

Introduction

Gender in and on the Air

One evening in July 1944, an Argentine radio program entitled *Hacia un futuro mejor* [Towards a better future] introduced its host, Eva Duarte, as “the voice of a woman of the people – that of the anonymous masses.”¹ In later years, the forceful, coarse voice of now First Lady Eva Duarte de Perón continued to present as the authentic voice of the people, and to beckon and mobilize via both radio speeches and public rallies. But “Evita” did not emerge in a vacuum. By the mid-1940s, there was a long history of women’s voices on the airwaves in the region. A decade earlier, Uruguayan-born journalist Silvia Guerrico was host of a popular prime-time radio interview and variety show and one of the most respected women in Buenos Aires broadcasting, until a 1934 on-air “amorous sermon” to Mexican-born Hollywood sex symbol Ramón Novarro had critics calling for government investigations and her banishment from the airwaves. The following year, across the river in Montevideo, Uruguay, the first “all-women’s” radio station in the Western Hemisphere went on the air. Within a few years, Radio Femenina became an important outlet for leading feminists and female intellectuals (including prominent anti-fascist activists), educating women and preparing them to exercise their newly won voting rights. During the war years, however, Radio Femenina was blacklisted and in 1944 had its broadcast license temporarily suspended, owing to the Nazi sympathies of one of the station’s (male) owners. These are but a few examples of the complex, engaging, and, until

¹ Otelio Borroni and Roberto Vacca. *La vida de Eva Perón: Tomo I: Testimonios para su historia*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1970, 74–75.

now, largely unexamined ways in which women and women’s voices spoke through the radio in the region of the Río de la Plata (Argentina and Uruguay) during the 1930s and 1940s. During this era, radio blurred the boundaries between public and private space and gave the female voice a heightened profile at a moment at which women were demanding new rights and challenging the relegation of the feminine to the private realm. Radio, in other words, amplified and diffused women’s claims to a place – and a voice – in the public sphere.

A woman’s voice on the radio; it is worth pausing for a moment to consider all that this implied in the 1930s and 1940s. Radio was the Internet of its day: it revolutionized the way people received information and perceived their place in the larger human community. Although not established at the same time or in the same way around the world, radio was a key plank of modernity in the twentieth century, and thus entered into inevitable dialogue with other planks, such as mass politics, the expansion of the state, and the so-called woman question.² In the 1920s and 1930s, radio was also a “new media” and, as Gitelman reminds us, “all new media emerge into and help to reconstruct publics and public life.”³ Radio’s range and easy traversal of traditional spatial boundaries – including those deeply gendered demarcations of public versus private space – helped to reformulate “imagined communities” and “intimate publics” in ways crucial to the development of twentieth-century politics.⁴ In this way, radio allows us to hear – figuratively and

² See, for example, Michele Hilmes’ discussion of “The Feminine Mass,” in *Radio Voices*, 152–154; Jason Loviglio “Vox Pop: Network Radio and the Voice of the People,” in Hilmes and Loviglio, eds. *Radio Reader*: 89–111; Bruce Lenthall, *Radio’s America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007. David Goodman, *Radio’s Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Outside of U.S. history, Andrea Matallana’s work on Argentine broadcasting, as well as Joelle Neulander’s study of French radio, follows a similar channel, charting the ways that radio both reflected and shaped notions of citizenship and the formation of mass politics in both countries. Andrea Matallana, “Locos por la radio”: *Una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923–1947*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2006; Joelle Neulander, *Programming National Identity: Radio in 1930s France*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010.

³ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006, 26.

⁴ For a discussion of radio and “imagined communities,” see Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

sometimes literally – the partial and contradictory ways in which women were incorporated into the public sphere as citizens and consumers during this era. With a focus on the leading radio cities of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Montevideo, Uruguay, this study asserts that the female radio voice introduced a new dissonance into the gendered soundscape, and that radio itself provided women with a new venue from which to speak and be heard at a time of significant renegotiation of gender roles.

Given the historical convergences, it is somewhat surprising that there are not more historical studies of women and radio. Almost everywhere, it seems, women were the majority of radio's listening audience, and radio came of age at a time when feminist movements and the "woman question" were at a high point. Women's place and gender relations generally were in flux, and much of this is reflected in radio programming. On its surface, so-called golden-age radio readily conformed to traditional gender roles and hierarchies. Able to reach women inside their homes and requiring aural but not visual attention, radio could be easily combined with household chores and thus serve as something of an antidote to the isolation and drudgery of domestic labor.⁵ Daytime radio schedules featured programming aimed at supporting women's traditional roles – childcare, cooking, and household tips – as well as a steady supply of melodrama. But daytime radio was often far more interesting and provocative than program guides – and our own preconceptions – may lead us to assume. Otherwise conservative radio fare could and did admit critiques of women's subordination around its edges, and Michele Hilmes has argued that daytime radio had the potential to forge what she calls "subaltern feminine counterpublics" by directly addressing an

2004, 21–24. See also Jason Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

⁵ Scholars differ as to whether radio served to reinscribe or erode women's confinement to the domestic sphere. Lacey argues that early German radio largely acted to reinforce the separate spheres of house and street, because it served as a way to cover the discontent and monotony of housework, and because so much early women's programming reinforced traditional gender roles and values. In her study of radio in Mexico, in contrast, Joy Hayes has argued that early radio acted to break down the separate spheres by breaking down the isolation of the home, in essence bringing women into the public sphere. Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920–1950*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000, 18. Donna Halper makes a similar argument in her study of early American radio, focusing especially on radio and the rural housewife. Donna L. Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001, 23–25.

audience who had been explicitly excluded from “mainstream, acceptable, masculine public society.”⁶ In delivering the public airwaves into the domestic sphere, radio invited women into the wider community. “In the right hands,” writes Susan Ware, “radio encouraged women to think of themselves as individuals with a stake in modern life and the public sphere.”⁷ The “right hands,” of course, refers to the specific conditions of both broadcasting and gender politics in a particular place and time and, by extension, to the specifics of radio’s message: the content of what was said and how that content may have been heard by listening audiences.

Kate Lacey’s groundbreaking study of women and radio in Germany notes that “the arrival of radio heralded the modern era of mass communication, while women’s enfranchisement confirmed the onset of mass politics in the twentieth century.”⁸ Although radio was “a public ‘male’ medium directed into a private ‘female’ sphere,” Lacey notes, it was also “a site on which gender relationships were open to contest and redefinition.”⁹ Evaluating what radio meant for women and gender relations, however, cannot be assessed in the singular or in the abstract. The story is different everywhere, and awaits more empirical research from around the world before we can proffer more general conclusions. As a study of women and broadcasting in two of South America’s most important early radio markets, this project helps gender the history of Latin American radio, and further internationalizes the history of women and radio beyond the United States and Western Europe.¹⁰ Moreover,

⁶ Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 159–164. Hilmes builds on Nancy Fraser’s concept, which defines subaltern counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.” See Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), 67.

⁷ Susan Ware, *It’s One O’Clock and Here Is Mary Margaret McBride*. New York: New York University Press, 2005, 13.

⁸ Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio and the Public Sphere 1923–1945*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 3. Andrea Matallana makes a similar observation about radio and mass politics when she notes that in Argentina “radio and the public became massified simultaneously.” Matallana, *Locos por la radio*, 19.

⁹ Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 10.

¹⁰ Although a comprehensive list of all relevant works in these fields is impractical, among the most important English-language studies of Latin American broadcasting includes Joy Hayes, *Radio Nation*; Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004; Robert Claxton, *From Parsifal to Perón: Early Radio in Argentina*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007; Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, *Broadcasting the Civil War in El Salvador: A*

in engaging more directly with radio as a sonic technology, this project poses larger questions about the sonic and aural dimensions of gender and modernity, and thus has implications far beyond radio history.

Gender and sound have both been explored as categories of historical analysis, the former more than the latter and often in isolation from one another. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, a first wave of women's histories sought to better document women's role in feminist and other social struggles and to explore the roots and evolution of patriarchy throughout the ages.¹¹ And in the 1980s, Joan Scott famously challenged historians to use gender more systematically and scientifically as a tool for understanding power and social change in history.¹² The historiographical impact of gender analysis is almost too obvious to mention; suffice to say that an attention to gender has altered the very questions historians ask of the past and the way we understand structures of power and historical change. Meanwhile, as gender was working its way into scholarly discourse, making us more attuned to both patriarchal assumptions and gender as a "primary signifier of power," other scholars were questioning the "visualist" paradigm of Western culture and challenging scholars to consider the ways sound structures and reflects our understanding of the world, past and present.¹³ Starting in the late 1960s, R. Murray Schafer laid the foundations for what would become the interdisciplinary field of Sound Studies with his concept of the soundscape, which he coined as a way to describe the "acoustic environment" of contemporary societies.¹⁴ Schafer was primarily interested in the impact of the modern urban industrial age on the quality and quantity of the sounds around us, and the impact of that soundscape on contemporary humans and

Memoir of Guerrilla Radio. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010; For historical scholarship on women and radio, see Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*; Donna Halper, *Invisible Stars*; Susan Ware, *It's One O'Clock*; Caroline Mitchell, ed. *Women and Radio: Airing Differences*. London: Routledge, 2001.

¹¹ For a basic historiographical overview of the first waves of women's and gender history, see, for example, Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005; Sueann Caulfield, "The History of Gender in the Historiography of Latin America." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 3–4, August – November 2001, 449–490.

¹² Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*. Revised ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 1–11.

¹³ See Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*. 2nd ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. See also Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1985, 3–6.

¹⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993, 7.

human societies. Modern media technology – and radio in particular – figures prominently in the modern soundscape, and in Schafer’s writings. Referring to radio as the “bird-song of modern life,” Schafer urges more serious scholarly study of the medium. “Radio programming needs to be analyzed in as much detail as an epic poem or musical composition, for in its themes and rhythms will be found the pulse of life.”¹⁵ As both a natural and built environment, the soundscape is also inherently historical, and over the years historians have adapted the concept of the soundscape and used it to inquire about the past through a sonic lens. Alain Corbin’s study of church bells in nineteenth-century rural France, Mark Smith’s study of regional soundscapes in the nineteenth-century United States, and Emily Thompson’s work on architectural acoustics in early twentieth-century urban America are leading examples of the way scholars have used sound as a category of historical analysis to great effect.¹⁶ Among other things, this body of work speaks to the sonic dimensions of modernity, as old soundscapes (whether bucolic or brutal) faded and soundscapes of “progress” (embraced and decried) became more pronounced. Here and elsewhere, we find examples of what Jonathan Sterne calls “sonic thinking” in historical practice, or the use of sound to “ask big questions about . . . cultural moments and the crises and problems of their time.”¹⁷ By bringing what Sterne calls “sonic thinking” to what we might call “gender thinking” about the past, we can hear the intersection of what Susan Besse termed “the modernization of patriarchy” and what Ana María Ochoa Gautier calls “aural modernity.”¹⁸

This study aims to bring these two scholarly threads – gender and sound – together in a more comprehensive way. We find the theoretical intersection of gender, sound, and history in the concept of the *gendered soundscape*. Helmi Järviluoma, Pirkko Moisala, and Anni Vilkkö and her colleagues introduce the term, asking readers to contemplate the way

¹⁵ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 93.

¹⁶ Alain Corbin *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998; Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001; Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002.

¹⁷ Jonathan Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2012, 3.

¹⁸ Susan Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914–1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996; Ana María Ochoa Gautier, “Social Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America.” In Sterne, ed. *The Sound Studies Reader*, 388–404.

gender – and gendered hierarchies – may be projected and/or heard in sound environments. We not only “learn gender through the total sensorium,” as they put it, gender is also represented, contested, and reinforced through the aural.¹⁹ Thinking about history in terms of gendered soundscapes can help us conceptualize sound and voice as a place where categories of “male” and “female” are constituted, and by extension the ways that power, inequality, and agency might be expressed via sound. This is really nothing more than becoming attentive (tuning in, as it were) to sound as a signifier of power. Paralleling Greg Goodale’s analysis of “the race of sound,” we are interested here in what we might term the gender of sound, and the ways that sound constructs, rather than simply reiterating, gender.²⁰ Many of us have been well-trained to look for gender; this study asks us to consider what it might mean to *listen* for it. Radio in a sense helps tune us in to the gendered soundscape, conducting us, in turn, to a wider appreciation of the sonic dimensions of gender and the gendered dimensions of sound. And as we learn to become more “ear-oriented” gender scholars, we come to perceive power, oppression, and agency in entirely new ways.

These introductory pages provide the reader with key theoretical and historical context for the chapters that follow. The first section – which discusses issues of voice, body, sound, and space and introduces the concepts of vocal gender and the gendered soundscape – lays out the basic theoretical framework within which the study is cast. In the next section, a historical overview of women’s voices and gendered soundscapes underscores the sonic dimensions of patriarchy, which in turn contextualizes the rise of radio and its potentially disruptive impact on soundscapes. The final section sets the stage regionally, providing a brief comparative historical overview of Uruguay and Argentina and the respective political, social, and regulatory environments that shaped radio and the place of women – and women’s voices – within these overlapping radio markets.

¹⁹ Helmi Järviluoma, Pirkko Moisala, and Anni Vilkkö. *Gender and Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage, 2003, 85.

²⁰ Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2011, 76–78. For more on race/ethnicity and sound, see, for example, Jennifer Stoeber-Ackerman, “Splicing the Color Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar *Nueva York*.” *Social Text*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 2010), 59–85; and Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante, “Indigenous Interference: Mapuche Use of Radio in Times of Acoustic Colonialism.” *Latin American Research Review*, 48: 5 (2013): 50–68.

Voices and Bodies in the Gendered Soundscape

One of the most immediately gendered of sound categories is the human voice, a rich, complex repository of past and present, space and place, language and song. Like other animals, humans are a noisy bunch, and the noises we make via the contraction and vibration of our vocal tract lie at the very essence of what makes us human. While universal, human vocalization has varied tremendously over time and place. We make assumptions and assignments based on various aspects (pitch, timbre, etc.) of a speaker's voice, especially when a voice is unaccompanied by any visual cues, as is the case with radio (or the telephone). Yet we may not always be consciously aware of the information we gather via sound and especially voice; we are more attuned it seems, to the assumptions we make based on visual data as opposed to those based on sonic data. We respond quickly and, according to Seth Horowitz, quite viscerally to sound. And of all the sounds, those that induce the strongest emotional appeal are "human vocalizations."²¹

Vocal gender is a crucial way in which identity is constructed, expressed, and perceived. We can and do hear gender in the human voice; most linguists seem to agree that, when listening to adult (non-elderly) voices speaking above a whisper "gender determination is usually a simple task."²² Although there are other ways in which male and female voices can and do differ, the most readily audible way we hear gender in the voice is via voice pitch or frequency – adult female voices tend to be higher-pitched than those of adult males. Anatomy plays an important role here – the size and thickness of vocal cords (or vocal folds) and the size of the vocal cavity are important determinants of voice pitch.²³

²¹ Seth S. Horowitz, *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2012, 127.

²² See, for example, D. Puts, S. Gaulin, and K. Verdolini, "Dominance and the Evolution of Sexual Dimorphism in Human Voice Pitch." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 27:4 (July 2006), 283–296; Michael Jessen, "Speaker Classification in Forensic Phonetics and Acoustics," in Christian Müller, ed. *Speaker Classification I: Fundamentals, Features and Methods*. Berlin: Springer, 2007, 180–204. The audible distinction between male and female voices that emerges most obviously with puberty begins to change with the onset of old age, when the distance between voices is reduced once again. For more on aging voices and the perception of aging in voices, see Joann M. Montepare, et al. "The Voice of Wisdom: New Insights on Social Impressions of Aging Voices." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 43:3 (June 2014): 241–259.

²³ For a concise, nontechnical overview of vocal gender, see especially David Graddol and Joan Swan, *Gender Voices*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. See also Ray D. Kent and Charles Read, *The Acoustic Analysis of Speech*. San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing

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This is related in some part to body size, but more directly to hormones associated with pubescence.²⁴ With the onset of puberty, the larynx is enlarged and vocal folds increase in both length and thickness, resulting in a decrease in frequency (Hz) of vocal fold vibration and thus a lowering of voice pitch. But whereas bodies classified as biologically female experience about a one-half octave average drop in voice pitch with puberty, biological males tend to experience a full octave average drop in pitch, with the result being that adult male voices tend to operate within a lower frequency range than female voices. We can hear this change, for example, in the stage of voice “breaking” we associate with pubescent males but not females.²⁵ Yet biology (body size, hormonal secretions, age, and other physiological factors) is in no way destiny when it comes to the human voice. Linguists distinguish between “anatomical voice quality features,” which in essence set the parameters of comfortable pitch range given a person’s vocal anatomy (the range outside of which is difficult to easily maintain one’s speaking voice), and “voice quality settings,” which refers to where someone places their voice within that range.²⁶ Bounded to some degree by these parameters, humans can and do place their voices in ways that are consistent with the performative aspects of gender, and voice pitch is both highly variable and subject to cultural/historical framing and self-fashioning. As evidence for the impact of history and culture on voice, scholars point to cross-cultural variability in vocal gender, a lack of consistent correlation between voice pitch and body size, and the fact that voice differences between males and females tend to precede puberty (i.e., boys’ voices tend to be lower than girls’ before there is any physiological basis for that difference).²⁷ Thus, like other aspects of gender and gender identity, with vocal gender we find a complex interaction between the physiological and the cultural/historical.²⁸

Group, 1992; Monique Biemans, *Gender Variation in Voice Quality*. Utrecht, The Netherlands: LOT, 2000.

²⁴ Graddol and Swan, *Gender Voices*, 13–17.

²⁵ This does not mean that adolescent female voices do not experience so-called voice mutation with puberty, however. See Kenneth Siple, *The Adolescent Female Voice: A Review of Literature*. Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). www.eric.ed.gov, 1995.

²⁶ Biemans, *Gender Variation in Voice Quality*, 21.

²⁷ Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice: How this Extraordinary Instrument Reveals Essential Clues About Who We Are*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2006, 153–171.

²⁸ Additional explorations of the complexities of gender, voice perception, and identity can be found in the literature on the so-called gay accent among gay men and studies of voice and gender identity for transgendered people. See, for example, Erez Levon, “Sexuality in

At this point it is necessary to consider the word “voice” and its various meanings. Reflecting perhaps a continued affinity for the “visualist paradigm” within much feminist scholarship, “women’s voice” (and related terms like “talking back”) tends to refer to writing or discourse, leaving those of us interested in vocal gender with something of a taxonomic quandary.²⁹ Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones concisely articulate the challenge for scholars interested in the sonic/acoustic dimensions of women’s voices:

Feminists have used the word “voice” to refer to a wide range of aspirations: cultural agency, political enfranchisement, sexual autonomy, and expressive freedom, all of which have been historically denied to women. In this context, “voice” has become a metaphor for textual authority. . . . This metaphor has become so pervasive, so intrinsic to feminist discourse that it makes us too easily forget (or repress) the concrete physical dimensions of the female voice upon which this metaphor was based.³⁰

As scholars, in other words, we are comfortable with this metaphorical “voice” but we have often neglected the voice in the physiological, sonic – and deeply gendered – sense of the term.³¹ Like Jacob Smith, I agree that we cannot usefully separate these dimensions of the voice, which “works as word and gesture simultaneously.”³² Here I ask readers to consider voice (and women’s voices in particular) as an organic whole – voice as word and gesture, signifier and song, medium and message. It is, after all, precisely this combination that makes human speech so powerful, and so distinctly human. As Mladen Dolar puts it, “[w]e are social beings by the voice and through the voice. . . . [V]oices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity.”³³

With the advent of sound media such as the phonograph, telephone, and radio in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the soundscape and the place of the human voice within that soundscape underwent

Context: Variation and the Sociolinguistic Perception of Identity.” *Language in Society* 36: 533–554; (2007); Adrienne B. Hancock, et al. “Voice Perceptions and Quality of Life for Transgender People.” *Journal of Voice*, 25:5 (September 2011): 553–558.

²⁹ See, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

³⁰ Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, eds. Introduction to *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 1.

³¹ See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, 122–124.

³² Jacob Smith, *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, 96.

³³ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2006, 14.