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WOMEN'S TELEVISION HISTORIES: LOCATING WOMEN'S ROLE IN EMERGING AND DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION

Sarah Arnold, Kate Terkanian and Helen Warner

This special issue aims to take steps towards the internationalisation of scholarship on women's television by drawing together articles on different national contexts of television and detailing the experiences of women in various national and historical television ecologies and economies. This is, of course, merely a step, since no one issue can attend to the breadth of women's experiences in the many national television organisations and roles. Scholarship in anglophone, Global North and Western countries has been enabled because of the confluence of various factors including: fairly stable employment prospects for academics comparable, for example, to Global South scholars; the availability of funding for such scholars to undertake travel to conferences and network with scholars; the availability of research on the topic of women's media histories because it is in English language and universities have the library resources. Therefore, the history of women's work in these national contexts has begun to be told but there is a pressing need for attention to, and recognition of, scholarship beyond the limited context of anglophone territories.

This issue is concerned with women's work as television makers, workers and their place within television organisations in various national contexts. The reason we claim that this is needed is because, while scholarship is emerging, it remains

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very limited in comparison to the scholarly attention to women's film work. Perhaps because of television's 'ordinary status' and the relative de-prioritisation of auteurism in television scholarship, there has been less interest in women's work in this medium and industry. Equally, film scholarship has often attempted to recuperate the status of women in film through focus on the creatives, the directors and above-the-line labour[1] more so than television scholarship which is as concerned with the television production assistant and vision mixer as with the director. There has been increasing inclusion of television in research on women's media histories such as the special issue of *Media International Australia* that looked at women's work in broader media including television and the subsequent special issue of *Women's History Review* that turned to 'women's film and broadcasting history' as an object of focus.[2] The founding and continued success of the Women's Film and Television History Network UK and Ireland in 2016 has also ensured that there is a forum for sharing and disseminating women's television histories. The biannual conferences that commenced in 2016 have an increasingly broadened geographic lens to include women's television histories from beyond the UK and Ireland. The special issue of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* evidenced both a global focus and increasing interest in television specifically. Baker et al.'s 2019 special issue of *Feminist Media Studies* recuperated 'broadcasting' as a focal point, often neglected in scholarship that prefers medium specificity; the issue drew attention to the transnational careers of women in television and the trend of women moving between nations in order to sustain careers.[3] Women's technical and production work in broadcasting was the focus of a recent issue of *Women's History Review* which uncovered rich histories of women working in technical departments, as crew and in jobs previously assumed male.[4] Collectively, then, these special issues, while tending to retain an anglophone focus, have advanced the study of women's work in television and created networks of researchers who advocate for further work in this area. Indeed, this current issue developed out of collaboration of colleagues who are members of the recently formed International Women's Broadcasting History group.

Various routes into women's television work are evident across the literature and are evident in this current issue. There are a number of organisational and institutional histories – including broadcasters, companies, unions and networks – which detail women's various technical, administrative and creative roles. While these histories are difficult to tell because of their sheer size, they are often paradoxically available because they are 'neatly' archived as organisational histories. Murphy and Terkanian, for example, each draw from the BBC archives to trace the role of women in the early years of the broadcaster, finding opportunities and limitations for women in equal measures.[5] Morgan Wait's study of women's television work in Irish national broadcaster RTÉ during its earlier years offers a corrective to the myth that RTÉ was a change agent in Irish society, with women subject to stereotyping and gendered labour regimes.[6] Byrely's study of women's 'ownership' of broadcast outlets in the US, showed that women's historic ownership was largely *via* family connections where they had little day-to-day roles in the organisations.[7] Blaylock looks at the career of Shirley Graham du Bois who was the first director of television in Ghana in the 1960s, having moved there

from the US.[8] As Perlman documented in her study of US television, this dearth of women in positions of power has motivated advocacy groups, like the National Organization for Women, to use their ability as interested public parties to petition the Federal Communications Commission to ensure better representation of women in the television industry.[9] Nonetheless, as scholars like Galt have evidenced, even those organisations such as television unions who should be supporting the rights of those most marginalised of workers like women, have sometimes done little to enact change and improvement in the conditions of television work for women.[10]

Scholars have been particularly concerned to avoid the pitfalls of and the cul-de-sac that is auteurism in approaching women's television work and labour and, instead, recognise the variety of production, service, administrative and creative work as all contributing to television. Although there is no shortage of scholarship on 'outstanding' and 'exceptional' women that broke down barriers to television jobs and roles, such biographies only tell part of the story of television and women's work in this industry.[11] However, as others have argued, women's histories are particularly vulnerable to the hierarchicalisation of labour. Prestige roles, those most often of interest to scholars and historians, are undertaken largely by men, and less prestigious, less recognised, valued, recorded and compensated roles are undertaken by women. This gendered division of labour works to invisibilise certain roles and certain people, leaving feminist scholars with much work to do to recuperate these histories and challenge the hierarchies that ignore women's important work across the television industry. Feminist media historians have pointed to the methodological challenge in representing what has been obscured. Moseley and Wheatley, for example, suggest that gender bias has played a role in the selection of television histories for preservation.[12] Institutional and organisations' archives are not neutral sites of history but reflect the value judgements and hierarchies of the organisational culture. Galt has pointed out that women's representation in such histories – in her own research, union records and documentation – is incomplete and often scattered across multiple collections, sites and archives, making the work of piecing together a historical narrative time-consuming.[13] Even when scholars can locate sufficient evidence of women's television work in archival records and collections and other documentary sources, there are huge gendered blind spots. Women's actual experiences, for example, may reveal something very much at odds with the 'official' record of the archives. Feminist media scholars have turned, in such cases, to interviews, particularly oral histories and life story interviews, as a means of filling in the gaps and identifying counter-narratives that can be valuable correctives in television history.[14] Methodological innovation and openness is, therefore, required of scholars in order to uncover the historical work of women in television.

Various trends in international scholarship on women's roles in television history include studies of authorship and creativity; considerations of women in specific fields such as technical work and/or journalism; women's work as announcers and presenters; women's work across various mediums including television; and the gendering of television labour. Studies of above-the-line and creative labour document and acknowledge women's authorship, creative voice and craft.[15] For

example, studies of female screenwriters and story editors note how they have been neglected in television scholarship because of their gender and because their often low numbers resulted in their marginalisation and invisibility in the industry.[16] Ellerson's exhaustive mapping of women's cultural production across various African nations, provides names and biographies of key creative figures in national television systems, for example, in countries such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Benin and Mauritania, which are often neglected within anglo-centric studies of television history.[17] Sarabia's account of her development of and work on feminist television programme *Womanwatch* in the Philippines in the 1980s and 1990s details the various technical, commercial and political challenges to creating feminist content during this time.[18] Likewise, Schiller's study of CatiaTV in Venezuela in the 1990s considers the role of its founding director, Blanca Eekhout, who created pathways into television work for marginalised women, but who could also not solve the problem of gender exclusion and discrimination which persisted in the organisation.[19]

Beyond above-the-line labour, there has been an increasing turn towards women's work in technical and craft roles, especially roles that are typically assumed to have been undertaken by men. Currently, scholarship is largely limited to the anglophone world, although Ellerson's survey of women's work across television roles throughout Africa identifies individual women who, for example, worked as camera operators (Pocas Pascoal of Angola).[20] Elsewhere, Lisa French's examination of thirty years of data on women's work in television details huge unevenness in women's participation in craft and technical roles, demonstrating that barriers to entry existed and continue to exist in the television industry.[21] Similarly, studies of women's work in technical roles in UK television had found something similar, whereby women face discrimination, are prevented from undertaking technical roles, or are permitted to undertake technical roles during labour shortages only later to find themselves excluded again when there is an abundance of workers, as was the case during the Second World War.[22]

While studies of women's technical roles in television may be limited, there has been greater attention to the gendered division of labour that was put into place early on in many television industries and that functioned to embed discriminatory practices at the institutional and cultural level. For example, international scholarship on the early years of television has evidenced that the role of announcer or host was often available to women because it leveraged the feminine beauty of female personalities to act as familiar and gentle introducers of television to mass audiences. These women – in Italy the Signorine Buonasera, in the Soviet Union the diktory – helped to domesticate television. Often highly educated and multilingual, television continuity announcers and hosts often found limited opportunities to advance their careers and the role later became less prestigious as television services developed.[23] Gendered division of labour was in practice early on in Australian television. In the ABC, women found it difficult to negotiate this division of labour and had to take action in cases where their gendered roles were undervalued practically as well as financially.[24] Scholarship on US gendered inequalities in television work addresses the discursive production of gender inequality produced in broadcast magazines of the 1950s. Research identifies how,

and where roles typically carried out by women, such as public relations, were undervalued by broadcasters such as NBC. Women had to advocate and engage in labour activism when they faced precarity in the broadcast industry.[25] National studies of television's gendered division of labour have revealed how even when women did succeed in gaining work in creative departments and were promoted to senior roles, they nonetheless faced discrimination, or had to have the support and approval of male family members and peers. Graña's study of Uruguayan television shows how women who worked in television since the 1990s depended upon good education and family support.[26] Likewise, separate studies of television history in Yugoslavia and Pakistan show that even women who managed to work in prestigious productions such as serial dramas still required support, approval or permission of males and found their work undervalued.[27] Sakr's study of Arab media, including broadcasting, paradoxically finds that women were in senior management positions but had little power to shape or determine media content in their organisations – this was in the hands of men.[28]

Where there is perhaps greater representation of women in television as well as scholarship on the topic is in broadcast journalism. There is an international literature on this topic which demonstrates that this was, perhaps, one of the more available routes into television work for many women. Women's historical access to broadcast journalism roles has been attributed to increased access to education, with women learning more languages and also taking Communications programmes at university in relatively high numbers.[29] However, while there are more women working in television journalism than, perhaps, technical roles, there are many challenges for them. Female journalists in places such as the Caribbean, Costa Rica, and Colombia are at risk in terms of job safety, and are subject to abusive comments and hostility and discrimination from colleagues.[30] Women are commonly relegated to soft news reporting and investigation and find it difficult to break into hard news as has been shown in studies of Arab and Middle Eastern media, Colombia, the Caribbean, Lebanon, Poland, and Romania.[31] A particular challenge identified in the international literature on women's work in television journalism is the extent to which they experience sociopolitical exclusions. For example, with no access to political fields in their nation state, women's ability to take on leadership and decision-making roles in television organisations, and to engage with hard news related to politics, is impacted.[32]

Responses to women's exclusions from the political or television fields have often taken the form of grassroots and collectivised media production in which women find more access, more opportunities to collaborate, to train and to be creative, and less bureaucracy. Internationally, film and video collectives emerged as a counter-media, often with strong social justice and advocacy objectives. For example, in the UK following periods of recession and risk to independent creative producers, the Association of Cinematograph, Television, and Allied Technicians (ACTT) worked with the British Film Institute and Channel 4 to establish the Workshop Declaration of 1982. As a result, Channel 4 committed to stable periods of funding for independent production companies operating in the workshop model, often opening up routes into production that would have otherwise been difficult for women to navigate due to gender bias. Studies of Central and Latin

American film and video collectives demonstrate how women, working in these collaborative, and often horizontally-organised, structures focused both on feminist production praxis and on addressing feminist concerns in their productions. Goldman and Cervera Ferrer's study of Cine Mujer in Colombia, for example, detail the topics covered in television series commissioned for Columbian television which covered women's issues and were intended to inform and educate audiences.[33] Guidi's study of Guatemalan Mayan women's training in video production argues that women were empowered because they could use video to communicate when they may have limited textual literacy.[34] However, Feder cautions that class and race dynamics must be considered in grassroots made media. Her analysis of Bolivian film and video in social movements, and for social causes, shows that women's collectives may reproduce class and racial dynamics, with upper-class white women representing marginalised Indian-identifying women.[35] Therefore, working on the margins of the television industry does not automatically guarantee women more creative and productive agency.

This special issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* represents the various frameworks and approaches to international scholarship on women's work in television's histories. Its international focus intends, on the one hand, to deviate from the focus on women's work in anglophone contexts. On the other hand, it aims to use familiar methods, issues and concerns about women's work in television to find commonality and solidarity across different national contexts. There are great challenges in undertaking historical research on women's work in television internationally. There is a dominance of anglophone scholarship, which means that the most well-trodden routes into women's television histories are in the English language and steer the scholarship and conversation towards anglophone experiences, organisations and concerns. There is great risk that the narratives of women in US or British television industries may become the default histories and universalise what is very particular. And, as is often the case, that language hierarchies result in English language histories becoming the global and universal histories, and non-English language histories, the local and parochial. This issue of global and local is particularly evident in the case of television since, unlike film, television was local and national by design. Whereas film scholarship, with its prioritisation of the text as an object of study, has benefited from greater access to films from around the world, television scholars have been somewhat limited because of the historic limited access to international television. Although foreign made television may have been available on national television channels, allowing for some transnational television, there has been less circulation of television productions than film. In addition, television emerged at very different points and under very different conditions globally. An 'early' history of British television refers to the 1930s where in Ireland it is the 1960s and in India, the 1970s. Couple this with the localised conditions for women – their participation in society, their rights regarding work, the ideology of womanhood – and it becomes clear that we have a diversity of women's television histories that is always inevitably contextual.

These histories are also challenging to understand because of archival limitations and absences. Scholars are very dependent upon broadcaster's archives for

institutional histories, and these may be inaccessible altogether, may be commercial and demand fees for access, or may have no public facing catalogues making the historical investigation difficult. Further, preservation and cataloguing policies may vary across time, between national television organisations, or across nation states. Public service television broadcasters may have a remit to create fully searchable catalogues of their television archives, but private television organisations may not. The challenges of data availability and archival absences are discussed and acknowledged across the articles in this issue. The interviews undertaken for this issue follow the path of oral histories and life stories in drawing from women's direct knowledge and experience of television work in order to gain greater understanding about what was available to them, how they negotiated male-dominated industries and how they managed multiple forms of exclusion.

We commence this issue with Josette Wolthuis examination of the 'neglected trade' of costume design in the Netherlands arguing that the emergence of activism and advocacy was in response to the historic gendering and concomitant undervaluing and invisibility of women's below-the-line labour in Dutch television and film. Drawing on interviews with working costume designers, Wolthuis details how this gendering of costume design labour is interrelated with their frustrations with poor working conditions, underfunding of their departments and the limited time within which they had to carry out their work compared to international standards. Questions of visibility and accepted social roles also underlie Morgan Wait's look at the Irish public service broadcaster Radio Telefis Éireann (R/TÉ). Wait's primary focus is on the station's policies towards women and marriage in television, although hiring standards at the broadcaster had their origins both in civil service practice and in radio broadcasting. Like many similar organisations, R/TÉ operated a marriage bar, a requirement that women resign permanent positions upon marriage. What was unusual in the Irish context is that the bar was not lifted until 1973, long after broadcasters in other countries had lifted their bars. By tracing the bar's implications and practice at R/TÉ, Wait demonstrates that whilst R/TÉ was considered to promote progressive ideals through its programming, that internally the organisation pursued conservative policies that disadvantaged women professionally and materially as married women were rehired on disadvantageous contracts, put onto a lower pay scale and usually removed from the pension system. This unequal system affected women across the employment spectrum with women in lower-level production and secretarial roles impacted most in terms of advancement and pay. Wait contends that the bar's lifting was not the result of changed attitudes within R/TÉ, but pragmatic concessions related to legal challenges.

Job mobility is also the subject of the next article, where Kate Terkanian details the transition of BBC radio broadcaster Nesta Pain to the new medium of television. Terkanian details the various challenges in recovering this history, namely the absence of surviving television programmes which proves an issue for all scholars of television history. Further, Terkanian argues that Pain was by no means an 'invisible' figure in BBC production. Instead, she could be understood as a 'cultural translator' who negotiated different media platforms. This, Terkanian argues, is partially why her name has not survived historicisation of the BBC. She

is both everywhere and nowhere in the BBC records. In order to recover and tell the story of Pain's television work, Terkanian turns to Pain's personal records which help to explain the challenges and opportunities Pain found in the transition from radio producer to television producer. The issue continues with programme production, moving from the UK to India. Women's programming was often founded under educational premises, demonstrating how to best perform household tasks like sewing and cooking, and providing authoritative 'guidance' on child-rearing and household management. Ipsita Sahu demonstrates that whilst grounded in this educational ethos, women's programming in India moved from *Ghar Parivar* (*Home and Family*) to *Ghar Bahar* (*Home and Outside*). This transition in the 1970s and 1980s was assisted by growing awareness and attention to women's issues and perspectives, and the establishment of women's studies as an academic discipline. For female television staff, the production of non-prestige 'minority' programmes at the Indian broadcaster Doordarshan allowed greater freedom for the development and presentation of potentially controversial current affairs topics as the programming stream operated outside of the tightly-controlled category of news and documentary broadcasting. Sahu's article weaves in oral history interviews and retrieves the details of broadcasts that are no longer available to view. The article ends by recounting several television interviews that demonstrate the ways that broadcasting from the margins had nationwide impact. One explosive interview was with a judge who presided over a dowry murder case in 1980 that led to a murder conviction for the bride's husband and in-laws. Whilst the murder conviction was initially overturned on appeal, the interview became a media event that challenged both legal and social currents around the topic. For Sahu, women's programmes in the 1970s and 1980s at Doordarshan are an example of how state authority can be contested from the margins.

Remaining on the margins of the television industry but moving to Brazil, the next article details the television programmes produced by feminist video collective Lilith Video, which operated out of São Paolo during the 1980s in the post-dictatorship era. Because Lilith Video was outside of the mainstream, male-dominated television system, and because it introduced a feminist voice and lens to contemporary Brazilian life, the Lilith Video work can be considered as a form of counter-television. By examining the television series produced by Lilith Video, Esther Império Hamburgera and Hanna Henck Dias Esperança argue that Lilith Video formed an alternative political expression, evidenced through the focus on framing, close-ups and subjective representation, and was one of the few feminist television series made for Brazilian television.

Finally, the articles finish with a detailed biography and celebration of the work of Colombian television producer Miryam de Flores who made various factual and drama programmes for Telecaribe, which has served the Colombian Caribbean region since the 1980s. Authors Juan-Pablo Osman, Nancy R. Gómez and Delfina M. Chacón detail the significant challenges in making regional television during this time and argue that Miryam de Flores was instrumental in developing television in the region. They document the production of *La Mujer del Puerto* (1990–1992), one of Miryam de Flores most popular dramas, demonstrating the various financial difficulties the production faced, and detailing how Miryam de

Flores overcame them. They further argue, using the same example, that Miryam de Flores introduced and guaranteed a female gaze in Colombian regional television, and that the story of Miryam de Flores and her dramas allow for a feminist reading at the level of context and content.

The issue ends with six interviews with women working across various national, linguistic, career and historical contexts of television production. While these contexts vary greatly, the narratives provided by women working in Irish, South African, Welsh, French, Nigerian, and Scottish television evidence a great deal of similarity regarding gender segregation in work and gendered divisions of labour, impossible work schedules, unfair treatment and poor working conditions, and poor representation in and on television. These interviews collectively echo much of the scholarship detailed in this introduction and across the articles. Ultimately, we hope that the articles and interviews represent a collective effort to broaden and deepen the histories of women's work in television in international and transnational contexts.

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Notes

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