

RE-BORDERING UK FEMINIST VIDEO IN THE 1980S.

CROSS-BORDER EXCHANGES AND REFLEXIVITY IN A DIGITAL AND ARCHIVE-BASED PROJECT

Dalila Missero
Lancaster University
d.missero@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract: This article discusses the benefits and limitations of the use of digital humanities tools in the context of transnational research in women's film and television history, with a particular attention to issues of positionality, cross-border circulation, and exchange. To do so, it details on the methodology and results of a research project reconstructing the transnational impact of the collaborations between women producers and practitioners and UK broadcasters in the context of the UN Decade of Women (1975-1985). The investigation, funded by FIAT/IFTA (International Federation of Television Archives), analyses a group of programmes from the BFI archives by producing data-visualisations such as maps and network analysis generated through the collection of geographical, biographical, and chronological information. The goal of the study is offering a deeper understanding of transnationalism in the context of local television productions, while avoiding risks of fragmentation and methodological nationalism. However, while digital tools and data visualisations helped the identification of recurring tropes and transnational collaborations, the process of data collection and the visual aids themselves made evident the persistence of problematic geographies of knowledge and representation, that would require a broader assessment through collaborative, cross-national investigations.

Keywords: Feminist media history, Development media, BFI National Television Archive, Digital humanities, Channel 4

This article contributes to the topic of re-bordering the archive with a series of methodological and theoretical reflections on the use of digital humanities tools in the study of transnational and feminist media histories. Specifically, it looks at the challenges and opportunities offered by data visualisations such as maps and networks for the analysis of audio-visual sources, with a particular attention to the process of data collection and sharing of the results.

My considerations stem from the research project *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video: Mapping Local Histories and Transnational Networks of the 1980s in the BFI Archive*, which reconstructs the collaborations of feminist and women audio-visual practitioners with UK broadcasters (Channel 4; ITV) in the context of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985). These productions have in common a focus on global development and gender equality, with a marked interest in the struggles of Third World women.¹ The approach to these subjects varied as much as their modes of production: some programmes had been developed in collaboration with international broadcasters and activists; others were commissioned or bought from local independent companies or workshops; while in some cases they were put together with pre-existing footage acquired from other networks. Such differences reflect the magmatic phase that UK

television was experiencing in the 1980s, with the debut of Channel 4 (November 1982) and the emergence of novel approaches to educational media, development, and gender equality. For this reason, these case studies picture a unique intersection between national broadcasting, women's videomaking and development media, stimulating a series of questions on the role of television in shaping notions of gender, progress, and resistance in the UK and beyond.

The investigation, funded by FIAT/IFTA (International Federation of Television Archives),² analyses a selection of 23 programmes – mostly current events shows and documentaries, from the **BFI National Television Archive**, to produce data visualisations, such as maps and network analysis, with the open-source digital humanities package Palladio. The resulting visual aids picture spatial and relational patterns of representation and collaboration, illuminating the existence of cross-border exchanges and recurring themes that challenged the “national” as a key attribute of these productions and of the BFI collections likewise. While doing so, the project gives visibility to the work of an international group of women practitioners, counteracting their historical marginality in the industry and their elusiveness within the archive. At the same time, the data visualisations also illuminated uneven patterns of collaboration and exchange, including tropes of representation that reproduced stereotypes. In other words, the research made visible historical asymmetries of power and unbalanced geographies of representation, somehow running the risk of reproducing them in the process of communicating and sharing the results.

Drawing from this impasse, the essay contributes to on-going conversations in the fields of archival science and digital humanities, while offering an entry point into an under-explored corpus of feminist audio-visual production. By doing so, it also details on the research process, aspiring to build a space for future collaborations grounded in a ‘critical transnational feminist praxis’³ that leads to concrete opportunities for action. In fact, as the experience on this project demonstrates, reflexivity is key for the recuperation of neglected historical narratives, yet reflective practices should also contribute to improve our empirical research practices in the archives.

1 Background of the Project & Theoretical Issues

In this first part of the essay, I outline the historical background of *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video*. This contextualisation introduces to the key debates and themes appearing in the programmes, but also delineates the theoretical and methodological horizons of the project, which will be covered in more detail in the last section. In particular, I will concentrate on the intersection between international and local debates and production practices, linking these productions with global feminist debates that encourage the adoption of a transnational approach.

1.1 Transnational Contexts and Feminist Debates during the UN Decade of Women

The programmes included in the selection of case studies (APPENDIX 1) were produced and broadcast between 1983 and 1987 and present several thematic connections with the debates surrounding the UN Decade of Women (1975-1985). The Decade was inaugurated at the United Nations' World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City), which set a Plan of Action for governments to ensure that women had equal access to resources such as education, employment, housing, and family planning. The Plan crucially assigned to the media a strategic role, by promoting the inclusion of women professionals in the industry, calling for a diversification of representations, and sponsoring the production of content to educate the public on development issues.⁴

The Decade's emphasis on development marked also the increasingly intense conversations between women's organisations from different parts of the world, which led to a growing problematization of top-down and Western

agendas at international women's meetings.⁵ These exchanges benefitted from media infrastructures that began to flourish during the Decade thanks to a combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts. The role played by the circulation of media in this phase of feminist history is still underexplored, perhaps due to the variety of initiatives and actors involved, who worked in publishing, journalism, broadcasting and filmmaking, among many others.⁶ To better illustrate their importance, I will briefly discuss two feminist media artefacts somehow emblematic of the heterogeneous production of the period: Helena Solberg's film *La Doble Jornada/The Double Day* (1974) and Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Global* (1984).⁷

The Double Day was a collaborative film made by an all-women crew under the name of International Women's Film Project. It portrayed the struggles of women's workers in Latin America and was funded by, among others, the United Nations Development Fund, and the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish Development Authorities.⁸ The film emblematically premiered at the Conference in Mexico City, demonstrating the potential of media to bridge and communicate women struggles from different parts of the world.

The publication of Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*, instead, was symptomatic of the conclusion of this period. Like *The Double Day*, Morgan's anthology attempted to create new coalitions by collecting the writings of activist groups from all-over the world and was funded by a variety of sources, including NGOs, the Ford Foundation, and divisions of the Methodist Church. However, by the time it was published, Robin's notion of global sisterhood was already coming to terms with the situated experiences of Third World women who refused Western assumptions of commonality that neglected the role of class, race, and culture in gender inequality. This criticism stemmed also from the failure of the Decade to address the reproduction of neo-colonial relations in development plans as well as among women organisations.⁹

As such, in the second part of the 1980s, Third World feminists proposed new approaches to development and activism centred on women's empowerment and collective leadership,¹⁰ with reflections also on contemporary feminist critiques to development media. The often marginal and submissive representations of Third World women in development films and media packages¹¹ stimulated responses from activists who advocated for grass-roots initiatives and the strengthening of feminist transnational networks.¹² Notably, this period coincided with a so-called process of 'NGOisation' of feminism,¹³ in which the project-based nature of filmmaking and the possibility to use audio-visuals as educational, training and advocacy materials well suited with the increasing professionalisation of gender equality activism.

To sum up, top-down efforts guided by the UN, development agencies and other organisations coexisted and converged with bottom-up, grass-roots initiatives, which promoted the use of media to build feminist networks, while making visible the increasingly complex power and geographical relations within the movement.

1.2 Feminist and Development Media Meet UK Television

In many ways, the local context in the UK reflects these international trends. In the 1980s, UK women's production companies and grass-roots groups found broadcasting sources of funding and outlets for projects with a feminist agenda, with a clear reference to questions raised during the Decade. The opening of these opportunities was the result of feminist campaigns initiated in the 1970s which called for a greater inclusion of women professionals in the audio-visual industry and a diversification of representations,¹⁴ with a particular impact on the institution of Channel 4 (1982).¹⁵ The appointment of the Guardian's editor of the women's page, Liz Forgan, as Senior Commissioning Editor facilitated the hiring of two women-only independent companies, Broadside Productions and Milne and Gambles, to produce actuality programmes with a female perspective 'accessible to mainstream television audiences'.¹⁶ Such opening to women's contributions went hand in hand with the network's aim to support independent producers and the workshop movement¹⁷ to develop innovative content for a diverse, multicultural audience.¹⁸

While women and other minorities achieved more visibility, Channel 4 also supported the production of programmes dealing with issues of global development, as part of its offer of educational and socially engaged programmes.¹⁹ These productions mostly consisted of documentaries, often commissioned to NGOs, educational trusts, or local companies. Not surprisingly, then, around the end of the Decade of Women, the network sponsored a series of productions explicitly dealing with development and gender equality, by supporting feminist practitioners, but also collaborating with NGOs and international partners.

The selection of case studies for this project reflects this magmatic and experimental context. For instance, the series *Promised the Earth* (3 Episodes, 1985), consisting of three documentaries on the Decade of Women, was produced for Channel 4 by Diverse Productions and the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) – a consortium of over 60 NGOs. The series *A Woman's World* (7 Episodes, 1987) was produced by Gillian McCredie for Thames Television and employed content from Channel 4 and other broadcasters, while the six episodes of *Female Focus*, produced by Broadside Productions for Channel 4 (1985) was a multi-national collaboration of women's producers funded by the United Nations.

Even more heterogenous is the range of independent productions that Channel 4 sponsored or broadcasted in different slots of its programming to showcase the work of local and international filmmakers. Among these, *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video* includes the documentary *Words in Action*, by the feminist production company Pictures of Women, and recorded at the first International Feminist Book Fair in London in 1984; and the series of films directed and produced by Betty Wolpert, which were made in collaboration with activists (Joyce Seroke, Ellen Kuzmayo) and grass-roots groups of black women (Maggie Magaba Trust, Zamani Soweto Sisters Council) from Soweto, South Africa.

Complementary to these case studies are two films that exemplify a strand of productions sponsored by Channel 4 and funded by local grants, like *Impressions from Exile* (Wide Angle, 1985) and *Madjar* (Retake Video & Film Collective, 1984), which focus on the experiences of women migrants in the UK and were sponsored by the Greater London Council and Greater London Arts Association.

The heterogenous nature of these productions somehow demonstrates that, at the time, UK independent networks afforded a space of relative pluralism and experimentation, in which a variety of perspectives and practices at the cross-roads of activist, independent and educational media could coexist or converge as the result of creative, economic, and political circumstances. At the same time, the recurrence of topics like development, migration, and gender equality confirms an attention to transnational debates and current events that will lead to cross-border collaborations and circulation.

1.3 Studying a Niche Production through the Lenses of Global History and Feminist Historiography

As fairly low-budget, current events programmes, most of the case studies analysed by *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video* belong to the peripheries of the mainstream, while maintaining an uncertain status in the realms of activist and feminist media. On the one hand, they struggle to fit within established notions of 'television for women', on the other their informative style is at odds with radical politics and experimental aesthetics. Despite this, their attempt to diversify the representation of women on and off screen, as well as their link to local and transnational feminist debates, is undeniable.

In this respect, their preservation history adds some interesting elements for evaluating the relevance of these productions in the context of UK television and feminist media history. The presence of recordings at the National Television Archive (the BFI) dates to a period when the institution began to purchase or record off-air a selection of programmes considered 'typical output' or worthy of archival relevance from independent terrestrial channels.²⁰ This

means that these programmes were already perceived as representative of the content commissioned and aired by Channel 4 and ITV at the time, meaning that there was an understanding of their possible relevance already in that period. Moreover, complementary sources indicate that some of these programmes found a public both inside and outside of the UK in feminist and educational circuits. Most of them appear in diverse sources like 'British National Film Catalogue' (BFI, 1977-1987), the 'Circles. Women's Film + Video Distribution' (1987), and 'Powerful Images. A Women's Guide to Audio-visual Resources' (1986), documenting their distribution in VHS or 16mm for activists, educational trusts, schools, and NGOs.²¹

In other words, these productions found a variety of generalist, activist, and niche publics, and as such one of the aims of *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video* is understanding their link to multiple 'cultures of circulation'. As Benjamin Lee and Edward Li Puma argue, circulation is a cultural process built by interpretative communities equipped with a specific collective agency and their own self-reflexive structures.²² Unpacking these flows means identifying the 'scattered hegemonies'²³ characterising this phase of feminist media history, marked by a problematisation of the inequalities among women. Indeed, by being broadcast in the UK for a generalist public, and at the same time distributed among activists in different national contexts, many of these programmes circulated notions of difference and otherness. By acknowledging the risks of essentialism inherent to cross-cultural representations, the project finds inspiration in Chalde Mohanty's suggestion to move from individual *herstories* to interconnected histories that articulate women's differences and recuperate their situated political agencies.²⁴

With this in mind, *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video* adopts a feminist perspective on global history's 'attention to units of analysis that go beyond national frameworks, [and] cross-border phenomena [resulting] in thus-far overlooked movements and connectivities'.²⁵ Indeed, global history has already contributed to challenge the prevailing of Western agendas in feminist historiography by recuperating the stories of travelling women, ideas, and objects.²⁶ However, as recent decolonial critiques to the field suggest, global historians should be aware of the geopolitics of knowledge that they reproduce, as most of these scholarly projects originate in Anglo-American academia. As Gabriela De Lima Grecco and Sven Schuste point out, we should always be aware that 'historiographical practices are not disconnected from the 'being (the historian) and the 'power' (from where it is written and for whom it is written)'.²⁷ As such, while this project aspires to an historiography that challenges methodological nationalism and essentialism, I am also aware of the epistemological and material implications inherent to the location (UK) and language (English) in which it was conceived and communicated. From this point of view, by adopting a critical approach to transnationalism,²⁸ the project openly discusses the asymmetrical geographies and power relations emerging from the historical sources as well as in the research process.

2 Reflecting on Tools, Methods, and Results: Software, Data and Visualisations

Inspired by Deb Verhoeven's considerations on the relationship between digital humanities and feminist archival research,²⁹ the project's adoption of digital tools is aimed to maximise the epistemological power of connections, links, and relations across both analogue and digital archives. As a result, the recuperation of a specific strand of audio-visual productions was pursued with an infrastructural disposition in which each case study was seen as the product of wider relational, material, and social circumstances. With this in mind, the following section will consist of a critical assessment of the digital infrastructures put in place for this study, in order to offer an in-depth, reflective perspective on the research process and its results. Indeed, issues of positionality and power had been considered in the design of *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video*, incorporating feminist, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives on digital humanities (DH) and data science. This scholarship is problematising the supposed impartiality and objectivity of technologies, by assessing their role in widening inequalities and reproducing colonial practices. Calls for greater intersectionality and decolonizing efforts in the DH³⁰ and discussions on 'data colonialism'³¹ and 'data feminism'³² are just some of the many interventions that are questioning the unequal access to information, funding, and

infrastructures characterising the field. In the remainder of this essay, I am going to discuss some of these issues in relation to the process of data collection and visualisations produced in the context of *Broadcasting UK Feminist Video*, to delineate some possible areas of reflection and future inquiry.

2.1 Digital Methods for a Holistic Analysis: Textual Analysis and the Power of Data

Given the project's concern with relations and space, the study uses digital tools to process spatial, temporal, and biographical information gathered from the close reading and production history of the programmes. In other words, the project adopts an 'interpretivist approach' that combines 'contextual and textual analysis [to achieve] a critical interpretation of television as both a witness to and an actor in economic structures, social change, political power and cultural meaning'.³³ In a context of vast gendered gaps in television archives,³⁴ the unique opportunity to access all the sources as they were broadcasted further encouraged the use of textual analysis as a primary method of data collection, to be cross-referenced with secondary sources, particularly with catalogues.

In this respect, as Nanna Bonde Thylstrup et al. suggest, it is especially important that in the process of using archives as generative sources of data, we pose attention to the continuities between analogue archival regimes and digital data sets.³⁵ Indeed, analogue archives' tendency to invisibilise and reproduce hegemonic power relations may persist also in digital assemblies of information, requiring the researcher to be critical at every stage of the study. In the context of this project, the many representations of gender, race, and inequality appearing in the sources called for a specific attention to the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of information, which involved the use of reflexivity as a critical tool to avoid the appropriation or suppression of identities, tropes and narratives. As Miriam Posner and Lauren Klein point out, 'data is as much an orientation toward one's sources as it is a primary category of knowledge',³⁶ therefore adopting a feminist stance to data entails posing a particular attention to positionality. Since the data was processed to produce visualisations to reproduce the scale, location and direction of the representations and collaborations similar considerations were applied in the analysis of these outputs. Indeed, since their massive incorporation into mainstream communication, data visualisations have been increasingly associated with objectivity, as they provide a seemingly self-contained, omniscient viewpoint.³⁷ Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein argue that this rhetorical power can be re-oriented towards social justice, by means of feminist principles, like the refusal of binarism, the embracing of pluralism, and the examination of power, to give visibility to the context, affects, and labour involved in their making.³⁸ Indeed, the work of data extraction and the use of digital tools are often intertwined with the invisibilisation of the labour of research assistants, archivists and technicians.³⁹

While some of these issues persist in this project, in the remainder of this essay, I will share some considerations about the tools and criteria of data collection, as an attempt to challenge some of these dynamics.

2.2 The Software

Key to a digital project is the choice of the software. This research utilises **Palladio**, a digital humanities package developed by Stanford's Humanities + Design Lab, to produce a series of maps and network analysis. This tool was selected primarily for matters of access: it is open-source and completely on-line and allows for the import of data directly from an Excel workbook. It is specifically designed for historians, making it particularly effective for the analysis of historical information with many attributes. However, despite these advantages, it also has limitations: the visualisations can be shared only in static, non-interactive form, so they can be exported only as screenshots or pdfs; the map and graph functions are not suitable for sophisticated customizations and detailed network analysis; and there are very limited options to customise the colours and patterns of the visuals. Moreover, it tends to be a bit buggy

and requires a stable connection, as the loss of connectivity may entail losing the progress on the project. However, considering the relatively small scale and exploratory nature of this study, Palladio offers a great deal of options to explore the data, refine it, and evaluate options for future research.⁴⁰

2.3 The Data Set and Categorization: Mapping Relations and Repositioning the Centre

The data set consists in a principal table containing the core information on each programme (title, number of episodes, type of production, sponsor, production company, broadcaster, year of production, country, date of broadcasting) and its content (locations, people, and groups featured, plus the thematic keywords). These categories are expanded in separate, secondary sheets, providing biographical, temporal, and geographical data (including coordinates). Another one is dedicated to the practitioners working on the programmes with information on their role, production company, country of activity, and gender. The assemblage of data was complex, as the sources available particularly on practitioners or the locations featured in the programmes were fragmentary, leading to issues of categorization.

A good entry point to discuss these questions is the spatial data, which was systematized by privileging a national scale. This choice was dictated by the impossibility to identify some locations as they appeared in the programmes, but also by the ways in which nationality organizes audio-visual production. While this generalization entailed a loss of detail, it also confirmed the persistent centrality of the nation in the making and circulation of film and television. To understand the consequences of this choice on the “politics of location” of this research, I will briefly discuss the visualisation in MAP 1, which displays all the recognisable locations featured in the programmes. Here there is a clear



Figure 1. MAP1 Represents all the recognisable locations represented in the entire sample of programmes.

concentration of data in three areas: Northern Europe – mainly the United Kingdom; Africa – especially the Western and Southern parts of the continent; and a handful of countries in Latin America (Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Guyana).

In MAP 2, which visualises the Countries of production, the United Kingdom still represents the main cluster of data, along with a handful of European countries (France, Germany, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Sweden and Norway). Only six non-European countries are featured in this map: Senegal, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Japan, Canada and Peru. An immediate comparison between these two maps suggests an uneven relation between ‘who represents’ and ‘who’s represented’, which is critical in relation to the developmental and gendered focus of this production.



Figure 2. MAP2 Features the Country of Production.

In this respect, the visualisation MAP3 pictures a more complex situation. By using Palladio’s point-to-point function, I linked the Countries of production with the Locations featured, obtaining a sense of the directionality of these movements. While this map confirms the North to South nature of most of the exchanges and the centrality of the UK, it is also possible to appreciate connections with and between a variety of other countries, including a South-to-South link, and instances where the geographical focus of the programme corresponds to the country of production (signalled by a bigger cluster), meaning that local companies had been involved in the making of content about their own country.

2.3. Transnational Networks of Practitioners and Weak Authorship

The geographical extension of the networks of professionals offers a glimpse into women’s participation in the audio-visual industry in very different parts of the world. These contributions were mapped through the compilation of a data set with the names of each identifiable practitioner, along with their role, gender, production company, country of



Figure 3. MAP3 Connects the countries featured with those of production.

activity,⁴¹ and the title of the programme. This information was obtained from the credits, and for this reason is only partially reliable: credits, especially in television, are often cut, also omitting the names of many crew members, particularly of those employed in technical roles.

At the same time, programmes purchased and re-edited, like episodes in the Thames Television series *A Woman's World*, or projects developed with international partners like *Female Focus* (Broadside for Channel 4/United Nations), display very minimal credits for the external crews. To quote Nanna Bonde Thylstrup et. al, 'one of the archive's most important powers is that of omission';⁴² despite this, it is possible to make absences and omissions visible in data visualisations, becoming sources of knowledge instead of limitations and boundaries to the research.

In this case, despite credits represent the main source available on the practitioners, it was possible to triangulate part of this data by cross-referencing the names of the practitioners in digital repositories like IMDB and the BFI catalogue, enabling the reconstruction of some filmographies and verify the countries of activity. The most difficult aspect was the attribution of gender, which often entailed a guess on the sole basis of a name, with evident risks of essentialism. To address this problem, when further information was not available or the practitioner adopted a gender-neutral name or pseudonym, no gender was assigned to that person. As a result, some data visualizations display a third pole, reflecting the attempt of the project to challenge the binarism characterising this data and make visible the fallacies of the archive and data gathering. For all these reasons, this information is presumably inconsistent with the effective workforce involved in these productions, yet it still outlines the scale and extension of these networks, as well as of the gendering of some professions.

Overall, indeed, no programme was entirely produced or made by men, as the majority features professionals of both genders. At the same time, a remarkable number of companies listed only women, meaning that many were produced by women-only crews. However, as we can appreciate in the visualisation NA1, which matches the gender of the practitioners with their technical roles, the traditional gendering of audio-visual professions persists in areas like sound (M), costume design (F), and production assistant (F). This doesn't detract from the equal representation of men and women in key creative and managerial roles like direction, photography, production, and editing.

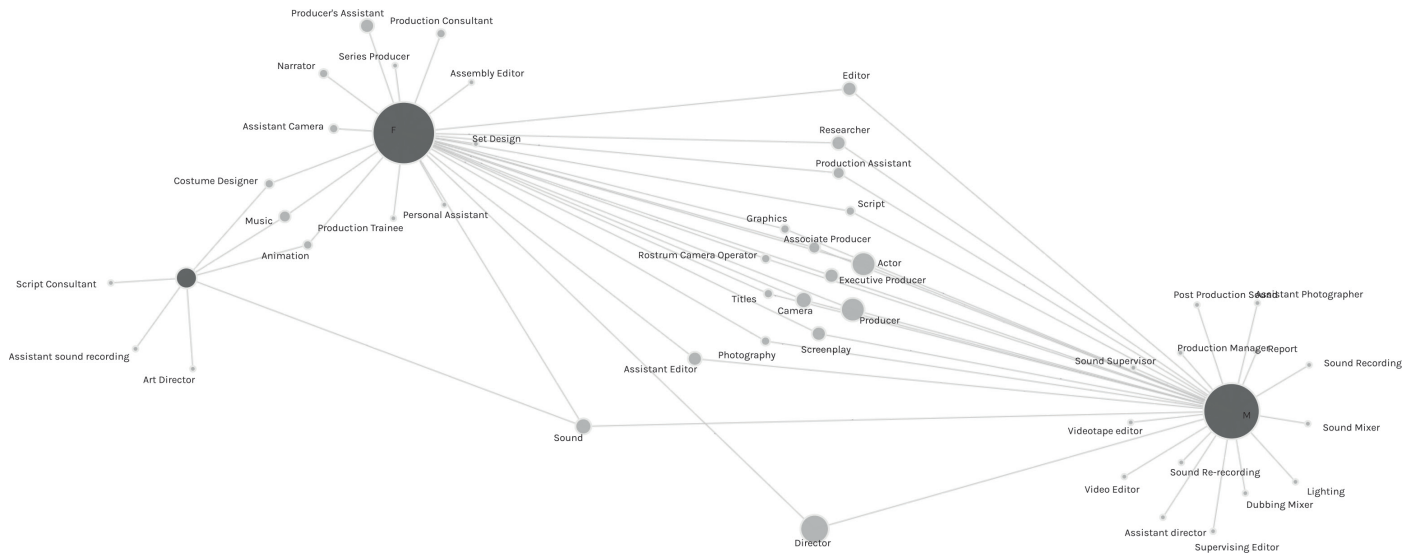


Figure 4. NA1 Network Analysis matching gender of practitioner with role.

As the network analysis NA2 shows – which connects each episode to the country of activity of the crew members, the UK is again the centre/main area of activity, yet most of these productions feature international professionals.



Figure 5. NA2 Network analysis connecting the country of activity of the practitioners with the episode in which they are credited.

Only a handful of episodes appear produced by UK-only crews. Interestingly, among them there are three documentaries with a prominent focus on global development: *The Impossible Decade* (Promised the Earth, International Broadcasting Trust/Diverse Productions for United Nations and Channel 4, 1985), *Less Equal than Others* (Promised the Earth, International Broadcasting Trust/Diverse Productions for United Nations and Channel 4, 1985) – which however concentrates entirely on the UK, and *Half the World's People* (A Woman's World, Thames, 1987). This aspect can be interpreted also through their re-use of clips from other programmes, which in the case of *The Impossible Decade* are credited to documentaries previously broadcasted by Channel 4.⁴³ At the same time, footage from *The Impossible Decade* itself was re-edited for *Half the World's People*. In this respect, another interesting result is provided by NA2 and NA3, which link the Country of activity with the Profession.

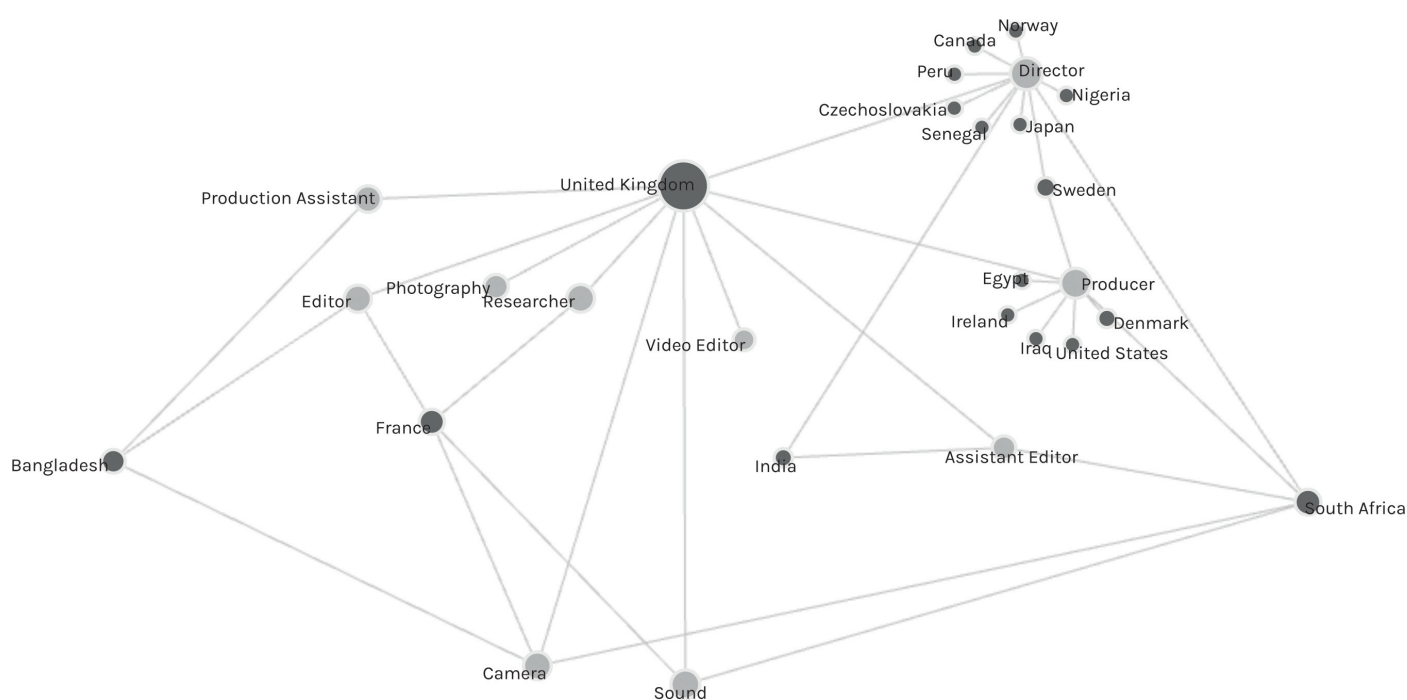


Figure 6. NA3 Network analysis linking the Top 10 credited professions to the country of activity.

NA2, which shows the top 10 most credited roles, confirms the prominence of UK-based professionals, yet NA3, which concentrates the data on Directors and Producers and the roles with only UK professionals, pictures a variety of Countries of activity on those two key professions. This result illuminates the contribution of women in apical roles usually precluded to them in very different industrial contexts. Indeed, these programmes were made by directors and producers from countries like Egypt, Denmark, Peru, Nigeria, and Sweden, opening to a much wider geography of feminist and women producers. At the same time, the ways in which these productions were re-edited and re-used throughout the years suggest the low-budget and “weak authorship” afforded to these practitioners.

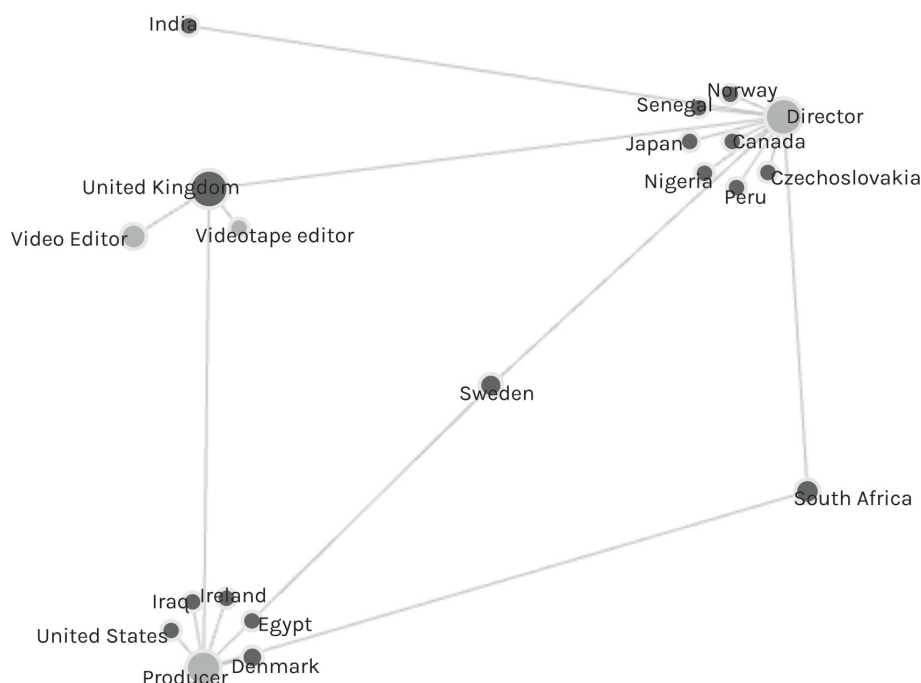


Figure 7. NA4 Network analysis focusing on the professions of director and producer.

Conclusions

In line with the location of the archival sources, the visualisations confirm the relevance of these programmes for the history of women in British television, yet the cross-border nature of their spatial and relational links encourages us to look beyond and above the local and national scale. This is particularly evident in relation to the centrality of the UK in most of the maps and network analysis, a perhaps obvious result which nonetheless reveals the interdependence of this centre with many other centres, hinting to a multidirectional, polycentric historiography, conscious of its situatedness and porous borders.

These maps also raise another issue, that of the status of these sources as 'heritage'. As Stuart Hall suggests, the notion of heritage is inherently linked to an idea of belonging, which is constantly negotiated as it is the imagined community of the nation.⁴⁴ The geographies pictured by these maps and visualisations hint to a 'circulatory history'⁴⁵ that raise fundamental questions about the geographies and meanings of "archival power", including in their migration into the digital. Given their topics and production history, these programmes could be relevant beyond the history of UK television and find a place within the archives of the many African, Latin American, and Asian countries represented and involved in these productions. As questions of repatriation of these materials go beyond the scope of this article, I wonder whether these programmes could contribute to the 'hodgepodge historiography'⁴⁶ that many colleagues working with post-colonial archives are writing against the grain of absent and migrated documents, and the importance of these histories in offering a more critical assessment of the role of the UK and other European television in producing and disseminating specific images of development and gender equality.

In this respect, the project also aims to encourage more research in the convergence between television, educational media and feminist film/videomaking, particularly in some of the areas (like Scandinavia and Germany) that the visualisations identify as particularly involved in producing this type of content. These questions are also relevant to a women's film and television history that aspires to move beyond national, regional, and comparative frameworks and the recuperation of individual histories and trajectories. As new productions and profiles emerge from neglected

archival paths, it is more crucial than ever to identify the links and bridges that these histories establish between people, locations, and cultures. Resurfacing and studying these connections must go hand in hand with the critical assessment of patterns of in/visibility and power relations, and in this respect digital humanities and data visualisations can be incredibly effective. These tools confront the historian with the nuances and limits of the archival source, forcing her to learn how to communicate/work through visuals, while achieving a critical awareness over her research process.

For the same reasons, these methodologies remind us of how complex archival research is, and how important are the affective and political components of empirical work, particularly when it involves the use and assembly of data sets. The links and connections found in the sources could also translate in scholarly collaborations and paths of archival repatriation overcoming the insularity of academic work and establishing broader conversations across disciplines and fields.

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Notes

1. My use of the expressions “Third World” and “Third World women” in this essay aims to reflect its prevailing use in the historical period considered by the project. In the 1980s feminist activists and intellectuals from the Global South used these terms to talk about themselves, in clear continuity with the anti-colonial agenda of Third-Worldism. Despite the limitations of this terminology, I prefer to adhere to the historical use rather than adopting other expressions in use, like “developing countries” or “Global South”, which similarly present issues in terms of essentialism and homogenisation. For a reconstruction of the historical genesis of these terms, please see Marcin Wojciech Solarz. *The Language of Global Development. A Misleading Geography* (London: Routledge, 2014).
2. The project was awarded the 2022 edition of the Media Studies Grant.
3. Richa Nagar and Amanda Lock Swarr, *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).
4. United Nations, *Report of the World Conference of the Women’s Year* (New York: United Nations 1976), 34, 62.
5. Nawal El Saadawi, “Women and Development. A Critical View of the Wellesley Conference,” in *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader*, ed. Nawal El Saadawi (London, England: Zed Books, 1997), 143–153.
6. The transnational nature of these media infrastructures is particularly evident in feminist independent press, which at the time counted on crowd-sourced news bulletins like the US based WIN (Women’s International Network) News, founded in 1975, and the bulletin ILET-Mujer Fempress, founded in 1981 in Mexico City by two Chilean women in exile, which published dispatches and information about feminist campaigns, initiatives and events, with a transnational aim.
7. Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global. The International Women’s Movement Anthology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984).
8. Thanks to her appearance in this film, Bolivian activist, and trade unionist Domitila Barrios de Chungara could travel to Mexico City and participate in the Tribune of non-governmental organisations that accompanied the official UN conference. Crucially, Barrios appeared also in Jorge Sanjines’ *El coraje del pueblo* (1971), which inspired Solberg to reach out for her during the shooting of *The Double Day*. Cfr. Domitila Barrios De Chungara, Moema Viezzer and Victoria Ortiz, *Let Me Speak! Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines*. (London: Stage 1, 1978), 194. For a detailed reconstruction on this phase of Solberg’s work, see Marina Cavalcanti, “The Women’s Film Project: An International Collective in the Career of Helena Solberg,” *Jump Cut. A Review of Contemporary Media* 61, 2022 (<https://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/MarinaCavalcantiTedesco/index.html>).
9. Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 30, no. 1 (1988): 61–88.

10. Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development Crises and Alternative visions: Third World Women's perspectives* (London: Earthscan, 1988); for a critical and historical perspective on empowerment as an approach to development see Srilatha Batliwala, "Taking the Power out of Empowerment: An Experiential Account," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4/5 (2007): 557–565.
11. On the in/visibility of women in development media see: Kamla Bahsin, "Women, Development and Media," in *Third World. Second Sex 2* edited by Miranda Davis (London: Zed Books, 1987), 133-42; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 186–188.
12. Margaret Gallagher and Lilia Quindoza-Santiago, *Women Empowering Communication: A Resource Book on Women and the Globalisation of Media* (London, Manila, New York: World Association for Christian Communication, Isis International and International Women's Tribune Centre, 1993). See also Marilee Klee, "Communication for Action," in *Powerful Images. A Women's Guide to Audio-visual Resources*, ed. by various authors (Rome and Santiago: ISIS International, 1986), 3–8.
13. On the "NGOisation of feminism" see Sonia E. Alvarez, "Advocating feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom'," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, n. 2 (1999): 181–209; Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewal, *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
14. Melanie Bell, *Movie Workers. The Women who Made British Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 180-190.
15. Stephen Lambert, *Channel Four: Television with a Difference?* (London: BFI, 1982), 126-27.
16. Helen Baehr and Gillian Dyer, *Boxed in: Women and Television* (New York: Pandora 1987), 121.
17. The workshop movement in Britain was born in the late 1960s as volunteer, filmmaker run collectives, generally with an experimental and/or socially engaged vocation. Many women and feminist practitioners opted for this production mode, also because of their horizontal and flexible working practices. However, as Melanie Bell points out, their role in the history of British feminist filmmaking is just starting to be investigated. Bell, *Movie Workers*, 194-5.
18. For an early assessment of the mixed results of Channel 4 multicultural efforts see Paul Gilroy. "C4-Bridgehead or Bantustan?" *Screen* 24, no. 4-5 (July-October 1983): 130–136, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/24.4-5.130>.
19. J. A. Zammit, "Fourth Channel: Third World," in *What's this Channel fo(u)r? An Alternative Report*, eds. Simon Blanchard and David Morley, (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1982), 124-29; Paul Gerhardt, "Broadcasting Notes," *Journal Of Educational Television* 13, No. 1 (1987): 73-76.
20. The BFI started to record a selection of programmes from terrestrial channels from public service broadcasters (ITV and Channel 4) in 1985. Due to the laborious and expensive process of analogue recording, this preservation initiative targeted only a selection of programmes.
21. The "British National Film Catalogue" lists educational and non-theatrical releases available for hire in the UK, which in many cases were produced by local broadcasters or distributed by independent companies. The catalogue by Circles, instead, offers evidence of the circulation of these shows as stand-alone features (usually in 16mm or as VHS) among local activist networks that rented and screened them. Finally, the resource guide "Powerful Images", edited between 1984 and 1985 by ISIS international, an organisation that since 1974 functioned as an independent information centre collecting and disseminating the writings and campaigns of feminist organisations across the world, with a particular link with a global network of NGOs working in development.
Cfr. British Film Institute, *The British National Film Catalogue* (London: BFI, 1975-1987); AA.VV., *Powerful Images. A Women's Guide to Audio-visual Resources* (Rome and Santiago, ISIS International, 1986).
About Circles and feminist film distribution in the UK see: Julia Knight, "Feminism and Film Distribution: An Analysis of Cinenova's Management Committee Meeting Minute, 1991–97," *Film Studies* 13, no. (1) (2015): 40-57.
22. Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 191-213.
23. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies. Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
24. Chandra Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience," in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 68-86.
25. Neus Rotger, Diana Roig-Sanz and Marta Puxan-Oliva, "Introduction: Towards a cross-disciplinary history of the global in the humanities and the social sciences," *Journal of Global History* 14, No. 3 (2019): 326.
26. For two recent interventions in this field see Lucy Delap, *Feminisms. A Global History* (London: Penguin Random House, 2021); Bonnie G. Smith, and Nova Robinson, *The Routledge Global History of Feminism* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2022).
27. Gabriela De Lima Grecco and Sven Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American Perspective," *Journal of World History* 31, no. 2 (2020): 433.
28. Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies," *Transnational Cinemas* 1, no. 1 (2010): 7-21.
29. Deb Verhoven, "As Luck Would Have It: Serendipity and Solace in Digital Research Infrastructure," *Feminist Media Histories* 2, no. 1 (2016): 7–28, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2016.2.1.7>.

30. Roopika Risam, "Beyond the Margins: Intersectionality and the Digital Humanities," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (2015); Babalola Titilola Aiyegbusi, "Decolonizing Digital Humanities: Africa in Perspective," in *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and the Digital Humanities*, eds. Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline (Wernimont, University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
31. Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias, "Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject," *Television & New Media* 20, no. 4 (2019): 336-49.
32. Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020).
33. Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson, "Transnational Television History: a Comparative Approach," *Media History* 16, no. 1, 2010, 2.
34. Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present, and Future of Television Studies," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2008): 152-58.
35. Nanna Bonde Thylstrup et al., eds., *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020): 4-5.
36. Miriam Posner and Lauren Klein, "Editor's Introduction: Data as Media," *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no. 3, (2017): 2.
37. Nanna Thylstrup and Kristin Veel, "Data Visualization from a Feminist Perspective: Interview with Catherine D'Ignazio," *Kvinder. Køn & Forskning* 26, no. 1 (2017), 67-71.
38. D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.
39. For a feminist discussion of the ways in which archival digital practices conceal labour and power dynamics see: Michelle Moravec, "Feminist Research Practices and Digital Archives," in *Archives and New Modes of Feminist Research*, ed. Maryanne Dever (London: Routledge, 2018).
40. For a more detailed review of Palladio, see: Melanie Conroy, "**Networks, Maps, and Time: Visualizing Historical Networks Using Palladio**," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2021).
41. For Country of activity, I mean the countries where the practitioner was active or developed collaborations with.
42. Nanna Bonde Thylstrup et al., eds., *Uncertain Archives*, 7.
43. The credits mention the following sources: *The Global Assembly Line* (Lorraine Gray, Maria Patricia Fernandez, Anne Bohlen. USA, 1986. BFI identifier: 183476); *Women in Nicaragua: The Second Revolution* (Jackie Reiter. Alter Cine. Canada, 1982. Broadcasted on Channel 4 in the programme Broadside, on 5 May 1984. BFI identifier 326103); *Carry Greenham Home* (Beeban Kidron. National Film and Television School. United Kingdom, 1982).
44. Stuart Hall, "Whose heritage? Un-settling 'the heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation," *Third Text* 13, no. 49 (1999): 3-13.
45. Flora Losch, "Preserving Public Broadcasting Archives in the Digital Era: Circulatory Stories and Technologies, the Digital Turn, and the Return of the Past in West Africa," *History in Africa* 47, no. 1 (2020): 219-241.
46. Luise White, "Hodgepodge Historiography: Documents, Itineraries, and the Absence of Archives," *History in Africa* 42, (2015): 309-318.

Biographical Note

Dalila Missero (Lancaster University) is lecturer in film studies. Her research interests include feminist filmmaking, critical archival studies, digital humanities, audiences and reception, transnational cinema. She was awarded the 2022 Media Studies Grant by the International Federation of Television Archives to explore the feminist productions during the UN Decade of Women preserved in the BFI Television archives. In 2022, she published her first monograph *Women, Feminism, and Italian Cinema. Archives from a Film Culture* (Edinburgh University Press), which won the runner-up award of the BAFTSS 2023 Publication Awards.

Appendix 1 – Full List of Case Studies

Series “Time of Our Lives/Female Focus” (7 episodes, Broadside, Sponsored by the United Nations and Channel 4, 1985)

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 771811

Female Focus: Legal Limbo, Ep. 1, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 12/06/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 172149

Female Focus: Polygamy Senegalese Style, Ep. 2, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 13/06/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 260300

Female Focus: The Quiet Revolution, Ep. 3, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 19/06/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 266246

Female Focus: Worlds Apart, Ep. 4, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 20/06/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 327403

Female Focus: Looking Back in Anger, Ep. 5, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 26/06/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 220508

Female Focus: Away from the Sidewalk, Ep. 6, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 27/06/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 122072

Female Focus: On Our Own, Ep. 7, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 04/07/1985

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 248663

Series “A Woman’s World” (6 Episodes, Thames Television, 1987)

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 776398

Half the World’s People, Episode 1, Broadcasted on: ITV 1987-02-09

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 325998

The Struggle for Land, Episode 2, Broadcasted on: ITV 1987-02-16

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 420397

The Price of Marriage, Episode 3, Broadcasted on: ITV 1987-02-23

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 325999

A Veiled Revolution, Episode 4, Broadcasted on: ITV 1987-03-02

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 326000

An Unknown Future, Episode 5, Broadcasted on: ITV, 1987-03-09

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 326001

Teresa, Ep.6, Broadcasted on: ITV, 1987-03-16

BFI Catalogue Identifier: 326002

Series "Promised the Earth" (3 Episodes, International Broadcasting Trust, Diverse Productions, Sponsored by the United Nations, and Channel 4)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 774649

The Impossible Decade, Ep.1, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 20/06/1985
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 264161

Seeds of Resistance, Ep.2, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 27/06/1985
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 264162

Less Equal than Others, Ep.3, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 1985-07-04,
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 104782

Stand-Alone Features

Words in Action (Pictures of Women, 1984, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 01/07/1985)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 326608

Awake from Mourning (E. Wolpert Productions, 1981, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 19/09/1983)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 4255

Awake from Mourning - The Women Discuss their Film (E. Wolpert Productions, 1981, Broadcasted on: Not available)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 4254

Tsiameló - A Place of Goodness (E. Wolpert Productions/ZDF - Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, 1984, Broadcasted on Channel 4: 21/10/1984)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 307217

Mama I'm Crying (E. Wolpert Productions, 1986, Broadcasted on: Channel 4, 23/08/1987)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 225460

Impressions of Exile (Wide Angle Production, 1985, Broadcasted on: Not Available)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 104885

Majdhar (Retake Film & Video Collective, 1984, Broadcasted on: Not Available)
BFI Catalogue Identifier: 102829