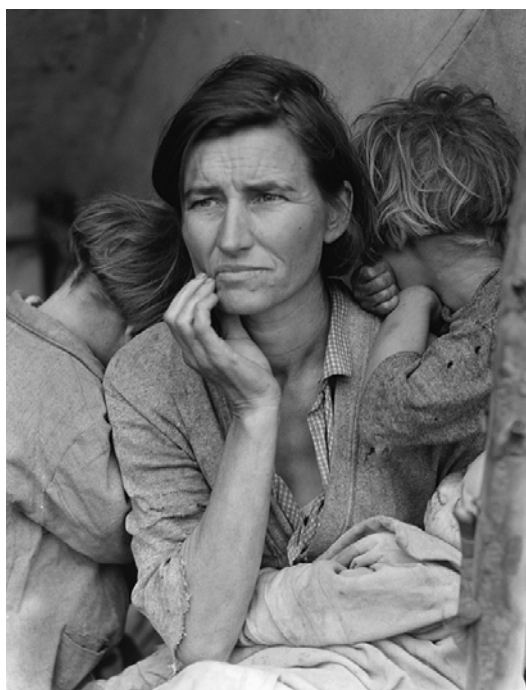


WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE 'GENDER AND MIGRATION' 1-2 SEPTEMBER 2023



Portrait of Florence Owens Thompson
"Migrant Mother". Dorothea Lange, 1936

We are delighted to be able to hold our Autumn 2023 conference in person in the new galleries of the Black Country Museum in Dudley, the West Midlands UK. To celebrate this new installation the conference will focus on all aspects of women and migration. Migration is gendered and historically has had a detrimental impact on women. The conference will seek to emphasise women's voices in the experience of migratory experiences across the globe from all countries and periods.

More details about the conference, and how to submit an abstract will be available in the New Year at :
<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/the-womens-history-network-annual-conference/>

We may be able to hold some hybrid sessions but expect the conference to be in person.

women's
HISTORY
NETWORK



Welcome to this special issue of *Women's History Today*, which is a 'Broadcasting' special. As you are likely to have seen, heard or read, this autumn marks the centenary of the BBC, which was established as the British Broadcasting Company on 18 October 1922 and which broadcast its first daily programme a month later on 14 November. The history of the BBC is vast and complex but in recent years, attention has increasingly turned to the women who worked there as employees as well as those who appeared on air and on screen. There has also been a corresponding growth in interest in women and broadcasting in other parts of the world. This issue brings together scholarship, as well as a selection of feature articles, that explore a range of issues connected with women and broadcasting.

We have four academic articles for your interest, two of which address broadcasting issues in two very different environments, China and Mexico. In his article *Feminine Frequencies*, Yu Wang breaks new ground with his critique of the women announcers who broadcast during the Chinese Revolution, challenging traditional understandings of who had the authority to speak. His focus is on a key woman, Meng Qiyu, who developed the 'natural tone' that came to be the accepted voice of communist radio. Sonia Robles' article *María Luisa Ross: Mexican educator, writer and radio station manager*, is also centred on an individual woman. In 1922, Ross was selected to manage the state-run radio station CZE-XFX, bringing to the job her many years of experience as a teacher, writer and supporter of the Mexican Revolution. Although a woman of the elite class, she understood the realities of life for an audience that was largely rural and poor. Our third article *Cathleen Nesbitt: The First Woman Radio Drama Producer*, also has a biographical theme. Here, Andrea Smith positions Nesbitt, a famous stage actor, as the doyenne of Shakespeare, exploring how she came to produce the first ever broadcast of a full play by 'the bard', in 1923. Also BBC-linked, Vanessa Jackson's *Frocks and Powder Puffs* documents the career paths of women working behind the scenes in television as costume designers and production designers in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In particular, she discusses how feminised craft sectors such as costume design, allowed women autonomy, good wages and advancement opportunities.

As well as academic articles, this special issue also has a number of broadcast-related features. *Spotlight on Academic Research* brings feminine perspectives from Emilie Morin on her recent Leverhulme Trust Research



Cover Image:
Radio Times cover, 16
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Fellowship and British Academy Small Grant funded project which has pulled together previously unexplored early radio texts and articles about radio from across Europe. In *From the Archive*, Kate Murphy shares her twenty-year experience of using the BBC's Written Archives Centre, revealing a history of women that goes far beyond broadcasting. In her *Doing History* piece, Birgitte Jalloff reflects on a directory of women's community radio in Europe that she compiled in 1983, now itself an historic document. *In Profile* is the broadcast historian and WHN member, Kate Terkanian.

Maintaining the special issue theme, the book reviews are all of recent books that take women and broadcasting as their theme. The issue also includes a range of WHN reports that embrace the AGM, and recent prize announcements.

Women's History Today is the journal of the Women's History Network. We welcome comments from members about how we can improve and develop the journal and are always keen to receive articles on any aspect of women's history as well as suggestions for special themed issues.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Laurel Forster, Kate Murphy and Kate Terkanian.

'Feminine Frequencies': Gender, Radio, and the Auditory Culture of Revolution in 1940s China

Dr Yu Wang

University of Macau

'In Mandarin, a female comrade announced
news reports,
On behalf of all Chinese people she
Spoke to the world,
With a voice so clear, so sonorous, so powerful,
And so appealing!'

—Xu Ming 'Listening to Yan'an XNCR radio
broadcast'

On 1 October 1949, Mao Zedong, with a strong Hunanese accent, announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China at the Tian'anmen rostrum. His resonant voice heralded the start of a new era in Chinese history. A much neglected but no less characteristic voice in the communist revolution belonged to the Yan'an Xinhua Radio Station (XNCR).¹ After listening to its programme, one excited listener wrote a poem to document his feelings and thoughts. The most remarkable stanza of the poem, quoted in the epigraph above, featured the voice of a female radio announcer. This voice, to the ear of the listener, was so sonorous and powerful that it sounded as if all Chinese people were speaking to the world at once.

This article explores the origins of female domination in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s radio broadcasting system during the 1940s. It asks, first, what constituted the CCP's radio announcing style and how women contributed to it, and, second, how does the experience of Chinese female radio announcers enrich and further complicate current understanding of the relationship between gender and radio broadcasting history? This article approaches these questions under the inspiration of Kate Lacey's concept 'feminine frequencies', which refers to a cluster of efforts to orient radio broadcasting toward women: the emergence of female radio announcers, the rise of radio scripts mimicking women's tone and the invention of programmes specifically tailored to female listeners' needs and their interest in Germany from the 1920s to the end of the Second World War.² Through this concept, Lacey effectively highlights how gender as a characteristic of speaking played a vital role in Germany's social integration and mass mobilization in the interwar period.

This article examines the crucial role that gender played in the making of a particular tone of speech during the Second World War and the revolution for national liberation in 1940s China. The acoustic technique in this context refers both to the radio announcers' embodied skills of emotional control and the communications technologies that sustained the generation, transmission and reception of radio signals within the network of radio stations, announcers and radio sets.

This article argues that Chinese female radio announcers developed a distinctive sonic style through the invention of a series of techniques to control emotion and turned such practices into a collective habit through the wireless medium. Under the joint influence of these techniques and technologies, female announcers not only rendered the CCP identifiable to listeners' ears but also created an aural image of the Chinese Revolution that was distinct from many other societies in the twentieth century.

This argument is elaborated in four parts: firstly, a review of the technological and social factors behind the domination of male voices in early radio broadcasting history; secondly, a depiction of the technological background in which women joined CCP's radio stations in the early 1940s; thirdly, how female radio announcers, most notably the announcer Meng Qiyu, searched for ways to balance accurate pronunciation and precise delivery of emotions, leading to the invention of a natural tone that rendered CCP acoustically distinctive; and finally, how an imagined auditory community came into being as local radio announcers emulated and appropriated the natural tone, widely spreading the style to reach listener groups throughout the CCP's newly established and expansive radio reception network.

Technology, Society and Male Domination in Radio Broadcasting

Scholars generally agree that radio broadcasting in the early twentieth century was distinctively gendered with men dominating most of the announcing positions. One of the factors accounting for such gender prejudice, according to Kate Lacey, was 'the primitive level of available technologies' at the time when 'voices with a higher pitch suffered from distortion in the process of conversion of sound waves into electrical signals'.³ This technological bias was so firmly entrenched into social norms that women continued to be treated as unsuitable for broadcasting even when technological limitations were solved in later years.⁴ In the UK as late as 1938, Elise Sprott, the BBC's Women's Press Representative, still remarked that women's voices 'on the whole are not awfully good over the microphone'.⁵

As this discourse on voice and technology became the accepted social norm, it further reinforced existing discrimination against female announcers. As Myra Macdonald keenly observes, women in early twentieth-century United States were treated as 'inadequate newsreaders' and 'totally unsuitable sports commentators' because their generally higher pitch voices had been claimed to connote 'unreasonableness, silliness and ultimately hysteria'.⁶ Similarly, as Lacey further points out, the association between men's relatively deep voices

and a higher degree of authority and credibility was the result of acculturation in a patriarchal society. Namely, 'men [had] traditionally held the most prestigious positions in society' with 'their voices being heard above the rest from pulpits and public platforms'.⁷

Lacey's techno-social approach to the gender discrimination against women resonates in other scholarship. Susan Douglas has showcased how radio convened space for men to demonstrate new forms of masculinity through assembling, modifying and listening to this technological device in the early 1920s.⁸ Michele Hilmes discerns the gradual disappearance of opportunities for women to work in diverse aspects of radio announcing in the United States as related technologies advanced from the early 1920s to the late 1930s.⁹ A similar phenomenon is observed by Donna L. Halper and Donald Fishman in their work, which highlights the agency female radio announcers demonstrated in their careers in twentieth-century US radio stations.¹⁰

The research of scholars like Kate Murphy further illuminates that women's marginalisation in this period was a transnational tendency shared outside North America. In Britain, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) employed only male announcers for its national network, although a small number of women did introduce women's and children's programmes on local and regional stations during the day. It was the 'authoritative' male voice who, as the personification of the BBC, read the news and introduced the more influential and widely listened-to programmes at night. The BBC waited until 1933, eleven years after its establishment, to let a woman announce to the entire country on its National Service, and this 'experiment' lasted only three months.¹¹ In Germany, appointing women as radio announcers continued to be 'contentious' in 1932, almost a decade after the country began broadcasting.¹² In Argentina and Uruguay, radio stations hired women as announcers for the purpose of appealing to female listeners and initiating family reform.¹³

The emerging scholarship on women and early broadcasting has fleshed out the intricate dynamics between gender, voice and radio announcing, while at the same time rendered certain gaps more striking than before. For instance, as Lacey reflects, we still know little about radio and gender politics in countries and societies covered by neither the BBC public service model nor the network of US commercial radio broadcasting.¹⁴ This article fills a gap by exploring how women dominated the Chinese Communist Party's radio broadcasting enterprise in the 1940s. By doing so, this article further brings to light the robust interactions between voice and gender politics in a technologically deficient society dealing with dated, low-power and oftentimes improvisatory radio devices.

'Do not Mispronounce a Word': Technological Deficiency and the CCP's Precision Principle in Early 1940s China

China in the early twentieth century witnessed a technological combat between different political powers both on land and air. Established in 1912, the Nationalist government treated radio as an innovative technology

that had great potential to cultivate ideal nationals and contribute to the building of a modern state. In 1928, the Nationalist government established its first radio station and quickly built up the output power to 75 kilowatts, ranking it the third in Asia.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Japan had become increasingly aggressive in territorial expansion and colonialism after the Meiji reform. It first took over Taiwan in 1895, annexed Korea in 1910 and then planted the puppet regime Manchukuo in China's northeast provinces after the Kwantung Army had attacked Mukden (today Shenyang) in 1931. To better manage this expanding colonial enterprise, the Japanese established a total of twenty-six radio stations in the northeast and later the north of China as well as propagating its colonial policies and counteracting the Nationalist government's call for a total resistance against Japan's invasion.¹⁶

It was under the shadow of these two giants that the CCP lurched forward with its radio enterprise, slowly and precariously. The CCP had a brief collaborative period with the Nationalist government in the early 1920s. As they broke up in 1927, the Nationalist government treated the CCP as a serious threat to its regime and attempted to completely exterminate the later through military attacks, an economic blockade and various other measures. The CCP did not own a radio transmitter until 1940, when Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Communist International, gifted a Soviet-made product to the CCP, to showcase the Soviet Union's support for China in the international communist movement.¹⁷

Due to the Japanese and the Nationalist government's total blockade, the CCP had to disassemble the transmitter and clandestinely ship the parts to Mao in Yan'an under the escort of an influential politician. The transmitter was colossal in size but minute in output power. According to an early technician, the designated output power of the transmitter was one kilowatt, and it would decrease to a few hundred when transmitting human voices.¹⁸ Besides the constraint on output power, the voice of radio announcers was further compromised when transmitted at 6000 kHz, a crowded band of frequency that squeezed in many other radio stations, and was subject to the combined electronic interference from the Nationalist government and the Japanese invading forces.¹⁹ The lack of radio receiving sets that were able to pick up voices clearly, further amplified CCP's technological deficiency.²⁰

In such a technologically-deficient environment, the voice of male announcers, according to Lu Dingyi then the head of CCP's Ministry of Propaganda, remained largely unintelligible after traveling through these distortions. He thus suggested that radio stations employ female announcers, as their high-pitched voices could better survive the stations' low transmission power output and the interferences from CCP's rival political powers.²¹ Lu's advice fitted well into the overall picture of CCP's radio stations. When the party established its first radio station, Yan'an Xinhua Radio Station (XNCR) in December 1940, it hired two women as announcers.²² The ensuing two announcers were also female. XNCR's programme for Japanese listeners was also conducted by a female announcer.²³ In 1943, the Yan'an radio station broke down due to technological reasons. Two years

later, it resumed broadcasting, again with two female announcers. The disadvantaged technological position of the CCP turned out to be a favorable condition for women to be radio announcers during the Chinese Revolution.

Precision, or loyalty to the script, was the founding principle of CCP's radio broadcasting enterprise. When



FIG 1 Group photo of the editorial department of Xinhua Radio Station in 1949

XNCR started, it mostly drew scripts from the reportages of the Xinhua News Agency which were then reviewed by senior party cadres before broadcasting.²⁴ Furthermore, radio served as a vital tool for the CCP to communicate classified political and military messages to its army and civilian listeners in the war against Japan's invasion. As the CCP's first radio station and the 'mouthpiece' of the party central, XNCR asked announcers, who had received only modest levels of education and spoke with accents, to consult a dictionary whenever they felt uncertain about pronunciation to ensure accuracy.²⁵ Hence, ensuring that the voice absolutely obeyed the script, with clear, precise pronunciation, became the first and foremost principle for radio announcers to observe. Although XNCR's broadcasting was interrupted in 1943, the precision principle survived and continues to be the cornerstone of radio broadcasting in the People's Republic of China today.

Meanwhile, XNCR announcers discerned the importance of emotion in articulating radio scripts and formulated a basic guideline on emotion control. For instance, 'scripts centering on battles against the enemies should be [pronounced] seriously and in a robust manner' while those featuring 'the masses in the anti-Japanese bases should be [pronounced] gently, articulating the advice of the party in a telling manner, with emotion'.²⁶ These guidelines powerfully captured the importance of emotional control in this period—namely, respecting and vocalising the incompatible difference and conflict between the enemy and the Chinese people, as embedded in the radio script. Yet, there still needed to be a series of specific measures in place to prepare the announcers while they sat at the table in front of their scripts in a

quiet broadcasting room. As will be discussed below, this technical void was filled when Meng Qiyu joined XNCR in September 1945.

Meng Qiyu and the Invention of the Natural Tone

In early broadcasting history, radio stations in major Western countries were structurally gendered, featuring males who dominated most of the announcing positions, prime hours, and key programmes. At the BBC, male announcers read the news in a 'dispassionate and impartial' tone to spread the voice of the nation to the entire Commonwealth.²⁷ Similar phenomena also occurred in the radio stations in Germany, Australia and the United States where male announcers were privileged by the entire broadcasting enterprise.²⁸ Women, by contrast, were greatly marginalized. Their voices were discriminated against, their capacities undermined, with limited chances to take part in the programmes that were broadcasted in the prime evening hours.

At the BBC, where spoken-word output was delivered as talks, those who broadcast were encouraged to speak in an intimate, natural tone.²⁹ For Hilda Matheson, the BBC's first Director of Talks, speaking in a natural tone was 'to remember that you are not speaking to a massed meeting'.³⁰ People were 'sitting alone in their own homes' when listening to the radio.³¹ Therefore, 'the note of *intimacy* [italicised in the original], as in conversation with a friend, is the note to adopt'.³² Although most of the invited speakers to the BBC's evening talks programme were male, Matheson commissioned a good number of female speakers and effectively delivered expertise and experience to listeners regardless of their gender.³³

Matheson's note of the natural tone as a vocal representation of intimacy found its resonance beyond the ideological abyss. In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, the famous actress Nina Litovtseta once gave the instruction that, once sitting down in the studio, the announcer should speak as if 'talking with his family, his audience, helping it, lovingly nurturing it, raising its general political and cultural level by the most varied means'.³⁴ Similarly, as the country was gradually seized by a fascist fever in the early 1930s, Germany's broadcasting style gradually transformed itself from dry lectures, conventional talks and public meetings to a type of informality featuring the tone of 'a supportive and trusted friend, the perfect family companion, a voice that would not intrude pompously into the sanctity of the family circle but one that people would be glad to welcome to their homes'.³⁵

By contrast, the natural tone in Meng's guideline was remarkably different from what was outlined above. Born in southern China in 1920, Meng had been a drama troupe performer before coming to Yan'an. Her articulation of announcing techniques echoed CCP's precision principle and served as a manual for later announcers to consult. For Meng:

Precision comes first in announcing. [One's] understanding [of what is to be announced] should be precise, and [one's] expression should be precise as well. Therefore, [one]



Fig 2: Meng Qiyu in Red Square. Undated

needs to deeply comprehend the script's content and get hold of its spirit and nature. [One] needs to be fully prepared, with [their] mind highly focused on the content while in front of the microphone, so that one can announce freely with a natural tone. When announcing, the more [one] concentrates on the content of the script, the better [one] expresses emotion and tone of speech. However, if one merely favors skills, moves lips instead of the mind, and voices as one pleases, one is doomed to make mistakes.³⁶

Meng's articulation exhibits two breakthroughs in the CCP's idea and practice of radio announcing. First, she greatly enriched the precision principle of the early 1940s to encompass not only a faithful reflection of the script's content but also an adequate representation of the script's spirit and nature. Alongside this comprehensive understanding of the precision principle, Meng further prescribed a set of operational methods to control emotion. Announcers needed to master both the content and the spirit of the script when announcing. By 'staying focused' the natural tone would appear, supplemented with an accurate expression of the embedded emotion.

The natural tone in Meng's guidelines was remarkably different from the liberal, unconstrained exercise of one's emotion. Qi Yue, who was the CCP's most talented male announcer in the revolutionary era, recalled in his memoir being criticised by XNCR colleagues for announcing in an 'unnatural' tone. Qi then decided to 'let go a little and announce naturally', which resulted in a series of mispronunciations. This in turn, put him at risk of punishment, though fortunately this did not happen. It is important to note that Qi was not an inexperienced orator. As a fan of Alexander Pushkin, Qi once recited 'The Ode to Liberty' in a university reading room. The scene was so remarkable that one witness saw Qi's voice as sonorous and passionate as thunder roaring

above the space.³⁷ After listening to Meng's explanation of the natural tone, Qi realized that being 'natural' meant something else in CCP's radio station: 'the natural tone we command in radio announcing is built upon seriousness and responsibility, rather than randomly letting go and speaking at ease'.³⁸ Since the announcers 'spoke on behalf of the party central' and 'served the people's revolutionary cause', their failure to announce in a 'serious and accurate' natural tone would 'let the people down' and compromise 'the authority of the party'.³⁹ This lesson marked a crucial turning point in Qi's career of radio announcing, after which he quickly corrected himself and so became CCP's most important male announcer in history.⁴⁰

While the case of Qi articulates how the natural tone served the cause of the communist revolution, the experience of Meng below illuminates how the revolution inspired this female radio announcer to invent the natural tone in the first place. Meng rarely wrote for the public. Apart from a few early articles, the only comprehensive account of her life is a biography by Zhou Xun published in 2008. Although retired, Meng's influence over the composing of this biography cannot be overestimated, especially considering she was still alive and once served as a high official in the Chinese government's broadcasting system. Zhou Xun's agency as the biography writer is also greatly compromised by the politics of history writing in contemporary China, which tends to favour the image of a determined communist fully devoted to the success of the Chinese Revolution. Therefore, rather than taking the biography as a personal documentation of Meng's life, it is treated here, rather, as a text that resulted from the negotiation between Meng's narrative of her individual experience and the grand narrative account of the Chinese Revolution. By looking into the inconsistencies as well as the ruptures between the two narratives, it is hoped that the complex dynamics between the gender, techniques of announcing and politics can be revealed.

In the biography, Meng was asked to recall her experiments with different techniques of announcing

at XNCR. Before entering the station, Meng identified herself as a good Mandarin speaker who once won a prize in a speech contest at school. In front of the microphone, however, she came to realize that her announcing was 'plain, lacked emotion and was unable to bring to life the spirit of the script'.⁴¹ In order to solve this problem, Meng initially sought techniques to rectify and standardise her announcing practices. For instance, she forced herself to pronounce accurately in colloquial language, notated unfamiliar words on the script, and invented symbols that marked where to pause, stress and add speed. Although she achieved accurate pronunciation in the end, the overall result remained unsatisfactory as she still found her tone of speech 'rigid and unnatural'.⁴²

It was a revolutionary tragedy that brought Meng into the natural tone. In 1946, Ye Ting, commander of CCP's New Fourth Army, was released by the Nationalist government. His aircraft crashed on his return to Yan'an and the whole crew died. Meng received an order to deliver this breaking news to listeners across the country. Barely able to control her emotions, Meng told herself, 'My responsibility, here and now, is to report this message of truth in a clean and clear tone, word by word, sentence by sentence, to the listeners. But I cannot report this saddening news to them indifferently'. In the end, she contained her sorrow and released the news 'in its totality'.⁴³

According to Meng's biography, the death of these revolutionary comrades brought her profound sadness. Such a psychological condition was reminiscent of revolutionary catharsis, which often arose when individuals encountered events of paramount significance, to evoke courage and strength, overcome obstacles and realise the elevation of one's personality.⁴⁴ In Meng's case, the revolutionary catharsis led her to the natural tone of radio announcing. This also marked the foundation of the CCP's radio announcing theory, as it reached larger communities of announcers through an expanding radio reception network.

To summarise, the revolution and the war of national liberation played a huge role not only in assisting announcers with better articulation of emotion but also in the invention of the natural tone itself. This also heralded a revolutionary understanding of radio announcing. It was no longer simply an oral replica of the written script, but rather, a doubling of the script at both vocal and emotional levels.⁴⁵ To borrow from Marshall McLuhan, the medium now became the message.⁴⁶ This is not to say that CCP discerned the duality of media at an earlier date than McLuhan; rather, it helped to unveil what is possibly an overlooked origin of that duality, other than calling it a product of the postmodern or post-revolutionary condition or a purely rhetorical concept.⁴⁷ The duality of media could be discovered and appropriated right there in the middle of the war and the revolution of national liberation. In other words, revolution was a sound laboratory for revolutionaries.

The tendentious narrative of the Communist Revolution that dominates Meng's biography seems to endorse a dichotomy of emotion and techniques around the natural tone with explicit disfavour against mere techniques. Yet, as elaborated in the following section, the

natural tone was a highly sophisticated oratory technique that required announcers to place emotion at the center of their announcing practices. XNCR announcers' collective turn to emotion from mere vocal skills was in effect a replacement of one technique with another. In this regard, the invention and popularisation of the natural tone, as spearheaded by Meng, was the fruit of a de-naturalisation process, during which spontaneity was transformed into self-consciousness.⁴⁸

Aside from the dominant revolutionary narrative, there were other heterogeneous elements scattered about in Meng's biography that indicate the complex dynamics that gave birth to the natural tone. One striking case concerns the Italian singing manner *bel canto*. In earlier pages of the book, Meng recalled how she liked *bel canto* as a youngster but mentioned nothing about this when detailing her experience at the XNCR. One has to wait until the last pages before *bel canto* is mentioned again, this time as Meng's sole love after retirement.

The disappearance of *bel canto* in Meng's work at XNCR is striking if one considers the following facts. Meng loved to sing and identified herself as a 'soprano solo'.⁴⁹ As a teenager, she acted as a drama actress and sang against the Japanese invasion of China.⁵⁰ After joining the Anti-Enemy Drama Troupe, she frequently visited armies and the masses, performing solo songs for them, and becoming acquainted with solo singing skills. She even practiced 'mixed four-parts chorus' to better perform large-scale chorus programmes.⁵¹ At the Lu Xun Academy of Art in Yan'an, Meng learned *bel canto* systematically and eventually turned herself into a solo professional.⁵² For Meng, *bel canto* 'not only made life interesting but also enriched it'.⁵³ Before joining XNCR, she bade farewell to just two people, one of whom was her solo teacher. Together these facts suggest that *bel canto* had become more than a manner of singing. It was an inseparable part of Meng's life. In this regard, the *bel canto*'s intriguing disappearance in Meng's announcer career raises a curious question—that if the Italian singing manner was indeed useless in radio announcing, was it purposely omitted so that Meng, in the biography, could be presented as a true nationalist serving the grand cause of revolution and anti-imperialism?

Further evidence is certainly needed if one wants to specify how *bel canto* influenced Meng's announcing style, but it is beyond doubt that there exists a striking rupture in Meng's narrative of personal hobbies along the revolutionary road. Such a phenomenon was by no means rare. For Wang Zheng, it widely existed in the writings of women who worked for the CCP and the People's Republic. Fully aware of their marginal status in the patriarchal power structure, female public servants and party members often attributed their achievement to the party's correct leadership while remaining extremely modest about their personal genius, capacities and efforts.⁵⁴ In this light, a detailed anatomy of the rupture not only helps to restore women's agency in the invention of the natural tone but also points to how the very process of invention was contingent upon an individual announcers' personal experience and hobbies. In other words, it was the contingency that shaped the path for the CCP to formulate its aural image.



Fig 3: Reunion with Yan'an colleagues, from left to right, Wang Weizhen, Qian Jiamei, Xu Ruizhang, Meng Qiyu, and Yang Zhaolin. Undated

Spreading the Natural Tone and the Birth of an Imagined Auditory Community

The natural tone spread to the wider announcer communities in two prominent ways. One was through Meng's personal guidance of several XNCR colleagues to improve their announcing craft. These included Wang Xun, Qian Jiamei, Yang Huilin and Qi Yue.⁵⁵ In Wang's memoir, Meng helped him like 'a dear sister' after pointing out that his announcing of journal reports was spiritless and lacked emotion.⁵⁶ A more profound recipient of Meng's influence was the aforementioned Qi Yue who realised that 'it was problematic to emphasise the natural tone technically'.⁵⁷ One had to comprehend it through his or her devotion to and love for the revolutionary cause.

As the natural tone circulated among Yan'an radio announcers, the associated emotion control techniques continued to develop and later contributed to the distinctive broadcasting style of 'demarcating a clear line between hate and love'. In May 1947, Mao Zedong listened to Qian Jiamei's aforementioned broadcast of victory news and commented delightedly. 'This female comrade is so sharp! She sounded righteous when criticizing the enemies but so encouraging when pronouncing our victories. [Her voice demarcates] a clear line between hate and love. [We] must train more announcers like her!'⁵⁸ Notably, although Qian was praised by Mao, she never took it as a personal achievement and used the pronoun 'we' to credit the entire announcing team. This might reflect the female announcer's modest personality. However, considering Qian was also a beneficiary of Meng's advice it also points to the possibility that the natural tone continued to evolve under the collective efforts of XNCR announcers and was further fashioned as the style of 'demarcating a clear line between hate and love' after Mao's unreserved compliment.

Perhaps more intriguing was when the CCP's propaganda organ later used Mao's comments to describe this period's announcing style. It simultaneously

concealed the fact that Mao's words first served as a prompt to announcers outside XNCR, to emulate the natural tone method. This highlighting of the natural tone helps illuminate the continuity between the principle of 'precision' in the early 1940s and the style of 'clear demarcation of hate and love' in the late 1940s, which have usually been discussed by scholars in isolation from each other.

The second way that the natural tone reached wider audiences, especially the announcers beyond XNCR, was through the expanding radio reception network. The CCP gained control of an increasing number of radio stations as it enlarged its area of influence in wars against the Japanese and later the Nationalist government. In 1941, the party instructed all its regional radio stations to listen to and transmit XNCR's programs.⁵⁹ Shortly after Meng Qiyu discovered the natural tone, the Xinhua News Agency drafted its first announcing guideline demanding that radio announcers 'speak colloquial Mandarin, use short sentences and choose words that sound immediately understandable, rhythmic and sonorous'.⁶⁰

Through listening to XNCR, these new radio stations took an active part in nationalising the announcing principles that Yan'an female announcers had set up. One announcer in a local station in Northeast China recalled that whenever transmitting programs from Yan'an, she would 'not only listen attentively to the content of the broadcast, but also pay special attention to the announcers' pronunciation, intonation, tone of speech and mark them down in a little notebook'. In this way, she learned how to sound rhythmic and to speak with emotion.⁶¹ Another female announcer and her teammate in a radio station in northern China similarly compared their announcing manners with that of the Yan'an announcers as it was the only way to be aware of their limits and space for improvement.⁶²

These two ways through which the natural tone spread also preconditioned the heterogeneous nature of this announcer community. Few announcers, if any,

received professional training prior to the establishment of the new People's Republic in 1949.⁶³ Textbooks on radio announcing did not exist and no training was available for them to standardise their pronunciation. Except for Zhangjiakou, most of the radio stations learned to improve themselves by emulating Yan'an and consulting a dictionary when encountering certain unfamiliar words.⁶⁴ This provided rich soil for the development of a shared announcing style with distinctive local features.

As the techniques of speaking a natural tone circulated among radio announcers, they engendered an imagined auditory community of shared sonic signals for listeners. In early 1947, the Nationalist government attacked Yan'an, and the radio station was forced to withdraw. Unwilling to lose its voice, the CCP commanded Handan radio station to take over announcing duties from Yan'an. Handan purposely selected two female announcers, one with an accent and tone of speech like that of Meng and another reminiscent of the Yan'an announcer with a northern accent. After some practice, they made themselves sound identical to Yan'an announcers. When listeners heard the familiar voice of Yan'an from their radio sets in April 1947, they could hardly imagine it was the substitutes who were announcing.⁶⁵ The success of this faking experiment readily demonstrated a new fact: the natural tone was no longer the feature of one particular announcer, rather, it had become a collective habit. The announcing techniques invented in Yan'an not only provided CCP with a distinctive sonic personality but also multiplied this when speaking on air.

In this auditory imagined community, communist soldiers refreshed their understanding of the revolution by feeling the rhythm of war with their ears. One soldier wrote in his diary between, December 1946 and May 1947, that the announcers of Handan radio station sometimes announced with 'a sonorous and passionate voice,' and at other times, with 'a clear and loud voice' to broadcast the army's victories.⁶⁶ The female announcers of Yan'an radio station once adopted 'a sharp and mocking tone, rhythmically' criticising the enemy.⁶⁷ According to another soldier's diary in March 1947, Yan'an female radio announcers spoke in 'a confident yet heavy-hearted tone' to report the withdrawal of CCP forces from Yan'an.⁶⁸ To these soldiers' ears, the change of tone in these female radio announcers' voices not only reflected the condition of the war, but also integrated individuals into symphony with the revolution. On 25 May 1946, Xu Ming, a staff member of Kangda University listened to Yan'an radio for the first time. He felt so passionate that he wrote the poem 'Listening to Yan'an XNCR radio', the epigraph of this article, to praise the voice of female radio announcers as the herald of a new age.

To conclude, it was the female radio announcers who, for the entire period of war and revolution, dominated the broadcasting of CCP's announcements, documents, and instructions. Their initial presence in CCP's radio stations was the result of the party's effort to overcome its technological deficiency during the Second World War against the Japanese in China. These female radio announcers experimented with different announcing techniques and drafted the CCP's principles and guidelines for radio announcing from their personal

experience. Both the first male announcer, who joined XNCR in January 1946, and the second, in 1947, had to conform to the rules that had already been set by the female radio announcers. Therefore, it is indisputable that the CCP sounded feminine to its listeners' ears, regardless of gender.

Women not only dominated XNCR but also played a substantial role in many other radio stations under CCP's control. When Zhangjiakou radio station was established in August 1945, it had a sole announcer who was a female.⁶⁹ In September 1946, Shenyang radio station was established and both of its announcers were female.⁷⁰ The Handan station, which was established at the same time, also started with two female announcers.⁷¹ When the Yan'an and Handan stations merged in 1947, only one out of ten announcers were male.⁷² The Huadong radio station established as late as February 1949 also equipped itself with an all-female group of announcers.⁷³ The rich evidence presented above demonstrates how women were central to the CCP's radio broadcasting enterprise, its soundscape and the aural image of the party.

Conclusion: Placing Chinese Female Announcers in the History of Radio Broadcasting

By bringing female radio announcers to the forefront, this article has highlighted the vital role that the interaction between gender and radio broadcasting played in making the Chinese Revolution audible. Furthermore, that women became the major force in shaping CCP's radio announcing practice and revolutionary auditory culture, was not only an active response to the harsh technological environment, but also a consequence of their energetic participation in the development and institutionalisation of announcing principles. In this process, Meng Qiyu and other female radio announcers developed a means to transform emotion into technique which spread out via CCP's expanding reception network. This in turn led to the standardisation of announcing techniques and the creation of an imagined auditory community, comprised of party leaders, soldiers, and active individuals in areas outside the CCP's control.

The exciting careers of Chinese female radio announcers and the vibrant agency they demonstrate provides an important case study that complicates our understanding of the relationship between gender and radio broadcasting. In contrast to the development of announcing in Western societies, the CCP's technological deficiencies in the 1940s created a distinctive environment that favoured women over men. It encouraged them to pursue a career as an announcer and eventually led to their domination in communist radio stations. The female announcers certainly presented entertainment programmes, but their primary job was to broadcast content related to war and politics. Their listeners were predominately soldiers, officials and occasionally underground party members who would transcribe, multiply and spread the content to the general population.⁷⁴

The experience of Chinese female radio announcers demonstrates that the relationship between gender, technology and the structure of auditory culture is

more complicated than much of the existing scholarship has revealed. Technology does not necessarily place women in a passive position. Rather, gender should be understood as a type of acoustic technology that enabled women to negotiate their status in the CCP's broadcasting organ and the revolutionary auditory culture at large. In the case of twentieth-century China, the coupling of the CCP's technological shortcomings in telecommunications technology with women's high-pitched tones not only gave voice to the Chinese Revolution, assigning it an aural image and gender, but also effectively connected Revolutionaries across political campaigns, social strata and gender divisions through an intimate listening experience. The profound intervention of Chinese female announcers in the Revolution demonstrated that women could be equally, if not more, revolutionary, political and inspiring than their male colleagues. This not only marked women's contributions to the Chinese Revolution, but more broadly, the contribution of Chinese women to the history of radio broadcasting and its auditory culture during the twentieth century.

A different version of this article is published in Chinese on *Funü yanjiu luncong* (the *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies*) 4, (2021). The author thanks the journal for kindly giving permission to use part of the material here. The author is also grateful to Chris Chung, Ling Kang and Fanghao Chen who carefully read and generously offered valuable suggestions during revision.

Notes

1. XNCR is Yan'an Xinhua Radio Station's call name. This call name remained unchanged when later Yan'an Xinhua Radio Station adopted the name of Shanbei Xinhua Radio Station. For the sake of consistency, this article uses XNCR throughout to encompass both stations in the 1940s.
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 27. Kathryn Terkanian, 'Women, work, and the BBC: how wartime restrictions and recruitment woes reshaped the corporation, 1939-45' (PhD Thesis. Bournemouth University, 2018), 48.
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57. Qi Yue, *Xiangei zuguo de shengyin*, 29.
58. Ji Qing, 'Handan tai boyin gongzuo sanji', in *Zhongguo renmin guangbo huiyilu*, ed. Beijing guangbo xueyuan xinwenxi, vol.1 (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbodianshi chubanshe, 1983), 152.
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FROCKS AND POWDER PUFFS

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When Joyce Hawkins joined the BBC in December 1958 as a wardrobe supervisor, and sole member of the costume department at their Gosta Green studio in Birmingham, she inherited 'a small room with sink, an industrial sewing machine, a telephone and a cupboard containing a box of assorted aprons, a coat circa 1930 and just one Elizabethan sleeve.'¹ It was an inauspicious start to a long and creative career spanning over thirty years. Joyce was one of a number of women working in craft areas of television production, in the BBC Midland Region, who were able to navigate satisfying, innovative and collaborative careers, in a period when women in other areas were struggling for opportunities. Women who worked, and indeed, headed departments, in below-the-line roles from 1950s-1970s were pioneers who helped build BBC television production in the UK nations and regions. Working in costume and production design presented women with the potential for promotion to senior roles. They established departments and patterns of working which were replicated until the 1990s, when John Birt's organisational changes resulted in outsourcing, which decimated the BBC in-house craft bases.² The work these women performed, and the impact of their efforts, has not yet been fully recognised. This article seeks to redress this omission. Drawing on oral history interviews and written memoirs, the article considers questions around working conditions and practices, gendered workplace niches, job satisfaction and the collaborative nature of television production.

Scholarship on women working in television and film production frequently focusses on influential individuals: directors, writers, and cinematographers, with traditionally female dominated professions, such as costume, being positioned as 'women's work'.³ This foregrounding by scholars of elite women challenging male dominated roles, can lead to the wider study of women's labour in television craft areas being neglected. Costume and production designers create physical worlds for characters to inhabit on screen. When done well, these worlds are almost invisible, becoming organic extensions of the characters' personalities and the settings for their dramas. This invisibility can extend to the female workers undertaking this creative labour.

Although limited in its scope, this study makes a

significant contribution to the understanding of the work of costume and production design in the early years of BBC television production in the English regions. This is an area which has received very little scholarly attention to date, and has wider relevance to both the BBC and independent broadcasters in the United Kingdom, as well as in other countries.

There is a distinction in film and television budgets between 'creative' roles (above-the-line) and technical or craft labour (below-the-line). Within below-the-line roles there are nuances in terms of budgetary allocation, and therefore of economic power, with production design often receiving a higher percentage of the production budget than the costume department. The line is a physical line on the budget sheet. David Hesmondhalgh describes those above-the-line as being responsible for creating symbolic meanings, with those below it considered as technicians or craftspeople who work with their hands.⁴ This is a somewhat crude and problematic distinction, which ignores the creative labour of many, so called, 'below-the-line' workers, including those in costume and production design. Scholars, Deborah Jones and Judith Pringle note that 'above-the-line' talent, including producers, directors and writers, help maintain their status by referring to those 'below-the-line' as 'workers,' with there being, in effect, a 'creative class division'.⁵ This perpetuates the divide, and ignores the creative and collaborative nature of television production across all departments; it also has repercussions in terms of craft labour in film and television being overlooked by researchers, despite this area accounting for the majority of workers.⁶ A greater volume of scholarly work has been undertaken into below-the-line roles in film, as opposed to television production, by academics including Miranda Banks, Deborah Jones, Judith Pringle, Helen Warner, Erin Hill and Melanie Williams.⁷ Many of their observations, for example Melanie Williams' view that it is the job of feminist film scholars 'to overturn the marginalization, devaluation and invisibility of women's work, including in the realm of costume', apply equally to television production.⁸ That perspective is one of the motivations of this research study.

Miranda Banks argues that the invisibility of the costume designer's work on-screen marginalises the

recognition of their work. It is no coincidence that the costume profession is female dominated, leading to it being undervalued and often dismissed as 'women's work'.⁹ Emphasising this point, Erin Hill notes that occupational segregation perpetuates male domination in roles with the most power and prestige, whilst women's roles have little visibility.¹⁰ Despite Banks' and Hill's work considering film and television production in the United States, the same conclusions can be applied to a UK context. With roughly equal numbers of men and women, production design, unlike costume and make-up, is not female-gendered, but it is still a below-the-line role, which frequently does not receive the recognition it deserves. It is likewise, under-researched by scholars.

Research into this area of television production is important to fully appreciate the creative contribution women have made both to television texts, and in developing cultural and production practices through their labour. Angela Coyle, writing in the 1980s, argues that television production processes are organised around male experiences and needs, with women being excluded due to the organisational forms and culture of the industry.¹¹ The dominant models of production are masculinised, and little academic work has been undertaken around how production processes and ways of working are adapted in female-led, below-the-line departments. As Miranda Banks points out, scholars need to understand how hierarchies of power in production, distribution and reception affect the production process and the finished product.¹² Therefore, to fully analyse historic media texts, an appreciation of the production context is necessary, as this alters the reading of the text, as well as the understanding of the media itself.

In addition, exploring the production practices of female-led departments can provide us with a nuanced understanding of the complexities of power dynamics and production practices. Occupational segregation by gender may reinforce male dominance in powerful roles, but it can also present opportunities for women. Melanie Bell in her study of female editors on short films in post-war Britain, concludes that the low status of the sector resulted in women's careers gaining traction, enabling some to reach senior roles and take the creative lead.¹³ The same observation is likely to be applicable in other female dominated roles. However, Angela Coyle concludes that the few women who pursued managerial grades compromised their feminine status and never quite measured up to masculine expectations.¹⁴ It is not clear what these expectations were and if this perception is reflected in the experiences of the women in management themselves, nor whether these observations apply to both above and below-the-line departments. The wider purpose of this research is to make the history of the women working in television design departments, including in managerial roles, more visible, and to better understand the production cultures they engendered.

A frequently noted challenge when conducting research into women's history is gaining access to sufficient relevant sources. Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley identify gendered gaps in archives and histories of television, and a lack of interest in preserving the history of everyday programming culture.¹⁵ This has relevance to

this study, as the women I interviewed worked across all genres of programming, from twice-weekly live soaps to weekly factual studio shows, as well as outside broadcasts and live and recorded dramas. A large proportion of the programmes they worked on were never recorded, and therefore few traces of the media texts exist, except in a handful of photographs and production documents and in the memories of those who watched or worked on them.

Melanie Bell notes that historically women in below-the-line roles are rarely recorded in official records, meaning that alternative research methods are required.¹⁶ I have been unable to visit the BBC Written Archives in Caversham personally, to ascertain the extent to which this statement is true in the production context I am investigating. However, as the working lives of women in below-the-line roles seem to be largely absent from public and institutional archives, feminist researchers must frequently resort to oral history methods to highlight the experiences of female production workers. Through undertaking the oral history process, they create new primary sources.¹⁷ Of course, these sources can have weaknesses as well as strengths. There are issues over verifying the accuracy of memories, and in considering the power dynamics of the interview and the influence of the interviewer on the interviewee's testimony. Despite these potential shortcomings, oral history allows us to construct a coherent picture from a partially remembered past.¹⁸ As Alessandro Portelli urges, it is relatively easy to verify facts from other sources, and it is the emotional truth and lived experience evident in oral histories, which is where their advantage lies.¹⁹ Oral history creation is a collaborative process, where the interviewee may reflect on their lived experience and make previously unnoticed links, articulating the meaning of what they have and have not done.²⁰ It can, therefore, be a very valuable research tool, especially where documentary evidence is lacking.

As noted above, the scholarly focus on elite female directors, writers and producers, distracts academic interest from less visible, traditionally female-dominated roles, which also has an impact on how we analyse research data. Helen Warner, in her study of US costume designers notes that the androcentric nature of production histories has led not only to a lack of knowledge around female-dominated professions, but a failure to provide 'appropriate analytical tools and theoretical frameworks to make sense of them'.²¹ However, Miranda Banks argues that feminist production studies provide a framework to analyse power dynamics, cultural and social capital, and feminine approaches in often overlooked production communities. She emphasises the need to draw from different disciplines in investigating questions of gender in historic, industrial, and aesthetic frameworks, understanding their interconnected nature.²² Researchers, therefore, benefit from gathering the testimonies of practitioners, enabling an analysis and understanding of the production process, and recovering and curating histories that may not yet have been told.

In light of non-existent media texts, and the paucity of other relevant sources, in order to investigate women's historic below-the-line production experiences, I conducted interviews with a number of costume and

production designers. The women included Costumer Designers: Joyce Hawkins, Pat Godfrey, Ann Doling and Gill Hardie, and Production Designer, Margaret Peacock. When the interview transcripts were analysed, common themes emerged. These included the nature of particular roles; working conditions and practices, including teamworking and job satisfaction; attitudes towards design departments; management and being pioneers in the work they did.

The BBC in Birmingham

The BBC has enjoyed a long presence in Birmingham. In November 1922 a broadcasting station was established in Witton, a Birmingham suburb, transmitting its first radio broadcast only twenty-four hours after the first BBC transmission in London. When the British Broadcasting Company was dissolved and became the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927, Birmingham became the headquarters of the Midland Region, covering a large area from the East Coast in Norfolk to the Welsh border, and from Nottinghamshire in the north, to the Cotswolds in the south.

In the 1930s the BBC's experimental television service began at Alexandra Palace in London, and the feminisation of costume and make-up began. The BBC in the 1930s, along with other large employers, like the Civil Service, imposed a marriage bar on women workers. However, there were special rules in the BBC's application of its bar allowing married women to work as television make-up and wardrobe assistants, as these roles were deemed traditionally undertaken by women.²³ The Second World War presented opportunities for women particularly in technical areas like engineering, as men took up positions in the armed forces. Hundreds of women were recruited as technical assistants in radio. However, after the war, as the men returned, the women tended to lose their skilled technical positions.²⁴ In the late 1940s and early 1950s the television services became established, including in the UK nations and regions, and in 1955 a former cinema and boxing stadium was transformed into the Gosta Green television studio in Birmingham. This enabled television programmes to be transmitted live in black and white. The studio developed a reputation for producing live drama series including *Swizzlewick* (BBC1, 1964), *United!* (BBC1, 1965-7), *Flying Swan* (BBC1, 1965), *The Newcomers* (BBC1, 1964-69) and *The Doctors* (BBC1,



Figure 1: BBC Gosta Green Studio circa 1960, photograph by Roger Davis



Figure 2: 'Gardening Club' demonstration at Gosta Green circa 1960, photograph by Roger Davis



Figure 3: 'Keep-Fit with Eileen Fowler' at Gosta Green circa 1960, photograph by Roger Davis

1969-71), as well as a host of one-off plays and factual series including *Farming* (BBC, 1957-88), *Gardening Club* (BBC, 1955-67) and *Keep-Fit with Eileen Fowler* (BBC, 1957-73).²⁵ Producer Peter Dews led the drama productions, which included classics such as *She Stoops to Conquer* (BBC, 1961), which was Derek Jacobi's television debut. Judi Dench, Thora Hird, Eileen Atkins and Michael Caine all appeared in Gosta Green productions in the 1950s and 1960s. The Birmingham studio was described in the 1960s by drama critic Kenneth Tynan, as the 'Mecca of television drama'.²⁶ All these programmes were serviced by the in-house costume and production design departments. In 1971 all production in Birmingham was consolidated on one site at BBC Pebble Mill, with the Gosta Green studio being closed.

The women who participated in this study all worked in the Gosta Green studio in the 1950s to the 1970s in below-the-line roles, across both factual and drama output. Many of these women subsequently worked at other BBC centres including Pebble Mill, Cardiff, Bristol and Television Centre in London.

The Work of Costume and Production Designers

The work of costume and production designers is complex and nuanced. As Miranda Banks explains it requires, 'skill, discipline, humility, creativity, attention to detail, and speed – all on budget.'²⁷ In addition to these demands, the interviewees spoke about the diplomacy and tact in managing artists, negotiating with other departments and suppliers, and the importance of teamwork. Ann Doling likened the role to 'being a social worker' because you are trying to keep everyone happy – the director, your staff, the artists – whilst managing your budget and fighting for what you need.²⁸ Costume designers liaise with producers and directors regarding the requirements of the programme including the style and period, as well as the logistics. They design the costumes, – although according to Ann, on many

programmes, especially factual television, this was a small or non-existent element – hiring, buying, altering, or having garments made by costumiers, in addition to organising the wardrobe needs of all those on screen.

There is a defined hierarchy of roles within costume, with dresser as the entry level, followed by wardrobe mistress/supervisor, assistant designer, designer, senior designer, and Head of Costume. The dresser prepares the artist for the camera; the wardrobe supervisor organises and checks all the costumes, lining them up for the respective artists; the assistant designer helps with fittings, takes artists shopping, and makes sure the dressers know who they are dressing; the designer plans and sources the costumes and liaises with production and other departments including make-up and production design. Although it is often thought of as a feminised department, the interviewees explained that there were many male costume designers working for the BBC, as well as male dressers employed to get male actors ready.

The interviewees also mentioned a hierarchy of television genres to work on from a design perspective. Factual shows were considered less creative than dramas, with continuing dramas and series being less prestigious than one-off or period drama serials. These divisions tended to be reflected in the design budgets, with budgets for factual shows being generally lower than those for dramas, especially period dramas. The women I interviewed worked across all genres, but had their favourites. Gill Hardie explained the process of beginning work on a drama:

I love doing the character. I liked the period shows best, but they were the hardest to work on. You read the script first. If there's a book attached to it, a period book like *Jane Eyre*, you read the book as well. You start getting ideas in your head. And you read the script through once, then you read it through again, and you tab it, you mark every page of the script with the change of day, what day

it was ... and then you start thinking about what you're going to do, who you're going to use, the costumier you're going to use.²⁹

Despite drama being more prestigious, it was not necessarily the most popular to work on. For Ann Doling, the genre she most enjoyed working on was light entertainment, relishing creating costumes for comedy sketch shows. Pat Godfrey also enjoyed working on entertainment shows like *Top of the Pops* (BBC1, 1964–2006). Joyce Hawkins emphasised the complexity of her role as sole costume designer at Gosta Green, attending rehearsals, meeting actors for fittings at costumiers, taking actors shopping, and then arranging transport for the costumes from London to Birmingham. Pat described many of the productions she worked on at Television Centre, after Gosta Green and Cardiff, as 'shopping shows', those not requiring costumes to be specially made. She worked on factual series like *Blue Peter* (BBC TV, 1958–present) and *Top of the Pops*, but also on modern-day drama series, where most of the costumes were sourced from existing BBC stock and, therefore, did not require the creative designing of period drama.

The pre-production elements required a combination of creative design, organisation and management of production, staff, and artists, but the shoot demanded additional skills. Both Gill and Joyce talked about the importance of the costume department in building the confidence of the actors before a performance. This is an under-appreciated aspect of the role. Joyce mentioned needing to reassure pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy before he gave a virtuoso performance at Gosta Green. She also reminded actors in *The Newcomers*, worried about their fluffed lines, that the soap was being tele-recorded rather than live, meaning their mistakes would be edited out. Gill recalled the challenges of working with an actor who could be a bully, but was also very nervous and having to tell the odd white lie to manage his ego. For example, she pretended to re-fit a jacket that he was unhappy with, when it already fitted perfectly. In a similar vein, Pat talked about the challenges of working with actors with drink and drug habits. She was asked by production to look after an actor with a drink problem who insisted on going to the pub, and had to try and ensure that he did not drink too much. These interventions are not considered part of the role of the costume department, and yet all the women interviewed mentioned them. They form part of the 'intricacy of the artistry, and the hidden – and gendered labor' of costume design, observed by Miranda Banks.³⁰

Production Stories

The women interviewed all had stories to tell about the productions they had worked on. These included the 'war stories' and 'against-all-odds allegories' that U.S. academic and producer/director, John Caldwell, describes as typical of below-the-line workers.³¹ Joyce Hawkins told the story of Judi Dench's performance on the live drama *Hilda Lessways* (BBC, 1959):

as Judi entered the studio her elaborate cascading bustle fell to the floor in a heap of

satin and lace ... as the direction "standby studio" rang out, I was on my knees frantically pinning it back up. Judi remained calm and I spent the scene huddled behind a sofa on set.

The story illustrates some of the attributes necessary for television production success, namely quick thinking, and a proactive attitude. Another of Joyce's 'against-all-odds' tales related to location filming for *The Case of Private Hamp* (BBC TV, 1959), where:

army cadets from a private school were used as extras. The bleak and cold conditions were exacerbated by firemen using their hoses, so the boys showed initiative by making a fire from wreckage timber to dry their sodden uniforms. Called for action, they rushed out in a cloud of steam. The khaki dye made pretty patterns through their string vests!³²

This, again, is an amusing story of resilience, in addition to illustrating television production working methods.

Other stories related to the difficulties dressers faced, including prejudice and disrespect. One interviewee related how an actress took exception to being dressed by a Black dresser, and made inappropriate demands. Because the actress had intricate henna designs drying on her hands, she asked the same dresser to wipe her bottom after she visited the lavatory. The dresser did as requested, but the costume designer, when it was reported to her, complained to the actress that this was highly inappropriate. Another reported incident, which also tested boundaries, involved young male actors deliberately stripping naked in front of young female dressers, something designers warned their dressers about. These 'war stories' illustrate how costume workers could be treated disrespectfully, in large part due to being female, but they also demonstrate the necessity of tolerating difficult artists and show how senior staff supported more junior colleagues.

Alongside the 'war stories' and 'against-all-odds' tales, were stories that John Caldwell would term 'genesis myths', which he noted were more typical of above-the-line workers.³³ For instance, Joyce stated:

we were pioneers of innovative stories, being the first, in 1967, to examine the lives and problems facing our immigrant population with a play, *The Dark Man* [BBC TV, 1960], starring Earl Cameron, and a series, *Rainbow City* [BBC1, 1967], featuring Gemma Jones and Errol John in a mixed-race marriage.

She views costume as an integral part of the productions, using 'we', not 'they'. Costume staff, in her eyes, were not incidental to the making of 'innovative stories', but rather were a crucial part of the creative process, and co-creators on programmes with the production team. This demonstrates that the divide between the production team and craft workers did not necessarily exist in the eyes of these workers, and that Caldwell's differentiation in the tales told neglects the complexities of how productions work as collaborative endeavours.

Hours, Conditions and Attitudes

The work of costume and design required punishing hours, due both to preparation time prior to recording or broadcast, and also time needed to clear up afterwards, something mentioned by all the women. Gill remembered doing a run of three nights, averaging twenty-one hours each night and realising the toll it took on her and colleagues. On a series featuring the *Beverly Sisters*, Joyce worked until midnight altering twenty-one dresses, with no assistance. Whilst working on *The Doctors*, she described the weekly ritual of finishing in the studio at 10pm, having to pack the costumes up, travelling thirty miles to the Cotswolds, then unpacking everything to be ready to start filming at 5am.

When working at Television Centre, Pat, along with two colleagues, decided to take action. Some weeks they were working in excess of one hundred hours. They went to management to fight for a seventy-two hour maximum working week. Their campaign was escalated to just below Director General level and took around two years to secure agreement. She did not remember the Association of Broadcasting and Allied Staff (ABAS) Union being particularly supportive in the process. Even after the agreement, they had to fight with productions to stay below the seventy-two-hour limit, along with maintaining a ten-hour break between shifts. She saw it as ongoing 'niggle' that you could not let slide. The assumption from production was that you would complete the work, despite the hours. She mentioned other battles with production to make sure you had the resources required, including the number of staff, facilities, and the budget to do a good job. This illustrates that relations between production and resource departments could become strained due to limited time, staffing and budgetary constraints.

However, there were benefits. The long hours resulted in costume, make-up and design staff being relatively well paid. Ann described the money as 'tremendous'. Those working on productions were classed as irregular hour workers and were paid for the actual hours they worked. Pat also explained that they always had equal pay within costume and other design departments, with male and female designers being paid

the same rate. 'At that time, when women were paid far less than men, we considered ourselves to be very lucky, and we used to say, well, the BBC is an equal pay employer, we get the same as the men.'³⁴ This view is corroborated in contemporary reports.³⁵ However, this neglects the fact that having female-dominated roles made equal pay very difficult to reinforce.³⁶ Grading and therefore pay were also not necessarily equivalent between departments. For example, a make-up artist, who joined the BBC in 1968, interviewed in a recent study complained that make-up designers were two grades below costume designers, and never achieved parity.³⁷

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the interviews was the attitude towards costume, make-up, and production design. Pat mentioned middle management being dismissive and thinking of them as 'silly little women in costume and make-up'. She felt that higher management were unaware of what they did, and how valuable it was. She and her colleagues just 'accepted it and didn't think too much about it'. She mentioned an incident when a colleague was awarded a BAFTA for a production. At the award ceremony, a male member of management told her that they could just call people up off the street to do her job, illustrating the lack of understanding of the role. Gill described some members of the production team and crew thought the costume and make-up staff, 'were just a nuisance and got in the way', because of making last minute adjustments to actors on set. She said, 'they would call us frocks and make-up, powder-puffs. So, I think that fairly well sums up how they thought of us'.³⁸ These attitudes demonstrate the gendered and hierarchical views which prioritise male labour.³⁹ Ann felt that on factual shows costume was considered less important than make-up, whilst on period dramas, costume was crucial, and therefore more prestigious.

The public recognition given to roles via programme credits substantiates these attitudes, with early dramas not crediting costume in the *Radio Times*. For instance, in the Gosta Green drama, *Hilda Lessways* (BBC TV, 1959), costume designer, Joyce Hawkins was not credited, nor was the make-up designer, however, Margaret Peacock received a production designer credit.



Figure 4: Photograph by Roger Davis of 'The Case of Private Hamp' (1959). Producer Peter Dews on the left in glasses. The soldier in profile is actor Noel Johnson (known for playing Dick Barton on radio), playing Lt. Hargreaves.

The same is true for many other programmes of the period. For example, in *The Case of Private Hamp* (BBC TV, 1959), shown in Fig. 4, Joyce Hawkins was not credited in the *Radio Times*, although the production designer was.

As noted earlier, costume had a predominantly female workforce, as did make-up, whilst production design had roughly equal numbers of men and women. The undervaluing of the work of female dominated craft departments results in these roles being uncredited, whilst male dominated roles such as cameraman, invariably received credit. The fact that production design was mixed in terms of gender led to greater valuing of the role, but also meant that women workers were subject to discrimination. Production designer Margaret Peacock remembered quite a lot of animosity towards women:

In Television Centre there were just four of us [women] and we really had to fight our way a bit. When I came to Birmingham, the old engineers were always a bit sniffy about women, you know, [production design] it's a man's job, it wasn't experienced with costume and make-up. I think they really felt it when we worked against their rigid structures. They were probably wary of the way we worked.⁴⁰

This statement reflects attitudes which were articulated in the 1973 report, *Limitations to the Recruitment and Advancement of Women in the BBC*, which demonstrated that the corporation remained a 'bastion of extremely prejudiced views'.⁴¹ The rigidity mentioned, regarding ways of working, particularly from male-dominated technical departments seems to have been at odds with the pragmatic approach employed by women like Margaret and Joyce in ensuring that the job got done, even if their methods might have been unorthodox at times. For example, in the early days of Gosta Green, Margaret even commandeered the Head of Centre's chauffeur driven car to transport props for a children's harvest festival programme. Ann, joining the costume department in 1966, explained that she was not conscious of discrimination, and accepted the gender biases of particular departments as the norm, because feminist ideas were very new.

The lack of understanding, and under appreciation of female-dominated craft areas extended to their need for facilities. When the studios moved from Gosta Green to Pebble Mill in 1971, Joyce discovered that her wardrobe department would be in phase two of the development and her staff were housed temporarily in the basement with no natural light. The small drip-dry area had an electric point at floor level, which was clearly a safety hazard. Joyce's office was shared with make-up, several floors away and had no telephone. This state of affairs illustrates the lack of regard towards the costume and make-up departments, in contrast to male-dominated areas like scenic services, who were provided with a spacious workshop and storage area.

Motherhood

The BBC considered itself pioneering in offering specific staff maternity leave and pay as early as the late

1920s.⁴² After World War Two, maternity leave became widespread in the UK, and was enshrined in legislation through the Employment Protection Act 1975.⁴³ However, long hours and the likelihood of weeks away on location meant that motherhood was a challenge for female design staff in the post-war period. This chimes with research that many women who were successful at the BBC until the late 1970s, were childless.⁴⁴ Gill said that motherhood would have been impossible for her because of the demands of the job, and she remembered colleagues who left because of their children. The 1971 report, *Women in Top Jobs*, mentions a widely held perception that pregnant women would leave the corporation.⁴⁵ Despite the BBC's support for working mothers at an institutional level some within the Corporation found ways to make their continued employment difficult. Pat talked about discrimination, describing a colleague at Television Centre in the 1970s, who was forced to leave, as it was allegedly written into her contract that women could not continue working if they had more than two children. She later returned but had to reapply when a vacancy occurred. She also remembered a male administrator who would deliberately book women returning from maternity leave on to location dramas as their first job back, to make sure they could cope with being away from home. This individual's approach was at odds with reports from other women that the BBC was fairer than some other employers in the treatment of working mothers.⁴⁶

Joyce successfully managed to combine motherhood with her costume designer role:

On Christmas Eve 1961 I gave birth to my son, Stephen, and became a rare member of Staff. The BBC did not have many working mothers in those days! In 1965 Stephen's sister, Caroline arrived. This latter occasion was during the run of *The Flying Swan*, with film star Margaret Lockwood, a charming and very professional lady who took delight in speculating on the sex of my expected baby.

Joyce seems to have been unusual in the BBC in the 1960s being a costume designer, a working mother and leading a department. Ann also became a working mother of three young children. She juggled childcare between her mother and husband, eventually going freelance to be able to spend more time with her children. She remembers Joyce, as her manager, being very supportive and allocating programmes that she knew Ann would be able work into her schedule, illustrating how important sympathetic management was.

Management and Teamwork

Working in female-dominated departments, such as costume and make-up, did provide opportunities to progress into management. The phenomenon of female-dominated departments presenting women with the prospect of senior positions has been noted by others.⁴⁷ The managers of costume and make-up at Gosta Green and Pebble Mill were consistently female, although this was not necessarily the case elsewhere. For example, the

BBC Head of Costume in London was male, as mentioned in the *Women in Top Jobs* report.⁴⁸ However, management roles came with challenges as well as opportunities, and did not appeal to some women. A reluctance to progress into management was articulated by two of the participants. Pat decided to stay as a senior costume designer and avoided swapping the creativity of that role for what she considered a nine-to-five administrative role. Gill also did not want to give up the enjoyable parts of her work to take on managerial responsibilities. This chimes with observations that many 'women were reluctant to be promoted away from close contact with the studio or camera'.⁴⁹

Margaret Peacock did become Head of Design at Gosta Green and continued this role at Pebble Mill. Although an effective manager, she talked of missing being able to design as much as she would have liked, particularly as her department grew in size. Her management style was collaborative and enabling. She spoke of putting together a team who would do anything to please the directors. This attitude engendered a culture in Birmingham of, 'everybody working together to get a good show; whereas in London, you've got to abide by that rule and abide by the other rule, oh dear me'. The smaller size of Gosta Green seems to have facilitated less rule-bound working practices. Margaret also spoke of the difficulties of managing staff with 'their foibles and their peculiarities' and of allocating people who would be amenable to the directors. This remark illustrates that even in the era of the 1950s to the 1970s, the hierarchy of power in production lay with the editorial team, and particularly the director.

As the sole costume designer at Gosta Green, Joyce was managing a team from the beginning of her time there. Like Margaret, she surrounded herself with a cohesive group of workers. She used informal recruitment methods, including employing students from a local drama school and dressers from Handsworth School of Dress Design on a casual basis. Pat Godfrey was one of these students and spent her Friday and Saturday evenings dressing actors on live dramas. This experience was what led her to a career in costume. She remembers the Head of Costume at Television Centre being impressed by the drama output of Gosta Green, which she put down to Joyce, because she was so good at her job. Pat also remembers Joyce's firmer side:

She took no casualties. Really, I mean, if she had a strong feeling about something she would dig her heels in and fight for what she felt was right. And I'm sure a lot of the management either probably thought, "ahh that woman" or, they admired her for the philosophy. You know, she was really great.⁵⁰

In the 1980s, Anglea Coyle wrote that female managers sacrificed their femininity and were considered ineffective by their male colleagues.⁵¹ However, Margaret and Joyce developed a resilience and an aura of authority, which they retain to this day. There is no indication they jeopardised their femininity, whilst they established very effective departments of staff who respected and

kept in touch with each other long after they had retired, demonstrating the extent of their social capital. They seem to typify the warmth and humanity towards colleagues, along with an understanding of other people's problems, that are mentioned as attributes of successful female managers.⁵²

The teams that women like Margaret and Joyce established were crucial in creating a productive working environment. The women I interviewed all spoke very positively about their colleagues and the teamworking involved in their work. Joyce remembers:

My colleagues at Gosta Green were without exception friendly and cooperative. Together we were a great team, taking pride in our work, sharing and helping to alleviate problems and rejoicing together at our successes, a splendid example of collaboration between all skills.⁵³

The women had close working relations, which is illustrated by the fact that they are all still in contact with Joyce, fifty years after the close of Gosta Green; she continues to be a BBC matriarch into her nineties. Pat also mentioned the importance of close working relationships with colleagues in different design disciplines, especially between the make-up and costume designer, interpreting together the look of the character, and both building the confidence of the actor, in different ways. She likened it to a family, especially when you could be on location with them for up to three months at a time. She mentioned still meeting up with colleagues at least once a year, even though they are geographically scattered. This spirit of collaboration typifies the production culture engendered by the working practices of female-led, below-the-line departments. I would argue that this is what differentiates them from masculinised models of production.

Pioneering Spirit

The BBC in its early decades, as Kate Murphy has explained, was a place where women could excel. Its pioneering spirit, sense of modernity and the support of John Reith, presented attractive career opportunities for middle-class, predominantly white, women. However, these favourable conditions ebbed and flowed, and in the 1970s diminished as bureaucracy, professionalisation and conformity masculinised the corporation, creating a discriminatory environment.⁵⁴ There were discriminatory practices in the regional production centres, as well as in London, but there also seems to have been a continuation of the pioneering spirit as television production developed and became established in the immediate post-war period.

Production designer, Margaret Peacock was one of the pioneers in the establishment of network television in the English regions. She set up teams and devised operating systems. Approached by the producer, Barry Edgar,⁵⁵ she was involved in the establishment of the Gosta Green television studio in the 1950s. Barry Edgar visited Margaret, who was then working in Television Centre in London, 'I hadn't even seen Gosta Green Studios then. There was nothing there at all. No facilities whatsoever.

No workshops, no buyers, no props'. She remembers Edgar wanted to stage a mixture of programming, including variety and music, and so, she, 'went up with three scene-hands from Television Centre and a lorry. It was a matter of borrowing stuff from London to use'. She talked about many people in Birmingham moving across from radio into television, to staff these new programmes, and described the way of operating in the beginning as 'amateurish', because of trying to find people to do what was necessary, when you had not yet established your own group of workers around you.⁵⁶ The story is of how a broadcast centre was started from nothing, requiring huge collective effort and the establishment of professional codes and ways of working.

Conclusion

The women studied for this article made a meaningful contribution to the development of television production in the post-war period. They were pioneers in their own departments, building productive and collaborative teams and helping shape the working practices that became industry norms. They did face difficulties over excessively long hours, discrimination regarding the value of their work to a production and juggling work with caring responsibilities, but they worked together to improve their labour conditions.

Despite the privations and challenges they faced, all had long, and for the large part, satisfying careers. Pat felt that costume had given her 'a fabulous career', which she thoroughly enjoyed, crediting Joyce with providing her first opportunity. Ann described her career as 'amazing, wonderful ... I loved the whole thing at the costume department from beginning to end; loved it, all of it'. Being creative in their roles provided immense satisfaction. Pat said that what she misses since she retired is, 'the excitement of reading the scripts and planning it all in my head without the involvement of all the people who could upset the applecart'. The women particularly enjoyed the collective endeavour across all departments to produce the best televisual show they possibly could. They felt part of the production process, not removed from it. The fact that Joyce is still in touch with all the women I interviewed, over fifty years since the Gosta Green studio closed, demonstrates the closeness of the working relationships they built, which several of the interviewees described as like a family.

This study casts light on the intricacies of the work of female below-the-line workers in both costume and production design, in terms of managing staff, budgets and logistics, production and artists. It demonstrates the creativity required, but also the importance of transferrable skills such as influencing and negotiating, whilst being sensitive to the needs of artists and their role preparation. In addition, it provides an insight into the culture and practices of female-led craft departments from 1950s to the 1970s, which created productive and supportive work environments, particularly for other women.

The small scale of the study leaves room for further research concerning the history of women's 'below-the-line' labour in television production, including the

application of additional methods to complement oral history testimony, for example through archival records and private collections. In addition, there is more work to be done on the pioneering history of production in the English regions from the 1950s onwards, encompassing engineering and editorial roles in addition to design departments.

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41. Douglas Moran, *Limitations to the Recruitment and Advancement of Women in the BBC* (1973), BBC; Suzanne Franks, 'Attitudes to Women in the BBC in the 1970s - Not So Much a Glass Ceiling as One of Reinforced Concrete', *Westminster Papers*, 8/3 (2011), 125-42, 130.
42. Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 90.
43. Employment Protection Act 1975, (c.71), (London: The Stationery Office).
44. Ibid, 137.
45. Michael P. Fogarty, A. J. Allen, Isobel Allen, and Patricia Walters, *Women in Top Jobs*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), 209.
46. Ibid, 209.
47. Ibid, 191.
48. Ibid, 189.
49. Ibid, 61.
50. Pat Godfrey, interview, 2021.
51. Angela Coyle, *Women and Work*, 58-79, 59.
52. Michael P. Fogarty et al., *Women in Top Jobs*, 204.
53. Joyce Hawkins, memoir, 2021.
54. Kate Murphy, "'New and Important Careers": How Women Excelled at the BBC, 1923-1939', *Media International Australia* (2016), 161/1, 18-29.
55. Barry Edgar was part of a media dynasty. His father, Percy Edgar was an important figure in the early days of the BBC in Birmingham prior to WWII. His son, David Edgar is a playwright.
56. Margaret Peacock, interview with the author, 2021.

María Luisa Ross: Mexican Educator, Writer and Radio Station Manager

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INTRODUCTION

In 1924, Mexico's Ministry of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública* [SEP]) selected María Luisa Ross to manage its newly inaugurated radio department and station. Between 1924 and 1933, Ross coordinated with teachers, health professionals, musicians, literary experts and Mexican and foreign intellectuals to craft a schedule that offered to a growing radio audience, an array of programmes that were broadcast seven days a week in the morning and evening hours. Believing that radio was an effective tool to instill change, Ross worked to interpret and implement many of the key promises of the Mexican Revolution of 1910: the distribution of land to peasants and displaced indigenous people; new labour codes; increased children's enrollment in primary and secondary schools and a boosted national civic participation.

Given that audio recordings during María Luisa's tenure at the SEP's radio station are inexistent and that to date no biographies of Ross have been written, this article uses an array of sources to reconstruct her life and career and to place her work within Mexican media and broadcasting history. These include official archival information about the radio station, official monthly and annual reports, newspaper columns Ross published, books she wrote, programme schedules printed in the local press and listener correspondence. The goal is to better understand the role of a government-employed media industry worker in a centralised country who, despite being vital to the trajectory of the industry, was on the margins or outside of the traditional historical narrative.

Women like María Luisa Ross occupied positions of influence during a critical moment in Mexican history. She was a multi-talented woman who dedicated her life to teaching and writing and who lived through two of the most decisive moments of the nineteenth and twentieth century: the Porfiriato, or rule of Mexico by Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1910, and the Mexican Revolution of 1910 which began when Díaz was ousted and which concluded in the 1920s. Analysing her life during this period through a radio lens offers a fresh understanding of women's experiences as behind-the-scenes actors—a perspective that only a few scholars have provided for women in Latin America.¹ This article examines the continuities of her work as an educator and writer amidst eras of profound change, and highlights some of the talents that allowed her to be selected as *Jefe de Extensión Educativa de Radio* (chief, or 'boss' of the educational radio office) of SEP radio in 1924.

BACKGROUND: COMMITMENT TO TEACHING AND WRITING

María Luisa Ross [Fig. 1] was born in 1887 in the

state of Hidalgo, 120 kilometers northwest of Mexico City, the country's capital.² Her father, Dr. Alejandro Ross, was a military physician of Scottish ancestry – hence her last name – and her mother was of Spanish descent. Born into privilege, she became a teacher after receiving an education in the country's top schools and allegedly desired to become a writer early on. These opportunities were available to her because, although she was born during the Porfiriato, her upper-class status and family ties to President Díaz allowed her to pursue the arts, education and music. Consensus among Latin American scholars is that the Porfiriato had long lasting and contradictory effects on Mexico. On the one hand, the infrastructural developments of the era were fundamental in Mexico's path toward industrialisation. In addition to the construction and operation of factories in urban centres and the introduction of streetcars and electric lighting to the Mexico City, Díaz ensured that under his leadership roads and railroad lines connecting the interior of the nation to its port cities and north to the United States, were completed. These achievements were visible signs of technological 'transfer' – the implementation of foreign practices and materials from sowing machinery to glass bottle factories.³ On the other hand, however, as the nation modernised, the bulk of the country's population remained isolated, impoverished and in rural areas. Progress only reached the few. Social inequality, racism and limited education kept the majority of the population in a state of poverty that overshadowed any steps toward modernity.

Regarding women's participation in education and the arts, the authoritarian president's welcome embrace of European fashion, arts, architecture and urban design allowed the elite population—who were able to enjoy Old World imported traditions and goods—ample opportunity to do so.⁴ The Ross family were members of the Porfirian political elite. For her part, María Luisa belonged to a group of cultural brokers, teachers and intellectuals who, once the dictator fell from power, supported and backed the presidency of his successor, Francisco I. Madero, before his assassination in 1913. Ross could have chosen a number of career paths yet dedicated her life's work to teaching for government-sponsored schools and writing. As an elite woman, she occupied a unique place in Latin American history. Across Latin America, elite women's ability to assert themselves in the public sphere and participate in a variety of civil service and education jobs after the independence era of the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, complicated the limits of citizenship. Along with the poor and most people of colour—indigenous, enslaved African or mixed race—women were excluded from the majority of rights and freedoms associated with nineteenth century



Fig 1. Photograph of María Luisa Ross during her cultural mission trip to Spain, 1920. Archivo Historico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, México. (Historic Archive of Foreign Relations, Mexico City) Expediente IV/813(72:46)/1

liberalism.⁵ They were trapped between a 'patriarchy from above' in that they had to be faithful and subservient to the masculine authority of the state, and a 'patriarchy from below', because they had to adhere to the authority of men in their roles as husbands and fathers inside the home.⁶

After primary school, María Luisa enrolled in Mexico City's *Escuela Normal para Profesoras* and graduated as a *Normalista*, that is, an educator in schools dedicated to teacher preparation. She was a member of the second generation of female educators in Mexico. The generation before her consisted of a small group of notable and celebrated teachers such as Rita Cetina, Dolores Correa, Laura Méndez de Cuenca and Rosaura Zapata.⁷ In fact, when Ross was born Mexico's first female physician, Matilde Montoya, obtained a doctorate and began to practice medicine.⁸ The Porfiriato provided clear paths for elite women in urban settings where nation-wide urbanisation projects improved all aspects of life. Ross, however, followed a different path than her predecessors; instead of pursuing a career as a teacher, after obtaining the prestigious professional title as *Normalista*, María Luisa enlisted in both the National Conservatory and the *Facultad de Altos Estudios*, the higher education university and precursor of what is today the *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM), one of Latin America's most influential universities.⁹ There, she was awarded advanced degrees in history and declamation (public speaking, oratory) as well as teaching certificates in the Spanish language, Mexican, Spanish and World literature, and education history. This varied resumé led her to alternate as an instructor at the *Escuela Nacional para Profesoras*, the National Conservatory and Mexico's national recitation,

declamation and aesthetics reading school.¹⁰

In the following decade, Ross continued her job as a teacher within the government's public education sector but also made a commitment to become a writer. The impulse to write and perfect that skill as an act of freedom and individuality was a tradition other elite Mexican female teachers enjoyed as well as a path female office workers and other contemporaries of her generation engaged in.¹¹ María Luisa's entry into writing—as a journalist, fiction writer, and primary school reading textbook author—was achieved through her networks in education. With the help of Justo Sierra, a Mexican author, journalist, historian, poet, philosopher and founding member of the UNAM, Ross was introduced to the poet Luis G. Urbina in 1903. Urbina, who was also a journalist, edited two Mexico City newspapers in the early twentieth century, *El Imparcial* and *El Mundo Ilustrado*, and put Ross to work in the women's section of both presses in 1907. There, she reported on the latest fashion trends and wrote advice columns for the capital's high society women. Ross's columns in *El Imparcial* are notable given that it was one of Mexico's first modern and metropolitan newspapers. In the span of her career as a journalist and newspaper contributor, which began in 1907 and concluded in 1917 with articles for *El Universal* and *El Universal Ilustrado*, Ross expressed herself creatively, explored her curiosity and wrote about female emotions, friendships, the weather and other mundane things. She often signed the columns and reports under the alias *El Paje Merili* ('Merili', the page) or 'Silvia Setalla'.¹² While she did not dedicate her life entirely to writing, she earned respect and recognition as one of Mexico's first female journalists.¹³

The exposure she received in the press as an author

and her elite status placed her in a precarious position; the busy Mexico City press featured her writing, but also wrote about her actions, opinions and volunteer work. Ross had been involved in charity work since she was a young girl and was a founding member of the Mexican Red Cross.¹⁴ However, in 1908, three Mexico City newspapers published reports and critiques related to a speech she gave at the annual meeting of the *Consejo Nacional de Madres* (National Council of Mothers). María Luisa, who was not a mother and remained single until her death in 1945, was invited to speak at the national congress and used the opportunity to condemn 'masculine professions' such as law and medicine. She also expressed the view that women should shy away from pursuing any path which diverted from their 'true and traditional' mission in society to be mothers and wives. In her speech, which was copied word for word in *El Imparcial*, Ross asked, 'if there comes a day when all women practice law or become lawyers and doctors, who will take care of the home?'¹⁵ This event and its subsequent reviews was the only occasion in which she appears in the historical record writing explicitly on the topic of feminism. Arguably, Ross leaned on the side of conservative and traditional Mexican women of the turn of the century. Mexican women of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in prominent positions of power, as Mexican historian Gabriela Cano notes, sought gender equality but did not demand or fight for political equity. Instead, they followed what is described as 'liberal' feminism, a viewpoint which focuses on non-religious and rational education and still adheres to women's predestined roles as mothers and wives.¹⁶ Using those definitions, it is easy to see how Ross believed in differences between the sexes and advocated for secular or non-Catholic education committed to helping the poor while simultaneously observing long-standing conservative traditions and gendered expectations. The fact that she was a single working woman did not seem to impact her view of women's roles in Mexican society. This neutral position is in line with an observation made by Mexican historian Susie Porter, whose scholarship on factory and office workers in Mexico City explains the social and political conditions that were opened to women when they entered the labour force, as well as the limitations of female participation in new spaces traditionally reserved for men. Porter notes that during the 1920s not only was feminism mislabelled—critics conflated working outside of the home with feminism—but 'women did not embrace feminism as an abstract idea to argue for special protections or equal rights. Rather, based on their experiences at work, they gave voice to a new female consciousness'.¹⁷

After her 1908 speech, Ross does not appear again in Mexico City newspapers as either a feminist or a staunch conservative. Instead, her writing took a new form. In 1916, as she continued to teach, she published a novel titled *Cuentos Sentimentales* (Sentimental Stories). The six-part story tells of a young woman who, like herself, migrated from one of Mexico's rural provinces to the capital city and wrestled with a number of emotions in her adolescent and early adult life including longing, love and the elation of new adventures.¹⁸ María Luisa also wrote a series of children's books that were later adopted

for Mexico's primary education curriculum. One of these texts, *Memorias de una niña. Libro de lectura* followed a genre known as *libros de lectura*, reading learning and comprehension books. *Memorias de una niña* is a reflective book told from a woman's perspective to other female pupils, in this case third grade students. The book is written in the first-person and includes more than 90, three-page short chapters covering a wide range of topics such as Mexican history, schoolwork, respect for elders and teachers, family illnesses, patriotism, the environment and the care and importance of animals. Also, given that it was written for young female schoolgirls, it illuminates what it might be like for young women to confront or learn from traditional gender roles or familial expectations. For example, Chapter 80, which is titled 'Heroic Women' opens with a question the narrator and her friends, Elena and Sofía, ask their teacher: 'Are women obligated to be heroic, or is that 'man's work'?' The young students, who have just learned the story of Joan of Arc, approach their teacher with confidence and concern for women's proper roles in Mexican society. The teacher responds by saying that women can be brave *and* heroic and uses the opportunity and captive audience to introduce two female actors in Mexico's fight for independence, Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez and Doña Leona Vicario. She concludes by telling the students that a woman who can display strength and overcome fear in the midst of pain, is brave.¹⁹ These publications demonstrate Ross's opportunities as an educated elite woman of the Porfiriato. At the same time, they are examples of grit and perseverance to establish herself as an author.

By the time María Luisa was in her thirties, she had accumulated a number of accolades including educator, author, journalist and even orator. Yet in 1920, four years before she was selected as the founding director of state-sponsored radio station CZE-XFX, Ross was appointed to travel to Spain on a cultural mission.²⁰ By then, the Mexican Revolution was a decade old and political leaders were implementing measures to centralise the nation, promote nationalism and consolidate power in Mexico City. There were a number of reasons for the cultural mission. While the Mexican Revolution had successfully ousted Porfirio Díaz, it had also destroyed the countryside, exposed Mexico to foreign military invasion by the United States in 1914, left the economy in ruins and contributed to the death of more than 1.5 million people. In the early 1920s there was an effort to highlight modern features of a nation brought to a state of stasis by such a long war.

As a social revolt, the Mexican Revolution did not conclude in one sweeping political act or legislation but slowly petered out. The new constitution, drafted in 1917, had introduced political stability.²¹ Thus, by 1920 as the bureaucratic central government focused on reestablishing diplomatic relations with Spain, France and Great Britain as well as the United States, President Adolfo de la Huerta sent María Luisa to Spain to hold a series of conferences on Mexican culture. Ross was appointed to this diplomatic-cultural mission as a mouthpiece to demonstrate the Mexican government's renewed interest in culture—broadly speaking—but also to strengthen ties with European countries. During her months-long tour throughout prominent cities in the Spanish peninsula

and European capitals such as Rome, Paris and Brussels, she spoke on two topics: Mexican literature and Mexican music. Another key purpose of her trip was to attempt to wipe clean the negative image Mexico had acquired throughout the world during the decade-long conflict. She explained, for example, that during the violent and armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1911-1916, roughly) while lawlessness prevailed in the countryside, in the cities factories were still in operation, libraries remained open and children continued to be instructed. Overall, Ross stressed that Mexican culture was not stagnant, but vibrant.²²

In retrospect, the trip solidified her commitment to share Mexican culture with the world. In a subtle but important way, she expressed awareness that the New World (i.e., the Americas) needed to forge new ties and increase cohesion with the Old World (with the *Madre Patria*), i.e., with the art, culture, and sentiments that gave the colonies their 'spiritual, social, and material character'.²³ She was one of a number of intellectuals who turned to high-brow art forms as avenues to forge diplomatic ties. Her mission to Europe during a key moment of political and economic reconstruction and transition demonstrates her ability to successfully bridge the Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution. Furthermore, her dedication to bring to the world the richness of Mexican culture and history, would play an important part of her work at the SEP radio station.

CHIEF OF EDUCATIONAL RADIO

In 1921, when Ross returned from her trip to Spain as cultural ambassador, two things occurred in the history of the nation and in the history of communications technology in Mexico. Firstly, the SEP was formally created and secondly, national radio transmissions were formalised. Despite the state of the economy during the armed phase of the Revolution, by the mid-1910s, the Mexican government had resumed earlier efforts to adopt and implement radio technologies.²⁴ In the final years of the Porfiriato, the government had adopted radio broadcasting, particularly the adoption and implementation of radiotelephony and radiotelegraphy, as a symbol of modernity. In the ensuing decades, wireless was introduced as a viable tool to educate and indoctrinate citizens during an era of reconstruction and renewal. As was the case in Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba, Mexican broadcasting was officially formalised in 1921, as a result of experiments and collaboration between electrical engineers, amateurs, businessmen and state officials. Yet despite these early experiments and transmissions, commercial and official broadcasting remained a novel medium of communication.²⁵

It is estimated that in the early 1920s approximately 5,000 families owned radio receiving sets throughout Mexico, and only a handful of stations occupied the spectrum.²⁶ The Mexican government was fortunate that a new mass communications technology arrived at the exact moment that it wished to establish a new relationship with its citizens.²⁷ Wireless broadcasting was embraced by the revolutionary state because of its promise to reach a large number of people and because

it could make that connection in a quick and affordable way, considering Mexico's physical terrain and limited transportation infrastructure. Instead of laying cables or buying telegraph posts, political leaders imported and constructed radio transmitters and receivers to advance the Mexican revolution's agenda which focused on land reform, education for the poor and, by the mid-1930s, socialism.

A handful of government institutions launched and operated their own stations in the early 1920s including the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor, the Ministry of War and Navy and the Ministry of Foreign Relations.²⁸ Yet it is the SEP (the Ministry of Public Education) station, CZE-XFX, established in 1924, that stands out among the other state-sponsored, amateur, cultural and commercial stations for a number of reasons.

First, it was established during a moment of nationwide political and economic reconstruction and global technological transformation and exchange.²⁹ Second, from its first years on air until the mid 1930s, CZE-XFX acted as a hub and mouthpiece for the government, not just the SEP; that is, it transmitted daily news bulletins and information from other Ministries such as Public Health and Foreign Relations as well as live congressional meetings and state of the union addresses once a year. The SEP was created by President Álvaro Obregón in 1921 just as power was centralized in Mexico City, an era of 'unprecedented state intervention'. Central government became convinced of its need and capacity to 'transform culture for the purposes of integration, rule, and development'; Mexican historian Mary Kay Vaughan notes that public education was one of the ways it carried out this change.³⁰ As federal institutions were inaugurated, the revolution honed in on culture, education and public health, utilising the Ministry of Public Education to implement its goals of social transformation and modernisation. This included the construction of schools, clinics, roads and factories and the beginning of two decades of 'postrevolutionary cultural formation'.³¹

It was the SEP who had responsibility for building schools, training and sending teachers to rural Mexico, enrolling children in primary schools in urban centres, secularising the curriculum, and enlisting media and visual arts to transmit revolutionary educational policy. As historian Alan Knight explains, this policy, 'sought to inculcate literacy, nationalism, notions of citizenship, sobriety, hygiene, and hard work. Art, rhetoric, and... radio were enlisted for the same purpose'.³² The SEP is a topic of close academic study. This is because of its commitment to the advancement of cultural nationalism and because schools and teachers were key players in ensuring that state policy reached people throughout Mexico. Since the 1980s art historians, anthropologists and social studies scholars alike have demonstrated the role of urban and rural schools, teachers, children, murals and art as agents of social transformation that helped to forge Mexican national identity.³³ Recent work on cinema and SEP educational campaigns, such as that of Mexican historian Rosa Gudiño Cejudo, highlight the aural and mass mediated methods of promoting the SEP's cultural project.³⁴ However, studies that consider the programming content and reception of state-sponsored media such as

radio are less well known.³⁵

A third reason for the significance of CZE-XFX is its prioritisation of national unity through a focus on extending education and culture to urban and rural citizens alike. Broadcasts covered a wide range of topics including daily weather reports, women's advice shows, technical courses, classes on proper cooking techniques, children's programmes, musical concerts, public health propaganda and political speeches. Furthermore, the station's schedule was in sync with daily routines and habits of the Mexican population. The main meal in Mexico is eaten in the early afternoon, for example, and Ross ensured that educational programming was not scheduled between noon and 4:00 p.m.

Fourthly, it has endured. While the radio department's name changed four times between 1924 and its most recent rebranding as *Radio Educación* in the 1960s, the station can still be heard anywhere in the world today, online. In Mexico it is located on FM.³⁶ The station has outlived other state-sponsored broadcasting operations such as XEO/XEFO, the station founded by Mexico's longest-serving political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* [PRI]), a political machine which ruled in Mexico for the greater part of the twentieth century (1946-2000).³⁷ Finally, CZE-XFX was the only state-sponsored station in Mexico to be founded and managed by a woman. As was the case with a select number of women in the BBC, Ross was supported by male bosses such as José Vasconcelos, leaders who recognised her talents.³⁸ As the SEP's first Minister, Vasconcelos strove to fill posts at the SEP with a new generation of public servants: young, creative and intellectually-minded people—male and female—who were committed to the values of the revolution. A philosopher, diplomat and controversial figure, Vasconcelos is remembered foremost as a crusader of education and cultural campaigns in Mexico and for his work advocating for Hispanic-American artistic and cultural unity. Most importantly, he turned to emerging mass media such as radio and film as pedagogical instruments to reach the nation's predominantly rural and illiterate population.³⁹ María Luisa's work during her tenure at the radio station helped shape the content and direction of state-sponsored media. She was a competent leader who used her cultural expertise, elite background, social networks, skills and commitment to the ideals of the revolutionary government in a number of important ways.

PROGRAMMING REVOLUTIONARY PRINCIPLES

After it was installed at SEP headquarters in downtown Mexico City in 1924, María Luisa Ross presided over the station's inaugural transmissions on the evening of 30 November from the third floor of the SEP building, a stately Spanish-colonial structure.⁴⁰ In her role as director, Ross contracted a group of experts such as media professionals, physical education teachers, historians, anthropologists and other members of Mexico's intellectual circles to instruct listeners live over the airwaves. María Luisa also worked with the SEP's Fine

Arts Department which was located in the same building. Musicians, poets and singers were encouraged to visit the station, to disseminate both high-brow and folkloric music before live audiences and in a state-of-the-art studio. In order to establish an effective communications channel, Ross worked closely with SEP engineers in the department of technical education. Fernando León Grajales and Francisco J. Stávoli, for instance, secured the transmitter in the United States and assisted with its relocation. In the late 1920s and 1930s, a small group of engineers worked in a laboratory building radio receivers for SEP schools, a collaboration with Ross that started as early as 1925.⁴¹

Station CZE-XFX introduced the shared-service broadcasting model in Mexico; that is, it offered distinct programmes to each age group within the family during designated daytime slots while reserving concerts and family programming for the evening and mealtime hours. This programme style was similar to France, Britain, the United States and other countries with comparable trajectories in radio broadcasting and development. In interwar France, as historian Joelle Neulander explains, 'the idea of the family audience drove radio's cultural production...radio programmers envisioned French listeners as family groups, located squarely inside the home'.⁴² Station CZE-XFX offered culturally themed broadcasts for the entire family such as concerts, recitals by Mexican poets and translated Shakespeare plays, such as *King Lear*.⁴³

Between 1925 and the early 1930s, CZE-XFX began its weekly programming with a live gymnastics lesson read by a physical education teacher at 7:00 am.⁴⁴ During its first full year on air the SEP radio department distributed over 1,000 pamphlets with diagrams of exercises and less than two years later, by March 1927, the station celebrated that 348 students were aural pupils of the early morning calisthenics course.⁴⁵ The focus on exercise, health and discipline is in line with a series of morality codes the SEP implemented to its curriculum in 1925 in which 'children were taught to be good citizens; kind toward others; and loyal to family, nation, and humanity'.⁴⁶ Ross integrated the new curriculum into her programmes, aware that, 'The revolution had transformed society', as historian Patience A. Schell notes. The new political class, which Ross was a member of, 'could not ignore the recent mobilised population, but instead had to incorporate revolutionary demands into the process of state formation'.⁴⁷

Station CZE-XEX offered other courses such as 'domestic economy', urgent surgical care, aviculture, apiculture, sericulture, crafts, physics, history and geography. In November 1927, Ross asked the orthodontics department at the UNAM to select a few of its professors to deliver brief broadcasts on mouth diseases and oral health twice a week.⁴⁸ In the early hours of the day, CZE-XFX broadcast programming specifically dedicated to women. This ranged from women's advice shows, cooking classes, and public health bulletins for mothers. As Mary Kay Vaughan explains, the government focused on educating women inside the home, 'In lectures in schools and over the government radio station, home economics professors discussed the function of the housewife'.⁴⁹ These programmes transmitted the values

that the government wanted to promote about women. As the head of the 'revolutionary family', the modernisation of the Mexican mother was a critical component of the government's national reconstruction programme.⁵⁰ The focus on women was significant given that the bulk of the SEP's educational mission fell on women's shoulders. By the 1920s women were educators, SEP inspectors in urban and rural sites, principals, students and volunteers in urban and rural areas. Other values which seeped into broadcasts considered gender roles, Mexican diet, cleanliness, European styles and influences. Often, these were high-brow and out-of-touch behavioural recommendations which aligned more with Ross's personal background than with the intended audience of rural or lower income Mexican listeners.

Before noon, the station transmitted a series of public health dispatches, which were featured in CZE-XFX programming as early as 1924. The bulletins, such as the one titled, 'The Case of Elisa Cedillo', which told the story of a young woman who died from a rabies infection after being bitten by a dog, followed a particular narrative style which integrated current event stories as a way to counteract misinformation, emphasise personal responsibility and highlight the benefits of health and the risks of contracting diseases. Other health-related topics included proper hand washing, room ventilation and general ways to encourage good hygiene among mothers and the public. Often, the Ministry of Public Health dispatches underscored how taking direct action, such as consulting a doctor, was a patriotic thing to do, as it could make a difference to Mexico's future. These recommendations, aired daily in five-to-ten-minute segments, were in line with government attempts to unite the population and demonstrate its goals for the radio project.⁵¹

The station's programming increased under Ross's leadership. Within a year, transmissions had risen to between two to three hours per day.⁵² As the years wore on, airtime increased exponentially. By 1927, the station was on air four and a half hours per day, thirty hours a week and by the early 1930s, when Ross departed, from 7:00 am to 11:00 pm.⁵³ Official records reveal that state-sponsored instruction reached hundreds of listeners, particularly in Mexico City and its surrounding *colonias*, or neighbourhoods. A technical training course offered by CZE-XFX on radiotelephony in the late 1920s, for instance, attracted more than 450 participant-listeners from various states throughout Mexico as well as Spanish-language radio listeners in Houston, Texas.⁵⁴

In addition to instructing and educating schoolchildren in urban and rural settings, housewives and workers, Ross emphasised that the station should be used to diffuse 'cultural messages' to people in 'North American and Central American cities'.⁵⁵ The SEP's radio department monitored this impact by keeping track of the thousands of hand written and typed letters sent to Mexico City.⁵⁶ In 1925, Ross indicated that on average the station received 26,000 reports per month from listeners throughout the Western Hemisphere and used the data to estimate that the station's range exceeded 119,000 kilometers.⁵⁷ Listener reports arrived at SEP headquarters from the United States, Canada and a handful of

Caribbean and European countries. Jean Maurier of Replattes, Switzerland, for example, wrote to CZE-XFX in 1926 indicating he had been able to tune in and hear the station through his shortwave receiver with great clarity and expressed a hope to listen on a regular basis.⁵⁸ Ross understood the value and importance of cultural diplomacy from her trip to Europe in 1920 and in the official reports she submitted to the Mexican government, used these letters as evidence of the technological power of CZE-XFX. They were also proof that Mexico's nascent radio industry had the capability to cross borders and reach varied audiences.

María Luisa's labour at the SEP intensified after 1929 as the number of commercial stations in Mexico increased. Scholars calculate that by the early 1930s around seventy-four radio stations operated in Mexico, some with powerful transmitters of more than 5,000 watts.⁵⁹ As competition for audiences intensified during the 1930s, the SEP's radio office added an 'information' section to the existing educational, cultural and artistic departments. The largest division remained the cultural office, which continued to be responsible for broadcasting concerts offered by the National Conservatory, remote control conferences from professors and intellectuals at the UNAM and classical and popular musical programs.⁶⁰

Competing with commercial stations implied implementing new strategies, including a campaign to distribute radio receivers to rural schools in the provinces surrounding the capital city.⁶¹ Before her departure from the SEP's radio department in 1933, Ross continued to focus on ways to elevate the musical quality of the station. She also campaigned for a new transmitter that could truly reach Mexico's listeners, aware that rival commercial stations had access to powerful and expensive ones. In her budget request for the SEP for that fiscal year, she requested more teachers for live radio instruction, a small orchestra and four singers to deliver effective musical education. Ross also outlined plans for the SEP to inaugurate an on-air newspaper; that is, to offer radio listeners news and information each morning over the airwaves, a practice Mexico City's commercial stations had begun to implement in the 1930s.⁶² Before the SEP acquired its powerful 1000-watt transmitter, Ross was relieved of her post as radio chief in 1933, becoming Director of the Library of Mexico's National Museum. Her successor, Mexican author Agustín Yáñez, worked to ensure that the station continued to prioritise cultural programming, education and increased the station's daily programming schedule.⁶³

CONCLUSION

Mexico benefitted from the fruits of the early twentieth century electronic media revolution—the telegraph, the telephone and wireless broadcasting. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the Mexican government's decision to enlist communications media and visual arts to transmit a revolutionary cultural and educational policy during the 1920s and 1930s was fruitful. As a media platform, wireless broadcasting became an effective way that the Mexican state, which was seeking to legitimise the triumphs of its revolution,

could disseminate propaganda, education, entertainment and public health service announcements to its people. As it forged a relationship of trust between citizens and the new revolutionary state, it also depended on enthusiastic civil servants—men and women committed to fulfilling the new government's projects.

Mexican women like María Luisa Ross occupied positions of influence during a critical moment in Mexican history. As a cultured and 'seasoned' woman with experience in education, drama, singing and leadership, María Luisa's profile by the time she began to work in radio is similar to that of other 'elite' women working at the BBC.⁶⁴ However, Ross did not defy social conventions or use radio as a platform for feminist or political ideas. Instead, her experience behind-the-scenes helped advance something much larger: a national political project of reconstruction centered on education. Thus, it was never 'radical', rather it was in line with nineteenth- and early-twentieth century feminist demands in Mexico.⁶⁵

María Luisa Ross does feature in official histories of CZE-XFX where she is acknowledged as a pioneer and an educator in the early history of the station. However, while her determination to utilise radio as a practical tool in the fight against ignorance is recognised, the skills and talents she brought, the social networks she cultivated early in life that aided her attempts to offer cultural programming, and the creative ways she adapted to the revolutionary government's goals have been overlooked.⁶⁶

This article has attempted to deepen our understanding of CZE-XFX by taking stock of the ways in which María Luisa Ross organised her programming to fulfill government's objectives. It has also highlighted how she incorporated and made use of her skills and talents as an educator and writer. Ross's story does not follow other media history monographs or stories in Latin America, which have focused on female voices, women as performers, producers or well-known operators.⁶⁷ Instead, this examination of an understudied agent in Mexican radio history has aimed to enhance our understanding of women's creative labour and role as civil servants. This is deserving of attention, given women's role in the construction of the pedagogical and propaganda-making arm of the Mexican government following the armed phase of the 1910 Mexican Revolution.

Notes

1. For South America, see Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For Mexico see Rita Abreu, *Damas con antifaz. Mujeres en la radio, 1920-1960* (Mexico City: Editorial Ink, 2017).
2. Some sources note that María Luisa Ross was born in 1887 while others in 1880. See www.elem.mx/autor/datos/958 https://sic.cultura.gob.mx/ficha.php?table=artista&table_id=5433 (accessed 21 Jun. 2022).
3. Edward Beatty, *Technology and the Search for Progress in Modern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). For a general overview of the Porfiriato see Paul Garner, *Porfirio Díaz* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001).
4. On consumerism during the Porfiriato see Steven

B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012).

5. Teresa Meade, *A History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 101.
6. Elizabeth Dore, *Myths of Modernity: Peonage and Patriarchy in Nicaragua* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
7. *Colección Las Maestras de México*. (México: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México; Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2015)
8. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/english/fearless-story-matilde-montoya-mexicos-first-female-doctor> (accessed 10 Oct. 2022).
9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Autonomous_University_of_Mexico (accessed 9 Oct. 2022).
10. Raul G. Guerrero, 'Mil biografías en la historia de México', *El Nacional*, 13 Dec. 1946, 3.
11. Women's and gender historians have produced a number of biographies on prominent women of Ross's generation, including Elena Arizmendi and Laura Méndez de Cuenca, who had multifaceted careers—educators, writers, activists, etc. See Gabriela Cano, *Se llamaba Elena Arizmendi* (México: Tusquets Editores, 2010); Mílada Bazant, *Laura Méndez de Cuenca: Mexican Feminist, 1853-1928* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018). On female officer workers and writing as a means of making sense of the world see Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker* especially chapter 5 "Commercial Education and Writing during the 1930s", 141-65.
12. Concha Alvarez, *Así pasó mi vida* (México: Porrúa, 1962), 51.
13. Raul G. Guerrero, 'Mil biografías en la historia de México', *El Nacional*, 13 Dec. 1946, 3; Elvira Laura Hernández Carballido, "La participación femenina en el periodismo nacional durante la revolución Mexicana (1910-1937)" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003), 70-72. On early feminism in Mexico and the use of the press see Gabriela Cano, "Mas de un siglo de feminismo en México", *Debate Feminista* 14: 10 (Oct. 1996): 345-60.
14. On her work as founding member of the Mexican branch of the Red Cross see *El Tiempo Ilustrado*, 19 Sep. 1909.
15. *El Imparcial*, 28 Jun. 1908. "El Feminismo y la Señorita María Luisa Ross".
16. Gabriela Cano, "Mas de un siglo de feminismo en México," *Debate Feminista* 14: 10 (Oct. 1996), 345-60.
17. Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker*.
18. María Luisa Ross, *Cuentos Sentimentales* (México: Tip. y Rayados "El Arte", 1916).
19. María Luisa Ross, *Memorias de una niña. Libro de lectura. Para las alumnas de tercer año de las escuelas elementales* (México: Sociedad de Educación y Librería Franco-Americana, S.A., 1924), 206-08.
20. In compliance with the International Telecommunications Congress taking place in Washington, D.C. in 1927, all Mexican stations were assigned XE and XF prefixes. Thus, in September 1928 CZE became XFX. Because this article encompasses both phases, I have

- included both call letters, CZE-XFX. By 1936 the station broadcast as XEXM, long wave and XEXA short wave. Archivo Historico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (Hereafter AHSEP), Expediente A-4/235.3(S-3)/-1 Folio 245.
21. William H. Beezley and Colin M. MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
 22. *El Democrata*. Sábado 11 de septiembre de 1920. Pagina dos. Vida Social. María Luisa Ross parte para Europa.
 23. *Tribuna Hispano Americana, Raza Española*, Dic. 1920, 37.
 24. J. Justin Castro, *Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).
 25. The history of radio in Mexico began in 1921 with formal transmissions in three locations throughout the country: Mexico City, the Gulf of Mexico coastal state of Veracruz and the northern state of Nuevo León. Gabriel Sosa Plata y Perla Olivia Rodríguez, "Hacia los cien años de la radio mexicana", *Días de radio. Historias de la radio en México* (México: Productora de Contenidos Culturales Sahagón Repoli y Secretaría de Cultura, 2016), 13-14.
 26. *Una historia hecha de sonidos. Radio Educación: La innovación en el cuadrante* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Radio Educación, 2004), 33.
 27. J. Justin Castro, *Radio in Revolution*; Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000).
 28. The latter two were founded in 1923. See Fernando Mejía Barquera, *La industria de la radio y la televisión*, 29.
 29. In 1937 all state-sponsored radio was consolidated and moved to an autonomous propaganda office, the Departamento Autonomo de Prensa y Publicidad (DAPP). See Priscila Pilatowski Goñi, "La nación acústica: la radio y el Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad, México, 1936-1939", in *América Latina entre espacios: redes, flujos e imaginarios globales*, eds. Stephanie Fleischmann, José Alberto Moreno Chávez y Cecilia Tossounaia (Berlin: Edition Tranvía, Verlag Walter Frey, 2014), 83-96.
 30. Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants and schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 5.
 31. *Ibid.*, 4.
 32. Alan Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940", *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74: 3 (Aug. 1994), 395-96.
 33. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Elena Jackson Albarrán, *Seen and Heard in Mexico: Children and Revolutionary Cultural Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Rick Anthony López, *Crafting Mexico: intellectuals, artisans, and the state after the revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Mary K. Coffey, *How a revolutionary art became official culture: murals, museums, and the Mexican state* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
 34. Rosa María Garduño Cejudo, *Educación higiénica y cine de salud en México, 1925-1960* (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2016).
 35. State sponsored media scholar Juan Leyva, *Política educativa y comunicación social: la radio en México, 1940-1946* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1992); Renfro Cole Norris "A History of La Hora Nacional: Government Broadcasting Via Privately Owned Radio Stations in Mexico", (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1963).
 36. The station broadcast consistently from from 1924-37 and then from 1968 to the present. See <https://radioeducacion.edu.mx/> (accessed 26 May 2022). At first, the radio department was the *Dirección de Extensión Educativa por Radio*. In 1928 it became the *Oficina de la Obra de Extensión Educativa por Radio* followed by *Oficina Cultural Radiotelefónica* in 1931. After Ross departed and before it was absorbed by a centralised propaganda department, it was the *Oficina de Extensión Educativa por Radio. Una historia hecha de sonidos*.
 37. Jorge Mejía Prieto, *Historia de la radio y la T.V. en México*, 55-58.
 38. Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 156.
 39. On the links between José Vasconcelos and Chilean poet and professor Gabriela Mistral see Gabriela Cano, "Gabriela Mistral: la dura lección de que existen patrias", *Debate Feminista* 13:4 (Apr. 1996), 133-39.
 40. Gabriel Sosa Plata y Felipe León López, "Radio Educación: Los pioneros" en *Días de radio. Historias de la radio en México* (México: Productora de Contenidos Culturales Sahagón Repoli y Secretaría de Cultura, 2016), 64.
 41. *Una historia hecha de sonidos. Radio Educación: La innovación en el cuadrante* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Radio Educación, 2004), 41.
 42. Joelle Neulander, *Programming National Identity: The Culture of Radio in 1930s France* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 2.
 43. *El Nacional*, 16 Jul. 1933, "Tuvo enorme éxito la radiación de una obra".
 44. *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* Tomo VI. Enero. Número 1. (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927), 155.
 45. *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* Tomo VI. Marzo. Número 3. (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927), 224.
 46. Patience A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), xix.
 47. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, xxii.
 48. *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* Tomo VI. Diciembre. Número 12. (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927).
 49. Mary Kay Vaughan, "Women, class, and education in Mexico, 1880-1928" *Latin American Perspectives: Issues* 12 and 13, Vol. IV, nos 1 & 2 (Winter & Spring 1977), 147.
 50. Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).
 51. For an example of one of these bulletins, see Sonia Robles "Constructing a suitable platform for public health: Radio propaganda, instruction, and 'The case of Elisa Cedillo', *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation*

Review, 2(2). <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/constructing-a-suitable-platform-for-public-health-radio-propaganda-instruction-and-the-case-of-elisa-cedillo/>

52. *Una historia hecha de sonidos. Radio Educación: La innovación en el cuadrante* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Radio Educación, 2004), 45.

53. *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* Tomo VI. Diciembre. Número 12. (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927), 306; *Una historia hecha de sonidos*. (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Radio Educación, 2004), 126.

54. *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* Tomo VI. Junio. Número 6. (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1927), 187.

55. James Schwoch, *The American radio industry and its Latin American activities, 1900-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública*. Tomo IV, número 2. Mayo 1925, p. 63.

56. Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo: Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, Expediente 22/131.6 (725.1)/149

57. AHSEP 41.8. 9475/15. Caja 4. "Informe especificado acerca de las necesidades futuras para la mejor aplicación de la obra de extensión educativa por radio", México, 20 de marzo de 1930. Jefe de Extensión Educativa por Radio, María Luisa Ross.

58. *El Universal*, 16 Feb. 1926.

59. Gabriel Sosa Plata y Felipe León López, "Radio Educación: Los pioneros" en *Días de radio. Historias de la radio en México* (México: Productora de Contenidos Culturales Sahagún Repoli y Secretaría de Cultura, 2016), 67.

60. Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo: Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, Expediente 22/131.6 (725.1)/149.

61. Joy Elizabeth Hayes, "National Imaginings on the Air: Radio in Mexico, 1920-1950" in Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds. *The Eagle and The Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 243-58.

62. SEP A-4/235.3(73) caja 1 518-14

63. *Una historia hecha de sonidos*, 69.

64. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless*, 160.

65. Gabriela Cano, "Mas de un siglo de feminismo en México", *Debate Feminista* 14: 10 (Oct, 1996): 345-60.

66. *Ibid.*, 42.

67. The articles in the "Forum: Women and Radio: Sounding Out New Paths in Women's History" *Women's History Review* 29,2 (Apr. 2020) offer one example. For Latin America, see Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Rita Abreu, *Damas con antifaz. Mujeres en la radio, 1920-1960* (Mexico City: Editorial Ink, 2017); Sonia Robles, "'El Club de la Escoba y el Plumero' y la creación de un espacio público. Las mujeres en la radio Mexicana" in *Género en la encrucijada de la historia social y cultural de México*, Susie S. Porter y María Teresa Fernández Aceves, coords. (El Colegio de Michoacán y CIESAS-Occidente, México, 2015).

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CATHLEEN NESBITT: BRITAIN'S FIRST RADIO DRAMA PRODUCER

Dr Andrea Smith

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The BBC's early history was dominated by men. But in radio drama, it was a woman who led the way. Cathleen Nesbitt, heralded as 'one of our most popular actresses' in the 1920s, was also the first person responsible for producing plays on the BBC.¹ This article will show that her 'pioneering' work led to the establishment of a new broadcasting genre and a legacy that continues to this day.² By piecing together contemporary accounts, it is possible to demonstrate that she worked as an adaptor and director, as well as producer: a practice that has continued into the twenty-first century. Her ground-breaking work seems to have been largely unacknowledged within the BBC: her personal file does not start until after the Second World War and programme details held by the BBC do not mention a producer for these early productions. In addition, anecdotal comments by a colleague made half a century after she produced these plays wrongly credited them to one of her male contemporaries, a mistake that has subsequently been repeated elsewhere. This article will restore the credit Nesbitt deserves as a radio pioneer.

Nesbitt was born in Liskeard, Cheshire, in 1888, but when she was 'probably about seven or eight' her father was given the command of the merchant ship *County Antrim*, and the family travelled with him to locations including Buenos Aires, Alexandria and St Petersburg, before eventually settling in Belfast. After winning a school essay-writing competition she decided to spend her ten pounds prize on 'further education' rather than books.³ However, Nesbitt's idea of further education was to work as an *au pair* in Paris, where she stayed for two years. Shortly after her return to Belfast the family moved to London, where she took acting lessons. In the end of term play, she played the part of a 'French wet-nurse' with an impeccable accent, thanks to her time in France.⁴ She also 'discovered I had authority' and was awarded a contract at the Court Theatre.⁵

In 1911, Nesbitt was invited to a lunch attended by the patron of the arts, Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory. Nesbitt overheard a conversation Lady Gregory was having about a forthcoming American tour by Dublin's Abbey Players that was short of an understudy. Nesbitt writes that 'after lunch I summoned up courage to attack'—and was rewarded with the job, being quickly moved up to full cast member when another actor pulled out at the last minute.⁶ The trip was a success, and on her return to London the following year, she was cast as Perdita in Harley Granville-Barker's production of *The Winter's Tale* at the Savoy Theatre.

Granville-Barker, a respected Shakespearean producer and critic, was a clear influence on Nesbitt. She wrote about him with great admiration in her autobiography, commenting that: 'I feel that Granville-Barker was a genius and so did everyone who knew him'.⁷ Two other observations about him may also have

informed her later work with the BBC. Firstly, that he 'cast the play magnificently'.⁸ This is evident in the actors she later recruited for radio, drawing on some of those she had met ten years earlier when working with Granville-Barker. Secondly, that 'Barker had a wonderful ear for the orchestration of a scene'.⁹ Her choice of words here is telling: a wonderful *ear* not *eye*. Media academic John Drakakis, writing about the early years of radio drama, states that 'what was for radio a natural reliance upon "sound" and the spoken voice was also the condition towards which, *mutatis mutandis*, the presentation of Shakespeare in the theatre had been moving for some time'.¹⁰ As such, the transition from stage to studio, where having an ear for storytelling is particularly important, may have seemed relatively straightforward to Nesbitt. It was also something recognised early in the BBC's existence by its then managing director, John Reith: 'As vision does not play a part, the audience is deprived of many of the most valuable aids to illusion and imagination [...] Other aids to the imagination, such as music, incidental sounds contingent to the situation, pauses and various dramatic devices are introduced wherever possible'.¹¹ Nesbitt employed all these elements when adapting Shakespeare for radio.

After *The Winter's Tale*, Nesbitt went on to appear, and often star, in a number of other theatre productions, including plays by Shakespeare and other Early Modern playwrights. She played Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* (Court Theatre, 1919), the Duchess in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (Lyric Hammersmith, 1919), Fiorinda in Philip Massinger's *The Great Duke of Florence* (Middle Temple Hall, 1922), and Cleopatra in an Oxford University Dramatic Society production of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1921), opposite Cecil Ramage, who became her husband soon after. By the time the British Broadcasting Company was starting up at the end of 1922 she was a thoroughly experienced actor with a good grounding in Shakespearean drama.

The BBC first presented Shakespeare in February 1923, although this was just a few short scenes from *Julius Caesar* and *Othello*. Two months later, to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday on 23 April 1923, members of the British Empire Shakespeare Society were invited to the studio at Marconi House.¹² Earlier in the day they had presented a series of scenes from Shakespeare's plays on the stage of the Haymarket Theatre, and that evening they reprised their performances at the BBC.¹³ Among the group was Nesbitt. It seems likely this was when the idea of broadcasting a whole play first came about, especially as four of the group appeared in the BBC's inaugural production a month later on 28 May 1923.

However, before then Nesbitt was back on air. *The Times* listings for 2 May 1923 state: '5.30. Children's Stories. Miss Cathleen Nesbitt will recite some of "The Children's

Garden of Verses”¹⁴ Nesbitt was clearly getting a taste for performing in front of the microphone. Meanwhile, on the same page, the paper reported on an issue that was becoming a real problem for the broadcaster: ‘the deadlock that has arisen ... over the question of broadcasting plays’.¹⁵ Earlier in the year, listeners were treated to extracts from West End productions, but the theatres then became concerned about the threat that radio might pose to their livelihoods.¹⁶ Just a few days after the broadcast by the British Empire Shakespeare Society, the Entertainments Industry Joint Broadcasting Committee agreed a resolution: ‘That the broadcasting of plays, music, songs, or other entertainments is prejudicial to the interests of all connected with places of public entertainment, and that such steps shall be taken as might be necessary to protect such interests’.¹⁷ As a result, theatres refused to allow their plays to be broadcast and even banned some performers from appearing on the BBC. By 1 May it was being reported, under the headline ‘Wireless War Goes On’, that ‘Prominent theatre managers, producers and actors have now made statements to the “Pall Mall Gazette” supporting the boycott’.¹⁸ And a few days later members of the Actors’ Association were told that those who were not under contract elsewhere ‘could enter into an engagement with the broadcasting company’, but if they did, they might find themselves ‘faced afterwards with a refusal on the part of managers to engage’ them.¹⁹ Nesbitt’s involvement with the BBC therefore had the potential to damage her successful career. It does not seem to have deterred her, though. Within three weeks of this story being published, she made history.

At this point, no one had broadcast a play on the radio. Until 1 May 1923 it had been barely feasible, with the cramped studio at Marconi House. But with the move to Savoy Hill at the end of March, the BBC had the space, and the row with the theatres may have provided the incentive. The BBC’s staff was small and did not include anyone who specialised in drama, this meant that the first plays would have to be ‘handled for the most part by outside producers’.²⁰ Deputy Director of programmes, Cecil Lewis, was ‘extremely interested in drama’ but not experienced and so ‘obtained the services of Miss Cathleen Nesbitt’.²¹ Her task was to create a script that would convey the action and cut down the text of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* to fit a two-hour slot. However, before the broadcast, the feedback she got on her script was not favourable. Lewis later wrote in *Radio Times* that he and Nesbitt had invited George Bernard Shaw to introduce the production.²² Shaw declined, but not before telling them what he thought of the script:

Your prologue is beyond human patience. Instead of supplying a very brief description of what the listeners would see if they were in a theatre, and leaving Shakespear [sic] to tell his own story, you are kind enough to help the lame dog of Stratford over the stile by telling the story yourself in your own inimitable way, leaving him to repeat it superfluously and to damn your impertinent vanity.²³

Bernard Shaw went on to complain that Nesbitt had

swapped the first two scenes around, opening with the more dramatic moment when Viola is washed ashore from a shipwreck, instead of Orsino’s famous ‘If music be the food of love’ speech. Shaw wrote, ‘Do you begin to realize what an utter chump you are?’²⁴ Perhaps Nesbitt took this on board, as none of the reviews of the production mention the switch, suggesting she may have returned to the play’s usual opening.

The script no longer exists, but several newspaper and magazine articles that were written before and after the broadcast give some idea of Nesbitt’s work. In terms of cutting, the only scene anyone seems to have been aware of being removed is ‘the duel scene, which was not broadcast’.²⁵ This was also mentioned by respected actor Dame May Whitty, who was listening, ‘Viola’s and Sebastian’s fights with Sir Andrew Aguecheek were difficult to grasp—the explanation was inadequate’.²⁶ The mention of explanation here indicates one of the major issues Nesbitt faced in transferring a stage play to radio: what to do about scenes that are highly visual, such as a sword fight. Her solution was to use narration, something the producers of Shakespeare’s plays on radio continued to employ for decades until the more sophisticated use of sound became possible. Ahead of the broadcast, *The Stage* reported that, ‘The play has been specifically arranged in order to adapt it to the medium. The matter that links up the scenes has been either specially written for this purpose or adapted from Lamb’, referring to Charles and Mary Lamb’s book, *Tales from Shakespeare*.²⁷ Comments made by a reporter from the *Daily Telegraph*, who was at the studio for the broadcast, echo this, ‘It was not deemed advisable to present the piece in its entirety, but merely in a series of scenes, the necessary links for the full understanding of the story being provided by an interlocutor’.²⁸ This might suggest that the play was not fully adapted, but other comments from those listening at home or watching at Savoy Hill indicate the broadcast was more akin to an actual play.

The correspondent for the *Daily Herald*, another journalist invited to the broadcast, described for his readers the end of Act One, Scene Three, where Sir Toby urges Aguecheek to caper higher, stating, ‘So well did they play this, that if my eyes had been shut, I should have sworn that Sir Andrew was not standing motionless, as he really was, but capering to the ceiling’.²⁹ Dame May was also impressed with this performance, ‘One visualised the foolish, timorous knight though one could not see him, and that was because the speaker used the upward inflection almost continually’.³⁰ It seems the performers understood that they needed to do more than just read the play aloud: they had to give a full performance in sound only. This is likely to have been down to Nesbitt as producer. For most of the BBC’s history, producers have also acted as directors in radio drama, as well as adaptors for Shakespeare’s plays.³¹

Dame May also praised Herbert Waring as Malvolio, ‘One realised the pomposity and fatuousness of the character, and one saw that painful smile and the yellow stockings cross gartered’.³² And she commended the other performances of the cast, all of whom were professionals and, like Nesbitt, were risking both livelihood and reputation on the broadcast. Again, it

would almost certainly have been Nesbitt's job to recruit actors for the performance and perhaps even talk them into trying out this new medium. It was something her co-star Gerald Lawrence, playing Orsino, found quite odd:

There is a sort of fascination in playing before an invisible audience. One feels that at the back of it (the big receiver) there are thousands of people listening ... It is always a joy to speak Shakespeare's lines, because they are such wonderful music. But of course, you miss your audience.³³

Lawrence cannot have found it too disorientating, as he came back to perform in the next production just over two weeks later, *The Merchant of Venice*.³⁴

Just as modern radio plays feature music, so did *Twelfth Night*. The BBC already had regular live music from its own 'orchestra'; in reality, this was often a small group of between six and eight musicians.³⁵ However, combining a group of ten actors with musicians and their instruments would be tricky, not only in terms of space but also sound. There was only one microphone for everything, with no way of mixing separate sources. The Director of programmes, Arthur Burrows, explained what needed to be done:

The variation in intensity of accompanying sounds is obtained by opening and shutting the doors between the studio and the property-room. Some of the instrumental music in Shakespeare's plays is performed in a room outside with the door open two or three inches only.³⁶

For *Twelfth Night*, music by Henry Purcell was played on a harpsichord.³⁷ It is less clear whether sound effects were used. They are not mentioned in contemporary accounts and a later article about their use states they were 'in a rudimentary stage' during 'this first year of broadcasting'.³⁸ The actors also had to be positioned with care, because of the single microphone. However, this seems to have been successful as *Popular Wireless* magazine noted that, 'no drowning effects were caused by a strong voice being placed nearer to the microphone than one not so powerful'.³⁹

All this may have been taken care of by Lewis, credited in some sources as co-producing the play with Nesbitt. Asa Briggs notes that Nesbitt 'produced several of Shakespeare's plays for radio', as does the *Radio Who's Who* in 1947.⁴⁰ However, Lewis himself suggested in 1924 that he was jointly responsible.⁴¹ And Glyn Dearman, a BBC producer writing nearly sixty years later, stated that the plays 'had to be produced from the studio' and that Lewis 'was chiefly responsible for the early work in this direction, assisted by the late Cathleen Nesbitt'.⁴² Lewis was a full-time employee of the BBC, so would have understood how the technology worked. But by his own admission he was merely a 'Shakespeare enthusiast'.⁴³ This suggests that the work on adaptation and direction fell entirely to Nesbitt, with Lewis being responsible for liaising between her and the engineers.

The reaction to the broadcast from listeners was hugely positive. The actors were even getting responses

while they were still on air. The *Belfast Telegraph* reported that 'Shakespeare was applauded by telegram for the first time' with the first arriving at the end of Act Two and describing the performance as an 'enthraling, wonderful, triumphant success'.⁴⁴ The reporter added that 'Actors and actresses read the applause while they said their lines'.⁴⁵ Two weeks later, *Broadcasting News* reported that 'About five hundred letters were received by the BBC couched in the most laudatory vein, all asking for more'.⁴⁶ And more plays did come soon afterwards. Before the end of July 1923, Nesbitt went on to adapt and produce *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as appearing in the plays. She is also credited as the adaptor for a production of *Macbeth* in October 1923 but did not appear in it and does not seem to have been involved in its production, although no producer is listed. Her scripts also found their way to other corners of the BBC, which at this point was made up of a series of stations in major cities, with the Manchester and Glasgow stations each producing two of her scripts.⁴⁷ By this point Nesbitt was busy back on stage in the play *Hassan* at His Majesty's theatre, something she was thrilled about, 'To be in a verse play by one of my favourite poets, James Flecker, music by Delius, a sumptuous production. I could wish for nothing more'.⁴⁸ And as she wrote in her autobiography, she 'wickedly concealed from the management the fact that I was pregnant!'⁴⁹ In fact, not only was she pregnant then, but she had been pregnant throughout her association with the BBC, quite possibly the first pregnant employee of the company!

Though Nesbitt's work producing plays for the BBC came to an end less than six months after it had begun, she was still regularly employed by the company. In May 1925 she – almost – became the first person to have a flying lesson live on the radio.⁵⁰ The *Western Mail* reported that 'She is to be the pupil of that intrepid airman, Mr Alan Cobham, for a flying lesson, and as his instructions to her will be broadcast the public will for the first time be given a vivid idea of what such a lesson in actual flight is like'.⁵¹ Unfortunately, on the day, the actor Heather Thatcher took her place, although no explanation was given for the change.⁵² In the same year she appeared with her *Hassan* co-star, Henry Ainley, in scenes from *Antony and Cleopatra*.⁵³ And the following year she played Portia in the successful and highly publicised series *Shakespeare's Heroines*.⁵⁴ She later went on to give readings and perform in many plays, both before and after the Second World War, including the first radio production of Noël Coward's *Cavalcade* in 1936; a one-hour, wartime *Macbeth* opposite Godfrey Tearle in 1939; and Edward Sackville-West and Benjamin Britten's *The Rescue* in 1943, as well as appearing on television from 1948.⁵⁵

In addition to her acting work, Nesbitt was also a BBC announcer. A columnist in *Wireless World* wrote in 1926 that she had appeared as an announcer in March and April that year and that 'a personality of her type would be a decided asset to the small band of male announcers at 2LO, and, as I stated in these notes recently, I have reason to believe that Savoy Hill is of the same mind'.⁵⁶ Two years later, former BBC artistic director Arthur Corbett-Smith told readers of *Modern Wireless* 'that the most attractive and compelling programme announcer that I have heard

in British radio was a woman—Miss Cathleen Nesbitt [sic].⁵⁷ It is not clear how long her tenure as an announcer was, but she was evidently a rarity for some time. It was not until July 1933 that the first woman announcer was to appear on the BBC's national service, and even then Sheila Borrett was 'withdrawn' after just three months.⁵⁸

Since Nesbitt's initial Shakespeare productions, the BBC has gone on to present more than four hundred versions of his plays on radio. But her legacy has not always been well recognised. Lewis, writing more than fifty years after their association in his book *Never Look Back*, seemed to forget ever having worked with her. Recalling the experience with Bernard Shaw, he wrote that he had asked the playwright to 'introduce our first series of Shakespeare plays that Nigel Playfair was producing'.⁵⁹ This has subsequently been quoted elsewhere. Playfair did produce radio plays for the BBC but never Shakespeare, although he did appear in the first two productions. In fact he had rather negative views on the subject, believing that 'the broadcasting of Shakespeare should be confined to lectures on his plays, with recitations of his more famous speeches and scenes', adding that full plays would be 'too tedious' for the average listener.⁶⁰ Nesbitt, on the other hand, saw the possibilities of radio. She was 'an ardent lover of Shakespeare' and 'preferred to sit with her eyes closed, listening to the words, and to imagine the scenery for herself'.⁶¹ As the BBC's first drama producer, she endeavoured to help her listeners do the same thing.

Notes

1. 'Broadcasting Flying Lesson', *Western Mail*, 13 May 1925, 6. The BUFVC cites Nesbitt as producing three of the first four plays ever broadcast: 'Twelfth Night [28 May 1923]', British Universities Film and Video Council bufvc.ac.uk/shakespeare/index.php/title/av66566 (accessed 23 Jul. 2022); 'Romeo and Juliet [5 Jul. 1923]', British Universities Film and Video Council bufvc.ac.uk/shakespeare/index.php/title/av66580 (accessed 23 Jul. 2022); 'Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream [23 Jul. 1923]', British Universities Film and Video Council bufvc.ac.uk/shakespeare/index.php/title/av66588 (accessed 23 Jul. 2022). See also 'Cathleen Nesbitt', *Radio Who's Who*, ed. by Cyrus Andrews (London: Pendulum Publications, 1947), 250: 'Adapted and produced the first Shakespeare plays to be broadcast at Savoy Hill.'
2. 'Broadcasting and Drama', *Wireless Constructor*, Apr. 1925, 508-10 (509-10).
3. Cathleen Nesbitt, *A Little Love and Good Company* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 23, 25.
4. Nesbitt, *Love and Good Company*, 47.
5. Ibid.
6. Nesbitt, *Love and Good Company*, 52-53.
7. Nesbitt, *Love and Good Company*, 196.
8. Nesbitt, *Love and Good Company*, 62.
9. Nesbitt, *Love and Good Company*, 193.
10. John Drakakis, 'Introduction', *British Radio Drama*, ed. John Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-36 (2).
11. J. C. W. Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 166.
12. The BBC did not open its first studio at Savoy Hill

until 1 May 1923: Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume I – The Birth of Broadcasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 193.

13. 'Broadcasting – A Shakespeare Night', *The Times*, 23 Apr. 1923, 10.
14. 'Broadcasting – Programmes Today', *The Times*, 2 May 1923, 12. This was part of what would become known as 'Children's Hour', although the term was not consistently used at this time.
15. 'The Theatres and Broadcasting – Conference today', *The Times*, 2 May 1923, 12.
16. Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, 229; A. R. Burrows, *The Story of Broadcasting* (London: Cassell, 1924), 80-81; C. A. Lewis, *Broadcasting From Within* (London: George Newnes, 1924), 88.
17. 'Broadcasting and the Theatres – Entertainment Industry's Opposition', *The Times*, 28 Apr. 1923, 8.
18. 'Wireless War Goes On', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 May 1923, 9.
19. 'The Actors' Association', *The Stage*, 10 May 1923, 18.
20. 'The Old BBC. The Story of the British Broadcasting Company, Ltd. November 1922 – December 1926', *BBC Year-Book 1930* (London: BBC, 1930), 151-86 (164).
21. Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, 256.
22. C. A. Lewis, 'G. B. S. Lectures the B.B.C.', *Radio Times*, 14 Nov. 1924, 357.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. 'Shakespeare by Wireless', *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 May 1923, 5.
26. Dame May Whitty, 'The BBC Plays', *Popular Wireless*, 23 Jun. 1923, 688.
27. 'Broadcasting', *The Stage*, 24 May 1923, 8.
28. 'Broadcasting Shakespeare – "Twelfth Night" by Wireless', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1923, 12.
29. R. C. W., 'Shakespeare in Modern Dress – How "Twelfth Night" was played for wireless', *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1923, 7.
30. Whitty, 688.
31. The formal roles of 'producer' and 'director' had not yet been established, however the descriptions of Nesbitt's work on this production and others suggest she took on the roles, having 'arranged the whole production' ('Broadcasting and Drama', *Wireless Constructor*, Apr. 1925, 508). Professor Tim Crook from Goldsmiths, London, also describes Nesbitt as 'the first Radio Shakespeare dramaturg and a real pioneer of British radio drama' (private correspondence).
32. Whitty, 688.
33. 'What it feels like – Actor's impression of play to invisible audience', *Daily Herald*, 29 May 1923, 7.
34. 'Broadcasting. Programmes To-day', *The Times*, 15 Jun. 1923, 12.
35. 'The Old BBC', *BBC Year-Book 1930*, 156; Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, 253.
36. Burrows, *The Story of Broadcasting*, 100.
37. 'Broadcasting – Performance of "Twelfth Night"', *The Times*, 28 May 1923, 10; R. C. W., 7.
38. *BBC Year-Book 1930*, 164.
39. 'Topical Notes and News – Voices Well-balanced', *Popular Wireless*, 9 Jun. 1923, 609.
40. Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, 256; Cyrus Andrews,

- Radio Who's Who* (London: Pendulum Publications, 1947), 250.
41. Lewis, *Radio Times*, 357.
 42. Glyn Dearman, 'Something old something new', *Radio Times*, 30 Sep. 1982, 80-7 (80).
 43. 'The Deputy-Director of Programmes. By one who knows him', *Radio Times*, 19 Oct. 1923, 118.
 44. *Belfast Telegraph*, 5.
 45. Ibid.
 46. 'Broadcasting News', *Wireless Weekly*, 13 Jun. 1923, 114.
 47. 'Broadcasting. To-day's Programmes', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Jul. 1923, 12; 'Forthcoming Events', *Wireless Weekly*, 18 Jul. 1923, 40; 'Broadcasting. To-day's Programmes', *Yorkshire Post*, 6 Sep. 1923, 8; "'Merchant of Venice" by Wireless', *Dundee Courier*, 7 Sep. 1923, 5; 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', *Radio Times*, 9 Nov. 1923, 233; 'To-day's Wireless Attractions', *Dundee Courier*, 16 Nov. 1923, 9.
 48. Nesbitt, *Love and Good Company*, 157.
 49. Ibid.
 50. 'Wireless Programme—Friday', *Radio Times*, 8 May 1925, 306.
 51. 'Broadcasting Flying Lesson', *Western Mail*, 13 May 1925, 6.
 52. 'Overheard Flying Lesson', *Daily News*, 16 May 1925, 7.
 53. 'London – Special Transmission', *Radio Times*, 6 Mar. 1925, 494.
 54. 'Shakespeare's Heroines – No. 4', *Radio Times*, 21 May 1936, 331.
 55. A search for "Cathleen Nesbitt" on the BBC Programme Index offers 179 results: <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/search/0/20?order=first&q=%22cathleen+nesbitt%22#top>.
 56. 'Broadcast Brevities – Lady Announcers', *Wireless World*, 28 Apr. 1926, 635.
 57. A. Corbett-Smith, 'Women and Wireless', *Modern Wireless*, Nov. 1928, 471-72 (472).
 58. Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 241; 'BBC's Woman Announcer', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 Oct. 1933, 8.
 59. Cecil Lewis, *Never Look Back* (London: Hutchinson, 1974), 81.
 60. Playfair reported in Norman Edwards, *Broadcasting For Everyone* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1924), 219-20.
 61. Edwards, *Broadcasting For Everyone*, 220.

Doing History

'Women on the Air': A Contribution to the History of Women in Community Radio in Europe

Birgitte Jalloff looks back at the 'Women on the Air' directory she produced in 1983 – now an historical document in its own right

Women on the Air was the title of a directory of women in community radio in Europe that I produced in 1983. At that time the notion that 'women were, actually, on the air' carried some pioneer feeling to it. Since then, numerous publications and networks have carried that same title, but in 1983 it was a first.

The directory is the earliest known attempt to systematically document women's engagement with community radio in Europe in the early 1980s. It was based on a first-hand collection of information and presented, in some depth, the situation in ten European countries with attempts to cover six more. In total, it encompassed the experiences of 26 radio stations.

For each of the ten main countries, I gave information about the status of the women's movement in that country, followed by short details about the general media situation including developments in community radio. This was followed by brief profiles of the radio stations and the women's collectives that I met and their work methods, ending up with a quick look at their finances and the future.

The document was prepared as background for

the very first international meeting of community radio broadcasters, 'AMARC', in Montreal in 1983—the 'World Communication Year' (WCY).¹ In a world without internet and social media, the WCY was seen as an opportunity for a 'quantum leap' in the development of a complete world communication network which would leave no one isolated from his or her local, national or international community. Today, this may sound like an antiquated notion, but actually at the time, it was visionary: the people and organisations behind the WCY wanted to create exactly the kind of networked life and work we experience today.

Why did I engage in this work?

I was active in the women's movement in Copenhagen, Denmark and, inspired by the many women visiting Copenhagen for the 1980 UN Women's Conference, I decided to take up an invitation to become an intern at the 'Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press' (WIFP) in Washington D.C. for six months in 1982-83. Prior to my departure, I had been engaged in the budding community radio movement in Denmark so I decided to spend some of my time at WIFP diving into what was happening in the US.

One of the organisations I researched and worked with was the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB), where preparatory work was taking place for the upcoming 1983 first ever international meeting of community broadcasters. The NFCB were working closely with their counterparts in Montréal, Canada, where the event would take place, searching for

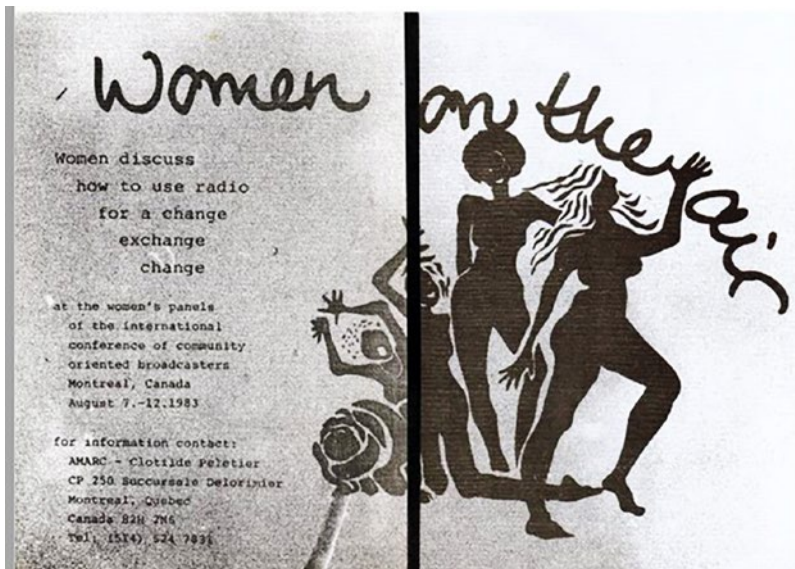


Fig One: Women on the Air

ways to tell the world about it and to invite participants to join. The (French-speaking) Canadian organisers had some contacts with French community broadcasters, who had agreed to do their best to map the community media landscape of southern Europe. With my special interest in, and focus on, women in the media, I was then asked to do the same in Northern Europe.

I returned from my internship in early 1983 with my two new hats and responsibilities—all unpaid of course. Once back in Denmark, I needed to complete my Communication Studies MA. For the final ‘production-focused’ semester it was agreed with my teachers at the Roskilde University that my ‘production’ could be: a publication—a ‘Directory of Women’s Community Radio in Europe’; a half-hour radio programme telling that story, and a poster.

The production process – how did the directory come about?

As a steering committee member for the AMARC conference, my responsibility was to coordinate the mapping and outreach of as many community radio stations and networks in Northern Europe as possible, and to invite them to come. Furthermore, I was to map the field of ‘Women in Community Radio in Europe’ to ensure that there was good representation for the women-focussed panels that would be part of the international event taking place in Montreal that summer.

In 1983 there was no internet, no international or all-European community media mapping or networks in existence, so I was really starting from scratch, on my own. But I was fired up by the desire to find out, and I had the backing of a very supportive, activist University.² Without internet – or fax – I started by carrying out a documentation search. With the assistance of the university librarians and my university advisers, I contacted the networks and people who we could collectively come up with. I telephoned and sent letters. But the outcome was quite meagre. I realised that I would have to travel to the capital cities I could reach.

With funds from the university for the train-rides, I embarked on a journey of discovery with my

notebooks, recorder, camera and my sleeping bag under my arm. When I arrived in a capital city, I went straight to the telephone booth at the central station where I called the Ministry of Culture, the national broadcaster or a women’s documentation centre, and asked – do you have community radio in your country? In 1983, this information was not centrally available anywhere. Any women’s stations or collectives known? I visited them all, slept on the floors in the squatted communes or apartments of the women – and moved on.

Mapping the women’s community radio landscape, collecting the stories

Personally, I started this voyage at a time where our own women’s community radio collective, ‘Women Waves’, was about to go on air in Copenhagen, Denmark. This was part of a coordinated three-year community radio experiment, initiated by the Danish state. At ‘Women Waves’, we had worked intensely on how to bring the working methods of the new women’s movement into the studios and our work. But what would feminist journalism look like? And in our organisational work with the other civil society organisations, joining hands and sharing a frequency—how would each of us maintain our full independence? We agreed that each partner should have full autonomy within the working collective.

It was these observations that I took with me into my research work around Northern Europe, as I systematically mapped the stations I encountered. With an aim to share stories, I looked for what we had in common, and what distinguished us. And what I found was that the ways in which we organised, the ways in which we worked and our experience of what was important, were all quite comparable. So, who did I meet?

The first wave – filled with thousands of pirates on the airwaves, in the South of Europe

The emergence of community radio in (Western) Europe could be described as coming in three waves. The first wave consisted of the thousands of pirate stations that appeared in the late 1970s in Southern Europe: Italy, France and Spain as well as in Belgium and Holland. A few examples of these pirate stations, or at least those that were not initially legal, were presented in the 'Women on the Air' directory. They are shared here to provide a glimpse into that time pocket. The full presentations can be found in the directory, itself.³

Vrouwenradio, Amsterdam. Through my contact with a well-stocked women's documentation centre in central Amsterdam, I received information that there was, indeed, a local women's radio station in town. They found the address for me, and I was welcomed by the women who made up the core of *Vrouwenradio*, who were living together in the top apartment of a squatted house. Here I could, indeed, roll out my sleeping bag and stay in their place for the day I spent with them. The women told me that the women's movement in the Netherlands was, at this point in time, very diverse. As lesbians and squatters, they considered themselves to be 'anarchist feminists', who belonged to the more radical part of the movement. They accepted illegal actions might be necessary – just like their radio station was illegal too.

The media in the Netherlands at the time was dominated by eight religious and politically oriented broadcasters covering different parts of the country, all of whom made up 'Dutch Radio and TV'. Similarly,



Fig 2: *Vrouwenradio*

there were four regional stations. Some of these stations carried regular women's programmes—once a week or once a month – none, however, feminist. The broadcasters in *Vrouwenradio* broadcast their programmes once a week for 1-2 hours, with a repeat the following morning. The programmes were planned a month in advance at weekly planning meetings. Besides reporting on issues of importance to women, they covered culture and often, themselves, played music live on air. They worked to develop new ways of communicating, mixing different programme formats. The funding for the station came from an organisation they had established called 'ease your conscience' where better-off feminists could donate. Besides this, they sold posters and held fundraising concerts and events.

The *Vrouwenradio* women could tell that there were five other (pirate) women's radios in the Netherlands at this point in time in Utrecht, Delft and Den Bosch; stations much like themselves. In Rotterdam the women's radio was not necessarily feminist and the fifth, in Nijmegen was taking a break to decide which way to go forward.

Radio Donna (Radio Woman), Rome. This was an underground feminist radio station created in 1976. The feminist programme was totally managed by women, although it shared a radio frequency with 'Radio Città Futura' (Radio Future City), the first subversive radio station in Rome, which had been founded by activists of a New-Left organization called 'Avanguardia operaia' (Working class Avant-garde). *Radio Donna* was the first women's radio station in Rome to broadcast programmes for working-class women every morning between 9 and 11am, for about two years. They brought the methods of the women's movement into the studios and involved listeners in their programmes, and they had in general a very strong neighbourhood engagement focus. *Radio Donna* broadcast from the women's house in the centre of Rome and was very popular. When I visited the women's house and station in the summer of 1980, in the planning stages of our Copenhagen woman's radio collective, it was very active. However, it was later closed down because of attacks on it from right-wing militia.

Les Nanas Radioteuses, Paris. 'The radio-chicks' were part of a mixed radio station and broadcast a variety of women's programmes once a week for six hours. They worked as a real collective, wanting to be a platform for women from all the different parts of the women's movement. Because the station held these collective aspirations, they did not have a management structure or a coordinator. Instead, they shared responsibilities as well as the various functions of 'journalist' and 'technician'. This required dedication, which was also seen in the rule that to have a say at the weekly planning meetings in the women's house (where they did all of their preparatory work), you had to be active in the life and production of the radio station.

Describing themselves in their station's pamphlet (1983) they wrote:

Every day we are confronted with the nature of the destructive oppression of our opinions.

The annihilation of the identity of women is happening particularly by stifling our discussions and voices. That is why it is so obvious to us that these discussions should be listened to, should be passed on by other means of communication than the written word, by faster means of communication. A feminist radio in Paris is an irreplaceable tool: an opening of the feminist movement and for discussion about real change of the gender-roles.⁴

Les Nanas Radioteuses had a high-powered start in 1981 but lost impetus and went off the air in 1985. This was partly due to new legislation that opened the way for commercialisation, which increased competition for airtime on the limited number of frequencies.

Radio Pleine Lune. 'Radio full moon' broadcast one night a week into Geneva, from neighbouring France, as part of a mixed grassroots radio station called 'Radio Zones'. *Radio Pleine Lune* was a feminist radio programme that was launched originally by a few women in Geneva who broadcast four pirate programmes between 1979 and 1980 on full moon evenings – until they were jammed by the Swiss Postal Telegraph and Telephone agency which was responsible for providing frequencies to radio stations.

Following the movement to liberalize the airwaves in France, a group of Genevans created 'Radio Zones' in the French border-town of Ferney-Voltaire, adjacent to Geneva, in order to circumvent the state monopoly still in force in Switzerland. A group of women took up the beautiful name of the feminist programmes that had been broadcast in Geneva earlier, *Radio Pleine Lune*. They had, like many of the other feminist community radio collectives who were included in *Women on the Air*, a weekday that was theirs on the mixed 'Radio Zones' station, but where they actually, usually, only broadcast for a few hours. The aim of the collective was to give space to as many different groups of women as possible – not necessarily feminists. At the core of their work was women speaking for themselves. The most common format for their programmes was to broadcast important news items, followed by a debate in the studio, and a phone-in with listeners. *Radio Pleine Lune* lived longer than most of the comparable stations. It started in November 1981 finally closing down on 15 December 1999.

Libre à Elles, Brussels. This was the weekly women's slot on 'Radio Air Libre', one of the few progressive and independent local stations, called Radios libres (Free Radio) in Brussels and Belgium. At the time, most of these stations were commercial music ones, with a few stations wishing to inform and spread 'social and political consciousness' as it was expressed at the time. Radio Air Libres was one of those and the women's collective *Libre à Elles* played on the pun of the space being 'free to them' or 'it's up to them' or, as was at the core, 'free for women'. They had been on air since December 1982 and the women, when I met them, told me that their programme had an effect. Their dedicated weekly slot was filled with relevant issues for women in Brussels such as how to

work against victimisation, developing methods to find solutions. Their programme was followed by another one-hour programme called 'Les Margherites' with a more feminist profile. Women had become much more engaged in the life and programming of the station since *Libre à Elles* went on air. They worked on the morning shows and on the news and they positively influenced both the style and the content of the broadcasts, opening it up more, becoming freer and more fun.

The second wave – searching for how to best break the state monopolies in the Nordic countries

A second European wave was the state-initiated three-year trial period of community radio in three Scandinavian countries at the beginning of the 1980s. The initiative was preceded by a limited amount of pirate activity, partly due to Scandinavian traditions that provided some access slots for ordinary people's programmes within the national monopolies. These 'Tape workshops' were more open to listener engagement, participation and influence and they broadcast the voices and views of women, environmentalist and workers.

Radio Klara, Stockholm. This was one of the first community radio stations in Sweden, which started in the spring of 1979. The development of women's programmes in Sweden was very different to most of the other countries profiled in the directory. This was because all the stations that belonged to the 'Swedish Radio' broadcasting corporation, both national and regional, had strong feminist programming, so the need was not felt as urgently among the feminists of *Radio Klara* as it was in most other countries. The women's collective of *Radio Klara* in Stockholm, which I did not visit, but telephoned, covered feminist issues with a focus on all that was related to a woman's body, patriarchy, culture and how to create a new and different future.

Women's Waves (Kvindebolgerne), Copenhagen. This autonomous collective within 'Sokkelund Radio' finally went on air on 31 May 1983 with a ninety-minute programme in the evening which was repeated the next morning. I was a part of this collective, which was formed in 1981. We spent the two years that it took to get on air, developing our own feminist journalistic approach, training each other and other women. As in Rome and Paris, this took place in the women's house, which was our base. We arrived at Sokkelund Radio on Tuesdays, ready to go on air from the shared studio. At the time that the *Women on the Air* directory went into press, only one programme had been aired by *Kvindebolgerne* which dealt with how to build up the strength of a woman's body through bodybuilding and the discussion focused on whether this was liberating – or just another way to suppress women. The second part of the programme dealt with peace, reporting from a recent demonstration and then debating the strategies used.



Fig 3: Kvindebølgerne

RadiOrakel, Oslo. Norway went its own way. With a media landscape and legislation similar to Sweden and Denmark. Norway's period of state-initiated experimentation started in 1982, and with it *RadiOrakel*. Instead of founding a women's collective within a mixed grassroots station, they started a separate women's radio station. *RadiOrakel* was different in many ways. They were on the air every day, not once a week; they allowed men on their staff as long as at least two-thirds of the staff were women. Furthermore, they created a professional structure with many specialised editorial groups and functions including editors, who were often paid rather than working on a voluntary basis. Also, the work methods were less related to those of the women's movement. *RadiOrakel* was at the time – and remains – a professional radio station. Moreover, *RadiOrakel* competed with both the national broadcasting station and the other community stations, producing smooth music



radio. *RadiOrakel* is still going strong today.

The Fruit of my Labours

The three weeks' of travel to meet the women and their radio stations, followed by the process of writing up the 124-page directory, the production of the half-hour radio programme and the development of a poster, was intense. But it worked. Many of the women I met, travelled to Canada to take part in the AMARC conference. There were five women's panels where experiences were shared around ownership, feminist journalism, listener participation and how to transform communication to become our own. The voyage and all the hard work was worth it. After Montréal the women's networks took on a life of their own, planning research, co-production – and fun. The *Women on the Air* directory and report was produced as a part of the extensive preparations for the conference. It was the most extensive mapping exercise of its time and was then – as now – used as a source of unique information. The contact list at the end, which covered all the initiatives included in the original research, was used as the starting point when, 13 years later in 1996, AMARC's Women's International News (WIN) asked me to do it again. This time to prepare a directory of women's community radio in the newly shaped Europe that had emerged after the fall of the iron curtain.⁵

'Women on the Air' – a directory in its own right then, an historical document now

Women on the Air provides a peek into a 'time pocket'; an era when the feminist movement of the early 70's in Europe was still at its height, and we were searching for other 'true' ways of moving into the public sphere and engaging on the cultural stage on our own terms. Almost 40 years on, it offers a first-hand account of what it was like to be part of that movement of impatient, fired-up women in radio studios and with mics in the streets, hoping to change the world.

Notes

1. 'Assemblée Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires—AMARC' was the title of the 1983 conference, which four years later became the acronym for the l'Association ... or in English, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.
2. Roskilde University opened in 1972, inspired by the student revolts of 1968 and with a clear activist focus. It was in no way hidden that the 'University Centre' (as it was called originally) was a forum for political thinking, with Habermas, Adorno, Horkheimer and not least Marx as the basis for the critical theory and with the Frankfurt School defining the starting point for RUC's sociology. The education was organised with a project focus and carried forward through group work. Lecturers were advisors, coaches and mentors to the groups.

CONFERENCE REPORT

Women & Community Radio

by Eliza Moore

I recently had the opportunity — through CKMS-FM, Kitchener-Waterloo's alternative music station — to attend the first World Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters, held in Montreal in August. This was an unusual event in a number of ways; it was the first time that so many people (over 500) from such a wide variety of countries (from Sweden to Sri Lanka to El Salvador) had gathered together to attempt to find some common ground in the realm of community radio. The event was intended to be accessible to as many as possible, which meant that not only was the registration fee unbelievably low (\$45 for 5 days) but also that translation was available in *three* languages (English, French and Spanish). Cheap accommodation was provided in a local youth hostel, and so all that was necessary was transportation to Montreal (no small matter, you might argue, from some place like India, but nonetheless many did attend from very far away). There was no representation from communist countries — rumour has it that they don't have community radio there — but people from all parts of western Europe, Africa, Latin America, India, Australia and North America attended; community radio has as many different interpretations/applications as there are stations who broadcast it.

I learned all kinds of interesting facts about what is happening in other countries. For example, there is a collective of about 70 women in Oslo, Norway which produces 10 hours per week in broadcast time. I found it hard to imagine a "collective" of 70 doing *anything!* They are split into sub-groups which each contribute a couple of hours a week



Birgitte Jallo, a resource person at the conference and author of "Women on the Air", a report concerning Women's Community Radio in western Europe.

— some deal with women's issues, others with broader social change concerns.

A great deal of general knowledge changed hands at the conference. Among the fascinating facts that I garnered were the following: West Germany is a very repressed country, and all non-state radio is suppressed. People are forced to broadcast from outside the country, or in a clandestine manner — radio to them is a radical political statement. In El Salvador, Radio Venceremos finds a US ship parked in the harbour jamming their frequency in an attempt to keep them off the air: it doesn't work (revolutionary communications types are very tricky people) but it makes life more difficult; this station plays a crucial role in revolutionary army communications.

Many women attended, and although the special section of women's workshops had been split up into other more general topics such as "technology" and "audience", many of the same women showed up for the various workshops on women's issues. This group of about 20-30 women put together a resolution to the conference plenary; it dealt with urging UNESCO (or another similar organization with money and no definite political ties) to set up an inter-

national clearing house for the exchange of information and tapes about women's issues. Most workshop discussions had brought out the need for an increased awareness about what women are experiencing in other places on some kind of ongoing basis.

The usual conference concerns of "how can we organize another conference — one just for women?" and "how can we keep all these women informed and in touch with one another?" were raised, and it was unfortunate that nothing more concrete than the above suggestion could be implemented. Lack of money, lack of time — both these will contribute to frustrate our efforts. It's a common problem of conferences: nothing is really resolved, although everyone had a good time meeting everyone else, and all are in agreement about the need for another future meeting. But now what?

Although I am not directly involved in community radio, I found the experience very useful in my work with *Hysteria*. Women from Europe and the United States use community radio in much the same way we use the print media — to publish our own stories, to print information we think women

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HYSTERIA

Fig 4: Report of the AMARC conference from *Hysteria* magazine, including a photograph of Birgitte Jallo

3. <https://empowerhouse.dk/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Women-on-the-air-1983-womens-CR-in-Europe-Birgitte-Jallo.pdf>

4. Quoted in 'Women on the Air', RUC, 1983 — based on a pamphlet received personally when visiting the station in 1983.

5. Women's Voices Crossing Frontiers: <https://tinyurl.com/mrx8mp4f>

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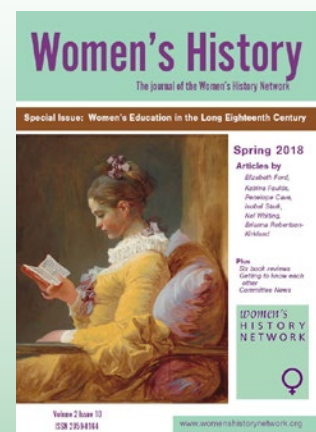
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Broadcasting History but also Working Lives: Women's History in the BBC's Written Archives

Kate Murphy,
Bournemouth University

Situated about a mile from the centre of Reading, at Caversham, the BBC's Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC) is an absolute treasure trove for women's history. I am an historian of BBC women and have been visiting the archive for more than twenty years; initially for an internal BBC report I wrote back in 2002; then, as the researcher on *Woman's Hour's* sixtieth anniversary book in 2006; next for my PhD on early women in the BBC, which I finished in 2011; and, since leaving the BBC and becoming an academic in 2012, for a raft of articles and chapters.

According to the website, the holdings of BBC WAC include more than 250,000 files of correspondence and 21,000 reels of microfilm plus BBC publications such as Year Books/Annuals, the *Radio Times* and *The Listener* and also the staff journal *Ariel* – a particularly valuable source for gaining an understanding of what was important for the BBC and its staff at any given time. The archive collections start in 1922, when the British Broadcasting Company was established (it didn't become the British Broadcasting Corporation until 1927). While holdings for the earliest years are somewhat sketchy, they pick up post-1931, when the first 'archivist' was appointed – a woman called Kathleen Edwin.

So, what sort of women's history is revealed in what amounts to many millions of documents? Women's role as performers, broadcasters and programme makers are here in abundance. There are also numerous files which reveal women's contributions to the running of the BBC; as administrators, librarians, press officers, secretaries, clerks, duplicating officers and typists, for example. Other files highlight specific issues that affected women, such as the BBC Marriage Bar. Programme files offer candid insights into what went out on air, be it long-running shows such as *Woman's Hour*, or short talks series on, for instance, household budgets, bringing up children, or careers. Accompanying scripts, where they exist, reveal what was actually said. Also documented is audience research – the observations of listeners and viewers which give glimpses into the thoughts and opinions of the general public. This means that BBC WAC offers details of women not just in terms of broadcasting, but also in terms of women's evolving lives. Almost a hundred years of social change for women in Britain – and in many cases the wider world – is documented here.

My research specialism is predominantly the interwar period, with some toe-tipping into the years up until the 1950s. However, because of the nature of the BBC and its key role in British cultural life, this spotlight on

women's lives can be replicated across most time periods – although documents less than 30 years old may not be available to view. Because of the richness of the collections, just a few examples are given here, but these should give at least a flavour of what you might find.

One of the joys of BBC WAC is being able to follow individual women through what can be several decades of their working lives, discovering how their careers progressed and their life experiences grew. If you're lucky there might be a staff file, which frustratingly don't exist for some key women. This can be augmented by digging into the programmes they worked on, the broadcasters they dealt with and the administrative necessities they overcame. Take, for example, Oxford graduate Janet Quigley. Her Staff Record shows that she was 27-years old when she joined the BBC in 1930, having had a previous career in journalism, bookselling and with the Empire Marketing Board. Her first BBC post was as an Assistant in the Foreign Department, earning £260 a year, a good salary for a woman at this time. Part of her job was liaising with broadcasting organisations in the USA, arranging for American output to be broadcast here and BBC output to be broadcast there; this was as 'relays' and her work is documented in dozens of Relay files. In 1936 she became an Assistant, the term then used for a producer, in the Talks Department where she oversaw the output aimed at women, as well as more general fare. One of her series was *Careers for Girls* in 1939, which she worked on with Ray Strachey from the Women's Employment Federation. The six talks were on Nursing, Physical Training, Domestic

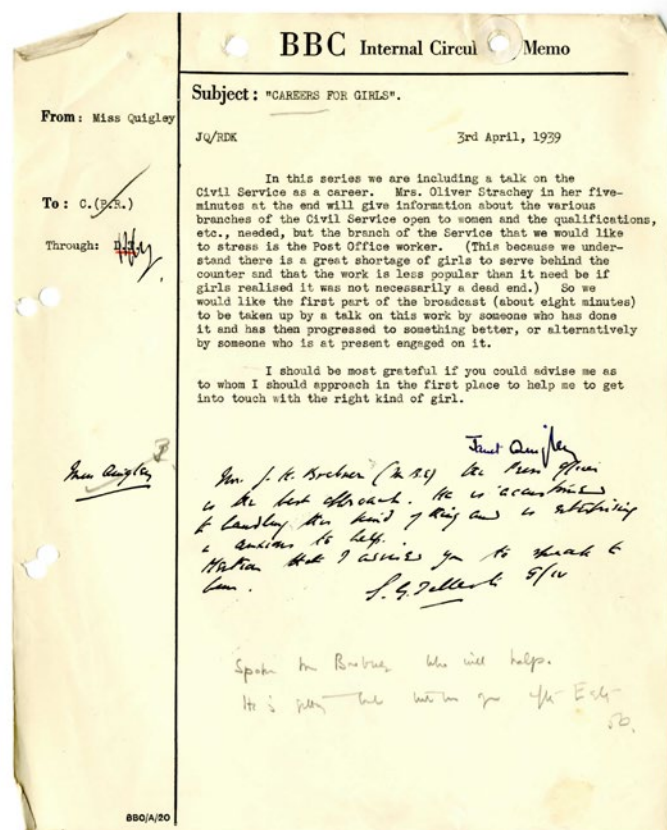


FIG 1 – Miss Quigley to Controller of Programmes, 3 April 1939.

Science, Dressmaking, Secretarial work, and the Civil Service, as [Fig 1.] reveals.

Quite a few of the scripts of the *Careers* series survive including the one given by the Post Office Counter Clerk. During the Second World War, Quigley was responsible for most of the BBC's women's programming and files exist for series such as *The Kitchen Front* and *Women at War*. Quigley left the BBC in 1945 when she married. She returned as Editor of *Woman's Hour* in 1950 and her impact on the programme is immediately apparent in scores of programme files. Her final roles at the BBC were as Chief Assistant in the Talks Department (1956) and then Assistant Head (1960). When she retired in 1962, she was earning £3650 a year.

We can track Janet Quigley's salary through her staff file, enabling us to compare her earnings with others at the BBC as well as men and women outside the Corporation. But what of the many BBC women who don't have staff files? Early on in my PhD research I was alerted to an incredible resource in the archive, the Salary Information Files, 1923-39. These three leather-bound volumes record the salary increments and career details of 830 of the BBC's monthly-paid staff, of whom 128 were women. Each entry also includes a photograph, which give visual clues about a person's style and character. Something that especially intrigued me was the number of women who had started their BBC careers as weekly-waged staff, working their way up through the ranks to the more prestigious – and much better paid – salaried grades. This lens onto the different status and treatment of working women in the interwar years

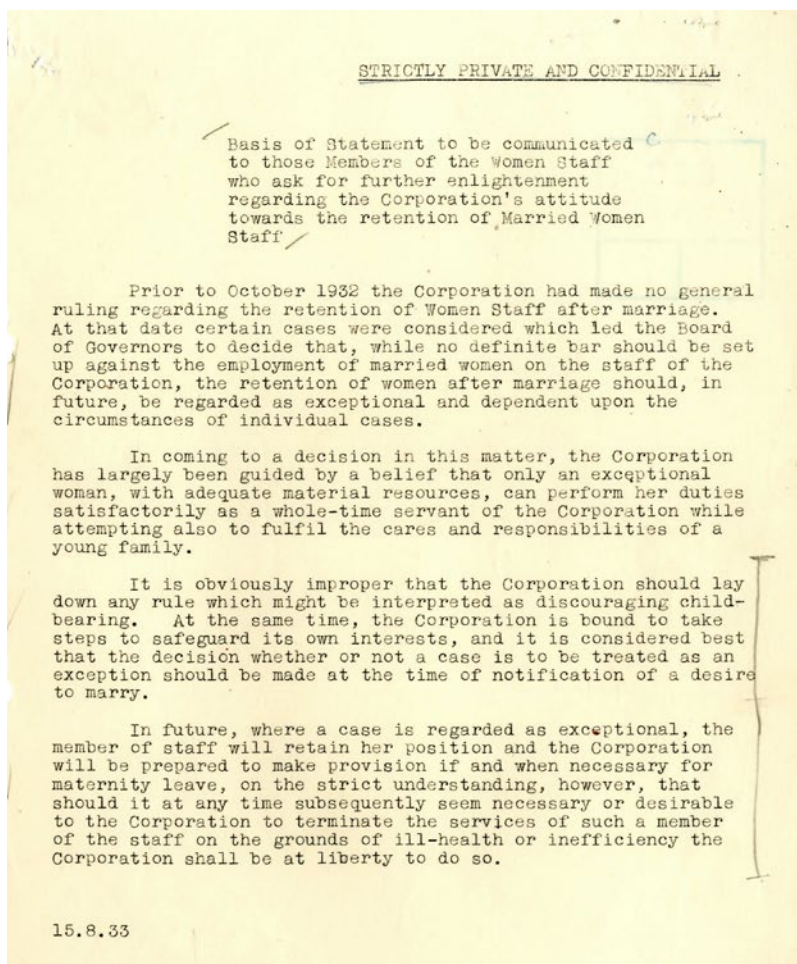


FIG 3: Marriage Bar statement, 15 August 1933

can then be augmented by other BBC staff policy files that deal with grading. As we can see from Evelyn Shepherd's entry in the Salary Information Files, she started as a £1-a-week clerk, rising to the salaried grade of Buyer's Assistant in 1933 before becoming a Buyer (Furniture) in 1938 [Fig 2].

Clearly written at the bottom of Evelyn Shepherd's details are words in red ink: 'Terminated, June 1938 – Marriage'. Miss Shepherd had chosen to leave her job when she wed, which was the convention at this time. Back in 2002, when I was doing my original BBC research, a small set of files had particularly captivated me, those associated with the BBC's Marriage Policy and Marriage Tribunal. It was these files that really inspired me to start my PhD. I had no idea then, that women in the 1920s and 1930s were often required to resign their jobs when they married and the BBC's capacious documentation provides startling details of this practice. The BBC had no bar when it was established in 1922 and it was only in 1931 that the notion of instituting one began to take hold. The bar that was eventually introduced in 1933 was a 'semi-bar', one that allowed 'exceptional' women to be retained. The hundreds of memos in these files give a vivid overview of the arguments for and against employing married women at this time, extraordinary social documents [Fig 3].

The BBC marriage bar, however, was not something that impacted on the women who broadcast on the BBC. Because they were on contract, and so paid fees for each appearance, their marital status was not considered

Date		Appointment	Salary
1	12 24	Accounts Clerk	1 per week
1	4 25	..	1 10/-
1	10 25	..	2
1	4 26	..	2 9/-
1	4 27	..	2 10/-
1	4 28	..	2 11/-
1	4 29	..	3
1	4 30	..	3 7/-
1	4 31	..	3 17/-
1	4 32	..	4 10/-
1	10 33	Buyer's Asst	260 per year
1	4 34	..	280
1	4 35	..	300
1	4 36	..	320
1	4 38	Buyer (Furniture)	320

Terminated June 38
(marriage)

FIG 2 – Evelyn Shepherd, Salary Information Files

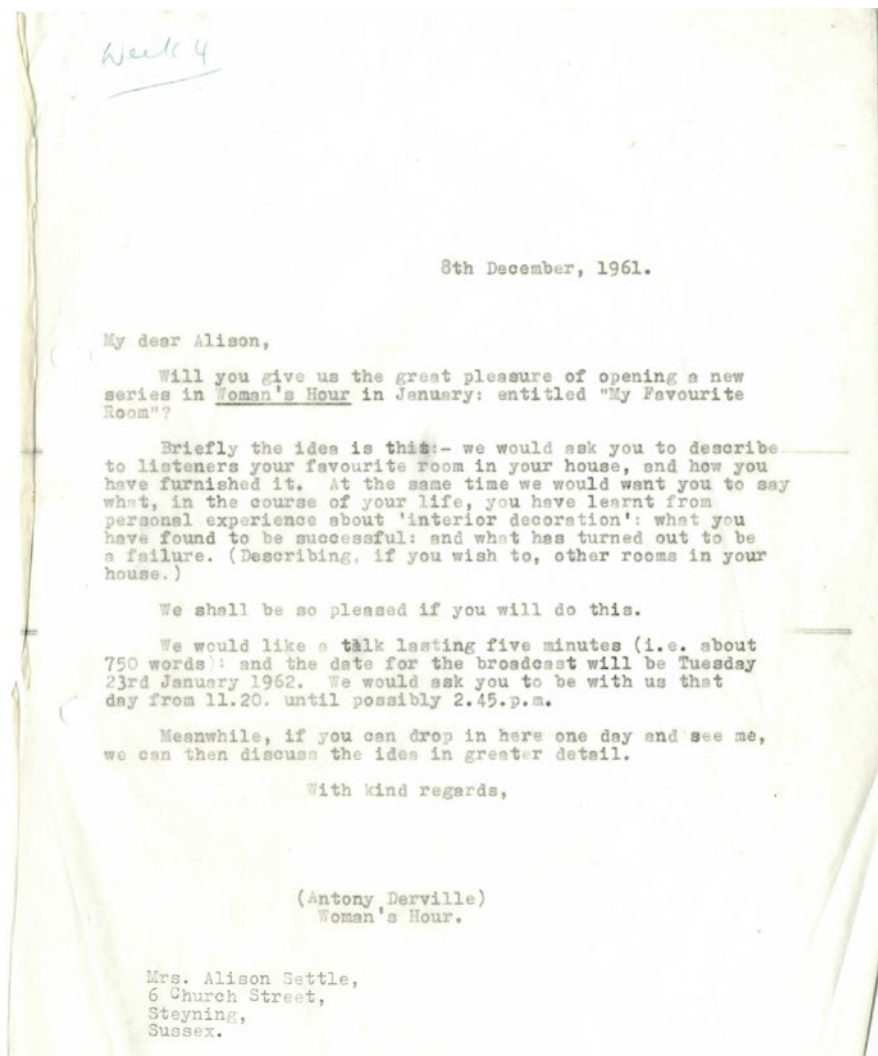


FIG 4: Alison Settle invited onto Woman's Hour, 8 December 1961

relevant. These contributor files are another great source for women's lives, and BBC WAC has hundreds of them. Most recently I have been delving into the files of women politicians who broadcast in the 1920s and 30s: Margaret Bondfield, Mary Agnes Hamilton, Nancy Astor, Margaret Wintringham and Megan Lloyd George. There are files of novelists, garden experts, sportswomen, journalists, poets and social reformers, and that's just for starters; the correspondence of a great many significant women of the twentieth century are filed away here. It is fascinating to follow a broadcasting career – an individual who starts out with trepidation but who then flourishes into a star. Alison Settle is one such example. As Editor of *Vogue*, she first contacted the BBC in 1927, persuading them that she could give talks on fashion for ordinary women, not just the elite. She proved a great success and appeared on the wireless numerous times in the 1920s and 30s. As Fashion Editor for *The Observer*, her broadcasts continued into the Second World War. Later in the 1940s, she was picked up by women's programming on the fledgling BBC television service, and also by *Woman's Hour*. Her final *Woman's Hour* talks were in 1962.

The files associated with *Woman's Hour* are themselves a social history of women in Britain, dating back to the programme's start in October 1946. As the main researcher for the Sixtieth Anniversary book, I had the task of going back through every programme script on microfiche and, although not a physically pleasant experience, the wealth of historical detail that tumbled

out was overwhelming. The running orders for each programme are themselves a shorthand of what was deemed important for women up until the 1980s

when the microfiche ends, and there are transcripts of most of the broadcasts up until the early 1970s. One of the most illuminating finds are the letters from listeners. *Woman's Hour* had a postbag of hundreds of letters each week, which it would have been an impossibility to keep. However, edited extracts from letters that were chosen to be read out on the programme do survive within the scripts, and so give an inkling of women's attitudes at this time.

This brief glance at BBC WAC is just the tip of the iceberg of the riches that can be found there. It is, unsurprisingly, an amazing resource for everything to do with women and broadcasting. What might be more surprising is the breadth of the wider women's history that is hidden away there.

Visiting BBC WAC

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/bbc-written-archives-centre/zdy9scw>

Visits to the BBC Written Archives Centre are by prior appointment only, between 10am and 5pm, Wednesday to Friday. Those who meet the visiting criteria, which includes academics and those writing for publication, can email heritage@bbc.co.uk with background details of their research and the type of material they wish to view. For more information on BBC WAC holdings and how to access the online catalogue descriptions, please see the Research and Services page on the website.

THE WOMEN DIARISTS OF EARLY RADIO

Professor Emilie Morin

University of York, UK

The research that I discuss here provided the foundations for a translation and anthologising project on early radio, which was funded by a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship (September 2021-May 2022), and by a British Academy Small Grant (2019-2020). The written outputs of this work include *Early Radio: An Anthology of European Texts and Translations*, with translations by Marielle Sutherland, Nicoletta Ascuito and myself, forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press.¹ The anthology gathers texts by long-forgotten or little-known writers, journalists, sound engineers, producers, actors and radio enthusiasts, and its purpose is to provide access to a new range of primary materials from a time in radio's history that is less often discussed, and to support reflections upon radio as an inherently transnational medium. The journalism and essays featuring in the book are representative of British, French, German and Italian radio cultures; authors from other countries including Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Ireland and Austria are also included. This research led me to texts on radio by women who were interested in aesthetic or social questions, had an interest in journalism and the essay form, and sometimes also designed or delivered radio programmes, or worked for broadcasting organisations in other capacities.

What enabled the project to come into being was not the lack or disappearance of sources that scholars of early radio have often had to confront in the archive, but the overabundance of writing about radio throughout this early period. Indeed, if the radio archives often seem to lack memory, the radio press of the interwar period does not. Kate Lacey has long established its significance, notably for women's programmes such as the Weimar-era *Frauenfunk* in Germany.² Radio ushered an often hypermnestic type of journalism, which sought to record listening impressions and frequently attempted to replace, in discursive form, that which could not yet be recorded as sound. Sometimes, this journalism even endeavoured to advance ideas about broadcasting that were diffusely present within the broadcasts themselves, by speculating about, and theorising, a sense of what radio could or should be. The reviews, chronicles, columns and essays published in specialised radio magazines, in mainstream newspapers, in the handbooks of broadcasting organisations and in literary and arts magazines (to mention but a few sources) are a precious and often unrivalled source of information, whose value is becoming clearer as the pace of digitisation accelerates and large databases become available. Together, these sources constitute a staggering mass of commentaries which account for radio's formidable artistic influence. One of the most significant facets of early radio journalism is how it enabled the dissemination of ideas, often as part of unpredictable transnational patterns. Indeed, if radio

has always crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries, this is also true of ideas about radio aesthetics. In the vast world of debating, theorizing and reviewing that nourished radio work and listening, women were often placed in the odd position of being both marginalized and key voices in the proceedings – as was mostly the case within broadcasting organisations.

The more we move from practice to theorisation, the more the number of women seems to dwindle; much evidence suggests that this pattern was replicated across British, French, German and Italian interwar radio cultures, then the most influential radio cultures in Europe.³ The number of women who made radio programmes or spoke regularly on the airwaves was small compared to their male counterparts, the number of women who wrote radio journalism was smaller, and the number of women who wrote essays about aesthetics and theorised radio broadcasting was even smaller. The essay or review discussing questions of aesthetic principle was a genre dominated by men. I became interested in this difference, and in tracking down the women who did write radio journalism. The records remain diffuse, as is always the case with this period, and particularly when attempting comparative transnational work. What I did find suggests that the women who made a mark on the radio journalism of the period worked mostly in two genres: they either wrote occasional articles chronicling their personal experiences of radio broadcasting (as performers before the microphone, or as employees working behind the scenes), or they styled themselves as listening diarists. The women who honed the latter genre specialised in anecdotal chronicles situated in the moment of listening, but rarely ventured into broader arguments about aesthetics and politics. Hilda Matheson, the BBC pioneer, was the exception in this regard, and if there are comments, theories or proposals elsewhere they tend to remain disguised, or buried within a discursive listening diary situated in the instant of listening, hence advertising its incidental nature. The prevalence of the listening diary in the form of short columns is such that it led me to wonder whether there are any female authors of books on radio prior to 1939, other than Matheson. The oft-forgotten authors whose work I traced often chronicled small transformations in everyday broadcasting, sometimes over long periods of time, and forged columns or essays staging their listening practice as a way of embedding other reflections on aesthetics denoting their experience and knowledge. Some of these texts are feminist in their intentions (often idiosyncratically so, to contemporary ears), and advocate for better offerings for women. Others reverberate the misogyny that shaped so much of the day-to-day running of radio stations, and struggle with the concept of a plural audience in which women's opinions and tastes matter equally.

The women whose writings I encountered, and whose stories I tell in my biographical sketches, had different relations to radio: some wrote about radio often, others rarely so. Some had a steady activity as journalists or writers; others were primarily involved in making or delivering radio programmes. Hilda Matheson's writing

stayed with me all the way through, particularly her description of broadcasting as ‘a means of enlarging the frontiers of human interest and consciousness, of widening personal experience, of shrinking the earth’s surface.’⁴ Matheson was not merely an important figure in the history of the BBC, but a brilliant theorist and historian of early radio aesthetics. Beyond her detailed, pioneering study *Broadcasting*, published in 1933, Matheson wrote regularly about radio, including a thought-provoking column for *The Observer* after her resignation from the BBC. Guided by Kate Murphy, I turned to other voices, no less experienced than Matheson but seemingly less comfortable in theorising their views publicly, and I became interested in the perspectives offered by Mabel Constanduros, Sheila Borrett, Florence Milnes (the BBC librarian), Ella Fitzgerald, Olive Shapley and Barbara Burnham in their all-too-scant journalism for magazines such as the *Radio Times* and *Radio Pictorial*, where they occasionally shared insights into their practical experiences. Guided by Birgit Van Puymbroeck, I became interested in Camilla, a columnist for *Vox*, *The Radio Critic & Broadcast Review* who wanted to improve what was on offer from the BBC, and act as a spokesperson for all female listeners. ‘If you are anxious to listen, to know what you want for the programmes, and to express your will, I hope that in these columns I may be your voice,’ Camilla writes in her opening salvo.⁵

My research also led me towards atypical French authors such as Madeleine Montvoisin, an obscure radio dramatist who published only one essay on radio drama, but whose ideas were disseminated through foreign publications including the Italian radio magazine *Radiocorriere* and the Brazilian radio magazine *Carioca*.⁶ It also led me to France Darget, who believed that radio could reinvigorate verse drama, and to Alida Calel, who authored an ill-fated essay on radio aesthetics with her brother. Louder, more confident voices included those of Grace Wyndham Goldie, one of the most prolific radio drama critics of the period, who developed original theories of radio drama in her witty columns for the BBC magazine *The Listener* prior to her career in television; Annette Kolb, a writer with attachments to both Germany and France, who had a keen interest in radio broadcasting and published a pithy critique styled as a list of ‘radio pains and radio pleasures’ shortly before the Nazis’ accession to power; and Suzanne Cilly, who advocated for better-quality women’s programmes on French radio stations. Cilly did not mince her words in her opening column for *Radio-Liberté*, where she complained about having to put up with ‘mountains of gossip, advice and recommendations’: ‘Is there anyone out there who truly believes that women who enjoy listening to radio, and young women generally, have no other preoccupations? That serious topics are of no interest to them?’⁷

Where can we find more authors like Cilly? This is a question I have no clear answer for, given the sheer mass of periodicals, magazines of newspapers, the unevenness of archival holdings and the uneven pace of digitisation. The outcomes probably boil down to a mixture of time, funding, persistence and luck. Anthologies make for peculiar research projects, because they are shaped by considerations that do not apply to other types of books,

involving ethics, balance, representativity and copyright restrictions (fair use or fair dealing, which underpins the writing of monographs, does not apply to anthologies – or to translations). Dealing with copyright permissions is feasible when authors are ‘known’, but what is to be done for authors who have fallen into oblivion, yet are still in copyright? The procedures can be unclear and publishers can, understandably, be nervous. Finding information about siblings or descendance can be haphazard, and in this particular case it involved collating and cross-referencing information from sources that are not standard research fare (such as obituaries, genealogy sites, acknowledgements in PhD theses, telephone books, online forums, LinkedIn and Facebook). Many possibilities had to be discarded; many routes led nowhere. The correspondence that arose from this alerted me to the significant role that children and sometimes grandchildren play as custodians, which I had not considered from the same angle before. There are uncomfortable questions to be reckoned with when it comes to copyright: we can neither simply nor easily recover a sense of the significance and variety of women’s writings in some circumstances, but may unwittingly find ourselves tied to old failures to value and preserve women’s work. To the challenges posed by the course of institutional memory and the laws of the archive, we can also add the vagaries of copyright. It is well established that wherever women seem absent in histories of radio broadcasting, their absences never involve absence as such, but disappearance, oblivion, concealment or erasure.⁸

Notes

1. Emilie Morin, ed., *Early Radio: An Anthology of European Texts and Translations*, with translations by Emilie Morin, Marielle Sutherland and Nicoletta Ascuito (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming May 2023).
2. Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).
3. See, notably, Rebecca P. Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 139; Pierre Miquel, *Histoire de la radio et de la télévision* (Paris: Editions Richelieu, 1973).
4. Hilda Matheson, *Broadcasting* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933), 14.
5. Camilla, ‘Vox Angelica: The Woman Listener,’ *Vox, The Radio Critic & Broadcast Review*, 9 Nov. 1929, 23. Much suggests that Camilla was one of the pen names used by the British author Faith Compton Mackenzie (1878-1960).
6. G. M., untitled article, *Radiocorriere*, 29 Aug. - 4 Sep. 1937, 4; ‘Uma vitoria do “broadcasting” brasileiro!’, *Carioca*, 6 August 1938, 40.
7. Suzanne Cilly, ‘Les femmes et la radio,’ (my translation) *Radio-Liberté*, Jun.-Jul. 1936, 1-2.
8. See Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

In Profile



In Profile – Kate Terkanian, Senior Lecturer in History, Bournemouth University

Tell us about your area of expertise?

My research primarily looks at gendering in employment practice and how organisations determine who is suited for certain types of jobs. Following on the ideas of Joan Scott, organisations under stress or in times of national crises are of particular interest as these are points where values are affirmed, temporarily altered or permanently changed. The Second World War was one such crisis point, and I have looked at the ways in which the British Broadcasting Corporation adapted employment practice in the face of labour shortages.

What motivated you to become an historian?

When I was a student at the University of North Carolina, I started studying broadcasting but was always interested in history. As the US system requires you to take elective courses outside of your major, I had enrolled in several courses on women's history. One of my professors, Judith Bennett, encouraged me to switch majors. She told me I would never find a job in history, something my broadcasting lecturers also said about broadcasting. The

one difference was that Dr Bennett said that the academic journey was more important than career choices, and that I would never regret studying history. I am happy to say that I took her advice and I have never looked back.

What achievement are you most proud of?

I always struggle with this question as I've never done anything that I consider to be really amazing, like sail around the world or spearhead a world-changing event. What I am most proud of, though, is the way that I have chosen to live my life – to change careers when I wasn't satisfied with the work, to get a PhD when I was terrified of writing something so big. I have been fortunate to have had these opportunities but following them was always a sometimes-scary venture into the unknown.

If you could travel back in time to witness an historical event, where and when would you return to, and why?

Having experienced an historical event first-hand – I was in Washington DC on 11 September 2001 – I am not sure I would want to travel back in time to see another. I have had opportunities to be part of what were personally pivotal historical moments like participating in a march on Washington for women's rights and helping elect the first woman to the office of vice president of the United States. While I am disappointed not to have seen a woman get the top job yet, there is still time.

What book about women's history has most inspired you?

The most inspirational book I have read about women's history was *Lady for the Defense: A Biography of Belva Lockwood* by Mary Virginia Fox. I read this book when I was thirteen for a book report. Lockwood was one of the first women awarded a degree in law in the US and won the right to appear before the US Supreme Court. She even ran for president twice in the 1880s. I was really inspired to learn about this amazing woman and have been interested in bringing stories like hers to light ever since.

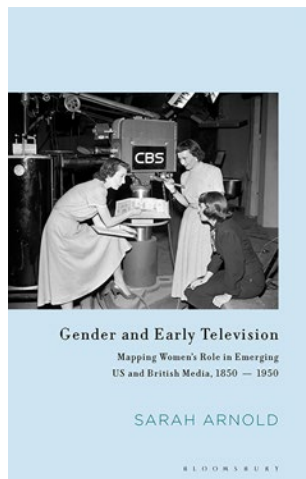
What important piece of advice would you impart to a budding historian?

To quote Ms Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus*, 'take chances, make mistakes, and get messy', well maybe not the messy part. Studying history sometimes takes you places you never expected to go, but you meet so many interesting people.

Book Reviews

Sarah Arnold, *Gender and Early Television: Mapping Women's Role in Emerging US and British Media, 1850-1950*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. £85.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781780769769, pp.304

Reviewed by Rowan Aust
University of Huddersfield



Sarah Arnold's new book, *Gender and Early Television: Mapping Women's Role in Emerging US and British Media, 1850 - 1950* is an invaluable contribution to the understanding of the interplay between emerging visual technologies and the social currencies they generated, and the ways in which these technologies both advanced and oppressed women's liberation across the period Arnold surveys.

Using a fine array of popular press sources, Arnold deftly lays out the context of the new visual spectacle technologies such as the kinoscope and the mutoscope. She describes the ways in which women were cultivated as objects of visual pleasure, while their own potential pleasures as viewers were circumscribed, and the way in which this segued into a gendering of experience of the newer technology of television. In other words, women's position as consumers rather than creators was replicated from one technology to the other. Women were not consulted about the potentials of their experience.

Similarly, the popular press is shown to have amplified the effects of television. Even if most people in the 1920s and 1930s did not own a set, they could still read about what appeared on TV, which fed into events such as the contest for a new 'television girl' held at the New York World's Fair in 1939 (p.60). Arnold also covers the disciplining, codified strictures imposed on how such women were to appear, and inevitably act. Across many examples on both sides of the Atlantic, from the kinoscope to the television set, women were objectified, criticised and even benignly described. This was by placing individual achievements on a par with marriage choices in ways that negated the threat of their expansion into the public, visualised sphere. The detailed descriptions of the way in which audience analyses were used to exclude women as recipients of 'serious' programming offers the historical line of gendered categorisation that applies to all the discussed aspects of the female experience within the book.

However, women were not kept out of television work, and Arnold traces the ways in which women were able to contribute and even, sometimes, mould the ways in which television was made. She outlines their methods and the ways in which this work was celebrated and even

normalised in the press. The networks of women that grew around women such as Mary Adams and Hilda Matheson are illuminated, as are the collaborative actions of women. This collaboration served to maintain careers and reputations in the face of undermining through underfunding and from additional expectations placed on women producers in comparison to men. Then, as now, women were expected to take on extra labour to keep their place in the industry.

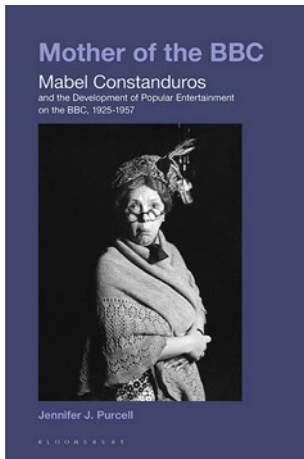
By employing a comparison between the US and British television industries, Arnold demonstrates that the marginalisation of women was not down to any indigenous broadcaster. Rather it followed similar trajectories of cautious inclusion of women at the early, experimental stages; a broad need for women's participation in the war years followed by a recalibration post-war, as women were re-framed as passive consumers. Conditional hierarchies were also applied to excluded groups, based on 'ethnic uniformity, with white women gaining more access than minority women' (p.105). As with the British context however, where women did gain access, their work was often devalued because of their administrative or supportive roles (p.109) and they were often denied more agentic roles that could influence and shape their surroundings. Access to television work is shown as contradictory and regulated, with women valued for their aesthetic promotion that performed a façade of progressiveness for the new technology of TV.

This is a fine addition to the scholarship that demonstrates women's elided contribution to early television and the media industries. It details many of the women whose contribution to the development of television, both behind the scenes and in roles such as the announcer, served to help the new medium be taken seriously. *Gender and Early Television* continues the work of feminist scholars to record the work women have done in a history that has long focused on the 'great men' of TV and not the women who so often facilitated their success. It illuminates the contemporary, depressingly continuing issues of women's participation in the television production workforce, where gender parity remains unsolved. One hopes it will be used in Media Studies Departments the world over to demonstrate that women were both there from the beginning, and that the potential of their involvement remains unrealised.

Purcell, Jennifer J. *Mother of the BBC, Mabel Constanduros and the Development of Popular Entertainment on the BBC, 1925-57*, New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. £28.99, 978-1-501-38985-6 (paperback), pp. 1-237.

Kate Terkalian
Bournemouth University

Seizing the opportunity offered by the emergence of radio in the 1920s, Mabel Constanduros rose to



stardom in the 1920s and 1930s and forged a professional career with the British Broadcasting Company, and the post-1926 British Broadcasting Corporation. Jennifer Purcell's *Mother of the BBC: Mabel Constanduros and the Development of Popular Entertainment on the BBC, 1925-57* offers a biography of her career within the setting of variety entertainment broadcast by the BBC, highlighting the ways that the

medium of radio entertainment developed in its early years. The seven chapters weave in different aspects of Constanduros's work in a roughly chronological order by focussing on themes and genres. Hampered by a paucity of documentary evidence – the surviving family members discarded the bulk of Constanduros's personal papers in the 1960s – Purcell deftly builds a picture of Constanduros's career using published memoirs, BBC archive files and material provided by both surviving family members. Intertwined with Constanduros's story is the history of the development of BBC variety, comedy, and entertainment.

In Chapter One, Purcell outlines the emergence of comedy on the BBC in the 1920s, and Constanduros's contribution. Whilst the BBC provided opportunities for music hall performers, many variety acts avoided broadcasting on the BBC (pp.26-29). Producers turned to ambitious amateurs like Constanduros, who was involved with an amateur theatrics group, to create radiogenic material. In this environment, Constanduros developed her signature characters the Buggins family. The domestic family comedy featured Cockney working-class characters voiced predominantly by Constanduros. Chapter Two discusses the development of the characters and Constanduros's comedic style that simultaneously celebrated and gently mocked the working class.

While today's audiences are less familiar with Constanduros, Chapter Three discusses her place as a radio star important enough to be included in the second series of Wills's *Radio Celebrities* cigarette cards. As noted by Purcell, BBC careers could be derailed by domestic troubles that imperilled their celebrity status (pp.57-62). The text details how Constanduros's success on the radio coincided with marital stress, and that her celebrity allowed a measure of independent living away from her husband. This same celebrity also required a public performance that masked these domestic difficulties.

One of the enduring stories about Mabel Constanduros was that while she was a popular radio star, she was not a confident performer in front of a live audience. Chapter Four disputes this account and describes her success on the stage (pp.81-2), as well as on commercial radio stations (p.79) and in print (pp.84-6). Chapter Five outlines how the Buggins family served to revive her radio career in the 1940s through appearances on the wartime *Kitchen Front*. Key to her success was the transformation of Grandma Buggins's transgressive

character from a scheming curmudgeon to an unflinching patriot (pp.99-107).

In the final two chapters, Purcell highlights the feminine space Constanduros's material created on air and Constanduros's foray into film in the post-war era. Chapter Six also contains interesting comment on Constanduros's development as a professional, including her firm negotiating style and her adroit use of professional networks (pp.125-8). This chapter presents a nuanced view of the business side of Constanduros.

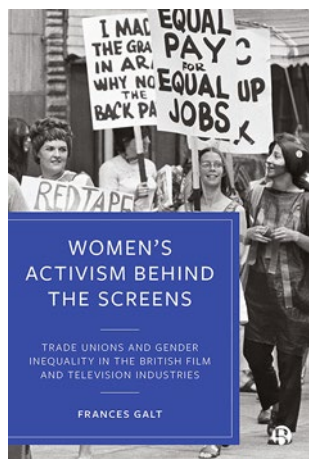
Chapter Seven is devoted to a series of films based on a play, *Acacia Avenue*, written with her nephew, and sometimes writing partner, Denis Constanduros. Faced with little in the way of documentary evidence regarding Mabel and Denis's contribution to the films, Purcell instead devotes much of this chapter to analysing the series of films produced by Muriel and Sydney Box. This chapter draws direct links between Constanduros's pre-war soap opera *The English Family Robinson* and the films' Huggett family.

While well-written and engaging, the book is not completely cohesive. There is a fantastic amount of detail on the BBC during the eras in which Constanduros wrote and worked, but sometimes this material is not linked tightly enough to Constanduros and her relationship to the material is briefly lost. Additionally, more direct references to gender differences could have been made with regards to Constanduros's post-war career. Earlier sections suggest Constanduros's work was routinely rejected by the BBC after the war, but a later section reveals that she wrote for, and often appeared on, *Woman's Hour* and on children's programmes. This segregation of her work, that was both female-focussed and domestic in nature, to women's programming seems to be a hallmark of BBC radio's need to project itself as serious, and therefore masculine, and is symptomatic of its growing sense of insecurity in the post-war era. This is an important element that is raised in the introduction but could be explored more thoroughly in the final two chapters.

Overall, Purcell has completed this difficult task of reconstructing a career mostly through the eyes of others. As Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley have indicated, media archives pose a challenge in researching women's careers in broadcasting as documentation on women's programming and practitioners is often not viewed as important enough to preserve. Even where Constanduros's own thoughts are available, Purcell points out the limitations of using published memoirs, and provides an insightful discussion on how Constanduros constructed her own experiences of marriage, motherhood, and career to suit her public image. Purcell convincingly provides an insight into the potential inspiration for Constanduros's characters by relating their personality traits to those in her personal life. This book shines a light on the successful career of a creative and adaptable star of early British radio and is a welcome addition to the small, but growing, body of research on women in early British radio.

Frances Galt, *Women's Activism Behind the Screens: Trade Unions and Gender Inequality in the British Film and Television Industries*, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021. £79.99, 978-1529206296 (hardback), pp. viii + 241.

Sarah Arnold
Maynooth University



One of the most pressing and important points of Frances Galt's *Women's Activism Behind the Screens* is that principles of gender equality do not always equate with practices of gender equality. In fact, her detailed examination of the long lead up to, and consequence of, women's activism in British film and television union the Association of Television, Cinematograph and Applied Technicians (ACTT), reveals

that equality for women workers can paradoxically be aspired to and undermined within the same organisation. Indeed, this book could very well work as a cautionary tale for today where activism for women's rights in media work, and attention to it in the public, may not necessarily translate into positive change.

With its focus on one case, that of women's role in one union across time, Galt's work is in similar territory to Melanie Bell's *Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema* (2021) and Kate Murphy's *Behind the Wireless* (2016), each of which uses historical data from a given union or institution to trace and uncover the work of women in the British film and television industries. Bell uses similar union data as Galt, but where Bell uses this data to examine women's work in the film and television industries, Galt is more concerned to look at the relationship that women had with the union, their role and their activism within it, and the impact that the union had in the progression of women film and television workers' rights. Institutional archival data is supplemented with other archival sources and oral history interviews which are used to shed light on, explain and problematise some of the institutional histories that exist. For example, Galt stresses the difficulties in sourcing data related to the Committee for Equality, established in 1973 in response to ACTT women's demand for change, since such archival material is dispersed across a number of sites. However, such data is crucial in shedding light on women's experience of the union and activism within it, where little evidence of such appears in formal union documents.

While Galt stresses that she is as interested in the everyday activities of women in the union as well as those flashpoints of activism and change, the book uses the ACTT's 1975 report *Patterns of Discrimination Against Women in the Film and Television Industries* as an anchoring topic through which to explore the role of women in the early iteration of the union, the Association of Cinematograph Technicians (1933-1956); through to the emergence of women's activism in the ACTT during the late 1960s and

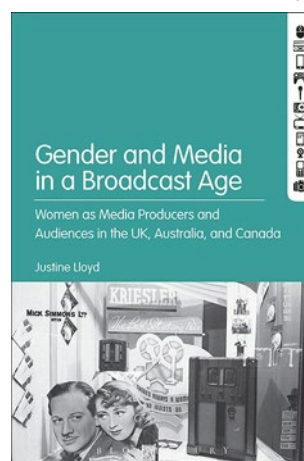
1970s; to the erosion of women's gains during the early Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) years (1991-ongoing); and the subsequent revival of attention to and formalisation of committees for women and other marginalised groups in the post-2000s.

Throughout this long history, the extent to which the status of women in ACT(T)/BECTU was dependent upon and shaped by wider socio-economic factors becomes clear. This included the Second World War's role in bringing women into the workforce; the emergence of the women's liberation movement and its influence on the film and television industries; and the 2008 financial crash and subsequent austerity measures which undermined the power of unions and turned focus away from women's concerns. Yet, Galt also shows how the union sometimes deviated from wider socio-economic trends. For example, Galt suggests that the lack of women's activism in the ACTT during the 1960s was perhaps down to the union's championing of itself as an equal pay employer, thus negating the need for women's activism. Indeed, one of the key points of the book is that the very organisation tasked with protecting and enshrining workers' rights, did not do so, and in many cases worked against the rights of women workers.

Women's Activism Behind the Screens is an exemplary investigation of women's role within the ACT(T)/BECTU. Each chapter spells out its foci and arguments with clarity and provides coherent and well-evidenced cases and instances of women's union membership, status, and activism between 1933 and 2017. Ultimately, this book should be required reading for those interested in women's rights, workers' rights and fairness and equality in the media industries, since as Galt suggests, the fight for women's rights in the sectors is as much needed today as it was in the years covered in the book.

Justine Lloyd, *Gender and Media in the Broadcast Age: Women's Radio Programming at the BBC, CBC, and ABC*, New York, London, and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. £24.99, 978-1-5013-1877-1 (paperback), pp. 208.

Kristin Skoog,
Bournemouth University



'Please tell us about cancer'... is one poignant question from a list of queries sent in by listeners to the BBC's *Woman's Hour* in 1947 (pp.120-121). The same year, a nineteen-year-old had written in asking about period pains, so bad she had fainted at work. Having been dismissed by her local doctor, she simply needed to find out whether this was normal or not, hoping the programme makers could provide an answer. With

examples such as these, Justine Lloyd, demonstrates how

BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALLS FOR REVIEWERS

The following titles are available for review, so if you like to review any of the titles listed below, please email Helen Glew, Book Reviews Editor, at bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org.

You don't have to be an expert to review, if you have a general interest and knowledge of the relevant historical period or territory then that will count for a lot. The ability to summarise a work (within the word limit!) and write interestingly about it is the most important thing. Any suggestions for books to review are also welcome - just email the book reviews editor as above.

Henrietta Heald, *Magnificent Women and their Revolutionary Machines* (Unbound, 2019)

Stephen Williams and Tony Chandler (eds), *Letters from England, 1895: Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling* (Lawrence Wishart, 2020)

Alexandra J. Finley, *An Intimate Economy of: Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020)

Barbara Jones, John Fagg, Melissa Wolfe, Tom Wolf, *Simple Pleasures: The Art of Doris Lee* (D. Giles, 2020)

Roberta J.M. Olson, *Artist in Exile: The Visual Diary of Baroness Hyde de Neville* (D Giles, 2019)

Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds), *Irish Women and the Vote*, new edition (Irish Academic Press, 2018)

Brianna Leavitt-Alcantara, *Alone at the Altar: Single Women & Devotion in Guatemala, 1670-1870* (Stanford University Press, 2018)

Martin Sheppard (ed.), *Love on Inishcoo, 1787: A Donegal Romance* (Matador, 2018)

Camilla Mørk Røstvik, *Cash Flow: The businesses of menstruation*, (UCL Press, 2021)

Andrew Maranis, *Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team* (Penguin, 2022)

Ann Mari May, *Gender and the Dismal Science: Women in the Early Years of the Economics Profession* (Columbia University Press, 2022)

Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism*, (University of British Columbia Press, 2022)

Andy Clark, *Fighting Deindustrialisation: Scottish Women's Factory Occupations, 1981-1982* (Liverpool University Press, 2022)

Sharon Thompson, *Quiet Revolutionaries: The Married Women's Association and Family Law*, (Bloomsbury 2022)

Alison Hill, *Pauline Gower: Pioneering Leader of the Spitfire Women*, (The History Press, 2022)

women's radio mid-century helped to challenge what could be heard and spoken of, further illustrating the sort of relationship radio could foster with its listeners. Women's radio would come to reconfigure the relationship between the private, the personal, the intimate *and* public life.

Lloyd's book about women's radio at the ABC (Australia), CBC (Canada), and the BBC (UK), in the 1930s to 1960s, investigates how far women broadcasters and listeners challenged, negotiated and pushed the accepted and recognised gender roles and expectations. Importantly it asks the question, 'What was at stake for women within mid-twentieth century media in transgressing gendered divisions between public and private spheres?' (p.46). The programmes examined, as Lloyd asserts, 'represented a new kind of women's culture, which began in domestic and personal experience but eventually escaped its anchoring to the private sphere' (p.4). *Gender and Media in the Broadcast Age* successfully addresses a gap in feminist media studies, one in which mid-century women's media has often been perceived as passive and less vocal, in comparison to the feminist media of the 'first' and 'second' waves. Across the three examples, Lloyd shows how complex this period was. As an international comparative study, the book is particularly valuable since existing work on women's radio has, until recently, tended to focus on national contexts alone.

Chapters One and Two, set out the theoretical framework as well as the historical and historiographical

contexts (the domestication and gendering of the radio medium). By using the conceptualisation of 'intimate geographies' the book makes a significant contribution to 'the role of the media in the "intimate turn"' (p.19).

In Chapter Three, Lloyd examines Australian broadcasters such as Irene Greenwood and Catharine King, and the broadcaster-turned-radio critic, Elizabeth Webb (whose sharp writing was a thrill to read). Greenwood's talks on ABC Perth's *Women's Session* shifted focus from the domestic setting to international politics and events, a shift that created and crafted a 'globally intimate voice' (p.52). Greenwood's leftist politics and her desire to challenge the notion of what a women's radio programme should be about ultimately made her a troublesome character for management.

In Chapter Four, Lloyd argues that the Canadian broadcaster CBC had a more experimental and creative approach to its women's programmes forming special relationships between the audience, the broadcasters and the institution. One example is *Our Knitting Circle* – a mix between the informational and serial formats introduced during the war 'to "lighten up" the talks format' (p.78). Another example is the role played by personality broadcasters, such as Claire Wallace, whose show *They Tell Me*, 'a program of stories behind the stories' (p.82) was based on real people's stories and often included location-based reporting and a soundscape that inspired imaginary travel and geographical mobility.

Chapter Five explores how the BBC's *Woman's*

Hour programme discovered the significance of the personal and ordinary, and how broadcasters such as Janey Quigley, Isa Benzie and Olive Shapley challenged and pushed topics and content. The programme enjoyed a certain autonomy but within institutional limitations as well as added pressures – and perhaps within the programme makers’ own projection that women’s public responsibilities were still grounded in the domestic.

Lloyd is both sympathetic and critical. This

ambition should be commended but it does mean that the final chapter on ‘legacies’ rather than providing a more in-depth conclusion and reflection instead moves quickly forward. Questions remain such as what brought these women broadcasters and programmes together/ what brought them apart? Nonetheless, this is an impressive piece of work, incredibly rich in its source material, and a book that will be of value and interest to media scholars, feminist scholars and women’s historians.

Committee Report – AGM 2022

Sarah Richardson, Chair of WHN
Steering Committee

This is my first year as Chair of the WHN. I would like to start by thanking the outgoing Chair, Maggie Andrews for her wonderful work for the network during her period as chair and for the tremendous support she has given me. Maggie introduced a number of successful innovations during her tenure focused on improving the support the network is able to give to students, early career researchers and independent scholars as well as introducing new posts on the steering group to support the broad range of activities the network undertakes.

After cancelling the 2020 conference because of the pandemic, the 2021 conference, ‘Homes, Food and Farms’ took place successfully online with over 40 papers from a wide range of scholars. The pandemic affected the building programme of our proposed venue for the 2022 conference and thus the committee made the decision to hold this year’s conference online once again, on the theme of ‘Addressing the Nation’ coinciding with the centenary of the BBC. The vibrant and varied programme demonstrates some of the advantages of an online conference but the organisation is no less time-consuming and thanks are due to the conference team of Alex Hughes-Johnson, Anna Muggeridge, Kate Murphy, Hazel Perry and Kate Terkanian. The network is currently in discussions with the Black Country Living Museum to hold the conference in-person (we will also consider hybrid sessions) in September 2023.

The pandemic has meant that we have continued with other activities online. Our successful online seminar programme has been able to attract international speakers and audiences and has continued to prove popular. We have continued with online writing retreats and the committee has met online. We are in discussion about the division between online and face to face activities.

Our focus on diversity has continued with an improved tagging system for our blogs and index for our journal. We hope this will mean that it is easier to cross-reference some of our publications. Our scholarships and prizes continue to attract a large number of high-quality entries and we are delighted with the diversity which demonstrates the

ongoing vibrancy of work on women’s history at all levels.

This year saw the re-launch of the Midlands Region branch of the WHN with a successful and well-attended online conference: Celebrating Women’s Histories. The branch aims to have two conferences a year. The West of England and South Wales region are returning to an in-person conference in October 2022 with an event on Women and Money: A Historical Perspective.

It would be impossible for the WHN to support the range of diverse activities that it does without the huge amounts of work by the WHN National Steering Committee. Lyndsey Jenkins has finished her term of office and thus is stepping down from her roles as blog editor and prizes and scholarships co-ordinator. Lyndsey also fulfilled the role of secretary until last year. Lyndsey will however join the book prize committee next year and is staying on the committee until Christmas to support the handover. Hazel Perry is taking on the conference support role during Alexandra Hughes-Johnson’s maternity leave and Susan Cohen has agreed to stay on as membership secretary. Three new members joined the steering committee this autumn: Beth Price who will join Kat Perry as blog editor; Emily Rhodes who, along with Anna Muggeridge, will support scholarships and prizes and Emma Barrett. The Steering Committee always look forward to receiving comments and feedback, so please do get in touch if you have ideas or suggestions.

Report on the 2022 Women’s History Network Annual Conference

We were delighted to host the Women’s History Network Annual Conference on 2 and 3 September on the theme ‘Addressing the Nation’. The theme was chosen to commemorate the centenary of the foundation of the British Broadcasting Corporation, in recognition of the fact that, from almost the very start, women worked in many capacities at the BBC including behind the scenes, making programmes, and speaking on air. However, the conference sought papers which explored how women across the world were ‘addressing the nation’ throughout time, not just as broadcasters but also as activists, actors, journalists, writers, cartoonists, orators, storytellers and public figures.

It was particularly exciting, therefore, to hear

papers which spoke to women addressing the nation in these capacities in a wide variety of countries – including America, Dominica, Germany, India, Ireland, Poland, Pakistan and Zimbabwe – as well as across the United Kingdom. Papers ranged from those focusing on women addressing audiences in the Ancient world through to the twenty-first century, and in public speeches, letters, magazines and journals, and of course radio and television.

Our three keynote speakers reflected this diversity. On Friday, Dr Angela McShane’s fascinating talk discussed women and the political ballad in the seventeenth century, uncovering the many significant ways in which they ‘addressed the nation’ during Britain’s revolutionary century. Later that day, Dr Imaobong Umoren delivered a riveting keynote on Eugenia Charles, who was elected Prime Minister of Dominica in 1980 and thus became the first woman to serve as leader of a Caribbean nation. Dr Umoren drew on Charles’ annual Independence Day speeches, reflecting on her contributions to the ongoing project of decolonisation. Finally, on Saturday, Dr Kate Murphy provided a timely and authoritative talk on women in the early BBC. Noting that the corporation was relatively progressive in its attitude towards employing female staff, Dr Murphy invited us to think about those women who had the ‘authority’ to speak on BBC radio, and when—indeed whether—attitudes towards women broadcasters has changed.

These three thought-provoking and stimulating papers set the tone for an excellent conference, in which speakers probed deeply the concept of women ‘addressing the nation’. We were particularly pleased to be able to welcome scholars from across the globe to present at the conference, thanks to its online format. While we did miss the opportunity to gather together and socialise during the conference, this format does allow for not just international scholars, but also those PGRs, ECRs and Independent scholars who may not have access to institutional funding to attend and share their work. We recognise the importance of this format, too, to those with caring responsibilities which may also preclude travel.

Just as with in-person events, however, online conferences take a lot of administration and organisation to flow so smoothly. We would therefore like to thank Dilara Scholz and Katy Tanner who provided administrative assistance, ensuring each panel went ahead without a hitch. WHN Steering Committee members Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Hazel Perry undertook the conference administrative duties for the conference, while Dr Kate Murphy and Dr Kate Terkanian kindly provided their expertise in the field of broadcasting history and oversaw the programme. We would like to thank all involved for their time in ensuring such an enjoyable conference for all. Most importantly, we would like to thank everyone who presented papers, chaired panels, and attended the conference – we look forward to seeing you in 2023 for our next conference!

Anna Muggeridge

WHN Schools History Prize, 2022

The WHN Schools History Prize is one of the highlights of the year. The prize, which celebrates International Women’s Day, gives young researchers the opportunity to engage with women’s history. It is backed up by educational resources available on the WHN website that assist teachers who would like to plan the posters as a lesson activity or a homework project. Each year the number of entries has steadily increased both from schools across the UK and internationally. This year we invited students to create a poster celebrating *Heroines who fought for Equality*. We had some truly amazing entries at both junior and senior level and, as well as congratulating all the pupils who took part, we would like to thank all the teachers whose enthusiastic support makes the prize possible. It was very difficult for the Steering Committee to judge; we were so impressed with all of the wonderful and thoughtful posters!

This year the winning entry in the senior category was a poster by Daisy Shepherd of Maya Angelou and in the Junior category Hannah Braithwaite’s poster of Marie Curie.

The winners and all the highly commended for the WHN Schools History Prize 2022 are available to view online. WHN Schools History Prize 2022 – Women’s History Network

Tahaney Alghrani, Schools History Prize coordinator



Schools Prize: Senior Category Winner (Top)
Junior Category Winner (Bottom)

Women's History Network prizes and bursaries

Early Career Researcher Bursaries:

Every year, the WHN awards a number of bursaries, each valued at £1,500, to support and further research into women's history. The bursaries are open to anyone within ten years of their doctorate (not including career breaks) and not in a full time academic post/postdoctoral fellowship. We are pleased to have awarded four bursaries this year, from a number of outstanding applications. These have been awarded to:

- Dr Victoria Golding: to research the history of the Greater London Council, housing, and lesbian agency in the 1980s, through the newly deposited records of the London Fields Housing Co-operative, council records and oral histories.
- Dr Claire Phillips: to research the experiences of girls and young women in workhouses in Wales, 1880–1920.
- Dr Sasha Rasmussen: to write up a monograph based on her doctoral research, titled *Feminine Feelings: Women and Sensation in Paris and St Petersburg, 1900-1913*, a cultural history of femininity, told through the lens of sensory experience.
- Dr Elizabeth Schlappa: to write up a monograph based on her doctoral thesis, which contributes the first history of female masturbation in eighteenth-century England.

We are delighted to be supporting a wide range of women's history projects and look forward to hearing more about their outcomes. In addition to the planned publications, our ECR Fellows will be sharing their research through the WHN this year.

Independent Researcher Grants:

These grants are designed to support and enable research into women's history by those working outside of academia. This year, we again received a number of outstanding applications, and have split the grant across three projects:

- Amanda Allan: £250 to fund research expenses for a biography of Rose Caroline Lady Graves Sawle and the patchwork quilt she produced, currently held at the Royal Museum of Cornwall, in Truro.
- Dr Emily Hooke: £500 to fund additional research into women in the French Resistance in the Second World War, to publish her doctoral thesis as a trade monograph.
- Patricia Sutton: £250 to fund research into two women impacted by the policies of Victorian transportation and Gladstone's brief period as Colonial Secretary, at Gladstone's library for publication as an article.

Many congratulations to all! We will look forward to sharing more about each project through the WHN this

year.

Undergraduate dissertation prize:

This year the undergraduate dissertation prize received a record 59 entries, more than double last year. All entries were of an extremely high standard, which did make judging a challenge, but which speaks to the breadth, depth and standard of undergraduate research into women's history in the UK. We were pleased to have entries from all four nations, from a range of institutions and we thank those who helped promote the prize. Our winners are:

Overall winner:

- 'Women and the Nation: Women's Fight for Self-Determination in Timor-Leste', Phoebe Parsons, SOAS

Runner up:

- 'Protesting Prisoners: An Examination of The Protests and Representations of Incarcerated Northern Irish Republican Women 1973-1980', Charlotte Stanbury, Plymouth

Highly commended:

- 'To grow up a blessing, not a curse': The control and criminality of adolescent girls in late-nineteenth-century Belfast', Mary Florence Williams, Queen's University Belfast
- 'What role did needlework play in the education of girls in England c.1660-1830?' Ronda Jerrard, Queen Mary, University of London
- 'A Conspiracy of Silence. An analysis of a defining feature of the history in the Magdalene Laundries, using evidence from survivors' testimonies.' Emily Vivian, Nottingham
- 'She was like wildfire to burn the world down': A Study of Women in the Gordon Riots of 1780', Jaydon Brown, Hertfordshire

Owing to the quality and quantity of entries this year, we also had a longlist. These were:

- 'Beloved by Them in Turn': Romanticism's Influence on the Exploration of Lesbian Identity from 1739-1840', Charlotte Pratt, Exeter
- 'We're Not Beautiful, We're Not Ugly, We're Angry': A study into the significance of the Miss World Protest of 1970', Eve Roberts, Reading
- 'For I shall never be easy till I know the truth or can hear of my dear babey son': the experiences of the London Foundling Hospital mothers, 1739-1782', Ellie Gregory, Cardiff
- 'Many Voices, One Chant': Socialism and the Black British Women's Movement, 1968-

- 1985', Kelly-Ann Gordon, Northumbria
- 'Perfection, Procreation, and Patriarchy: How did notions of nature and order affect perceptions of women in Early Modern, Western European Society?', Sarah Rose Brown, Nottingham
 - "Keep Our Mouths Shut or Adopt Middle-Classness". An analysis of the inclusivity

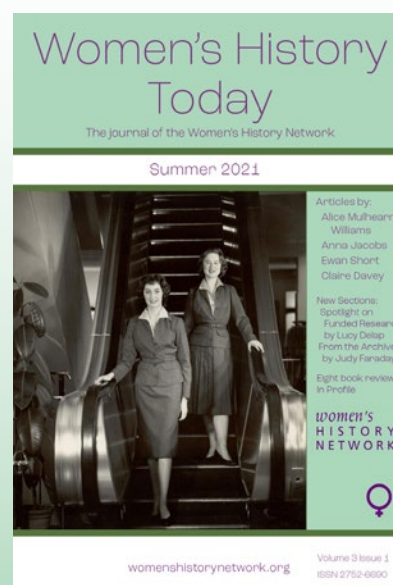
of the Bristol Women's Liberation Group',
Maisie Jepson, Winchester

Look out for blog posts from many of our winners coming soon and congratulations to all! The WHN MA Dissertation award will also be launching very soon.

Publishing in *Women's History Today*

Women's History Today welcomes contributions from experienced scholars and those at an earlier stage in their research careers. We aim to be inclusive and fully recognise that women's history is not only lodged in the academy. All submissions are subject to the usual peer-review process. Articles should be 3000-8000 words in length. Contributors are requested to submit articles in final form, carefully following the style guidelines available at:

<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-today/>
Please email your submission, as a word attachment, to the editors at
editor@womenshistorynetwork.org



Women's History Network National Steering Committee and Other Contacts—2022

Chair—Sarah Richardson

Charity Rep—Hazel Perry

Social Media and Blog Editors— Kat Perry, Lyndsey Jenkins and Beth Price

Membership Secretary—Susan Cohen

Treasurer—Becki Hines

(Archive) Secretary—Urvi Khaitan

Conference support role—Hazel Perry

Website and publicity—Nancy Highcock

Prizes and Grants—Anna Muggeridge and Helen Antrobus

Journal—Kate Murphy, Laurel Foster, Helen Glew, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Kate Terkanian, Angela Platt

Newsletter Editor—Catia Rodrigues

Community Liaison Anne Logan and Helen Antrobus

Diversity Officer—Norena Shepherd

Schools Liaison—Tahaney Alghrani and Mary Feerick

Seminar Organisers Sarah Hellawell and Rachel Chua

Co-opted Members of the Committee

WHN Book Prize Panel Chair —Krista Cowan
bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org

WHN Journal Editor: Kate Murphy
editor@womenshistorynetwork.org

IFRWH rep—Gillian Murphy

To join the WHN just go to
womenshistorynetwork.org/join-us/ and follow the instructions.
Donations and Gift-Aid declarations can all be
accessed online as well

Why not join the Women's History Network?

The **Women's History Network** is a national association and charity for the promotion of women's history and the encouragement of women and men interested in women's history. Following our establishment in 1991 we have grown year by year and today we are a UK national charity with members including working historians, researchers, independent scholars, teachers, librarians, and many other individuals both within academia and beyond. Indeed, the network reaches out to welcome women and men from any background who share a passion for women's history. The WHN is controlled by its members who elect a national steering committee who manage our activities and business.

Conference

The annual WHN conference, which is held each September, is a highlight for most of our members. It is known for being a very friendly and welcoming event, providing an exciting forum where people from the UK and beyond can meet and share research and interests. Each year well known historians are invited as plenary speakers and bursaries are offered to enable postgraduate students or those on a low income to attend.

Prizes and Grants

The WHN offers annual community history and book prizes, grants for conferences and ECR and independent researcher fellowships.

Networking

Of course, talking to each other is essential to the work and culture of the Women's History Network. We run a members' email list and try to provide support for members or groups who organise local conferences or other events connected to women's history that bring people together.

Publication

WHN members receive three copies of our peer reviewed journal, *Women's History Today*, each year. The content of the journal is wide ranging from articles discussing research, sources and applications of women's history, to reviews of books, conferences, meetings and exhibitions, as well as information on calls for papers, prizes and competitions, and publication opportunities. The journal is delivered electronically in PDF form to all members via email, but members, can elect to receive a printed hardcopy of *Women's History* for an increased membership fee.

WHN membership

Annual Membership Rates September 2022 / with journal hardcopy / with journal overseas delivery

Community Group member	£15 / £25 / £35
Student or unwaged member	£15 / £25 / £35
Low income member (*under £20,000 pa)	£25 / £35 / £45
Standard member	£40 / £50 / £60
Life Membership (includes journal hardcopy)	£375
Retired Life Membership (includes journal hardcopy)	£195

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