

Gender and Labour in the Italian Audiovisual Industries

Critical Research Approaches and Methods

Edited by Rosa Barotsi, Gloria Dagnino and Carla Mereu Keating



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ROSA BAROTSI - GLORIA DAGNINO - CARLA MEREU KEATING*

INTRODUCTION

On Method Building: A Half-Century of Research on Gender and Labour in the Italian Audiovisual Industries

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Interviewed by Francesco Savio (alias Chicco Pavolini) in February 1974, in preparation for the oral history volumes *Cinecittà anni trenta*, prolific costume designer Maria de Matteis was asked to share her memories of the celebrated costume designer Gino Sensani (1888-1947)¹. Hinting discreetly at a sometimes uneasy professional relationship with a more prominent practitioner (her ‘maestro’, as the interviewer defined him)², de Matteis’ recollection problematised Sensani’s authorial input in the design of the film costumes that were credited to both (e.g., *Piccolo Mondo Antico*, 1941) and allowed memories of emotional labour to emerge. The designer described how she had to negotiate her position as an artist not only as Sensani’s assistant but also, in later years, as an accomplished and sought-after film professional collaborating with directors, screenwriters, and production designers (such as Mario Chiari in *War and Peace*, 1956). De Matteis made efforts to define her own professional worth not only in relation to her immediate collaborators, like Sensani, but also to her larger professional milieu. Responding to Savio’s final question on the importance given to costume design by her peers, de Matteis stated: “You felt, not important, but necessary, useful. A feeling of carrying, to that wall that was being built, of carrying your own stone too”³.

In over fifty years of political and scholarly writing on women’s work in the Italian audiovisual sector, authors have often had to prove the value of that work on the basis of its importance, necessity, or usefulness. Advocating for the value of women’s cinema has meant different things at different times, its meaning shifting in relation to the socio-political contexts in which analyses take place. But one of the fundamental questions

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¹ F. Savio, ed., *Cinecittà anni trenta. Parlano 116 protagonisti del secondo cinema italiano (1930-1943)*. Vol. 2 (*DEG-MOR*), Rome: Bulzoni, 1979, 450-458.

² *Ibid.*, 450.

³ *Ibid.*, 458.

at the heart of studies on women's work in the Italian film industry remains unresolved. From Cinzia Bellumori's 1972 study and up to Laura Buffoni's 2018 edited volume on women in Italian cinema, authors have continued to revisit the debate over *difference*, that is, the status of women's work as exemplary and/or self-evidently distinct (a difference which risks becoming internally homogenous and therefore exclusionary), and *individualism*, the idea that every person has their own unique set of experiences and points of view, which is therefore of intrinsic value⁴. Scholars continue to struggle with the question of how to avoid having to prove the "usefulness" of women filmmakers or the quality of their work, without at the same time falling either into the trap of an essentialist feminism of difference, or that of a postfeminist individualism that dissolves possibilities of community in favour of compromised notions of meritocracy and glass ceilings. Various iterations of this question lie, more or less visibly, in the foundations of the works presented in this special issue.

This special issue examines the lived experiences, working conditions, and career trajectories of women in various branches of the audiovisual sector in Italy and the power relations that govern(ed) them. The contributions retrace the roles and "shifting positionalities"⁵ assumed by women working in the Italian audiovisual sector from the Fascist dictatorship to the present day. The special issue was born out of our common interest in exploring how gender, as a multifaceted social construct, is currently being used by researchers to address and interpret historical and contemporary issues around labour in the Italian film and audiovisual media industries. Our intellectual curiosity was directed at questions of methodology that shape our interdisciplinary, inter/transnational, and intersectional film and media research, and it included our desire for an opportunity to engage in feminist collaboration methods based on mutual support and the creation of a safe space in which to think together⁶. Developing distinctly from various theoretical, linguistic, historiographic, and sociological traditions, our readings and personal experiences of researching labour in the audiovisual industries have been intrinsically connected with the continuous development of new digital tools that have allowed us to (re)orient our research in ways that are important, yet remained critically under-examined. Tracing, and at times testing, the contours of gender-based scholarly enquiry, the contributions selected in this special issue rewarded our initial curiosity, demonstrating a wide array of methodological approaches to the study of women's audiovisual work. By documenting women's presence behind the camera, both diachronically and synchronically, these contributions cut across disciplinary, hierarchical, and national boundaries to place Italian film and media scholarship in dialogue with an expanding global network of feminist media research⁷.

⁴ C. Bellumori, *Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema*, Rome: Edizioni Bianco e Nero, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, 1970, 38; L. Buffoni, ed., *We Want Cinema: Sguardi di donne nel cinema italiano*, Venice: Marsilio, 2018, 15.

⁵ R. Pickering-Iazzi, "Introduction: Inventions of Women's Making, in History and Critical Thought", in *Mothers of Invention. Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, edited by R. Pickering-Iazzi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995: XII.

⁶ Italian feminist media scholars Dalila Missero and Giovanna Maina published an inspiring account of the practices, aims, and meaning of their shared experience of feminist academic friendship in "(Feminist) Academic Friendships: Discussing and Re-Thinking the Labour of Love", *The Italianist*, 41, 2 (2021): 241-246.

⁷ Key English-language studies on the subject include: A. Hastie, S. Stamp, "Introduction: Women and the Silent Screen: Cultural and Historical Practices", *Film History*, 18, 2 (2006): 107-109 and related journal contributions; V. Mayer, M.J. Banks, J.T. Caldwell, eds., *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, New York: Routledge, 2009; C. Gledhill, J. Knight, eds., *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015; E. Hill, *Never Done. A History of*

In Italy, studies that interconnect gender and labour issues can be traced back to the 1970s, when the so-called second wave of feminist movements fostered ground-breaking investigations on women's employment in film and the creative-cultural sector more broadly⁸. After Cinzia Bellumori's seminal 1972 study, *Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema*, and Patrizia Carrano's 1977 *Malafemmina: La donna nel cinema italiano*, other engaged work, such as that by Lina Mangiacapre and by Annabella Miscuglio, Rony Daopoulo and Judita Hribar (both published in 1980), came at what would turn out to be the tail-end of the militant Italian feminist movement⁹. Another eight years went by before Giuliana Bruno and Maria Nadotti published the first English-language book on women in Italian filmmaking that moved beyond the question of representation to explore the complex relationship between women's work and moving images from a transnational perspective¹⁰. After a decade-long "phase of aphasia"¹¹ – caused, at least partly, by a widespread positivist view of nascent digital communication technologies as democratising, therefore erasing identity and social differences in media production and consumption – Italian studies on media and gender (almost exclusively understood to mean 'women') flourished at a fast pace after the turn of the century. These studies focused alternately and/or jointly on the tripartition of women as filmgoers, as filmmakers, and as objects of cinematic representation¹² and were in conversation with intermedial,

Women's Work in Media Production, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016; K. Hole, D. Jelača, E. Kaplan, P. Petro, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, London: Routledge, 2017; S. Loist, E. Prommer, "Gendered Production Culture in the German Film Industry", *Media Industries*, 6, 1 (2019): 95-115; S. Liddy, ed., *Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Practice and Power*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; M. Bell, *Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2021; as well as the publications linked to the project "Calling the Shots: Women and Contemporary Film Culture in the UK" (2000-2015) by Shelley Cobb, Linda Ruth Williams, and Natalie Wreyford; and the publications linked to the project "Representing Women: Gendering Swedish Film Culture and Production" (2017-2022) by Maria Jansson, Louise Wallenberg, Ingrid Stigsdotter, and Frantzeska Papadopoulou.

⁸ Bellumori, *Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema*; M. Buonanno, *Naturale come sei. Indagine sulla stampa femminile in Italia*, Rimini: Guaraldi, 1975; P. Carrano, *Malafemmina. La donna nel cinema italiano*, Rimini: Guaraldi, 1977.

⁹ L. Mangiacapre, *Cinema al femminile*, Padova: Mastrogiacomo-Images, 1980; A. Miscuglio, R. Daopoulo, J. Hribar, eds., *Kinomata: La donna nel cinema*. Vol. 1, Bari: Dedalo, 1980.

¹⁰ G. Bruno, M. Nadotti, eds., *Off Screen. Women and Film in Italy: Seminar on Italian and American Directions*, London: Routledge, 1988.

¹¹ A. Cati, M. Fanchi, R. Maule, "Creative Industry and Gender: Reflections on a Non-Obvious Combination", *Comunicazioni sociali*, 3 (2014): 349-356 (351). Although undoubtedly a decade that showed little scholarly interest in Italian women filmmakers, it is worth noting that the 1990s saw the publication of the watershed study on Elvira Notari by Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), as well as the second volume by Lina Mangiacapre, *Cinema al femminile* (Naples: MiniManifesta, 1994).

¹² A list of volumes includes: T. Sossi, *Dizionario delle registe: l'altra metà del cinema*, Roma: Gremese, 2000; M. Dall'Asta, ed., *Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano*, Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2008; E. Mascherini, *Glass Ceiling: oltre il soffitto di vetro: professionalità femminili nel cinema italiano*, Città di Castello: Edimond, 2009; M. Morandini, M. Morandini, *I Morandini delle donne. 60 anni di cinema italiano al femminile*, Rome: Iacobelli, 2010; L. Cardone, M. Fanchi, "Che genere di schermo? Incroci fra storia del cinema e gender studies in Italia", *The Italianist*, 31, 2 (2011): 293-303; C. Jandelli, L. Cardone, eds., "Gesti silenziosi. Presenze femminili nel cinema muto italiano", *Bianco e Nero*, 570 (2011); F. Laviosa, "Cinematic Journeys of Italian Women Directors", *Studies in European Cinema*, 8, 2 (2012): 85-88; M. Cantini, *Italian Women Filmmakers and the Gendered Screen*, London: Palgrave, 2013; B. Luciano, S. Scarparo, *Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2013; V. Pravadelli, *Le donne del cinema. Dive, registe, spettatrici*, Bari: Laterza, 2014; L. Cardone, S. Filippelli, eds., *Filmare il femminismo: studi sulle donne nel cinema e nei media*, Pisa: ETS, 2015; L. Cardone, C. Jandelli, C. Tognolotti, eds., *Storie in divenire: le donne nel cinema italiano*, monographic issue of *Quaderni del CSCSI*, 11 (2015); L. Buffoni *We Want Cinema*; G. Maina, C. Tognolotti, eds., *Essere (almeno) due. Studi sulle donne nel cinema e nei media*, Pisa, ETS, 2018; M. Buonanno, F. Faccioli, eds., *Genere e media: non solo immagini*.

transnational, and film genre analyses¹³. Reflecting the growing vitality of the field, the Forum Annuale delle Studiose di Cinema e Audiovisivi (FAScInA) was launched in 2012, soon becoming an important platform for Italian researchers working on cinema and audiovisual media from the perspective of women's studies¹⁴.

In this renewed landscape, historical and contemporary research increasingly focused on the various professional roles occupied by women working in Italy's audiovisual media industries. Far from being an entirely novel approach¹⁵, academic attention to women's labour gained fresh impetus from the 2010s onwards following an outpour of studies that focused on the political-economic and industrial frameworks in which Italian films and audiovisual media are regulated, produced, and circulated to national and international audiences¹⁶. The Anglo-American debates around *production studies*¹⁷ and *media industry studies*¹⁸ provided useful labels for a diverse body of questions, theories, and methods emerging from Italy, even when authors were not explicitly writing from within that framework. Although gender does not necessarily constitute its primary research focus, the connections between gender and production studies are such that the latter has been recognised as having an inherently feminist impetus, as Miranda Banks' positional claim summarises:

Production studies is a feminist methodology. At its core, production studies often resists or complicates traditional power hierarchies, it has its origins in a nonbinary interdisciplinarity, and it has a capacity to highlight cultural inequities [...], a genealogy of production studies reveals its deep affinities with feminist scholarship: a tradition of research by and about women, as well as core themes that resist top-down hierarchies, that highlight production at the margins, and that make visible hidden labor¹⁹.

Soggetti, politiche, rappresentazioni, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2020; D. Missero, *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022; M. Buonanno, F. Faccioli, eds., *Gender Issues: Trajectories of Change in the Italian Mediascape*, monographic issue of the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 11 (2023).

¹³ L. Cardone, "Noi Donne" e il cinema. *Dalle illusioni a Zavattini. (1944-1954)*, Pisa: ETS, 2009; V. Pravadelli, I.A. De Pascalis, eds., "Feminist/Gender Studies oggi. Nuove prospettive dal 2000", monographic issue of *Imago*, 3, 6 (2012); L. Cardone, S. Filippelli, eds., *Cinema e scritture femminili. Letterate italiane fra la pagina e lo schermo*, Rome: Iacobelli, 2012; V. Pravadelli, "Women's Cinema and Transnational Europe", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2016, 23, 4 (2016): 329-334; N. Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style*, London: Routledge, 2015.

¹⁴ The Forum takes place annually at the University of Sassari. The 2021 edition of the Forum, celebrating its tenth anniversary, also provided the occasion for the co-editors of this special issue to meet for the first time and to start developing the idea of a common project. Accessed April 26, 2023, <https://fascinaforum.org>.

¹⁵ Bellumori's 1970 study adopted a sociological perspective to analyse, with quali-quantitative methods, the presence and contribution of women in both above- and below-the-line roles.

¹⁶ See for example: B. Corsi, *Produzione e produttori*, Milan: Il Castoro, 2012; F. Di Chiara, *Generi e industria cinematografica in Italia. Il caso Titanus (1949-1964)*, Turin: Lindau, 2013; L. Barra, T. Bonini, S. Splendore, eds., *Backstage. Studi sulla produzione dei media in Italia*, Milan: Unicopli, 2016; M. Cucco, G. Manzoli, eds., *Il cinema di Stato. Finanziamento pubblico ed economia simbolica nel cinema italiano contemporaneo*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2017; M. Nicoli, *The Rise and Fall of the Italian Film Industry*, London, Routledge, 2017; V. Re, ed., *Streaming Media. Distribuzione, circolazione, accesso*, Milan: Mimesis, 2017; M. Scaglioni, ed., *Cinema Made in Italy. La circolazione internazionale dell'audiovisivo italiano*, Rome: Carocci, 2020; M. Cucco, *Economia del film. Industria, politica, mercati*, Rome: Carocci, 2020; F. D'Urso, *Economia dell'audiovisivo. Politiche pubbliche e struttura del mercato*, Rome: Dino Audino, 2023.

¹⁷ J.T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008; Mayer, Banks, Caldwell, *Production Studies*.

¹⁸ T. Havens, A.D. Lotz, S. Tinic, "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach", *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 2, 2 (2009): 234-253; J. Holt, A. Perren, eds., *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2011.

¹⁹ M.J. Banks, "Production Studies", *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, 2 (2018): 157-161 (157).

Banks' words resonate in the pages of this special issue. Largely authored by women scholars who embrace a range of interdisciplinary and multi-methodological perspectives, this issue encompasses an extensive period of time, spanning from the 1930s to the 2020s. It deals with the multiform iterations of power relations and exclusionary practices in the workplace and foregrounds the creative and operational contribution of female professionals long excluded or marginalised by canonised film historiographies.

In organising the structure of the special issue, we have chosen to proceed in chronological order. By doing so, we aimed to provide a diachronic overview of labour issues impacting the Italian film and audiovisual industry through a gender lens. We also structured the issue diachronically to invite a reflection on the relationship between the methods chosen to research the gender dimension of labour in the film, TV and audiovisual media industries and the historical periods on which that research focuses. Each of the essays collected here variously adopt qualitative and/or quantitative research methods, drawing evidence from archives, interviews, quantitative datasets and close reading.

If first-hand testimonies are essential to giving voice to previously neglected experiences of working in the Italian film industry, what happens when this precious historical evidence (in the form of audio or print interviews, correspondence, diaries etc.) has never been formally recorded, conserved, and collected, nor is available through institutional repositories? Personal archives and collections can significantly help fill existing historiographical gaps. This is the case of Stella Scabelli and Michael Guarneri's contribution on "Paola Ojetti and Maria Basaglia: Two Women Workers in Fascist Italy's Cultural Sector". Scabelli and Guarneri's archival research furthers understanding of film culture in Fascist Italy and reveals how women of different social classes negotiated their place within the film industry. Threading together fragmentary evidence gathered from a number of historical repositories, including private and local archives, Guarneri and Scabelli compare the "eclectic and at times non-normative careers" of Basaglia and Ojetti, two intellectuals employed in cinema-related activities in the 1930s and 1940s. Bringing visibility to Basaglia and Ojetti's wide professional and social networks and their manifold contribution to the burgeoning of Italy's sound film industry, the authors reflect on the exclusionary patterns of employment based on gender, class, familial, and political affiliation. In doing so, the article demonstrates the detrimental legacy of this combination of factors for women's access to the profession and related specialisation in the following decades.

Family and corporate archives are used by Chiara Grizzaffi in her article "'Una ragazza che si arrangia': Notes on the Film Producer Marina Piperno". Examining the Aamod records of the Reiac film company and Piperno's family archive, Grizzaffi focuses on the figure of prolific independent producer Marina Piperno whose "fuori norma" (non-standard) professional identity and activities have never before been the object of scholarly enquiry. Grizzaffi complements archival sources with written memoirs by, and interviews held with, Piperno, to explore the correlation between the "rigid hierarchical organisation" of the Italian film industry and Piperno's professional "self-realisation". In doing so, the author demonstrates how the producer negotiated and voiced her gendered position within the industry as one of the few women in Italy working in above-the-line positions in the post-war years and beyond.

Oral history and interviews are key methodological tools of the project "Donne in onda. Voci, professioni e ascolto in radio e nei media sonori", upon which Marta Perrotta's contribution is based. "Women Working in Radio: Methodological Approaches Comparing Italy and the International Context" broadens the scope of the special issue by going beyond purely screen-based media to focus on broadcasting cultures and radio

production. Perrotta offers an international overview of radio scholarship, comparing the Italian context to the more established traditions in the UK, USA, and Germany. While highlighting some specific challenges related to the investigation of radio, a “light and volatile” medium, Perrotta clearly demonstrates that many of the historical and methodological issues that emerge in gender-based radio research are common to other audiovisual industries. These include the systematic removal of women from positions of visibility and the consequent dearth of female role models, the progressive feminisation of radio production coupled with horizontal segregation practices, and the reliance on insiders’ accounts of production sites and practices. As for the future of radio production studies, Perrotta calls upon new epistemologies that not only incorporate gender and sonic thinking but that also look at production dynamics across the entire screen and sound-based media ecosystem.

Oral history methods are also used by Maria Ida Bernabei in her article “Women in Italian Film Production (1949-976): Mid-Management Roles as Seen through ANICA Data and Oral History”. Bernabei combines interviews with original historical research into the database of the Italian national audiovisual industries association, ANICA, to quantify women’s contribution to the Italian filmmaking industry and to examine their specialisation in a variety of below-the-line, secretarial and administrative, roles. As explained by Bernabei, the ANICA database presents statistically significant margins of error due to internal and external factors, such as errors in manual transcription in the compilation of the database and the general lack of accreditation of below-the-line professions in film opening and closing credits. Even so, an examination of the ANICA database and similar historical repositories through an inclusive lens is valuable insofar as it forces historians of Italian cinema and media to pay closer attention to the gendered composition of the workforce and to challenge auteur-centred, text-based perspectives that still dominate critical and educational discourses associated with Italian cinema, both at home and abroad.

Quantitative data can provide crucial insights into the gendered dimensions of screen labour in Italy, from past to present, and open up novel and transdisciplinary collaborations that engage humanists, data scientists, and creative industry practitioners²⁰. In her article, “Women’s Labour in TV Series Production: A Comparative Analysis of Italian Generalist TV and Pay Platforms (2016-2019)”, Marta Rocchi carries out a comparative analysis of gender inequality, segregation, and mobility patterns in series production across Italian generalist TV and pay platforms in the three years before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Rocchi’s goal is not to produce “yet another statistic” that provides evidence of a problem that is now well-documented, but rather to observe the structures of gender inequality and discriminatory dynamics, so that more effective measures might be put in place to push against them. At the same time, the author reflects on the reliability and limits of IMDb as a data source for large-scale, transnational research into audiovisual media inequalities. Although Rocchi raises a number of crucial ethical and practical challenges in relation to its use, she concludes that certain

²⁰ Key European and Italian data-based reports include: EWA, *Where Are the Women Directors? Report on Gender Equality for Directors in the European Film Industry 2006-2013*, 2016; IRPPS/SIAE/DEA Donne e Audiovisivo, *GAP&CLAK: I divari di genere nel lavoro e nell’industria audiovisiva*, Rome: CNR, 2016; and the annual reports of the European Audiovisual Observatory, e.g., P. Simone, “Female Professionals in European Film Production 2022 edition”, *European Audiovisual Observatory*, October 2022, last accessed April 26, 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/female-professionals-in-european-film-production-2022-edition-p-simone/1680a886c5>.

forms of large-scale research render IMDb's use near-inevitable. That presumed inevitability is in itself, of course, an ethical conundrum.

The potential limitations and ethical concerns connected to the use of different data sources are also explored in Mariagrazia Fanchi, Matteo Tarantino, and Rosa Barotsi's article "Heaven Can Wait? Gender (Im)balance in Contemporary Italian Film Crews". Whereas data feminists Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein remind us that data are always "dirty"²¹, Fanchi, Tarantino and Barotsi argue that this is particularly true of film data, both user-generated and official. Similarly to Rocchi, the authors move beyond a "counting the women" approach to show the occupational dynamics of the female workforce in the Italian audiovisual industry, both in the present and the past, across a sixty-year period. Their conclusions confirm some of the most problematic systemic tendencies in the workplace. Specifically, despite some positive indicators over the past few years, which should make us cautiously optimistic, women's careers continue to be shorter and more precarious than their male counterparts'. Moreover, given the historical ties between the occupational feminisation and devaluation of certain professions, the authors point out that, whilst we need to celebrate rising percentages in areas where women are scarce, we should also be wary of tendencies towards feminisation in previously male-dominated roles.

In their article "Unsuitable Jobs for Women: Women's Behind-the-Scenes and Female On-Screen Representation in Italian TV Crime Drama", Valentina Re and Marica Spalletta rely on a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative, quantitative, textual, and production-centred tools, reflecting a growing international trend adopted in institutional reports on diversity in the audiovisual media industries²². The authors analyse the presence and roles of female characters in Italian crime TV series (2015-2022) while, at the same time, considering the various professional roles that women played in the production of these scripted dramas. Gathering gender equity insights from a sample analysis of a highly popular TV genre such as crime fiction, Re and Spalletta argue that such an approach could be extended to larger datasets that have already been created in previous studies. Their conclusions suggest that, while gender segregation remains strong behind the camera, a gradual transition towards gender balance is indeed in progress. On screen, on the other hand, the general under-representation of female characters is clearly exacerbated if looked through the lens of age, ethnicity, and race. These findings urgently call for a more systematic adoption of intersectional approaches in screen media research and the intervention of policy-making actors to help challenge racism and ageism on Italian screens.

Re and Spalletta demonstrate that diversity off-screen and on-screen are correlated, mirroring the results of other international studies²³. Bernadette Luciano moves from a similar premise to explore feminist filmmaking and representational practices in her article "Relational Feminist Practices On and Off-Screen: The Case of *Amanda* (2022) and *Giulia* (2021)". Luciano uses a case study approach to conduct a close reading of two recent Italian feature films: *Amanda*, written and directed by first-time feature director Carolina Cavalli, and *Giulia*, by director Ciro de Caro and co-written with leading

²¹ C. D'Ignazio, L.F. Klein, *Data Feminism*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2020, 131.

²² Examples include reports by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Diversity and Inclusion in the European Audiovisual Sector, 2021; Gender Imbalances in the Audiovisual Industries, 2018) and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (Study on Industry Good Practices related to Gender Diversity in the European Audiovisual Sector, 2019).

²³ See for instance the annual Hollywood Diversity Reports of the UCLA Entertainment and Media Research Initiative.

actress Rosa Palasciano. Both films centre on the life of unconventional young women who do not fit in and who yearn for genuine interpersonal connections. Luciano draws on intersectional feminist thought, affect theory, and the tradition of Italian feminism to analyse the film texts in light of their creative and production processes. Notably, the feminist concept of relational practice is utilised to understand how women's and feminist cinema is made. Luciano's approach offers an insightful integration between a macro-level quantitative examination of gendered dynamics in Italian contemporary film production and a micro-level qualitative analysis of the concrete strategies adopted by women professionals, namely collaborative practices of network building (*fare rete*).

This special issue brings together a range of work on women's artistic, creative, and technical contribution to Italy's screen industries that traverses micro-historical and qualitative, and macro and quantitative approaches. Whereas the gap between these approaches might sometimes seem incommensurable, we can recognise connections, thanks to their diversity, that would otherwise remain invisible. For instance, the failed attempts at networking with upper-class Ojetti by the lower middle-class Basaglia, as demonstrated by Scabelli and Guarneri's analysis of their archival correspondence, hint at underexplored class barriers to female solidarity during and beyond the Fascist regime. This, in turn, calls for intersectional research on the "class over gender" dimension that impacts women's ability to network and collaborate. Whether the class ceiling trumps the glass ceiling is a question also hinted at in Luciano's close reading of *Amanda*, where female solidarity is enabled thanks to a desolate but class-determined bourgeois setting. The issue of class and socioeconomic possibility is similarly implicit in the quantitative studies by Rocchi and by Fanchi, Tarantino and Barotsi, which focus on examining the longevity and mobility of women's careers in contemporary Italian film and TV industries. Their work highlights the importance of obtaining gender-disaggregated data in order to examine the correlations between the increasing precarisation of the sector, as confirmed by recent reports²⁴, and the dynamics of women's employment discussed by our authors.

There is still much to learn about the ways gender intersects with age, class or socioeconomic mobility, ethnicity, race and regional provenance and how these variables have structured existing cultures of exclusion in the Italian audiovisual sector. Gender-based research that meaningfully engages with intersectionality is a critical step in producing actionable guidelines and policies²⁵. Such a step is needed to push towards the elimination of structural disadvantages, as well as narrow ideological narratives regarding professional ability in the sector. A noticeable example is the scarce research on the compounded minoritization of women filmmakers of colour with or without access to Italian citizenship. The 2016 *Gap&Ciak* DeA report makes a brief reference to this aspect²⁶, calling for future research that focuses on the professionals who fall through

²⁴ S. Bologna, A. Soru, eds., "Dietro le quinte. Indagine sul lavoro autonomo nell'audiovisivo e nell'editoria libraria", *Serie: Itinerari di diritto e relazioni del lavoro*, 62, Fondazione Brodolini, 2022: 72-73.

²⁵ Over the past few years, several national governments have introduced in their public funding schemes various forms of incentives for film companies to involve female professionals. In Italy, gender-focused reward mechanisms were firstly introduced by the 220/2016 cinema reform law and subsequent implementation decrees. For a regularly updated overview of gender equity policies in the European audiovisual sector, see Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma website, last accessed April 28, 2023, <https://femmesdecinema.org/en/map-of-measures-per-country/>.

²⁶ DeA, *Gap&Ciak*, 26. Last accessed April 27, 2023, <https://www.irpps.cnr.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/rapporto-GapCiak.pdf>.

the cracks of gender-based analyses, as well as other intersectional identities whose discrimination cannot be explained by taking into account gender alone.

Recent research, including research emerging from this special issue, suggests that the field is developing in this intersectional direction. For example, through their quantitative analysis of TV crime drama, Re and Spalletta demonstrate the existence of a gendered ageist trend, which reduces screen roles for women (but not men) who are over 30 years of age. In other words, ageing women are further penalised for failing to conform to the dominant aesthetic standards of screen production²⁷. Whereas radio production should theoretically be exempt from these discriminatory practices, Perrotta's research indicates that these sexist and ageist double standards also apply to women's voices and that the marginalisation of women in radio dates back to the very origins of the medium.

In 2021, reflecting on the possibilities, challenges, and limitations of academic research to generate meaningful change in the screen industries, Melanie Bell stressed that oral histories, and women's accounts of past work experiences in particular, have the capacity to communicate experiential knowledge across generations and to inspire campaigns for change in a contemporary media landscape still rife with gender, race, and class-based inequality and discrimination²⁸. Several contributors in this special issue have provided evidence of the complex historic gendered patterns of employment in the Italian screen industries thanks to interviews with practitioners. Bernabei's interviews with Rosalba di Bartolo Tonti, a film production manager active since the early 1960s, for example, hint at the additional challenges she faced as a mother, and at the personal and professional compromises that she and women like her did (or did not) make in order to fit in. Insights into past negotiations of filmmaking work with motherhood and caregiving responsibilities (which are also class-based constructions, both materially and ideologically)²⁹ deserves further attention, especially as the sector has only recently begun to counteract such obstacles to women's participation in the creative industries³⁰.

In her conclusions, Grizzaffi reminds us that claims for gender equality cannot be separated from demands for better working conditions for all professionals in the audiovisual industry, lest they be doomed to failure. Similarly, we call for scholarship that engages more systematically with intersectional approaches to gender-based inequities³¹. In doing so, as argued by Kimberlé Crenshaw, we must avoid the pitfalls of mis-characterising and mis-using intersectionality as a mere re-hierarchisation of ex-

²⁷ Susan Sontag described this phenomenon as early as 1972 in her much-cited article "The Double Standard of Aging", *The Saturday Review*, September 23, 1972, 29-38.

²⁸ M. Bell, "'I owe it to those women to own it': Women, Media Production and Intergenerational Dialogue through Oral History", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 18, 4 (2021): 518-537. See the AHRC-funded project 'Histories of Women in the British Film and Television Industries, 1933-89' (PI Melanie Bell, University of Leeds). Bringing archival and oral history research together, the project highlighted the hidden contribution of women working below-the-line in Britain's 20th century film and media industries.

²⁹ T. Dent, "Devalued Women, Valued Men: Motherhood, Class and Neoliberal Feminism in the Creative Media Industries", *Media, Culture & Society*, 42, 4 (2020): 537-553.

³⁰ *Raising Films* is a UK-based industry organisation launched in 2015 to advocate for better working conditions for parents and carers in the film industry: www.raisingfilms.com/. Major film festivals have also started to provide childcare services for professional attendees: *Le Ballon Rouge*, for example, is a 2019 joint venture of the Cannes Film Festival, the Cannes Marché and the Parenting at Film Festivals group: last accessed April 27, 2023, www.marchedufilm.com/fr/news/le-ballon-rouge-welcomes-kids-back-to-cannes/.

³¹ Our own research moves in this direction. Rosa Barotsi is PI of the project *Cinema Beyond the Industry: Contemporary Minoritised Italian Film Cultures* (co-financed by the European Union - NextGenerationEU); Gloria Dagnino is research associate in the *AGE - C Aging and Gender in European Cinema* project, funded by Volkswagen Foundation (PL Vinzenz Hediger, unit PI Francesco Pitassio). Carla Mereu Keating is researching the history of below-the-line workers in Italian film studios between 1930 and 1960.

clusionary factors and, by extension, of research agendas³². If it is true that all forms of oppression act in distinct ways and times on different individuals and social groups, it is also true that only cross-cutting, coalitional undertakings can aspire to real change, within and beyond the Italian audiovisual sector. Change, too, much as the making of a film, is a collaborative effort.

³² Intersectionality theorist Crenshaw has argued against such mis-characterisations in a 2019 interview. See J. Coaston, “The Intersectionality Wars”, *Vox*, 28 May 2019, last accessed April 27, 2023 www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination. To engage with the concepts of intersectionality and the related matrix of domination see K. Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”, *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (1990): 1241; P. Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* [1990], New York: Routledge, 2022; Combahee River Collective, “Combahee River Collective Statement”, in B. Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* [1977], New York: New Press, 1995, 232-240.

MICHAEL GUARNERI - STELLA SCABELLI*

PAOLA OJETTI AND MARIA BASAGLIA: TWO WOMEN WORKERS IN FASCIST ITALY'S CULTURAL SECTOR

Abstract

Putting into dialogue scholarly studies on Italian Fascism with a wide range of newly identified film and media history resources, the authors reconstruct and compare the career paths of Paola Ojetti (1911-1978) and Maria Basaglia (1908-2000) in the 1930s and early-1940s, with a specific focus on their cinema-related activities such as dubbing, film criticism, screenwriting and on-set assistance. By shedding light on the microhistory level of professional routines and social interactions, the article seeks to contribute to a history of women workers in Fascist Italy's cultural sector grounded in the concrete life experiences of women intellectuals. The career paths of Ojetti and Basaglia show that the mastery of foreign languages was a key requisite for women wishing to enter the field of cultural production: translation work was considered especially fitting to women because it was generally poorly paid, mostly carried out at home, held in lower esteem than authorial work, and thus perceived as less threatening to male privilege. The cases of Ojetti and Basaglia also show that no matter their talent and diligence, women intellectuals in Fascist Italy often had to put themselves under the mentorship or in the employ of male colleagues, who enjoyed greater civil liberties and career advancement opportunities than their female counterparts. The women who met these conditions accessed the cultural sector, working through the ranks of a specific branch, reaching out to one another to create useful networks of mutual support and collaboration, and eventually building an eclectic and at times non-normative career for themselves. While confirming the existence of a repressive system that exploited women's intellectual work, the article proposes that there were ways for women to partially break through the narrow boundaries of subordinate work established by the discriminatory policies of the Fascist regime.

Keywords

Fascist Italy; gender history; dubbing; film criticism; Paola Ojetti; Maria Basaglia.

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Abbreviations in notes

ACS Archivio Centrale dello Stato

ASBN Archivio di Stato di Benevento

ASCR Archivio di Stato di Cremona

BNCF Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze

BRR Biblioteca Renzo Renzi della Cineteca di Bologna

DGPS Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza

DGS Direzione Generale Spettacolo

FAAM Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori

FMD Fondo Mino Doletti

GNAM Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Roma

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I. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to extensive archival research into the work and personal correspondence of Italian film critics¹, this article reconstructs and compares the career paths, professional routines and social networks of Paola Ojetti (1911-1978) and Maria Basaglia (1908-2000) in the context of 1930s and early-1940s Italian culture, with a specific focus on their cinema-related activities². The choice of studying Ojetti is due to her prominence: as a wealthy, upper-class woman who received the highest-quality education available in arts and humanities, she overcame many of the obstacles that hindered women's authorial recognition in Fascist Italy's cultural sector, and obtained public praise in the fields of literary translation, dubbing, film criticism and screenwriting. Since zooming in on a socially, economically and culturally privileged woman might provide too partial an account of gender and cultural labour during the regime, the Ojetti profile is followed by a study of the life and work of Basaglia, an intellectual from the small bourgeoisie who occasionally corresponded with her colleague and age-peer Ojetti but remained virtually unknown, even if she occupied positions of responsibility such as director of dubbing department and assistant director. Despite the considerable differences between the two women in terms of social, economic and cultural capital, both Ojetti and Basaglia gained access to cultural professions through their language studies and translation skills. Their eclecticism allowed them to build useful connections, open new career possibilities for themselves, and cover non-normative roles within the film labour market of Fascist Italy, one in which – according to the 1931 population census of the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica – the personnel involved in film production, development and printing amounted to 728 men and 264 women³. Thus, the personal cases of Ojetti and Basaglia are useful to show not only the repressive system that, in 1930s and early-1940s Italy, limited women's access to high-ranking, well-paid and publicly recognised work positions in the cultural sector, but also the strategies through which female creative workers could partially break through institutionalised barriers.

As documented by influential historians of gender policy in Fascist Italy such as Victoria De Grazia, the regime deployed a “multilayered politics of sexual discrimination” towards women workers by leveraging long-standing prejudices and accentuating the disadvantages and exploitation of women's labour already enforced by the legislation of the pre-Fascist liberal governments⁴. A 2014 article by Lorenzo Benadusi sum-

¹ This research was funded by the Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN) “Per una storia privata della critica cinematografica italiana. Ruoli pubblici e relazioni private: l'istituzionalizzazione della critica cinematografica in Italia tra Anni Trenta e Settanta”, 2017-2023, Università di Bologna (PI: Paolo Noto), Università di Udine (coordinator: Andrea Mariani) and Università di Parma (coordinator: Jennifer Malvezzi), in partnership with the Cineteca di Bologna (Anna Fiaccarini, Michela Zegna). Stella Scabelli conducted research on Paola Ojetti and wrote sections 1 and 2; Michael Guarneri conducted research on Maria Basaglia and wrote sections 3 and 4. Translations into English are by the authors unless otherwise stated.

² For an introduction to Italian film critics' letters as historical sources, see M. Guerra, S. Martin, eds., “La cultura della lettera. La corrispondenza come forma e pratica di critica cinematografica”, *Cinergie*, 15 (2019): 1-67; S. Dotto, A. Mariani, “Il cervello di Carné”, in *Ugo Casiraghi e Glauco Viazzi. Il cervello di Carné. Letterario 1941-1943*, edited by S. Dotto and A. Mariani, Milan: La Nave di Teseo, 2021: 13-50.

³ C. Mereu Keating, “Verso una nuova città del cinema. Il contributo delle donne alla produzione cinematografica in Italia tra il 1930 e il 1960: una riflessione sulle fonti”, *Arabeschi*, 18 (2021). Accessed November 22, 2022. <http://www.arabeschi.it/28-verso-una-nuova-citt-del-cinema-il-contributo-delle-donne-alla-produzione-cinematografica-in-italia-tra-il-1930-e-1960-riflessione-sulle-fonti/>.

⁴ V. de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 167. See also P. Willson, *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; P. Willson, *Women in Twentieth-century Italy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, 4-78.

marises the intricate history of Italian women from the mid-1920s to the early 1940s, drawing from a large number of contributions on the subject: the patriarchal ideology of the regime coexisted and clashed with unprecedented opportunities and cracks in the status quo as the traditional home-bound figure of the *angelo del focolare* (angel of the hearth), who was assigned the tasks of reproduction and maternal care, began to be mobilised in the public sphere as a political activist, a worker, a consumer, or a combination thereof⁵. From a methodological standpoint, Benadusi points out the crucial importance of focusing on the microhistory level of women's lifestyles, which he considers the most appropriate perspective to produce an accurate historical account of gender issues in this complex and contradictory period⁶. Anna Ferrando's research on women translators in Fascist Italy employs archival materials, such as work and personal correspondence, to uncover the career paths taken by women in the publishing industry and the non-normative roles they sometimes managed to assume within the gender-unequal labour market of a male-dominated society⁷.

This article also engages with women's studies produced within the field of film and media history. For example, Elena Mosconi and Meris Nicoletto offer gender perspectives on Fascist cinema cultures through film analysis and an attentive scrutiny of the popular press⁸, while other scholars combine film industry analysis with biographical and autobiographical resources to outline a history of women in Italian⁹, European and American cinema from the silent era to the present day¹⁰. From a methodological standpoint, the reconstruction of Ojetti and Basaglia's career paths, professional routines and social networks specifically draws inspiration from Melanie Bell's investigation on post-World War II film criticism in Great Britain¹¹, which makes ample use

⁵ L. Benadusi, "Storia del fascismo e questioni di genere", *Studi Storici*, 55, 1 (2014): 183-195 (190-195).

⁶ Benadusi cites E. Mondello, *La nuova italiana. La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987; S. Bartoloni, *Il fascismo e le donne nella "Rassegna femminile italiana" 1925-1930*, Rome: Biblink, 2012; and P. Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy. The Massaie Rurali*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

⁷ A. Ferrando, "Donne oltre i confini. La traduzione come percorso di emancipazione durante il fascismo", *Italia Contemporanea*, 294 (2020): 205-234.

⁸ E. Mosconi, "Figure femminili tra cinema ed editoria popolare", *Comunicazioni sociali*, 20, 4 (1998): 634-651; EAD., "Donne in vetrina: immagini del femminile nel cinema italiano tra le due guerre", *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 17 (2010): 71-86; M. Nicoletto, *Donne nel cinema di regime fra tradizione e modernità*, Alessandria: Falsopiano, 2014.

⁹ M. Dall'Asta, ed., *Non solo dive: pioniere del cinema italiano*, Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2008; L. Cardone, S. Filippelli, eds., *Cinema e scritture femminili: letterate italiane fra la pagina e lo schermo*, Pavona: Iacobelli, 2011; L. Cardone, C. Jandelli, C. Tognolotti, eds., "Storie in divenire. Le donne nel cinema italiano", *Quaderni del CSCI*, 11 (2015): 12-334; D. Missero, "Titillating Cuts: Genealogies of Women Editors in Italian Cinema", *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, 4 (2018): 57-82; L. Cardone et al., eds., "Sentieri selvaggi. Cinema e Women's Studies in Italia", *Arabeschi*, 18 (2021). Accessed November 22, 2022. <http://www.arabeschi.it/collection/sentieri-selvaggi-cinema-e-womens-studies-in-italia/#sentieri-selvaggi-cinema-e-womens-studies-in-italia>; D. Missero, *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

¹⁰ P. Morrissey, "Documents (III): Question de genre. Regards sur les femmes au travail dans le cinéma français des années Trente", *1895*, 65 (2011): 168-179; J.K. Allen, "Doing It All: Women's On- and Off-Screen Contributions to European Silent Film", in *Silent Women: Pioneers of Cinema*, edited by M. Bridges and C. Robson, Twickenham: Supernova Books, 2016: 107-130; E. Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016; S. Liddy, ed., *Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Practice and Power*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; M. Bell, *Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2021.

¹¹ M. Bell, "Film Criticism as 'Women's Work': The Gendered Economy of Film Criticism in Britain, 1945-65", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 31, 2 (2011): 191-209; M. Bell, "Feminism and Women's Film Criticism in Post-War Britain, 1945-59", *Feminist Media Studies*, 11, 4 (2011): 399-416.

of work correspondence and other administrative documents to shed light on women's more ordinary professions, working lives and professional dynamics, as well as on the relations between cinema and other cultural spheres. In so doing, the present article contributes new materials for the study of gender and labour in the 1930s and early-1940s Italian film industry, especially as far as the female presence in audiovisual translation and in film criticism is concerned and considering that none of the key studies on the introduction and development of dubbing in Italy approach audiovisual translation from a gender perspective¹². The decisive contribution of female writers to the booming market of women's periodicals and entertainment magazines has been highlighted before¹³, but existing overviews of Italian film criticism in the 1930s only mention Guglielmina Setti as a woman critic¹⁴.

2. PAOLA OJETTI

Born in 1911, Paola Ojetti was the daughter of Ugo Ojetti, an Italian writer, art critic and journalist well connected to the cultural and political establishment of his time. From 1913, Ugo Ojetti and his wife Fernanda Gobba (a close collaborator and advisor of her husband's, an important node in the Ojetti family's social network, and a cultural mediator in her own right) settled at Il Salviatino with their infant daughter. The salon of this fifteenth-century villa, immersed in the greenery of Fiesole and renovated on the initiative of the Ojettis, represented for artists, intellectuals and politicians an exclusive gathering place for decades¹⁵. At Il Salviatino Paola Ojetti was introduced not only to the study of arts and humanities, but also to her family's influential circle. In his memoirs, poet Marino Moretti recounts Paola Ojetti's childhood and adolescence, discussing her homeschooling, her singing exercises, her study of foreign languages and, above all, her fascination with the artists who regularly visited her parents' house¹⁶.

In her early twenties, Paola Ojetti was commissioned to translate into Italian Max Reinhardt's adaptation of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was to be performed at Giardino di Boboli in 1933 during the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. Paola Ojetti's social position and family connections certainly enabled her to ob-

¹² M. Quargnolo, "Pionieri ed esperienze del doppiato italiano", *Bianco e Nero*, 5 (1967): 67-79; M. Quargnolo, *La parola ripudiata: l'incredibile storia dei film stranieri in Italia nei primi anni del sonoro*, Gemona: Cineteca del Friuli, 1986; S. Raffaelli, *La lingua filmata. Didascalie e dialoghi nel cinema italiano*, Florence: Le Lettere, 1992; C. Mereu Keating, *The Politics of Dubbing: Film Censorship and State Intervention in the Translation of Foreign Cinema in Fascist Italy*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016.

¹³ S. Salvatici, "Il rotocalco femminile: una presenza nuova negli anni del Fascismo", in *Donne e giornalismo. Percorsi e presenze di una storia di genere*, edited by S. Franchini and S. Soldani, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004: 110-126; L. Cardone, "Lo schermo della frivolezza. Giornaliste e scrittrici nel vortice dell'editoria popolare", in *Culture del film. La critica cinematografica e la società italiana*, edited by M. Guerra and S. Martin, Bologna: il Mulino, 2020: 115-138.

¹⁴ O. Caldiron, "Geografie della critica", in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. 5: 1934-1939*, edited by O. Caldiron, Venice-Rome: Marsilio-Bianco e Nero, 2006: 481-484 (483). At the third national convention of the Italian film press, held in Cortina d'Ampezzo in early 1940, not a single female delegate was present. Cf. S. Favre, "Giornalisti cinematografici a 18 sotto zero", *Lo Schermo*, 2 (1940): 11.

¹⁵ The main source on the history of the Ojetti family is D. De Angelis, *Nanda Ojetti. La signora del Salviatino*, Rome: Gangemi, 2020. See also U. Ojetti, *Vita vissuta*, edited by A. Stanghellini, Milan: Mondadori, 1942; U. Ojetti, *I taccuini. 1914-1943*, edited by F. Gobba and P. Ojetti, Florence: Sansoni, 1954.

¹⁶ M. Moretti, *Il libro dei miei amici*, Milan: Mondadori, 1960, 178-183. Paola Ojetti herself briefly wrote about her formative years at Il Salviatino in Ojetti, *I taccuini*, XI-XIII.

tain this role within such a prestigious cultural event – her father being an *Accademico d'Italia* since 1930 and the artistic director of the Florence-based festival¹⁷. Upon being hired, she skilfully took advantage of the assignment, establishing an important work and personal relationship with Reinhardt, for whom she translated another Shakespeare play, *The Merchant of Venice*, performed at Campo San Trovaso in 1934 during the Biennale di Venezia. On this latter occasion, Paola Ojetti undertook a significant role, organising and coordinating cultural activities that went far beyond linguistic adaptation. For instance, she worked alongside Romolo Bazzoni, the administrative director of the Biennale di Venezia, and she had a decisive influence over the choice of the musical commentaries and the recruitment of composer Victor de Sabata¹⁸. In fact, the Ojetti's correspondence recently acquired by the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze shows that several composers turned to Paola Ojetti for professional advice and help, which was not only due to the wide and influential social network of her family but also to her own inclination for and education in the music field. In 1937-1938 she co-directed with renowned musicologist Guido Gatti a collection of music textbooks for the publishing house Tumminelli¹⁹, and she published a music-themed children's novel²⁰, further proof of her eclecticism.

At the end of 1934, Paola Ojetti's work as a translator of Shakespeare earned her the Premio Galante, an important literary prize for women writers awarded by the publishing house Bompiani²¹. After that, she continued to translate Shakespeare plays into Italian, including *Romeo and Juliet* (performed at Ca' Foscari in 1937, under the direction of Guido Salvini, during the Biennale di Venezia) and *As You Like It* (performed at Giardino di Boboli in 1938, under the direction of Jacques Copeau, during the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino). Because of her close collaboration with Reinhardt in the early 1930s, she was also commissioned to translate the dialogue of the Warner Bros. movie *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Max Reinhardt, William Dieterle, 1935). Filippo Sacchi's review of the film in the Milan-based national daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera* lauded Ojetti as “the heroic film translator who faced the impossible task of dubbing Shakespeare”²², and so did the monthly magazine *Lo Schermo*, which called her a “well-educated and considerate translator”²³. In the wake of this growing success, Ojetti became one of the most sought-after translators-adapters in the dubbing scene of 1930s Italy, and in April 1937 she was even invited to give conference talks on film dubbing in Genoa, at the Liceo Femminile and at the Cineguf section²⁴. However, the institution of the Italian state monopoly on foreign film importation abruptly put an end to her career

¹⁷ I. Ruggiero, *Le regie di Max Reinhardt in Italia nei festival degli anni Trenta: “Sogno di una notte di mezza estate” ai Giardini di Boboli - “Il Mercante di Venezia” in Campo San Trovaso*, Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova-Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2016-2017, 54-55.

¹⁸ BNCF, Carteggi vari, Nucleo Ojetti-Gatti, 563.13, P. Ojetti to I. Pizzetti, 16/10/1933.

¹⁹ Anonymous, “Alfredo Casella pianista”, *Corriere della Sera*, December 23, 1937: 3.

²⁰ P. Ojetti, *Musica di Claudio*, Florence: Bemporad, 1938. Ugo Ojetti was the president of the publishing house Bemporad from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. Cf. Mondello, *La nuova italiana*, 213; A. Ceconi et al., *Il fondo Bemporad dell'Archivio storico Giunti Editore*. Accessed November 22, 2022, <http://www.soprintendenzaarchivistatocscana.beniculturali.it/fileadmin/risorse/inventari/Bemporad.pdf>.

²¹ Anonymous, “Il ‘Premio Galante’ a Paola Ojetti”, *Corriere della Sera*, December 16, 1934: 5. For the “invasion” of translated works in Italy's 1929-1934 publishing industry, see C. Rundle, *Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, 67-111.

²² F. Sacchi, “Sogno di una notte di mezza estate”, *Corriere della Sera*, February 15, 1936: 3.

²³ Anonymous, “Un esempio di doppiaggio”, *Lo Schermo*, 3 (1936): 36.

²⁴ Anonymous, “Una conferenza di Paola Ojetti sul doppiaggio cinematografico”, *Corriere della Sera*, April 17, 1937: 2.

at the Warner Bros. dubbing department, as she recalled in a November-1938 letter to Alberto Cavalcanti²⁵.

Having entered the Italian film industry in the mid-1930s thanks to her dubbing experience, Paola Ojetti soon expanded her activities into other sectors of film culture. In January 1938, she co-founded the weekly magazine *Film* with journalists Giuseppe Vittorio Sampieri and Mino Doletti. Doletti, who had been working as a reporter since 1924²⁶, took on the role of *direttore* (magazine director), while Paola Ojetti was given the subordinate role of *segretaria di redazione* (editorial secretary). This is hardly surprising: within the discriminatory framework of the period, high-ranking, well-paid and publicly recognised intellectual professions were hardly accessible to women, if only because of the difficulties women had to face in order to attend academic courses and obtain university degrees²⁷. Nevertheless, due to the “belletristic” conception of the profession and its aura of lesser prestige, journalism seemed “a suitable female occupation”, to the point that the number of women journalists steadily grew from the early 1920s (the 1921 census reported 382 women journalists, equal to 7% of Italian professional writers) to the early 1930s (the 1931 census reported 991 women journalists, equal to 12% of Italian professional writers)²⁸. However, “only a score or so of women journalists were truly *firme di successo*” with permanent employment contracts: most female writers had to resign themselves to freelancing as *pubbliciste* (occasional press collaborators), often scraping by “with occasional pieces published in the women’s press”²⁹. Not even upper-class, well-educated Paola Ojetti could avoid this situation, as testified by the 1941-1942 issues of the yearbook *Almanacco della donna italiana*, which included her in the list of Italian *pubbliciste*³⁰. Yet, the extensive body of correspondence preserved in the Fondo Mino Doletti of the Biblioteca Renzo Renzi della Cineteca di Bologna reveals that, from the very foundation of the magazine, her work as a member of *Film*’s editorial staff was far from ancillary or sporadic.

In a letter dated 21st April 1939, Sampieri recollected how the ideation of *Film* came to be: the spark was the friendship between Sampieri and Paola Ojetti, which developed in the mid-1930s, thanks to Ugo Ojetti; later the two friends met Doletti and the trio came up with the idea to establish a film publication³¹. In the letters written between the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938, Paola Ojetti enthusiastically expressed her wish to participate in the creation of a serious periodical intended for a popular audience, and to use statements by the most prestigious figures from all artistic fields to demonstrate that “cinema is a serious art”³². To fulfil her role as the magazine’s editorial

²⁵ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943, C2 V, V/1366, P. Ojetti to A. Cavalcanti, 20/11/1938.

²⁶ Initially in the Parma-based local daily newspaper *Il Piccolo*, then in the Bologna-based local daily newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* and in the Turin-based national daily newspaper *La Stampa*. Cf. BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A 1, unnumbered and undated typescript; M. Doletti, “Il mio mancato duello con Malavasi” [1975], in *Il Resto del Carlino 1885-1985: un giornale nella storia d’Italia*, edited by D. Biondi, Bologna: Poligrafici Editoriale, 1985: 229.

²⁷ De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 147-157.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 196, 325.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁰ Anonymous, “Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1941”, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 22 (1941): 297-389 (311); Anonymous, “Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1942”, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 23 (1942): 293-394 (308).

³¹ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 S-V XXV, XXV/6971, G.V. Sampieri to P. Ojetti, 21/04/1939. For Doletti’s own memories of *Film* in the late 1930s and early 1940s, see F. Savio, *Cinecittà anni Trenta. Vol. 1*, edited by A. Aprà, Rome: Bulzoni-Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, 2021, 330-333.

³² BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 C3 VI, VI/1663, P. Ojetti to G. Civinini, 24/12/1937. For her specific ideas on cinema as art, see P. Ojetti, “Wagner in pericolo”, *Lo Schermo*, 10 (1937): 18.

secretary, she put to good use her knowledge of English and French, her vast culture, her practical experience in music, theatre and cinema, and, most importantly, her impressive network of professional and personal relationships in Italy and abroad. From late 1937 onwards, she contacted illustrious personalities who could, in her opinion, certify the artistic legitimacy of cinema among both the cultural elite and the general public. A key example is *Film*'s "30 righe di..." column: in the debut issue of *Film*, Ugo Ojetti shared his thoughts on cinema³³; in the following issues, many prestigious personalities, all connected to *Il Salviatino*, responded to Paola Ojetti's invitation – among them poets Ada Negri and Angiolo Silvio Novaro, and composer Franco Alfano³⁴. Paola Ojetti also wrote to Reinhardt, presenting *Film* as a "very serious" periodical, "not the usual movie stories that interest only house-maids"³⁵, while to de Sabata, whom she was begging for a short article, she explained that her objective was to demonstrate that in Italy "people of high and great artistic standing" were concerned with cinema³⁶. It is thus that, by capitalising on past collaborations such as an Italian translation of "beautiful fairy tales" published "by Bemporad in Florence"³⁷, or by evoking memories of social events such as an "enjoyable breakfast" at *Il Salviatino*³⁸, Paola Ojetti obtained written contributions from Italian and foreign composers, poets, novelists and playwrights. Evidently, her nominal role of editorial secretary did not do justice to her daily labour. Firstly, with her frequent presence in the "Sette giorni a Roma" review column, Paola Ojetti was a proper film critic, an atypical role for a woman in the context of 1930s Italy. Secondly, her duties included a wide range of activities, such as proposing columns, writing reports and interviews, translating and revising articles, maintaining good relations with established collaborators and finding new ones. Not coincidentally, in her work correspondence, she is occasionally addressed as "la direttrice"³⁹.

The work and personal relationships between the *direttrice* and the female writers who contributed to *Film* are of particular importance to better understand gender dynamics within the cultural and creative industries of Fascist Italy. In the pages of *Film* we find several *Almanacco della donna italiana* contributors: Margherita Cattaneo, Ada Negri, Alba de Céspedes, Irene Brin and Vera Rossi Lodomez⁴⁰. An in-depth study of their correspondence testifies to the existence of a network of women intellectuals whose membership provided mutual encouragement, support and collaboration, as best exemplified by the cases of Cattaneo, Negri and de Céspedes. As for the Ojetti-Cattaneo relationship, in December 1937, Paola Ojetti asked Cattaneo to contribute an article to *Film* and offered her a higher

³³ U. Ojetti, "27 righe di", *Film*, January 29, 1938: 2.

³⁴ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 N-O XV, XV/4212-XV/4216, correspondence between P. Ojetti and A. Negri from 03/01/1938 to 02/02/1938; BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 N-O XV, XV/4242, P. Ojetti to A. S. Novaro, 11/02/1938; BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/10, P. Ojetti to F. Alfano, 14/03/1938. Cf. A. Negri, "16 righe di", *Film*, February 12, 1938: 2; A.S. Novaro, "29 righe di", *Film*, March 5, 1938: 2; F. Alfano, "40 righe di", *Film*, April 2, 1938: 2.

³⁵ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/26, P. Ojetti to M. Reinhardt's secretary A. Adler, 27/11/1937 [English in the original].

³⁶ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 D2-E, VIII/2064, P. Ojetti to V. de Sabata, 01/12/1937.

³⁷ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 C1 III, III/735, P. Ojetti to K. Čapek, 05/03/1938 [English in the original]. Cf. K. Čapek, *Novelle*, translated by P. Ojetti, Florence: Bemporad, 1938.

³⁸ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 C3 VI, VI/1639, P. Ojetti to F. Cilea, 19/10/1939.

³⁹ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 R XVII, XVII/4903, S. Ricciardi to P. Ojetti, 02/01/1938; BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/100, R. Alessi to P. Ojetti, 04/04/1942. For a semi-serious self-portrait of Paola Ojetti as an overworked *Film* employee, see P. Ojetti, "Paola Ojetti: Io, cane da guardia", *Film*, February 14, 1942: 8.

⁴⁰ Created in 1920 on the initiative of the publishing house Bemporad and the Rome-based magazine *La donna*, *Almanacco della donna italiana* presented contradictory gender cultures, including calendars of domestic chores, appeals for women to conform to the model of (house)wife-mother for the Fatherland, and non-conformist contributions by female intellectuals. Cf. Mondello, *La nuova italiana*, 162-164.

publication fee than other male and female collaborators in view of her extraordinary cultural standing⁴¹ – an invite that was reciprocated in 1939, when Cattaneo became the director of *Almanacco della donna italiana* and asked Paola Ojetti to take charge of the film column⁴². In 1937-1938 Negri sent Fernanda Gobba a series of enthusiastic letters about Paola Ojetti's work in dubbing and film criticism, prophesying a successful career for the young woman in the cultural sector beyond journalism⁴³. As for the Ojetti-de Céspedes relationship, in addition to offering de Céspedes space in the 1940-1943 issues of *Film* to comment on the film adaptation of her own 1938 novel *Nessuno torna indietro*⁴⁴, Paola Ojetti actively participated in the revision of the screenplay written by de Céspedes and Alessandro Blasetti⁴⁵. Possibly, Ojetti's work as a translator-adapter in the 1930s helped refine her screenwriting skills, which she started practicing in 1939, when she co-authored the award-winning synopsis of the war-propaganda film *La guerra* with Doletti and Stefano Landi, alias Stefano Pirandello⁴⁶.

Ojetti tried her hand at screenwriting especially during the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), which she joined with conviction, moving from Rome to Venice in the aftermath of 8 September 1943 to continue her work in the RSI-sponsored publication of *Film* alongside Doletti⁴⁷. Upon her return to Rome after the end of World War II, her indisputable collaborationist status raised the indignation of anti-Fascist film journalists and screenwriters. A press campaign against her was launched by film magazines such as *Film d'oggi* and *Star*, to which she reacted by suing her former *Film* colleague Italo Dragosei who, among other things, had insinuated that Ojetti's reintegration into post-war Italy's cultural sector was due to her friendship with partisan de Céspedes⁴⁸. In the immediate post-war, Ojetti resumed her career as a literary translator and began an assiduous professional partnership with the publishing house Mondadori thanks to a recommendation letter that de Céspedes wrote to Arnoldo Mondadori on 5 August 1945⁴⁹. As for cinema-related activities, in the post-war Ojetti not only kept on working as a translator-adapter in Italy's dubbing sector, and as a critic in the film magazines directed by Doletti (*Film* in the second half of the 1940s and *Film d'oggi* in the 1950s), but she

⁴¹ BRR, FMD, Film 1943-1938 C2 V, V/1336, P. Ojetti to M. Cattaneo, 07/12/1937.

⁴² P. Ojetti, "Le stelle stanno a guardare", *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 23 (1942): 207-211 (207).

⁴³ GNAM, Fondo Ugo Ojetti, Corrispondenti: letterati e politici, 2563, correspondence between F. Gobba and A. Negri from 22/04/1937 to 11/02/1938.

⁴⁴ P. Ojetti, "Il film di 'Nessuno torna indietro'. Intervista con Alba de Céspedes", *Film*, January 13, 1940: 5-6; A. de Céspedes, "Ho paura del cinematografo", *Film*, December 12, 1942: 5; A. de Céspedes, "Nel limbo dei personaggi", *Film*, January 2, 1943: 5; A. de Céspedes, "Non basta l'abito", *Film*, January 16, 1943: 7; A. de Céspedes, "Con o senza volto", *Film*, February 13, 1943: 3. See also L. Cardone, "Alba de Céspedes. Scrivere (anche) per il cinema", in *Cinema e scritture femminili*, edited by L. Cardone and S. Filippelli: 70-92.

⁴⁵ BRR, Fondo Blasetti, 0044 *Nessuno torna indietro*. Relazioni, P. Ojetti to A. Blasetti, 07/02/1943.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, "L'esito del concorso per un soggetto cinematografico", *Corriere della Sera*, April 27, 1940: 5; M. Doletti, "Cinque soggetti premiati a pari merito", *Film*, May 4, 1940: 3; Anonymous, "I cinque soggetti cinematografici premiati", *Film*, May 11, 1940: 5. Incidentally, in the late 1930s Paola Ojetti translated into Italian an English-language screenwriting handbook: S. Margrave, *Come si scrive un film*, translated by P. Ojetti, Milan: Bompiani, 1939.

⁴⁷ G. Ghigi, "Il cinema di Salò", in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. 6: 1940-1944*, edited by E.G. Laura, Venice-Rome: Marsilio-Bianco e Nero, 2011: 444-454 (450 and 452-454).

⁴⁸ Anonymous, "Questi sono i traditori". *Film d'oggi*, June 16, 1945: 8; I. Dragosei, "La Serenissima rasserenata. Il carnevale continua", *Star*, July 14, 1945: 2; I. Dragosei, "Paola l'inafferrabile", *Star*, September 22, 1945: 8; I. Dragosei, "Un ritorno", *Star*, November 3, 1945: 8; Anonymous, "Collaborazionisti alla riscossa", *Star*, November 17, 1945: 3; I. Dragosei, "Pezze d'appoggio", *Star*, December 22, 1945: 8.

⁴⁹ This letter was published in S. Ciminari, ed., *Lettere all'editore: Alba de Céspedes e Gianna Manzini, autrici Mondadori*, Milan: FAAM, 2021, 242. For Mondadori, in addition to revising existing translations, Paola Ojetti translated authors such as William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw and John Dos Passos. Cf. V. Armanni, ed., "Fra cultura e vita". *L'editore Alberto Mondadori*, Milan: FAAM, 2014, 20-25.

also co-wrote melodramas, comedies and adventures, and in 1961 she even collaborated in the screenplay of Luchino Visconti's unrealised film project *La monaca di Monza*⁵⁰. Finally, true to the eclecticism that had distinguished her career trajectory since the 1930s, in the early 1960s Ojetti was hired by the record label Istituto Internazionale del Disco⁵¹, where she directed the literature-themed vinyl-record series "Collana culturale a cura di Paola Ojetti".

3. MARIA BASAGLIA

Maria Basaglia was born in Cremona on 12 June 1908. Her father, Mario Basaglia, was a glassworker; her mother, L. B., was a seamstress and laundrywoman who quit her job after marriage⁵². It is likely that, as an only child, Maria Basaglia had a comfortable infancy: her father was an esteemed professional who owned a busy shop in the town centre⁵³; her maternal grandparents ran a thriving tailoring business⁵⁴. Mario Basaglia died in September 1917, at the age of forty-five, and L. B. suddenly became the head of a small middle class family that had lost its main source of income. In spite of the financial difficulties, Maria Basaglia did not quit her studies: after middle school, she enrolled in the accountancy course of the Istituto Tecnico di Cremona for the school year 1921-1922⁵⁵. Meanwhile, her mother started a relationship with N. C., a traveling salesman from Tuscany. The three of them moved to Sanremo in November 1921, and Basaglia completed her first year of high school there. Then, in the summer of 1922, Basaglia returned to Cremona alone to finish her studies at the Istituto Tecnico di Cremona. From the school year 1922-1923 she lived with the family of a classmate and studied with good results, especially as far as French was concerned (she also studied German, but not as successfully). In October 1925, Basaglia obtained a diploma in accountancy and, shortly after, she moved to Alessandria with N. C. and her mother. In Alessandria, it is likely that Basaglia put her studies to good use and worked in commercial firms, perhaps thanks to N. C.'s business connections.

The relocation of Basaglia and her mother from Alessandria to Rome dates to sometime between the 1931 census and the 1936 census⁵⁶. In Rome, Basaglia probably exploited her excellent command of French to make a living as a translator for both literature and cinema – the home-based nature of translation work undoubtedly making it a socially acceptable career choice for a young woman of the petite bourgeoisie living in the capital with her aging mother and no male guardians. It is currently unknown

⁵⁰ Cf. BRR, FMD, Film 1950-60 N-O; FAAM, Archivio Alba de Céspedes, Corrispondenza scrittori 1961, Busta 29, Fascicolo 6; ACS, Fondo Ministero Turismo e Spettacolo - DGS - Archivio Cinema - Lungometraggi. Fascicoli per opera (CF 16-5000), Busta 321. Between 1948 and 1950 Paola Ojetti contributed to the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia's magazine *Bianco e Nero* too, as both author and translator: P. Ojetti, "Shakespeare sullo schermo", *Bianco e Nero*, 5 (1948): 41-47; J. Leyda, "Arte e morte di D.W. Griffith", *Bianco e Nero*, 10 (1949): 7-13; J. Agee, "L'epoca d'oro della commedia cinematografica", *Bianco e Nero*, 4 (1950): 52-70; E. Irving, "La musica per film in Inghilterra", *Bianco e Nero*, 5-6 (1950): 122-125; L. Jacobs, "King Vidor", *Bianco e Nero*, 7 (1950): 25-34.

⁵¹ De Angelis, *Nanda Ojetti*, 48.

⁵² All personal data about the Basaglia family come from ASCR, Stato Civile. Personal names have been anonymised by the author.

⁵³ E. Santoro, "La casa Liberty del salumiere Brusati", *La Provincia*, October 9, 1974: 6.

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Maria Basaglia's relatives Luciano and Andrea Panvini (in person, 2022).

⁵⁵ All school data come from ASCR, Fondo Istituto Tecnico Eugenio Beltrami.

⁵⁶ Author's correspondence with Ufficio Anagrafe di Alessandria (e-mail, 2016).

which literary and film works Basaglia translated from French into Italian at the very beginning of her career. However, a 1980s oral history of Italian dubbing credits her with having worked for Paramount on the Italian version of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1938), released in Italy in spring 1938, which suggests that she also mastered English⁵⁷. It was probably around this time that Basaglia met Marcello Albani, a “playwright, film translator, screenwriter, dubbing director and dialogue writer”⁵⁸ with whom she started a romantic and professional relationship that lasted for decades. In March 1938, Albani and “X. Y.” (Basaglia? Paola Ojetti?)⁵⁹ wrote an article in *Film* to denounce the unsatisfactory working conditions experienced by film dubbers, and especially by *riduttori/dialoghisti* (film translators) and *direttori di doppiaggio* (dubbing directors)⁶⁰. Albani and X. Y. complained that the work of those who translate, adapt, and dub the foreign films imported to Italy was not given the consideration it deserved. Firstly, in the opening credits, the names of the *riduttori/dialoghisti* and of the *direttori di doppiaggio* were never mentioned. Secondly, in the Italian press, film critics hardly ever discussed dubbing, and never credited the people responsible for the Italian-language versions. Finally, the *riduttori/dialoghisti* were normally paid 130 Italian Liras per reel, which amounted to a sum that would range between 1,000 and 1,300 Italian Liras for a whole movie – merely 1% of the total cost of dubbing a feature film⁶¹.

Although our focus is Basaglia, it is worth providing some information about her life and work partner Marcello Albani, as the two climbed up the film industry ladder together, from dubbing to film direction. Marcello Albani was the pen name of Giorgio Marchetto, born in New York on 3 May 1902 to an Italian couple who had emigrated to the USA at the turn of the century (his father, Carmine Marchetto, was a copper artisan from San Giorgio la Molara)⁶². Giorgio Marchetto returned to San Giorgio la Molara with his parents in 1905 and attended military school at the Collegio Militare di Roma during his teenage years. Upon being drafted by the Regio Esercito, he joined the Bersaglieri and, in the summer of 1923, he became second lieutenant⁶³. Around the same time, he enrolled in the Fascist Party and worked in the Benevento-based press office of the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale. His career in the Fascist Party didn't last long, though: during a 1925 purge, he was expelled due to his unruly private life⁶⁴. Then, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he began to roam around Italy, Greece and Egypt, often using false credentials. In this period, Marchetto started to call himself Marcello Albani and attempted a career in journalism and theatre. Although he never acquired a professional qualification as a journalist, he still managed to publish four dispatches from the Balkans in Roberto Farinacci's Cremona-based national daily newspaper *Il Regime Fascista* in 1934-1935⁶⁵. His career in theatre is equally

⁵⁷ C. Camerini, C. Biarese, “Alla ricerca del dialogo perduto. 13 filmografie di dialoghisti”, *Segnocinema*, 22 (1986): 40-41 (40).

⁵⁸ Anonymous, *Almanacco del cinema italiano*, Rome: Società Anonima Editrice Cinema, 1939, 263.

⁵⁹ The latter reviewed said article before publication and, in her correspondence, called Albani “my colleague in dubbing”. Cf. BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A.I, I/68, P. Ojetti to A. Alberti, 11/03/1938.

⁶⁰ M. Albani, X. Y., “Questioni. Doppiaggi”, *Film*, March 26, 1938: 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² All personal data about the Marchetto family come from ASBN, Stato Civile.

⁶³ ASBN, Ruoli Militari.

⁶⁴ For Marchetto's political profile and criminal record, see ACS, Fondo Ministero dell'Interno - DGPS - Divisione polizia politica - Fascicoli personali, Busta 777; ACS, Fondo Ministero dell'Interno - DGPS - Divisione affari riservati - Categoria B, Busta 228.

⁶⁵ M. Albani, “Il teatro di stato e la cinematografia in Grecia”, *Il Regime Fascista*, November 28, 1934: 3; Id., “L'organizzazione dei trafficanti d'armi (1)”, *Il Regime Fascista*, February 8, 1935: 5; Id., “L'organizzazione dei trafficanti d'armi (2)”, *Il Regime Fascista*, February 15, 1935: 5; Id., “L'organizzazione dei trafficanti d'armi (3)”, *Il Regime Fascista*, February 20, 1935: 5.

unsubstantial: in 1932, he tried to set up a theatre company in Milan by taking advantage of his wife's resources (in June 1931, Marchetto had married the daughter of a wealthy widow who owned a brothel) and those of industry magnate E. R. (the lover of actress M. F.). In February 1935, his wife, M. M., obtained legal separation from Marchetto due to his mishandling of her family assets, and he moved to Rome, where he founded the production company San Giorgio Film for the making of a movie titled *Verso l'azzurro*. The portrait of Marchetto that emerged from the May-1936 correspondence between the police and the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia (DGC) was far from flattering: according to the investigators, he knew nothing about filmmaking and, as a businessman, he was untrustworthy⁶⁶. The *Verso l'azzurro* project was thus halted by the DGC and Marchetto's directorial debut was postponed indefinitely for his lack of experience and reliability.

The work partnership with Basaglia fulfilled Albani's need for experience and reliability. In the second half of the 1930s, Basaglia built a good professional reputation for herself as a translator-adapter from French and English to Italian, to the point that, after 1938, she occupied the prominent position of director of the dubbing department at Scalera Film⁶⁷. At the same time, the partnership with an unscrupulously ambitious aspiring director like Albani provided Basaglia with many opportunities to divert her career from the obscure, poorly paid ancillary work of *riduttrice/dialoghista* to much more prestigious and remunerative authorial work. At Scalera Film, Basaglia and Albani worked on three movies shot in both Italian and French versions: *Papà Lebonnard* (Jean de Limur, 1939), *Ultima giovinezza* (Jeff Musso, 1939) and *Rosa di sangue* (Jean Choux, 1940)⁶⁸. In all three cases, Basaglia worked as screenwriter, while Albani was credited as *direttore artistico* and presumably took care of coaching the Italian actors⁶⁹. Whether it was Basaglia who got Albani hired on Scalera Film's Italo-French triptych or the other way around remains open to debate. Curiously, for her screenwriting debut in *Papà Lebonnard*, Basaglia chose to credit herself as "Maria Basaglia-Albani", although the two were never married⁷⁰. It could be supposed that she wished to be strongly associated with the *direttore artistico* for reasons of professional prestige, since the important Italo-French cooperation *Papà Lebonnard* was likely to put Albani on the map of high-end Italian (and European) cinema. The fear that her screenwriting contribution could be overlooked due to her being a woman might also have played a part in Basaglia's decision to present herself as 'the wife of' an emerging talent. Or, more simply, it was a way for Basaglia to declare her love for Albani (by the early 1940s the two were living together in Rome). It is currently impossible to provide a definitive answer. Whatever the case, she would not use the name "Maria Basaglia-Albani" again in her screen credits, although in a letter to Paola Ojetti dated 6 September 1939 Basaglia referred to Albani as "my husband" and signed herself "Maria Basaglia Albani"⁷¹.

Surname aside, the letter mentioned above is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it

⁶⁶ The May-1936 institutional correspondence can be found in the Busta 777 mentioned in Note 64.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, *Cinema italiano (estratto dall'Almanacco del cinema italiano)*, Rome: Società Anonima Editrice, undated [1942-1943], 151.

⁶⁸ *Papà Lebonnard* is based on Jean Aicard's 1889 drama *Le père Lebonnard*; *Ultima giovinezza* on Liam O'Flaherty's 1926 novel *Mister Gilhooley*; *Rosa di sangue* on Pierre Benoit's 1937 novel *Les compagnons d'Ulysse*.

⁶⁹ According to Máximo Barro, who worked for Albani and Basaglia in São Paulo in the late 1950s, Albani could speak only Italian and a little ancient Greek. Author's correspondence with Máximo Barro (e-mail, 2018).

⁷⁰ Her nubile status was confirmed by the documents of the Ufficio Anagrafe in Cremona, where she died on 12 June 2000.

⁷¹ BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/66, M. Basaglia to P. Ojetti, 06/09/1939.

represents an interaction between women workers struggling to make a career in Fascist Italy's cultural sector. As such, it is worth noting that the relationship between colleagues was far from equal: Basaglia addressed Ojetti as "Gentile e cara Donna Paola", an obsequious salutation that immediately marks the difference between the two women in terms of economic, social and cultural capital (the expression "Donna Paola" alludes to an aristocratic heritage that the Ojettis didn't have). As a matter of fact, Basaglia wrote to the "dearest" Ojetti in order to thank her for having written a *Film* article that "sheds light on our [Albani and Basaglia's] obscure work as dubbers", so it makes sense that Basaglia stressed her own 'inferiority' to Ojetti, who – as a prominent figure in *Film*'s editorial staff – held the power of conferring fame and prestige to film workers among the artistic community and the general public alike. Yet, the letter evidently exceeds the aims of a simple thank-you note, including as it does elements of strategic network-building. In fact, in spite of the subservient tone, Basaglia was undoubtedly trying to fraternise with Ojetti, as the former praised the latter for being "very chic" – a clever way to highlight the Francophone background that they shared, perhaps in view of a future friendship between Rome-based, educated, cosmopolitan women active in Italy's cultural sector.

Secondly, by comparing the content of the letter to that of the *Film* article about Albani and Basaglia's dubbing work, it is possible to shed light on the professional routines and gender dialectics of the Albani-Basaglia couple. The article is devoted to the work done at Scalera Film to dub Italian movies into Greek: "having received the dialogues [translated into Greek by Georgios Theodorou Zoras], Marcello Albani and his faithful companion and collaborator [Basaglia] worked at the moviola to verify, with incredible patience, that the synchrony of the dialogue was perfect also from a technical point of view"⁷². Not only is Basaglia not even mentioned by name, but the fact that she was Albani's superior at Scalera Film's *reparto doppiaggio* is also omitted (as already said, she directed the dubbing department, he was one of the *riduttori/dialoghisti* and *direttori di doppiaggio*). Indeed, the article has the chain of command turned upside-down, with the higher-ranking and more competent worker Basaglia ending up portrayed as Albani's faithful companion and collaborator. For this misrepresentation, Basaglia thanked Ojetti with great deference: arguably, any mention in a popular magazine was better than nothing for a woman working in Fascist Italy's cultural sector.

After the apprentice period at Scalera Film, Albani must have appeared to the DGC as a stronger candidate for a film-director position. From 1940 to 1944, he directed five features: *Il bazar delle idee* (1940) and *Divieto di sosta* (1941), two romantic comedies produced by Andros; the Venus-Scalera production *Boccaccio* (1940), an adaptation of the homonymous 1879 operetta by Franz von Suppé; the Marfilm-Artisti Associati production *Redenzione* (1942), based on the homonymous 1927 propaganda play by Farinacci, glorifying 1919-1922 *squadristo*; and the seduced-and-abandoned melodrama *L'ultimo sogno* (1947), produced by Felsinea, shot and edited between Budrio and Venice in 1944, but released only in the post-war. For these five films, Basaglia appeared as 'help' or 'assistant' to Albani in planning and managing the shooting, which presumably allowed her to gather the necessary on-set experience to step up and direct the comedy *Sua Altezza ha detto: no!* (1953) and the drama *Sangue di zingara* (1956) in Italy, and the drama *O pão que o diabo amassou* (1957) and the comedy *Macumba na Alta* (1958) in Brazil. In the 1940-1944 period, Basaglia also authored film treatments (*Il bazar delle idee* and *L'ultimo sogno*), co-authored screenplays (*Il bazar delle idee*,

⁷² Y. X., "Si 'doppia' in greco", *Film*, October 7, 1939: 10.

Boccaccio, *Divieto di sosta* and *L'ultimo sogno*)⁷³ and acted as the legal representative of the film production company Marfilm.

In spite of her multifaceted talent and hard work, Basaglia did not achieve visibility in film magazines with wide circulation such as *Lo Schermo*, *Cinema* and *Film*. However, she was credited alongside Franca Luchini as *assistenti alla regia* (literally 'assisting the direction', rather than the more authoritative 'assistant directors') in an early-1942 article about the Cremona-set shooting of *Redenzione*, published in *Il Regime Fascista*⁷⁴. As for the rest, the only sources that go into any depth about Basaglia's work during Fascism are to be found at the local-press level, namely in a spring-1942 issue of the monthly magazine *Cremona* (published by the homonymous town's Istituto di Cultura Fascista) and in an early-1946 issue of the weekly newspaper *Oggi* (published by the Cremona-based section of the Partito Democratico del Lavoro). In addition to featuring a portrait of Basaglia in her prime, *Cremona* offers a rare glimpse of her specific on-set duties during the shooting of *Redenzione*:

Those assisting the direction advise the actors on the best way to perform their lines and on the movements and the gestures that would best fit within the prearranged camera takes [...], they organise the extras and inform them of what to do [...], they check this and that to avoid [...] inconsistencies [...]. In front of us, the director Albani, followed by the two assistants Maria Basaglia and Franca Luchini who are holding and keep checking the script, [...] briefly explains the starting positions, the entries, the gestures, the lines, the movements. The assistants specify what is written in the script [...]. And they start rehearsing. The assistants follow the actors as mobile prompters. [...] - *Quiet on set! Roll camera!* The assistants, notebook in hand, are ready to note down the lines spoken, the length, the characteristics of every single take⁷⁵.

Oggi instead focuses on Basaglia's public-relations skills and sense for business, making her one of the instigators of the *Redenzione* film project, whose genesis apparently had more to do with financial speculation than with politics. It all began in early 1941, with a reception organised in Rome by Scalera Film. At this promotional event, Basaglia got acquainted with a film exhibitor from Cremona and learned that her childhood friend Angelo Milanese had become a wealthy industrialist and a top politician in Farinacci's realm. Thence came the idea of setting up a company for a movie to be shot in Cremona with financing from Milanese and his business associates. The Cremona-based funders agreed to help upon hearing that an initial investment of only 600,000 Liras was needed and, in order to make the future shooting in Cremona as smooth as possible, they chose to adapt Farinacci's play *Redenzione*⁷⁶.

Since *Oggi* was an anti-Fascist publication, its report on *Redenzione* exuded disdain for Albani and Basaglia, who were not only Fascist propagandists but also RSI adherents (after 8 September 1943, Albani reprised his officer rank in the Esercito Nazionale Re-

⁷³ The 1941-1942 issues of *Almanacco della donna italiana* included Basaglia in the list of Italian *scrittrici*. Cf. Anonymous, "Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1941", 318; Anonymous, "Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1942", 316.

⁷⁴ F. Ghilardi, "Il film *Redenzione* di Farinacci. Il primo giro di manovella", *Il Regime Fascista*, February 17, 1942: 3.

⁷⁵ P.M. Trucco, "Mentre al Ponchielli si gira *Redenzione*. Sguardo profano al mondo del cinema", *Cremona*, 3-4 (1942): 107-118 (113-117).

⁷⁶ Anonymous, "Storia di un film. Pavolini e *Redenzione*. Farinacci autore fischiato", *Oggi*, January 13, 1946: 2.

pubblicano, moving with Basaglia to Florence and then, from July 1944, to Venice)⁷⁷. Yet, the information provided by *Oggi* seems plausible, especially because in 1954-1955 Albani and Basaglia adopted the same *modus operandi* of *Redenzione*, exploiting state incentives and wealthy film ignoramuses from outside the Rome-based film circles to finance two movie productions to be shot in San Giorgio La Molara, Albani's home village: the comedy *Strapaese* (never completed) and *Sangue di zingara*⁷⁸. Two of these wealthy film ignoramuses, Alfredo Maffei and his Italo-Brazilian brother-in-law Adone Fragano-Coppola, were instrumental to Albani and Basaglia's move to São Paulo in 1956. There, in addition to producing *O pão que o diabo amassou*, *Macumba na Alta* and the documentary *Brasil, mezzanotte* (never completed), Albani and Basaglia set up the dubbing studio Odil Fono Brasil⁷⁹ with funds from the Maffei-Fragano-Coppola family and other Brazilian and Italian businessmen (including Salvatore Persichetti, the founder of pioneering Italian dubbing studio Fono Roma in 1932-1933). However, due to Albani's shady financial administration of Odil Fono Brasil and its sister companies Euram Cinematografica and Comercial Internacional Cinematografica, he and Basaglia ran into legal troubles⁸⁰, and in 1964 they fled back to Rome, where they made a living throughout the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s thanks to Basaglia's credited and uncredited translation work for cinema, television, and publishing houses such as Longanesi and Mondadori⁸¹.

4. CONCLUSION

The centrality of Paola Ojetti in Italy's cultural sector is testified by the frequent mentions of her activities in widely circulated Italian newspapers and magazines from the early 1930s onwards, and by her copious epistolary exchanges with the elite of the Italian and international arts scene, which are currently preserved in some of the most prestigious cultural institutions in Rome, Florence, Bologna and Milan. Moreover, information about Paola Ojetti can be found in her father's often-reprinted notes and diaries, in the numerous newspaper articles, essays and monographs dedicated to Ugo Ojetti's life and work, and in the autobiographical memoirs of those who frequented Il Salviatino between the mid-1910s and the early 1940s. In contrast to Paola Ojetti, whose life and work present few uncharted areas due to the abundant first- and second-hand resources available to researchers, Maria Basaglia is a much more obscure figure, as shown by the lacunae in her biography relating to the 1926-1938 years. More generally, apart from the 6 September 1939 letter discussed above, we never hear Basaglia speaking in the first person, so the reconstruction of her early career almost entirely relies on indirect sources such as succinct almanac entries, cursory mentions in the press, and oral memories of relatives and colleagues between Italy and Brazil. However, as the search for more first-hand, possibly autobiographical information about Basaglia continues, the comparison

⁷⁷ Reports on Marchetto's activities during the RSI can be found in the Busta 228 mentioned in Note 64. See also Bibliomediateca Mario Gromo, Fondo Miscellanea - Cinema italiano in epoca fascista, MSFC0011.

⁷⁸ Cf. ACS, Fondo Ministero Turismo e Spettacolo - DGS - Archivio Cinema - Lungometraggi. Fascicoli per opera (CF 16-5000), Buste 115 and 127.

⁷⁹ M. Barro, *Participação italiana no cinema brasileiro*, São Paulo: SESI-SP, 2017, 19 and 37.

⁸⁰ Cf. Cinemateca Brasileira, 43293 - Coleção de recortes de jornais e revistas sobre produção e distribuição cinematográficas no Brasil (1964), clippings 21-30 and 38.

⁸¹ Author's interview with Luciano and Andrea Panvini (in person, 2022); Camerini, Biarese, "13 filmografie di dialoghista", 40.

between Ojetti and Basaglia's life and work experiences makes it possible to advance some conclusions about gender and labour in Fascist Italy's cultural sector.

If it is true that socio-economic privilege granted women intellectuals such as Paola Ojetti better access to the higher spheres of Italian culture, with all the related benefits in terms of reputation and remuneration, the similarities between Ojetti and Basaglia's careers in Fascist Italy's cultural sector are more relevant than the differences. First of all, their career trajectories during the regime show that the mastery of one or more foreign languages was a key requisite for women wishing to enter the field of cultural production, regardless of their socio-economic background: translation work was considered especially fitting to women because it was generally poorly paid, mostly carried out at home, held in lower esteem than authorial work, and thus perceived as less threatening to male privilege. Ojetti and Basaglia's work in film dubbing is proof of this, although more research needs to be carried out in order to ascertain the literary-based income of the two women and compare their fees to those paid to male literary translators. Secondly, the cases of Ojetti and Basaglia show that regardless of their talent and diligence, women intellectuals in Fascist Italy often had to put themselves under the mentorship or in the employ of male colleagues, who had greater civil liberties and career opportunities: not coincidentally, most of the letters by and to Paola Ojetti referenced in the present article belong to archival collections named after Ugo Ojetti and Mino Doletti, while Maria Basaglia passed herself as Marcello Albani's wife for most of her adult life.

The women who met these conditions accessed the cultural sector, working through the ranks of a specific branch (dubbing, then film journalism and screenwriting in the case of Paola Ojetti; dubbing, then screenwriting and assistant direction in the case of Basaglia) and reaching out to their fellow women intellectuals to create useful networks of encouragement, support and collaboration (such as the Ojetti, Cattaneo, Negri and De Céspedes relationships, and the seemingly less successful September-1939 attempt by Basaglia to fraternise with the *directrice* of *Film*). While confirming that women's intellectual work was rarely rewarded with proper public recognition and financial compensation due to social and moral prejudices and government-imposed restrictions in education and the job market, Ojetti and Basaglia's career paths, professional routines and social networks also suggest that there were ways for women in the cultural sector to partially break through the narrow boundaries of obscure, subordinate work. For instance, dubbing expertise and connections in the literary and journalistic world could become a gateway, and a springboard, to an eclectic authorial career in the film industry – all the more so after the Hollywood majors' embargo due to the late-1938 implementation of the Italian state monopoly on foreign film importation forced the Italian film industry to scale down dubbing activities and enormously increase movie production (Ojetti and Basaglia's official screenwriting debuts date from 1939, with *La guerra* and *Papà Lebonnard* respectively).

Finally, Ojetti and Basaglia's post-1945 activities show that the politics of discrimination towards women intellectuals somewhat relaxed in Italy after the fall of the Fascist regime. In the early 1950s, Basaglia managed to make her directorial debut with the Albani-produced features *Sua Altezza ha detto: no!* and *Sangue di zingara*, and in the early 1960s Paola Ojetti directed a literature-themed vinyl-record series, successfully applying to the record publishing industry the cultural mediation skills she had acquired in the book publishing industry. If looking at Ojetti and Basaglia's trajectories during and after the end of the regime is not enough to draw general conclusions about women's career developments in the post-war period, their example aims to stimulate further research into the gendering of cultural and creative work beyond the Fascist regime, during the postwar reconstruction and in the years of the economic boom.

MARIA IDA BERNABEI*

WOMEN IN ITALIAN FILM PRODUCTION (1949-1976): MID-MANAGEMENT ROLES AS SEEN THROUGH ANICA DATA AND ORAL HISTORY

Abstract

This contribution offers an overview of women's labour in the Italian film industry between 1949 and 1976, the chronological span examined by the PRIN 2017 project *Modes, Memories and Cultures of Film Production in Italy*. It applies a thematic criterion to organise data from the Anica database, which aggregates the credits of all feature films and documentary films produced and co-produced in Italy from 1930 onwards. Moving from an overview of women's below-the-line labour, this analysis examines the remarkably scarce female presence in production mid-management roles (such as production supervisors and production and unit managers) in the postwar years. Highlighting the challenges of doing historical research on below-the-line roles, particularly when these are held by women, the article discusses the careers of some of the few women active in mid-management positions such as Jone Tuzi, Anna Davini, Bianca Lattuada, Mara Blasetti and Cecilia Bigazzi. Finally, the quantitative analysis performed on Anica data is complemented by a micro-historical analysis based on interviews conducted with unit manager and production supervisor Rosalba di Bartolo, who worked in the Italian film industry for four decades between the 1960s and the early 2000s.

Keywords

Below-the-line; mid-management; Anica; quantitative analysis; oral history.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Defining women's role in Italian film production during the so-called "golden years" faces several nesting doll-like layers of challenge. The outermost layer consists in the generic challenge of talking about the history of the below-the-line professions, those who fall below the imaginary line separating "artistic" and "technical" jobs within a film's productive machine¹. Going deeper, in the heart of this nesting doll is the challenge tied to the apparent invisibility of women in the film industry, although academic studies have begun to shed light on the issue in the last twenty years, also in regard to below-the-line roles². This contribution uses and arranges thematically the archived Anica

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¹ See J.T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008: 197-273 and Id., *Authorship Below-the-Line*, in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, edited by J. Gray and D. Johnson, Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2013: 347-369.

² Influential studies on women's labour in the Italian film industry are: C. Bellumori, "Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema", *Bianco e Nero*, 1-2 (1972); M. Dall'Asta, ed., *Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema*

database aggregating the credits of “all the feature films, documentaries produced and distributed since 1930” in Italy³. In doing so, it offers an overview of women’s labour in the Italian film industry between 1949 and 1976, the chronological span examined by the PRIN 2017 project *Modi, Memorie e Culture della produzione cinematografica italiana* (Modes, Memories and Cultures of Film Production in Italy)⁴. Moving from an overview of women’s below-the-line labour, this analysis examines the remarkably scarce female presence in production mid-management roles (e.g., production supervisors, production managers and unit managers). It also draws on interviews with unit manager and production supervisor Rosalba di Bartolo, who worked in the Italian film industry for four decades between the 1960s and the early 2000s⁵.

2. BELOW THE LINE

Before embarking on the analysis, some critical issues concerning the use of the Anica database as a source need to be raised. The percentages calculated and discussed in this section and at the beginning of the next one are to be understood as indicative. This is due to the nature of the database, which was set up in 1987 on Aldo Bernardini’s initiative, as an internal “research project” of Anica, and financed by the Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo and by the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri⁶. Data entry began *a posteriori*, based on the manual transcription of film credits, which produced gaps and a margin of error that could be statistically significant. First of all, many below-the-line professions were not accredited, such as continuity supervisors and production assistants, who are not always listed in the film credits. Secondly, the transcription in the database may have failed to report names of professionals who were in fact credited in the films: one example above all is Beatrice Banfi, Pier Paolo

mutò, Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2008; L. Cardone, C. Jandelli, C. Tognolotti, eds., *Storie in divenire: le donne del cinema italiano, Quaderni del CSCI*, 11 (2015); L. Cardone, M. Fanchi, “Che genere di schermo? Incroci fra storia del cinema e gender studies in Italia”, *The Italianist*, 31, 2 (2011): 293-303; L. Buffoni, *We Want Cinema. Sguardi di donne nel cinema italiano*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2018. See also the AHRC-funded project “Producers and Production Practices in the History of Italian Cinema, 1949-1975” that Prof. Stephen Gundle headed at the University of Warwick: “Reading Italian Film Credits” at Women in Italian Film Production, Warwick University, 15 March 2019, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/research/current/italian_producers_project/events/study_day_on [accessed 6 December 2022]. For a transnational perspective, I refer to the ongoing project on silent film era *Women Film Pioneers Project*, curated by J. Gaines and R. Vatsal, M. Dall’Asta (2013); see also K. Hole *et al.*, *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, London: Routledge, 2016 and C. Gledhill, J. Knight, *Doing Women’s Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015. The historical survey on women working within the American and British film industries of E. Hill, *Never Done. A History of Women’s Work in Media Production*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016 and M. Bell, *Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2021 were valuable references in writing this essay.

³ Cited in www.archiviodelcinemaitaliano.it/chi-siamo [accessed 6 December 2022], homepage of the online version of the archive, which contains a simplified version of the more extensive Anica database. On Anica’s archives M. Comand, S. Venturini, “Anica Cinematic Universe. Nuove fonti per lo studio dei modi e delle culture della produzione cinematografica italiana”, in *Gli archivi della produzione cinematografica (1949-1976). Fonti, strumenti, casi di studio*, special issue of *L’Avventura. International Journal of Italian Film and Media Landscapes* (2021): 13-34 (26-30).

⁴ PRIN MMC 49-76, PI Mariapia Comand (Università degli Studi di Udine); Luisella Farinotti (Libera Università di lingue e comunicazione IULM), Vito Zaggarro (Università degli Studi Roma Tre), Sara Martin (Università degli Studi di Parma), <http://cineproduzione.uniud.it>.

⁵ All translations from Italian into English are by the author.

⁶ *Archivio del cinema italiano, vol. IV, Il cinema sonoro 1990-1995*, edited by A. Bernardini, Rome: Anica, 1995: I-II. See also Comand, Venturini, “Anica Cinematic Universe: 26-30.

Pasolini's continuity supervisor from *Porcile* (1969) to *Salò* (1975), does not appear for the latter in the Anica database, even though she is credited in the film. Further margins of error are to be attributed to the erroneous transcription of names and surnames, which may be missing or duplicated. The use of pseudonyms, widespread in film credits, also requires further research: for example, Mila Vitelli is the credited name for Maria Rosa Valenza; Bixie Bam stands for Beatrice Banfi. The assignment of gender and nationality to each entry based on the first name has clear ethical and methodological implications. An historical example is Fede Arnaud, active in Italy since the early 1940s in a variety of roles⁷. Her name is not recognizable as either female (Federica) or male (Federico) in the Italian language. Female professionals also appear both under their maiden and married names, which complicates the estimates. This is especially true in a field so prone to familism as the Italian film industry⁸. Rosalba di Bartolo, for example, often appears in the database under her married name, Rosalba Tonti, as does Vittoria de Fazio, born Vittoria Vigorelli. The quantitative reading, therefore, needs to be accompanied by a qualitative analysis.

The Anica database does not credit any female cinematographer, camera operator, assistant camera operator, props assistant, grip or gaffer, sound designer or production designer, and only a few set designers are indicated⁹. Conversely, one could observe a large female workforce made of seamstresses, hairdressers, costume designers, make-up artists¹⁰ and – traditionally – editors: interestingly, women employed as editors or assistant editors are about 24% of editors credited in the Anica database, which rises to 39% when including foreign female colleagues employed in national co-productions¹¹. The archived Anica database, consulted for the years 1949-1976, details this scenario, at least in quantitative terms. On the other hand, historical research on below-the-line professions, especially the ones performed by women, continues to be challenged by archival gaps, and women's memories of work in the industry remains consigned to the discretion of family archives or to ad hoc initiatives¹².

Among the below-the-line roles, script supervision stands out as a highly gendered position: 78% of Italian continuity supervisors (known in Italian as *segretaria di edizione*) were women, working on about 85% of the entire national film output between

⁷ Fede Arnaud Pocek (Venice, 1920) enrolled in the film school of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in set design (1940), but she worked as a screenwriter and dubbing director for many years. In 1970, she founded the dubbing company Cine Video Doppiatori; she also directed dubbings for the Società Attori Sincronizzatori.

⁸ S. Toso, E. Nazzari, *Fratelli d'Arte. Storia Familiare del Cinema Italiano*, Cantalupo in Sabina: Edizioni Sabiniae, 2016.

⁹ Female set designers employed in Italian film production during this period accounted for around 5% of credited set designers. However, they made a handful of films each, except for a few very prolific cases, including Gisella Longo, Giulia Mafai, Paola Mugnai, Lucia Mirisola and Mila Vitelli (Maria Rosa Valenza).

¹⁰ With very few exceptions, all credited sewers are women, as are 70% of hairdressers, approximately 55% of costume designers, and 28% of make-up artists.

¹¹ On women editors, D. Meuel, *Women Film Editors: Unseen Artists of American Cinema*, Jefferson (NC): McFarland, 2016 and, on the Italian case, D. Missero, "Titillating Cuts: Genealogies of Women Editors in Italian Cinema", *Feminist Media Histories*, 4 (2018): 57-82.

¹² These include for example Mara Blasetti's collection, held at the Cineteca di Bologna, Beatrice Banfi's, held at the Pasolini archive (Cineteca di Bologna), or Myrta Guarnaschelli's at the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin. See also B. Corsi, S. Moras, "Gli archivi della produzione cinematografica. Un'ipotesi di mappatura", in M. Comand, S. Venturini, *Gli archivi della produzione cinematografica (1949-1976)*: 65-74; L. Cortini, "Lavoro e industria nel cinema e nelle fonti audiovisive", *Economia della cultura*, 3 (2011): 265-274 and Id., "Il recupero degli archivi privati di cinema. Strategie, metodologie... utopie", in *Uomini e donne del Novecento. Fra cronaca e memoria*, edited by A. Aiello, F. Nemore, M. Procino, Mantova: Universitas Studiorum, 2015.

1949 and 1976. The label *segretaria* is perhaps indicative of the ways in which this profession channelled women into the film industry¹³. Like other female-dominated professions lent to this field – sewing, hair and to some extent make-up – secretarial work has been markedly feminised. It is worth highlighting that, in 1971, all the 140 pages of the Italian *Manuale della segretaria di edizione* exclusively used feminine articles¹⁴. The feminisation of this profession is also been documented in other film industries around the world. In Britain, for example, veteran continuity girl Tilly Day recounted that she took up the role in 1917 by answering an advertisement in a paper requesting a “very bright secretary, very ladylike”¹⁵. In the English language, the term “continuity girl” or “script girl” has only recently been converted to the more neutral “continuity supervisor” or “script supervisor”¹⁶.

Beyond the connection between the feminisation of secretarial work and that of continuity supervision, the skills required for this position have also been widely considered to be inherently female: “great resistance”, but also being organised, precise and having an eye for detail, “great visual memory, clarity and attention”¹⁷. The secretary must also “keep an eye on the director that gives orders, on the assistant that carries them out, on the actor, on the operator. She must observe, supervise and record everything to be able to compile her reports”¹⁸. Ultimately, she must master a level of attention that is both thorough and multi-layered, and thus highly valuable professionally, but which is often downgraded to the most “feminised” of skills, multitasking.

Despite this progressive feminisation of the role of *segretaria di edizione* during the 1950s, which led to its undervaluation both as a professional category and on a public level¹⁹, Anica data show that this role constituted the entry point to the role of assistant director for women. Between 1949 and 1976, approximately 8.3% of women were employed in this capacity, including some veteran continuity girls: Serena Canevari, Beatrice Banfi, Elsa Carnevali, Elvira D’Amico and Tersicore Kolossoff. Some of the most active female assistant directors also had a professional history in continuity: Vana Caruso, Maria Teresa (Mimmola) Girosi, Silvana Mangini, Marina Mattoli and Lucia Porfiri. Exceptional cases are Luisa Alessandri, Isa Bartolini, Carla Ragionieri and Monica Venturini, who previously worked as scriptwriters.

Half of the *Manuale della segretaria di edizione* is dedicated to notions of film production, cinematography, shooting, optics and lighting, projection, development and printing, and editing. This reveals the cross-cutting nature of the skills required of a continuity supervisor, even if transition from continuity supervision to other pro-

¹³ On the gendering of this profession in the North American film industry, see M.J. Banks, “Gender Below-the-Line: Defining Feminist Production”, in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, edited by V. Mayer, M.J. Banks, J.T. Caldwell, New York-London: Routledge, 2009: 87-98.

¹⁴ L. Valdambri, *Manuale della segretaria di edizione*, Rome: Edizioni del Centro Studi e Sperimentazioni CineTV, 1971.

¹⁵ T. Day, interview (1988) for BECTU History Project, <http://www.bectuinterviews.uea.ac.uk> [accessed 6 December 2022].

¹⁶ P.P. Miller, *Script Supervising and Film Continuity*, Boston (MA): Focal Press, 1999.

¹⁷ Valdambri, *Manuale della segretaria di edizione*: 3-4. For an English-language source, see P. Ross, “Continuity”, in *Women Talking: A Symposium on the Part Played by Women Technicians in Film Production*, Royal Photographic Society Pamphlet, 1944: 16.

¹⁸ M. Williams, “The Continuity Girl: Ice in the Middle of Fire”, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 10, 3 (2013): 603-617 (603).

¹⁹ S. Harper, *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*, London: Continuum, 2000, 4; Williams, “The Continuity Girl: Ice in the Middle of Fire”: 604, and S. Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A Politics of Love*, London: Wallflower Press, 2009: 140.

duction departments was much less frequent for female professionals as compared to their male colleagues, who could boast more mobile career trajectories in the same years. Anica data show that, for men, continuity was only one brief occupation among many others and that they had a long career after taking up that position. An example of this is Alberto Salvatori, who was continuity supervisor in sixteen films before becoming sound engineer (in Pasolini's *Porcile*, 1969, among others) and later moving on to production (as assistant, supervisor and even producer himself). Alternatively, others such as Gennaro Balestrieri, Adolfo Dragone and Albino Cocco, Visconti's assistant director in a number of productions moved seamlessly between continuity and assistant direction. For women, instead, continuity took the form of a permanent position, difficult to move away from²⁰. Anica data indicate a progressive feminization of the role: between 1949 and 1959, women occupy 79% of all script supervising credits; between 1960 and 1970 their number rises to 89%; between 1970 and 1976, a staggering 92% of credited script supervisors are women. In other words, according to Anica records, an average of 85% of the films shot between 1949-1976 are overseen on set by women.

3. PRODUCERS, PRODUCTION

The Anica database confirms male dominance in many production departments. Starting from the top of the pyramid, the handful of female producers represent the exception. Amongst them, Marina Cicogna and the Euro International Films²¹, Marina Piperno and the independent Reiac²², and Silvia d'Amico Benedicò (Suso Cecchi D'Amico's daughter), who produced Alfredo Giannetti's films (*La ragazza in prestito*, 1964; *Correva l'anno di grazia 1870* and the television trilogy *Tre donne: La sciantosa, 1943: un incontro* and *L'automobile*, 1971-72) and Roberto Rossellini's *Anno uno* (1974), *Il messia* (1975) and *Concerto per Michelangelo* (1976), among several others films from the 1980s onwards.

Other female producers still deserve a dedicated survey. Amongst them, the first two are Enrica Bacci and Fulvia Faretra. Bacci, founder of Venere Film and Alcyone Film, who was also the production supervisor of several Venere Film pictures and had a background in screenwriting (*Fuoco nero*, S. Siano, 1951; *I calunniatori*, M. Volpe e F. Cirino, 1956; *Le due sorelle*, M. Volpe, 1950). Faretra, founder of Faretra Film, a company specialised in documentaries, was the producer of Guido Leoni's *Di qua, di là del Piave* (1953) and Florestano Vancini's Sicilian trilogy (*Luoghi e figure di Verga, Più che regione* and *Portatrici di Pietre*, 1952). The activities of Giuliana Scappino and Liliana Biancini are also worth a mention. Scappino, head of Faser Film, produced her husband Sergio Capogna's *Un eroe del nostro tempo* (1960), *Plagio* (1969) and *Diario di un italiano* (1973). Biancini, daughter of production manager Ferruccio, and wife of producer Dario Sabatello, had an established career as an actors' representative and was

²⁰ In the UK, continuity supervisor Martha Robinson ends her memoir with a joyous declaration of independence from her old job, having managed to move from script supervision to scriptwriting: "I walked out on air. I had achieved the job I had dreamed of. I was on the way up the ladder. Continuity was behind me forever". See *Continuity Girl*, London: Robert Hale, 1937: 253.

²¹ On Marina Cicogna see M. Giordana, "The Producer's Roles. La Euro International Films e i fratelli Cicogna attraverso una prima ricognizione delle fonti (1965-1970)", in *Gli archivi della produzione cinematografica (1949-1976)*: 153-164.

²² On the Reiac archive refer to Chiara Grizzaffi's contribution in this volume.

known for producing a handful of crime dramas and thrillers during the 1960s (e.g., *Un angelo per Satana*, 1966; *Lovebirds-Una strana voglia di amare*, 1969). These and other twenty women producers identified in the Anica records over the same period boast sporadic achievements, averaging no more than a couple of films each. Their production formulas still await to be investigated²³.

Moving on to analyse the structure of the production department from its basis, I have identified that female Italian production assistants [often credited as *segretari di produzione*] account for around 8.2% of the total, which rises to 12.5% when including foreign women working in national co-productions. Nevertheless, the bottleneck inevitably tightens as we move on to mid-management roles: only 1.7% of unit managers [*ispettori di produzione*] are women, (the number rises to 2.8% when we include foreign workers); just above 1% (reaching 2% if including non-Italian staff) of production managers [*direttori di produzione*] are women; finally, only fourteen Italian women are credited as production supervisors [*organizzatori generali*]²⁴. In these three slightly permeable professional categories, the same few names circulate: leading the way is the backstage star of the golden years of Italian cinema, the well-known Jone Tuzi (sometimes spelled as Ione Tuzzi). In figure 1 Tuzi is indicated with the overextended masculine gender form 'direttore di produzione'. As a prolific production manager and production supervisor with Ponti²⁵, Rizzoli and Cristaldi, Jone Tuzi worked with Camerini, Risi, Mastrocinque, Loy, De Robertis, Rossellini (*Roma città aperta*, 1945), Gentilomo (five films including *Lo sparviero del Nilo*, 1950 and *I lancieri neri*, 1962), Gallone (*Don Camillo e l'onorevole Peppone*, 1955), Castellani (*I sogni nel cassetto*, 1957), Monicelli (*Casanova '70*, 1965), Rosi (*C'era una volta*, 1967), De Sica (e.g., *La ciociara*, 1960, *Matrimonio all'Italiana*, 1964) and Petri (*La decima vittima*, 1965). Tuzi was also Dieterle's assistant in *Vulcano* (1950). Her sister, Wanda Tuzi, was an equally prolific continuity supervisor working from the post-war years to the end of the 1970s. Tuzi's extensive career achievements undoubtedly deserve dedicated research in Italian film archives, starting with Cristaldi and Rizzoli's collections.

²³ Clara Giannini (Oxford Brookes University), "Women behind the scenes owners of production companies founded between 1945 and 1959: N.A.R. Film and Roberta Film, Rita Farinelli and Antonietta Montanari Bianchi", paper presented at *Women in Italian Film Production* (University of Warwick, 2019).

²⁴ Even if they are recorded in the Anica database, these professional categories do not always appear in the film credits. When they do, they are often indicated in the overextended masculine (e.g., 'direttore') or otherwise neutralised (e.g., 'organizzazione').

²⁵ Tuzi's employment at Carlo Ponti's Artisti Tecnici Associati (ATA) is confirmed by a curious circumstance: a win she made at the Italian football pools *Totocalcio*: "I milioni del totocalcio alla periferia della città". *L'Unità*, May 22, 1951: 2: "the lucky [winners] are three: Rocco Pistone, ragman; Silvana Merlini, mender; and Jone Tuzzi, production assistant at the ATA-FILM (Artisti Tecnici Associati) film company".

Figure 1 - Tuzi (left) described as “Direttore di produzione” at a cocktail party for *Ti ho sempre amato* (Costa, 1953), *Cinespettacolo*, 37, September 1953: 2



Tuzi, Bianca Lattuada and the lesser-known Bianca de Silva (production manager of, among others, Fernando Cerchio's *Cenerentola*, 1948, and Di Martino's first Italian-Turkish co-production *Sultana Safiyè*, 1954²⁶) are the only three women production managers authorised to use the acronym ADC which stands for Associazione Direttori Cineproduzioni²⁷. The ADC list began to appear in 1955 in the columns of *Cineproduzione italiana*, the magazine edited by the association. At the XVIII Mostra del Cinema di Venezia, the magazine also mentioned Tuzi when discussing the emergence of an authentic culture of *cineproduzione* which the ADC was promoting:

The 18th Venice Film Festival has now opened. Italy presents *Le notti bianche* by Luchino Visconti and *I sogni nel cassetto* by Castellani. This is the definition for the public. We love being able to say *Le notti bianche* by Pietro Notarianni and *I sogni nel cassetto* by Jone Tuzi²⁸.

²⁶ “Prima co-produzione italo-turca. La Sultana (Safiyé)”, *Cinespettacolo*, 22-23, June 1953: 4.

²⁷ Refer to “Elenco dei direttori di produzioni cinematografiche autorizzati ad usare la sigla ADC”, in *Cineproduzione italiana*, 2, May 1955: 19.

²⁸ I. Broggi, “Venezia e il progresso”, *Cineproduzione italiana*, July-August 1957: 3.

As for Bianca Lattuada (fig. 2) the *Araldo dello Spettacolo* defined her in 1949 as a “decisive and intelligent young woman, simple and straightforward” and a “smart little woman [who] will make a name for herself”²⁹. She did not only join the ADC, but also had an active role as the association’s “auditor” (“revisore dei conti”), together with Domenico Bologna and Carlo Civallero³⁰. From the post-war period to the late 1970s, she was credited as the production manager and/or supervisor of about thirty films (fig. 3), half of them directed by her brother Alberto – from *Il cappotto* and *La lupa* (1952 and 1953) to *La cicala* (1980) she also worked with Fellini (*Luci del varietà*, 1950), Zampa (*Cuori senza frontiere*, 1950), Capuano (*Ballata tragica*, 1954), Franciolini (*Il letto*, 1954 and *Racconti romani*, 1955), and Damiani (*La rimpatriata*, 1963). In 1959, Bianca Lattuada also coordinated a BBC television programme on Italian cinema, realised in collaboration with Unitalia³¹.

Figure 2 - Portrait of Bianca Lattuada, *Araldo dello Spettacolo*, 33, March 1950: 1



²⁹ Califano, “Piccolo mondo di cinelandia”, *Araldo dello Spettacolo*, 65, July 1949: 2.

³⁰ “La prima assemblea dell’associazione tra i direttori di cine produzioni ADC”, *Cinespettacolo*, 4, May 1951: 15.

³¹ “Affermazioni del film italiano all’estero”, *Cinemundus*, January 1959: 4.

Figure 3 - *Lattuada* credited as “Direttore di produzione” in *Cuori senza frontiere* (*Zampa*, 1950)



Anna Davini was also a key figure in post-war Italian cinema. Secretary of the Associazione Professionale degli Ispettori di Produzione Cinematografica (APIC)³² and the only woman to be credited as unit manager [*ispettore di produzione*] on the ADC³³, Davini was a lifelong unit manager on Matarazzo's films (*Catene*, 1949; *Tormento*, 1950; *Chi è senza peccato...*, 1952; *L'ultima violenza*, 1957), as well as in De Santis' (*Caccia tragica*, 1947), Emmer's (*Domenica d'Agosto*, 1950; *Camilla*, 1954), Zurlini's (*Estate violenta*, 1959), Loy's (*Le quattro giornate di Napoli*, 1962) and Soldati's (e.g., *Donne e briganti*, 1950; *È l'amor che mi rovina*, 1951). However, her name was linked above all to Luchino Visconti's: she was indeed the production manager of *La terra trema* (1948) and *Morte a Venezia* (1971) and the unit manager of *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960) and *La caduta degli Dei* (1969). At the end of her career, in 1972, Davini was awarded the “Una vita per il cinema” career award (in its 15th edition) for the categories of “production managers and technicians” (fig. 4)³⁴.

³² APIC, chaired by Giorgio Riganti, was established on 9 August 1955, “Notiziario dell'UNAC”, *Cine-produzione italiana*, 5, August 1955: 18.

³³ Prior to the establishment of ADC, Davini was registered as production manager and inspector in the FILS [Federazione Italiana Lavoratori dello Spettacolo]. “Comunicazioni dell'Anica n. 96”, *Araldo dello Spettacolo*, 139, December 1950, and “Rassegna economica e professionale”, *Araldo dello Spettacolo*, 124, November 1951: 4.

³⁴ “La vita per il cinema. XV anno. I premi del lavoro 1972”, *Cinespettacolo*, 5-6, 1972: 1-4, e “Fotocronaca. La vita per il cinema”, *Giornale dello spettacolo*, 27, July 1972: 10.

Figure 4 - Anna Davini, awarded "La vita per il cinema" prize, Cinespettacolo, 5-6, 1972: 4



Medaglie d'oro « La vita per il cinema » a componenti della produzione: Alessandro Gori, Liana Ferri, Anna Davini.

Two other women stand out for their volume of activity. The first is Cecilia Bigazzi, who received the career award the year after Davini³⁵. Bigazzi was the niece of producer Giorgio Venturini and cousin of Monica (Felt) Venturini, a director and producer herself, with whom she often worked. Throughout her career, Bigazzi was able to pursue a career trajectory similar to many of her male colleagues. Active from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, she initially served as production assistant (*Erode il Grande*, A. Genoino, V. Turžanskij, 1959; *Il sicario*, D. Damiani, 1961; and *Le baccanti*, G. Ferroni, 1961), and then, in the 1960s, as unit manager for some twenty films including Umberto Lenzi's "Salgarian quadrilogy". Bigazzi finally became production manager and production supervisor, working mainly in genre and erotic titles throughout the 1970s, among which *Una farfalla con le ali insanguinate* (D. Tessari, 1971) and *La svastica nel ventre* (M. Caiano, 1977). The second name is that of Anna Maria Campanile, who in 1966 founded Clesi Cinematografica with her husband Silvio Clementelli, later directing the company's productions. Before the foundation of Clesi, Campanile worked for a long time on films produced in various capacities by her husband, first serving as production assistant (also in the trilogy *Poveri ma belli*, *Belle ma povere*, *Poveri milionari*, D. Risi, 1957-1959), and then as unit manager with Zampa (*Il magistrato*, 1959), Monicelli (*Risate di gioia*, 1960), Petri (*I giorni contati*, 1962) and Vancini (as production manager for *La calda vita*, 1963).

Lastly, the case of Mara Blasetti, daughter of influential film director Alessandro Blasetti, closes this brief overview of female mid-management professionals. Unlike her colleagues, Mara Blasetti consciously entrusted her archive to the Cineteca di Bologna and her professional figure is enjoying more scholarly attention because of the wealth of archived evidence³⁶. Because of her family connections, she came into the film industry by

³⁵ "Una vita per il cinema", *Cinema d'oggi*, 26, July 1973: 8.

³⁶ L. Cesaro, "'Ci sono scivolata dentro come se fosse la cosa più naturale'. Mara Blasetti: una vita consacrata al cinema", in *Sentieri selvaggi. Cinema e women's studies in Italia*, Arabeschi, 17 (2021) online;

the direction department (as a continuity supervisor and assistant director) and then went on to have a long career in production: she was considered a valued unit and production manager and production supervisor in major films, including international ones, working with Losey (*Modesty Blaise*, 1966), Polanski (*What?*, 1972) and Paul Morrissey (*Flesh for Frankenstein*, 1973, and *Blood for Dracula*, 1974), Cosmatos (*Cassandra Crossing*, 1976, with Rosalba di Bartolo as unit manager). In addition to her personal archive, the collection named after her at the Cineteca di Bologna preserves her “tools of the trade”, the production plans used with companies such as Columbia, Confidential, Istituto Luce, 20th Century Fox. This rich archival material gives us an account of the plurality of networks and wide-ranging relationships that became the hallmark of the “Blasetti way”.

The careers of these protagonists of production mid-management, female pioneers in a professional field dominated by men, deserve dedicated study and research with the aim of bringing to light their working practices³⁷. Only through extensive archival research, it would be possible to relegate the “anecdotal” dimension conveyed by existing Italian oral history records, which affects so much of the memory of the Italian film industry, into the background³⁸. In the next section I will attempt to overcome the scarcity of archival resources documenting below-the-line and mid-management professions, and add a micro-historical perspective to the quantitative data. The professional profile of Rosalba di Bartolo Tonti, a mid-management professional active between the 1960s and the early 2000s, can be outlined thanks to personal interviews held during the autumn of 2022 in Rome³⁹.

4. “I HAVE BEEN VERY LUCKY”: ROSALBA DI BARTOLO TONTI

Daughter of a Sicilian air marshal but a lifelong Roman citizen, Rosalba di Bartolo, born in 1943, had a dream: to be a surgeon. However, having been born a girl in a somewhat “traditional” family, she found herself enrolled in a high school for interpreters, one of many that were opening in the 1950s. She studied English and French and fell in love with the former: she enjoyed learning it because of it being “a concise and precise language that gets straight to the point”. Nothing could be further away from the dream

C. Giannini, C. Guido, “‘Mi farà piacere lavorare con un’amica che sa fare il cinema!!!’ Dal set alla produzione: il lavoro organizzativo di Mara Blasetti”, *La valle dell’Eden*, 34 (2019): 5-12; D. Missero, “‘Carissima Mara, mi auguro di firmare tantissime fatture di films organizzati da lei’: frammenti di cultura produttiva nell’archivio di Mara Blasetti” in *Cinema italiano: tecniche e pratiche, Quaderni del CSCI. Rivista annuale di cinema italiano*, 13 (2017): 203-208.

³⁷ On the organisation of film production in the 1950s V. Brosio, *Manuale del produttore di film*, Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1956; L. Solaroli, *Come si organizza un film. Il manuale del direttore di produzione*, Rome: Bianco e Nero Editore, 1951; see also M. Argentieri, *Produzione cinematografica e televisiva*, Rome: Accademia, 1971.

³⁸ On the anecdotal dimension of Italian oral history records see F. Di Chiara, P. Noto, “Appunti per una storia un po’ meno avventurosa: produzione e cinema italiano 1945-1965”, in *Backstage. Studi sulla produzione dei media in Italia*, edited by L. Barra, T. Bonini, S. Splendore, Milan: Unicopli, 2016: 103-115. Making reference to F. Faldini and G. Fofi, *L’avventurosa storia del cinema italiano* (latest reprint Bologna, Cineteca di Bologna, 2021), the authors mention the persistent “adventurous” narrative of the Italian film industry that gives practitioners a mythological aura based on subjective notions of talent and improvisation. Faldini and Fofi’s book reports Jone Tuzi’s memories of *Roma città aperta*, *Quartetto pazzo* and *Vulcano*, and Anna Davini’s memories of *La terra trema* and *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* are mentioned in L. Micciché, ed., *La terra trema di Luchino Visconti. Analisi di un capolavoro*, Rome, CSC, 1994 and *Rocco e i suoi fratelli. Storia di un capolavoro*, Milan: Minimum Fax, 2010. For an international perspective compare Caldwell, *Production Culture*: 150 ss.

³⁹ I wish to thank Vivalda Vigorelli, continuity supervisor and casting director, for putting me in touch with Rosalba di Bartolo.

of cinema, which had pervaded the horizon of desire of young girls in the previous generation⁴⁰. For Rosalba, cinema was a coincidence: a family friend worked for Carmine Gallone and his son, Carmine Gallone Jr., was looking for a secretary for the office in Via Lucullo. There she met the casting director Valentina Sturla, who introduced her to the International Film Service, a company managing organisation for foreign productions coming to film in Italy. At the International Film Service, di Bartolo was hired as a secretary in administration. She was no longer a simple office secretary but handled money, learnt how to manage it, and, thanks to her command of English, got in touch with Hollywood – 20th Century Fox, Columbia, Warner – but also with Bollywood: in fact, she worked in the R.K. Films production *Sangam* (1964), produced, directed by and starring Raj Kapoor, the first Indian movie filmed outside national borders. Rosalba remembers the countless Indian gold parures and luxurious saris that the diva Vyjayanthimala changed into twice a day and never wore more than once. At the age of twenty, it was an incredible experience (fig. 5).

Figure 5 - *Di Bartolo Tonti (holding the bouquet) with the Sangam crew at the airport, 1964. Courtesy of Rosalba di Bartolo*



⁴⁰ For a survey of inter-war female fandom through ephemera see M. Comand, A. Mariani, eds., *Ephemera. Scrapbooks, fan mail e diari delle spettatrici nell'Italia del regime*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2019.

In these years, di Bartolo Tonti worked in administration as an accountant, handling as much as 4 or 5 million lire a week, such as the budgets for the films *The Reluctant Saint* (E. Dmytryk, Columbia, 1962) and *The Victors* (C. Foreman, Columbia, 1963), partly filmed in the village of Campagna, in the Salerno area. While working on these two films, she met Mara Blasetti, who was already an established professional, working with many American companies: it was to be a lifelong professional and human partnership – “she almost adopted us”. With Blasetti as production manager or supervisor, di Bartolo worked on many productions, including *Gidget Goes to Rome* (P. Wendkos, 1963), *La linea del fiume* (A. Scavarda, Luce, 1975), *The Cassandra Crossing* (G.P. Cosmatos, Associated General Films, Champion Film Company, 1976), and in the Libyan production *Lion of the Desert* (*Asad al-šahrā*, M. Akkad, 1980)⁴¹. During our interview, di Bartolo recollected the daring production adventures, including a pseudo-hijacking by Libyans over Malta on the crew’s return flight.

Her role in administration continued throughout the 1960s in increasingly important productions: as assistant to David White, the auditor of *The Reluctant Saint*, she was involved in the administration of Zeffirelli’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (F.A.I., Royal Film International, 1967), in Richard Burton’s *Doctor Faustus* (Columbia, 1967) and *The Appointment* (S. Lumet, MGM, 1969). In the meantime, 1964 had been a year of fundamental change for her: with her new job for Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, di Bartolo switched from working in administration to actual production and met her future husband Giorgio Tonti, son of the veteran director of photography Aldo Tonti, cinematographer and camera operator himself. They got married, had two children, and began their 58 years of life together.

Rosalba’s Enpals record gives an account of an exponentially expanding filmography, a selection of which follows here. She was unit manager for *Le avventure e gli amori di Scaramouche* (E.G. Castellari, Zephir Film, Lisa Film, Jadran Film, 1976), *Arrivano Joe e Margherito* (G. Colizzi, C. Ponti, 1974), *La città gioca d’azzardo* (S. Martino, Dania Film, 1975), *Gran bollito* (M. Bolognini, Sandra Riccardi Infascelli, 1975) and *The Valachi Papers* (T. Young, Dino De Laurentiis-Euro-France Films, 1972), of which she recalled the explicit on-set intimidation the troupe suffered in the United States, since the film used the characters’ original names. It is notable, however, that the Anica database reports only a residual part of her filmography (five titles only⁴²), a clear indication to embrace a circumspect attitude when approaching the Anica database.

Between the 1970s and 1980s, alternating work with foreign and Italian companies and other mid-scale film productions, Rosalba varied her activities as a production manager in television broadcasts and documentary series by Luce. At the same time, she continued to work with Italian commercial productions (*Vacanze in America*, C. Vanzina, Cecchi Gori, 1984; *Sotto il vestito niente II*, D. Piana, Artisti Associati, 1988; *Il deserto di Fuoco*, E. Castellari, 1997).

Rather than the passing of the years, an understandable deterrent to such demanding work as filmmaking, it was, above all, the advent of the digital – and the increasingly low quality of Italian productions – to distance Rosalba Tonti from her work: “this was no longer filmmaking”, she has recently recalled⁴³. A profession that she had otherwise

⁴¹ All these productions are recorded in the Mara Blasetti’s collection at the Cineteca di Bologna.

⁴² *La città gioca d’azzardo*, *Cassandra Crossing*, *Le avventure e gli amori di Scaramouche*, *Arrivano Joe e Margherito*, *Le guerriere dal seno nudo*.

⁴³ The disruptive change in production practices that occurred due to the advent of video technology is a recurring theme in the memories of below-the-line Italian workers between the years 1949-76.

loved for a lifetime, to which she had dedicated her experience; a job that she would not have changed under any circumstances, and that had fulfilled her fully professionally, personally and economically – “Cinema paid well back then”. Indeed, she states that she never felt belittled in the work environment as a woman during her long career with foreign companies, where her professionalism was consistently recognised and valued. Instead, it was a different experience on Italian sets, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, which Rosalba did not recall with pleasure during our interview. In these years she suffered some harassment and general criticism: “it was, a bit, part of the Italian culture at the time, they felt threatened by the power of a woman,” she admitted, smiling.

Another notable point emerging from Rosalba di Bartolo Tonti’s experience is the propensity for familism in the film professions. However, unlike most of the cases of female professionals mentioned in this brief analysis, for which a certain familiarity with the film industries came because of family connections, in Rosalba di Bartolo’s case, her career initiated as a result of her personal and professional choices, independently from that of her husband, Giorgio Tonti, who instead came from a family with a long-standing reputation in the film industry. The two met thanks to their shared professional activity, and they carried on an everyday relational life made up of similar rhythms. Beyond the evident propensity to familism in the Italian film industry, it is worth reflecting on the fact that life partners who shared similar occupations were able to sustain a similar work-life balance that was otherwise unsustainable because of challenging rhythms on set, non-existent days off, frequent long trips abroad etc. If combining work and family time was complicated, many women chose, or were forced to choose, a different occupation. Rosalba recalled that many women she met during her professional life gave up their careers at some point because of unbearable work-life patterns, and even more so if they had children to raise. A common recollection in the oral testimonies of female film workers is precisely the absence of children by choice, even when married. However, here too Rosalba Tonti’s path breaks away from the norm because she had two children. A respected and esteemed practitioner and a pioneering figure in a professional sector dominated by men, she now enjoys the orange sunsets in her home in Castelli Romani and considers herself ‘lucky’.

The case of Rosalba di Bartolo, active for over forty years in several production mid-management roles, has a twofold value. On one hand it stands for its exceptional-ity, thus confirming the existence of a male-dominated productive sector, overviewed here with a quantitative scrutiny of the Anica database. On the other, it allows for a small step forward in the reconstruction of the professional lives of these unknown film industry workers, forcing the researcher to face the methodological challenges tied to the physical scarcity and dispersion and fragmentation of empirical evidence that documents technical film professions, and the complex logistics of doing field ethnography and oral history. In support of quantitative historical analysis, the need to gather testimonies of women who worked during the golden age of Italian cinema has now become paramount. More research is needed to identify those who are still around and available to share their memories. This would also allow scholars to investigate different historical periods. An extensive archival survey of both private collections and (film) heritage institutions will complement existing quantitative and qualitative knowledge of the professional networks and working practices of women in the Italian film industry and encourage further investigation into their significant and often neglected role and value.

CHIARA GRIZZAFFI*

“UNA RAGAZZA CHE SI ARRANGIA”**:
NOTES ON THE FILM PRODUCER MARINA PIPERNO

“John Wayne is going to be in it?”
The Indians, too!
“SEND IN THE EXTRAS!”
Jokes aside
You know, the producer is stingy! He gave me only ten!
“Be happy for it!
I only got eight and I gave three of them back!”
A matter of maths?
“Of remainders...”¹

Abstract

The article focuses on the figure and the activity of the producer Marina Piperno. Among the few women who had a leading role in the Italian film industry, Piperno was the sole administrator of the REIAC film production company and produced over two hundred works, including documentaries, industrial films, “caroselli”, fiction films and television dramas. Her professional path can be considered “fuori norma” (non-standard) as it was marked by the need to claim her space not only as a woman in a male-dominated field but also as an independent producer interested in conceiving and implementing production practices alternative to those of mainstream cinema. The article reviews her career path and her approach to film production and then examines the discourses, representations and self-representations concerning Piperno and her professional identity, analysing several sources, including the REIAC collection, publications that gather together the oral testimonies of Piperno and her co-workers, and the biographical documentaries about her and her family history made with Luigi Faccini. The main goal is to investigate how Piperno negotiated, over the course of her career, her status, and her professional identity in relation to her gender and with regard to broader debates about the role of the producer in the Italian film and television industries.

Keywords

Production studies; gender studies; film producers; Italian cinema history; independent cinema.

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** “Sono una ragazza che si arrangia (*I am a Girl Who Makes Do*)”, a collection of poems written by Marina Piperno (La Spezia: Edizioni Cinque Terre, 1999).

¹ M. Piperno, “Dialoghetti,” in *ibid.*, 12. All translations from Italian into English are the author’s, unless otherwise noted.

1. INTRODUCTION

By investigating the case of the producer Marina Piperno, the article examines the complex interweaving between professional and gender identities, the processes of film production and their historical development, the discourses, and the forms of (self)representation through which the actors of the film industry negotiate the perception of their role². The article introduces Piperno and details her work, especially as the sole administrator of the production company REIAC Film (Realizzazioni Indipendenti Autori Cinematografici) and as a “fuori norma” (non-standard) producer – to use the expression coined by Adriano Aprà and recently adopted, in relation to the history of Italian cinema production, by Vito Zagarrìo³. The article then investigates how Piperno has defined and negotiated her role and her professional identity also in relation to her gender – she has been one of the few women to undertake this profession in that period.

Piperno has often defined herself as “the first woman in Italy to produce images”⁴: in truth, although there were pioneer female producers already at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, such as Elvira Notari with her Dora Film⁵, the number of women in the production field, and especially in leading positions, decreased with the rise of fascism and remained decidedly low in the following decades⁶. Examining a dataset of film credits of movies produced and co-produced in Italy between 1949 and 1976, Maria Ida Bernabei has counted less than thirty female producers working in the field⁷. Most of them produced an average of “no more than one film each”, while very few of them, such as Marina Cicogna⁸ and Marina Piperno had a more complex and long-spanning career⁹. Piperno, in particular, produced over two hundred “pieces” – as she and her partner, director Luigi Faccini, call them¹⁰ – in more than fifty years, including documentaries, industrial films, advertising films, fiction films and television dramas.

² This research was supported and funded within the PRIN 2017 Project “Modes, Memories and Cultures of Film Production in Italy (1949-1976)”, <https://cineproduzione.uniud.it> (accessed January 10, 2023). I would also like to thank AAMOD (Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico) and especially Letizia Cortini, for the invaluable help provided for my research, and Marina Piperno for her generosity in discussing several aspects of her professional experience with me.

³ A. Aprà, ed., *Fuori norma. La via sperimentale del cinema italiano (2000-2012)*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2013; V. Zagarrìo, “Modo e modi di produzione. Cinema mainstream e fuori norma 1949-1976”, *L'avventura*, 2021, 75-95.

⁴ M. Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni,” in AA.VV., *M. Piperno. Produttore di sogni*, Genova: CGS Club Amici del Cinema: 7-11 (10).

⁵ E. Troianelli, *Elvira Notari pioniera del cinema napoletano (1875-1946)*, Rome: Euroma, 1989; M. Dall'Asta, ed., *Non solo dive. Pioniere del cinema italiano*, Bologna: Cineteca, 2008; G. Bruno, *Rovine con vista. Alla ricerca del cinema perduto di Elvira Notari*, Milan: La Tartaruga, 1995. Other female pioneers are mentioned in the ever-expanding database of the project *Women Film Pioneers*, founded by Jane Gaines, Monica Dall'Asta and Radha Vatsal, which maps female labour in the silent film industry. The database sheds light on the work of many unknown pioneers, such as the Italian producer Elvira Giallanella. <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/about/> (accessed January 10, 2023).

⁶ R. Rinaldi, “Produttrici e distributrici nel cinema italiano dagli anni '30 a oggi”, *Storie in divenire: le donne del cinema italiano*, edited by L. Cardone, C. Jandelli, C. Tognolotti, *Quaderni del CSCSI*, 11 (2015): 224-230 (225).

⁷ M.I. Bernabei, “Pioniere senza medaglie. Segretarie di edizione e professioni al femminile nel cinema italiano (1949-1976)”, *Arabeschi*, 18 (2021). Accessed September 10, 2022. <http://www.arabeschi.it/21-pioniere-senza-medaglie-segretarie-di-edizione-e-professioni-al-femminile-nel-cinema-italiano-1949-1976/>.

⁸ On Cicogna's activity, see M. Giordana, “The Producer's Roles. La Euro International Films e i fratelli Cicogna attraverso una prima ricognizione delle fonti”, *L'avventura*, 2021: 165-177.

⁹ *Ibid.* The career path and the self-narrative of Cicogna and Piperno, however, are quite different.

¹⁰ Marina Piperno and Luigi Faccini's website, last accessed January 10, 2023, <http://www.pipernofaccini.com/marina/>.

However, establishing her primacy for chronological reasons or for the number of films she produced is not that relevant. This research, instead, focuses on Piperno's activity as a producer and on the discourses around her gender identity and her professional role, as they seemingly served a precise purpose: that of redefining the producer's role within the industry and its conventional representation. This redefinition was encouraged by the political and cultural context in which she worked, profoundly influenced by those militant instances and film practices developed in the 1960s, which strived towards a re-configuration of film production in a less hierarchical and more collective and participatory sense. Cooperatives and independent productions had a deeply political vision of the cinema and the film industry and argued for a radical change that also involved the role of the producer: to overturn hierarchies and class divides within the industry, it was required to dissolve the equation between producer and master/owner. This hierarchical and unequal labour organization, moreover, was related to the difficulties of women in the film industry in a pioneering survey published by *Bianco & Nero* in 1972 and curated by Cinzia Bellumori. She interviewed several women who worked in the film industry, both in above-the-line and below-the-line roles, including Mara Blasetti, Marina Piperno, Paola Pitagora, Monica Vitti and Suso Cecchi D'Amico, among others. According to Bellumori, the extreme parcelling out of work in the film industry was directly linked to "the issue of women's self-realization"¹¹, and the rigid hierarchical organization determined, for the women interviewed, a condition of "conflict and frustration that depends on the subordinate position of some workers", especially female ones¹². Indeed, as Bellumori observed, there were very few women in leading positions, due to a prejudice against them – women would lack the necessary authority for a leadership role – and due to the scarcity of training opportunities: "that women are unable to carry out this type of work, it is just a cliché: one simply doesn't know how to do what is not taught"¹³.

By running a proudly independent production company, born in this heated political context, Piperno is deeply involved in rethinking the industry hierarchies and the role of the producer. Her figure, however, also problematises the *gendering*¹⁴ of the producer's profession, conventionally considered a male role, above all by virtue of the economic and decision-making power linked to it. The imagery surrounding the producer is definitely male-oriented: producers are often represented as powerful moguls usually accompanied by the diva of the hour (consider, for example, Dino De Laurentiis and Silvana Mangano or Carlo Ponti and Sofia Loren); as efficient businessmen; or as enriched ignoramuses or ruthless swindlers. Piperno's gender identity, I aim to demonstrate, comes into play not only in determining for her those limitations and difficulties she felt as a woman in a leading role, "facing all the masculine knots of decisions, risk, guide, imposition if necessary"¹⁵, but also in stripping her of certain expectations to allow her to reinterpret such a role. To examine how Piperno shaped or contributed to representing her own professional, private, and gender identity all – three are indissolubly connected in the discursive

¹¹ C. Bellumori, ed., "Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema", *Bianco e Nero*, 1-2, 1972: 60.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*: 40. Bellumori's study also focuses on the problem of female education in general, and professional and technical education in particular, highlighting how access to education for women was restricted, especially for high levels of education and specialisation.

¹⁴ The "gendering" of work or a role, as Miranda Banks clarifies, is the way in which "a particular profession may be socially constructed through gender". M.J. Banks, "Gender Below-the-Line. Defining Feminist Production Studies", in *Production Studies. Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, edited by Vicki Mayer, M.J. Banks, J.T. Caldwell, New York: Routledge, 2009: 87-98 (87).

¹⁵ M. Piperno, "Lettera di un produttore di sogni", 10.

production about her – I will refer to a range of sources, adopting a production studies methodology. Production studies combine the interrogation of heterogeneous and usually neglected archival sources – including trade documents for internal use or promotional materials – with written and oral testimonies. Moreover, “at its core” – as Miranda Banks argues – “production studies often resists or complicates traditional power hierarchies, it has its origins in a nonbinary interdisciplinarity, and it has a capacity to highlight cultural inequities”¹⁶: it represents, therefore, a “feminist methodology”¹⁷ especially suitable to shed light on the “fuori norma” figure of Marina Piperno.

The first, fundamental resource for my research is the REIAC collection, held at the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD)¹⁸, a foundation aimed at building and nurturing the memory of social movements in Italy by preserving, in particular, audiovisual documents. Donated to AAMOD by Marina Piperno and by the intellectual and film director Ansano Giannarelli – one of the founders of the archive and its president between 1996 and 2004 –, the collection includes many documents related to the cinematographic activity of REIAC film (Realizzazioni Indipendenti Autori Cinematografici), a production company founded in 1962 by Giannarelli himself together with Pietro Nelli, and of which Piperno became, in 1964, the sole administrator. The collection includes many of the REIAC films and several folders with documents concerning the company, its foundation, and its activity: among others, the statutes, some letters promoting the activity of REIAC, materials concerning the “satellite” companies set up to manage some branches of the REIAC business, and many documents related specifically to the production of single films¹⁹.

The writings devoted to Marina Piperno, or both Piperno and her partner, Luigi Faccini, represent another essential source: while the activities of REIAC or Piperno have not been comprehensively discussed in any scholarly study²⁰, a body of works²¹ has attentively analysed the films produced by Piperno and collected precious accounts and statements given by her or by her friends and co-workers. These are extremely useful for understanding Piperno’s work methods and the narratives through which she and others have described and conceptualised her role as a producer²². Besides Piperno’s memories collected in books and other publications, the films with and about her represent another important source. This article considers, in particular, Faccini’s latest films about Piperno and her family, especially *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile* (2009): by documenting Piperno’s daily, mundane life, but also her professional path, this complex film can provide further insights on her image and self-perception. These written and audiovisual memories have been supplemented with interviews which I recently held with the producer.

¹⁶ M. Banks, “Production Studies”, *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, 2 (2018): 157-161 (157).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ My investigation of this collection is ongoing; here I present the first results of a study still underway.

¹⁹ The collection does not cover the whole lifespan of REIAC film, which officially closed in 2002, but covers most of the company’s activity.

²⁰ For a partial reconstruction of the history of the company, and especially of the economic and organizational aspects, see G. Contenti, “Analisi di un’impresa cinematografica: la Reiac srl”, Dissertation, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, a.a. 2009/2010.

²¹ Such as AA.VV., *M. Piperno. Produttore di sogni*, or AA.VV., *Marina Piperno & Luigi M. Faccini. Un film lungo 50 anni*, Rome: Fondazione Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, 2014.

²² Furthermore, Piperno and Faccini in February 2023 published a book dedicated to the life and activity of Piperno, *Eppure qualcosa ho visto sotto il sole*. The volume, the most comprehensive one written so far by and about her, will include several archival photographs of the Piperno family and of the producer’s professional activity.

2. MARINA PIPERNO: THE REIAC YEARS AND BEYOND

I will first present a brief overview of Piperno's activity as a producer, in order to outline her professional path and her approach to cinema, as well as to restore, at least in some measure, the richness of a largely forgotten production. I will then move to analyse the discourses and strategies of (self)representation concerning her professional and gender identity.

Unlike other female professionals in relevant production roles within the cinema industry (such as Marina Cicogna, Mara Blasetti or Bianca Lattuada, among others), Marina Piperno did not come from a family of film industry workers: her father, Simone Piperno, was a Jewish fabric retailer. She was born in 1935, during the Fascist Era and three years before the Racial Laws. Of her childhood, Piperno remembers the sense of isolation, the fear, and the hiding²³. Her family memories have always been entrusted to images: the Piperno family archive is full of photographs and even amateur films, such as the 16mm footage of Marina's parents' wedding in 1933²⁴. The testimonial value of the images, along with the need to constantly question, problematise and redefine their meaning, becomes one of the key aspects of Piperno's productions.

In her twenties, after a brief and precocious career as a journalist, and after a stay in the United States in which, among other things, she attended a course in film directing, Piperno made her debut as a producer in 1961, with *16 Ottobre 1943*, directed by Ansano Giannarelli, her husband at the time. The film tells the story of the SS raid in the Ghetto of Rome, which caused the deportation of more than a thousand Jewish citizens to concentration camps. This work, financed with the help of her father Simone, already indicated the trajectory of Piperno's professional career: from that moment on, she committed to producing a cinema of civil, political engagement – *16 Ottobre 1943* is exemplary of a renewed anti-fascist spirit that permeated Italian cinema in the 1960s²⁵ – marked also by experimentation and hybridization of formal strategies²⁶. Furthermore, the partnership with Giannarelli constitutes, together with that with Faccini, Piperno's most significant collaboration – and in both cases, there is a personal as well as a professional relationship between them.

The following year, together with Giannarelli and Pietro Nelli, Piperno founded REIAC film, a production company that was active for forty years. Because of its longevity, REIAC witnessed a number of critical transformations in the Italian audiovisual industries. The company adapted to those changes by diversifying its production, while at the same time maintaining overall coherent methods and values: the independence of its authors, the making of a politically engaged but non-dogmatic cinema, the interest in new technologies and formal experimentation, the adoption of flexible production methods, and a low-budget approach.

In the 1960s, REIAC mainly balanced the production of personal projects with that of industrial and educational films, advertising films and “caroselli”, made to secure some profits: films such as *Biografia di un aereo* (Giannarelli and Nelli, 1964), for Fiat –

²³ To avoid being deported, her family took on a false surname, Pistolesi, for two years. See Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni”: 7.

²⁴ The footage has also been included in *Diaspora* and *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

²⁵ As argued by film critic and historian Mino Argentieri, who wrote the screenplay of *16 Ottobre 1943*. M. Argentieri, “Il cinema nell'Italia del centrosinistra”, in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. X – 1960/1964*, edited by G. De Vincenti, Venezia: Marsilio, 2003: 182.

²⁶ See A. Medici, *Il cinema saggistico di Ansano Giannarelli*, Turin: Lindau 2011, 64–65.

awarded at the fifth edition of the Festival del film industriale in Bologna – *Green Light* (Giannarelli and Nelli, 1965), for ENI, *SOS Neurochirurgico*, again by Giannarelli and Nelli (1965), for Pfizer; or the Facis, Omsa and Upim “caroselli” (1968-1970)²⁷. These commissioned works, which the REIAC authors made without completely renouncing their style, allowed the company to finance more personal projects, especially documentaries, for cinema and television. The documentaries on Africa made between 1966 and 1968 and directed by Giannarelli and Nelli – *Diario di bordo*, *L’asfalto nella giungla*, *Il bianco e il nero*, *Dakar è una metropoli*, *Noi siamo l’Africa*, *Tokende!*, *Labanta negro* – are examples of such projects²⁸.

During the 1960s, Piperno produced one of the most notable works by REIAC, a film she is especially proud of²⁹: *Sierra Maestra* (1969). *Sierra Maestra* is the byproduct of the collaborative instances that found legitimacy with Law n. 1213 of 1965, the so-called “Corona Law”, and in particular with art. 28, that established “a special fund for films inspired by artistic and cultural aims made with a production formula that provides for the participation in the production costs of authors, directors, actors and workers”³⁰. The film was produced thanks to this funding opportunity and belongs to what many define as the “golden age” of article 28, the second half of the 1960s, in which such funds guaranteed results of a remarkable quality³¹. The documents of the REIAC archive include the contracts and agreements of profit-sharing stipulated by the company for the film, not only with the director and above-the-line workers but also with below-the-line professionals, such as the assistant director Giuseppe Bellecca or the cinematographer Marcello Gatti, in full compliance with the collective spirit at the foundation of REIAC³². Piperno, however, took the highest risk: when she went to Banca Nazionale del Lavoro to obtain the credit, she was asked to personally guarantee its repayment. With a small crew ready to film in Venezuela, Piperno gave in to this request that, as the producer herself recalled on several occasions³³, forced her to pay the debt for twenty years: she was one of the few who repaid a credit basically considered non-repayable³⁴.

Thanks to the awards and the critical attention surrounding *Sierra Maestra*, during the 1970s REIAC intensified the collaboration with the public broadcasting

²⁷ The industrial films commissioned to REIAC represented also a great opportunity to develop the theme of work, which was of great interest to many REIAC directors, above all Ansano Giannarelli, as films such as *Profilo di un operaio* (1964), *Diario di bordo*, *Sabato domenica e lunedì* (1968), *Analisi del lavoro* (1972), *Linea di montaggio* (1972) or *Mani nere* (1973) demonstrate. S. Savorelli, “La paziente arte di sperimentare. I film sul lavoro di Ansano Giannarelli”, in *Cercando la rivoluzione*, edited by A. Medici, Rome: Donzelli, 2013: 103-118.

²⁸ Almost all of them are directed by Giannarelli, except for *Diario di bordo*, directed by both Giannarelli and Nelli, and *Labanta negro*, directed by Nelli. For a detailed analysis of these works and of the collaboration between Nelli and Giannarelli, see Medici, *Il cinema saggistico di Ansano Giannarelli*, 83-118.

²⁹ Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni”: 10.

³⁰ *Gazzetta ufficiale*, November 12, 1965, accessed January 10, 2023. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1965-11-12&atto.codiceRedazionale=065U1213&elenco30giorni=false

³¹ V. Zagarrò, “Dal ‘28’ al ‘68: l’età d’oro di un fondo particolare”, in *Storia del cinema italiano*. Vol. XI – 1965/1969, edited by G. Canova, Venice: Marsilio, 2002: 429.

³² REIAC collection, Film e programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA3, Materiali fase progettazione produttiva e definizione di risorse, Fascicolo 1.

³³ The episode is recalled, for example, in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

³⁴ A late integration to art. 28, promulgated on 23 July 1980 (*Gazzetta ufficiale*, July 31, 1980). Accessed January 10, 2023, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1980/07/31/080U0379/sg>, established once and for all that the failure to return the credit could be compensated by transferring the film negative and the rights of the film to the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.

company RAI, making works such as *Ragioniamo col cervello*, a study in six episodes by Giannarelli (1971); some films made for “gli Sperimentali”, curated by Mario Raimondo and Italo Moscati, between 1969 and 1970 (*La traversata*, by Beppe Bellecca, *Il desiderio di diventare pellerossa*, by Roberto Alemanno and Francesco Calderone, and *L’Alessandro nelle Indie*, by Vittorio Sermonti); the five-episode film series *Uomini della scienza*, supervised by Giannarelli and Lombardo Radice (1977). REIAC, therefore, benefitted from a peculiar phase in the history of RAI, as the national broadcasting company fostered, in the 1970s, the production of films by first time or little experienced directors, and favoured auteur cinema³⁵. REIAC also continued to produce industrial films and theatrical fiction films such as *Il Fratello*, by Massimo Mida (1974).

The most relevant production of the 1970s is *Non ho tempo* (1973), a television film about the mathematician Evariste Galois, directed by Giannarelli for RAI. The numerous documents related to the production of the film in the AAMOD archive demonstrate that Giannarelli and Piperno did not want to produce a theatrical film with television funding, but rather to fully harness the potential of television as a medium, structuring the narrative and language of their project accordingly. In particular, the intention was to divide *Non ho tempo* into episodes, a desire expressed by Giannarelli, but also fully supported by Piperno: “We proposed to shoot *Non ho tempo* as a three-episode program” – wrote, in December 1970, Marina Piperno to Edoardo Sanguineti, screenwriter of the film together with Giannarelli:

This is because there is a lot of material that needs to be developed in the appropriate time-span; and we are also convinced that seriality is one of the main features of television: films like Bertolucci’s *La strategia del ragno* – aired a few weeks ago – are immediately forgotten precisely because of the atypical way in which they are broadcast³⁶.

Despite an initial refusal from RAI, Giannarelli and Piperno were finally granted permission to make a three-hour version of *Non ho tempo*, to be aired in three episodes, along with a theatrical version of about an hour and forty, especially since Piperno managed to keep costs down. For a long time, the theatrical version was the only one that circulated: the three-episode version was stalled by RAI and aired, after a long battle, only in 1977³⁷. Such a troubled distribution was a recurring issue in the history of Piperno as a producer, due to the political engagement of the authors she worked with and the limited commercial appeal of the films. The case of *Non ho tempo*, nonetheless, demonstrates once again that REIAC was a company whose producer and filmmakers were prone to explore other media besides cinema, and to resort to both technical and aesthetic solutions that allowed them to preserve their autonomy and, at the same time, to reduce production costs³⁸.

During the 1980s, REIAC continued along the same path of experimentation: in

³⁵ V. Zagarrò, *L’anello mancante. Storia e teoria del rapporto cinema-televisione*, Turin: Lindau, 2004, 149-182; G. Barlozzetti, F. Pinto, C. Salizzato, *La televisione presenta... La produzione cinematografica della Rai, 1965-1975*, Venice: Marsilio, 1988.

³⁶ M. Piperno, Lettera a Edoardo Sanguineti del 22 dicembre 1970, REIAC collection, Film e programmi, *Non ho tempo*, Faldone UA3, Materiali fasi progettazione creativa e progettazione produttiva, Fascicolo 4.

³⁷ A. Medici, *Il cinema saggistico di Anzano Giannarelli*, 234-235.

³⁸ So much so that REIAC equipped itself, internally, with an Institute for Audiovisual Technologies Research (IRTAV) that conducted research and studies on less expensive technologies, such as video tapes and video recorders.

1982, Piperno produced for RAI *La Verità*, by Cesare Zavattini. This was another challenging production: it was the first film as a director for the eighty-year-old Zavattini, “an existential and political happening that escapes any genre definition”³⁹ and weighed entirely on Zavattini’s shoulders, engaging him in a *tour de force* that was also risky for the producer, since no insurance company was willing to insure Zavattini due to his age. But Piperno persisted because she considered him a mentor and a master: “Cesare Zavattini is a very special chapter in my life as a producer and as a human being... I did my best to allow him to stage the ‘truth’ which commercial cinema would have never allowed him to stage and to tell”⁴⁰.

In these years, REIAC was affected by the crisis of the industry that marked the 1980s: the contraction of the audience determined a decrease in production investments, while the role of television networks in financing film productions became increasingly important. The end of the RAI monopoly and the liberalisation of private local broadcasting, nevertheless, determined a fierce competition between RAI and Fininvest, as both wanted to invest in the production and the rights acquisition of successful films⁴¹. In such a context, middlebrow, low-risk cinema prevailed⁴², thus leaving little room for more eccentric productions. The collaboration between REIAC and RAI continued despite these difficulties⁴³; conversely, due to the widespread diffusion of video technologies, which made it more convenient for businesses to rely on small local companies, the demand for industrial films and advertising films decreased⁴⁴.

Giannarelli limited his work for REIAC; the marriage between him and Piperno had already ended during the making of *Non ho tempo*. In the meantime, at the end of the 1970s Piperno established a second, fundamental personal and professional partnership with Luigi Faccini. Faccini, a film critic (he was one of the founders of *Cinema & Film*) and director since the end of the 1960s, met Piperno after he had directed his debut film *Niente di meno niente di più* (1970) for the RAI “gli Sperimentali”, which was followed by *Garofano rosso* (1976); he had also carried out long research work in the asylum of Arezzo as well as founded the Filmcoop cooperative. After Faccini’s resignation from Filmcoop, in 1980 the couple began a long-lasting professional collaboration that led them to found, in 1982, the production company MP, which operated at the same time as REIAC until the end of the 1990s⁴⁵.

From the Faccini-Piperno collaboration, one should at least mention the anthropological investigation documentaries such as *Sassalbo, provincia di Sidney* (1981) or *L’Amiata è anche un fiume* (1983); *Inganni* (1985), a biopic about Dino Campana whose development dated back to the years spent by Faccini in the asylum in Arezzo, that became one of the filming locations; *Donna d’ombra* (1988), a woman’s film about death and grieving inspired by the death of Piperno’s beloved father; the diptych *Notte di stelle* (1992) and *Giamaica* (1998), suburban tales that combine reality and fiction. Faccini’s

³⁹ S. Parigi, “La Verità di Zavattini”, in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. XIII-1977/1985*, edited by V. Zagario, Venice: Marsilio, 2005: 240.

⁴⁰ Piperno’s memory as recounted in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

⁴¹ B. Corsi, *Produzione e produttori*, Milan: Il Castoro, 2012, 42-47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴³ Both Piperno and Giannarelli identify the political context and corruption caused by the interference of the PSI in the administration of RAI as responsible for the subsequent deterioration of their relationship with the broadcasting company. See their interviews in G. Contenti, “Analysis of a film company”.

⁴⁴ Interview with Ansano Giannarelli, in *ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁵ Refer to the couple’s biography in AA.VV., *Marina Piperno & Luigi M. Faccini. Un film lungo 50 anni*, 7-21.

“impure”⁴⁶ and “non-standard”⁴⁷ cinema found in Piperno its possibility of existence, thanks to her ability to work with reduced budgets for the realization of projects that cannot hope for great revenues.

Both REIAC and MP dissolved at the beginning of the 2000s, but the couple continue their professional and personal partnership. The growing difficulties in realising their projects did not discourage them. The urgency of filming led Faccini to use lightweight, cheaper cameras (such as prosumer cameras and GoPros) that allowed him to work on a very low budget: his cinema of the 2000s is a cinema made with modest means, almost homemade⁴⁸. It is also an intimate cinema, a dialogue between him and Piperno, who becomes the protagonist or the narrator of films such as *Diaspora* (2014), *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*, *Rudolph Jacobs, l'uomo che nacque morendo* (2011) and *Giro di boa* (2019). In these films, the camera accompanies her as she retraces her personal and family memory, reflects on the traumas of history, and hands her experience over to future generations.

3. PRODUTTRICE OR “PRODUTTORE DONNA”? THE COMPLEX IDENTITY OF MARINA PIPERNO

This final section examines Piperno’s (self)representation and (self)reflection to understand how she perceived her role as a producer and a woman working in the industry. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to consider her own discourses, but also to *look through* other people’s stories on her, and especially those told by her partners, Giannarelli and Faccini. Giannarelli’s understanding of the goals and modes of production of REIAC film and his political and aesthetic views as both an author and a partner of the company is prevalent in the REIAC collection, as the vast majority of the notes and documents of the collection belonged to him. This inevitably overshadows Piperno’s presence. As Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight, among others, have observed, this is a very common condition when studying female figures in film production: “many women have left few historical traces, their roles in production or film culture obscured by more publicly visible or self-promotional male partners or concealed behind collective or collaborative practices”⁴⁹. Nonetheless, the documents of the REIAC collection provide important insights into her approach to work. Similarly, Piperno’s recent film portraits are mediated by Faccini’s gaze, and yet the producer is also, for all intents and purposes, their co-author.

The relative “absence” of Piperno from the REIAC papers, after all, matches the profile of a present and yet discreet producer, who believed that her task was above all to make possible the material conditions necessary for the realisation of the projects and the vision of the REIAC authors: “please don’t think of this word as too big: but I have always considered myself the *strategist* of the company, without ever crushing authors or collaborators, but rather putting myself *at the service* of their creativity”⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ L. Barisone, “Una meteora devastante”, in *Marina Piperno & Luigi Faccini. Un film lungo 50 anni*, 212-217 (213).

⁴⁷ Faccini is one of the “fuori norma” authors indicated by Adriano Aprà. See Aprà, ed., *Fuori norma. La via sperimentale del cinema italiano (2000-2012)*.

⁴⁸ This body of works is produced by the cultural association Ippogrifo Liguria.

⁴⁹ “Introduction”, in *Doing Women’s Film History. Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, edited by C. Gledhill, J. Knight, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015: 1-12 (4).

⁵⁰ Emphasis added by the author. Piperno, “Lettera di un produttore di sogni”: 10.

The documents related to the pre-production and the shooting of works such as *Sierra Maestra* and *Non ho tempo* demonstrate the high degree of autonomy with which Giannarelli worked, especially while filming. Piperno has often confessed that she disliked being on set; rather, she concentrated her energies and her work on raising money and organizing production according to the budget:

I would never distinguish the term producer from that of unit production manager, at least in my specific case, because in the kind of work that I do, making a certain type of film [...] quality is essential. There is, therefore, a great amount of preproduction work, that not only entails producing a film, but organising it too. [...] I know this might sound peculiar, because other producers have their own production managers, and perhaps this is the reason why I make two films in three years instead of twenty or ten, because I handle both production and organisation at the same time⁵¹.

Her method, however, was also tailored to the needs of the authors she worked with. By way of example, during the shooting of *La Veritàaaa* her presence on set was constant:

I spent the whole day on set, I believe I have never been on set like that before, because I never enjoyed it, I have always liked, when producing, organising preproduction, searching for funding, instead that time with Zavattini I was on set all day because I wanted to be close to him, basically, I did not want to leave him alone, it seemed to me that he needed the producer to be close to him all the time and no matter what⁵².

Piperno's preference for production management also shines through in her description of the work in an independent production company as a stimulating challenge. She claims to wear the nickname she earned in the industry, “the queen of low budget”, with pride:

Low budget does not imply approximation, quite the opposite. Making a film with a low budget means obsessively analysing the project beforehand, over and over, analysing everything that is needed so that the film can be wrapped up without budget issues. It means having your collaborators involved – I remember having these obsessive meetings, obsessive for them, not for me, because I tried to give them control of the various parts of the film, something that in my opinion was absolutely necessary for the film to be done without exceeding the budget. A producer must be careful not to go over budget. I have always worked meticulously, like a goldsmith, I tried to mend all the stretch marks like a *knitter*, like a *seamstress* with her own thread, and I spent a lot of time on budgeting before starting the film, I estimated production costs, I reread the script, I talked to the director, I examined all the economic solutions that were the most suitable for the film and also for our budget. Making a film with a low budget is definitely more difficult than making a film with a high budget, that is, with a lot of money⁵³.

The documents in the REIAC collection confirm Piperno's cooperation with the directors to find a balance between their creative needs and the films' budget. Her commitment to raising money and finding clients for the company was constant: during REIAC's first years, she was always busy, together with Nelli and Giannarelli, making contacts with companies of various kinds, even with really small businesses, to promote the activity of REIAC in the field of industrial film, internal training films or advertising. In this respect,

⁵¹ Interview with Piperno in Bellumori, ed., “Le donne del cinema contro questo cinema”, 69.

⁵² Memory shared by Piperno in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

⁵³ Emphasis added by the author. M. Piperno in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

the collection also confirms something that has already been observed about producers' archives in general: "sifting through a producer's archive one is often struck by the sheer volume of letters asking for money; and the volume of rejections calls to mind Winston Churchill's definition of success: 'stumbling from failure to failure without any loss of enthusiasm'"⁵⁴.

For Piperno, organising the work is a process in which creativity translates into "the ability, so necessary for independent producers, of securing funds for a project by manipulating markets, negotiating deals, pre-selling and all the other elements of a complex financial package without which a film could not be made"⁵⁵. Furthermore, when she defines herself as the "enabler" of other people's creativity, she confirms a certain rhetoric of self-representation that is typical for above-the-line professionals working on quality productions with a strong collective dimension⁵⁶. Such a narrative is also the result of the demands for collectivism that arose in the 1960s within the film industry, which encouraged the redefinition of the producer's role and asked for a truly collective production. Since her activity was strongly connected to this *milieu*, Piperno worked hard to differentiate herself from the more conventional image of the producer as the owner and to mark her distance from more mainstream productions and their methods. It is indicative in this sense that REIAC and its partners not only never joined ANICA, the Italian film industry trade association, but rather opposed it.

The position of ANICA's president, Eitel Monaco, regarding cooperativism or autonomous production groups, after all, was very clear:

The protesters, generally over-benefiting from the consumer economy, do not want to work with the producers because they think they exploit the law of profit. [...] They have therefore made up groups of authors, artists and technicians to produce autonomously while being community-funded, under the guidance of a new type of professional figure, the cultural organiser. Such proposals cannot be taken seriously⁵⁷.

Conversely, on the pages of the militant magazine *Questo cinema*, REIAC is described as one of the few companies to promote an idea of collective cinema of high artistic and cultural value, and for which "the producer [...] transforms into a cultural organiser who works not to impose his creative will (a mediation of the laws of the market) but to identify himself with the premises and the direction freely chosen by the authors"⁵⁸. Piperno and REIAC proudly represented themselves as an alternative to the highly hierarchical and institutionalised system of film and media production. The company's documents emphasise the fact that Piperno considered herself different from the producer as it is commonly understood. As explained in a company profile: "Marina Piperno, who is the sole administrator of the company, has been working for some time now as producer and production manager. Today, using a buzzword, she would be called a *cultural operator*"⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ A. Spicer, A.T. McKenna, C. Meir, "Introduction", in *Beyond the Bottom Line. The Producer in Film and Television Studies*, edited by A. Spicer, A.T. McKenna, C. Meir, London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2014: 1-23 (6).

⁵⁵ Spicer, McKenna, Meir, "Introduction", 13.

⁵⁶ J.T. Caldwell, *Production Culture. Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2008, 202.

⁵⁷ Monaco's declaration has been reported in an anonymous article of *Questo cinema*, November 6, 1968. REIAC collection, Film e programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA12, Rassegna stampa.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Emphasis added by the author. REIAC presentation document from 1972, REIAC collection, Attività

By presenting herself as a “fuori norma” producer, Piperno wanted to distance herself from the ‘others’, whom she called “cinematografari”⁶⁰. During the pre-production of *Sierra Maestra*, Gian Maria Volonté, who had initially agreed to play the main role, left the project at the last minute plausibly causing economic damage to REIAC: the withdrawal of his name from the project was an issue both for the funding and the distribution of the film⁶¹. However, Piperno sent him a letter declaring that she did not want to make any legal claim against him because “we do not belong to ‘normal’ cinema, where this would perhaps be considered normal”⁶². At the end of June 1968, when Volonté’s withdrawal was confirmed, Piperno wrote to Bino Cicogna, who was interested in distributing the film with Euro paying a “minimum guarantee” because of Volonté’s participation, and kindly declined his offer, justifying the change of the leading actor as an artistic choice made by Giannarelli⁶³. Volonté, for his part, left the project without consequences, while the actor’s decision not to take part in *Metti, una sera a cena* (Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, 1969) right at the beginning of production led to a severe official stance from the Unione Nazionale Produttori⁶⁴ and a controversy with the production company of the film, Euro International, that could only be resolved with a new agreement between him and Marina Cicogna.

Piperno was well aware of the position of weakness in which independent producers found themselves operating, and of the need to find a way to defend their collective interests. Therefore, together with a group of producers, including Mario Gallo and Filippo Bandini, she contributed to the foundation of APICET (Association of Independent Film and Television Producers), of which she was nominated vice-president together with Roberto Levi. Although this was a short-lived experience, it demonstrates how actively engaged she was in redefining the professional role of the producer. One of APICET’s goals, as a draft of the programmatic platform states, was formally that of

rejecting the image, which circulates superficially in many contexts, of the role of the producer as exclusively charged with negative meanings, automatically identified with that of the owner or as a simple executor of financial deals: this implies an unacceptable underestimation of the promotional and organisational function of the audiovisual production process⁶⁵.

Giannarelli’s response to Piperno’s desire for REIAC to join APICET, however, is quite telling:

For you, this is about getting out of that isolation that you have felt and denounced for years. It is also about being more politically engaged than before. [...] In my opinion, despite your

istituzionale, organizzativa e amministrativa, Comunicazione, promozione e corrispondenza, Faldone 03.

⁶⁰ A derogatory term to indicate people in the film industry. See Piperno’s interview in G. Ganino, “L’opera di Ansano Giannarelli”, M.A. diss., Università di Bologna, a.a. 1996/1997, 7.

⁶¹ See M. Piperno, Letter to Gian Maria Volonté, June 11, 1968, REIAC collection, Film e Programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA2, Materiali fase progettazione produttiva e definizione risorse, Fascicolo 1).

⁶² Piperno, Letter to Gian Maria Volonté.

⁶³ M. Piperno, Letter to Bino Cicogna, June 27, 1968, REIAC collection, Film e Programmi, *Sierra Maestra*, Faldone UA2, Materiali fase progettazione produttiva e definizione risorse, Fascicolo 1.

⁶⁴ “Il Consiglio produttori sul caso Volonté”, in *Cinema d’oggi*, 39, October 14, 1968: 4.

⁶⁵ A. Giannarelli, “APICET. Piattaforma Programmatica” (ca. May 1978), REIAC collection, Attività istituzionale, organizzativa e amministrativa - 1977/1986, Faldone 02. The document is drafted by Giannarelli, after some consultations between him and Piperno, but they likely agreed on this matter as well as on most of the content. Piperno has made similar comments in several interviews during the years.

political inexperience, your partial production experience, your lack of in-depth analysis on various problems, *your position as a woman*, you are ‘newer’ than Gallo⁶⁶.

Besides the harsh honesty and a slightly patronising tone, what is striking in Giannarelli’s words is the reference to being a woman as a condition of disadvantage. There is, indeed, a certain ambivalence in the way in which the gender identity of the producer is perceived by herself and by others, and also in the way her gender relates to her professional identity, contributing to the definition of the latter.

On the one hand, despite her temperament and resolutions, not even Piperno escaped a certain rhetoric of leadership as strength and command. The producer herself, or those who knew her and were asked to describe her work, seemed to feel, on several occasions, the need to be reassuring about her professionalism by using metaphors or adjectives conventionally associated with the sphere of masculinity. Piperno herself, as we saw earlier, says she had to face “the masculine knots of decisions” with “*impositività*” [imposition]; Citto Maselli describes her as “the soul or the war machine”⁶⁷ of REI-AC, contrasting a delicate metaphor with a ‘warlike’ one and conveying the impression of her ‘implacable’ method. For the Argentine director Fernando Birri, the struggle is not even metaphorical anymore:

I remember you, so well, fighting for everything, big or small, to solve it in the best way. And when I say fighting, I mean fighting, not in a metaphorical way but in a concrete way (and you will remember, I hope, also some verbal fights between the two of us [...]). So – oh, *brave!* – to your credit, I repeat, to your *determination*, to your *firmness*, to your *consistency*, to your *stubbornness*, to your *provocation* [...]. And of course, I acknowledge all the work, so much work, and more work, work, work, that you did and that you made us do *without mercy*, neither for you nor for anyone else⁶⁸.

Before listing Piperno’s qualities, however, Birri raises the issue of gender declension of her profession when wondering if he should address her as “produttrice” or “produttore donna”⁶⁹. The use of the over-extended masculine, also adopted in the title of the volume that includes Birri’s statement, and even used by Piperno on several occasions, suggests a certain reluctance in using a feminine noun for an almost exclusively male role, as if the feminine declension could diminish its importance. In describing Piperno, Patrizia Pistagnesi conversely puts her gender identity before the professional one, “great woman, great producer”, and then defines her as “creative and *welcoming*”⁷⁰, the latter an adjective more usually associated with the domestic and private sphere, conventionally associated with the feminine.

Piperno has also constructed a different image of herself, for which her gender identity constitutes a strength, instead of a weakness, and a central element from which to conceptualize her role and her productive practice. This aspect emerges above all in the reflections conveyed in *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*. In the film, which is at the same time a portrait of her everyday life, a dialogue with her partner

⁶⁶ Emphasis added by the author. A. Giannarelli, Lettera a Marina Piperno, 22 marzo 1978, collection, Attività istituzionale, organizzativa e amministrativa, Comunicazione, promozione e corrispondenza, Faldone 03.

⁶⁷ C. Maselli in *Cercando la rivoluzione*: 99.

⁶⁸ Emphasis added by the author. F. Birri, in *M. Piperno. Produttore di sogni*, 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Though “welcoming” doesn’t fully translate the nuances of the Italian “accogliente”. P. Pistagnesi in *Cercando la rivoluzione*: 31-33 (32).

Luigi, and a memoir based on archival images (home movies, film stills and excerpts, set photographs) Piperno proves to be “fuori norma” also in constructing her image. It is an image that does not deny the private, personal dimension but rather puts it in the foreground, highlighting aspects of domestic work and care usually absent in more conventional portraits of businesswomen. In the film, we see her sweeping the floors, cooking, washing the dishes, and working in the garden, having allowed her partner to film her while doing household chores. The domestic space, however, also becomes a space for intellectual and creative activities, such as writing, reading, painting, and listening to music. Indeed, she presents herself as “creative and welcoming”. This intimate portrait is distant from the film producers’ image conventionally conveyed by documentaries, which often underline their entrepreneurial acumen, brilliant intuition, or heroic battles to realize their vision. It is also different from the representation of another female producer, Marina Cicogna, in the documentary *Marina Cicogna, La vita e tutto il resto*: the elegant and aristocratic figure of Cicogna appears composed and detached, while the archival materials show her in control and perfectly at ease in the international jet set or with the people in the industry.

The exposure of herself and her weaknesses is not easy for Piperno, so much so that at the beginning of the film she complains about the “loss of [her] freedom” and tells her partner: “I’m cold, I’m tired, I would like to be left alone”. Moreover, for a woman like Piperno, who declared that she went to the United States when she was young to escape the fate of many women of her generation (meaning marriage and children), the choice of showing herself dedicated to care work within the domestic space may seem counterintuitive. However, that of care, and specifically of maternal care, is another of the metaphors through which Piperno conceives her work as a producer:

I have always said they [the films] were my children, I looked after them, I pampered them, I kept them with me. I did not have children because I had films. Since I started in the 1960s I felt satisfied by this work, it fascinated me, because seeing a film, a documentary, a project being born from nothing, is very gratifying [...] it is like raising a child⁷¹.

The metaphor of production as *reproduction* and care is not new. Lita Stantic, the well-known Argentine producer of authors such as Lucrecia Martel, in discussing her work often refers to a quotation (that she attributes to Michel Chion) according to which the mother of the film, that is “the main creative force” behind its making, is the director, whereas the producer is the father of the film⁷². Undoubtedly, the type of metaphor chosen by Stantic may depend on the fact that she mainly collaborated with female directors, while Piperno produced films directed by men, establishing the most abiding professional bonds with two men to whom she was/is also romantically involved. In this respect, her conceptualisation of the producer’s work as caregiving and as a substitute for maternity has an ambiguous nature: on the one hand, it could be read as bringing her profession back into a patriarchal order in which care work is entrusted to the woman behind the scenes, while the limelight belongs to the man on stage; an order in which a ‘lack’ of the female subject, the rejection of the reproductive maternal role, must be balanced with metaphorical childbirth and care⁷³.

⁷¹ *Storia di una donna amata e di un assassino gentile*.

⁷² C. Grant, “The Cultural Saliency of an Argentine Female Film Producer,” paper presented at the Latin American Women Filmmakers on the Global Stage, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, May 10, 2013; C. Burucúa, “Lita Stantic: Auteur Producer/Producer of Auteurs”, in *Beyond the Bottom Line*: 215-228 (221).

⁷³ See Piperno’s honest interview about her choice of being childfree in the web archive of the project *Lunadigas*, <https://www.lunadigas.com/archivio/marina-piperno-cinema/>. Accessed January 10, 2023.

On the other hand, this ‘feminisation’ of the producer’s work, also expressed on other occasions, (for instance, when she compared her job to other gendered professions such as that of *magliaia* [knitter] and *cucitrice* [seamstress]) – is also accompanied, for Piperno, by a precise political vision: the desire to overthrow the hierarchies and power dynamics of labour within the film industry. One could argue, therefore, that this feminisation is almost a radical gesture, one that, by bringing to the fore the importance of caregiving, removes the production role from male domination and ‘feminises’ it, not to diminish its importance but, if anything, to reimagine it as a practice that could generate not only films (‘babies’), but also new professional kinships. The reproductive metaphor also relates to her desire to pass on her memory and legacy. The dedication with which the producer and her partner have re-tied the threads of her family memories and reconstructed family links, compiling books and catalogues of their activity almost obsessively, is a manifestation not only of their desire to remember but also to be remembered, to ensure that their work and commitment are not forgotten⁷⁴.

As this article has demonstrated, Marina Piperno’s work as a producer is worth being remembered for several reasons. Her career stands out as unique in the Italian scene for her professional path’s longevity, articulation, and coherence. Retracing her positioning at the margins of the film industry also reveals key labour shifts in the history of film production in Italy: the introduction of art. 28 in 1965 and the financing of cultural and artistic films whose costs were shared by above- and below-the-line workers; the examples of cooperativism; the position of the main trade associations and the foundation of APICET as an alternative to ANICA for independent producers; the role of broadcasting networks in producing films and documentaries between the 1970s and 1980s.

Furthermore, the self-narrative she constructed over the years, especially in the last period of her activity, is aimed at removing the producer’s work not only from the conventional professional hierarchies within the film industry but also from the male domination that characterises a strongly gendered role. This is despite the inevitable contradictions that surface in a personal and professional path so closely linked to the male figures of Giannarelli and Faccini. It is also worth considering that Piperno’s political engagement was not accompanied, as she confirmed during our interview, by an involvement with feminist movements, with which she had no contact. As Gledhill and Knight have rightly pointed out, there may be a “fracture, between feminist perspectives now and the perspectives within which our historical subjects worked”⁷⁵; nonetheless, a careful analysis of Piperno’s figure “may gesture to future conditions and perspectives” different from those that constrained someone like Piperno, therefore alerting us “to the blind spots lurking in our contemporary imaginaries”⁷⁶.

Even though Piperno and others like her who dreamed of a different industry remained marginal, her legacy goes beyond the considerable body of work she produced, and should not be underestimated. Her work and her constant attempts to push the boundaries of the producer’s role may serve as a reminder that the battles for gender equality within the film industry cannot be separated from a more general rethinking of the modes and structures of work in the creative industries and may hopefully inspire new forms and new practices of resistance.

⁷⁴ This paper cannot discuss at any length the aspects of Piperno’s Jewish identity. However, as she and her partner recalled on several occasions, this urge to recover, preserve, and pass on memories to the next generations could be strongly related to the experience of having her right to life denied under the Fascist regime, and having to give up her identity, as a child, in order to survive.

⁷⁵ Gledhill, Knight, *Introduction*, 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

MARTA PERROTTA*

WOMEN WORKING IN RADIO Methodological Approaches Comparing Italy and the International Context

Abstract

For several years, studies on media production have cut radio work out of consideration. This is due to the structural and economic lightness of the audio medium, which employs fewer people than the audiovisual sector in percentage terms; it is also due to the flexibility of professional roles, which are often subject to reshuffling and overlapping; and finally, to an unstable factor in the evolutionary dynamics of the medium, which has continually changed formats, technologies and organisation models over the last century. The dearth of academic work on radio production is much more evident if we focus on gender issues, and even more when looking at the Italian landscape in comparison with similar international realities. Therefore, the article aims to review a wide range of sources on the ways in which the role of women in radio production has been studied in scholarly contexts across the world. Then it briefly traces the state of the art of radio studies in Italy and in particular the gaps and opportunities of production studies applied to radio, proposing ways in which Italian scholarship on radio can and should “catch up”.

Key words

Radio; gender; production culture; female voice; sound.

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1. THE GENDER FACTOR IN RADIO STUDIES

It is now well established that the tradition of radio studies is one of the most difficult to create and expand, at least in Italy. At the international level, there has recently been a surge of interest confirmed by the release of three manuals between 2022 and 2023¹, but in Italy radio studies are a niche, for historical and structural reasons². Research that addresses the medium’s production cultures and gender imbalances is even harder to find.

Despite this marginalisation, which demonstrates the persisting invisibility of radio studies compared to other areas of media studies, such as film and television studies, the

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¹ M. Lindgren, J. Loviglio, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies*, London: Routledge, 2022; H. Chignell, K. MacDonald, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Radio*, London: Bloomsbury, 2023; A. Bottomley, M. Hilmes, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Radio Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

² See T. Bonini, “La lunga strada verso la maturità. Radio e production studies in Italia”, in *Backstage. Studi sulla produzione dei media in Italia*, edited by L. Barra, T. Bonini, S. Splendore, Milan: Unicopli, 2016: 63-80, and E. Menduni, “An Unheard Story? The Challenge for Radio Studies in Italy”, *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 2, 1 (2004): 15-26.

aim of this article is to review international research dedicated to radio production from a gender perspective and compare it with that concerning Italian radio. The article will highlight the work still to be done in the Italian context, suggesting potential avenues for future work, proposing a range of research questions and methodologies, and pointing to how these approaches can open up new perspectives on gender and labour in the broadcasting industries.

The first step is to reconstruct and connect the research paths³ that have highlighted the contribution of women in radio as one of the most vibrant sectors of the cultural and media industry, while at the same time reflecting on methodological approaches capable of illuminating production cultures and unveiling gendered power dynamics.

There are studies that have given space to a historical perspective on national realities, also by virtue of a vertical approach that privileges the analysis of broadcasting cultures linked to a language and a culture. Thus, we have studies on women in English radio⁴, French⁵, German⁶, Spanish⁷, North⁸ and South American radio⁹, while in Italy this reconstruction work, already *in nuce* in the contributions of some radio historians¹⁰, has only just begun¹¹.

While the Italian perspective will be analysed in the next section, it suffices for now to point out that putting these studies together in a comparative perspective, a common

³ The main contribution that initiated the reflection on the subject is that of C. Mitchell, who edited the book *Women and Radio. Airing Differences*, London-New York: Routledge, 2000. It contains research carried out ex novo as well as studies that have already been published, presented in partial or complete form with the intention of building an organic repertoire on the subject.

⁴ K. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless. A History of Early Women at the BBC*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. The author falls into the category of insiders responsible for reporting on certain production cultures, as she was producer of the BBC *Women's Hour* for 18 years.

⁵ M. Beccarelli, "'Croyez-moi, mesdames, n'abusez pas du micro' ... Per una storia delle voci femminili alla radio francese", *Genesis, Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche*, XIX, 2 (2020): 137-155.

⁶ K. Lacey, "From Plauderei to Propaganda. On Women's Radio in Germany 1924-1935", in Mitchell, ed., *Women and Radio. Airing Difference*: 48-63.

⁷ J.E. Perez Martinez, *Radio y mujer en las ondas de radio nacional (España, 1960-1975)*, Madrid: Abada Editores, 2021.

⁸ See the work of M. Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922-1952*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 and above all D. Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting*, Armonk-New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001.

⁹ C. Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930-1950*, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

¹⁰ Gianni Isola's studies that reconstruct radio listening cultures, also focusing on female audiences are worth mentioning: *Abbassa la tua radio, per favore... Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nell'Italia fascista*, Scandicci (FI): La Nuova Italia, 1990; *Cari amici vicini e lontani... Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nel primo decennio repubblicano*, Scandicci (FI): La Nuova Italia, 1995 e *L'ha scritto la radio. Storia e testi della radio durante il fascismo, 1924-1944*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1998. Furthermore, Paola Valentini's studies on the voice (and the female voice) in 1930s cinema trace an important furrow on this terrain of analysis, as they connect the role of radio in constructing the fascination towards the disembodied voice, and the fallout of this phenomenon on the power of audiovisual narratives. See P. Valentini, *Presenze sonore. Il passaggio al sonoro in Italia tra cinema e radio*, Florence: Le Lettere, 2007. Branciforte's book has reconstructed the female presence in the radio industry during the 20-year fascist period: L. Branciforte, *Donne in onda nel ventennio fascista. Tra modernità e tradizione (1924-1939)*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino. Anna Lucia Natale's study recent is dedicated to the Italian public radio phone-in show *Noi, voi, loro, donna* (1978-1982), a space for women-led discussion on women's issues: A.L. Natale, "Radio Programming by and for Women in Italy in the 1970s: The Case of *Noi, voi, loro donna*", *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 11, 2 (2023): 369-385.

¹¹ For instance, the research project *Donne in Onda – Women On Air* (www.donneinoda.eu), funded by the German-Italian Center for the European Dialogue Villa Vigoni and coordinated by Marta Perrotta, Golo Föllmer and Pascal Ricaud: an international network of radio scholars dedicated to the analysis of women and radio in three countries (Italy, Germany and France) and from a comparative perspective.

theme emerges that may be of interest to us if we are concerned with the radio industry as a workplace and cultural and creative practice: the difficulty with which women have had to conquer the microphone over time, compared to a more agile professional perspective in backstage roles¹² – production and editing, directing – or only recently in senior roles in the industry.

1.1. *Approaches to early radio*

The advantage of lightness and volatility that radio brings, a disembodied voice to listeners, could theoretically favour a fairer representation and a greater presence of women in radio: “the radio practice itself could in turn be a liberating experience for women working in the world of audiovisual media, often judged on the basis of their body”¹³, their age and physical appearance¹⁴.

However, the marginalisation of women in the sound broadcasting industry is a phenomenon that has its roots in early radio, and research identified some recurring reasons for this early on, such as men’s prejudices about the aesthetic qualities of women’s voices¹⁵, or even the idea that it was inappropriate for women on the air to be involved in news, sports, or any other topic besides home economics¹⁶. Indeed, Marine Beccarelli argues that voice has long been a “building block in the construction of social and cultural hierarchies in the radio world”¹⁷ and the same is confirmed by Jason Loviglio, who notes that the development of radio broadcasting culture is characterised by a defensive attitude towards “the destabilising potential of women’s voices unmoored from their bodies, their sexuality, their objectification within a male gaze”¹⁸.

We will not go into the details of the theories that may help us shed light on the deeper aspects of the issue¹⁹, and which would lead us to speak of the power of the female acousmatic voice. According to Anne Karpf, the latter is a “deep echo of our

¹² See F. Brunati, S. Zambotti, *A microfono spento. Il mestiere del producer radiofonico in Italia*, Milan: Unicopli, 2022, 10.

¹³ M. Perrotta, “Corpi senza voce o voci senza corpo? Donne al microfono nell’informazione radiofonica”, *Problemi dell’informazione*, XL, 3 (2015): 601-623 (602). All the translations in this article from original Italian and German are by the author.

¹⁴ Among the most recent studies on the subject, Gober states that “women and specifically older women are discriminated in and through television production in Poland because they are, as employees and as guests, expected to possess a specific type of physical capital which is connected to their gender but, as women, also to their age”. G. Gober, “Gender and age inequalities in television and news production culture in Poland: Ethnography in a public broadcasting company”, *Critical Studies in Television*, 15, 1 (2020): 49-68 (51).

¹⁵ See R. Gill, “Justifying Injustice: Broadcasters’ Accounts of Inequality in a Radio Station” in *Discourse Analytic Research: Readings and Repertoires of Texts in Action*, edited by E. Burman and I. Parker, London: Routledge, 1993: 75-93. The debate is taken up in other texts including: K. Michaels, C. Mitchell, “The Last Bastion: How Women Become Music Presenters in UK Radio”, in Mitchell, ed., *Women and Radio. Airing Difference*: 238-249; A. McKay, *Speaking Up: Voice Amplification and Women’s Struggle* in the same book, 15-28.

¹⁶ There is much evidence of this deep-rooted prejudice. See A. McKay, *Speaking Up: voice amplification and women’s struggle*.

¹⁷ Beccarelli, “Croyez-moi, mesdames, n’abusez pas du micro’... Per una storia delle voci femminili alla radio francese”, 137.

¹⁸ J. Loviglio, “Sound effects: Gender, Voice and the Cultural Work of NPR”, *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 5, 2 (2007): 67-81 (74).

¹⁹ See for example M. Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; K. Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; D. Pettman, “Pavlov’s Podcast: The Acousmatic Voice in the Age of MP3s”, *Differences*, 22, 2/3: 140-167; M. Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2006; A. Karpf, *The Human Voice*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2006.

earliest, prenatal experience of hearing a disembodied voice – our mother’s”²⁰. Instead, we need to emphasise that the acousmatic female voice, so common in the experience of listening to the radio medium and any of its digital remediations, has constituted a perennial challenge to the enunciative authority, predominantly male; this led to various attempts at containment over time²¹.

Signs of this systematic removal of women from the microphone come from studies focusing on production cultures, with methodologies favouring direct sources and analysis of the trade press. Michele Hilmes cites a 1924 column in the pages of *Radio Broadcast* titled “The Listener’s Point of View”, which states that the audience dislikes women’s voices in radio because women, without being able to be seen, are “very undesirable, and to many, both men and women, displeasing”²².

Rosalind Gill, for example, performs a discourse analysis of interviews with programme controllers and male DJs as they explain the reasons for the lack of female DJs in the radio stations where they work. These reasons very often seem interdependent and in no way unmask deeper motivations, proving that the origins of the imbalance lie elsewhere: “women just don’t apply” or “there aren’t many who are interested in doing it”, or “research has proven [...] that people prefer to listen to a man’s voice on the radio rather than a woman’s voice”²³, are only a few of the explanations given by the interviewees, but they are all in some way disclaimers of those – the programme controllers – who would be able to redress the balance. On the other hand, when questioned about the reasons why women would not be interested in this job, one of the interviewees gives a series of answers which rather seem to explain why he himself avoids hiring them, suggesting that women lack the necessary skills and qualities to be DJs.

Some of the interviewees go so far as to venture the hypothesis of sexism, defining the work environment as a harsh place where women are antagonised: “it’s a man’s world... they’re picked on if they are here”²⁴. Others strike at the heart of the matter, namely the alleged (or in the case of those who present these reasons, indubitable) unattractiveness of female voices, defined as “grating” or “high” or “shrill”²⁵, blamed for turning listeners off; or, on the other hand, too “dusky”²⁶ and blamed for turning listeners on. If they are high-pitched, as they can be due to the different physical conformation of female vocal cords compared to male ones, women’s voices are annoying. If they are breathy and tenebrous, they are too sexy and should be restricted to certain time slots with specific programming (late night shows with calls from listeners - usually men).

A number of other analyses developed in the wake of Gill’s study, all focusing on the deconstruction of a gendered work culture in the radio industry. Michaels and Mitchell’s study focused on the gradual dismantling of the last barriers to the presence

²⁰ See A. Karpf, “The Sound of Home? Some Thoughts on how the Radio Voice Anchors, Contains and Sometimes Pierces”, *The Radio Journal. International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 11, 1 (2013): 59-73 (71).

²¹ McKay already points them out when she observes that the process of women’s legitimisation in the public sphere coincided with the possibility for women to use microphones and megaphones to overcome their natural vocal insufficiency compared to men, but this was always accompanied by criticism of the voices themselves and how amplification made them shrill or croaky. McKay, *Speaking Up: Voice Amplification and Women’s Struggle*.

²² Hilmes, *Radio Voices*: 42.

²³ R. Gill, “Justifying Injustice: Broadcasters’ Accounts of Inequality in Radio” in Mitchell ed., *Women and Radio. Airing Difference*: 138-145 (141).

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 140.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 142.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

of women as music presenters in the UK, a path that since the 1960s has made it difficult for many aspirants²⁷. One of them was Annie Nightingale, the first woman to appear at the microphones of BBC Radio 1 in 1970:

When Annie Nightingale first applied to the BBC national youth station Radio 1 in 1967, she was told that they did not intend to take on female presenters because the male DJs functioned as ‘husband substitutes’ to the identified female listeners. [...] Women seemed to be invisible as ‘makers’ of music radio until the 1980’s. This is partly explained by the background roles that they performed ‘off air’, particularly as producers – including producing male DJs²⁸.

The authors also identify in this process the limitation constituted by the absence, up to the end of the 1970s, of role models that could inspire women to pursue this professional path. They also point out how both commercial and public radio stations only implemented a “girlification strategy”²⁹ at the beginning of the 1990s to broaden the target audience of radio stations by employing women in non-secondary roles, thus increasing their overall share and not relegating them to unfavourable time slots.

The 1990s are also the context for Caroline Millington’s research which examines gender balance in British public service, highlighting a positive trend during that period, which led to a gradual improvement in the percentage of women in primary positions³⁰.

1.2. *News radio and gender balance*

More recently, studies have brought together stories of female speakers who have fought, especially in journalism, to carve out their own space in hostile, male-dominated professional environments: the prejudice about the non-authority of the female voice, therefore, becomes even stronger when the sphere of the production culture is limited to news, regardless of the medium. In their book on women and journalism, Chambers, Steiner and Fleming³¹ reconstruct some of these stories and show interesting parallels between the United States and Great Britain despite the fact that these are systems in which competition between broadcasters presents very different characteristics. In particular, the authors point out a clear division of labour between men and women, the former assigned to hard news, the latter to soft news: women were in fact required to produce “something that came to be called ‘human-interest’ news. This emergent news genre not only emphasised consumerism, fashion and housework, but also reported events in a style aimed at evoking emotion, compassion and sensationalism”³². Although mitigated over time, this division of domains has given rise to a strong correlation between women’s journalism and a style more devoted to emotion and mainstream stories, as a result of which women have gradually been co-opted into every branch of radio journalism, but only to expand the traditional news audience. With the gradual

²⁷ K. Michaels, C. Mitchell, *The Last Bastion: How Women Become Music Presenters in UK Radio*, in Mitchell, ed., *Women and Radio. Airing Difference*: 238-249.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 238

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 243

³⁰ C. Millington, “Getting In and Getting On: Women and Radio Management at the BBC”, in Mitchell, ed., *Women and Radio. Airing Difference*: 209-218.

³¹ D. Chambers, L. Steiner, C. Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, London: Routledge, 2004.

³² *Ibid.*, 33.

employment of female voices on the air, “management realised that a woman reading the news – especially on a male-DJ-dominated station – provided balance and added texture to the rest of the output”³³. Despite being a historically male-dominated sector, the authors note how radio journalism has gradually been populated by women who choose to adapt to this profession, which is made up of long shifts, unpredictable emergencies and few career opportunities. Indeed, although there are renowned male and female radio presenters, “very rarely did journalists achieve major reputations and journalistic successes on the basis of radio. Not only has radio been relegated by television to the margins, but the centralization of radio by the radio networks means that there are few high-profile radio reporting jobs”³⁴.

In regard to radio journalism and the changes brought to production routines and newsrooms by digital disruption, Haworth interviewed a sample of British female journalists in the role of news chief³⁵. Her research confirms the continuing prejudicial claim about female voices being too sharp or too scratchy (“postcoital”, as was noted about a BBC Radio 4 female journalist)³⁶. Furthermore, the analysis shows how the entry of women into editorial offices and particularly into prestigious roles has not made a difference in the articulation of the journalistic product, nor in the internal organisation of work. According to the author, the male dominated editorial culture, which exploits staff in exhausting and unpaid shifts, is not sufficiently challenged by women in power, hired for being compliant with the hegemonic culture. If a female news agenda exists, according to the sample interviewed by Haworth, it is dictated by target needs rather than by a gendered approach in news research. Indeed, female journalists choose to prioritise lifestyle news in order to appeal to young-adult listeners, giving more space to topics such as health, entertainment and fashion and leaving out more hierarchically relevant news (crime, politics and foreign affairs). Haworth concludes by bemoaning the anachronism of this trend, which offers the female audience poor information content and fuels their social exclusion. Instead of leaving the subject areas considered to be masculine to men - Haworth argues – women should take up more space and authority, not only vocally, and pursue their own style in news management: a more direct way of interviewing, a focus on the jargon and a natural tendency to address everyone, not just women.

1.3. *Music radio, gender, and genres*

A recent study by Patricia A. Williamson and Ethan A. Kolek³⁷ has focused on gender balance at the microphone of all FM radio stations in the top 30 markets of the United States. The article correlates the share of female speakers with factors such as radio format (Adult Contemporary, Contemporary Hit Radio, Rock, Sport, Religious), the characteristics of ownership (large, medium, small-sized) or the gender of the corporate board members. The study notes that women are under-represented in almost all dayparts – about a third of the on-air presenters and 14% of the presenters in the most

³³ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁵ J. Haworth, “Women in Radio News: Making a Difference?”, in Mitchell, ed., *Women and Radio. Airing Difference*: 250-261.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 254.

³⁷ P.A. Williamson, E.A. Kolek, “The Underrepresentation of Women on Commercial FM-Radio Stations in the Top 20 Markets”, *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 28, 2 (2021): 307-326.

prized morning slot – but with differences across formats – there are more women in Adult Contemporary stations and fewer in Rock, News/Talk and Sports stations. No significant correlation was found between the characteristics of the ownership and the air talent gender, nor between the gender of corporate board members and that of speakers. However, it is interesting to note the methodological concerns of the scholars, who point out that “this study did not directly talk to programmers, consultants, or air-talent at individual stations or station groups”³⁸ to understand the hiring practices that have allowed men to dominate the radio ranks. Future research is therefore invited to focus on century-old biases embedded in radio industry practices.

Kiron Patka’s study spotlights the professional culture of the analogue radio studio in post-World War II Germany as its own area of experience and knowledge³⁹. His work reconstructs gendered routines of sound production, for which men and women receive different training from the national radio academy: the former, to occupy the mixing desk, and the latter to cut the magnetic tape, two activities with markedly different economic treatment. Methodologically, the scholar starts from the song written by a sound engineer of the Süddeutscher Rundfunk in 1950, the score of which was framed and posted in a studio of the same broadcaster: “Wir sind die Mädels vom Band” (*We are the tape girls*). The song “was never released on record and probably not even produced with the intention of being broadcast on the radio. It was presumably a project with a social, community-building function within the station, intended solely for the production staff”⁴⁰. But although the dedication that the author writes on the sheet music is a thank-you to the tape girls for their patience in the work, upon closer inspection, the lyrics of the song seem to suggest that it is more of a mockery than a celebration “What comes across as a homage to a profession, to the women in the recording studio, can actually be read more as a caricature. All the actions of the female sound technicians are associated with expressions of lacking professionalism”⁴¹. From here, Patka addresses the motivations behind such a massive employment of women in a technical profession – certainly not usual for those times: many had been trained in radio broadcasting technology for wartime reasons, and after the Second World War employed in the broadcasters established under Allied supervision. He goes on to explore the professional culture, which clearly shows that “the connection between the activity performed or assigned, training opportunities and gender [...] arises from the systemic interplay between broadcasting institutions and schools. In this way, it adds a vertical order to what at first seems to be a horizontal gender segregation”⁴².

2. RADIO PRODUCTION STUDIES IN ITALY

The second focus of this article is to compare the international research work on gender in radio production – and radio more broadly – with the relative dearth of Italian research on this topic, and to suggest ways in which to make up for lost ground. As

³⁸ *Ibid.*: 321.

³⁹ K. Patka, “Männer, Mädchen, Mädels. Gegenderte Berufsrollen in der analogen Radioproduktion”, *Navigationen - Zeitschrift für Medien und Kulturwissenschaften*, 18, 2 (2018): 119-133

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 123.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 124.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 130.

Tiziano Bonini has noted⁴³, Italian radio studies have two fundamental characteristics: an originally purely historiographic approach that began in the late 1970s, and a certain difficulty in focusing on objects of investigation such as production, social uses, and listening cultures, partly due to the lack of archives and the lack of access to production sites.

As Bonini claims, “radio passes under the radar of the academy” and later, with the spread of media studies in Italy from the end of the 1980s onwards, is eclipsed by television, which attracts more scholarly attention⁴⁴. At the same time, though, the popular diffusion of free radio during the 1970s led to the flourishing of a series of memoirs written by ‘insiders’ and circulated by non-academic publishers, which recount the phenomenon from the inside and provide testimony that, whilst apparently devoid of scientific value, is still important from a historical point of view. These are, in many cases, “unaware autoethnographies”, stories told by “Italian radio amateurs, activists, and professionals whose perspective we might describe as ‘unknowingly’ oriented toward production issues, in many cases even with a critical eye”⁴⁵. These stories give an account of interesting internal dynamics, of the distribution of production roles, of economic or professional issues, but without providing comments from a gender perspective. They are important sources for historians, and a great enrichment of the landscape of studies on the medium, but they do not allow us to adequately investigate the production context, and its gender dynamics.

Academic works on radio increased in the period from the late 1990s through to the year 2000, thanks to the thirtieth anniversary of free radios in Italy in 2006. Some of them can be considered useful for the study of radio production cultures through the category of gender. With regard to public service radio, the work of RAI executive Lidia Motta deserves mention⁴⁶. Motta develops an analysis of her own career progression and discusses her work as a creator of a type of production made by women and designed for women, such as the feminine and feminist programme *Sala F*⁴⁷.

With regard to Italian private radio stations, two books in particular stand out. One is a history of Milan’s Radio Popolare, which covers the radio’s production and organisational environment, as well as the contribution made by women⁴⁸. The other is the very rich catalogue of an exhibition celebrating the 30th anniversary of free radio stations, edited by Peppino Ortoleva, Giovanni Cordoni, and Nicoletta Verna⁴⁹. These are texts that collect direct testimonies and are based on a critical reworking of interviews, shedding light on production dynamics, on the cultures of access to radio practice, on the genesis of ideas, programmes and their evolution over time, up to a listing of significant figures, a definition of the most common professional profiles and an assessment of the social impact of radio and radio work.

⁴³ Bonini, “La lunga strada” (2016): 63-80. He cited Menduni, “An Unheard Story?”: 15-26.

⁴⁴ Bonini, “La lunga strada”: 67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 68.

⁴⁶ L. Motta, *La mia radio*, Rome: Bulzoni: 2000.

⁴⁷ M. Perrotta, “La differenza in radio. Donne al microfono di Sala F (1976-79)”, in *Filmare il femminismo. Studi sulle donne nel cinema e nei media*, edited by L. Cardone and S. Filippelli, Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2015: 193-204.

⁴⁸ S. Ferrentino, L. Gattuso, T. Bonini, eds., *Vedi alla voce Radio Popolare*, Milan: Garzanti, 2006.

⁴⁹ P. Ortoleva, G. Cordoni, N. Verna, eds., *Radio FM 1976-2006. Trent’anni di libertà d’antenna*, Bologna: Minerva, 2006.

2.1. Recent developments

About ten more years must pass before the first works expressly dedicated to the working conditions of producers in the Italian public and private radio industry are published⁵⁰. As Bonini argues, the ethnographic approach to radio production cultures matures:

in the wake of another tradition of studies consolidated over the last fifteen years, that of the study of media work, or more strictly the analysis of workers in the cultural and creative industries, which has played an important role in deconstructing the positivist rhetoric built by the media itself around media work: studies in this tradition have shown the real living conditions of these workers, far removed from the glossy portraits devoted to them in magazines, and has allowed us to shed light on the conditions of increasing instability within these industries and the phenomenon of self-exploitation of these workers, who are willing to do anything in exchange for access to the media world⁵¹.

But media production studies have originally neglected radio. This is due, according to Fabrizia Brunati and Sara Zambotti, to the structural and economic lightness of the audio medium, which employs fewer people than the audiovisual sector in percentage terms⁵²; to the indefiniteness and flexibility of professional roles, which are often subject to reshuffling and overlapping; and finally to a factor of instability in the evolutionary dynamics of the medium, which has continually changed its technologies and work organisation models – including the rise and disappearance of certain professions – over the last century.

It is only from 2014 onwards that the critical nature of the radio professional environment is highlighted and framed in the broader context of cultural work in the media. Bonini and Gandini in fact recognise, in the radio work observed in public and private radio stations between Rome and Milan, a dual character: on the one hand, it corresponds to the binary nature of the freelance profession, which is flexible but tends to be precarious, with some negative repercussions on the quality of work; on the other hand, it presents peculiar aspects of fandom-based work, of a supportive and not particularly competitive productive subculture, far removed from the personal branding dynamics present in other creative work, such as above-the-line workers of the screen industries. Radio work dispenses symbolic rewards and guarantees job satisfaction, even in the absence of high remuneration: “fandom makes the invisible and unbranded condition of radio workers bearable, insofar as it renders their passions a trap that prevents them from engaging in entrepreneurial competition on the broader labour market. They love the work they do, a kind of work they dreamt of when they were young and passionate fans of radio shows”⁵³.

The two authors do not use gender as a variable in their object of study, but to all their considerations they add a reflection that is relevant to our perspective. The study is based on an ethnographic methodology with in-depth interviews on a sample of 20 freelance producers from 5 Italian public and private radio stations – 14 women and 6 men.

⁵⁰ T. Bonini, A. Gandini, “Invisible, solidary, unbranded and passionate. Everyday life as a Freelance and Precarious Worker in Four Italian Radio Companies”, *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 10, 2 (2016): 84-100.

⁵¹ Bonini, “La lunga strada”: 75.

⁵² Brunati, Zambotti, *A microfono spento. Il mestiere del producer radiofonico in Italia*: 26.

⁵³ Bonini, Gandini, “Invisible, solidary, unbranded and passionate. Everyday Life as a Freelance and Precarious Worker in Four Italian Radio Companies”: 87.

Participants were identified in a non-statistical way but starting from participant observation, which then led to the first interviewees contacting other potential candidates in the community of freelance radio producers. The fact that the sample includes a much higher number of women does not mean that women are the majority of the population of freelance radio producers in Italy: the ISTAT data on which the research is based (2011) only tells us that among the 3,803 permanently employed people in the Italian radio sector, 2,232 are men and 1,571 are women. However, we know that among the radio stations analysed in Bonini and Gandini's study there are certainly more women than men in the role of freelance producer. Although not statistically relevant, the results resonate with the observations of Brunati and Zambotti, authors of the first study of backstage professionals in Italian radio, which pose the terminological problem, understandable only when speaking Italian, of using the masculine (*il*) or female (*la*) article before the word *producer*⁵⁴:

Radio work like all social practices is gendered. The most 'visible' part [...], that of those working as speakers, was for many years occupied almost exclusively by men. Women were entrusted with the task of announcing the start of programmes, in radio as in TV. Especially in the development of *personality radio*, those channels that focused on the signature and recognisable identity of the voices, the latter has long been male. On the other hand, the 'behind the scenes', the preparatory work (that of the 'editorial staff'), has over the years seen an increasing presence of female figures who have gradually 'conquered' the microphone, so that today it is customary to have a male/female pair hosting. It will not be difficult to note that the top radio figures on the Italian scene are still more often men (although a gradual re-balancing is underway), but the intermediate role of producer still seems to us to have more female connotations. Thus, we will speak of female curators (*curatrici*) when referring to female work (as in our case) and use producer to indicate the role in general⁵⁵.

There is no statistical evidence supporting this claim, but the concern of the two researchers – who are also respectively producer and host of Italian public service radio – stems from their observation of the reality in which they have been operating for several years and of those selected for the study (the top ten most listened to radio stations in Italy). It can be said that this work is a 'conscious' autoethnography, to stick to Bonini's hypothesis, and it is certainly a methodologically situated work, inspired by the ethnography of media⁵⁶, by the work of Jerome Bourdon in analysing public service television⁵⁷, and by sociological studies such as those by Hervé Glevarec carried out inside public radio headquarters in Paris to observe the production dynamics of the *France Culture* channel⁵⁸. Originating from two insiders, the research seeks to capture "unwritten", informal dynamics, automatism (which are always present in productive work). All this, the 'non-verbal' of which our practices are made, is material of which people are only partly aware and which would therefore not emerge in more formalised research settings, such as interviews⁵⁹; it is in this way that the authors strive to look beyond words and discourses and to explore how organisa-

⁵⁴ Brunati, Zambotti, *A microfono spento. Il mestiere del producer radiofonico in Italia*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁵⁶ F. Boni, *Etnografia dei media*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2004.

⁵⁷ J. Bourdon, *Du service public à la télé-réalité. Une histoire culturelle des télévisions européennes, 1950-2010*, Paris: INA, 2011.

⁵⁸ H. Glevarec, *France Culture à l'œuvre, Dynamique des professions et mise en forme radiophonique*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2001.

⁵⁹ Brunati, Zambotti, *A microfono spento. Il mestiere del producer radiofonico in Italia*: 23.

tion and production are mediating dynamics that are essential to the outcome of the programme, also emphasising how often these mediations – totally invisible – are entrusted to women.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR CATCHING UP: ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES

A comparison between the international research that has focused on the role of women in the medium's production routines and the experiences concerning Italian radio shows us some interesting insights into the methodologies that can be applied in realities – like the Italian one – where much remains to be explored.

Undoubtedly, the research discussed in this article has elements in common: 1) the use of ethnographic approaches such as participant observation, in a triangulation between voices of leading or intermediate figures⁶⁰, analysis of contexts and structures – think of the sexist song about the tape girls hung in the SDR studios, analysed by Patka – and complementary documentation; 2) the great contribution of accounts written by insiders, in a more or less conscious form, capable of grasping structural elements of the production routines, despite some limitations in neutrality and distance from the object of study; 3) the predominance of written sources – written archives of the radio stations, newspapers, magazines, sector press, radio guides, fan magazines, listeners' letters – over the more perishable, difficult to access, and sometimes poorly preserved sound sources.

An immediate application of the indications stemming from this analysis is beyond the scope of the article. However, the aforementioned *Donne in onda - Women on Air* project is focused on creating a network of multidisciplinary scholars divided between Italy, France and Germany, and soliciting the collection and analysis of primary and secondary sources on radio production routines in its one hundred years of history, with a comparative look at the three countries⁶¹. In my work for the Italian part of the project, I draw on the schedules published and available for the most part on *Radiocorriere* and from secondary sources – sector magazines, memoirs and sound materials in the possession of the broadcasters, the availability of which is unfortunately far from assured⁶². These sources are being used to set up a database of women in hosting or production roles over a period of time ranging from the dawn of radio broadcasting to the 2000s, a series of figures to investigate, in search of hidden stories at the microphone and behind the scenes of programmes and radio stations.

By way of conclusion, I would like to highlight two more points as to what still needs to be developed in order to strengthen this field of study – not only in Italy. The first concerns the focus on sound: the professional radio environment, whether one looks at who is at the microphone or in backstage roles, always overwhelmingly calls into question the sound dimension, the analysis of which is not always possible. As Christine Ehrick argues, it is crucial to overcome the problem of the scarcity of sound sources

⁶⁰ As advocated by Luca Barra in his “La virtù sta nel mezzo (e nel confronto). Questioni di metodo per i production studies televisivi e mediali”, *Schermi*, 3 (2019): 65-80.

⁶¹ www.donneinonda.eu.

⁶² www.radiocorriere.teche.rai.it. This website has the entire archive of the weekly official magazine of Italian Public Service Broadcaster RAI for 70 years, from 1925 to 1995.

by processing written sources with a sonic thinking⁶³, “understanding the parameters of written sources, and consciously reading these sources for sound”⁶⁴. Moreover, one cannot understand the role of women in the backstage of radio without focusing on the gender soundscape, which has been historically male dominated, but has recently been moving toward a more balanced situation. That is why, even in production studies, it is important to focus on how gender is performed through the voice.

A second closing point is based on John T. Caldwell’s considerations regarding the media industries:

Many production companies are permeated by problematic sexual and gender politics. The camera crews of films and prime time television programmes provide dramatic examples of how gender segregation in specific roles is justified on the basis of suspected notions of ‘natural’ abilities. Women must hyper-masculinize themselves to prove themselves as capable operators or assistants; [...] sneaky expectations abound that women are better at detail work, record-keeping, or managing communications between different departments⁶⁵.

Noting with amazement a substantial absence of ecological approaches and analyses that connect production dynamics from one industry to another⁶⁶ – from cinema to radio, from television to radio, from music industry to radio, from dubbing to radio – future research should develop a type of analysis that addresses, at the very least, the ecosystem of creative industries dealing with voice and sound⁶⁷. Bringing into the aforementioned sonic thinking also a ‘gender thinking’ that combines the analysis of female professional figures with multidimensional tools, will help us begin to understand the links between production routines, delivered content – for women or for men, but female-led –, reception by women, and representations of women on air.

⁶³ See J. Sterne. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

⁶⁴ C. Ehrick, “Ethereal Gender: Thoughts on the History of Radio and Women’s Voices”, in *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies*, edited by M. Lindgren and J. Loviglio, London: Routledge, 2022: 144-151 (148).

⁶⁵ J.T. Caldwell, “Intorno alle industrie dei media. Dieci tratti distintivi e sfide per la ricerca”, in Barra, Bonini, Splendore, eds., *Backstage*: 163-176 (167-168).

⁶⁶ Bonini and Gandini do this by broadening the field to include creative industries close to radio, such as television – often integrated into the same media company –, but without considering the gender variable; Patka does this by looking for connections between radio and the recording industry, or by studying the links between professional schools and broadcasting institutions; those who deal with journalism do this, perhaps the only field of study that has been oriented towards integrated and supply chain analyses from the outset.

⁶⁷ Rai Ufficio Studi, *Audio-Sound Ecosystem. From Radio to Public Service Audio*, Rome, Rai Libri, 2023. https://www.railibri.rai.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Audio-Sound-ecosystem_DEF.pdf.

MARTA ROCCHI*

WOMEN'S LABOUR IN TV SERIES PRODUCTION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ITALIAN GENERALIST TV AND PAY PLATFORMS (2016-2019)

Abstract

Influential European research on female representation and employment in the news media and audiovisual industry shows how the sector is dominated by strong gender inequality. Women's labour is under-represented, underpaid and characterised by high levels of precariousness. European audiovisual regulatory authorities are promoting an increase in gender representation both on- and off-screen through the analysis of existing industry-led practices and the development of non-legally binding recommendations. However, these policies often prove to be ineffective. Until now, most research has focused on analysing women's labour in film production. However, in September 2021 the European Audiovisual Observatory delivered a cross-country assessment of the gender imbalance in six audiovisual professional categories in European TV fiction. Considering the increasing interest in the audiovisual seriality sector, the aim of this paper is to conduct an exploratory analysis of the employment situation of women in the production of Italian TV series using IMDb as a data source. We focus on and discuss the intersections between women and labour through the production of Italian free-to-air and pay platform TV series in 2016-2019. By retrieving IMDb data for more than 8,000 credits, we evaluate and discuss gender inequalities, segregation and mobility patterns in the Italian audiovisual workforce and raise methodological challenges in relation to the use of online sources in gender-based studies of Europe's screen industries.

Keywords

Women; labour; TV series; generalist TV; pay platforms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), it has become clear that the topic of women and media has played a crucial and cross-cutting role in the achievement of gender equality worldwide. During the Conference there was a call on governments, media industries, and the research community to take action to foster more gender-balanced media content and structures. The responsibility of the media is considerable when it comes to representing diversity¹ or, conversely, stereotypes of gendered

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¹ F.J. Cabrera Blázquez, M. Cappello, J. Talavera Milla, S. Valais, *Diversity and Inclusion in the European Audiovisual Sector*, IRIS Plus, European Audiovisual Observatory, Strasbourg, April 2021.

roles². While there are several sociocultural factors that contribute to the formation and construction of biases and collective imaginaries, media exposure can have a significant influence³. Indeed, empirical evidence shows how media representations and content can, and do, influence people's understanding and behaviours under certain conditions⁴. In this context, it is key to understand the different levels through which media may contribute to diversity. Considering the primary components of diversity (i.e., source, content, and exposure diversity⁵), several studies have been concerned with one of the subcomponents of *source diversity*: the diversity of the workforce within individual media outlets⁶. Some of this research has aimed to understand who is responsible for on-screen representation through an analysis of the diversity within the teams behind the camera. Indeed, there is evidence of a positive relationship between the number of female or male characters portrayed on-screen and the number of females or males working behind the scenes⁷. In scripted programmes (e.g., TV series), the relationship between the presence of women in the production team and the portrayal of women has been shown to be clear, while in other genres (e.g., reality shows) it has not⁸. There have also been comparative investigations that consider how different media outlets approach gender equality, such as analyses focusing on the assessment of women's representation on-screen and their presence behind the scenes on broadcast and streaming platforms on US TV shows. These analyses reveal that programmes on streaming services had substantially higher percentages of women working as creators, directors, and editors than broadcast programmes. In addition, programmes with women creators employed higher percentages of women as directors, writers, and editors⁹.

² T. Williams, "Gender, Media and Democracy", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 89, 357 (2000): 577-583. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1080/003585300225205.

³ E. Scharrer, "Hypermasculinity, Aggression and Television Violence: An Experiment", *Media Psychology*, 7 (2015): 353-376. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1207/S1532785XMEP0704_3; E. Scharrer, "Television and Gender Roles: Cultivating Conceptions of Self and Other", in *Living with Television Now: Advances in Cultivation Theory and Research*, edited by M. Morgan, J. Shanahan, N. Signorielli, New York: Peter Lang, 2012: 81-100; R.M. Perloff, "Social Media Effects on Young Women's Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research", *Sex Roles*, 71, 11 (2014): 363-377. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6.

⁴ K.E. Dill, K.P. Thill, "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions", *Sex Roles*, 57, 11 (2007): 851-864. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1007/s11199-007-9278-1.

⁵ These terms refer respectively to the study of: (I) who is responsible for on-screen representation and therefore considers off-screen diversity within the production context (source diversity); (II) on-screen representation diversity (content diversity); and (III) off-screen diversity (considering the audience – exposure diversity). P.M. Napoli, "Deconstructing the Diversity Principle", *Journal of Communication*, 49, 4 (1999): 7-34; T. Krijnen, S. Van Bauwel, "Gender and Media: Representing, Producing, Consuming", New York: Routledge, 2015.

⁶ B. Conor, R. Gill, S. Taylor, "Gender and Creative Labour", *Sociological Review*, 63, S1 (2015): 1-22. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12237.

⁷ J. Glascock, "Gender Roles on Prime-Time Network Television: Demographics and Behaviors", *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 45, 4 (2001): 656-669. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1207/s15506878jobem4504_7.

⁸ M.M. Lauzen, D.M. Dozier, E. Cleveland, "Genre Matters: An Examination of Women Working Behind the Scenes and On-screen Portrayals in Reality and Scripted Prime-Time Programming", *Sex Roles*, 55, 7 (2006): 445-455. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1007/s11199-006-9100-5; M.M. Lauzen, D.M. Deiss, "Breaking the Fourth Wall and Sex Role Stereotypes: An Examination of the 2006-7 Prime-Time Season", *Sex Roles*, 60, 5 (2009): 379-386. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1007/s11199-008-9553-9; M.M. Lauzen, "Boxed in: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes on Broadcast and Streaming Television in 2020-21", The Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University, 2019. Accessed August 7, 2022. https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2020-21_Boxed_In_Report.pdf.

⁹ Lauzen, "Boxed in: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes on Broadcast and Streaming Television in 2020-21".

The film and television industry has been found to exhibit common features which together constitute a sectoral regime of inequality¹⁰. For example, Skadi Loist and Elizabeth Prommer¹¹ empirically highlight how gender imbalance in the German film industry contributes to the unsustainability and precarity of women creative professionals' careers (directors, producers, cinematographers, and scriptwriters). Organisational processes within TV production are predominantly characterised by precariousness, informality, requirements for flexibility¹², and 'bulimic' working patterns¹³ that intensify inequalities, restrict employment prospects, and render equal opportunity policies ineffective¹⁴, turning them into "empty shells"¹⁵. These labour conditions have proven to disadvantage women's careers in comparison with men's¹⁶ (e.g., in terms of pay, contractual status or seniority) and often this disadvantage intersects with categories of ethnicity, age, sexuality and class, among other characteristics¹⁷. The screen industry is therefore characterised by the under-representation, under-promotion, and under-rewarding of women¹⁸. The under-representation of women off-screen in most, if not all, fields of media production underlines how the sector is still marked by vertical and horizontal segregation with regards to gender. Vertical segregation refers to the idea that women are found in managerial or editor-in-chief positions less often than men. For example, research conducted on women's working experiences in British TV production points out that the "bifurcation of roles [...] took place after Assistant Producer level, with women oriented toward development roles associated with legal and financial responsibilities, which can be carried out relatively flexibly (and often on a freelance basis), and men taking the more prestigious and highly paid creative and director routes"¹⁹. Instead, horizontal segregation refers to specialisations within a certain field. In this way, "segregation tends to possess a messy combination of both horizontal and

¹⁰ J. Acker, "From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes", *Sociologie du travail*, 51, 2 (2009): 199-217. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1016/j.sotra.2009.03.004; A. Coles, K. MacNeill, "Policy Ecologies, Gender, Work, and Regulation Distance in Film and TV Production", in *Women, Labor Segmentation and Regulation. Varieties of Gender Gaps*, edited by D. Peetz and G. Murray, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017: 211-232.

¹¹ S. Loist, E. Prommer, "Gendered Production Culture in the German Film Industry", *Media Industries*, 6, 1 (2019): 95-115. DOI: 10.25969/mediarep/14849.

¹² A. Coles, K. MacNeill, "Policy Ecologies, Gender, Work, and Regulation Distance in Film and TV Production", in *Women, Labor Segmentation and Regulation. Varieties of Gender Gaps*, edited by D. Peetz and G. Murray, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017: 211-232.

¹³ A.C. Pratt, "Hot Jobs in Cool Places. The Material Cultures of New Media Product Spaces: The Case of South of the Market, San Francisco", *Information, Communication and Society*, 5, 1 (2002): 27-50. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1080/13691180110117640.

¹⁴ J. Holgate, S. McKay, "Equal Opportunities Policies: How Effective Are They in Increasing Diversity in the Audio-Visual Industries' Freelance Labour Market?", *Media Culture & Society*, 31, 1 (2009): 151-163. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1177/0163443708098250.

¹⁵ K. Hoque, M. Noon, "Equal Opportunities Policy and Practice in Britain: Evaluating the 'Empty Shell' Hypothesis", *Work, Employment and Society*, 18, 3 (2004): 481-506. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1177/0950017004045547.

¹⁶ D. Hesmondhalgh, S. Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011; T. Dent, "Devalued Women, Valued Men: Motherhood, Class and Neoliberal Feminism in the Creative Media Industries", *Media, Culture & Society*, 42, 4 (2020): 537-553. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1177/0163443719876537; N. Percival, "Gendered Reasons for Leaving a Career in the UK TV Industry", *Media Culture & Society*, 42, 3 (2020): 414-430. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1177/0163443719890533.

¹⁷ P.H. Collins, S. Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016.

¹⁸ ScreenSkills, *Annual ScreenSkills Assessment*, London: ScreenSkills, 2019. Accessed August 7, 2022. <https://www.screenskills.com/media/2854/2019-08-13-skills-foresighting-report.pdf>.

¹⁹ S. Milner, A. Gregory, "Time for a Change: Women, Work, and Gender Equality in TV Production", *Media, Culture & Society*, 44, 2 (2022): 286-302. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1177/016344372111045525.

vertical dimensions”²⁰. Even if, in the European context, gender-aware strategies and media-focused policies are abundant, policies that articulate a strong commitment to media gender equality have proven to be scarce and ineffective²¹. In applying network science to the question of gender inequality within the Australian, German and Swedish film industries, Deb Verhoven and colleagues showed that the most likely way to generate behavioural changes that improve network openness and address gender inequality is the expansion of collaborative sector networks between men and women²². However, as highlighted by Amanda Coles and Kate MacNeill, “the issue of gender inequality in the film and television production industry is [...] both an employment equity issue and one of sociocultural significance”²³.

Several collaborative projects between researchers, civil society, industry professionals and production companies exist to implement monitoring strategies and to build databases that may observe, promote, and enhance women’s labour in the screen industries (e.g., European Audiovisual Observatory; Eurimages; European Women’s Audiovisual network; Women in Film, Television & Media). We decided to focus on the Italian screen context because, among general trends that follow social transformations, the Italian television sector has received an innovative boost with the arrival of Netflix and its (seemingly) inclusive policies. In this paper, we employ an exploratory analysis that uses IMDb as a data source in relation to women’s labour in the production of Italian TV series²⁴. We are interested in productions that were primarily aired in Italy through generalist TV and streaming platforms and pay TV²⁵ in the period 2016-2019²⁶. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, we aim to assess whether there are significant differences in the female workforces across the production of TV series for generalist TV and pay platforms. In particular, we pay attention to understanding the distribution of gender inequalities, and segregation and mobility patterns (i.e., do female professionals hold the same roles? What career changes are taking place? Are these changes in above-the-line or below-the-line roles?). The focus is not on aggregate data, but we consider two levels of analysis: (I) differences within each professional role or department; and (II) differences at the level of individual professionals. Indeed, some studies suggest that “we are likely to understand the complexities of segregation by sex better, the more we drill down to specific job levels, rather than looking at occupations or occupational groupings (such as creative or craft workers, or ‘above-the-line’ and ‘below-the-line’ positions) as a whole”²⁷. It

²⁰ J. Browne, *Sex Segregation and Inequality in the Modern Labour Market*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2006.

²¹ K. Sarikakis, E.T. Nguyen, “The Trouble with Gender: Media Policy and Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union”, *European Integration*, 31, 2 (2009): 201-216. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1080/07036330802642771; V.M. Byerly, C. Padovani, “Research and Policy Review”, in *Gender Equality and the Media: A Challenge for Europe*, edited by K. Ross and C. Padovani, New York-London: Routledge, 2017: 7-29.

²² D. Verhoeven, K. Musial, S. Palmer, S. Taylor, S. Abidi, V. Zemaityte, L. Simpson, “Controlling for Openness in the Male-dominated Collaborative Networks of the Global Film Industry”, *PloS One*, 15, 6 (2020): e0234460. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0234460.

²³ Coles, MacNeill, “Policy Ecologies, Gender, Work, and Regulation Distance in Film and TV Production”: 212.

²⁴ Italian TV series are defined as those audiovisual products that have both ‘Country’ listed as ‘Italy’ and ‘Language’ listed as ‘Italian’ on IMDb. See the Methods and Data section for details.

²⁵ From here on we use the term pay platforms to indicate both streaming platforms and pay TV.

²⁶ Considering the exploratory nature of the analysis of this paper we decided to consider a brief window that is central to the landscape of Italian seriality since it considers a post-Netflix and pre-Covid time span.

²⁷ D. Hesmondhalgh, S. Baker, “Sex, Gender and Work Segregation in the Cultural Industries”, *The Sociological Review*, 63 (2015): 23-36. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12238.

is not the intention of this study to propose yet another statistical analysis showing an established situation, but rather to grasp possible differences in each profession from a comparative perspective, in order to highlight trends and labour mobility patterns that may also help guide future research. Second, we critically discuss whether it is possible to reliably monitor gender inequality and segregation in the serial audiovisual production industry using IMDb as a data source. Although, as we will discuss in the last section, IMDb's user-generated data present some limits, it is being successfully used by some scholars for research²⁸ into gender issues, such as the CrEative NeTwoRks Information Cruncher (CENTRIC)²⁹, which focuses on films, but it has also been used in studies related to user-generated content and user-generated film reviews³⁰. Testing IMDb's potential, opportunities, and limitations as a data source for the study of audiovisual serial production might allow for a large-scale assessment of gender balance between countries and may help to evaluate the policies' impacts and their effectiveness.

2. METHODS AND DATA

As the corpus under investigation, we considered Italian audiovisual serial productions on generalist TV channels (Rai 1, Rai 2, Rai 3, Canale 5) and pay platforms (Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, Sky) from 2016 to 2019. We decided to focus on the period after Netflix's arrival in Italy and before the outbreak of Covid-19 because the impact of the global pandemic greatly disrupted the labour landscape worldwide, exacerbating employment insecurity and posing a significant threat to workforce diversity³¹. Data was obtained from IMDb³² in August 2022 and processed with Python scripts using the IMDbPY package³³. First, all data items corresponding to TV series and mini-series which had 'Country' listed as 'Italy' and 'Language' listed as 'Italian' were extracted. Then, all items identified as 'animation', 'game-show', 'news', 'sport', 'talk-show',

²⁸ SVP Group, "Automatic Generation of Movie Trailers Using Ontologies"; *IMAGE. Zeitschrift für interdisziplinäre Bildwissenschaft*, 3, 1 (2007): 117-139. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.25969/mediarep/16750; D. Verhoeven, B. Coate, V. Zemaityte, "Re-distributing Gender in the Global Film Industry: Beyond #MeToo and #MeThree", *Media Industries Journal*, 6, 1 (2019): 135-155. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.3998/mij.15031809.0006.108; S. Sreenivasan, "Quantitative Analysis of the Evolution of Novelty in Cinema through Crowdsourced Keywords", *Scientific Reports*, 3, 1 (2013): 1-11. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1038/srep02758; N.K. Rao, B. Naseeba, N.P. Challa, S. Chakrvarthi, "Web Scraping (IMDB) Using Python", *Telematique*, 2022: 235-247.

²⁹ M. Fanchi, M. Tarantino, "Has Digital Transformation Impacted Gender Imbalance in Italian Cinema? A Data Analysis of Creative Clusters 2004-2016", in *Digital Transformation in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, edited by M. Massi, M. Vecco, Y. Lin, London: Routledge, 2020: 162-184; M. Fanchi, M. Tarantino, "Donne e reti creative nel cinema italiano (2004-2016)", *Economia della Cultura*, 29, 4 (2019): 523-530. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1446/96648.

³⁰ J. Otterbacher, "Gender, Writing and Ranking in Review Forums: A Case Study of the IMDb. Knowledge and Information Systems", 35, 3 (2013): 645-664. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1007/s10115-012-0548-z; K. Boyle, "Gender, Comedy and Reviewing Culture on the Internet Movie Database", *Participations*, 11, 1 (2014): 31-49. Accessed August 7, 2022. <http://www.participations.org/Volume%2011/Issue%201/3.pdf>.

³¹ Z. Blaskó, E. Papadimitriou, A.R. Manca, "How Will the COVID-19 Crisis Affect Existing Gender Divides in Europe?", Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.2760/37511; D.R. Eikhof, "COVID-19, Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in the Cultural Economy: What Now, What Next?", *Cultural Trends*, 29, 3 (2020): 234-250. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2020.1802202.

³² <http://www.imdb.com/interfaces>.

³³ <https://cinemagoer.github.io/ecosystem/>.

‘documentary’, and ‘reality’ under ‘Genre’ were removed³⁴ to leave us with the set of data to review³⁵. Data items were considered at series level, not at season or episode level³⁶. For each audiovisual serial product, the professional crew names were extrapolated from the database. Data storage was done on MongoDB³⁷. Data analysis was performed with R version 4.2.1³⁸.

Like many other databases, IMDb lacks proper information about gender. Several gender detection algorithms have been developed and critically discussed³⁹ to infer gender from available data. Based on the names of the professionals involved, we automatically assigned genders using the *genderize.io* API⁴⁰. This name-based gender inference tool also works well with diminutives or nicknames⁴¹. Clearly, these approaches have some limitations. A gender dichotomy might reinforce a non-inclusive gender concept and further marginalised individuals who do not identify as women or men. From an ethical point of view, to increase the correctness of the data, it would be preferable to ask for self-identification, “since it avoids the offensiveness of assigning categories to individuals, while allowing for inclusion of identities beyond the gender binary”⁴². However, for large scale assessment, self-identification is not achievable and the use of automated methods to infer gender from available data is unavoidable.

Data collected from IMDb considered 77 Italian audiovisual serial productions on generalist TV and 12 on pay platforms from 2016 to 2019. We gathered data on 4,451 professionals and 8,974 credits⁴³, distributed among 26 professional roles or across departments⁴⁴ (i.e., a professional can be involved in several productions in the same role or in different roles). Figure 1 shows the 26 sectors surveyed⁴⁵ and the overall labour distribution: camera and electrical department (1,455 credits), sound crew (963 credits), visual effects (928 credits), writers (926), assistant directors (597 credits), and production managers (446 credits) were the most populous sectors.

³⁴ The genres that were included were ‘action’, ‘adventure’, ‘biography’, ‘comedy’, ‘crime’, ‘drama’, ‘family’, ‘fantasy’, ‘film-noir’, ‘history’, ‘horror’, ‘music’, ‘musical’, ‘mystery’, ‘romance’, ‘sci-fi’, ‘talk-show’, ‘thriller’, ‘war’, and ‘western’.

³⁵ Data obtained from IMDb was reinforced via a manual check of each product to make sure nothing had been excluded or incorrectly included.

³⁶ Data on episode crew is often available only for the most successful productions.

³⁷ <https://www.mongodb.com/productions/compass>.

³⁸ <https://www.r-project.org/>.

³⁹ For a review see L. Santamaría, H. Mihaljević, “Comparison and Benchmark of Name-to-Gender Inference Services”, *PeerJ Computer Science*, 4 (2018): e156. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.7717/peerj-cs.156.

⁴⁰ <https://genderize.io/>.

⁴¹ D.A. Menéndez, J.M. González-Barahona, G. Robles, “Damegender: Writing and Comparing Gender Detection Tools”. InSATTtoSE, 2020. Accessed August 7, 2022. <https://easychair.org/publications/preprint/GT7d>.

⁴² Santamaría, Mihaljević, “Comparison and Benchmark of Name-to-Gender Inference Services”.

⁴³ The term ‘credits’ refers to the number of jobs undertaken by a professional over a time span (i.e., one professional can have more than one credit in the same role and/or in a different role) while the term ‘workforce’ refers to the total number of people, which in our case is 4,451 professionals.

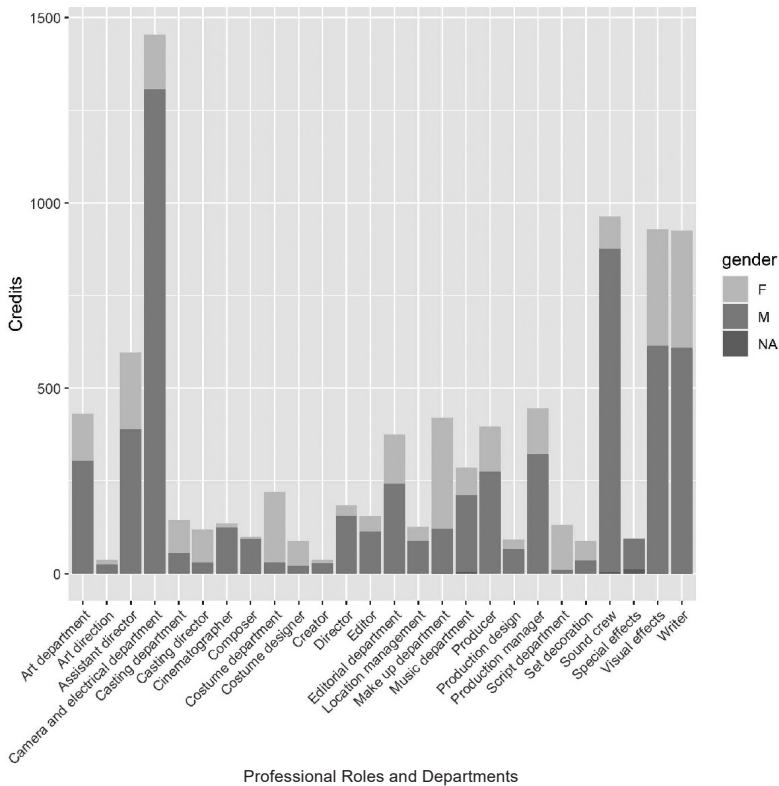
⁴⁴ We considered as ‘professional roles’ those positions that are clearly defined (e.g., casting director, cinematographer, director); we considered as ‘departments’ those groupings that can be characterized by different professional roles but which all fall within a specific area (e.g., costume department, art department, music department).

⁴⁵ To see a complete list and definition of each role and department, see IMDb’s page on “Filmography credits”, https://help.imdb.com/article/contribution/filmography-credits/eligible-credits/GFXKZE9VXLB-5CR8M?ref=helpart_nav_11#.

3. RESULTS

We found that women's labour constituted 33% of the workforce engaged in the production of Italian TV series from 2016 to 2019. Of the 1,467 individual female professionals working behind the scenes (2,737 credits), 1,319 of them were involved in 2,390 credits for generalist TV productions and 288 were involved in 347 credits for pay platform productions (tab. 1). Figure 1 features a barplot that shows the professional presence in terms of credits within each sector. Overall, considering the percentage of women's credits, we see that the most represented departments and/or professional roles are the script department (92%), costume department (86%), costume designers (76%), casting directors (75%), and make up department (72%)⁴⁶.

Figure 1 - Barplot showing the number of credits in Italian audiovisual serial productions on generalist TV and pay platforms from 2016 to 2019. F: female professionals; M: male professionals; NA: not available (relating to professionals where name-based gender inference was unavailable)



⁴⁶ Other departments and professions include: casting department (62%), set decoration (60%), assistant directors (35%), visual effects (34%), writers (34%), editorial department (35%), art direction (33%), location management (31%), producers (31%), art department (29%), production design (28%), production managers (28%), editors (27%), music department (26%), creators (22%), directors (16%), camera and electrical department (10%), sound crew (9%), cinematographers (8%), composers (5%), and special effects (2%).

Table 1 - Numbers of professionals and credits in Italian generalist TV (“G”) and pay platform (“P”) serial productions from 2016 to 2019. (“NA” relating to professionals where name-based gender inference was unavailable)

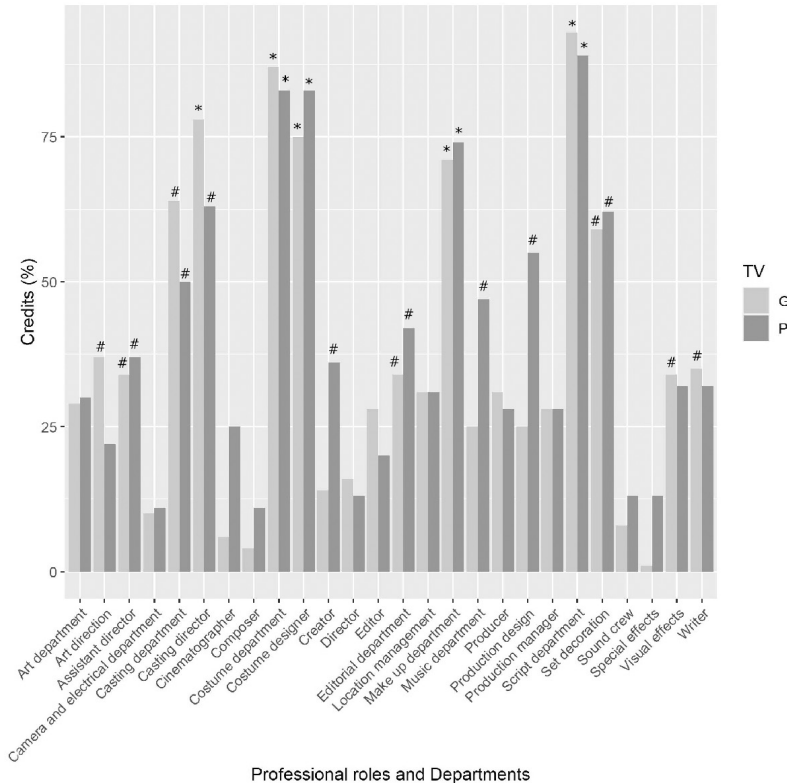
	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>NA</i>	
	G	P	G	P	G	P
No. professionals	1,319	288	2,690	590	14	4
No. credits	2,390	347	5,451	759	23	4

In figure 2, we evaluate the percentage of women’s labour (credits) in each sector across generalist TV and pay platform productions and identify some relevant differences. Women in generalist TV series are involved in the role of casting director, casting department and art direction 10% more than in pay platforms, while pay platform productions have a higher presence of women within production design (+30%), the music department (+22%) and cinematographers (+19%) than generalist TV. In addition, women work more frequently behind the camera as directors and editors in generalist TV productions.

To understand segregation patterns we considered which sector was male-dominated, female-dominated, or gender neutral. According to the literature, male-dominated industries, organizations and sectors are those where women comprise less than 33.3% of the total and female-dominated are those where women’s representation is 66.6% or above⁴⁷. Those falling between the two percentages are considered gender neutral sectors. Within generalist TV productions we found 5 female-dominated professions, 14 male-dominated and 7 gender neutral (fig. 2). On pay platform productions there were 4 female-dominated professions, 14 male-dominated and 8 gender neutral ones (fig. 2). During the period 2016-2019, in generalist TV productions, considering the total number of women (i.e., female workforce), 30% were employed in male-dominated occupations, 28% in female-dominated occupations, and 42% in gender-neutral occupations. By contrast, in pay platform productions, considering the total number of women, 26% were employed in a male-dominated occupation, 24% in a female-dominated occupation, and 50% in a gender-neutral occupation. Across both generalist TV and pay platforms, the script department, costume department, costume design and make up department were female-dominated sectors. In addition, in generalist TV productions, casting direction was female-dominated, while set decoration was gender neutral. In pay platform productions, casting direction and set decoration were both gender neutral groups. Considering the two distribution environments, there were no female-dominated occupations that were male-dominated in one sector compared to the other, and vice versa. The three most segregated occupations in generalist TV productions were cinematographer, composer and special effects department, whereas in pay platform productions they were composer, director and sound crew departments.

⁴⁷ M. Torre, “Attrition from male-dominated occupations: Variation among occupations and women”, *Sociological Perspectives*, 60, 4 (2017): 665-684. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1177/0731121416683160.

Figure 2 - Percentage of women's labour (credits) in Italian generalist TV ("G") and pay platform ("P") serial productions from 2016 to 2019; (*) indicate female-dominated sectors; (#) indicate gender neutral sectors all the others represent male-dominated sectors



We then focused on labour mobility. In particular, we were interested in understanding whether women and men involved in Italian audiovisual productions played the same roles, what their career changes were, and whether these concerned above-the-line or below-the-line roles⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Above-the-line roles are defined as those in which professionals are responsible for the creative development of the audiovisual products (such as director, producer, cinematographer, and scriptwriter) while other crew members are below-the-line (e.g., editor, costume department, make up, camera and electronic department).

Figure 3 - Number of professionals (F: women, M: men) and their credits in Italian generalist TV and pay platform serial productions from 2016 to 2019. The last column specifies the professionals count in above-the-line (ATL) and below-the-line (BTL) roles

	Professionals involved in the same role		Professionals involved in different roles	
	Once	Multiple times	Total	Per type of role
Generalist TV	F: 789 (789 credits) M: 1,498 (1,498 credits)	F: 324 (1,007 credits) M: 718 (2,372 credits)	F: 81 (274 credits) M: 193 (784 credits)	changes in ATL roles: F: 16 M: 57
				changes in BTL roles: F: 40 M: 76
				changes across ATL and BTL roles: F: 25 M: 60
Pay platform	F: 136 (136 credits) M: 247 (247 credits)	F: 8 (21 credits) M: 20 (50 credits)	F: 5 (7 credits) M: 26 (79 credits)	changes in ATL roles: F: 2 M: 10
				changes in BTL roles: F: 2 M: 8
				changes across ATL and BTL roles: F: 1 M: 8

In figure 3 we consider the total number of professionals and credits over the entire corpus to establish: (I) the number of women who had only one credit each; (II) the number of women who had multiple credits within the same role; (III) the number of women who changed roles, considering also those changes that involved above-the-line roles, below-the-line roles, and a mix between the two. Considering individual mobility patterns, we found that the percentage of women and men who held only one role was higher on pay platforms (women: 91%; men: 84%) than on generalist TV productions (women: 66%; men: 62%). The presence of women and men in multiple credits for different professional roles was higher on generalist TV (women: 7%, men: 8%) than on pay platforms productions (women: 3%, men: 9%). This may suggest greater mobility patterns and longer careers for generalist TV professionals, but this needs further investigation over a longer time span.

Finally, we were interested in understanding whether female professionals who worked for generalist TV productions were also involved in pay platform productions and vice versa, and what roles they played. We found that 131 female professionals (510 credits) worked in the same role for generalist TV and pay platform productions (18 professionals in above-the-line roles, 112 working below-the-line, and 1 professional in the same role both above- and below-the-line), while 25 professionals (69 credits) had different roles (5 professionals in above-the-line roles, 14 working below-the-line, and 6 professionals in both). From a comparative perspective, we found that 295 male professionals (1,266 credits) worked in the same role across both generalist TV and pay platform productions (41 professionals in above-the-line roles, 253 below-the-line, and 1 professional in the same roles both above- and below-the-line) while 42 professionals (135 credits) had different roles (5 in above-the-line roles, 20 working below-the-line, and 17 professionals in both).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have considered the intersection between women and labour in serial production for generalist TV and pay platforms in the period 2016-2019. We imple-

mented a data-driven exploratory analysis that used IMDb as a data source. We found that gender inequity remains ubiquitous. Overall, the proportion of positions occupied by women in generalist TV and pay platform productions was the same (33%), also considering their distribution in male-dominated, female-dominated and gender-neutral roles. Considering specific roles/departments, some considerable differences can be seen between the two contexts. Women in generalist TV serials are hired more often as casting directors, in the casting department and in art direction, while pay platform productions employed more female professionals as production designers, in the music department, and as cinematographers. In contrast with Lauzen's US-based study discussed in the introduction which found that programmes on streaming services had substantially higher percentages of women working as creators, directors, and editors than broadcast programmes⁴⁹, the present research found that in Italy women work more frequently behind the camera as directors and editors in generalist TV productions. Finally, considering individual mobility patterns, the data points to greater mobility patterns and longer careers for generalist TV female professionals. However, a significant difference was detected in men's higher mobility between jobs in generalist TV and pay platform productions compared to their female peers. It would be interesting to extend the corpus over a wider period of time to better observe the development of career paths in the Italian screen industry.

Considering the second aim of this article, we have identified several potential advantages and some limitations of using IMDb as a data source. IMDb allows for the analysis of both segregation patterns (it is possible to track the mobility of women in male-dominated professions and men in female-dominated professions) and the mobility of individual workers (the evolution of their careers). In addition, it may be useful in assessing such changes among professional roles and departments in different environments (e.g., generalist TV versus pay platforms) but also within different countries and genres over time.

IMDb might thus provide useful information and patterns that may help guide further study. However, we have also identified some limitations. The first is that data from IMDb may not be complete. Indeed, users enter the information we scraped and, while this collective work represents an enormous opportunity for conducting large-scale research that would otherwise be difficult to perform, it also means gaps may emerge in the descriptive records of the professionals involved in the production, especially at the level of individual episodes. However, we should stress that, whilst some caution is necessary when dealing with limited corpora, these considerations become less significant when the scale of the research is enlarged. In addition, it would be necessary to assess which positions are actually occupied within the departments, as these can vary greatly in terms of work and salary. In the future, further studies are needed to test the reliability of IMDb.

The second limitation is connected to the fact that "data alone is not enough for successful advocacy [...] a successful advocate will also pair these data with deep contextual analysis, bringing to light the stories of girls and women affected by the issues"⁵⁰. Indeed, the relationship between gender and media production does not stop solely at the number

⁴⁹ Lauzen, "Boxed in: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes on Broadcast and Streaming Television in 2020-21".

⁵⁰ A. Connell, A. Holder, H. Kearney, "Equal Measures 2030: A New Approach for Advocacy and Influencing Beyond Beijing+ 25", *Gender & Development*, 28, 2 (2020): 405-423. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1080/13552074.2020.1750218.

of males and females working in these industries, and “it is necessary to go beyond the ‘body count’ and to start looking at specific social practices, embodied in conventions and rules, formally and informally, based on history and tradition, sustained by people working in the media organizations”⁵¹. The increased participation of women in the workforce cannot automatically be interpreted as empowerment⁵². We are currently investigating women’s conditions and experiences in 10 Italian film production companies involved in serial production, in order to understand how production companies in Italy can help women manage possible motherhood penalties that may increase discontinuous career pathways, and reduce gender pay gaps. Finally, a third limitation is related to the binary view of gender that was discussed previously.

We are still a long way from the ‘equal opportunities’ model. Despite the numerous laws and policy objectives promulgated in recent decades by the European Union, inequalities between men and women are deeply rooted in working practices that significantly disadvantage women⁵³. We need policies that can provide adequate frameworks for the media to operate in, while contributing to transforming unequal gender relations, at the national level as well as at the level of media organizations⁵⁴. Gender quotas, the theory of womenomics, and the concept of diversity management (i.e., the idea that increasing women’s employment rates will benefit the whole society from an economic point of view) are some of the tactics that have been used to accelerate this process⁵⁵. Italy has recently defined a “National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2026”, with the goal of gaining five points in the ranking of the Gender Equality Index. The Strategy identifies specific measures to increase the employment rate of women, such as tax relief initiatives for companies hiring women, incentives to return to work after maternity leave, and monitoring diversity in governance in both private companies and public administration.

As underlined by Karen Byerly and Carolyn Ross⁵⁶, ‘who’ is involved in production matters for media content, and as other researchers have pointed out, the rationale for the vast amount of research on gender and media production is that achieving critical mass is vital⁵⁷. Critical mass theory⁵⁸ assumes that once enough women take part in media production (with an emphasis on key behind-the-scenes roles), media content will become unbiased regarding gender representation. However, “critical mass is only

⁵¹ M. De Bruin, “Gender, Organizational and Professional Identities in Journalism”, *Journalism*, 1, 2 (2000): 217-238. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.1177/146488490000100205.

⁵² D.J. Liebowitz, S. Zwingel, “Gender Equality Oversimplified: Using CEDAW to Counter the Measurement Obsession”, *International Studies Review*, 16, 3 (2014): 362-389. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1111/misr.12139.

⁵³ A. Genders, *An Invisible Army. The Role of Freelance Labour in Bristol’s Film and Television Industries*, Bristol: University of the West of England.

⁵⁴ C. Padovani, R. Bozzon, “Media Gender-Equality Regimes: Exploring Media Organisations’ Policy Adoption across Nations”, in *Comparing Gender and Media Equality Across the Globe: A Cross-National Study of the Qualities, Causes, and Consequences of Gender Equality in and through the News Media*, edited by M. Djerf-Pierre and M. Edström, Nordicom: University of Gothenburg, 2020: 99-144. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI 10.48335/9789188855329-3.

⁵⁵ S. Capecchi, *La comunicazione di genere: prospettive teoriche e buone pratiche*, Rome: Carocci, 2018, 93-94.

⁵⁶ K. Ross, C.M. Byerly, *Women and Media: International Perspectives*, Maidenhead-Malden: Blackwell, 2004.

⁵⁷ Krijnen, Van Bauwel, “Gender and Media: Representing, Producing, Consuming”.

⁵⁸ For the first studies on critical mass theory, see R.M. Kanter, “Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life”, in *The Gender Gap in Psychotherapy*, edited by P.P. Rieker, E. Carmen, Boston: Springer, 1977: 53-78; and more recently C. Sarah, L.K. Mona, “Critical Mass Theory and Women’s Political Representation”, *Political Studies*, 56, 3 (2008): 725-736. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00712.x.

useful if we discard the belief that a single proportion holds the key to all representation needs of women and if we discard notions that numbers alone bring about substantive changes in policy processes and outcomes”⁵⁹. Inequalities in employment and remuneration are entrenched. To achieve gender equality, production companies must do more than simply ‘check a box’ when casting a production, or make a ‘gender hire’ behind the camera. Joan Acker⁶⁰ acknowledges that inequality regimes are fluid and subject to change, and that pushing to enact transformation often meets with resistance. Research, concrete action and debates increase the visibility of inequalities and create possibilities for disruption because they counter the taken-for grantedness of privilege.

⁵⁹ S. Grey, “Numbers and Beyond: The Relevance of Critical Mass in Gender Research”, *Politics & Gender*, 2, 4 (2006): 492-502. Accessed August 7, 2022. DOI: 10.1017/S1743923X06061149.

⁶⁰ Acker, “From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes”.

VALENTINA RE - MARICA SPALLETTA*

UNSUITABLE JOBS FOR WOMEN Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment and Female On-Screen Representation in Italian TV Crime Drama**

Abstract

This article combines quantitative tools of social research, text-based analysis, and production studies to analyse gender equality and female labour in contemporary Italian TV crime drama. More precisely, we analyse the portrayal of female characters and women's employment in key behind-the-scenes roles in Italian TV crime dramas distributed from Fall 2015 to Summer 2022. The research has two main goals: first, to understand how crime narratives address gender equality and diversity from a twofold perspective – behind-the-scenes and on-screen; second, to understand *if* and *how* a sample analysis, targeting a specific case study, can provide general trends such as those coming from the analysis of broader datasets. Although sample analysis proved to be more effective in mapping behind-the-scenes roles rather than on-screen representation, we argue that the original findings obtained may extend beyond the boundaries of the crime genre. Despite some positive trends, data on the different production roles reveal a bleaker scenario, with strong gender inequalities in top positions, and Italian dramas show a substantial lack of diversity regarding gender identity, race, and geographical origin. Although the share of female leads and co-leads aligns with the international scenario, more specific insights into crime narratives' characters reveal a still very unbalanced situation, where only 21% of professional detectives are women, and leadership positions and supervisory power continue to be almost exclusively held by men.

Keywords

Gender equality; diversity; TV crime drama; Italian screen industry; mixed methods.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Gender equality is a fundamental EU value and a core EU objective. To achieve this fundamental goal, a strong policy background (see for instance the *EU Gender Equality*

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** This study originates at the intersection of three research projects: the H2020 project DETECT – Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives (2018-2021); the national project (PRIN 2020) The Atlas of Italian 'Giallo'. Media History and Popular Culture (2022-2025); the CERV-2022-GE project GEMINI – Gender Equality through Media Investigation and New Training Insights (2023-2025).

Strategy 2020-2025 and the *Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023*) has been set up in all sectors of European societies. The significant influence exerted by the media on how social and cultural norms relating to gender are perceived makes them suitable to advancing the cause of gender equality, promoting gender awareness and preventing and fighting gender discrimination. Specific measures currently address gender parity in the cultural and creative industries. Starting from the 2011 *Framework of Actions on Gender Equality To Support Organisations in the European Audiovisual Sector* (which resulted in the 2020 report *Achieving Gender Equality and Promoting Diversity in the European Audiovisual Sector; Good Practice Handbook*), the *Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)9 on Gender Equality in the Audiovisual Sector*, and the *European Parliament Resolution on Gender Equality in the Media Sector* (signed on 17 April 2018), specific actions have been progressively established to increase gender equality and diversity in the European audiovisual sector. Recent examples include the *Creative Europe MEDIA Programme (2021-2027)* and the *Eurimage – Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2023*.

The reference to ‘diversity’ underlines the need to complement the gender equality perspective with an ‘intersectional’ approach aimed at addressing discrimination on a systemic level, thus combining gender with other personal characteristics (e.g., race, religion, age, disability) that can be a potential source of inequality, and promoting diversity as a value and a driver of growth and innovation in all areas of life. In this respect, over the past five years several reports have combined behind-the-scenes and on-screen research to map gender issues in the audiovisual sector from the broader perspective of diversity and elaborated policy recommendations¹. All these reports stress that the “availability of such knowledge is crucial for both creating awareness about existing gender issues as well as developing appropriate policies and good practices”, while pointing out the “lack of systematic data”². As clearly stated in the conclusions of the 2020 report *Achieving Gender Equality and Promoting Diversity in the European Audiovisual Sector; Good Practice Handbook*: “The high value of the regular production of statistics and qualitative analyses of the levels of representation of women and other under-represented groups on screens and in the audiovisual workforce has been demonstrated”³.

Although film and television studies are becoming increasingly concerned with data-driven approaches, it is still difficult to find research, both in the humanities and social sciences, based on a mixed methods approach, where qualitative and quantitative approaches blend to offer qualitative analysis of quantitative data and vice versa. It is precisely in order to contribute to this research area that this article combines quantitative tools of social research, text-based analysis, and production studies to analyse gender equality and female labour in contemporary Italian TV crime drama. While considering the extensive Italian and international literature on gender and media in both social sciences and media studies, this article is mainly concerned with methodologies

¹ These include at least: EAO, *Diversity and Inclusion in the European Audiovisual Sector; IRIS plus*, 2021; EENCA, *Gender Gaps in the Cultural and Creative Sectors*, 2020; Voices of Culture, *Gender Equality: Gender Balance in the Cultural and Creative Sector*, 2020; ERGA SG 4, *Study on Industry Good Practices related to Gender Diversity in the European Audiovisual Sector*, 2019; EAO, *Gender Imbalances in the Audiovisual Industries*, 2018. Concerning the impact on policy strategies and funding, see the BFI diversity standards as a paradigmatic case.

² EENCA, *Gender Gaps in the Cultural and Creative Sectors*, 8.

³ D. Tepper (Projects Director, UNI Europa – Media, Entertainment & Arts), *Achieving Gender Equality and Promoting Diversity in the European Audiovisual sector; Good Practice Handbook*, 2020, 69.

and data evidenced by reports from stakeholders such as public broadcasters, streaming services, public service organisations and non-profit research organisations. In this respect, and despite the huge popularity of television narratives, the only data currently available on gender equality in Italian television production are those released by the European Audiovisual Observatory, APA (Associazione Produttori Audiovisivi)/Fondazione Symbola, and the public broadcaster Rai⁴.

2. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

This study analyses the portrayal of female characters and women's employment in key behind-the-scenes roles in Italian TV crime dramas distributed from Fall 2015 to Summer 2022 (seven television seasons). The research has two main goals: first, it aims to understand how crime narratives address gender equality from a twofold perspective, from behind-the-scenes and on-screen; second, it aims to understand *if* and *how* a sample analysis, targeting a specific case study, can point to general trends, such as those emerging from the analysis of broader datasets.

The focus on the crime genre depends on well-established findings presented by academic literature of recent years. On the one hand, crime narratives provide the opportunity to analyse mainstream productions and popular narratives; as argued in *Transnational European Television Drama*, “crime drama [...] is clearly the most popular genre across Europe”⁵ and it “serves as a lens through which to observe the local, national and even transnational issues that are prevalent in a society”⁶. On the other, the crime genre has been investigated by a rich tradition of feminist cultural and media studies that have explored the role of women as creators, characters, and consumers of crime narratives⁷. In this respect, the crime genre has represented a privileged point of view from which to observe changes in gender roles, both in society and fictional worlds, and particularly the relationships between the representation of female investigators and changes in the condition of women in the broader socio-cultural context, especially in the workplace and domestic spaces.

The 2015-2022 timeframe is motivated both on international and national grounds.

⁴ G. Fontaine, *Female Audiovisual Professionals in European TV Fiction Production – 2020 Figures*, EAO, 2022; APA and Fondazione Symbola, “L’occupazione nell’audiovisivo e la presenza femminile”, in *4° Rapporto sulla produzione audiovisiva nazionale*, 2022; Rai, *Monitoraggio sulla rappresentazione della figura femminile, sulla capacità di garantire il pluralismo di temi, soggetti e linguaggi e contribuire alla creazione di coesione sociale nella programmazione Rai trasmessa nell’anno solare 2021*.

⁵ I. Bondebjerg et al., *Transnational European Television Drama*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 223.

⁶ K.T. Hansen, S. Peacock, S. Turnbull, *European Television Crime Drama and Beyond*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 1.

⁷ See in particular: L.M. Dresner, *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film and Popular Culture*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2007; P. Gates, *Detecting Women: Gender and the Hollywood Detective Film*, Albany: State University of New York, 2011; M. Hoffman, *Gender and Representation in British ‘Golden Age’ Crime Fiction*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; K.G. Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*, Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995; M.T. Reddy, “Women Detectives”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by M. Priestman, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003: 191-207; S. Turnbull, *The TV Crime Drama*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. For a literature review focused on the Italian context, see E. D’Amelio, V. Re, “Neither Voiceless nor Unbelievable: Women Detectives & Rape Culture in Contemporary Italian TV”, *MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture*, 7 (2021). <https://maifeminism.com/neither-voiceless-nor-unbelievable-women-detectives-rape-culture-in-italian-tv/>. Accessed January 14, 2023.

On the one hand, it allows for a comparison of the results of this research with data provided by EAO (European Audiovisual Observatory) about the presence of women among six audiovisual professional categories in TV fiction with a first broadcast or release in the EU27 plus UK between 2015 and 2020⁸. On the other, at the national level, the year 2015 stands out as a turning point in the innovation processes implemented by Rai, the Italian PSB and leading provider of TV series, to respond to original productions by linear and non-linear pay TV players (Sky, Netflix, Amazon) and to the increasing circulation of productions and narrative models from other European countries, and especially Nordic countries. The TV series *Non uccidere (Thou Shalt Not Kill)*, which aired on Rai 3 in September 2015, achieved international visibility thanks to its innovative visual style and its female protagonist, Valeria Ferro, a woman in her thirties and inspector in the homicide squad.

Concerning the second goal, the use of quantitative research methods in media scholarship, although not unfamiliar, has increased particularly in recent years. This led many researchers to the adoption of a mixed methods perspective, based on a data-driven approach to measuring a given phenomenon, whilst also serving as a starting point for a qualitative analysis aimed at understanding that same phenomenon⁹. Furthermore, the adoption of a quantitative approach involves, by its own nature, the analysis of a huge amount of data that result from large datasets, or, conversely, a sample methodology that allows researchers to make inferences about a selected sample corpus with the expectation of making them generalisable to the whole target population¹⁰.

In this respect, we decided to replicate, at least in part, the approach adopted by the report *Boxed In 2019-2020*¹¹, which used the sample methodology of randomly selecting one episode for every TV series. Following the model suggested by the report *Women Over 50*¹², we decided to select and analyse the second episode of season 1 (01x02). This choice allowed us to focus on the first season of each series (which comprises the ‘original crew’) while considering that season premieres or pilot episodes, as well as season finales, may differ from regular season norms.

⁸ G. Fontaine, *Female Audiovisual Professionals in European TV Fiction Production – 2020 Figures*; see also M. Jiménez Pumares, *Female Audiovisual Professionals in European TV Fiction Production*, EAO, 2021. Pioneering research on gender equality in the Italian audiovisual sector, with special reference to the film industry, have been conducted by the research project DEA from 2016 to 2019: DEA, *Gap & Ciak: I divari di genere nel lavoro e nell’industria audiovisiva: lo stato dell’arte*, 2016; DEA, *Gap & Ciak 2, Secondo rapporto DEA-Donne nell’industria dell’audiovisivo*, 2018. For more recent approaches focused on Italian cinema, see WIFTMI (Women in Film, Television & Media Italia), *Women Directors and Film Production. Addressing the Gender Gap and the Role of Festivals*, 2019; the research project *CineAF: Women’s Films in Italy (1965-2015)*; and M. Fanchi, M. Tarantino, “Has Digital Transformation Impacted Gender Imbalance in Italian cinema? A Data Analysis of Creative Clusters 2004-2016”, in *Digital Transformation in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, edited by M. Massi, M. Vecco, Y. Lin, London: Routledge, 2021: 162-183.

⁹ R. Kitchin, “Big Data, New Epistemologies and Paradigm Shifts”, *Big Data & Society*, 1 (2014): 1-12; E. Amaturò, G. Punziano, *I mixed methods nella ricerca sociale*, Rome: Carocci, 2016. For an application in Italian film studies see for instance: D. Holdaway, “La rete sociale del cinema di interesse culturale”, in *Il cinema di Stato. Finanziamento pubblico ed economia simbolica nel cinema italiano contemporaneo*, edited by M. Cucco and G. Manzoli, Bologna: il Mulino, 2017: 127-169; M. Rocchi, E. Farinacci, “Shonda Rhimes’s TGIT: Representation of Womanhood and Blackness”, *Series*, 6:1 (2020): 29-41; G. Avezù, *L’Italia che guarda. Geografie del consumo audiovisivo*, Rome: Carocci, 2022.

¹⁰ P. Corbetta, *La ricerca sociale: metodologia e tecniche. Vol II: Le tecniche quantitative*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2015.

¹¹ M.M. Lauzen, *Boxed In 2019-20: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television*, 2020.

¹² Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, *Women Over 50: The Right to Be Seen on Screen*, 2021.

The sample analysis is based on two sets of predetermined variables (behind-the-scenes and on-screen), which nowadays represent a consolidated two-fold perspective, especially in international reports¹³. To collect the first set of data, we referred to the opening credits of each episode, integrating them, when needed, with final credits or the information provided by the IMDb¹⁴. For the second set, data were collected by watching every episode in the sample one or more times in its entirety.

These two sets of variables subsequently merged into two analytical patterns aiming at measuring and understanding:

a) Women's employment in the crews:

- *Above-the-line roles*: director(s), writer(s), delegate producer(s)¹⁵
- *Below-the-line roles*: cinematography, music, sound, editing, costume design, production design, special/visual effects, casting, make-up
- Main producer(s)
- Producer(s) for the commissioner

It is important to emphasise that, based on the interpretation of the credits, it is impossible to distinguish between sex, gender identity and sexual orientation at this first level of analysis. The distinction between female/women professionals and male/man professionals was made based on the credited personal name and the sex with which this name is commonly associated in Italian culture¹⁶. As demonstrated by the variables used to analyse characters representation and listed below, this choice in no way implies a binary approach to gender issues. However, in order to collect more accurate data beyond the gender binary, further qualitative research based on surveys and semi-structured interviews with professionals should investigate the relations between sex/gender identity/sexual orientation from a behind-the-scenes perspective, and assess how these aspects impact the working conditions in the audiovisual sector.

b) The representation of female characters:

- *Sex*: female, male, intersex
- *Gender identity*: man, woman, trans man, trans woman, genderqueer (non-binary)
- *Sexual orientation*: asexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian, heterosexual, pansexual
- *Age*: children (0-13), youth (14-18), young adult (19-30), adult (31-50), older adult (51-70), senior (over 70)
- *Race & origin*: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska

¹³ See for instance the EAO 2018 report *Gender imbalances in the Audiovisual Industries*: “Evidence from numerous analyses and statistics [...] have revealed that gender equality is far from being achieved in the audiovisual sector, both in terms of women's involvement in the sector and in terms of how women are portrayed in the works produced by these industries” (3).

¹⁴ Compared to all other crew members, some problems occurred with the identification of the visual and special effects supervisor(s)/producer(s), as they are not usually mentioned in the opening credits.

¹⁵ The high heterogeneity in crediting the various producer figures, which describe equally diverse production practices, made it necessary to make some methodological choices. As we wanted to focus on figures with decision-making and supervising roles, we distinguished between the main producer(s) (that is, the main financial supporter[s]), his/her main delegate(s) (in Italian *produttore delegato* or *produttore esecutivo*) and the producers representing the commissioner (e.g., the channel/platform of the first release, which is also the major funder).

¹⁶ While in the international scenario ‘Andrea’ is both a male and female name, in Italy it is mainly used to identify male persons; therefore, all crew members with that name have been coded as male. On the other hand, for personal names not belonging to the Italian tradition (e.g., Emita), pseudonyms (e.g., Salmo) and bands (e.g., Calibro 35), further research was carried out to identify their sex. Finally, based on the biographical names given in the credits, it was impossible to identify the share of intersex professionals, which would only be identifiable through interviews or surveys with direct answers.

Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, interracial. To provide insights about the most represented race (white) in Italian society, we have distinguished based on geographical origin between Italy, Southern Europe, Western/Northern Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia, Latin America, Northern Africa and the Middle East¹⁷

– *Sentimental status*: happy stable relationship, troubled relationship, divorced, widowed, extramarital relationship(s), casual relationships, single

– *Occupational status* (for female characters only)

– *Relevance in the narrative*: recurring characters (lead[s], co-lead[s], supporting), episodic characters (major, minor) and one-line characters¹⁸

– *Role in the crime narrative*: professional detective, amateur detective, private detective, victim, criminal, coroner, lawyer/prosecutor/judge. Professional detectives have been further distinguished between main, assistant, and supervisor.

3. ANALYSED CORPUS

This study spans a period of seven television seasons and monitors 62 TV crime dramas¹⁹, tracking 1.158 mentions in main title sequences²⁰ and 1.353 characters (tab. 1).

¹⁷ At this early stage of the research, and in a provisional form, we decided not to combine the issues of representation of race with those of representation of ethnic groups and especially ethnic minorities. That said, it should be remembered that ethnic diversity has minimal prominence in Italian TV production. To confirm this, as discussed later, the Rom/Sinti ethnic minority is the only one portrayed in the analysed series.

¹⁸ The main distinction between recurring and episodic characters corresponds to the distinction between serial and episodic narratives, but the increasingly complex forms of hybridisation between the two narrative models make this a challenging methodological issue. Leads are the recurring characters from whose perspective the story is told, while co-leads represent important yet complementary viewpoints on the story being told. Supporting characters are instrumental to unfolding lead(s) and co-lead(s) storylines. For episodic characters, the distinction between minor and major corresponds to the relevance of their role in the episodic plot. Finally, every character who speaks at least one line or whose role is only instrumental in unfolding a scene is codified as one-line.

¹⁹ We have considered all the Italian TV series labelled as ‘crime’ and ‘thriller’ (or, in Italian, *giallo* and *poliziesco*) on IMDb, and otherwise labelled series (e.g., ‘action’ or ‘drama’) that are referable to ‘crime fiction’ as a pragmatic set of features and expectations shared by producers and viewers and displayed in promotional strategies.

²⁰ Since our aim is to measure female employment compared with male employment, we considered all the names in the credits with respect to the sex and not the individual they refer to. For this purpose, each name was counted every time it appeared in the credits.

Table 1 - *The analysed corpus*

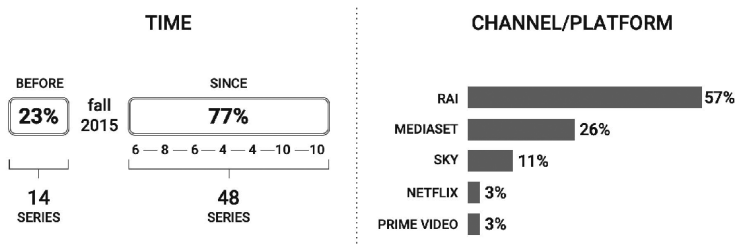
Tv series	Years	Seasons	Episodes	Channel/Platform
<i>Baby</i>	2018-2020	3	18	Netflix
<i>Bang bang baby</i>	2022-	1	10	Amazon Prime Video
<i>Bella da morire</i>	2020	1	8	Rai 1
<i>Blanca</i>	2021-	1	6	Rai 1
<i>Blocco 181</i>	2022-	1	8	Sky Atlantic
<i>Camurandi - Nel nome del padre</i>	2016-	1	12	Rai 1
<i>Diavoli</i>	2020	2	18	Sky Atlantic
<i>Don Matteo</i>	2000-	13	265	Rai 1
<i>Fosca Innocenti</i>	2022-	1	4	Canale 5
<i>Fuoco amico TF45 - Eroe per amore</i>	2016	1	8	Canale 5
<i>Giustizia per tutti</i>	2022	1	6	Canale 5
<i>Gli orologi del diavolo</i>	2020	1	8	Rai 1
<i>Gomorra: La serie</i>	2014-2021	5	58	Sky Atlantic/Sky Cinema
<i>I bastardi di Pizzofalcone</i>	2017-	3	18	Rai 1
<i>I delitti del BarLume</i>	2013-	9	18	Sky Cinema
<i>I misteri di Laura</i>	2015	1	8	Canale 5
<i>Il bosco</i>	2015	1	4	Canale 5
<i>Il cacciatore</i>	2018-2021	3	28	Rai 2
<i>Il capitano Maria</i>	2018	1	4	Rai 1
<i>Il commissario Montalbano</i>	1999-2021	15	37	Rai 2/Rai 1
<i>Il commissario Ricciardi</i>	2021-	1	6	Rai 1
<i>Il giovane Montalbano</i>	2012-2015	2	12	Rai 1
<i>Il miracolo</i>	2018	1	8	Sky Atlantic
<i>Il processo</i>	2019	1	8	Canale 5
<i>Il re</i>	2022-	1	8	Sky Atlantic
<i>Il silenzio dell'acqua</i>	2019-2020	2	8	Canale 5
<i>Il sistema</i>	2016	1	6	Rai 1
<i>Imma Tataranni - Sostituto procuratore</i>	2017-	2	14	Rai 1
<i>Io ti cercherò</i>	2020	1	8	Rai 1
<i>L'allieva</i>	2016-2020	3	35	Rai 1
<i>L'ispettore Coliandro</i>	2006-	8	34	Rai 2
<i>L'alligatore</i>	2020	1	8	Rai 2
<i>L'onore e il rispetto</i>	2006-2017	5	32	Canale 5
<i>La fuggitiva</i>	2021	1	8	Rai 1
<i>La narcotici</i>	2011-2015	2	12	Rai 1
<i>La porta rossa</i>	2017-	2	24	Rai 2
<i>La strada di casa</i>	2017-2019	2	24	Rai 1
<i>Le indagini di Lolita Lobosco</i>	2021-	1	4	Rai 1
<i>Màkari</i>	2021-	2	7	Rai 1
<i>Maltese - Il romanzo del commissario</i>	2017	1	4	Rai 1
<i>Masantonio - Sezione scomparsi</i>	2021-	1	10	Canale 5
<i>Monterossi - La serie</i>	2022	1	6	Amazon Prime Video
<i>Nero a metà</i>	2018-	3	36	Rai 1
<i>Non mentire</i>	2019	1	3	Canale 5
<i>Non mi lasciare</i>	2022	1	8	Rai 1
<i>Non uccidere</i>	2015-2018	2	36	Rai 3/Rai 2/Rai Premium
<i>Petra</i>	2020-	1	4	Sky Atlantic/Sky Cinema
<i>Pezzi Unici</i>	2019	1	12	Rai 1
<i>Provaci ancora prof!</i>	2005-2017	7	46	Rai 1
<i>Rocco Schiavone</i>	2016-	4	16	Rai 2
<i>Romanzo Siciliano</i>	2016	1	8	Canale 5
<i>Rosy Abate - La serie</i>	2017-2019	2	10	Canale 5
<i>Solo</i>	2016-2018	2	8	Canale 5
<i>Solo per amore</i>	2015	2	18	Canale 5
<i>Sorelle</i>	2017	1	6	Rai 1
<i>Sotto copertura</i>	2015-2017	2	10	Rai 1
<i>Squadra antimafia - Palermo oggi</i>	2009-2016	8	74	Canale 5
<i>Squadra mobile</i>	2015-2017	2	32	Canale 5
<i>Saburra - La serie</i>	2017-2019	3	24	Netflix
<i>Un passo dal cielo</i>	2011-	6	80	Rai 1
<i>Vite in fuga</i>	2020	1	12	Rai 1
<i>Vostro onore</i>	2022	1	8	Rai 1

Based on the specific objectives of this article, two aspects related to the corpus need to be briefly addressed:

- *First release*: when (before/since Fall 2015) and on which channel/platform (Rai, the commercial broadcaster Mediaset, the Pay TV Sky, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video)
- *Protagonist(s)*: male-based, female-based, duo-based or team-based (ensemble)²¹.

Crime dramas distributed since Fall 2015 consist of 48 TV series (77%), while 14 cases (23%) started before Fall 2015 and were renewed in the 2015-2016 season or the following ones. Figure 1 shows that over the last two seasons the number of new productions has significantly increased, thus proving the popularity of the crime genre. Concerning channels and platforms, about half of the corpus (57%) consists of crime dramas co-produced by Rai, while 1 in 4 (26%) comes from the commercial broadcaster Mediaset. The remaining ones are co-produced by Sky (11%), Netflix (3%), and Amazon Prime Video (3%). Comparing the performance of the broadcasters in the shift before/since Fall 2015, an inverse trend emerges: the number of Rai TV series grows (from 50% to 59%) while Mediaset productions decline (from 36% to 23%) (fig. 1).

Figure 1 - *First release*

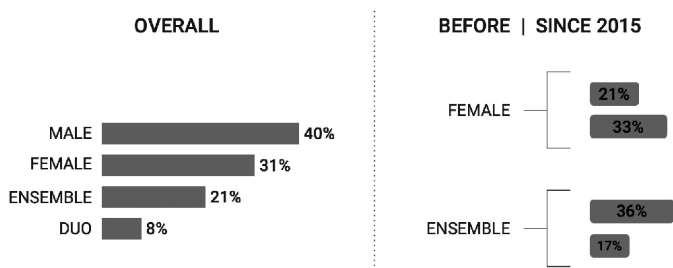


Concerning the *protagonist's role*, male protagonists peak with 40%, followed by female protagonists (31%), team-based (ensemble) narratives (21%), and duo-based narratives (8%)²². However, comparing TV series released before and since 2015, ensemble narratives show a descending curve (36% vs 17%) to the advantage of female protagonists, which grew from 21% to 33%. The 'decline' of the team-based model, which has mainly characterised Mediaset productions in the past, can be partially explained by the decreasing number of Mediaset productions and by the decreasing relevance as strategic drivers of internationally successful Sky productions such as *Romanzo criminale – La serie* and *Gomorra – La serie*. On the other hand, the growth of female protagonists and the focus on female narratives can be linked to Rai's innovative production strategies mentioned above (fig. 2)²³.

²¹ The female- and male-based models do not necessarily imply the identification of a single lead character.

²² In all the analysed series, each duo consists of a man and a woman. The only case in which the duo involves two characters of the same sex/gender (male/man) refers to the Fortebracci brothers in *L'onore e il rispetto*.

²³ For an overview of Italian TV policewomen and the role of female characters in the team-based model see M. Buonanno, *La fiction italiana. Narrazioni televisive e identità nazionale*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2012, and especially chapter 6, "Le ragazze con la pistola". For an overview of recent productions see M.E. D'Amelio,

Figure 2 - *Protagonist(s)*

4. FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLES

To understand women's employment in key behind-the-scenes roles, we measured the female presence with respect to both the total tracked credited roles (how many women, overall, are involved in the crews in comparison with men?) and all the analysed crime dramas (how many TV series include women in their crews?).

General data show that the overall female presence represents 31% of the 1.158 analysed credited roles, while the male presence amounts to 69%. Therefore, crime dramas tend to have predominantly male crews because for each woman involved there are at least two men; only one series (*Catturandi – Nel nome del padre*) does not include any woman in its crew (fig. 3).

Figure 3 - *Overall female employment*

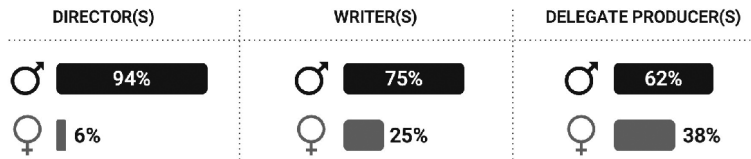
Male employment prevails in the above-the-line roles, with no relevant differences between series released before or since 2015. In the analysed time frame, female directors represent 6%, and only three women (Cinzia Th Torrini, Maria Sole Tognazzi and Rossella Izzo) are directors of 4 series. Three series in four also present a female protagonist when there is a female director.

Compared to direction, female employment in scriptwriting rises to 25%, but male writers still prevail (75%). This trend is confirmed by looking at the series: although in

32 of 62 crime dramas there is a female writer, only two series (*La narcotici* and *Vostro onore*) are entirely written by women and, more generally, a male majority characterises writing teams.

The female presence in above-the-line roles peaks with the role of delegate producer: although men still prevail, women account for 38%. This larger female employment is confirmed by looking at the second parameter: women work as delegate producers in 20 out of 43 series in which this role is conferred (fig. 4).

Figure 4 - Female employment in above-the-line roles



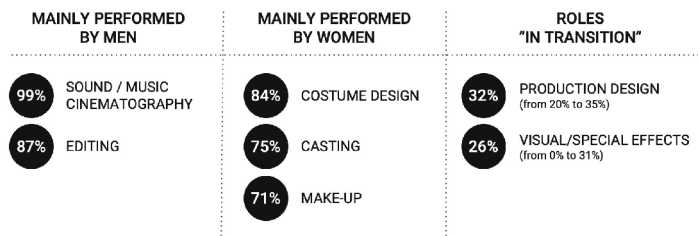
Concerning below-the-line roles, data analysis shows three different categories:

1. *Roles mainly performed by men*: cinematography (99%), music (99%), sound (99%) and editing (87%). Only one series credits women in cinematography (*Il miracolo*), sound (*Gomorra*) and music (*Il processo*). On the contrary, editing boasts a more significant female presence: 9 series out of 62 series credit at least one woman in their editing crews

2. *Roles mainly performed by women*: costume design (84%), casting (75%) and make-up (71%). Respectively 53 series out of 62 and 44 out of 59 involve at least one woman in costume design and make-up, while 50 series out of 62 credit a female presence in casting roles

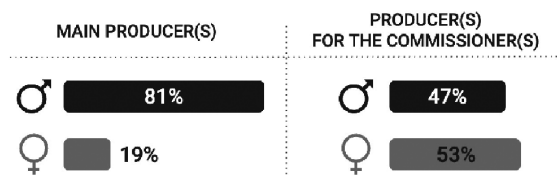
3. *Roles 'in transition'*: production design (32%) and visual/special effects (26%). These roles show an increase in female employment from crime dramas released before or since Fall 2015: female production designers shifted from 20% to 35%, while female visual/special effects supervisors grew from 0% to 31%. Women serve as production designers in 21 of 62 series, while women supervise visual/special effects in 15 out of 52 entries (fig. 5)

Figure 5 - Female employment in below-the-line roles



Regarding production roles, women seem to have more opportunities as producers representing the commissioner than as main producers (53% vs 19%). However, both roles show a negative trend: between 2015 and 2022, the share of female main producers has dropped from 32% to 15%, and commissioners have reduced the number of their female producers from 71% to 48%. Yet, 21 out of 58 series include at least one woman in their production team, while series in which women are employed as producers for the commissioner amount to 34 out of 44 (fig. 6).

Figure 6 - *Female employment in production roles*



5. ON-SCREEN FEMALE PORTRAYAL

The second part of our research moves from the behind-the-scenes to the on-screen perspective and focuses on 1.353 characters from 48 TV series released since Fall 2015. Before moving to the analysis of the main findings, a methodological premise is due. Concerning the variables identified in the research design (see section 2), the sample analysis implied several challenges in coding sexual orientation, occupational status, sentimental status, and role occupied in the crime narrative (e.g., the criminal, the victim, the detective). Regarding this latter variable, the single episode coding could lead to erroneously codified roles especially for serial narratives, where the identity of the villain (criminal), for instance, may not be revealed until the end of the season, and the victims may increase as the episodes unfold. We therefore agreed to complement the viewing of the episode with information on the complete storyline. The first three variables pose more complex challenges and methodological issues. In many cases, viewing a single episode does not allow one to acquire the needed information²⁴, nor can this gap be filled simply by referring to the complete storyline. Moreover, these variables may evolve in parallel with the plot, and this evolution does not always follow a linear pattern (from A to B). Consequently, we decided to exclude these variables from the quantitative analysis and to analyse them at a later stage based on a qualitative approach.

That said, the first part of our analysis focuses on the overall sample, aiming to outline its general portrait in terms of sex, gender identity²⁵, race, origin, and age. Referring to sex, male characters prevail over female ones by a 2:1 ratio (64% vs 36%). This proportion is also confirmed by unbundling the data by channels/platforms, especially

²⁴ Of the characters whose sexual orientation is clearly discernible from viewing the sample episodes (67%), for instance, asexual, bisexual, homosexual or pansexual characters account for 3%.

²⁵ It goes without saying that sex and gender identity can also change throughout a season. This aspect has been temporarily put aside as there are no examples of gender transition in the selected corpus.

regarding Rai and Mediaset; on the contrary, in Amazon Prime Video series, female characters grow to 40%, while on Sky and Netflix the share drops to 32%. Concerning gender identities, there are only two cases of trans women characters²⁶, while for all the other characters sex matches with gender identity.

In terms of race, Caucasian characters (98%) and Italian characters (93%) are largely dominant; the only other races represented are Black/African American²⁷ and Asian²⁸, while the most recurring foreign origins consist of Eastern Europe & Russia²⁹ and Western & Northern Europe³⁰ (2% each).

Referring to the age variable, the majority of characters belong to the adult age group (44%). This finding, if partly ‘physiological’ – since the 30-50 age group sociologically overlaps with the active population – also reflects a more-or-less prejudicial tendency to favour younger age groups, as the low percentage (7%) of senior characters confirms. On the contrary, it is worth underlining that one character in four (23%) belongs to older adults, who ‘naturally’ blend the active adult aptitude with typical senior features. Finally, data show a significant representation of young people, split between young adults (15%), youth (7%), and children (4%). Breaking down the age variable by sex, no significant differences concern adult, children and senior categories; on the contrary, male older adults prevail over female ones (28% vs 16%), while female characters peak among youth (10% vs 4%) and young adults (17% vs 13%)³¹ (fig. 7), thus confirming the concerns for gendered ageism and the trend whereby “around age 30, female actors’ roles start to decline, but male actors’ roles continue to increase and peak at age 46”³².

²⁶ The case of *Il re* only features a one-line character (a prisoner); the case of *Il commissario Ricciardi* features a trans woman character named Baminella. However, it should be pointed out that a strict classification of Baminella as a trans woman is problematic for two main reasons: first, this character corresponds to a typical figure of traditional Neapolitan popular culture, that of the *femminiello* (literally ‘little woman-man’), which is difficult and perhaps inappropriate to define based on contemporary western categories such as sexual orientation and gender identity; secondly, *Il commissario Ricciardi* is a period drama set in the 1930s fascist Italy. It is therefore problematic to use it with respect to contemporary concerns about the representation of diversity in gender identities and sexual orientation.

²⁷ Black people do not play relevant roles, with only two exceptions: the case of *Nero a metà*, featuring Malik Soprani as a professional detective, and the case of *Diavoli*, set in London and featuring the characters of Vicky Bale as a professional detective and Oliver Harris as an ‘amateur detective’ assisting the protagonist Massimo Ruggero in his informal investigations.

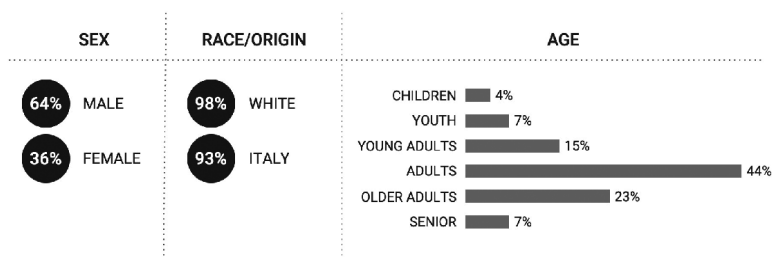
²⁸ Only two TV series feature Asian persons as co-lead characters, *Diavoli* and *L’allieva*. In *Diavoli*, Kalim Chowdrey is a member of Massimo’s team; in *L’allieva*, Yukino Nakahama is a friend and roommate of the protagonist, Alice Allevi.

²⁹ In most cases, the origin from Eastern Europe was inferred from the strong accent of characters when speaking Italian and from their names, but no specific information on the country of origin is given. In general terms, the only specific role Eastern European characters play in relation to the crime narrative is that of the criminal. Almost half of them belong to the Roma or Sinti ethnic groups. The only Italian Sinti character playing a lead role is Spadino Anacleti in *Suburra*.

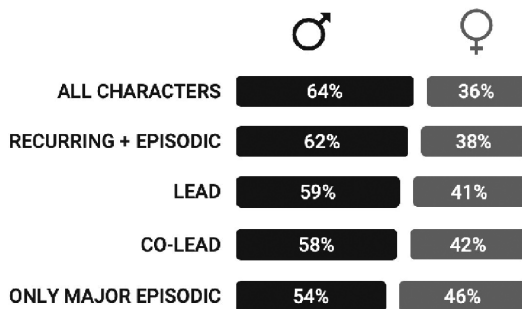
³⁰ *Diavoli*, set in the UK, features the majority of characters from Western & Northern Europe.

³¹ In line with our research findings, the Rai report also shows that the highest number of women (related to the overall programming) is recorded in the 35-49 age group (30,8%), while women over 50 turn out to be less represented (24,3%). From this point of view, the aforementioned report on women over 50 also confirms that “characters 50+ are typically less than a quarter of all characters shown on screen in films and television [...] Furthermore, women 50+ are less common than men 50+” (p. 11).

³² *Women Over 50: The Right to Be Seen on Screen*, 3.

Figure 7 - *Characters overview*

Although male characters numerically prevail, the relevance of female ones within the narratives appears stronger. Putting away the 338 one-line characters (25% of the total), female recurring and episodic characters grow from 36% to 38%. The increase is even more pronounced with respect to episodic characters, where women portrayed in major roles amount to 46%. Focusing on the recurring characters, female leads and co-leads amount respectively to 41% and 42%, with an increase of about five percentage points over the average. Interesting data also emerge on the age of lead characters. First, it is interesting to underline that there are no male or female senior leads. Looking at the other age groups, female adult leads prevail over male ones (54% vs 46%), while an inverse trend concerns young adult leads (57% male vs 43% female); finally, there are no older adult female leads, nor are there any youth male leads (fig. 8).

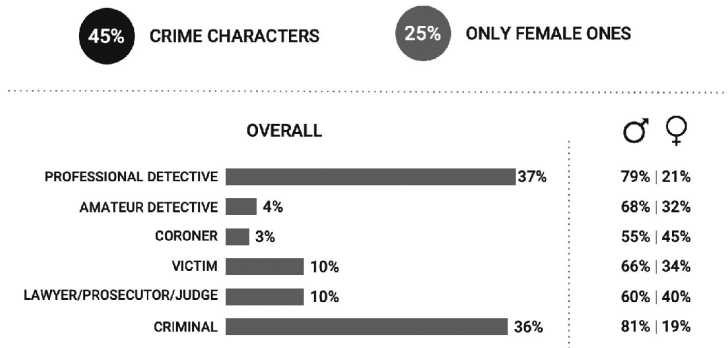
Figure 8 - *Relevance of female characters*

The final part of this study focuses on the specific roles that recurring and episodic characters play in the crime narrative (professional detective, amateur detective, private detective, criminal, victim, coroner, and lawyer/prosecutor/judge)³³, which account for 45% of the characters. Focusing on these 'crime characters', two categories stand out: professional detectives (37%) and criminals (36%). They are followed – at a significant

³³ Crime characters can also be found among one-line characters and mainly belong to the categories of professional detectives and criminals. Nevertheless, given the minimal relevance of these characters, we focused on episodic and recurring characters. We need to underline that several TV series feature characters with two roles (especially criminal+victim and detective+criminal); consequently, the number of analysed roles (577) does not match the number of analysed characters (546).

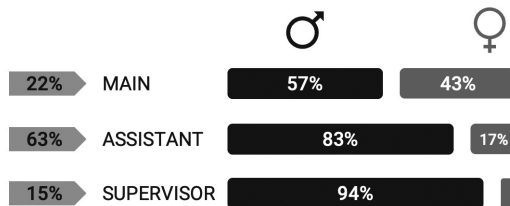
distance – by victims and lawyers/prosecutors/judges, both at 10%. Finally, amateur detectives and coroners amount to 4% and 3% of crime characters, but it is essential to underline that they stand out as leads or co-leads in several cases. Focusing on the gender perspective, the percentage of women crime characters drops to 25%. Lower percentages regard especially professional detectives (21%) and criminals (19%), while women achieve better performances as coroners (45%), lawyers/prosecutors/judges (40%), victims (34%) and amateur detectives (32%)³⁴ (fig. 9).

Figure 9 - Female crime characters



Looking at the role of professional detective, 22% consists of main detectives, 63% of assistant detectives and 15% of supervisors (up to main detectives). Unbundling the data by sex, the share of female main detectives amounts to 43%, while women tend to be underrepresented in the roles of assistant detective (17%) and supervisor (6%). Therefore, women play important roles (main detective) in the narrative almost as much as men who, although represented in greater numbers, in many cases stand as assistant detectives. However, the female relevance in the narrative does not go hand in hand with the relevance of their roles in the Italian Police Force ranks, since the supervisor category favours male characters over female ones (fig. 10).

Figure 10 - Female professional detectives



³⁴ On the persistence of the stereotype of women in amateur detective roles, see Klein, *The Woman Detective*.

6. CONCLUSION

This research has a two-fold objective: on a more general level, it aims to understand *if* and *how* a sample analysis targeting a specific case study (crime narratives) can provide general trends about gender equality both from an on-screen and an off-screen perspective, such as those coming from the analysis of broader datasets; secondly, and more specifically, it aims to assess how Italian crime narratives address gender equality.

Focusing on this two-fold perspective, the sample analysis turned out to be ‘differently’ effective, depending on whether we considered the behind-the-scenes or the on-screen data.

The data emerging from this study about the modest number of women in the role of scriptwriters (25%), as well as the extremely poor presence of women in the roles of cinematographer (1%) or composer (1%), are in line with those on Italian TV fiction provided in the EAO 2022 report – female writers between 30 and 35%; female cinematographers and female composers less than 5%³⁵. Since the sample analysis we conducted revealed data and trends consistent with analyses of larger datasets, we can argue that the original findings obtained may extend beyond the boundaries of the crime genre. In this respect, the increase of female production designers (from 20% in TV series started before Fall 2015 to 35% in series distributed since Fall 2015) and VFX/special effects supervisors (from 0% to 31%) shows a positive trend. However, data on the different production roles reveal a bleaker scenario, with strong gender inequalities in top positions. Women represent only 19% of main producers and tend to occupy more functional, albeit relevant, roles such as producer for the commissioner (53%) and *produttore delegato* (38%) – this latter figure is in line with the general figure for Italian female producers provided by EAO, between 30% and 35%.

Given these promising results, we can strongly encourage further analyses of gender equality in the Italian television sector that focus on other genres and formats and over a longer time span. Further scrutiny would allow for a more comprehensive picture of Italian television production, as well as a more in-depth and systematic comparison with the film sector and other European and US production cultures. More particularly, new research methodologies need to be developed to overcome a rigidly binary approach and to study diversity in audiovisual professions. Further qualitative research is also needed to enlighten the relations between sex, gender identity and sexual orientation and how these aspects impact working conditions in the audiovisual sector.

The need for qualitative research is even more pronounced when we move to the on-screen perspective. Although the sample analysis of on-screen representation appears effective with regard to unchanging (or less changing) variables such as age and race, it runs the risk of not providing enough information to track those variables which mark the evolution of the character over the time span of the series as well as throughout different seasons (e.g., gender identity, sexual orientation, sentimental status, occupational status).

In general terms, the percentage of female characters (36%) is lower than in other national reports (41,9% in Rai TV fictions, based on the *Monitoraggio sulla rappresentazione della figura femminile*, Rai 2021) and international reports: 43% in the *Boxed In 2019-20* report; 47,3% of female-identified main cast and 40,5% of female-identi-

³⁵ Note that in all these cases the share of female professionals is weighted by the number of professionals in that role for each episode.

fied speaking characters in Netflix scripted shows³⁶. Focusing on prominent characters, women represent 41% of leads, 42% of co-leads and 46% of episodic major characters. Despite some disparities in data collection and interpretation, we can argue that these figures are in line with the general figures provided at both the European level (women in lead roles 43%, EAO 2022 report) and in the US (45% of major characters, *Boxed In 2019-20*); however, they are lower than those provided by Rai (47,1% of women appear in central roles and 36,5% in relevant narrative roles) and Netflix (54,5% of scripted shows star female-identified protagonists).

Although the share of female leads and co-leads aligns with the international scenario, Italian dramas show a substantial lack of diversity regarding gender identity, race and geographical origin. In terms of race and ethnicity, 98% of the characters are white and 93% Italian. Black or Asian characters in prominent roles are only present in four series. Seniors are largely underrepresented (7%) and there are no male or female senior leads. Data show age discrimination against women: young (10% vs 4%) and young adult (17% vs 13%) female characters prevail over males, while female older adults are far fewer than male ones (16% vs 28%) and there are no female older adults in the roles of lead and co-lead. These data are particularly interesting because they represent an initial attempt to investigate gender equality in Italian TV fiction from a broader intersectional perspective. In fact, Rai does not provide data specifically on race but only on geographical origin, nor does it distinguish between Italy and other European countries (the share of European countries in all programmes is 94,4%). Similarly, the Rai report shows that the highest number of women (related to the overall programming) is recorded in the 35-49 age group (30,8%), while women over 50 turn out to be less represented (24,3%).

Finally, more specific insights into the crime genre reveal a significantly unbalanced scenario. Regarding recurring roles in crime narratives, female characters are prevalent in the role of forensic doctors (45%) and lawyers/prosecutors/judges (40%). Their presence decreases in the role of victims (34%) and amateur detectives (32%) and is even smaller in the roles of professional detective/police officer (21%) and criminal (19%). If we focus on the role of the professional detective, women account for 43% of 'main' detectives (generally, inspectors or deputy superintendents). The percentage drops significantly both if we go down the hierarchical ladder (women represent 17% of 'assistant' detectives) and, above all, if we go up, with only 6% of women in the role of supervisor, thus showing how leadership positions and supervisory power continue to be almost exclusively held by men.

³⁶ S.L. Smith *et al.*, *Inclusion in Netflix Original US Scripted Series & Films*, February 2021.

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HEAVEN CAN WAIT? Gender (Im)balance in Contemporary Italian Film Crews

Abstract

In the mid-to-late 2000s, the digitalization of film production in Italy carried a promise of increased diversity and cultural pluralism due to the lower entry barriers. About a decade later, in 2016, the so-called Franceschini law introduced a revision of the norms regulating public funding which included a mandate for greater inclusivity. Did these developments fulfill their promise? The article answers this question empirically by investigating the roles occupied by women within Italian film productions and co-productions that obtained clearance (*nulla osta*) for national theatrical distribution between 2017 and 2021. We examine the gender composition of each film for ten heads of department involved in its production, drawing on the database produced by the CENTRIC/CineAF project. We proceed to correlate gender balance with a set of structural features (genre, format, budget). Finally, we examine the makeup of the creative teams in which women were involved, and their evolution over a period of sixty years (1964-2021). We argue that the promise of increased diversity in Italian cinema was only marginally kept. We demonstrate that the centrality of female professionals is greater in low-budget cinema and that women's careers still suffer in terms of progression, continuity and longevity compared to those of their male counterparts. In conclusion, we highlight the limits of existing gender equality policies, evaluate the risks hidden in the processes of feminization of some of the professions (such as pay drop), and reflect on the promises and limits of big-data approaches in counteracting discrimination and supporting pluralism and equity.

Keywords

Gender equity; film industry; production studies; big data; creative teams

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural and creative industries are often held up as exemplary cases of how the digital transition drives the shift from old to new paradigms within political, cultural, economic, and social projects. This shift is described as hinging on a set of key practices, such as collaboration, open participation, fluid *heterarchies*, communal evaluation, and as promoting radically innovative approaches. In 2006, Axel Bruns coined the neologism *produsage* to define this new model (building upon the 'third wave' theory formulated

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in the 1970s by Alvin Toffler¹) and to emphasize the opportunities it offered to overcome injustice and inequality in culture, economy, and society². And yet – as demonstrated by the example of one of the creative industries’ major exponents, the film industry – these promises of equity in the digital age have translated into very modest advances at best³.

The limits and risks of the concept of produsage and the new productive routines it engenders have been discussed extensively. To quote Alessandro Gandini and James Graham: “after the enthusiastic call for the rise of a ‘creative’ class, the condition of today’s creative economy appears to be quite different from the expectations that accompanied its acclaimed surge”⁴. According to the literature, *the new creative scenes*, to use John Hartley’s expression⁵, reveal *five weaknesses*. First: contemporary creative economy workers (such as artists, freelancers, social entrepreneurs, and so on) *operate in an underregulated space* which can lead to various forms of deprivation and exploitation⁶. Second: the *separation between ‘work time’ and ‘life time’ is collapsing*, and the ‘economic’ is re-embedding in the ‘social’, eroding another fundamental achievement in labour rights⁷. Moreover, certain forms of *participatory culture*⁸ and the involvement of active audiences in creative industries have been criticised by some for causing the devaluation of the reputation of professionals⁹, potentially, in some cases, leading to their replacement by an unlimited workforce of unpaid *amateurs*, or *professional Amateurs*¹⁰. Some of the critics have suggested that the same participatory culture that supports and promotes the involvement of these users in the production cycle is also giving rise to the ‘decentralization of creation’, as Andrew Currah calls it: the displacement of creative work from professional spaces which, according to the author, may lead to the loss of technical opportunities and, potentially, of production quality¹¹. Others have countered that in reality this form of amateur or fan labour constitutes a constant stream of value production for corporations, a form of (mostly) unpaid work that is becoming ever-more

¹ A. Toffler, *The Third Wave*, New York: Bantam, 1980.

² A. Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond. From Production to Produsage*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

³ M. Fanchi, M. Tarantino, “Has Digital Transformation Impacted Gender Imbalance in Italian Cinema? A Data Analysis of Creative Clusters 2004-2016”, in *Digital Transformation in the Cultural and Creative Industries. Production, Consumption and Entrepreneurship in the Digital and Sharing Economy*, edited by M. Massi, M. Vecco, Y. Lin, Oxford-New York: Routledge, 2021: 162-184.

⁴ J. Graham, A. Gandini, “Introduction”, in *Collaborative Production in the Creative Industries*, edited by J. Graham and A. Gandini, London: University of Westminster Press, 2017: 15.

⁵ J. Hartley *et al.*, *Key Concepts in Creative Industries*, London: Sage, 2013: 17-20. See also: J. Hartley, W. Wen, H.S. Li, *Creative Economy and Culture. Challenges, Changes and Futures for the Creative Industries*, London: Sage, 2015.

⁶ A. Gandini, C. Bandinelli, A. Cossu, “Collaborating, Competing, Co-Working, Coalescing. Artists, Freelancers and Social Entrepreneurs as the ‘New Subjects’ of the Creative Economy”, in *Collaborative Production in the Creative Industries*: 15-32.

⁷ I. Pais, G. Provasi, “Sharing Economy. A Step towards the Re-embeddedness of the Economy”, *Stato e Mercato*, 105 (2015): 347-378.

⁸ A. Delwiche, J. Jacobs Henderson, eds., *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, London-New York, Routledge, 2013.

⁹ A. Keen, *The Cult of Amateur. How Today’s Internet is Killing our Culture*, New York: Doubleday, 2007.

¹⁰ C. Leadbeater, P. Miller, *The Pro-Am Revolution How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society*, Demos, 2004. Accessed September 12, 2022. <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/proamrevolutionfinal.pdf>.

¹¹ A. Currah, “Managing Creativity. The Tensions between Commodities and Gifts in a Digital Networked Environment”, *Economy and Society*, 36, 3 (2007): 467-494; Y.D. Bolter, *The Digital Plenitude. The Decline of the Elite Culture and the Risk of New Media*, Cambridge: (MA) MIT Press, 2019.

crucial in certain sectors of the digital creative industries¹². Finally, cultural and creative industries are strongly resisting change. Angela McRobbie, in *Be Creative*, denounced the resilience of conservative agencies in cultural enterprises¹³. One of the most significant pieces of evidence of the resistance to change in the cultural industries is the persistence of a pronounced gender imbalance, despite increasing lobbying and policy efforts to redress it over the last decade. In the words of Skadi Loist and Elisabeth Prommer regarding the unequal access of women to the German film sector, “for an industry that describes itself as ‘creative’, the dominant practices are shockingly conventional and far from progressive”¹⁴. Even relatively recent professions or industries with less historically-established hierarchies of value show signs of this: for instance, while the Nigerian movie industry, Nollywood, demonstrates some of the opportunities offered by informal and innovative cultural economies for creativity and accessibility¹⁵, these have not translated into an expansion of access to women professionals any more than in areas with century-old consolidated film industries¹⁶. Other relatively recent sectors, such as the video-game industry or VFX, show similar patterns of disadvantage for women professionals¹⁷.

In this context of promises undelivered, the article examines the working conditions of women in Italian cinema in order to assess the ongoing gender balancing processes in one of the most prominent creative industries, and, more broadly, in the Italian economic and productive system. Specifically, the article compares contemporary data with the nonlinear process of reducing the gender gap over more than half a century, highlighting the ambivalence of the increase in the number of women in Italian film crews and the persistence of a significant gender imbalance and unequal working conditions between women and men in terms of career progression, continuity and longevity.

The main focus of the article is on the five years from 2017 to 2021, therefore touching upon the effects of the pandemic on the process of gender balancing and the working conditions of women in the national cinema industry in ten above- and below-the-line roles. The small gains documented over these five years are placed in context by comparison with data on gender inequality in the Italian film industry in the near-60 years since the institution of the first organic film law in the country, Law 1213 of 1965, also known as “Legge Corona”. Before moving on to the presentation and discussion of our results, we introduce the framework of data-based approaches to gender equity research, as well as the tools and methods we used in our projects. In our conclusion, we reflect on the ethical and practical methodological challenges of data-driven approaches.

¹² A. De Kosnik, “Fandom as Free Labor”, *Digital Labor*, Routledge, 2012, 124-5.

¹³ A. McRobbie, *Be Creative. Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*, London: Wiley, 2015.

¹⁴ S. Loist; E. Prommer, “Gendered Production Culture in the German Film Industry”, *Media Industries*, 6 (2019), Nr. 1, 108. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14849>.

¹⁵ R. Lobato, “Creative Industries and Informal Economies: Lessons from Nollywood,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13, 4 (2010): 337-354; Id., *Shadow Economies of Cinema, Mapping Informal Film Distribution*, London: BFI, 2012. A. Jedlowsky, “Small Screen Cinema: Informality and Remediation in Nollywood”, *Television New Media*, 13, 5 (2012): 431-446.

¹⁶ A. Ukata, “Women and Representations in Nollywood. Questions of Production and Direction”, in *Women in the International Film Industry. Policy, Practice, and Power*, edited by S. Liddy, Cham (Switzerland): Palgrave-Macmillan, 2020, 315-330. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39070-9_10; Id., *The Image(s) of Women in Nigerian (Nollywood) Videos*, Berlin: Galda Verlag, 2015.

¹⁷ M. Kivijärvi, T. Sintonen, “The Stigma of Feminism: Disclosures and Silences Regarding Female Disadvantage in the Video Game Industry in US and Finnish Media Stories”, *Feminist Media Studies*, 22, 5 (2022): 1083-110; J. Erhart, K. Dooley, “‘Post Goblins’ and ‘Predators’: Identities, Experiences, and Contributions of Women in Australian Screen Postproduction and Visual Effects Sectors 2020/2021”, *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 16, 1 (2022): 17-34.

2. GENDER POLICIES AND DATA: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Although relatively young, the debate on data feminism has already produced substantial critical contributions¹⁸. Data feminist principles – which encourage us to examine power, challenge power, elevate emotion and embodiment, rethink binaries and hierarchies, embrace pluralism, consider context, and make labour visible¹⁹ – promise to greatly improve the quality and effectiveness of data-based research, while also urging us to confront a new set of challenges. Before examining the data on Italian film crews, it is therefore essential to clarify the theoretical and methodological framework within which we move, with its limitations and opportunities.

The study of gender through big data – defined as data at a scale that requires data science and digital tools to be captured and processed efficiently²⁰ – faces several difficulties. The first is the absence of an effective “knowledge ecology framework”²¹. As Doris Ruth Eikhof, Jack Newsinger, Daria Luchinskaya, and Daniela Aidley write: “what gender equality initiatives are possible and probable depends on what gender knowledge is produced and circulated, and which aspects of gender inequality that knowledge makes visible”²². Despite the growth of attention to gender inequality issues, fuelled also by movements such as #metoo, information regarding women’s role in media industries, and, in particular, in the screen industries, continues to be deficient. This problem has always troubled studies of women and work due to the tendency to relegate the female workforce to the grey areas of the informal economy through lack of contracts or contracts that under-represent actual work²³.

Secondly, the limitations of the data-centred approach can be traced to the mismatch between the categories conventionally used to describe and weigh productive activity and the atypical forms in which women’s work is expressed. At the beginning of the new millennium, reflecting on the difficulty of tracing a history of women’s work, Barbara Montesi wrote:

statistical survey, which has been, and is, a source of primary importance for verifying the dimensions of women’s access to different professions and their evolution over time has, contributed to the codification of the bias for the ‘awkwardness’ often shown by statistical surveys in framing the multiple activities of women²⁴.

Using big data to analyse gender inequality means having to face the absence and inaccuracy of information, and recognizing the epistemological limits of data and the inevitable bias they generate in their representation of reality. According to Cullen and Murphy, for example, analyses based on big data almost always neglect the experiences of women workers, focusing exclusively on numbers: how many women work in a

¹⁸ C. D’Ignazio, L.F. Klein, *Data Feminism*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2020.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ C. Abreu Lopes, S. Bailur, *Gender Equity and Big Data: Making Gender Data Visible* (Report, UN Women, 2018).

²¹ D.R. Eikhof *et al.*, “And ... Action? Gender, Knowledge and Inequalities in the UK Screen Industries”, *Gender Work Organ*, 26 (2019): 840-859.

²² *Ibid.*: 841.

²³ B. Conor, R. Gill, S. Taylor, “Gender and Creative Labour”, *The Sociological Review*, 63, S1 (2015): 1-22. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12237.

²⁴ B. Montesi, “Donne, professioni, cittadinanza”, *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 31, 9 (2002): 148. Our translation.

particular sector or how many women occupy top roles²⁵. This numbers-only approach to data has negative consequences for the drafting and application of gender policies. Maria Jansson and Luise Wallenberg's recent study on the Swedish film industry is significant in this respect²⁶. Even if, in 2016, Sweden achieved the 50:50 goal – half of all audiovisual productions supported by public funding were directed by women – the numerical parity has not meant the disappearance of inequality and injustice against women, as the testimonies of directors, actresses, and producers collected by the two authors reveal. The centrality of big data within gender-gap analyses, if not mitigated by an awareness of its limitations, risks creating problematic scenarios, to the point of potentially increasing the gap itself.

The third issue emerging from contemporary debates concerns the lack of models that are able to measure intersectional effects and the tendency to limit the analysis to the gender dimension alone, in a binary perspective²⁷. The discussion rightly tends to focus on the political consequences of this lack, but it is also important to examine the specific methodological and ethical challenges related to data acquisition and management brought to the fore by intersectional analysis, as well as analysis of gender outside the binary view²⁸.

Finally, a growing number of contributions have examined the possibility of circumventing some of the limitations mentioned above through the use of social network analyses²⁹. Social network analysis makes it possible to go beyond the mere counting of women and men, and to identify the conditions, in terms of the composition and functioning of the creative scenes, that favour the inclusion of female professionals and best support them in their career paths. According to Deb Verhoeven *et al.*: “Social Network Analysis provides methods for visualizing these group relationships” and “for identifying strategically important components and participants in the network” in order to “dismantle” or “open up” male-dominated creative scenes³⁰. Mark Lutter's well-known study of the casts of some 350,000 U.S. film productions between 1929 and 2010, for example, demonstrates that actresses have less linear career trajectories than their peers and significantly higher dropout rates when they are working in “closed” creative teams composed of professionals who tend to collaborate exclusively with each other³¹. Conversely, the risk of failure and career interruption is lower for actresses cast in projects

²⁵ P. Cullen, M.P. Murphy, “Leading the Debate for the Business Case for Gender Equality, Perilous for Whom?”, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 25, 2 (2018): 110-126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12199>.

²⁶ M. Jansson, L. Wallenberg, “Experiencing Male Dominance in Swedish Film Production”, in *Women in the International Film Industry*, 2020: 163-178.

²⁷ K. Guyan, “Constructing a Queer Population? Asking about Sexual Orientation in Scotland's 2022 Census”, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31, 6 (2022): 782-792, DOI: 10.1080/09589236.2020.1866513; B. Collier, S. Cowan, “Queer Conflicts, Concept Capture and Category Co-Option. The Importance of Context in the State Collection and Recording of Sex/Gender Data”, *Social & Legal Studies*, 31, 5 (2022): 746-772. DOI: 10.1177/09646639211061409.

²⁸ Intersectionality, or the idea that in order to understand social inequalities we need to view systems of oppression as interlocking, was developed within US-based Black feminism, in the theories of the Combahee River Collective (1977), Kimberlè Crenshaw (1991), and Patricia Hill Collins (2002), amongst others.

²⁹ M. Fanchi, M. Tarantino, “Has Digital Transformation Impacted Gender Imbalance in Italian Cinema? A Data Analysis of Creative Clusters 2004-2016”, in *Digital Transformation in the Cultural and Creative Industries*: 162-184.

³⁰ D. Verhoeven, K. Musial, S. Palmer, S. Taylor, S. Abidi, V. Zemaityte *et al.*, “Controlling for Openness in the Male-Dominated Collaborative Networks of the Global Film Industry”, *PLoS One*, 15, 6 (2020): 2. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0234460.

³¹ M. Lutter, “Do Women Suffer from Network Closure? The Moderating Effect of Social Capital on Gender Inequality in a Project-Based Labor Market, 1929 to 2010”, *American Sociological Review*, 80, 2 (2015): 329-358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414568788>.

with open creative teams. Lutter's conclusions are not automatically extendable outside the specific context in which the scholar conducted his analysis; they do, however, show the relevance of "social capital" as a resource for female professionals against segregation and gender inequality.

Starting from this framework, the article (and more widely, the CENTRIC software and the CineAF project that was based on it) sets three methodological goals: to address the lack of information about women's work in Italian cinema; to promote new and more effective data policies against gender inequality that will be able to highlight women's working conditions and the conjunctures that generated them; and to make available a set of categories and indexes that will highlight the feminization processes in audiovisual professions, including questioning the fact that the growth of women's presence in the screen industries is always and in any case a positive prospect.

3. THE CENTRIC SOFTWARE

The CENTRIC software has been in development since 2019 at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan to provide a unified framework for the systematic collection, storage, analysis and visualization of data about audiovisual industries, as opposed to piecemeal per-project approaches. It has been used to develop the CineAF database, which contains crew information on films produced or co-produced in Italy between 1964 and 2021³². Although the CineAF project has recently concluded, CENTRIC continues to gather data on an annual basis and enlarging its scope and breadth of analysis. CENTRIC has collected and analysed data on the crews of Italian film productions or co-productions that obtained the *nulla osta* (state authorisation) for theatrical distribution (Law no. 161 of 1962) from 1 January 1964 to 1 November 2021. From 2 November 2021, with the abolition of the *nulla osta* requirement (Law 220/2016), CENTRIC collects data on audiovisual products that obtain age classification or ratings³³.

The database contains two main kinds of data: one regards individual films and other audiovisual products (including such information as title, year, unique id, as well as a variety of scores calculated by the system); the other contains individual crew entries for each film, which, for the purposes of this project, includes heads of department in ten professions: director, writer, cinematographer, editor, composer, make-up artist, set decorator, special effects supervisor, producer and costume/wardrobe manager³⁴. Although this circumscribed set of professions does not cover the entirety of film crew positions, it broadly reflects the general makeup of the average Italian production team's decision-making roles (the majority of Italian film productions fall into the low budget

³² CineAF (A Cinematic Archive for the Future: Women's films in Italy, 1965-2015) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 891966. The project took place between 2020-2022 and was conducted by Rosa Barotsi under the supervision of Mariagrazia Fanchi and with the collaboration of Matteo Tarantino. For more information, see cineaf.eu.

³³ A catalogue of these entries can be consulted at the website of the Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivo of the Italian Ministry of Culture <https://cinema.cultura.gov.it/database-nulla-osta-film/>; accessed February 2023.

³⁴ Only leading roles are considered for each professional class; thus, for instance, assistant directors are not included as directors.

range)³⁵. Since gender information is not included as a field in online databases, the gender information for each credit is inferred through probabilistic estimates. Such estimates take into consideration, in this order, the presence of any pronouns or other terms that indicate a gender preference in the professional's short bio, and, in the absence of such indicators, the professional's first name. Since we are not asking individuals to self-define and cannot be sufficiently confident about the scale of pronoun and biographical information that exists in our data pool, we make it explicit that the resulting "attributed gender" should not be considered as the gender of the *individual*, as much as the gender of the *professional instance* recorded in the film credits. While in many cases this works as a satisfactory proxy of the individual's gender, we must keep in mind the scientific, ethical, and political limitations of this approach, some of which we will discuss in the conclusion.

CENTRIC obtains information by extracting and cross-referencing data about Italian films from multiple open-access online databases³⁶, as well as institutional sources³⁷. As of 13 October 2022, the database contains 132,882 entries for professionals, corresponding to 47,554 individuals. Each crew entry includes: the film title, the film's unique ID, the professional's unique ID, their name and the gender attributed to them by the system (which includes "company" for collectives and "unknown" when gender could not be conclusively estimated). Male-attributed (henceforth, for simplicity, "Male") professionals are about three times as many as Female-attributed ones (henceforth "Female") in the database.

Table 1 - *Percentage of professionals in the database by attributed binary gender*

ATTRIBUTED GENDER	% ON TOTAL
OTHER/UNKNOWN	1,85%
COMPANY	21,30%
FEMALE	20,75%
MALE	56,09%
GRAND TOTAL	100,00%

Source: CENTRIC/CineAF. Università Cattolica.

As part of its analytical functions, CENTRIC automatically calculates numerical scores to measure various film features. One of these is the Gender Balance Score (GBS), which calculates the ratio of male professionals to female ones for each profession and in each film (ranging from -1 when 100% male to +1 when 100% female, with 0 representing gender balance).

³⁵ *Valutazione di impatto della Legge Cinema e Audiovisivi* (<https://cinema.cultura.gov.it/comunicazione/eventi-e-pubblicazioni/valutazione-di-impatto/>); *Tutti i numeri del cinema italiano. 2020* (<http://cinema.cultura.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tutti-i-Numeri-del-Cinema-e-dellAudiovisivo-%E2%80%93-Anno-2020.pdf>); accessed February 2023.

³⁶ The currently available modules interface with imdb.com, mymovies.it, cinemaitaliano.it, comingsoon.it and cinematografo.it.

³⁷ As of 2017, our core official sources originate from the Italian Ministry of Culture: distribution/censorship authorisation records and datasets comprising films that applied for public funding.

The database constructed through CENTRIC during the CineAF project is also designed to address the ethical challenge of collecting accurate gender data in the following ways: the participatory interface we are developing will allow users to propose changes and integrations of the collected data³⁸. By allowing for a granular approach to their careers, professionals will be able to modify their data for specific periods or even specific films, thus recording changes throughout their biography³⁹. Finally, quantitative analyses will be enriched with context by fostering an accompanying activity of collecting qualitative data through testimonials and life stories.

In this article, the data collected by CENTRIC into the CineAF database informs our analysis around three core questions:

– Q1: what is the share of women workers employed in contemporary Italian cinema? Which professions have a better gender balance and which, conversely, are marked more deeply by a gender gap?

– Q2: what type of projects (in terms of director team composition, genre, and budget) engage higher numbers of female professionals?

– Q3: What are women's working conditions in the Italian cinema industry in terms of career stability, continuity, and progression?

Cutting across these three questions are two further, interlocking questions: have policy innovations, such as the gender balance incentives for public funding introduced with the 2016 Franceschini Law, and external phenomena, most significantly the Covid-19 pandemic wave of 2020, impacted these dynamics?

The analysis draws upon two samples of data collected by CENTRIC: overall dynamics are based on the dataset developed for the CineAF project (1964-2021), whereas the analyses on the contemporary situation will employ a five-year subsample (2017-2021), for a total of 1,236 films.

3.1. *Adding is not enough: limits and risks of the feminization process*

In 2021, despite the health crisis, the significant slowdown in production⁴⁰, and the greater difficulties of female professionals in balancing work and family, the share of women employed in domestic film production shows a mild growth (tab. 2).

³⁸ A sampling of the database (around 20%) was manually checked by a team of rotating editors, operating under supervision of the project team, during a pilot launch in the Spring of 2022. Each edit had to be manually approved by a supervisor. Editors were assigned a package of films and double-checked all given entries by manually examining available information (such as biographies, interviews etc.). During the experiment, we assigned all distributed films from 1964-1965 and 2010-2021 to a team of 265 students. This resulted in a total of 21,557 edits performed on the database. Crew edits accounted for 28.01% of the total. Editors were selected amongst graduate students who attended film and media courses at the Catholic University of Milan.

³⁹ K. Heyam, *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender*, London: Basic Books, 2022, 12-14.

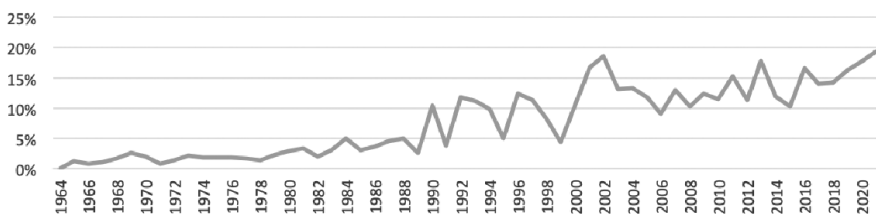
⁴⁰ In 2020, Italian film productions decreased by more than 20 percent: from 325 films in 2019 to 252 in 2020. *Tutti i numeri del cinema italiano. 2020*. <http://cinema.cultura.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tutti-i-Numeri-del-Cinema-e-dellAudiovisivo-%E2%80%93-Anno-2020.pdf>; accessed February 2023.

Table 2 - *Percentage of women by profession. 2017-2021*

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
DIRECTION	14%	14%	16%	18%	19%
SCREEN WRITING	22%	20%	22%	20%	23%
EDITING	27%	28%	25%	28%	27%
MUSIC	12%	14%	11%	12%	16%
DoP	8%	11%	9%	10%	10%
PRODUCTION	25%	28%	28%	28%	26%
COSTUMES	78%	76%	72%	78%	82%
SET DESIGNER	44%	46%	50%	48%	58%
MAKE-UP	70%	70%	75%	73%	73%
SFX	9%	6%	10%	9%	12%

Source: CENTRIC/CineAF. Università Cattolica-Ministero della Cultura.

The increase is slight, and it does not affect all professional roles; however, even those few extra percentage points in shares that are still, overall, significantly low, are indicative of a process that seems, perhaps for the first time, to upset the deep-seated mechanisms of the film industry. To take the specific example of directors, the significance of this small, contemporary upward trend becomes clearer if we compare it with data for the preceding 60-year period. Figure 1 shows the curve traced by the quota of women directors in Italian feature-length films that obtained authorisation for theatrical distribution between 1964 and 2021. Based on our data, the last five years show the longest positive trajectory for women directors in Italy in over half a century. Although there is no guarantee that this constitutes a systemic change, the percentage of women directors shows a slow, steady growth compared to the continuous, and at times vertiginous, ups and downs of the past – that typical trend that Susan Liddy has described as “two steps forward, but one step back” (fig. 1).

Figure 1 - *Percentage of Italian feature films' women directors. 1964-2021*

Source: CENTRIC/CineAF. Università Cattolica-Ministero della Cultura.

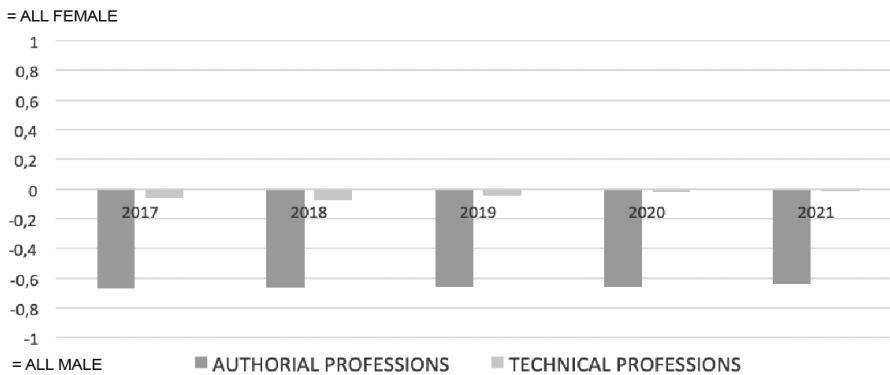
Although this might be cause for some cautious optimism, focusing on the numbers alone is not enough. As Verhoeven, Bronwyn Coate, and Vejune Zemaityte point out:

Policies that focus on adding more women without consideration of “down-the-line” gate-keeping are likely to result in reiterating the current two-tier structure within the industry in which men continue to dominate the most lucrative aspects of the business and women are effectively relegated to the edges.

The feminization of those “edges” – specific film professions where the vast majority of workers are women – requires a different form of intervention and attention, if we don’t want to risk producing changes that generate other, more insidious, forms of inequality and injustice.

In fact, when looking in detail at how the gender composition of Italian film production initiatives is changing, two potentially critical factors emerge. First, the number of women grows unevenly in different professional roles. Figure 2 shows the incidence of women in authorial professions (directing, screenwriting, editing, music composition, and cinematography) and in technical or managerial ones (production, and heads of department in costume, set design, special effects, makeup) over the period 2017-2021. Along with confirming the severe gender gap in the national creative scene, the graph shows the different speeds and possibilities of the feminization process in Italian cinema. Whereas the technically specialised professions tend toward the zero line and thus toward a more gender-balanced condition, the authorial professions are still and distinctly male-dominated and show a higher resistance to change. This, as we know, does not mean that specific technical professions are necessarily more gender balanced: in fact, some of the most polarised professions, one way or the other, are found in below-the-line roles.

Figure 2 - Gender Balance Score (GBS) of authorial and technical professions. 2017-2021



Source: CENTRIC/CineAF. Università Cattolica-Ministero della Cultura.

Which brings us to our second critical factor. A more pronounced tendency toward feminization emerges in traditionally female-dominated roles: costumes and set design. For instance, the share of female costume designers has continued to increase, reaching 82% in 2021 (up from 78% in 2017), whereas set design has seen the largest increase of the film professions we examined, going up by 14% between 2017 and 2021. The mechanism that leads women to gain easier access to professions where they are already present in good numbers generates an imbalance in the opposite direction and risks turning these jobs into objects of that process of devaluation – economic and contractual –

of women's work that Milly Buonanno already observed and denounced in the case of journalism⁴¹.

Thankfully, signs of a counter-trend are also emerging: the slight increase in the share of women in music direction (from 11% in 2019 to 16% in 2021), also recorded at the European level⁴², or the slight but exemplary rise in the presence of women in special effects, trace a possible alternative to feminization trends, not in the direction of a generic increase in the presence of women, but of focused interventions into those areas where gender segregation is most severe.

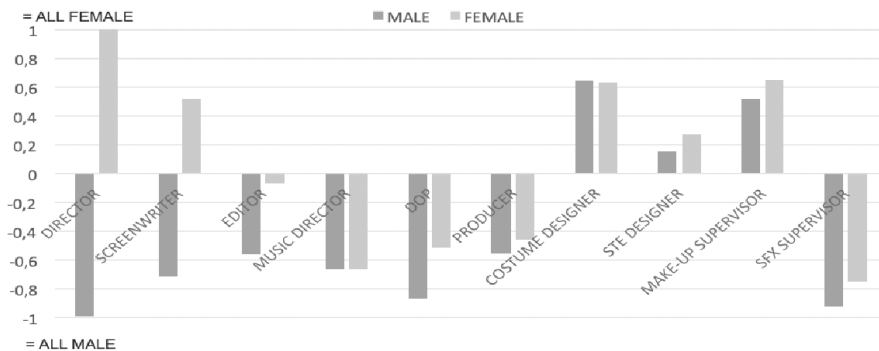
Even if the rise in numbers of women working in the film industry did not stop with the pandemic, we are still far from having any guarantees of the effective transformation in the make-up of the Italian film industry workforce: both because the 50:50 goal is dramatically distant (considering the ten roles surveyed by CENTRIC, 87% of works produced in 2021 were male-dominated) and because merely 'adding' women is not enough.

3.2. *Where (and how) women work*

Our data shows that the presence of women in Italian cinema varies on the basis of two parameters: professional roles and types of projects. Some production initiatives favour women's work, while others configure non-inclusive work environments characterized by severe segregation dynamics.

Regarding the first parameter, we found that female direction represents the foremost driver of feminization of Italian film crews. Indeed, when the direction is predominantly female (in other words, when it has a GBS tending to +1) the presence of women in the creative team tends to increase. Figure 3, like the previous one, depicts the gender composition of creative teams using the Gender Balance Score index. The figure shows that when the direction column is above the 0 line – which indicates a prevalence of women professionals – the ratio of women to men tends to increase in the other professional roles as well.

Figure 3 - *Gender Balance Score (GBS) per profession by female-driven and male-driven works. 2021*



Source: CENTRIC-CineAF- Università Cattolica.

⁴¹ M. Buonanno, *Visibilità senza potere. Le sorti progressive ma non magnifiche delle donne giornaliste italiane*, Naples: Liguori, 2005.

⁴² P. Simone, *Female Professionals in European Film Production*, October 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/female-professionals-in-european-film-production-2022-edition-p-simone/1680a886c5>; accessed February 2023.

This insight can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, it might be proof of the effectiveness of equity actions that operate on decision-making roles, providing, for example, easier access to funding when films are directed by female professionals⁴³; on the other hand, it might indicate the onset of a feminization process, such as the risk of (re-)creating a category of “women’s projects”, which we would do well to be wary of.

A second parameter, with equally ambivalent implications, is the genre of film projects, which strongly correlates with women’s presence⁴⁴. This is usually explained in the debate with reference to production costs and the persisting perception of the risk of assigning expensive projects to women directors⁴⁵. For instance, research has suggested that the fewer women directing thrillers or action movies could be explained by the higher production costs of such features (compared with dramas or comedies), which would drive producers to prefer male directors⁴⁶. This reading is corroborated by our data emerging from the Italian context (tab. 3)⁴⁷.

Table 3 - *Percentage of female-driven and male-driven films by genre. 2017-2021*

	<i>FEMALE DRIVEN</i>	<i>MALE DRIVEN</i>
Documentary	34%	19%
Drama	26%	26%
Comedy	12%	19%
Biopic	8%	3%
Romance	4%	4%
Thriller	3%	4%
Historical Drama	2%	3%
Musical	2%	1%
Family Movies	2%	1%
War	2%	1%

Source: CENTRIC/CineAF.Università Cattolica-Ministero della Cultura

⁴³ In Italy, for example, the recent Cinema Law (220/2016, implementing decrees of 07/31/2017 and 11/09/2017) favours access to public funding for films with one or more women as directors, screenwriters, or composers.

⁴⁴ See for instance the Annenberg Foundation’s *Inclusion Initiative* reports. <https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/aii>. Accessed September 13, 2022; accessed February 2023.

⁴⁵ A. Coles, D.R. Eikhof, “On the Basis of Risk: How Screen Executives’ Risk Perceptions and Practices Drive Gender Inequality in Directing”, *Gender, Work & Organisation*, 28, 6 (2021): 2040-2057. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12701>.

⁴⁶ S.L. Smith *et al.*, “The Ticket to Inclusion: Gender & Race/Ethnicity of Leads and Financial Performance Across 1,200 Popular Films”, 2020. <https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-2020-02-05-ticket-to-inclusion.pdf>; accessed September 13, 2022; S.L. Smith *et al.*, “Inclusion in the Director’s chair. Gender, Race, & Age of Directors Across 1,200 Top Films from 20177 to 2018”, 2019. <https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/inclusion-in-the-directors-chair-2019.pdf>; accessed September 13, 2022.

⁴⁷ The percentages were calculated on the total number of female-driven audiovisual products and on the total number of male-driven audiovisual products respectively (that is, products that had a GBS of over +0.5 and below -0.5 respectively for the director’s role). It should also be noted that genres below 1% are excluded from this table, and that each film can be associated with several genres: thus, the sum of the shares does not add up to 100.

As the table shows, female directors are more present in documentaries (+15% compared to male-directed productions), a genre that, on average, has lower production costs than fiction.

The hypothesis that women professionals tend to work in low-cost projects more than in high budget ones is confirmed by the average cost of female-directed films. It is necessary to point out that production cost information was available for 51% of the sample. Within this sub-sample, films directed by women show average budgets that are 38% lower than those of their male counterparts.

While undoubtedly discriminating, the economic dimension of production is not the only element impacting the feminization process. For Ana Alacovska and Dave O'Brien, for example, different genres of cultural production configure *different working environments*, also from the point of view of relationships among professionals and labour models, which in turn influence the presence of women in the creative scene⁴⁸. Once more, this is evidence that numbers can only go part of the way in helping us understand the complex terrain of exclusion in the creative industries.

3.3. What are women's working conditions in the Italian cinema industry?

Looking at career progression, stability and longevity is one way of disentangling these complexities. Our data shows that contemporary career dynamics of women professionals in Italy are characterized by perduring structural fragilities. For instance, in above-the-line professions, a higher percentage of female professionals tend to work in pairs with a male colleague more than their male counterparts: for instance, 15% more in direction and screenwriting, and 11% more in editing (see tab. 4). Although this is partly explained by the larger proportion of male professionals across all examined sectors, at the same time, it can also be read as an indicator of dependency of female professionals on male ones.

Table 4 - Percentage of professionals working alone, in mixed pairs, or in other group forms, by profession. 2017-2021

		<i>DIRECTION</i>	<i>WRITING</i>	<i>EDITING</i>
<i>FEMALE</i>	SINGLE	69,76%	20,92%	70,85%
	F/M PAIR	18,54%	25,26%	18,18%
	OTHER GROUP FORM	11,71%	53,83%	10,97%
<i>MALE</i>	SINGLE	81,78%	29,32%	74,03%
	F/M PAIR	3,57%	10,37%	7,49%
	OTHER GROUP FORM	14,65%	60,21%	18,48%

Source: CENTRIC/CineAF.Università Cattolica-Ministero della Cultura.

To investigate the nature of this fragility, we first examined career structure across the entirety of the CENTRIC/CineAF period (1964-2021), measuring duration and continuity

⁴⁸ A. Alacovska, D. O'Brien, "Genres and Inequality in the Creative Industries", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24, 3 (2021): 639-657.

in four professions – DoP, editing, direction, and screenwriting (tab. 5). For duration, we considered two indicators: the “1-shot rate” (intended as the percentage of directors that released only a single film throughout their career) and the “career span”, calculated as the number of years between the first and the last recorded film projects. We excluded “active” professionals, who have had a feature released within the last 5 years, from our calculation.

Table 5 - *Career Dynamics Summary. 1964-2021*

PROFESSION	ATTRIBUTED GENDER	TOTAL %	% 1-SHOT	CAREER SPAN AVG.	F/M CAREER DELTA	CAREER GAP avg years	F/M GAP DELTA
DOP	F	4%	23%	9,35	-33,2%	4,72	+8,7%
	M	96%	6%	14,27		4,34	
EDITING	F	30%	10%	11,62	-10,6%	5,01	+3,7%
	M	70%	9%	14,25		4,83	
DIRECTION	F	8%	22%	11,60	-23,9%	7,04	+28,7%
	M	92%	9%	15,16		5,47	
SCREEN WRITING	F	13%	14%	10,97	-15%	5,87	+5,7%
	M	87%	8%	13,60		5,55	

Source: CENTRIC/CineAF.Università Cattolica-Ministero della Cultura.

The resulting data shows that 22% of female directors produced a single film in their career, against 9% of male directors. Concerning career span, women professionals consistently show shorter careers than men, a discrepancy that peaks with cinematographers, who have careers that last 33% fewer years on average compared to their male colleagues; the value is 23,9% for directors.

Regarding career continuity, we measured average gaps, that is, the number of years between consecutive films. Again, our data shows that the gaps between films produced by women professionals are consistently higher, peaking at 28,7% for directors, about three times as much as the next profession (cinematographer) with an 8,7% delta. The interpretation of these data points requires more qualitative work, focusing on the biographies of women professionals; we can speculate that factors such as work/life balance, on top of exclusionary industry norms, play a role in this increased discontinuity. It must also be underscored that our data consider only the cinema industry, intended as the production of feature-length works that received permission for distribution; it does not, therefore, take into account that professional continuity could be secured by work in other areas of the audiovisual sector. Since that option obviously applies to all professionals regardless of gender, it would still not explain the substantial and systemic gender gap across professions evident in our data.

What appears certain is that throughout the history of Italian cinema, women in authorial or above-the-line professions have been fewer in number, have had shorter careers, and have worked with less continuity.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Our analysis of the occupational dynamics of the female workforce in the contemporary Italian cinema industry has shown a slight increase in the presence of women, as well as a perdurance of the structural weaknesses that hinder female professional growth in many areas of modern economies. These can be summed up as follows: a) an inverse relationship between presence in a professional category and the resources and responsibilities it entails; b) a shorter, more discontinuous career path resulting in a greater vulnerability.

The impact of the biggest exogenous stressor in a generation, the Covid-19 pandemic, appears to have had little influence on the gendered dynamics of the Italian cinema industry. This can be read as an unexpectedly positive fact, given the increased vulnerability female professionals tend to face during social and economic crises⁴⁹. Instead, the overall number of women kept increasing. At the same time, the policy interventions introduced in 2017 by the new Film Law, which benefit women-led film projects' funding applications, appear to have barely moved the needle in the short time since they came into effect: the percentage of women-led films that received state production funds rose by 1% between 2018 and 2020⁵⁰. While, thus, some small positive signs of improvement are recorded, the deep structures that fuel the gender gap in films appear untouched. To reiterate, increasing the number of female professionals, or "adding," is not enough. The risk, mentioned in many studies, is to build a cosmetic equality that hides deeper imbalances and injustices⁵¹, including the complete lack of family/work balance policies – which should be key concerns regardless of gender.

Finally, this work forces us to reckon with a methodological challenge that big data-driven analyses like ours face. Our project relies upon data collated from private sources, such as online databases, and public ones, such as ministerial documents, which has shown (through our collaborative editing experiment) non-zero levels of unreliability. Until national and supra-national institutions establish a protocol for the interoperability of data that would allow for the creation of a granular database of creative works, we will struggle with data quality in any analysis of the occupational dynamics of these sectors. At the same time, when the focus of the analysis is as complex and politically sensitive as gender, the difficulties (and related costs of collation and verification) multiply. However questionable or essentialist, the fact that quantized conceptualizations of gender work well with the structure and function of relational databases makes them all that more difficult to restructure. This is true both *upstream*, at the level of the design of those databases, as well as *downstream*, at the level of data aggregation and interpretation where analyses such as ours operate. More flexible, accurate conceptualizations of gender increase the costs of both processes, either at the data collection or verification phases, possibly leading to the point of grinding analyses to a halt if resources are not sufficient.

We do not currently have good solutions for these problems, although discussions are thankfully ongoing⁵². For instance, if nonbinary gender identities are lumped under

⁴⁹ On the gendered impacts of Covid-19, see World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Report, 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>; accessed on October 15, 2022.

⁵⁰ Valutazione di Impatto, 2022, p. 147.

⁵¹ S. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, 102. This point is also put forward in Marta Rocchi's article in this issue, "Women's Labour in TV Series Production: A Comparative Analysis of Italian Generalist TV and Pay Platforms (2016-2019)".

⁵² See, for example, the conference "Beyond the binary variable: feminist quantitative analyses of gendered inequalities", whose programme is freely available on YouTube (FemQuant, CRSSH, University of Cambridge, 2021).

a “third” category, we fall back into quantized essentialism, simply adding a further column to the databases and analyses. If they are expressed using specialized categories (possibly emerging from lower-level descriptors), which would require a direct input from the professional to be correctly assigned, they would fully acknowledge self-identification but would risk becoming impractical on a large scale. Or, again, nonbinary identities could be downright excluded from databases: such is the current approach of the totality of the online databases that CENTRIC relies upon⁵³. As we advocate for the collection of more inclusive gender data, we might also take into account Judith Lorber’s argument, made in her recent *New gender paradox*⁵⁴: that in order to eliminate gender inequality we need to both dismantle the gender binary but also to strategically insist on it when it is functional in demonstrating inequalities that derive precisely from the persistence of a structural binarist view at the institutional level. In such cases, including our analysis of the screen industries, where the assumption of binarism is used to produce hierarchies of professional value, data collection in binarist terms can be strategically useful in order “to identify where formal gender inequality exists and to bring hidden discriminatory practices to light”⁵⁵.

This article, then, and the data on which it is based, still read gender dynamics outside a necessary intersectional perspective. Here, too, the application of a data-driven approach comes up against complex issues relating to the supply of data, their management and protection, and the ethical and political implications of attributing intersectional variables to individuals on a large scale: possible, for example, for variables such as age, very complex for variables such as ethnicity, almost impossible for variables such as disability and/or chronic illness.

In order to address the risks that contributions to the research on gender inequalities in the creative industries face – to be reduced, ignored, underfunded, individually unsustainable and so on – analyses have to integrate multiple data streams, most of which were designed long before the current debates brought to the fore a new set of challenges. The stimulating and urgent methodological questions they pose can only be solved at the intersection between social sciences, philosophy, computer sciences *and the lived experiences of professionals themselves*.

⁵³ Similar conversations have barely started on other, even more complex issues, such as the attribution of gender identities to professionals who are no longer alive (C. Morgan, “Their-stories: Interrogating Gender Identities of the Past”, 2nd What Is and How to Do LGBT History Conference, 2015).

⁵⁴ J. Lorber, *The New Gender Paradox. Fragmentation and Persistence of the Binary*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2021 (Italian translation, *Oltre il gender*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2022).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, conclusion.

BERNADETTE LUCIANO*

RELATIONAL FEMINIST PRACTICES ON AND OFF-SCREEN: THE CASE OF *AMANDA* (2022) AND *GIULIA* (2021)

Abstract

Current statistics presented at the most recent Annual Seminar on Gender Equality and Inclusivity in the Film Industry held at the 2022 Venice Film Festival reveal that the number of women working in the Italian film industry is increasing across professions at a very slow rate, and the growth seems to be primarily in highly specialised technical roles rather than in authorial ones. The detailed statistical work carried out by the research group led to the provocative question posed to a number of practitioners at the 2022 seminar: is cinema a sustainable career for women? The responses provided by the Italian women directors participating in the seminar highlighted the importance of female solidarity within and across creative professions, that is the idea of “fare squadra” or “fare rete”, working together rather than singularly, and adopting an approach akin to Italian feminism’s *pratica delle relazioni*. Previously, in the 2016 edition of their annual seminar on women in the cinema and audiovisual industries, the FAScinA group explored the idea of relationality or female collaboration in film taking as its starting point the ideas proposed in Luce Irigaray’s 1994 publication, *Essere due* (“Almeno in due. Donne nel cinema italiano”). <https://fascinaforum.org/2020/10/22/almeno-in-due-donne-nel-cinema-italiano/>). The conference organisers proposed that in order to exist and present themselves as subjects, women had to “essere (almeno) due”/ “to be at least two”, thereby taking advantage of the energy and the resources provided by female relationships. The papers presented at the conference traced a range of cinematic relationships, both on and off screen, that displayed strategies promoting collaboration and proximity. This paper builds on the on-going dialogue on female collaboration in the film industry, through the analysis of two contemporary Italian films, *Amanda* (2022) and *Giulia* (2021), which explore on and off-screen collaborations, challenge prevailing cultural norms, and engage in feminist practices that explicitly contest mainstream cinematic genres and traditional representations of gender on screen.

Keywords

Italian feminism; women filmmakers; Italian contemporary cinema; *Giulia*, *Amanda*; ethics of care.
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1. INTRODUCTION

At the opening of the fourth edition of the “Annual Seminar on Gender Equality and Inclusivity in the Film Industry” held at the 2022 Venice Film Festival, Festival Director

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Alberto Barbera acknowledged that while Italian cinema is still far from a situation of gender parity, the prospects for the future are promising, given the increase in women represented in the categories of first-time films, the Biennale College and other categories featuring younger filmmakers. Indeed, the statistics provided by the CENTRIC/CineAF Project¹ reveal that the number of women working in the film industry is increasing, albeit at a very slow rate, with the growth primarily in highly specialized technical roles such as costume design and set design rather than in authorial roles². The detailed statistical work carried out by the CENTRIC/CineAF research group led to the provocative question posed to a number of practitioners at the 2022 seminar: Is cinema a sustainable career for women?

The responses provided by the Italian women directors participating in the seminar highlighted the importance of female solidarity within and across creative professions, that is the idea of *fare squadra* or *fare rete*, working together rather than singularly, and adopting an approach akin to Italian feminism's *pratica delle relazioni*. According to feminist theorist Luisa Muraro and the Diotima group, *la pratica delle relazioni* contends that the necessary modification of oneself and one's understanding of the world cannot come in isolation but rather "operates by valorising the relationships that we already have or by activating new ones, and entrusting to the very dynamism of the relationships the most important problems that we have"³. This practice recognizes the sense of agency, authority and empowerment that can come by engaging in such a relationship. The validation that comes from being enabled by and working collaboratively with a network of women underpinned the responses of the various directors on the panel. Veteran filmmaker Roberta Torre was adamant in her advocacy of female solidarity and emphasized the importance of female alliances to the success of her work. Jasmine Trinca, a well-established actress who in 2022 directed her first feature film, *Marcel*, spoke of her deliberate choice to work with a predominantly female crew as a choice important for the aesthetic and content of a film with a deliberately gendered gaze. The most junior of the filmmakers, Carolina Cavalli, whose film *Amanda* was presented at Venice and is discussed below, addressed the importance of female relationships for younger generations of filmmakers and spoke to how networks helped her acquire a sense of authority and confidence as a director.

Previously, in the 2016 edition of their annual seminar on women in the cinema and audiovisual industries, the FAScInA (*Forum Annuale Studiose di Cinema e Audiovisivi*) group explored the idea of relationality or female collaboration in film taking as its starting point the ideas proposed in Luce Irigaray's 1994 publication, *Essere due*⁴. The conference organizers proposed that in order to exist and present themselves as subjects, women had to "be (at least) two" *essere (almeno) due*, thereby taking advantage of the energy and the resources provided by female relationships. The papers presented at the conference traced a range of cinematic relationships, both on and off screen, that displayed strategies promoting co-operation and proximity that run counter to the negative stereotypes of women being their own worst enemies and the conviction that it is

¹ https://cinema.cultura.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/GENDER_EQUALITY_SITO_v4.pdf.

² In 2021, the gender gap was still significant: 87% of films were led by males, only 15% were female-driven, and women featured under 20% as directors (19%) or cinematographers (10%) and between 20 and 30 % as screenwriters, producers and editors.

³ S. Scarparo, "Feminist Intellectuals as Public Figures in Contemporary Italy", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 19:44, 2004: 204, DOI: 10.1080/0816464042000226500.

⁴ "Almeno in due. Donne nel cinema italiano". <https://fascinaforum.org/2020/10/22/almeno-in-due-donne-nel-cinema-italiano/>.

the exceptional talent of the individual artist that defines genius. The studies submitted unveiled the variety of ways in which women accompanied each other and continue to accompany each other in their roles as cinema directors, actresses and other women creatives and indeed as characters of the works.

This paper builds on the on-going dialogue on female collaboration in the film industry through the analysis of two contemporary Italian films which explore on and off-screen collaborations, challenge prevailing cultural norms and engage in feminist practices that explicitly contest mainstream cinematic genres and traditional representations of gender on screen. Solidarity and relationality off-screen between women creatives and between women and men are instrumental to the construction and unravelling of transformative female-centred narratives. *Amanda* (2022), scripted and directed by Carolina Cavalli and starring Benedetta Porcaroli and *Giulia* (2021), directed by Ciro de Caro, co-scripted by and starring Rosa Palasciano, feature a female demographic under-represented in Italian cinema: post-adolescent transgressive women, in their mid-twenties and early thirties, in search of a way to survive in a dysfunctional world marked by a breakdown of communication, relationality and care. Representing very different genres and modes of storytelling, these are character studies more than conventional stories, that challenge and encourage spectators to confront issues of trust, respect, autonomy, freedom of movement, and female solidarity, all part of a rethinking and remaking of the world based on an ethics of care.

2. FROM WANDERING NARRATIVES TO A POLITICS OF CARE

Cinematically, *Amanda* and *Giulia* are films in which the camera remains close to their female protagonists, who dominate the screen space and around whom the narrative revolves. Alongside a profound sense of unease depicted through their aimless wandering and solitude, symptomatic of the prevailing sentiments of the early years of the 21st century, is a deep-seated desire for freedom and autonomy that extends beyond the boundaries defined by society. Walking and wandering become a way for these ‘uncared for’ and yet ‘willful’ women, to try and find a place in the world. In *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti argues that:

being free to move around to go where one wants is a right that women have only just started to gain. [...] Earning the right to go where one wants to without being punished physically or psychologically for being there: becoming entitled to mobility is a superb achievement for women⁵.

By asserting their right to mobility, *Amanda* and *Giulia* become wilful subjects, according to Sara Ahmed’s formulation of wilfulness as it is applied to women, “to be identified as wilful is to become a problem” because it implies a resistance to acceptable behaviour⁶. According to Ahmed, “wilfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given [...]”⁷. Wilful subjects, thus, are those who refuse to follow the path prescribed for them by patriarchal society. In cinema, these ‘wilful subjects’ have antecedents in what Kathleen Rowe calls “unruly women”, the feminist pro-

⁵ R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 256.

⁶ S. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

tototype of a transgressive subject who uses humour and excess to undermine patriarchal norms and authority⁸. More recently, such transgressive subjects have been populating indie-inflected television series: they are visible and resistant, outspoken young women who defy conventions and take up figurative and physical space as they struggle to exist in a messy world⁹.

At the same time, such ‘wilful subjects’ want to care for others and be cared for, adhering thus to polyphonic interpretations of care that have been central to feminist debates for decades. In *Caring*, Nel Noddings articulates an approach to ethics and to life rooted in relationality, receptivity, and responsiveness¹⁰. The notion of care that has more recently been developed by a number of interdisciplinary traditions and social movements positions care as an inherently interdependent survival strategy, a foundation for political organising, and a prefigurative politics for building a world in which all people can live and thrive¹¹. It is at once an affective state, a practice, and an ethico-political obligation that involves the practice and process of undoing and then remaking the world, and that implicates imagining and enacting alternative ways of being together¹². As Michelle Murphy argues, it proposes a politics of the dismantling and unsettling of a world already violated¹³.

3. AMANDA

Carolina Cavalli’s debut film *Amanda* was presented in the Orizzonti Extra Section of the 79th Venice Film Festival and subsequently at the 47th edition of the Toronto International Film Festival. At the 2022 Gender Equality Seminar, Cavalli was one of four filmmakers to address the question of the sustainability of a career in the cinema industry and, more specifically, the role female networks have played in her career thus far. Her professional career took off after she was awarded the Solinas Prize in 2018 in the Category of “Experimenta Serie” for her work *Sputiamo nel Milkshake*, which was then made into a pilot for Rai TV featuring as the main character Siri, a young woman similar in disposition to what we find in *Amanda*. Annamaria Granatello, artistic director of the Solinas Prize, who also met Cavalli’s producer at the awards ceremony, stated that the professional mission of the prize is to function as network creators for authors and producers. Cavalli acknowledges her debt to Solinas and to the networks it generated for enabling her to make her first feature film by introducing her to women who served as role models and who empathise with her stories:

For me, the network was essential, and a female network was my point of departure and continues to be so. The Solinas Prize is directed by a woman, my producer Anna Maria Morelli is a woman, 80% of the productions I work on are produced by women so certainly it offers

⁸ K. Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

⁹ C. Perkins, M. Schreiber, “Independent Women: From Film to Television”, *Feminist Media Studies*, 19 (2019): 919-927.

¹⁰ N. Noddings, *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 19.

¹¹ D. Woodly *et al.*, “The Politics of Care”, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 20 (2021): 890-925.

¹² J. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York-London: Routledge, 1993.

¹³ M. Murphy, “Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices”, *Social Studies of Science*, 45, 5 (2015): 716-737 (732).

[the opportunity] to find role models with whom I can identify and undertake the journey within a system that often, in certain aspects, makes you feel alone. In my case, having a group of women around me whom I hold in esteem certainly helps with the problem of that authority that sometimes you have to earn in an almost arrogant way because it's not at all a given as it is for other colleagues. It provides a perspective that helps you grasp things that are not right, to understand them. There are certain things that need to be underscored and not allowed. In a network of female support and by admiring those models, you protect yourself as well¹⁴.

Strongly underpinning Cavalli's reliance on female networks is the need to feel "authorised" as a young filmmaker who is often discredited or not taken seriously by her colleagues. Female networks were particularly important in Cavalli's transition from screenwriter to director. Despite having written many screenplays for cinema and television, she acknowledges that her cinematic experience had previously focused primarily on creating characters on paper as opposed to working with actors on the set. Her move to directing meant foregrounding the responsibility of embodying the characters she had created and finding the right person who could collaborate with her on that project. In describing *Amanda* she stated:

I didn't have a 'story' to tell, but a character. A young woman who has a hard time accepting common conventions, an isolated young woman who does not compromise or give in easily¹⁵.

Cavalli auditioned more than sixty actresses before finally casting Benedetta Porcaroli in the role of Amanda. She claims that her encounter with Porcaroli was fortuitous, having found in her a professional with the ability to authentically convey the complexities of the character of Amanda.

Cavalli and Porcaroli replied in almost textbook feminist terms when asked to explain their mode of collaboration. At a presentation of the film in Milan, they described their working relationship as based on their mutual desire to dispel traditional hierarchical structures that frequently prevail between director and actress¹⁶. Cavalli's attitude toward directorial authority is far from the hierarchical authoritarianism that is often anecdotally cited in reference to the role of director. Her acknowledgement of her own lack of experience in filmmaking meant that she exercised her authority in a way that was relational. In *Oltre l'uguaglianza*, the Milan-based feminist collective, Diotima, theorises a fundamental distinction between authority and power. Borrowing from Hannah Arendt's study "What is Authority?", the feminist text suggests that we have lost access to the original meaning of the Latin *auctoritas* which comes from the verb *augere*, to guide, discuss and conduct, and refers to the ability to make others grow and prosper whereas *potestas* (power) is linked to the verb *gerere*, to administer and govern, and to have the faculty to act despite opposition from others. Power therefore is linked more to authoritarianism and hierarchy than to authority¹⁷.

¹⁴ Annual Seminar on Gender Equality & Inclusivity in the Film Industry, <https://veniceproduction-bridge.org/vpb-live-channel-archive>.

¹⁵ C. Cavalli, Interview with G. Bogani, "Carolina Cavalli: 'Scrivere è un modo per entrare in contatto con me stessa e con gli altri'", October 1, 2022. <https://luce.lanazione.it>.

¹⁶ Post-screening Q&A on *Amanda* at the presence of director and cast at Anteo Cinema, Milan, October 15, 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvBO5z7y6X4.

¹⁷ A. Buttarelli, "Fare autorità, disfare potere", *Oltre l'uguaglianza: le radici femminili dell'autorità*, Naples: Diotima, 1995, 88.

The collaborative and non-hierarchical collaboration of Cavalli and Porcaroli reflected the shared desire of director and actress to experiment with the character through a working style based on trust and generosity: “We prepared the character together and completely trusted each other”. Cavalli conceded that Porcaroli’s professionalism and talent were invaluable to her as director. Ultimately, their mutual sensitivity to the nuances of this complex character was fundamental to the authentic transfer of the character from page to screen. In the various interviews that Cavalli has released, she extends her gratitude to the collaborative performances of singer-turned-actor Michele Bravi in the role of Amanda’s ‘boyfriend’, and of other women who contributed generously to the film, from a close friend, sister of the actress who played the part of Marina, to the mother of her costume designer, Francesca Cibichino, who knitted the vest that is part of Amanda’s ‘uniform’, and to the composer of the soundtrack, Niccolò Contessa.

The film has been described by critics and by the director herself as a grotesque comedy verging on the surreal, with a narrative that is primarily made up of a range of situations more than actions. Diegetically, everything we know about Amanda and her world is filtered through her point of view and transmitted through a filmic style that oscillates between the hyperreal and the surreal. The images, from the desaturated bright colours of elaborate family villas to the pink-toned hotel room in which Amanda seeks refuge from family to the muted tones of the vast and largely unpopulated landscape that Amanda traverses, refract her interior state of displacement and isolation. Furthermore, Amanda’s clothing is fundamental to the representation of a character situated in a temporal limbo. Cavalli speaks of the specific choice of vintage apparel for Amanda: the ‘pre-loved’ eclectic combination, besides affirming her freedom of expression, is symbolic of Amanda’s habit of borrowing and stealing from the family homes¹⁸. The well-defined wardrobe provides a window onto her personal history: the baby girl blouse with the round collar and the multicoloured knitted vest, remnants, or reminiscence of her childhood; the bomber jacket, of her travels abroad; and the wide trousers and combat boots provide the comfort required for her continual wandering.

It is in fact the act of wandering, physical and metaphorical, that is at the heart of the film whose halting narrative follows Amanda’s personal logic and ‘wilful’ disposition, as she moves determinedly through the vast countryside or empty city streets. Episodes begin with frontal views of Amanda on the move, accompanied by a variegated musical score that extends from upbeat Appalachian folk music to operatic arias. As viewers we follow her, never sure where we are going, but finding ourselves often intruding unwelcomed and unannounced into other people’s spaces and exiting just as quickly. Episodes and conversations tend to end unresolved and are usually punctuated by a profanity. The visuals and intrusions are accompanied by carefully scripted epithets that encapsulate Amanda’s perception of the central characters: her father, who thinks everything is fine when it’s not and represents what Amanda calls the double-edged “deceit” and “fascination” of the bourgeoisie; her mother’s perverse logic exemplified in her statement to Amanda “You don’t do anything because you are too busy not doing anything”; her sister Marina’s admission that she didn’t attempt to save Amanda from drowning as a child because she was lazy; her niece, the only person with whom Amanda seems to have a connection, is in therapy because she loves Jesus “as a person”. Outside her dysfunctional family, Amanda lacks any meaningful relationships; she has no friends until she discovers that, as a toddler, she

¹⁸ C. Cavalli interviewed by Alessandra De Tommaso, *Festival di Venezia 2022*, Carolina Cavalli e l’esordio alla regia: “Voglio una vita spericolata (come Amanda)”, September 6, 2022. www.vogue.it/news/article/festival-venezia-carolina-cavalli-amanda-film-margherita-missoni.

did have a friend from whom she was inseparable: Rebecca, the daughter of her mother's best friend, Viola. What she does not know is that Rebecca, once a great athlete, suffers from agoraphobia and has not left her room in a year.

Amanda, like her creator, is ultimately a storyteller. If the film begins with Amanda reconstructing for the viewer and her sister one of the many 'what might have been' stories that populate her imagination (the story of a thwarted relationship that never took off five years previously), the discovery that she had had a friend twenty years ago exalts Amanda and quickly transforms the potential 'what might have been' story into a mission to rekindle the friendship. The discovery marks the beginning of the central 'story' of the film, signposted as a second beginning, as the title AMANDA flashes onto the screen. The scene that relays Amanda's first encounter with Rebecca reveals Cavalli's aesthetic playfulness as she adapts her cinematic style to the exigencies of the episode. Arriving unannounced at Rebecca's house Amanda is invited in, and Rebecca's mother, Viola, whose face tilts upward toward her daughter's room, is captured in a close-up fisheye shot as she screams her daughter's name to announce Amanda's arrival. Haunting music accompanies the camera, focused on Amanda's heavy boots as she climbs the stairs and proceeds somewhat anxiously down the corridor. When she reaches Rebecca's room the camera records the exchange of glances between the two childhood friends, before Rebecca slams the door in her friend's face. This episode sets the pace for the series of events that lead to a revival of their relationship. Amanda's persistence and cleverness eventually win out over Rebecca's self-imposed seclusion as Amanda initially manages to trick her way into her friend's bedroom and eventually lures her outdoors. While the friendship is subsequently interrupted when the adult world intervenes with its misplaced conventional wisdom and deems the care that Amanda has provided Rebecca as harmful, it is eventually restored through an act of caring reciprocity. Having been enabled by Amanda to leave her room, and taught the magic of fireworks, Rebecca mobilises herself and uses that same ammunition to seek revenge on Amanda's 'almost boyfriend' on her behalf. The ending of the film sees the two friends literally walking off into the sunset. As they disappear off-screen along with the end titles rolling, the unresolved ending of the film subverts conventions – it is not the white horse of fairy tales, traditionally signalling the arrival of a masculine figure who saves the damsels in distress, but it is the damsels who set off to save, once again, the horse that Amanda had previously 'saved' from its owners.

Ultimately, the ending celebrates female solidarity and an ethics of care. In *Caring, Nel Noddings* (1984) articulates an approach to ethics rooted in relationality, receptivity, and responsiveness: "Caring is largely reactive and responsive. Perhaps it is even better characterised as receptive. [...] Whatever the [one-caring] does for the cared-for is embedded in a relationship that reveals itself as engrossment and in an attitude that warms and comforts the cared-for"¹⁹. The relationship, however, is reciprocal, because the one cared for completes the relationship by accepting the care that is offered. In *Amanda*, the notion of care is personified in the mutual receptivity and response of two characters disconnected from the world who ultimately reach out to the other and, in becoming receptive to their respective care, dissipate their sense of emptiness and isolation. The film does not try to transform the characters into affable young women but rather celebrates their willfulness. Initially lost in a desolate and unwelcoming world, they directly or obliquely empower each other through their own idiosyncratic strengths that supersede failed institutional structures and stifling societal mores.

¹⁹ Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 19.

4. GIULIA

Essere due is a descriptor that aptly defines the collaborative process that led to *Giulia*, Ciro de Caro's third film, which premiered at Venetian Nights in the 18th Giornate degli Autori at the 2021 Venice Film Festival. *Giulia* shares with the director's earlier feature films, *Spaghetti Story* (2013) and *Acqua di marzo* (2016), an exploration of characters on the fringes of society dealing with the challenges of everyday life, and in search of a balanced existence. The screenplay for *Giulia* was written *a quattro mani* in a necessarily close-knit collaboration between the director and the co-screenwriter, Rosa Palasciano, which began over a year before they started making the film. De Caro fully acknowledges that Rosa's contribution was fundamental to the point of view of an explicitly gendered story:

Working with Rosa, I realised that if I had to write a character like this on my own, I would have once again told a female character as we men imagine it: in a superficial and disrespectful way. Rosa helped me understand how limited and superficial the vision we [men] have of a female character can be²⁰.

In discussing their collaboration on this film and in particular the crafting of the character of Giulia, de Caro and Palasciano talked about their desire to bring to the screen a different kind of female character, a young woman in her thirties who constructs her identity and develops through encounters with others, a character who wants to be taken care of but is suspicious of relationships that seem incompatible with her desire for freedom, a freedom that seems out of reach²¹. Like Amanda, Giulia belongs to the generation of contemporary young adult women who feel disconnected from the world they inhabit. Uncompromising and uninterested in fitting into a society that doesn't make sense to them, they speak and act frankly and without filters, and wander the landscape in search of a way and place to be in the world. Like Amanda, Giulia enters unwelcomed and unannounced not only into other people's spaces but into the viewer's space. Her intrusions and outbursts, and most notably her socially questionable, visceral reactions (she handles a used condom, contemplating the possibility of pregnancy, and urinates on the toothbrushes of her boyfriend's dismissive family) evoke both uneasy responses and extreme empathy. On-screen, Palasciano brings to the role the nuances of the character she co-created. De Caro describes Palasciano's interpretation of Giulia in the following terms:

Giulia is a character you both hate and love, and if Rosa didn't have the ability to walk this fine line she would have easily fallen into drama, melodrama, or comedy. The nuances make this character believable, and they are made up of the little things that are often cut out in cinema because they are too normal²².

Stylistically very different from *Amanda*, *Giulia* adheres to more realistic styles of filmmaking, clearly influenced by the *nouvelle vague*, which tries to minimise artifice. Unlike *Amanda*, where music plays an essential role, there is little music to condition the spectator's emotions, no use of make-up, and minimal technical interference. A hand-

²⁰ C. De Caro, Interview: www.fabriqueawards.com/single-post/giulia-a-heroine-without-filters.

²¹ *Giulia* | Intervista a Ciro De Caro e Rosa Palasciano: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccasO1yrE8E.

²² C. de Caro, Interview: www.fabriqueawards.com/single-post/giulia-a-heroine-without-filters.

held camera, very close to the characters and often held in extended shots, provides the sensation of observing the action in real time. De Caro believes these choices along with the encouraged use of improvisation, leave as much space as possible to the actors to authentically inhabit their characters.

Like *Amanda*, *Giulia* is a character-focused rather than action-driven narrative, with the film's attention on the female protagonist Giulia, her relationships, and wanderings. The film shot in the hot 2020 Roman summer, nods to the confusion of the pandemic era in which it was made. From the opening scene, that destabilising pandemic uncertainty is referenced in the first of many exchanges or gestures regarding masks and social distancing, and Giulia explains that she has not worked in a long time because of the "crisis" (although which 21st century crisis she refers to is also in question). In the scene, the protagonist holds the shaky camera's attention, framed in an extended shot in which she is uncomfortably interrogated by her potential future employers, who never appear on-screen but pronounce patronising and judgmental comments. Giulia has submitted not one but multiple CVs in the hope that one of them might satisfy the whims of the interviewers. This perplexes them, and leads them to ask the fundamental question at the heart of the film: "Who is Giulia?" The multiplicity of the CVs represents Giulia's own oscillating idea of who she is and what she yearns for, on the one hand a family and maternity that are aligned with more traditional values, on the other, a desire for freedom and independence which is echoed in the subtitle of the film: "A wild desire for freedom".

Just as Giulia offers multiple and seemingly contradictory versions of her identity, the film emphasises the multiplicity and relativity of truth and its dependence on the perspective through which events are recounted. This notion is rendered in the same initial episode cited above, where the employers perceive and declare that Giulia and her generation are depressed, an allegation which Giulia placidly but emphatically denies: "I'm not depressed", she replies, leaving the viewer in the position to side either with Giulia or with those who, with little basis, judge her. Subsequently, when Giulia returns home where her boyfriend is packing up his belongings, their disagreement not only over ownership of the various possessions but also of the status of their relationship is depicted by two contradictory versions of their common history. The same relativity of truth is echoed later at the home of the boyfriend's sister and her husband, who present very different, and we might add gendered, accounts of their Kenyan holiday, she is providing a romantic and positive version, he a negative one based on the financial losses incurred. In its continual exposition of accusations, conflict, and arguments often without resolution, the film refuses to provide answers but instead offers situations for reflection.

Unlike *Amanda*, Giulia has no family history that the viewer is given access to, as the film is steeped entirely in the present, and hence, also given Giulia's taciturn nature, our understanding of the character needs to be constructed on the basis of observation and interpretation of detail. The camera sensorily tracks Giulia's wanderings through a hot and smelly suburban Rome, dressed in her uniform of sorts: jeans shorts, green tee shirt, red flats and a small backpack, sipping water and nourishing herself on peanuts. Giulia pauses along the way in order to rummage through the garbage that lines the streets, 'gleaning' objects, primarily discarded toys, in what seems a clear nod to Agnès Varda whose work, along that of Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut, was an inspiration to the screenwriters. It is these childish objects (which she tenderly fingers, initially hoards, and eventually donates or sells), her activities entertaining and accompanying the elderly at the community recreation centre, and the sharing of her bottled water and

peanuts, which divulge a proclivity toward care. On the other hand, Giulia's receptivity toward care is an object of tension in the film. While she initially clings to her traditional heterosexual relationship that has ended, she finally lets it go through the symbolic gesture of discarding her cellphone. Her resulting homelessness, however, leads her to reluctantly seek out and accept the hospitality of her co-worker, Sergio. Her relationship with Sergio, his roommate, and neighbour, a community of equally marginalised characters who accept her, is one marked by closeness and distance. Paralyzed by their own problems and a sense of inertia that exudes from the atmosphere of the hot, semi-desolate, claustrophobic summertime Rome, their lifestyle runs counter to Giulia's "wild desire for freedom".

If it is a cement city that Giulia inhabits and wanders through, it is the sea and the freedom it represents that she craves, and the sea returns several times as desired destination in the film. "The sea" is the response Giulia provides in her initial interview when asked what she dreams of at night; it is the Roman seaside that Giulia convinces Sergio to drive them to on a hot Sunday afternoon and that she walks along in search of solitude; it is the sea that bears more gifts of children's toys; the seashore that provides her with a place to sleep. It is not, however, the crowded beach of the Fiumicino seaside that Giulia seeks, but an idyllic sea immersed in nature and devoid of people, a form of freedom that for Giulia seems achievable only far from the expectations and judgments of an unsympathetic society. The film ends with Giulia's discovery of that space of freedom, having travelled alone out of the city toward the pristine countryside of southern Tuscany. It is here that Giulia provides a final act of care; with a gesture reminiscent of Amanda, she feeds her final two stolen apples to a bridled horse and then sets it free. The camera then follows Giulia from behind, through the fields and towards a placid sea. With a series of images of Giulia, in her stolen bikini, frolicking, swimming, diving, and re-emerging from the water, the film ends, leaving her temporarily or permanently beneath its rippled surface.

"I'm the one who does not know how to live in this world", Giulia admits to Ciavoni, Sergio's roommate as we near the end of the film. "If you want to be alone, be alone", Ciavoni replies, "you don't have to also depend on someone". Giulia's actions, prompted by Ciavoni's words, mark on the one hand her desire for freedom. On the other hand, they are a response to a disconnected world – a world that does not listen to her, or labels her crazy, a cell-phone congested world where a passer-by will not acknowledge her plea to make an urgent call – an unreciprocated calling out for care. The world in which Giulia finds herself is incompatible with her own code, "a world already violated", as alluded to early in this paper, a world that needs rebuilding.

5. CONCLUSION: REMAKING CINEMA, REMAKING THE WORLD

At the 2021 Venice Film Festival, where Laura Bispuri's third feature film *Il paradiso del pavone* was screened, the director spoke of her deliberate choice to depict women in ways that deviate from stereotypical representations as a strategy to bring about culture change: "I tell stories about women that go beyond stereotypes [...] Societal change can also be set off by unhinging the female stereotypes that cinema has reinforced"²³.

²³ L. Bispuri, Interview by Elisa Grando. "Non c'è un solo modo di essere donna e nemmeno di amare", parola di Laura Bispuri oggi a Venezia", *Elle*, September 5, 2021, www.elle.com/it/showbiz/cinema/a37440608/laura-bispuri-film-il-paradiso-del-pavone-venezia-2021/.

Indeed, Italian cinema for the most part struggles to articulate nuanced perspectives and aesthetics that are capable of interpreting the complexities and concerns of contemporary women. The imperative to challenge and change the existing model is crucial to a rethinking of cinema and of Italian society at large. The films discussed above derive from the collaborative efforts of directors, screenwriters, and actors as responses to this imperative; they are committed to authorising each other, to unhinging stereotypes and to proposing new female characters and performances on screen. These films, examples of the feminist notion of *partire da sé*, or starting from the personal experience, carry with them back stories of on and off-screen relationships, the idea articulated by FAScinA of “essere [almeno in] due”²⁴ that result in final products which foreground an evolving form of female-centred cinema. By representing young transgressive women who do not feel at home in the world through a self-reflexive, at times jarring, cinematic language, they not only make a substantive contribution to the uneasiness and alienation that is an unfortunate feature of our age, but they deliberately unsettle viewers, provoking them to imagine and enact alternative ways of being together. As Michelle Murphy would argue, they propose a politics of dismantling and unsettling of a world already violated²⁵, or perhaps we should say, a world still violated. In this world that is still violated, where feminist battles believed to have been won resurface as on-going battles, Italian feminist practices, and in particular the notions of relationality and care, are fundamental if we are to imagine a cinema and a world that embraces difference, diversity, and inclusivity.

²⁴“Almeno in due. Donne nel cinema italiano”. <https://fascinaforum.org/2020/10/22/almeno-in-due-donne-nel-cinema-italiano/>.

²⁵ M. Murphy, “Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices”, *Social Studies of Science*, 45, 5 (2015): 716-737 (732).



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