The Gendered Landscape in the International Film Industry: Continuity and Change

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a response to the need for a comprehensive collection about women’s struggle for equality in the contemporary international film industry. Despite there being some excellent scholarly work in this area, to date, our information is limited. While knowledge of Hollywood, or Sweden for its trailblazing leadership, is widespread, much less is known about the drive for gender equality in other parts of the world. Chapters in this collection interrogate film industries in seventeen countries worldwide by offering a wide-ranging, critical assessment of practice, policy and progress and by establishing the range and scale of gender inequality and the urgency with which the issues are being addressed. As O’Neill and Domingo observe, social, economic and political conditions vary and “combine in different ways to enable or constrain women’s agency and leadership” (2015, p. 4). Many of the contributors acknowledge and address issues of diversity and inclusion, and undoubtedly, a far greater focus must be directed to intersectionality going forward. However, this collection is primarily about gender equality and focuses on, to quote Natalie Wreyford from her work on female screenwriters,
“the commonalities rather than the differences between women and racial [and other] minorities” (2015, p. 8).

Some contributors present detailed statistical research, others celebrate the women, past and present, whose work is part of film history and more offer snapshots or case studies about issues of particular concern. Approaches vary depending on the level of activism and gender awareness in individual countries. Whether attention is directed to screenwriters, directors, producers, below the line workers, film education, film festivals, the surge of activism that has surfaced in Western societies, the impact of #metoo and Times Up movements, or policy and intervention strategies, to name just a few, contributors offer an evaluation of what is, overwhelmingly, a gendered industry. An appraisal of the response from national funders is also included and ranges from those who are gender blind, or who minimise the existence and extent of gender inequality, to those who theoretically commit to equality but prevaricate on the best measures to implement change to others who have introduced formal gender policies and intervention strategies, with varying results. All are relevant to our understanding of the international landscape and will facilitate comparing and contrasting the pace, rate and effectiveness of change.

Feminist film historians have identified women filmmakers who have made important contributions to film but whose work had previously been overlooked or ignored (e.g., Acker 1993; Stamp 2015). In the same vein, a number of contributors here are mindful of the history of activism—a feminist film activism that is equally important to be cognisant of and track. For instance, gender equality in Sweden is “the culmination of a long struggle” initially driven by women film workers who had organised themselves to make demands in the 1970s (Jansson and Wallenberg). Similarly, a new generation of women directors appeared in Norway at that time gaining that country a “pioneering reputation” (Svane). In the late 1970s, in Germany, the Verband der Filmarbeiterinnen (VeFi: i.e., the association of female film workers) published a manifesto calling for 50% of the means of film production (Prommer and Loist). The 1970s was the “crucial decade” of feminist activism in the US with newly formed women’s committees of industry guilds and organisations like Women in Film (Brannon Donoghue). In Canada, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, artist-driven feminist filmmaking and distribution co-ops and collectives, such as Vancouver Women in Focus (1974–1992), supported women’s work and were advocates for equality (Brinton and McGowan).
In the 1980s, in Finland, a group of feminist film activists screened films directed by women and organised seminars on the issues of the day (Savolainen). Women filmmakers also flourished in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia, supported by the Women’s Film Fund established by the Australian Film Commission (1976–1989). But, between the withdrawal of the women’s funding stream and a feminist backlash, their numbers eventually declined (French). Previous waves of activism have slipped into historical darkness and, soberingly, often “without permanent change” (Cobb and Williams). This collection serves as a reminder that contemporary film activists are part of a new wave of a movement that stretches back well over half a century. It is a testament to current activism that we are united across time and place in the continuation of a struggle for visibility, voice and an equal share of resources.

**THE NUMBERS GAME**

Among the strengths of quantitative research “is its ability to identify the patterns” and provide “a solid evidence base” (Scott 2010, p. 235). The importance of statistics and data monitoring in making gender issues visible in the film industry was a position strongly promoted by the CEO of the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), Anna Serner, a champion for gender equality not only in Sweden but internationally (Swedish Film Institute 2017, p. 19). It is now widely accepted as an imperative first step in tackling the issue. Without it, the extent of women’s marginalisation can be denied or evaded (Liddy 2016). However, this collection does not set out to offer a cohesive, statistical analysis of a gendered film industry as the availability and extent of the data fluctuates widely, according to the extent to which it is made available by national funding agencies, some of whom provide only the most rudimentary data, and the extent to which individual researchers are themselves collating and monitoring national trends. For instance, Nigeria has few official statistics: “such data in very difficult to come by because the country does not keep records of such things” (Utaka). In Portugal, the Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (ICA) does not gather or provide clear statistics and “data remains untreated” though what information does exist suggests that “even when more films are being produced and supported exclusively by public funding, women remain excluded” (Baptista and Prata).

Yet, many contributors present statistics pertaining to the participation of women in key creative roles: usually defined as writer, director
and producer, what Smith has labelled “the holy trinity” (2009, p. 2). When women occupy these roles, it leads to more female professionals being hired and also has an impact on the number of female characters on screen and the kinds of stories under the spotlight (e.g. Lauzen 2015; Lauzen 2019). But, female directors, particularly, are faced with gender-specific industry challenges and roadblocks resulting in a struggle not only to create, as is evidenced in most of the countries here, but also to distribute their work. Research suggests that the percentage of all theatrical screenings of films directed by women is just 3% across the globe—“opportunities for women to secure like-for-like projects and to therefore gain equitable exposure for their work is seriously constrained” (Verhoeven).

Popular discourse can suggest we are moving inexorably towards equality but the data, when it is made available, can paint a contradictory picture—two steps forward, perhaps, but one step back. In 2016, there was much public debate when film production funding from the Swedish Film Institute reached its goal of funding at least 50% of women writers, directors and producers. There have been fluctuations since then but films supported by the SFI have generally done better in terms of gender equality. In the Swedish film industry, between 2013 and 2017, women were 38% of directors, 34% of screenwriters and 52% of producers though, soberingly, even achieving, or moving towards, numerical equality may not be sufficient to transform working conditions for female film workers (Jansson and Wallenberg).

The picture is similar in Denmark (2011–2014) with women comprising 34% of directors, 34% of screenwriters and 36% of editing roles across the entire film industry and all types of films. On average, every third producer and screenwriter of Finnish feature films was female in the years 2016–2018 but, interestingly, while the share of women directors is 39%, according to the Association of Finnish Film Directors, women directed only 25% of (fiction) features in 2018 and 2019 (Savolainen). Numbers in Norway are a little higher with 33% of women directors receiving public production funding for feature films between 2012 and 2016 while women producers were 42% in the same period. However, 2018 stands head and shoulders above other countries with the share of women directors at 53% though this may be an exceptional surge rather than something that might be sustainable over time. In contrast, in films without public funding, the numbers “are especially grim” (Svane).
Surprisingly, despite Iceland’s impressive record on gender equality, women’s presence in the film industry is “peripheral” with almost no research conducted to ascertain why that might be the case (Bragadóttir). While the total number of films released between 2010 and 2019 increased by 44%, the involvement of women in the industry declined, with the notable exception of women producers, a group that doubled. The growth of Icelandic film, over the last number of years, has not led to greater opportunities for women.

Moving away from the Nordic countries, a decline in the percentages of women in all creative roles is immediately apparent, some tipping below 30% such as—Austria, Germany, Portugal, New Zealand, US, and Poland. At the lower end of the scale, women film directors receive just 12% of public funding in Italy, though the situation is somewhat better with films for television. While comprising only 15% of all writers for the screen, women write 40% of Italian films, though the content is far from progressive, as Luciano and Scarparo discuss in some detail. In the same vein, the UK has been “steadily and disappointingly consistent at between 10 and 13 per cent year on year”, though writers and editors did a little better at 20% and 27%, respectively (Cobb and Williams).

Comparatively, Screen Australia and Screen Ireland appear to have made greater progress in terms of increasing the numbers of female screenwriters, directors and producers being awarded production funding. Screen Australia (SA) funded films were 47% female-led in 2017 and 56% in 2019 (French). But “female-led” may be misleading—since it requires women to comprise only two of the following: writer, director, producer and protagonist. Moreover, in November 2019, an open letter to the SA Board signed by 200 people, mostly Australian academics, denounced their September funding announcement of the same year. Despite SA’s high-profile gender policy, five feature film projects, all written and directed by men, were awarded funding, something that French evaluates in her chapter.

From 2011 to 2017, 21% of female writers and 17% of female directors were attached to Screen Ireland production funded films. But in 2018, SI projects with female directors and screenwriters attached increased to 36% and 45%, respectively, though, of course, a reliable assessment of progress can only be made by tracking the outcome over a number of years. However welcome these increases are, and there is cause for celebration when one translates dry statistics to real women who are finally able to get their projects off the ground, it is unclear whether they are
sustainable. Starkly, as Cobb has noted in relation to the small numbers of UK female directors, “reports that have produced data on multiple years show small ups and downs from year to year. Overall, progress toward gender equality is at best minor and at worst is non-existent” (Cobb 2020, p. 116).

Moving away from writing, directing and producing, some contributors also provide an indication of women’s inclusion in other roles, where data is available. Again, this is neither definitive nor exhaustive but nonetheless points to occupational segregation in film industries across the world. For instance, in Austria, women are minorities in cinematography and soundtrack composing, and across a number of technical areas, ranging anywhere from 4% to 10% with editing faring better at around 25%. “The more technical the jobs are (e.g., lighting, sound and camera), the smaller the share”, broadly true for Germany also (Flicker and Vogelmann/Prommer and Loist). This is echoed in the UK with cinematographers averaging 7% from 2003 to 2015. In Denmark, women are underrepresented in post-production positions, like editing, colour grading and sound-editing and especially in technical roles making up 10% or under in film, photography, sound and lighting positions but they are 80% of costume designers and “severely overrepresented” in costume, makeup, continuity and casting (Thorsen)—a situation replicated in Germany and in Poland where 80% and 93% (respectively) of costume designers and 87% of makeup artists are women.

Aylett’s work on female directors had previously exploded the myth that there are not enough skilled women available (Aylett [EWA] 2016). This is addressed by a number of contributors who reject such a simplistic explanation and point to structural barriers for women which restrict their ability to enter the industry and/or maintain a career. But for some roles, capacity building is required and education and pre-industry programmes are, according to Banks, “uniquely positioned to educate the next generation of media makers” specifically, in this context, women (2019). Different educational paths can lead to gendered industry roles which are maintained through stereotypes (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015). While space prohibits a detailed discussion here, the prospect of gendered lives in which the unresolved, and often unvoiced, issues surrounding motherhood, caring, and the demands of the film industry (Liddy and O’Brien, in process), cultural expectations, informal hiring practices, predominantly male film sets and the familiar “labyrinth” (Eagly and Carli 2007) that women can expect to face at various career points may be unpalatable to
young women who do not, in any case, see themselves mirrored in many of the technical industry careers or crafts (Doona 2020; Connolly 2020).

The Funding Game

There are few big budget opportunities for women in US studio films, despite the high-profile exceptions. Instead, in the US, the majority of women directors work primarily in independent productions characterised by lower costs, lower budgets and lower risk. Women directors continue to face “gendered barriers around bankability, risk, and experience” (Brannon Donoghue). This assessment of the US film industry could apply to many film industries worldwide.

Most of the film industries discussed in these chapters are publicly funded and have a gender policy and measures/initiatives in place to promote gender equality. Though their effectiveness varies considerably, without them it is doubtful whether gender inequality would be addressed by the wider industry at all, even with the work of overburdened professional and voluntary groups. Nonetheless, difficulties remain for key creatives accessing public funding and that is true over time and place. Moreover, there are outstanding issues around equality of funding amounts that can get buried in the “good news” stories and the positive gender equality discourses in circulation. With reference to Australia, French argues that statistics indicating women’s increasing share of production titles may work to conceal the fact that they are not getting an equal share of the available funds. An argument that might well be made for Screen Ireland (Liddy) and most of the funders discussed in this collection. Even in the Swedish film industry which we generally think of as somewhat more enlightened, films with a male lead have, on average, a 33% higher budget than films that lead with a female protagonist, and female protagonists are linked not only to lower budgets, but to “fewer screenings, lower PR-budgets and less audience” (Jansson and Wallenberg).

The data for film funding in Austria shows that the amount women received from 2012 to 2016 “shrunk with each stage” between script development funding (28%) and production funding (20%). The more women in a crew, the less funding the project was awarded (Flicker and Vogelmann). In Germany too, all funding tracks—script development, project development, production funding and dissemination, movie release and marketing—are marked by a gender imbalance. Finnish female
directors received only a quarter of the public financing from 2011 to 2015 while Thorsen is concerned that the Danish Film Institute (DFI) “does not illustrate how large the gendered discrepancy actually is in subsidy-portions” focusing, instead, on women’s lower application rate being the primary barrier to gender equality.

Svane suggests that in Norway women are receiving “less of the money than the numbers suggest” because they are being funded for short films and documentaries more readily than features—categories that generally have lower budgets, something that is replicated in Portugal, Poland and the UK, to name just a few. For instance, in the UK, women are more likely to make documentaries with a budget under £0.5 million than any other genre and proportionally more than their male colleagues (Cobb and Williams).

**Quotas, “Fairness” and New Directions**

In an attempt to equalise women’s share of public funding, the introduction of “quotas”, even if that term has not in all cases been used, has been considered in a number of countries. It is often claimed that the SFI operates a quota system, though Serner herself has contradicted that assertion. Quotas, effectively, replace the concept of “equal opportunities” with the concept of equality of result. Speaking about quotas in relation to board membership, Humbert et al. argue that there is evidence that quotas “can be a key driver of progress, particularly when associated with hard sanctions” and in contexts that are more gender equal (2019, p. 3).

Despite indications that quotas can help to change the culture French notes, there is “resistance” to quotas in Australia as well as an “active ambivalence to affirmative action” from many stakeholders, based on perceptions of “fairness”. In New Zealand, female filmmakers were advised by the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) that there was “no appetite” for quotas though the NZFC is now aiming for 5050 × 2021/2022, arguably a target not a quota and, according to Evans, one without any clear implementation strategy in place. The broader Danish film industry has “refused to discuss” them while the Danish Film Institute (DFI) has labelled gender quotas “extreme”, thus implicitly supporting the maintenance of the current status quo (Thorsen). In the UK, Cobb and Williams note that quotas are “widely considered illegal under the terms of the 2010 Equality Act [Jarrett, 2011]”.

However, voices are raised here and there proposing we revisit the debate or find alternative ways or achieving the same result. In Germany, a call for a 5050 quota, which originally surfaced in the late 1970s by the Verband der Filmarbeiterinnen, is still “driving discussions, albeit with renewed energy” (Prommer and Loist). Similarly, in Ireland, the Writers Guild of Ireland (WGI), the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland (SDGI) and Women in Film and Television Ireland (WFT) have called for gender quotas to be implemented for a fixed period of time in order to ensure that Screen Ireland’s own gender policy will be successfully embedded in the industry. Importantly, in an Irish context, this is a quota relating to production funding for film titles and makes no demands for equal budgets at this stage. However, when a formal request was put to Screen Ireland in 2019, they declined saying sufficient momentum was in play for now (Liddy).

In 2018, Norway’s Labour Party did propose radical affirmative action when they introduced a bill setting a goal of 5050 representation of men and women. If the goal was not met within three years, any public funding should automatically be split in half. It was met with an insistence that things were “getting better” and did not necessitate such a measure. However, more recently, the Norwegian Film Institute has stated “the ideal is equal share of the money and we will continue to discuss how to make this happen”, which may suggest an intent to tackle the financial disparity (Svane).

Initiatives undertaken by key Canadian funding agencies and the national public broadcaster in 2015–2016 could be classed as either “incentive” or “requirement” with incentive being an encouragement and reward-based approach and requirement stipulating action which must be met to secure funds. The National Film Board, albeit with a comparatively small budget, was the first to embrace the “requirement” approach with impressive results (Brinton and McGowan)—a reminder of the power of consequences.

A new approach in the UK that has been adopted by activists is to pressure the government to include diversity targets for film and television productions with accompanying tax relief (Cobb and Williams). And, in Ireland, new guidelines for the Irish tax incentive scheme for the industry call for “details on gender equality initiatives, diversity and inclusion initiatives” to be included in applications, though this scheme is as yet unproven and it is unclear if, and how, sanctions will apply (Liddy).
Quotas tend to spark controversy and prompt ideological disputes about merit, fairness and quality. In fact, “fairness”, towards women in the film industry, has been in short supply historically and a resistance to quotas can work to support a “privilege-based male status quo” and an uneven playing field (Murray). It may be timely to revisit and review quotas, or similar measures “with teeth”, if public funding is involved and when changes in the industry are painstakingly slow and have a history of stagnation and even reversal. Indeed, Verhoeven, Coate and Zemaityte argue that “male domination of the worlds film industries will not decline until there is a different distribution of film industry’s resources” (2019, p.151).

**Why Don’t They Apply?**

The argument that posits low levels of female applicants to funding bodies as the problem, rather than a systemic problem within the industry itself, has been identified by a number of contributors including Bragadóttir (Iceland), Thorsen (Denmark), Liddy (Ireland), Prommer and Loist (Germany) and Savolainen (Finland) and is also acknowledged as an issue in the work of French (Australia) and Evans (New Zealand). The argument states that projects by male applicants are not favoured for funding but women simply do not submit in enough numbers. Women also form a minority of applicants to the Finnish Film Institute and research is currently being undertaken to ascertain why but previous negative feedback and the difficulty of finding a producer have been mooted. French has also suggested that research would be useful to gain insight into why “decades of official policy and program response […] have not significantly increased female participation”.

In an Irish context, Liddy found that screenwriters and writer/directors implicitly perceive the existence of a gender order. Finding their work routinely sidelined and devalued, they cease to invest in a system perceived to be hostile (2020a, p. 89). This impacts on personal and professional confidence and can result in a disengagement from the process. Reflecting on the situation in Denmark, Thorsen extends this point arguing that the Danish Film Institute places a strong emphasis on the lack of female applicants, without any analysis of the factors that might be deterring women from applying for funding. The data, she argues, does not speak of the litany of previous rejections—“the
reasons for that rejection; the manner in which the applicant has been rejected and how that impacts on future applications” (Thorsen).

In a similar vein, Evans cites producer Kerry Warkia speaking about working with Maori and Asian New Zealand filmmakers “Doors have been closed for so long it’s not just about opening the door, it’s about going out to find [these filmmakers] because they walked away a long time ago” (Evans). Elsewhere, Bragadóttir suggests that in Iceland women’s resistance to applying for film funding has roots in a toxic industry for female workers which only came to light in November 2017, during the #metoo movement. Icelandic women publicised a litany of issues relating to wage inequality, sexual harassment, abuse of power by male supervisors and attempted rape. Bragadóttir’s interviewees acknowledge a changed attitude in the industry since then which may, potentially, translate into a proactive re-engagement.

Rather than immediately placing blame on women for not applying to film funders, it might be more pertinent to ask why, if an organisation is transparent and welcoming, would women not apply and why, when they are trained to work in the film industry, do many of them opt out or get edged out?

**Women on Screen**

Apart from the desirability of women taking up employment in an international film industry, there are other reasons why it is important to have women behind the camera. The greater the number of women in key creative roles, the greater the likelihood of having more female characters; of having less sexualised representations; and of having stories about women’s lives foregrounded, and this point is made by many contributors. However, there can still be a resistance to the inclusion of female protagonists and female story worlds. Writing about the Polish film industry, Gober mourns the loss of the “untold story”—lost to the culture by the “commissioning bias” which fosters conditions unfavourable to women and privileges films with “white, male-driven, narratives”, an argument central to gender equality debates in Poland.

Between 2003 and early 2016, just under 17% of feature films had a female protagonist in New Zealand features though a new gender policy is currently being developed which may see an increase in those statistics. In Norway, in the short period between 2016 and 2018, the number of female protagonists was 36.5%, representing a small decrease. Female
characters are also less visible than men in Finnish films with only one-third of female protagonists in Finnish fictional features between 2004 and 2014 and in Germany, around the same time frame, that figure was just under 17% in feature films. Industry interviewees in Sweden identify concerns within the industry about depicting complex female characters and sideling male characters in the belief that more male characters make films “mainstream” (Jansson and Walenberg).

As Liddy (Ireland) and Jansson and Wallenberg (Sweden) have discovered, there are still problems with opportunity and visibility for women as they age. Financiers, producers and distributors request more stereotypical portrayals, and likeability and sexual attractiveness are encouraged. Liddy’s work found, in an Irish context, that proactive female sexuality, particularly in older female characters, was not encouraged and female characters were unpicked rigorously by industry executives to ensure audience empathy (2020). However, there has been an impressive increase in the number of female characters in Screen Ireland funded films over the last two years, related, perhaps, to intense public debate and an all-female commissioning team (project managers). The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland also launched a “women’s stories” intitative in 2019 as part of their Sound and Vision 3 funding scheme. This desire for more female stories also emerges in an assessment of Screen Australia’s policies and what French has called “an unmet demand for female stories”.

For Utaka, more women directors would mean more female-driven stories about “women’s issues” in Nollywood. She laments the widespread inclusion of female characters as prostitutes, home breakers, thieves, the diabolical, destroyers of men among other negative roles. Her concerns are echoed by Luciano and Scarapro and their dismay at the one-dimensional portrayal of “scantily clad young women” involved in relationships with powerful older men. In Italy, there are still very few stories in which female characters depart from traditional, stereotypical and highly sexualised representations.

**Contemporary Activism**

While high-profile movements such as #metoo, #OscarsSoWhite and TimesUp have dominated the headlines and impacted in varying ways on many of the industries in this collection, particularly Italy, Iceland, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the US, activism is taking many different shapes and forms. Indeed, there was already a shift taking place in some countries that
predated the impact of the #metoo movement: these include #Waking the Feminists in Ireland, a revolt against male-dominated theatre and the arts and #BlackProtest (#CzarnyProtest) in Poland to protect abortion rights.

In the UK, “a network of activist groups” that include researchers, professional and campaigning bodies, exhibitors and filmmakers have worked together to bring attention to the problem, putting pressure on the film industry and public bodies. A similar situation exists in Ireland with the Writers Guild of Ireland, Screen Directors Guild of Ireland and Women in Film and Television Ireland to the fore of the challenge with advocacy, lobbying and public meetings the preferred approach to date (Liddy). In contrast, in Norway, filmmakers have taken to the streets and marched at the 2018 International Women’s Day parade with a banner proclaiming “We are half of the stories!” illustrating the growing discontent with the continuing underrepresentation of women in the industry.

Across the world, WFT or WFT-like groups, such as FC Gloria in Austria, are lobbying for change and initiating interventions to support female members. The extent to which they are vocal and forthright can vary, depending, arguably, on the composition of members, particularly board members, at any given time. For example, Women in Film Poland “intensified gender equality activism” there and built institutional support for gender equality. Protests and demonstrations have been spreading across the country as women filmmakers mobilised since 2015 (Gober). In contrast, WFT New Zealand did not speak out against the marginalisation of women by the NZ funders until relatively recently, arguably for fear of reprisal in a small country where “quiet words” was the preferred course of action (Evans), while Portugal could be characterised as having a “fragile” but intensifying activism (Baptista and Prata).

In Italy, the Se non ora quando or SNOQ (if not now when) movement saw over a million women from all backgrounds take part in simultaneous rallies all over the country to denounce Berlusconi-gate and challenge women’s representation in the media and their treatment in society. SNOQ continues to keep women’s issues at the forefront of public debate, uncovering inequalities and calling for legislative change. Italy’s own variant of #metoo was #unavoltache (that time that) but it failed to galvanise widespread support. Indeed, allegations of sexual misconduct were sometimes directed at the victims rather than the men who abused their power. Somewhat contentiously, many women activists
in Italy favour collective action which evades naming names and instead calls for major cultural change (Luciano and Scarparo).

**Conclusion**

Wherever you look, with some national variations, women are still underrepresented in film industries as screenwriters, directors, producers, cinematographers, editors and crew. They are less likely to be funded and when they are, the proportion of finances allocated to their projects is less than their male colleagues. The overall picture to emerge here is that of a gender order (Liddy, 2020b) in which women continue to be sidelined, devalued and underfunded with troubling similarities across the world. Researchers paint a picture of continuing exclusion; small incremental achievements and inevitable reversals; a lack of transparency and opaque decision-making; and a resistance to power sharing within the industry. It is no coincidence that as the number of women behind the camera increased in Sweden, so has the critique of the gender equality measures (Jansson and Wallenberg). It does appear, to quote French writing about the Australian film industry in this collection, that in Western industries globally progress is occurring “at a snail’s pace”.

Ultimately, it can be argued that the absence and marginalisation of women in the international film industry is another manifestation of patriarchal power. A discussion of patriarchy can seem outdated—a throwback to second-wave feminism. But, as Higgins writes in *The Guardian* newspaper, “as the #metoo campaign has grown, so has the use of ‘patriarchy’. It has burst its way out of the attic of half-discarded concepts to greet a moment – one of fourth-wave feminist ferment – in which there is a newly urgent need to name what women are still struggling against” (June 22, 2018).

Social media has played a significant role in consciousness-raising and the dissemination of gender research relating to women in the international film industry. Gender blindness has been replaced by a heightened awareness though, of course, awareness does not necessarily lead to action or to long-term structural change. Indeed, Brannon Donoghue assesses the wave of popular feminist activism in the US, so familiar to many of us, and questions whether “hashtag feminism” will actually lead to “measurable policies and tangible means of enforcement”. Cobb and Williams and others echo her reservations and sound a note of caution at the
optimism of some high-profile industry celebrities that “things are changing” and the industry has fundamentally been altered in terms of power. Gender equality efforts have not fundamentally changed industry norms or affected how gender is portrayed on film, or impacted on “the macho culture” on set (Jansson and Wallenberg).

Women’s global activism has heralded a new focus on gender power relations, discrimination, unconscious bias and structural inequalities, and the impact of these on women’s creative lives. Yet “waves” of activism are very much part of our feminist film history and can serve as a cautionary reminder that we have travelled this road before. Here we are in 2020 with the glass still half full, at best. During euphoric moments of seemingly imminent breakthrough, it might be steadying to remind ourselves that reversals and row-back have also been part of that history and “social change does not proceed without struggle and conflict” (Eagly and Carli, 2007). This is not to inspire hopelessness but to reignite the positive anger needed to maintain the pressure: the “anger of hope” (Chemaly, 2019). More optimistically, consistent and persistent global activism highlights the power of agency and strategic collaboration which functions to keep gender equality and diversity issues to the fore politically. When we work together, we amplify our voices, sharpen our resolve, recommit to common goals and search for new and innovative ways to move forward.

Though an analysis of the gendered impact of COVID-19 is outside the reach of this collection, which was already in process before the onslaught of the global pandemic, it is important to register that it has exacerbated exiting gender inequalities in a number of ways. The so-called triple shift sees women carrying a disproportionate responsibility for paid and unpaid work during the lockdown (Wilson, 2020). Moreover, it has been suggested that COVID-19 is likely to result in an economic recession, “a pink-collar recession” (Ribeiro, 2020) and those in temporary, precarious employment, often women, are “particularly vulnerable to economic shocks with many contracts having been terminated or frozen” (eige.europa.eu). In terms of our focus here, the film and television industries have been decimated with production cancellations, company closures and mounting job losses. This does not bode well for advancing gender equality; for, as Baird notes “equality programmes tend to go backwards after recessions and crises” (cited in Ribeiro, 2020).

So, what does the future hold? “If you look at the history [...] the industry changes only when it is absolutely forced to do so”, Martha Lauzen observes. “The real question: are they feeling enough pressure
to change the structures of the filmmaking business to welcome more diversity?” (cited in Lopez, 2018).

Are they, indeed? The research in this collection does not suggest we are on the cusp of radical change, despite many effective and well-intentioned interventions. But we must go on and only time will tell.

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