171 William Street, Sydney, From Tuesday to Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> August 1948, 1085/47, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>74</sup> D. K. Horton, 'What Women Prefer', *ABC Weekly*, 20 April 1946, 19.

enough.<sup>75</sup> According to Horton, women's sessions therefore needed both engaging content and an engaging compere to run them.

Sheila Hunt took over as compere from April 1948 and oversaw the change of the session to a magazine format. When she took over she was the only woman announcer at the ABC's Sydney studio; in an interview with the *ABC Weekly* she compared the ABC unfavourably with the BBC, which she noted had a much larger proportion of female announcers.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, in this interview she recognised the importance of radio as a medium that normalised the sound of women's voices in the public sphere: 'I do think women have something to offer on the air, if it is only a change from men's voices.'<sup>77</sup> At the time of the launch of the new format on 5 April Molesworth said that the ABC expected a 'stronger reaction' from Australian women to the 'brighter, quicker, more definite and immediate' session, most likely in the form of increased listener figures.<sup>78</sup> Some listeners did appreciate the session, and wrote in to the *ABC Weekly* to say so. One listener wrote that she was happy that the ABC realised that 'the modern, educated housewife is interested in many things apart from children's complaints and Monday's washing' and appreciated the variety of interesting subjects and people on the program.<sup>79</sup> Another wrote that all 'the interesting talks on various subjects are enlightening.'<sup>80</sup> Others, however, disliked the new format. Horton, ever displeased, described it as 'snippety, jerky, and far too short.'<sup>81</sup>

Despite the new format, the *Women's Magazine* still struggled to attract listeners. In 1950 it averaged just one per cent of homes in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Newcastle, and two per cent in Brisbane.<sup>82</sup> ABC reports of the session's failures noted that it was a

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<sup>75</sup> D. K. Horton, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 20 September 1947, 26.

<sup>76</sup> 'Young A.B.C. Announcer Now Comperes the Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 13 March 1948, 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> 'A.B.C.'s New Women's Magazine of the Air on April 5', *ABC Weekly*, 3 April 1948, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Alice Howard, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 24 April 1948, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Hilda Voysey, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 23 October 1948, 2.

<sup>81</sup> D. K. Horton, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 18 September 1948, 29.

<sup>82</sup> Listener Research 27<sup>th</sup> March 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

‘closely packed 20 minutes of almost unbroken speech, covering a variety of subjects unrelated except that they could all be of interest to some women.’<sup>83</sup> This format lacked coherence and required too much concentration, and women seemed to prefer the light entertainment offered by serials on the commercial stations. The report also noted that there were too many guest speakers who were not good broadcasters, the lack of a personable compere, and subjects of narrow interest.<sup>84</sup> There was also criticism that the session focused too much on ‘dream stuff’ out of the reach of ‘Mrs Suburbia.’<sup>85</sup> The session sounded as if a ‘stock’ women’s magazine was being read out—but this suffered from the lack of visuals present in a print magazine.<sup>86</sup>

The low listener figures were not helped by the contradictory ideas put forward by ABC management. In a report from June 1951, Controller of Programs Keith Barry argued that the session should be for the ‘average’ woman and suggested several subjects which should make up the core of its repertoire: gardening, cooking, clothing, children, celebrities, home jobs, health, travel, book reviews and, notably, careers. Subjects which should be covered occasionally included foreign affairs, handicrafts and sport.<sup>87</sup> However, in the final report submitted the following week, Molesworth argued that the ABC should not ‘aim at the audience who listen to the serials on the commercials’ but instead should try to ‘serve the interests of the normally intelligent woman who sees beyond the mundane chores of domestic life and the naïve approach of the popular serial.’<sup>88</sup> On the one hand, the ABC was concerned about appealing to the ‘average’ woman and not talking about things that were

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<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Campbell, 29 March 1951, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> J. J. Donnelly, 29 March 1951, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 18 June 1951, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>88</sup> B. H. Molesworth, ‘Women’s Magazine: Summary of Comments Received’, 22 June 1951, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

out of reach to the ordinary housewife. On the other, they viewed their audience as women of 'intelligence' who did not lower themselves to listening to serials. This supposed tension between the 'average housewife' and the 'intelligent woman' demonstrated the difficulties that the ABC experienced in attracting a larger audience for its national women's session; without a clear vision of who their audience was the program struggled to produce coherent content and attract listeners, especially in competition with the popular format of serial dramas on the commercial stations. Audience intelligence had long been of concern to governments, radio executives and cultural commentators in many parts of the world. In his study of interwar American radio, for instance, David Goodman has observed that there was significant concern 'about whether the mass of people were actually intelligent enough to undertake the tasks of radio listening responsibly.'<sup>89</sup> Although it is unlikely that this tension between the average and the intelligent woman was new, it does appear to have been a significant concern that both shaped and inhibited the ABC's approach to women's programming in the postwar era.

Following their discussion of these reports, the ABC decided to renew the session with changes, and Ida Elizabeth Jenkins was hired as the compere. Jenkins was already a well-known and well-loved voice on the ABC, having hosted the popular ABC children's session in the 1940s.<sup>90</sup> Reporting on her appointment in November 1951, the *ABC Weekly* noted that the session would 'be geared to the woman in the home, whose daily routine tends to be less high-powered than that of the city worker.'<sup>91</sup> This did not mean that the material would be dumbed down—indeed Jenkins intended 'to widen the scope of the session, with as large a panel of speakers as possible' and said that she would do 'anything to lift the housewife out of her sink.'<sup>92</sup> The children's session connection was emphasised, as Jenkins

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<sup>89</sup> David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253.

<sup>90</sup> 'Ida Jenkins in Charge of New Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 10 November 1951, 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 6.1: Ida Elizabeth Jenkins on the cover of the *ABC Weekly*, 7 March 1953.

herself noted that many of her former listeners would now be wives and mothers who would 'listen to me all over again—from a new angle.'<sup>93</sup> There was some pushback against the rhetoric of housewife betterment, however. A listener complained to the *ABC Weekly* that

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

housewives found ‘the superior attitude of many women who work for a living as irritating as it is amusing’ and hoped that Jenkins would not condescend to her well-informed housewife listeners.<sup>94</sup> The tension between the ‘average’ and ‘intelligent’ woman was again in play, as this listener chafed at what she viewed as the ‘intelligent’ compere talking down to the ‘average’ housewife. Housewives, this listener argued, were in fact already intelligent listeners who could engage on equal footing with the content presented by comperes such as Jenkins. This was a tension which Jenkins had to navigate in her role as compere; not only was ABC management divided over what the best approach should be, but her listeners also had their own opinions on the issue.

The early sessions under Jenkins’ stewardship were along the lines suggested in the ABC’s report, including book reviews and talks on travel, health, cooking and charm. Mondays were for talks on homemaking and travel, Tuesday featured family advice and a book review, Wednesday featured talks by a female doctor and an interview with the guest of the week, Thursday had talks on cooking and childrearing, and Friday featured talks on gardening and fashion.<sup>95</sup> Providing competition to serials continued to be a focus of concern. It was observed in a report in October 1952 that due to their afternoon serials 2UW had built up its audience share from two per cent to ‘8% or 12%,’ but that audiences for morning serials were double these figures—an indication of the significant popularity of soap operas and the uphill battle that talk-based women’s sessions faced to win over listeners.<sup>96</sup>

Johnson and Lloyd have suggested that that the ABC national women’s session increasingly focused on fashion and travel in the early 1950s, rather than social and political issues, as it was under significant pressure from other programs, especially soap operas.<sup>97</sup> Yet

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<sup>94</sup> L. Hall-Jackson, ‘Condescension Not Wanted’, *ABC Weekly*, 24 November 1951, 2.

<sup>95</sup> See for example: ‘The Women’s Session: Week Beginning 2<sup>nd</sup> December’, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>96</sup> Keith Barry to Charles Moses, 23 October 1952, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>97</sup> Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, 141.

this argument neglects the influence of Jenkins, who very much saw her role as a leader to her audience and supplemented the program's domestic-focused content with commentary on a myriad of social issues. Jenkins' attitude towards women's role in society can be seen in a speech she gave to the Newcastle Business Men's Club in 1953 in which she argued that Australia was very much a 'man's country' that wasted the potential of its women by debarring them from public life once they got married. She argued that 'Australian women would be capable of work outside the home as well as in it.'<sup>98</sup>

By including her listeners' opinions and experiences in her session Jenkins endeavoured to compensate for the loss of women's potential in public life. In 1953, she developed a social survey for married women so that she could gauge women's opinions on a range of subjects and discuss them on the air.<sup>99</sup> A two-page written questionnaire was devised by the ABC's research division at her behest which asked women questions about jobs, housework, free time, relationships with their husbands, and what could be done to help women prepare for marriage. The final question asked: 'If you were quite free to do whatever you wanted, what would you like to do?'<sup>100</sup> This question recognised that it was possible for a woman to have ambitions beyond the domestic sphere, although she might still desire to be in the home. The survey was sent to a diverse sample of women from across Australia, including women in regional areas.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately there is no record of the results of the survey and it is not clear what impact this research had, if any. However, the example demonstrates how Jenkins attempted to make the program of relevance to Australian women and that she wanted to include their own words and opinions on the program—not just her own.

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<sup>98</sup> 'Australia "Man's Country"', *Newcastle Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 3 September 1953, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Nancy Sheehan to Keith Barry, 9 January 1953, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>100</sup> 'Social Survey for Married Women', National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>101</sup> Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 19 January 1953, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

Each week, listeners' letters on a given topic were read out by Jenkins and her guests, and Jenkins always ensured that equal weight was given to each side of a debate. The practice of reading listener letters incorporated the audience into the program more directly, and the readers did not comment on the letters but let them speak for themselves. Jenkins used letters as a device to discuss controversial issues on air by soliciting responses to a topic she had set. For instance, in November 1954 Jenkins broadcast listeners' letters on the topic of euthanasia. Most of the letters were staunchly against it for religious or moral reasons. Some of the letters, however, did support it, such as a veterinarian who had been 'able to painlessly and permanently relieve the sufferings of many animals' and did not see why humans could not also choose to end their own suffering, and a nurse who admitted that she had carried out treatment plans prescribed by doctors with the understanding that they would 'hasten the end of hopelessly incurable and agonised patients.'<sup>102</sup> The topic elicited a protest from pharmaceutical chemist Robert B. Billings, who wrote to the ABC Chairman Richard Boyer that euthanasia was 'deliberate murder' which was 'opposed to God's teaching' and as such it was not appropriate to discuss or debate the topic on air.<sup>103</sup> Boyer replied to Billings in early December, noting that the free discussion of viewpoints was crucial to robust public debate. However, Boyer referred Billings' complaint to be noted at the next meeting of the board.<sup>104</sup> In response to the criticism Jenkins expressed the purpose of the national *ABC Women's Session* as a forum for discussion of thorny social issues:

The 'Women's Session' is designed for an audience of intelligent adults, and the well reasoned, stimulating discussions we have had in the past of such subjects as Japanese Wives, Co-education, Racial

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<sup>102</sup> 'The Women's Session Conducted by Ida Elizabeth Jenkins', Script, 30 November 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>103</sup> Robert B. Billings to ABC Chairman, 30 November 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>104</sup> Richard Boyer to Robert B. Billings, 9 December 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

Discrimination, assimilation of Migrants, etc., prove that a very big section of housewives wants more thought-provoking material from their radio than is supplied by the usual serials and soap-operas.<sup>105</sup>

Once again, the example of mind-numbing soap operas was raised to justify the need for the women's session to discuss a wide range of stimulating and often difficult issues of public interest. Molesworth agreed with her and did not see why euthanasia should be 'excluded from the controversial topics which we should be free to discuss.'<sup>106</sup> Indeed one of the correspondents, a disabled ex-soldier, expressed in his submission to the debate that it was 'a very healthy sign when a subject like euthanasia can be discussed over the air, and particularly in a women's session.'<sup>107</sup>

Jenkins herself appears to have been a key drawcard for the audiences that tuned in to the session. For instance, a listener wrote to the *ABC Weekly* in 1954 to express their approval of the session and Jenkins in particular:

May I express my appreciation and affection for the Women's Session so ably conducted by Ida Elizabeth Jenkins. I find this half-hour one of the most interesting, informative, and delightfully refreshing on the air. Mrs. Jenkins has a charming, well-modulated voice, and is a pleasure to listen to.<sup>108</sup>

In another letter to the magazine, a young mother wrote that she was 'confined to the home for most of the time and do feel the need for some stimulating and educational programs.'<sup>109</sup>

Jenkins worked hard on the program, remarking on air that the 'broadcasting for half an hour

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<sup>105</sup> B. H. Molesworth to Keith Barry, 15 December 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> 'The Women's Session', Script.

<sup>108</sup> Joy McFetridge, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 20 February 1954, 2.

<sup>109</sup> N. G. Rutherford, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 1 August 1953, 2.

is only a very tiny part of the job—so when I say good-bye to you all, I whip upstairs and get really busy.<sup>110</sup> Her radio voice was also praised. She was described by the *News* in March 1954 as a presenter ‘who has delighted listeners all over Australia with her natural “smiling” voice.’<sup>111</sup>

Jenkins’ popularity and professionalism were recognised during the 1954 royal tour of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, when she was appointed as the only female commentator from the ABC. Her experience of the tour coverage demonstrated the difficulties of live radio at the time—for example, she had to curtsy to the Queen while wearing a breastplate microphone and being entangled by cords. She was a professional, however, who had trained for the royal tour by watching a film of the Royal Tour of Canada and commenting on it.<sup>112</sup> Listeners reacted well to Jenkins’ approach to the tour commentary. One wrote to the *ABC Weekly* that her ‘vivid descriptions of the overall scene and quickness to note small human incidents have, in my opinion, put the male announcers to shame.’<sup>113</sup> This comment suggests that the place of women on the air was of concern to some listeners, who recognised the importance of expressing their appreciation of the work of women such as Jenkins. Elizabeth Webb described Jenkins’ masterful commentary on the royal tour in a column for the *Brisbane Telegraph* in March 1954, observing that Jenkins ‘talks to the microphone as though it were an old friend’ but always ensured to keep exactly to time. Webb commended her ‘complete naturalness to all females who aspire to broadcast work’ and that she was a good broadcaster because she ‘has something to say and goes ahead and says it.’<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> ‘The Women’s Session Conducted by Ida Elizabeth Jenkins’, Script, 3 March 1952, Monday, February to April 1952 [Scripts of the Womens Session, Women’s Magazine] [2.5cm; box 12], C3224, FEBRUARY TO APRIL 1952, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Thursday Women’s News’, *The News*, 25 March 1954, 23.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Untitled article, *ABC Weekly*, 27 February 1954, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Webb, ‘Your Radio Service’, *Brisbane Telegraph*, 18 March 1954, 8.

As the compere of the national women's session Jenkins was also chosen to help organise and publicise a new women's session in Papua New Guinea. The session was supported by Alexandra Hasluck, the wife of the Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck, who had been interested in establishing a women's session for Papua New Guinea for some time. Hasluck wrote to Boyer in February 1953 having heard that a program for Papua New Guinea was being planned, and argued for the 'importance of having the right sort of women's session'—one like King's Western Australian session.<sup>115</sup> She argued that a session with talks, discussions and interviews would 'became a focal point of interest for women who miss the interchange of ideas and news that women living in a city have.'<sup>116</sup> Alexandra Hasluck clearly thought that broadcasting could be of service to community and would play a key role in connecting Australian expatriate women to the mainland. But, she noted, the compere was key—the session had to be run by 'a woman of intelligence and education, rather than one with a mellifluous voice and a knowledge of broadcasting procedure.'<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, she did not agree that a good radio voice was essential for a broadcaster, but rather thought that their educational credentials and cultural knowledge were of greater importance.<sup>118</sup>

In October 1954, Jenkins flew to Papua New Guinea to discuss arrangements for a new session with the local advisory committee and to promote the new program. The session was to have its own compere and make use of local speakers.<sup>119</sup> It was specifically for 'European' women in New Guinea, as Indigenous women apparently already had their own sessions.<sup>120</sup> Jenkins travelled to Port Moresby, Lae and Rabaul to get an overall picture of

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<sup>115</sup> Alexandra Hasluck to Richard Boyer, 4 February 1953, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> H. S. Sibary to Alison Niall, 27 July 1954, Advisory Committees - Women's Session [box 6], J502, 2/3/1, National Archives of Australia, Brisbane.

<sup>120</sup> 'New Guinea Women "Alert" Says Broadcaster', *Sum*, 17 November 1954, 43.

radio needs of women in different parts of the territory and meet a range of local women.<sup>121</sup>

Her visit was a busy one as she met with many people, gave speeches about her experiences as a commentator for the royal tour and made sure that the session was ready to go to air.<sup>122</sup>

In a report to Molesworth, the ABC's Manager for Papua New Guinea, H. S. Sibary, praised Jenkins' work during her visit:

It is impossible to pay too great a tribute to the work done by Mrs. Jenkins during her visit. Her charming personality and ability as a speaker impressed everyone with whom she came in contact and her visit, apart from the essential organising work in connection with the session itself, was certainly of great relations value, and one has nothing but admiration of the way she stood up to the severe physical and mental strain of the trip.<sup>123</sup>

Upon her return, Jenkins reported back that the women in Papua New Guinea were 'hungry for feminine contacts' and that the 'power of radio to bring interesting women right into their homes will be a very real help.'<sup>124</sup> Jenkins detailed her experiences to her Australian listeners in a talk which described a meeting of eight women's clubs in Port Moresby, which were apparently formed so that the women could have something of their own 'apart from the men's world.'<sup>125</sup> Jenkins' role in setting up a new session in Papua New Guinea demonstrated the ABC's public service ethos and the role of radio in fostering women's citizenship. Nevertheless, the national women's sessions continued to receive low ratings of one to two per cent in each Australian city, demonstrating that despite attempts to reach out

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<sup>121</sup> H. S. Sibary to Alison Niall, 13 September 1954, Advisory Committees - Women's Session[box 6], J502, 2/3/1, National Archives of Australia, Brisbane.

<sup>122</sup> H. S. Sibary to B. H. Molesworth, 22 December 1954, Advisory Committees - Women's Session[box 6], J502, 2/3/1, National Archives of Australia, Brisbane.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> 'Launching of New Women's Session', *Dungog Chronicle*, 10 November 1954, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, 'Women's Club at Vaboukori', *ABC Weekly*, 1 January 1955, 6.



to women and Jenkins' own charisma, the program was still being beaten by the commercial stations and their soap operas.

### **Woman to Woman**

One major exception to the soap opera's dominance of the commercial radio in the postwar years, which again shows the exceptionalism of Western Australia, was Irene Greenwood's women's session called *Woman to Woman*. This program was broadcast on Perth commercial station 6PM and relayed to stations in Kalgoorlie and Northam. As Kaye Murray has argued Greenwood intended this program would be 'based on communications and cooperation between and for women.'<sup>126</sup> The session was sponsored by local department store Corot & Co, owned by Jess and Harold Stafford. The Staffords were active members of Perth's Jewish community, with whom Greenwood had close ties—she had sponsored the immigration of several Jewish refugees and had even become a member of the Perth Jewish Women's Association even though she herself was not Jewish.<sup>127</sup> *Woman to Woman* was a successful venture for Corot & Co as they especially benefitted from Greenwood's facilitation of direct listener interaction with their brand through reading their letters about their 'Best Corot Buys.'<sup>128</sup> In the first program, Greenwood clearly outlined the central role that Corot played in the session:

This, I want you to know, is not just MY session, it is OUR SESSION. Yours, and Mine, and Corots who make it possible. We want all women to feel that it is a FREE AND FRIENDLY

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<sup>126</sup> Kaye Murray, *A Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood (1898-1992)* (Perth: Kaye Murray Productions, 2005), 90.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–92.

<sup>128</sup> See for example the listener letters contained in QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 12, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

FORUM OF THE AIR conducted for women—but not only for women.<sup>129</sup>

The clothing advertisements and competitions gave the session a lighter feel than Greenwood's earlier talks for the ABC, however it is clear that the political material was still very much present on the program, albeit cloaked in a more easy-going commercial style. Although it might seem that a commercial station would be at odds with Greenwood's approach to broadcasting, commercial radio offered greater freedom for Greenwood to craft her material without needing to have every word vetted before broadcast as was required on the ABC. Furthermore, for the first time Greenwood would compere her own show and control what went on it—an opportunity she was not offered on the ABC.<sup>130</sup> Finally, this program gave her the ability to reach new kinds of women, especially working-class Perth women who did not usually listen to the more patrician national broadcaster.

Jeannine Baker has shown that Greenwood drew upon her experience of feminist broadcasting in the development of this program, and that she especially sought to integrate her audience into the program by eliciting their opinions on a range of often controversial topics.<sup>131</sup> Baker has argued that *Woman to Woman's* 'difference was marked not only by the foregrounding of non-domestic and political topics, but by the way it paid attention to its audience.'<sup>132</sup> She is correct that Greenwood used the greater flexibility of commercial radio to craft a program that spread her message of feminism and peace. However, I argue that *Woman to Woman* was an attempt to prolong the tenure of this type of talk-based women's session, rather than a 'new kind of women's program' that challenged the status quo of

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<sup>129</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Woman to Woman', Script, April 1948, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>130</sup> Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s-1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017), 299.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

domestic-focused women's sessions.<sup>133</sup> Greenwood claimed that she had left the ABC to host the program because of her concern over listener research figures, which revealed a high percentage of women who primarily listened to serials, and she believed that she was providing 'A-class material' to women listeners of B-class stations.<sup>134</sup> Like King and Jenkins, Greenwood was concerned that women's sessions were being replaced by serial dramas, especially on commercial radio. *Woman to Woman* was therefore less a new challenge to the domestic focus of women's programs in this era, than an attempt to restore a format that was decreasing in popularity. It should therefore be seen within a longer tradition of engaged women's radio programming.

*Woman to Woman* commenced in April 1948 and was broadcast in the afternoons from 2pm until 2.30pm. Each day was set aside for a different feature so that women would never need to guess what would be on that day. Mondays featured a guest of the week, usually a notable woman leader in some capacity. On Tuesdays Greenwood discussed her 'Woman of the Week,' whom she chose as a notable woman leader from anywhere in the world. On Wednesday she gave book reviews, and on Thursday she read out listeners' letters which had been submitted in response to a pre-set question. Fridays featured a segment called 'Radio Roundabout' which gave details of events happening around Perth, such as plays and lectures.<sup>135</sup>

The *Broadcaster* reported upon the program's commencement that Greenwood planned to 'make the program Australian in spirit, cultural and humanitarian in outlook and to build it on news interest.'<sup>136</sup> Listeners to Greenwood's ABC talks welcomed the new program and the leadership that she provided on major issues. One country listener wrote

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>134</sup> Murray, *A Voice for Peace*, 90-91.

<sup>135</sup> Irene Greenwood, 'Woman to Woman: 1<sup>st</sup> Diary', QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>136</sup> Untitled article, *Broadcaster*, 24 April 1948, 11.

to the *Broadcaster* in May 1948 to express her views on the role that Greenwood played as a leader through her broadcasts:

She said that women alone could not do much but it took men and women together to cure the world's ills. Those are my sentiments and those of most women today who find themselves with problems that are the result of the two world wars.<sup>137</sup>

Greenwood herself was therefore considered by her listeners to be a leader, but she also used her platform to give publicity to a significant number of women in a range of leadership positions on her program. The 'Guest of the Week' segment was an interview with a notable personality, usually a woman, either a local or a visitor. Greenwood interviewed hundreds of women over the course of the program from well-known figures, such as actress Dinah Shearing, to local activists.<sup>138</sup>

On 26 October 1953 Greenwood interviewed Nora Shea, who was purportedly the first Aboriginal woman employed in the Western Australian public service. Greenwood wrote to the editor of the *Broadcaster* as part of her weekly bulletin of *Woman to Woman's* weekly schedule:

Nora Shea is a telephonist at Native Affairs Dept...[s]he is one of the coloured West Australians who is earning a respected place in our community and is working hard for her group's attempt to get Hostels for Original Australians by their own efforts.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> 'Country Mouse', 'New Women's Session', *Broadcaster*, 8 May 1948, 17.

<sup>138</sup> Irene Greenwood's "Woman to Woman" Session. Stations 6 PM – 6 AM Daily at 2 p.m., 21 December 1953, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; 'Woman to Woman', Script, 1 May 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 25b, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>139</sup> Irene Greenwood's "Woman to Woman" Session. Stations 6 PM – 6 AM Daily at 2 p.m., 26 October 1953, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

In this interview Shea discussed her work with the Coolbaroo League (CL). Founded in 1947, this organisation was an Indigenous social club that raised awareness of issues that affected the lives of Aboriginal people in Western Australia.<sup>140</sup> Shea was especially involved in the CL's fundraising for Aboriginal hostels in Perth, and in her interview with Greenwood she explained the importance of the initiative for the lives of many young Aboriginal people. Shea described how many young men and women had to refuse 'apprenticeships and very good jobs in Perth' due to 'lack of suitable accommodation':

If boys and girls both had a hostel near Perth from where they could go to their respectful trades and places of employment, it would give all who occupied them a great chance and I am sure the hostels would prove their worth, and they would show, as many have shown already just what our people can do given the chance.<sup>141</sup>

Greenwood's interview with Shea generated considerable publicity. *Woman's Day* picked up the story and interviewed Shea about her life and work with the CL in September 1956, and featured a photograph of her in the studio with Greenwood.<sup>142</sup> Shea was a rare example of an Aboriginal woman who had the chance to speak on the radio, and it should be emphasised that her ability to do so was due in large part to her respectability as a gainfully employed public servant. However, Shea also used the opportunity to advocate for greater support for young Aboriginal people to achieve their potential, and to highlight to a predominantly white audience that work that Aboriginal people themselves were doing through organisations such as the CL.

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<sup>140</sup> 'Coolbaroo League'm *Kaartdijin Noongar - Noongar Knowledge*, <https://www.noongarculture.org.au/coolbaroo-league/>, accessed 22 November 2017.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Hugh Schmidt, 'The Half-Caste Crusader', *Woman's Day*, 17 September 1956, 44.

*Woman to Woman* presented a coherent and usually unchallenged message to its listeners—it was not a forum for free debate but a tool for Greenwood to promote her messages to an audience of working-class women. John Andrew Richardson has argued that Greenwood exercised a high degree of control over the program’s image. In the case of her interviews, she selected guests whom she knew fit with her feminist message and often drafted an outline of the interview beforehand, thus attempting to control the topics discussed and to create a ‘consensus dialogue.’<sup>143</sup> She took a similar approach in the ‘Mailbag to Microphone’ segment. Greenwood chose the topic that listeners were to respond to, then selected letters to be sent to an adjudicator who would choose the winner and a runner-up. These letters were then read over the air. As Richardson has noted the adjudicators were generally professional, middle-class women who were ‘receptive to the ideology of the



Figure omitted from digital version of the thesis.

**Figure 6.2: Nora Shea and Irene Greenwood in the studio, 1953,  
State Library of Western Australia.**

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<sup>143</sup> John Andrew Richardson, ‘The Limits of Authorship: The Radio Broadcasts of Irene Greenwood, 1936-1954’ (Honours Thesis, Murdoch University, 1988), 63–65.

women's movement'—often Greenwood's friends.<sup>144</sup> Sometimes these women also entered letters themselves. For example, WSG president Isabel Johnson won in April 1951 for her letter about the qualities required of women in parliament. Greenwood was also an active member of the WSG and the adjudicator, Ida Swift, was Johnson's neighbour.<sup>145</sup> In this way even the segments of the show which purported to present the opinions of other women were structured to reinforce Greenwood's vision. Richardson has argued that Greenwood created this consensus dialogue because of her sincere belief in her role to educate the public through her broadcasts.<sup>146</sup> However, it is also important to recognise that the control she had over the message of the program was a key way in which she exercised leadership over these issues. Greenwood believed that to combat what she saw as the increasingly dominant message that a woman's place was in the home, she needed to enter the home with her own consistent message that women's contribution to the public sphere was crucial for the development of postwar society.

*Woman to Woman* needed to present a clear and coherent message which emphasised the capacity of women to contribute to society and culture on equal terms with men. At a time when that message was being undermined by an emphasis on domesticity the program pointed to the examples of thousands of women across the world who were working to make the world a better place. This was especially the case in the 'Woman of the Week' segment, which was the successor to Greenwood's long-running ABC talks on *Women in the International News*, and they were structured in a similar way. She identified notable women from her reading, or women who were in the news or connected to an important date. In March 1949, for example, she discussed the appointment of Isobel McCorkindale, who had long been an organiser in the WCTU and had lived and worked all over Australia, as one of Australia's representatives to the United Nations Status of Women Commission. Greenwood

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 69.

emphasised McCorkindale's outstanding qualifications, including her extensive world travel, her lecturing and writing, and her long involvement with many journals. Greenwood argued that these attributes would enable her to make an outstanding contribution to the project of bringing 'women up to that status where they have the same democratic rights as men enjoy as citizens, and workers' in all nations of the world.<sup>147</sup> Greenwood emphasised the importance of speech to successful leadership in her description of McCorkindale:

An impression of a quick brain matched by a vocabulary and a voice that add up to one of the best platform speakers among Australia's women. Not an orator...but a reasoned, fluent speaker, who can hold audiences entranced for hours, without boring, or losing interest. Who can present a reasoned case, and give history, background, present all sides of a question, and sum up admirably.<sup>148</sup>

Throughout the program's tenure the 'Woman of the Week' segment focused on a range of women from across the world and across time, thereby highlighting both the longevity and scope of women's contributions to society, politics and culture in a global context. For example, to celebrate American Independence Day on 4 July 1950 she discussed the status of American women. She noted that a 'large number of American women maintain their careers after marriage' not because of economic necessity, but because they 'feel they make a greater contribution to family life than if they became mere housewives.'<sup>149</sup> Greenwood was also keenly aware of the importance of women's history well before it was found on academic curricula and would regularly profile leading women from the past. In January 1951, for example, she gave a series of talks called 'Looking Backwards' which highlighted 'some

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<sup>147</sup> 'Woman to Woman', Script, 1 March 1949, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> 'Irene Greenwood's Woman to Woman', *Broadcaster*, 1 July 1950, 50.



of the women who helped shape the ideals of a young country,' who included Australian suffragist Rose Scott and writer and preacher Catherine Helen Spence.<sup>150</sup> By discussing these subjects, Greenwood examined how women had stepped out of their domestic roles in different historical and cultural contexts, thereby promoting a sense of global and historical solidarity.

Another key aspect of these talks was Greenwood's emphasis on the range of careers available to women. In April 1950 she profiled Dorothy McCullough Lee, the mayor of Portland, Oregon. Greenwood noted that not only was Lee a pathbreaker for winning the position, but also because Lee had done so with overwhelming popular support: 'At this time when we hear the call so frequently from women's groups for more women in public office, it is of great moment that Mrs Lee was elected to office of Mayor more overwhelmingly than any other previous mayoral candidate.'<sup>151</sup> For Greenwood, this example demonstrated that it was not only possible for women to attain leadership positions but to be popular and respected in those positions. In 1950 she profiled 'women in unusual jobs,' including South Australian lawyer Mary Tenison Woods, American anthropologist Margaret Mead, and American fashion designer Ethel Klamroth.<sup>152</sup> Greenwood also gave a series of talks about careers for women, to help parents guide their daughters into an appropriate vocation, thereby using her position to promote careers for young women.<sup>153</sup> As these examples demonstrate, Greenwood used *Woman to Woman* to promote women's leadership and highlight what women were capable of achieving.

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<sup>150</sup> 'Irene Greenwood's "Woman to Woman" Session. Stations 6 PM – 6 AM Daily at 2 p.m.', 29 January 1951, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; 'Irene Greenwood's "Woman to Woman" Session. Stations 6 PM – 6 AM Daily at 2 p.m.', 5 February 1951, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>151</sup> 'Irene Greenwood's "Woman to Woman" Session. Stations 6 PM – 6 AM Daily at 2 p.m.', 1 April 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>152</sup> 'Irene Greenwood's Woman to Woman', *Broadcaster*, 10 June 1950, 51; 'Irene Greenwood's Woman to Woman', *Broadcaster*, 17 June 1950, 51; 'Irene Greenwood's Woman to Woman', *Broadcaster*, 25 June 1950, 51.

<sup>153</sup> 'Irene Greenwood's "Woman to Woman" Session. Stations 6 PM – 6 AM Daily at 2 p.m.', 4 December 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

Greenwood also used her sessions to promote the visibility of women whom she knew and respected. For example, she gave a tribute to feminist Linda Littlejohn following her death in March 1949.<sup>154</sup> She provided a general biography for her listeners, and then gave her own personal memories of Littlejohn. In this tribute, Greenwood made clear the impact that Littlejohn had on her own broadcasting career. As noted in Chapter Two, when Littlejohn ran the women's session on 2UE in Sydney in the 1930s, Greenwood would deputise for her when she was out of town. As a result, Greenwood found herself 'doing broadcasting, debating, and speaking more and more on public platforms where she had been asked to speak.'<sup>155</sup> Greenwood mused that 'no other woman had so great an influence upon me, for she literally shaped my ideas through reading the books which she generously gave to me.'<sup>156</sup> Littlejohn's status as a leader—a persuasive speaker, organiser, mentor, and broadcaster—is apparent in this talk. Greenwood also makes clear the extent to which broadcasting as a tool of women's leadership was pioneered and then shared with others by Littlejohn. This example shows that the development of radio as a key platform from which women could exercise leadership on the big issues of the day was very much the result of the drive of individual women who recognised the power of the medium and especially its ability to reach a large audience of women.

At the beginning of each new year Greenwood used several sessions to discuss 'women in the news, and the news they affected' throughout the previous twelve months. In January 1949, for example, Greenwood looked back on 1948 and discussed athlete Shirley Strickland's success at the London Olympics, as well as the relative backwardness of Australia regarding women's equality. She noted that 'returning travellers tell us again and again that in Britain, and in Europe, women have succeeded in doing anything they want to do without

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<sup>154</sup> 'Woman to Woman', Script, 29 March 1949, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

limitations.<sup>157</sup> Scandinavian countries were particularly advanced in this regard. By contrast, any Australian woman in an ‘unusual post’ was so rare that she became news.<sup>158</sup> Greenwood’s extensive knowledge of the fight for women’s equality in different parts of the world was an important aspect of her leadership on that issue in Australia. By comparing the situation in Australia to like-minded nations and informing her listeners about the gains made by women in the United States and Europe, she sought to fuel in her listeners not only a recognition that greater gender equality was possible, but anger that Australia was lagging behind. In this way, she tried to develop a feminist consciousness amongst her listeners, especially amongst the more working-class audience that she was capturing through her commercial program.

Greenwood retired from broadcasting in March 1954, after two decades of being a leading radio voice for the peace movement and women’s equality in Western Australia. The *Broadcaster* reported that, during her six years of hosting *Woman to Woman*, she had interviewed over three hundred guests of the week, profiled thousands of women as part of the ‘Woman of the Week’ segment and interviewed another three hundred women as part of the radio roundabout segment.<sup>159</sup> The letters she received from listeners when *Woman to Woman* went off the air indicate that her approach was appreciated. One Kalgoorlie woman was appreciative that Greenwood ‘brought the woman of the outback to the city,’ and a British migrant in Perth ‘came to know much about Australia and its people’ through the session and was now happily settled.<sup>160</sup> Although not as longstanding as King’s session, *Woman to Woman* demonstrated that commercial radio could also offer feminist programming and that the presence of clothing advertisements did not necessarily preclude discussions of women’s equality.

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<sup>157</sup> ‘Woman to Woman’, Script, 11 January 1949, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Irene Greenwood Says Farewell to Radio’, *Broadcaster*, 3 April 1954, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Joyce Hardey to Irene Greenwood, 20 March 1954, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Beryl Harper to Irene Greenwood, 18 March 1954, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on several women who continued to advocate for daytime radio as a platform for women to engage in public discourse at a time when radio was increasingly turning toward serial dramas as its primary form of daytime programming. Soap operas were especially lucrative for commercial stations, as they leveraged their significant female audience to attract advertisers to sponsor increasing numbers of dramas. The rising popularity of serials alarmed those who believed that radio's most important role was as a medium which fostered an engaged citizenry—especially one that included women citizens. Women such as Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, Catherine King, and Irene Greenwood all viewed women's programming as a way to bring the public sphere to housewives, and housewives into the public sphere. They also built their own profiles as leading women through the medium, something which could not continue if audiences dwindled. These women continued to view broadcasting, and especially women's sessions, as a key platform for the advancement of women's equality in the postwar era.

Why did talk-based women's sessions decline in this period? Firstly, it should be remembered that women's sessions were a type of programming which was developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s—they were therefore a product of an earlier generation and their appeal to younger listeners was clearly waning in comparison with soap operas. Women's sessions were most popular in the crisis years of the 1930s and 1940s, and their ethos of social justice, intellectual engagement and active citizenship may not have been as appealing as prosperity grew in the postwar era. Secondly, soap operas were powerful dramatisations of the complexities, frustrations and joys of women's lives, while also being well-produced and entertaining. They were therefore both a form of escapism from boredom and a validation of women's experiences. Western Australia does provide an exception to the general pattern as talk-based women's sessions thrived there until the 1960s, as seen in the examples of King and Greenwood. The next chapter will explore some of the ways that these

and other local sessions fulfilled needs specific to women in the west and other areas outside of the major east coast capitals of Melbourne and Sydney.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ‘We Span the Distance’:

#### Women’s Radio and Regional Communities

City women have so much and country women so little in the way of recreation. I would like to see greater specialisation in broadcast services to the outback.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1948 the woman member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), Ivy Kent, visited Adelaide to get South Australian women’s feedback on the quality of ABC programming. The *News* reported that South Australians ‘felt they should not be “swamped” by relays from the eastern States’ and ‘intelligent women’ wanted content that went ‘deeper than recipe sessions.’<sup>2</sup> Kent was impressed with these suggestions and believed that ‘more attention should be paid to interviews with important visitors at times that suit women listeners.’<sup>3</sup> The special circumstances of women in rural areas of the state were also considered, as demonstrated in the above epigraph. These complaints provide an excellent example of the complex meanings of women’s radio in Australia in the mid-twentieth century. Women in urban areas had very different needs to those in rural areas, while listeners in states other than New South Wales and Victoria bristled at the dominance of programming produced on the east coast. While there were complaints about the centralising influence of radio, Kent’s response also indicated that radio had the potential to meet the differing needs of female listeners across the country and give a voice to women in their local communities.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Women Complain of Radio Sessions’, *News* (Adelaide), 3 August 1948, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

This chapter uses several case studies of women's radio programs in areas outside of the major east coast capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne to examine how women broadcasters used the medium to fulfil the distinctive needs of sub-national communities. These examples include Catherine King's use of the medium to foster a distinctive Western Australian identity and to address issues specific to women in the state, especially those in very remote areas. The chapter also looks at examples of local radio programs from Newcastle, Wagga Wagga, and Shepparton, as well as the Queensland *ABC Women's Session* and the national *Country Hour Women's Session*, an ABC program which attempted to foster a national community of country women. Radio stations became an integral part of the patterns of life across the nation from the 1930s until the 1950s, and, as this chapter shows, broadcasting was adapted to address the various needs of different communities. Within this context women broadcasters played a very important role by providing practical support and companionship to their listeners, bridging long distances between women in their regions, fostering distinctive identities, and providing intellectual stimulation. In many cases these broadcasters were not only recognisable radio voices but were civic leaders who actively worked to improve the lives of their listeners and communities.

### **Gender, Radio, and Country Life**

The relationship between the city and the country is, as Graeme Davison has noted, one of the 'great themes' of Australian history. This relationship has been characterised by an idealisation of the bush in national mythology, even while the bush shrinks and the cities grow.<sup>4</sup> Kate Murphy has argued that elite discourse has promoted the bush as the solution to problems caused by urbanised modernity for over a century.<sup>5</sup> In the early twentieth century

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<sup>4</sup> Graeme Davison, 'Fatal Attraction? The Lure of Technology and the Decline of Rural Australia 1890-2000', *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003), 41.

<sup>5</sup> Kate Murphy, 'Rural Womanhood and the "Embellishment" of Rural Life in Urban Australia', in *Struggle Country: The Rural Ideal in Twentieth Century Australia*, ed. Graeme Davison and Marc Brodie (Melbourne: Monash University ePress), 34.

the city was painted as being responsible for bad health, lowered fertility, and looser morality. Rural settlement was promoted as the solution to the declining birth rate, as the natural environment supposedly encouraged more frequent and better quality breeding. By the 1920s this pro-natalist sentiment had given way to a fixation on the morality of young women, which was supposedly imperilled by their presence in urban areas as increasing numbers moved to the city for work. Country girls were painted as paragons of pure femininity who needed to be protected from the negative influences of city life.<sup>6</sup>

This idealisation of rural femininity resulted in a discursive push to ‘present country life as more attractive, less arduous, and to depict the rural woman of the 1920s as a contented, domestic-maternal figure rather than an overworked drudge.’<sup>7</sup> During the 1920s the amenities available in rural areas lagged behind those in the cities, but new technologies including the telephone and the pedal wireless promised significant improvements in the quality of life in isolated communities. As Richard Waterhouse has observed, rural Australians believed that women would be more willing to settle in their communities if they had access to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the ability to easily communicate with friends and family, and the ability to educate their children via the pedal wireless. The possibilities presented by radio were also presented as a key part of the attractiveness of bush living—women could have the best of both city and country.<sup>8</sup>

Radio was a modern technological wonder which transformed private leisure, political culture and, as I have shown in this thesis, women’s integration into the public sphere. But radio had an even greater impact in regional areas, and from the mid-1920s stations and advocates for radio promised to bring the city to the country. Stations began to install wirelesses as soon as they could receive broadcasts, and shearers even purchased their

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<sup>6</sup> Murphy, ‘Rural Womanhood’, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Waterhouse, *The Vision Splendid: A Social and Cultural History of Rural Australia* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2005), 219.



own sets to take with them, claiming that they quelled the loneliness of camping. Wireless sets were also used as public entertainment in country towns. Radio carried very practical benefits for rural communities, as it enabled farmers to access market reports more quickly than ever and schoolchildren to access educational broadcasts. There was hope that the medium would assist in arresting the depopulation of rural areas by bringing some of the culture and entertainment that was previously lacking.<sup>9</sup>

The radio press trumpeted the benefits of the new medium to regional communities. For example, an article published in the *Listener In* in July 1930 announced that the medium had ‘shattered’ the isolation of the outback.<sup>10</sup> Farmers no longer needed to make long journeys on dirt roads into town to find out financial information, but could now hear it announced multiple times a day. They could also listen to talks on agricultural issues and get new ideas. However, its biggest impact was bringing entertainment to country homes. As the report noted: ‘Wireless has brought a flood of sunshine into what was often for them a drab and monotonous existence, filling in the gaps of many long winter evenings with an intriguing interest.’<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, women’s sessions kept farmers’ wives up-to-date with their ‘sisters in the city.’<sup>12</sup> It would not be long, this author opined, before the radio was considered as essential to the running of the farm as a plough or a harvester.<sup>13</sup>

Radio likewise brought the country to the city, and thereby played a significant role in bringing the concerns and experiences of regional areas into mainstream (urban) discourse. This was achieved through programs like Gwen Meredith’s ABC serial *The Lawsons*, commissioned in the 1940s to disseminate the latest farming practices as part of post-war reconstruction.<sup>14</sup> As Megan Blair has argued, the serial depicted rural Australians as willing

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 241–42.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Radio—Down on the Farm’, *Listener In*, 5 July 1930, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Megan Blair, ‘Listening in to the Lawsons: Radio Crosses the Urban-Rural Divide’, in Graeme Davison and Marc Brodie (eds.), *Struggle Country: The Rural Ideal in Twentieth Century Australia* (Melbourne: Monash

to adopt modern, scientific agricultural knowledge while also educating urban Australians about farming practices.<sup>15</sup> Meredith also created female leads who blended the physical work of farm life with romance and beauty—a representation which again promoted country life as attractive for women.<sup>16</sup> Radio therefore held significant utility in improving communication between city and country and in integrating rural areas into popular culture.

Although the potential of radio to improve the lives of rural dwellers was often repeated as one of the medium's key benefits, most Australians in rural areas could not access radio on anywhere close to the same level as their urban counterparts until at least the late 1930s. Most urban stations could not be heard in the country and there were few regional stations at first. Country listeners also required more expensive sets in order to get adequate reception. The relatively low rates of electrification in rural areas posed a further problem, as rural listeners could only use battery sets and not the more sophisticated plug-in sets that their urban counterparts could use.<sup>17</sup> In 1950, for example, ninety-five per cent of Melbourne households had electricity, but only half of households in the Mallee and Wimmera regions in north-western Victoria were electrified, demonstrating the significant gap between urban and rural development in Australia in this period.<sup>18</sup>

The arrival of the wireless also elicited anxiety and criticism within regional Australia. As Davison has argued, technological innovation has been a 'fatal attraction' for the bush, as the benefits of new amenities were often accompanied by an erosion of the unique character and lifestyle of rural communities.<sup>19</sup> Many were also critical of what they saw as the centralising influence of radio, which increasingly broadcast material produced in major cities—especially serial dramas from the 1940s.<sup>20</sup> However, this argument neglects the role

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University ePress, 2005, 130–31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> Davison, 'Fatal Attraction?', 49–50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–52.

that women's radio sessions played in regional Australia. These programs were key points of social interaction and citizenship activity until well into the 1950s. Radio was useful in fostering communities and identities for those in regions outside of the capital cities, as it connected people living on rural properties to the towns and to each other. In an era when travelling into town was less common, radio provided a much-needed link to other members of the community, and this was especially so for country women.

### **The Role of Radio Clubs in Regional Communities**

Regional women's radio clubs enabled women in town and on properties to connect with each other daily, host get-togethers on a regular basis, and perform fundraising and other charitable works to support the community. They provided daily contact with other women in the area, which went a long way to alleviate the loneliness of women on farms and in small villages. As such, these clubs were a significant feature of regional communities from the 1930s until the 1950s, and notably offered women an opportunity to fulfil their civic duty to their communities.

In the 1920s the Country Women's Association (CWA) began to establish radio listening clubs in regional communities, where a radio would be set up in a public space such as a school and members would come and listen together. 2GB was also involved in arranging these sorts of clubs by broadcasting special sessions for country women on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings. The *Cootamundra Herald* reported in November 1926 that the organiser of the program, Nell Dungey, argued that the happiness of remote communities would be exponentially improved by a radio set being set up in the village hall, which would enable the community to assemble every night of the week if they wished.<sup>21</sup>

Just as radio clubs such as the 2GB Happiness Club began to be established in major cities throughout the Great Depression, regional stations began to establish their own clubs

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<sup>21</sup> 'Women's Radio Clubs: Forming in the Country', *Cootamundra Herald*, 3 November 1926, 4.

during the 1930s. The 3SR Friendship Club, for example, was established in Shepparton, Victoria, in February 1937 and was heard in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales.<sup>22</sup> In a profile of the club for the *Argus Women's Magazine* in 1946, then-leader Elizabeth Burchill described how the club had offered 'practical friendship' to women in the region since its inception: 'Help for those who have lost their home, help for those who are sick, help in the house, practical help—those are things that spring from the spirit which is the driving force of the Friendship Club.'<sup>23</sup> The club's objectives were to 'foster the spirit of friendship, to organise social gatherings, and to develop a spirit of community service.'<sup>24</sup> The club's motto was 'We Span the Distance,' which succinctly encapsulated the role of the club as a means of connecting women living across the region.<sup>25</sup> In 1947 the 3SR Friendship Club had approximately 10,000 members who raised money for hospitals, blind appeals, bush fire victims and the Food for Britain appeal. The daily radio sessions featured '[i]deas, thoughts, amusing incidents.'<sup>26</sup> Burchill also reflected on the importance of the club leader, noting that it was her 'privilege to follow Marjorie [Sutton], whose charming voice and attractive personality captured the hearts of clubbers and other listeners far and wide.'<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the listeners of 3SR appear to have had particularly strong opinions about the on-air personalities of the club leaders. A 'Satisfied Listener' wrote to the *Listener In* in March 1945 to praise 'young announcer' Pat Hamilton, who the letter writer predicted would 'go a long way in the radio world.'<sup>28</sup> In November 1945, another listener wrote in to praise Sutton, 'the best lady announcer on 3SR.'<sup>29</sup> The listener lauded her sympathy and

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<sup>22</sup> '3SR—"The Heart of Victoria"', *Argus*, 2 February 1937, 15; "'Mary Ann" Leaves 3SR', *Australasian*, 10 December 1938, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Burchill, 'Friendship that is Practical', *Argus Women's Magazine*, 17 July 1946, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> 'Satisfied Listener', '3SR Announcers', *Listener In*, 3 March 1945, 21.

<sup>29</sup> 'Nanna', '3SR's Marjorie Sutton', *Listener In*, 24 November 1945, 19.

understanding and her organisational capacity as leader of the 3SR Friendship Club.<sup>30</sup> In late 1955 a controversy erupted in the letters pages of the *Listener In* after Helen Thomas took over from 'Maree' as the compere of the Friendship Club. A listener complained in September that Thomas would be a better host if she refrained from saying 'terribly adorable' or 'awfully beautiful' so often.<sup>31</sup> This elicited a number of responses from club members. Some argued that Maree had left the club near extinction, and that Thomas had revived it by 'making it interesting again' and that she was 'cultured' and refined. Others argued that Maree 'had a good sense of humour' and shared the daily struggles of her listeners because she was married, while Thomas was not.<sup>32</sup> Another wrote to argue that the 'clubbers' had been disloyal in abandoning Maree.<sup>33</sup> These letters demonstrate the important role that women's radio clubs played in the local community and the sometimes passionate opinions that listeners held about the comperes and content of these sessions. The women who hosted these sessions were not just radio comperes but community leaders—they were usually fully involved in local activities and were well-known in the area.

Although many women broadcast on the radio stations that served their local area, there is evidence that some women broadcasters moved around regional stations to develop their careers. One notable example is Betty Raymond, a broadcaster whose career spanned stations in Tasmania, Victoria, and South Australia—including serving as the compere of the 3SR Friendship Club in the 1940s. She started her career in 1936 as host of the children's club on station 7BU in Burnie, Tasmania, where she also did announcing for the women's session, as well as commentaries of local events. Through her work at 7BU Raymond played a significant role in the northern Tasmanian community during this period. During 1938 there was a polio epidemic in Tasmania, which led the Launceston hospital to become

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> 'Col-ar-sal', 'Listeners Viewpoint', *Listener In*, 17 September 1955, 25.

<sup>32</sup> 'Helen or Maree? For and Against', *Listener In*, 5 November 1955, 25.

<sup>33</sup> 'Still they Argue: Maree or Helen?', *Listener In* 19 November 1955, 17.

overcrowded. To help with the crisis she regularly broadcast live from the hospital to entertain the children and organised a picnic for 3000 children and their families where Dame Enid Lyons presented trophies to the children. For her efforts she was made a life member of the Crippled Children's Association.<sup>34</sup>

After the outbreak of war Raymond felt that she had to 'branch out' to the mainland to contribute to the war effort, as Tasmania felt 'cut off' from the action.<sup>35</sup> In 1941 she found a job as the compere of the 3SR Friendship Club in Shepparton—a much larger station than 7BU. She moved into a boarding house in the centre of Shepparton and quickly became established in the town.<sup>36</sup> Her role within the area significantly impacted on her privacy, as Raymond recalled in the 1950s: 'I had no private life at all... There were 10,000 members and 35 branches in a radius of 100 miles, and most of my time was spent officiating at annual meetings.'<sup>37</sup> In her role on 3SR she hosted the daily women's club session, performed general announcing duties and did fundraising for the merchant navy and the local hospital. She also gave regular broadcasts on the war situation in Britain called 'London Letter.' These broadcasts were relayed in station 3UZ in Melbourne and helped to increase her profile there. She eventually took a job at Melbourne station 3KZ in 1944, where she compered the children's program and a women's session, as well as performing general announcing duties. She stayed at 3KZ until she married Flight Lieutenant John Clarebrough in 1946 and moved to Adelaide. From April 1947 until March 1951 she worked at commercial station 5DN as the women's session compere, known as the 'social editress.'<sup>38</sup> In this role she reported on events occurring in South Australian society, especially live theatre, which boomed in

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<sup>34</sup> Betty Raymond interviewed by Nancy Flannery, 26 June 1984, 214829, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> 'Long Radio Job Ends', *Mail* (Adelaide), 3 March 1951, 35.

<sup>38</sup> 'Retirement from Radio', *News* (Adelaide), 28 February 1951, 19.

Adelaide in the postwar years. She also broadcast a program from the local hospital and was closely involved with fundraising, just like her role on 7BU in the 1930s.<sup>39</sup>

Raymond's career in radio spanned over a decade, three states, and both regional and metropolitan stations. Reflecting on her remarkable career in an oral history interview in 1984, Raymond noted that women of her era were lucky to enjoy a different lifestyle to their mothers, as they married later due to the war and could thus have careers beforehand. Although she left her position at 5DN once she had children, she mused that she was 'foolish' not to have gone back to work. She believed that radio was a fantastic medium for helping people, as listeners wanted 'philosophy and caring' and to talk about personal things. Women's radio clubs were especially important in filling that need amongst audiences and as a result listeners considered announcers to be their friends. The work that Raymond performed in her local communities, especially in Burnie and Shepparton, further demonstrated the importance of radio stations as pillars of the community that worked to improve the lives of residents by providing entertainment, companionship, and fundraising.

2WG, a B-Class station broadcast out of Wagga Wagga, in the New South Wales Riverina, provides another example of the active role that radio stations played in local communities during the mid-twentieth century. The station was established by Eric and Nan Roberts, who were schoolteachers from Narrandera, 100 kilometres west of Wagga Wagga. Eric Roberts was a keen amateur radio builder and kept up this hobby throughout the late 1920s, until the school district decided that his hobby was impinging on his duties as an educator and asked him to give it up. Instead, Eric and Nan both resigned and moved to Wagga Wagga in 1931, where they began the process of setting up a radio station. They received a B-Class licence that year but according to their daughter, Wendy Hucker, experienced difficulties in convincing local businesses to advertise on the radio as it was an unfamiliar and untested medium in the region. They eventually received enough capital to

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<sup>39</sup> Betty Raymond interviewed by Nancy Flannery, 26 June 1984.

begin broadcasting in June 1932, and the station was a rapid success. Hucker believed that the number of radio sets in households in the Riverina grew quickly in the early 1930s due to the availability of a local commercial station—prior to that only the ABC could be heard in the region. The station soon firmly established itself as a pillar of the local community. It connected Wagga Wagga with the surrounding towns and villages and fostered a more cohesive Riverina community, while providing much-desired entertainment. Like other country stations it also provided essential public services, such as bushfire and flood warnings and local bulletins. Hucker believed that 2WG was proud of being very much a Riverina station.<sup>40</sup>

The 2WG Women’s Club was started in 1937 by Nan Roberts, who identified a need for a club to ameliorate the loneliness of country women—especially those on farms outside of the region’s major towns. As Hucker, observed it fulfilled a very important role of ‘friendship across the distance.’<sup>41</sup> Each town or village within receiving range of 2WG set up its own branch of the club with a branch president and secretary. An estimated forty to fifty towns had branches, including Griffith, Leeton, Tarcutta, Batlow, and Tumbarumba. At its peak in the late 1940s and early 1950s the club had approximately 22,000 members.<sup>42</sup> This was a significant percentage of the women in the area. According to the 1954 census, the Riverina district had a population of 40,484 females and the South Western Slope district had 61,649—a combined 102,133 females in the region that 2WG broadcast to. Wagga Wagga itself had a population of 9,852 females, which indicates that a substantial number of the club’s members came from outside the town.<sup>43</sup> The local branches would fundraise and

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<sup>40</sup> Wendy Hucker interviewed by Bob Pymm, 2005, 0548718, Wagga Wagga City Library, Wagga Wagga.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Marie Black interviewed by Bob Pymm, 2007, 0590730, Wagga Wagga City Library, Wagga Wagga.

<sup>43</sup> Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1954, Volume I. – New South Wales, Part I. – Analysis of Population in Local Government Areas, etc.*, Canberra, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/5F8EE4B9D3A06B72CA257872001CD4DC/\\$File/1954%20Census%20-%20Volume%20I%20-%20Part%20I%20NEW%20SOUTH%20WALES%20Analysis%20of%20Population%20in%20LGA.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/5F8EE4B9D3A06B72CA257872001CD4DC/$File/1954%20Census%20-%20Volume%20I%20-%20Part%20I%20NEW%20SOUTH%20WALES%20Analysis%20of%20Population%20in%20LGA.pdf), accessed 6 March 2018.



hold events for their local area, but some of the money raised would go back to the central club funds to be put toward bigger projects for the region.<sup>44</sup> The club's constitution stated: 'The 2WG Women's Club is intended to foster a spirit of loyalty to our Queen and Country and of goodwill and service amongst the members of the community.'<sup>45</sup>

The club was centred on the daily radio session and the compere was also the president of the club as a whole. The session was broadcast twice a day—from 10.45am to 11am and 11.30-12pm.<sup>46</sup> There were no fees to join the club, and all members were given a radio name, which was a common feature of women's radio clubs during this period.<sup>47</sup> The radio sessions primarily consisted of reading the letters of club members, which made the sessions intimate and social. These letters were especially important for women outside of town centres, who could not socialise with other women as easily as those in the towns.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Jacqueline Kent has argued that in regional communities like the Riverina women's radio clubs became a substitute for chats over the back fence.<sup>49</sup> The club's rules clearly stipulated that members were to submit a letter of 'two normal sized pages' each month.<sup>50</sup> Women were also able to request that the compere make birthday calls to friends or relatives on their behalf.<sup>51</sup>

The 2WG Women's Club's radio sessions were first compered by Susan Barrie, a newcomer to broadcasting with a reportedly charming personality, and from mid-1938 by Kay Millin (later Brownbill), a veteran broadcaster from South Australia who would later make the leap into political citizenship by becoming the third woman elected to the

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<sup>44</sup> Marie Black Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>45</sup> 2WG Miscellaneous File, 0482529, Wagga Wagga City Library, Wagga Wagga.

<sup>46</sup> Marie Black Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>47</sup> Wendy Hucker Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>48</sup> Evelyn Patterson Interviewed by Bob Pymm, 16 May 2006, 0547537, Wagga Wagga City Library, Wagga Wagga.

<sup>49</sup> Jacqueline Kent, quoted in Amy Heap and Bob Pymm, 'Wagga Wagga Women's Wireless and the Web: Local Studies and New Technologies', *The Australian Library Journal* 58, no. 1 (2009), 9.

<sup>50</sup> 2WG Miscellaneous File.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Australian House of Representatives.<sup>52</sup> Millin was described in *Radio Pictorial* as ‘exuding efficiency and charm.’<sup>53</sup> But it was Ada Webb, known on air by her club name ‘Cobby,’ who came to define the 2WG Women’s Club. Webb became the president and compere in 1939 and stayed in the role for nearly nineteen years. Her daughter, Marie Black, stated that the role was her mother’s full-time job and that she was heavily involved in the day to day operations of the club, including running the radio session and organising fundraising activities. Black estimated that Webb handled approximately 200,000 pounds between 1942 and 1954. This was a change from previous club presidents, as the 2WG Women’s Club was only one part of their job duties at 2WG—they were also general announcers, advertising script writers and administrative assistants. Webb developed epilepsy in the mid-1950s and had several seizures on air yet continued to work until she resigned to care for her husband in 1958. The club kept going under another president until 1965.<sup>54</sup>

Both Hucker and former 2WG announcer Evelyn Patterson noted that announcers were not allowed to express individuality on the air and were required to stick to the script.<sup>55</sup> Hucker believed that this was so that no announcer could ‘build a personality cult.’<sup>56</sup> This policy chafed on a number of announcers who left the station to pursue careers in Sydney.<sup>57</sup> However it appears that this policy did not apply as stringently to the presenters of the 2WG Women’s Club’s sessions, perhaps due to their additional roles as organisers of fundraising and club activities. The club broadcasts also brought in a substantial proportion of the station’s advertising revenue, which probably also helped insulate it from the policy.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wendy Hucker Interviewed by Bob Pymm; ‘Meet Susan Barrie’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, October 1937, 33; Rosemary Francis, ‘Brownbill, Kay Catherine Millin (1914-2002)’, *The Australian Women’s Register*, The National Foundation of Australian Women and The University of Melbourne, 2009, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE4046b.htm>, accessed 6 March 2018.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Behind the Dial at 2WG Wagga’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, July 1938, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Marie Black Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>55</sup> Wendy Hucker Interviewed by Bob Pymm; Evelyn Patterson Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>56</sup> Wendy Hucker Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Marie Black Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

The club played a vital role in bridging the distances between towns, villages, and farms in the area. These distances were compounded by poor infrastructure, making it difficult to travel around the area easily. This was underscored in a report in *Radio Pictorial* in 1938 that described a delegation from the Wagga Wagga headquarters of the club, including the compere Susan Barrie, becoming repeatedly bogged en route to open a new branch in Junee, about forty kilometres north-east. The delegation was greeted enthusiastically when they finally arrived. Barrie told *Radio Pictorial* that the club would start a fund for ‘a nice new road to Junee.’<sup>59</sup> As was common in country areas at this time, residents of the hinterland would often come into the main town one day per week to perform errands. Patterson recalled that Thursdays were sale days when people from the farms and villages surrounding Wagga Wagga would come into town.<sup>60</sup> The radio club had a room where visiting farm women could rest during the day and held regular morning teas sponsored by Robur Tea.<sup>61</sup> In the 1950s there were weekly singalongs sponsored by Bushell’s Tea.<sup>62</sup>

The club also raised significant amounts of money for local projects, mostly through small-scale drives such as a mile of pennies down the main street of Wagga Wagga, raffles and dances. Through these efforts the club funded a bed elevator, an ambulance, a portable x-ray machine and furnishing for a maternity ward at the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. In the 1930s, the club responded to a large number of local women who were unable to clothe their babies due to the hardships caused by the Great Depression by initiating a baby box program, in which club members would knit layettes which were then anonymously donated to needy young mothers. During World War II the club’s fundraising focused on the war effort, and they donated a field ambulance and a mobile canteen to the army.<sup>63</sup> The local

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Behind the Dial at 2WG Wagga’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, March 1938, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Evelyn Patterson Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>61</sup> Marie Black Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>62</sup> Evelyn Patterson Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>63</sup> Wendy Hucker Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

branches also took charge of their own fundraising activities, such as holding parties, afternoon teas and competitions in aid of the local hospitals and ambulance services.<sup>64</sup>

The club's most lasting contribution to the community came in 1946, when the husband of a club member came to see Webb. He told her that his wife's health was failing and that there was no facility in the district that was able to take care of her—she had to travel 460 kilometres to Sydney to receive appropriate care. The man tearfully told Webb that if this happened he would never see his wife again as he could not afford to travel to Sydney to visit her. His story was a common one in the region at the time, as there were no nursing homes in the area. Webb was moved by the man's plight and approached the Robertses to see if there was anything the station could do. This was the impetus for the Haven, a retirement village and nursing home complex which continues today. From 1947 the women's club began to fundraise solely for the Haven project, and this would continue until the end of the club in the 1960s. The Robertses bought a plot of land on the outskirts of Wagga Wagga and the Haven opened in 1954. It featured a central nursing home and a number of cottages for married couples so that they were not separated.<sup>65</sup> The example of the Haven demonstrates the important role that the 2WG Women's Club played in the community through providing social welfare and healthcare that was not being provided by the state. Furthermore, it fostered a sense of community and identity, as Webb believed it was important that people who had lived in the district their whole lives should not be forced to leave it in their old age.<sup>66</sup>

The 2WG Women's Club and its radio session declined in popularity in the 1960s and eventually ceased in 1965, following a similar pattern across the country as explored in the previous chapter. During the decade after World War II traditional pastoral industries boomed and tourism took off in country areas. Regional towns began to prosper on the

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<sup>64</sup> Evelyn Patterson Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>65</sup> Marie Black Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

backs of these industries and received modern shops and new forms of entertainment such as bowling clubs and swimming pools.<sup>67</sup> Hucker believed that the popularity of the session declined as living standards in the country improved, and especially as farming families were able to purchase cars. As women on isolated farms were able to travel more easily the need for such a session disappeared—while some loneliness remained, it was not the all-encompassing isolation of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>68</sup>

In 2007, the Wagga Wagga City Library undertook a local history project on the 2WG women's club which culminated in three oral history interviews with women involved in the session—Patterson, Hucker, and Black—and a website about the session. As Amy Heap and Bob Pymm have noted, local radio clubs were a 'social phenomenon that lasted around 30 years and which for many was a key entertainment and support service,' but their history has largely gone unrecorded.<sup>69</sup> The 2WG website is sadly no longer online but the interest taken in the club as an important part of the Riverina's history demonstrates the importance of local radio to women's lives in the region.

### **Newcastle: Not Just a Men's Town**

The New South Wales city of Newcastle presents an interesting case study in the role of radio in regional centres. Nancy Cushing has argued that Newcastle has been neglected in Australian history, despite its significant contribution to the nation's industrial development. As a regional city based around mining and heavy industry it does not fit neatly into the main locales of Australian history—the capital city and the bush—'each of which derive their wealth from the produce of the land.'<sup>70</sup> 'Internal social differences are relatively small' in Newcastle when compared with other Australian cities, as until recently it has been primarily

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<sup>67</sup> Waterhouse, *The Vision Splendid*, 213–16.

<sup>68</sup> Wendy Hucker Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

<sup>69</sup> Heap and Pymm, 'Wagga Wagga Women's Wireless', 10.

<sup>70</sup> Nancy Cushing, 'Australia's Smoke City: Air Pollution in Newcastle', *Australian Economic History Review* 49, no. 1 (2009), 20.

a working-class industrial city.<sup>71</sup> But as Jude Conway has observed Newcastle has also been perceived as a ‘men’s town,’ and men’s experiences and needs as industrial workers have shaped the city’s politics and culture.<sup>72</sup> This focus on Newcastle as a masculine city has marginalised women’s experiences. I argue that a focus on women’s broadcasting in the region contributes to Conway’s aim of ‘subverting the “men’s town” trope of Newcastle’ by demonstrating the role that female broadcasters played as community leaders and how they improved the lives of their listeners and created spaces for women to become active local citizens.<sup>73</sup>

One of the most significant aspects of women’s programming was that it raised the profiles of the comperes, who became well-known public figures and even celebrities in some cases. The role of women’s session comperes took on even greater importance in smaller cities and country areas, as listeners felt a close connection with another local woman. An excellent example of this trend can be found in Newcastle. Elma Gibbs, a former stage actress, hosted the 2KO women’s session in the 1930s and 1940s. She started a correspondence club in 1934, which appealed to ‘city, suburban and outback dwellers’ and was enhanced by her ‘more than pleasing voice and personality.’<sup>74</sup> *Radio Pictorial* reported that she worked twice as hard as her male counterparts:

All morning Elma works hard—much harder than a lot of you imagine. Breaks are few and far between “on the air” for the mike is a hard task-master. For the rest of the day, Elma gets into a load of program-work, session-arranging, correspondence and the like. Or

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<sup>71</sup> J. C. Docherty quoted in Jude Conway, ‘The Battle for Custodianship of International Women’s Day in Newcastle, New South Wales’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 23 (2017), 61.

<sup>72</sup> Conway, ‘The Battle for Custodianship’, 61.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>74</sup> ‘A Popular Lass’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, August 1936, 33.

maybe she does a spot of shop-walking for her out-of-town listeners.<sup>75</sup>

Here Gibbs was presented as a dedicated professional who put in a significant amount of effort to developing her program. Furthermore, she ran errands for her listeners located outside of the city centre, thereby performing an important service for those women. She was a very well-known figure in the city—a true Novocastrian celebrity. *Radio Pictorial* regularly reported on Gibbs' life, including her holidays, her previous career as an actress and her engagement and wedding. There was clearly a significant demand from Novocastrian readers for gossip about her and information about her personality, which was regularly described as 'always smiling—always looking on the best side of things.'<sup>76</sup>

The level of Gibbs' celebrity at this time was clearly demonstrated in the interest in her 1942 wedding to Charles Puddicombe, which was reportedly the 'biggest wedding that



**Figure 7.1: Charles Puddicombe and Elma Gibbs at their wedding, *Newcastle Sun*, 19 January 1942, 4.**

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<sup>75</sup> 'Gossip from the Studios', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, March 1939, 38.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Newcastle has seen for many a day.<sup>77</sup> The day before the wedding Gibbs was honoured with a tribute at the Newcastle City Hall, which was attended by the Mayor and Mayoress and representatives from dozens of charitable organisations. She was presented with gifts including a community plate and a cloth signed by hundreds of her listeners, accolades which demonstrated her significant position in the Newcastle community at the time.<sup>78</sup> On the day of the wedding more than one thousand women tried to force their way into the Wesley Methodist Church in Hamilton an hour before the start of the ceremony. When refused entry many of the women refused to leave and continued to crowd outside the church—blocking the entrance of the bride and matron of honour, who could not enter until ushers had forced clear a path. Following the ceremony, the bridal party were mobbed by Gibbs’ fans ‘despite the efforts of a number of men who linked hands to keep the crowd back’ and Gibbs had to be carried ‘shoulder-high’ to the car.<sup>79</sup> ‘Many of the bride’s radio friends hurried to the reception’ but a further rush was averted.<sup>80</sup> The enthusiastic frenzy displayed by Gibbs’ listeners reveals her popularity and, further, the important role that female radio hosts played in smaller cities and regional areas—they were local celebrities and played a direct role in the lives of their listeners.

The central place of the coal industry in the Newcastle region also shaped the radio sessions that were broadcast, which often sought to reach an audience of working-class women. *Heart to Heart* was a women’s session hosted by British migrant Phyllis Rose and broadcast on 2KO in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was supported by the Joint Coal Board (JCB), the Federal Government authority with control over the industry, and aimed at an audience of coalminers’ wives. The program emphasised the importance of community and provided real support to women and their families who were often struggling to meet

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<sup>77</sup> Untitled Article, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, March 1942, 37.

<sup>78</sup> ‘A Tribute to Miss Elma Gibbs’, *Newcastle Sun*, 16 January 1942, 5.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Extraordinary Scenes at Wedding’, *Newcastle Sun*, 19 January 1942, 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



their basic needs. Recordings of several episodes of this program from December 1949 have been preserved and are held at the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA). These provide very rare evidence of a live women's session and the sound of such a program. Rose speaks in a high pitch and uses words like 'dear' to create an intimate bond with her listeners. Like many regional radio sessions, *Heart to Heart* was based on listeners writing in under pen names.<sup>81</sup> This gave the session a community feel, which was further enhanced both by the intimate details listeners included in their letters, and by Rose herself visiting her listeners in their homes.

On 16 December 1949 Rose read a letter from 'Molly,' a woman who lived in a small community outside of Newcastle, in which she described the death of her two-year-old daughter and her loneliness due to her husband having to live away from home for work. 'Molly' expressed her gratitude to Rose for the session, which helped to alleviate her loneliness: 'I feel as though I am speaking to a friend...and I hope you will accept me as one of yours too.'<sup>82</sup> Another example was a woman known as 'Chin Up' who needed to be hospitalised, but did not have anyone to look after her children while she was admitted. After Rose read out her letter over the air there were numerous offers from other listeners to take care of her children, and a suitable arrangement was found. After 'Chin Up' had recovered Rose visited her home to check how she was doing and provide support from other listeners. 'Chin Up' told Rose that she recognised her only from her voice—again demonstrating that the personas of comperes like Rose were developed primarily through radio speech.<sup>83</sup> This example demonstrates the important role that radio sessions could play in communities, such as working-class Newcastle, by providing real support to struggling women. *Heart to Heart* is reminiscent of the radio clubs of the Great Depression years discussed in Chapter Two,

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<sup>81</sup> See for example: 'Heart to Heart 1949.12.14', Sound Recording, 207404, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra; 'Heart to Heart 1949.12.16', Sound Recording, 207404, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra; 'Heart to Heart 1949.12.23', Sound Recording, 207404, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>82</sup> 'Heart to Heart 1949.12.16'.

<sup>83</sup> 'Heart to Heart 1949.12.23'.

however it is apparent that they continued to hold a significant place in smaller communities like Newcastle and Wagga Wagga in the postwar years.

As indicated by the session's name—*Heart to Heart*—the session was a space for women to share their experiences, get help, advice and affirmation. Rose struck a positive note in the program, urged her listeners to be true to themselves, and commented warmly on their letters. She told one listener that her letter was 'as colourful and romantic as you are.'<sup>84</sup> Listeners responded in kind, writing of the 'pleasure even the smallest letter can give to your lonely listeners' and how 'thrilled' they were to 'feel a part' of the session.<sup>85</sup> The specific problems of life in a coalfields community were also discussed on air, anchoring the program in local issues. The low standard of housing in the coalfields was addressed on 23 December, as Rose identified that the problem had developed over many years and was made worse by the general housing shortage caused by the war. The session's role as a public relations platform for the JCB was made apparent when Rose then highlighted what it was doing to resolve the problem by assisting mine workers to build their own houses through their building society.<sup>86</sup> In another session she publicised the JCB's scholarships for the children of mine workers to study at Sydney University.<sup>87</sup>

The examples of Elma Gibbs and *Heart to Heart* show that radio was a central feature of Hunter women's lives during the 1930s and 1940s, as they worked to address distinctively local issues. Women's sessions like *Heart to Heart* played a similar role in the industrial Newcastle and Hunter community to women's sessions in more agricultural areas, such as 3SR and 2WG, by providing practical support to women in times of need and fostering friendship over the air by reading listeners' letters. Furthermore, these examples provide an

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> 'Heart to Heart 1949.12.14'.

insight into the experiences of Novocastrian women, who have been under-studied in the history of the area.

### **ABC Country Women's Sessions**

Local stations such as 3SR, 2WG, and 2KO provided a way of rejecting the centralising influence of broadcasts which originated in the capital cities, by broadcasting local content and supporting the local community. The ABC significantly increased the number of its regional studios in the late 1940s, so that more country areas could receive locally-produced content from the national broadcaster.<sup>88</sup> The ABC had its highest audience shares in country areas, especially amongst those listeners living on rural properties. This meant that locally-produced women's sessions broadcast on regional ABC stations reached a higher proportion of their target audience than those in metropolitan areas.<sup>89</sup> One such program was found on 2NU, the ABC station in New England, New South Wales, which opened in November 1948.<sup>90</sup> This program was compered by Yola Adamson and featured news of the local area, interviews with local women and visitors, and domestic advice. The program also highlighted the challenges of country life. Adamson spoke about the difficulties previous generations of country mothers had to deal with, including not being able to access appropriate medical care during birth which resulted in 'weak and sickly' babies.<sup>91</sup> Although conditions had improved by 1951, with the advent of baby clinics, the Royal Flying Doctor Service and modern appliances, mothers living outside of major towns remained unable to access the best care for their babies. To help close this gap the session broadcast regular talks from a paediatric nurse.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> 'Build 22 Radio Stations', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate*, 18 November 1947, 4.

<sup>89</sup> K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 155.

<sup>90</sup> 'New ABC Station', *Newcastle Sun*, 5 November 1948, 4.

<sup>91</sup> 'The Northern Women's Session 2NU', Script, 30 July 1950, 2NU [Scripts of the Womens Session, Women's Magazine] [2.5cm; box 12], C3224, 2NU, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

The potential of radio as a key tool of communication and support during emergencies was also part of its role in regional communities, and one that the ABC took seriously. In November 1951 destructive bushfires swept through northern New South Wales, causing the evacuation of families to Tamworth. Adamson broadcast on 19 November about the efforts that the CWA were making to ensure that women and children evacuees were well cared for, including by setting up a childcare centre to give their mothers time to arrange accommodation and obtain supplies.<sup>93</sup> Local ABC sessions, such as this one, therefore fit in to the mould of local B-Class stations by providing content to help local women. However, the 2NU session did not perform the same level of community-building work through women's clubs and fundraising activities that stations like 2WG did. The local ABC sessions instead fit more with the national broadcaster's public service ethos of educating and entertaining the public to a high standard; an approach which limited their ability to fully integrate themselves with the local community. Indeed, several listeners of local ABC stations wrote to the *ABC Weekly* in 1948 to express their dissatisfaction with the content on these stations, with one stating that 'most "yokels" do not listen in to the A.B.C., but to their nearest Commercial stations.'<sup>94</sup>

From 1953 until 1966 the ABC broadcast a national program aimed at regional women called the *Country Hour Women's Session*, which aired at 1pm on Friday afternoons. This program was compered by Lorna Byrne, an experienced broadcaster and another active citizen who had given regular radio talks in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s for the New South Wales Department of Agriculture, where she was employed to promote the interests of rural women.<sup>95</sup> In this role, Byrne championed increasing women's representation in leadership positions within the agriculture industry, stating in 1946 that she 'had no doubt that women

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<sup>93</sup> 'The Northern Women's Session 2NU', Script, 19 November 1951, 2NU [Scripts of the Womens Session, Women's Magazine] [2.5cm; box 12], C3224, 2NU, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>94</sup> R. Hanan, 'Regional Programs', *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1948, 2.

<sup>95</sup> 'Byrne, Lorna (1897-1989)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2007, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/byrne-lorna-12277>, accessed 6 March 2018.

would play an important part in connection with the progress' of agriculture bureaus, a type of farmers' association.<sup>96</sup> Her broadcasts often addressed the 'women's side of the Agricultural Bureau' in order 'to help women in acquiring capacity for leadership in matters that affect country women.'<sup>97</sup> Byrne therefore had extensive experience in using radio to improve the status of women in regional Australia.

The *Country Hour Women's Session* faced a difficult beginning as it replaced the popular serial *Blue Hills* on Fridays. In an oral history interview in 1978, Byrne recalled that the program was a 'terrible failure' at first and that she received many 'insulting' letters castigating her for daring to replace *Blue Hills*.<sup>98</sup> One listener wrote to the *ABC Weekly* that the session was 'the worst thing we've ever heard from a National station.'<sup>99</sup> Another complained to the magazine:

All I can say is the A.B.C. must surely think the country folk are a lot of half-wits to want to listen to such a session, not to mention the harsh masculine voice with it.<sup>100</sup>

The attack on Byrne's voice demonstrates the continued importance placed upon radio speech as a foundation for a successful program. By attacking the compere's voice, the listener was attacking a central element of the session and, in doing so, the program's legitimacy. It is important to stress that in surviving recordings of the session Byrne's voice was low, older-sounding and well-intonated and modulated, which gave her an authoritative air—it was certainly lower than usual for a woman's voice, but in no way harsh.<sup>101</sup> As another

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<sup>96</sup> 'Miss Lorna Byrne's Address', *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales*, 11 May 1946, 5.

<sup>97</sup> 'Miss Lorna Byrne to Talk', *Northern Champion*, 26 March 1938, 3; 'Lorna Byrne to Country Women', *Macleay Argus*, 23 May 1939, 7.

<sup>98</sup> Lorna Hayter Interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 13 February 1978, DeB1064-1065, Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>99</sup> L. Bradford, 'Country Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 7 February 1953, 2.

<sup>100</sup> A. E. Tonge, 'Countrywomen's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 21 March 1953, 2.

<sup>101</sup> 'The Country Hour – Women's Session – Final Program with Lorna Byrne', C102, 1500453, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

listener later described it: ‘Miss Lorna Byrne’s voice—unlike most women’s voices—is as a rule clear and easy to follow.’<sup>102</sup>

These difficulties were not helped by disagreements within ABC management as to whether a session for country women was truly needed. The Director of Rural Programming, Dick Thompson, pushed for the institution of a daily session, as he argued that the national women’s session produced in Sydney did not meet the needs of women in regional areas.<sup>103</sup> Director of Programs Keith Barry disagreed, and argued that the national session was ‘just as much for country women as it is for city women.’<sup>104</sup> He pointed to the presence of the president of the CWA on the women’s session advisory committee as evidence of this fact.<sup>105</sup> There was also disagreement about the frequency and length of the program, which again centred on whether the national session was of relevance to country women or not. A listener wrote to Byrne that she and her friends felt that the session contained so much information that was relevant to their lives that it was ‘far too short’ and should be extended to one hour per week.<sup>106</sup> Thompson forwarded the letter to Barry as proof that there was listener demand for an expanded *Country Hour Women’s Session*.<sup>107</sup> Barry, however, replied that the national *ABC Women’s Sessions* contained plenty of content of interest to country women and that the listener ‘might care to listen to it.’<sup>108</sup> Barry’s opinions were shared by others at the ABC. The Tamworth advisory committee discussed the session in April 1957 and were divided on its success, with some members believing it to be an unpopular session while others thought

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<sup>102</sup> G. Meryon Ward, ‘Countrywomen’s Session’, *ABC Weekly*, 4 April 1953, 2.

<sup>103</sup> R. G. Thompson, Memo, 6 December 1955, Country Women’s Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>104</sup> Keith Barry, Memo, 15 December 1955, Country Women’s Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> F. Hayes to L. Byrne, 18 May 1955, Country Women’s Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>107</sup> R. G. Thompson to Keith Barry, 30 May 1955, Country Women’s Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>108</sup> Keith Barry to R. G. Thompson, 1 June 1955, Country Women’s Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

that it was excellent. Some members suggested that Byrne's voice was an impediment to the session's success, as it 'gave the impression of talking down to the audience from time to time'—again demonstrating the importance of radio speech to the success of a program.<sup>109</sup> Although the program experienced considerable criticism from listeners and ABC management, it continued to be broadcast until 1966, which indicates that it was popular enough to keep its weekly timeslot for nearly fourteen years. As Byrne later recalled: 'I began to establish it, and before very long it was really a very well patronised program.'<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, a report in December 1955 noted that Byrne was receiving 'very regular and enthusiastic' mail from listeners and received many invitations to visit regional areas across the country.<sup>111</sup> During her time on the program, Byrne travelled extensively across Australia. Her visit to Tasmania in November 1955 was the first trip that she undertook as compere to establish the legitimacy of the session. Listeners there were keen 'to hear her voice' and the CWA wanted her assistance in drawing attention to their activities.<sup>112</sup> Thompson thought that the trip was a good opportunity to gather new content, as although the session was ostensibly national it contained 'too much material gathered in New South Wales.'<sup>113</sup> Byrne travelled around Tasmania over ten days in November 1955, where she interviewed local women, and visited schools and CWA branches.<sup>114</sup> Her visit attracted significant interest amongst Tasmanian women, and the listener response to her visit was 'amazingly high':

The outstanding impression gained by Miss Byrne's visit was the immense popularity of the Session, and subsequently, when they

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<sup>109</sup> 'Extract from Minutes of Tamworth Advisory Committee', 1 April 1957, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>110</sup> Lorna Hayter Interviewed by Hazel de Berg.

<sup>111</sup> John Douglass, 'Country Hour Women's Session', 6 December 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>112</sup> Walter Colwell to R. J. F. Boyer, 24 June 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>113</sup> R. G. Thompson, 'Letter from W. R. Colwell,' 6 July 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>114</sup> R. G. Thompson to Walter Colwell, 15 August 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

knew her, of Miss Byrne herself. The Country Hour women's session is listened to extensively in the rural areas and the listening audience of the groups which met Miss Byrne, was almost 100%...The cordiality of the welcome surprised Miss Byrne, as did the number of people who listened to her, and there is no doubt that a visit of this nature is of extreme importance to a program of National character.<sup>115</sup>

The visit was a public relations success for the ABC in its 'relations with Tasmanian country dwellers.'<sup>116</sup> She was invited again to visit Tasmania to judge a statewide cookery contest at the Ulverstone show the following year. These trips were the beginning of regular cross-country travel for Byrne. During the fourteen years of the program, she travelled to Western Australia, where she was met with 'nothing but friendship and cordiality,' Queensland, where she became a 'temporary Queenslander' each time she visited, as well as South Australia, Victoria, the Northern Territory, and Papua New Guinea.<sup>117</sup> In 1958 she even travelled to China and broadcast a session of the *Country Hour Women's Session* from Singapore.<sup>118</sup> In the last session of the program, broadcast on 6 May 1966, Byrne stated that she would miss visiting her friends in other states who meant a great deal to her. Indeed Thompson, the Director of Rural Talks, stated that Byrne had 'built a wonderful reputation for cheering the hearts of women throughout the length and breadth of Australia.'<sup>119</sup>

State-based ABC women's sessions also catered to rural listeners and were often better able to tailor their content to the specific needs of their audiences. Rita Humfress

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<sup>115</sup> E. P. Whitlock, 'Visit of Lorna Byrne to Tasmania', 12 December 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> The Country Hour - Women's Session - Final Program with Lorna Byrne, 6 May 1966, C102, 1500453, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>118</sup> Lorna Hayter Interviewed by Hazel de Berg.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.



compered the Queensland *ABC Women's Session* from January 1937 until 1946, after which she gave a weekly talk on the ABC national women's session and hosted the national program once a month. The *ABC Weekly* reported in March 1940 that Humfress was one of 'the most popular women' on the ABC and was especially known for her celebrity interviews.<sup>120</sup> Humfress herself noted in 1939: 'Thousands of women daily open their doors to me. I am their guest and I appreciate their friendship tremendously.'<sup>121</sup> Once again the theme of companionship across the distance was a key reason for the success of this session; Grafton's *Daily Examiner* reported in 1947 that her decade at the helm of the Queensland ABC Women's Session had made her 'the friend and confidante of those for whom distance made friendship with other women impossible.'<sup>122</sup> A listener named Josephine Kaye appears to have especially appreciated the session, as she wrote to the *ABC Weekly* in March 1940 to praise how 'admirably' Humfress conducted her program, stating that she 'combines light music and a pleasant speaking voice, we have talks by well-known women speakers, we're carried to distant lands.'<sup>123</sup> Kaye also wrote to the *Brisbane Telegraph* in July 1940 after Humfress' session was cut by thirty minutes to accommodate a BBC broadcast. She requested that the ABC reduce musical programming to allow the Women's Session to again run for one hour and noted the 'cheery session' supplied much-needed 'brightness around the house.'<sup>124</sup>

Humfress focused on Queensland's regional and rural women in her session, as she stated in an interview with *Queensland Country Life* in 1939:

Country women influence me in the compilation of my session. As

I walk the streets I think of them continually. I try to be their eyes. I

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<sup>120</sup> 'Rita Humfress: Runs Popular Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 21.

<sup>121</sup> 'Guest in a Thousand Homes!', *Queensland Country Life*, 14 December 1939, 6.

<sup>122</sup> 'To-day's Highlights on National Radio', *Daily Examiner* (Grafton), 5 February 1947, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Josephine Kaye, 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 63.

<sup>124</sup> J. Kaye, 'Broadcast Policy', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 3 July 1940, 8.

know they are far from the shops which every woman loves, and I take an impression of what I see each day and endeavour to pass it on to them.

Country folk have an excellent critical faculty...their standard of musical appreciation is exceedingly high...I always enjoy the narratives of bush incidents in their daily lives which they send me, and am intensely interested in everything that happens to them.<sup>125</sup>

Humfress emphasised the role of radio as a two-way method of communication, where she provided listeners with content from Brisbane, while they wrote to her about their lives in regional areas of the state. She appears to have travelled to regional areas of the state to meet her listeners and experience the diverse regions first-hand. This was demonstrated in June 1946 when Humfress flew to Rockhampton for a brief visit, and Rockhampton's *Morning Bulletin* reported that she was a 'confirmed air traveller' who was pleased with the hour and a quarter flying time from Brisbane.<sup>126</sup>

In 1949 Humfress was given a weekly music request show to host on ABC radio entitled *Hello There*. Brisbane's *Sunday Mail* reported that listeners who had 'long mourned' her decreased presence on the air would appreciate the new session, and new listeners would find her 'warmth and sincerity' to be 'quite infectious.'<sup>127</sup> This program was reportedly very popular in the Far North Queensland Gulf Country, and as the *Sunday Mail* observed in January 1952 Humfress had a 'strong following' amongst the 'coloured as well as white women' who received ABC programs via shortwave broadcast.<sup>128</sup> This was a rare mention of Aboriginal women as radio listeners and indicates that broadcasts reached listeners in remote

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<sup>125</sup> 'Guest in a Thousand Homes!'

<sup>126</sup> 'Visit by Radio Personalities', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 28 June 1946, 5.

<sup>127</sup> 'Nothing "Phoney" About Amateur Hour Voting', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 6 March 1949, 7.

<sup>128</sup> 'Radio is Now Vital Lifeline in Gulf Country, Says E.C.W.?', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 20 January 1952, 7.

areas such as Far North Queensland. As this article noted, residents of the Gulf Country relied on pedal wireless as a communication tool that enabled them to communicate with each other across vast distances, and as such had a deep appreciation of the medium. Furthermore, radio programs were heard on pastoral stations as a key form of entertainment and radio was also the primary source of news in this region, as newspapers only arrived once a week.<sup>129</sup>

### **Catherine King and Western Australia's Outback Women**

In the previous chapter I discussed Irene Greenwood and Catherine King as examples of women's continued promotion of the medium of radio as a platform for women's contribution to the public sphere in the postwar years. In this chapter I will turn to look at their use of the medium to foster a distinctive Western Australian identity and to address issues specific to women in the state, especially those in very remote areas. Western Australia's isolation has shaped its history, identity, and culture. As Geoffrey Bolton has observed, the political and cultural dominance of Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne also draws in Adelaide and Brisbane in their 'commercial and cultural orbit.'<sup>130</sup> Not so Perth; rather, Western Australians, 'challenged by greater distance from the dominant south-east, have found scope for independent initiative.'<sup>131</sup> Until at least the second half of the twentieth century, there 'persisted among many Western Australians a belief that in their isolated community, disagreements should never be pushed too far, but all should stick together.'<sup>132</sup> Experiences of and responses to isolation are a defining feature of the state, although these experiences differed dramatically between Perth, coastal towns and outback communities located across its vast landmass.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia Since 1826* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 3.

As shown in Chapter Six, Western Australian women's radio came into its own with the premiere of King's ABC session in the final months of the World War II, followed by Greenwood's commercial session in 1948. During the postwar years King and Greenwood fostered distinctively Western Australian programs which contributed to the cultural output of the state. As Bolton has argued, their programs 'showed that Western Australia still possessed the capacity to respond innovatively to isolation.'<sup>133</sup> This is a recognition of the importance of women's radio to cultural and social development in Western Australia.

King's session was unique in the national repertoire of ABC women's programming, as she fought to maintain the independence of her session and conceptualised the program as addressing a long felt need for intellectual stimulation which had been unfulfilled due to the state's isolation. She advocated for a greater recognition of the importance of Western Australia within national programming. In late 1946 Clare Mitchell, the organiser of the national women's session, asked King to speak about life in Western Australia for the opening program of the new national session.<sup>134</sup> King, however, was 'a bit taken aback at first at your wanting to know how we live, and so on. We think we think pretty much as you do!'<sup>135</sup> However, King did concede that there were some differences which could be discussed on the air. Mitchell replied that she was 'sorry if I conveyed the impression that we thought you were a foreign country' and that she wanted King to build the 'personality' of the state through her talk.<sup>136</sup> King continued to be annoyed by Mitchell's tone, however, and wrote back that she was 'not at all happy' about the talks she was being asked to give. She responded that she would like to focus on how residents of the eastern states ignored the west: 'because of our isolation, Australia has got into the habit of regarding us as a different

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>134</sup> Clare Mitchell to Catherine King, 16 October 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>135</sup> Catherine King to Clare Mitchell, 22 October 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>136</sup> Clare Mitchell to Catherine King, 12 November 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.



Figure 7.2: Catherine King, *ABC Weekly*, 10 January 1948, 15.

country. The point I'd try to make is that we are really very much part of Australia.<sup>137</sup> Mitchell responded that she was 'a little perturbed at the mare's nest I stirred up by my unfortunate

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<sup>137</sup> Catherine King to Clare Mitchell, 26 November 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

phrase “how you live”,’ which she noted was used in letters to all states, not just Western Australia:

My first impression was that your scolding of us for our belated interest in Western Australia detracted from what I consider is an interesting and delightful talk. However, on thinking it over, if it is a question you feel strongly on far be it from me to curb you.<sup>138</sup>

It is apparent that King was acutely aware of the perception of the west by those in the east, and she was outspoken in her opposition to any insinuation that the state was different to the rest of the country, or less a part of the nation than anywhere else. She was also critical of perceptions that the west was less developed than the east, as seen in her exclamation that she lived exactly as Mitchell did. King therefore advocated for an increased awareness of Western Australia by residents of the eastern states and a greater recognition of the state’s contributions to the nation.

Like Humfress, King’s session was especially aimed at an audience of women in regional and rural areas of Western Australia. Indeed, much of the impetus for the reinstatement of a women’s session in the state was due to the belief that it would do much to ameliorate the isolation of outback women. In their submission to the ABC Commission in 1944, the Women’s Service Guilds (WSG) emphasised the isolation of Western Australian women, especially those in outback areas. They pointed out that the ‘old isolation of peacetime,’ which was ‘geographic, economic and political,’ had been made worse by wartime conditions.<sup>139</sup> Rural women’s ability to travel had been curtailed by petrol rationing and the reduction of train services. Their husbands were away fighting, leaving them to take care of

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<sup>138</sup> Clare Mitchell to Catherine King, 20 December 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>139</sup> Women’s Service Guilds of Western Australia to the Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 5 May 1944, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

the farm on their own—a situation that was especially acute in dairying and wheatbelt areas. Newspapers were only delivered twice or three times per week, and women often did not have enough time to read them. Furthermore, the reduced print-runs of women’s magazines due to wartime print restrictions meant that they often did not even reach the west, as the eastern states absorbed the limited number available. All of these reasons meant that radio held a special position as the ‘only outside contact with the great world of affairs from which countrywomen in this State feel so completely cut off.’<sup>140</sup> The WSG argued that the importance of radio in the lives of rural Western Australian women necessitated programming specifically for them:

It is radio which brings her news, relaxation, entertainment and items which stimulate her interest in cultural things. Countrywomen do listen to all broadcast sessions. But it is important that they should be catered for much better than at present in those matters of specific interest to women...Above all they want to feel that this is their own session which belongs to them.<sup>141</sup>

The importance of having such a program was crucial for women in isolated outback areas, as well as women isolated by health problems or for other reasons, as ‘for a short while each day there is someone who is interested in them and their lives’ and they could feel they were ‘part of a large group of women whose lives are like their own.’<sup>142</sup>

The *Broadcaster* reported the announcement of the new women’s session with a particular focus on its utility to women in regional areas, noting that they had particularly ‘felt the loss’ of the women’s session and that it was anticipated that they would form the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

majority of the audience for King's session.<sup>143</sup> In response to the announcement a woman from Piawaning in the state's northern agricultural region wrote: 'At last we women in the country can turn on our radios in the knowledge that there will be something worthwhile to listen to.'<sup>144</sup> Another wrote that country women 'everywhere' would welcome the new session: 'I lived for 20 years on a farm and know how isolated the folk there feel especially since transport difficulties.'<sup>145</sup> The return of women speakers would fill a 'longfelt want among women listeners.'<sup>146</sup>

Six months after the start of the session the *Broadcaster* published four letters from women across outback Western Australia. A woman from Kondonin wrote that the session made her forget the 'drudgery of farm life in a drought' and provided emotional support. Another woman from Eastern Pingelly wrote that the session, which aired at 10.45am, gave her a pleasurable break after rising at 4.30am to tend to animals, cart hay, and harvest peas.<sup>147</sup> A woman from Pithara wrote that city-dwellers might not realise 'how cut-off we women of the outback are from the city and its many interests and doings,' but the women's session 'brings us some of this over the air.'<sup>148</sup> The *Broadcaster* opined that:

It is interesting to know that 90 per cent of the women who have written to express their appreciation live in isolated country districts. They are the women who are debarred from taking part in many of the things they love. They crave companionship and knowledge of current happenings. They can get this companionship and

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<sup>143</sup> 'ABC Women's Session Begins on Monday', *Broadcaster*, 30 August 1944, 3.

<sup>144</sup> 'A Country Woman,' 'Boon in the Country', *Broadcaster*, 20 September 1944, 8.

<sup>145</sup> 'Mrs. M. J.,' 'Women's Session Welcome', *Broadcaster*, 13 September 1944, 8.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> 'Appreciation for a Session: Outback Women Approve', *Broadcaster*, 9 May 1945, 6.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*



knowledge from the session, and their letters are proof of their appreciation.<sup>149</sup>

The Western Australian ABC women's session focused on issues which particularly affected women in the country. In 1945, for example, the difficulties that mothers faced in obtaining a decent education for their children in the bush was discussed in a series of talks on the session. One mother wrote to the session of the deprivation of her child's rural school which was built on barren land, had no toys or play equipment, had old desks, and required the local mothers to do the work of washing dishes and cleaning the school while also supporting their husbands on the farm.<sup>150</sup>

King sometimes travelled to regional areas to speak with women and gain a better sense of the realities of their lives. She spent a week in the country in May 1946 to 'meet country listeners' and listen to the session herself 'under country conditions.'<sup>151</sup> In March 1947 she proposed a visit to Kalgoorlie to 'spend a couple of days with a miner's wife' which she expected would provide 'a wealth of good human material for broadcasting.'<sup>152</sup> Talks Director B. H. Molesworth agreed with her, and noted that the visit would provide her with 'a more exact knowledge of the life and problems of women in the goldfields' which would enable her to 'talk more directly' to them on her program.<sup>153</sup> She visited Kalgoorlie again in May 1949 and conducted a radio session from the town. The session featured local speakers who discussed the experience of living in the area, as well as Kalgoorlie's history. The *Kalgoorlie Miner* reported that King believed that 'people who live outside the city are the

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> 'A.B.C. Women's Session', *Broadcaster*, 24 October 1945, 6.

<sup>151</sup> Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 30 May 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>152</sup> Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 6 March 1947, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>153</sup> B. H. Molesworth to Catherine King, 12 March 1947, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

people who are wearing the real fabric of life.<sup>154</sup> The issue of King performing public relations work in regional areas caused some friction amongst management at the ABC. Molesworth believed that King could improve her session if ‘she could get out into the country areas sometimes and meet women and women’s organisations in country towns,’ as more country listeners tuned in to the session than those in city, and thus the interests of country listeners should be more directly addressed.<sup>155</sup> Barry, however, did not believe that meeting country listeners was important enough to warrant taking one day per week to do so.<sup>156</sup>

King specifically requested feedback from rural listeners and received a significant number of letters from them. She stated in November 1945 that eighty per cent of her correspondence was sent by country women.<sup>157</sup> A farmer’s wife wrote to her that the radio was her ‘only source of world information’ and she found it ‘depressing beyond words’ that the daytime programming schedule was dominated by serials and music. Rather, she wanted more talks and interviews with foreign visitors who could provide insight into their countries.<sup>158</sup> Another listener from North Collie wrote of the ‘marvellous difference’ that the wireless had made to the lives of country listeners, and that educational content was its primary value.<sup>159</sup> King herself stated that country people were anxious ‘to gain knowledge of progressive ideas.’<sup>160</sup>

The importance of radio in the lives of rural Western Australian women was also a key aspect of audience responses to Irene Greenwood’s broadcasts. A farmer’s wife wrote

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<sup>154</sup> ‘Broadcast for Women: Visit of Mrs Catherine King’, *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 27 May 1949, 1.

<sup>155</sup> B. H. Molesworth to Keith Barry, 28 March 1947, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>156</sup> Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 24 March 1947, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Woman’s Realm: Country Needs’, *West Australian*, 30 November 1945, 11.

<sup>158</sup> E. Robertson to Catherine King, 18 January 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>159</sup> G. M. Rees to Catherine King, 17 January 1946, Talks - Mrs Catherine King - Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, National Archives of Australia, Sydney.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Women and Broadcasting’, *Broadcaster*, 29 August 1945, 6.

to the *Broadcaster* in November 1940 to protest the discontinuation of Greenwood's talks and emphasised the impact that this would have on women in rural areas: 'We women in the bush must carry on against adverse conditions. Let us listen to something that will help us forget such mundane things as dry seasons, very little harvest, no food for stock, etc.'<sup>161</sup> When Greenwood began her commercial session in 1948, rural women again wrote to the *Broadcaster* to express their gratitude for her work, such as a listener who wrote that she used to listen to Greenwood when she lived 'on the farm' and welcomed the return of a session which dealt with issues that women wanted to hear about.<sup>162</sup>

Like King, Greenwood recognised the unique experiences and challenges of Western Australia's outback women, as seen in her shortwave broadcasts about life in regional areas during the World War II. This recognition continued in *Woman to Woman*, her session on Perth commercial radio discussed in the previous chapter. In October 1950, for example, Greenwood interviewed Julitha Walsh, an 'Outback Girl' and aspiring writer who lived on a sheep station in the state's mid-west. In the interview Walsh described her travels around the Gascoyne and the north-west, as well as out to Christmas Island. Greenwood idealised rural life in the broadcast, as she ended the interview by stating that she wished Walsh could do a film about her life 'so that more Australians who live in cities, and our "New Australians" could know the kind of life being lived by those like you and your family who are the real Australians!'<sup>163</sup>

Although Greenwood was well received in regional areas and recognised the unique experiences and challenges faced by outback women, her programs also promoted an image of Perth as a worldly, cultured and sophisticated city, different (and better) than its eastern counterparts. Greenwood presented an image of Perth's women as fully engaged citizens

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<sup>161</sup> 'Farmer's Wife of Berkshire Valley', 'Talks for Women', *Broadcaster*, 2 November 1940, 13.

<sup>162</sup> 'Country Mouse', 'New Women's Session', *Broadcaster*, 8 May 1948, 17.

<sup>163</sup> 'Guest of the Week: Miss Julitha Walsh', 30 October 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

interested in local, national, and international issues. Western Australia had a long tradition of feminist activism by this stage. The state was one of the earliest to grant women the right to vote in 1899, after South Australia had done so in 1895. It was also the first to have a woman elected to Parliament, with Edith Cowan taking her seat in 1921, followed by Labor member May Holman in 1925. Influential women's organisations based in Perth included the WSG and the Karrakatta Club, and leading feminist Bessie Rischbieth called the city home. Greenwood was proud of this pedigree and saw her broadcasting work was a continuation of it. She regularly interviewed Western Australian women on *Woman to Woman* as her guests of the week. In April 1950, for example, she interviewed Isabel Johnston, state president of the WSG and co-founder of the Western Australian Women's Parliament, which Greenwood proudly noted was the 'only authentic "model parliament" in Australia.'<sup>164</sup> She also interviewed Western Australian women who had excelled in their careers, such as architect Margaret Feilman, state politician Florence Cardell-Oliver and federal senator Agnes Robertson, and runner Betty Judge (Beazley).<sup>165</sup> These interviews not only publicised the activities of women in the state, but worked to promote an image of Western Australia as a forward-looking society with a plethora of active and talented women working to improve it even further. Greenwood was sensitive to the perception that Western Australians were parochial, and instead presented this attitude as pride in the state's culture and achievements.

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<sup>164</sup> 'Woman to Woman Script', 17 April 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<sup>165</sup> 'Woman to Woman Script', 18 August 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; "'Woman to Woman': Proposed Session week September 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>", QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; Irene Greenwood to Senator Agnes Robertson, 10 December 1951, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth; 'Woman to Woman Script', 21 March 1952, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 99, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the significance of women's broadcasting in areas outside of the major east coast capitals. Local commercial women's sessions such as 3SR Shepparton and 2WG Wagga Wagga played major roles in their communities through fundraising, volunteering, and creating a community amongst local women over the airwaves. The example of Newcastle demonstrates the role of women's radio in helping women in need and fostering a community and identity among working class women in the region. It also highlights the importance of the comperes themselves, who were leading citizens in their communities. The ABC similarly tried to meet the needs of country women, however its public service ethos meant that the sessions could not emulate the hands-on work that the local commercial stations performed. Lorna Byrne's *Country Hour Women's Session* also suffered from criticism for its attempt to cater to all country women listeners in Australia, however the session did build up a substantial following and ran for fourteen years. Catherine King's Western Australian *ABC Women's Session* catered specifically to the state's very isolated outback women and integrated them into the public sphere, while Irene Greenwood promoted an image of Perth as a cosmopolitan centre with engaged women citizens. These examples all emphasise the importance of radio as a medium which brought women across Australia into the public sphere. Radio catered to the very different needs of women in regions across the country, improved their lives and provided opportunities for them to engage in active citizenship in their local communities. The role of radio in regional areas demonstrates its role in fostering women's civic participation and, moreover, the practical ways it could be used to improve the lives of women and the community as a whole.

## CONCLUSION

Television went live in Sydney and Melbourne in 1956, in Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth in 1959 and in the rest of country throughout the 1960s. Although radio remained on air after the introduction of television, the presence of a new broadcast medium profoundly changed the character of its programming.<sup>1</sup> During the 1960s radio became increasingly focused on music as young listeners played popular hits on their new transistor radio sets. Since radio's inception, talkback radio been forbidden due to a law that prohibited conversations over the wireless so that radio would not compete with postal and telegraphic services, but talkback sessions were finally legalised in 1967. Many commercial stations, most notably Sydney's 2GB, embraced talk programming to appeal to older demographics and differentiate themselves from the hit-dominated programming of rival commercial stations.<sup>2</sup> The 1960s saw a significant shift in how Australians listened to the radio, which demographics listened, and the types of programs that were aired.

In 1957 Catherine King, the compere of the popular women's session on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) Western Australian network, accompanied her husband Alec on a sabbatical to the United Kingdom. While there, she attended a course at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on television production so that she would be ready to take full advantage of the new medium when it arrived in Perth. Early in 1960, plans for a women's session began to be developed in anticipation of the medium's introduction to the West, and it went to air on 1 April 1960. For two years King worked on the weekly television show as well as her daily radio program. The television show was broadcast for thirty minutes on Wednesday afternoons, but required extensive time to script, shoot and

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<sup>1</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 269–70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 345, 382–84.

produce. Although initially enthusiastic about the new medium due to its potential to show people in action, King quickly soured on it. She believed that television production divided staff too rigidly between departments, and as such it did not have the same collegiality that radio had. Furthermore, the introduction of the visual element meant that much more could go wrong on television. King was also stretched by the responsibilities of hosting both a daily radio session and a weekly television show, and eventually decided to resign from television in April 1962 to preserve both her health and the quality of her radio program, which had remained her priority.<sup>3</sup>

The example of King's experience with television highlights some of the reasons why radio was so useful to the development of women's citizenship from the 1920s until the mid-1950s. Television's overly rigid departmental structures, which prevented staff from moving between different tasks, meant that she did not have the same level of control over what went to air. Furthermore, although television enabled audiences to see the presenters, the visual aspect of television required presenters to act on air, which worked to create greater distance between the presenters and the audience. King felt that television was about creating entertainment more than fostering conversations.<sup>4</sup>

Radio gave Australian women a new way to easily access the public sphere from their homes—as Dame Enid Lyons stated in 1954, a woman could now ‘do two things at a time: cultivate her mind and do her housework.’<sup>5</sup> Women now had opportunities to publicly speak in their own voices and be audibly heard on a significant scale. As Lyons argued, ‘generations of treatment as the intellectual inferiors of men’ had meant that women were reluctant to become involved in public affairs, but the opportunity to speak in public and hear other women doing so had resulted in ‘a big change in women’s confidence in themselves and

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<sup>3</sup> Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 111–16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 114–15.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Dame Enid Lyons: ABC Commissioner’, *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1954, 20.

men's readiness to accept them as mental equals.<sup>6</sup> Although it is difficult to assess the accuracy of her claim, it is notable that radio often featured in the rhetoric of leading public women at this time, many of whom identified it as an instrument of women's advancement. The women in this thesis saw radio as a medium that had the potential to transform women's lives and status in society and worked to both claim their own voices in the public sphere and encourage other women to become active citizens.

Radio was first introduced to Australia in 1923 and had become well-established by the end of the decade. During the 1930s feminists such as Linda Littlejohn used broadcasting to fight against attacks on women's rights, to argue for women's equality, and to encourage women to actively participate in social and political life. The Great Depression further shaped both radio programming and the development of women's citizenship as women such as Eunice Stelzer started radio clubs and women's session comperes used their platform to improve the lives of their listeners. The 1930s were also a time of increasing international tensions, and women such as Constance Duncan, Irene Greenwood and Ruby Rich used radio to contribute to public discourse as active world citizens and encourage their listeners to become engaged with world affairs. By using broadcasting for different purposes—to work for social justice, to promote feminism, and to contribute to debates on international affairs—these women demonstrated the value of radio as a tool for active citizenship and further opened up the public sphere to women's voices and opinions on social and political issues.

Like they did in World War I, women again demonstrated that they were active patriotic citizens during World War II by taking up volunteer work, joining the auxiliary services, and working in industry. Women stepped into new positions in radio where they used their skills to boost morale and encourage women to do their patriotic duty in Australia, and to try to increase support for the war amongst American women by giving shortwave

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



broadcasts. However, there were also cuts to women's sessions on the ABC during the war years due to financial constraints, which underscored the lower status given to this type of programming by the ABC's management. During World War II, Lyons and (Dame) Dorothy Tangney were elected to the Australian Parliament, which was a watershed moment for Australian political history and the development of women's equal citizenship. Public speaking, and broadcasting in particular, was a central aspect of political citizenship in the 1940s. Lyons, Tangney and Jessie Street (who also stood as a political candidate in this period) all made use of broadcasting to legitimise their political candidacy and integrate women into formal politics. Through their broadcasting these women staked their claim as patriotic citizens and legitimate legislators; public speech, including radio speech, became a key aspect of how they practised and asserted equal citizenship. Radio enabled them to reach in to the home and involve women listeners in political debate.

During the postwar era, soap operas increasingly replaced women's sessions as the dominant form of women's programming in morning timeslots. This concerned several female broadcasters, including Greenwood, Catherine King, and Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, all of whom used their sessions to continue to promote active citizenship to their listeners. However, despite their hard work, soap operas continued to displace women's sessions, a trend that was further exacerbated by the introduction of television in 1956. By the 1950s Australia's increasing prosperity and the rise of more sophisticated forms of broadcast entertainment converged to reduce the demand for women's spoken-word broadcasts, and while King, Greenwood, and Jenkins used their own programs to fight for the place of sharp, civic-minded programming during the daytime sessions, by the 1960s the place of radio women's sessions had significantly declined. The erosion of women's broadcasting as a key part of active citizenship during the 1950s clearly demonstrates that the medium was a useful tool at a specific period in time, and as broader political, social, and cultural changes occurred its resonance lessened. By the mid-1950s radio has become firmly established in Australia,

and older forms of programming began to seem outdated in comparison to soap operas and variety shows.

Radio had particular significance for women in areas outside of the major east coast capitals of Sydney and Melbourne, and these local stories complicate the national narrative of women's empowerment through broadcasting. Local women's clubs and sessions eradicated the distance between women living in regional areas and actively worked to improve conditions in their communities, for example by raising money to upgrade amenities and infrastructure as well as providing direct help to women in need. Women's sessions in Western Australia and Queensland integrated women in the state's remote regions, while also fostering distinctive state identities over the airwaves. Broadcasting was used to address the differing needs of women in regions across the country. It also became a central part of women's civic activity in regional areas during the mid-twentieth century, as a number of women broadcasters took on public roles within their local communities. Radio was not a transformative medium for all women, however. Indigenous women were largely left out of the imagined audience of women listeners, although there is some evidence of Aboriginal women listening to the ABC women's session in Queensland. It was also rare for Aboriginal women to speak on the radio. One woman who did, Nora Shea, was interviewed on Greenwood's program *Woman to Woman* in the 1950s as she was believed to have been first Aboriginal woman to work in the Western Australian public service, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Radio's significance as a tool that aided the development of women's citizenship was due to a confluence of several factors, which reveal that the medium both reflected the broader changes of the mid-twentieth century and drove change itself. Firstly, the birth of the medium was a key technology of modernity which transformed communications and media. Its status as a new, cutting-edge technology meant that it was well positioned to challenge the status quo of the gendered soundscape of the public sphere. Indeed, by giving regular airtime to women, radio stations provided a new space for them to contribute to

public discourse. Secondly, radio's time as the dominant broadcast medium was a period of profound social and political shifts. Coming so soon after the end of World War I, the advent of radio characterised the hope for a modern future. However, the onset of the Great Depression from 1929, coupled with the rise of fascism and the increasing geo-political strife that led to the World War II, characterised an age of profound instability.

Finally, this period saw significant change to women's status in Australia. White women's participation in domestic service and home-based economies had declined in the late-nineteenth century, while they increasingly worked in the manufacturing, retail and service industries, professions such as teaching and nursing, as well as office work. The trend of women's increased participation in the workforce continued over the twentieth century, including spikes in workforce participation during the First and Second World Wars. Women claimed greater social and sexual freedoms in this period. The flapper of the 1920s was associated with 'consumerism, feminine beauty and sports' and a visible sexuality, and World War II was a period of sexual exploration for many young women who became involved with visiting American servicemen.<sup>7</sup> Many women travelled, most often to Britain but also to the United States and, as discussed in Chapter Three, to Asia.<sup>8</sup> Women also undertook a wide range of political activity. As discussed in Chapter Two, the interwar period was characterised by the dominance of large women's organisations, who promoted a largely non-party approach to politics that emphasised the commonalities of women's experience and structured their political demands accordingly. Women also began to be elected to Parliament, first in small numbers in State Legislatures and then, in 1943, to the Australian Federal Parliament. By the 1960s, and the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement, equality with men in the public sphere became a central focus of feminist demands, from

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<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Preston, 'From "Precocious Brat to Fluffy Flapper": The Evolution of the Australian Flapper', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 21 (2015), 44; Marilyn Lake, 'Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II', *Australian Historical Studies* 24, no. 95 (1990), 267–284.

<sup>8</sup> See: Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Anne Rees, 'Travelling to Tomorrow: Australian Women in the United States, 1910-1960' (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2016).

Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bognor's demand to drink in the front bar of Brisbane's Regatta Hotel to campaigns against discriminatory hiring practices and abortion restrictions.<sup>9</sup>

Within this context, radio provided another change to women's status as a new platform from which women could articulate their viewpoints. The regular presence of female voices on the airwaves, while often located in timeslots and programs specifically delineated for that purpose, was a notable development that differentiated radio from print media. As seen throughout this thesis, radio's focus on the sound of the voice made it a more intimate medium, and listeners regularly identified radio voices as central to successful broadcasts. Skilled broadcasters relied on their radio speech to connect with their audiences and present a persuasive message. As this thesis has revealed, one of the major contributions of broadcasting to women's advancement was its ability to normalise the sound of women's voices in the public sphere, as the advent of radio enabled women to speak publicly on a daily basis. While the airtime given to women's voices was far less than that given to men, it should be recognised that their roles on the air enabled them to speak for themselves. Because of this, as Muriel Sutch argued in 1934, radio 'played a not unimportant part in feminine emancipation.'<sup>10</sup>

The story of radio's role in the development of women's citizenship further emphasises the importance of the media as a tool for women's advancement and empowerment. This is a topic that continues to have relevance today. In 2016 journalist Julia Baird wrote that 'the reluctance of women to stand in the spotlight and voice an opinion is real' in Australia, as women participate in public life against a backdrop of criticism and hostility to their presence.<sup>11</sup> The internet has opened up new avenues for sexism and abuse,

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<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 214–227.

<sup>10</sup> Muriel Sutch, 'Broadcasting from a Woman's Viewpoint', *Broadcast Year Book and Radio Listeners' Annual 1934* (Sydney: C. C. Faulkner, 1934), 88.

<sup>11</sup> Julia Baird, 'Women's Voices Stifled While Men Run the Media', *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 12, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/womens-voices-stifled-while-men-run-media-20160211-gms4u6.html>, accessed 16 December 2017.

and social media sites can become ‘aggregators of online misogyny.’<sup>12</sup> Conversely, social media sites have also provided women with new spaces to discuss issues pertaining to their lives and to call out oppression and abuse, powerfully seen in the 2017 ‘#MeToo’ movement against sexual harassment and assault.<sup>13</sup> As Michelle Smith has argued, feminist social media movements ‘express the challenges of being a woman in a world where it only takes a mere scratch of the surface to reveal hostility and deep discomfort about women’s ever-strengthening public voice.’<sup>14</sup> Speaking continues to be a frequent theme amongst contemporary feminists, who refer to ‘speaking out,’ being ‘loud’ and ‘shrill,’ or giving voice to ‘unspeakable things’ as part of their activism.<sup>15</sup>

Social media has provided new ways of engaging in public debate and resisting oppression by enabling anyone to use the platforms to connect with others in real time. Feminist Laurie Penny has argued that the internet led to a feminist revival in the mid-2000s as it enabled women to talk online with each other.<sup>16</sup> While social media has certainly transformed the way we communicate and obtain information, it should also be recognised that the current feminist uses of social media are part of a much longer history of women’s engagement in the media, including broadcast media. In its time, radio provided new ways of contributing to the public sphere by enabling live verbal communication that could reach large audiences and foster intimate connections with individual listeners. Through broadcasting, women formed communities and spoke directly to each other. Although the broadcasters in this thesis had to exhibit patrician ideals of educated, eloquent speech to

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<sup>12</sup> Carrie A. Rentschler, ‘Rape Culture and the Feminist Politics of Social Media’, *Girlhood Studies* 7, no. 1 (2014), 65.

<sup>13</sup> #MeToo spread virally in October 2017 in response to allegations of sexual assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, and then many other well-known entertainment industry figures including director Brett Ratner, actor Kevin Spacey and comedian Louis C.K. Many women used the hashtag to come forward with their own experiences of sexual harassment and assault.

<sup>14</sup> Michelle Smith, ‘Friday Essay: Talking, Writing and Fighting like Girls’, *The Conversation*, 30 September 2016, <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-talking-writing-and-fighting-like-girls-66211?utm>, accessed 16 December 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Laurie Penny quoted in Smith, ‘Friday Essay’.

secure their positions on the air, they played an important role in shifting the accepted boundaries of how women could participate in the public sphere by modelling active citizenship and encouraging their listeners to become engaged citizens themselves. The feminists of today are therefore part of a continuing line of women who identified media as a key tool of women's emancipation and used it to claim their public voice.

**Appendix 1: Topics from Irene Greenwood's *Women in the International News, 1937-1938***

Taken from a topic list in the Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
22/01/1937	Women and Education
5/02/1937	Women and Adventure
19/02/1937	U.S. Women in Public Office
5/03/1937	International Women's Days - Women in Government in the World
12/03/1937	Women's Firsts in Europe
26/03/1937	Amelia Earhart, Lady Heath
9/04/1937	Prunella Stack, Packham Health Centre, Frau Schultz-Klink
16/04/1937	Women MPs
25/06/1937	Country Women in Norway, Latvia, Poland, Dr Mary Wolley
2/07/1937	French, English and American Women Writers
9/07/1937	A Woman Views the News
16/07/1937	New Constitution and 1st Election in India with Women MPs
23/07/1937	Search for Amelia Earhart
30/07/1937	A Day in the Life of Florence Nightingale, Frances Perkins and Sonja Henie
6/08/1937	Japanese Women
13/08/1937	A Woman Views the News
27/08/1937	China - Mme Sun-Yat-Sen, Mme Chiang-Kai-Shek
3/09/1937	Pan-Pacific Personalities
17/09/1937	Lady Davidson, MP, and Other Women MPs
24/09/1937	Baroness Marthe Boel, new President of the National Council of Women
1/10/1937	Natalie Kalmus & Rosita Forbes
8/10/1937	New York World Fair and Monica Walsh (Director of Women's Participation)
22/10/1937	Sybil Thorndike, Christina Foyle, Caroline Haslett
29/10/1937	Queen Farida, Ataturk's Wife (Turkey), Caris Evelyn Mills
5/11/1937	Travel
12/11/1937	Jane Addams and Peace
26/11/1937	Indian Women & the 1st Female Cabinet Minister
10/12/1937	Indian and Philippine Women
24/12/1937	Mother and Child
31/12/1937	In Review 1937
14/01/1938	Elizabeth Fry
21/01/1938	Helen Melville, English Barrister, Women Judges in many countries
28/01/1938	Women in Purdah
4/02/1938	Women's Part in the Sesquicentenary celebrations
25/02/1938	Turkish Women
4/03/1938	Anthony Eden and His Wife Beatrice
11/03/1938	Countess of Warwick and Miss Myra Curtis
18/03/1938	Beatrice Webb
25/03/1938	Women and Adventure
1/04/1938	Mrs Gilbert Grosvenor and Miss Kathleen D. Courtney
8/04/1938	Madame Alexandra Neel and Miss Kathleen Glover - Adventurers
20/04/1938	Freya Stark - Traveller in Arabia

6/05/1938	Three Women Who Have Influenced Governments of their Respective Countries
13/05/1938	Mrs Haruko Katayama - Geisha - and Women of Japan
20/05/1938	Countess Geraldine Apponyi - 1st Queen of Albania, and Women of her Native Hungary
27/05/1938	Czech Women: Their Country, their Customs and their Outstanding Woman - Senator Plaminkova
3/06/1938	Madame Pierre Casgrain - Quebec Suffragist and Madame Genevieve Tabouis - French Journalist and Commentator
10/06/1938	Dr Edith Summerskill, Mrs Elsie Parker, Miss Caroline Woodruff and Mrs Stein
17/06/1938	Women of Brazil
24/06/1938	Miss Maude Bennot, Miss Rose Briggs, Miss Flo Field - Some Unusual Careers for Women
1/07/1938	Mrs Laurene Diehl, "Eulalie", Mrs Mary Long Whitmore
8/07/1938	Miss Octavia Hill, Mrs Cecil Chesterton
15/07/1938	Amelia Earhart - a Tribute to a Valiant Airwoman
22/07/1938	Emily Post, Rosalie Edge
29/07/1938	Mrs Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence
5/08/1938	Miss Mary Neal, Dame Ethel Smyth
12/08/1938	Dame Laura Knight - Greatest Living Woman Artist
19/08/1938	Miss Jean Batten
26/08/1938	Clare Sheridan - Sculptor, Journalist, and Citizen of the World
2/09/1938	Dowager Marchioness of Reading, Nurse Edith Cavell
9/09/1938	Dr Edith Summerskill, Mary Macarthur
16/09/1938	Miss Mary Anderson
23/09/1938	Women of the Philippines
30/09/1938	Some Notable Englishwomen Connected with the Present Crisis
2/10/1938	A Democratic League Talk
7/10/1938	Miss Caroline Haslett, General Evangeline Booth
14/10/1938	Lilian Bayliss
21/10/1938	Items of Interest from Holland, Egypt and Iran
28/10/1938	News About India's Women Legislators
4/11/1938	Women of Scandinavian Countries
18/11/1938	Women of Norway
25/11/1938	Nancy Bird, Dr Jean White, Dr Freda Gibson
2/12/1938	Women of Still Another Scandinavian Country - Finland
9/12/1938	A Finnish Woman Playwright, a Danish Woman Chief of Railways, a Norwegian Girl Athlete
16/12/1938	Rosita Forbes - English Woman Explorer, Lecturer and Journalist
23/12/1938	Christmas Thoughts
30/12/1938	1938 - In Review



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