

Radio, reception and memory: Portuguese female audiences and housewife politics from the 1930's to the 1950's¹

José Ricardo Pinto Carvalheiro²

Abstract

The popularization of radio broadcasting in Portugal coincided with the starting decades of the New State dictatorship (1930-74). From the 1930's to the 1950's, there were considerable changes in the ways common people from a scarcely literate country could experience the world, but it was also a time of ideological supervision within a country under relative isolation. In this context, the specificity of women as radio audiences has to be placed into an atmosphere of traditionalism towards gender roles. How was, then, the reception of the new media in the home? Did radio reception set new challenges to patriarchy or did it reinforce traditional conceptions of women? The article draws on qualitative research with elder women from Lisbon, presenting data focusing on their memories of radio use in everyday contexts.

Keywords: Radio; Reception; Women; Portugal; Dictatorship

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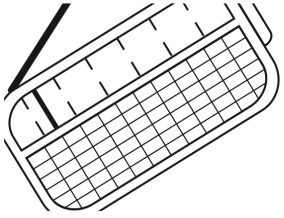
1. New State's regime and the women

Approaching early radio and its reception by Portuguese women requires a contextualisation of the country's dictatorial regime and its social framework. In Portugal there has been, previous to the 48-year dictatorship in the 20th century,³ a long hierarchical tradition of corporatism, deeply embedded in social institutions which can be characterized by a value system based on widespread acceptance of

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³ A military dictatorship, since 1926, and then the New State regime from 1930 until 1974.



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hierarchy, elitism, organicism and authority. “Stratification and differentiation not only exist but also are presumed to be right, necessary and not to be challenged” (WIARDA, 1979: p. 93).

Upon this tradition, Salazar’s dictatorship feared communism above all things but also disliked capitalism and consumerism as forms of a materialistic perversion that should be fought against (LUCENA, 1979). Standing against liberalism and individualism, a key idea of the regime was that each person had its own place. The regime aimed at maintaining a rigidly segmented and hierarchical social body whose inner boundaries should not be crossed.

Thus, differently from other European dictatorship regimes of the same period, such as the Italian fascism, Portuguese New State was a movement inspired in the past and committed to preserve the values and social structure of an agrarian society. The regime’s propaganda proposed an idyllic rural model. One of its motos was: *Deus, Pátria e Família* (God, Nation and Family). In 1930, half of the total labour force worked in agriculture; three quarters of the active population was male; the general illiteracy rate was 62%, and illiterate women made up to 70% of adult females; the birth rate was 29.6 per thousand inhabitants, almost the double of United Kingdom’s (16.3).

Among the corporatist traits there was the traditional patriarchal family. At this level, New State was a reaction against the previous period known as First Republic (1910-1926), which was also a patriarchal regime that denied incorporation of women in political citizenship, but allowed discussion in the urban public sphere by feminists and opened routes for female education. This first wave feminism was a modernist project committed to human self-fulfilment and enlightenment of women, looking for equality between sexes, trying to make its route within the liberal rhetoric of Republicanism and taking chance of the 19th century trend towards individual autonomy.



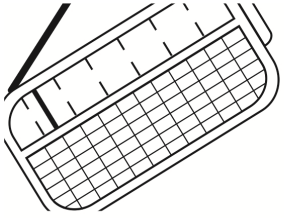
New State's anti-modernistic essence stood fiercely against these liberalistic and individualistic trends in what concerned to gender roles, both in the public sphere and in the private realm of family life.⁴ Salazar's corporatist ideas rejected the abstract concept of citizen, and conceived individuals as part of 'natural groups' that form society. The regime's ideology thus prescribed constrained roles for the woman in labour, in education, and especially defined her as an element of the family. For Salazar, women's work outside the household was corrosive for family unit, potentially releasing bonds between its members and eroding a whole conception of common life. Women's celebrated role was to act as social cement for the family unit.

This service as bonder of a collective unit implied a status of des-individualization, abdication of freedom and of control over their own destiny. A list of prohibitions for women included certain jobs, travelling abroad without husband's permission, and pleading for divorce if the husband's adultery didn't involve public scandal. Family was paramount over the individual, mainly if the individual was a woman.

Female 'nature' was used as argument for disqualification of professional careers, since maternity was said to be naturally the women's most aimed goal. Female work was then tolerated until marriage could offer women the chance to reach their supposed primal aspiration in life, which should be raising children and serving the family.

The rhetoric of woman's valorisation was used to place females into the household, to promote family as a corporation of unequal members, and to subject

⁴ The New State introduced, although selectively, political rights for Portuguese women: some women, in some situations, could vote and also be elected. This seemingly contradictory decision under a dictatorship did not contradict the regime's goal of defining a fixed role for women in society, and to circumscribe female action within a limited terrain. Political rights have to be understood in relation with other aspects, such as the place of female elites and the notion of feminine issues within politics.



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females to mechanisms of social control, an important part of it being sexual morals and surveillance of the body (FERREIRA, 2011, p. 256).

Nevertheless, there were many transgressions to the official morals and a heterogeneous country beyond the regime's propaganda. Popular and rural women mostly worked outside the household. There were also hidden ways of female power within households, and some working-class practices in urban areas were seen as immoral and contradicted the regime's aim of making people return to an imagined rural pureness and simplicity.

2. New State and popular media

The media's role along the 20th century in the West can be placed within the general context of a movement towards capitalist modernity and its tensional trends of regulation and emancipation (GARNHAM, 2000). But exceptionally, Portugal under the dictatorship of Salazar experienced a particular case of media development in Western Europe. The Portuguese authoritarian regime was anti-modernist and acting to slow down the capitalistic dynamics that pervaded the rest of Europe.

Most important books about New State and 'Salazarism' do not mention mass media as prominent weapons of the dictatorial regime. In fact, the main ideological and symbolic role in the 1930's and the 1940's is attributed to the educational policy and official organizations designed to indoctrinate and mobilize youngsters at school age – above all *Mocidade Portuguesa* (Portuguese Youth), which had a feminine branch (LÉONARD, 1996; PIMENTEL, 2011).

Salazar was aware of the importance of media, though. He stated that “politically there exists only what the public knows that exist”. In fact, New State's policy for media was based on two pillars: the propaganda, and the censorship. The first one was designed to offer a systematic representation of a peaceful and cohesive

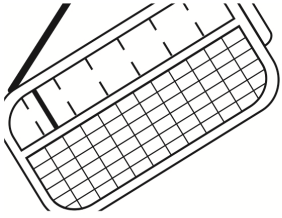


country; the second one, aimed at a de-politicization of Portuguese people (PIMENTEL, 2007).

The propaganda branch is best exemplified by the ‘politics of the spirit’ project, centralized by the National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN) created in 1933 under the leadership of António Ferro, an admirer of Mussolini and aesthetically a modernist. His aim was to educate the people within a strict ideological frame. The SPN was much broader than media oriented and involved great public exhibitions, an architecture style, artistic and cultural events. In this ideological enterprise to produce an integrative national culture anchored on historical past and an ethnographic design, media were just a part – but a fairly active one – in the mission to model people’s tastes and thoughts. Characteristic of this trend was the idea that, more or less subtly, the regime’s ideology should be present in every cultural or media manifestation (RIBEIRO, 2005).

Trying to target the people, the national public radio (*Emissora Nacional*) promoted the purchase of radio sets by families of low income in 1935, when it began its regular broadcasting. In 1940, the SPN came to direct *Emissora Nacional*, where Ferro developed his cultural program not willing to tolerate what he called “the mediocre needs of certain parts of the people” (in SANTOS, 2005, p. 266). Within the national public radio several orchestras were created, radio-theatre was launched and lighter but didactic programs were promoted, such as the live transmission ‘Evening for workers’ where producers mixed arts with music and amusing skits. There were also feminine talks, broadcasted regularly – more than once a week in average – in the 1930’s, and mainly used to give advice in terms of housekeeping, including how to recycle and save resources in cooking and clothing (RIBEIRO, 2005).

Nevertheless, other forces within the New State were not so concerned with an active educational policy, and aimed mainly to reproduce a traditional status quo and an ideology of conformism and obedience. Thus, through its censorship pillar, the regime tried specially to stop the circulation of unwelcome information and to prevent



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people to access broader perspectives of life and the world, not just in a strict political domain but in a general sense. In this mood, political, social and religious powers looked at female media audiences within a general fear of modern utilities and other 'dangers' of the time, presented mainly as coming from abroad under foreign influences (ABOIM, 2011).

Radio landscape was also encompassed in this conception of media as tools expected above all to entertain people into a frame of national and traditional taste. On one hand, the effectiveness of national propaganda was doubtful since in the mid-thirties the number of radio sets in Portugal was estimated to be of only one to 150 people (TORGAL, 2009).⁵ On the other hand, several stations, large and small, had emerged, and although the regime controlled their owners and contents, it was difficult to make active propaganda devices out of them.⁶

In spite of SPN's aspirations to shape respectable cultural habits in people, the general landscape of radio shifted along the 1930's and onwards from a previously predominant "old taste" based on amateur stations and the transmission of classical music to what became a more popular and "modern taste" based on national songs

⁵ For comparative terms among European totalitarian regimes, at the time there was one radio set for every seven people in Germany. At this level there was a parallelism between Portugal and Italy, both countries touched by a slow implementation of radio sets for reception among a vast part of the people characterized by poor living conditions (Richeri, 1980).

⁶ A couple of other radio stations were licensed in the 1930's, namely the commercially oriented *Rádio Clube Português* previously created by a regime's military officer in 1931, and also the catholic channel *Rádio Renascença*, starting in 1937. Along with the national public radio (operating regularly since 1935), these channels made the trio of large radio stations, each of them set over its own basis: political, religious and commercial. Besides these there were small stations in Lisbon, created by partnership of radio amateurs or by association within popular neighborhoods. As a way of political control, small stations could not produce their own news bulletins, they were not allowed to have commercial advertisements, and in 1939 they were forced to converge to a sole channel where they shared successive emissions (Santos, 2005).



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and fashionable music, targeting a broader and more diverse audience (SANTOS, 2005).

This shift into popular radio was supported by the New State ideological atmosphere, rather inclined to folk culture and local communities' entertainment – in contrast to the enlightenment ideal of the previous First Republic. It also was fuelled by the development of a music industry and the beginnings of a mass culture for which the radio was the first vehicle.

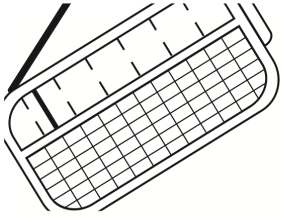
Small popular stations were decisive in designing new contents made of contests, humour, sports, children's plays, cinema, and notoriously the diffusion of *fado* and other national folk music. Singers, actors and sportsmen started to circulate through radio stations and became popular. The largest private commercial station, *Rádio Clube Português*, added a new stage in this sort of popular programs in 1952 by launching *Companheiros da Alegria* (Companions of Joy), a live transmission with music and entertainment that itinerated throughout the country. The voices and names of radio professionals became themselves notorious and popular.

The popularization of radio listening was therefore a slow process in Portugal. It was only throughout the 1940's that the audience enlarged considerably, mainly in urban areas. In the mid-fifties there was an estimated 130.000 radio sets in Lisbon (SILVA, 2001), which meant an average of one to 6 people.

In the 1950's, also the SPN (then renamed SNI – National Secretariat of Information, Popular Culture and Tourism) became practically a mere tool for censorship and repression, inserted in a deep strategy of anesthetizing Portuguese society (LÉONARD, 1996).

3. Women and reception: four types across the social spectrum

In spite of media policies and contents, it has been acquainted that audiences may have the capacity for creative practices of reception, active interpretation and



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unexpected ways of reasoning. Moreover, there is an array of possible uses and appropriations of communication technologies, which articulate with other social practices and relationships, inside domestic or public contexts. Our aim is to use biographical interviews in order to understand how radio was received and used at the starting decades of broadcasting in Portugal, within the historical context described above and the particular situation of women in a corporative patriarchal system.

Historical introduction of radio in everyday life was studied in other contexts by collecting biographical interviews (MOORES, 1988; JOHNSON, 1981; PODBER, 2007). In Portugal there are only a few references to home reception in the 1930's, drawing from newspapers articles (SANTOS, 2005).

It is known that biographic methods require cautions in verifying and interpreting data, but it in turn allows for what Portelli (2008) argued as the main achievement in oral history, which is to give access to the meaning of events for the ones who participated in them. When we deal with common people, deprived of other means to deliver their accounts of the past, there may be no other way to apprehend some actions. Biographic sources do not only speak to us about events, they also tell us what people intended to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now believe they did then (PORTELLI, 2008, p. 36).

The biographic approach allows us to situate the subject's life experiences in their sociocultural and intersubjective contexts, thus putting a light on how people negotiate their identities, interpret and engage with social norms. This integration of individuals within their relational context has special utility in studying gender (SUMMERFIELD, 2004). Another benefit of an oral history approach as presented by Summerfield (2004) is that it offers an effective way of intertwining memory and subjectivity, because it relates personal experience to historical social context and social positioning, allowing to take into account the influence of dominant public discourses in our subjects' making sense of the past.

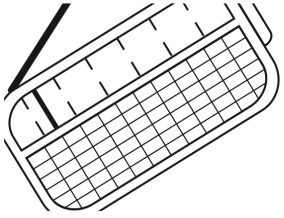


The empirical data exposed in this section is based on biographical interviews carried out with women born in the 1930's in Lisbon. Semi-structured interviews aimed at allowing informants to talk first about their biographic past according to broad stages of their life cycle. Specific focus on radio and other media was induced by the researcher only in a second interview.

In the analysis of oral records, the understanding of media use and reception is articulated with both biographical data in general and socio-cultural context. Particularly, we attempt to find interrelations and synchronicities between a set of dimensions such as lifestyles, social interactions, technology consumption, media uses, and reception meanings.

Another aim of this research is to relate female audiences to social class, trying to understand radio uses and reception across the class structure. Taking into account that throughout mid-20th century Portugal had scarce class mobility, we present here four biographies of markedly different class positions. Nevertheless, women interviewed were later touched by social changes that affected their positions in society, and they today speak from much closer socio-economic situations than when they were young, being themselves examples of a relative social equalization that reshaped the country in the last decades of the century.

Differently from most academic works, which develop “paradigmatic” analysis of autobiographic accounts and convert narrative data into classified categories and concepts, in this text we chose to present a few women’s life histories also under a narrative configuration (POLKINGHORNE, 2003). Narrative cognition has been sustained as an equally valid form of scientific knowledge when dealing with the uniqueness of human experiences. Thus, instead of an analysis of narratives, what we propose here is “a narrative analysis”, where “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot” (POLKINGHORNE, 2003, p. 12).



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3.1 Irene: a glimpse over modernity

Irene was born in the late 1930's, in a popular quarter of Lisbon. Her father was much absent because of alcoholic problems, and her mother was an illiterate woman living from trading vegetables and washing clothes in other people's homes. She had an elder sister and an elder brother, and they all lived in a small house without hot water or a fridge. There was a coal stove, but not much food apart from soup, milk, and bread with ham or cheese.

Her first encounter with a radio set happened she went visiting a better-off family that her mother worked for. "I thought people were inside the box" – it was an unsuspected technological reality, amazing and incongruent with her immediate experience at home. Her memory couples these first radio encounters with an also existing large fridge – "the first fridge I ever saw" – and the very pretty furniture. The lady of the house was "very kind and sometimes she offered me a soup, and it was such a good soup, all the vegetables squeezed, and not like my mother's which was very thick".

In the 1940's, for a poor girl from a popular quarter in Lisbon, radio was first of all a surprising machine, habiting in a world of modernity that she could only glimpse as a daughter of the servant. Here, the life-world context for radio entrance was one of technological innocence and sharp social boundaries.

After four years of school, Irene went learning to be a seamstress at a neighbour's. Around 12, her mother bought a sewing machine and she started earning some money making blouses to women in the neighbourhood. Later she started to work in other parts of the city.

In the streets, she used to watch clowns with a goat and a monkey. Her mother never let her go to balls or popular feasts. Thus, going to the mass on Sundays with her elder sister was a moment of freedom and joy for Irene.



When she was a teenager, radio sets became an existing technology in several neighbourhood homes. It provided everyone with radio sound, and particularly women, not in contexts of public listening such as clubs or coffee houses, but as another sort of collective listening, made of a web of points of reception from which the sound crossed the private spaces of small and very close houses in the quarter. Irene also listened to it; although she had no radio set at home, the sound came in from other houses enabling the whole neighbourhood with a shared listening experience.

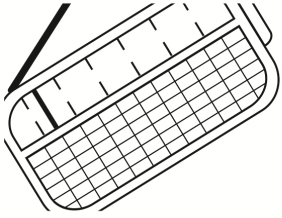
It was madness around the radio soap opera; people listened to it at half past two, and then everyone commented, if she was going to get married or not; we wanted to know the plot, and it was a bit confusing for me, how was it all there, I thought it was real. And when there were rink hockey tournaments abroad, we were all excited about it, and we won it all, it was a great joy.

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Besides radio, music was listened to in the streets, where blind men used to circulate singing and playing along with a partner who sold leaflets with the lyrics. “They sang it in the streets, and we listened and learnt all the songs”.

Irene was courted for years by a boy who she refused to engage with because of perceived social differences. He was the son of an army officer, and Irene now says: “He was too much for my condition; it would have had no future; a rich man marrying to a house servant is something that happens only in romances”. Meanwhile, what she came to enjoy the most was to dress by fashion and to go to the cinema with her sister.

In the mid 1950’s, a low-class girl with some but limited aspirations linked cinema to ideas of pleasure and a broader social life, associated theatre and reading with intellectual improvement and status, and radio was connected to everyday life in a popular quarter, interwoven to interaction with neighbours and in a context of porosity between private and collective spaces. Radio sound inserted in the collective as a neighbourhood flow inevitably shared. It fuelled common feelings and expressions



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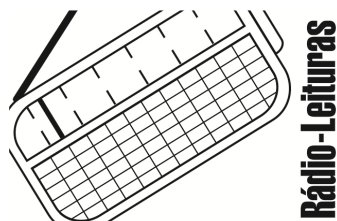
in ceremonial moments such as nationalist sports events and popular soap operas that turned up to be daily rituals of social comment at the threshold and in the streets.

Irene met her husband at 17 and married at 20. Their first meeting took place on a beach at the outskirts of Lisbon. “He came along with a portable radio – that was the time of popular radio soap operas. He enjoyed listening, or it could be that he wanted to impress the girls”.

Her husband was of not so modest condition. His father worked in an insurance company, and he opposed to the political regime – he subscribed to a newspaper and used to read it every day. He had his own maple in a privileged position in the living-room where he used to sit and listen to the radio. “He enjoyed listening, and sometimes he complained about it, he used to say something was not true, or that some people in the radio didn’t use the Portuguese language correctly, and he also enjoyed listening to football matches”. Irene’s mother-in-law, who worked in a hats workshop, also listened to the radio, as subsidiary to her husband’s listening. “She was raised differently from my mother, she could read and write, and she used to paint her fingernails...”

By the end of the 1950's, this contexts inaugurates what electronic media have further become to Irene: they came to be seen as modern and expensive apparatuses linked to a gradual but slow enhancement in domestic space, and also symbolizing a higher status, which is embodied in the figure of her father-in-law.

One notable element in Irene’s biographic narrative is the contrast between salient class-based differences, about which she is conscious and willing to cross it moderately, on the one hand, and on the other hand the gender relations that come out to be unquestionable and untouchable within each class location. Gender appears to be strongly structured inside the family, and it is within that sexed home environment that radio comes to be incorporated.



Radio as connection to the outside world and public life tended to be seen as men's tool and domain, and as a domestic apparatus it seemed to be placed under the control of the "family leader". This fitted the patriarchal corporative household and its prescribed rigid roles: public connections, authority, and income earning for men; home and child care, service provider, and emotional management for women.

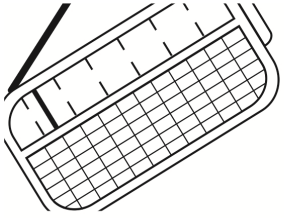
3.2 Clotilde: on the road to middle class consumption

Clotilde was the third daughter of a salesman and a housewife, born at the end of the 1930's in what was then a peripheral quarter in Lisbon. The flat was improved with current water, which didn't exist originally in the building. Clotilde's father died when she was 9, and the family income was provided by her elder sisters. Contrary to them and to almost all of her schoolmates, she went on studying after four years of elementary education, until she was 17. During Clotilde's adolescence, gas stove and fridge were brought into the home of her low-middle-class family.

Work and leisure at home are described as intertwined, and this is where radio comes up.

Generally we were all in the living-room and used to chat. At home, my mother took care of the housework and my elder sisters were the ones that had to help her. I used to sit at the living-room table and study. My father had bought a radio set, as a present for my mother when she had been ill, and I always listened to it while studying. I've always been very fond of music, so I used to put the radio set over the table and listen to it. It was the only entertainment we had.

As a student freed from doing housework, Clotilde was the one to lead radio use, the others following her listening when sharing the same space. The absence of a man at home since her father premature death opened the way for radio management by females, and gave her the chance for a prominent role. But it also made it difficult for Clotilde to go on studying for much time. At 17, she started working as secretary at



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a trading firm to reinforce the family budget. “It was a pity, because I always was keen on studying and I aspired to become a teacher.”

In spite of having a job in another part of the city, Clotilde's way of living was much confined to friendship with neighbours and to leisure within their quarter, namely going to the church in group (only girls) and organizing balls in each other's homes.

Clotilde mentions a popular soap-opera that she was keen on, but radio seemed to be mainly linked to music listening, and on the other hand music extended to group leisure.

I enjoyed very much listening to music. I used to listen to radio programs people called by phone and records were played on demand. And then pickups appeared. I had a crash on pick-ups. So, immediately after get my job and took my first wages, I thought of buying one, and I did it through hire purchase, I couldn't afford to pay it all at once. It was a kind of suitcase, very heavy and so it went from place to place, to play in balls.

Meanwhile there was the new local society, where there were balls that gathered all the people from the neighbourhood. The society was created by the time television was launched in Portugal (1957), and radio listening was something she never did there. The club had a bar, a ball room, a tennis-table room and a TV room with chairs in rows. “It was unthinkable for a girl to go out to the society without the company of her mother, or a grand-mother, or an aunt. She could not go in group with other girls either, each one had to go with an elder person. Boys had the freedom to go alone.”

Clotilde's biographic narrative and identity memories do not make any connections between professional and social aspirations of mobility during youth – which involved long term studies and promised more potential autonomy in a family frame – on one hand, and the media as a tool for cultivation or gathering information,



on the other hand. She always introduces radio in a discourse context of free time, distraction, entertainment.

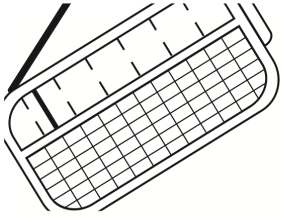
Her musical taste focused on light songs, instead of the vernacular *fado*. She mentions Portuguese popular singers from the 50's she used to listen to on the radio by referring to their physical type because she used to see photographs of them on illustrated magazines which at the time frequently displayed national and international artists from music, cinema and sports in their covers.

In this biography, broadcast media seemed not only not be connected to everyday life but also to a 'life as usual' way of living, an attitude towards being in the world with no exaltation or great projects, individual or collective. Radio, as television later on, was taken as provider of pleasantness among dull routine. If it means freedom or emancipation it is from work oppression, or articulated with youth aspirations for a space of its own.

This broadcasting role is part of changing patterns of social organization in work and leisure parallel to the urban reordering in Lisbon by the late 50's and 60's: growing distances between home and work, increasing women's labour, decreasing time availability for friendly relationships. It points to the existence of a primal point of articulation between an emergent urban low-middle class and the raising electronic mass media, mainly as forms of entertainment.

3.3 Judite: and there was a piano

Judite was born in Lisbon in the mid 1930's from a navy officer and a housewife who inherited a fortune. They lived in a three-floor building owned by the family in the centre of the city. In the 1930's they had an iron, a coal stove, an ice box, and a tank to keep water warm all day. One of the several servants of the household used to wake up early in the morning and polished the stove.



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Her mother had a piano degree, but she never looked for a job. Judite's mother played the piano in the living-room on Sundays for family leisure. Judite's father used to buy her mother song books with musical novelties in downtown music shops, "and then all the family gathered around the piano, my mother played and we all sang".

In an upper-class traditionalist family, new media technologies in the 1930's came out to be part of leisure reunions around music, articulated with habits already established and gradually transforming or replacing them. "We had a very nice gramophone too and my father played the records". In practice, a technology for playing records gave the male a prominent role, different from the bourgeois housewife playing music herself as a central leisure actor. The house male was the leader in adopting gradual innovations in technology. "Then my father ordered a piece of furniture with pickup and radio from England". All these musical apparatuses were set in the living-room, the site that simultaneously served the purpose of family gathering and of free-time expenditure.

Judite speaks insistently about family talk involving several generations.

One of my old aunts always had a saying about everything, and I and my sisters learnt a lot with that, the time spent with the elders. My aunts used to sing all that old folk songs, and I still taught them to my kids when we travelled to the countryside, because my husband didn't want music in the car, so we used to sing all the way.

In the 1940's and early 50's for Judite, and also her sisters and her mother, radio and the other media did not work as very relevant means of knowledge and experience of the world. "After the meals, we stayed at the table and my father used to tell us about wherever he had been with the navy". Farer realities, such as stories and references to places and events, were mediated by masculinity and brought inside domestic life by her father's voice and experience.

The use of radio was mostly within leisure domain, intertwining the listening of music with records, piano and singing, or connecting home to collective ceremonies



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such as national sports events. But radio and music also became a soundtrack to some housework for her mother.

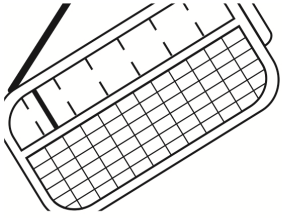
Later on we had a more modern radio set and also a small one on purpose to be in the sewing room. My mother sat there embroidering with a cousin and I remember them listening to rink-hockey matches. It was contagious when there were international hockey tournaments.

Female autonomic listening happened here in a later stage of radio appropriation, and it was done through a secondary apparatus in the home.

Gradually, radio seemed to pervade and transgress the traditional contexts of leisure reunion, family talk and cultural transmission. On Sundays, the small radio was taken to the dining-room, because Judite's father enjoyed very much a humour program. "It was a family plot, much about funny relations between son-in-law and mother-in-law, that holy woman, as he called her. We all had fun for 15 minutes time, it was very entertaining." Some radio programs happened to be more than family entertainment and became mass listening phenomena.

Later on there was a soap-opera, when I was 18. Everybody listened to it. We went for a summer season at the Navy, and there was a kind of cloister in the barracks, and after lunch all the soldiers gathered there to listen to the soap-opera. There was nobody who didn't listen to it at the time.

In Judite's perception, the idea of lightness and unserious character of media practices at the time seems to result in a contrast between serious public worlds and futile radio auditions: a navy officer involved in important political missions that never wanted to miss the Sunday comic theatre; or a crowd of soldiers that gathered in the barracks to listen to a soap-opera about a girl's love disgusts. Light entertainment provided by New State's radio stations appear to have, therefore, a subtle gender dimension, which was seen as natural for women's listening, but brought men out of its expected roles as audiences.



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3.4 Cristina: politics of unquestioned gender

Cristina was born in Oporto in the early 1930's, in a high-bourgeoisie family from the chemical business' sector. She moved to Lisbon with her mother when she was 7. Her biography is unusual for the time, because of her parents' separation and the gaining of autonomy by her mother, who came to lead the family business in Lisbon and live without a husband, thus escaping from a family patriarchal regime. Both by her mother heterodox social practices and an evolving political consciousness, Cristina's position may be seen as an upper class oppositionist.

"Leaving alone with my mother, I became a compulsory reader very early. We scarcely went to the cinema, and we had a radio set at home but we didn't use to listen to it, it was in the sitting-room." She doesn't remember ever listening to the radio at home. Radio audition used to happen at her uncle's, in the North of the country, where she used to spend holidays together with her two female cousins. Cristina's uncle had a small library at home, and there was an explicit divide there between the sections of books that the girls could read and the ones they were forbidden to touch. The radio set was on the living-room and there were no explicit restrictions for the cousins on radio listening, unless their father was at home and wanted to listen to his favourite programs or football matches.

One of my cousins was very talented for singing, but my uncle was a conservative man, and he wouldn't allow her to learn chant because it was not a proper career for a decent young lady. The career for a decent young lady was to get married. So, my cousins did high school, and then they had embroidering lessons, cooking, and learning to be good housewives, which was the expected role for girls after 18. But, as she was very fond of singing, she turned on the radio, when her father was not at home, and listened to songs we enjoyed very much.

Thus, radio was seen by patriarchal power as not threatening in content for social control and gender ideology. Although it could be used to break that power, introducing pleasure and imagination, it was not seen as really menacing the



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hierarchical structure of gendered roles. Nevertheless, it gave occasion to an alternative performing of gender, thus opening up for newly imagined practices.

In Cristina's adolescence, political consciousness arose through various episodes: an elder schoolmate arguing for God's non-existence; the expelling from high-school of a girl from a pro-liberal family; or a brilliant schoolmate hindered to go to university because she was the daughter of a tramway driver.

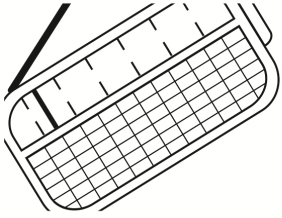
Quite early in her life, class divides and religious dogmas came out to be fields of doubt and dissension, but gender issues were out of her political frame. About the women's role in families and society Cristina didn't question anything at the time. Although her mother was different and she felt lucky for the freedom the situation gave her, everybody else fitted in the norm, and so gender roles were taken for granted and unquestionable.

A group of intellectual oppositionists, male and female, turned up to be Cristina's entourage throughout university period, while she did a degree in History, and onwards as she took an education job. Literature and philosophy became the main focus of their lives. Media such as popular radio were despised and useless for their purposes.

We knew there were radio soap-operas, and we joked a bit about it. We made fun, but I never listened to it. Neither the radio was ever used to get to know anything that we were interested in from abroad [French music, literature or philosophy]. Those things came through someone.

Cristina married in 1955, the same year her mother died. Her husband moved into her house and turned the sitting-room into an office and library.

He set there with his books, his objects, and the pickup. It was the place where we spent more time. It was also the room where we received friends, who came very often. And there was the radio too. But he didn't use the radio much, because he preferred to choose his own music. He listened to football matches once in a while, but he wasn't much keen on football. Whenever we were with fiends there



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were always very vivid discussions, so we didn't need the radio either.

In spite of Cristina's emancipated biography, the couple's intellectual project became gendered and male-centred, and the radio set, although perceived as unimportant, was placed at the core of this male-female split.

We made a couple where I think there wasn't distinction of status. But he had a project to be a writer that I respected very much, and I thought he shouldn't be occupied with other tasks. So I prevented the kids to disturb him. But he used to call me all the time to discuss, there was no separation such as the woman staying in the kitchen. Apart from the time he had for intellectual creation we were at the same level in every other aspects of life.

Conclusion

Regarding the New State ideology and values, broadcasting could only cause ambivalent feelings for the regime. Radio was welcomed as a technology of domesticity, where it should play a role of bonding, allied to the women provision of a cosy cohesive atmosphere. It was also welcomed if functioning for political propaganda and inculcation of cultural norms for previously unreachable vast parts of the population. But it was looked as dangerous if creating collective audiences through which invisible links could be forged outside political and cultural control. And it was mostly feared as a channel for modernity, undesired transmitter of different thoughts, morals, lifestyles, fashions and aesthetics.

The collected biographies and their data about media uses reveal ways of dealing with radio that differ according to social class, but generally they suggest a priority to male use within the domestic space, a space already structured by gender lines. Radio was firstly adopted by entering in the common areas of the house, and these areas were the ones dominated by male presence.



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These biographic interviews also point to the importance of radio as a technology, an object of consumption that incorporated aspirations, statuses and social meanings, and that was placed within the ecology of home apparatuses. These technologies were bought by men, but with a sense of belonging to a family collective. As home apparatus they seemed to be appropriated by females not by being a nice piece of furniture in the first time, but rather when they later became portable and turned up to be more easily articulated with housework, then being a secondary radio set not listened to in the common parts of the house but rather in the kitchen or in the sewing room.

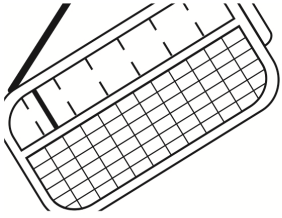
Interviews point to notable class divides on the axis public space-domestic consumption, with radio used as a private family practice in middle and upper classes, but functioning in collective or permeable spaces in popular contexts.

While there were connections between aspirations of enlightenment and some other media such as the press, radio broadcasting in the 1940's and 50's New State context seems not to be associated by audiences with emancipation or liberty from ignorance. The idea of freedom rather appears linked to temporary liberation from life concerns, connected to chances to relax, to be distracted and amused.

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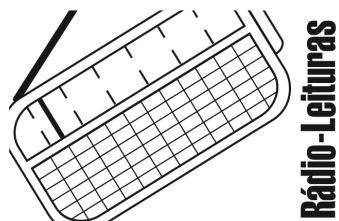
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