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Helena Sangirardi and women's education in Brazil (1940–1970): a biography of the author based on her works *

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Abstract: We aim to present a biography of Helena Sangirardi (1915–1989), a woman who educated other women through her prescriptive writings, published in printed media between 1940 and 1970. Grounded in Cultural History, the biographical approach focuses on the relationship between the author and her printed works, seeking to explain her perspective on the ideal woman, which influenced generations of women and young girls. Despite the social changes during the analyzed period, Helena's discourse emphasized women's roles as wives and housewives. We conclude that elucidating Helena Sangirardi's life trajectory at the intersection of her personal experiences and historical context may contribute to broadening the history of women's education in Brazil.

Keywords: history of education; biography; women.

1 Introduction

Helena Bechuath Sangirardi, known as Helena Sangirardi, was born on April 12, 1915, in Ribeirão Preto, in the countryside of São Paulo. Her single name was Helena Bechuath. She began working on the radio, the main communication means at the time. In 1940, when she was 19 years old, she married Ângelo Bourroul Sangirardi Júnior, adopting his surname¹, with which she gained national recognition. Both of them worked at Rádio Bandeirante, but met at Rádio Difusora. After three months of dating, they married and started to work together, as told in an interview for Revista do Rádio (1949). Helena had Silvia Helena when she was 32 years old, and, two years later, Maria Lúcia² was born.

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¹ In research at FamilySearch (2024), we could not find information about the family origin of Helena Sangirardi or her husband.

² In November 1950, Helena Sangirardi answers in this way the question of a reader about her children: "Answering your question: Silvia Helena, blonde, with 4 years and 3 months, and Maria Lúcia (Malu), brunette, with 2 years and seven months" (O Cruzeiro, Lar Doce Lar, 1950, 25 Nov. 1950, p. 128).



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During the 1940s and 1970s, Helena Sangirardi worked in several communication areas; she was a radio announcer, writer of a magazine section, television host, and book author, always targeting women as her audience. She talked with young women, wives, mothers, and housewives, giving advice, tips, and behavioral prescriptions. Among her publications were the columns she wrote weekly at the magazine *O Cruzeiro*³, since 1939; the book *A Alegria de Cozinhar* (1948?), with several reeditions; and the *Coleção Feminina* (1968), with six volumes.

According to the newspaper *Lampião da Esquina*, her card of *Associação Brasileira de Imprensa* (ABI- Brazilian Press Association) dates back to 1945, in the journalist category (Bittencourt, 1979). This journal cites the author's modesty when saying that "I never could be brilliant when writing, only giving interviews" [...], despite having "[...] 11 published books about cooking and women's issues" (Bittencourt, 1979, p. 5). This statement can explain why Helena started her successful career in radio, alongside television programs, as she considered herself brilliant when giving interviews, indicating her greater confidence in oral communication and impromptu situations.

Committed to her work and recognized as a "producer of women programs" in the radio, television, and printed press, Helena Sangirardi recurrently appeared as a topic in the *Revista do Rádio*, giving interviews, appearing as clues in crosswords or guessing games about famous artists, in the section about television programs, or the gossip pages. In 1958, the *Revista do Rádio* announced that "Helena Sangirardi was very unwell [...] but [...] fortunately has recovered." (*Revista do Rádio*, 1958a, p. 18). Three editions later, the same magazine said that "Helena Sangirardi, who was ill, resumed her activities in the radio and TV" (*Revista do Rádio*, 1958b, p. 61). Helena Sangirardi died on December 7, 1989, in Rio de Janeiro when she was 74 years old.

Answering the call of the dossier "Biographies of Women in the History of Brazilian Education," in this article, we aim to present a biography of Helena Sangirardi (1915-1989), having her writings as the main source (published as books and weekly columns in periodicals, between the 1940s and 1970s). Her trajectory was not directly connected to the school space, but her publications influenced generations of women and girls, aiming to shape the ideal woman. Helena became known in Brazil as a

³ The magazine *O Cruzeiro* started on November 10, 1928. It peaked between the 1940s and 1950s, reaching 700,000 copies and leading the Brazilian editorial market.

"specialist in the domestic economy, and women issues in general" (Prefácio [...], 195?).

We propose a historical biography of Helena Sangirardi as a participant and protagonist in the history of women's education in Brazil, questioning her influence over the female audience during her career. Our hypothesis is that, through her printed publication, Helena Sangirardi contributed to educating middle-class Brazilian women in several aspects, carefully addressing the social expectations regarding the roles attributed to women.

A deeper analysis of the works published by Helena Sangirardi, her books and columns at *O Cruzeiro*, show that her content repeats itself; they are compilations, rewritings, and synthesis, often assumed, while others, not so much. The objective here is to show the ideas of Helena Sangirardi about the ideal women of her time through her prescriptions in publications of the column *Da Mulher para a Mulher* (1944-1946) [From Women to women], at the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, and the book *A Alegria de Cozinhar* [The Joy of cooking]. Thus, we aim to produce a biography of Helena Sangirardi based on her texts, understanding her way of thinking within the context in which she lived. Such a proposal will allow us to show, through a character, a perspective of the society at the time, as Le Goff proposes (2001 *apud* Zimmermann; Medeiros, 2004, p. 31) when stating that "[...] when I make a biography, I think I should, through a character, reach an explanation of the society of that time".

Grounded in Cultural History, we seek to present Helena Sangirardi's individual history, emphasizing her professional work in the inseparable relation with her social context. To do so, besides understanding the expansion context of radio and the printed press as informative and formative means and the publication of books targeting the female audience, we used the *Estatuto da Família as a source*⁴ [Family Statute], published during the Vargas Era, to dialogue with said period.

This research shed light on a woman committed to educating other women between the 1940s and 1970s in Brazil. The article is divided into three parts: "Among radio, magazine, television, and books: creating a sociability network," in which we present Helena's trajectory and work; "Helena Sangirardi in 'Da mulher para a mulher',"

⁴ The *Estatuto da Família* was a Decree-Law created by Ministry Capanema, signed on September 7, 1939, but was not promulgated due to the strong criticisms made by Francisco Campos and Osvaldo Aranha.

which aimed to show the prescriptions for and about marriage; and “Helena Sangirardi and *A Alegria de Cozinhar*,” which illustrated women’s care for the domestic environment.

2 Among radio, magazine, television, and books: creating a sociability network

Helena Sangirardi stood out in the Brazilian communication field as one of the first women to occupy a prominent space and be recognized in the national media. As Betti (2021) observes, women have participated in the development of Brazilian radio since the first broadcast channels. In this subsection, we present Helena Sangirardi's professional trajectory, which began in the radio and overtook printed materials and television from 1956 onward.

Between 1939 and 1955, Helena Sangirardi presented the programa *Consultório Sentimental* [Sentimental Office] at *Rádio Nacional do Rio de Janeiro*, offering guidance and advice to women all over the country about romantic relationships. In the 1940s, she also worked at Rádio Tupi. Helena's work was based on her reputation as a sentimental adviser and an excellent cook. The preface of *A Alegria de Cozinhar* affirms that “[...] in the radio of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro [...] Helena [...] made history with her extremely popular program ‘Bazar Feminino’, which became the standard of the genre, in our ‘broadcasting’”, and that, at the time, her program was “broadcasted by Rádio Nacional” (Prefácio [...], 195?).

Revista do Rádio presents Helena Sangirardi’s work in radio programs in different Brazilian states. In an interview, Helena affirms that “[...] in the break of the programs in Nacional, and Bandeirante, in São Paulo where I have to go every month, and at Rádio Jornal de Pernambuco, I write Childhood Psychology, a Treat of Good Manners and a Domestic Encyclopedia.” (Revista do Rádio, 1949, p. 50). The magazine also mentions that “Helena Sangirardi was one of the great attractions of *Rádio Cultura da Bahia*. Her presentation at the microphone was ‘the nicest’ and pleased a lot .” (Revista do Rádio, 1955, p. 18).

In 1939, Sangirardi began signing as the person responsible for the column *Lar Doce Lar* [Home Sweet Home] in the illustrated weekly magazine *O Cruzeiro*. Between 1944 and 1946, she also signed, substituting for Maria Teresa, the section *Da Mulher para a Mulher*. The column *Lar Doce Lar* had the *slogan* “The recipe to marital

happiness can be simply...cooking.” (Sangirardi, 1944o, p. 98). As part of this column, a section was included since 1944, in which Helena presented *Pratos que todos repetem* [Dishes everyone repeats] with “Delicious recipes, not expensive, and easy to prepare [...]” (Sangirardi, 1944o, p. 77), with culinary tips in times of war, indicated for each time of the year. Her publications in this magazine included a *Pequena enciclopédia doméstica* [Small domestic encyclopedia], with tips about household care and chores, for instance, “when boiling milk, grease the edges of the pan with a bit of butter so that it does not overflow.” (Sangirardi, 1944p, p. 80).

“The first book of Helena Sangirardi”, as the editors affirm was *A alegria de cozinhar* (Prefácio [...], 195?), released by Livraria Martins Editora, possibly in 1948, a work that, according to Marques (2014), sold more than 250,000 copies. The book was compiled from a series of recipes that Sangirardi published weekly at *Pratos que todos repetem* in the magazine *O Cruzeiro*. Besides publishing culinary recipes in the magazine, she also received contributions from her readers, showing the use of dialogue through correspondence as a characteristic of her columns. This exchange enabled a greater approximation between the columnist and her audience, as shown in the answers below: “Thank you for the recipes [...] I've tried both, and they were delicious.” (Sangirardi, 1944q, p. 145). In the preface of *A Alegria de Cozinhar* (195?), the editors highlight the originality of the work, a result of the author's effort to collect suggestions from her readers and having them as a target audience:

Among the thousands and thousands of letters received, she had the opportunity to implement a proper “survey” among young women and ladies from all social classes – feeling their domestic problems, listening to their aspirations to perceive what might interest them. Thus, “*A Alegria de Cozinhar*” was born (Prefácio [...], 195?).

In July 1948, Sangirardi answered a reader who purchased her book through the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, affirming that “Her request was noted and the book will be sent by mail, as soon as it is ready.” (Sangirardi, 1948, p. 145). That is, on this date, *A Alegria de Cozinhar* was still not released but could have been released months later. In an interview with *Revista do Rádio*, in 1949, Helena mentioned the book as published⁵.

⁵ We cannot precise the first edition date of Helena Sangirardi's *A Alegria de Cozinhar*, but the evidence leads us to define 1948 as the date of the first edition. *Culinária de Papel*, Gomes, and Barbosa (2004,

The edition of *A Alegria de Cozinhar* that we used in this article has evidence of the publication data in the 1950s⁶. We also found the work *Nova Alegria de Cozinhar* [New Joy of Cooking], in three volumes, published by Samambaia, with no data, and the edition *Nova Alegria de Cozinhar*, in a single volume, published by Bloch, with the dates of 1981 and 1988⁷. These results show the longevity of *A Alegria de Cozinhar*, from 1948? to 1988, more than 40 years in the editorial market.

Her second work was *Coleção Feminina*, divided into six volumes published by Samambaia in 1968. The six volumes of the *Coleção Feminina* are: v. 1: Drinks and finger food; v. 2: Culinary – savory food; v. 3: Culinary – sweets; v. 4: Life in society and at home; v. 5: Beauty and Health; v. 6: Decoration and general advice⁸. It is vastly illustrated with photos – differently from previous ones, with not many images and colors –, however, much of the content is a compilation of other publications. According to Tomé (2013), *Coleção Feminina* is among the women's instruction manuals used as didactic material in the subjects of Normal School .

Regarding her television work, in 1956, Helena Sangirardi presented a weekly program specialized in culinary recipes on TV-Paulista: "Help yourself to good dishes" (Revista do Rádio, 1956a, p. 14). In 1957, she interviewed Ibrahim Sued during her work at TV-Rio (Revista do Rádio, 1957, p. 52). This year, she presented the program *Alegria de Cozinhar*, broadcast by Canal 5. In 1963, her program *Alegria de Cozinhar* was presented every Saturday, from 11h05 to 11h30, at channel 13 of TV Guanabara, as announced in the television scheduled in several numbers of Revista do Rádio. In a section entitled "10 years ago", the Revista do Rádio affirmed that, 10 years before, i.e., 1954, "Helena Sangirardi signed a contract with TV-Record, with the monthly salary of 50,000 cruzeiros." (Revista do Rádio, 1964, p. 32). In several editions from 1970, the Revista do Rádio announced a television program with Helena Sangirardi

p. 12) affirm that the work is from 1948, which is also stated by Pilla (2020) in *Ensinos de Rosa Maria em A Arte de Comer*.

⁶ In 1956, "Helena Sangirardi signed a contract for one more edition of her book *A Alegria de Cozinhar*" (Revista do Rádio, 1956c, p. 45).

⁷ When searching Google Shopping by "Helena Sangirardi book," we found 19 occurrences for the author's name, with prices varying from 10 to 800 reais. Available at: <https://shopping.google.com.br/?pli=1>. Accessed: Nov. 1, 2024.

⁸ We hypothesize that *Nova Alegria de Cozinhar*, published in three volumes, was incorporated as the first three volumes of *Coleção Feminina*, produced by the same publisher and with the same printing material characteristics.

on Thursdays, from 7:30 pm to 8 pm, at TV Guanabara, channel 13. From 1970 onwards, she started collaborating with Hebe Camargo in television, co-hosting the program *Show de Hebe Camargo*, produced by TV-Rio in partnership with TV Record. Between 1972 and 1977, she had a program with her name: *O Programa Helena Sangirardi*.

Her trajectory created a meaningful sociability network, encompassing, in conformity with Sirinelli (2003), that participation in a sociability network is a voluntary gesture, denoted by affinities, not restricted to purely rational actions and also by a political dimension, in a broader sense. Seeking signs about Helena Sangirardi's sociability network – beyond those evidenced by *Revista do Rádio*, between the 1940s to 1970s, when Helena appeared in wedding parties, dinners, trips, and funerals with famous people from the television and radio – we find evidence that she circulated among famous people in Brazilian cultural and intellectual scene, having contact with renowned authors, such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jorge Amado, and Vinicius de Moraes.

Vinicius de Moraes wrote a poem dedicated to the “ friend Helena Sangirardi,” entitled “*Feijoada à minha moda*” [Feijoada my way], referring to her fame as an exemplary cook. This recognition was due to the success of the section “Pratos que todos repetem”, published in the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, and the book *A Alegria de Cozinhar*, which had several reeditions. As Gilda Santos (2014, p. 200) affirms, when analyzing the poem, we can see the “unbeatable duo” between “women and food.”

Amiga Helena Sangirardi
Conforme um dia eu prometi
Onde, confesso que esqueci
E embora - perdoe - tão tarde

(Melhor do que nunca!) este poeta
Segundo manda a boa ética
Envia-lhe a receita (poética)
De sua feijoada completa.
[...] (Moraes, 1962).⁹

Jorge Amado, “a great literary name” often mentioned at *O Cruzeiro* as Accioly Netto (1998) affirmed, autographed the book *Tieta do Agreste* (1977) to her with the

⁹ My friend Helena Sangirardi / As promised one day/ Which, I confess, I forgot/ And though – sorry – so late/(Better than ever!) this poet/Following the good ethics/Send us a (poetic) recipe/Of your complete *feijoada*.

following words: "To Helena Sangirardi, with a hug from your old friend, Jorge. 1977 – SP" (Amado, 1977). Carlos Drummond de Andrade, another well-known name in the Brazilian literature, also autographed the book *A Paixão Medida* (1980), mentioning her national fame in the kitchen: "To the dear Helena Sangirardi, who makes delicious things from so many Brazilian palates with her wonderful recipes, a hug from Carlos Drummond. Rio, 05. XI. 81" (Andrade, 1981).

The poem and the dedications provide evidence of Helena's socialization in the Brazilian intellectual circuit in that context, be it due to affection, political relations, or both. The evidence presented shows that these authors knew and recognized Helena's fame, making "delicious things from so many Brazilian palates," with her professional trajectory acting in radio and television broadcasters, besides the publications in books and magazines.

3 Helena Sangirardi in "*Da mulher para a Mulher*"

Having the editions of the column "*Da Mulher para a Mulher*", published between 1944 and 1946, as sources, we presented Helena Sangirardi's thoughts around the practices and behaviours that women should incorporate to reach and keep a marital relationship¹⁰, and, as it seems, in harmony with the Decree-Law *Estatuto da Família* [Family Statute], from 1939, and the Decree-Law n. 3.200, from 1941, about family organization and protection. The *Estatuto da Família*, proposed by Gustavo Capanema, affirmed in article 13 that [...] "to women it would be given an education that will make them fond of marriage, wishing for motherhood, competent when raising children, and able to manage the house." (*Estatuto da Família apud Schwartzman, 1980, p. 72*).

In the column *Da Mulher para a Mulher*, Helena Sangirardi gave advice and criticisms, and answered countless letters from women – from different parts of the country – who had problems in their romantic relationships. Apparently, the column's main objective was to show that women [...] needed tolerance and understanding [...] (Sangirardi, 1944a, p. 78). Thus, Helena gave advice and answered in a [...] spontaneous and sincere [...] way with [...] frankness and loyalty [...] (Sangirardi,

¹⁰ At *O Cruzeiro*, Helena Sangirardi signed 125 numbers of the column "*Da Mulher para a Mulher*" between 1944 and 1946, giving advice and suggestions (March 4, 1944 to December 7, 1946).

1944g, p. 77) her readers, aiming to help them adjust and “readjust life in the sentimental field” (Sangirardi, 1944d, p. 68).

Years later, in an interview at Revista do Rádio, the reporter asked Helena: “Why do you think so many men like to listen and not advise their wives not to listen to your program?”. She answered: “I think is the fact that, indirectly, I defend them through the advice given to women. The human felling of the program is to appease and never to separate couples” (Revista do Rádio, 1956b, p. 17). This answer is a compass to understand Helena's prescription to women regarding marital relationships. Perhaps there lies an explanation for her lasting success: men's support for her programs because her precepts were based on the need for women to understand men, not the other way around. As we can see in her recommendations below, Helena reinforced the importance of women's abilities to seduce and keep their husbands.

In the column *Da Mulher para a Mulher*, Helena developed a sequence of 33 editions about the “lack of luck in love”, highlighting the mistakes committed by young women that hinder their chances in marriage. Therefore, it is a collection of guidelines to help in what she describes as “[...] the golden dream of almost all normal women: having a true – home, sweet home...” (Sangirardi, 1945c, p. 73).

Helena was emphatic in her advice, as in the statement below about virginity, making explicit criticisms of certain behaviors, mainly in texts about the “lack of luck in love.” She questions:

Certain girls so easily enter their boyfriends' automobiles for long rides and – what is worse! – unaccompanied. And then, when the boys kiss them and let them have other liberties, they write us in tears and still have the nerve to complain about their Lack of Luck in Love...My friend [...] open those little eyes of yours [...] do you think you will get this boy to propose to you by taking rides on his automobile? [...] (Sangirardi, 1946d, p. 76).

As Mary Del Priore (2005, p. 283) stated, “[...] the car became an option for the hotels, where a couple could only enter by showing a marriage certificate.” There were countless pieces of advice from Helena targeting the young women around the care to keep their virginity and, therefore, their dignity as a way to guarantee marriage because women's honor, according to her, was associated with virginity. Sexual relations before marriage were severely recriminated.

Consonant to the bourgeois values preached by a socioeconomic elite, Helena incentivized virginity, as women should have sex with the sole purpose of reproduction.

As Eva Gavron (2002, p. 115) affirmed when researching "seductions and deflowerings" between 1930 and 1940, "[...] the woman was like a flower that, if not cared, could be deflowered and after losing her highest treasure, her hymen, she would be left to uselessness."

Helena emphasized that, to keep her demure, "[...] women should not make themselves too easy for the men". The young lady should keep her "[...] dignity above any feeling of piety.", and not be persuaded by her fiancé. During engagement, it would be essential to "make herself be respected as a bride to reach the wedding with her head up high and a happy heart" (Sangirardi, 1944h, p. 100). As an incentive, she said: "[...] never regret being pure, serious, and good [...]" (Sangirardi, 1945b, p. 84). "You need to be careful when it comes to certain liberties to be given to the boyfriend or fiancé" (Sangirardi, 1945b, p. 88), sentenced, thus, "men make many promises until they accomplish their intentions" (Sangirardi, 1944l, p. 73).

These excerpts portray the behavior expected between men and women during the engagement period. To Helena, answering the social expectations of her time, it was normal for young men to try to persuade their fiancées to have sexual relations before marriage. Hence, women had the responsibility to completely reject this possibility as the only way to guarantee their dignity. Despite the duty of being emphatic in her negative, the woman's attitude in the relationship should be a passive one, expecting the men's initiative: "You, acting as you are doing so far, is only in your role as a woman: to expect, to let the initiatives to men" (Sangirardi, 1946e, p. 68).

Despite the friendly tone when answering the questions, saying things like "[...] lovingly hug this friend of yours [...]" (Sangirardi, 1944b, p. 80), "[...] remember that I am your close friend [...]" (Sangirardi, 1944n, p. 84) and "[...] do enjoy your true friend" (Sangirardi, 1944m, p. 80), Helena recommends prudence and caution regarding the friendship among women because "[...] the number of loyal men in their friendships [...]", according to Sangirardi, "[...] is higher than the number of women" (Sangirardi, 1945a, p. 68). In this sense, she advised "never" to "[...] listen to friends' comments, also not flaunt your happiness [...]" (Sangirardi, 1944a, p. 78), as well as "[...] not show too much will to get married and not open yourself up about his with your friends." (Sangirardi, 1944e, p. 72) She also affirmed that:

The habit of flaunting to her friends that certain women have sometimes complicates the relationship... If you, my dear reader, have pretty friends, more seductive and interesting than you, use your cunning... Avoid appearing with them in front of your boyfriend, before being absolutely sure that you are loved by him (Sangirardi, 1946b, p. 72).

To Helena, friendship among women should always be treated with mistrust, except for her friendship with her readers and advisees, which could be considered true. Based on this relationship of trust and friendship, Helena prescribed behaviors for the young ladies to find and win a "prince charming", accomplishing "the Golden dream of having a home sweet home".

Young ladies intending to marry should behave with demure and prudence, always hiding their true selves when necessary and giving space for the expressions of their future husbands: "You should know you will please your boyfriend much more if you talk less about you and listen more to him talk about himself. Always show that you are interested in his problems, regardless of how boring they might seem to you" (Sangirardi, 1944f, p. 76), teaches Helena. According to her, "[...] an attitude of modesty and reservation also satisfies the natural vanity [...]" of men, a "[...] vanity that the enamored and intelligent woman knows how to cultivate, attentively listening to him, discussing in moderation and, sometimes, knowing how to lose a discussion." (Sangirardi, 1944k, p. 77).

Following Helena's prescription, woman should "[...] seek to value [...] [men's] qualities, seeking to forget their flaws..." (Sangirardi, 1944j, p. 74). These young ladies should always be in good humor to keep men's interest; after all, "Bad humor decreases this halo of enchantment that should surround every girlfriend or bride.". Thus, Helena suggested "Try to tame yourself [because] a ill-humored young woman is always an unpleasant company." (Sangirardi, 1944i, p. 73). The need to present herself as understanding and good-humored was an attitude expected of a girlfriend or bride, as well as of a married woman.

To guarantee the relationship, the woman needed to know how to dissimulate her grievances, always presenting herself as understanding; "Try to tame a bit your temperament to be happy [...]" she affirmed (Sangirardi, 1944c. p. 44). Helena emphasized that her reader should sacrifice "[...] a bit your little wishes of a spoilt lady [because this was] the cause of conflicts" (Sangirardi, 1944c. p. 44) at home. That is, it was up to the woman to keep her self-control to avoid "greater anger" and to

understand “such a good husband” (Sangirardi, 1944r, p. 80). To Helena, women should always give in, either genuinely or feign it, so as to ensure harmony in marriage.

What can be said about a woman's complaint when noticing her husband to be less loving and understanding after the honeymoon? Helena explained that “After the ceremony of the first marriage days, the man emerges differently, more authoritarian, less flexible to the little wishes of the woman.” (Sangirardi, 1946a, p. 72). From then on, “[...] it was up to here, therefore, to understand this change almost always natural, from the honeymoon to the everyday life.” (Sangirardi, 1946a, p. 72). Helena aimed to break women's romantic illusions regarding the perfect husband. Though referring to the “prince charming” and the “golden dream” of marriage, giving a tone of magic and enchantement to the marital relationship, she was emphatic and assertive in her advice to women, prescribing attitudes of submission and dissimulation so that they could be “luck in love”. Simultaneously, though, she warned “marring young ladies” about the danger of excessive idealization: “Beware of exaggerated dreams. [...] The more awake you are, the less suffering.” (Sangirardi, 1946f, p. 72).

Besides being emphatic and assertive, Helena showed – in a “spontaneous and sincere way,” with “frankness and loyalty,” as she said herself – her displeasure when faced with the attitudes and behaviors of her advisees that she considered wrong or mistaken. In one answer, she wrote: “I want to ask you to stop spreading this bitterness that ruined your life! Keep it to yourself!” (Sangirardi, 1946g, p. 68).

Among the 125 editions analyzed of *Da Mulher para a Mulher*, two readers' questions were published and answered by Helena. The first is more related to the magazine *O Cruzeiro* than the column itself, asking if the delay in having her letter published in the column was an editorial strategy for the reader to buy “number after number” until she could see her answer published. Helena answered that, “The demand for the magazine is so great that we do not need any trick to increase sales [...]” (Sangirardi, 1946h, p. 68). She uses the main space to answer this questioning, entitled it as the “letter of a ill-mannered reader” (Sangirardi, 1946h, p. 68) and later as the “answer to the ill-mannered reader” (Sangirardi, 1946c, p. 72). In this answer, Helena explained that there was not enough space in the magazine to write everything she would like, that the number of questions was too high, and that the reader's letter was “heinous.”

The second was referred to a reader who questioned how the columnist could affirm that she knew at least 20 "completely happy" couples. She asked what she based this statement on and how Helena could know about the happiness of others because, according to the reader, "Happiness in marriage is an extremely rare, exceptional, case", furthermore, there is infidelity, "the 'quality' of ALL men, that having no moral, absolutely disregard it." (Sangirardi, 1946e, p. 68).

Although the reader knew Helena's publication in the column, they did not agree with her perspective on the marital relationship, indicating that not all readers shared her views. However, as in other moments, Helena affirmed that the reader was "[...] a poor loser in her marital life [...]", with an "unbelievable wish to annoy her": "Tame the selfishness that fills your heart and do not seek for misfortune companions in every woman you know. Just then there will be a possibility left of finding some peace of mind!" (Sangirardi, 1946g, p. 68).

4 Helena Sangirardi and the *Alegria de Cozinhar*

In this subsection, we present Helena Sangirardi's thoughts based on her positions regarding women as a housewife, prescribed in several of her publications. Considering the recurrence of her positions in different means, our focus lies on the work *A Alegria de Cozinhar*, a culinary book – divided by topics: drinks, soups, eggs, sauces, rice, savory food, deserts, etc. – where, besides teaching how to prepare several dishes, Helena shows, in her introductions and directions, her belief about the ideal behavior of a housewife, a wife, and a mother, who should, according to her, know how to cook – which Helena considered an essential attribute. Aiming to convince women, she proposes in the title that, far from an obligation, cooking is a joy.

"Every action undertaken by the authors of cookbooks", in this context, as Demeterco (2003, p. 250) reminds, means "'collaborating' with her 'friends' who are seeking to improve themselves as good housewives". This was Helena Sangirardi's objective with *A Alegria de Cozinhar*, a book targeting housewives "from the more experienced ones to the most inept 'novice'" (Prefácio [...], 195?). Helena intended to convince even the "'cerebral' women, who look down to anything regarding the kitchen" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 11), arguing that her book was about the culinary art: "Yes, I do sincerely believe that, also in the kitchen, one can compose poems", she affirmed. "And

there is always this sweet poetry that emanates from you – wife, mother, and housewife. You are poetry, my friend!!” (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 12).

The kitchen and the act of cooking, according to Sangirardi (195?, p. 11), made up the “[...] things that, in general, may interest the commonly feminine women”. Thus, for the “[...] advisee, full of bitterness and rebellion [...]” that was not keen on cooking, Helena recommended “[...] to start fighting with the weapons of the kitchen battery, to reconquer her threatened marital happiness.” (Sangirardi 195?, p. 11). That is, for here there was no happy marriage if the woman did not know how to cook. Even if she had a cook, the housewife needed to know how to guide her, what, in Helena’s perspective, was also a pleasure. She stated that if the woman “[...] does not want to prepare something ‘new’ with her own hands, at least she has the pleasure of guiding [...]”, suggesting that “[...] once in a while, indicate to your cook a new recipe, a new way of decorating a dish, or to vary the daily menu.” (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 11).

Besides reinforcing the *Estatuto da Família* proposal – which foresaw that women should be educated to manage the house and, consequently, the kitchen – when mentioning the relationship between the housewife and the cook, Helena presents some evidence about the socioeconomic level of what she considers to be the target audience of her book. Besides being literate, her reader would have enough money to be considered part of the Brazilian economic elite in that context.

We should consider, following Chartier (1990) regarding the uses of printed material, the existence of indirect readers that, though illiterate, could access the book information through the reading of someone else. Although they were unable to purchase the work, they could have borrowed the book, received it as a donation, etc., which shows the circulation amplitude of the printed works.

Helena dedicated *A Alegria de Cozinhar* to her husband, Ângelo Bourroul Sangirardi Júnior. Reproducing the jargon that “Men – as fish – die by its open mouth”, it made sense to dedicate this book to him, as it aimed to help her “dear readers” please their husbands by cooking well for them (Revista do Rádio, 1949, p. 50).

Among her arguments, she affirmed that the blame of divorce laid on the woman who could not please her husband with her culinary abilities, after all, “Gaston Gerard, a famous French lawyer, said he never worked on a divorce case in which the woman knew how to cook well” (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 11). Another example that every effort and care in the kitchen, following Helena’s tips, focused on pleasing the husband, appears

when, in the chapter about soups, she explains that “The potato absorbs the excess of salt and, thus, stops your husband from making faces at the table.” (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 111).

In an interview with *Revista do Rádio*, in October 1949, entitled “*Helena e Sangirardi, um casal feliz*” [Helena and Sangirardi, a happy couple], Helena appeared in various photos, smiling alongside her daughters and husband, doing several household chores and affirmed that she was “[...] concerned with the domestic chores [and] perfectly foreign to everything that was not her laboratory, in this case, the magnificent kitchen in the house” (*Revista do Rádio*, 1949, p. 50). As part of the interview, when they questioned the husband about Helena's attractive traits as he married her, he argued: “I was tired of being single, and I thought that Helena was a good wife. I do enjoy eating; she does enjoy preparing good dishes; furthermore, I needed to have a wife, beautiful, lovin, and she could criticize what I write, that is why I married her!” (*Revista do Rádio*, 1949, p. 50).

The discourses Helena presents in *A Alegria de Cozinhar* sought to create sensibilities around women's social attributions, reinforcing not only the importance but also the pleasure, according to her, of caring for the domestic environment and the “art of cooking.” This position agrees with the ideal of women that should be responsible for the indissolubility of marriage. Certainly, with the support of the editorial team, Helena used a discourse of intimacy and affection, with words of incentive for her readers, convincing them to enact daily domestic chores with pleasure or as part of women's natural obligations. These activities should be enacted with even more care and dedication, following her prescriptions.

Helena recurrently uses words of affection and care, such as “friend” and “dear,” seeking to get closer to her readers. According to Buitoni (2009, p. 191), when analyzing the text of *Women's Press*, “[...] there lies a true linguistic trap to catch, without warning, women's spirits”. Precisely at the expanse of this friendly conversation, which eliminates the distance, Helena simultaneously uses assertive statements, like the “duty” and “need” to do something. As examples of assertive discourses, she observed that “every housewife,” with no exception, “[...] should know very well when the shrimps are fresh or not” (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 160) to avoid food poisoning in the household. Furthermore, when making a flan, it is important to place it “[...] in the fridge in the pan it was baked. It should be taken to the refrigerator after

cooled and unmolded. If not, it will be very difficult to unmold it" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 425).

In the topic of problems and solutions in the kitchen routine, Helena presented several tips on how the housewife should act if rice, beans, or any other food is burnt while preparing it. Regarding culinary hygiene, she presented several practical tips for housewives, showing hygienic habits and incorporating products considered common at the time. About the storage of "fruit sweets," she observed the importance of adequate cleaning: "To store a fruit jam, first sanitize the container" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 493). To preserve candies and caramels, she suggested: "Keep them in a very dry container, placing a small bag of chalk. The chalk absorbs the excess of humidity and prevents them from melting and smearing." (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 633).

About the use of domestic utensils, Helena was firm about the Pyrex: "Never place a transparent Pyrex on the bottom of the oven because the direct heat breaks the glass. Place it over the grid or the oven's tray. The blue Pyrex is the only one that can use directly over the flame" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 366). Furthermore, we can see in these pieces of advice the emphasis given to prescriptions with plenty of absolutes, such as "always" and "never."

Another example of this assertive tone refers to the care and attention that a housewife should provide as a hostess. When preparing a party, the housewife should try the recipes beforehand, asserted Helena, to avoid embarrassments, even if the guests were close friends:

You should also not forget that a culinary failure ruins the hostess's goodwill, making guests uncomfortable, embarrassed, and unsure whether they should lie by complimenting or protesting when the housewife refers to the ill-made dishes (Sangirardi, 195?, pp. 22-23).

This guidance was concluded by the statement, "These small attentions make the 'parties'¹¹ more pleasant and compose the art of receiving a friend ..." (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 23). To Helena, "We should [...] promote these gatherings when we feel like it or when there is an occasion. Furthermore, when one works in the morning, the gathering should happen on Saturday" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 21). After all, being a hostess could be an imposed social demand, a part of the housewife's attributes. Regarding the importance of varying the dishes, for the guest and in everyday life, it

¹¹ Translator's note: Written in English in the original text.

would be relevant to observe that "As we do not repeat the same type of meat or vegetable in two or more dishes, we do not present two salads in the same meal" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 273). These assertive prescriptions portray the array and diversity of demands that Helena perceives as a woman's responsibility as a housewife.

There is no contradiction between Helena's intimate discourse and the assertive one as she places herself in the position of a friend who is an expert in the culinary arts and the care of the home. Furthermore, she presents herself as someone open to benevolently share all she knew. While Helena showed herself as a friend, in other moments in different publications, she exposed the rivalry between women. When talking about a mayonnaise recipe as the "horror of certain cooks," she affirmed that this reputation as something difficult "[...] is no more than a legend created by selfish housewives that do not like to share with others the results of their own experience...", contrary to her, who was indulgently willing to pass on all her wisdom (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 273), so that her housewife reader could also transform her home into "a true home sweet home."

Besides the importance of knowing about the "[...] nutritional value of the main foods consumed in Brazil", understanding how to eat with quality considering the distribution of foods and not the most expensive diet (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 29) – what would be a hard task for a housewife –, Helena's prescription also included the need to know how to decorate the food presented on the table. Helena mentioned the aesthetic importance of displaying dishes and drinks: "When presenting a mayonnaise, the housewife's imagination shows itself because this is dish in which the fantasy can jump and do somersaults, in which it would be possible to make landscapes or caricatures, animals or flowers" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 273).

Creativity was also an attribute of a good housewife, according to Helena. Besides incentivizing imagination, she suggested a series of decorations for drink glasses: "Decorate each glass with some mint leaves and attach, to the tip of the glass, a lime slice," or "serve them decorating each glass with a green olive (or a little slice of lime peel)" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 40-41). These are small details to receive well and please, guaranteeing future compliments.

As a discursive strategy to convince readers about the pleasure of cooking, Helena multiplied arguments to incentivize housewives to accept that following her prescriptions was worthwhile. She presented a discourse about women's need to

dedicate themselves, as housewives, aiming to please and, in exchange, to be valued as a beloved housewife.

Helena also presented tips on economy, such as the reuse of coffee, which could "never be reheated," but, if so, it should "always be in bain marie," as times allowed "no waste" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 39). In another moment, she affirmed, "If eggs are difficult to find or the price is too high and you want to make a cake, substitute the eggs with baking powder". (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 130). These suggestions are valuable so that the housewife would not need to "[...] bother her husband with little things, such as 'rationing and market difficulties: lack of fish, the price of potatoes'" (Sangirardi, 195?, p. 89).

5 Final remarks

Without disregarding that the book and the magazine column used here as main sources involved all production conditions of a printed work, as Chartier (1990) states, considering, for instance, the role of editors and revisors in text, even so, many discourses presented here, besides being produced as a good, with the intention of pleasing and, therefore, selling, refer to Helena Sangirardi's thoughts about what she idealized as a woman, corresponding to her context. That is, considering the production conditions and editorial interventions in the author's text; we can identify a way of thinking that indicates Helena Sangirardi's positions and interpretations of the role of women in her time and space.

In consonance with the *Estatuto da Família*, published in the Vargas Era context, Helena's prescriptions to Brazilian women – which significantly circulated through printed materials published until the 1970s – illustrate the strategic position of women's population as a contributor to the social order foreseen by the State, which incentivized procreation, marriage, and the formation of families, in which women played a fundamental role. Article 15 from the *Estatuto da Família* foresaw the propaganda in favor of its own determinations, and, in this sense, Helena's prescriptions contributed to educating women as wives and housewives.

Helena Sangirardi's fame was due to the dissemination of her prescriptions for behaviors and values for women through the various communication means of her time. The values instilled in her texts reflected her conservative view of women's roles

in society at the time. Dedicating herself to talking to women about female attitudes and actions considered socially adequate, Helena essentially aimed for success in marriage. The responsibility for a perfect marriage laid completely on women, thus, the need for so many prescriptions and care. Despite the gradual ascension of women in the work market during the time analyzed (1940-1970), Helena's discourse privileged women's roles as wives and housemakers.

All Helena's precepts revolve around protecting and pleasing the husband, even if such end meant renouncing women's authenticity, after all, a woman could only be happy when winning over her husband and keeping her marriage. However, as announced in the gossip page of *Revista do Rádio*: "My dear Helena Sangirardi, who knows how to give so many beautiful advices on love, was not happy in hers! (*Revista do Rádio*, 1961, p. 18). A year later, the same magazine affirmed that "The peace dove is flying over Helena Sangirardi and her husband Sangirardi Júnior, who are separated (the daughters wish everything can be worked out)." (*Revista do Rádio*, 1962, p. 18). We do not know the reason for the separation, nor there was, in fact, a reconciliation. What we know is that Helena continued working as an adviser in "women's issues," including cooking, until the 1970s, with the *Coleção Feminina*, in six volumes, published in 1968, her television programs broadcast at least until 1977, and the re-editions of *A Alegria de Cozinhar*, until the 1980s.

Amidst her rules about the ideal woman, Helena instilled mistrust in women's friendships. According to her, women were not loyal to themselves; trust was a characteristic found among men. The propagation of this impression meant women could not articulate among themselves, leaving them at the mercy of their husband's and families' exclusivity, the only trust bonds reinforced in her precepts.

Beyond the assertive tone, a characteristic of her text, aiming to appear confident and convincing, in some moments, Helena's discourse was to confront women who disagreed with her. Such situations, as shown throughout this article, demonstrate that not all women agreed with her prescriptions; some began to disagree with the impositions imposed on women, verbalizing their discontent and finding an echo to the point that Helena felt, if not threatened, but "upset." Helena says so when characterizing these readers as "insolent," "ill-mannered," "advice seekers," "full of bitterness and rebellion," "cerebral women," etc.

The publications and – we believe – her radio and television programs influenced generations of women around conservative values and behaviors, considered adequate regarding women's social role in the context of the 1940s and 1970s. We consider that this biography of Helena Sangirardi contributes to broadening the history of women's education in Brazil, allowing us to show and understand the longevity of some sexist expectations regarding women in Brazil and worldwide in the 21st century.

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