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**Title:** *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture*, by Dalila Missero

**Journal Issue:** *gender/sexuality/italy*, 10, I-II (2023-2024)

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**Publication date:** 12/01/2024

**Publication info:** *gender/sexuality/italy*, "Reviews"

**Permalink:** <https://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/16-women-feminism-and-italian-cinema>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.15781/knfr-3w70>

**Keywords:** Book Review

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Missero, Dalila. *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Pp. 240. ISBN 9781789385601. \$ 24.95 (paperback). \$ 99.07 (Hardcover).

Dalila Missero has proven that tracing women's unrecognized contribution to the history of cinema is far more difficult than one would think. In her book, *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema*, she examines scattered and fragmentary sources about women's role as spectators, fictional characters, actresses, activists, and directors to attempt to give a cohesive methodological framework not only to her own research, but also to the case studies of contemporary feminist scholars. This heterogeneous body of work, of which Missero's volume is now part, signals the existence of a consistent interest in women's film culture. *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema* contains three main sections, divided in twelve chapters, that explore the subjects of: 1) film consumption, 2) representation and 3) production. With diligence and acumen, Missero shines invaluable light onto the history of the feminist film culture and provides us with a contemporary, interdisciplinary lens through which to see how the degradation of women's knowledge and artistic production is functional to their exclusion from places of power. Though Missero's stated goals are "to demonstrate that the dominance of men in cinema history is far from obvious," (p. 2) and to approach women's political participation in light of their reinvention and redefinition of the everyday, the result of her work is at times scattered and negligible through the decades she analyzes (1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s). In other words, the length of some of the chapters, which are sometimes just a few pages long, conveys to the reader a sense of unfinished and fragmentary nature. It is true that Missero does warn us in her introduction about the methodological and structural difficulties she faced in analyzing every case study i.e., the lack of sources. Thus, her book leaves us with the desire to know more as more could not be said because of the endemic lack of sources that hampers women's film history. It is therefore the duty of curious scholars to expand and integrate this first holistic attempt.

In the first section, "Cultures of Film Consumption: Affective Spectators and Activist Audiences," Missero aptly discusses the gendered experience of cinema-going in relation to the consumption of other media, such as radio, television and magazines. In chapter one and chapter two, the author analyzes the "advice columns" of politically diverse women's magazines from the 1950s and 60s —*Annabella*, *Famiglia Cristiana*, *Alba*, *Così* and *Noi donne*—to probe how women were prepared, and sometimes indoctrinated, to the fruition of the cinema-going experience. These sources suggested which movies to watch, which ones not to watch, with whom to watch them, what time of the week to go, which show-time to choose, etc. Missero provides a fascinating analysis of women's magazines during and after the economic boom in terms of fully-fledged emotional texts that encouraged reflexivity and self-scrutiny. In such historical moment of cultural and social change, these magazines translated Communist and Catholic political ideologies into practical life-style choices. Missero's analysis showcases a variety of competing political discourses about cinema-going which were targeting young women: from the right-wing thought *Famiglia Cristiana*, which advised to avoid the cinema ("the more a girl stays away from the cinema, the more she deserves esteem, praise and consideration" (p. 32)), to left-wing ideology fostered by *Noi Donne* that instead encouraged women's political engagement with films. Abundant were also magazines that offered more pragmatic suggestions that fitted the needs of the modern bourgeoisie. For instance, *Annabella* published a whole series of articles on how to be a respectable modern woman, that wants to live in a big city and go to the movies, while avoid being harassed by male spectators. The power of Missero's work in these two brilliant chapters stems primarily from her methodological and theoretical approach through which she analyzes understudied sources such as surveys, advice columns, and letters from the readers contained in these popular magazines. Missero proves that *Annabella*, *Famiglia Cristiana*, *Noi Donne*, and

*Cosa* were rather successful at promoting in accessible terms a deeper understanding of cinema-going—first and foremost—as an instrument for cultural and political (dis)engagement.

Chapter three broadly discusses three feminist film festivals—*Kinomata* (1976), *Le rassegne del cinema femminista* (1976), and *L'occhio negato* (1980)—as cultural products of feminist political collectives aiming to build a community of politicized spectators. Here, the author combines archival sources (pamphlets, feminist press, and festival books) with collective narratives of the past in the form of interviews with activists and filmmakers who attended these exhibitions. Missero claims that “the collective experience of watching women’s films together nurtured a sense of belonging to a transnational feminist film community,” (p. 42) a finding that is validated by the translation into Italian of several writings of Anglo-American feminist film theorists. For instance, Laura Mulvey was translated in the popular magazine *Effè*. However, the limitations of this chapter are as evident as the impact of these feminist film festivals, which is almost non-existing. As Missero herself states “these exhibitions didn’t succeed in their project of creating solid infrastructures for the circulation and distribution of women’s cinema and feminist film culture more broadly” (p. 47). The chapter seems rather encyclopedic and aims just to show a list of initiatives whose impact on society seems irrelevant.

In chapter four, the author focuses on lesbian counter publics in the late 19070s. Her reconstruction is based on the materials produced by the lesbian collective Brigade Saffo, the gay magazine *Lambda*, and personal testimonies. Particularly touching is Giovanna Pala’s recollection of her trajectory from objectified film star to committed feminist. Pala describes the Italian film industry as “unapologetically sexist and homophobic, a space in which lesbians could not exist outside the restrict [sic] horizons of patriarchal imagination” (p. 53). Despite the desire to explore what it means to be lesbian in Italy in the 70s, this chapter only vaguely discusses the relation between queerness and cinema as a public, urban space.

The last chapter of this section, chapter five, concentrates on the reactions and debates about pornography in the Italian feminist movement. Missero presents two case studies: the requisition request of *Tamaño Natural / Life Size* (Luis Berlanga, 1974) promoted by Laura Remiddi during the aftermath of the Circeo Massacre; and the attacks against cinema theaters that culminated in 1979 with the group “Compagne Organizzate per il Contropotere Femminista,” which bombed four porn theaters in Rome. This chapter effectively shows that, despite the common feminist belief that pornography affected women at the level of representation and everyday life by objectifying women and instigating sexual violence, Italian feminists did not establish a united front against the use of pornography, especially when it came to arthouse films.

The second part of the book, *Cultures of Representation: Sexuality, Race and Politics*, opens with a dazzling interpretation of the film character of the asexual housewife. Missero is interested in probing the “sexuo-economic relations,” portrayed in the Italian-style comedies of the 60s, and she offers theoretical and political reflections of Italian feminism for these. In this chapter, Missero highlights the connection between the sexuality of heterosexual women in married couples and the realm of capitalist economics that results in two diametrically opposed interpretations: on the one hand, women’s rejection of conjugal sex in these comedies is seen as a neurosis caused by their condition of ‘unproductive’ housewives; on the other hand, in feminist theory, ‘frigidity’ is the expression of women’s discontent and their refusal to engage in unpaid reproductive labor (p. 76).

Chapter seven is a substantial contribution to the topic of racial representation and self-determination of Black Italian actresses. The author utilizes the case study of Ines (Marcia) Pellegrini and her trajectory in Italian media to analyze the role of racialized and colonial discourses in the media culture of the ‘sexual revolution’ of the 70s, and particularly in soft-core pornography. To do so she compares what male *Playboy* authors write about Ines and her collaboration with Pier Paolo Pasolini with how feminist activists victimize her for participating in low-end and soft-core films, and how Ines carries and presents herself as a professional and career woman. Particularly compelling from the

latter perspective, is that Pellegrini “explicitly affirmed that she was aware of the compromises she had made for her career and explained that soft-core films were the only option to start a career in Italian cinema” (p. 93). By stressing this, Missero rescues Pellegrini’s agency while also making a point about the lack of opportunities for black women in Italian cinema. This kind of approach highlights not only the material issues women working in the film industry face(d), but also an incipient post-feminist sensibility that normalizes the link between agency and making ‘necessary’ career ‘compromises.’

Finally, chapter eight focuses on the multifaceted strategies of depoliticization that Fellini pursued during the production of the film *La città delle donne* (*City of Women*, 1980). For this project, Fellini asked feminist activists such as Le Nemesiache, Ippolita Avalli, Adele Cambria to collaborate with him. However, as Missero argues, Fellini resisted and distorted these very contributions and eventually disregarded most. By highlighting the mechanisms of power and resistance within the film, Missero reads *The City of Women* to recuperate neglected positionalities and perspectives, specifically those of feminist activists and queer spectators.

The third and last part of Missero’s volume, “Cultures of Production: Maps, Labour and Archives,” provides a genealogical perspective on women’s role in filmmaking, to emphasize its problematic relationship with notions of authorship, and national cinema. Chapter nine focuses on the figure of Mara Blasetti, production manager and daughter of the director Alessandro Blasetti. Missero positions her research from a gender inequality perspective, which differs from previous anecdotal readings (Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi *L’avventurosa storia del cinema italiano*), from a political-economic perspective (Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano*), and from a technological standpoint, too. In this way, the author emphasizes the importance to undertake research that retraces the historical and material consequences of sexism in the film industry, a task that cannot be achieved without understanding the whole of historical narratives in naturalizing women’s marginality in everyday life.

Chapter ten focuses on the reconstruction of the translational trajectories of a group of women, with specific focuses on Helena Lumbreras, Olga Bianchi, Lili Rademakers, Marisa Romano, Liliana Cavani, and Rosalia Polizzi, all of whom studied film direction at the CSC (Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia). Here, Missero’s original research shows that the ‘absence’ of women directors behind the camera is tied to many institutional and cultural obstacles. The different case studies illuminate the contradictions inherent in women’s visibility and career achievements, the translational contributions of women to their industry, the precarious working conditions characterizing Italian audio-visual industry, and the importance of non-theatrical filmmaking for women directors.

Chapter eleven explores the political and material links between collaborative filmmaking and the activist practices developed in Italy. Missero uses two case studies, one on the experimental films of the Collettivo Femminista di Cinema (FCC), and the other on Sofia Scandurra’s *Io sono mia* (I Am Mine, 1978), as prime examples of counter narratives to the traditional author/director epitome of gendered mechanisms. Furthermore, she explores the transportation of the feminist experimental practice of *autocoscienza* into filmmaking. Finally, the last chapter of section III provides an archive-based reconstruction of the different phases of Adriana Monti’s political and cinematic work.

In conclusion, in her volume Missero significantly and authentically acknowledges the impact of women in cultural productions of different media. She intentionally engages with and illuminates the main argument of the book: that personal beliefs, class, sexual orientation and race concurred to shape women’s precarious, imperfect and sometimes contradictory collectivity. Missero’s research is particularly commendable for retracing the historical and material consequences of sexism in the film industry. The author takes care not to homogenize spectatorship and accentuates the need for acknowledging the nuances and contradictions of diverse feminine subjects. With her poignant analysis, Missero deconstructs the endemic discourses that normalize sexual violence in the workplace

(mainly the cinema and the theater world) and warns us about the dangers of endorsing the common belief that what happens at the level of representation and the media has no influence on the society we live in.

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