

# The Celluloid Hurdles

## Israeli Women Film Directors in the Prism of Gender and Time

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**Abstract:** *This qualitative study explores the role of personal and historical time in the power dynamics that women encounter in the Israeli film industry. Based on a close thematic analysis of 26 interviews with women film directors in the film “In the Director’s Chair Sits a Woman” (2020), the findings suggest that women in the Israeli film industry continue to face unique obstacles that prolong or block their professional advancement. The study proposes four metaphors that capture specific axes that intersect time, cinema and gender. Firstly, “uncertain time” refers to the loss of precious time that women in cinema experience due to gendered stereotypes about women’s ability to direct. Secondly, “the time loop” denotes having to face stereotypical gendered norms and recurrent instances where women directors are forced to reshoot scenes due to male obstinacy on the set. Thirdly, the “sliding doors” metaphor captures how women are forced to choose between two life trajectories, focused either on childbearing or on filmmaking. Lastly, “time standing still” addresses setbacks related to women’s experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault as part of their work in the film industry. In addition, we chose the metaphor “gendered historical time” to indicate the significant change that is gradually taking place in the film industry, in everything related to gender equality.*

**Keywords:** *Israeli women in cinema; women and time; gender equality; celluloid ceiling; power relations; feminism*

## Introduction

The metaphor of the “glass ceiling”, first coined in the 1970s, does not directly relate to the aspect of lost time in women’s careers. Instead, it calls attention to the invisible barriers that lead to the increasingly homogenous masculine gender dominance that emerges the higher up the professional ladder one climbs (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovidia and Vanneman 2001). However, the notion of lost time is inferred by the metaphor, when thinking of the efforts many women face trying to break the various concealed ceilings they confront in their professional life. Following this conceptualization, more than twenty years later, the “celluloid ceiling” metaphor was repurposed for indicating the unseen barriers that stand in the way of women in the film industry (Lauzen 2011). Again, the aspect of lost time can only be induced from reading the annual reports of the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film which began recording women’s status in the film industry in the United States in 1998. Similarly, when Israel had joined what had quickly become an international effort, and issued a report that provided concentrated numerical data recording the heavily gendered state of affairs in the local television and film industries, women’s loss of time was not a central issue (Elefant et al. 2021). It could only be inferred from reading the numbers.

The issue of loss of time was not at the center of the worldwide qualitative attempts to understand the underrepresentation of women in the film industry and to explain the gender bias in directorial positions. Yet, the topic of time could often be found in interviews with women directors who produced in-depth accounts of their work behind the camera (Lyden 2018). These endeavors simultaneously document the significant advances that women in the industry have made during the last few decades as well as the many structural time-consuming barriers they continue to grapple with.

In this qualitative study, we focus on the role of time in the professional career of Israeli women film directors. Based on fully transcribed interviews with 26 feature-film directors, who speak directly to the camera about their experiences in the documentary *In the Director’s Chair Sits*

a *Woman* (Zamir 2020), we address the question of the role of personal and historical time in the power relations women encounter in the Israeli film industry.

## **The Marginalization of Women's Voices in Israeli Society and Cinema**

Despite its ethos of equality, the social structures that emerged during the early development stages of secular Zionist society deprived women of participating in social life on an equal footing with men (Benjamin 2012; Pfefferman 2011). The marginalization and silencing of women, side by side with the privileged, hegemonic positioning of Israeli men is still evident in Israel today, in the overwhelmingly male-majority representation of professionals working in key state institutions and in political spaces (Tzameret et al. 2021).

This gender-based structural imbalance is reflected in the Israeli film industry, which mirrors and reproduces women's exclusion in a number of ways. Most egregious is the scarcity of women directors: Women directed only 7% of feature films from the establishment of the state until the early 2000s. The gap started to close over the past two decades, but remained distinct as between 2013 and 2018 women directed only 21% of films. Women are also underrepresented in casting, both in the number of roles as well as the scope of roles they play – often supporting roles, whose principal function is to reflect aspects of the male protagonist or protagonists who occupy the center of the plot (Shaer-Meoded 2016; Elefant et al. 2021).

### **Time and Gender: Between Family and Career**

On the surface of things, gender inequality in the film industry is not linked to time. However, while time is a resource that is universal in its uniformity – as we all have the same 24 hours a day – gendered social norms charge one's time with additional meanings. Starting in childhood and increasing in salience in adulthood, social regimes of

gender-specific expectations weigh heavily on self-efficacy levels and on professional life patterns. Traditional divisions of labor between women and men accord different social value to ways men and women choose to spend their time. Whereas women are expected to prioritize their familial roles as mothers and housekeepers, men do not face similar expectations when managing their time (Fogel-Bizawi 1999). Studies indicate that despite having entered the labor market in ever increasing numbers in recent decades, on average, women dedicate significantly more time to housekeeping than men. Women thus may have secured the 'right' to work outside the house, but they have overwhelmingly remained the sole parties responsible for managing it (Cerrato and Cifre 2018). Since society expects women to assume responsibility for the caretaking role, the conflict between work and family is a common element in many women's lives. If, in early parenthood, women are considered the principal responsible parties in nursing young children, they are also saddled with the burden of taking care of older people and family members with disability in the later stages of their lives. As a result, women often report a need to find flexible employment, which would permit them to take prolonged leaves of absence and to resume working in accordance with the fluctuations of their families' needs. Men, by contrast, often assume the role of the principal breadwinner and develop a constant and uninterrupted pattern of participating in the labor market. Hence, it is safe to argue that the conflict between the home and the family is felt particularly strongly and significantly in women's lives (Cerrato and Cifre 2018).

### The Present Study

This qualitative research explores the role of time in Israeli women directors' professional life. The study is based on the thematic analysis of 26 interviews with directors documented in the film *In the Director's Chair Sits a Woman* (Zamir 2020). The film, that premiered at the Haifa Film Festival, records the experience of being a woman director in the Israeli film industry that is controlled mainly by men.

As a documentary, the film corresponds with existing literature on gender and filmmaking, setting as its main target to focus on the question of the minority of women directors in the Israeli film industry. This feature turns the film into a unique and valuable source of data. After close examination, which included each of us watching the film twice, and building a table with participants' details, we found that the film is a most suitable source for data analysis, as it provides insights into the worlds of 37% of all women directors of feature films in Israel. The film allowed the directors to narrate their own perspectives on being a woman in the Israeli film industry and to share their personal experiences in their own words, thereby making it especially suitable for qualitative research analysis. Moreover, the fact that the directors interviewed in the film are heterogeneous with regard to age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, and marital situation (e.g., single, married, divorced, with and without children), enabled us to examine commonalities beyond differences in experience. This followed the understanding that the diversity of cases enhances generalization (Ragin and Amoroso 2011).

## Method

This research is based on a data corpus that consists of the full transcription of all the interviews in the film. We used thematic analysis in order to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Our goal was to capture relevant concepts that were repeated in different interviews.

Our analysis was data-driven; we chose an inductive approach in searching and coding time related themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). We watched the movie a few times and each author read and re-read the transcribed interviews a number of times. We marked topics explicitly related to time where directors talked about time they wasted on their road to filmmaking. We also marked latent and implied notions related to time. Following the process of identifying repeated notions, concepts, and ideas related to time from various interviews, we coded them and divided them into distinct categories (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). The first author took the lead role by developing the prelimi-

nary categories related to the concept of time. These categories were subsequently reviewed and elaborated by the second author. Although other topics also emerged in the interviews, such as gender relations or the financial costs associated with producing movies, our focus was exclusively on time. This focus was determined after a thorough reading and re-reading of the transcribed interviews. We analysed our findings from a constructionist perspective, attempting not to focus solely on an individual perspective, but on the socio-cultural and structural basis of various individual accounts (Braun and Clarke 2006).

We acknowledge that the number of interviews was determined by the director. Nonetheless, we have reached thematic saturation even before the 26 interviews were completed as no new data emerged from the text with regard to the concept of time.

## Findings

While three directors had explicitly stated that they never felt discriminated against, most of the directors talked about various obstacles limiting their ability to create. Paying close attention to the motif of time, we divided our findings into four categories. The first, “There was no one. Only men”, explores the difficulty of being a woman pioneer in a field dominated by men. The second, “A glass ceiling inside your mind”, examines experiences of loss of time due to women’s socialization. The third, “They had a problem with me calling the shots”, portrays difficulties with male crew members and stereotypical thinking that consumes time, as well as a sexist atmosphere that sets women back in the film industry. The fourth, “Did you check the state of your ovaries?”, refers to time consuming conflicts between work and motherhood.

### **“There was no one. Only men.”**

The few women who were active filmmakers at the onset of Israeli cinema were pioneers of their trade, a fact that carries much significance in terms of the time required to mobilize knowledge and support. Za-

mir's film begins with revisiting choreographer and director Elida Gera's groundbreaking contribution to cinema, her film *Before tomorrow* (1969), which was the first full-length feature film directed by a woman in Israeli cinematic history. In the archival footage, Gera speaks of her isolation in the field:

**This wasn't a period of female directors.** In cinema, women were actresses. There might've been an editor or two, and Margot Klausner, who was a big producer. (Elida Gera)<sup>1</sup>

The sense of being a diminutive minority, that women directors born in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century experienced in their careers, is also described by Dina Zvi-Riklis, who makes a connection between the absence of women in the film industry at large with the time it took her to enter the world of filmmaking:

**It took me a long, long time** [...] even after having made two short films, I never called myself a director. I looked around me, and only men were directors. Back then, Michal was [...] she did films, Michal Bat-Adam. I think she was the only one. She had experience – she was an actress, too – so she already had a head start. **It was hard, you know, to get into that world** [...] because “director”, that's an entire world, it was a huge thing. Monetarily, too, the responsibility [...] of justifying the investment. And there was no support to be had, **you couldn't just phone another director [...] a woman director and tell her: “Listen, I need some tips, how did it go for you? What should I do? Should I insist on that? [...] there was no discussion to be had, because there was no one. Only men.** (Dina Zvi-Riklis)

Zvi-Riklis captures women's experience of time as simultaneously progressing on two axes. On one hand, when there were fewer women filmmakers in cinema, women who succeed in making their way to the director's chair were made to feel self-aware since their professional milieu made them exceptional. This heightened self-awareness made them take longer to develop a distinct professional identity in their field and to

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1 Emphases, here and elsewhere, are ours.

expend much energy on overcoming self-doubt. On the other hand, this situation also fostered a long-term hope that, the more women would become involved in cinema, the less self-aware women directors would be in the future.

### **“A glass ceiling inside your mind”**

Women are forced to face time wasting obstacles long before they begin their careers, due to societal gendered structures. Actress, screenwriter, playwright, and director Hanna Azoulay-Hasfari recounts her childhood impressions:

Women are socialized to not want things. Today this had changed, today women do want things. Why is that? It's because they see other women who wanted things, too, and who set out to achieve them [...]. My mother never wanted anything for herself. Which was the worst example I could have been exposed to, as her daughter. This is what women were told [...].

I never wanted to direct. But the first time I directed, I couldn't, for the life of me, understand why I've never tried it before. When I was a kid, I was student council president, but by the time I got to high-school, all I wanted was for people to fall in love with me. That's all I wanted [...]. It's a striking transition, from a smart girl, a leader, to a girl [...] who diminishes herself, who wanes herself down, because to be loved she obviously can't be a leader, can't be opinionated, can't be this, that, or the other [...]. So I can only imagine that, had I attended a girls-only high-school, for example, I'd cultivate that little leader that I was as a child [...] I'd bring her to a situation where she wants things [...] young woman who stands up for herself, an entrepreneur, a creator, and I would've probably begun directing in my late 20s, not in my late 40s. That's twenty years. Twenty years' hold-up. (Hanna Azoulay Hasfari)

Azoulay Hasfari enhances the understanding of the difficulty of creating without having models of success to look up to or even the reassurance that film directing is a possible and realistic occupation as a woman.

Her description of her transition from an opinionated and smart girl, a leader, to one whose self-esteem depends on being liked is not unique to her, and evokes research on teen-age girls silencing their opinions and desires while seeking attention from teen-age boys (Gilligan 1982).

Career wise, it is possible to conceptualize the process of early loss of the confidence to speak and act out as resulting in loss of precious time. In Azoulay Hasfari's case, it amounts to twenty years' worth of creative work lost. Azoulay Hasfari did eventually attain professional success, won numerous accolades and prizes, and today is rightly considered to be a successful role model. One might suggest that she entered the field with greater insight and life experience. Still, it is worth contemplating what more she could have created had she spent those twenty years busy in professional activity, gaining in-field experience. This question becomes even more poignant when we consider the centrality of experience to refining one's artistic craft and deepening one's authorial voice.

On top of early socialization that discourages women from allowing themselves to dream and invest in their abilities, there are obstacles that stand in the way of women who have the courage to dream but could not pursue their dreams due to social conventions:

After my grandmother Rivka, peace be upon her, died, I understood that much of that character, the protagonist, of my film "The Mountain", was actually her. And my childhood memories from her, and her pains, that she never left her kitchen [...] there are those women who always say: what good came from feminism? We had it better in the past [...] but I **grew up with a grandmother who always said: "I'm not happy! This isn't what was supposed to happen to me! I was supposed to go out and study chemistry and be like Marie Curie, not knead Matzah balls in Ramat Gan** (Yaelle Kayam)

Kayam's story of her grandmother Rivka's unfulfilled ambitions demonstrates a complete loss of time, where a woman lives without attaining her fullest potential, and all that is left is sorrow.

The aspect of regret over the loss of valuable time due to social constructions that sow self-doubt among women emerged in different interviews in a variety of ways:

I don't think that the notion that a woman making a film was an obvious and simple thing. Who was I to make a feature? I'd ask. And it took me years to write [...] who am I? What am I? [...] what will I do? Things that may have been self-evident to others, when they won awards for short films and then went, "Sure, time to do a feature!" and to me it always seemed like "What do you mean? That I oversee a truck and twenty guys and tell them 'go left, go right'? Who am I?" and, say I'd even manage to get the money, what would I do with it? I'd feel like I'm on an expedition to the moon. When Dover (Kosashvili) got money with pre-conditions, he came and told me: '90 days, each day you write one page of text, and voila, you've got yourself a feature [...] Me, it took me five years. Everyday I'd wake up and ask "who am I? what am I? me, make a movie? Why ever? [...]. I said: 'A million shekels [...] all the things one could buy with a million shekels!' [...] It's a glass ceiling inside your mind. (Maya Dreifuss)

Past research has located gender differences in diverse expectations of success, showing how women lag behind men in their belief in their ability to succeed as a result of the role of cultural agents, parents, and teachers in forming achievement-related beliefs (Meece, Bower Glienke and Burg 2006). In her early career as a film-director, Dreifuss found it difficult to imagine herself fulfilling the leadership role required of a film director on set. The contrast she draws between Kosashvili who ostensibly writes a script in three months and the five years of self-doubt it took her to write encapsulates the broader story of women struggling alone against social constructs that curtail women's confidence, enabling them to either professionally develop late or not at all.

## “They had a problem with me calling the shots”

The social perception and assimilation of gender roles within the film industry form another structural obstacle in the professional careers of women in the field:

There were some men who [...] hid it, but they didn't do a very good job hiding that they were having a hard time. They had a problem with me calling the shots. With my telling them, “the camera should be here”. My insisting, “this high, not that high”. With my saying we need a 40mm lens, not 50. They wouldn't admit as much, but it'd be there, in something they did. That [...] suddenly someone'd try, facetiously of course, counteract me [...] here and there, there were some horrible things. I mean, really horrible stuff. (Michal Bat-Adam)

The first time I wanted to film, I took all the Tel-Avivians to Deir Hanna,<sup>2</sup> to the village. And I had a cameraman who didn't set the camera, and I wanted a fixed shot. And it drove me crazy, that someone altered my decision, and **that he allowed himself to do it, because he thinks he knows better**. And I remember [...] it was war, and I said: I'm going to shoot it again! [...] **it dawned on them that this girl, this broad [...] she won't give up, not [...] that she isn't a small woman**. (Maysaloun Hamoud)

Men's underestimation of women's efficacy can lead to a precious loss of time. Bat-Adam is an extremely accomplished and prolific filmmaker and the winner of Israel Prize for cinema who started making movies in 1979; Hamoud won the NETPAC Award for World or International Asian Film Premiere for her first feature film in 2016. Both Bat-Adam and Hamoud's narratives demonstrate the reluctance of their staff to receive and carry out their directions. In Bat-Adam's account, the time wasted squabbling over the size of the lens or the height of the camera is

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2 A local council in the Northern District of Israel, where most inhabitants are Arab-Muslims.

only hinted at. In Hamoud's description, it is clear that the cameraman's countermanding her directions forced her to go on an additional day trip of shooting in the village with the crew, incurring an additional investment of time, labor, and money.

The effect of negative attitudes and stereotypes is also reflected in the words of the director, screenwriter, and cinematographer Esti Almo Wexler, whose filmography has depicted, inter alia, stories of the Ethiopian Jews and their lives in Israel.

**It's like there's sack of images and stereotypes heaped on your back.**

I was in a pitch meeting at the Haifa Film Festival [...] when a director comes to me and says: 'I want to tell you, I'm really proud of you, that you're going to direct films' [...] and he says, 'seriously, like, how did you come up with the idea?' Like, what do you mean how did you come up with the idea? [...] **it was as if he were speaking of himself, saying 'It's obvious why I'd be a director because I'm an Ashkenazi<sup>3</sup> man, I had tons of role models as directors, whereas you, where did you ever get the idea to be a director?'** (Esti Almo Wexler)

Similar to the way in which the glass ceiling becomes thicker and more impenetrable when additional social markers intersect, Almo Wexler depicts a celluloid ceiling which represents not only a gender-based form of discrimination but one that is simultaneously ethnically-based as well. While Almo Wexler does not talk directly about the element of wasted time, her description of a "sack of images and stereotypes" heaped on her back portrays a heavy burden that can slow down a woman on her way.

Men's disbelief in female efficacy, aptly encapsulated in the memorable quip, "never underestimate a man's ability to underestimate a woman"<sup>4</sup> (Paretsky 2009), has concrete material underpinnings:

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3 Jews descendent from European and Western countries that are considered part of the Israeli elite.

4 The sentence, was also prominently featured in a Kathleen Turner 1991 film of the same title.

When I arrived at the Israeli film service, they asked: ‘so [...] you’re married?’ I said I was. ‘Got kids?’ I do. ‘What do you need all this for, anyway? Go to the kitchen, cook [...]’ in these very words. I said: ‘Yeah, great, thanks.’ I went and came back and got things going. I had a hard time getting money. I’m like a merry-go-round, which is why most of my films really were low budget. **And I think women are seen as less capable of making a film. Give her millions? Millions?! There’s nothing to do about it. A male industry. A men’s club, you might say.** A lot of deals are closed in – pardon me – men’s toilets. They stand there and [...] they close deals. It’s true that now, here and there you see more women [...] like, they’ll say we need a woman for the board of directors, so let’s find someone. But generally, given the choice, I think they’d put 90% men there, or only men, anyway. Today it’s as if it’s become correct to always have a few women, but none of it’s natural, it doesn’t emerge from the inside, it’s not what you’d call “intrinsic”. It’s because we’re obliged to show we’re actually inclusive and egalitarian. (Tzipi Tropé)

When I waited for a response from the film council if they’ll support my film, there was someone else, another filmmaker who also had a project in the same year [...] and it was clear to me that it’s either me or her. [...] if they select four projects, say, it was obvious that they’d place us on the same slot. **The woman’s slot. And suddenly I told her, why the heck are we even on the same slot? Our projects are just so, so different, and yet, I knew clearly, that it’ll be either me or her. And it was.** (Talya Lavie)

Throughout the years, the women’s identities were marked identities. As a result, women won less grants and competed over a single grant predesignated to ‘women’. According to the Israeli “Celluloid Ceiling” project (Elefant et al. 2021), the number of male directors who received support far outweighed female directors. For example, 121 male directors received support from the Rabinovich foundation, compared to 22 female directors. From the Israeli Film Foundation, 51 male directors

received support, compared to 13 female ones (Elefant et al. 2021). This stark gender divergence is due, in part, to the low number of women directors who submit requests to the foundations. This is an example, then, of how inequality reproduces itself: Less women receive grants, so less women submit requests due to a belief that their chances are low. It is hard to make a film without a budget, especially a feature film, and it is even harder to promote it. This, in turn, leads many women directors to either expend energies on time-consuming bids to secure a budget with the odds stacked against them, or to resorting to make films without them.

Experiences of sexism and sexual harassment were rarely detailed or raised during the interviews conducted as part of the film. Yet, director Julie Shles spoke to the atmosphere in work meetings at some length:

If you look at the beginning of Channel 2, at “Reshet”<sup>5</sup>, it was like coming to some army base, you know, the way all those honchos strutted around there. It was an entirely different atmosphere. It was like [...] one long harassment. It’d start the moment we parked the car, there’d be this feeling that the two chicks have arrived, I had a production company with Amit Bruyar back then, and they’d talk to us that way. I mean, the way they talk to me in the street today: “redhead”. Real vulgar, too, like, comments about your boobs and your ass. And that, too, was the atmosphere. And all sorts of “secretaries” would sit on their laps. It was something more resonant of the army, in the way that you either fight it out, or you allow a kind of fear, a fear that is all yours, not external, that makes you always try to carry favor, to let things slide, and he can talk to you in that way, and you just giggle [...] you come to a work meeting and its like [...] they just talk in the most [...] “suck my cock”, like [...] (Julie Shles)

The sexist atmosphere Shles describes was familiar to other women filmmakers who had meetings in the same places she describes and encountered the same people. The aspect of fear Shles talks about as one possible reaction to these encounters is familiar to many women in the public

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5 Israeli free-to-air television channel.

sphere and in the workplace. Feminist literature describes fear as a common result of patriarchal spaces in which a sexist atmosphere reinforces women's exclusion from public life. The fear is real, because women are forced to acclimatize themselves to spaces in which they may well become victims of sexual assault. The MeToo movement across the world and in Israel has done much to expose, in unprecedented detail, the endemic culture of sexual harassment and assaults that the film and television industry harbors. The accusations leveled by numerous women in the industry, including some against the erstwhile CEO of one of the Israeli television channels and against leading actors and figures in the industry, involved women directors who did not speak about these issues in the film. Yet their testimonies echo Shles' account and, like her, point to a broad phenomenon that everyone was aware of and kept silent about. Despite the possible impact of fear on workplace behaviors, the literature on this subject remains relatively scarce; however, one prominent well-discussed outcome of fear is that of silence (Kish-Gephart et al. 2009). In view of the importance of voice to the creative process, in terms of time, fear is one of the greatest impediments to action as it is commonly accompanied by stagnation and carries with it an implicit bias against creativity (Lee, Chang, and Choi 2017).

### **“Did you check up on the state of your ovaries”?**

Motherhood has often been described as a social expectation of parenting directed uniquely at women, one that includes childbearing, care work, and housekeeping:

Many **extremely talented women never reach the top of the pyramid, never direct – not because of a lack of talent, but because of cultural and social circumstances.** Because of the burden they place on us [...] I think that a woman's largest enemy in her creative life is herself. **It's this fear, it's this thing that she'd internalized from a very young age, this education to motherhood and the holy goal of starting a family – that keeps a lot of very talented women from a lot of jobs, including**

**cinema** [...]. There are a lot of woman editors because you can work it into family routines. A woman editor can still raise her children and work. It'd be really difficult for a camerawoman. She'd need to wake up at 4 AM, and what then? Who'll get up at 4 AM to prepare food for the kids? The man?? (Tova Ascher)

Film director and editor Asher's claims are corroborated by data that points to a very small percentage of camerawomen versus woman editors in the film industry (Elefant et al. 2021). Similarly, film director Keren Yedaya points to the biological clock as a unique challenge for women when they plan their careers:

A lot of women in the industry talk to me because **they're just at that 30–35-year-old range when they first get an opportunity to do a full-feature length film. And then they need to decide if they take the risk of letting the age of fertility pass and make a film, or do it before, or after.** And I find myself in all these appointments sort of offering [...] **how old are you exactly? Did you check up on the state of your ovaries?** First things first, then, get them checked and see if you have a year to spare, and if you do, go shoot first, because it's better to shoot first and then have a kid, [...]. It's not simple, not simple at all. You can't be pregnant, nor be with a little child. I mean, it's technically impossible to shoot when you're pregnant. (Keren Yedaya)

Having children also becomes a continuous looming threat to one's career, especially when calculating whether to take a risk is necessary, such as taking up work abroad:

The film ("Newland") premiered in the Jewish Film Festival in Los Angeles, and I think it was the most talked-about premier back then [...] and after the screening [...] the crowd cheered and actually gave a standing ovation, and agents from a talent agency approached me and offered to sign me, which back then represented Mick Jagger and Barbara Streisand [...]. The next day I met them in an office, they gave me a contract and I signed it without even reading it, and I was so excited, so dazed, and they soon sent me a Hollywood script and an offer to direct [...] and then the moment of truth came, I had to in-

form them when I was coming, and I didn't go. It's also because **I was scared [...] And I've got the children with me, in a foreign environment, and they were so little. What'll I do? What'll I do with them? How will I get by?** I guess if I were a man, I'd go to Hollywood, and I'd direct the film, who wouldn't want such an opportunity? If there are sliding doors, that was a sliding door moment. I mean, I stayed in Israel [...]. I didn't become a Hollywood director. (Orna Ben-Dor)

The fear aspect that film and television director Orna Ben-Dor describes here is materialized in her self-doubt of her ability to get by with small children in an unfamiliar environment, and one she identifies as unique to women. Ben-Dor speaks of a formative life and career choice, a path she chose not to take despite having the opportunity to do so, by referring to the film *Sliding Doors* (dir. Peter Howitt 1998). Ben-Dor's evocation can be seen as testimony to the significance she accords to the event. Possibly, it also suggests that, to some degree, she weighs her life against an image of what could have been, and who she could have become, had she accepted the offer.

## Discussion

In conceptualizing the challenges that women face in the industry as measurable by time, the findings depicted numerous forms of gender-based discriminations that women directors faced that prevented them from advancing their careers as they saw fit. Focusing our analysis on the issue of lost time leads us to suggest that, by itself, the metaphor of the “Celluloid Ceiling” (Lauzen 2011) comes short of fully conceptualizing the extent of the obstacles women face in the film industry. We do not offer to replace this important concept, rather to build on it by suggesting an additional metaphor of “Celluloid Hurdles” – a series of diverse barriers and obstacles that women uniquely face, and which often prevents or delays them in the ongoing race to make a movie.

In this manner, it is possible to speak not only of the additional 44 Israeli women film director who have created a feature film by 2020 and

were not interviewed in Zamir's film, but also of all the women who have attended a film school but never had the opportunity to direct – precisely because of the numerous obstacles that are depicted in the interviews. Calling attention to the fact that all the women within the data set had successfully overcome some of the hurdles and made at least one feature film. Hence, they represent the group of successful, well-selected Israeli women film directors, who have made it against all odds. Nonetheless, by way of expanding on the notion of Celluloid Hurdles, we invoke four additional metaphors which capture specific axes that intersect time, cinema, and gender: “uncertain time”, “time loop”, “sliding doors” and “time standing still”. Finally, we also chose to address “gendered historical time”, which, in this case, accounts for the positive cumulative aspect of time as gender equality in women's representation in the film industry edges closer.

- **Uncertain Time:** the loss of valuable time as the outcome of low self-efficacy among women and the low efficacy ascribed by a male-dominated environment. As a result, decades might pass by until woman filmmakers make their first film. “Uncertain time” also captures the silenced voices we have not examined here and includes the many women who dropped out from film schools, as well as those who have but never succeeded in creating a feature-length film.
- **The Time Loop:** lost time due to the need to reshoot or re-create footage as a result of a gender-sensitive intransigence on behalf of the male crew to adhere to the directives of the woman director, either due to a sense they have of knowing better than she does, or a reluctance to carry out instructions given by a woman. This appeared in some of the interviews but was not pervasive. Still, this phenomenon is widely recorded in the literature as well, pointing to men's unwillingness to receive orders from women or accept their leadership as legitimate (Watson 1988).
- **The Sliding Doors:** women who had opportunities they could not make the most of, or women who faced a choice at a particular point in their lives whether to focus on raising a child or making a movie. Unlike the film of the same title (*Sliding Doors* by dir. Peter

Howitt 1998) that presents the two alternatives simultaneously, this situation points to an imaginary alternative life that looms over one's actual life and casts it as incomplete.

- **Time Standing Still:** experiences of gender-based discrimination and of harassment and sexual assault, whether they occur in specific moments or are ingrained in a misogynistic work-culture, sear themselves onto memory causing a sense of threat and fear. The interviewees tended to speak more about experiences of gender-based discrimination than about sexual harassment. Yet, many of them mentioned fear as related to gender inequality. It is important to note that fear leads to stagnation and impedes the creative drive (Lee et al. 2017). Moreover, sexual abuse has been extensively raised in the professional literature and in other interviews given by women directors – including some of the same interviewees who appear in Zamir's film – who did speak about harassment they had endured working in the film industry. The mere absence of this topic from the current film could possibly represent the decision of the film director herself, who chose not to focus on this topic. Even though life continues, exposure to such violence leads to mental scarring and can cause mental disorders such as panic and compulsive self-deprecation, which only further aggravate the isolation of the female creator subjected to the harassment. Research on the negative post-factum effects of sexual harassment and violence recorded numerous symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-blame, self-doubt, low self-esteem, self-confidence, and suicidal thoughts. This time-standing-still aspect, in which victims endure psychic scarring, manifests itself in victim's professional lives as well, with studies recording heightened levels of disengagement from work, increased feelings of burn-out, and a diminishing sense of fulfillment in, and commitment to, working life (Zhang et al. 2020).
- **Gendered Historical Time:** alongside time wasted overcoming the numerous celluloid fences that women face, the linear axis of historical time represents a hopeful vision for the future and casts time as an enabler and agent of change. This linear model of time points

to a generational shift taking place that is creating significant transitions for women. The past first appears as a time when oppression of women meant they did not dare to want things or to clearly formulate their professional aspirations, which implies an implicit understanding of reality as unchangeable, and a sense of disappointment about miscarried careers. It later depicts the generation of pioneering women filmmakers who spoke of their isolation as women in the industry. The present, however, is a time when many women are joining the industry, their examples de-exceptionalize women directors and cast a positive effect on aspiring women filmmakers' self-efficacy and self-belief. Historical time is also expressed on a private level, in the personal development and maturation that women described as enabling and enriching to the creative process.

In sum, the universal time measured in watches and clocks across the globe ticks differently for women in the film industry. Overt and covert obstacles that not everybody overcomes make the way impossible for some and longer for others. Taking into account various outcomes of ageism towards older directors in the Israeli film industry (Aharoni Lir and Ayalon 2022) these obstacles that delay women's career as directors potentially hold severe future prices, such as greater difficulties in fund raising. And yet, on the historical scale of things, both collectively and personally, a change is slowly taking place. We did not engage in this study with the cinematic stories that women directors bring to the screen. These stories are important as they depict round female characters and represent the perspectives of women of different positionalities on life. It seems that we, too, are stuck in a loop, one that forces us to speak about the challenges involved in telling a story instead of the story itself.

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