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Cinematic Representations of Working Women in the Western World and Japan from 1945 to 1953

Analysing the socio-economic gender backlash through selected popular feature films

Noriko in 'Tokyo Story' (1953)

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Master's thesis

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Abstract

After women joined the industrial workforce during the Second World War, they departed from their industrial occupations as post-war societies reconverted to more traditional gender roles. This thesis studies the socio-economic gender backlash in the Western World and Japan during the early post-war era by analysing the representations of working women in selected popular feature films released in the years between 1945 and 1953. Because predominant social norms are, in social film history, assumed to be reflected in the filmic images of national cinemas, changes in cinematic representations is seen to be a result of changes in the public sentiment. The feature films *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947), *Port of Call* (1948), *Summer with Monika* (1953), *Bitter Rice* (1949), *Umberto D.* (1952), *Early Summer* (1951), and *Tokyo Story* (1953) are used as primary sources for analysis of the USA, Sweden, Italy and Japan respectively. The filmic representations of working women are found to change, in some cases quite clearly and in others more ambiguously, from being largely positive to negative role models as the years go by. Female characters adhering to traditional gender roles are represented more favourably than those who are seen as crossing gender boundaries. This indicates how the public sentiments as reflected in the national cinemas seem to change in accordance with the socio-economical gender backlash in the selected countries.

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Furthermore, I would like to thank my friends and family for offering support and encouragement along the way. Every step along the way was made brighter and easier with their help. A special thanks is dedicated to Andreas who has had to live with me through this process, and who always offered help and words of encouragement.

Looking back, I realise that I could have made things easier for myself. I could have narrowed in on a case study of a single country instead of four. I could have limited the time period further, or chosen a different method of which I had more previous knowledge and experience. I could have chosen an entirely different topic or subject. However, for me that would be to stop exploring, searching, and discovering within the realms of knowledge that are made so readily available at university. I did not want to play it safe with something I already felt I knew, but to reach further in my last semester of being a full-time student. Despite times of stress and difficulty, studying is a privilege I will never take for granted and learning a pleasure I hope I will never go without.

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1 Introduction, Theory and Method

Throughout the duration of the Second World War many countries experienced an intensified mobilisation of the female workforce to aid in their war efforts. Political and public discourse, propaganda and the media framed the working women as patriotic and as being a temporary necessity in times of war. In the United States, female industrial workers were praised to whole new levels by both the media and government documents. "What Job is Mine on the Victory Line" was a famous US propaganda leaflet that encouraged housewives to enter the rearmaments industry by giving a multitude of industrial jobs domestic attributes, as illustrated by the excerpt below:

"What job is mine on the Victory Line?"

If you've sewed on buttons or made buttonholes on a machine,

you can learn to do spot welding on airplane parts.

If you've used an electric mixer in your kitchen,

you can learn to run a drill press.

If you've followed recipes exactly in making cakes,

you can learn to load shell.

…

(Westerberg, 1985)

Although this passage domesticizes heavy and traditionally "masculine" work, it nonetheless allows for transfer between "feminine" and "masculine" skills. The leaflet illustrates that women were now deemed able do this new type of work, and just as she once learned to sew on buttons she could "learn to do spot welding on airplane parts".

In fact, Kossoudji and Dresser's study on women industrial workers at a Ford Motor Company during World War Two provides evidence that women were not only able to transfer their skills to traditionally male jobs, but that "women outproduced men". Kossoudji and Dresser cited a major study of 174 firms in New York that

"concluded that women's productive efficiency were the same or better than men's" (1992: 440). The data suggests that there is no such thing as 'natural' skills fixed to one gender, although that very idea came back with renewed vigour in the post-war period.

When the war ended, so did the praise for the industrial working women. After having gone to great lengths to recruit women to the previously male-dominated jobs and industries, the women were in the early post-war years 'pushed out' from their wartime jobs. A 'return to normality' was on the forefront of many a country's itinerary: everywhere, men returned to their old jobs, married their girlfriends and started families. Furthermore, those countries that had faced great hardships and material destruction during the war were desperate to rebuild and restructure their economies and industries. What this meant for the working women was that just a few years into the post-war period the majority of the female workforce in the male dominated industries had either returned to more traditional female jobs (e.g. as clerks, 'light'-industry work (using light machinery), nursing, primary education and social services) or they became housewives (Kossoudji and Dresser, 1992:431). Scholars used the term 'gender backlash' to describe the loss of power for women as a result of a "normalisation" of society. The return to more traditional jobs for women resulted in loss of power and influence, as well as lower pay and job security.

The gender backlash seemed to pressure women into the traditionally assigned gender roles and gendered jobs women and men respectively had occupied before the war. In the US, the feminine ideal occupation changed from "What Job is Mine of the Victory Line" to "the Feminine Mystique"[1] and "Occupation: Housewife" (Friedan 1963: 38), which glorified the stay-at-home mom and elevated the profession to the highest level.

However, the gender backlash was not confined to the Unites States. In many countries that participated in the war, women were, whether by carrot or by stick, pushed out of the jobs they had occupied during wartime. Also these returned either to

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[1] "The Feminine Mystique" is criticised in Betty Friedan's 1963 book by the same name, and her work is said to have "started" the 1960s feminism and women's movement in the US. The feminist mystique refers to the idea that the only role for women in society is to be a housewife and mother, and that pursuing careers outside the home goes against the natural feminine role. The feminine mystique criticise masculine traits and ambitions in women "who wanted to be like men", and instead

the position of homemaker or had to settle for more traditional types of work, typically with far lower pay and less job security than many of their male counterparts[2].

Much of the research on the topic of representations of working women during and after the war has focused on sources created by governments and the media[3]. By focusing on a different type of medium – popular film – and analysing whether and how the gender backlash is represented in film, I want to add to this body of research. Popular films are so labelled because they appeal to a mass audience and a mass taste. This is what makes them important as a historical source: popular films speak to a majority of people. Allen and Gomery assert that "since filmic images are assumed to be reflections of prevailing social norms, changes in representations are attributed to changes in public sentiment" (1985: 159). Thus, by studying films and filmic representations of working women, female role models and "ideal" femininities and masculinities, I hope to uncover how views on working women changed in different post war societies.

In this thesis I study the socio-economic changes in the Western world and Japan during the post war era by analysing representations of working women in selected feature films released in the years between 1945 and 1953. I have chosen to analyse two films from each of the four following countries: The United States, Sweden, Italy and Japan. For the US, *Mildred Pierce* (1945) is compared to *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947). For Sweden I compare the films *Port of Call* (1948) and *Summer with Monika* (1953). *Bitter Rice* (1949) is compared with *Umberto D.* (1952) for Italy, and *Early Summer* (1951) is compared with *Tokyo Story* (1953) for Japan.

The objective of the thesis is to analyse whether the representations of working women in the selected films indicate a gender backlash in society; secondly, to determine if and how cinematic representations of working women change in response to socio-economic developments between the years of 1945 and 1953; and

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[2] In the cases where the men were actually employed. Many countries, e.g. Italy, faced huge unemployment, and cheap female labour were used by many factories and workplaces to save money.
[3] Relevant studies: Friedan (1963); Summerfield (1989); Westerberg (2007)

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lastly, to compare how the filmic representations differ between the selected countries.

In this thesis I argue that the post-war gender backlash manifested itself in different and complex ways in each of the countries I study, and that changes in the cinematic representations of working women in the chosen films show varying degrees of correlation to the socio-economic developments of each country.

The United States was selected for the analysis to represent the victorious Allied powers after the war. It was a global economic and military superpower, and is the textbook definition of "the West". I selected Sweden as a representative of Northern Europe. As an economically and socially stable country, Sweden was neutral during the war and suffered no major disruption. Italy was included to represent Southern Europe, and was an Axis power and lost the war. It is a Catholic country, suffered massive economical devastation after the war, as well as struggled with a politically divided country. Lastly, Japan represent "the East", and was also on the losing side of the war. The country suffered incomprehensible material destruction after it was hit with two atomic bombs by the US, faced large economic problems, and was under American occupation in the postwar years. The selection comprises a country that emerged from the war as victorious and with a booming economy, as well as two countries on the losing side that had suffered tremendous material, economic and human losses, and a country that remained neutral and therefore faced few consequences of the war. The selected countries provide highly different postwar socio-economical contexts from which it is interesting to see how representations of working women change during the postwar era. Importantly, all four countries had a thriving film industry after the war (Grainge, Jancovich and Monteith 2007).

By comparing a relatively small number of countries, I am applying a small-n case study. A small-n case study is a study which includes the comparison of a small number of countries regarding a specific theme (Hague and Harrop 2010: 44). In doing so, I am looking at some socio-economic developments during the early post-war period in four different countries that pertain to the alleged global gender backlash. A small-n study comparing these four countries and the post-war gender backlash is just small enough to produce a brief, but comprehensive, case-based country comparison, and is yet large enough to say something about global trends

regarding women in waged labour during the selected time-period. This forms the context overview chapter, which will help provide legitimacy to the ensuing film analysis.

Social film history as method

Because of their popularity and significance as a mass entertainment medium, films are an important source to historians of both film and society (Allen and Gomery 1985:157). Justin Smith states that "the aim of film history is to recover evidence about the past through an examination of film texts" (2008). This assumes that any film can reveal something about the time, location and contexts within which it was made. Consenting to such an assumption does, however, in no way mean that I believe the films I have selected directly *reflect* the social reality within which they were made. Rather, I acknowledge Allen and Gomery's warning "that the relationship between films from a given era and the "society" within which they were produced and consumed is both complex and uncertain" (1985: 171). The process of, as well as the benefits and complexities of, applying film history in my investigation of the gender backlash in postwar societies is discussed in this sub-chapter.

Social film history is the main method used in this thesis, and the above-mentioned films are my primary historical sources. The key questions related to the method of social film history are: firstly: Who makes films, and why?; secondly: Who sees films, how and why?; thirdly: What is seen, how and why; and fourthly: How do films get evaluated, by whom and why? (Jarvie 1970: 14; Allen and Gomery 1985: 154).

First, the question 'who makes films and why?' asks who actually speaks to us when we see a film. The question concerns itself with films being a 'social product'. By this I mean that filmmakers by no means have a vantage point from which they can observe and produce films that are perfect descriptions of a 'true reality'. Rather, as members of society, these filmmakers are subject to the same social norms and pressures as everyone else. Furthermore, one of the virtues of using social film history as a method for analysing societies of the past is that films are 'art produced

collectively'. Both Jarvis (1970) and Smith (2008) argue that analysing films are more useful than e.g. analysing books or paintings created by a single artist. Films are products of collaborative efforts, and normally require large teams of individuals working towards their completion. This means that neither the director nor the producer of a film can claim to be singularly responsible for the finished product. Others, such as the script-writers, editors, actors, costume designers, sound-technicians, make-up artists etc., also play a part in influencing the film in various, larger or smaller, ways. This adds to the medium's validity as a source through which to gain some insight into past societies.

Furthermore, filmmaking takes place within a social context, and film is additionally influenced by a country's filmmaking practices and traditions. Jarvie writes that: "(…) attempts have been made to relate films to what is known of the society and social psychology of the societies which produced them. It may seem a trifle odd to speak of societies 'producing' things; all that is meant is that to some extent the attitudes, values and interests of their makers are conditioned by the social context in which they were raised and in which they work" (Jarvie 1970: 7). Based on Jarvie's statement, I propose the following syllogism:

Filmmakers are individually influenced by their society and social context → A film is the product of many filmmakers → Therefore films are negotiated social products of art.

The term 'films are *negotiated* social products of art' means that the films carry the imprint of the social understanding and experiences of those individuals who have collaborated on the film. The film is a negotiated social product because it may inadvertently illustrate a mixed sense of the society within which it was made. The above syllogism is of course a oversimplification of the social film history argument. But, nonetheless, it works to illustrate the correlation between film and society.

As for the sub question of "why" films are made, it is important to clarify that filmmaking is essentially a business. It is an industry with the main purpose of making a profit so that it can produce more films. Filmmaking is usually very expensive, and thus the director needs a producer or a production company who is

willing to finance it. In return, the producer sees the film as a product he wants to sell, and earn more from. However, to be profitable, a film has to appeal to mass audience, meet their preferences, know their fears and hopes and play to them. People are drawn by the masses into the cinema by several factors: famous stars, popular directors, through specific genres people like to see, through stories people like to watch, and through characters on screen they can identify with. The interests of the filmmakers are often somewhat different from the producer (though sometimes overlapping). A filmmaker wants to make "his" film, apply his ideas to the film and make a work of art. However, he or she also (usually) wants to be praised and become famous, which is directly connected to money and the film's popularity.

The second question, 'Who saw films, how and why?', enquires about the audience as a group, their habits and their reasons for seeking out films to pass their free time instead of reading books or engaging in some other pastime. John Belton answers the first part of the questions as follows: "Who goes to the movies? No one really knows" (1994: 419). Sociologists call an audience an 'unstructured group' in that it only exist as a group intermittently and for a short period of time, as well as it constantly shifts and alters itself with different membership (Jarvie 1970:89). Entering a cinema with the intention to watch a film is both a private and a social act. It is a private act in that the individual experience the film in his or her own way, and it is social because the cinema venue was also a place where people met and shared experiences (Gennari and Sedgwick 2015). The demographic of the cinema-goers varies through history in terms of age groups, social class, regions, income and ethnicity (Allen and Gomery 1985:156).

People's motivations for going to the cinema are as diverse as the audience itself. Some people go simply to have a good time and see the new film they have heard about, whilst others go for a rest. Some want to distract themselves from their own problems, and others want to open their eyes of the problems of others by observing the characters predicaments on-screen. Some go to learn, others for art, and others again to see their favourite star-icon (Jarvis 1970:19). In any case, they all have some reason to actively go and seek out a specific film on which they spend their time and money.

All four countries included in this thesis experienced a golden era of cinema in the early postwar era. In fact, the United States only started to see a decrease in audience numbers in the late 1940s due to the emergence and increased availability of the television set. Cinema boomed after the Second World War, and never before, or after did so many people go to the cinema (Allen and Gomery 1985: 157). In many countries cinema was the most popular pastime, which makes films a particularly good source to investigate postwar society.

Third, the question, 'What is seen, how and why?' relates to the films themselves, and how they are understood by the audience. Even fictional films are ultimately social representations, however indirect this connection may be. The fictional films' social environment, within which they were created, has influenced their stories and themes, as well as their images, sounds and characters. Fictional characters still derive their attitudes, motivations, desires, fears and appearances from the prevalent social roles and general ideas about how a mother, husband or factory worker is "supposed" to act (Allen and Gomery 1985:158).

Here, it becomes important to identify some possible complexities and pitfalls with this type of reasoning. Siegfried Kracauer's classic *From Caligary to Hitler* (1947) has been criticised by later film historians (Allen and Gomery, 1985; Jarvie, 1970; Kaes, 1995) for being hind-sighted and reductionist. Kracauer argued that "through an analysis of the German films deep psychological dispositions predominant in Germany from 1918 to 1933 can be exposed – dispositions which influenced the course of events during that time and which will have to be reckoned with in the post-Hitler era" (Kracauer in Allen and Gomery 1985: 160-1). Hence, he believed one can observe a nation's mentality reflected in its films, and that the motifs in films reflected the state of mind of the entire society. Although Kracauer's thesis has been refuted, it makes us aware that there are some significant uncertainties with using social film history as a method to learn more about the past – both in terms of how films influence the society and the mass audience through role models and images, and with regard to how society shapes the content and form of film. Jarvis states: "Apart from anthropological fieldwork, I know of nothing comparable from the point of view of getting inside the skin of another society as viewing films made for the

home market" (1970: 4). By this it is not implied that by watching a film one will be able to determine what is "true" about its society and nation. Yet the fact that the film was made by and for the inhabitants of that society, and viewed by a mass audience, makes it an important source from which we can gain a glimpse into another society and culture.

Here it is also important to note how power comes into play. As Foucault said: "Whoever speaks possesses the power to speak" (1981). Certain films, styles, movements etc. did not emerge in a specific country at a specific time at random, but is the product of the structures and manifests of power (Kaes 1995: 55). It is interesting to ask "who are represented in the films and who are repressed? Why were the filmmakers of the films chosen for this study able to express themselves and not others?" Asking critical questions about prevalent power structures in a given society is crucial in the pursuit of understanding the links between the "real" society and the society, people and ideals and ideas that are re-imagined in the films.

Hence, an argument made by Molly Haskell in her book *From Reverence to Rape*, draw attention to how women are reflected on-screen in a manner that is in line with male attitudes towards women in society as a whole: "audiences for the most part were not interested in seeing, and Hollywood not interested in sponsoring, a smart ambitious woman as a popular heroine. A woman who could compete and conceivably win in a man's world would defy emotional gravity, would go against the grain of prevailing notions about the male sex" (Haskell in Allen and Gomery 1985:158-9). Thus, stereotypical depictions of female characters often correspond with society's view on women.

Lastly, the fourth key question social film history is concerned with is 'How do films get evaluated, by whom and why?'. According to Jarvis there is a difference in how the 'success' of a film is determined by the film production companies and "the high-brow critics". The film companies claim that when they are making a lot of money off a film, the audience are getting what they want and are seeing it by the masses, and the film is deemed a 'hit', and thereby successful. Meanwhile, the 'high-brow critics' complain that profits offers no guidance to tell if a film is successful or not, because even though many cinemagoers paid for and saw the film they might have left the theatre bitterly disappointed. They argue that the audience is often served 'trash'

films, as opposed to 'good' ones that may be less of a 'blockbuster hit' and more about the art and quality of the medium. Jarvie points out that both positions are flawed, and that the highbrows overcomplicate things while the film companies oversimplify (1970: 181-2). The essential question here is perhaps rather "what is a good film?". Is a good film one that attracts large audiences and brings high box office returns, as the film industry claims? Or is a good film a work of high artistic quality that inspires the audience to reflect and think, as is the film critic's argument? Attempting to find some common ground between the opposing views, I have in this study chosen films that were both a hit in terms of their box-office numbers, as well as award-winning productions. The film awards granted to the feature films I have chosen to analyse will tell me something about how the films were 'officially' evaluated by film critics at the time of their release. I must emphasise, however, that I do not make a qualitative judgement of the films I analyse, but that I am rather interested in the films for the sake of the representations of gender roles and relations.

Gender as category

As elaborated on earlier in this chapter, the objective of this study is to evaluate whether the representations of working women in the eight selected feature films address the post-war socio-economic gender backlash. 'Gender', as defined by the feminist theorist J. W. Scott, is "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (1986: 1057). Hence, using gender as a category of analysis helps to establish how the films engage with, and perhaps produce or affirm, these relationships of power. Where are women placed in the film? Is there a discernible change between the films in how femininity is represented? Which traits are presented as "ideal" masculine and feminine traits? How and why are certain femininities and masculinities presented in a positive light, whilst other types are repressed, ridiculed or stigmatised? And lastly, how do these cinematic representations correlate to, or produce, different post-war realities?

Based on biological differences, men and women have historically been assigned certain gender roles and characteristics. These characteristics have been used to either

grant or limit an individual's access to economic or political power, and assigned each gender to either the public or private sphere of society. For instance, in the Western world women have traditionally been associated with the private sphere, the home, whilst men are out in the public sphere. Simone De Beauvoir critically labels these historic domains ascribed to women and men as 'immanence' and 'transcendence' (De Beauvoir 1997). Women as immanent are placed in a closed-off realm where they are essentially static, passive, reproductive and self-immersed. Men are designated for the opposite, namely transcendence, where they are dynamic, active, and productive as they extend outwards into the public realm (1997).

Mimi Schippers builds a theoretical framework based on R.W. Connell's ground-breaking ideas about hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities in her work 'Recovering the feminine other: masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony' (2007). Here she includes suggestions of multiple femininities and hegemonic femininity into Connell's existing theories, which are directly relevant for the cinematic representations of working women I look for in this study. In his work, Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (…) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995: 77 in Schippers 2007: 87). Importantly, at the core of Connell's thesis lies the statement that there is a hierarchy between masculinities, and that the hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity that is accepted by men and women alike as the ideal form of masculinity. The idea is that hegemonic masculinity suppresses other forms of masculinity, but is, in spite of this suppression, still considered an ideal by the supressed masculinities. The influence of hegemonic masculinity is so strong because even the suppressed masculinities (those who are sidelined, ridiculed, etc.) are still hierarchically above women because they are men. Thus, Connell suggests that hegemonic masculinity authorises men's domination over women as a group when it is represented by a group of men over time and space. This means that specific characteristics has to have a strong foothold in society as being associated with particularly ideal "masculine" traits over time by an elite group of men to establish itself as the hegemonic masculinity. He further states that no femininities are hegemonic, since every form of femininity in society is necessarily

constructed within a context of female subordination to men (Ibid.). To this, Schippers add her own definition of the concept of hegemonic femininity: "Hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2007: 102). This illustrates an idealised relationship between femininity and masculinity, wherein neither category is threatened by the other, but rather works to strengthen the existing power relations between men and women.

This theory then seems to correlate with Butler's earlier definition of gender as a socially constructed binary that defines "women" and "men" as two distinctive classes of people who inhibit certain behaviours, bodies, desires and personality traits, which assigns them to one or the other group (Butler 1990 in Schippers 2007: 89-90). However, Butler goes on to claim that what connects the feminine and masculine in their binary, hierarchical relationship, is heterosexual desire. The 'masculine' is here constructed through the possession of the erotic desire for the feminine object, whilst the 'feminine' is constructed by being the object of masculine desire (*Ibid*: 90). What becomes interesting here, however, is what happens if anything upsets this relationship.

If hegemonic masculine and feminine characteristics differentiate mainly in terms of desire for the feminine object, authority and physical strength, and additionally work to legitimate and define male superiority and social dominance over women, it would be in men's self-interest to keep these characteristics unavailable to women. Hence, in order for men to guarantee their own exclusive access to the above characteristics, women who appear to inhabit these traits must be stigmatised and labelled as deviant, as well as face swift social sanctions (Schippers 2007: 94-5). Also women object to other women's display of specific characteristics traditionally associated with men, which is what hegemonic femininity is all about: Namely that it suppresses other femininities, and thus works as an accomplice to hegemonic masculinity. Thus, women who are considered threatening to male power are suppressed or stigmatised by both men and women, as they upset the power structure. Women who are aggressive, promiscuous, sexually inaccessible, or desire other women sexually, can be said to infringe on the hegemonic masculine characteristics.

Schippers name this set of characteristics in women as 'pariah femininities'. This is because rather than being subordinate to the hegemonic femininity, pariah femininities are deemed to contaminate the idealised relationship between masculinity and femininity. It is this relationship between hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and the "pariah femininities", which I want to explore further in the chosen films of this study. What characteristics are presented as unfeminine and thus attributed to "pariah femininities"? Does this classification change over the progression of the early post-war years? Are the female characters presented in a negative or positive light based on which 'femininity' they have been cast in? What is the relationship between male characters and different female characters? These are questions that will be answered in the film analysis chapter and discussion and conclusions chapter.

The thesis is comprised of four chapters including the introduction. Chapter 2 offers an overview over the socio-economic context from the time of the Second World War to the early post-war era. This synopsis is limited to developments that connects to the topic of a gender backlash in female labour participation, such as political and public discourse, marriage and birth rates, economy and political directives, and thus has a thematic approach. The focus of the chapter is on the USA, Sweden, Italy and Japan, though occasionally includes other countries (e.g. Germany and the USSR) in order to illustrate the wider context. The purpose of this second chapter is to provide the socio-economic context and historical background for the following two chapters: the film analysis chapter and the discussion and conclusion chapter. Chapter 3 analyse the selected films from a social film history approach. The films are separated into a country-by-country structure, moving from the USA to Sweden, Italy and Japan, and analysed within their respective countries' social context in the years 1945 to 1953. The films are first introduced individually, and then come together in the context discussion for each country. This will reveal any changes in representations of on-screen working women during the early post-war years.

Lastly, chapter 4 comprises the discussion of the findings and conclusion of the thesis. The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the filmic representations of working women within the historical socio-economic context and to compare and contrast the countries.

2 Context Overview

The early postwar era was a time of massive global transformation Because of the devastating effects of the Second World War, the former Great Powers were now replaced by two ideologically incommensurable non-European superpowers: the capitalist USA and the communist USSR. The war had been responsible for close to 40 million deaths worldwide: over half of them were Soviets, six million were Polish, four million were German, two million Chinese, and two million Japanese, whilst the USA and Britain lost just under half a million people each (Lowe 2005: 117, and NationalWWIIMuseum.org). There was massive material destruction, as well as devastated economies and industries in several countries, and poverty and unemployment was huge concerns for many. The process of rebuilding in Europe did not start immediately, and the whole continent remained politically, morally[4] and economically unstable long after the decade came to an end (Lowe 2013: 93). Moreover, the introduction of the atomic bomb resulted in people living in fear of total destruction, not just of single cities and countries, but of mankind itself (Huldt 2007:13).

However, despite the atomic fear, the short decade after 1945 was also an era of optimism. Economic growth, the development of the welfare state, and an end to the global war had caused many to be excited and optimistic for the future (Huldt 2007: 13). Several countries experienced "marriage-" and "baby booms", as people during the war had been longing for "normality", which included ideas of home, safety, traditions, marriage and children, could now finally make this happen (Freidan 1963: 47-8; Simonton 2003: 190). Within this context, women experienced several changes and reconversions regarding their roles and place in the different societies.

From mobilisation to gender backlash

The signs of a gender backlash I am looking for in each country will necessarily have some differences due to the countries different political, economical, cultural and historical context. The gender backlash observed in the US after WWII follows a rather clear-cut formula: after a massive surge in female labour participation during

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[4] Thieving, rape, violence, prostitution etc. were widespread throughout Europe in the aftermath of the war (Lowe 2013).

the war, which included women entering into lucrative industrial jobs that had previously been almost exclusively male-dominated, they largely disappeared from these occupations in 1944-5. These female workers were either laid off or left willingly[5]. Regardless, the women who left then returned to more traditional jobs, or became housewives (Kossoudji and Dresser 1992:431), which was an ideal further pushed through dominant political and media discourse (May 1988; Freidan 1963). In Sweden, a new Labour Market Commission, arbetsmarknadskommisionen (AMK) had in 1939 started to work on conducting a national registration of labour market "reserves", which consisted of women, youths, the unemployed and retirees, who were recruited to essential occupations. This reserve manpower was desperately needed during the war, as Sweden, despite being neutral, initiated military conscription, and redirected much of the labour power to defence industries (Klausen 2001: 97-100). Several sectors in Sweden acutely felt the lack of female workers during the war, and especially seamstresses and retail workers were lacking, as these sectors had been outdone by industry and administrative work who offered higher pay (Almgren 2006: 44). Consequently, Swedish women experienced to gain greater access to male dominated fields of employment during this period (Almgren 2006: 2). After the war ended there was still a great need for female workers in the typical female occupations, but many (especially married) women returned home as homemakers instead (Almgren 2006: 153). This was because this type of "female" work was seen as repetitive, meaningless and low-payed, and women, who had to combine responsibilities in the home and at the workplace, had to decide whether working was economically viable or not (Almgren 2006: 153). However, in other countries, women can be seen to take up a larger proportion of the nation's total workforce in the early post-war era than they had before, such as in Italy (Tomka 2013: 67). Yet, the dominant political discourse (supported and influenced the Catholic Church) spoke out against women in gainful labour, and ideally placed

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[5] Kossoudji and Dresser (1992), Friedan (1963), etc., suggest that some women who can be recorded as having left "voluntarily" were instead "pushed out" of their jobs. Male managers and union leaders used institutional prerogative and seniority rules which aided a return to an "all male workforce" (Kossoudji and Dresser 1992: 431). Some women's job situation seemed hopeless or unrewarding as men were promoted over women, and women often had to be content with being demoted to positions where men could take credit for their work (Friedan 1963: 163). These were contributing factors to why women willingly left their jobs, rather than being fired.

Italian women almost entirely in relation to the home and in the family, as mothers, daughters, or wives (Rossi 2009; Tasca 2004).

In Japan, women were not required to work in factories until 1943, at which point the Japanese labour market had lost a significant amount of men. By 1944, over four million Japanese women worked in most of the vital industrial sectors, such as weaponries, pharmaceuticals, aircraft manufacturing, electrical factories and textiles (ethw.org). Now, all able-bodied women, including married women, were strongly encouraged to take up work (ethw.org). However, after the war had ended and the American Occupation had pushed through more rights for Japanese women through the implementation of the Constitution of Japan in 1947 (Constitution of Japan 1947; Koikari 2002; Gerteis 2009), working women still faced criticism and disapproval for diverting from traditional gender roles and occupations (ethw.org). Furthermore, the persistence of maternalist ideologies played a significant part in shaping women's employment patterns in post-war Japan (Gerteis 2009: 3; Devasahayam and Yeoh 2007: 54).

Consequently, to establish whether and how the gender backlash took place in the post-war societies of the USA, Sweden, Italy and Japan, I look out for several political, economical and social factors that led to women returning to more traditional occupations after the war.

The aim of this chapter is thus to provide a concise outline of the political, economical and social developments that affected working women from the years 1945 to 1953 in the United States, Sweden, Italy and Japan. My main objective for this chapter is to provide a context overview, which will be used to support up under the subsequent film analysis. The idea is to link the cinematic representations of working women to the reality of the societies within which the films were produced and influenced.

I have divided this chapter into four main parts. The first part, Economic Change, investigates how economic factors played into the transformations of women's employment situations. The second part, Political Change, looks at the dominant political discourse, as well as the relevant legislations coming out, regarding women, work and family in the four countries. The third part, Social Change, deconstructs the post-war social restoration of narrower gender boundaries regarding the roles for

women in society, at home and in the workplace. Lastly, the fourth part offers a brief summary of the main points to take away from this context overview.

Economic Change

The economic situation in the four nations played a significant part regarding the position of women in non-traditional gender roles and employment. For instance, whilst Japan and Italy had lost the war and suffered greatly economically, the United States had come out of the war on top as an economic and military superpower, and was now also the occupying power in Japan. Italy suffered large-scale poverty and unemployment, and the country was politically and ideologically torn between liberal and communist/socialist supporters. Sweden, on the other hand, had had a different experience and outcome of the war because of its neutrality. The country had been able to stay out of the conflict, and had thus avoided any economic, material, industrial or large human losses[6]. Instead, Sweden had experienced strong economic growth throughout the conflict, experienced labour shortages, and had started building up the world's first welfare state (Huldt 2007: 156-7). Consequently, the four countries' economies were significantly uneven after the Second World War.
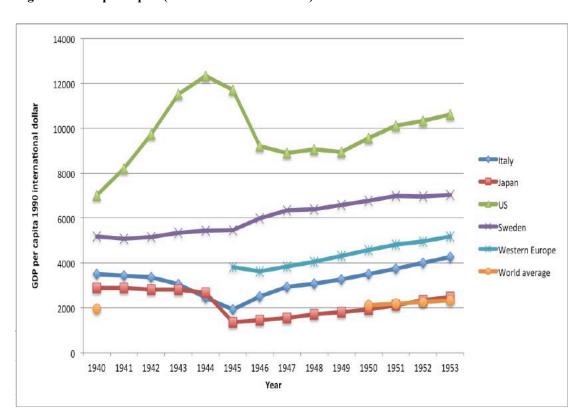
Figure 1: GDP per capita (1990 international dollar) from 1940 to 1953

Looking at Figure 1, which illustrates the GDP per capita from 1940 to 1953, it becomes apparent how the economic postwar division was rooted in the individual country's success or failure in the war. Japan and Italy were both at their lowest economic points in 1945, their economies ruined by war, before they started increasing steadily again as the countries were able to rebuild and restructure. Sweden had an overall steadily rising economy over the wartime and early postwar years due to its neutrality, and the United States had become hugely wealthy on their massive war production during the war, and then continued its economic prosperity after it had restructured the war production to other peace-time productions, such as car manufacturing. The graph in Figure 1 overall shows a positive development for Western Europe, Sweden and the US, with their real GDP per capita steadily growing. However, Western Europe collectively presents numbers lower than Sweden, and much lower that the US alone, which reflects the economic problems and destruction left in certain European countries directly after the Second World War, such as Germany.

These economic differences between countries meant a huge deal for working women in the respective countries, much because of the political measures that were taken to reverse the negative economical developments in some countries after the war, or to continue the prosperous economies in others. In 1945, Sweden was one of Europe's wealthiest countries – seeing that it had avoided the war, as well as that the country had had a strong economic growth since the end of the First World War (Huldt 2007: 153). The country's economic strength had sprung from several factors: Firstly, the expansion was mainly due to a global postwar boom in international trade. Secondly, Sweden had transformed from a country mainly exporting raw materials to a country with a highly advanced technological industry. Especially the engineering industry, with its highly advanced production system (electronics) had taken over as Sweden's main livelihood. Thirdly, there was a fundamental stability in the society's structure,

and a stable labour market that was built on trust between employees and employers (Huldt 2007: 157).

Sweden's strong economy was directly influencing the citizens lives positively, as the Social Democratic government made sure to spend that money on building up the welfare state, and was intent on decreasing economic- and class-based differences between the people. In Sweden female participation in the total labour force decreased from 30,1 to 29,8 percent between 1940 and 1950, before it rose again in 1960 to 33,6 percent[7] (Tomka 2013: 67). In the US, the female labour force had increased by over 50 percent between 1940 and 1945, as a result of the war effort, but these numbers fell as women were pushed out during the war's immediate aftermath. In 1947, the proportion of women in the labour force had decreased to 30.8 percent from 36.5 percent in 1944. Female employment began to climb again by the end of 1947 (Coontz 1992:160), but this re-growth of female labour participation was within the more traditional occupations.

Thus, a gender backlash did not mean that women had necessarily pulled out of the workforce entirely, but rather that the nature of their work changed. In Italy, the number of female employment as a percentage of the total workforce rose from 25,3 percent in 1940 to 26,4 percent in 1950, before it jumped to 30,7 in 1960[8] (Tomka 2013: 67). This rise could be explained in terms of the cheap labour women were made to provide during Italy's economic crisis in the immediate postwar years. Men were largely out of work due to the massive unemployment facing Italy at the time, but families still needed food and shelter, so women went out to work for negligible pay just so they could provide for their families (Buchanan 2006: 63).

Japan, however, stands out significantly from the other three countries with regards to their significant increase of women in waged labour after the war: The total number of women employed in full-time waged work (and the vast majority worked full time) more than doubled between 1940 and 1950, from 2.98 million to 6.3 million working women (Gerteis 2009: 7). This result could have several likely factors: First, like in many other countries, Japanese women played their part in the war effort, and

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[7] Also Ireland and Finland experienced a temporary decline in their female portion of their total workforce from 1940 to 1950 (Tomka 2013:67)

[8] In fact, in Europe, Italy was just one of the many countries who experienced an incline in female participation in the waged labour force between 1940 and 1950; Hungary, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Germany/FRG, Belgium and France also saw more women out in work after the war (Tomka 2013: 67).

started working in factories etc. to help their country, which led to an increase in numbers. Second, the reason why these figures did not seem to drop after the war ended was that the old feudal system was abolished through the Occupational power's new Japanese Constitution, which encouraged gender equality, and female work participation. Despite this however, after the war the Japanese government tried to emphasise women's roles as mothers rather than workers (Lee 2006: 387). There were also the issue of a weakened economy, in which female workers provided much cheaper labour than their male counterparts: Wages for women, relative to men worsened after the war, and in 1952, women working full time in the mining sector made only 46 percent of the average monthly wage earned by men. This number was 41 percent for the women working in the manufacturing sector, 46 percent in the wholesale retail sector, 44 percent in finance and insurance, 50 percent in construction, 59 percent in transportation, and electric, gas and water earned 59 percent of the monthly wage to their male counterparts (Gerteis year: 82-3). It is interesting then, that GHQ had in 1947 prohibited employers from paying wages based on the sex of the workers through special provisions under the Labour Standards Law (Gerteis 2009: 22). As the economy started to improve towards the end of the American occupation in Japan, Japanese women left their jobs and returned to the home as housewives (Lee 2006: 387).

Political Change

For Italian women, the period of Italy's postwar reconstruction could initially be seen as signifying a moment of hopefulness after Mussolini's Fascist rule; in the election of the Constituent Assembly and in the referendum on the Italian monarchy in 1949, they voted for the first time as "full Italian citizens" (Rossi 2009: 247). Additionally, both of the main political parties, the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI), had in 1944 established women's associations, and in 1950 a bill regarding working mothers became law. This meant that the dismissal of mothers during pregnancy and a year after the child's birth was now forbidden, and working mothers were provided with paid leave both before and after childbirth (Rossi 2009: 247).

However, the legislation did not protect the large numbers of women who worked from home, and the law resulted in newly married women being dismissed, and thus they joined the multitude of women who had been fired from their jobs to make space for the men returning from war (Rossi 2009: 247).

Furthermore, the role of the Catholic Church and their influence on the dominant political discourse of the eventual winning party, the DC, cannot be overstated. The DC had emerged in 1946 as Italy's largest party, and had won by getting 35 percent of the vote. The party had strong support from women, who seemed to accept the party's arguments of how the war had damaged the family order and tradition, and now needed to be repaired (Hitchcock 2004: 84). Domestic work was conceptualised as a "feminine duty" in 1948, and was a theory that had substantial political consensus (Tasca 2004: 93). The first mayor of Florence after the liberation, socialist physician Gaetano Pieracci, suggested a "state ordinance for the removal of wives from extra-domestic labour," should be put in place, and that there should be a total division of responsibilities in the family, where women were at home, the men went to work, the children attended school and the elderly went into retirement (Gaetano Pieracci in Tasca 2004: 96). This sentiment was shared by President of the Council De Gasperi, who praised the woman who returned home to her family and her home, whilst emphasising "the accessory nature of feminine labour" (Tasca 2004: 96).

Two catholic associations[9] with connection to the DC further worked to root women more firmly to the home in traditional gender roles, and opposed any measures that would help women actively participating in the nation's labour force. For instance, the associations objected to nurseries and company cafeterias, reasoning that the family will be destroyed if a woman is relieved of her chore of preparing lunch for her family, as it will take away her joy of caring for her family, and that the bond between mother and child will break if children are sent to nurseries (Tasca 2004: 97-8). At the core of the Catholic proposal in post-war Italy, was the family allowance. Family allowances were paid to men, and "fertility prizes" for men replaced maternity benefits (Simonton 2003: 189). Simonton (2003) argues that though these measures succeeded in improving maternity and welfare services, only

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[9] Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani (Italian Christioan Worker's Association) and the Centro Italiano Femminile (Italian Feminine Center).

breastfeeding Italian women could expect to receive assistance, and that the maternalist ideologies that shaped Italian post-war policies considerably haltered women's initially improved position in society in 1949.

The immediate postwar political situation in Japan could also be argued to initially represent a positive development for Japanese women. The country was under US occupation from 1945 to 1951, with the chief commander being General MacArthur (Huldt 2007: 173; others). The American occupiers had strongly encouraged the creation of a constitution that granted women rights equal to those Western women enjoyed (Huldt 2007: pp; Koikari 2002: pp). This ended up being included in the constitution, despite Japan's historical staunch traditionalism regarding gender roles, behaviour, work, etc. This new constitution was created in 1947 through the cooperation between the Japanese Shidehara Cabinet and MacArthur's staff, but it is clear that the constitution in its final form was largely a product of the occupying force (Huldt 2007: 173). This is made especially clear by the three demands that were made by the Americans: one, the monarchy was to remain; Two, the constitution would in writing have the Japanese people renounce war, and; Three, all "feudal" features should be removed (Huldt 2007:173). Directly regarding Japanese women, the Constitution of Japan (1947) included Articles 13[10] and 14[11], which would assure women's equality and rights as Japanese citizens. Article 15[12] guarantees universal suffrage, Article 24[13] supported gender equality with regards to marriage and divorce, and equal access to education was guaranteed under Article 26[14]. Japanese women's

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[10] Article 13. All of the people shall be respected as individuals. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness shall, to the extent that it does not interfere with the public
welfare, be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs.
[11] Article 14. All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin.
[12] Article 15. The people have the inalienable right to choose their public officials and to dismiss them. All public officials are servants of the whole community and not of any group thereof. Universal adult suffrage is guaranteed with regard to the election of public officials.
In all elections, secrecy of the ballot shall not be violated. A voter shall not be answerable, publicly or privately, for the choice he has made.
[13] Article 24. Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis.
With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes.
[14] Article 26. All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law.

rights to work was written in under Article 27[15], and Article 44[16] stated that the elections and qualifications of members of both (political) Houses should not be discriminated because of sex. Moreover, GHQ (General Headquarters) went a step further, and under the Labour Standards Law approved some special provisions that would uphold the equal right for women to have the same opportunity as men for employment and promotions. These provisions also prohibited employers from paying different wages based on the workers sex, and also "specifically guaranteed maternity leave, nursing and menstruation leave" (Gerteis 2009: 22).

Of course, this all looked very promising on paper, and the occupiers wrote home about having "liberated" Japanese women (Huldt 2007: 173; Koikari 2002: 24). The reality, however, was that these abrupt changes in cultural and social standards did not foster true or lasting social change in equality for Japanese women (ethw.org 2015). For instance, Japan favoured the system of a male breadwinner and female homemaker, and men could get tax exempt privileges for supporting their spouses, whereas women could not (Devashayam and Yeoh 2007: 53). Although the 1947 Constitution of Japan remained after most of the US military troops had left in 1951, it was problematic in the sense that it did not spring naturally from the Japanese people themselves. After the emperor's first visit with general MacArthur, he published a poem in Tokyo's newspapers:

"The fir is brave when it does not change colour under snow weight.
Also people should be so." (Huldt year: 173)

The poem seem to imply that the Japanese people had to be patient and bear the presence of the American army, but do so without changing their nature. This leads me to believe that the Japanese people accepted the temporary occupying role America had for the few years they were there, but that they planned to revert back to their old traditions and cultural customs when the occupiers left. My theory is supported by Huldt's explanation of how very little anti-Americanism had taken place

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[15] Article 27. All people shall have the right and the obligation to work. Standards for wages, hours, rest, and other working conditions shall be fixed by law.

[16] Article 44. The qualifications of members of both Houses and their electors shall be fixed by law. However, there shall be no discrimination because of race, creed, sex, social status, family origin, education, property or income.

out in the open in the years between 1945-1951, but that it rather broke out after Japanese independence was achieved (2007: 175). People's discontent was expressed when the occupying power's censorship was abolished, which was in part inspired by the communists, and partly a reaction to the conditions they had lived under after the war. Political life, however, did not change (2007: 175).

Consequently, despite the new constitutional rights of gender equality and the now increased work experience of women in the war industries, after the war the government emphasized the roles of women as mothers. As Japan started to recover and grow economically, women were returning home as housewives (Lee, 2006: 387).

Both American and Swedish women already had the right to vote, and gender equality in these countries were already largely in place on paper and relatively well rooted politically. So much so in fact, that the American occupational forces in Japan chose to export their own model of gender equality to the Japanese (Koikari 2002).

There are essentially two opposing theories trying to provide an explanation for why and how American women left their lucrative industrial jobs at the end of the Second World War. The first theory, the traditional supply theory, explain that extraordinary times pulled women into the industrial labour markets as a patriotic act, and then willingly retreated to more traditional roles at the war's end. This was due to their personal preference or because of pressures from a feminine ideology (Kossoudji and Dresser 1992: 431). The second, and newer theory, the demand theory, instead claim that working class women changed occupation as a response to the high industrial wages, and were subsequently pushed out after the war. This was done by male managers and union leaders trying to re-establish an all male workforce through the use of institutional male privilege and seniority rules (Kossoudji and Dresser 1992: 431).

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the USA introduced a legislation that threatened women's chances to work. The G.I. Bill (of Rights), was a legislation passed in 1944 that would ensure certain benefits for veterans of the Second World War. Amongst other things, the bill ensured certain job training and gave hiring privileges to the returned GIs, which caused some post-war anxiety amongst women and minorities who feared they would be pushed out of their employment to make for

the returning veterans, which clearly was a valid, and accurate, apprehension (Library of Congress n.d.).

Furthermore, some argue that the women's movement in post-war America was not as strong or as popular as the civil rights movement. This led to the UAW (the United Automobile Workers) being able to force companies to hire many more African-American men, but could allegedly not promote women as the issue lacked a strong local movement and local consensus favouring their work rights (Milkman in Kossoudji and Dresser 1992: 445).

Nevertheless, the crucial factor for a post-war gender backlash for American women can be traced back to the dominant political discourse. This discourse had framed wartime female – and especially, housewife – participation in the war production industry as a temporary patriotic measure. The wartime propaganda was framed in such a way that it reinforced the patriarchal ideas of gender relations, and women were asked to "help out", "for the duration", "for the country in its time of need" (Simonton 2003: 183). This rhetoric assumes that this type of work was "unnatural" for women, and suggest women were asked to temporarily behave "like men" (Simonton 2003: 183). The war-time phenomenon of housewives employed in war production was essentially need-driven in many respects, and therefore both an acceptable and admirable endeavour for women during war-time. These women were labelled as patriotic for helping their country win the war, as well as some even took over the main responsibility for keeping their children housed, clothed and fed.

However, when the war was won, and the men returned, women were expected to retreat from their industrial jobs and go back to "Occupation: Housewife" or other more traditional occupations, such as clerical work (Friedan 1963). According to Robert J. Corber (2006) and Elaine Tyler May (1988), one of the cornerstones of the Cold War nationalism apparent a little later in the 1950's was the re-domestication of women in the post-war American society. Vice-President Nixon went so far as to root American superiority in the "ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and distinct gender roles for family members" (May 1988: 19). For him, the male breadwinner and the female homemaker in the "model" home, decked out with consumer goods, signified the very heart of American freedom (Nixon 1959 in May 1988: 19-20). Corber further emphasises that American women who chose their careers over motherhood and domesticity could risk being labelled as

lesbians, regardless of their actual sexual orientation, and who were seen as a threat to the national security by making the nation susceptible to communist subversion (2006: 8).

Just like before the war had started, the Swedish Socialist Party continued its dominance in domestic politics (Wegs and Ladrech 2006: 41), but also managed to increase their popularity. The party extended social welfare services during the rapid economic expansion, which allowed Sweden to adopt social measures such as pension plans, health insurance, family allowances, and more (Wegs and Ladrech 2006: 73).

The post war era also experienced a process of equalisation, which was evident in almost all European countries, but especially rapid in Scandinavia, where the income share of the wealthiest decile of society declined from 34-36 percent to 27-29 percent between 1935 and 1950 (Tomka, 2013: 99). Thus, with the favourable economic development and stable government situation[17] as background, the Swedish affluent society was gradually built up. Both the general living standard and social welfare had reached one of the highest levels in the world.

Swedish politics regarding working women during the early post-war experienced a development which contrasted strongly to the other countries'. As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, there was an acute need for female workers back in traditional occupations, which had suffered from labour shortages since women took up heavier industry work during the war (Almgren 2006: 44 and 149). Nils Kellgren, an economist and social democratic politician, believed that a slight increase in the professional activity especially among middle-aged married women would help this situation (Almgren 2006: 154). Even though the type of work made available for women did not change, it was a fact that the increased rate of marriages and fertility meant that there existed more young women and mothers in the labour market than before. Thus, in order to be able to utilise the manpower reserve that was Swedish women, a series of measures in home support was needed and the only realistic solution was to create better social policies and collective facilities, such as kindergartens, to help working mother's workload (Almgren 2006: 154). Furthermore, by using propaganda, a long-term plan made was to break the resistance people put up

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[17] Social democratic government with state-controlled market economy

against women in "male" occupations, influence women's career choices, and to change employers' negative attitude towards part-time work and hiring middle-aged women (Almgren 2006: 1956).

Social Change

After the Second World War, mothers became to a stronger degree than before defined in terms of "(…) moral, physical and social guardians" (Simonton 2003: 188). Friedan exemplifies this with how magazines spread case stories and psychological papers of how much of children's physical and mental health and development were suggested to rely on mothers dedicating all their time to them and the household (1963: 171-4). For Japan, Emiko Ochiai (1997: 35) writes "in the postwar period, the state of being a housewife became so strongly normative that it was practically synonymous with womanhood". In Italy, being good and orderly homemakers were equal to being a good mother, and the 'reconstruction of the family' came as a response to the wartime conditions as "women expressed concern with 'putting things back to rights'"(Simonton 2003: 189-90). As noted earlier, it was not just women who followed this restorationalist approach of rebuilding the importance of the "traditional" family structure, but governments and religious institutions as well. This idealisation of traditional gender roles, and the renewed social structure set up to revolve around the nuclear family was maintained by US, Italian and Japanese actors, very often included women themselves. This is despite many women expressed that they had enjoyed working and would miss it when they returned to their homes as housewives again after the war (Simonton 2003; Kossoudji and Dresser 1992; Friedan 1963). However, politicians and professional elites fiercely attacked those who resisted reverting to traditional gender roles, and passionately believed that a woman's place was in the home, caring for her husband and children.

In the US, "three categories" into which one could allocate all American women were created from a survey which explored the psychology of housekeeping (Friedan 1963: 183); 'The True Housewife', 'The Career Woman or Would-Be Career Woman', and 'The Balanced Homemaker'. The 'True Housewife' type had housekeeping as her dominating interest, and took great pride in the work of maintaining a well-run and comfortable home for her family. 'The Career Woman' did not necessarily have to be

job-holders, but they did not believe that women belonged primarily in the role as homemakers. Lastly, 'The Balanced Homemaker' was presented as the ideal type, as she had had previous job experience before she married, or had some outside interests, before she would dedicate herself to homemaking (Friedan 1963: 183-4).

A post-war trend, which was especially noticeable in Japan, point to that women would work when they were young and single, and then withdraw from the labour market for a while when they married and had young children and then return to work later when their children had reached school age (Coontz 1992; Gerteis 2009; Lee 2006; Kossoudji and Dresser 1992; Simonton 2003). This is work pattern is referred to as an "M-curve", because the shape illustrate the trajectory of women's workforce participation. In Japan this trajectory continued for a great number of years even after 1953 (Gerteis 2009).

Both Friedan (1963) and May (1988) for the US, and Simonton (2003) for Europe, point towards the increased numbers in marriages, the evidence that people married younger, and the ensuing "baby boom" as contributing factors leading towards the gender backlash in the early post-war era. This may be true for the US and certain European countries, including Sweden, but certainly not for all. In fact, Tomka (2013: 16) demonstrates that Italy's fertility rate drops from 3.07 to 2.47 between 1940 and 1950, and to 2.41 in 1960. In Japan, a sharp decline in fertility could be seen in the 1950s, where the number of children per woman dropped from approximately four to two (Devasahayam and Yeoh 2007: 53). This decrease in fertility rate in Japan and Italy could bear witness to the intense hardship the two countries were in after the war. Economic issues, political uncertainty, coping with great loss, and the struggle to rebuild homes and whole communities did not create optimum conditions for starting families.

Summary

The Second World War had brought about a significant shift in women's labour participation in all four countries. Responding to the nation's needs, political propaganda, and feelings of patriotism, women had streamed out to take over what had typically been "men's work", such as heavy factory work. When the war ended,

however, these female workers were expected to leave their jobs to return to their more "gender appropriate" occupations, such as being housewives, seamstresses, clerks, etc. The 'gender backlash' thus refers to the devaluing of women as active participants in the workforce and society, and placing their roles more firmly within the private realm, as wives and mothers first. Though women had gained equal rights to men, and the period is sometimes described as a time of female emancipation (Simonton 2003: 188), many of the changes were somewhat superficial. Though Italian and Japanese women gained the right to vote, and women in many more countries saw new legislations introduced which would provide them with better job protection, pension rights etc., these changes did not immediately inspire foundational changes in people's attitudes (Simonton 2003: 188). Maternalist ideologies and the idea of returning to a romanticised normality after the war were present in each of the four countries' post-war societies. It continued to be a strongly held view that women, both married and single, should treat family and household as their first priority. Women were still treated as secondary citizens in most post-war societies, despite seeing some improvements in status (Simonton 2003: 188) Wegs and Ladrech 2006: 144-5).

3 Film Analysis

In this chapter I attempt to answer the following main questions: Is the post war socio-economical gender backlash observable in selected feature films' representations of working women? If so, how do cinematic representations of working women change in response to socio-economic developments between the years of 1945 and 1953? And lastly, how do these representations differ between the selected countries (the United States, Sweden, Italy and Japan)?

The above questions are tackled by comparing two different films produced in the same country during this era, but from different years. Hence, *Mildred Pierce* (1945) will be compared to *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947) for the analysis of the United States, *Port of Call* (1948) with *Summer with Monika* (1953) for Sweden, *Bitter Rice* (1949) with *Umberto D.* (1952) for Italy, and *Early Summer* (1951) for Japan with *Tokyo Story* (1953).

The films are all fictional, and mostly of the same genre. *Mildred Pierce* is a mix between melodrama and *film noir*, whereas *The Best Years of Our Lives* is a drama film. *Port of Call* and *Summer with Monika* are both dramas, as are *Early Summer* and *Tokyo Story*. However, there are a few factors present in these latter Japanese films, which make it tempting to classify them more specifically as 'family dramas'. This is because of the latter two films' portrayal of several generations and branches of a single family, the films show the everyday lives of the members of the family, and their plot and themes revolves around the "natural developments"[18] within a family (Buehrer 1990).

Dramatic films are likely the biggest film genre because of its inclusion of a broad spectrum of films (Dirks n.d.-a). Drama films as its own genre mostly deals with emotional and interpersonal relationships, where characters often come into conflict with either themselves, other characters or society at large (Dirks n.d.-a).

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[18] Natural developments within a family would in the case of the Japanese films *Early Summer* and *Tokyo Story* refer to a few of the main topics the films elaborate on. For example: "All parents will be disappointed at their children", "Parents will inevitably become a burden to their children", the issue of marriage, connections, tradition versus modernity etc. are also topics that come up in these films as they relate to families moving forward in time and society. (Buehrer 1990)

Melodramas are a sub-genre to the drama, and focus more on the emotional effect the film has on the audience. In some cases, the genre has been dubbed 'women's films', because of their (frequent) female protagonist, and its intention of appealing to a female audience by addressing 'female concerns'. These 'female concerns' are often seen to revolve around domestic life, romance, family, motherhood and self-sacrifice (Dirks n.d.-b). *Film noir* is a genre connected to crime, and has dramatic contrasts of black and white colours. *Film noir* films often utilise flashbacks to tell a story, and a *Femme Fatale* is regularly the cause for the protagonist's downfall or tragedy (Dirks n.d.-c; Hanson 2007: 2). Lastly, both Italian films, *Bitter Rice* and *Umberto D.*, are of the genre neorealism. The latter genre aims to produce a film as close to reality as possible, and Italian neorealism frequently dramatizes stories of the poor and the working class. Difficult economic and moral situations after the Second World War came to be the most shown matters of this genre, and the years 1945-1952 are most associated with the neorealist genre in Italy (Ruberto and Wilson 2007: 3).

The criteria for selection was that the films must be released between 1945 and 1953; that they were contemporary films; that they included characters that were women employed in waged labour outside their own home; and that the films had been 'box office hits' at the time of their release, as well as they received critical praise.

Ideally, all the chosen films should have different directors, but due to limited access to films fitting all the above criteria I had to be pragmatic. Thus, Ingmar Bergman and Yasujirô Ozu are the listed directors for both of the films chosen from Sweden and Japan respectively.

This thesis argues that the cinematic representations of working women change in response to the country-specific political and socio-economic developments. As discussed in the introduction, there is an issue of representation with this analysis, and the use of these fictional films will in no way be regarded as "true" reflections of the socio-economic developments of the time. However, because of their popularity and success, they do have some merit in showing how presentations of certain characters, roles and themes resonate with their audience. Thus, a link can be established between the success of the film, and what the mass audience finds appealing, and how the audience feel the character, theme or situation fits with their own experiences, hopes

and fears. As a medium for both entertainment and education, films may show the audience one character to admire and another to criticise. Fictional films therefore create positive and negative role models, rather than perfect renditions of historically representative women with careers or in gainful employment.

USA

Film introduction: *Mildred Pierce* **(1945)**

Mildred Pierce was made in 1945, directed by Michael Curtiz and produced by Jerry Wald and Jack L. Warner. Key actors in the film were Joan Crawford (Mildred Pierce), Ann Blyth (Veda Pierce), Jack Carson (Wally Fay), Zachary Scott (Monty Beragon), Eve Arden (Ida Corwin), Bruce Bennett (Bert Pierce).

      Mildred Pierce received great critical recognition and was immensely popular at the time of its release. Joan Crawford won the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role in 1946 for her role as Mildred in the film, and the film was further nominated for five more Oscars that night: Best Picture, Best Actress in a Supporting Role, Best Writing, Screenplay, Best Cinematography Black-and-White. *Mildred Pierce* was a box office success, having a budget of an estimated $1,453,000 and a worldwide rental of $5,638,000 (with $3,483,000 in the USA and an additional $2,155,000 globally) (IMDb n.d.-a)

Mildred Pierce tells the story of a middle class housewife and mother of two daughters (Veda and Kay), and her determination to give her daughters everything they desire. Her husband is explained to be recently unemployed and unfaithful to her, and the marriage fails. In order to provide her eldest daughter with a luxurious lifestyle, the film depicts Mildred working hard to go from being a broke single mother, to becoming successful businesswoman who owns a large chain of restaurants. However, nothing is ever enough for the daughter, who kills her mother's new husband when he refuses to divorce Mildred and marry the daughter instead.

Film analysis: *Mildred Pierce* (1945)

In this film analysis of *Mildred Pierce* I investigate the representation of two different characterisations of working women in the film. On the one hand, there is Mildred, the desirable mother and homemaker who creates her own business empire to provide a good life for her daughters. On the other hand, there is Ida, the unmarried and childless 'Career Woman', around whom " (…) men become allergic to wedding rings" (Ida in *Mildred Pierce* 1945).

Firstly, both characters can be placed somewhere within the "three categories" of American women (Friedan 1963: 183) mentioned in the context analysis; 'The True Housewife', 'The Career Woman or Would-Be Career Woman', and 'The Balanced Homemaker'. However, whereas Ida fits perfectly in the second category as 'The Career Woman', Mildred goes through several changes in the film, which makes her character fit into each of the three categories at different points throughout the narrative in response to different challenges.

Figure 2: Mildred's style in *Mildred Pierce* (1945)

Mildred's change of categories is emphasised in her dress style, as shown in Figure 2. The top picture portrays her in very feminine "homely" clothes, in a simple blouse and floral apron accentuating her waist and womanly shapes. The second picture shows Mildred wearing an outfit with a black blouse with shoulder pads, which is

professional for her opening day of her new restaurant, but also feminine and domestic because of the white apron she puts on when she helps out the kitchen staff. The third picture shows the characters drastic change in style and social position, because her new masculine business suit is compared to her maid's outfit, which is similar to Mildred's own outfit in the first picture. Now, however, her suit has large shoulder pads and a straight line, which gives her a more manly shape as it enlarges her shoulders and narrows her hips (Corber 2006: 5). Ida, on the other hand, remains relatively unchanging in style; She always sports rather masculine clothes with no hints of any domestic or motherly affinities, such as aprons or tight-fitting, curve-hugging items.

The fact that both characters wear masculine-styled clothes when they work for the sake of earning money to improve their situations (rather than to ensure the survival of their families) reveals that high-paying jobs are associated with masculinity, and is thus a "man's world". This is also Here, Ida and Mildred must assimilate a masculine style as well as masculine trends in order to fit in. This is also seen in the film with regards to Mildred's drinking, where she as a housewife would not even drink strong liquor blended out, but where she "prefers it straight" (Mildred in *Mildred Pierce* 1945) towards the end of the film, when she is at the top of her game business-wise.   Second, there seems to be a correlation between bad motherhood and masculinised women. The more successful and powerful Mildred Pierce becomes in the business world, the more masculine her clothes become, and her relationship with Veda deteriorates to the point where Mildred has little to no control over her daughter. Ida, a more static character, has no maternal instincts or typical "feminine" or "domestic" traits at all, as is consistent with her masculine traits and style.

As to what this masculinised portrayal meant in relation to the socio-economic situation in immediate post-war America, the masculine style could represent the temporary upheaval of traditional gender roles for women, and especially housewives, during the war with the need for women in the war production industry. In the film, the masculine style was a "suit" necessary for the situation and position Mildred was in. But, clothes are essentially changeable, and can be put on or off to suit different situations, and for most women, their positions during the war had an expiry date, and a "return to normality" was the desired outcome after the war (May 1988; Kossoudji

and Dresser 1992). This can be seen in how Mildred loses her job, her restaurants and her money at the end of the film, but is reunited with her ex-husband Bert.

Figure 3: Focus on Mildred's legs

As was established in the introduction, women in possession of hegemonic masculine traits – called a *pariah femininity* – were frowned upon, and even ridiculed, shunned, or seen as deviants (Schippers 2007). Mildred is masculinised through style and a few other things she "(…) picked up from men" (Mildred in *Mildred Pierce* 1945), such as drinking strong alcoholic beverages straight. Although, at her core, she is always a mother first, which accentuates her femininity and makes her desirable in the eyes of the male characters, Bert, Wally and Monty. There is one frame in the film in particular, in which the character is completely reduced to a sexual object, which is illustrated in Figure 3. Here the viewer only sees her cut-off legs, and as Monty, one of her business partners and a romantic interest, comes through the door to the restaurant, her legs are the center of his attention.

The character of Ida Corbin, however, is placed so firmly in the box 'Career Woman' that she is deemed undesirable by the men in the film. This is illustrated in the scene where Wally, one of Mildred's business partners, announces to her that he hates all women after Mildred have rejected his romantic advances a final time, but goes on to say to Ida "Good thing you're not one" in a mocking tone as he storms out. She is thereby eliminated as a potential romantic interest by the most forward and womanizing male character in the film. Her outlooks of attracting anyone seem unlikely. This emphasises how unmarried career women were somewhat de-sexualised and mis-gendered in society. Though they provided money into the capitalist machine, which benefitted the US, these women were no longer seen as

feminine, and were assumed to have chosen away he family life and turned away from their feminine nature (Freidan 1963).

Ida also seems to be compared to dangerous animals at two occasions in the duration of the film. Once, when she compares herself to a dog and barks once loudly at a small, bald, bespectacled man whom jumps away at the sound. And another when she confesses to Mildred that Veda makes her think alligators 'got it right' because 'they eat their young'. Both these instances makes Ida appear as masculine and undesirable, and lacking in motherly feminine instincts.

Film Introduction 2: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (TBYOL) (1947)

The Best Years of Our Lives, directed by William Wyler, was released in 1947 and produced by Samuel Goldwin. Key actors in the film were Dana Andrews (Fred Derry), Frederic March (Al Stephenson), Harold Russell (Homer Parrish), Myrna Loy (Milly Stephenson), Teresa Wright (Peggy Stephenson), Virginia Mayo (Marie Derry), and Cathy O'Donnell (Wilma Cameron).

The Best Years in Our Lives was a box office success. The film had a budget of an estimated $2,100,000 and grossed $23,650,000 in the US alone according to IMDb (n.d.-b) making it nr. 78 in the top 100-list of the highest grossing films in US history when the box office prices are adjusted for inflation (Box Office Mojo n.d.).

The film won nine Oscars at the 1947 Academy Awards, Best Motion Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Writing (Screenplay), Best Supporting Actor, Best Film Editing, Best Music (Score of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture), Honorary Award and Memorial Award, and was additionally nominated for Best Sound Recording. It also won two Golden Globes, a BAFTA, and Myrna Loy won Best Actress Through the Ages at the 1947 Brussels World Film Festival, and several others. (IMDb n.d.-b)

The Best Years of Our Lives is a story about three World War Two veterans who return home and need to learn to readapt to their normal lives. Their characters are of different age, rank, social status, and place in life: Captain Fred Derry is returning to the girl he married just before he shipped out. Sergeant Al Stephenson is a wealthy banker, and is job is firmly secured. Yet, upon his return, he feels like a stranger to his family whom have grown up without him. Lastly, the young sailor

Homer Parrish was wounded in the war, and lost both his hands. He is tormented by his handicap as he can no longer hold his high school sweetheart in his arms, and he secludes himself from his girlfriend and his family. The women's efforts (or lack thereof) in helping their men readjust on the home front and the trials the veterans' face upon their return are equally focused upon in the film.

Film analysis: *TBYOL* (1947)

There are three female characters that I want to take a closer look at with regard to their specific representations in this hugely popular film, and how and why these representations cast them as positive or negative role models. These characters are: Marie Derry, who married Fred Derry just before he was sent out to war and who has never seen her husband out of his uniform; Milly Stephenson, who has been married to Al Stephenson for two decades and with whom she has two children who are in their mid- to late teens, and; Peggy Stephenson, Al and Milly's daughter and eldest child.

Like the female characters analysed in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), also these women seem to fit rather neatly in the established three categories of American women; 'The True Housewife', 'The Career Woman or Would-Be Career Woman', and 'The Balanced Homemaker' (Friedan year: 183). The character Milly is fully portrayed as 'The True Housewife', and is always depicted as bustling around the house, or as spending quality time with her husband and/or children. She has acquaintances outside the family, but is never seen with them, and nor does she appear to have any interests, hobbies or activities outside the house and family. Her daughter Peggy, is a more modern version of her mother, and has a job at the hospital, but ultimately is very family-oriented and domestic. Because she does not yet have a husband and a family of her own, this character could be deemed a "Would-Be Balanced Homemaker". This is image is enforced in how she in the end gets together with the poor, but heroic, Fred Derry, and they will both have to work hard in order to make ends meet. Lastly, Marie is placed in the category of 'Career Woman', because she loves her job at the club *The Blue Devil*, and is not at all domestic or maternal in nature. When Fred comes home from war he stops her from working, and she should have taken up the role as homemaker. Instead, she is constantly pictured lounging about in a messy house, doing her make-up or her hair, or talking with friends and

colleagues on the phone. Her husband is portrayed as doing more cleaning and cooking than she does, and in the end she divorce him and goes back to the workplace she has missed so much.

Figure 4: Milly, Peggy and Marie in the home

The two above screenshots from the film perfectly illustrates the female character's roles in the home: Milly is the most firmly placed in the Stephenson's home, and wears a robe to the kitchen whilst having just started preparing breakfast in bed for her husband, who is still in bed. Peggy, in the doorway, is dressed to go to work at the hospital and will take Fred with her. Her character has obligations outside the home, but these are very "gender appropriate" and involve her caring, selfless nature, and show her helpfulness and practicality in that she is taking Fred home to his wife on her way to work. Marie, in the second picture, is lounging about her messy apartment, and shows her vanity and self-absorption as she is doing her make-up. She is far from being domestic, and her enjoyment revolves around going out and spending money, and she does not mind earning those money for herself, even though Fred has temporarily stopped her late-night shifts at the club.

Having a so-called *pariah femininity* (Shippers 2007), Marie is seen as having some rather masculine traits, at the same time as she is highly sexualised. Her character's sexual promiscuity is highlighted through an insert shot of Fred's photograph of Marie in a bikini, along with Fred's comment about how "(…) the boys used to say 'no-one's got a wife like that! What's her number?" (*TBYOL* 1947). The film strengthen the character's unsuitability as a wife by having her refusing to take

part in domestic work, making her blunt, aggressive, independent, promiscuous, cheating, vain, and insensitive to Fred's PTSD.

Contextualised changes in cinematic representations: The USA

The changes in the cinematic representations of working women in the two American films *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947) closely resembles the gender backlash in American post-war political and socio-economical context. It is no coincidence that the protagonist of the first film was a largely successful working woman, and that the most positively presented female characters in the second were a 'True Housewife' and a future 'Balanced Homemaker' (Friedan 1963: 183).

Importantly, *Mildred Pierce* is partly a melodrama, which was a genre supposed to strike an emotional chord with a distinctly female audience. The filmmakers' goal for producing films was to earn money so that they could continue their business, and thus they needed to respond to what the audience would want to pay money to see. It is plausible that right after the war, *Mildred Pierce* was in one part a reflection of what American women had gone through during the Second World War. Due to the increased war production and lack of men, women had to step out of their roles as housewives to take part in the waged labour force. This was, according to dominant political propaganda, to take on a rather masculine role, which can be reflected in Mildred's gradual change of style. Mildred's return home to Bert at the end of the film, also symbolise the "return to normality" which was a desired image for Americans during the war and early post-war years.

The Best Years of Our Lives also responded to Americans dreams of a return to normality. The film's focus on the troubles veterans can have in readjusting, the roles of women to help them settle in, and the trials they all face in finding back to what is normal after the war, was highly appealing for the movie-goers according to the huge box office returns. These issues were likely resembling some of the audiences own issues after the war, and thus the cinemagoers could find role models to look to when they themselves had trouble with PTSD, or simply found it hard to re-connect with family members. Traditional gender roles played a huge part in reinforcing the

romantic or nostalgic idea of "normality", and thus the positive female role models are those who are seen possessing feminine and motherly qualities, and that are family-oriented and domestic. Whereas an argument can be made for that Marie's offer to take her husband out to dinner when he is broke could have been interpreted in the wartime context as a woman 'helping out' and being patriotic. However, in the post-war context of 1947, the husband reacts by shaking her harshly for injuring his masculinity by adapting masculine traits herself.

Sweden

Film introduction: *Port of Call* (1948)

Port of Call (original title: *Hamnstad*) was released in 1948, was written by Ingmar Bergman and Olle Länsberg, and directed by Ingmar Bergman. The producer of the film was Harald Molander, and Nine-Christine Jönsson and Bengt Eglund were cast in the roles as Berit and Gösta, with Birgitta Valberg in the role of Mrs. Vilander (the assistant) and Berta Hall as Berit's mother.

This was one of Bergman's earlier films, and was received very well at the time of its release, and had great reviews (Åhlander 1980: 679). Box office results for this film was not available for this film, therefore Bergman's up-and-coming recognition in Sweden is used instead as an insurance of the film's popularity.

Port of Call is the story of Berit; a young suicidal factory girl who is trying to set her life straight after having spent years at reformatory school. More than anything she wants to be free, especially from her manipulative mother, who tries to portray herself as caring, but who in reality want to ruin Berit's progress and her chances of attaining independency. When Berit meets Gösta, a sailor who has come ashore, they fall for each other. He sees her past as very difficult to ignore, especially because she has a long sexual history with men. After Berit's friend dies after an illegal abortion, Berit ends up in trouble and could be sent away again. Gösta realise how much he loves her, and make plans for them to run away together, but they change their minds last minute and decide to fight their battles at home – together.

Film analysis: *Port of Call* (1948)

I have chosen to analyse two female characters from Bergman's film from 1948, namely the main female character Berit, and her mother. These two characters represent both Swedish women as factory workers and housewives, which were somewhat complex occupations to have in the early post war era. Women who took part in heavy industry work during the war were heavily in demand in other, more traditional occupation. The character of Berit is shown to rather want a more "feminine" job, as her work with large machinery is damaging her fingers (see Figure 5). The director of the company presents a very kind and accommodating figure, and at her slight complaint of damaged hands, he offers to place her in the control room instead, where she can work with administrative tasks.

Figure 5: Berit, occupational injuries

The same kindness does not reach to some of her other supervisors though, and Berit face persistent sexual harassment from her young male superior at the factory she works at. The superior even wants sexual favours from her for telling the management the truth about how good she is at her job, and feels he is owed this for supporting an 'institution-girl'. He does not only objectify her and give her unwanted attention and crude comments at work, but continues this out of the factory as well, which threatens to ruin her relationship with Gösta after a nasty episode outside the cinema on their first proper date. The sexualisation and degrading words to Berit in the workplace could signify the supervisor being somewhat threatened by her presence and good work in the factory, and could be an attempt to reinforce gendered divides between male and female workers even further in the workplace. This would be consistent with some of the fears male workers had in Sweden in the early post-war period, who thought women would come to replace the male labour force, because they were cheaper.

The next time the viewer see the character Berit at her workplace, however, the focus is on Berit walking confidently over to her abuser and slapping him across the face, before she stamps herself in and goes to work. Visually, the supervisor stands still with his back turned to the camera and is posed at the right end corner of the shot, whilst she appears in the scene as the dynamic person, as (without cutting to different shots or moving the camera) she is seen walking up the stairs, go towards him, slap him, and walk away and down the stairs again. The scene is empowering in that she is in control of the movement in the scene, which could symbolically mean that she is taking a stand as a female worker (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Berit confronts supervisor

However, the main issue with this normalised sexual harassment of Berit is that it keeps putting her in a bad light because of her past with men, of which there have been a few.

Bergman depicts the character of Berit's mother as being extremely manipulative. She would do anything to feel needed and loved as a mother, yet she is physically and psychologically harmful towards her only child. She is also in a dysfunctional relationship with Berit's father, whose character only appears in the film in one of Berit's flashbacks to her traumatic childhood. Hence, *Port of Call* makes the mother out to be the bad one, not a working woman, as other films have done.

Film introduction: *Summer with Monika (*1953)

Summer with Monika (original title: *Sommaren med Monika*) was made in 1953, and directed by the celebrated Ingmar Bergman. The film was produced by Allan Ekelund, and starred Harriet Andersson as Monika Eriksson, and Lars Ekborg as Harry Lund.

The film had some box office success (IMDb n.d.-e) and people, both Swedish and international, were hurrying to the movie theatre to see Harriet Andersson completely nude on-screen.

Summer with Monika is the story of two teenagers, Harry and Monika, who are stuck in unsatisfying jobs in a drab working class setting in Stockholm where they fall in love. They both quit their jobs, steals Harry's father's boat and run away to the archipelago for the summer. In the archipelago, their life is adventurous, simple and idyllic until Monika finds out she's pregnant. After that, they are faced with the prospects of having to face reality and go home, and the couple starts to argue: Harry is happy to accept the responsibility of fatherhood, and wants to study, and get a good job so that he can provide for Monika and the baby. Monika, however, not only refuses to work, but is also unhappy in the role as housewife. She dreams of glamour and excitement, which leads her to cheat on Harry whilst he is away at work, and she eventually leaves Harry and the child.

Film analysis: *Summer with Monika* (1953)

Due to a limited selection of female working characters in this film, Monika will be the only one suitable for analysis. Monika's unwillingness to work stems from her both her previous experience with work (where she was harassed), and her dreams of living a carefree, fancy, and wealthy life, being taken care of by a working husband. This idea would most likely come from all the magazines she reads and the glamorous Hollywood films she sees. She desperately wants to escape her current lifestyle and class, and she thinks that by not working (even when her situation desperately calls for it) she can get a taste of the life of the rich and famous.

Figure 7: Monika reads while others work

Her character is ultimately seen as selfish, and not even maternity can make her value anyone else over her own desires. She leaves her infant daughter and loving husband for the sake of pursuing the life she wants for

herself (Figure 8). Thus, the act of selfishness and being a bad mother correlates to a young, able-bodied woman refusing to work, rather than her being portrayed as selfish and a bad mother for working too much as is the underlying issue in the American films. Monika's willing lack of work is thereby seen as lazy, exploitative and immoral, which makes some sense for her being a citizen in a country where women made up almost 30 percent of the total workforce in 1950 (Tomka 2013: 67).

Figure 8: Monika leaves

Contextualised changes in cinematic representations: Sweden

Ingmar Bergman's films *Port of Call* (1948) and *Summer with Monika* (1953) came out five years apart, and highlight some of the changes in the Swedish post-war society between these years. First, the character Berit is portrayed to be working in a factory, and operates some type of large and loud machinery that is severely hurting her fingers (see figure 5). When she complains to the director, or engineer, he kindly suggests that she could be moved to administrative work and that maybe this type of work would suit her better, and her face lights up at the offer. This scene could almost be seen as a push in the "right direction" for Swedish women, who were desperately needed in the more feminine occupations in the post-war era. The sexual harassment of both female protagonists at their workplace is significant in that it shows a masculine hostility towards the females in the workplace. As mentioned, Swedish

men worried about the security of their jobs after the war with women providing cheaper labour, and these male characters either tries to scare the women away, or assert their masculinity and thereby superiority over the female workers.

The female characters reasons to work vary greatly between the two films. Berit works at the factory because she has been placed there by the reformatory school, as well as her motivation for working is to gain some form of independence and freedom from her mother. On the other end of the scale, there is Monika who struggles to survive with her young husband Harry and their baby, but still refuse to work. Both Swedish films portray work participation as a possible redeeming factor for both leading ladies, but whereas Berit has a positive attitude about work despite hardships and mental health problems, Monika, who is both healthy and able-bodied, refuse to work after the birth of her baby and would rather go out dancing and frolicking. In the end, Berit is rewarded with a happy and healthy romantic relationship with Gösta, while Monika in the end leaves Harry and their infant baby daughter, moving away from the possibility of a better future and towards a life of uncertainty. Sweden's economic prosperity after the war led to the country gradually spending more money on social benefits, many of which helped young families and women to continue working with almost no break after having children. Therefore, Monika's ruin lies not in a dire social injustice or poverty in the post-war Swedish society, but in her own unwillingness to work her way to the top by herself.

Italy

Film introduction: *Bitter Rice* (1949)

Bitter Rice (original title: *Riso* Amaro) came out in 1949, and was written and directed by Giuseppe De Santis. The film was produced by Dino De Laurentis, and had Doris Dowling and Silvana Mangano in the lead roles as Francesca and Silvana, with Vittorio Gassman as Walter and Raf Vallone as Marco.

The film was entered into the 1949 Cannes Film Festival, as well as nominated for Best Story in the 1950 Academy Awards, and has been deemed one of the greatest global box office hits of neo realism (Shiel 2006: 5; IMDb n.d.-d).

In *Bitter Rice*, Francesca and Walter are a couple running from the police after having stolen a necklace apparently worth millions. They try to escape on the train station but are separated, and Francesca joins the masses of women heading to the rice fields to tend to the rice plants. She meets Silvana, a young and voluptuous peasant rice worker with whom she develops a turbulent friendship. When Walter finally finds her, he becomes enamoured with Silvana instead. He tells her he loves her, and gives her the stolen necklace as an engagement present. Thus, Silvana joins his thieving crew who plan to steal all the rice from the hardworking women. When Francesca realises Walter's plan, she tries to save Silvana and stop the crime with the help of the handsome and retiring sergeant Marco. The two couples has a gun fight, which Francesca is winning, and she reveals to Silvana that Walter lied, and that the necklace is worthless. Silvana shoots and kills Walter as he runs away, but feels such shock, remorse and guilt that she runs away and throws herself off a tower structure and dies.

Film analysis: *Bitter Rice* (1949)

The two female characters that will be focused upon in this analysis are the two main characters Francesca and Silvana. The two are polar opposites in appearance, with the character Silvana as blonde, voluptuous, young and beautiful, and Francesca as thin, dark-haired, slightly older, and pretty.

Francesca has had three jobs of which one becomes aware when watching the film: As a handmaid to a rich, beautiful young woman, working in a hotel, and now, working short term in the rice fields. The fact that she looks back on her job as a handmaid with fondness discloses that she misses a time before her problems with Walter, a simple life where she could dress, undress and put shoes on her mistress. Silvana's envy of this job when she hears about it, and asking questions about is specifically, also reveals that Francesca's good employment was somewhat privileged and highly valued.

Figure 9: Francesca tells her story

The character Silvana can thus be assumed to be poorer than Francesca, and have worked in the rice fields several years in a row to help provide for her family (parents most likely), but spends her money on luxuries such as her cherished gramophone. Out of all the women on the rice fields, Silvana is the only one who is seen as shirking her responsibilities, by instead sneaking away to steal Francesca's boyfriend when the others work. She also help him sabotage and flood the finished rice fields on the last day so that he can steal the rice, which could reflect her disregard for hard work, and preference of an easy and immoral road to gain riches without working for it.

Every other woman in the film is part of the workforce that tends to the rice crops that year, and they are generally a hard working and cohesive team, presented positively to the viewer.

Despite playing only a small part in the beginning and end of the film, the reporter who comments on the Italian working women's toils and ambitions in the rice fields reveals a great deal about the real socio-economical conditions in early post-war Italy. The reporter's explanation of the work these women are doing in the rice fields is rooted in admiration of their hard work, and they are presented as strong for doing the job. However, he creates clear gender divisions for men's and women's work, and although the planting and weeding of rice is a very physical and 'manly' job, he draws connections to how their 'quick, light hands' does the job better. The ensuing link between nurturing mothers and growing rice fields thus takes away from the masculine aspect of the job, and the women are identified as being strong in a maternal way, doing what needs to be done.

Through his mentioning of the women coming from all trades, and returning back to those trades at the end of the forty days of working in the rice fields, it also becomes visible that it was natural for these women to have some kind of permanent employment, and that the hard work is not just a 'once-a-year' occurrence. However,

Italy had among the absolute lowest participation rates of women in the total workforce at the time, with women only accounting for 25.3 percent in 1940 and 26.4 in 1950 (Tomka 2013: 67).

Film introduction: *Umberto D.* (1952)

Umberto D. is a film directed and co-produced by Vittorio De Sica, which came out in 1952. The other producers were Giuseppe Amato and Angelo Rizzoli, and the film was starred by Carlo Battisti (Umberto Domenico Ferrari), Maria Pia Casilio (Maria the maid), and Lina Gennari (Antonia Belloni, the land lady) in the leading roles.

The film was nominated for the Oscar Best Writing, Motion Picture Story at the 1957 Academy Awards, won the Best European Film at the 1955 Bodil Awards, was nominated for the Grand Prize at the 1952 Cannes Film Festival, De Sica won Best Director at the 1957 Jussi Awards, and the film won Best Foreign Language Film at the 1955 New York Film Critics Circle Awards. *Umberto D.* was also a Box Office success (IMDb n.d.-c), and had people streaming to the movie theatres all over Europe and the US.

Umberto D. is a film about Umberto D. Ferrari and his dog Flike, and their daily struggle of living on a meagre government pension in post war Italy, even after decades of his hard honest work as a civil servant. Umberto's main goal is to avoid eviction from his room by his mean, greedy landlady, Antonia Belloni, and he is forced to sell his valued belongings in the attempt to save himself and Flike from the alternative. No one seem willing to help him, other than a young, poor, pregnant maid Maria, who works for Umberto's landlady. Umberto starts to see the hopelessness of the situation and attempts to give Flike away to a loving family (which fails) before attempting to kill them both together by standing on the train rails. Flike wriggles free last minute, and Umberto follows him into a park, where they start to play, and the film ends on a hopeless note, but with the small comfort that they at least have each other.

Film analysis: *Umberto D.* **(1952)**

The two main female characters in Umberto D., Maria the maid (Figure 9) and Antonia the landlady (Figure 10), represent two contrasting types of women, and will for that reason be analysed closer in this part. Maria is the female in the film who is mostly represented as working in the film. The nature of her work as a live-in maid is domestic, but relevant as she is not employed by family. Antonia, on the other hand, gives singing lessons in her own house, rents out a room to Umberto, and sneakily rent out his room when he is away to couples who want some privacy. She is grown woman, voluptuous, and platinum blonde wearing heavy make-up, and she is always found in fancy dresses. She aims for a better lifestyle, which is part of why she is marrying the manager of the music theatre.

Figure 9: Maria   **Figure 10: Antonia**

Maria is presented as Umberto's only real friend after Flike, and she is kind and helpful towards both the man and dog. Because of her pregnancy she is afraid of losing her job, but Umberto urges her to leave Antonia anyway. She claims that she cannot go back to her family because her father would hit her, but Umberto states that there are lots of jobs in Rome, and that she needs to get away from the lady of the house. There is no question as to why Maria works: The father of her baby refuse to take on responsibility, and therefore cannot, or will not, provide for them, and so she needs to work for her self, to ensure her own and her baby's survival. She never talks

about what she wants to do with her life, or her hopes and dreams, but is pragmatic and lives from day to day, focusing on the issue at hand. The only thing she would like is for the father of her child to acknowledge his paternity and help her. Umberto cares deeply for Maria, she loves Flike and she helps him at home, and even came to see him in the hospital, so he leaves her some of his things when he leaves his room in the house for good, and gives her some final boy-advice.

Umberto: *"During the war she called me 'Grandpa'. I gave her some meat from time to time. After the war she went crazy. She even hates my dog. If you saw my dog, you'd know it's impossible to hate him!"*

The above background story of their relationship can be part of explaining Antonia's ruthless attitude towards him as her tenant, and her desperate need to make something of herself and earn money. Her own poverty was so great during the war she had to rely on Umberto's charity, and she is terrified of going back to a similar situation and a life in poverty. She is cornered by Umberto in the street at one point, when he blames her for having let Flike escape, and she responds with disgust: "You think I owe you something? You wretch! Pay your debts!". The last bit is ironic though, as she is the one who is not paying her debt to Umberto for when he helped her during the war. She works only for her own profit and improvement in social standing, and marries up for the same reason. She is therefore seen as greedy, compared to the sympathy we feel towards Maria, who works out of her, and her unborn child's need to survive.

Contextualised changes in cinematic representations: Italy

De Santis' *Bitter Rice* (1949) is considered to be one of the biggest neorealist box office successes, whereas De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952) is generally recognised as one of the great masterworks of neorealism (Shiel 2006: 3). The first film presented themes of crime, poverty, unemployment and morality in the agricultural Northern Italian community, whereas the second depicted social injustice, class divide, poverty and unemployment in the urban ruins of Rome. The Catholic Church condemned

Bitter Rice completely, and the Christian Democrat Undersecretary of Public Entertainment, Giulio Andreotti, launched an infamous attack on De Sica after the release of *Umberto D.* claiming the director's social responsibility was to help create a more optimistic view of Italy (Shiel 2006: 86).

In *Bitter Rice*, all the female characters are working women who contribute to their families income by working hard in the rice fields. Maria, the maid in *Umberto D.* similarly work to survive extreme poverty, and so that she can provide for her unborn child. The introduction of Antonia, the aggressive and mean landlady in *Umberto D.* shows another type of working woman, who work for her own personal gain and not out of necessity. Due to Italy's dire economic situation in the early post-war years the working women who worked out of necessity were seen as positive role models, despite them not adhering fully to the ideals of the politicians and church who wanted women at home and men at work as breadwinners.

Japan

Film introduction: *Early Summer* (1951)

Early Summer (original title: *Bakushû*), which premiered in 1951, was directed (and co-written) by Yasujirô Ozu and was produced by Takeshi Yamamoto. The key actors in the film were Setsoku Hara, in the lead role as Noriko Mamiya, Chishû Ryû (Koichi Mamiya), Kuniko Miyake (Fumiko Mamiya), Shûji Sano (Sotaro Satake), Hiroshi Nihon'yanagi (Kenkichi Yabe) and Chikage Awashima (Aya Tamura).

The film won Best Film in the 1952 Kinema Junpo Awards and the 1952 Mainichi Film Concours, and was part of Ozu's extremely popular *The Noriko Trilogy*. The collection was also highly regarded by Western audiences.

Early Summer revolves around the 28 year old Noriko, who is unmarried and lives with her brother, Koichi, his wife, Fumiko, their two sons, and her mother and father. She works in an office in downtown Tokyo, and her boss, Mr. Satake, feels that his friend Manabe would be a good match for Noriko, despite her many refusals of wanting to marry at all. Her family approves of this match, despite never having

met him, but in the end, Noriko makes her own decisions of who to marry, and she chooses their old family friend, Kenkichi, who is a widower and a father, and who is moving away for a promotion. Noriko's family has disapproves of her independent choice at first, but gradually come to accept it. The family, formerly living under one roof, split up and go their separate way after having taken one last family photo.

Film analysis: *Early Summer* (1951)

Although the plot of the film appears to be little more than a show of everyday things that happen, it is a 'slow' film that takes up interesting themes that apply to the daily events of life. The film does not rely on the big dramatic events or high points in life, such as weddings, moving or similar, but rather suggests that it is the daily routines of a person's life that is interesting.

Noriko is repeatedly referred to as being "strange", and her family members believes that is the explanation for why she will not marry. Her boss, Mr. Satake, even go so far as to ask her best friend if Noriko is a lesbian, because of her disinterest in marriage, but alleged obsession with Audrey Hepburn.

Overall, Noriko seems to be valued as a good worker by her boss, who treats her like a close friend, and the film does not give away anything to make us think her family dislike her work. Noriko is often shown to be working and at the office, and she talks with her boss outside of working hours as well. In the last scene with her boss, before she leaves to join her future husband in Akita, she thanks him "(…) for everything over all these years", indicating the long span of her employment. Hence, work is clearly a big part of her everyday life, and has been for many years of her young adult life.

However, there are a few things in the film which seems to devalue Noriko as a working woman: First, Noriko's family (esp. her brother) are wanting her to marry soon because of her age, and it seems to be the trend, at least amongst her married friends and her sister-in-law, that married women stop working and start taking care of the house, raise the children, or care for elderly family members. Second, it is her boss who takes the first concrete step to try and get Noriko to marry, thereby mixing her modern work environment with the very traditional concept of an arranged

(mutually advantageous) marriage. Noriko has never met the man her boss suggests for her and he is 12 years her senior, but he is from a good traditional family, and a successful businessman which makes her brother very pleased, although the women in her family are concerned with his age. Thirdly, when she spontaneously and independently chooses to agree to a marriage proposal made by a man's mother, she also knows she will have to move away with him to Akita, northern Japanese farm-land. This will ultimately remove her from her workplace, and will require her to take up a new profession, most likely connected to some rural keep, or/and looking after his daughter. Lastly, when Noriko comes to visit her boss at the office before leaving for Akita he jokingly asks if she would have accepted a marriage proposal from him, given that he was younger and single. He answers his own question with "You would probably turn me down too", and they both giggle. However, given that her relationship status is such a hot topic of conversation even in her place of work goes to show the importance the matter of marriage was with regards to young professional working women.

Consequently, one gets the impression that a woman's career is time restricted to before she is married, by which time other chores of a more domestic nature will take over, or if she continues working, it will be need-based (poverty or family business) or based around the husband's choices.

Film introduction: *Tokyo Story* (1953)

Tokyo Story (original title: *Tôkyô* monogatari) was released in 1953, and was also directed by Yasujirô Ozu. Ozu additionally co-wrote the screenplay together with Kogo Noda. Like in *Early Summer*, the producer of the film was Takeshi Yamamoto, and Ozu uses many of the same leads as from his earlier films in the series: Setsuko Hara (Noriko), So Yamamura (Koichi), Kuniko Miyake (Fumiko), Chishu Ryu (Shukichi Hirayama) Chieko Higashiyama (Tomi Hirayama), Haruko Sugimura (Shige Kaneko), and Nobuo Nakamura (Kurzao Kaneko, Shige's husband).

Tokyo Story has the reputation of being Ozu's most popular film (Buehrer 1990: 79), and it was his first, and only, film to gain popularity outside of Japan. Ozu was considered "the most Japanese of directors", and therefore his films were much

less exported abroad as Japanese distributers believed foreigners wanted exotic costumes and dramas, not the contemporary non-dramas showing the daily lives of the Japanese (Buehrer 1990: 49). The film, however, won the 1958 Sutherland Trophy of the British Film Institute Awards, and was voted the greatest film of all time in the directors' selection of the 2012 *Sight & Sound* magazine's poll. His films were not the highest grossing, box-office successes at years of their release, but Ozu was still very much in tune with the Japanese mass audience (Desser 1997: 3).

Tokyo Story is set around an elderly couple's visit to Tokyo to see their children and grandchildren. However, when they arrive, they feel that they inconvenience their children, who are too busy working. Their daughter, Shige runs a beauty salon, whilst their son, Koichi is a paediatrics doctor. Only Noriko, the self-supporting widowed wife of their late son Shoji, takes the time off work to show them the city. When they see that their visit disrupts their children's busy lives, they return home again, but the mother falls ill on the train and the children are called for. When they finally arrive, she is already in a comatose and dies shortly after. Her husband, now a widower, gives away his wife's watch to Noriko, rather than their own flesh and blood, because she had been the kindest to them on their last trip together in Tokyo.

Film Analysis: *Tokyo Story* (1953)

Firstly, the war and its effects are acutely felt in the film, as Noriko portrays the wife of a fallen soldier who also was and the old couple's son. The film deals with both grieving and the need to move on after a tragedy, and show this as a natural progression of life.

Two statements are constantly reinforced, both verbally and through actions, in the film: One, that parents eventually become a burden for their children, and two, that children will always disappoint their parents. There is, however, a loophole in these statements, which allows Noriko, as the daughter-in-law, to never appear to feel as if her parents-in law are a burden to her, and also prevent the old couple from ever feeling disappointed in her. Noriko, as a widow, can also more acutely appreciate family, than her brothers-and sister-in-law, because of her loss

In this film, Noriko works with administrational tasks at Bridgestone, the world's second largest tyre-producer. Noriko's work at the office is need-based, due to her situation as a widow with no husband to support her or to add to the household income. When the sister in law first call Noriko to ask her to show her parents Tokyo in stead of herself, Noriko immediately agrees, and then go to her manager to ask permission for a day off the next day. He agrees, but quickly asks how a project is going, to which Noriko answers that it will be done by the end of the day. Without knowing for certain, one can muse as to whether she stays late to finish up her work so that she can meet her parents-in-law the next day, and thus sacrifice sleep or social commitments in order to get it all done on time.

There is also some significance in how Noriko always gets phone calls at work. It could certainly hint to the amount of time Noriko spends there, but symbolically it shows how Noriko makes room for family calls during her work hours, and prioritises family before herself and her ambitions. Whilst the other children of the old couple constantly blame a busy schedule or heavy workload for why they cannot find the time to entertain their parents, Noriko will go out of her way to make sure she is available.

Contextualised changes in cinematic representations: Japan

American occupation and influence played a big role in how Ozu changed his portrayal of the Japanese society and the "ideal" woman heroine in the two films. Because the American occupation of Japan ended in late 1951 (Huldt 2007: 175) it means that the first film, *Early Summer* (1951), was created during the occupation, and the second, *Tokyo Story* (1953) produced after American forces had pulled out of most areas in Japan. For one, the American occupation had meant the creation of a Japanese constitution that granted women equal citizenship and equal rights to men. Hence, in *Early Summer*, when the character of Noriko's brother, Koichi, during dinner complains that since the war women have become too forward, and takes advantage of laws and "etiquette", she swiftly shut him down by saying that women merely have taken up their natural space, and that it was men who were too forward before. Noriko's argument is met with a joyful "Hear hear!" from her sister in-law.

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This conversation at the dinner table makes it clear that previous traditional Japanese gender roles have changed as a result of the Constitution of Japan (1947). In the second film, *Tokyo Story,* there is no such similar feminist outburst from the film's heroine, Noriko. Rather, Noriko is most obviously awarded (by signs of admiration, gratitude or gifts) when she portrays more traditional and respectful manners, actions and speech, and put family above her work.

American products and stars are more also visible in the background of the first film than in the second. In *Early Summer,* some of the main characters offer each other Coca Cola, imitate American accents during a conversation, refer to American-style houses, and discuss Noriko's obsession with pictures of the popular Hollywood actress Audrey Hepburn. However, in the second film, *Tokyo Story,* American influences or products are replaced by Japanese items and products. Coca Cola is replaced by sake or tea, and the character of Noriko is now working with administration at a large Japanese tyre-producing company, called Bridgestone Corporation.

Regarding Noriko's work, there is also a discernible development here in line with the socio-economical changes in post-war japan. In the first film, Noriko is a valued and respected worker, and her character is often portrayed at her workplace, where she is smiling, socialising and actively engaging with work. In the second film however, she is only portrayed at work at the two times when family call her to ask her to look after her ageing parents in-laws, and to tell her that her mother in-law is dying. Neither time is she depicted as actively engaging with colleagues or work, other than to ask her boss for a day off.

Whereas Noriko was only ever seen in modern, western, 'business' clothes in *Early Summer,* she appears in *Tokyo Story* in more traditional clothes on two occasions: when she was going to bed during Tomi's visit, and at Tomi's funeral. This shows a more traditional side of Noriko that has previously not been shown, which could relate to the film's attention to the importance of cherishing and appreciating the old, yet embracing the new and moving on when the time comes.

Both of Ozu's films furthermore illustrate an interesting element regarding women's work: The Japanese M-curve: All the young, single women work in his films, and their work is a natural part of their lives, whilst young married women,

without children yet or with small children, stay at home. Older married women are also seen working.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The Second World War and its early aftermath had a huge influence on the themes, motifs and characters presented in various national cinemas in the years between 1945 and 1953. Even a new genre, neorealism, emerged from the ruins and harsh human conditions in Italy, with the "(…) overwhelming desire (…) to place the camera into the mainstream of real life, of everything that struck our horrified eyes" (Vittorio De Sica quoted in Shiel 2006: 9). Going to the cinema was a worldwide popular pastime in the early post-war years, and especially so in the USA, Sweden, Italy and Japan, before the television became the new main source of entertainment. The popular feature films of the time, however, did not just offer an escape from reality, but responded to the nation's realities and people's hopes and fears by way of offering a "(…) means of national and personal self-examination" (Shiel 2006: 9).

In this thesis I sought to determine the following questions: Firstly, is the post war socio-economical gender backlash observable in selected popular feature films' representations of working women? Secondly, if so, how do cinematic representations of working women change in response to socio-economic developments between the years of 1945 and 1953? And thirdly, how do these representations differ between the selected countries (the United States, Sweden, Italy and Japan)?

Although the films are a fictional, and a hybrid of both artistic creativity and an industry designed to make money, they are able to say something about the society in which they were made, and the audience they were meant for (Allen and Gomery 1985; Smith 2008; Jarvie 1970; Kaes 1995). As I have elaborated on in the introductory chapter, by using only popular contemporary national films from the early post-war era I rely on the film's appeal to a mass audience to reveal a mass taste, which would help me identify dominant social norms and views. I have further worked under the assumption that "(…) filmic images are assumed to be reflections of prevailing social norms, changes in representations are attributed to changes in public sentiment" (Allen and Gomery 1985: 159). With this, I hoped to uncover how the

public sentiment regarding women in gainful labour changed over time within a society.

The Context Overview and the Film Analysis chapters in this thesis have established that women in the US, Sweden, Italy and Japan did indeed experience a gender backlash during the early post war era, both in real life and on-screen. In this final chapter I want to further discuss the findings from the film analysis within the broader socio-economic context of the postwar societies I investigated. I compare and contrast the developments in the filmic representations of working women in the four countries, and try to discern some of the contextual differences between the countries that made the gender backlash present itself distinctively in the four national cinemas.

Context, clarity and complexity

In the two films from the US, the female character with the strongest connection to waged labour go from being portrayed as strong, independent and honourable – although flawed as a mother – (as Mildred in *Mildred Pierce* from 1945), to being selfish, superficial and immoral (as Marie in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (*TBYOL*) from 1947). Female economic independence leads to Bert's (Mildred's ex-husband) renewed admiration of Mildred, but emasculates and infuriates Fred (Marie's husband) when Marie invites him out to dinner. The changing characterisation of working women appears to relate to the actual social developments in the US, where women were slowly pushed out of the work environment, and into the role as homemakers. "Occupation: Housewife" (Friedan 1963) became celebrated by politicians, media, and professionals (e.g. psychologists), and the image of the happy homemaker overtook and eventually replaced "Rosie the Riveter", the cultural icon of American war women during the Second World War (May 1988: 66). In *Mildred Pierce,* adaptability, resourcefulness, diligence and perseverance is presented as ideal feminine traits for the most part, and can exclusively be found in those female characters who work for a living. Just two years later, *TBYOL* presents female sacrifice and loyalty as ideal feminine traits that only women who are not in gainful employment possess.

Consequently, the two American films I analysed seem to display a close correlation between the fictional representations and the actual economical, political and social changes in society. In the other films, this correlation is not immediately evident, and requires some additional examination.

My analysis of Ozu's two films, *Early Summer* (1951) and *Tokyo Story* (1953), can, however, also be deduced to show some change in focus, based on the developments of the times; the protagonist of *Early Summer*, leaves her full-time office job in Tokyo to become a doctor's wife in farm-land Akita. However, she voices her beliefs regarding women's naturally equal position to men in society, and her character is frequently filmed at her workplace, and she is respected as a good worker. Her family and boss claim that she is "odd" for not wanting to marry at first. Her sexuality is also brought into question a few times in the film, as she is uninterested in marrying and collects Audrey Hepburn photographs. In the second film, *Tokyo Story,* the protagonist remains in her job (because of need, as she is a widow), but the film highlights only her traditionally feminine qualities, and rewards her for her efforts in selflessly taking care of her late husband's elderly parents. The parent's biological daughter, however, is punished for focusing more on her job than her old parents, and throughout presented as an unlikable character. I would argue that the first film reflects to a greater extent the influence the American occupation had on Japanese society, as both the film and the real society had to negotiate a balance between old Japanese traditions and American modern influences. In 1951, at the film's release, Japan was still under American occupation, whose forces did not leave until April 1952 (Lowe 2005: 327). The second film, however, seems much more intent on distancing itself from American cultural influence, and rather attached value to the more traditional Japanese gender roles, behaviours and traits. *Tokyo Story,* which came out in 1953, was then an almost immediate filmic response to the American withdrawal, and can be linked closely to the information presented by Bo Huldt, who states that there was an outbreak of anti-Americanism only after Japan had achieved its independence (2007: 175). Even though the US occupation of Japan by US forces was a period of relative social and political harmony, there emerged a forceful return to more traditional values and beliefs after the US forces withdrew in 1952. This could be seen in Ozu's films by the way the protagonist spoke loudly of gender

equality in the first film, as well as her long hesitation to marry, but where the essentially same character appears much more conservative and family oriented in the second, despite her not even being directly related to the family in question, but a widower to the family's son. Based on this, I would emphasise that rather than being anti-American, *Tokyo Story* is instead more pro-Japanese, as the American items, ideas, speech, and idols disappeared after *Early Summer*.

Bitter Rice (1949) depicts the lives of the women who toil as seasonal workers in the rice fields in northern Italy. Although some women have left their families and children to work during the summer, female employment is not presented as negative, since the women work out of necessity to provide for their families. This mirrors Italy's desperate economic situation after the war, and the huge unemployment many men faced. Women in gainful employment, no matter how lowly the position or little pay it provided, was considered positive because they worked for their families to survive. The film does, however, place women within gendered labour. Their skills as field workers are explained in the film to be rooted in their "natural" predispositions for having quick, caring and nurturing hands. This means that they are not competing with men for work, because rice planting is presented as work that only a female is "suited" to do.

In the second film, *Umberto D.* (1952)*,* the story takes place in the city of Rome, and thus there is more variety in how working women are represented on-screen. The character Maria, a young maid, works purely out of desperate necessity. She is pregnant, but without a husband, and cannot return to her family because of her father's disapproval and likely violent reaction to her pregnancy. Because her character's work is need-based, she is presented as kind, sweet, helpful, caring. She gets the audiences sympathy for her tragic situation, which will get worse when the landlady discovers her pregnancy. The fact that the characters Umberto and Maria are so close in the film illustrates the magnitude of the poverty in post-war Italy, because of it crossing generational lines as well as genders. That both Umberto and Maria are close to being turned out of their homes help to demonstrate how Rome's impoverished streets are filling with women, children and the elderly, and where the rich Fascists take up more space in the house.

The female character she works for, the fearsome landlady Antonia, works as a singing teacher, as well as she receives income from Umberto who rents one of her rooms. Her ruthless efforts to evict Umberto from his room so that she can use it as she pleases is argued to be linked with the post war "expansionism" by the bourgeois and upwardly mobile population (Ruberto and Wilson 2007: 152), which left very little left for the poor working-class people. The characters of Maria and Umberto is left by the end of the film in increasingly worse situations than what they had started with, and the film's end offers no solution to the social problems they both are trapped in. Therefore, "(t)he film foreshadows the absence of a future for many of the characters who will perish in the wake of Italy's ruthlessly burgeoning economic "recovery"" (Ruberto and Wilson 2007: 153).

Because her work is not purely need-based but based on a desire to rise to a higher class in society, her character is presented as greedy, immoral, and opportunistic. However, a clear development in representations of working women is not found between these films which were released three years apart. The Italian films I analysed both present women who work out of necessity positively, and whose best feminine qualities were being caring, nurturing, and hardworking (but in their ultimately feminine jobs: rice worker and maid). However, a significant change between the films was the introduction of the greedy and immoral female character who worked for personal gain and her own social betterment, who emerged as the Italian economic miracle crept steadily closer in the early fifties, the film *Umberto D*.

The representations and development of female characters in and between the Swedish films were also markedly more ambiguous to interpret than the American or Japanese films. Sweden, at the time of the early post-war era a social democracy and a burgeoning welfare state with a surplus of jobs and not enough employees, needed and wanted women who worked in typically feminine jobs, and who could combine work with family obligations. This is reflected in how negatively the character Monika is portrayed in *Summer with Monica* (1953); She works because of her and her family's poor economic situation, but she hates every second of working, and dreams of climbing the social ladder by finding a man who can take her away from her working class life. After she quits her job, has had her romantic summer adventure with Harry, returned to the city and had a baby, she refuses to actively participate in

society either as a worker or as a good homemaker and mother. Instead, she leaves parenting, work and studying to her husband Harry, while she spends all their money, loaf around the house, go out dancing, and cheats on him. In the end, she leaves both husband and baby. Thus, her lack of working when the situation calls for it, makes her seem selfish and destructive, and would be considered most unhelpful in the post-war Swedish society, which was in need of both homemakers and workers.

Interestingly, the American title for *Summer with Monika* is *Monika: The Story of a Bad Girl* (Koskinen 2008: 233). The change in title changes the assumptions about the film and about Monika herself quite drastically. The original title assumes the standpoint of Harry, as in Harry's *Summer with Monika*, and reflects on the free and joyous and youthful summer the two young lovers spent with each other, away from their working class lives, but which could never last. The American title focuses instead on Monika's shortcomings and vices, and detaches Harry from the story.

This can be contrasted to the situation of the character Berit, from the film *Port of Call* made by Bergman five years earlier in 1948, who works with operating repetitious machinery-work at a factory to gain some level of independence from her manipulative and abusive mother. Her character does not work out of dire necessity, as some of the positively presented characters in *Mildred Pierce, Bitter Rice* or *Umberto D.*, but because the institution or "reformatory school" has placed her there as a way to become a useful member of society. She does not work to rise to achieve a higher social status, but to save herself from more abuse from her mother, as well as to redeem herself in the eyes of society after a failed suicide attempt and years spent in an institution with other "troubled" girls. Even though Sweden encouraged women to work in the early postwar era, they still worked mostly in traditional female jobs. Men also feared women as competitors immediately after the war, when economic prospects were uncertain. Although the technical practice of "equal pay for equal work" was already in place in Sweden in the post-war era (Almgren 2006), there were ways around having to hire women on the same basis as men. Swedish women were often hired in temporary or part-time work, for instance, which would allow companies to pay them much less, and made up a much cheaper labour force than men. Male workers worried that Swedish women This made some men hostile to the idea of women working in typically "male" occupations, which exacerbated the idea

of tradition and gendered roles (Almgren 2006: 54). The two Swedish films could show how male workers assert a type of dominance over women in the workplace by talking down at them and by through sexually aggressive behaviour and language. The character Monika is often spoken ill of by the older men her boyfriend Harry work with, or sexually harassed by the men she worked with before she quit. The sexual harassment by a male co-worker is also a factor present in *Port of Call*, where Berit, the heroine, is continuously harassed by one of her managers, both at work and outside of it. This type of behaviour and speech works to sexualise and engender women in gainful employment, separating them from men in the workplace.

Femininities and Masculinities

When comparing all the films more closely, it becomes apparent that most characterisations of the negatively presented women in the films of each country are ascribed traits that are traditionally considered typically masculine. The representations of these women fit Schippers' concept of *pariah femininities*, where the women appear aggressive, promiscuous, sexually inaccessible, or desire other women sexually (2007). Fred's beautiful young wife Marie, from *The Best Years of Our Lives,* is portrayed as promiscuous, and somewhat aggressive as she is unafraid to pick a fight with her husband. She likely cheats, and has cheated on him, and she truly enjoys working at the nightclub 'The Blue Devil', whose name designates it as an "immoral" workplace for any good and respectful wife.

The example of the landlady Antonia in *Umberto D.* is even clearer in its negative representation of the 'pariah femininity'. Her character is aggressive in both appearance and through her actions: She is a tall, curvy, dominating woman, who walks and moves with an air of determination and power, which makes her appear very strong and intimidating. Her hair is bleached to a platinum blonde colour and her face is almost always in heavy make-up. Her character lacks empathy – a traditional female quality – and is quick to pick a fight. She is also represented as both promiscuous and sexually unavailable, which are also traits of the pariah femininity.

The character of Silvana in *Bitter Rice* can also immediately considered rather promiscuous due to her sexualised appearance, and her joy in showing off while

dancing the Boogie-Woogie in front of crowds. Later in the film, her promiscuity is also evident as she seduces and steals Francesca's boyfriend. Moreover, she first seduce the male hero of the film, only to make herself sexually unavailable to him when she discovers that he is poor and has little glamour to offer her.

The character of the daughter, Shige, from *Tokyo Story*, is portrayed rather differently from the above negative female role models, but can nonetheless still fit within the idea of possessing a pariah femininity. She is not promiscuous or sexually unavailable, but is happily married. She is, however, aggressive and bossy, and does not portray many feminine or caring traits when it comes to taking care of her ageing parents. She even hits her father when he comes home drunk one night, as well as she rise to answer the door in the middle of the night, even though her husband is in bed as well. She seems to have taken charge over her marriage as well as she runs her own beauty salon, and can thus be deemed somewhat masculine.

The fact that all of these negatively presented working women possess masculine qualities mentioned in Schippers concept of pariah femininities enforces their function as negative role models for the respective audiences at the time of their release. These types of women contrasted with the 'hegemonic femininity', which Schippers describes as consisting of characteristics defined as womanly and that establishes and legitimates "(…) a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2007: 102). Thus, the characters fitting into the characterisation of the pariah femininity rather than the hegemonic femininity challenged male hegemonic masculinity by assimilating it. This is especially clear in the example of the love triangle between Fred, Marie and Peggy in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947), where Fred represents the hegemonic masculinity, Marie the pariah femininity and Peggy the hegemonic femininity. Working-girl Marie threatens her husband Fred's masculinity by being dominant and by challenging him in areas of work and economy, while Peggy helps to strengthen his masculinity by being supportive and submissive. When Fred happily ends up with Peggy instead of Marie, *TBYOL* illustrates that the hegemonic femininity is the ideal one, which women should embrace, and which will leave men and women happy together. Even though the positively presented characters Mildred in *Mildred Pierce* and Noriko in *Early Summer* do not always work out of dire necessity, have certain masculine traits and

portray pariah feminism during the film, they develop in such a way that by the end of the film they belong to the group hegemonic femininity as they leave work to live with breadwinning men.

In addition to these female characters sharing traits tied to those of the pariah femininity, they are also connected by another common factor: Their work. These negative representations of women all have, or have recently had, jobs, are hard workers, and have ambitions for their labour. The characters are often positioned in the workplace, and their conversations revolve around business and their work. In contrast, the women who are positively characterised (Noriko, Peggy, Milly…) are mostly positioned at home, or with family, which enforce the positive view of female domesticity and focus on family. The only exceptions to this model are the Swedish films, wherein the most negatively presented character in *Port of Call* is Berit's mother, and Monika in *Summer with Monika.* These two characters can instead be seen using their feminine roles as either mothers or romantic interests to manipulate and harm the protagonists of the respective stories.

Consequently, because Swedish women who worked were largely seen as a resource for the post-war development of the welfare state, neither of the Swedish films presents them as negative role models. Working women with pariah femininities in all the second films from the USA, Italy and Japan were, however, criticised for their aggressiveness, bossiness, promiscuity, and general lack of positive traditional female traits. In the cases where working women were presented positively, the women are either working out of dire necessity, helping their families, or develop throughout the film to become more traditional in the sense of gender roles, by either marrying and leaving their jobs, or returning home after being pushed out of work.

The effects of the Second World War were varied and it is problematic to do sweeping generalisations regarding war and social changes for working women. Women were affected differently based on their nationality, age, class, relationship status etc. it is also difficult to determine how many women willingly left their jobs after the war to pursue more feminine work or homemaker status, and how many were pushed out (Almgren 2006: 30). The link between films and social reality in the four countries is therefore difficult to verify, as it is prone to hindsight, oversimplification,

misinterpretation and bias, and may place more focus on one type of women over others. However, based on my analysis of the films in relation to their socio-economical context, I would allude to the probability of certain generalisations, such as that the losing Axis powers, Italy and Japan, show a positive image of working women on screen as long as the characters work out of necessity rather than self-advancement in society, belong to a "feminine" workforce and otherwise portray typically feminine traits. This links with the two countries desperate economical problems after the war, which required women to contribute to the family income, but also maintained a gender divide in the workforce which catered to their post-war societies' developments, which placed women more firmly in traditional gender roles as mothers and wives. The American and the Swedish films show the biggest disparity with regards to their representations, with the American films clearly depicting a return to the home for women in the early post-war years, and adheres arguably very closely to contemporary media and political discourse for example, whereas the Swedish films show the female protagonists being far more complex in their development and with regards to their work. The Swedish example could be influenced by the dichotomy of Swedish women's value as workers in typically feminine jobs, and the post-war idealisation of traditional gender roles.

In chapter two, the context overview, I showed how a gender backlash can be observed in all four countries, but emphasised how contextual these changes were. Claims can be made regarding a global desire to put the war behind them and return to normality, which included a stronger division of gender roles. However, this was done differently in the four countries, and had different reasons, influences, discourses etc. that determined how a gender backlash took form in each country. Thus, a "global" gender backlash developed in the early post-war era was not some homogeneous shift in the socio-economical position of women in all four countries. In fact, because of the strikingly national differences in the onset, nature and development of a gender backlash in the different countries, it becomes problematic to refer to these post-war developments as a 'global gender backlash' at all. Rather, a better term for these developments would be 'glocalisation' which can be tied to the sociologist Roland Robertson. 'Glocalisation' is a combination of the words 'globalisation' and 'localisation', which conveys the idea that the global and the local influence each

other. The global, or globalisation, does not simply influence local societies in a one-way direction. Instead, the local society or culture absorbs global trends, at the same time as it holds on to or enforces its own distinctiveness (Beyer 2006: 24). This theory of glocalisation could more accurately explain why so many countries longed for tradition, family, and a return to a simpler time with traditional, established gender roles after the global horrors of war. However, the local variations between countries in terms of culture, economy, and politics determined to what extent this would be possible to do.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have studied the socio-economic gender backlash in the Western World and Japan during the post war era by analysing the representations of women in waged labour in a selection of popular feature films released in the years between 1945 and 1953. My aim was to find out whether the post war socio-economical gender backlash was observable in the selected popular feature films and, if this is the case, how – and whether - the cinematic representations of working women changed in response to the socio-economic developments between the years of 1945 and 1953. Lastly I sought to investigate how representations of working women differed between the selected countries.

The countries I chose for this study were the United States, Sweden, Italy and Japan. By comparing two films produced in the same country in different years, I was able to discern whether the films responded to the socio-economic and political developments, and see if and how the gender backlash was transmitted onto the screen.

Although all the eight films were released only a few years apart, with the biggest gap being five years between the two Swedish Bergman-films, *Port of Call* (1948) and *Summer with Monica* (1953), the difference in their representations of working women were sometimes remarkable. A change in the representation of working women was most striking in the US productions, where female characters in gainful labour can be seen as admired for their hard work in the first film, but where they are framed as greedy and immoral in the second. An important factor in all of the second

films of each country except Sweden was the introduction of a 'Career Woman' as a negative role model, who had not been present in the first.

There were also interesting national variations in how the films discuss the relation between female employment and the role of a mother and housewife. For example, Fred's wife, Marie from *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947) loved her work at the club 'The Blue Devil', and was untidy, could not cook or keep house, and was clearly not content to stay at home as a housewife. Thus, Marie as a working woman, is not in possession of typical motherly or domestic skills, and the roles of employee and good wife seems incompatible. On the opposite end of the scale is Bergman's Monika from *Summer with Monika* (1953), whose poor work ethic and rejection of motherhood and family-life makes her the ultimate post-war Swedish "bad girl". Sweden, who had too few workers in their growing industry would appreciate her efforts and usefulness as a worker in society, or even at home caring for her child while her husband could work and study, but she is too lazy to do either. Here, even the character's poor mothering skills would have redeemed herself if she had been a good worker, since the young couple have someone to care for the baby when they are busy.

In sum, a gender backlash occurred in the United States, Sweden, Italy and Japan (even though Japan and Italy were very traditional countries prior to the second world war) in the early post-war era, which can to some extent and in certain respects be observed on-screen in popular films from the time in the film's representations of working women and their portrayal of positive of negative role models.

A gender backlash can be seen to have taken place in all four countries, as shown in chapter two, but the manifestations of this backlash were contingent on the country's historical, political and socio-economical context. Hence, the development of the different national films also showed the national gender backlash in varying ways on-screen. However, based on the eight selected films, I have shown that working women, or at least women who work to improve their economic or social standing rather than work out of necessity, are portrayed more negatively in later productions in the early post-war era than in films that were produced earlier in the same time-frame.

The issue of representation was brought up in the introduction, but has become more evident throughout my research. By using successful and popular films as a medium through which to study representations of working women in the early post-war era that could support the evidence of a near-global gender backlash, I could be more safeguarded against the films' social irrelevance, as the films' popularity can say something about dominant social norms and views. However, by using only two films from each of the four countries to look for correlations between a social reality and cinematic representations of working women, the research was limited to a very small sample that struggled to provide effective general developments between films and trends between countries. Hence, I would suggest the inclusion of a larger sample of popular films from each country to analyse for further research on this topic, in order to strengthen the argument that national gender backlashes can be observed to varying extents in films.

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