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‘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?*¹ 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’.² 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.

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.³

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.⁴ 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'.⁵ Thus, for Street, women's workforce participation was the key to increasing their political participation.

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.⁶

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'.⁷ 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'.⁸ Like Street, Lyons linked the exclusion of women from public life in Nazi Germany to the warmongering of that regime:

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.⁹

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'.¹⁰ 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'.¹¹ 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

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.¹² 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.¹³ 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 1937.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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

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.²²

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.²³ 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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, 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.²⁷

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.²⁸ 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'.²⁹ 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,

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 1943.³⁰ 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 2011.³¹ 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.³² 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.

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/, 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/, 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, accessed 23 October 2020.

32 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 189.

Lyons received elocution training as a child and even performed in elocution competitions.³³ The ‘intellectual refinement’ that defined genteel femininity was associated with the voice, and particularly with the cultivation of a balanced, melodious style of speaking.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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’.³⁶ 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’.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² During her own political career, she drew on maternalist discourses when articulating her rhetoric and policy positions.⁴³ 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 1949.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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, 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.⁴⁶ 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?⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸

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:

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.⁴⁹

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'.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ However, the broadcasts from the 1949 election were predominantly heard on Western Australian stations at 11am, a daytime slot targeted at housewives.⁵² 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.

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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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’.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tangney's was a 'story of the triumph of courage, character, and hard work over adversity'.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ 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'.⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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'.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴

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.⁶⁵ 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

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'.⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷

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'.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ Tangney's political rhetoric emphasised the importance of women's lived experiences to policy development.

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.⁷⁰ 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'.⁷¹ The *Worker* described her as a 'cultured speaker, energetic, and good humoured'.⁷² 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.⁷³

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

70 'Senator Dorothy Tangney: Maiden Speech' (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1944), 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'.⁷⁴ 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'.⁷⁵

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'.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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.'⁷⁸ 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'.⁷⁹ 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'.⁸⁰ Through her

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?'⁸¹ 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?⁸²

The NFSA holds recordings of several of Street's election broadcasts from 1949 when she ran as an independent.⁸³ 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.'⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

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

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.⁸⁷ 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

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.

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