The Road to 5050: Gender Equality and the Irish Film Industry

Susan Liddy

INTRODUCTION

Irish film production “progressed in fits and starts” for much of the twentieth century but women have written, directed, edited and set designed for at least some of that time (O’Connell 2015, p. 410), albeit sporadically and in very small numbers (see also, Edge 2020; Pettitt 2020). However, prior to 2015, the Irish film industry was unproblematically male dominated characterised by occupational segregation, unconscious bias and perceived discrimination, and this situation was primarily unacknowledged and unchallenged (Liddy 2020a). Over the last five years, there has been a significant cultural shift. Within that relatively short space of time, industry discourse has become infused with the importance of gender equality; the need for more women behind the camera in key creative roles, the need for more women’s stories and perspectives on-screen, even if such a position is not universally welcomed and sometimes (mainly privately) deemed to be “going too far”. Public funders have issued quite forthright statements about the importance of achieving gender equality, and gender policies have been formulated and implemented.
This chapter will chart the evolution of the gender equality project in Ireland over that period of time by focusing primarily on the policies and initiatives of Fís Eireann/Screen Ireland (SI), the national development agency for “Irish filmmaking and the film, television and animation industry” (Screen Ireland, About Us) and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), the “regulator of public and commercial broadcasting” (BAI, About Us). Screen Ireland was known as the Irish Film Board (IFB) prior to rebranding on 18 June 2018 but is referred to as SI throughout, for clarity. Additionally, the work of professional and representative bodies such as the Writers Guild of Ireland (WGI), the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland (SDGI) and Women in Film and Television Ireland (WFT) will be considered. However, to provide context, the chapter begins with an overview of women in Irish culture and society.

**Women in Irish Society**

Fine Davis has observed that Ireland’s “transformation in terms of gender role attitude and behaviour” began later than in many other Western countries. Our geographic isolation as an island and the fact that our economic and industrial development did not accelerate until the early 1960s and the strong influence, until relatively recently, of the Roman Catholic Church go some way to explaining our slower development in this regard (Fine-Davis 2015, p. 4). Indeed, despite the fact that there have been many social and cultural changes in Irish society over the last few decades, according to the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI), Irish women remain “disadvantaged in the labour market; […] women also continue to be hugely underrepresented in the political, economic and administrative systems in Ireland” (2016, p. 5). Looking at the creative arts, it is clear that similar problems exist there. Women’s voices are underrepresented on radio (Walsh et al. 2015), in theatre (Donohue et al. 2016) and in the film industry (Liddy 2016, 2020a, b; Barton 2019; O’Brien 2019). Additionally, a recent study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) suggests that the division of paid and unpaid work (care work and housework) is heavily gendered in Irish society (Russell et al. 2019, p. ix). Until 2019, the impact of motherhood on Irishwomen’s career trajectory in the audio-visual industry was somewhat sidestepped by those advocating change. The pursuit of broad gender equality policies was prioritised though it is clear that motherhood and caregiving can and does shape women’s involvement, or lack
of involvement, in the industry and is now becoming a significant focus (Liddy and O’Brien, in process).

In many ways, Ireland has broken free from the conservative forces of the past that had such a profound impact on women’s lives; in May 2015, we became the first country to vote in favour of same-sex marriage in a national referendum and the result was a resounding yes. After decades of social conservatism, an overwhelming yes vote in May 2018 paved the way for the provision of abortion services here. A decisive yes vote in the divorce referendum followed in May 2019 which eased restrictions on divorce. Yet, in June 2019, when announcing the establishment of a Citizens Assembly to examine gender equality in Ireland, the Taoiseach (prime minister), Leo Varadkar, observed: “I don’t think anyone can argue for a second, that Ireland is a country in which men and women are equal […] the current rate of progress is too slow” (RTE 2019). Arguably, despite undeniable progress in the Irish film industry, the same argument might reasonably be made.

**Waking the Feminists**

To understand recent advances around gender equality, a review of the period from 2014 to 2015 is important. A number of events coalesced to catapult a debate on gender equality in the film industry into the public arena. These include the questioning of the status quo in public arenas (Liddy 2015a, b); academic research interviews with Screen Ireland personnel exploring (a) how decision-makers rationalised the low numbers of women funded and (b) advocating for the provision of statistical information pertaining to gender and funding (Liddy 2016); the appointment of a number of gender-aware and feminist Screen Ireland Board members including the chair, Dr Annie Doona, and the formation of advocacy groups to put pressure on the funders. However, the most significant challenge to the status quo was the emergence of a national campaign entitled *Waking the Feminists*. In brief, ten plays were chosen for a significant cultural programme called *Waking the Nation* to be performed at the national theatre, the Abbey, to mark the centenary of 1916, an important historical milestone which led to the foundation of the Irish State. Only one of those plays, a monologue for children, was written by a woman, Ali White’s *Me Mollser*.

The anger at that discovery, articulated by freelance set designer Lian Bell, gathered momentum and erupted on social media. It was met with a
cavalier response from the artistic director at the time, Fiach Mac Conghail, who said he made decisions based on who he “admired and wanted to work with” (O’Toole 2017, p. 137). Bell effectively issued a call to arms on November 2015, on her Facebook page: “If all these posts about wanting equality in the arts means something to you, say something. Even if you don’t want to bang a drum. Even if you don’t know what to say. Even if your comment is, I stand with you. Say something” (Quigley 2018, p. 86).

Waking the Feminists kick-started an interrogation of Irish women’s place in Irish culture and society and the accompanying imbalance of power. The Irish Times carried letters outlining the problem for women not only in theatre (Donohue 2015) but also in film (Liddy 2015b). Demands for gender equality in the film industry gathered momentum rapidly; panel discussions and media analysis carried impassioned and outraged debates. Advocacy groups were formed, and Irish state agencies, Screen Ireland (SI) and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) responded, at different times and in different ways, to these accelerated demands.

**Waking the Irish Film Industry**

Screen Ireland occupies a central position in Irish film-making and functions as a cultural gatekeeper, evaluating projects and awarding funding at development and production stages. Up until 2015, Screen Ireland was calling for “Irish stories” and seeking “Irish creative talent” ignoring the reality that the vast majority of films were about men and written and directed by men (Liddy 2015a). Indeed, at that time Screen Ireland did not gather or publish any statistical information on gender. Liddy found that between 1993 and 2013 only 13% of produced features funded by Screen Ireland had an Irish or Irish-based female screenwriter attached (2015c, p. 423), if co-productions and animated films are included that statistic was 19% for both screenwriters and directors (Tracy and Flynn 2016).

Geraldine Creed assessed all Screen Ireland’s schemes across a ten-year period, 2006–2015, and found the percentage of funded female directors, screenwriters and writer/directors remained steady at 18%, 21% and 22%, respectively, with “no perceptible increase in the gender representation of females in either creative or crew roles on BSE/IFB funded
productions across the ten-year study” (Creed 2018, p. 178). Interestingly, the only instance of consistent gender parity over that period was the role of producer in Screen Ireland’s short film scheme, which tipped just over 30% (Creed 2018, p. 158). The short film scheme has a significantly lower budget than either documentary or live-action feature film and sidesteps the “risk” equated with female film-makers internationally. Indeed, although a consideration of the monetary value of funding awards is outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting Creed’s observation that Screen Ireland’s feature film production funding awards between 2006 and 2015 show “a very low rate of representation for female producers on award amounts of over €750,000” (Creed 2018, p. 155).

The absence of any statistical data on gender from Screen Ireland at this time facilitated the avoidance of gender issues; indeed, the grim reality behind their “gender neutral” approach could not be adequately debated without statistics. “Project-led” development was deemed ungendered in a system that emphasised “quality” (Liddy 2016). In her analysis of the Swedish film industry, Lantz suggested that “quality” could be “gendered to male advantage” as men dominate the decision-making and gatekeeping positions and hence enjoy what she calls “the preferential right of judgement” as to how it should be defined (2007, p. 31). In 2014/2015, there was little acknowledgement in the Irish film industry that quality could be subjective. A neoliberal choice discourse justified the lower numbers of women in the industry; women did not apply in enough numbers and that was their “choice”. Such a position upheld the status quo and contributed to the cycle of female exclusion. Interestingly, application rates are being cited as a problem again in 2020, arguably to rationalise a lower success rate than was hoped for, as I will go on to discuss.

Galvanised by events arising from Waking the Feminists and, arguably, concern about reputational damage in the aftermath of Liddy’s letter to The Irish Times, Screen Ireland issued a statement through the chair, Dr Annie Doona, on 12 November 2015 stating it acknowledged a “major underrepresentation of women exists in Irish film” and went on to lament that women were “not fully represented either in terms of accessing funding for film or in public recognition of their talent” (Clarke 2015). Some weeks later, on 22 December 2015, the Six Point Plan, a gender policy, was unveiled. It included the provision of information; training (including unconscious bias training) and mentorship;
education; and, the jewel in the crown, the inclusion of a 5050 gender funding target over three years. This approach was aimed particularly at increasing the numbers of female screenwriters and writer/directors (Screen Ireland, Gender and Diversity Policy) informed, presumably, by international research suggesting that greater numbers of women in key creative roles have a positive impact on the number of women hired (e.g. Lauzen 2019, p. 6). While Screen Ireland is concerned with broader issues of diversity and inclusion and will be directing greater attention to those issues going forward, its first priority, at least up to mid-2020, has been gender equality—“our focus in ensuring a diversity of voices in Irish film and filmmaking will be on gender” (Screen Ireland, Gender and Diversity Policy). Crucially, the Six Point Plan also undertook to gather and publish statistics relating to applications and funding decisions, despite previous resistance.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is the broadcasting regulator in Ireland, funded from the television licence fee. The scheme of relevance to the independent film sector, Sound and Vision, provides funding for television (and radio programmes) with a stipulation that applicants have the support of a broadcaster who will guarantee the funded production will subsequently be screened on national or community-based television. During a colloquium on gender equality in the film industry in MIC, Limerick in 2016 it emerged in a presentation by BAI senior policy manager, Stephanie Comey, a supporter of gender equality, that the BAI had been gender blind. For instance, of the 386 television projects funded in the previous five-year period, just 19% had a female director. Moreover, the BAI had little or no ready access to statistical information about how their funding was being distributed until Comey herself undertook to uncover and provide statistics for her presentation (Liddy 2020a).

In the past, the BAI had argued that it was outside their remit to record and monitor gender statistics but after many public debates, internal discussion and meetings with stakeholders the organisation subsequently reviewed its policy and practice. Statistics are now available though they are not as accessible or published as regularly as those of Screen Ireland. In 2017, in its 3-year Statement of Strategy, one of the key strategic objectives under the theme Promoting Diversity and Plurality was to “foster a landscape that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society” (BAI 2017, p. 25). The aim of the BAI, then, was to create a
more diverse media in terms of content and media producers by the end of 2019.

Arising from that commitment, a *Gender Action Plan* was published in 2018 with a brief to engage in: “Data collection and publication, supporting research, encouraging the development of gender initiatives internally, and with stakeholders and enhancing accountability processes, including monitoring and reporting” (BAI 2018, p. 2). In order to address the gender imbalance on-screen and behind the camera “strategic assessment criteria now include gender” (Comey 2018). The BAI has, effectively, moved towards a “points system” in the evaluation of projects; those that demonstrate greater gender inclusivity, when all else is equal, will be favoured over those that do not. Not only must the gender of the proposed producer, screenwriter and director be declared at the application stage but, according to Comey, they must later report on the gender of those who actually occupied those key creative roles “in order to draw down the final tranche of payment” (Comey 2018). In April 2020, 36 TV projects were awarded 6.4 million euro by the BAI and more than 80 per cent of the successful projects identified between 1 and 4 women in key creative roles. This should, according to their statement, result in steady percentage increase in women’s representation over the next number of years as they have “sent a strong message[...]about the importance for the BAI of gender equality both on and off the screen” (BAI 2020, p.5)

**SPREADING THE WORD**

Through a combination of advocacy, negotiating with funding organisations and broadcasters, awareness-raising events with the membership and heightening female visibility in the industry, the EAC of the Writers Guild, the Screen Directors Guild and WFT Ireland have pursued gender equality since late 2015. Gender equality has also been the subject of dedicated seminars in third-level institutions (e.g. MIC Limerick, 2016 and 2017); in panel discussions with key decision-makers and practitioners which graced many of the major Irish film festivals; and in *Spotlight*, the Irish Film Institute’s “annual review of the year in Irish film”.

Additionally, the WGI and the SDGI, separately and under the umbrella of the EAC, organised tailored events for female screenwriters and directors, focusing on a range of skills such as networking whether with producers, directors or screenwriters; pitching; developing treatments; preparing funding documents; and introducing fiction and theatre
writers to writing for the screen, all with targeted financial support from the BAI. These interventions were essential when it became clear that, despite the fanfare surrounding Screen Ireland’s Six Point Plan, women screenwriters and writer/directors were not celebrating the new policy in a way that might have been anticipated. Indeed, applications to Screen Ireland were quite slow, and initially, the organisation did not “sell” its policy with any vigour adding to the suspicion that it would not make any fundamental difference to gender equality (Liddy 2020b). To counter those concerns, both guilds also held information meetings for their membership which focused on interrogating the Six Point Plan, and reassuring practitioners that the potential for real change was on the horizon and not simply “more of the same”.

Of particular note was the fact that many women writers in their 40s and older, who had worked through periods when even having a female protagonist in a screenplay was deemed unmarketable, had all but given up after years of rejection. Liddy captures the sense of fatigue, sadness and cynicism in the accounts of many such practitioners who identified an industry in which the perception exists that men have the proverbial inside track; that “lesser talented men have moved up”; and that, unlike women, men “have a right to fail” without sanction (2020b, p. 83). Their perceived relegation to second class, expressed in the devaluing of narratives about women’s lives, the showcasing of the male “star” director, the ubiquitous “boys club” and a gendered organisational culture, has potentially quite damaging consequences for their investment in the Irish film industry (Liddy 2020b, pp. 81–87). As Fels observes, women can often “incrementally lose their early convictions about their abilities and their talents” (2005, p. 254). Over time, they can become more reluctant to articulate that ambition and become demotivated and demoralised. This is not, in many cases, a lack of personal confidence, but a lack of confidence in a system that has long devalued their work and talent.

Gender statistics were eventually provided by Screen Ireland for films produced between 2011 and 2017, and the results largely echoed Creed’s findings for writers and directors revealing that women comprised 21% of screenwriters and 17% of directors though female producers were 59% over that period of time. The disproportionately large numbers of women producers might suggest that many more female-driven projects
would make their way into production than is currently the case. In a US context, Smith, Choueiti, Choi and Pieper have speculated whether: “female producers face strong headwinds advocating for female directors on open directing assignments? Or are they simply not championing other women?” (2019, p. 26). However, in an Irish context, it may signal that female producers do not always inhabit positions of power within the Irish industry, despite the existence of a number of high-profile female-lead production companies. Interestingly, in Creed’s analyses, Screen Ireland’s funding awards for 2006–2015 show the nine production companies with the highest financial awards for feature film production had 14 male producers attached to the projects versus just 4 females (2018, p. 155).

Concern at the relatively low number of applications by female screenwriters and directors prompted Screen Ireland to introduce a range of initiatives to incentivise female creative talent, rolled out in 2018. These include Enhanced Production Funding for Female Talent where up to 100,000 euro in additional funding is available to female-led projects; 50,000 euro for a project with a female writer attached; and 50,000 euro for a female director. For documentary productions, 25,000 euro is available for projects with a female director attached. A second initiative, POV, is a female-led, low-budget, film production and training scheme targeted at female screenwriter/directors. After a six-month development process which includes mentoring and training, four projects were selected for production, with a budget of up to €400K each (Screen Ireland, Gender and Diversity Policy).

There are conflicting responses to this scheme; many argue that it is a good way to facilitate more women to make their first feature, albeit on a low budget. Others contend that it prioritises training for women, yet again; that the funding is far too low and does not even provide a living wage for key creative personnel. In this analysis, the steering of women into low-budget film-making is merely being replicated in this scheme and will unlikely lead to systemic change in the industry: for example Verhoeven et al. suggests that “policies to ‘improve’ women filmmakers through remedial skills training are not the answer and have the effect of suggesting that women themselves are the cause of their own statistical failure” (2019, p. 151). Indeed, it could be argued that at least two of the scheme’s recipients are already too qualified to warrant what might reasonably be deemed an entry level opportunity—an experienced director of television drama and an already produced feature film screenwriter. That said, the success, or otherwise, of these initiatives has yet to
be determined and the outcome will not be known for some time. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry has come to a standstill in Ireland, as elsewhere, and it is unclear when these projects will now go into production.

In May 2018, Annie Doona acknowledged that progress was “glacially slow” but new statistics that emerged later that year tentatively pointed to something of a breakthrough. Production funding decisions with female directors attached increased to 36% and with female screenwriters attached rose to 45%. Greater numbers of women were starting to apply, suggestive, perhaps, of a cycle being broken. For instance, funding applications with female directors attached have risen from 15% in 2017 to 31% in 2018 (Screen Ireland, Gender Statistics). Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that considerably more work needs to be done to ensure consistency and to definitively embed change. A particular concern is to increase the number of female directors working in the industry, a problem not confined to Ireland, and one that does not appear to relate to pipeline difficulties but, rather, a lack of opportunity; directors need to be hired and gain experience. But film direction is a leadership role and subject to subjective risk assessment in a notoriously risk-averse industry. Leaders, across many sectors, tend to “clone” themselves in their own image “guarding access to power and privilege […] to their own kind” (Grummell et al. 2009, p. 333) explaining, at least partially, why the number of female directors across the world remains consistently low. Ironically, women-directed films generate no greater financial risk than films directed by men and often deliver greater investment returns (Sun 2016).

Despite the improvement in applications and funding decisions, Screen Ireland’s own gender policy, the Six Point Plan, failed to deliver 5050 by the deadline, December 2018, with the exception of its short film schemes. Celebrating Irish female directors who have moved from shorts to features, Screen Ireland states: “Short film is a crucial proving ground for any director and at the most recent world premiere of Screen Ireland’s short films, over 60% of the short films screening were directed by women” (Screen Ireland 2019). While short films offer a good training ground for women to hone their skills and can be effective in introducing more women into the industry it may be that such support provides “a limited and less risky investment in Irish female talent” (Liddy 2020b, p. 369). Ultimately, to move into features, women need the backing of a
production company and Screen Producers Ireland (SPI) have only tentatively involved themselves in the gender equality debate, something I will return to below.

Another positive outcome is the welcome indication that the resistance to female protagonists, in evidence pre-2014, has successfully been challenged. For example, 69% of films produced in 2017 with Screen Ireland funding had a female protagonist compared with 22% and 36% in 2016 and 2015, respectively (Screen Ireland, Gender Statistics). In the BAI Sound and Vision 3 Broadcasting Funding Scheme 2019, a “women’s stories” initiative was introduced in order to “widen the narrative, present new female characters, real or fictional” (BAI 2019). In its recent assessment of the scheme the BAI noted that while it was too soon to analyse the impact of the scheme it had resulted in approximately 100% of television projects being recommended for funding because of the inclusion of women’s narratives (BAI 2020, p. 2). While the initiative was broadly welcomed the argument has also been made that this is not particularly useful for female practitioners and it will not challenge a male-dominated industry as male teams can also submit projects with female leads.

**Quotas to Embed Change?**

Because progress is inconsistent and Screen Ireland has not meet its own 5050 target by 2020, there is concern that an important moment in the history of the Irish film industry will be lost. Currently, Screen Ireland is a highly feminised organisation with a recently appointed female CEO, Désirée Finnegan, replacing long-serving predecessor, James Hickey; three female project managers (commissioners); and a board of seven members, of which five are female, including the chair, Dr Annie Doona. However, the Screen Ireland Board serves for just four years. Indeed, Doona will complete her second and final term of office in March 2021. While the gender policy will remain in place irrespective of personnel changes in Screen Ireland, it would be desirable for gender equality to be achieved, in line with SI’s own policy, during the term of office of the sitting board who are well disposed to change.

The Writers Guild and Screen Directors Guild have called for gender quotas to be implemented for a fixed period of time in order to build on the positive work already begun and to ensure that Screen Ireland’s gender policy will be successful. While Doona and other members of the Screen Ireland Board have, over the last couple of years, publicly said
they would not rule out quotas, a public debate during the Galway Film Fleadh in July 2018 threw that position into question. Representatives from both guilds posited the prospect of “managed” quotas (tailored to suit each funding round) which would, for the moment, be measured merely in terms of the numbers of men/women funded, irrespective of the nature of the projects for which they are funded, the amount awarded or the size of the budget.

Orla O’Connor, the director of the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI), and Doona, SI chair, both panellists, adopted opposing positions on this question. O’Connor argued that quotas have the power to actually change the culture but Doona contended that it is better to change the culture first, and bring the industry along. The NWCI has previously (successfully) promoted quotas in relation to political representation arguing “without quotas, the pace of change is too slow. We only have to look at State boards as an example of this: a 40% gender target was set for State boards in 1993, and it has taken a quarter of a century to reach that target without a quota” (O’Connor, 11 March 2019). Pondering on the resistance to quotas as a solution to the under-representation of female artists in Britain in 2018, Kate McMillan argues: “Surely to propose that gender quotas may result in poorer quality work is simply to suggest work by female artists is of a lesser standard?” In any event, Screen Ireland has declined to adopt such a position, at the moment, arguing that there is sufficient momentum currently in play.

**Encouraging Producers to Invest**

Producers occupy a powerful position, some would say too powerful, in the Irish film and television landscape. Creed questions the “unique relationship” producers have with Screen Ireland, obtaining more support than any of the other creative roles and also enjoying greater funding opportunities from the European Commission’s *Media* funding programme (Creed 2018, pp. 157–158). Unlike the WGI and the SDGI, Screen Producers Ireland (SPI) did not adopt a public position supporting gender equality initiatives, and indeed, they did not proactively engage with the process to any great extent though they did organise a half-day diversity event in Dublin on 20 June 2019 to discuss “approaches that have been taken in other countries to support production companies as they introduce diversity policies and initiatives”. Yet, for gender equality
to become embedded in the industry the support of production companies is vital, particularly the larger companies. Anecdotally, it is often said that Screen Ireland has practised a softly, softly approach to the “problem” of producers’ lack of engagement, arguably to avoid fracturing relationships with the powerful players. However, as I will go on to discuss, that position may be challenged somewhat going forward.

In terms of ensuring the involvement of the larger production companies, 2019 appears to signal a change of approach from Screen Ireland who now state that with public funding comes responsibility to put “gender equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of their productions”. Whether this will be accompanied by sanctions is unclear. But it was followed, in April 2019, by a statement from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht outlining new guidelines for Section 481, the Irish tax incentive for the film, television and animation industry. Among the requirements in the Skills Development Plan that accompanies the application are “details on gender equality initiatives, diversity and inclusion initiatives together with a sustainability plan”. Some are hopeful that production companies may finally be called to account, since “buy-in” is important if gender equality is ever to become part of the fabric of the industry. It is not clear, however, what exactly will be achieved by this requirement and if it will lead to concrete change or whether it is a well-meaning but poorly thought out attempt to do something? One female producer remarked. “While it’s useful to require an equality policy from anybody in receipt of public funds, the implementation aspect is a very large unknown and I hope the benefits outweigh the costs. I’m unclear as to how much consultation (if any) was done with the producers responsible for implementation to ensure that it’s an effective tool”.

**Conclusion**

In 2018, for the first time, the Irish Government made a long-term commitment to film culture by directing funding of €200 million to SI from 2018 to 2027. Screen Ireland acknowledges that the film and screen industry “is poised to continue to increase and expand the significant economic and social contribution it makes to Irish society” (Screen Ireland 2019, *Statistics*). Achieving gender equality is particularly important in order to ensure women have an equal presence and a voice in
a burgeoning industry. Over the past four years, there has been a credible shift from a “gender-neutral” position (Liddy 2016) to a proactive engagement with gender equality issues to some effect. However, 5050 gender equality has not been achieved, and there is insufficient data at this stage to be sure whether long-term change will be the outcome. It is positive to note that 2018/2020 saw produced films from a number of female directors’ and screenwriter/directors’ including: Rebecca Daly (Good Favour), Carmel Winters (Float Like a Butterfly), Sinéad O’Shea (A Mother Brings her Son to be Shot) Cathy Brady (Wildfire), Christine Molloy—in partnership with Joe Lawlor—(Rose Plays Julie), Neasa Hardiman (Sea Fever), Aoife Crehan (The Last Right) and Emer Reynolds (Songs for While I’m Away), all of whom Screen Ireland has enthusiastically promoted. However, the welcome emergence of female talent does not necessarily signal a new order. Ireland is a small industry (Screen Ireland funded 21 feature films in 2018) and a reliable assessment of progress can only be made by tracking the outcome over a number of years. However, the recent shortlist for the Irish Film and Television Awards (IFTA), the Irish “oscars”, saw just 1 woman out of 6 nominated for best film script and 2 women out of 7 nominated for best film director arguably suggestive that the broader film industry is not anywhere near 5050.

Despite SI and the BAI being more gender-aware in 2020, and despite their investment in achieving gender equality, considerable work remains to be done. After the panel discussion at the Galway Film Fleadh, 2019, Comey expressed concern about the rate of progress for female directors tweeting: “more action needed for women directors if we want 5050 by 2020”.10 Some weeks earlier Doona had addressed the vexed question of producers investing in the gender equality process explaining that Screen Ireland is taking a proactive approach with production companies telling them: “if you’re bringing in projects to Screen Ireland where’s your gender policy, where’s your gender plan? I think it’s fair to say that’s been challenging for the industry” (May 30, 2019).11 Challenging for production companies, it may be, but whether it is challenging enough to shift the balance of power in the Irish film industry is yet to be determined. Screen Ireland has reverted to stating that women are not applying in enough numbers, which may, indeed, be one consideration. However, a proactive funding organisation with a gender policy, gender targets and a time line for achieving those targets may need to explore other avenues to attract female applicants. To expect that women will solve the
problem themselves, as individuals, is to downplay the systemic nature of that problem. Women’s choices and decisions are shaped by prevailing gender inequalities; examples from the corporate world are instructive and suggest that women often have a lower sense of entitlement and are less likely to put themselves forward for positions they know “systematically favour their male colleagues” (Grace et al. 2005, p. 5).

The contribution of professional organisations and representative bodies continues to be significant in terms of advancing gender equality in the industry through advocacy, education and the promotion of female film-makers and their work. The introduction of quotas continues to be a pressing issue for both the WGI and SDGI. Employing a different strategy up to now, WFT Ireland’s primary, but not exclusive, focus relates to increasing the visibility and promotion of Irish screen professionals. However, in a strategic review of the organisation in 2019 members stressed the importance of a ‘watchdog’ role, arguably an indicator of increased politicisation. It was WFT Ireland, in partnership with the French Collectif 5050, who initiated the 5050x2020 Charter for Parity and Inclusion in Ireland and 8 Irish film festivals have already signed “pledging” transparency and accountability. As a consequence of endeavours such as these, there is an awareness of gender equality issues circulating within the film community. Perhaps the struggle for gender equality must be fought on a variety of fronts. It has been argued that if the industry is ever to “effectively redistribute power, then change must also occur at scale—from the smallest of habits to the widest of policies” (Verhoeven et al. 2019, p. 136). However, increased awareness does not necessarily translate into action as lessons from other countries have demonstrated; the slow rate of change, the possibility of losing momentum and the likelihood of gender fatigue over time are very real possibilities.

The picture emerging suggests there is some way to travel before gender equality is truly embedded in the Irish film industry; a laudable attempt has been made but power still very much resides in male hands. In 2019, Annie Doona reiterated Screen Ireland’s position saying: “we have vowed to tackle inequality in Irish filmmaking and screen content […] and achieving 5050 gender equality remains our priority.” Despite these fighting words, it is unlikely that Screen Ireland or the BAI will hit 5050 in 2020, particularly post Covid-19 and the challenges facing the industry on so many fronts. If it is achieved, it will be a “head count”
at best. As is the case internationally, the bigger question about parity of funding remains untouched, a battle for another day.

NOTES

1. The author is currently Chair of the EAC of the WGI and Chair of WFT Ireland. Between April 2017 and December 2019, she was chair of a joint EAC representing the WGI and the SDGI. She has been active in working for gender equality as a researcher and an advocate since early 2014.
2. Women in the Irish Film Industry: Moving from the Margins to the Centre, Dr Susan Liddy MIC, Limerick, 2016.
3. Women in the Irish Film Industry: Moving from the Margins to the Centre, Dr Susan Liddy MIC, Limerick, 2016; New Horizons: Women in the Irish Film and Television Industries, Dr Susan Liddy, MIC, Limerick, 2017.
4. See It—Be It! Putting Women in the Picture, EAC, Galway Film Fleadh, 2016; Building Momentum: The Road to Gender Equality, EAC and WFT, Galway Film Fleadh, 2017; Balancing the Industry: The European Perspective, Creative Europe Ireland and WFT Dublin 2017; Accelerating Gender Equality: Time for Quotas? EAC and WFT, Galway Film Fleadh, 2018; The Female Voice, WFT, Still Voices Short Film Festival 2018; Inclusion and Best Practice in the Film Industry, WFT, Cork International Film Festival, November, 2018; Countdown to 5050x2020: Where Are We Now? EAC and WFT, Galway Film Fleadh, July 2019.
5. Check-In on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight 2019; A Catch-Up on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2018; A Catch-Up on Gender Equity, IFI Spotlight, 2017; Towards Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2016.
6. A Catch-Up on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2018.
7. Screen Producers Ireland. SPI Diversity Event. Retrieved, July 22, 2019, from https://www.screenproducersireland.com/events/spi-diversity-event.
8. Screen Ireland Production Catalogue (2019) [online], https://www.screenireland.ie/about/ifb-production-catalogues-and-location-brochure/production-catalogue, p. 2.
9. Screen Ireland. Industry Notice: Key Changes Introduced to Section 481 Including a New Requirement for a Skills Development Plan. Retrieved April 20, 2019, from https://www.screenireland.ie/news/industry-notice-key-changes-introduced-to-section-481.
10. Stephanie Comey, BAI Tweets, July 13, 2019.
11. Annie Doona, Check-In on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2019.
12. 5050en2020. www.5050x2020.fr.
REFERENCES

BAI. (2018, December 21). BAI Focuses on Women’s Stories Under Sound and Vision Schemes. Retrieved July 27, 2019 from https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-focuses-on-womens-stories-under-sound-vision-scheme/.

BAI. (2019). About Us. Retrieved 22 July, 2019 from https://www.bai.ie/en/about-us/.

BAI. (2020). Review of the BAI Gender Action Plan for Activities 2018 and 2019 and Proposed Activities for 2020. Dublin: BAI.

BAI Annual Report 2017. (2017). Retrieved July 28, 2019 from https://www.bai.ie/en/media/sites/2/dlm_uploads/2018/11/20181011_BAI_AR_2017_English_vFinal_SH.pdf.

Barton, R. (2019). Irish Cinema in the Twentieth First Century. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. (2018). Gender Action Plan. Retrieved July 22, 2019 from https://www.bai.ie/en/media/sites/2/dlm_uploads/2018/04/20180423_BAI_GenderActionPlan_vFinal_AR.pdf.

Clarke, D. (2015, November 12). Irish Film Board Issues Statement on Gender Inequality. The Irish Times. Retrieved June 25, 2019, from http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/screenwriter/2015/11/12/irish-film-board-issues-statement-on-gender-equality/.

Comey, S. (2018, April 27). Power Point Presentation. Retrieved July, 28, 2019 from https://ifi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2.-Stephanie-Comey-IFI_Spotlight_GenderAP_SC-amended.pptx.

Creed, G. (2018). Women in the Power Sphere of Film and Television Production in Ireland: An Analysis (Unpublished master’s thesis). Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Ireland.

Donohue, B. (2015, November 4). The Irish Times. Retrieved July 29, 2019 from https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/women-and-the-abbey-theatre-1.2415780.

Donohue, B., Dowd, C., Dean, T., Murphy, C., Cawley, K., & Harris, K. (2016). Gender Counts: An Analysis of Gender in Irish Theatre 2006–2015. Dublin: Waking the Feminists.

Edge, S. (2020). Feminist Reclamation Politics: Reclaiming Maeve (1981) and Mother Ireland (1988). In S. Liddy (Ed.), Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and Storytellers (pp. 35–48). Cork: Cork University Press.

Fels, A. (2005). Necessary Dreams: Ambition in Women’s Changing Lives. New York, NY: First Anchor Books.

Fine-Davis, M. (2015). Gender Roles in Ireland: Three Decades of Attitude Change. London and New York: Routledge.

Grace, M., Leahy, M., & Doughney, J. (2005). Response to Striking the Balance: Women, Men, Work and Family. Retrieved June 18, 2020 from www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/.../files/strikingbalance/.../114.d.
Grummell, B., Devine, D., & Lynch, K. (2009). Appointing Senior Managers in Education. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 37*(3), 329–349.

Lantz, J. (2007). *About Quality: The Film Industry’s View of the Term Quality.* Stockholm: WFT Sverige.

Lauzen, M. (2019). *The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2018.* Retrieved July 18, 2019, from www.womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp.../2018/2017_Celuloid_Ceiling_report.pdf.

Liddy, S. (2015a, April 20). Missing in Action: Where Are the Irish Women Screenwriters? *Film Ireland.* Retrieved July 21, 2019, from http://www.filmireland.net/2015/04/.../missing-in-action-where-are-the-irish-women-screenwriters.

Liddy, S. (2015b, November 11). Women and the Irish Film Industry. *The Irish Times.* Retrieved 24 July, 2019 from https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/women-and-the-irish-film-industry-1.2424444.

Liddy, S. (2015c). Look Who’s Talking! Irish Female Screenwriters. In J. Nelmes & J. Selbo (Eds.), *Women Screenwriters: An International Guide* (pp. 410–433). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Liddy, S. (2016). ‘Open to All and Everybody?’ The Irish Film Board: Accounting for the Scarcity of Women Screenwriters. *Feminist Media Studies, 16*(5), 901–917.

Liddy, S. (2020a). Setting the Scene: Women in the Irish Film Industry. In S. Liddy (Ed.), *Women in Irish Film: Stories and Storytellers* (pp. 1–22). Cork: Cork University Press.

Liddy, S. (2020b). Where Are the Women? Exploring Perceptions of a Gender Order in the Irish Film Industry. In S. Liddy (Ed.), *Women in Irish Film: Stories and Storytellers* (pp. 61–86). Cork: Cork University Press.

Liddy, S., & O’Brien, A. (Eds.). (in process). *Media Work, Mothers and Motherhood: Negotiating the International Audio-Visual Industry.* London: Routledge.

McMillan, K. (2018). *Representation of Female Artists in Britain During 2018.* London, UK: Freelands Foundation.

NWCI. (2016). *Government Misses Key Opportunity to Increase Women’s Representation in Local Elections.* Retrieved July 14, 2019, from https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/government_misses_key_opportunity_to_increase_womens_representation.

O’Brien, A. (2019). *Women, Inequality and Media Work.* London: Routledge.

O’Connell, D. (2015). Ireland: Overview. In J. Nelmes & J. Selbo (Eds.), *Women Screenwriters: An International Guide* (pp. 410–422). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
O’Toole, E. (2017). Waking the Feminists: Re-imagining the Space of the National Theatre in the Era of the Celtic Phoenix. *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory, 28*(2), 134–152.

Pettitt, L. (2020). Pat Murphy: Portrait of an Artist as a Filmmaker. In S. Liddy (Ed.), *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and Storytellers* (pp. 203–218). Cork: Cork University Press.

Quigley, C. (2018). #Wakingthefeminists. In E. Jordan & E. Weitz (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (pp. 85–91). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

RTE. (2019). *Citizens Assembly Set to Examine Gender Equality*. Retrieved, June 12, 2019 from https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2019/0612/1054940-gender-equality/.

Russell, H., Grotti, R., McGinnity, F., & Privalko, I. (2019). *Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute & Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Retrieved July 21, 2019, from https://www.esri.ie/publications/caring-and-unpaid-work-in-ireland.

Screen Ireland. *About Us*. Retrieved June 17, 2019, from https://www.screenireland.ie/.

Smith, S. L., Choueiti, M., Choi, A., & Pieper, K. (2019). *Inclusion in the Director’s Chair: Gender, Race & Age of Directors Across 1,200 Top Films from 2017 to 2018*. USC: Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

Sun, R. (2016). *Films Directed by Women Receive 63% Less Distribution than Male Helmed Movies* [Exclusive]. The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved June 16, 2020 from https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/study-films-directed-by-women-907229.

Tracy, T., & Flynn, R. (2016). Quantifying National Cinema: A Case Study of the Irish Film Board 1993–2013. *Film Studies, 14*(1), 32–53.

Verhoeven, D., Coate, B., & Zemaityte, V. (2019). Re-Distributing Gender in the Global Film Industry: Beyond #MeToo and #MeThree. *Media Industries, 6*(1), 135–155.

Walsh, K., Suiter, J., & O’Connor, C. (2015). *Hearing Women’s Voices? Exploring Women’s Underrepresentation in Current Affairs Radio Programming at Peak Listening Times in Ireland*. Dublin: NWCI.