



# Sound Citizens

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN BROADCASTERS  
CLAIM THEIR VOICE, 1923–1956

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Australian  
National  
University

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P R E S S



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# List of Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
AWNL	Australian Women's National League
<i>AWW</i>	<i>Australian Women's Weekly</i>
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CL	Coolbaroo League
CWA	Country Women's Association
HA	Housewives Association
IPC	International Peace Campaign
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
LNU	League of Nations Union
NCW	National Council of Women
NFSA	National Film and Sound Archive
POW	prisoners of war
RHA	Racial Hygiene Association
UA	United Associations
WAAAF	Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force
WIZO	Women's International Zionist Organisation
WSG	Women's Service Guilds
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association



# Introduction

In 1954, Dame Enid Lyons, the first Australian woman elected to the House of Representatives, remarked in an interview with *ABC Weekly* that radio 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. According to Lyons, radio had given women the ‘confidence’ to accept ‘responsibility in public affairs’, resulting in a marked improvement in women’s social and political standing.<sup>1</sup> Taking this claim as a starting point, this book shows 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. It traces 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 previously experienced. Further, radio bridged the public and private spheres as it was 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

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1 ‘Dame Enid Lyons: ABC Commissioner’, *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1954, 20.

made the medium especially suited to advancing women's position by providing them with a tool to integrate themselves into the public sphere. In this book I tell the story of 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.

## Radio in Australia

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 licences, the Australian Government abandoned this policy in 1924 and replaced it with 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, largely through advertising.<sup>2</sup>

In 1932, the Australian Government set up the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), which took over and nationalised the A-Class licences, ostensibly to increase quality programming in the smaller states. Radio was largely a middlebrow cultural form that featured programming that fell between high and popular culture, and often aimed to cultivate the general population.<sup>3</sup> However, what constituted the right balance between education and entertainment became a point of disagreement between A- and B-Class stations and their audiences. The ABC aimed to broadcast programs that 'educated, enlightened and entertained', and they projected their claim to cultural authority through the use of announcers with cultured voices.<sup>4</sup> But many listeners appreciated

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2 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.

3 Anna Johnston, 'Becoming "Pacific-Minded": Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts', *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017): 91.

4 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 11.

the lighthearted approach of the B-Class stations over the ABC, and the number of commercial stations steadily increased over the 1930s.<sup>5</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>6</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 (WWII) 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 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>7</sup> Further, 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>8</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>9</sup> Some talk radio remained, and the legalisation of talkback radio in 1967 provided a boost to the genre, but these programs were presented by provocative, and usually male, hosts.<sup>10</sup> By the 1970s, the role of radio as a central space for women to perform citizenship had receded, replaced

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5 Ibid.

6 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).

7 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), 163–79.

8 Potts, *Radio in Australia*, 70–73; Goodman and Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World'.

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

10 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 383–86.

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.

## Women on the Air

Women's radio programming has largely been presented as reinforcing domesticity, and restricting women's roles to those of wife, mother and homemaker. Lesley Johnson, for instance, 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>11</sup> Women were taught to be efficient household managers and their daily routines were structured around the radio program by creating set times for breaks.<sup>12</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.

From its earliest days, the ABC broadcast educative programming such as well-selected music, informative talks, church services and the occasional play.<sup>13</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 on the ABC 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.

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

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11 Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988), 101.

12 *Ibid.*, 101–04.

13 K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 25–29.

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>14</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 30 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 eavesdrop on political conversations, but they could not take part in them.<sup>15</sup>

In this book, I demonstrate 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. Indeed, the commercial stations often offered greater opportunities for women to discuss important issues on air as they were not subject to the same level of editorial scrutiny as the ABC.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the period covered by this book, the commercial stations and the ABC took turns at being more welcoming to women's broadcasting. From its earliest days, the ABC adhered to stringent editorial and personnel policies, including a marriage bar for women, which often limited women's opportunities to broadcast their ideas. Commercial stations had the freedom to make their own hiring and programming decisions, and increasingly offered more opportunities for women to broadcast throughout the 1930s and during WWII—including those in regional areas. But, in the postwar era, as commercial stations increasingly broadcast serial dramas in place of women's sessions, the ABC largely took over as the key medium for women's broadcasts on social and political issues.

This difference in focus between the ABC and commercial stations shaped their programming content and presentation styles, with the ABC positioning itself as a more highbrow offering, and commercial stations promoting entertainment and intimacy. Yet, class distinctions were still drawn among the commercial stations—Sydney station 2CH,

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14 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 203–05.

15 *Ibid.*, 204–05.

16 Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s–1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017): 293.



for example, promoted itself to advertisers as a station that appealed to a 'better class of homes'.<sup>17</sup> As we will see, the women broadcasters themselves were almost always white and usually middle class or wealthy, and often made use of their personal connections to claim their spots on the air. In many cases, they imagined that they were speaking to an audience of women similar to themselves. There are notable exceptions to this, however, such as Depression-era and regional women's sessions that were particularly focused on helping working-class women, and political broadcasts targeted at working-class women voters.

Women's programming on both Australian commercial radio and the ABC during the early to 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>18</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 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>19</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>20</sup>

Another listener wrote of the 3LO women's session in Melbourne:

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17 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 104.

18 Eva Linn, 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 10 February 1940, 20.

19 Gladys Moore, 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63.

20 'Emily', 'Her Ideal', *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63.

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>21</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. There has been a widespread perception that 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>22</sup> Evidence from the time suggests that the term 'announcer' had a much broader application, and simply referred to the presenter of a program, not exclusively as a news or inter-program presenter. In 1934, for example, Muriel Sutch noted that there were increasing numbers of women announcers who were no longer considered to be unsuitable for the job.<sup>23</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.

## Debates over Radio Speech

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

21 'Another Housewife', 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 63.

22 Potts, *Radio in Australia*, 106.

23 Muriel Sutch, 'Broadcasting from a Woman's Viewpoint', *Broadcast Year Book and Radio Listeners' Annual*, 1934, 89.

women in journalism.<sup>24</sup> Print media publications created communities of women through the use of specific types of language that signal membership of a particular group. 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 advent of radio in 1923 provided 'a new benchmark of correct Australian English', and broad Australian accents were generally not heard on the airwaves.<sup>25</sup> There was a divide between the formal voices of the ABC, and the more intimate and conversational style of the commercial stations.<sup>26</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>27</sup>

The perception of women's voices as too shrill or lacking in authority was common in the early decades of Australian radio.<sup>28</sup> Yet, 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 WWII.<sup>29</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 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>30</sup>

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24 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.

25 Joy Damousi, *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 240.

26 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 73.

27 Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 244.

28 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251.

29 Julie Coleman, *The Life of Slang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 218; Pam Peters, 'Australian English', in *Americanization in Australia*, ed. Philip Bell and Roger Bell (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998), 32–44.

30 J. T. Fawcett, 'The Cult of the Extra R', *ABC Weekly*, 20 January 1945, 8.

Women speakers could, and did, exhibit good radio voices that conformed to the highest standards of elocution.<sup>31</sup> This was, for example, a key aspect of the early success of the first woman announcer on Australian radio, Stella Hume, who ran B-Class station 5DN along with her husband Ernest from their Adelaide home in the 1920s.<sup>32</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>33</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, in March 1945, the *Listener In* published a letter that 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 of Gloucester.’<sup>34</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>35</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>36</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 that 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.

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31 Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 254.

32 Nancy Robinson Whittle, ‘Hume, Stella Leonora Hariette’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, first published in hardcopy in 1996), adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hume-stella-leonora-harriette-10571, accessed 9 May 2016.

33 ‘A Visit to 5.D.N Adelaide’, *Listener In*, 7 November 1925, 12.

34 ‘Anti-Jane’, ‘Voicing a Protest’, *Listener In*, 10 March 1945, 18.

35 ‘Mary Jane’, ‘Jane of the A.B.C.’, *Listener In*, 24 March 1945, 17.

36 ‘Sunny Jim’, ‘Unfair Attacks’, *Listener In*, 31 March 1945, 18.

This book reveals that women not only spoke on the airwaves, but also that their radio speech was a powerful tool for challenging the gender hierarchy of the public sphere. 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. 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.

## The Australian Woman Citizen

This book restores 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 the mid-twentieth century. As such, it played a key role in the longer history of feminism and women's citizenship in Australia.

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>37</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>38</sup> Suffrage-era feminists believed that women's enfranchisement and equality would bring much-needed new perspectives into civic decision-making, resulting in the betterment of society.<sup>39</sup> But non-white women were left out of this vision of female citizenship—for example, white activists completely ignored non-white

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37 Eva Cox, 'Feminism and Citizenship', in *Rethinking Australian Citizenship*, ed. Wayne Hudson and John Kane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56–65.

38 Patricia Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 176; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 19–45; Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), 172.

39 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 28.

women during the campaign for women's suffrage in South Australia in the 1880s and 1890s. Although the South Australian *Constitution (Female Suffrage) Act 1895* 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>40</sup>

The opportunities for women to be integrated into the equal citizenship of the independent worker were curtailed by the 1910s, replaced by a new 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>41</sup> Although, as Susan Magarey has argued, 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>42</sup> Marilyn Lake has shown that 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>43</sup> They argued that as their work as mothers was equal to men's paid work, they should enjoy the same financial security and independence available to working men. Although they were unsuccessful in winning a motherhood endowment, they were successful in creating a maternalist welfare state and eventually winning child endowment.<sup>44</sup>

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

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40 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.

41 Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, 173.

42 Ibid.

43 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.

44 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 12.

autonomy could only be won within these limits'.<sup>45</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>46</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>47</sup>

Although the interwar years saw the dominance of maternal citizenship as an ideology, it did not go unchallenged. According to Marilyn Lake, 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>48</sup> Much of this rhetoric was a continuation of the vision of first-wave feminists to integrate women into equal and independent citizenship. WWII 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>49</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

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45 Marian Quartly, 'Defending "The 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): 179.

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

47 Marilyn Lake, 'Personality, Individuality, Nationality: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship 1902–1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994): 30.

48 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 173.

49 Zora Simic, 'A Hall of Selective Mirrors: Feminism, History and Identity, 1919–1969' (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2003), 1–2.

movement in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>50</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. Between 1919 and 1969, feminists utilised a dual rhetoric that emphasised both women's equality as citizens and 'the special contributions of mothers'.<sup>51</sup> They wanted to legitimise their movement by demonstrating that it could be incorporated 'into the political, social and cultural fabric of society'.<sup>52</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 featured in this book believed that broadcasting could affect 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.

## Radio and Public Spheres

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>53</sup> Jennifer Bowen has examined how many different groups of people enthusiastically embraced early Australian spoken-word radio as a way to have their voices heard in public.<sup>54</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>55</sup> Some histories of radio have recognised the importance of radio magazines in educating listeners, particularly Johnson's work on interwar Australian radio, and

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50 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 206.

51 Simic, 'A Hall of Selective Mirrors', 1–2.

52 Ibid.

53 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*; Inglis, *This is the ABC*.

54 Jennifer Bowen, 'A Clamour of Voices: Negotiations of Power and Purpose in Australian Spoken-Word Radio from 1924 to 1942' (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2018).

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



Lacey's work on women's radio in Weimar and Nazi Germany.<sup>56</sup> Although limited source material makes researching the responses of radio audiences difficult, there has been 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>57</sup> Rebecca P. Scales has examined the intense debates that accompanied the rapid spread of broadcasting in France following World War I. She has argued that France began to understand itself as a 'radio nation' where radio listening became an important, if contested, citizenship practice.<sup>58</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>59</sup>

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>60</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

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56 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 78; Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923–1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 11.

57 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), 311–26.

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

59 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).

60 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), 69–92; Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 198–205.

sessions, as soap opera actors and as singers.<sup>61</sup> Several historians, including Damousi and Inglis, have identified instances of women's radio voices being criticised.<sup>62</sup> However, the focus on these criticisms has obscured the ways in which women broadcasters themselves claimed their voices on the air and built their careers.

American broadcasting historian Michele Hilmes has questioned these interpretations of women's roles on radio; according to her, 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>63</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 that 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>64</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>65</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 that masquerades as a space for all.

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', that can allow subordinated groups to create

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61 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; 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.

62 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 199; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251.

63 Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 131–32.

64 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.

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

and disseminate alternative discourses 'to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs'.<sup>66</sup> Several scholars have highlighted the existence of feminine counterpublics in modern media sources, including Hilmes on daytime radio programming for American women.<sup>67</sup> Hilmes's 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 book, 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. Therefore, radio provided not only a space for women to discuss their opinions among themselves, but also a platform for them to reshape the gendered hierarchies of society.

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 that 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>68</sup> Further, radio provided a public space in which various women could discuss their work and ideas, including controversial topics, with a wide audience.<sup>69</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>70</sup> In her research on women's voices on Argentine and Uruguayan golden age radio, Christine Ehrick focused on case studies

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66 Ibid., 56–80.

67 Miyako Inoue, *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 110–11; Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 159–60.

68 Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves', 86–87.

69 Ibid., 89–90.

70 Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*.

of a small number 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>71</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>72</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>73</sup> Kate Murphy has produced a comprehensive history of early women at the British Broadcasting Corporation (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>74</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, although there have been some brief considerations of this topic. Ehrick, for example, has argued that criticisms of women’s radio voices in the

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71 Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

72 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.

73 Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves*, iix–x, 4–7.

74 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).

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>75</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>76</sup>

There is also exciting work currently being done on women's radio in Australia, including Kylie Andrews's research on ABC women producers, Jeannine Baker's project on the history of women in Australian broadcasting and Justine Lloyd's work on mapping the geographies of women's radio.<sup>77</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 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>78</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

75 Ehrick, "Savage Dissonance", 76.

76 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.

77 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; Kylie Andrews, 'Australian Broadcasting's Female "Pilgrims": Women and Work in the Post-War ABC' (PhD thesis, University of Technology Sydney, 2019); Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 292–308; Justine Lloyd, *Intimate Geographies: Gender and Media in the Broadcast Age* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

78 Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 297–98.

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>79</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>80</sup> This book 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. There is a much broader and more complex history of women's contributions to Australian broadcasting than has been previously acknowledged.

## Researching Radio History

Like many histories of radio, this book 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. 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>81</sup>

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79 Ibid., 299–300.

80 Ibid., 298–99.

81 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 70.

They also provide key evidence of reception, in the form of listener letters printed in the magazines. 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 audiences. Some magazines, such as *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, profiled celebrity radio personalities. The feminisation of the content of radio magazines indicates the importance of radio as a medium that had a significant influence on the lives of women.

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>82</sup>

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, the selection is limited. I have been fortunate that a number of recordings of Lyons's 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 National Archives of Australia.

## Chapters

This book traces 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

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82 Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 302.

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 WWII. Next, the book 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 1 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. Australia's dual system of commercial and public broadcasting influenced programming and audiences, with the former airing popular entertainment programs, and the latter predisposed to educational or civic-minded content, usually delivered by well-credentialed speakers. Commercial stations, however, offered many opportunities for women to speak on the air, and were less encumbered by strict editorial policies. 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. Further, 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 2 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 WWII 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 on both the ABC and commercial stations 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 that 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 3 argues that broadcasting was an important means by which Australian women contributed to the nation as patriotic citizens during WWII. Through radio talks, women encouraged each other to participate in the war effort and relayed their own experiences of the conflict. They gave short-wave 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 4 examines how women in federal parliamentary politics used broadcasting on both commercial and public radio 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: Enid Lyons, Dorothy Tangney and Jessie 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 provide 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 5 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 that could empower women and they used their programs to promote their ideal of the postwar woman citizen, with mixed success. King and Greenwood were both Western Australian broadcasters and their work ensured that women's talk-based programming continued to have a strong presence in that state well into the 1950s.

Chapter 6 uses several case studies of women's broadcasting in areas outside 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 book 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.



# 1

## 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>

A dual system of public and commercial broadcasting is a hallmark of Australia's media landscape; however, this system was not in place until nearly a decade after the introduction of radio into the country. Originally, A-Class stations were not government run but rather funded through listener licence fees, while B-Class stations were privately funded. In this early period, both types of stations took seriously their responsibility to educate the public, and it was not until the 1930s that commercial radio's role as a domestic companion and entertainment medium became apparent.<sup>2</sup>

Public broadcasting finally arrived in Australia with the establishment of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) on 1 July 1932.<sup>3</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, and vice-president of the National Council

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

2 Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988), 1–2, 202–04.

3 K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 5.

of Women (NCW).<sup>4</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>5</sup> Couchman believed that broadcasting had significant power to improve society. The above quotation, 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 role of broadcasting.<sup>6</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>7</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>8</sup> These two aims—the social potential of broadcasting and women’s civic duty—were central elements that shaped the development of women’s broadcasting as a key platform for women to contribute to the public sphere in the interwar years. 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>9</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 affect 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, a high point of the activist woman citizen due to a significant number of large and active women’s organisations.<sup>10</sup> During the 1930s, women broadcasters used radio to perform their civic duty of supporting

4 Judith Smart, ‘Couchman, Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay (1876–1982)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2007), adb.anu.edu.au/biography/couchman-dame-elizabeth-may-ramsay-12359, accessed 26 February 2018.

5 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32.

6 Baumberg, ‘Mrs. Claude Couchman’.

7 Smart, ‘Couchman, Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay (1876–1982)’.

8 Baumberg, ‘Mrs. Claude Couchman’.

9 ‘Radio Likes and Dislikes’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, August 1936, 43–44.

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

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 counterattacks on women workers within the context of high male unemployment. Professional 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. While in this early period commercial radio presented the greatest opportunities for women to air their voices, Couchman's example shows that there were also growing opportunities at the ABC.

## 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, 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>11</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>12</sup> The NCW was an umbrella organisation that 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), and 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 that went beyond party politics, thereby constructing women as a collective with coherent and uniform political goals.<sup>13</sup>

11 Marilyn Lake, 'The Inviolable Woman: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship in Australia, 1900–1945', *Gender & History* 8, no. 2 (1996): 197–98.

12 Smart, 'Couchman, Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay (1876–1982)'.

13 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.

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 tyrannies'.<sup>14</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 that 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>15</sup> The ideal of maternal citizenship, however, was also one that 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>16</sup>

It was not only avowed feminists who advocated women's citizenship in the interwar years. There was also 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, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. 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>17</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>18</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.

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

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14 Marilyn Lake, 'Personality, Individuality, Nationality: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship 1902–1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994): 26.

15 *Ibid.*, 25–28.

16 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 34.

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

18 *Ibid.*, 39–45.

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.

## Broadcasting Feminism

Interwar feminists recognised the potential of radio as a medium that 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 1930s radio program that featured these feminist messages was the *Australian Women's Weekly's* (AWW) session, *The Woman's Hour*. Launched in June 1933 as a newspaper for women, the AWW promoted a feminist agenda in its earliest years by offering a platform for a re-evaluation of women's role in society.<sup>19</sup> Crucially, the magazine also 'gave Australian women a redefinition of Australianness that included them in it'.<sup>20</sup> This reassessment of Australianness extended to broadcasting.

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' that would extend the magazine's policy of giving women the best possible service in broadcasting.<sup>21</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 in the Sydney radio scene. The AWW emphasised Vautier's outstanding experience and attractive voice—'one of the finest broadcasting voices in Australia'—

19 Denis O'Brien, *The Weekly* (Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 1982), 21.

20 Susan Sheridan et al., *Who Was That Woman?: The Australian Women's Weekly in the Postwar Years* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), 4.

21 'The Women's Weekly Links Up with Station 2UW', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 24 February 1934, 2.



which equipped her to take the helm of their women's sessions in 1934.<sup>22</sup> The choice of Vautier as the regular announcer for the session ensured that the feminist message was 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 at the 2UW studios on 26 February by feminist Jessie Street, Littlejohn's colleague in the UA. In her speech, Street articulated her perception of radio as a transformative medium for women, congratulating the directors of 2UW and the *AWW* 'on their arrangement for a link-up, which she thought would do much to help Australian women realise their proper status in life'.<sup>23</sup> The radio session would complement 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, she had become well known in Sydney feminist circles by the 1920s, serving as an executive member of the NCW of New South Wales and the Feminist Club, founding the League of Women Voters in 1927 and co-founding the UA with Jessie Street in 1929. Littlejohn's broadcasting career was also prolific.<sup>24</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>25</sup> 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>26</sup>

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22 Ibid.

23 '2UW's New Women's Sessions: Successful Opening at the New Studios', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 3 March 1934, 21.

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

25 Ibid.; Lake, *Getting Equal*, 171.

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

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 the 1920s.<sup>27</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 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>28</sup> The active citizenship of feminist leaders like Littlejohn was often made possible by their independent incomes and domestic help.<sup>29</sup> This was certainly true for Littlejohn, who was from a wealthy background that 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>30</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>31</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>32</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, amidst their multitudinous household tasks, their tennis, or

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27 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 171.

28 'Personalities at 2UW', *Broadcast Year Book and Radio Listeners' Annual*, 1934, 106.

29 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 140.

30 *Ibid.*, 171.

31 'The Women's Weekly Links Up with Station 2UW', 2.

32 Linda P. Littlejohn, 'Equal Social Rights for Sexes', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 10 June 1933, 1.

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>33</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>34</sup> This, in turn, resulted in a more educated populace. Through articles such as these, Littlejohn 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>35</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>36</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 the music of other countries, and another on whether prosperity or adversity had the most influence on personality development.<sup>37</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>38</sup> Another feature of the program was its on-air debates 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>39</sup> Through talks such as these, the *AWW*'s radio sessions promoted a distinctively feminist agenda,

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33 Linda P. Littlejohn, '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 28 April 1934, 5.

34 Linda P. Littlejohn, 'Radio and the Written Word: A Close Alliance', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 3 March 1934, 10.

35 Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 296.

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

37 'The Women's Weekly and 2UW', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 10 March 1934, 16.

38 '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 12 May 1934, 8.

39 '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.

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 that 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 played a crucial role in 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 from Perth to Sydney in 1931, Irene Greenwood joined the UA on a recommendation from Bessie Rischbieth, who she knew from her time in the Western Australian 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>40</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>41</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>42</sup> The example of Littlejohn and the *AWW*'s radio sessions demonstrates that broadcasting was a key way in which the shift in emphasis from highlighting 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.

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40 OH 1094, Interview with Irene Greenwood, Feminist, 1 August 1982, State Library of Western Australia, Perth.

41 Kaye Murray, *A Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood (1898–1992)* (Perth: Kaye Murray Productions, 2005), 42.

42 '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 25 August 1934, 8; '2UW Highlights for Readers', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 21 April 1934, 22.

## 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. They recognised the role of radio as a tool that was especially well suited to raising the political consciousness of women in the home, even if they often focused on different issues in their broadcasts than more overt feminists such as Littlejohn.

The HA articulated a concept of women's citizenship based on Protestant Christian values that were secularised and practical, rather than overtly spiritual. It promoted women's domestic role in the language of 'modernity, efficiency, science and progress'—'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>43</sup>

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>44</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>45</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,

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43 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): 216.

44 *Ibid.*, 223.

45 'Housewives Association's Annual Report', *Housewife*, May 1936, 9.

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 to equality is a valueless one'.<sup>46</sup> Further, she asserted 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>47</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 that 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 World War I, 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>48</sup> Cecilia Downing, 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>49</sup>

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

47 Ibid.

48 'Mrs. Watts Broadcasts to Members', *Housewife*, June 1936, 4.

49 'Broadcasts by Mrs. John Downing, Senior Vice-President', *Housewife*, March 1936, 8.

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>50</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>51</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—that 'portion of the community least able to fight for itself, and to whom the price of bread is of very great importance'.<sup>52</sup> The HA, therefore, recognised that radio was a medium that 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 also 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 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 under-reported, at least one-fifth of wage and salary earners were out of work between 1930

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50 Ibid.

51 'Broadcast by Mrs A. B. Speedie, Vice-President', *Housewife*, May 1936, 4.

52 'A Subject That Affects All Housewives—The Price of Bread: A Strongly Worded Protest through 3AW by Miss Rachael Robinson', *Housewife*, October 1936, 5.

and 1934, and unemployment reached a high point of 30 per cent of union members in mid-1932.<sup>53</sup> In 1932, up to 1 million people, in a total workforce of 2 million, lacked stable full-time employment.<sup>54</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.<sup>55</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>56</sup> Moreover, 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>57</sup> Further, charity was strongly stigmatised, with people turning to charitable organisations only when they could not get assistance from friends and family.<sup>58</sup> 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>59</sup> Speaking in an oral history interview in the 1970s, 'Sheila', a former 3KZ advertising scriptwriter, 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>60</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>61</sup>

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53 Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 4 1901–1942: The Succeeding Age* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 275.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 286–87.

56 Ibid., 279.

57 Ibid., 278.

58 Ibid., 284.

59 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.

60 Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930's Great Depression in Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1978), 285–89.

61 Ibid., 288.



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. These clubs enabled radio station to foster intimate communities among 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>62</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, including facilitating tie-ins with local and national businesses.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the clubs allowed for personal contact with radio hosts and other listeners, which fostered a greater sense of intimacy among audiences.

While 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, they also provide one of the clearest and most widespread examples of how women's citizenship was expanded through radio in the interwar years. Feminist conceptions of citizenship in the early twentieth century often 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>64</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 that 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>65</sup> Stelzer began the Happiness Club in 1929, when she was giving regular talks on Sydney commercial

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62 Griffen-Foley, 'Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio', 127.

63 Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 129.

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

65 Griffen-Foley, 'Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio', 127.

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 the 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 tearoom's doors. With such overwhelming attendance, Stelzer decided to turn the gathering into an official club, with the aim to make others happy, prevent loneliness and work for charity.<sup>66</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 55 branches.<sup>67</sup> It was a phenomenon that 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>68</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>69</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 quotation 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

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66 'Sincerity is Keynote', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 February 1936, 6.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 126.

branches, and in that way secures the support of the listening public. For instance, busy person 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>70</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 in which 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>71</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. Further, 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>72</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>73</sup> The 3AW Women's Association held regular outings and sporting events, including hosting an ice skating club. Their motto was 'hold on to health and you will hold on to Youth'.<sup>74</sup>

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70 '2GB Happiness Club Activities: Brings More Revenue for Charities', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 2 March 1936, 12.

71 'Radio's Important Role', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 April 1936, 19.

72 'Women's Club Notes', *Radio Times*, 13 June 1936, 7.

73 'Australian Women's League', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 2 March 1936, 22.

74 'Women's Club Notes', 7.

## Women Announcers

Radio raised the profile of its 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>75</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 announcers anticipated that radio could improve society and they worked to ensure that it did so.

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 that organised a range of social and sporting activities.<sup>76</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>77</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 that would broaden their outlook. She argued for the importance of radio in educating listeners in music and the importance of home happiness for good citizenship.<sup>78</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>79</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.

75 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.

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

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

78 Ibid.; Dorothy Graham, 'The Housewife's Corner', *West Australian Wireless News and Musical World*, 1 July 1930, 35.

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

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. 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 commercial radio renowned for her genuineness and empathy.<sup>80</sup> In her session, *Smilin' Thru'*, she covered a diverse range of topics, from fashion, to theatre, sports and motor cars.<sup>81</sup> She was presented as a 'forceful, dominating personality' with an 'absurdly soft heart that is always melting at the silly little sentimental things of life'.<sup>82</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>83</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

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80 Bridget Griffen-Foley, 'The Gabblings of Gabba', *Australian Book Review*, no. 289, March 2007, 35.

81 'Winner of Myra Dempsey's 2UW Competition', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 February 1936, 28.

82 'Smiling Thru' With Myra Dempsey', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, October 1937, 23.

83 Ibid.

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>84</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>85</sup>

Dorothy Jordan was one of the first women announcers in Australia, starting on Sydney commercial station 2BL in 1925 before joining commercial station 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. 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>86</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>87</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>88</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>89</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>90</sup> Once again, Jordan articulated her own vision of radio's potential

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84 *Ibid.*, 45.

85 *Ibid.*

86 'Mother and Daughter in Radio', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, November 1935, 43.

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Ibid.*

89 'How Australia's Pioneer Woman Announcer Started', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 30 March 1935, 22.

90 '2GB—The Theosophical Broadcasting Station', *Broadcast Year Book and Radio Listeners' Annual*, 1934, 111.

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.

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>91</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>92</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>93</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 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.

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91 'Miss Radio', 'For Men Only—and That's Why Women Listen!', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 October 1937, 7.

92 *Ibid.*, 48.

93 Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia*, 276.

## 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 on both commercial and public radio was viewed as a tool that 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. In this period, commercial radio provided greater opportunities for women to speak on air, and they founded women's clubs both to support local communities and promote local and national businesses. However, the public broadcaster also offered women's sessions, as the example of Dorothy Graham's session on the ABC's Perth station demonstrates.

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 among women and establish radio as a platform that could be used to 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—especially on the ABC.





## 2

# 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 the late 1920s, Helen Beegling became well known as the compere of 2GB's women's session, and gave many talks on her extensive travels in the United States, the Pacific Islands and Asia during the interwar years.<sup>2</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>3</sup> In October 1930, Rockhampton's *Evening News* reported that few 'women have experienced more unusual adventures than Miss Helen Beegling, radio announcer'.<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 rise of fascism and the descent into World War II (WWII) 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 global citizens.

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1 'Miss Helen Jean Beegling', *Brisbane Courier*, 5 June 1930, 20.

2 Ibid.

3 'Adventures in the South Seas', *Evening News*, 25 October 1930, 2; 'Adventures on Her Travels', *Sun*, 20 May 1938, 11.

4 'Adventures in the South Seas'.

Australian women broadcasters used radio to claim their own voices as experts on international affairs and to encourage other women to become active world citizens in the 1930s. World citizenship refers to beliefs and practices that can be used 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> During a period when feminist internationalism experienced a high point of activity, internationalist women broadcasters sought to promote Australians' responsibility to world affairs by giving talks about their experiences abroad and knowledge of various foreign countries, and about international feminism and peace activism. 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.

## Connecting the World via Wireless

From its introduction in 1923, radio was promoted as a medium that 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>6</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.<sup>7</sup> Feminist leader Jessie Street, for instance, believed that technology had 'made the world a neighbourhood' where isolationism was no longer possible.<sup>8</sup> This ethos was captured by travel

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

6 'In the Air!', *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 18; 'Listening-In to America', *Listener In*, 17 January 1925, 20.

7 Yves Rees, 'Making Waves Across the Pacific: Women, Radio Broadcasting and Australian-US Relations', *Feminist Media Histories* 5, no. 3 (2019): 85–113; Justine Lloyd, "A Girdle of Thought Thrown around the World": International Aspirations of in Women's Programming in Australia and Canada', *Feminist Media Histories* 5, no. 3 (2019): 168–94.

8 Lenore Coltheart, 'Citizens of the World: Jessie Street and International Feminism', *Hecate* 31, no. 1 (2005): 187.

talks, a type of broadcast that featured descriptions of journeys to far off places, the cultural experiences of the traveller while there, and sometimes even information about the culture and history of the particular country. They capitalised on a desire by middle-class women to experience the world, even if it were not feasible for them to undertake the long journeys from Australia's shores.

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 carried accounts of travels across Australia and the world. Travel writing in accessible, middlebrow forums such as *Walkabout* provided an easy way for the public to experience other cultures.<sup>9</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, writer Patsy 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>10</sup> Travel articles were also published in women's magazines, such as the *Australian Women's Weekly*, thereby demonstrating both their popularity among the readers of these publications and the enthusiasm of the women who wrote them.<sup>11</sup> Radio travel talks were another manifestation of this genre that imbued the tales with the intimate and sensory experience of oral storytelling.

Europe was a popular topic for travel talks. Actress and playwright Catherine Duncan, for example, 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>12</sup> The focus on European countries in the 1930s often 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.

9 Anna Johnston, 'Becoming "Pacific-Minded": Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts', *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017): 91.

10 Robyn Greaves, 'Footloose in Tasmania: Patsy Adam-Smith and Middlebrow Travel Writing, 1950–1973', *Studies in Travel Writing* 20, no. 1 (2016): 69.

11 Bruce Elder, 'Travel Reporting', in *A Companion to the Australian Media*, ed. Bridget Griffen-Foley (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, 2014), 476–77.

12 Georgia Rivers, 'Women and the Microphone', *Listener In*, 6 July 1935, 23.

Australian women also spoke about destinations beyond Europe; 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. Travel and tourism to Asia was a crucial aspect of developing Australian impressions of the region and its inhabitants.<sup>13</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.

Miss Punshon 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>14</sup> Later that month, she gave a talk on Korea, where the 'Japanese annexation has rapidly brought better conditions'.<sup>15</sup> Miss V. Robertson, who arrived back in Melbourne in 1930 after 14 years in India, gave talks on life in India in the same month. The *Listener In* reported that 'to meet and converse with her is to be transported to the land of adventure'.<sup>16</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>17</sup> Margery Pulsford gave a series of talks on Australian Broadcasting Commission (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>18</sup>

Although evidence of listener reactions to these talks is limited, there are some letters that demonstrate listeners' opinions. 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 hearing talks about life in Belgium and Holland, being carried to other distant lands and being provided with a 'window on the world'; the letter was especially important for women in country areas.<sup>19</sup> These letters

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13 Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2014), 4.

14 'What's on the Air for Us Women', *Listener In*, 1 January 1930, 34.

15 'People in the Programs', *Listener In*, 29 January 1930, 20–21.

16 'People in the Programs', *Listener In*, 8 January 1930, 16–17.

17 *Ibid.*

18 'Margery Pulsford', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 February 1936, 19.

19 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63; 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 63.

indicate that women appreciated not only learning about the world but also 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>20</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 Young Women’s Christian Association (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, 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 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>21</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 also 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

20 ‘Personalities behind the Dials’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 14 December 1935, 28.

21 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.

intellectuals associated with the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) who became ‘missionaries’ for the cause of promoting the Asia-Pacific region to Australians.<sup>22</sup> The IPR, originally established in Honolulu, was one of a number of international organisations that established Australian branches in the interwar years, and that ‘demonstrated a growing concern about Australia’s evolving status towards independence and its position in the Pacific’.<sup>23</sup> Other notable bodies included the Australian Institute of International Affairs, the local branch of the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs and the League of Nations Union (LNU), which also originated in Britain. Glenda Sluga has shown that, throughout the interwar period, the LNU spread to numerous countries and boasted large membership bases, which ‘reflected a popular, mainstream fascination with international sociability and international minds, often alongside expressions of national patriotism and/or imperial efforts’.<sup>24</sup> The Australian branches of these organisations attracted many high-profile and influential members who were often involved with several groups.<sup>25</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 LNU, gave regular radio talks 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>26</sup> Jean Stevenson, general secretary of the Melbourne branch of the YWCA, spoke on the organisation’s activities in Czechoslovakia and Poland to demonstrate its wide international reach.<sup>27</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>28</sup> Established in

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22 David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850–1939* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1999), 226.

23 Summy, ‘From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor’, 31.

24 Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 71.

25 Summy, ‘From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor’, 32.

26 ‘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.

27 ‘Broadcasting Programs of the Australian Stations’, *Listener In*, 5 March 1930, 23.

28 ‘League of Nations Union,’ *Argus*, 24 May 1934, 7.

Britain towards the end of World War I, the LNU was an international organisation that promoted the aims and work of the League of Nations and pressured governments to uphold the principles of its covenant.<sup>29</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>30</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>31</sup> Duncan invited guests who could speak about women in other countries and international affairs more generally, and she also spoke about her own areas of expertise:

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>32</sup>

Rather than present their unique perspectives on international relations theory, the speakers were asked 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 attractive to listeners from country areas who wished to hear about world affairs.<sup>33</sup> The countries that featured on the program in 1935 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>34</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.

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

30 Ibid.

31 Georgia Rivers, 'Women at the Microphone', *Listener In*, 27 July 1935, 19.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.



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 about the value of language in promoting international understanding.<sup>35</sup> Following the conference, the ABC sponsored her to tour China and Japan to assess the reception of Victorian ABC short-wave station 3LR in those countries and give a series of broadcast talks on the region upon her return.<sup>36</sup> Her experiences of broadcasting in Asia demonstrated the medium's capacity for enhancing mutual engagement and understanding, as reported in the *Age* 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>37</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>38</sup> It was, apparently, the 'first time Australia had sent anyone to the East for such a purpose'.<sup>39</sup> Duncan reported that, while the current reception was relatively poor, there was significant potential for Australia to develop a regular program of short-wave broadcasting to Asia, as English-speaking expatriates and 'educated Chinese' were eager to listen to Australian broadcasts.<sup>40</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>41</sup>

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35 Summy, 'From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor', 36.

36 'Publicity for Australia: Broadcasting in the East', *Sun*, 2 December 1936, 21.

37 'Broadcasting in the East: "Undreamt of Possibilities"', *Age*, 5 December 1936, 9.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 'China Likes Australian Broadcast Programs: Travellers from the East', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 1936, 20.

41 '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>42</sup> According to Walker, 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>43</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>44</sup> Her listeners, the LNU and other left-wing activists protested the decision. For example, the Communist Party of Australia’s 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>45</sup>

The ABC was embroiled in other censorship debates in this period, most notably those surrounding the ‘The Watchman’, the pseudonym of E. A. Mann. He was the most dominant and popular political commentator in Australia at the time, airing up to 11 times a week in 1938.<sup>46</sup> ‘The Watchman’ put forward strong viewpoints that were often very critical of the government of the day, and the ABC received increasing numbers of complaints from politicians and others about him.<sup>47</sup> There was significant argument within the ABC about whether an anonymous broadcaster was given too much airtime, and whether alternative viewpoints were being crowded out. ‘The Watchman’ himself refused to air both sides of

42 Summy, ‘From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor’, 40.

43 Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 232.

44 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.

45 ‘Radio Censorship’, *Workers’ Weekly*, 30 September 1938, 2.

46 Neville Petersen, ‘The Decline and Fall of “The Watchman”—the Logic behind the Actions of the ABC’, *Politics* 15, no. 1 (1980): 98.

47 Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988), 181–83.

controversial issues and to seek appropriate confirmation from sources, and became increasingly difficult for the ABC to manage.<sup>48</sup> From 1939, ‘The Watchman’ was subject to censorship on the orders of the Menzies government, and Mann’s identity was outed in parliament later that year.<sup>49</sup> In 1940, the ABC transferred news commentaries to the Talks Department, in part to reduce Mann’s influence—he resigned soon after.<sup>50</sup>

Duncan’s talks were reinstated on a less frequent basis until the beginning of WWII, 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>51</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.

During its time on the air, the *League of Nations Union Radio Club* hosted numerous notable women guests. Bessie Rischbieth, for instance, gave a talk on the program in 1936 about women’s influence at Geneva. 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>52</sup> 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>53</sup>

48 Petersen, ‘The Decline and Fall of “The Watchman”’, 98.

49 E. M. Andrews, ‘Mann, Edward Alexander (1874–1951)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University), published first in hardcopy 1986, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mann-edward-alexander-7472](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mann-edward-alexander-7472), accessed 26 February 2018.

50 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 181–83; Andrews, ‘Mann, Edward Alexander (1874–1951)’.

51 Warne, ‘Constance Duncan’, 300–01; Summy, ‘From Missionary to Ministerial Advisor’, 40; ‘Broadcasting—National Stations’, *Argus*, 8 August 1940, 2.

52 Zora Simic, ‘A Hall of Selective Mirrors: Feminism, History and Identity, 1919–1969’ (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2003), 37.

53 Bessie Rischbieth, ‘Women’s Influence at Geneva’, Script, MS 2004, Papers of Bessie Rischbieth, Series 2, Box 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra (hereafter NLA).

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 that she described in this talk as 'the landmark of my life'.<sup>54</sup> She noted that there were over 1,000 women who 'came to secure better opportunities for women inside the machinery of the League of Nations as promised in the Covenant'.<sup>55</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 argued that 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', and she encouraged listeners to become involved.<sup>56</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>57</sup> She then described her work on the league's Child Welfare Committee, including her 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>58</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>59</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.

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54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Bessie Rischbieth, 'Australian Women at Geneva', Script, 1936, MS 2004, Papers of Bessie Rischbieth, Series 2, Box 2, NLA.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

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 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>60</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>61</sup> Like many other British feminists, she also broke with pacifism (particularly the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) in the mid-1930s, believing that such a position would only lead to the victory of fascism. Therefore, by this point, feminist internationalism was no longer synonymous with feminist pacifism and there were competing views on what should be done.<sup>62</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 that were 'of vital importance to every citizen'.<sup>63</sup> The first was nationalism, the doctrine that caused the Great War and that fascist countries had revived 'in its crudest and most violent form'.<sup>64</sup> The second was internationalism, which 'recognizes the underlying unity which exists between nations' and 'maintains the doctrine of international rights' through the League of Nations.<sup>65</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 assert their moral commitment to peace while productively engaging the fascist countries

60 'International Peace Worker: Miss Kathleen Courtney's Visit', *West Australian*, 4 April 1938, 9.

61 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): 452.

62 Ibid.

63 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.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

so that they did not feel cornered into a war.<sup>66</sup> She emphasised that upholding ‘the doctrine of international right and collective security’ needed the support of all citizens, ‘not only in Great Britain, but [also] in the Dominions’.<sup>67</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>68</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>69</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. Greenwood 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 WSG 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. 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 her 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>70</sup>

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66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Catherine Horne Fisher, ‘Greenwood, Irene Adelaide (1898–1992)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published online 2017), [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/greenwood-irene-adelaide-25528/text33876](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/greenwood-irene-adelaide-25528/text33876), accessed 26 February 2018.

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 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 Australia's west in the mid-twentieth century were distinct from those in the country's 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>71</sup>

Greenwood's weapon was her 'concerned, informed, warm, educated, and cultured voice'.<sup>72</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 prepared her to speak effectively in public, and also provided her with skills that would prove useful when she began her radio career.<sup>73</sup> The UA chose her to be the 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>74</sup>

Greenwood used her broadcasts to publicise women's equality, peace and socialism, all of which were presented as international issues. 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>75</sup> Yet, there is also substantial evidence that her ABC

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71 John Andrew Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship: The Radio Broadcasts of Irene Greenwood, 1936–1954' (Honours thesis, Murdoch University, 1988), 4.

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

73 *Ibid.*, 19.

74 *Ibid.*, 69.

75 Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship', 41.

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>76</sup>

Greenwood's talks were broadcast during Dorothy Graham's women's session, at 11am on Friday mornings. 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 that flew under the radar.<sup>77</sup> While broadcasting on a commercial station would not have required the same scrutiny, it would have required engaging with advertisers, which would have impacted both the seriousness and prestige of her talks. As discussed in Chapter 5, Greenwood would later navigate this tension on her commercial radio women's session *Woman to Woman* in the 1950s.

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>78</sup> Greenwood argued that it was 'vitaly necessary' for women to understand international affairs and 'take their part in shaping our Brave New World'.<sup>79</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>80</sup> Greenwood subscribed to a range of international newspapers and magazines that reported on 'the achievements of women, their status, civil and political, and the organisations by which they endeavour to better the conditions

76 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.

77 Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship', 47.

78 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, Murdoch University Archives, Perth (hereafter MUA).

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.



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>81</sup> She wanted to give her listeners 'a living, breathing picture of women' who they only knew as 'names in cold print'.<sup>82</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. 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>83</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 that gave rise to the Civil War.<sup>84</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>85</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

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81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 28 August 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

84 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 30 October 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

85 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 20 November 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

of how women could attain 'utopia'.<sup>86</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. 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 nationalist revolutionary Constance de Markievicz.<sup>87</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 and aviator Jean Batten.<sup>88</sup> She similarly broadcast about women who had achieved positions in various occupations across the globe, such as in aviation and politics.<sup>89</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, arguing that the only difference between travel tales and newspaper reports:

Was a difference of the impersonal and the personal, the difference between blue-books [almanacs] and novels. Facts and figures may seem dull things. Actually if one has imagination they take on form and colour and life.<sup>90</sup>

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86 Richardson, 'The Limits of Authorship', 72–88.

87 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 9 October 1936, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 2 September 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 17 January 1937, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 19 February 1939, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

88 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 6 January 1939, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 10 June 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 19 August 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

89 See for example: Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 3 February 1939, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA; Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 28 October 1938, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

90 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', Script, 26 November 1937, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

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>91</sup>

Using her position to promote internationalism and 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>92</sup>

Greenwood would give more talks in this series, on and off, until 1946. However, the war altered what internationalist feminists 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 New South Wales with Marion

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91 Irene Greenwood, 'Women in the International News', *Script*, 31 December 1937, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 104, MUA.

92 'Farmer's Wife of Berkshire Valley', 'Talks for Women', *Broadcaster*, 2 November 1940, 13.

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>93</sup> From 1929, Rich lived abroad in London, becoming 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>94</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>95</sup> During this period, she regularly broadcast on these issues in daytime timeslots, promoting the positions of the IPC and the Zionist movement and encouraging other women to become active contributors.

Rich's papers contain over 20 broadcast scripts from the 1930s and 1940s that are some of the best examples of the evocative power of radio speech as a form of social activism. She underlined or capitalised words that 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 that 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:

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93 Yves 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.

94 Audrey Tate, 'Rich, Ruby Sophia (1888–1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), 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), 218–24.

95 Ruby S. Rich, 'International Peace Campaign', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 6 January 1938, 5; 'Australia's Ruby Rich: Creates Stir in U.S.A. with Speech', *Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 27 January 1939, 4; Ruby Rich, Interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 4 June 1975, DeB 835-839, Hazel de Berg Collection, NLA.

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>96</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 get through a wealth of information in the 10 minutes allotted to her.<sup>97</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 that 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>98</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>99</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 'too 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>100</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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96 Ruby Rich, 'World Peace Rally', Script, 1937, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 3, NLA (original emphasis).

97 Ruby Rich, 'Miss Rich's Talk on 2.G.B. Broadcasting Station', Script, 5 March 1936, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 3, NLA.

98 Ruby Rich to Director, Station 2GB, 3 March 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

99 Ibid.

100 Ruby Rich, Script, 5 March 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

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>101</sup> Rich made good use of the medium to construct this series of talks as a discussion among women. To this end, 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>102</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, she exhorted her listeners to ‘listen often to the radio programs, on world affairs, and discuss them afterwards to your friends’.<sup>103</sup> When asked what women could do to prevent war, she nominated increasing women’s influence in broadcasting as one prerequisite, along with gaining positions within diplomacy and the League of Nations.<sup>104</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 warlike 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>105</sup>

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101 Ruby Rich, ‘Can Women Influence World Peace?’, Script, 3 February 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ruby Rich, ‘Child and Peace’, Script, 17 February 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

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 Nations 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>106</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>107</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>108</sup>

McLagan also explained that her friends 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. She 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>109</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 the world. As McLagan noted, Rich's careful explanations of the factors

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106 Ruby Rich, 'Private Manufacture of Arms', Script, 24 February 1938, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

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 Europe 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 Cairns 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, on contributing towards world citizenship and world peace.<sup>110</sup> The future of internationalism, she argued, required the defeat of 'bigoted nationalism' such as that present in Nazi Germany.<sup>111</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>112</sup> Jewish persecution by the Nazis also led many Jewish feminist peace activists across the world to abandon pacifism, including Rich.<sup>113</sup> Although she believed that averting war was the ideal outcome, it should not come at the cost of fascism and Jewish persecution: therefore, 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 Mandatory 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 its work. She became the founding president of the Australian branch of WIZO in 1937, a position she held for three years. 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

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110 Ruby Rich, 'Is Internationalism Opposed to Nationalism?', Script, February 1936, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

111 Ibid.

112 Gottlieb, "The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning", 452.

113 Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 187.



public.<sup>114</sup> Anti-Zionists tended to be prominent Anglo-Jewish figures in Australian society, such as Governor-General Sir Isaac Isaacs. Due to their established 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>115</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>116</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 to 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 Mandatory 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>117</sup> She argued that the Arab population had benefited enormously from Jewish immigration and the prosperity and development that had come with it.<sup>118</sup> Rich also made use of the rhetorical devices common in the travel talk genre to impart her impressions of Mandatory 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>119</sup> Rich’s broadcasts on

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114 Suzanne Rutland, ‘Perspectives from the Australian Jewish Community’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 11 (2002): 92.

115 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.

116 Rutland, ‘Perspectives from the Australian Jewish Community’, 92.

117 Ruby Rich, ‘Palestine: The Land Question’, Script, 14 February 1937, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

118 Ibid.

119 Ruby Rich, ‘New Palestine’, Script, 22 April 1937, MS 7493, Papers of Ruby Rich, Box 4, NLA.

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, Rich 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 these women advocated for different issues, all believed in the importance of women contributing to international relations and the role of radio as a medium that could facilitate it. The ABC, in particular, provided airtime for women to discuss international issues; however, its strict impartiality protocols could prove difficult to navigate, eventually impacting Duncan's ability to broadcast. By contributing to public discourse and demonstrating their expertise in foreign affairs, these women showed themselves to be well-informed and engaged world citizens, and encouraged their listeners to be the same. As the next chapter shows, women broadcasters continued to use their public voice throughout WWII in support of the war effort.



# 3

## Voicing the War Effort: Women's Broadcasts during World War II

During World War II (WWII), 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>1</sup> They also took on a new prominence in broadcasting in late 1940 with the appointment of Margaret Doyle as the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) first female general announcer.<sup>2</sup> Radio magazine the *ABC Weekly* argued that Doyle's promotion extended not only the 'professional orbit' of women on radio, but also showed how women could contribute to the war effort through language.<sup>3</sup> There was, according to the publication, '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>4</sup>

This chapter argues that radio played a key part in the development of women's citizenship during WWII as women broadcasters mobilised language to encourage participation in the war. Some of these broadcasters exhorted women to support the war, relayed their own experiences of war work and trauma, provided emotional support for their listeners and worked to improve public morale. Others gave short-wave broadcasts to

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1 Stuart Macintyre, 'Women's Leadership in War and Reconstruction', *Labour History*, no. 104 (2013): 66.

2 K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 104.

3 'Women's Voices on the Air', *ABC Weekly*, 18 January 1941, 49.

4 *Ibid.*

American and Pacific listeners to elicit public support for 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.

## The Radio War

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, which 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>5</sup> Like other nations, the Australian Government established a Department of Information to administer censorship and, eventually, disseminate propaganda. The department's primary role changed with governments. Under Menzies, the focus was primarily on withholding information deemed to be of value to the enemy (often information embarrassing to the government), while under the Curtin government the focus shifted to promoting Australia's value as a good ally to overseas audience, in particular those in the United States.<sup>6</sup> 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>7</sup> The number of talks on the national stations increased, yet speakers were required to ensure that they did not utter any statement that 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>8</sup>

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5 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 78.

6 John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and Propaganda in World War II* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 4.

7 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 78.

8 *Ibid.*, 84.

Radio took on even greater importance as a medium that promised fast access to information during the 1942 crisis over the threat of Japanese invasion. By June of that year, 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 this 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 that vilified the Japanese people. These overtly propagandist broadcasts were less popular with listeners, many of whom thought them to be in poor taste.<sup>9</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 among 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 that 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>10</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 that 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 dismay of British authorities, who began a press campaign to discourage civilians from listening to him on the grounds of disloyalty.<sup>11</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,

9 Ibid., 96–98.

10 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.

11 Ibid., 58–59.

evoking ‘fear and fantasy simultaneously’.<sup>12</sup> Two of the most the most prolific female radio propagandists of WWII 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>13</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 Harbor 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>14</sup> Her scripts were written by prisoners of war (POWs) and produced by Australian Captain Charles Cousens, a POW who had previously worked as a radio announcer on Sydney commercial station 2GB.<sup>15</sup> Tokyo Rose took on a mythic status as broadcasts she was rumoured to have made spread among 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>16</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>17</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>18</sup>

12 Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 116.

13 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.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Ivan Chapman, ‘Cousens, Charles Hughes (1903–1964)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1993), [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cousens-charles-hughes-9842](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cousens-charles-hughes-9842), accessed 28 February 2018.

16 Pfau and Hochfelder, “‘Her Voice a Bullet’”, 54.

17 *Ibid.*, 64.

18 Shibusawa, ‘Femininity, Race and Treachery’, 181–83.

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>19</sup> The dissonance of women's voices presenting propaganda on national, and international, radio was a defining feature of the gendered experience of WWII. 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 WWII nearly 1 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>20</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>21</sup>

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.

19 Pfau and Hochfelder, "Her Voice a Bullet", 50–51.

20 'Enlistment Statistics, Second World War', *Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial), [www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww2](http://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww2), accessed 23 November 2017.

21 'Sister', 'Women in War Work—Service as Radio Announcers', *Recorder*, 21 June 1940, 2.



By 1942, more than 20 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 19 women were engaged as general announcers across the country by 1942, including two newsreaders—the job usually reserved for only the best announcers. The ABC's policy 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.<sup>22</sup> This was a significant shift for the ABC, which, before the war, had not been especially supportive of women's careers, especially when compared with the far greater opportunities provided to women at the BBC during the same period.<sup>23</sup> Word of these new opportunities attracted interest among many hopeful broadcasters.<sup>24</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>25</sup> Women also performed work as technicians, sound officers, journalists, record librarians and producers.<sup>26</sup> 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>27</sup> This demonstrates that women's radio speech was expected to conform to a broader ideal of speech that 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

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22 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 104–05.

23 Virginia Madsen, 'Innovation, Women's Work and the Documentary Impulse: Pioneering Moments and Stalled Opportunities in Public Service Broadcasting in Australia and Britain', *Media International Australia* 162, no. 1 (2017): 21.

24 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 104–05.

25 Irene Greenwood to A. N. Finlay, 25 July 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, Murdoch University Archives, Perth (hereafter MUA).

26 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 105.

27 Ibid.

chance in 1940 when one of the main announcers on the station joined the Royal Australian Air Force 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 due to the unfamiliar international placenames 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>28</sup>

A new opportunity came Beard's 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 Australian Labor Party, and reopened in December 1943.<sup>29</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 that, 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>30</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 necessitated her return to work

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28 Beryl Beard, Interviewed by Paul Linkson, 26 July 1995, 316981, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

29 'Who's Been Sleeping in My House: The 5KA Story', Adelaide Remember When, [www.adelaiderememberwhen.com.au/multiple-paragraph-post](http://www.adelaiderememberwhen.com.au/multiple-paragraph-post), accessed 12 November 2017.

30 Beryl Beard, Interviewed by Paul Linkson.

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>31</sup>

Beard's story demonstrates some of the opportunities that opened up for women broadcasters during the war, especially on commercial stations that 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 experience of being headhunted, along with her experiences of 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 money she herself had earned.

## 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 10 minutes on weekday mornings allotted to the same program prior to the war.<sup>32</sup> Haffner was trained in elocution, had been broadcasting in the children's session for four years and, as she told *Radio Pictorial* magazine, 2UW had originally hired her because her voice broadcast very well. Haffner's trained voice made her an ideal announcer and her actions reinforced the connection between radio speech and citizenship.<sup>33</sup> She was actively involved in the war effort, ensuring that her male colleagues serving overseas received support from home by knitting socks and

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31 Ibid.

32 'Broadcasting Programs', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 July 1939, 60.

33 'Shirley Haffner: Now in Charge of 2UW's Women's Session', *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 March 1942, 21.

writing letters, while also serving as ‘an active member of the station’s anti-bomb squad’.<sup>34</sup> Other commercial women’s session compères also performed war work and used their platform to contribute to the war effort. 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>35</sup> Doreen McKay hosted a program in 1941 that 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>36</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 wartime 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>37</sup>

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 without falling foul of censorship restrictions.

Feminist Jessie Street, for example, saw WWII as an opportunity to demonstrate that women were fully engaged and active citizens. Zora Simic has observed that the war years were the peak of Street’s influence both nationally and internationally.<sup>38</sup> During the war, Street was a high-profile campaigner who aimed to mobilise women to participate both in the war effort and in planning the postwar future, while also continuing

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34 Ibid.

35 ‘2CH Session Appreciated’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 October 1943, 27.

36 ‘Social Science Session’, *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, 1 September 1941, 8.

37 Edith A. Waterworth, ‘Women Should Talk on the Human Side’, *ABC Weekly*, 16 March 1940, 66.

38 Zora Simic, ‘“Mrs Street—Now There’s a Subject!”: Historicising Jessie Street’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 48 (2005): 291.

to campaign for equal pay and improved workplace conditions.<sup>39</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, for instance, she gave a broadcast encouraging women to take up liberty loans, urging them to put in their ‘last shilling to win the war’.<sup>40</sup> Street emphasised that the ‘country has got to have ammunition, and guns, and tanks and planes’ that could only be obtained if citizens contributed as much as they could.<sup>41</sup> She used direct language to impress upon her female listeners the importance and urgency of their contributions—they would be responsible for ensuring Australian troops were armed and able to secure victory.

Although the image of women joining up to auxiliary forces and working in factories is closely associated with the later memory of the war, the reality was more complicated. The many employers who refused to increase women’s rates of pay—and even refused 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 servicemen in Australia 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 agreement increased the need for women workers in more traditionally female—and low paid—places of employment such as textile factories and service jobs.<sup>42</sup> In January 1943, the manpower committees gained the power to order childless women into work, resulting in many (mostly working-class) women being directed into factories, although large numbers of 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>43</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

39 Heather Radi, ‘Street, Jessie Mary (1889–1970)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2002), adb.anu.edu.au/biography/street-lady-jessie-mary-11789/text21089, accessed 26 October 2020.

40 Jessie Street, ‘Liberty Loan’, Script, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, National Library of Australia, Canberra (hereafter NLA).

41 Ibid.

42 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.

43 Ibid., 93–95.

joining the auxiliary services or performing volunteer work. The use of women's radio speech was seen as a friendly, intimate way to present these messages, and was therefore deemed useful to the national interest.

Margaret Curtis-Otter, second-in-command of the Women's Royal Australian Navy Service, 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>44</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>45</sup> Here Curtis-Otter utilised a wartime discourse that highlighted both women's duty and capability to contribute to the crisis. By describing women's contributions in terms of 'holding lines', Curtis-Otter directly linked their roles on the home front to that of the servicemen fighting across the world.

In another talk, Curtis-Otter discussed how '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>46</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 air raid patrol wardens or offer rooms to billet families left homeless in the event of air raids. Curtis-Otter used language that emphasised the positive qualities of older women, such as reminding them that their 'poise and experience' were valuable assets and that the whole community looked to them for 'strength and courage'.<sup>47</sup> Her broadcasts demonstrate how the government used women in official positions to propagandise and recruit through the popular medium of radio.

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44 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 (hereafter AWM).

45 Ibid.

46 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, AWM.

47 Ibid.

## 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 ability to boost morale, provide comfort and, crucially, demonstrate the importance of women's contributions to public discourse was Dame Enid Lyons. She was the recently widowed wife of former prime minister Joseph Lyons and would become the first woman elected to the Australian House of Representatives in 1943. Lyons began broadcasting in the early 1920s, when her husband was 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 premier of Tasmania in 1923 and, after moving to federal politics and defecting to the United Australia Party in 1931, serve as prime minister of Australia from 1932 until his death in office in 1939.<sup>48</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 15-minute talks on Sydney's 2CH each Thursday night, which were then relayed to Brisbane's 4BC and Adelaide's 5DN.<sup>49</sup> Weeks before the 1937 federal election, he broadcast a '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 had been broadcast to the American people several years earlier.<sup>50</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>51</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>52</sup> His death placed a significant burden on her, as she was now the sole provider for

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48 Diane Langmore, 'Lyons, Dame Enid Muriel (1897–1981)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-dame-enid-muriel-14392/text25465](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-dame-enid-muriel-14392/text25465), accessed 28 February 2018.

49 Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 358.

50 *Ibid.*, 358–59.

51 Anne Henderson, *Enid Lyons: Leading Lady to a Nation* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2008), 188–89.

52 'Nation Mourns with Dame Enid Lyons', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 15 April 1939, 3.

her seven children still at home. Within this context, she was approached in May 1939 by the Macquarie Network, then Australia's largest network of commercial stations, regarding the possibility of a weekly Sunday night broadcast. She agreed to a 15–20-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 12 months.<sup>53</sup>

The declaration of war, as well as Lyons's own health issues in the immediate aftermath of her husband's death, meant that the broadcasts were delayed until 3 December 1939.<sup>54</sup> The original contract had been shortened from 12 months to four to six weeks of talks due to the difficulties of finding commercial backing during the early stage of the war; however, the talks proved so popular that the Macquarie Network continued the broadcasts for over six months on a week-to-week basis.<sup>55</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>56</sup> However, the talks took a toll on her deteriorating physical and mental health, and were discontinued on 3 June 1940.<sup>57</sup> 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>58</sup>

Lyons's listeners had appreciated her presence on the air. Her papers in the National Library of Australia contain a rare archive of letters from listeners of the Macquarie Network talks, many of which express their gratitude to her for broadcasting after her husband's death. For example, one listener wrote: 'Tonight, I listened to your voice over the air and was so pleased to hear your voice back in public life again'.<sup>59</sup> On 10 April 1940, Mrs W. J. Carr wrote:

53 Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 264–65.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*

56 See: MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

57 H. G. Horner to Dame Enid Lyons, 20 June 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

58 Enid Lyons, *Among the Carrion Crows* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1972), 37.

59 Kathleen A. Pratt to Dame Enid Lyons, 7 January 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.



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>60</sup>

Regarded as one of the leading broadcasters of her time, Lyons exemplified leadership during the war. As Anne Henderson has observed, her 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>61</sup> Her status as the nation's pre-eminent maternal citizen meant that her views on the war effort were influential, and she addressed the war in a number of broadcasts. In one such talk, entitled 'The Hard Road', she began with 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 faced by Australian women, who she described as 'the most capable and versatile women in the world'; 'however hard the road', Lyons was confident they would 'follow with resolution to the end'.<sup>62</sup> In another broadcast, she mobilised a language of sacrifice in talking about Australians' unselfishness and generosity in 'giving their sons' to the war effort, and also emphasised that listeners should not 'let fear or hatred overcome' them.<sup>63</sup>

In her broadcasts, Lyons often used language that emphasised personal responsibility and sacrifice, and presented this message to her audience in her well-practised and charming radio voice. In 'Getting Things Done', for example, she addressed both men and women regarding their responsibilities as active citizens:

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>64</sup>

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60 Mrs W. J. Carr to Dame Enid Lyons, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

61 Ibid., 264.

62 Dame Enid Lyons, 'The Hard Road', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

63 Lyons, 'P's and Q's', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

64 Dame Enid Lyons, 'Getting Things Done', Broadcast Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

Many listeners appreciated hearing Lyons's voice regularly during the uncertain times of the early war, 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>65</sup>

Other listeners expressed their deep affective reaction to hearing Lyons 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 Lyonses' love story captured the imagination of the Australian public, many of whom intensely felt for Dame Enid following her loss.<sup>66</sup> Her grief and health were often commented on by listeners, some of whom professed to hearing distress in her voice. For example, Olive E. Knight wrote in April 1940: 'I listened to your voice last night and heard the tears behind it'. Similarly, Isabel M. Brockett wrote in January 1940: 'all the time you were speaking I just knew that you were missing your beloved one'.<sup>67</sup> It is apparent that listeners connected emotionally with Lyons's experience through the combination of her language and the sound of her voice. Some considered the routine presence of her voice on the radio as akin to a real friendship. As Knight wrote 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>68</sup>

Elsie Hankins wrote to Lyons in February 1940: 'I have a very lonely life, therefore my radio friends become very dear to me'.<sup>69</sup> These examples demonstrate one of the most important functions of the radio voice: its capacity to alleviate loneliness. Lyons's 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 the early stages of WWII when

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65 Catherine Cock to Dame Enid Lyons, 19 February 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

66 Kate White, *A Political Love Story: Joe and Enid Lyons* (Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 1987).

67 Olive E. Knight to Dame Enid Lyons, 29 April 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA; Isabel M. Brockett to Dame Enid Lyons, 1 January 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

68 Knight to Lyons, 29 April 1940.

69 Elsie Hankins to Dame Enid Lyons, 29 February 1940, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

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 for listeners. This was enhanced because Lyons had recently suffered the loss of her husband and had credibly relatable experiences of grief and suffering. This example demonstrates that sound could be just as comforting as words in times of distress.

Lyons continued to broadcast after the end of the Macquarie Network series, giving regular talks on the ABC in late 1940 that were sometimes published in the *ABC Weekly*. Once again, these broadcasts demonstrated Lyons's role as a leading public figure who modelled engaged citizenship for all Australians. She used empathetic language when describing the plight of British civilians suffering under air raids. In October, for example, she mused on her feelings for England's plight by imagining that an 'incendiary bomb' fell in her own quiet and safe Tasmanian garden, 'setting alight the pines' and burning her house down—a thought that made the attacks on London seem more real.<sup>70</sup> In another talk in November, she emphasised Australia's cultural, emotional and 'blood' ties with England, arguing that it was '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>71</sup>

Lyons used language that emphasised Australians' blood ties to Britain to stoke her listeners' feelings of race patriotism and empathy. Through her broadcasts, she 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.

## The Voice of Australia

Australian women also participated in international propaganda broadcasts using short-wave transmissions, becoming part of the voice of the Australian war effort abroad. In late 1939, the Department of Information began short-wave broadcasts in several languages. The short-wave service was placed under the ABC's control in 1942 and, by mid-1943, there were 16 daily broadcasts in seven languages, heard

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70 Enid Lyons, 'In the Quiet of My Garden I Thought of Bombs', *ABC Weekly*, 26 October 1940, 45.

71 Enid Lyons, 'How Would WE Face Bomb Raids?', *ABC Weekly*, 16 November 1940, 45.

mainly in Japanese-occupied countries, the United States, and by Allied and Japanese forces stationed in the Pacific.<sup>72</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 short-wave broadcasts were not as prolific as their British, American, German or Japanese counterparts, the Department of Information (and later the ABC) did commit to a regular and varied program of talks and other material that disseminated Allied propaganda as well as information about Australia.

Perth broadcaster Irene Greenwood was recruited by the division to give some of these talks due to her well-known broadcasting ability.<sup>73</sup> She began her broadcast career in Sydney in the early 1930s, giving radio talks for feminist organisation the United Associations. In 1936, following a move back to Perth, Greenwood began regularly broadcasting a series of talks called *Women in the International News* on the local ABC women’s session.<sup>74</sup> Her first short-wave broadcast was a talk on women under Nazism as part of a series called *Hitler’s World and Ours* in September 1940. 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’; however, 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>75</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:

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>76</sup>

72 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 97.

73 C. R. Badger to Irene Greenwood, 16 August 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, MUA.

74 Catherine Horne Fisher, ‘Greenwood, Irene Adelaide (1898–1992)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published online 2017), [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/greenwood-irene-adelaide-25528/text33876](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/greenwood-irene-adelaide-25528/text33876), accessed 28 February 2018.

75 Ibid.

76 Irene Greenwood, ‘Women Under Nazism’, Script, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, MUA.

Greenwood then emphasised the importance of democracy, and thus the Allied war effort, for securing women's freedom, arguing that Australians 'must guard jealously our democracy' and also 'help break the regime which holds German women in bondage'.<sup>77</sup> She used evocative language in her descriptions of German women's abjection—they were degraded, in bondage and had sold their birthright. The message was clear: the Allies must fight to protect the freedoms and high standard of living enjoyed by Australian women.

Following this talk, Greenwood gave short-wave 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>78</sup> These talks aimed to emphasise the close ties between Australia and the United States, and encourage an appreciation of Australian society among American listeners that would increase their support of American involvement in the Pacific to protect Australia.<sup>79</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 writer, thus establishing her 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>80</sup> She went further to directly address Prichard's views on American women: 'She 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>81</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 avowed communist. Greenwood

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77 Ibid.

78 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).

79 W. Macmahon Ball to Irene Greenwood, 2 October 1940, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 91, MUA.

80 Irene Greenwood, 'Katharine Susannah Prichard', [Department of Information – Broadcasting Division:] Talks by Irene Greenwood (Nov 1940 – Jan 1941) [transcripts], AWM80, 1/190, AWM.

81 Ibid.

even alluded to Prichard's communist sympathies through her mention of the New Theatre Movement, the dramatic group associated with the Communist Party of Australia.<sup>82</sup> However, Prichard's literary pedigree meant that she was also an acceptable representative of Australian womanhood and commitment to global justice, an example that 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>83</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>84</sup> Greenwood also made use of this trope in a series of short-wave talks she gave on the everyday lives of Western Australian women. These broadcasts were intended to foster empathy for Australia among North American women that, it was hoped, would increase their support for the United States' involvement in Australia's defence. Greenwood began the series by describing her own life in Perth, emphasising 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>85</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>86</sup> Greenwood used language that emphasised the similarities between the Australian and American western frontiers. For example, she described the Western Australian wheatbelt as a 'vast strip of territory' that had only been developed in the

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82 John Hay, 'Prichard, Katharine Susannah (1883–1969)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1988), [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/prichard-katharine-susannah-8112](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/prichard-katharine-susannah-8112), accessed 28 February 2018.

83 Anna Johnston, 'Becoming "Pacific-Minded": Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts', *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017): 89.

84 *Ibid.*

85 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, AWM.

86 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, AWM; 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, AWM.

last few decades by brave and hardworking pioneers.<sup>87</sup> 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 would be powerful messages in support of the Australian war effort.

Senior women from the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) also gave short-wave 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 help. Clare Stevenson, the director of the WAAAF, gave a short-wave talk to American women about the organisation in October 1941. She also used language that 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>88</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>89</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 was the flight officer in charge of education services for the WAAAF. She was also the daughter of Vance and Nettie Palmer, both of whom were writers and prolific broadcasters. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Nettie regularly broadcast on the ABC on topics to do with foreign languages and literature.<sup>90</sup> Following in her mother's footsteps, Helen broadcast on the education facilities of the WAAAF to American audiences in September 1943; she explained how the organisation wanted its recruits to gain something more from their service than the satisfaction of helping their country—that is, 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

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87 Irene Greenwood, 'A Day in the Life of a Woman on a Wheatbelt Farm'.

88 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, AWM.

89 Ibid.

90 Deborah Jordan, 'Listening for the Future', *Inside Story*, 13 August 2018, [insidestory.org.au/listening-for-the-future/](https://insidestory.org.au/listening-for-the-future/), accessed 23 October 2020.

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 that 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>91</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>92</sup>

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>93</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 service personnel do all the heavy lifting, they were actively contributing to their own defence and were, therefore, worthy of protection.

## Conclusion

During WWII 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 that 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. At the ABC, women news announcers were heard for the first time, while the commercial stations increasingly needed women to produce and host their programs. In these roles, women broadcasters encouraged women's

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91 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, AWM.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.



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 short-wave broadcasts, where they fostered support for the Allied war effort and directly combated Axis propaganda. These broadcasts demonstrate the key role that language played in both women's contributions to the war effort and their efforts to claim their voice within the public sphere. As the next chapter shows, women parliamentarians made use of radio to claim their political voices during this time as well.

## 4

# ‘An Epoch Making Event’: Radio and the New Female Parliamentarians

In April and May 1944, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) ran a series of national listening group broadcasts that dealt with Australia’s postwar future titled *After the War: Then What?*<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 ABC promotional material, which stated 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 a prime time ABC series is significant, as it demonstrates both the importance of women’s equality as a topic of public debate and the role of radio as a forum in which it could be discussed and advanced.

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1 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): 627–48.

2 *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 (hereafter NAA), 4.

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 Council of Women President Elsie Byth (Queensland), lawyer Winnie Levy (South Australia), playwright Catherine Duncan (Victoria), and politicians (Dame) Dorothy Tangney (Western Australia) and Dame Enid Lyons (Tasmania). The inclusion of Lyons, a United Australia Party (UAP) member of the House of Representatives, Tangney, an Australian Labor Party (ALP) senator, and Street is notable, as all three women stood as candidates for major political parties in the 1943 federal election, and Lyons and Tangney became the first women elected to the Commonwealth Parliament—one of the most significant advances in women's equality at that time. These three women contested the next two federal elections and, over this period, 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 talk of forcing women out of the professions and factories to fascism, observing that this was one of the 'first things the Nazis did'. She commented:

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>

Strategically, Street emphasised that, while the 'greatest happiness for a woman is to care for a home and raise a family', many women needed to work out of financial necessity and working before marriage helped women to develop a diverse skill set and broaden their outlook.<sup>4</sup> She also noted that women's lack of employment was preventing them from running for political office: '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> Thus, for Street, women's workforce participation was the key to increasing their political participation.

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3 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, NAA.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

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. Further, 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 women politicians, Tangney stressed to potential women candidates that 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 politicians were not sex-specific representatives; rather, they represented all their constituents, just like their male colleagues.

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:

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6 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, NAA.

7 Ibid.

8 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, NAA.

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 emphasised 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 examines the significance of broadcasting to the political careers of Lyons, Tangney and Street. It particularly focuses on the 1943, 1946 and 1949 federal elections, both because women were finally successful at achieving Commonwealth representation and because 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.

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>11</sup> Indeed, a movement aimed at getting women elected to the Commonwealth 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

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 'Women for Canberra', *Woman's Cause* (Sydney: United Associations of Women, 15 June 1948), 3–5, MLMS5 2160, United Association of Women Records, Box Y4481, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

involved in political life.<sup>12</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>13</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.

## Women in Australian Parliaments

Although women won both the federal franchise and the right to stand for Commonwealth Parliament in 1902, it was not until 1943 that the first women were finally elected. 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>14</sup>

In December 1943, Kathleen Sherrard wrote an article that 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>15</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 that few women were connected with powerful industry and business groups. As a result, Sherrard argued, women were unknown to voters who were

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12 Ibid.

13 'United Associations of Women Broadcast', Script, 26 August 1943, MLMSS 2160, United Association of Women Records, Box Y4481, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

14 Marian Sawyer and Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 85–110.

15 Kathleen Sherrard, 'The Political History of Women in Australia', *Australian Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1943): 49.

inclined to elect candidates that fit the status quo—that is, men.<sup>16</sup> Also contributing to the problem was 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>17</sup>

Women voters were also becoming increasingly important in this period. Robert Menzies's 1942 'Forgotten People' speech and series of radio talks, aimed at the supposedly forgotten Australian middle class, were notable for their focus on women and their interests.<sup>18</sup> As Judith Brett has argued, Menzies appealed to women by elaborating values of home—women's traditional social space. While this reinforced traditional notions of femininity, it also made it more likely that women's needs would be met at a political level.<sup>19</sup> Joy Damousi has also shown that, during the 1951 election, politicians from both parties targeted women as a voting bloc who could make decisions as housewives, independent of their husbands' voting preferences.<sup>20</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 Commonwealth 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. Further, by this point, the election of women to the Commonwealth Parliament was no longer seen to be solely a necessity for women's public citizenship, but a potential career option for women.<sup>21</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, including the movement's leader Ivy Weber, who had resigned her seat in the Parliament of Victoria to run. Although none of the Women for Canberra candidates were ultimately elected, the movement provided an

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16 Ibid.

17 Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 45–47.

18 Joy Damousi, "'Women—Keep Australia Free!': Women Voters and Activists in the 1951 Referendum Campaign", *Australian Historical Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 91.

19 Judith Brett, 'Menzies' Forgotten People', *Meanjin* 43, no. 2 (June 1984): 263.

20 Damousi, "'Women—Keep Australia Free!'", 92.

21 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 188.

impetus for renewed scrutiny of the lack of female representatives, and the election delivered its first female MPs: Lyons, UAP (later Liberal Party) member for the Tasmanian seat of Darwin, and Tangney, ALP senator for Western Australia.<sup>22</sup>

Lyons was reportedly convinced by her daughter, Enid, to run for the seat of Darwin in the 1943 election. On paper, she seemed like 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>23</sup> However, she won the seat with the help of preferences from the two other UAP candidates, 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>24</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 among 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>25</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>26</sup>

Jessie Street 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 Sydney's Eastern Suburbs at the 1943 election. Despite Street gaining a 20 per cent swing towards the ALP and the largest number of overall votes (31,048), incumbent UAP candidate

22 Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 108–12.

23 Anne Henderson, *Enid Lyons: Leading Lady to a Nation* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2008), 274–77.

24 Diane Langmore, 'Lyons, Dame Enid Muriel (1897–1981)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2012), [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-dame-enid-muriel-14392/text25465](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-dame-enid-muriel-14392/text25465), accessed 5 March 2018.

25 Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 120.

26 *Ibid.*, 121.



Eric Harrison retained the seat after preferences. In the 1946 election, the ALP endorsed her for the same seat, but 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. After the 1946 election, she left the party as she did not believe they had any intention of running her in a winnable seat. Later, after rejecting the ALP's ultimatum that she end her association with the Australian Russian Society, an organisation with communist affiliations, she 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 6 per cent of the vote and did not again stand for election.<sup>27</sup>

## Dame Enid Lyons

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>28</sup> When she began her campaign for election in 1943 it was, therefore, not surprising that she made extensive use of radio. Lyons's 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 152nd anniversary of 'being ruled by men', the *Australian Women's Weekly* published an article by Elizabeth Wilmot that detailed her picks for a government run by women. Lyons was selected as the ideal prime minister and was described as a 'gifted speaker and broadcaster, poised yet homely'.<sup>29</sup> The direct mention of Lyons's skills as a speaker and broadcaster indicates the importance that was afforded to them as important requisites for the position.

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,

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27 Jessie Street, *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography*, ed. Lenore Coltheart (Sydney: Federation Press, 2004), 150–53, 217.

28 Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 188–89, 264–65.

29 Elizabeth Wilmot, 'If Women Ran Australia', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 27 January 1940, 2.

which were originally given in September 1943.<sup>30</sup> The recordings of both speeches have been preserved and were added to the National Film and Sound Archive's (NFSA's) 'Sounds of Australia' registry in 2011.<sup>31</sup> The recording of Lyons is an excellent surviving example of her radio speech that demonstrates how the sound of her voice interacted with her words to produce a sonic ideal of the female parliamentarian.

Lyons sought to emphasise her femininity throughout her political career, highlighting that she was there particularly to represent women.<sup>32</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; she likened herself to a new broom, sweeping through parliament. At the same time, she deferred to the experience of her male colleagues, hoping that they might help her in a chivalrous manner. Notably, she directly addressed their concerns over the entrance of women to parliament and sought to alleviate these by assuring her colleagues that she intended to behave in a modest fashion.

Lyons employed particular vocal styles that worked to emphasise her femininity and differentiate herself from the male MPs. The sound of her 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.

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30 Tangney's maiden speech was recorded on 21 April 1944 (according to an annotation on the recording). There is no specific date noted on the recording of Lyons's 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's speech was broadcast during this period. Based on the date of Tangney's recording, I conclude 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 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*, [aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dorothy-tangney-maiden-speech/notes/](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*, [aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dame-enid-lyons-maiden-speech/notes/](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, NAA.

31 National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), 'Sounds of Australia 2011', [www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/sound/sounds-australia/2011-registry-additions](http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/sound/sounds-australia/2011-registry-additions), accessed 23 October 2020.

32 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 189.

Lyons received elocution training as a child and even performed in elocution competitions.<sup>33</sup> 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>34</sup> 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>35</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 speaker’ and the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated that she spoke ‘clearly and fluently’.<sup>36</sup> In her autobiography, Lyons described how the press was ‘unanimous in praise’ of her oratory and mentioned one report that praised her ‘control of inflection and phrasing’.<sup>37</sup> Her style of speaking, influenced by her elocution training, was, therefore, crucial to her performance of femininity, and the radio broadcast would doubtless have aimed to capture the vocal quality that was considered to be such a feature of the original speech.

Fin-de-siecle Australian feminist Vida Goldstein used a feminine vocal style 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>38</sup> Although Lyons was speaking several decades later, 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, as it was foreshadowed in her maiden speech, Lyons’s place in parliament was largely defined by her maternal femininity. During the first half of the twentieth century, a concept of maternal

33 Enid Lyons, *So We Take Comfort* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 32–33.

34 Joy Damousi, *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 119.

35 Deborah Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*, rev. ed. (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 170.

36 ‘Notable Maiden Speech: Dame Enid Lyons Impresses House’, *Advertiser*, 30 September 1943, 2; ‘Dame Enid Lyons An Attractive Speaker’, *Advocate*, 30 September 1943, 2; ‘First Speech in House: Dame Enid Lyons Impresses M.P.s’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 1943, 4.

37 Enid Lyons, *Among the Carrion Crows* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1972), 39.

38 Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 179–81.

citizenship was developed that promoted white Australian women as the mothers of the race, who should have citizenship rights bestowed on them on that basis.<sup>39</sup> Motherhood was promoted as a service to the state, equal to men's paid work, and it was understood that white women's value to the nation lay in their capacity to rear children.<sup>40</sup> Compared with her male counterparts, Lyons was represented in the press as an 'abnormal' figure in politics due to her status as a wife and mother.<sup>41</sup> Her radio broadcasts during her husband's prime ministership had cast her as a 'mother to the nation', a role that she would continue to embody for many years.<sup>42</sup> During her own political career, she drew on maternalist discourses when articulating her rhetoric and policy positions.<sup>43</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>44</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.

As a politician, Lyons 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. Her 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: it is not coincidental that Lyons's speaking style was a performance of a white, British ideal of femininity.<sup>45</sup> As such, in speaking to the public through the radio, her role as a mother to the nation potentially reinforced exclusionary discourses of women's public citizenship by highlighting a white, middle-class ideal of who should occupy public space.

39 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.

40 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.

41 Cathy Jenkins, 'A Mother in Cabinet: Dame Enid Lyons and the Press', *Australian Journalism Review* 25, no. 1 (2003): 181–96.

42 Henderson, *Enid Lyons*, 188–89.

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

44 Jenkins, 'A Mother in Cabinet', 194.

45 Eveline, 'Feminism, Racism and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Australia', 147.

During the 1946 election campaign, Lyons recorded a series of political advertisements for radio on topics related to the family, including rationing, social security and the housing crisis.<sup>46</sup> In these broadcasts, she emphasised how these issues impacted 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 1941*, which taxed gifts over £500 in value, Lyons emphasised how this tax affected 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>47</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>48</sup>

According to this rhetoric, reduced government interference in economic and social relations 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 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:

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46 Enid Lyons, 'Gift Duty Act/Too Much Power', 1946, 339308, NFSA; Enid Lyons, 'A Liberal Plan for Social Services/Homes for the People', 1946, 339215, NFSA; Enid Lyons, 'The Meanness of the Means Test/Is Rationing Rational', 1946, 339220, NFSA.

47 Lyons, 'Gift Duty Act'.

48 Enid Lyons, 'Democratic Ideal', Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra (hereafter NLA).

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>49</sup>

Lyons's 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 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>50</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>51</sup> However, the broadcasts from the 1949 election were predominantly heard on Western Australian stations at 11am, a daytime slot targeted at housewives.<sup>52</sup> These broadcasts focused on issues perceived to be of specific relevance to Western Australia's women voters, and they featured titles such as 'Women and Free Medicine' and 'Women and Banking'. By 1949, therefore, Tangney was using radio to speak directly to women voters in her state.

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49 Enid Lyons, 'Women's Rights', Script, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, NLA.

50 'Miss Tangney's Broadcast', *Westralian Worker*, 1 March 1940, 8.

51 Dorothy Tangney, 'Untitled: 31 July 1943 (broadcast at 7.35 pm)', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

52 See for example: Dorothy Tangney, 'Untitled: 23 November 1949', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA; Dorothy Tangney, 'Women and Banking', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA; Dorothy Tangney, 'Women and Free Medicine', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

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>53</sup> This included a prolific use of radio to canvass her message. The *Worker* reported that Tangney had made 60 broadcasts during the 1943 election campaign.<sup>54</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>55</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 that 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>56</sup>

Tangney’s relative youth at the time of her election—she was 36—was also emphasised as an asset. The *Australian Women’s Weekly* stated in 1943 that while Lyons 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>57</sup>

53 Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman’s Place*, 120.

54 ‘Miss D. M. Tangney Is Australia’s First Woman Senator’, *Worker*, 30 August 1943, 3.

55 ‘Our First Woman Senator’, *Williamstown Chronicle*, 17 September 1943, 3.

56 See for example: ‘Keen Interest in Woman Senator’s First Speech’, *Advertiser*, 25 September 1943, 5; ‘Will Help Farm Wives: Our First Woman Senator’, *Mail*, 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.

57 ‘Two Women Go to Canberra’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 25 September 1943, 10.

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 that she had survived beyond infancy despite her low birth weight. She was a 'bright, ambitious girl' who began working at age 15 to supplement the family income, graduated from the University of Western Australia and became a teacher.<sup>58</sup> According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tangney's was a 'story of the triumph of courage, character, and hard work over adversity'.<sup>59</sup>

Tangney was unmarried and had no children; as such, it was difficult for her to embody the ideal of maternal citizenship that Lyons assumed 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. She 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>60</sup> In this way, she 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.

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. She stated that a large number of women had left the clothing trade following the end of the war, resulting in a serious shortage of personnel to produce clothing for returned 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 emphasised its practical benefits to women both as a skill that could be used after marriage and as a secure career path, arguing that 'good needlewomen need to have no fear for the future'.<sup>61</sup> Tangney clearly placed value on marriage and homemaking as the preferred life path for women; however, she recognised that economic circumstances

58 'Will Help Farm Wives: Our First Woman Senator', *Mail*, 28 August 1943, 11.

59 'Career of Miss D. Tangney: Inspiring Battle with Adversity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1943, 9.

60 Sawyer and Simms, *A Woman's Place*, 121–22.

61 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, NLA.



and the needs of industry often required women to work, and that wartime conditions continued to necessitate women's participation in the workforce.<sup>62</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, 'one of her strongest characteristics is a crusading spirit on behalf of country women living on marginal wheat areas, whose conditions horrify her'.<sup>63</sup> In an undated script titled 'The North-West', Tangney imparted her impressions on the vast northern outback of Western Australia and the hardships faced by women in isolated communities, noting that:

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>64</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>65</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 across the state, 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

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62 Ibid.

63 'Will Help Farm Wives: Our First Woman Senator', *Mail*, 28 August 1943, 11.

64 Dorothy Tangney, 'The North-West' Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

65 Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 31.

including women in the peace process was also 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>66</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', broadcast on Perth commercial station 6PM in November 1949, she explained the ALP's health care policies that aimed to reduce the cost burden of doctor's visits and medicines on families, while in 'Broadcast to Women', aired in 1946, she outlined what she had delivered for women during her three years in the Senate:

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>67</sup>

According to Tangney, a female presence in parliament had resulted in tangible benefits to women's lives and voting, as women members ensured that women's concerns had 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>68</sup> In 1949, she broadcast on Perth commercial station 6PM in support of the government's proposed bank nationalisation, arguing 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>69</sup> Tangney's political rhetoric emphasised the importance of women's lived experiences to policy development.

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66 Dorothy Tangney, 'Collie', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

67 Dorothy Tangney, 'Women and Free Medicine', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA; Dorothy Tangney, 'Broadcast To Women', Script, MS 7564 Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

68 Dorothy Tangney, 'Child Endowment', MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

69 Dorothy Tangney, 'Women and Banking', Script, MS 7564, Papers of Dorothy Margaret Tangney, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

As previously mentioned, in 1944 Tangney recorded her maiden speech for the ABC and her recording is also held by the NFSA.<sup>70</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, practised 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's 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>71</sup> The *Worker* described her as a 'cultured speaker, energetic, and good humoured'.<sup>72</sup> In 1944, it was reported of a speech she gave in Adelaide that:

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>73</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 her image as a competent legislator.

## Jessie Street

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, her electoral broadcasts 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, she argued that the 'government of the country affects every phase

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70 'Senator Dorothy Tangney: Maiden Speech' (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1944), [aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dorothy-tangney-maiden-speech/clip1](http://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/dorothy-tangney-maiden-speech/clip1), accessed 16 December 2017.

71 'Senator Tangney's Debut in Senate', *Canberra Times*, 24 September 1943, 2.

72 'Miss D. M. Tangney Is Australia's First Woman Senator', *Worker*, 30 August 1943, 3.

73 'Husder', *Bruce Rock Post and Corrigin and Naremben Guardian*, 1 June 1944, 1.

of your life'.<sup>74</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 'think well before you vote'.<sup>75</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>76</sup> She 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 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>77</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>78</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. In 1943, for example, she told voters that they '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>79</sup> Street had given considerable thought to her own political positions, membership of the ALP and decision to stand for parliament and she discussed these in her broadcasts. In 1943 she explained that 'the only likelihood of any of these [social and economic] reforms being achieved was through the medium of the Labor party'.<sup>80</sup> Through her

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74 Jessie Street, 'Broadcast to Women', Script, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

75 Ibid.

76 Jessie Street, 'Untitled Broadcast Script, 1940', MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Jessie Street, 'Broadcast—1943 Federal Election', MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

80 Ibid.

political broadcasts, she emphasised the importance of considered deliberation, both for voters and for candidates. Her explanation 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 yourself more important as a citizen of Australia, or more important as a citizen of the State in which you live?'<sup>81</sup> She criticised the ability of the states to handle the big issues facing Australia, and implored women to recall 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>82</sup>

The NFSA holds recordings of several of Street's election broadcasts from 1949 when she ran as an independent.<sup>83</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>84</sup> She argued that women complimented men, and that having women in parliament would address many issues that had been allowed to continue unaddressed, such as the housing shortage.<sup>85</sup> In another broadcast from this campaign, she 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>86</sup>

Although Street employed strong rhetoric in her broadcasts and has been described as a persuasive public speaker, the recordings reveal that she sometimes stumbled over words, cleared her throat, and sounded as

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81 Jessie Street, 'Broadcast on the Referendum', Script, MS 2683, Papers of Jessie Street, Series 3, Box 10, NLA.

82 Ibid.

83 Jessie Street, 'The Need for Women in Parliament; Why I am Independent', 490665, NFSA.

84 Street, 'The Need for Women in Parliament'.

85 Ibid.

86 Street, 'Why I am Independent'.

though she was stopping and straining to read the script in front of her.<sup>87</sup> She adopted a fairly flat tone, failing to intonate and modulate her voice. To modern ears, she does not sound as convincing as Lyons and Tangney, and this undermines her message. However, Street does speak quite loudly and forcefully, which gives her broadcasts an air of passion and even fury at the current situation.

This is not to suggest that Street's poor broadcasting skills resulted in her electoral failure, as the considerable favourable swing she experienced 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. Listening to her broadcasts indicates that she also did not match the sonic ideal of the female parliamentarian cultivated by Lyons and Tangney.

## Conclusion

By the 1943 federal election, radio was firmly established as a medium through which women could claim their voice as politically engaged citizens, and had been 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 that 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's 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

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87 Zora Simic, "'Mrs Street—Now There's a Subject!': Historicising Jessie Street', *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 48 (2005): 296.

needs. Further, public speaking was seen as an important prerequisite for a political career, and it was by demonstrating their skills through broadcasts that women established their legitimacy and authority as political representatives. In particular, Lyons's and Tangney's use of ideal speech styles worked to position them as competent orators and, thus, as competent legislators. The next chapter explores how women's radio changed in the postwar era as serial dramas increased in popularity on the commercial stations, while some women broadcasters continued to fight for intelligent and relevant programming for women.

## 5

# 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's appointment was greeted warmly by senior ABC management and the public at large, although the Australian Labor Party attacked it 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'

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

2 'Dame Enid Lyons Appointed to A.B.C.', *Canberra Times*, 14 July 1951, 4; Charles Moses to Dame Enid Lyons, 13 July 1951, MS 4852, Papers of Dame Enid Muriel Lyons, Box 8, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

3 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.'



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, and now she could use her skills and status to shape the direction of the national broadcaster. As noted in the above quotation from the *ABC Weekly*, 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 her 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 have been described as the 'golden age' of Australian radio due to the proliferation of Australian serial dramas and light entertainment on the air, especially on 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 that 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 compered the ABC national women's session in the 1950s and discussed a range of social and political issues on her program. 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 that included an array of social and political content alongside well-cloaked advertising. 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

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4 Boyer to Lyons, 13 July 1951.

5 Richard Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama, 1923–1960: A History through Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

still a medium that 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 the airwaves and broadcast programs that emphasised engaged citizenship, and while 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.

## The Golden Age?

Radio serials were broadcast in Australia from the 1930s, including the popular Australian serial *Dad and Dave* that featured on the ABC from 1937.<sup>6</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>7</sup> Further, as David Goodman and Susan Smulyan have shown, American serial scripts began to be lightly rewritten and completely revoiced 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 American scripts, including the popular serials *When a Girl Marries*, *Portia Faces Life* and *Doctor Paul*.<sup>8</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>9</sup> The rise of these programs caused some controversy due to 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,

6 K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 55.

7 Lane, *The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama*, 201–02.

8 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), 163–79.

9 Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 234–35.

which is apparent when listening to a number of these programs.<sup>10</sup> Australian serials were still often Australianised versions of American scripts, continuing the trend that had begun during the war years.<sup>11</sup> The talk-based women's sessions that had dominated in the 1930s and early 1940s were increasingly replaced by soap operas, which proved lucrative for the commercial stations. The sessions that had provided women with a platform to contribute to public discourse were disappearing in favour of radio dramas that 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 that 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. The program was appealing to audiences for its rural setting, which tapped into romanticised notions of the country that were central to Australian national identity, and because its storylines were centred on popular romance.<sup>12</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 who believed that they had a negative influence on engaged listener-citizens. This was the case in many countries around the world, including the United States, where their 'moribund' content made them a subject of national concern.<sup>13</sup> As such, the remaining talk-based women's sessions consciously positioned 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. There was a 'dual system' for women in

10 Phil O'Brien, 'Women's Voices', *Listener In*, 22 January 1955, 29.

11 Goodman and Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World', 170.

12 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.

13 Michelle Hilmes, *Radio Voices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 155.

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>14</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>15</sup>

The ABC was the ‘preferred venue for their activism’ as its major role was to educate its listeners.<sup>16</sup>

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. According to Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, 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>17</sup>

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>18</sup>

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14 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.

15 *Ibid.*, 4.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), 130.

18 *Ibid.*, 131–41.

## 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. When searching for a host for the session, ABC Perth Manager Conrad Charlton argued that she 'should be chosen both for her cultural ability and for her place in the respect of female sorority', and put forward Catherine King for the role.<sup>19</sup> He 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>20</sup> King had been involved with broadcasting for several years, first as a children's book reviewer for the *ABC Women's Session* in the 1930s and later as an organiser of the successful children's program *Kindergarten of the Air* in the early 1940s.<sup>21</sup> She was also the daughter of Sir Walter Murdoch, an academic at the University of Western Australia and a leading public intellectual.

The session premiered on 4 September 1944. The *Broadcaster* enthusiastically reported on the new program, and noted that, from the outset, it 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>22</sup> The magazine reported that the session would include talks on science, women in careers, infant health, women's organisations and literature.<sup>23</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>24</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

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19 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 (hereafter NAA).

20 Conrad Charlton to Keith Barry, 9 June 1944, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

21 Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 17–24.

22 'ABC Women's Session: Begins on Monday', *Broadcaster*, 30 August 1944, 3.

23 Ibid.

24 'Mrs. M. J.', 'Women's Session Welcome', *Broadcaster*, 13 September 1944, 8.

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>25</sup>

In August 1945, one year after the program's launch, the *Broadcaster* reflected on the impact of the session, observing that the core of the program's output was at least 10 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>26</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>27</sup>

These subjects included education, science, girls' careers, local government, women in international affairs, books, news commentary, marriage and parenting.<sup>28</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>29</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':

25 'A.B.C. Women's Session: Wide Range of Subjects', *Broadcaster*, 21 March 1945, 6.

26 'The Feminine Angle', *Broadcaster*, 29 August 1945, 6.

27 'Her Women's Session Covers a Wide Field', *ABC Weekly*, 10 January 1948, 15.

28 *Ibid.*

29 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>30</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. 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 that focused on a range of social issues.

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 ABC Talks Director B. H. 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 that to men, belongs the high adventure, for women, the dashing accessory to her wardrobe.<sup>31</sup>

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30 'Are Women Natural Highbrows?', *Broadcaster*, 4 April 1945, 6.

31 Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 14 October 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

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 ways they could participate in society, politics and the paid workforce outside their roles of wife, mother and homemaker. She therefore practised feminism, even if 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>32</sup> She 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>33</sup> Following Mitchell's resignation, ABC management undertook a review into the women's session and made suggestions for how to improve it. The format in which the 'Comper spoke herself and then introduced three or four other speakers' was 'now outmoded'; they suggested instead that the program be recast as a 20-minute magazine with a daily serial and content 'more slanted on things of special interest to women'.<sup>34</sup> Female listeners had provided

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32 Catherine King, Interviewed by Des Guilfoyle, July 1982, OH 572, State Library of Western Australia, Perth.

33 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 169.

34 Keith Barry to Charles Moses, 20 January 1948, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.



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>35</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>36</sup>

Horton wrote again in September 1947 to complain about Mitchell’s session, which she argued had the ‘taint of the lecture hall’ about it and was not ‘friendly and personal’ enough.<sup>37</sup> According to Horton, women’s sessions 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. At that time, 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>38</sup> The BBC had also introduced its own women’s program, *Woman’s Hour*, to increase women’s engagement with social and political issues in the postwar era.<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly, in this interview Hunt 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

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35 Extract from Minutes of Conference of National Talks Advisory Committee Held at A.B.C. Building, 171 William Street, Sydney, from Tuesday to Thursday, 17–19 August 1948, 1085/47, National Women’s Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

36 D. K. Horton, ‘What Women Prefer’, *ABC Weekly*, 20 April 1946, 19.

37 D. K. Horton, ‘Women’s Session’, *ABC Weekly*, 20 September 1947, 26.

38 ‘Young A.B.C. Announcer Now Comperes the Women’s Session’, *ABC Weekly*, 13 March 1948, 18.

39 Kristin Skoog, ‘Neither Worker nor Housewife but Citizen: BBC’s *Woman’s Hour* 1946–1955’, *Women’s History Review* 26, no. 6 (2017): 2.

a change from men's voices'.<sup>40</sup> When the new format was launched 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>41</sup> Some listeners did appreciate the session, and wrote in to the *ABC Weekly* to say so. One listener, who appreciated the variety of interesting subjects and people on the program, 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'.<sup>42</sup> Another wrote that all 'the interesting talks on various subjects are enlightening'.<sup>43</sup> Others, however, disliked the new format. Horton, ever displeased, described it as 'snippety, jerky, and far too short'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the new format, the *Women's Magazine* still struggled to attract listeners. In 1950, it averaged just 1 per cent of homes in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Newcastle, and 2 per cent in Brisbane.<sup>45</sup> ABC reports of the session's failures noted that it was a '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>46</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>47</sup> The format lacked coherence and required too much concentration, and women seemed to prefer the light entertainment offered by serials on the commercial stations. Many other criticisms were levelled at the show, including too many guest speakers who were not good broadcasters, too many subjects of narrow interest, too much focus on 'dream stuff' that was out of the reach of 'Mrs Suburbia' and the lack of a personable compere.<sup>48</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'

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40 Ibid.

41 'A.B.C.'s New Women's Magazine of the Air on April 5', *ABC Weekly*, 3 April 1948, 18.

42 Alice Howard, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 24 April 1948, 2.

43 Hilda Voysey, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 23 October 1948, 2.

44 D. K. Horton, 'Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 18 September 1948, 29.

45 Listener Research 27 March 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

46 Elizabeth Campbell, 29 March 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

47 J. J. Donnelly, 29 March 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

48 Ibid.; Elizabeth Campbell, 29 March 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

woman and suggested several subjects that should make up the core of its repertoire: gardening, cooking, clothing, children, celebrities, home jobs, health, travel, book reviews and, notably, careers. Subjects that should be covered occasionally included foreign affairs, handicrafts and sport.<sup>49</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>50</sup>

On the one hand, the ABC was concerned about appealing to the 'average' woman and not talking about things that were 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. During the interwar years in the United States, for instance, there was significant concern 'about whether the mass of people were actually intelligent enough to undertake the tasks of radio listening responsibly'.<sup>51</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>52</sup>

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49 Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 18 June 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

50 B. H. Molesworth, 'Women's Magazine: Summary of Comments Received', 22 June 1951, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

51 David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253.

52 'Ida Jenkins in Charge of New Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 10 November 1951, 7.

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>53</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>54</sup> The children's session connection was emphasised, as Jenkins 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>55</sup> There was some pushback against the rhetoric of housewife betterment, however. A listener complained to the *ABC Weekly* that 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>56</sup> The tension between the 'average' and 'intelligent' woman was again in play, as this listener chafed at what she viewed as the 'intelligent' comperes 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 that Jenkins had to navigate in her role as comperes; not only was ABC management divided over what the best approach should be, but also her listeners had their own opinions on the issue.

The early sessions under Jenkins's stewardship were along the lines suggested in the ABC's report: Mondays were for talks on homemaking and travel, Tuesdays featured family advice and a book review, Wednesdays featured talks by a female doctor and an interview with the guest of the week, Thursdays had talks on cooking and childrearing, and Fridays featured talks on gardening and fashion.<sup>57</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, Sydney commercial station 2UW had built up its audience share from 2 per cent to 8 or

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53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 L. Hall-Jackson, 'Condescension Not Wanted', *ABC Weekly*, 24 November 1951, 2.

57 See for example: 'The Women's Session: Week Beginning 2nd December', National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

12 per cent, 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>58</sup>

Historians Lesley Johnson and Justine 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>59</sup> Yet, 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 myriad social issues. Jenkins's 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>60</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>61</sup> A two-page written questionnaire was devised by the ABC's research division at her behest that 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>62</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>63</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

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58 Keith Barry to Charles Moses, 23 October 1952, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

59 Johnson and Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, 141.

60 'Australia "Man's Country"', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 3 September 1953, 5.

61 Nancy Sheehan to Keith Barry, 9 January 1953, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

62 'Social Survey for Married Women', National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

63 Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 19 January 1953, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

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.

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 letter writers were staunchly opposed for religious or moral reasons. However, some supported it, such as a veterinarian who had been 'able to painlessly and permanently relieve the sufferings of many animals' and who 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>64</sup> The topic elicited a protest from pharmaceutical chemist Robert B. Billings who complained to ABC Chairman Richard Boyer that euthanasia was 'deliberate murder' that was 'opposed to God's teaching' and, as such, it was not appropriate to discuss or debate the topic on air.<sup>65</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's complaint to the ABC Board.<sup>66</sup> Jenkins's response to the criticism was to highlight 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 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>67</sup>

64 'The Women's Session Conducted by Ida Elizabeth Jenkins', Script, 30 November 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

65 Robert B. Billings to ABC Chairman, 30 November 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

66 Richard Boyer to Robert B. Billings, 9 December 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

67 B. H. Molesworth to Keith Barry, 15 December 1954, National Women's Session [Box 36], SP724/1, 13/3/4, NAA.

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: he did not see why euthanasia should be ‘excluded from the controversial topics which we should be free to discuss’.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, one correspondent, a disabled war veteran, 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>69</sup>

Jenkins 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 ‘interesting, informative, and delightfully refreshing’ session, and of Jenkins’ ‘charming, well-modulated voice’.<sup>70</sup> In another letter to the magazine, a young mother wrote that she was ‘confined to the home for most of the time and [felt] the need for some stimulating and educational programs’.<sup>71</sup> Jenkins worked hard on the program, remarking on air that the ‘broadcasting for half an hour 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>72</sup> Her radio voice was often 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>73</sup>

Jenkins’s 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>74</sup> Listeners reacted well to Jenkins’s approach to the tour commentary. One wrote to the *ABC Weekly* that her ‘vivid descriptions of the overall scene and

68 Ibid.

69 ‘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.

70 Joy McFetridge, ‘Women’s Session’, *ABC Weekly*, 20 February 1954, 2.

71 N. G. Rutherford, ‘Women’s Session’, *ABC Weekly*, 1 August 1953, 2.

72 ‘The Women’s Session Conducted by Ida Elizabeth Jenkins’, Script, 3 March 1952, Monday, February to April 1952 [Scripts of the Women’s Session, Women’s Magazine] [2.5cm; Box 12], C3224, FEBRUARY TO APRIL 1952, NAA.

73 ‘Thursday Women’s News’, *News*, 25 March 1954, 23.

74 Ibid.

quickness to note small human incidents have, in my opinion, put the male announcers to shame'.<sup>75</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's 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 concluded that she was a good broadcaster because she 'has something to say and goes ahead and says it'.<sup>76</sup>

## 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. Greenwood intended that the program would be 'based on communications and cooperation between and for women'.<sup>77</sup> The session was sponsored by local department store Corot & Co., who benefited from Greenwood's facilitation of direct listener interaction with their brand through reading their letters about their 'Best Corot Buys'.<sup>78</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 political material was still very much present on the program, albeit cloaked in a more easygoing 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. Further, for the first time, Greenwood could compere her own show and control

75 Untitled article, *ABC Weekly*, 27 February 1954, 2.

76 Elizabeth Webb, 'Your Radio Service', *Telegraph*, 18 March 1954, 8.

77 Kaye Murray, *A Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood (1898–1992)* (Perth: Kaye Murray Productions, 2005), 90.

78 See, for example, listener letters contained in QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 12, Murdoch University Archives, Perth (hereafter MUA).



what went on it—an opportunity she was not offered on the ABC.<sup>79</sup> Finally, the 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 her 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>80</sup> She has argued that *Woman to Woman's* 'difference was marked not only by the foregrounding of non-domestic and political topics, but also by the way it paid attention to its audience'.<sup>81</sup> It is correct that Greenwood used the greater flexibility of commercial radio to craft a program that spread her message of feminism and peace. However, *Woman to Woman* was in fact 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 domestic-focused women's sessions.<sup>82</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>83</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 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, and 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. The schedule was same each week, which meant that listeners knew what to expect. 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

79 Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s–1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017): 299.

80 *Ibid.*, 301.

81 *Ibid.*, 300.

82 *Ibid.*, 298.

83 Murray, *A Voice for Peace*, 90–91.

listeners' letters that had been submitted in response to a pre-set question. Fridays featured a segment called 'Radio Roundabout' that gave details of events happening around Perth, such as plays and lectures.<sup>84</sup>

The *Broadcaster* reported that Greenwood planned to 'make the program Australian in spirit, cultural and humanitarian in outlook and to build it on news interest'.<sup>85</sup> Listeners to Greenwood's ABC talks welcomed the new program and the leadership that she provided on major issues. One country listener wrote 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>86</sup>

While Greenwood's listeners considered her to be a leader, she used her platform to promote other women in a range of leadership positions. The 'Guest of the Week' segment took the form of 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>87</sup>

On 26 October 1953, Greenwood interviewed Nora Shea, purportedly the first Aboriginal woman employed in the Western Australian public service.<sup>88</sup> In this interview, Shea discussed her work with the Coolbaroo League (CL), an Indigenous social club founded in 1947 that raised awareness of issues that affected the lives of Aboriginal people in Western Australia.<sup>89</sup> Shea was involved in the CL's fundraising for Aboriginal hostels in Perth and, in her interview, she explained the importance of the

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84 Irene Greenwood, 'Woman to Woman: 1st Diary', QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, MUA.

85 Untitled article, *Broadcaster*, 24 April 1948, 11.

86 'Country Mouse', 'New Women's Session', *Broadcaster*, 8 May 1948, 17.

87 '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, MUA; 'Woman to Woman', Script, 1 May 1950, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 25b, MUA.

88 '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, MUA.

89 'Coolbaroo League', Kaartdijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge, [www.noongarculture.org.au/coolbaroo-league/](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/coolbaroo-league/), accessed 22 November 2017.

initiative for the lives of many young Aboriginal people. She 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>90</sup>

Greenwood’s interview with Shea generated considerable publicity. *Woman’s Day* picked up the story and interviewed Shea about her life and her work with the CL in September 1956, and featured a photograph of her in the studio with Greenwood.<sup>91</sup> Few Aboriginal woman had the chance to speak on radio, and it should be emphasised that Shea’s ability to do so was due, in large part, to her respectability as a gainfully employed public servant. Shea used the opportunity to advocate for greater support for young Aboriginal people to achieve their potential, and to highlight to a predominantly white audience the work that Aboriginal people themselves were doing through organisations such as the CL.

*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. As such, she selected guests who fit with her feminist message and often drafted outlines of the interview beforehand, thus attempting to control the topics discussed and to create a ‘consensus dialogue’.<sup>92</sup> She took a similar approach in the ‘Mailbag to Microphone’ segment. Greenwood chose the topic that listeners responded to then selected letters that were sent to an adjudicator who chose the winner and runner-up. These letters were then read over the air. The adjudicators were generally professional, middle-class women who were ‘receptive to the ideology of the women’s movement’—often Greenwood’s friends.<sup>93</sup> Sometimes these women also entered letters themselves. For example, Women’s Service Guilds president Isabel Johnson won in April 1951 for her letter about the qualities required of women in parliament. Greenwood was an

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90 Ibid.

91 Hugh Schmidt, ‘The Half-Caste Crusader’, *Woman’s Day*, 17 September 1956, 44.

92 John Andrew Richardson, ‘The Limits of Authorship: The Radio Broadcasts of Irene Greenwood, 1936–1954’ (Honours thesis, Murdoch University, 1988), 63–65.

93 Ibid., 66.

active member of the WSG and the adjudicator, Ida Swift, was Johnson's neighbour.<sup>94</sup> In this way, even the segments of the show that purported to present the opinions of other women were structured to reinforce Greenwood's vision. She created this consensus dialogue because of her sincere belief in her role to educate the public through her broadcasts.<sup>95</sup> The control she had over the message of the program was one of ways in which she exercised leadership over these issues. To combat what she saw as the increasingly dominant message that a woman's place was in the home, Greenwood believed that 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 that 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 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 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 Women's Christian Temperance Union and had lived and worked all over Australia, as one of Australia's representatives to the United Nations Status of Women Commission. Greenwood emphasised McCorkindale's outstanding qualifications, including her extensive world travel, her lecturing and writing, and her long involvement with many journals. She 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>96</sup>

Greenwood used her sessions to promote the visibility of women she knew and respected. For example, she broadcast a tribute to feminist Linda Littlejohn following her death in March 1949.<sup>97</sup> After providing a general

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94 Ibid., 67.

95 Ibid., 69.

96 'Woman to Woman', Script, 1 March 1949, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, MUA.

97 'Woman to Woman', Script, 29 March 1949, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, MUA.

biography, she told her listeners about her own personal memories of Littlejohn. The impact that Littlejohn had had on Greenwood's own broadcasting career was made clear. 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'.<sup>98</sup> She 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>99</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 12 months. In January 1949, she 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 limitations'.<sup>100</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>101</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 also anger that Australia was lagging behind.

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98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 'Woman to Woman', Script, 11 January 1949, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 14, MUA.

101 Ibid.

In this way, she tried to develop a feminist consciousness among her listeners, especially among 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 300 'Guests of the Week', profiled thousands of women as part of the 'Woman of the Week' segment and interviewed another 300 women as part of the 'Radio Roundabout' segment.<sup>102</sup> The letters she received from listeners when *Woman to Woman* went off the air indicate that her approach was appreciated. One Kalgoorlie woman wrote that Greenwood had 'brought the woman of the outback to the city', while a British migrant in Perth claimed that she had come 'to know much about Australia and its people' through the session and was now happily settled.<sup>103</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.

## Conclusion

During the postwar years, 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 that fostered an engaged citizenry—especially one that included women citizens. Women such as Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, Catherine King and Irene Greenwood viewed women's programming as a way to bring the public sphere to housewives and housewives into the public sphere. They built their own profiles as leading women through the medium, but this was something that could not continue if audiences

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102 'Irene Greenwood Says Farewell to Radio', *Broadcaster*, 3 April 1954, 5.

103 Joyce Hardey to Irene Greenwood, 20 March 1954, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, MUA; Beryl Harper to Irene Greenwood, 18 March 1954, QB 24, Irene Greenwood Collection, Box 72, MUA.

dwindled. Nevertheless, 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? First, it should be remembered that women's sessions were a type of programming that was developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s; therefore, they were 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. Western Australia provides 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. Second, soap operas were powerful dramatisations of the complexities, frustrations and joys of women's lives, while also being well produced and entertaining. Thus, they were both a form of escapism from boredom and a validation of women's experiences. As the next chapter shows, in Australia's regional and rural areas, women's radio played a key role in strengthening and supporting local communities for several decades.

## 6

# ‘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, Ivy Kent, the sole woman member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), 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 that ‘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 demonstrate 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

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1 ‘Women Complain of Radio Sessions’, *News*, 3 August 1948, 1.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.



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.

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 Wagga Wagga and Shepparton, as well as the Queensland *ABC Women's Session* and the national *Country Hour Women's Session*, an ABC program that 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 also 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 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> 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, the city was painted as being responsible for bad health, lowered fertility and looser morality. Rural

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4 Graeme Davison, 'Fatal Attraction? The Lure of Technology and the Decline of Rural Australia 1890–2000', *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003): 41.

5 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.

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 presented 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. 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 that transformed private leisure, political culture and 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 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

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6 Ibid., 35.

7 Ibid., 44.

8 Richard Waterhouse, *The Vision Splendid: A Social and Cultural History of Rural Australia* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2005), 219.

9 Ibid., 241–42.

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>

Further, 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>

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>14</sup> In 1950, for example, 95 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>15</sup>

The arrival of the wireless also elicited anxiety and criticism within regional Australia. As Graeme 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>16</sup> Many were also critical of what they saw as the

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10 'Radio—Down on the Farm', *Listener In*, 5 July 1930, 11.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 Megan Blair, 'Listening in to the Lawsons: Radio Crosses the Urban–Rural Divide', in *Struggle Country: The Rural Ideal in Twentieth Century Australia*, ed. Graeme Davison and Marc Brodie (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2005), 128.

15 Davison, 'Fatal Attraction?', 49–50.

16 *Ibid.*, 41.

centralising influence of radio, which increasingly broadcast material produced in major cities—especially serial dramas from the 1940s.<sup>17</sup> However, this argument neglects the role 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.

Just as radio clubs such as the 2GB Happiness Club were established in major cities throughout the Great Depression, regional stations began to establish their own clubs 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>18</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>19</sup>

17 Ibid., 51–52.

18 '3SR—"The Heart of Victoria"', *Argus*, 2 February 1937, 15; "'Mary Ann' Leaves 3SR', *Australasian*, 10 December 1938, 24.

19 Elizabeth Burchill, 'Friendship that is Practical', *Argus Women's Magazine*, 17 July 1946, 5.

The club's objectives were to 'foster the spirit of friendship, to organise social gatherings, and to develop a spirit of community service'.<sup>20</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>21</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 'ideas, thoughts [and] amusing incidents'.<sup>22</sup>

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 compered the women's session and commentated on local events. 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>23</sup> In 1941, she found a job as the compere of the 3SR Friendship Club in Shepparton—a much larger station than 7BU.<sup>24</sup> At 3SR, she hosted the daily women's club session, performed general announcing duties and fundraised 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 by 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 and moved to Adelaide in 1946. From April 1947 until March 1951 she worked at commercial station 5DN as the women's session compere, where she reported on events occurring in South Australian society.<sup>25</sup>

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 'Long Radio Job Ends', *Mail*, 3 March 1951, 35.

25 'Retirement from Radio', *News*, 28 February 1951, 19.

Raymond's career in radio spanned over a decade across three states in both regional and metropolitan stations. Reflecting on her remarkable career in an oral history interview in 1984, she 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 among audiences and, as a result, listeners considered announcers to be their friends. The work that Raymond performed in her local communities, especially 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, schoolteachers from Narrandera, 100 kilometres west of Wagga Wagga. A keen amateur radio builder, Eric Roberts kept up this hobby throughout the late 1920s until the school district decided that it was impinging on his duties as an educator and asked him to give it up. Instead, Eric and Nan resigned and moved to Wagga Wagga in 1931, where they began the process of setting up a radio station. They received enough capital to begin broadcasting in June 1932 and the station was a rapid success. A pillar of the local community, 2WG connected Wagga Wagga with the surrounding towns and villages and fostered a more cohesive Riverina community while providing much-desired entertainment.<sup>26</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. The Robertses' daughter, Wendy Hucker, observed that it fulfilled a very important role of 'friendship across the distance'.<sup>27</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 40–50 towns had

26 Wendy Hucker, Interviewed by Bob Pymm, 2005, 0548718, Wagga Wagga City Library.

27 Ibid.

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, which represented a significant percentage of women in the area.<sup>28</sup> The local branches would fundraise and hold events for their local area, but some of the money raised would go back to the central club funds to be put towards bigger projects for the region.<sup>29</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 11.30am to 12pm.<sup>30</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>31</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>32</sup> The club's rules clearly stipulated that members were to submit a letter of 'two normal sized pages' each month.<sup>33</sup> Women were also able to request that the compere make birthday calls to friends or relatives on their behalf.<sup>34</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 become the third woman elected to the Australian House of Representatives.<sup>35</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 19 years. Her daughter, Marie Black, stated that the role was her mother's full-time job and that she was

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28 Marie Black, Interviewed by Bob Pymm, 2007, 0590730, Wagga Wagga City Library. 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.

29 Marie Black, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

30 Ibid.

31 Wendy Hucker, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

32 Evelyn Patterson, Interviewed by Bob Pymm, 16 May 2006, 0547537, Wagga Wagga City Library.

33 2WG Miscellaneous File, 0482529, Wagga Wagga City Library.

34 Ibid.

35 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*, 2009, [www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE4046b.htm](http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE4046b.htm), accessed 6 March 2018.

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 between 1942 and 1954. This was a change from previous club presidents for whom the 2WG Women's Club had been only one part of their job—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>36</sup>

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. 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.<sup>37</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>38</sup> The club also raised significant amounts of money for local projects, mostly through small-scale drives such as raffles, dances and a mile of pennies down the main street of Wagga Wagga. 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 initiated a baby box program, in which club members would knit layettes that were anonymously donated to needy young mothers who could not afford to clothe their babies due to the privations of the Great Depression. During World War II (WWII), the club's fundraising focused on the war effort, and they donated a field ambulance and a mobile canteen to the army.<sup>39</sup> The local branches also took charge of their own fundraising activities, such as holding parties, afternoon teas and competitions in aid of local hospitals and ambulance services.<sup>40</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

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36 Marie Black, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

37 Evelyn Patterson, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

38 Marie Black, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

39 Wendy Hucker, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

40 Evelyn Patterson, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.



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 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 that 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>41</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. Like the radio station itself, the Haven fostered a sense of community and identity, as people who had lived in the district their whole lives were no longer forced to leave it in their old age.<sup>42</sup>

The 2WG Women's Club and its radio session declined in popularity in the 1960s and eventually ceased in 1965. During the decade after WWII, traditional pastoral industries boomed and tourism took off in country areas. Regional towns began to prosper on the backs of these industries and received modern shops and new forms of entertainment such as bowling clubs and swimming pools.<sup>43</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>44</sup>

In 2007, the Wagga Wagga City Library undertook a local history project on the 2WG Women's Club that 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>45</sup> The 2WG website is sadly no

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41 Marie Black, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

42 Ibid.

43 Waterhouse, *The Vision Splendid*, 213–16.

44 Wendy Hucker, Interviewed by Bob Pymm.

45 Amy Heap and Bob Pymm, 'Wagga Wagga Women's Wireless and the Web: Local Studies and New Technologies', *Australian Library Journal* 58, no. 1 (2009): 10.

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.

## ABC Country Women's Sessions

Local stations such as 3SR, 2WG and 2KO provided a way of rejecting the centralising influence of broadcasts that 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>46</sup> The ABC had its highest audience shares in country areas, especially among 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>47</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 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>48</sup> 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>49</sup> One listener wrote to the *ABC Weekly* that the session was 'the worst thing we've ever heard from a National station'.<sup>50</sup> Another complained to the magazine:

46 'Build 22 Radio Stations', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate*, 18 November 1947, 4.

47 K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 155.

48 Anonymous, 'Byrne, Lorna (1897–1989)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 2007), adb.anu.edu.au/biography/byrne-lorna-12277, accessed 6 March 2018.

49 Lorna Hayter, Interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 13 February 1978, DeB 1064-1065, Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

50 L. Bradford, 'Country Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 7 February 1953, 2.

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>51</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 is low, older-sounding, and well-intonated and modulated, giving her an authoritative air; certainly, her voice was lower than usual for a woman's voice.<sup>52</sup> Yet, not all listeners disapproved, one writing: 'Miss Lorna Byrne's voice—unlike most women's voices—is as a rule clear and easy to follow'.<sup>53</sup>

These difficulties were not helped by disagreements within ABC management as to whether a session for country women was truly needed. Director of Rural Broadcasts 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>54</sup> Director of Programs Keith Barry disagreed, arguing that the national session was 'just as much for country women as it is for city women'.<sup>55</sup> Barry pointed to the presence of the president of the Country Women's Association (CWA) on the women's session advisory committee as evidence of this fact.<sup>56</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, advising 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>57</sup> Thompson forwarded the letter to Barry as proof that there was listener demand for an expanded *Country Hour Women's Session*.<sup>58</sup> Barry, however, replied that the national *ABC Women's Sessions*

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51 A. E. Tonge, 'Countrywomen's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 21 March 1953, 2.

52 'The Country Hour – Women's Session – Final Program with Lorna Byrne', C102, 1500453, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA).

53 G. Meryon Ward, 'Countrywomen's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 4 April 1953, 2.

54 R. G. Thompson, Memo, 6 December 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

55 Keith Barry, Memo, 15 December 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

56 Ibid.

57 F. Hayes to L. Byrne, 18 May 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

58 R. G. Thompson to Keith Barry, 30 May 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

contained plenty of content of interest to country women and that the listener 'might care to listen to it'.<sup>59</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: some members believed it to be an unpopular session while others thought 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>60</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 14 years. As Byrne later recalled: 'I began to establish it, and before very long it was really a very well patronised program.'<sup>61</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>62</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>63</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>64</sup> Byrne travelled around Tasmania over 10 days in November 1955, interviewing local women and visiting schools and CWA branches.<sup>65</sup> Her visit attracted significant interest among Tasmanian women, and the listener response was 'amazingly high', the session being 'listened to extensively in the rural areas and the listening audience of the groups

59 Keith Barry to R. G. Thompson, 1 June 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

60 'Extract from Minutes of Tamworth Advisory Committee', 1 April 1957, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

61 Lorna Hayter, Interviewed by Hazel de Berg.

62 John Douglass, 'Country Hour Women's Session', 6 December 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

63 Walter Colwell to R. J. F. Boyer, 24 June 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

64 R. G. Thompson, 'Letter from W. R. Colwell', 6 July 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

65 R. G. Thompson to Walter Colwell, 15 August 1955, Country Women's Session [Box 21], SP1687/1, R16/2/4 PART 1, NAA.

which met Miss Byrne, was almost 100%'.<sup>66</sup> A public relations success for the ABC in its 'relations with Tasmanian country dwellers', the visit marked the beginning of regular cross-country travel for Byrne.<sup>67</sup> During the 14 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>68</sup> In 1958, she even travelled to China and broadcast a session of the *Country Hour Women's Session* from Singapore.<sup>69</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 broadcasts, stated that Byrne had 'built a wonderful reputation for cheering the hearts of women throughout the length and breadth of Australia'.<sup>70</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 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>71</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>72</sup>

Humfress focused on Queensland's regional and rural women in her session. She stated in an interview with *Queensland Country Life* in 1939 that she tried to be the eyes of country women and 'take an impression of what I see each day and endeavour to pass it on to them'. She also enjoyed the 'narratives of bush incidents in their daily lives which they send me, and am intensely interested in everything that happens

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66 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, NAA.

67 Ibid.

68 'The Country Hour – Women's Session – Final Program with Lorna Byrne', 6 May 1966, C102, 1500453, NAA.

69 Lorna Hayter, Interviewed by Hazel de Berg.

70 Ibid.

71 'Rita Humfress: Runs Popular Women's Session', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 21.

72 'Guest in a Thousand Homes!', *Queensland Country Life*, 14 December 1939, 6.

to them'.<sup>73</sup> She emphasised the role of radio as a two-way method of communication—she provided listeners with content from Brisbane and 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 their lifestyles firsthand. This was demonstrated in June 1946 when Humfress flew to Rockhampton for a brief visit, and the town'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>74</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>75</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' among the 'coloured as well as white women' who received ABC programs via short-wave broadcast.<sup>76</sup> This rare mention of Aboriginal women as radio listeners indicates that broadcasts reached audiences in remote areas. As the article noted, residents of the Gulf Country relied on pedal wirelasses as a tool that enabled them to communicate with others across vast distances, and, as such, they had a deep appreciation of the medium. Radio programs were heard on pastoral stations, where they served as a key form of entertainment, and radio was also the primary source of news in the region, as newspapers only arrived once a week.<sup>77</sup>

## Catherine King and Western Australia's Outback Women

Women's radio played an important role in the cultural and social development of Western Australia. Western Australian women's radio came into its own with the premiere of King's ABC session in the final months of WWII, followed by Greenwood's commercial session in 1948. During the postwar years, King and Greenwood fostered distinctively

73 'Guest in a Thousand Homes!'

74 'Visit by Radio Personalities', *Morning Bulletin*, 28 June 1946, 5.

75 'Nothing "Phoney" About Amateur Hour Voting', *Sunday Mail*, 6 March 1949, 7.

76 'Radio is Now Vital Lifeline in Gulf Country, Says E.C.W.', *Sunday Mail*, 20 January 1952, 7.

77 Ibid.

Western Australian programs that contributed to the cultural output of the state. Their programs 'showed that Western Australia still possessed the capacity to respond innovatively to isolation'.<sup>78</sup>

Western Australia's isolation has shaped its history, identity and culture. The political and cultural dominance of Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne also draws in Adelaide and Brisbane in their 'commercial and cultural orbit'.<sup>79</sup> Not so Perth; rather, Western Australians, 'challenged by greater distance from the dominant south-east, have found scope for independent initiative'.<sup>80</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.

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 that 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>81</sup> King 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>82</sup> However, King conceded that there were some differences that 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>83</sup> King continued to be annoyed by Mitchell's tone, 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:

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78 Ibid., 139.

79 Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia Since 1826* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2008), 2.

80 Ibid.

81 Clare Mitchell to Catherine King, 16 October 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

82 Catherine King to Clare Mitchell, 22 October 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

83 Clare Mitchell to Catherine King, 12 November 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

Because of our isolation, Australia has got into the habit of regarding us as a different country. The point I'd try to make is that we are really very much part of Australia.<sup>84</sup>

Mitchell was 'a little perturbed at the mare's nest I stirred up by my unfortunate phrase "how you live"', which she noted was used in letters to all states, not just Western Australia, but she nevertheless conceded to King's request. She explained:

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>85</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 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>86</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 the farm on their own—a situation that was especially acute in

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84 Catherine King to Clare Mitchell, 26 November 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

85 Clare Mitchell to Catherine King, 20 December 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

86 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, NAA.



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. Further, 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>87</sup> The WSG argued that the importance of radio in the lives of rural Western Australian women necessitated programming specifically for them, as 'above all they want to feel that this is their own session which belongs to them'.<sup>88</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>89</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 majority of the audience for King's session.<sup>90</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>91</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>92</sup> The return of women speakers would fill a 'longfelt want among women listeners'.<sup>93</sup>

Six months after the start of the session, the *Broadcaster* published four letters from women across outback Western Australia. A woman from Kondinin wrote that the session made her forget the 'drudgery of farm life in a drought' and provided emotional support. Another woman

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87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 'ABC Women's Session Begins on Monday', *Broadcaster*, 30 August 1944, 3.

91 'A Country Woman', 'Boon in the Country', *Broadcaster*, 20 September 1944, 8.

92 'Mrs. M. J.', 'Women's Session Welcome', *Broadcaster*, 13 September 1944, 8.

93 Ibid.

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>94</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', and that the women's session 'brings us some of this over the air'.<sup>95</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 knowledge from the session, and their letters are proof of their appreciation.<sup>96</sup>

The Western Australian *ABC Women's Session* focused on issues that 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 of the deprivation of her child's rural school that was built on barren land, had no toys or play equipment, old desks, and required local mothers to do the work of washing dishes and cleaning the school while also supporting their husbands on the farm.<sup>97</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>98</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>99</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

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94 'Appreciation for a Session: Outback Women Approve', *Broadcaster*, 9 May 1945, 6.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Ibid.*

97 'A.B.C. Women's Session', *Broadcaster*, 24 October 1945, 6.

98 Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 30 May 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

99 Catherine King to B. H. Molesworth, 6 March 1947, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women's Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

‘talk more directly’ to them on her program.<sup>100</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 people who are wearing the real fabric of life’.<sup>101</sup> The issue of King performing public relations work in regional areas caused some friction among 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>102</sup> Barry, however, did not believe that meeting country listeners was important enough to warrant taking one day per week to do so.<sup>103</sup>

King specifically requested feedback from rural listeners and received a significant number of letters from them. She stated in November 1945 that 80 per cent of her correspondence was sent by country women.<sup>104</sup> A farmer’s wife wrote that the radio was her ‘only source of world information’ and that she found it ‘depressing beyond words’ that the daytime programming schedule was dominated by serials and music. She wanted more talks and interviews with foreign visitors who could provide insight into their countries.<sup>105</sup> Another listener from North Collie wrote of the ‘marvellous difference’ that the wireless had made to the lives of country listeners, and commented that educational content was its primary value.<sup>106</sup> King herself stated that country people were anxious ‘to gain knowledge of progressive ideas’.<sup>107</sup>

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100 B. H. Molesworth to Catherine King, 12 March 1947, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women’s Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

101 ‘Broadcast for Women: Visit of Mrs Catherine King’, *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 27 May 1949, 1.

102 B. H. Molesworth to Keith Barry, 28 March 1947, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women’s Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

103 Keith Barry to B. H. Molesworth, 24 March 1947, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women’s Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

104 ‘Woman’s Realm: Country Needs’, *West Australian*, 30 November 1945, 11.

105 E. Robertson to Catherine King, 18 January 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women’s Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

106 G. M. Rees to Catherine King, 17 January 1946, Talks – Mrs Catherine King – Women’s Session WA [Box 38], SP1558/2, 650, NAA.

107 ‘Women and Broadcasting’, *Broadcaster*, 29 August 1945, 6.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the significance of women's broadcasting in areas outside 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 among 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 compères themselves, who were or became 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* was also criticised for trying to cater to all country women listeners in Australia; yet, the session built up a substantial following and ran for 14 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. These examples emphasise the importance of radio as a medium that 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 the country throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. 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 had 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 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 30 minutes

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1 Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 269–70.

2 *Ibid.*, 345, 382–84.

on Wednesday afternoons, but required extensive time to script, shoot and 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 engender the same collegiality as radio. Further, the introduction of the visual element meant that much more could go wrong on television. Stretched by the responsibilities of hosting both a daily radio session and a weekly television show, King resigned from television in April 1962 to preserve not only her health but also the quality of her radio program, which had remained her priority.<sup>3</sup>

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 King did not have the same level of control over what went to air. Further, 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 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 book saw radio as a medium

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3 Julie Lewis, *On Air: The Story of Catherine King and the ABC Women's Session* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979), 111–16.

4 *Ibid.*, 114–15.

5 'Dame Enid Lyons: ABC Commissioner', *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1954, 20.

6 *Ibid.*

that had the potential to transform women's lives and status in society, and they 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, argue for women's equality and 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 platforms to improve the lives of their listeners. The 1930s were also a time of increasing international tensions, and women presenters such as Constance Duncan, Irene Greenwood and Ruby Rich used radio to contribute to public discourse as active world citizens, encouraging their listeners to become engaged with world affairs. By using broadcasting for different purposes—to work for social justice, promote feminism and 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.

As in World War I (WWI), women again demonstrated that they were active, patriotic citizens during World War II (WWII) 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 other women to do their patriotic duty in Australia; some also tried to increase support for the war among American women by giving short-wave broadcasts. However, there were 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 WWII, Lyons and (Dame) Dorothy Tangney were elected to the Australian Commonwealth 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 into 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 on the commercial stations. This concerned several female broadcasters, including Greenwood, Catherine King and Ida Elizabeth Jenkins, all of whom used their sessions 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 daytime sessions, by the 1960s the place of women's radio sessions had significantly declined. The erosion of women's broadcasting as a key part of active citizenship during the 1950s demonstrates that the medium was a useful tool at a specific period in time; however, as broader political, social and cultural changes occurred, its resonance lessened. By the mid-1950s, radio had 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 in her capacity as the 'first' Aboriginal woman to work in the Western Australian public service, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Radio's significance as a tool that aided the development of women's citizenship was due to a confluence of factors; these reveal that the medium itself both reflected and drove broader changes during the mid-twentieth century. First, the medium was a key technology of modernity that 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. Second, radio's time as the dominant broadcast medium occurred during a period of profound social and political shifts. Coming so soon after the end of WWI, 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 geopolitical strife that led to WWII, brought forth an age of profound instability.

Finally, this period saw significant changes to women's status in Australia. White women's participation in domestic service and home-based economies had declined in the late nineteenth century and they increasingly worked in the manufacturing, retail and service industries, and in professions such as teaching and nursing, as well as office work. The trend of women's increased participation in the workforce continued during the twentieth century, including spikes in workforce participation during WWI and WWII. Women claimed greater social and sexual freedoms in this period. The flapper of the 1920s was associated with 'consumerism, feminine beauty and sports' as well as visible sexuality, and WWII 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

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7 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): 267–84.

in Chapter 2, to Asia.<sup>8</sup> Women also undertook a wide range of political activity. As discussed in Chapter 1, the interwar period was characterised by the dominance of large women's organisations that promoted mostly non-party approaches to politics that emphasised the commonalities of women's experiences 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 Commonwealth Parliament. By the 1960s and the advent of the women's liberation movement, equality with men in the public sphere had become a central focus of feminist demands, from 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 it served 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 book, radio's focus on the voice made it a more intimate medium, and listeners regularly identified radio voices as being central to successful broadcasts. Skilled broadcasters relied on their radio speech to connect with their audiences and present a persuasive message. This book has revealed that 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

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8 See: Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Yves Rees, 'Travelling to Tomorrow: Australian Women in the United States, 1910–1960' (PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2016).

9 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 214–27.

10 Muriel Sutch, 'Broadcasting from a Woman's Viewpoint', *Broadcast Year Book and Radio Listeners' Annual*, 1934, 88.

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, 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 Me Too 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 among 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. According to feminist Laurie Penny, the internet produced 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.

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11 Julia Baird, ‘Women’s Voices Stifled While Men Run the Media’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 12, 2016, [www.smh.com.au/comment/womens-voices-stifled-while-men-run-media-2016-0211-gms4u6.html](http://www.smh.com.au/comment/womens-voices-stifled-while-men-run-media-2016-0211-gms4u6.html), accessed 16 December 2017.

12 Carrie A. Rentschler, ‘Rape Culture and the Feminist Politics of Social Media’, *Girlhood Studies* 7, no. 1 (2014): 65.

13 #MeToo spread virally in October 2017 in response to allegations of sexual assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein and, later, against 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.

14 Michelle Smith, ‘Friday Essay: Talking, Writing and Fighting like Girls’, *Conversation*, 30 September 2016, [theconversation.com/friday-essay-talking-writing-and-fighting-like-girls-66211?utm](http://theconversation.com/friday-essay-talking-writing-and-fighting-like-girls-66211?utm), accessed 16 December 2017.

15 Ibid.

16 Laurie Penny quoted in Smith, ‘Friday Essay’.

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 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.

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