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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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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'.⁴

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

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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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’.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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’.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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, 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹

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, 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.²² 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.²³ Word of these new opportunities attracted interest among many hopeful broadcasters.²⁴ 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.²⁵ Women also performed work as technicians, sound officers, journalists, record librarians and producers.²⁶ 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'.²⁷ 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

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.²⁸

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 1943.²⁹ 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.³⁰

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

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, 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 1954.³¹

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.³² 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.³³ She was actively involved in the war effort, ensuring that her male colleagues serving overseas received support from home by knitting socks and

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’.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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’.³⁶

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.³⁷

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.³⁸ 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

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.³⁹ 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’.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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'.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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'.⁴⁶ 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'.⁴⁷ Her broadcasts demonstrate how the government used women in official positions to propagandise and recruit through the popular medium of radio.

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 1939.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

Joe Lyons died on 7 April 1939, and this prompted an outpouring of grief and sympathy for Dame Enid from the Australian public.⁵² His death placed a significant burden on her, as she was now the sole provider for

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, 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.⁵³

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 1939.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ However, the talks took a toll on her deteriorating physical and mental health, and were discontinued on 3 June 1940.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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'.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

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'.⁶¹ 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'.⁶² 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.⁶³

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.⁶⁴

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.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ 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'.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

Elsie Hankins wrote to Lyons in February 1940: 'I have a very lonely life, therefore my radio friends become very dear to me'.⁶⁹ 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

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.⁷⁰ 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'.⁷¹

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

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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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’.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

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, 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'.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹

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'.⁸⁰ 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'.⁸¹ 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

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.⁸² 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'.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ She then gave talks about women in more remote parts of the state, including on a wheatbelt farm and in a timber town.⁸⁶ 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

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, 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.⁸⁷ 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'.⁸⁸ 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'.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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

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/, 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.⁹¹ 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':⁹²

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?⁹³

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

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.

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