Global Women's Cinema

Ince, Kate

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Abstract: This essay draws on established and more recent debates about world cinema and on recent feminist writings about women's cinema in order to argue that in the 2010s, women's cinema should be regarded as (a) world cinema. By offering a survey of how nations and regions without a tradition of women's film-making have begun to join those that do have such a history (albeit often discontinuous and under-researched), it argues that books such as Patricia White's *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* and Sophie Mayer's *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* have made the case for a global women's cinema compelling and irresistible.

In the twenty-first century, a literature suggesting that women's cinema be considered as (a) world cinema has begun to emerge. Both of these terms – 'women's cinema' and 'world cinema'– are contested labels with multiple possible meanings, which makes an introductory summary of debates about their usage advisable, but before offering even this, a quotation from feminist film scholar Kathleen McHugh's article 'The World and the Soup: Historicizing Media Feminisms in Transnational Contexts' (McHugh 2009) will show how what she calls the "problem of the world" has been engaged with afresh in twenty-first century feminist film studies:

> In the past decade, feminist film scholars have employed a number of strategies to engage this "problem of the world" and the distinct, often paradoxical *transnational* cultural specificities of women's and feminist film production. They have recovered and remobilized the concept of "women's cinema," first popularized by Anglophone scholars such as Claire Johnston,

> and submitted it to the politics of location, charting its instantiation across and through different cultural contexts and modes of production. In monographs, articles, and special issues of journals, their work advances transnational conceptual frameworks such as "minor cinema" or "women's cinema as world cinema" to apprehend women's creative, diverse, and transnational contributions to cinema systematically, beyond encyclopedic reference and national or regional formats (McHugh 2009: 118)

Here McHugh refers first to Ella Shohat's essay 'Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation and the Cinema', then (along with Claire Johnston's discussion of women's cinema in her 1973 essay 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema') to Adrienne Rich's coinage of the concept of 'the politics of location' in an essay included in Rich's *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*: *Selected Prose 1979--1985*. The 'transnational conceptual frameworks' of 'minor cinema' and 'women's cinema and world cinema' she alludes to next were offered in Alison Butler's book *Women's Cinema: the Contested Screen* (2002), and by Patricia White, first in the *Global Cartographies of Cine-Feminisms* programme for a conference held in April 2008 at Ewha Woman's University, Seoul, South Korea (McHugh 2009: 144 n18) and more recently in *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms*. Another recent book-length study that advances discussion of women's cinema as a global phenomenon is Sophie Mayer's *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (2016), an energetic manifesto for women's film-making that ranges from the 'world-beating cultural phenomenon' (Mayer 2016: 1) that is the 2013 Disney production *Frozen* (written and co-directed by Jennifer Lee) to a considerable number of films directed by Mexican, African and Chinese women. The subject of both *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* and *Political Animals* is twenty-first century film: White confirms that her book's primary focus 'is on directors who made their first features after 2000' (White 2015: 7) after explaining how 'the contours of women's cinema

[were] redrawn by shifts in global production, circulation, and evaluation of films as well as by changing perceptions and practices of feminism' (White 2015: 6) in the first decade of the 2000s. Mayer, after citing White's attention to '"the worlding of women's cinema" and "the gendering of world cinema" as twenty-first century effects', insists that what is new about the 'new feminist cinema' of the twenty-first century is 'its negotiation of a transgenerational feminist film history of four decades within a reflexive awareness of the interruption and re-vision of feminisms, and interconnectedly of film cultures, in the new millennium' (Mayer 2016: 5-6).

Butler's *Women's Cinema: the Contested Screen* (2002) has perhaps come closer than any other to tracing a genealogy of its titular concept, the early popularization of which is linked by McHugh to Claire Johnston's work of the first half of the 1970s. Its contestatory character is explained by Butler as follows:

> Women's cinema is not 'at home' in any of the host of cinematic or national discourses it inhabits, but . . . is always an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting the conventions of established traditions. . . . The distinctiveness of women's film-making is therefore not based on an essentialist understanding of gendered subjectivity, but on the position – or positions – of women in contemporary culture . . . : neither included within nor excluded from cultural traditions, lacking a cohesive collective identity but yet not absolutely differentiated from each other (Butler 2002: 22).

Citing exactly these two sentences approvingly, White expresses her matching sense 'of the antiessentialist and essential project of connecting up all kinds of women's interventions in the medium of cinema with each other' (White 2015: 13). Butler ended her book with a discussion of Deepa Mehta's *Fire* that summed the film up as 'an imperfect women's film, which rises to some of the challenges of transnationalism

but fails to negotiate others' (Butler 2002: 123), thus signaling a connection between her own idea of women's cinema as minor cinema and the transnationalism explored in much greater depth by critics such as White. White, who mentions that 'some might find the term [women's cinema] dated to the analog era of second-wave feminism' but firmly counters this tendency by stating that 'the discursive terrain referenced by women's cinema is still very much at stake' (White 2015: 3), observes that questions of gender have yet to be 'significantly' brought together with the remappings of world cinema currently being undertaken by scholars of film, postcolonial studies and transnational studies in many countries worldwide (White 2015: 6). Her own book and Mayer's *Political Animals* have decisively advanced this *rapprochement* of fields, and this is to my mind partly because both authors do not run away from the cries of 'essentialism!' and 'ghettoization!' that the concept of women's cinema has often inspired, electing instead to view it positively and with an open mind. The project of 'connecting up all kinds of women's interventions in the medium of cinema with each other' (White 2015: 13) requires a drive towards inclusivity and a resolve to bring together not just practitioners working in locations far removed from one another, but critical and theoretical perspectives and literatures not often enough considered in the same frame. The survey of twenty-first century women's film-making worldwide around which this essay is organized will emphasize connection and inclusivity over fragmentation and exclusion, and my intention in supplying it is to imitate White's strategy in *Women's Cinema, World Cinema,* where she contributes to making women's cinema a worldwide phenomenon by discussing it in those terms.

As Saër Maty Bâ and Will Higbee note in the introduction to their co-edited volume *De-westernizing Film Studies*, contemporary moving image culture 'is more globalized and diversified than at any time in its history' (Bâ and Higbee 2012: 1). The fragmentation and disconnection that the forces of twenty-first century global capitalism threaten would seem to make the work of 'connecting up' all the more important, and Bâ and Higbee, like White and Mayer, mention its importance to their project: '*De-Westernizing Film Studies* complicates and/or rethinks how local, national, and regional film cultures "connect" globally, seeking polycentric, multi-directional, non-essentialized alternatives to Eurocentric theoretical and historical perspectives found in film as both an artistic medium and an academic field of study' (Bâ and Higbee 2012: 1). The above description seems entirely pertinent to the approach White takes to women's cinema as a field in *Women's Cinema, World Cinema*, and I shall for this reason be guided by it too when setting out the understanding of women's cinema as (a) world cinema that I formulate in the rest of this chapter. In entitling their book *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, Bâ and Higbee are forging, by means of novel terminology, a path that overlaps with twenty-first century debates about world cinema while remaining distinct from them. The 'polycentric, multi-directional, non-essentialized alternatives to Eurocentric theoretical and historical perspectives' (Bâ and Higbee 2012: 1) that they say they are seeking have also been sought in much of the work on world cinema drawn on by contributors to their volume, and I shall comment briefly on this set of debates before looking more closely at the geopolitics of contemporary women's film-making.

Polycentric multiculturalism versus uncentred inclusivity: World Cinema in the twenty-first century

In 'Situating world cinema as a theoretical problem,' the introduction to their edited collection *Remapping World Cinema* (2006), Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim note that world cinema shares with world literature 'an investment in the Third World and the postcolonial' (Dennison and Lim 2006: 2). An emergent field of study that film studies was grappling with as Dennison and Lim prepared their volume and that is younger than either postcolonial studies and Third World Studies is transnational studies, which must now be added to the list of interdisciplinary areas essential to any mode or medium of culture qualified by 'world'. Since Third Worldism and postcolonial studies predate scholarship on the transnational, however, feminists engaged with them earlier, leading to key publications in feminist postcolonialism such as Ella Shohat's 'Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation and the Cinema' (1997). Appearing shortly after *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (Stam and Shohat 1994), the volume of postcolonial criticism she co-wrote with Robert Stam, Shohat's essay discusses a range of feminist film and video works produced between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, declaring that she means this 'as a simultaneous critique both of Third-Worldist anticolonial nationalism and of First-World Eurocentric feminism' (Shohat 1997: 184). The Eurocentrism – or at least, thoroughgoing Western-ness – of feminist film theory of the 1970s and 1980s is undeniable, and Shohat's critique pinpoints how the 'generally monocultural agenda' (Shohat 1997: 184) it pursued inhibited the located, material politics espoused by multicultural feminists:

> Prestigious feminist film journals have too often ignored the scholarly and cultural feminist work performed in relation to particular Third-Worldist national and racial media contexts; feminist work to empower women within the boundaries of their Third-World communities was dismissed as merely nationalist, not "quite yet" feminist. Universalizing the parameters for feminism and using such ahistorical psychoanalytical categories as "desire", "fetishism", and "castration" led to a discussion of "the female body" and "the female spectator" that was ungrounded in the many different – even opposing – women's experiences, agendas, and political visions (Shohat 1997: 185).

Offering a list of eleven 'Third-Worldist' women filmmakers from Guadeloupe, Colombia, Lebanon, Cuba, Senegal, India, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Egypt, Tunisia and Puerto Rico, Shohat asks rhetorically whether their prominence at Third-World 'rather than feminist film programs and conferences' (Shohat 1997: 185) can be a coincidence. That Third-Worldist anticolonial nationalism as well as this First-World Eurocentric feminism is the target of her critique is assured by Shohat's principal focus on later generations of female filmmakers than the eleven Third-Worldist women she lists initially, and by her illustration of how the revolutionary paradigm they adopted was anchored in 'the resistance work these women have performed within their communities and nations' (Shohat 1997: 186), always part of a local and specific struggle, and always multicultural rather than monocultural. What she is attempting to do in 'Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation and the Cinema' is 'to forge a "beginning" of a post-Third-Worldist narrative for recent film and video work by diverse Third-World, multicultural, diasporic feminists' (Shohat 1997: 187),

and this entails situating the work in question 'between gender/sexuality and nation/race' (187), after the narratives of women's liberation and anticolonial revolution yet before the post-postmodern and post-decolonializing stage of globalization that began at around the turn of the new millennium. By 1997 the term "Third World" itself had begun to be viewed 'as an inconvenient relic of a more militant period' (Shohat 1997: 188), and the Three-worlds theory and accompanying Three-cinema theory in which 'First Cinema is cinema made in Hollywood, Second Cinema is the *auteur* cinema of the *nouvelle vague* or *cinema novo*, and Third Cinema is a cinema of liberation films "that the System cannot assimilate and which are foreign to its needs, or…film that directly and explicitly set out to fight the system"' (Dennison and Lim 2006: 5) had come to seem simplistic and homogenizing, limiting in its genderedness in comparison to the work of feminist critics such as the Egyptian Nawal El-Saadawi, the Indian Vinz Mazumdar, the Sri Lankan Kumari Jayawardena, the Moroccan Fatima Mernissi, and the Brazilian Lelia Gonzales (Shohat 1997: 188).

Dudley Andrew's chapter in Dennison and Lim's collection drew attention to the importance of Shohat and Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism* as 'a 'first and crucial "World Cinema" textbook'' (Dennison and Lim 2006: 5). *Unthinking Eurocentrism* had included a call for polycentric filmmaking intended to directly challenge the 'Hollywood and the rest' thinking that dominated early contributions to debates about world cinema, such as Wimal Dissanayake's chapter 'Issues in World Cinema' for *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (1998) and John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson's *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* (2000). The notion of polycentrism is decisively taken up by Lucia Nagib in her essay for *Remapping World Cinema*, 'Towards a

positive definition of World Cinema', which she begins by stating the indisputable truth that to define 'world cinema' as 'non-Hollywood cinema' is a 'restrictive' and 'negative' (Nagib 2006: 30) approach to the phenomenon at issue. The Three-worlds and Three-cinema theory whose insufficiency for a post-national and diasporic world Shohat had sought to update in 'Post-Third-Worldist Cinema' also fails to satisfy Nagib, at least in the manner it is drawn on in two books that appeared in 2003, Guneratne & Dissanayake's *Rethinking Third Cinema* and James Chapman's *Cinemas of the World*, which is divided into three sections entitled 'Hollywood Cinema', 'European Cinemas' and 'World Cinemas' respectively. 'The result of viewing world cinema as 'alternative' and 'different' is that the American paradigm continues to prevail as a tool for its evaluation', Nagib warns (Nagib 2006: 31). Despite approving of the awareness of and concern about 'the reduction and simplification entailed by the binary approach' shown by Andrew in 'An Atlas of World Cinema' (Andrew 2006), Nagib still finds echoes of the binary opposition between Hollywood and the rest of the world in his vocabulary (Nagib 2006: 33). Insisting that '[a] truly encompassing and democratic approach has to get rid of the binary system as a whole', the only fellow critics Nagib wholeheartedly endorses are Shohat and Stam, who 'dismiss as unnecessary and ultimately wrong the world division between 'us' and the 'other', 'centre and periphery', 'the West and the Rest' (Nagib 2006: 34).

It is no surprise, given the preference for Shohat and Stam's approach to world cinema(s) Nagib states in 'Towards a positive definition of World Cinema', that agreement with their concept of 'polycentric multiculturalism' recurs in the 2012 collection she co-edited with Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah, *Theorizing World*

Cinema (Nagib, Perriam and Dudrah 2012). To what extent this volume actually does any theorizing is questionable, however, as the editors state in their introduction that their understanding of 'theory' 'follows David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's suggestion [in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* in 1996] of in-depth research on representative cases' (Nagib, Perriam and Dudrah 2012: xxii). The last sentence of their introduction refers to 'the polycentric method' to studying world cinema, and this elision of theory and method picks up on some corresponding grey areas in the concluding paragraphs of 'Towards a positive definition of World Cinema'. Here, Nagib states her view that 'the belief in a centre is as mythic as the quest for origins' (Nagib 2006: 34), and her preference for 'a method in which Hollywood and the West would cease to be the centre of film history'. In the new tripartite definition of world cinema that opens the conclusion to her essay, Nagib says that world cinema 'has no centre' (Nagib 2006: 35). It is no small quibble to point out the contradiction between polycentrism and uncenteredness, and I would maintain that it is on account of not thinking through this contradiction that other statements in Nagib's conclusion – that world cinema 'is a global process' and 'is circulation' – fail to convince. In the conclusion's second bullet-point, she suggests that '[w]orld cinema is not a discipline, but a method' (Nagib 2006: 35), a formulation that ignores Dennison and Lim's highly persuasive argument in 'Situating world cinema as a theoretical problem' (Dennison and Lim 2006: 6-9) for thinking of world cinema as a discipline *as well* as a methodology and a perspective. The definition of 'World Cinema' that the title of Nagib's essay identifies as the ultimate objective of her thinking is at its *most* positive when she says 'I propose,

following Shohat and Stam's suggestion, the inclusive method of a world made of interconnected cinemas' (Nagib 2006: 34) – but polycentrism does not figure in this formulation. I shall return to these points about centredness, disciplinarity and method(ology) in the conclusion to this essay, but turn now to its *raison d'être*, the survey of twenty-first century worldwide women's filmmaking.

Women's Cinema Goes Global

In Kathleen McHugh's *Camera Obscura* article from which I quoted at the start of this essay, McHugh refers to the many monographs, articles and special journal issues through which the *systematic* apprehension of women's 'creative, diverse and transnational contributions to cinema' has now begun, following calls such as Pam Cook's in 1998 for a *positive* recognition of 'the historical contribution of women to cinema across the board' (Cook 1998: 244). Cook went on

> This involves a shift in perception — away from counting the relatively small numbers of female directors towards a more historical and contextual analysis of different points of entry into the industry by women, in what is, after all, a collaborative medium. The influence of female audiences, and the considerable impact of feminism — or should I say feminisms — across the full range of production have scarcely begun to be addressed (Cook 1998: 244)

In 2016, such positive evaluation of women's contributions to the world's film industries is indisputably underway, but far more developed in the West – the

collaborative project that launched the UK's Women's Film and Television History Network between 2009 and 2011 is a prime example – than in the countries and regions without a documented tradition of women's filmmaking. A rapid survey of the countries and regions for which a twenty-first century breakthrough into visibility by female directors (for their films and themselves) can be claimed is a near-impossible task, but I shall attempt to construct one nonetheless, by drawing on material from White's *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* and Mayer's *Political Animals*, where possible observing trends in this 'worlding of women's cinema' (White 2015: 8-14) as I do so.

The two 'continents' whose novelty as 'producers' of female film directors is most obvious in White's and Mayer's books are East Asia – China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan – and Central and Latin America, particularly Argentina and Peru. There is also a history of women's film-making in Latin America in the twentieth century, of course, but a director such as Lucretia Martel (b.1966), who shot one feature-length film alongside a number of shorts in the 1990s but only found success in the 2000s with *La Ciénaga* (2001), *La niña santa* [*The Holy Girl*] (2004) and *La mujer sin cabeza* [*The Headless Woman*] (2008), has contributed significantly to the renewed global profile of Argentine film-making, along with compatriot Lucia Puenzo (b.1976), whose *XXY* (2007), *El niño pez* [*The Fish Child*] (2009) and *Wakolda* [*The German Doctor*] (2013) have garnered considerable acclaim. Another Latin American director closely considered by White is Peruvian Claudia Losa (b.1976), of whose work White says '[it] inhabits the spaces of contemporary world cinema in a way that is emblematic for this book' (White 2015: 187). Women's film-making in China, spearheaded by directors like Ning Ying (b.1959), Guo Xiaolu (b. 1973), Li Yu (b. 1973) and Liu Jiayin (b. 1981) has already been written about as a transnational

cinema by Lingzhen Wang in *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Perspectives*, from which White quotes a sentence in the introduction to *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* that is entirely supportive of the theme of her book as well as my argument in this essay: '"Feminist film studies must step outside the restrictive framework of the nation-state and critically resituate gender and cinema in a transnational feminist configuration that enables examination of relations and power and knowledge among and within cultures"' (White 2015: 12). Over half of White's chapter on Asian Women Directors (the only area-based chapter of five) is devoted to Taiwanese director Zero Chou (b. 1969), whose film *Ci qing* [*Spider Lilies*] (2007) won Best Feature at the Berlin International Film Festival even before going on general release in Taiwan and across Asia, and was followed in 2008 by *Piao lang qing chun* [*Drifting Flowers*] (2008), which travelled the international film festival circuit almost as much as *Spider Lilies*. Chou's status as an out lesbian as well as her thematization of lesbianism and gay male sexualities has considerably expanded the profile of Asian queer cinema, to which Hong Kong-based directors Yau Ching (*Ho yuk* [*Let's Love Hong Kong*] (2001)) and Ann Hui (*Duk haan hao faan* [*All About Love*] (2010)) also drew attention in the 2000s.

A double parallel between fifth-generation Chinese film directors and recent sub-Saharan African cinema is drawn by White in the introduction to *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* when she notes that 'strong central female characters are signature features' of these films and that 'women directors working in these movements are much less well known internationally and receive less support at home' (White 2015: 6). The paucity of sub-Saharan African female filmmakers with an international reputation has long been noted by feminist film critics: where are the women *auteurs* to stand alongside Abderrahmane Sissako and Souleymane Cissé? White offers little

commentary on African women's film-making, somewhat more of which is provided by Mayer in *Political Animals*, who picks out a 'singular' feature film of the 2000s directed by Fante Régina Nacro, *La nuit de la vérité* [*The Night of Truth*] (2004), 'a rare example of a feature by an African female filmmaker to receive international distribution' (Mayer 2016: 65). *The Night of Truth* resembles Claire Denis' third Africa-based feature *White Material* (2009) in its setting in a fictional African nation, unnamed in *White Material* though named as Bonandé and Nayak in *The Night of Truth*. A further transnationally funded and exhibited African film discussed by Mayer in the chapter of *Political Animals* entitled, 'Water Rites: Ecocinema's New Earth Mothers', is Kenyan Wanuri Kahiu's short film 'Pumzi' (2009), which 'premiered at Sundance in 2010 and screened at festivals around the world' (Mayer 2016: 45), trading off its novelty as the first-ever Kenyan science fiction film to be set in a world without water.

The importance of diasporic women's filmmaking to the 'worlding' of women's cinema is obvious from the second chapter of *Women's Cinema, World Cinema*, which focuses on Indian-born émigré to Canada Deepa Mehta (b.1950), and in particular *Water* (2005), the third in her 'elements' trilogy after *Fire* (1996) and *Earth* (1998), and then on Iranian diasporan directors Mariane Satrapi (b.1969) and Shirin Neshat (b.1957). By telling an autobiographical story of post-revolutionary Iran from a young woman's point of view, Satrapi's co-adaptation (with Vincent Paronnaud) of her own highly successful graphic novels into *Persepolis* (2007) also drew attention to the careers of fellow Iranian women, although Mayer suggests that the success of Samira Makhmalbaf's (b.1980) *The Apple* (1998) had already 'opened a door to distribution for subsequent Muslim-world girl'hood films by adult filmmakers', such as *Persepolis* and *Wadjda* (Haifaa Al-Mansour (b.1974), 2012), the first film directed

by a woman ever to emerge from Saudi Arabia. Samira Makhmalbaf's younger sister Hana (b.1988) made her first short film at the age of eight, and her first feature at a similar age to Samira: *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame* (2007), which is set in war-torn Afghanistan and won the Berlin film festival's Crystal Bear in 2008, is described by Mayer as 'the precise and perfect example of global feminist cinema's riposte to US international politics under George W. Bush' (Mayer 2016: 63). Along with directors such as Tahmineh Milani (b.1960), the title of whose *The Hidden Half* (2001) draws attention to women as 'the hidden half' of Iran's population, and Marzieh Meshkini (b.1969), the mother of Hana Makhmalbaf and co-writer of *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame*, Iran boasts a contribution to global women's cinema that outstrips most other Middle Eastern nations, not including the countries of the Maghreb (usually said to include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania), although such a nation-focused view obviously excludes important exilic voices such as the Beirut-born Mona Hatoum (b.1952), based in Britain since the 1970s, as well as Palestinian Annemarie Jacir (b. 1974), director of the first full-length feature by a Palestinian woman *Salt of this Sea* (2008), which she followed with *When I Saw You* in 2012. Close attention to women's roles in the historic decolonizing struggles of Algeria and Morocco – as seen through women's eyes in the case of Moufida Tlatli's acclaimed *The Silence of the Palace* (1994) – is paid by Ella Shohat in 'Post-Third-Worldist: Gender, Nation and the Cinema', and as White comments in relation to the internationally successful Lebanese director Nadine Labaki (b.1974), '[f]inancing deals, filmmaker labs, and festival showcases have benefited Labaki and other young women filmmakers from North Africa and the Middle East' (White 2015: 223n25).

North American films feature more in Mayer's *Political Animals* than in White's

Women's Cinema, World Cinema, and Mayer underlines the importance of ecocinema and films about war as modes of film-making (if not fully-fledged genres) that US women directors have favoured in the new millennium. Kelly Reichardt seemed to pause between releasing her first feature *Rivers of Grass* (1994) and her second, *Old Joy* (2006), but has since 2006 made five features in a decade by following *Old Joy* with *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), *Night Moves* (2012) and *Certain Women* (2016), and in her 'Water Rites' chapter on women's ecocinema, Mayer also dwells briefly on 'the intersection of eco- and sexual diversity' to be found in Beth Stephens' *Goodbye Gauley Mountain* (2013), a project Stephens co-directed and produced with her partner Annie Sprinkle, the artist and pro-pornography feminist. The most acclaimed US woman film-maker of the last thirty years, Kathryn Bigelow, has led the recent trend in female-directed films about war with her Oscar-winning *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), about the war in Iraq and the killing of Osama bin Laden respectively, but Mayer also draws attention to Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers's *Lioness* (2008), about 'the traumatic experiences of the first US women soldiers sent into direct ground combat, in contravention of official policy, due to a shortage of active combat troops caused by the US' dual illegal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq' (Mayer 2016: 66) and Beth Freeman's *Sisters in Arms* (2011), *Lioness*'s 'Canadian equivalent' (Mayer 2016: 67). A further film of the 2000s critical of the US military's policy was *Stop-Loss* (2008), the first film in almost a decade from Kimberley Pierce, director of the acclaimed *Boys Don't Cry* (1999).

Other chapters of Mayer's *Political Animals* to focus on Anglophone films include 'I Have No Country: British Cinema as a Runaway Girl', and Great Britain and Ireland, like France, Germany and Spain, are of course regions of Europe where some

tradition in women's film-making can be traced and has already been researched. This is less true of smaller nations such as Denmark, where the name of Susanne Bier (b.1960) is picked out by both Mayer and White as a director whose 'back seat' (White 2015: 6) in the Dogme 95 movement did not prevent her winning the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2011, for *In a Better World* [*Haevnen*]. In Greece, Athena Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg* (2010) has been 'hailed as part of the 'weird wave of Greek cinema'' (Mayer 2016: 36) headed by Giorgos Lanthimos, whose 2009 hit *Dogtooth* Tsangari produced. And two younger directors from the relatively new nation of Bosnia picked out by White are Jasmila Žbanic (b.1974) and Aida Begié (b.1976): Žbanic's 2006 film *Esma's Secret - Grbavica* [*Grbavica*] is described by White (2015: 26) as the 'legacy of the siege of Sarajevo', is treated as the key case study for Balkan cinema in her chapter 'Is the Whole World Watching? Fictions of Women's Human Rights', and is also discussed by Mayer in her chapter 'Home Front: Women at War, Women against War' (Mayer 2016: 73).

Conclusion

The necessarily condensed survey of global women's film-making in the twenty-first century offered above illustrates the geographical range achieved by recent studies of the topic: the 'specific articulation of gender, geopolitics, and cinema' (White 2015: 2) identified at the very start of *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* is now indisputably a discourse with which film studies has to contend. Among the critical concepts that have emerged from this essay's survey of how women's cinema functions as (a) world cinema in the twenty-first century, authorship and transnationalism are at the top of the list: these two concepts overlap with the two historiographic strategies adopted by McHugh in 'The World and the Soup: Historicizing Media Feminisms in

Transnational Contexts'; '*follow the filmmaker*, indicative of feminisms' inescapably transnational character, and *follow the money*, indicative of its material force' (McHugh 2009: 122). McHugh's strategic historicization of women's film-making in the transnational contexts of the contemporary globalized world can be contrasted with – though can also complement – the project of transnationalizing women's film history set out by Christine Gledhill in her introduction to the dossier devoted to the topic in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* (Gledhill 2010), while the plan for a virtual archive for women's cinema proposed in Rosanna Maule's article for the same dossier (Maule 2010) offers an exciting (if possibly utopian) way round the barriers women film-makers still often face within transnational distribution networks.

In her Afterword to *Women's Cinema, World Cinema*, White lists a number of crucial changes to the articulation of gender, geopolitics and cinema that had taken place by c.2010:

> Training opportunities expanded; transnational financing for art cinema reached more women directors in more countries: costs of feature film production decreased with digital technologies; festival economies – of taste as well as sales – proliferated; and cinephilic criticism and digital streaming exploded on the Internet (White 2015: 199).

If sustained, these may prove to be the kind of changes that will allow additional areas of the world to be added to the global map of women's cinema now in existence. The positive evaluation of women's contributions to the world's film industries and

cultures for which Pam Cook called in 1998 is sufficiently advanced for White to be able to state that 'women's cinema today cannot be defined in terms of Western texts and theories' (White 2015: 201), and as I have suggested, the de-Westernizing of film as a medium and film studies as a discipline set out by Bâ, Higbee and their contributors in *De-westernizing Film Studies* is particularly pertinent to the juncture at which women's cinema finds itself. The same type of global forces that divide and fragment film-viewing societies everywhere in the 2010s – flows of capital and ever more complex economic and political relations – also enfold new possibilities of connection, in the shape of transnational finance and digital communications, and women's cinema has already shown itself more than capable of taking advantage of these. Whether such a cinema is polycentric or uncentered is debatable, and my personal view is that makes more sense to describe women's cinema (like world cinema) as a disciplinary field rather than as a method or methodology, but whichever terms are chosen, the conjunction of women's cinema and world cinema is now established and growing. The final sentence of White's Afterword to *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* is both cautious and hopeful, not the kind of rallying-call employed by Mayer as the title of her introduction to *Political Animals*, 'Girls to the Front', but an assessment of the status quo and an optimistic look to the future: 'Contemporary cinema studies must now contend with a critical mass of films by women directors; doing so could change the world' (White 2015: 201).

Related topics

Screening World Cinema at Film Festivals; Transnational Cinema: Mapping a Field of Study; Women's Cinema: Movements.

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