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Supervised by Dr. María del Mar Azcona Montoliú

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Introduction

When women move, they surprise us.

—Virginia Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads*

In the 2009 film *The International* (Tom Tykwer) Interpol detective Louis Salinger (Clive Owen) and US district attorney Eleanor Whitman (Naomi Watts) work together to expose a case of corruption within a high-profile international bank involved in money laundering and arm trading. Their task takes them on a frantic chase from Berlin to Luxembourg, Milan, and New York. Armed with the right passports and visas, they keep moving together from one place to another in a smooth way. Yet, an hour and a half into this two-hour long film, Salinger tells Whitman: "I think it's time for you to leave". She firmly opposes his decision and is determined to go ahead with their original plan, claiming that she cannot just walk away from the mission: "You're walking away so I don't have to"—says Salinger, who has realised that, if he wants justice, he needs to go outside the system and take matters into his own hands. He is willing to put himself at risk, but he cautions Whitman against endangering her and her family's safety. Up until this point in the film, they have been equally involved in the investigation and seem equally capable of conducting it. Whitman, however, proves unfit to move on to the next stage. The reason why she has to stay in New York while her male colleague does the dirty work remains unclear. Is it because, unlike Salinger, she has a family? Or is it because she is a woman?

The International is not the only film in which a male protagonist tells a female one that he must continue on his own. In *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, 2002), Marie

(Franka Potente) accompanies the hero on his journey from Zürich to Paris. Then, he sends her away for her own good. Leaving the female character behind is a staple of popular culture, encapsulated in tropes such as "This Is Something He's Got to Do Himself", "Wait Here", or "Stay in the Kitchen" (TV Tropes). Female characters are often compelled to stay put, waiting for the hero to come back from his adventure. This is so even when the woman is perfectly mobile, as in the case of Whitman, for whom travelling and crossing borders is a fundamental part of her job. It seems that there is a sort of "glass ceiling" that sets a limit on the mobility of women, so they can move but only up to a certain point, and not in the same way as men do.

Mobility is inherently political. The movements of people, objects, and information around the world simultaneously produce and reproduce patterns of power and privilege, tracing what Doreen Massey describes as a "power geometry" (1993, 61). Massey, who establishes a close connection between power and spatial patterns, notes that different individuals and social groups are positioned in highly uneven ways within networks of time-space flows and connections (1993, 61). It is not merely a question of who moves and who does not: different subjects have distinct relationships to the highly complex systems of mobility and immobility at work in the world. The power geometries of mobilities are multidimensional: "there is the dimension of the degree of movement and communication, but also the dimensions of control and of initiation" (Massey 1993, 62). Scholars like Tim Cresswell and Mimi Sheller have also called attention to the political dimensions of mobilities. The former remarks that, since mobility has become one of the major resources of twenty-first-century life, the differential distribution of this resource produces some of the starkest differences that can be perceived in today's society (2010b, 22). For the latter, the uneven distribution of mobilities underlines the need for what she refers to as "mobility justice" (2018).

In her discussion of power geometries, Massey is notably critical of late twentieth-century Marxist theorisations of human experience of movement and communications across space (such as David Harvey's "time-space compression") that heavily focus on capital as the force that rules movement and class as the factor that influences people's experience of mobilities (1993, 60). For her, Harvey fails to acknowledge the wider range of social positions that are involved in human experiences of space and movement, among which she underlines gender. Women's practice and experience of mobility, as well as the meanings attached to it, differ significantly from men's. As Uteng and Cresswell point out, every aspect of mobility—observable physical movements, the experience of practicing these movements, the meanings that such movements are encoded with, and even the potential for undertaking these movements—has "histories and geographies of gendered difference" (2). The relationship between gender and mobility is bidirectional: all aspects of mobility are differentiated according to gender and, in turn, this difference manages to reaffirm and reproduce the power relations that produced these differences in the first place. As they argue, "how people move (where, how fast, how often, etc.) is demonstrably gendered and continues to reproduce gendered power hierarchies" (2). For that reason, the fact that Whitman's movement is cut short in *The International* has underlying ideological implications.

To understand how mobility becomes political, one must take into consideration the different aspects that play a role in the constitution of mobile hierarchies or, using Massey's terminology, "power geometries". Among the six different elements of a politics of mobility identified by Cresswell—motive force, velocity, rhythm, route, experience, and friction (2010b, 22)—, I want to bring into focus the motive force that causes a body to move, that is, the reasons why a person moves. There are countless forces that may induce people to move and travel, one of them being work. The relationship

between work and travel goes back centuries. In fact, the English word "travel" is etymologically linked to the French *travail*, which means work. It is said to have originated from the Middle English word *travailen, travelen* (to torment, to labour, to strive, and to journey), which can be traced back to the Old French verb *travailler*: to work strenuously and to toil according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. From the moment in which the idea of work was introduced in society, there have been people who travel on account of their labour—merchants, sailors, peddlers, explorers, messengers, performers, soldiers are only some of an ever-growing list of mobile occupations. Currently, millions of people travel for work on a more or less regular basis, be it internationally or domestically. Work-related travel has increased due to key factors such as the emergence of mass automobility, the rapid growth of air traffic, the development of communication technologies and the increasing geographical scale of economic and political-administrative activities (Gustafson 2006, 514).

Mobilities and work interact in complex and varied ways that exceed the scope of this dissertation. The cinematic representations of some forms of work-related movement such as labour migration and commuting call for a specific and detailed examination. This thesis focuses on contemporary screen portrayals of a definite case of work-related mobility, that of the female "mobile professional", that is, a woman who must travel in order to actually perform her job. To clarify, by work-related travel I refer to fairly substantial movements, not necessarily between countries, although they are in many cases, but at least between different cities. This group presents marked inequalities in terms of race, class, age, nationality, education, and, most relevant to this thesis, gender. Although the percentage of mobile professional women is gradually growing, most of these jobs are still occupied by men.

The gender gap concerning occupation and mobility is also observable at the level of representation. This thesis argues that the portrayal of women characters in the role of mobile professionals differs from that of their male counterparts in many ways. For one, there are not as many films featuring mobile professional women characters in a substantial, speaking role. Furthermore, the portrayal of mobile professionals tends to be different in narrative and visual terms depending on gender. Most films about mobile professional women explore themes and tropes that are connected to women's distinct experience of work-related mobilities or conventional gender roles and stereotypes. They tend to employ narrative and audiovisual conventions in a specific way in order to reflect such an experience. This thesis studies the representation of mobile professional women in twenty-first-century cinema, the meanings and connotations ascribed to their mobility, and the topics recurrently discussed in connection with these characters. It examines the inextricable relationship between gender and mobility as reflected in film.

In order to do so, this thesis explores a significant corpus of films from 2000 onwards that feature women characters who travel for work, even if some twentieth-century films are also mentioned in the historical overview included in each chapter. The corpus is largely made up of English-language, Western (mainly US), and mainstream (mainly Hollywood) films. Despite acknowledging the portrayal of mobile professional women in other types of films, I have chosen to focus on movies that are accessible to a larger audience and have a greater impact on the cultural imaginary so as to examine the prevailing representations of the mobile female professional and their ideological implications. Through textual and sociocultural analysis, I argue that these cultural products contribute to shaping our understanding of women's professional mobilities.

This thesis deals with the intersection of three subjects: mobilities, women, and film. Mobilities, feminism, and media representation are all highly momentous issues that

are key to the study of the onscreen mobile professional woman. Chapter 1 outlines a theoretical framework for these three aspects that comprises current critical theories of mobilities, gender, and filmic representations of women**.** This chapter is followed by three chapters that focus on three types of mobile workers: corporate workers, journalists, and special agents. These three categories leave out some mobile professional women such as military and police officers, aid workers, or astronauts, among others. Yet, these categories have been chosen because most of the mobile professional women found in contemporary films fit into one of these categories. Moreover, as will be argued below, an examination of these three groups can be used to paint a comprehensive and representative picture of the representation of mobile professional women in twenty-first-century films.

Each chapter starts with an introduction to the sociocultural background of the topic under analysis. This is followed by an overview of the filmic representations of the category of mobile professionals under examination in each chapter, starting with a brief historical overview of the matter and then focusing on its representations in films from the twenty-first century. This is used to contextualise the two close readings that close each chapter. Filmic corporate female workers are the focus of chapter 2. Corporate and business travel is one of the largest and commonest forms of work-related travel in contemporary society and, therefore, onscreen representations of female corporate workers abound and deserve careful consideration. The two films chosen for analysis in this chapter are *Up in the Air* (Jason Reitman, 2009) and *I Don't Know How She Does It* (Douglas McGrath, 2011). Chapter 3 looks at films about women journalists, focusing specifically on war reporter characters. It discusses the growing penchant in the cinema of the twenty-first century for biopics and films about war reporters and analyses the discourses of femininity present in these films, particularly in *A Private War* (Matthew

Heineman, 2019) and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2016). Chapter 4 deals with the cinema of special agents, a highly popular type of films featuring mobile professionals. This chapter examines the cinematic portrayal of the woman special agent and the ways in which film language is used to depict the female characters' hypermobility (and its concomitant limitations) in *The 355* (Simon Kinberg, 2022) and *Fair Game* (Doug Liman, 2010).

This thesis aims to bring to the fore the issue of women's work-related mobilities and their representation in contemporary films. As will be argued, the figure of the mobile professional woman is a complex, multifaceted, and meaningful one, especially in a sociohistorical context in which this type of mobility carries with itself specific ideological implications. Like in the quotation that opens this section, the movements of these women characters are likely to surprise us (Virginia Scharff 3), since their moving signifies a departure from a master narrative by which women's freedom of movement seems always in doubt.

Chapter 1. Framing Mobile Professional Women: Mobility, Gender and Film

1.1. Mobilities: A New Paradigm, Similar Inequalities

Movement and mobility have become distinctive features of today's globalised world. As Zygmunt Bauman states, everything is now on the move, either physically or through the information technologies (1998). People, objects, capital, and information are constantly moving around the world, in a new articulation of space that Manuel Castells refers to as the "space of flows" (1996). Anthony Elliott and John Urry claim that "a golden age of mobility" has arrived, since people are now more mobile than ever (ix). Currently, people are travelling further, faster, and more frequently, and often spend more time "on the road" despite transportation actually taking less time than before (Urry 2007, 4). Similarly, there is a ceaseless flow of materials and goods that move faster and smoother than ever, due in part to intensive consumerism and the effects of globalisation or, in Sheller and Urry's words, of a "cosmopolitanisation" of taste that increases the demand of just-in-time delivery from around the world (2006, 208). Moreover, being mobile does not necessarily demand physical movement anymore. The rapid growth of information and communication technologies allows people to have access to any part of the world with a device that they can carry in their bags, their pockets or even around their wrists. Information travels faster than ever and new forms of "virtual" and "imaginative" travel are emerging.

However, mobility is far from being a new phenomenon. All throughout history, people have moved from one place to another for different reasons, like "work, housing, leisure, religion, family relationships, criminal gain and asylum seeking", and so have

objects and ideas (Urry 2000, 3). Nevertheless, the speed and intensity of mobility in contemporary society are greater than ever before. Now the world is moving differently, on a new scale and in more dynamic, complex and trackable ways (Sheller 2014, 795). These new forms of mobility have a distinctive impact on the formation of identity and the experience of everyday life. Over the past decade a new approach to the study of mobilities has been emerging across the social sciences involving research on the constant movement of capital, goods, people. and information. The so-called "mobilities turn" began in the social sciences in the 1990s driven by the increased levels and new forms of mobility. These new approaches to mobility bring together studies of geography, migration, borders, transportation, tourism, imaginative travel, infrastructure, transnationalism, mobile communications, culture, and anthropology. Scholars such as Marc Augé, James Clifford, and Manuel Castells are considered to be the precursors of contemporary mobilities research, followed by the works of John Urry, Mimi Sheller, Peter Adey and Tim Cresswell, among others. The "new mobilities paradigm" aims to establish a "movement-driven" social science in which movement, potential movement, and blocked movement are all conceptualized as constitutive of economic, social, and political relations" (Urry 2007, 43). It incorporates new ways of theorizing about how these mobilities lie "at the center of constellations of power, the creation of identities and the micro-geographies of everyday life" (Cresswell 2010a, 551). Besides, the mobilities paradigm puts emphasis on the idea that all places are connected, creating networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place (Sheller and Urry 2006, 209). This idea is linked to Castells' conception of the "space of flows", a space based on movement. He highlights the importance of the connections between spaces. As he puts it, the space of flows "links up distant locales around shared functions and meanings, [...] while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the space of places" (2001, 171).

As mentioned above, mobility is historically significant, and it has been regarded differently over the years. For instance, in the past, areas of high mobility, such as cities, were considered areas of demoralization, violence, crime and vice, and mobile figures such as the travelling salesman, the gypsy-traveller, and the so-called wandering Jew were seen as "people without place", undisciplined, immoral and, consequently, as a threat (Creswell 26, 37). By contrast, mobility is generally understood as something positive nowadays. It is associated with economic status, new opportunities, discovering new cultures, and it is usually considered an enriching experience—at least by a privileged and small segment of the population, the inhabitants of the "first world" in Bauman's terms (89). In his book *On the Move,* Cresswell analyses the different meanings attached to mobility throughout history and distinguishes two principal metaphysical ways of viewing the world in relation to mobility: a "sedentarist metaphysics" and a "nomadic metaphysics". The former sees the world as bounded and rooted and mobility as a threat, a disorder in the system and a thing to control (2006, 28). It stresses the importance of place and spatial order; movement is relegated to the background while the place that is being left and the place of arrival gain importance (29). A nomadic metaphysics, however, focuses on movement rather than on place, stasis, and social order. According to this approach, being static, rooted or bounded is seen as a thing of the past, dull, confining, and possibly reactionary (25-26). A nomadic metaphysics sees mobility as progress, freedom, and change. Although Cresswell acknowledges that a sedentarist metaphysics is still relevant in multiple domains of social and cultural life, he points out that at the beginning of the twenty-first century a positive view of mobilities that emphasises movement, flow, and dynamism over stasis and attachment has come to the fore (43). "In contemporary social thought," he states, "words associated with mobility are unremittingly positive" (25).

However, it has been argued that the positive view of mobilities perpetuates a hierarchical "mobile/immobile dualism" and that a nomadic metaphysics is deeply influenced by social power relations (Manderscheid, 38). This points to the fact that the meanings of mobility are contextual and socially constituted, that is, they depend on the subject that is moving and its circumstances. For example, mobility does not mean the same for a US businessman as it does for a Syrian refugee seeking asylum in Europe, even if both are on the move. As Urry points out, there are "good movers" and "bad movers" (2007, 205). In fact, it is noticeable that negative meanings of mobility are resurfacing at a time marked by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the forced immobilisation of entire nations by means of containment measures such as travel restrictions, lockdowns, home confinement, and curfews. Before the pandemic, mobility was already being given notably negative connotations in the context of a serious refugee crisis and the rise of anti-immigration movements and policies. Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias write about an ongoing "war on mobility" based on a Eurocentric vision of migration which pays close attention to "the points of origin and transit of those flows from places labelled as undesired sources of mobility" (2019a, 177; 2019b, 199). This illustrates the fact that mobility's meanings depend on who is moving and who evaluates this movement. As Frello writes, "what matters is not just 'who can travel where, when, and how?' but also 'who gets to tell the story?'" (33).

Furthermore, the meanings of mobility are changing and even the more positive view has taken on negative connotations over the last few years. In the context of a growing climate crisis, an environmental movement called "flight shame", originally "*flygskam*", has started to spread around the world which aims to get people to reconsider the environmental harm of current flying habits (Timperley, Korkea-aho). It refers to the feeling of shame or guilt experienced by environmentally conscious travellers when

taking flights and the public shaming of people, especially celebrities and influencers, for their excessive consumption of air travel. Nevertheless, the aim of this movement is not to discourage people from travelling altogether but to change the social norm of air travel and choose more sustainable transport methods.

Just like mobility does not mean the same for everyone, not everybody experiences it in the same way. Contemporary mobility systems create substantial inequalities in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and wealth. According to Bauman, postmodern society is a stratified one and a stratifying factor is one's degree of mobility, that is, "the freedom to choose where to be" (86). As Elliott and Urry argue, to be able to move at will, and even to be able to stay still if one wants, is nowadays a major source of advantage, privilege, and power (19). However, this privileged form of mobility is not accessible to everyone. For Bauman, the capacity—or incapacity—to move at will has divided society into tourists and vagabonds. Tourists travel because they want to, and travelling does not pose any problem for them. State borders seem to open as they reach them and they are welcome anywhere they go. Vagabonds are, in Bauman's words, "travellers refused the right to turn into tourists" (93). They do not travel by choice but rather because they have no other choice, and they are likely to be unwelcome anywhere they go. They often travel clandestinely and/or illegally and encounter numerous barriers that limit their mobility (Bauman 1998, 89, 93). Cresswell refers back to the division established by Bauman when he writes about a kinetic elite—a term coined by German Philosopher Peter Sloterdijk—, who "inhabit the luxurious space of flows" and possess large stocks of what Urry calls "network capital", and a kinetic underclass that are "thrown into a mobile world they did not choose" (Cresswell 2006, 255-256). According to Cresswell, what divides them is not only their degree of mobility, as Bauman claimed, but also the nature of their experience of mobility (255).

Several authors have tried to dismantle the fantasy of a "liquid" world where everything is on the move. Cresswell warns against believing that notions such as borders, place, and territory, which are sometimes considered immobile, are no longer relevant in the twenty-first century (2010b, 18). Globalisation is said to have brought about a dissolution of borders, which allows for the free flow of capital, goods, information, and people, and an increasing sense of a single global whole. Thus, the national gives way to the global and the distinctions between nations and cultures are less marked. However, for Cresswell, the idea of a "world of flow" and a "frictionless bubble" (2006, 108), an interpretation of Castells' replacement of the "space of places" by a "space of flows", fails to acknowledge the role of friction in the articulation of mobilities. As Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford put it, "one legacy of globalisation is a world of proliferating borders—rather than a 'borderless world'" (262). For them, borders are mobile and in constant transformation, they "are everywhere" and mean different things to different people (263). For some, borders are a major source of friction as they act as "firewalls" that allow some to pass while preventing the passage of others (Cooper and Rumford 263), thus reinforcing inequalities. As Cresswell states, "friction is unequally distributed" and therefore it can be a tool in the production of power (Cresswell in Adey et al.: 103, 110), used to restrict the mobility of the more mobility-poor groups, among which women are often included (Elliott and Urry, 62; Uteng and Cresswell, 8).

As scholars such as Uteng and Cresswell have pointed out, mobility is a gendered issue, and it is experienced and practiced differently by men and women (2008, 2). Historically, mobility has been more available to men than to women, who have been less able and less likely to move with the same degree of ease as men. In Virginia Scharff's words, "movement belongs to men" (3). Womanhood and femininity have been commonly associated with stasis, fixity, rootedness, confinement, and restricted

movement, as well as with the private, domestic spaces (Uteng and Cresswell, 5; Clarsen in Adey et al., 96; Hanson, 5). As Sheller notes, tropes of home and dwelling are often feminised and, while men are associated with travelling, hitting the road, and escaping from home, women are often described as "rooted in place and home" (in Uteng and Cresswell, 258). As she mentions, women's traditional attachment to the home has shaped and more often than not limited considerably their mobility. As Doreen Massey points out, "survey after survey has shown how women's mobility [...] is restricted in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place'" (1994, 148).

In addition, the meanings ascribed to women's mobilities are often very different from those ascribed to men's (Clarsen in Adey et al. 2014, 97). Currently, women's mobility is generally considered as empowering and liberating, since enforced immobility or denial of mobility have been used historically to keep women in a subordinate position (Adey, 88; Uteng and Cresswell, 132; Hanson, 9). It has been associated with women's power, resistance, and emancipation (Cresswell 1999, 175). However, this positive consideration of women's mobility has been contested by an opposing view that sees mobility as not necessarily empowering and immobility as not necessarily disempowering and points out that movement can also consolidate unequal gender relations (Hanson 10, Elliot 83). For instance, mobility is not liberating for victims of human trafficking. As mentioned above, the meanings of mobility are contextual; they depend on who is moving. Therefore, it would not be accurate to approach the mobility of women as a homogeneous group. Rather, scholars should shift from "universalizing to particularizing and contextualizing" women's experiences (Ray 2006, 460), that is, different women's contexts should be taken into account when studying their mobilities. After all, women

can be “tourists” or “vagabonds” (Bauman 1998), they can be commuters, migrants, world travellers, victims of human trafficking, international students, and so much more.

1.2. Women: A Feminist Framework

Women are the ultimate protagonists of this thesis. Through the analysis of the female characters featured in a selection of films, it aims to reflect on the experiences and struggles of a yet underrepresented group. Since the beginning, the study of women in film has gone hand in hand with the development of the feminist movement. Germinal feminist works such as Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) have been highly influential in film criticism and research since the 1970s. In fact, the women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s led to the emergence of feminist film theory, which constitutes a major part of film studies as an academic discipline and has contributed significantly to our understanding on gender identity and inequality (Hollinger 2012, McCabe). As Janet McCabe states, “film studies shaped feminist concerns as well as granted feminist research a space to flourish” (McCabe, 1).

Feminism has experienced an upsurge of popularity (and also notoriety) in the past few years. Despite being declared dead several times throughout history (one of the most well-known examples perhaps being *Time* magazine’s 1998 cover story headlined “Is Feminism Dead?”)—so many in fact that the term “False Feminist Death Syndrome” was coined to refer to this phenomenon (Pozner)—it has become apparent that there is a renewed interest not only in contemporary women’s movements but also in earlier waves of feminism. Feminism’s roots have been traced back to Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as to the ideas of female intellectuals of the Enlightenment such as Olympe de

Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft (Brunell and Burkett). However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that these ideas coalesced a clearly identifiable and self-conscious movement like the suffrage movement. The beginning of the first wave of feminism, which extended well into the twentieth century, is usually set on the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, that was announced as "a convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman" (McMillen, 88). The main objective of the first wave was women's rights of citizenship, the most important symbol of citizenship being the right to vote (Baumgardner). The second wave began in the 1960s in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements. Second-wave feminism aimed to increase equality for women and broadened its scope to cover issues such as sexuality and reproductive rights; wages, education, jobs, and domesticity; and visibility in art, history, science, and other disciplines (Zimmerman 55). Influenced by works such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), as well as by Marxism and psycho-analytical theory, the thinkers of this wave began to associate the subjugation of women with the predominance of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, and the woman's role as wife and mother (Rampton). The slogan "the personal is political" was coined to stress the systematic nature of women's oppression and the impact of sexism and patriarchy on every aspect of women's private lives, and it became an important message for collective consciousness raising (Munro 23, Zimmerman 55).

After a strong backlash against second-wave feminists in the 1980s, which was famously described by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (1992), the mid- to late 1990s and early 2000s were perceived as a period of "silence". This was in part due to the fact that the third wave of feminism, which is said to emerge in the 1990s, focused on individuality and moved away from the notion of having a

collective identity (Rampton, Iannello, Evans). Third wavers distanced themselves generationally from their second wave "mothers"—in the case of Rebecca Walker, the coiner of the term "third wave", this became literal as she rejected the ideals of her biological mother, Alice Walker. A point of departure from the earlier feminist movement was the readoption by young feminists of expressions of femininity and female sexuality as a challenge to objectification, such as lipstick, fashion magazines and pornography, giving rise to "girlie feminism" (Baumgardner, Rampton). They embraced pop culture and internet products such as "e-zines" (electronic magazines) (Baumgardner, Burkett). Third-wave feminism is believed to overlap to some extent with postfeminism, even though it has resolutely defined itself against postfeminism (Rivers 18, Evans 6). Postfeminism appeared in the 1980s as part of the backlash against second-wave feminism, but it was during the 1990s that it became concretised and highly popular in both the academic world and the media world (Tasker and Negra 8). Although its meaning has caused confusion and debate, the term postfeminism has been widely used to suggest that feminism has ended, either because its aims have been achieved and it is no longer needed or because it has failed and is no longer valid (Tasker and Negra 28, Evans 6, Genz 20). As Angela McRobbie argues, postfeminism invokes feminism as something that is "taken into account" only in order "to emphasize that it is no longer needed" (in Tasker and Negra 28). Postfeminist discourse has had a strong impact on popular culture and the media, and it emphasises individualism, freedom of choice, femininity is a bodily property, physical and sexual empowerment, and consumerism (Gill 2007, 148-161; Tasker and Negra 2). Tasker and Negra describe postfeminist culture as one that "works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer" (2).

However, accounts of postfeminism as a period in feminist history, an epistemological break, or a regressive political stance fail to recognise its continued influence in both contemporary media representations of women and feminist academic analysis of media and gender relations (Riley et al. 2). Rosalind Gill interprets postfeminism as a "sensibility" that characterises films, television shows, adverts, and other media products (2007, 148). She proposes to use postfeminism as "a critical analytical term that refers to empirical regularities or patterns in contemporary cultural life" (2016, 613). She lists a series of "stable features" that characterise postfeminist discourse, including the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (2007, 149). The term postfeminism is used in this thesis as an analytical framework for the study of filmic representations of women and gender issues. Thus, postfeminism does not refer to a political backlash movement or the non-necessity of feminism, but mostly describes a set of ideas, conventions, and representations circulating popular culture.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there was the illusion that women's equality had already been achieved and it was questioned whether or not feminism was necessary anymore. Postfeminist discourse had permeated mass media culture extensively and feminism was deemed "unspeakable" within contemporary popular culture (Tasker and Negra 5). Some third wavers refused to identify themselves as "feminists" because they found the word limiting and exclusionary (Rampton). However, things have changed and now women are no longer so afraid of referring to themselves

with the “F-word”. For example, at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards, Beyoncé performed her song “Flawless”, in which she samples Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s speech “We should all be feminists”, in front of a giant screen with the word “FEMINIST”. As Martha Rampton points out, feminism is moving from the academic world, where it was “incubating”, back into the realm of public discourse. In fact, it was proclaimed word of the year 2017 by Merriam-Webster. As Nicola Rivers puts it, “feminism has been undergoing something of a revival in the past few years, at least in terms of a heightened visibility in media and popular culture” (7). Slogans like “The future is female” have become widespread and campaigns such as Laura Bates’ Everyday Sexism project draw attention to feminist issues and efforts. In 2017, The International Women’s Strike, also known in the US as “Day Without a Woman”, was held for the first time coinciding with Women’s Day on the eighth of March in over fifty countries and millions of women marched for their rights.

Movements like “Me Too” or “Time’s Up” against sexual harassment and sexual assault, which are closely connected with the film industry, have had a significant impact and have generated discussion worldwide. #MeToo came under the spotlight after Hollywood star Alyssa Milano posted a tweet in October 2017 encouraging women who had been sexually harassed or assaulted to spread the phrase “me too” in order to “give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem” (Milano). Milano’s tweet was posted in the midst of an outpouring of sexual-abuse allegations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein and prompted the viral spread of the #MeToo movement as a hashtag on social media under which women in vastly different geographical and socio-economic locations, including celebrities like Patricia Arquette, Lady Gaga and Anna Paquin, shared their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. However, as Milano herself acknowledged in a subsequent tweet, the Me Too movement was founded by African-American civil

rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006, long before the hashtag appeared. Burke began using the phrase after a 13-year-old girl confided to her that she had been sexually assaulted and she, also a victim of abuse, was unable to say "me too" (Burke). Since then, Burke's Me Too has aimed to help young black women who have experienced sexual violence and abuse and promote "empowerment through empathy" (MeTooMvmt.org). Although the Me Too movement received more attention due to the hashtag's popularity, media debates about #MeToo have not always taken into account Burke's intersectional demand (Boyle, 5).

In response to #MeToo and the so-called Weinstein effect, the "Time's Up" movement was founded in January 2018 by more than 300 women in the entertainment business, including Hollywood stars such as Meryl Streep, Reese Witherspoon, and Kerry Washington, to combat sexual harassment and gender inequity in the workplace (TimesUpNow.org n.d.(a)). Although it started as a Hollywood initiative, the movement expanded with the objective of achieving "safe, fair, and dignified work for women of all kinds" (TimesUpNow.org n.d.(a)). In the open letter that the Time's Up founders published in *The New York Times*, these women expressed their solidarity with other victims of sexual harassment, especially with the members of the *Alianza Nacional de Campesinas* (the National Farmworker Women's Alliance), who had written a letter of support to these Hollywood women in November 2017 in which they described experiences of assault and harassment among female farmworkers (TimesUpNow.org n.d.(b)). The Time's Up Legal Defense Fund was launched to support survivors of sexual harassment in the workplace seeking legal justice, especially lower-income and racialised women. During the 2018 award season, Hollywood celebrities wore all-black outfits and "Time's Up" pins to show solidarity to the movement. Since it was fronted by some of

the biggest names in the entertainment industry, the Time's Up movement went viral—also as a hashtag on social media—and contributed to raise awareness on feminist issues.

The "Me Too" and "Time's Up" movements exemplify the close relationship between digital media and social causes that characterises contemporary feminism and has given rise to a phenomenon known as "hashtag activism" (Xiong, Cho and Boatwright 2019). The use of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs is one of the defining features of contemporary feminism and has led to the announcement that a new wave of feminism has arrived. Fourth-wave feminism is a somewhat debated phase of feminism which began in the second decade of the twenty-first century and advocates for issues such as justice against sexual assault and harassment, bodily autonomy, equal pay for equal work, and greater representation of minority groups in politics and business (Munro, Zimmerman). A movement "defined by technology", many writers claim that the shift from third to fourth-wave feminism was enabled by the increased usage of the internet (Cochrane 2013b, Munro, Baumgardner, Zimmerman, Rivers). As Jennifer Baumgardner writes, what differentiates the new generation of young feminists is that "their experience of the online universe was that it was just part of life, not something that landed in their world like an alien spaceship when they were twenty or fifty" (250). The Internet, and particularly the growth of social media, has transformed the way in which activism is done. Using Hester Baer's words, it is "redoing feminism". This has led to the emergence of a growing body of academic research on "digital feminist activism" and its impact on contemporary feminist movements (Fotopoulou, Baer, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller). However, as authors like Cochrane and Zimmerman point out, the fourth wave acknowledges that online presence is not enough to effectively achieve political change and stresses the importance of "returning to the street" to do social and political activism (Zimmerman 56). In fact, the rise of forth-wave feminism is

associated with a "growing sense of dismay at established political institutions and corporations" and "a renewed commitment to visible political activism and protest" which is related to the economic uncertainty of the late 2000s, the aftermath of the financial recession of 2007-2008 (Cochrane 2013a, 1098; Rivers 135).

Another key issue of contemporary feminism is intersectionality. The term intersectionality was first coined by US academic Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and it addresses the dynamics of inequalities and privileges. It draws attention to the fact that different axes of oppression—gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, age etc.—intersect and create unique forms of discrimination that have often been overlooked by a predominantly white, middle-class, western feminism (Zimmerman). Fourth-wave feminists stress the need to take an intersectional approach that goes beyond gender difference (Cochrane 2013b, Zimmerman). Thus, one of the objectives of the fourth wave is to "smash the kyriarchy", that is, the system of "interlocking structures of domination" (Cochrane 2013a, 778; Schüssler Fiorenza, 8). Moreover, Simões and Matos see the fourth wave as characterised by a process of "gendered democratic institutionalization" and by the influence of transnational feminism and the globalization of local women's agendas on the long-standing objectives of the feminist movement (95). Since feminist debates are taking place online, women from all over the world are able to contribute and share their struggle. Digital media makes it possible to "link the specific local stories of individual women to larger narratives of inequality", exposing the global scale of gender oppression (Baer 18). Furthermore, Cochrane identifies humour as a defining mark of the fourth wave, although she acknowledges that feminists have used it for decades (805-831). Then again, digital platforms have stimulated the development of new forms of humour and nowadays feminism has even become a part of "meme culture".

The existence of a fourth wave as a distinctive one has been considerably challenged since it started to emerge. To begin with, the use of the wave narrative to periodise feminism is a highly problematic and contested one. One the one hand, many commentators reject it because it overlooks the fact that feminism does not develop uniformly across the world and focuses almost exclusively on western feminist movements (Reger 111-112, Evans 4, Cochrane 2013a, 216). On the other hand, the wave metaphor implies that waves are completely different from their predecessors, stressing the tensions and conflicts between the waves and overlooking the fact that ideas and issues overlap and resurface (Rivers 20-22, Reger 111-112). As Rivers puts it, "the arrival of a new wave does not signal the neat conclusion of what came before" (20). Thus, some reject the existence of a fourth wave on the grounds that many of its apparent defining features can be linked with prior waves (Rivers 5). For instance, intersectionality flourished during the third wave and online campaigning and activism was increasingly introduced by third wavers (Evans 19-24, Rampton, Rivers 22). Similarly, scholars such as Rosalind Gill and Nicola Rivers observe the fourth wave's continued connection with postfeminism, contradicting the idea that postfeminism is redundant in the wake of a fourth wave (Retallack et al). Baumgardner acknowledges that the fourth wave takes forward the agenda of third wave feminists, but she defends the relevance and potential of the new wave. Using the image of sea waves which recede and gather strength and come back stronger, she argues that "the waves are all part of the same body politic known as feminism, and combine to become a powerful and distinct force" (251). Another major argument against the fourth wave is, as Munro mentions, that increased usage of the internet is not enough to delineate a new wave (23). On the other hand, the reliance on digital presence that characterises the fourth wave might generate new forms of exclusion

based on people's capacity to access and participate in the online public sphere, which most often depend on their age, resources, and digital literacy (Fotopoulou, 51).

Whether we recognise it as a fourth wave or not, there is much indication that feminism is undergoing a renewal and a resurgence of interest in the press and popular culture. Media and popular representation play a fundamental role in people's understanding of feminism. As Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley state, "most people become conscious of feminism through the way it is represented in popular culture" (2). Fourth-wave feminism serves to illustrate the enormous influence that online media, popular culture, and audiovisual products have on today's social issues and phenomena. Consequently, an analysis of contemporary films may be useful to examine the impact of filmic representations on people's understanding of social groups, issues, and events, including present-day mobilities. Therefore, this thesis analyses twenty-first-century films that address the issue of gendered mobilities in some way or other in order to examine the filmic representation of mobile professional women and how it contributes to shaping our understanding of this type of female professionals.

1.3. Film: Gendered Representation of Women and Occupation

As mentioned above, intensive mobility has become one of the distinguishing features of today's world and, therefore, it has received much attention not only from scholars in different fields of study but also from the media, popular culture, and the arts. Mobility has for long been a recurrent topic in cinema and a great number of films have reflected the increasing mobilisation of our contemporary world. Likewise, films have also addressed the issue of uneven mobilities, showing that mobility is not understood, experienced, and practiced in the same way by everybody.

In the past twenty years, many films have been released that feature female characters that travel as tourists, such as *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008), *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Audrey Wells, 2003), *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (John Madden, 2011), and *Eat Pray Love* (Ryan Murphy, 2010), among others. For these female characters, travelling is a choice and an opportunity to visit new places, know different cultures, get some rest, live adventures, or find themselves. Most of these films feature highly mobile women who encounter minimal friction when moving. Similarly, twenty-first-century cinema has explored extensively the experiences of female migrants and refugees. These women travel out of necessity and/or in search of a better future and often struggle with friction, borders, and immobility. Some of these films are *Fast Food Nation* (Richard Linklater, 2006), *Sin Nombre* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2009), *Crossing Over* (Wayne Kramer, 2009), *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud, 2007), *Amreeka* (Cherien Dabis, 2009), and *Remittance* (Patrick Daly and Joel Fendelman, 2015). There are also films that feature both characters, that is, the tourist woman and the migrant woman. A well-known example of that would be Alejandro González Iñárritu's multi-protagonist film *Babel* (2006). One of the characters, Susan (Cate Blanchett) goes on vacation to Morocco with her husband. While on a tour bus, she is accidentally shot and, although there are some complications, her husband manages to contact the US embassy. Finally, a helicopter takes her to the hospital where she receives medical care. Meanwhile, Susan's Mexican nanny, Amelia (Adriana Barraza) takes the couple's children with her to her son's wedding in Mexico. Later that night, she asks her nephew to drive them back to the US. On the way back, they are stopped at the border and, out of fear, they trespass it. Amelia finds herself forced to wander in the desert with the children until she is finally arrested and deported to Mexico. *Babel* shows the contrast between

these two women that, while both are moving, they do not move in the same way, in the same circumstances, or with the same connotations.

However, it is possible to identify a different group of mobile women who stand between the tourists and the migrants. This third category comprises female characters who travel for work-related reasons. These women share some of the characteristics of the tourists and the migrants but do not fit this binary division. Their reasons for travel are not the same as those of the tourists (they do not get to rest, for instance) but they are not forced to travel in the same way that most migrants are. Travelling is part of their job and, in many cases, they have chosen that job. Their mobility has specific connotations and is fully related to work. My research on women's mobilities showed that women who travel for work are underrepresented in cinema, and literature on the topic is scarce by comparison with the numerous examples of films and academic works about migrant and tourist women. While there is a rather strong female representation of these two groups of travellers, the roles associated with professional mobility—business travellers, journalists, special agents and investigators, military officers, police officers, aid workers, etc.—have traditionally been played by male actors, and continue to be to a large extent. To this day, only a limited number of films feature mobile professional women. In some cases, one has to look past the protagonist and into the secondary characters in order to find these characters.

It is noticeable that, although it might seem that there are as many women as men in films, cinema still shows a stronger presence of male characters. The Bechdel test, which is still relevant after more than 35 years, reveals that there is a continued gender bias in the film industry. This test appeared in a 1985 strip entitled "The Rule" from US cartoonist Alison Bechdel's comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*. According to it, for a film to pass "the Rule" it has to meet three criteria: there are at least two named women in the

picture, they have a conversation with each other at some point, and that conversation is not about a male character. The test shows that in the 2010s still around 40% of US films did not satisfy these three requirements (Smith; Friedman, Daniels and Blinderman). The gender gap is also documented in the studies conducted annually by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. As the 2011 study shows, females accounted for 33% of all characters in that year's top 100 grossing Hollywood films, and only 11% of all clearly identifiable protagonists were female (Lauzen 2012). In 2019, the percentage of top grossing films featuring female protagonists reached a recent historic high, rising from 31% in 2018 to 40%, but it declined precipitously to 29% in 2020 (Lauzen 2020, 2021).

The success of several high-profile female-led films in recent years, such as *The Hunger Games* (Gary Ross, 2012), *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014), or *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014), may give the impression that certain steps are being taken towards a more equal and fair representation of women on screen. However, as Martha Lauzen states, "there is a growing disconnect or gap between what we might perceive as being the current status of women in film and their actual status" (Lang). In fact, audiences are still almost twice as likely to see male characters as female characters in Hollywood films. Furthermore, women are not represented equally in terms of age, roles, or power, therefore perpetuating male dominance. Female characters are younger than their male counterparts; the majority being in their 20s (22%) and 30s (31%) whereas men over 40 account for 47% of all male characters (Lauzen 2020). As Lauzen points out, this age gap between male and female characters contributes to keeping women "relatively powerless" since people usually gain personal and professional power as they grow older (Lang). This has implications for the number of authority figures in films, with only 14% of onscreen political, social, or professional leaders being women in 2011 (Lauzen 2012).

In connection with the perception gap described by Lauzen, Jocelyn Murphy argues that the recent popularity of strong female heroines like Katniss Everdeen in the *Hunger Games* franchise may give the impression that traditional gender roles are not as pervasive in today's media as they used to (8-9). She connects that to the influence of postfeminist and postmodernist perspectives such as David Gautlett's in his 2002 book *Media, Gender and Identity*. Gautlett argues that "the traditional view of a woman as a housewife or low status worker has been kick-boxed out of the picture by the feisty, successful 'girl power' icons" (247). However, research shows that women in contemporary films are still identified by the roles they assume in their personal lives such as mothers, wives, or lovers (Murphy, Lang). For example, Lauzen's 2019 study reveals that 46% of female characters have a known marital status, but only 34% of male characters do. All in all, female characters are two times more likely than males to be identified only by a life-related role rather than a work-related role, while a larger percentage of male characters have an identifiable occupation and are shown in the workplace (Lauzen 2015, 2020).

In fact, as Walt Hickey's study shows, when it comes to occupation, the gender gap is actually bigger in films than in reality. Using a database that tracks screen credits, he looks up film characters played by women from 1995 to 2015 listed in the credits by their profession. The results reveal that working women are largely relegated to supporting and background roles, and the jobs they embody are mostly stereotypically female. Thus, female characters account for 89% of nurses, 81% of secretaries, 57% of teachers and 53% of waitresses, while only 10% of the characters credited as doctors are women, 5% of engineers and 3% soldiers. Even though there are fields where the gender gap is larger and the glass ceiling prevents women from reaching upper-level and leading positions, the study shows that these gender inequalities are not only perpetuated but actually exacerbated in films. As Hickey explains,

> Even in fields with a large gender gap in real life, what we see on-screen is even worse. [...] In 2005, 30 percent of lawyers were women, but in this data set, only 11 percent of lawyers or attorneys were played by women. And according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, about 32 percent of doctors were women in September 2014, but on screen, only 10 percent were women.

Research conducted at the University of Southern California obtained similar results when examining female representation and character occupation in family films and prime-time television released between 2006 and 2011. Not only are there fewer female characters in entertainment popular with children but also they are still often sidelined, stereotyped, domesticated, and sexualized (Smith et al.). A higher percentage of males on screen have an identifiable occupation and are portrayed working (79.7% in total), while female characters comprise only 20.3% of those employed. In contrast, women made up 47% of the US labour force in 2011 (Smith et al. 7). Once again, these results show that workplace-based sexism portrayed in popular entertainment content is actually worse than it is in real life, and this is also noticeable with regard to the types of jobs male and female characters hold in family films. On the one hand, professional women are mostly portrayed as teachers, nurses, secretaries, clerks, and similarly stereotypical occupations. On the other hand, stereotyping shapes the representation of work force hierarchies too and fewer female characters are shown in prestigious and/or powerful occupational positions. Across the sample of 129 films, not one female character is depicted at the top of the business/financial sector (e.g., investor, developer, or an economic official), the legal arena (e.g., chief justices, district attorney), or the field of journalism (i.e., editor in chief), and only two women are portrayed as top executives of major corporations (i.e., CEOs, CFOs, Presidents, VPs, GMs), even though women represented 25.5% of all chief executives in 2010 (Smith et al., 8). Women are also noticeably absent from prestigious

positions in the political sphere (3 female characters) and the scientific field (26 female characters in science, technology, engineering, and math), which are largely populated by men (Smith et al., 8-9).

As these studies show, the portrayal of occupation continues to be largely gendered and built upon traditional gender roles, as well as paints an inaccurate picture of women's actual presence and role in the labour market. As mentioned above, certain occupations seem to be reserved for male characters. Such is the case with most jobs that imply travelling. On screen, women tend to be portrayed as less mobile than men and their mobility as more complex and problematic. This, along with the fact that working women are underrepresented altogether, results in an unbalanced representation of mobile professionals. Thus, although work-related travel is very frequent nowadays for both male and female workers, roles associated with this type of travel are mostly played by male actors. This disparity in representation makes it harder to find films featuring mobile professional women.

At this point, it is also worth noting that the majority of the films analysed in this thesis focus on white women. As the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film study shows, 74% of all female characters were white in 2014 (Lauzen 2015). Other races and ethnicities are still underrepresented at present (Lauzen 2021). If films about mobile professional women are scarce, films about racialised mobile professional women are especially rare. There are films such as *Love & Basketball* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2000), about a black professional basketball player, *Baggage Claim* (David E. Talbert, 2013), which tells the story of black flight attendant, and the latest instalments of the *Charlie's Angels* and Bond franchises, which introduce racialised characters, but non-white characters remain a minority in Western cinema. If films about non-white women are rare, examples that feature transgender women are virtually non-existent.

Consequently, all films mentioned below feature cisgender characters. Body diversity is also lacking in terms of both size and disability. As this shows, mainstream cinema is still dominated by white cis-heteronormative representations of women.

The three following chapters look at films that feature women characters in roles such as those mentioned above in order to examine how women who travel for work are represented in movies from 2000 onwards. Taking as a starting point that, as I have indicated above, this type of roles is less abundant than others, this thesis explores the reasons for the unequal representation of mobile professional women, as well as whether this situation is changing. One of its aims is to explore the evolution of the female mobile professional in film over time and whether it reflects the events and changes that have taken place during this period.

Chapter 2. Business or Pleasure?: Corporate Travel and Work-Life Balance

2.1. Corporate Travel and Gender Differences

Corporate travel has become a familiar practice for millions of people around the globe. Whether it is to market products, provide services, meet customers or suppliers, attend conferences, or install equipment, it is not unusual for many individuals to travel, often long distances, as part of their working life. One of the main factors that have contributed to the increase of corporate travel is the improvement of technologies and infrastructures of mobility and the growth of fast and generally affordable modes of transportation such as air travel (Gustafson 2013, 63; Beaverstock et al. 2010, xvii, Bergström Casinowsky 311, Gustafson 2006, 514). It is said that the "international business traveller has never had such relative ease of movement" (Beaverstock et al. 2009, 195). Mobile workers usually benefit from an infrastructure of corporate travel management services focused on improving their travel experience. Airlines, hotels, and car rental companies offer specific services and amenities to business travellers that sometimes may border on luxury. The process of border-crossing is in many cases simplified due to the issuance of business visas, which are often electronic and instantaneously granted on application, and open border policies such as the one implemented by the member countries of the European Economic Area (EEA) or the Schengen Area, whose citizens do not even need a visa to travel within these areas (Beaverstock et al. 2009, 195).

Similarly, the effects of the ongoing processes of economic and political globalisation have played a central role in boosting corporate travel (Gustafson 2013, 63; Beaverstock et al. 2010, xvii, Bergström Casinowsky 311, Hislop, 87, Gustafson 2006,

514). The exponential increase of international trade, the territorial reorganization of production, a more intense networking and interfirm cooperation, and organizational and managerial trends towards work in international teams have heightened the need for communication and interaction between people working in different locations (Gustafson 2013, 63, Bergström Casinowsky 311-312; Mäkelä et al. 156; Gustafson 2006, 514; Aguilera 4-6). As Beaverstock et al. state, "business travel now appears to be the fundamental production process in constructing and reproducing the 'network society' and the global, knowledge-based economy that have come to be the hallmarks of contemporary capitalism" (2010, 2). The rapid development of information and communication technologies is considered to have contributed substantially to the increase of work-related mobility since they enable individuals to work from a wider range of locations and even while on the move, generating mobile work spaces such as airport lounges and cafes (Hislop 1, 28).

In this context, work-related travel has grown and proliferated significantly in the twenty-first century. Already in the early 2000s, business travel represented approximately one third of all international travel (Haynes 549). In 2002, business travel accounted for the 48% of air trips within the EU (Mason 48). The Global Business Travel Association's 2014 BTI report indicated that a 12.5% increase in international outbound travel was expected in 2014 regarding US business travel trends (Mäkelä 13). As ONS data shows, the number of business trips taken by UK residents remained stable until 2020, with 9.0 million trips abroad and 8.7 million work-related visits to the UK in 2019 (ONS). These numbers were affected by the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which interrupted travel for several months and was followed by a period of reduced travel as lockdowns and travel restrictions were gradually lifted. This is not the first time that the levels of business travel have decreased: the SARS epidemic of the early 2000s

led to a short-term reduction in international business travel, as did the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 forced firms to cut their travel spending significantly (Beaverstock et al. 2010, 6).

However, even though there are moments when work-related travel decreases, it still holds a central place in the corporate system. Furthermore, the positive connotations that it has make it unlikely to cease entirely. For instance, mobility is considered to be instrumental in boosting one's career and succeeding at work (Beaverstock et al. 2009, 190). Besides, these trips are, for many people, enriching, stimulating and closely linked to personal development (Gustafson 2006, 515). In addition, many authors state that sometimes there is no clear distinction between work travel and leisure travel and tourism, which makes this mobile working life attractive for many people (Swarbrooke and Horner, Davidson et al., Lassen 2006, Uriely). In some cases, especially among young professionals, it becomes a lifestyle choice and a way to develop a cosmopolitan identity (Gustafson 2006, 515, Beaverstock et al. 2010, 184-186). As Jeremy Smerd puts it, "a corporate version of wanderlust is on the rise".

However, the number of women who travel for work is still a minority. The 2001 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) showed that men accounted for more than three-fourths (77%) of business trips in the US. Mäkelä argues that, on the one hand, business travel is related to male-dominated jobs and, on the other, men are more eager to accept positions involving international business travel (43). For Insch, McIntyre and Napier, if women already face a glass ceiling in order to reach high management positions, a double layer of glass is added when international assignments are involved since they have usually been "masculinized" and "'subtly' deemed inappropriate for female candidates" (19-20). As they put it, mobile professional women face several obstacles with which their male counterparts do not struggle to the same extent, such as

having to prove themselves to others, constantly being aware of being a woman in a man's world, or the lack of mentoring, career counselling and networking relationships (21). As will be examined below, one of the greatest hindrances that women encounter is the obligation to balance home life and career.

Despite remaining unequal, the proportion of women who travel for business seems on the rise. Harris and Ateljevic identify a rapid increase in the number of businesswomen travellers between the 1980s and the early 2000s (22). According to the 2016 Women in Business Travel Report, 47% of the US business travellers are now women (Harris 4). Similarly, the typical profile of the expatriate, usually male, appears to have changed. As of 2007, 21% of overseas assignments were taken by young, single women (Smerd). They attribute this change to equal employment opportunities, affirmative action legislation, women's improved qualifications and experience, and their positive responses to new opportunities (22).

Yet, the business travel experience is still notably different for women. Travelling entails some risks, which are significantly increased when the traveller is a woman. In 2018, AIG Travel and the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) conducted an online survey of women who travelled for business four or more times in the year 2017. 71% of these women acknowledge that they face greater risks than their male counterparts and 83% declare having experienced a safety-related issue within that year (Global Business Travel Association). The Women in Business Travel Report shows that 31.4% of female business travellers have suffered sexual harassment while travelling (Harris 6). Other incidents include handbag theft, drink spiking and sexual assault (Harris 6).

Moreover, as Hearn points out, women's experiences of certain aspects of travel, such as hotels, eating out, or airline lounges, are also likely to be different from men's. They are likely to be confronted with various forms of what R.W. Connell calls

"transnational business masculinity": the "hegemonic form of masculinity in the current world gender order" that is associated with the business and political executives who dominate the global corporate economy (16). As Elias and Beasley highlight, "contemporary manifestations of a hegemonic masculine identity can be witnessed in the trading rooms of investment banks, the board rooms of multinational corporations and the business class lounges of international airports" (282). Studies show that women want to be recognized as business travel consumers, for example, with more representation in marketing campaigns and customer service initiatives oriented to improving their travel experiences (Harris and Ateljevic 28, Harris 15).

Gender differences can also be perceived with regard to the influence of corporate travel on work-family balance. Being absent from home due to work generates family problems for both men and women workers, since it prevents them from fully participating in the everyday routines of the household and sharing family responsibilities (Mäkelä et al. 2015, Mäkelä, Westman et al., Saarenpää, Gustafson 2006, Gustafson 2013, Bergström Casinowsky, Jensen). In addition to the time devoted to travelling, the irregular working hours and round-the-clock availability implied in this type of jobs aggravate the work-family conflict (Mäkelä et al. 2015, 158). Research widely shows that not only do men travel for work more than women, but also travel affects their work-family balance differently (Mäkelä et al. 2015, Mäkelä, Westman et al., Saarenpää, Gustafson 2006, Gustafson 2013, Bergström Casinowsky). Women struggle more to strike a balance between work-related travel and personal life because, in spite of the advancement of the status of women in the workplace, traditional gender roles concerning the division of household and childcare responsibility are still in place, and home and family expectations still place a greater burden on women (Westman et al 462). As Mäkelä et al. remark, male travellers delegate their share of the domestic tasks when they

travel, whereas women tend to take an active role in household and childcare matters even during their trips (159). In fact, female travellers usually take on the same domestic responsibilities and tasks than women who do not travel (Bergström Casinowsky 12). As a result, travel is a source of stress and emotional exhaustion for most mobile professional women (Gustafson 2013, 65; Westman et al. 475).Westman et al. point out that levels of stress are actually higher when businesswomen return home from a work trip, since they often have to cope with household and family demands they could not attend while they were away, as well as job demands that they may have accumulated, an issue that is rarely reported by businessmen (475). Consequently, women are more likely to either choose not to engage in business travel or limit the frequency of travel due to family obligations (Gustafson 2013, 65; Bergström Casinowsky). This has implications for the career advancement of corporate women since a willingness to travel is positively valued in most professional fields (Gustafson 2006, 517; Bergström Casinowsky 14).

Gender is still a determining factor regarding corporate travel. On the one hand, the female traveller's experience is notably different from that of males. On the other hand, traditional gender roles and expectations still affect women's engagement in work-related travel. In the following pages, the focus will be on the way in which the figure of the travelling corporate woman is portrayed in films.

2.2. Business Travel On Screen

In a scene in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), the avaricious tycoon Mr. Potter (Lionel Barrymore) tries to bribe James Stewart's George Bailey into working for him, offering him a generous salary and the opportunity to do what he always wanted to do: travel. When Mr. Potter dangles the prospect of business trips to New York and Europe

in front of him, George's face lights up and, for a moment, he actually considers working for him even though he is repelled by everything Potter stands for. Cinema has always been fascinated by travel, and business travel has not been an exception. The figure of the travelling salesman has occupied an important position in US culture since the nineteenth century. It played a central role in the development of modern consumer culture and shaped the customs of life on the road (Spears). Throughout the twentieth century, cinema reflected the evolution of this figure and the different forms it took. In some cases, business travel was glamourized by featuring big Hollywood stars as powerful and elegant businessmen, as is the case with Clark Gable in *Wife vs Secretary* (Clarence Brown, 1936), or was associated with glamourous locales like first-class hotels and VIP lounges, as is the case of the films *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932), *Week-End at the Waldorf* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1945), and *The V.I.P.s* (Anthony Asquith, 1963). Other films, like the adaptations of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (e.g., László Benedek, 1951; Volker Schlöndorff, 1985), show a more negative side of business travel, as is also the case of *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000) or *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003). What these different perspectives on business travel tend to have in common is that the characters who travel are usually men. From Steve Martin's marketing executive in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (John Hughes, 1987) to George Clooney's hypermobile downsizer in *Up in the Air* (Jason Reitman, 2009), the history of cinema has been largely dominated by travelling businessmen and has featured very few women in such a role.

For decades, cinema has relied on and helped to construct stereotypical gender roles of men as wage earners and women as stay-at-home wives. When women were not depicted as housewives, they had jobs that had been culturally defined as appropriate for women, most of which were an extension of domestic care duties, such as nursing,

teaching, or waiting tables. Films have often emphasised men's predominance in the business world and, as a result, female characters are further singled out when they are employed in this field. These characters present more of a stereotypical woman's role than the occupational role as a businessperson, that is, the "professional stereotype" is overlapped by a "gender stereotype" (Flicker, 316). Films like *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988) and *The Intern* (Nancy Meyers, 2015), despite being almost thirty years apart—a period of time in which the presence and role of women in the corporate world has changed significantly—, similarly rely on conventionally female traits to portray working women, focusing on issues such as femininity, motherhood, and gender discrimination. The portrayal of corporate women in these films has nothing to do with those of their male counterparts, as is the case with *Wall Street*'s Gordon Gekko (Oliver Stone, 1987) or Leonardo DiCaprio's character in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Martin Scorsese, 2013).

Throughout history, some films have featured women entrepreneurs or workers in male-dominated fields like business. From the Classic Hollywood era, we can mention films such as *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945) and *Lucy Gallant* (Robert Parrish, 1955). The 1980s, in keeping with the social changes regarding women's employment of the time, left many examples including *9 to 5* (Colin Higgins, 1980), *Baby Boom* (Charles Shyer, 1987), *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988), and *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987). However, there are not many films that feature women characters who engage in work-related travel. A recurrent issue among the few that fit this category is the interplay between the mobile character's work and personal life. The following are some relevant films that deal with this issue.

One of the earliest examples of a film featuring a mobile professional woman, in this case a travelling sales agent, is *Traveling Saleslady* (Ray Enright, 1935). In the film,

tooth-paste manufacturer Mr. Twitchell (Grant Mitchell) is convinced that women are not suited for business of any kind, let alone to join his company's travelling sales force, a job that his daughter loves and dreams about. When Mr. Twitchell rejects Angela's idea for a cocktail-flavoured toothpaste, she takes it to her father's competitor on condition that she goes on the road for a year. Under an alias, she soon becomes a successful saleswoman and steals her father's customers. *Traveling Saleslady* revolves around the fact that women have always struggled considerably more than men to make their way into the world of business travel. In fact, a film like this, with a female protagonist that travels for business and where the main plot line is the woman's pursuit of a professional goal, is rare.

Most films put a greater focus on personal storylines than on plots concerning the female character's professional career. *There's Always Tomorrow* (Douglas Sirk, 1956) stars Barbara Stanwyck as Norma Vale, a dress designer based in New York who travels to Los Angeles, where she formerly lived, for a fashion conference. There, she visits her former employer, toy manufacturer Cliff Groves (Fred MacMurray), with whom she is infatuated since she was a young woman. Norma is presented as a successful and dedicated businesswoman but, upon seeing Cliff's suburban life—his happy marriage, his three children, and their beautiful family house—, she laments her lonely life. Cliff, by contrast, is fascinated by her exciting unrooted lifestyle and contemplates abandoning his unadventurous life and going away with Norma. He must choose between the "domestic" woman, embodied by Marion (Joan Bennett), his wife, and the mobile career woman, embodied by Norma. Despite initially portraying the mobile woman as a threat to the traditional social order, Norma ends up rejecting Cliff's proposal so as to not take him away from his family, and returns to her work-centred, unrooted life.

Norma expresses having gone "up the ladder, step by step, so slowly" after years of hard work to earn her place as a fashion designer. Yet, the film does not pay much attention to her hard work. Other films reflect how in some cases, a woman is allowed on the corporate sphere but that includes some sort of gender-bending. In *The Associate* (Donald Petrie, 1996), Laurel Ayres (Whoppi Goldberg) is a smart and hard-working woman working at a Wall Street investment firm. One day she finds out that she has been passed over for a promotion because she is a woman, while her male partner climbs the corporate ladder despite having less work experience. She decides to start up her own firm but, since she is not taken seriously in the male-dominated world of Wall Street, she pretends to have a male partner named Mr. Cutty. Laurel attends meetings and goes on business trips on behalf of her partner, but clients insist that they want to do business with Mr. Cutty personally and they will not close deals with Laurel. Therefore, in order to get ahead in business, she must impersonate Cutty, so she seeks the help of her drag queen friend to transform herself into the man she has invented. In other words, she has to symbolically "become" a white man to have a place in the business world.

The Associate uses comedy to criticise the sexism of such world and the fact that the woman has to undergo a sort of "masculinisation" to be able to occupy a position of influence. This trope has been used in later comedy films such as *Unfinished Business* (Ken Scott, 2015), which revolves around the competition between novice entrepreneur Dan (Vince Vaughn) and his former boss (Sienna Miller) to close a business deal. Dan is presented as a "loser" by stressing that he is not an "alpha male". He is failing to be the family's breadwinner, he faints during a presentation and wears his wife's sports clothes. By contrast, Chuck, the ruthless female boss—whose androgynous name is not arbitrary in the least—exudes self-confidence, makes sexual jokes, and mocks Dan by implying he has female genitals. She shows some of the features associated with business masculinity,

relying on and perpetuating the identification of these masculine traits with professional success.

If a film like *The Associate* concentrates on the problems women face to enter the business world, other movies have concentrated on what happens at home when the female character has a career that makes her spend a lot of time away from home. 1983 film *Mr. Mom* (John Hughes) revolves around this idea. After Jack (Michael Keaton) loses his job, his wife, Caroline (Teri Garr), decides to re-enter the workforce and finds a job at an advertising agency, leaving Jack in charge of housekeeping and raising their three children. From the beginning, this situation is presented as a reversal of gender roles and the natural order of things. However, it becomes worse as Caroline starts to climb the ladder and gets an executive position, especially since her promotion implies spending less time at home. While Caroline is away on a business trip with her boss, Jack makes a complete mess of the house. A pot abandoned on the stove sets off the fire alarm, the washing machine starts squirting water, one of the kids is chased by the vacuum cleaner, and the baby gets covered in chili sauce. The idea that when women are away from home on a trip, household balance is broken is a rather recurrent one in contemporary cinema, and in the last few years several films—*Mamá se fue de viaje* (*Ten Days Without Mom*, Ariel Winograd, 2017), *10 giorni senza mamma* (*When Mom Is Away*, Alessandro Genovesi, 2019), *Padre no hay más que uno* (*Father There Is Only One*, Santiago Segura, 2020), *10 jours sans maman* (*10 Days With Dad*, Ludovic Bernard, 2020)—follow the same narrative premise: mom goes on a trip and dad is overwhelmed and clueless. Furthermore, *Mr. Mom* draws attention to the fact that spending time away from home is taking a toll on Caroline's relationship with her family. Due to her business trips, she misses important family moments such as Halloween, the baby's cutting two new teeth and her son's giving up his security blanket. Jack's reproaches emphasise the importance

of home as the place where women have to be always present—"even when you're here, you're not here", he says. Caroline has given priority to her career over her role in the house and his husband reminds her not to "forget what is important". At the end, Jack gets his old job back and Caroline quits hers, and status quo is finally restored.

Today's society is experiencing significant changes regarding gender relations and employment. The turn of the twenty-first century saw an increase of corporate travel in the context of a highly mobilized world which offered new opportunities for women to enter the mobile workforce. However, films seem to have failed to reflect these changes since the representation of mobilities and occupation continues to be notably gendered. Nowadays, although the number of travelling businesswomen in films may have increased, this type of female character continues to be underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts. As Foster and Botterill remark, "the increased number of businesswomen seems not yet to have provoked a reconstruction of the grey-suited middle-aged male (probably white) common-sense definition of the businessperson" (392). Thus, the image of the mobile professional portrayed in the media, advertising, popular culture and, definitely, cinema is still more often than not that of the stereotypical businessman. This chapter aims to look at films that capture women's business travel experience in the twenty-first century in order to examine what these films have to say about the representation of mobile professional women in contemporary popular culture. Before turning to the close analysis of *Up in the Air* (Jason Reitman, 2009) and *I Don't Know How She Does It* (Douglas McGrath, 2011), I will briefly comment on other twenty-first century films that also feature women who engage in work-related travel in order to present a general overview of how these women have been portrayed in the last twenty years.

2.3. The Work-Family Dilemma in Twenty-First-Century Films

As mentioned above, films about working women tend to focus more on the personal lives of female characters than on their professional lives (Lauzen 2020). The majority of these films do not focus exclusively on the woman's work life and her experience of work-related travel. Rather, they are commonly concerned with the interplay between the professional and personal spheres of her life. Films about working women usually draw attention to their family and marital status and domestic matters are generally treated differently on the basis of gender. Cinema recurrently stresses how these women attempt and/or manage to reconcile their professional and domestic roles. This is further emphasised when the character has a job that requires her to travel since it means being geographically distant from the domestic sphere and, therefore, complicates the conciliation of work and personal life. As a result, the female characters found in these films often struggle to find a balance between the two spheres. Their mobility is shown to be a determining factor in managing a work-life balance and to affect in one way or another their personal life and their family and intimate relationships. This recurrent theme, which revisits the question of "having it all", is approached in films from different points of view; its pervasiveness, however, denotes that the representation of occupation continues to be notably gendered.

Some twenty-first-century films have considered the possibility of the balance tipping in favour of the woman's career. One of the ways in which the mobile professional woman has been portrayed in the last years has been as a dedicated career woman. These characters prioritise their professional advancement and success over personal goals such as marrying, having a family, or a home. Such is the case with the protagonist of the 2013 Italian film *Viaggio sola* (*A Five-Star Life*, Maria Sole Tognazzi). Irene (Margherita Buy)

is a single, middle-aged woman who is fully devoted to her job as a luxury hotel inspector. She is constantly on the road, travelling around the world in order to thoroughly evaluate the quality standards of high-class hotels. She follows a perfectly choreographed ritual that includes timing room service, taking the temperature of wine, and inspecting dust levels with white gloves. After two of her colleagues resign on the same day (one is pregnant and the other is getting married and wants to start a family), she is the only woman inspector left in the company. Her boss, exasperated because "with women it always finishes this way" (*"Con le donne va sempre finire così"*, my translation), calls her in the hope that she will be willing to take over their assignments even if that means spending more time on the road. "This job is for people that don't have availability problems, husbands, children, girlfriends" (*"Questo lavoro è per gente che non ha problemi di disponibilità, di mariti, di figli, di fidanzate"*, my translation)—he says. Irene accepts without hesitation and admits: "I get it, I'm your ideal inspector because I don't have a life" (*"Ho capito, sono il tuo ispettore ideale perche non è una vita"*, my translation). The film emphasises Irene's loneliness by showing her coming home to a sparsely furnished apartment where nobody awaits her. She collects hotel amenities, eats frozen food, and does not care to unpack her luggage. She spends the little time she gets in between trips with her former boyfriend and now best friend Andrea (Stefano Accorsi), or with her sister Silvia (Fabrizia Sacchi) and her family, who are worried about her being alone all the time and putting her job before her scarce social life. Following her sister's advice to spend more time with people to forge a stronger bond with them, Irene decides to take her nieces with her on one of her trips. She pretends to be their mother to remain incognito, which amuses the children at first, but eventually they want to go home and be with their real mother. In addition, Andrea finds out that his girlfriend is pregnant and Irene worries this will move him away from her. During a trip to Berlin, Irene meets Kate

Sherman (Lesley Manville), a feminist writer and anthropologist, an encounter that makes her reassess the value of intimacy.

These events shake up Irene's worldview and make her reflect on her unattached, mobile life. In her Berlin hotel room, she realises that she receives the constant attention of people who tend to her every need, but she has no real intimate connections with anyone. For the first time in the film, we see Irene leaving the hotel and walking around the city. She looks around as though longing for interaction. However, the way in which this sequence is filmed emphasises Irene's loneliness in contrast to the big city. For instance, several point-of-view, low-angle shots of tall buildings make the onlooker seem small and disoriented while preventing the spectator from seeing the hustle and bustle of a city like Berlin. In fact, as the sequence progresses, we see less people on the city's streets, until finally Irene is shown completely alone at Oberbaum bridge. Moreover, at one point it is implied that the character gets on a taxi, and the static shots of buildings are followed by moving, passenger point-of-view shots of the city. These tracking shots suggest that Irene is just passing through the places she visits without fully immersing herself in any of them. Similarly, at that moment she wonders if she is also passing through life without living it to the fullest. She has chosen a job who allows her to have a mobile life and enjoy her independence, but now she is starting to think that "this is not freedom, this is loneliness" (*"Questa non è libertà, questa è solitudine"*, my translation). At the end, however, she takes yet another trip, but only after making amends to her sister and Andrea. She concludes that "that happiness and wellbeing are strictly personal concepts" and that for her, despite feeling lonely at times, the sense of freedom and adventure that she gets from travelling is an essential part of life.

Thematically, narratively, and even visually, *Viaggio Sola* resembles *Up in the Air* in many ways. The opening scene of the Italian film, in which Irene unzips her

suitcase and smoothly performs her inspection routine, brings to mind Ryan Bingham's packing scene at the beginning of *Up in the Air*. To some extent, Irene seems to be a female version of George Clooney's character in Reitman's film. Not unlike Ryan, she is fully committed to her job and enjoys having an unattached, mobile life. However, this is not the only film where it is possible to find a female "Ryan Bingham's lookalike". The protagonist of *1001 Gram* (*1001 Grams*), a 2014 Norwegian film written and directed by Bent Hamer, has also prioritised her career over her social life. Marie (Ane Dahl Torp) is a researcher at the Norwegian Institute of Weights and Measures, where the national prototype of the kilo is kept. She spends her days meticulously calibrating measurements in a pristine laboratory, then goes to her deserted house, which she used to share with her now ex-husband. She pursued this career following in the footsteps of his father, who has dedicated his life to preserving the prototype. Her job has also become Marie's top priority, which she does with proficiency and rigour, but she is equally serious and restrained when she interacts with people. Her face rarely reveals any emotion, what makes her appear cold and distant. Even at home, she seems rigid when she uncomfortably sits by the fireplace, which is always unlit, staring into space in silence. The mise-en-scène of Marie's soulless home reflects the way in which the character is presented. An aerial shot of the residential area shows that her modern, boxy house with plain white walls is identical to all the others. It is functional but impersonal, especially as Marie's former partner takes out most of the furnishings. The fact that she does not seem to have many belongings, along with the tiny car she drives, imbue Marie with a sense of detachment and weightlessness, recalling fully mobile characters like Irene in *Viaggio Sola*.

Marie's home environment also emphasises her loneliness and suggests that her career has eaten up her personal life. As Barbara Mennel remarks, the fact that her house

is somehow similar to the laboratory where she works "obscures the difference between work and leisure" (46). She argues that "the coldness that [the film] associates with Marie's workplace, home, and character implies that wage labor undermines women's domestic abilities, including for marriage and the sexual contract" (Mennel 47). *1001 Gram* is yet another example of how professional women in films struggle to strike a balance between having a successful career and having what is considered to be a full personal life—a stable, long-lasting love relationship, children, and a comfortable home. Marie is portrayed as too focused on work to socialise. The only information the spectator is given about her social life is that she is just getting out of a failed romantic relationship, she gets on well with one of her female colleagues, and she spends most of her free time with her widowed father.

When her father suffers a heart attack, Marie is forced to fill in for him and attend the annual kilo seminar in Paris, where the different countries' prototypes are weighted and compared to establish an international standard. The film's cinematography—which displays many of the features associated with "quirky sensibility" such as visual neatness and calculated compositions (see James MacDowell's 2010 article "Notes on Quirky")—in addition to reflecting the almost ritualistic nature of this gathering, also emphasises Marie's uptightness and loneliness. At lunchtime, she puts her food on a scale, pays for it without saying a single word, and sits alone at a distant table. Later, she remains silent while her peers have a conversation. When the international prototype is displayed, all the attendants gather around, eager to catch a glimpse of it. The carefully composed shot shows Marie in the centre of a smothering crowd of mostly male figures that blocks her view. In fact, the scenes in which we see most of the conference attendants, like one in which the different countries' representatives parade in a straight line with identical blue umbrellas, emphasise that women are a minority in this setting. By means of a shot of all

the representatives posing for a group photograph—a type of shot that is characteristic of quirky films described as "a static, flat-looking, medium-long or long 'planimetric' shot (Bordwell 2007) that appears nearly geometrically even, depicting carefully arranged characters, often facing directly forward, who are made to look faintly ridiculous by virtue of a composition's rigidity" (MacDowell 2012, 9)—it is possible to count exactly four women and twenty-eight men.

During this trip, she meets Pi (Laurent Stocker), a French man who gave up a career at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures to become a gardener and take care of her mother. His warm, outgoing personality and his different viewpoint on life help her open up. As Mennel points out, the careful use of colour palette illustrates notions of domesticity by employing cold and warm colours to establish a contrast between North and South, women and men, work and leisure. The cinematography reverses gender conventions of colour and mise-en-scène by associating Marie with blue and grey colours, bare environments, and empty spaces, and Pi with warm colours, a lush mise-en-scène, and vibrant nature (Mennel 46). Mennel reads this reversal as the film's way to imply that work, especially in traditionally masculine professional fields, turns women into cold, detached beings and undermines their domestic abilities (47). After her father's death and several trips to Paris, Marie realises that she must put her life on the scale and figure out what weights more: her work or her personal life. She decides to not prioritise her job anymore and start a relationship with Pi. She travels once more to Paris, only this time she has relieved herself of the weight of the kilo, a symbol of her professional commitment and her personal burdens. Her mobility, that is her trips back and forth between France and Norway, brings about a transformation in Marie that, like in *Viaggio Sola*¸ implies a feeling of freedom, but which in this case tips the balance in favour of intimacy instead of career.

This type of narrative, which finally achieves a reasonable balance between career and intimacy, is common among films that seek to reach a conventional happy ending. Chick-flick *New in Town* (Jonas Elmer, 2009) is an example of this. Lucy Hill, played by Renée Zellweger, is a single, ambitious executive based in Miami who is sent to a tiny Minnesota town in order to oversee the restructuring and downsizing of a manufacturing plant. She is a career-driven woman who is determined to climb the corporate ladder and is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve it, even if that means going to freezing-cold Minnesota. She makes it clear that she is there to do her job, not to make friends. She is portrayed as distant and coldblooded, strutting around in high heels and constantly using corporate jargon to assert her authority and professionalism. As a result, nobody likes her; her Miami colleagues resent her presence on the executive board and rejoice in seeing her leave for this remote location, and the Minnesotan workers, who are aware of her true intentions, do not hide their desire to send this "boss lady" that does not show respect for the local ways and customs back to the city where she belongs. *New in Town*, a film released in 2009, reflects a "barely suppressed anger towards women in the workplace", a recurrent theme in recessionary films, where men are depicted as the primary victims of the economic downturn (Tasker and Negra, 357). But a negative conceptualisation of female workplace authority figures is not restricted to the recessionary context. The demonised figure of the woman boss has characterised the portrayal of working women in postfeminist culture, reflecting the concern and anxiety over the need for women to achieve, manage, and balance their domestic and professional roles (Hamad, Genz 123-127). As Hamad suggests, the female "Bosszilla", like its variations "Bridezilla", "Momzilla" and "Wifezilla", is a postfeminist take on the "monstrous feminine".

Once again, the representation of this female professional's mobility is directly related to an unbalanced interplay between work and personal life. Lucy is the most

suitable candidate for this assignment because she is completely unattached; she is single and does not have children or family ties of any kind, and therefore she can just hop on a plane and start working immediately. However, she arrives at this snowy location wearing stilettos, bare legs, and a flimsy jacket and carrying a cartload of suitcases. By ridiculing her as a mobile figure, the film advances that her current unattached and career-centred life philosophy is flawed. Her excessive luggage, which also hinders her mobility, suggests that she is too attached to her Miami lifestyle, based on individualism and rootlessness, which contrasts with the way of life in the Minnesotan town, a place where women cook dinner and run a scrapbook club while men watch football and drink beer. Traditional family and home values and a strong sense of community are preserved in this place, and they leave a mark on Lucy, who progressively warms to the townspeople, becomes friends with her nosy secretary (Siobhan Fallon), and falls in love with Ted (Harry Connick Jr.), the tough local union representative. She even develops a maternal instinct and helps Ted's daughter get ready for a school dance. At the end of the film, Lucy decides to help the community by preventing the closure of the plant, turns down a vice president post at the Miami's office, and starts a life in Minnesota with Ted. The film's ending is an example of what Diane Negra deems "narratives of adjusted ambition", which "discredit the meaning and value of work in the heroine's life or at least insist that it be made secondary to romance" (2009, 88). It follows the conventions of many postfeminist chick flicks about powerful and ambitious professional women in which, by the end, the female character's "unruliness is curbed, [her] ambition adjusted, and she has endured various humiliations through this revenge exercise in 'taming the savage boss', magnanimously saving her from a future of abject singlehood" (Hamad). Besides, this ending restores the balance between a successful career—she becomes the CEO of the now-worker-owned manufacturing plant—and a "full" personal life by means

of a return to traditional values of family and home. As will be mentioned below, this appreciation of family values has recurrently appeared in contemporary Hollywood films featuring mobile professional women.

Films like *1001 Gram* and *New in Town* correlate business travel and singlehood on one hand and a more rooted life and coupledom on the other. Cinema constantly revisits the way in which mobility and work affect love relationships. *10.000 km* (Carlos Marques-Marcet, 2014) tells the story of a young couple living in Madrid whose plans to have a baby get thwarted when Alex (Natalia Tena) is offered a one-year residency in Los Angeles, an unprecedented opportunity to pursue her career as a photographer. They try to make it work using Skype, but their intercontinental relationship proves more challenging than they could have imagined. Alex is busy working on her photography projects and Sergi (David Verdaguer) has to focus on his public examination to become a teacher. As time goes by, their videocalls start to be riddled with coldness and reproaches, especially directed at Alex. By choosing to travel for the sake of her career, Alex has broken the stability of the relationship, prioritising work over having a baby and starting a family with Sergi. Mobile career women are more often than not either childless or flawed mothers in films. *Family* (Laura Steinel), a 2019 film about a self-centred, workaholic senior executive woman who is asked to take care of her 11-year-old niece for a few days, highlights this idea when a character tells the protagonist that she does not belong around children but in an airport wine bar, a claim that the protagonist wholeheartedly agrees with: “I belong at the Admirals Club at JFK”, she says.

The aforementioned issues are featured in *Up in the Air* and *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, two films that exemplify a fixation in movies to explore whether corporate travel is compatible with cultivating a personal life and determine which one should be

prioritised. Both hint at a discourse of celebration of the importance of family and home in women's lives seems to permeate mainstream Hollywood products.

2.4. Away from Home: Hypermobile Life and the Mobile Woman in *Up in the Air*

Up in the Air, a 2009 comedy-drama directed by Jason Reitman and written by Reitman and Sheldon Turner, captures the world of intensive mobilities of the early twenty-first century, a world in which travelling became a rather quotidian activity and even a way of living. Based on the 2001 novel of the same name written by Walter Kirn, *Up in the Air* stars George Clooney as corporate downsizing expert Ryan Bingham. His job keeps him on the road for 322 days a year, flying around the country in order to conduct layoffs in numerous companies—and he loves it. He lives out of a suitcase and enjoys the sense of freedom and weightlessness that he gets from travelling. On one of his trips, he meets Alex (Vera Farmiga), another frequent flyer who knows her way around the world of business travel. Since neither of them is interested in having a serious relationship, they start a casual affair, meeting in business hotels when their busy travel schedules allow for it. Ryan's mobile lifestyle is threatened by Natalie (Anna Kendrick), Ryan's new colleague, who has designed a system to fire people remotely using video calls, eliminating the need for career transition counsellors like Ryan to travel to do it in person.

Film critics have praised the film's timeliness and its attention to topical issues such as mass unemployment, cultural alienation, and technology. Roger Ebert, who selected it as one of the best films of 2009, called it "a film for this time" and Claudia Puig of *USA Today* wrote about it: "It's tough to capture an era while it's still happening, yet *Up in the Air* does so brilliantly, with wit and humanity". The film captures corporate America at one of its most unstable moments, the economic recession that followed the

financial crisis of 2007-2008. It has been considered as part of a cycle of films which address issues related to the financial crisis and subsequent economic recession that marked the late 2000s and the 2010s (Oliete-Aldea 1163-1164). These films approach the topic from different perspectives and genres, ranging from documentaries such as *Inside Job* (Charles Ferguson, 2010), *American Casino* (Leslie Cockburn, 2009), and Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009); to corporate dramas like *Margin Call* (J.C. Chandor, 2011), *Wall Street II: Money Never Sleeps* (Oliver Stone, 2010), and *Too Big to Fail* (Curtis Hanson, 2011); and to films which are set in the Great Recession period and/or deal to a greater or lesser extent with the consequences of the economic recession, such as *The Company Men* (John Wells, 2010), *Assault on Wall Street* (Uwe Boll, 2013), *Larry Crowne* (Tom Hanks, 2011), *Limitless* (Neil Burger, 2011) or *Money Monster* (Jodie Foster, 2016).

Released in 2009, the recession is notably present in *Up in the Air*, a film which deals with the activities of a fictional consultancy firm that conducts mass layoffs. In fact, Reitman acknowledged adapting the original script, based on a novel published before the economic boom was over, to the new context of economic instability in which the film was shot and released (Nemiroff). He even used people who had actually lost their jobs at the time of filming for the firing scenes (Du Preez 787). Hence, the film not only reflects the effects of the recession but also makes some direct references to the economic situation. At one point during the film, Ryan's boss, Craig (Jason Bateman) mentions they are going through "one of the worst times on record for America". "Retailers are down 20%. Auto industry is in the dump. Housing market doesn't have a heartbeat. This is our moment"—he says. These are difficult times for most companies and, therefore, times of prosperity for a company that profits from the downsizing they have to carry out. As the film progresses, the effects of the great recession are more visible in the offices that Ryan

and Natalie visit. In Kansas City, they enter an office that has been significantly affected by the cutback and downsizing. A devastated secretary greets them with a worried look and the camera pans to reveal an almost deserted office in which only a few desks and scattered chairs remain.

The film also stands out for its paradigmatic portrayal of the corporate travel experience in the age of mobility. It explores how some professionals adopt a mobile lifestyle to keep up with the increasing mobilisation of the world and how they make relentless travel their way of life. It also deals with the ways in which frequent flyers interact with their surroundings as they try to reconcile their work trips and their social life. Moreover, what is also noteworthy about Reitman's film is that is does not exclude women from the business travel experience, offering spectators the opportunity to have a look at how female professionals navigate the world of work travel. *Up in the Air* is one of the not so many films about corporate travel that features two female characters that play a central role in the development of the story. In many ways, the male protagonist works as a model on which these female characters are constructed, taking into account the similarities and differences between the female characters and Ryan. Therefore, in order to analyse the portrayal of these two female characters as mobile professional women, it is essential to take a close look at the male protagonist so as to examine how this type of mobility is represented in the film.

2.4.1. Life Up in the Air: Hypermobile Frequent Flyers

The increasing mobilisation of the world has given rise to an array of mobility patterns and a new breed of mobile people. Walter Kirn, the author of the novel upon which the film is based, wrote it after a chance encounter with one of these "new mobile creatures" (Nemiroff). In a first-class cabin, he had a conversation with a passenger sitting next to

him, who told him that he used to have an apartment in Atlanta but, since he was on the road three hundred days a year, he had got a storage locker instead. He spent so much time on the road that he considered the flight crew to be like family. When he was asked where he was from, this passenger answered, "I'm from right here"—just as it was reenacted in the film version (Nemiroff). This man inspired the character of Ryan Bingham, who embodies a type of mobility that, although still limited to a small part of the population, has influenced the way in which mobility is seen in contemporary times. *Up in the Air* portrays a world in which people move incessantly, faster, and more frequently than ever before. Ryan has successfully adapted to this environment of rapid movement, ceaseless flow and dynamism. He firmly believes that "moving is living" and, consequently, rebuffs everything that hinders his capacity to move or slows him down. "The slower we move, the faster we die", he says. He has turned travelling into a routine which he performs effortlessly, and he moves smoothly and efficiently. Watching him pack and move around airport check-in desks and security controls is almost like watching a meticulously designed choreography. We see him expertly packing his luggage, a scene which stands out for its fast rhythm. The editing of the scene mirrors the fast pace of life in contemporary times and shows how Ryan does not have any problem to keep up with such a frenetic pace. For him, the key to do so is to become weightless, to make his life fit in a cabin-size suitcase or, as he would say, in a backpack. In his motivational speeches, he asks his audience to put all the components of their lives—their house, their things, their acquaintances—inside an imaginary backpack and feel the unbearable weight of their lives on their shoulders. His lectures about how to unpack one's backpack encompass his philosophy of life, which enables him to lead a life of intensive mobility.

Ryan is presented as the quintessential frequent flyer, and so is Alex, whom Ryan meets at the Hilton hotel in Dallas. In terms of mobility, Alex is portrayed as Ryan's alter

ego; she also lives a mobile life, frequently away on business trips around the US. “Just think of me as yourself, only with a vagina”, she tells Ryan. Since they are constantly travelling, Ryan and Alex spend most of his time in non-places such as planes, airports, and business hotels. According to Augé, non-places are not locally specific; on the contrary, they are almost the same regardless of where they are (2006). For Castells, the similar design of these places aims at the unification of the symbolic environment of the elite around the world (1996, 447). Non-places are “sites of pure mobility” (Urry 2000, 63), traversed by thousands of people from all over the world every day. However, they are also “in-between zones” since thousands of people pass by them but do not stay (Urry 2000, 63). Non-places serve as mobile business spaces for mobile professionals like Ryan and Alex. As Beaverstock et al. point out, the growth of corporate travel, coupled with the development of information and communication technologies, has transformed the spatiality of the workplace, leading to the proliferation of “the mobile office” (2009, 196). Places—or non-places—like airport lounges, business class plane cabins, and corporate hotel restaurants, function as extensions of the formal workplace when the worker is in transit (196).

In spite of the fact that they apparently do not travel outside the US, Ryan and Alex can be considered members of a world elite whom Zygmunt Bauman calls “the globals” (1998, 99), a new social class of “hypermobile travellers” (Gössling et al.) who live in the fast lane and for whom travelling is almost a daily activity. According to Bauman’s division of society into tourists and vagabonds, that is, individuals who move at will and those who move because they have no other choice, like migrants or refugees, globals like Ryan and Alex are tourists in so far as they travel because they want to and travelling does not pose any problem for them (1998, 93). This new elite puts great emphasis on swiftness, weightlessness, dexterity, and flexibility. Their mobile nature, as

well as the mobile nature of their money, enables them to shift between various countries and regions, tax regimes and legal systems, while living affluent, opulent lifestyles well above the standards of locals living in territorially fixed societies (Elliott and Urry 2010, 67).

"Speed of movement," writes Bauman, "has become today a major, perhaps the paramount factor in social stratification and the hierarchy of domination" (2002, 27). The members of the global mobile elite are more often than not wealthy. However, megawealth is not what makes this new social class stand out from other elites in the history of humankind. While in the past being a member of the elite implied owning vast expanses of land or massive industrial plants, currently money and possessions play second place to frictionless movement, weightlessness, and speed. Membership of the new global elite is now based on being free to move and choose where to be, and having the means to do so effortlessly, comfortably, and quickly. Ryan does not own a luxurious house or a high-end car, nor does he want them, but he benefits from various premium services when he travels: he always flies in business class, stays in the best hotels, and eats at good restaurants. The services themselves are not as important for him as the promptness with which he can get them—priority check-in at airports and hotels, for instance. He does not aspire to be on the Forbes list of the world's wealthiest people, but he longs to gain executive status with American Airlines. It is the same case for Alex, also a member of the mobile elite. In an attempt to flirt, Alex and Ryan literally lay their (credit and membership) cards on the table as if trying to trump each other. They discuss which are the best car rental services and which hotels offer the best services—Alex, who describes herself as "a sucker for simulated hospitality", goes for warm cookies at check-in. Besides, she, dazzled by Ryan's American Airlines Concierge Key, asks him to

"impress her with [his] numbers", which in this case refers to the number of miles he travels per year.

Globals like Ryan and Alex are fond of the rewards and privileges they enjoy as frequent flyers, which range from priority airport check-in to personalised greetings and elegant first-class lounges. Even though the mobile lifestyle of globals is accessible only to a miniscule elite, it is presented as a normative ideal and a sign of prestige and power in popular culture and the media, and it has become an object of desire for many people. In some cases, the incessant demands for travel that the globals' lifestyle entails are not regarded as constraining and time-consuming but rather as opening up endless possibilities and projects (Elliott and Urry 2010, 73, 80-82). In line with this view of mobility, Alex and especially Ryan are introduced not as "time-poor" businesspeople but as privileged travellers, and their mobile lifestyle is presented not as constraining but as highly desirable.

The glamourised representation of Ryan's mobility at the beginning of the film seems to imply that it adheres to this positive view of mobilities as a source of freedom, power, and privilege, and of mobile lives as attractive and fascinating. This initial representation of mobilities is reinforced by the fact that the character embodying this specific type of mobility is played by Hollywood star Clooney. From the moment that Ryan is introduced, Clooney's star persona adds certain connotations to the character and influences spectators' expectations. Praised for his looks and elegance, Clooney has often been compared to classic actors like Cary Grant and Gary Cooper (Sterrit 220). the elegance and charisma that have become associated with Clooney's star persona imbue all the characters he played in the first decade of the twenty-first century: a high-rolling thief in Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's* trilogy (2001, 2004, 2007), a "fixer" for a corporate law firm in *Michael Clayton* (Tony Gilroy, 2007), a narcissistic divorce lawyer in

Intolerable Cruelty (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2003), or a downsizer in *Up in the Air*. Furthermore, the world of designer suits, VIP services, and first-class travel in which Ryan lives replicates that of Hollywood stars like Clooney. This contributes to the idealisation of Ryan's lifestyle and, in turn, of the specific type of mobility that he embodies.

Due in part to Clooney's elegance and charm, the film makes the first-class cabins, airports and hotels where Ryan spends most of his time seem attractive and inviting. These non-places are the setting for Ryan and Alex's playful love story. Similarly, at least at the beginning of the film, the mobile lifestyle led by Ryan and Alex is presented positively, emphasising the freedom and privileges they enjoy as members of the global mobile elite. Yet, the film soon introduces us to another female character that threatens Ryan's lifestyle. Natalie Keener, his new work partner, represents an entirely different attitude towards mobility, work, and love.

2.4.2. Natalie: Filming the Not-So-Mobile Professional

From the moment she appears in Ryan's life, Natalie Keener shakes up the downsizer's world of relentless travel. She is a bright, ambitious new graduate who arrives at the company with fresh ideas for improving its methods. She has developed a new downsizing system that will allow the company to cut expenses and increase efficiency. For Natalie, to keep downsizing specialists like Ryan on the move for most of the year is too expensive and inefficient and, as a solution, she proposes the use of technology to carry out the layoffs. Her proposal is to use videocalls to inform employees of their dismissal without having to send a specialist to do it in person. This method enables them to fire people from a distance regardless of their location, which, apart from saving money, allows them to conduct more layoffs in a shorter time.

In many ways, Natalie functions in the film as the antithesis of Ryan. She is sharp-talking, uptight, and eager to show that she is a highly qualified and competent professional. She rationalises and plans everything, from the procedures she must follow to do her job to her personal life aspirations. However, her firm adherence to manuals and rules makes her seem too rigid, too matter-of-fact, and proves ineffective when dealing with human emotions. By contrast, Ryan, who is a much more experienced worker, is more spontaneous and laidback. Even if he is a loner, he is good at the type of social interaction that his job requires and, therefore, he conducts termination meetings with ease. For him, communication skills are more important than carefully designed workflows.

But, most importantly, Natalie's attitude towards and experience of mobility differs significantly from Ryan's. Natalie is not fully mobile and, therefore, she is unfit for Ryan's world. The way in which her first time at the airport with Ryan is shot already implies this. The squeaky wheels of Natalie's suitcase, which clash with Ryan's smooth movements and choreographed travelling rituals, can be heard in the background as the camera tracks left following Ryan, finally showing the woman dragging her luggage. Subsequent close-ups of the suitcase emphasise the fact that it is too heavy, overpacked with things that Ryan thinks are completely unnecessary. She carries too many things in her "backpack", both literally and symbolically. Ryan tries to make Natalie a more mobile individual and he begins by lightening her luggage. Among the things that Ryan takes out of her suitcase, there is a pillow, an object that can be linked to the cosiness and comfort of the home. The fact that she has packed her own pillow can be read as an attempt to bring a piece of home with her while travelling. The symbolic identification of women with home is an age-old one. Historically, the home has been understood as a feminine space and as an expression and component of women's identity (Morley 63-67, Saegert

and Winkel 46). For women, the meaning of home involves a "sense of belonging", a place "where [they] are safe and secure", a "refuge" and even "a part of [them]" (Morley 64, Saegert and Winkel 48). The identification of women with home also implies an association with "staying at home" and, consequently, with stasis, fixity, rootedness, confinement, and restricted movement (Morley 68; Uteng and Cresswell 5, 258). By contrast, men are usually linked to public spaces and, therefore, to movement and mobility (Morley 67-68). In Enloe's words, masculinity "has been the passport for travel" (in Morley 68). Such discourses of home-bound femininity and the idea that "a woman's place is in the home" have functioned to limit considerably women's access to public spaces and mobility (Morley 69, Uteng and Cresswell 258), as seems the case with Natalie.

While Ryan is ready to set out at any time, Natalie needs some time to say goodbye to her boyfriend. She believes in love, marriage, and family, which Ryan considers the biggest obstacles to mobility. Natalie tries to achieve an ideal balance between professional and personal "success". She applies herself to being productive and efficient in her job as a downsizer, but she also expects to be engaged by the age of twenty-three. She explains to Ryan that she had her life fully planned at sixteen: get a corner office job, marry a man that "fits the bill"—college graduate, white-collar job, attractive—and have a child before turning thirty. Failing to reach these goals seems "apocalyptic" to her and the pressure to "have it all" is a major source of anxiety for her. She has a promising career ahead of her, yet she struggles to strike a balance between her work and personal goals. When her boyfriend breaks up with her over a text message during one of her work trips—ironically, using the type of "at-a-distance termination tool" that she wants to implement in the workplace—, she has an emotional meltdown in the middle of a hotel lobby. Her plans to have both a career and a family are falling through, as is the promise

to “have it all”. She bemoans the feeling that no matter how much success she might have professionally, it will not matter unless she finds the right guy. She discusses her concerns with Alex, a representative of the older generation of women, to whom Natalie is grateful for everything they did for the new generation, but that are to blame for raising the expectations of feminine fulfilment. Natalie’s discourse shows certain disappointment with feminism’s alleged overly-ambitious program of “having it all”, hardly criticized in the 1980s for pressuring women to become “superwomen” and resulting in them falling victim to the “double burden” of work and home (Faludi, Friedan).

In addition to being unfit for the world of intensive mobility of the globals, she is also portrayed as unfit for the downsizing business. This job involves being always in control of the situation, remaining detached from the personal stories of the employees they fire and indifferent to the negative consequences that losing their jobs has on these people. Top “terminators” like Ryan have built a successful career at the expense of the suffering they have caused in others, profiting from the difficult economic situation. This world seems to be ruled by “the survival of the fittest” and adopting a predatory attitude seems to be an effective way to success. “We are not swans. We are sharks”—says Ryan. The downsizing business is presented by means of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity that emphasises competitiveness, individual success, and emotional toughness. For instance, when Ryan describes his job, he says he works for a company that “lends [him] out to pussies [...] who don’t have the balls to sack their own employees”. This discourse of “alpha masculinity” is especially relevant in a recessionary context in which men were often seen as the primary victims of the Great Recession, which was therefore referred to as a “Mancession”, and masculinity was deemed to be in crisis, with some commentators announcing the “death of the macho” (Thompson, Salam). Natalie appears as a disruptive figure in this masculine environment. Ryan receives his new work partner with scepticism

and questions her aptitude for the job. Despite her efforts to prove her professionalism, she is not taken as seriously as her male partner. Even one of the workers they lay off tells her to "go fuck herself" but responds more positively to what Ryan has to say. He knows how to control the situation, telling the people he fires what they want to hear. He gives the impression of being empathetic and caring, yet he remains indifferent to what the people he fires tell him, which is often not very pleasant.

Unlike Ryan, Natalie is unable to remain detached from the harsh words of the people she fires, and their stories affect her deeply. When one of the employees she has to fire tells her that she is going to commit suicide, she panics and, when she finally finds out that this woman actually killed herself, she cannot handle the job anymore and resigns. The damage that her job does on the lives of these people does not leave her indifferent and, as the film progresses, it is possible to notice how the emotional strain is taking its toll on her. This is further emphasised by the film's cinematography. For instance, after a long termination session in Des Moines, Natalie is shown in a room full of empty desk chairs, sitting alone in the middle of these chairs that stand for all the employees that have been dismissed. The high angle used for this shot makes her appear weak and small, overwhelmed by the mass layoffs that she is contributing to conduct.

Yet, the character of Natalie is not free from contradictions. It is Natalie, the less mobile individual, who suggests the new firing-at-a-distance approach, even though it is an impersonal technique that seems to clash with her rootedness and, especially, with the way in which she seems to care about the workers' feelings. The hypermobile and extremely detached Ryan, however, strongly objects to Natalie's methods and openly opposes the changes that his boss has agreed to introduce. Ryan defends the importance of face-to-face interaction when dealing with such a delicate situation as telling someone that they have lost their job, which is surprising in a character that tries to avoid interaction

with others as much as possible. For Natalie, the firing process is something one can do mechanically; she has even designed a workflow of firing techniques, a script that enables anyone to carry out a firing just by following the steps. However, as we have seen, once she is actually faced with the task of firing people, her mask of matter-of-factness and self-assurance slips, revealing a more emotional and empathic woman that was trying to conform to the ideals of professional competence and success that rule the male-dominated corporate world. By the end of the film, her initial plans, beliefs, and expectations, concerning both her personal and professional life, have been completely shaken up and proven to be unrealistic and ineffective. The film's events lead Natalie to change and take a different path. The news that she is leaving her downsizer job are accompanied by a cut-away shot of Natalie moving away from the camera on an airport conveyor. This way of depicting that she is moving away from her former job and life, which takes advantage of the conveyor belt to show movement while leaving the camera static, suggests that she is abandoning her unattainable ideals of professional and personal fulfilment and her plans to "have it all". Just as she is being carried by the conveyor, she is letting herself go, free to discover her own path. This time she is not following a man, neither a boyfriend nor a mentor like Ryan. She applies for the same job that she turned down to be with her boyfriend in Omaha, taking the opportunity to start anew.

Natalie is constructed as a foil character, as the antithesis of Ryan. But she also stands in contrast to Alex, the protagonist's love interest. Alex is more experienced and mature than Natalie and she, apparently, has freed herself from the unrealistic expectations and deadlines that Natalie frantically tries to meet. However, as will be discussed below, Alex turns to be more complex a character than it may seem at first.

2.4.3. Alex vs Home: Geographical Promiscuity and Geographical Monogamy

Alex is introduced as a fully mobile professional woman, subverting traditional understandings of women as mobility-poor and as static, rooted, and passive individuals. Unlike other female characters that travel for work—as will be the case of the protagonist of *I Don't Know How She Does It*—, she does not have to juggle work and family life. She is, apparently, an independent woman that does not carry any "baggage" with her. Her lack of baggage, however, is revealed as a façade when, in a rather surprising turn of events, both Ryan and the spectators find out that she has a husband and children in Chicago. A close look at the film's mise-en-scène reveals that the film had in a way been pointing out that Alex was not quite the same as Ryan in this sense. After their first sexual encounter, Alex and Ryan compare diaries to see when their paths will cross again. This scene, which takes place in a hotel room, shows a symmetrical two-shot of both characters staring at their laptops, implying that they are mirror images of each other. Yet, when examining the shot in detail, it is easy to notice that the composition is unbalanced, since there are more objects on Alex's side: a telephone, a water bottle and, in particular, the large paintings that fill up the wall behind her. This contrasts with Ryan's side, where there is only a lamp. Thus, the symmetrical composition highlights their compatibility while, at the same time, hinting at the fact that Alex's "backpack" is not as empty as Ryan's.

Yet, having a family does not prevent Alex from leading a hypermobile life. In fact, her lifestyle makes it possible for her to lead a double life. Since she is constantly "on the move", Alex is able to have a casual affair with Ryan without having to follow the protocols and manners attached to dating. They just engage in casual sexual encounters when their work trips take them to the same city. As in many other films, such

as *Last Night* (Massy Tadjedin, 2011), *360* (Fernando Meirelles, 2011) or *28 Hotel Rooms* (Matt Ross, 2012), business travel is portrayed as the perfect cover for adultery. The workplace has been generally understood as the breeding ground for extramarital affairs and a causal link has been established between the rise in infidelity in the workplace and the increased presence of women in that space (Leonard 108). Scholars have drawn attention to Hollywood's reiterated representation of the "working woman" as a problematic figure, as well as one that is persistently associated with some form of sexual performance (Negra 2009, 6; Tasker 1998, 3). Similarly, postfeminist films recurrently caution women against letting their careers become a hindrance to their marriage and family prospects (Leonard 103, Negra 2004). Therefore, as Suzanne Leonard argues, the prevalence of the female adultery trope in the current popular culture environment might signal an attempt to "critically interrogate the uses and limitations of the figure of the working woman" (108). The adulterous working woman reflects a continued cultural anxiety over female labour (Leonard 110-111) and, in the case of *Up in the Air*, an additional concern over work travel opening up the opportunities for adultery. Therefore, mobile corporate women like Alex can be read as posing a double threat to the patriarchal order since, besides the fact that they normally occupy positions of relative power within organisations, their sustained absence from the domestic space compromises the stability of the family and facilitates the blossoming of potential adulterous relationships.

The female adultery narrative, Leonard remarks, often focuses not on the unfaithful woman but on the profound destabilisation and anxiety that women's betrayal causes to men (111). This applies to other forms of women's transgression of the traditional gender order such as leading a mobile lifestyle and spending a prolonged time away from their children and homes, which also destabilise men. Thus, when Ryan finally decides to establish a more serious relationship with Alex and unexpectedly shows up at

her house in Chicago to ask her to be his "co-pilot", but instead finds out that she has a family of her own, the spectator is led to pity Ryan, the protagonist and spectator's main point of identification in the film. Consequently, Alex becomes a problematic figure insofar as it is discovered that she is not the female equivalent of Ryan after all, and the uncovering of her secret life abruptly shatters his plans and expectations. For her, the relationship with Ryan is just a "parenthesis", a break from her "real life". In this sense, Alex subverts the conventions of mainstream Hollywood heterosexual relationships and romance by unapologetically living outside monogamy on one hand and relegating her relationship with the protagonist to a secondary position on the other. She, however, is not exactly portrayed as a deceitful temptress or a femme fatale. In interviews, Vera Farmiga described the character of Alex as empowered and dignified:

> I thought it was a really interesting portrayal of female desire that you don't often get to see. Usually when a female character is so demanding in her sexuality and unapologetic she usually lacks some dignity. It was cool to see someone who's completely self-possessed, had class, had depth and yet was operating in a very masculine way. From the start she set up her parameters and said these are the rules, come in for the enjoyment of it and just think of me as yourself (in Bustillos).

Nevertheless, whether one reads Alex as a morally questionable character who has deceived both Ryan's and the spectator's expectations or as an assertive woman who made clear from the beginning that she wanted to have a casual affair and that it was him that misinterpreted her affections, the film's siding with Ryan problematises Alex as a disruptive, destabilising figure in the protagonist's story. This has major implications with regard to the representation of women's professional mobility, which is consequently given negative connotations.

The film's ending seems to be critical with the type of mobility and lifestyle that was apparently presented at the beginning as attractive and privileged. By the end of the film, life on the fast lane is portrayed as a lonely and empty life and the importance of home, marriage, and family is emphasised. A turning point in the film's narrative, which marks a change in its discourse on mobility and relationships, is the wedding of Ryan's younger sister, Julie (Melanie Lynskey), held in the Bingham family's hometown in Northern Wisconsin. Alex attends the wedding as Ryan's plus one and is introduced to Ryan's sisters, whose rooted small-town life differs from Alex's business travel lifestyle. In the scenes that take place at Julie's wedding, the film highlights the contrast between the global and the local that, according to Elliott and Urry, arises in conditions of intensive mobilities (73). While Alex's hypermobile lifestyle represents the global, Ryan's sisters stand for the local, roots, stability, and moorings. They embody the traditional values of family and home that Alex subverts as a mobile professional. The warm colours used in the rehearsal dinner and the wedding sequences, which contrast with the cold, bluish tones of the non-places where mobile workers spend most of his time, stress the warmth of home and family, which in the film are identified with the hometown. Just like in the aforementioned *New in Town*, the mid-West heartland is romanticised as a place where traditional values of family, home and community are cherished and preserved in order to draw attention to the hypermobile, career-driven woman's subversion.

The hometown fantasy has become a recurrent narrative trope since the late 1990s, bearing equal if not greater relevance in post-recessionary cinema since "concepts of home acquire greater meaning in a hostile social environment" (Morley in Negra 2009, 16). Recessionary texts tend to be imbued with a sense of nostalgia for a better and simpler time and feature a nostalgic search for a shelter for the community, represented by the home as a haven against hardship (Oliete-Aldea 348). As Sarah Domet writes, "in times

of great uncertainty, groups often look back to the past, to the traditions that once provided order" (124). In films like *Up in the Air*, the idealised hometown stands for tradition, family values, stability, and comfort, and it is set against the urban spaces of work and mobility where people experience isolation, precariousness, and loss both at the professional and personal level. Family is at the heart of these films as "both the victim of the crisis and its only antidote" and tropes of families reuniting to overcome financial trouble or individuals returning to a "sustainable" nuclear family are recurrently featured (Kinkle and Toscano 45, 39). Thus, *Up in the Air* ends with a documentary-style sequence in which several people that have been fired throughout the movie, who were in fact real recently laid-off employees, explain that although losing their job was difficult, it was made easier by the support of their friends and families.

Thus, the film seems to turn into a cautionary tale on "the perils of disembedding from kith and kin", adopting a stance on what is really important in life which is recurrent in the cinema of the recession (Kinkle and Toscano 44). In a context of economic turmoil, stability—stable jobs, stable families, and stable homes—is exalted over flexibility and isolation. From the wedding scenes onwards, traditional values of roots and home are set against the mobile life of business travel, painting what Agnes Heller calls "geographical monogamy", which she identifies with rootedness, in a good light and "geographical promiscuity", identified with mobility, in a much less favourable light (in Morley 16). *Up in the Air* establishes a contrast between the geographically monogamous and promiscuous female characters and in so doing it conveys a negative view of female mobility; both Julie and the female interviewees find happiness and comfort in their spouses, families, and homes (and, in the case of Julie, in the hometown as well), whereas the constant travelling has emotionally affected Natalie and has broken her belief system, as well as has enabled Alex to lead a double life behind his husband's back. In this sense,

the film's ending adopts a recurrent discourse that favours female geographical monogamy over mobility and casts geographically unsettled women as deviant and/or threatening (Negra 2009, 18, 35).

Up in the Air progressively moves away from its initial glamourisation of business travel, independence, and singlehood and adopts a discourse that emphasises the negative aspects of a mobile life and the importance of home and family. That discourse becomes crucial for the representation of women, who are either connected to rootedness and family ties or to a flawed "geographical promiscuity". The mobility of the professional female characters, Natalie and Alex, is presented as having negative consequences either for themselves or for others. Natalie is unfit for the travelling downsizer job, as well as unable to "have it all" and find a balance between her professional ambition and her high expectations for her personal life. Alex seems to have achieved such balance, expertly navigating the world of business travel. However, the film seems critical with the fact that she takes advantage of the time she spends away from home to lead a double life and have an extramarital affair with Ryan. The film's ending seems to reinforce the idea that women should stay away from business travel especially if it interferes with their place in the house and in the family, which they should cherish and preserve. This discourse gains a wider significance in the recessionary context in which the film is set and released.

2.5. Frequent Flyer, Supermom: *I Don't Know How She Does It* and the Fantasy of Having It All

Kate Reddy has a hectic life. We see her dashing incessantly around the city to take her daughter to school, buy baking supplies, or get to work on time. She rushes to the airport to go on work trips many times too. Everyone around her wonders how she does it all:

she is a loving and supporting wife, a mother of two and she works as an investment manager for the Boston affiliate of a New York financial advisory firm. The protagonist of *I Don't Know How She Does It* (which will henceforth be referred to as *IDKHSDI*), a 2011 film based on Allison Pearson's best-selling novel, is presented as the queen of multitasking and a working mom heroine. However, her balancing act is over when she lands a new account that will see her travelling to New York on a regular basis, that is, when mobility is thrown into the mix. The pressure to "do it all" intensifies in light of this new career opportunity, which makes it even harder for Kate to fulfil her expected duties in the house. How can she take care of her children, her marriage, her house, even her personal appearance when she keeps flying back and forth to New York? The use of the word care here is not accidental. The gendered dynamics of care are paramount in reading the character's experience of work-related mobility. This chick-flick puts gender differences at the centre by showing the woman lying awake at night trying to figure out how to handle all those things, mentally composing endless to-do lists, while her husband peacefully sleeps—he does not understand why she does not rely more on the nanny.

Although Pearson's novel came out in 2002, the film adaptation was not released until 2011, thus setting the story in a different socioeconomic context. At the time when the film came out, society was suffering the consequences of the financial crisis of 2007-2008. This atmosphere of economic instability is present in the film. Whereas Kate has a lucrative and stable job in finance, her husband Richard, played by Greg Kinnear, faces a very unstable employment situation. Richard is an architect and therefore he struggles with the effects of the financial crisis on the housing sector, one of the most severely affected by the recession. Spectators are told that he had just started his own business when the economy went down. Now a failed entrepreneur, he is trying to get back on track by pursuing a new job opportunity, but he is notably underemployed all throughout

the film. In fact, Kate is the main breadwinner of the family. Her career is thriving despite the financial situation. She is highly regarded by her superiors and her workload is increasing by the day. Consequently, Richard finds himself in the position of having to step in as the stay-at-home parent, a position where he is noticeably uncomfortable. The Reddys' situation brings to mind the gendered impact that the crisis was said to have and the discourses of male victimisation that ensued. Significantly high job loss was observed in male-dominated fields like manufacturing and construction over other fields with a greater presence of female workers, which led many to see men as the main victims of the crisis. This prompted the appearance of buzzwords like "Mancession" or "Hecession" (Thompson). There was the impression that women had, up to a certain extent, eluded the blow of the financial crash. Hanna Rosin famously announced "the end of men" in her much-remarked article for *The Atlantic* which pointed out a cultural and economic shift that resulted in the overturn of uncontested male dominance in terms of education, income, presence in the workforce, and even of male attributes like physical strength or aggressiveness. In her subsequent book, *The End of Men and the Rise of Women*, Rosin writes about how "Plastic Women", who over the course of the century have proved themselves flexible enough to adapt to changes in the economic and social order and enter "male" territories, are besting "Cardboard Men", who struggle to change their roles in the public sphere (2013, 14-15). Women's adaptability has enabled them to "pull themselves up" in recent economic downturns, while, Rosin suggests, "men don't follow" (2010).

However, it is not as if gender roles had been completely reversed in the film and Kate had abandoned domesticity altogether in favour of her career. Rather, the film revolves around Kate's frantic attempt to fulfil both. Kate assumes both the traditionally male role of breadwinner and the traditionally female role as carer, as well as inhabits

both the masculine spaces of business and mobility and the feminine spaces of domesticity.

2.5.1. The Rule of "The Perfect"

Kate is determined to earn her place in the masculine world of finance and business travel, but she also aims to accomplish what is expected of her as a woman. She regrets not having the time to clean and tidy up the house. She even struggles with the fact that she has a nanny taking care of her children, who spends more time watching them grow up than she does. Still, she manages to bring a pie to the school's bake sale and organise a birthday party for her daughter. She has embraced the duty to work, using Hochschild's term, a "second shift" (Hochschild and Machung), taking up a heavy load of after-work responsibilities that range from arranging a playdate for her daughter to refilling the car's washing fluid. She acknowledges that this load is too heavy for her to handle, yet she does not consider dropping it. Succeeding to manage both her paid and non-paid work seems to be her main goal and priority and, in fact, is at the centre of the film's plot.

The film brings up the "postfeminist dream" of "having it all"—and its accompanying imperative to "do it all". The phrase "having it all", which gained momentum after the publication of Helen Gurley Brown's book *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money… Even if You're Starting With Nothing* in 1982, is now a staple of popular culture. Even if its origins have more to do with attracting wealthy liberated consumers than with the women's movement, feminism was soon brought into the picture (Szalai). According to this narrative, one that is part of the backlash against feminism described by Susan Faludi, feminism betrayed women by promising them that they could have it all—a happy family and a successful career—and then failing to deliver. The aspiration to "have more" started to be felt as an unattainable demand, a fantasy, even a

reproach, and the term went "from empowering to delusional" (Szalai). However, the significance of this idea does not end at that. When approached from the postfeminist perspective of women's empowerment as a choice, "having it all" has been read as a matter of personal determination. Women can (in fact, they should) choose to have a career, raise children, be sexually active, and stay fit and beautiful. Discourses of individualised agency and self-responsibility, present in the writings of Ulrich Beck, Elizabeth Beck-Gernscheim and Anthony Giddens on late modernity, contribute to the postfeminist idea that women already have the agency to play an active role in their own life paths and the responsibility to make choices (McRobbie 2009, 45-47). Therefore, it is in their hands to choose to have it all. As McRobbie points out, this argument ignores the existence of gender hierarchies and takes responsibility off the patriarchal system to place it on individual women's shoulders (46).

The cultural construct of "having it all" goes hand in hand with the so-called "superwoman syndrome". "Superwoman", Ellen Goodman said, "is the myth that a woman can have it all only if she can do it all and do it all by herself" (in Hayes, 436). Superwomen try to live up to the unattainable ideal of fulfilling traditional female roles in the private sphere while also pursuing a professional career in the public sphere. The figure of the Superwoman has been criticised since the 1980s—a decade that Whelehan identifies with the "crashing of the Superwoman" (141). For Friedan, women were likely to fall into the "superwoman trap" of aspiring to be "Perfect Mothers […] and also perfect on the job", as well as to become victims of the "double burden" of work and home, "placing insatiable demands on herself in her work, and getting locked into power battles with her husband over insatiable standards of housework" (101). Superwomen were charged with the responsibility and the blame for trying to become "super" versions of themselves (Genz, 122). Once more, the postfeminist idea that women have freedom of

choice only contributes to the arguments that blame feminism for women's troubles and deflects attention away from the structural gender inequalities that force them to "do it all" and the lack of support from the system (Genz 122). Whelehan states that, "as activist feminism waned and common-sense, individualist feminism came to the fore", "notions of personal choice, aspiration, lifestyle, and romance" perpetuated the perception that women are supposed to do the largest share of domestic work in addition to having a full-time job, managing to succeed professionally without giving up everything else (142). These notions, she suggests, have contributed to prolonging the life of the Superwoman complex into the twenty-first century, when many women still give their best to "have it all".

Furthermore, the myth of the Superwoman is only accessible to a minority and fails to acknowledge the realities of many women who do not have these presumed possibilities for choice and agency. Kate Reddy can aspire to have it all because she lives a privileged life in economic and social terms. She is a terciary-educated, married, white woman who lives in a big house and has a high-paying job. She can afford to pay for a good school for her daughter, to hire a nanny to take care of her children, and even to bribe her children with presents every time she comes back from a work trip. In fact, the film has been criticised for its limited scope and over-privileged setting, which prevented many spectators from identifying with the character and taking her struggles seriously. A review of the film reads:

> *I Don't Know How She Does It* is a salute to the oppressed middle classes, guaranteed to strike a chord with every harried working mum who's found herself lumbered with a full-time nanny, oodles of cash, a four-storey Boston townhouse and a supportive husband with flexible working hours (Brooks).

Even if the story was transposed to a recessionary setting, the world of *IDKHSDI* is populated exclusively by considerably privileged characters. Even the Reddys' nanny is a carefree college student that goes surfing in her free time. The choice of the cast is also relevant regarding this matter. Parker is, in Deborah Jermyn's words, "something of a poster-girl for 'having it all'" (2008, 170). Her star persona, which is permeated by her widely-known role as Carrie Bradshaw in the *Sex and the City* series and subsequent films, is that of a stylish, fashionable, urbanite woman—she lives in the West Village neighborhood in New York City—but also that of a working mother—the star is a mother of three. Thus, Parker has been said to "have it all": wealth and fame, a happy marriage to actor Matthew Broderick and three adorable children. Furthermore, Parker's rags-to-riches story has contributed to her persona as a highly successful yet down-to-earth star. She has openly spoken about growing up poor in Ohio and needing welfare support until she could help her family with the money she earned from acting.

SJP, as Parker is popularly known, has been characterised by her "exceptional ordinariness", that is, her persona seemed to embrace both ordinary and extraordinary traits, thus embodying Richard Dyer's "ordinary/extraordinary" paradigm (Dyer 43). She is an international fashion icon but she has been described as an unconventional beauty and "not a model", which resulted in Parker's identification with a "democratisation of style" (Radner 161-162). When she gave birth to her son, her star persona made room to incorporate the "mom persona" without giving up her style-icon status. As Jermyn puts it, "'mother/style icon' becomes another ordinary/extraordinary dichotomy that the SJP star persona manages to straddle" (2008, 165). SJP has come to exemplify the popular fascination with the "celebrity mom" and the emergence of the "yummy mummy": "an attractive, confident, and well-groomed mother or expectant mother, who retains her pre-conception sense of style to resist the traditionally dowdy image of motherhood" (Jermyn

2008, 166). Parker received media attention for her stylish pregnancy outfits—her "baby bump" was referred to as "her latest accessory"—and her slim postpartum figure. Similarly, her "celebrity mom" persona fed on images of extraordinary motherhood that could be found in the star's accounts of the personal transformation that motherhood brought about in her, in which she described how having a baby changed her perspective on work for the better and brought about "balance" (Jermyn 2008, 170). However, in line with Dyer's ordinary/extraordinary dichotomy, SJP tries to counterbalance the idealised image of motherhood that she has been said to project by positioning herself as an ordinary working mother that "keeps it real" (Jermyn 2008, 171). In interviews, she has talked about her own struggles as a working mom, having to realign her priorities and to exert herself to combine stardom and parenting. She describes her husband and her as "hands-on parents" and admits to "failing miserably" sometimes to balance the different components of her perceived dream life (Anon in Jermyn 2012, 250).

However, it is possible to observe certain tensions and inconsistencies within Parker's star persona. Although she negotiates an identity that maintains an equilibrium between ordinary and extraordinariness, sometimes her down-to-earth image seems hard to reconcile with her celebrity status. For instance, Radner points to the fact that her image as a style icon receives more attention than her domestic life as a wife and mother (162). Her style-icon persona, Radner claims, does not seem to fit with her actor life nor with her private life as a devoted wife and mother (164). Her celebrity status, especially because of her close relationship with the fashion world, brings her ordinariness into question. Regarding her image as a working mother, she has been criticised for being too much of a "celebrity mom", enjoying the privileges that her status grants her, and endorsing an unattainable ideal of "having it all". As Jermyn explains, figures of extraordinary motherhood, such as the celebrity mom and the "yummy mummy", are

hinged on a degree of considerable economic and social privilege and, therefore, they belong for the most part to the white upper and middle classes (2008, 166). Jermyn argues that Parker "overstepped an undefined mark" in positioning herself as a fraught working mother at a time of global recession such as the one in which the film was released (2012, 251). SJP's claims to ordinariness were disputed, alluding to the fact that she employs two nannies to look after her children, a personal trainer and yoga instructor to stay in shape, and an assistant that helps her with everything else (Jermyn 2012, 251). As Jermyn states, "we know how Sarah Jessica Parker does it" (2012).

Although sometimes disputed, SJP's persona as a juggler of her role as a major fashion icon and high-profile actor with that of a working mother makes her a suitable candidate to embody the figure of the Superwoman in *IDKHSDI*. Parker's embodiment of idealised working motherhood contributes to the fantasy of work-family balance in which this chick-flick seems to indulge at times, while the star's resolution to emphasise the hard work and effort that she puts in parenting complements the film's portrayal of the conciliation of a demanding mobile job and family life as an extremely difficult endeavour. This dichotomy can be already observed in the first scenes of the film. In one of the documentary-like interviews that the film includes, Allison (Christina Hendricks), Kate's best friend and fellow working mother, tells the audience: "All us working mothers feel like we're spinning fifty plates in the air at once, but Kate, you can give her ten more plates, all the size of manhole covers, and she just keeps going". Her description paints Kate as a genuine Superwoman, able to pull off an extraordinary feat in dealing with everything "without mixing vodka and Xanax". However, the scene that follows comically clashes with that description. Kate is on her way home from a business trip when she gets a reminder about her daughter's school bake sale. Since she promised her that she would prepare a homemade pie, she rushes to the deli to buy baking supplies with

the intention of staying up all night baking it. Unable to find them, she buys a ready-made pie and tries to make it look homemade. Then, as she starts unpacking her suitcase, her husband suggests having sex. Before he can get into bed, she has fallen asleep out of exhaustion. Thus, while the film's characters wonder "how she does it", spectators are shown that she actually has great difficulties to "do it".

As Genz puts it, "on screen and in print, the biggest shortcoming of the working mother seems to hinge on her inability to embody work and home roles to a Superwoman model of perfection" (132). Similarly, Kate is subjected to what Angela McRobbie describes as the paradigm of "the perfect": "a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the 'good life'" (2015, 9). In a neoliberal society, women compete to be perfect in pursuit of career success, but especially of "domestic excellence" regarding family, home, motherhood, and femininity (McRobbie 2015, 7). This competition is inner directed; perfection works for women as a benchmarking strategy to assess themselves, calculate their assets, and mind their possible losses (McRobbie 2015, 10, 15). The paradigm of "the perfect" has a particularly strong impact on women who have children, who are also supposed to be perfect mothers. Media narratives revolve around the "good mother-bad mother" dichotomy, so mothers who do not adhere to the demands set by the perfect mother ideal are perceived as having failed in their maternal role. The standards of good mothering have been raised to a level where these demands are excessively high and so, to be good mothers, women are supposed to put their all into raising their children, which should be their main priority. From this mindset stems the concept of "intensive mothering", a term coined by Sharon Hays in 1996. The intensive mothering ideology is based on the notions that women must be solely responsible for and fully devoted to their children's upbringing, that they must lavish copious amounts of time, energy, and money on them, putting their offspring's needs before their own,

and, finally, that child rearing is “priceless” and more important than any other activity (Hays 8).

The tenets of intensive mothering are also at the centre of “new momism”, a “highly romanticized and yet demanding” view of motherhood that has developed over the last forty years (Douglas and Michaels 4). Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels highlight the role of mass media in exacerbating the pressure to achieve the standards of intensive mothering through an over-idealisation of motherhood and a massive coverage of celebrity moms and other praise-worthy mother figures. New momism seems “on the surface to celebrate motherhood” but, in reality, it promulgates “standards of perfection that are beyond [one’s] reach” (4-5). The culture of new momism promotes the idea that mothers can choose to pursue a career outside the home as long as they prove that they can “do it all” (22). Over the past few decades, however, new momism has become more hostile to working mothers, whose performance of good mothering is under intense public scrutiny (22). All in all, mothers’ current situation in Western societies could be summarised with the now popular statement that women are expected to raise children as if they did not work and work as if they were not raising children.

Kate is portrayed as a quintessential victim of the new momism culture and the extremely high levels of perfection and judgement to which mothers, and especially working mothers, are subjected. Revisiting the bake sale episode, which is said to be a blot in her Superwoman record, lets one grasp the influence of new momism culture on representations of working mothers. As she deals with the store-bought pie, she states her resolution to not let her daughter down and explains why it is of vital importance that she succeeds at passing it off as home-baked. First of all, she recounts, the other mothers’ contribution would look perfect. Her words conjure up the workings of “the perfect”, which produce the combination of “an inner-directed self-competitiveness which is in

effect self-beratement about not being good enough or perfect enough, and outer-directed competition or antagonism towards other women" (McRobbie 2015, 15). In addition, by pitting her cooking skills against those of the other mothers, an "army of mini Martha Stewarts", she gives in to the demands that mothers acquire "professional-level skills" (Douglas and Michaels 5).

Then a newsflash image appears as part of Kate's self-conscious narration, with her photo over the header "convicted mother: Kate Reddy" and a subhead that says that the lack of home cooked meals leads to juvenile delinquency, drug use, and low life expectancy. The newscaster says: "Friends trace the start of Emily Reddy's mental problems to a school bake sale where her mother, a shadowy presence in her life, humiliated her in front of her classmates". Through this comical piece, which comes from the narrator's imagination, Kate's failure at the bake sale is painted as a potentially traumatic experience for her daughter. Following the ideology of intensive mothering and new momism, the widespread assumption that every action has long-term consequences for the child leads women like Kate to impose unattainable standards of child rearing upon themselves (Hays 7, Douglas and Michaels 6). Her belief of the gravity of this failure stems from her own experiences as a child. "I still remember the looks I got in 1974, when my mother sent me to the school bake sale with two cans of sliced peaches"— she says. We later learn that Kate's mother worked two jobs and struggled with severe economic hardships. As will be further discussed below, the film hints at a generational clash between women, and Kate's way to act on it seems to be to compensate for her mother's mistakes by trying harder to "do it all".

As this scene illustrates, *IDKHSDI* employs narration and visual techniques to explore in a comic way a world ruled by the demands of "the perfect". The film underlines the protagonist's struggle to balance work and family life by having her tell the audience

herself about it, alternating between voice-over and on-screen narration, always addressed directly at the audience. As a narrator, Kate breaks the fourth wall several times, some of them looking directly at her audience and talking to them. By having Kate as both the main character and a self-conscious omniscient narrator, the film aims to make her the main point of identification for spectators. Some of the visual elements that complement voice-over narration seem to serve the same purpose. Particularly prominent is the depiction of "the list". As Kate lies awake at night, she starts to mentally compile lists of all the things she must take care of. The cream-toned ceiling of her bedroom functions as a blank page for her mental to-do list to take form, which appears as animated words in the character's handwriting, accompanied by some pictures, that hover around in the air. The list epitomises her frantic multitasking and illustrates the unbearable workload that she carries. In fact, it is worth noticing that when a new item is added to the list, the previous one does not disappear but remains blurred in the background, giving the impression that tasks stack up. It is not an organized list, one that helps to relieve stress, but a messy one. Besides, the pace at which the list items appear increases as the scene progresses, enhancing the stressful process of managing that many tasks. All in all, these narrative devices seek to highlight Kate's struggle to juggle her professional and personal responsibilities, which only grows harder when mobility becomes another ball to juggle.

2.5.2. The Impact of Professional Mobility on Personal Life

Kate, who already finds it hard to keep up with the hectic pace of her job as a fund manager, is assigned a new project that implies spending two or three days a week working at the firm's New York office with Jack Abelhammer (Pierce Brosnan), a Wall Street heavyweight. Even though that much travelling seems incompatible with her already gruelling schedule, she accepts the assignment without hesitation. Kate is warned

of the drawbacks that her new work assignment would have for a woman in her situation, suggesting that she may not be fit for a mobile position. “This will mean a lot of travel, long days, late nights, and I just wanna make sure it won’t be too much for you”, Jack tells her. Her male colleagues express a degree of scepticism over her aptitude for a job in which travelling plays a fundamental role. One of them, Chris Bunce (Seth Meyers), says: “You have to travel in this job. We’re road warriors. And if you are tethered to anything, then you are a bird that cannot fly. And no one goes to a pet store and says, ‘I would like a bird that cannot fly’”. Chris, who recurrently tries to undermine Kate at work, makes a sarcastic remark after Kate is assigned the New York project, which he desired himself, about the “extra quality time” that her children will spend with the nanny as she travels back and forth to New York and how her husband “will be thrilled” about her constant travels. Nevertheless, when asked whether she can “swing it”, she knows exactly what to say: “of course I can”.

From this moment on, Kate adopts a frequent flyer lifestyle. The film highlights that work trips are now part of her day-to-day routine by means of a montage sequence that includes shots of planes taking off and landing, and the hustle and bustle of city streets and roads, with cars and people in fast motion. However, the film’s portrayal of Kate as a mobile professional woman differs notably from the image of the frequent flyer in other films about corporate travel like *Up in the Air*. Unlike the characters in that film, who, having fully incorporated travel into their routine, move swiftly and without effort, Kate does not qualify as a hypermobile subject and is definitely “time-poor”. She complains about the fact that business travellers only see airports and hotel rooms, suggesting that she does not enjoy the travelling experience that much. She finds business travel constraining and time consuming. The same montage that presented her as a mobile worker includes shots of her family spending time without her and of her playing with

her children, as well as a faux-interview segment where Paula, the nanny, praises Kate's superhuman ability to combine work travel and child rearing. Thus, instead of exalting the protagonist's experience of corporate travel, which stands for her professional success, the focus is once more on its effects on her personal life. Professional mobility is portrayed not as an empowering and enriching experience and a symbol of status, but as yet another obstacle in a woman's quest for a balanced life of career and domesticity.

This portrayal points to the fact that corporate travel has negative consequences for family relationships. At the beginning of the film, Kate explains that her daughter "punishes" her every time she goes on a business trip. "If I'm away for too long she rewards me with a game of snubs and punishments", she says. The child is shown clinging on to her mother's hand when she is about to leave, unwilling to let go. Kate laments not spending more time with her due to work travel and feels like she is failing as a mother. She expresses her concern over her daughter "feeling different from the other kids because her mother has to travel for work". To prevent this from happening and compensate for her absence at home, she attempts to practice intensive mothering when she is not travelling. Regarding her younger son, Ben, who is still a toddler, Kate also feels that her mobile job is complicating his upbringing. Although he is too young to hold a grudge against her for travelling, she suffers from separation anxiety when she is away for a long time. She is worried about missing what she sees as significant milestones in her children's lives such as Ben's first haircut.

Kate's mother-in-law, Marla (Jane Curtin), is critical about Kate's work-family management and reproaches her about how her choice to not give up her demanding job is affecting her children's development negatively. She implies that her baby's delayed speech and language development would not have occurred had she stayed home to raise him. When the child finally starts talking, Marla makes a biting comment on the fact that

the baby's first words are "bye-bye, mama". "Well, it will come in handy", she says, suggesting that she also disapproves of Kate's mobile occupation and current frequent-flyer situation. The film resorts to female stereotypes like the critical mother-in-law to hints at a generational clash between women who have divergent views on the role women should occupy. Kate's mother-in-law represents an older generation that has not deviated from patriarchal norms and is sceptical about feminism's promise of gender equality. She believes that family life was easier when men and women had more clearly defined roles, when men "made the money" and women "changed the diapers".

As Winch points out, chick flicks recurrently have "absent or dead mothers, or women fighting across differences of generation" (2012, 78). *IDKHSDI* has both. Kate's mother, as well as any other family member, is absent from the film and the only information about her family that the spectator gets is that Kate (just like the star that plays her) did not have an easy childhood. Her mother had to cope with her husband's gambling addiction, having to work two jobs and faced with a burden of debts. As a result, she did not have the means to be a "perfect mother", which apparently scarred Kate and motivated her to apply herself to becoming a Superwoman in an attempt to compensate for her mother's mistakes. Kate represents a generation of women that respond to the previous generation—epitomised by the housewife, embodied by Marla, on the one hand, and the working woman who was absent from home, embodied by Kate's mother, on the other—by pursuing to "have it all", that is, both domestic bliss and paid work.

However, Kate's fantasy of a perfectly balanced life is not accessible for all women. Kate tries to achieve it from a privileged position that enables her to hire the help of a nanny that occupies her place at home while she is away working. In the words of Susan Cheever, "if there's a good woman behind every great man, behind every great woman there's a good nanny" (36). The figure of the nanny is a recurrent one in cultural

texts about affluent working mothers striving to "have it all". As Diane Negra writes, "in the nanny resides the hope for resolution of […] one of postfeminism's defining dilemmas—the achievement of a work/life 'balance'" (2009, 107). The film playfully shows Kate's total dependence on her nanny's help and has Kate tell her husband that it would be easier if he left than if the nanny left. Her remark reinforces the matriarchal atmosphere that the film creates and stresses that "the care of children remains inevitably a female task, even if that care is outsourced" (Negra 2009, 107). Professional women entering the workforce and advancing in their careers create more jobs for other women to fill, establishing what Hanna Rosin calls a "travelling sisterhood" (2012). In short, when women leave home, other women occupy their place in the domestic space. Moreover, the role of the nanny has to do with Kate's portrayal not only as a working mother but as a mobile professional as well. The fact that she is dependent on the nanny is also symptomatic of the workings of contemporary mobility systems. Mobility is necessarily intertwined with and dependent on immobility. For some to move, there needs to be others that stand still. Therefore, that mobile professional women like Kate go on frequent work trips, freeing themselves from a confinement to the domestic, depends on other women taking their place at home, thus giving up their mobility.

Mobility also takes a toll on Kate's relationship with her husband, which grows increasingly tense as Kate's work trips become more frequent. If at the beginning of the film Kate was already too tired to have sex with him, from the moment that Kate accepts her new work assignment they spend progressively less time together and their intimacy decreases, to the point where Richard complains about not having "just five minutes of being together" or a conversation about "something other than logistics". As Elliott and Urry explain, mobility has a profound impact on intimate relationships and poses the challenge of having to negotiate and renegotiate intimacy across distance (85-111).

Furthermore, women's professional mobility is portrayed as potentially dangerous for marriage since it opens up the possibility for extramarital affairs and relationships. As a result of the many trips that Kate makes to visit her colleague Jack in New York, they spend a considerable amount of time together, not only working on their project but also after work, going out for dinner and messaging almost daily. Kate's frequent trips to New York arouse feelings of mistrust and jealousy in her husband, who feels intimidated by her work partner. These feelings stem from the common belief that "straight, single guys" tend to "hit on attractive co-workers on business trips", as her friend Allison points out when she also implies that a special bond and desire may develop between Kate and Jack. By toying with the possibility that Kate might cheat on her husband, the film perpetuates the representation of the mobile professional woman as potentially adulterous and revisits the discourse of virtuous and desirable "geographical monogamy" versus flawed and reprehensible "geographical promiscuity" discussed in the analysis of *Up in the Air*.

Even though Kate stays faithful to Richard throughout the film, the film stresses the fact that her mobile occupation compromises the stability of the family. The negative outcome of female mobility is also reflected on the house, which is remarked when Ben falls down the stairs because Kate has been postponing getting the carpet fixed (a task which, for whatever the reason, is also Kate's responsibility and not her husband's). As was also the case in *Mr. Mom*, Kate's absence from home is resented by the family, which demand her to be not only present but actively engaged in the household activities. At a given moment, Richard reproaches Kate for this by saying: "Even when you're here, you're not here, Kate", a line that is also uttered, almost verbatim, by Caroline's husband in *Mr. Mom*. Despite being almost thirty years apart, the portrayal of the mobile professional woman in these films hinges on the perception of women's active presence in the home as fundamental to the stability of the family and admonishes working women

for pursuing and devoting themselves to professional success. The minimal change in representation that these examples show suggests that gender roles regarding occupation and domesticity still operate and determine women's experiences.

Lastly, Kate's juggling of mobile career and domestic demands also has an impact on herself and her body. Kate is described as looking "always tired [...] and insufficiently groomed". Her hair is messy most of the time and her unkept roots are looked at with disapproval. She arrives at the office smelling like school paste, with her blouse untucked and stains on her clothes (pancake batter if she is lucky, barf if she is not). The film takes it even further and has Kate getting lice right before a business trip, which results in Kate frantically scratching her head at a meeting. Kate looks messy, and the film is determined to highlight that as something the spectator should laugh at to start with and then either pity or condemn. It seems that the female body pays the price for aspiring to have a successful and demanding career, especially a mobile one.

Kate's ambition to have a successful mobile career without giving up family life is deemed excessive and wrong since it has a negative effect on her appearance and prevents her from devoting the necessary time to look her best, something that, according to the ideology of the film, is still expected of women. As Nally and Smith observe, despite the advances in countering gender inequality, even those made since the emergence of fourth-wave feminism in the late 2000s, there is still a sharp focus on women's bodies in the twenty-first century and women still feel the need to conform to an ideal of femininity that remains central to their judgement (8-14). This stems from an age-old tradition of scrutiny of the female body as an integral component of women's identities, as well as a movement within feminism towards a realignment of feminist ideals and femininity founded on individual freedom and choice in the 1990s and 2000s (Nally and Smith 2, 7). *IDKHSDI*, which in this regard stands on the same ground as

Pearson's 2002 novel, is framed in this context in which women simultaneously negotiate feminist notions of empowerment and agency and patriarchal ideas of feminine beauty (Genz and Brabon 89). Since women are allegedly in control of their own bodies, not matching the expectations of female attractiveness is perceived as a failure (Nally and Smith 8). Their bodies are evaluated and scrutinised by themselves, by men, and by other women (Gill 2007, 149). This culture of hyper-surveillance and judgement of women's bodies is personified in the film by the full-time mothers from Kate's children's school, which are referred to as the "Momsters". Kate's messy appearance stands in contrast to the stay-at-home moms' well-groomed, well-dressed, and in-shape bodies—while Kate rushes back and forth between home and work, we see Wendy Best (Busy Philipps), her perfect mom nemesis, exercising at the gym**.**

Ultimately, as McRobbie remarks, female success is inextricably equated with the idea of the perfect, according to which "high levels of investment in the self, in 'grooming' and in appearances" are expected of women (4, 6). She calls attention to the "heightened demands of bodily capacity" that contemporary neoliberalism imposes, which for women imply not only having the perfect body but also ensuring that it does not deteriorate (6-7). Feminism's achievements such as women's opportunity to work and gain economic independence also entail women's participation in consumer culture and, therefore, in the fashion-beauty complex and its endless products and treatments designed for body maintenance and improvement. Kate is also a victim of this beauty apparatus and, despite work and family being her priorities, she seems to give in to the demands of femininity. We see her adding "waxing something, anything" and "Kegels" to her already challenging to-do list. She measures herself up against the ideal of the "yummy mummy" and, although the film tries to emphasise that she fails at that, the fact that she is played by Sarah Jessica Parker clashes with that apparent failure. Her shirt may be untucked and

stained, but she is still graceful and cute, just like the star that plays her. The novel's perpetually angry Kate is transformed into a character with a permanent smile that never loses her temper. In fact, although the negative consequences of professional ambition for the female body are pointed out, Kate's imperfect beauty and maternal femininity, enhanced by SJP's star persona, is favoured over the narcissism and shallowness of "yummy mummies" like Wendy Best.

Kate describes Wendy and the other Momsters as "the most terrifying creatures in captivity". They are terrifying for Kate because they represent the lack of solidarity between women and the constant monitoring of women's actions and bodies. But the choice of words is especially eloquent when it comes to the idea that these apparently perfect women are "in captivity". Wendy boasts that she is fully devoted to raising her children and rejoices in her role as stay-at-home mother. Yet, when she describes her family's yearly Thanksgiving gathering, she is visibly annoyed about having to cook, clean and take care of the children while her husband watches football with his friends. Thus, Wendy's "domestic prowess" is more of a domestic trap, a compliance with patriarchal gender roles that results in a lack of emancipation and a shallow existence. This is emphasised by the image of Wendy on the treadmill, perpetually walking but never leaving her current position. Wendy's immobility contrasts with Kate's mobility, which is associated with professional fulfilment.

Finally, there is yet another mobile professional woman in *IDKHSDI*: Momo (Olivia Munn), Kate's junior associate. She embodies the young, career-driven, single and childless mobile professional woman. She is a junior research analyst with impressive qualifications and driving ambition. Her strong work ethic makes her appear cold and robotic. For Momo, marriage and motherhood are obstacles that limit a woman's opportunities for professional fulfilment and mobility. She describes family life as being

on parole, suggesting that she considers having to notify one's partner of schedule changes and work trips—in short, to share one's life with someone else—as a loss of one's freedom and agency. Thus, she displays a highly individualistic, neoliberal mentality based on productivity and self-advancement that is meant to contrast with Kate's will to sacrifice herself for her family's wellbeing. This mentality is in line with notions of self-investment and improvement that apply directly but not exclusively to the woman's body. Thus, Momo cringes at Kate's insufficiently groomed appearance and the degeneration that working motherhood causes on her body. She is horrified by Kate's grown-out hair roots and lice-infested scalp, and she does not hide her disgust and disapproval. She admires her boss's financial wisdom and hard work, but she is openly critical about her personal life choices.

Momo embodies the figure of the workaholic, child-phobic mobile professional that pervades narratives about women who travel for work. In *IDKHSDI*, this character is introduced as a foil to shine the spotlight on the protagonist's maternal and selfless nature, as well as her embodiment of a reconciliation of professional drive and domestic femininity. Momo's robotic coldness towards personal relationships and, especially, towards motherhood is portrayed as flawed in contrast to Kate's role as loving wife and mother. This is emphasised by means of her awkward to-camera interventions, such as one in which she recounts "flushing" a pet fish because it demanded too much attention by way of example of her lack of caring qualities. However, Momo undergoes a transformation that goes in line with the overall development of the story. At one point during the film, Momo is terrified to find out that she is pregnant and is decided to interrupt the pregnancy. Kate offers her help and support and delivers a sentimental pro-maternity speech in order to convince her to keep the baby. Eventually, Momo decides to have her baby even though she believes it to be a mistake. Although she has not

completely abandoned her capitalist mentality yet—she hopes that her baby will turn into Justin Bieber, who started as a mistake and is now a billionaire—she is one step closer to what the film sees as a more fitting femininity. Momo's unfeminine callousness and sharp criticism towards Kate at the beginning of the film are tamed and replaced with a scene of female bonding through the experience of motherhood, which the film seems to argue is the most fulfilling for a woman. Momo's narrative arc is in line with the ideology that permeates the film's ending.

2.5.3. "She Does It"

Despite the many differences that can be found between the original novel and the film, perhaps the one that deserves attention is the ending of both texts. Pearson's novel ends with Kate realising that trying to be a Superwoman is impossible and that it is coming at the cost of her personal wellbeing and family stability. Aware that she cannot keep up with that lifestyle, she decides to resign from her job and move to the countryside. Her boss offers the possibility of working part-time, but Kate rebuffs it on the grounds that part-time work is a fallacy for women that usually means losing their position in the firm. Although the epilogue points towards a potential compromise between work and domesticity, the novel's ending is significantly in line with the narratives of retreatism described by Negra in which affluent women find stability by giving up paid work and pulling back to a "perfected domesticity" (2009, 5-9). In this type of narratives, work-life balance is also achieved through geographical relocation and urban femininities are abandoned in favour of rural ones (Hollows 108; Negra 2009). The foundations on which these narratives rest are the notions of "new traditionalism", which centralises women's knowledgeable choice to return to domesticity, and the dream of the "mystique chic" in

which housework is rebranded as fashionable and satisfactory (Brabon and Genz 57-58, Kingston 65).

The film, however, does not choose the same ending for the Reddy family. The film adaptation ends with Kate similarly realising that her current hectic schedule is taking a toll on her personal life and cannot be maintained for much longer. Consequently, when her boss commands her to go on yet another business trip for the weekend, she refuses. For the first time, she replies that she is unavailable and lays down her conditions to stay in the job. "I can't dump my family at a moment's notice anymore", she says. She is prepared to accept her boss' decision to fire her, but her resigning is not an option because she loves her job and "cannot give up". Reluctant to lose one of her best workers, and one who has just sealed a major deal, her boss agrees to let her postpone the trip until Monday and to relax her schedule so she can spend more time with her family.

The choice to have Kate set boundaries for herself at the end of the film resonates with screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna's own personal experience during the film's production. In an article by Susan Dominus, she recounts that, while working on *IDKHSDI* in New York, the team was running behind schedule and she was about to lose her flight back to Los Angeles. Executive producer Harvey Weinstein asked her to stay but she, who wanted to be at home when her children woke up the next morning, refused and left the meeting to catch the flight (Dominus). Drawing on her own personal experience, McKenna wrote a different ending for Kate's story in which she fulfils the fantasy of having it all. For the writer, there was no other possible ending for a film whose title is "I don't know how she does it": "She does it" (in Dominus). Thus, Kate storms out of the office and dashes to her children's school in order to finally build a snowman with her daughter, as she promised. Meanwhile, her husband, having realised that he has to be more supportive, promises to take on more responsibilities at home by making a to-do list

of his own. Under the snow, Kate is finally reunited with her family and stability is reinstated.

The film provides its main character with a happy ending that allows her to enjoy domestic bliss without renouncing her career, that is, without "downshifting" or "retreating" from the public sphere and into the domestic realm. Yet, precisely because of its utopian resolution, this ending is problematic in more ways than one. The film's ending recognises and celebrates the possibility for women to have it all, but Kate's success is built upon a discourse of individual choice and personal determination that uncovers it as a fantasy only accessible for a few. Firstly, the film underlines that her boss agrees to renegotiate her working conditions and travel schedule only because she is one of his best employees. It implies that this concession is motivated by Kate's recent success at closing a deal, as her boss makes clear when he tells Chris: "You land a major fund with Jack Ablehammer, we talk about relaxing your schedule, too". Secondly, as previously mentioned, Kate's situation is signalled as notably privileged since the beginning of the film. Not only has she a status in the firm that gives her the possibility to improve her conditions, but she also has the financial means to facilitate work-life balance by hiring a full-time nanny. Her privileged socio-economic status grants her the choice to have a "perfect" life and pursue professional and family bliss.

The utopian quality of the film's ending is also connected to the fact that the protagonist achieves her goal of perfect work-family balance because she has a supportive husband with flexible working hours who eventually decides to take on more domestic responsibilities so as to lift them off Kate's shoulders. Richard, on his own initiative, decides to give up her male privilege and and get actively involved in housework and childcare. The ending puts forward the idea that when these tasks are shared, women can work outside the home, travel and, ultimately, lead a balanced life without giving up any

of their aspirations (even though, as has already been mentioned, this is all in the context of a position of privilege, thus overlooking that gender inequality is also connected to larger patterns of discrimination). Furthermore, the film's ending celebrates traditional family values and the nuclear family as the most important element in the protagonist life and the ultimate source of happiness and fulfilment for women. Firstly, Kate's virtuousness is highlighted by having her resist the temptation to have an affair with the attractive, powerful Abelhammer—imbued with Pierce Brosnan's suave, Bond persona. Rather, it helps her to reassert her priorities and conclude that she belongs with her family. Then, the couple reunites following the conventions of romantic comedy, in a dreamlike scene of the Reddy family on the school playground surrounded by laughing children and falling snow which emphasises Kate's role as wife and mother.

However, the film leaves mobility out of its happy ending. In fact, despite the notable differences between the endings of the novel and its film adaptation, both share an underlying message: female high-flyers will be brought down one way or another. In the case of the film, from the beginning Kate's mobility is portrayed as problematic. Even though work travel is connected to professional success, her work-related mobility is depicted mainly as an obstacle in her quest for domestic bliss. The film concludes that for Kate to achieve her objective of having it all and, therefore, a happy ending, she needs to reduce her mobility. Therefore, although Kate is afforded an alternative ending that does not involve retreating to a rural home and quitting her job, the film immobilises her in a different way by readjusting her mobility, as well as by bringing attention to its potential threats.

Chapter 3. Women on the Scene: Women Journalists, Mobility and Femininity

3.1. Women in Journalism and War Coverage

Journalism is a field of work where mobility undoubtedly plays a significant role. Journalists working as reporters, photographers, or camera operators, for instance, move around in local and/or global contexts in order to gather information, conduct interviews and document events. Örnebring and Weiss claim that journalists' unhindered mobility is not only taken for granted but also crucial to our understanding of journalism as a necessary and valuable practice (1-2). As they put it, journalists' position of authority and privilege rests on the fact "that they can go where the audience cannot (or do not)", that they "go to key places on our behalf" (1). Journalism is a fundamentally mobile practice, even after a digital revolution that has granted limitless access to information, and which has brought about an unprecedented transformation of the journalistic profession. Some argue that journalism is now more sedentary than it was a few years earlier, shifting back to a desk-based standard that had been long abandoned in favour of a mobile news work (4). Sedentarism has been said to increase with the implementation of new technologies that enable news work to be done without having to leave the office (8). Yet, digital journalism is inherently mobile, arguably even more than previous forms of news work. Technology has opened up new opportunities for journalism that, although sometimes result in a reduction of physical mobility, other times enhance journalists' mobility. For instance, mobile devices such as smartphones and drones reduce friction and facilitate the production of journalistic content "on the go" (12).

Journalistic mobility is unequally distributed in terms of gender, race, and other factors. Although the number of women has risen impressively over the past two decades, gender inequalities persist in the field of journalism. Women have worked in journalism since the nineteenth century, even before that according to some sources. Yet, it is still perceived by many as a male-dominated profession. According to Hanitzsch et al.'s *Worlds of Journalism* study, published in 2019, about 57% of journalists are male (73). The numbers reported by the Women's Media Center reflect a similar situation: 41.7% of female journalists in US newsrooms (11). The representation of women in the media industry is not as scarce as in other sectors where women are almost entirely absent. In fact, women students outnumber men in journalism classes at university, comprising over two-thirds of the students graduating from communications and journalism (Arroyo Nieto and Valor). However, as Arroyo Nieto and Valor observe, twenty years after these female students graduate, most of them do not work in journalism anymore. Only a third of journalists with this long a career are women (Griffin). Beard et al. claim that there is a "glass screen" in the media industry that prevents women from moving forward in their career. They also underline that women journalists face a more hostile work environment (2-3).

This gender gap does not only manifest in the lesser number of women working in journalism, but also in the gender differences that determine these women's experiences. Low wages, long and irregular hours, and 24/7 availability are problems widely experienced in the profession but that have a greater impact on women journalists, who still do the bulk of childrearing and housework, and who also face sexism, harassment, lack of childcare facilities, unequal pay, barriers to promotion, etc. (Griffin, Arroyo Nieto and Valor, Chambers et al.). As Chambers, Steiner and Fleming state, "women journalists are signified as gendered" in more ways than one (1). In their book

Women and Journalism, they write: "women have been the object of the public gaze 'as' women, that is, for their status as mothers or their single-woman status, for their oddity or difficulties as *women* war reporters or as *women* bosses, and for the sexism they face from male colleagues" (4, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, women journalists commonly become spectacles, especially regarding the attention given to their physical appearance. An attractive and youthful femininity continues to be not only valued but demanded in the media industry (Chambers et al. 2). Appearance is sometimes used to attack or discredit women journalists, whose aptitude and credibility are systematically called into question.

Studies show that women journalists are judged by different standards than men (Beard et al. 6). Gender-inequity patterns are also seen in the roles women occupy within news outlets and media companies and the journalistic genres and fields in which they tend to work. Authors refer to a "gender segregation" that operates in the world of journalism, giving rise to male and female "ghettos" (Chambers et al. 81). Women are generally concentrated in sectors considered to be "soft" news, such as travel, health, home, or fashion—thus creating, as Chambers et al. put it, "feminine and inherently less prestigious 'ghettos'"—, while men dominate in areas like politics, world news, business, and sports (Griffin, Byerly, Chambers et al. 81). Furthermore, and mainly as a result of this segregation, women have often been relegated to less mobile positions. As Örnebring and Weiss explain, the politics of mobility also apply to the world of journalism, in which both symbolic and physical violence are used to limit the mobility of women (13). Women abound in television studios due to their "decorative value" (Chambers et al. 1), but still struggle to secure a position in particularly mobile areas such as international or world news.

This chapter will focus on what is probably the most mobile journalistic figure and, as a result, the one with the most substantial mobility-related gender inequalities: the war reporter. As several authors observe, women and war are two terms which may be difficult to reconcile (Buonanno 2012, 801; Allison 2010, 1). Women journalists have been covering war conflicts since the nineteenth century, but it was not until the late twentieth century that the increasing presence of women in war zones gained momentum (Buonanno 2012, 801). Yet, they are still a minority. According to Anthony Feinstein's study, there are almost three male war journalists for every one female (119). War coverage has been described as one of the most male-dominated areas of journalism—Janine di Giovanni refers to it as an "uber-macho world". Furthermore, ongoing debates about the legitimacy and status of women in this area indicate that gender stereotypes and prejudice are profoundly marked in the context of war.

The growing visibility of women war journalists raised the question of whether there is a significant difference in style between men and women reporters. Women's coverage of war tends to be characterised by emotional involvement, sensitivity to detail and to human-interest angles in accounts of war (Chambers et al. 188, Bounanno 810). Quoting Greg McLaughlin, "it is assumed that unlike their male colleagues, women journalists are keen to get beyond the obsession with military hardware and report the human costs of war: suffering, loss and bereavement, displacement and upheaval" (170). Women's greater presence in conflict zones has been said to contribute to the supposed "feminisation" of war reporting (Bounanno 811). However, most women correspondents assigned to war zones work in broadcasting media, while newspapers assign fewer women (Chambers et al. 185). This has to do with a "market-oriented feminisation" that employs women journalists for their novelty and attractiveness (Chambers et al. 185, 188). Thus, women's appearance plays a crucial role in television even as regards war

reporters, whose femininity is exploited as "a pleasant distraction from the horror of the events themselves" (Van Zoonen 44).

A disparity in terms of mobility can also be observed. As Cinny Kennard and Sheila Murphy point out, female correspondents are more likely to work from domestic locations, like newsrooms, government facilities, or military bases in their own country, than their male co-workers, who tend to file stories from foreign locations such as the battlefield, an overseas military base, and the combat frontlines (132). Women's lesser presence in war zones has to do with the fact that they face greater dangers in these environments. Yet, for some, being a woman reporter might have certain advantages in terms of mobility within war zones. For instance, most women reporters have acknowledged having a "feminine advantage" in many of the locations stricken by war in recent times, where women are considered less of a threat. This "feminine advantage" has generally granted women war reporters more freedom of movement and access to places and people (Bounanno 809).

3.2. Beyond the Sob Sister: Women Journalists On Screen

One of the earliest and most renowned portrayals of women journalists in film is Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940). Having been away for some time, Hildy (Rosalind Russell) returns to *The Morning Post* newsroom, where she used to work as a reporter, to announce her intention to quit a career in journalism and settle down to a quiet married life in Albany with her husband-to-be. Her ex-husband and boss Walter (Cary Grant) tries to convince her against leaving the newspaper, contending that it would kill her since she is passionate about the job. "You're a newspaperman!", he exclaims, to what Hildy replies: "That's why I'm quitting. I wanna go someplace where I can be a

woman". Gender certainly plays a role in Hawks's film and its portrayal of the world of journalism. For one thing, this adaptation of Ben Hecht's *The Front Page* (1928), originally a play about two male reporters, makes the character of Hildy Johnson a woman. Undoubtedly, this gender switch has major implications. By having Hildy suggest that success in this profession might come at the price of renouncing her womanhood, journalism and women might seem irreconcilable or, at least, very hard to reconcile. However, the figure of the female journalist is one that has consistently appeared on screen and that, unlike other professional women, goes back a long way in the history of cinema. As we shall see, Russell's character has had many celluloid sisters, and films have much to say about these women journalists.

The long-lasting and fruitful relationship between cinema and journalism can be traced back to the late 1890s-early 1900s with films such as Georges Méliès *L'affaire Dreyfus: Bagarre entre journalistes* (*Fight of Reporters*, 1899). According to Howard Good, some of the reasons why journalists abound in film are the fact that many ex-newspapermen became Hollywood producers, writers, and executives, the impression that journalists were fast and witty conversationalists and therefore ideal characters for "talkies", or audiences' fascination with the aura of importance and mystery of the press and with figures like "the hardened city reporter", "the crusty editor", or "the debonair foreign correspondent" (5). Durán Manso and Cartes Barroso highlight the narrative possibilities that journalism opens, the variety of topics it covers, and its close link with society (39). Another reason, one could add, might be the journalist's ability to move with ease, which makes for a great opportunity to develop an array of stories. As Laviana remarks, the character of the journalist is able "to cross social and geographical barriers at will" (in Durán Manso and Cartes Barroso, 39).

However, figures like those mentioned above—the hardened city reporter, the crusty editor, the debonair foreign correspondent—, have traditionally been constructed as male. As for female figures, there is principally the "sob sister", a woman reporter whose stories have strongly emotional angles (McNair 102). A well-known "sob sister" was Lois Lane in the Superman franchise, a writer of an advice column for women, who made her film debut in 1941 (Hanley 1). The gender disparity described in the previous section with regard to journalism is reflected in the gendered representation of journalists in film. However, even though cinematic male journalists are more abundant and salient, the filmic representation of journalism has not excluded women in the same way as other professional spheres have done. Already in the early years of cinema, the girl reporter was considered to be "the most successful embodiment of the non-passive female professional" (Good 6). Films such as *The Star Reporter* (Will S. Davis, 1911), *Dot on the Day Line Boat* (Arthur Ellery, 1915), and *The Food Gamblers* (Al Parker, 1917) provided an alternative to the roles of homemakers and wives to which actresses of the period were largely relegated (Saltzman 2020, 76). During the 1920s and 1930s, films portrayed women journalists as intelligent, self-confident, independent, and hardworking (Saltzman 3, McNair 100). Loren Ghiglione states that these characters "were not only as talented but just as tough as their male counterparts". For some, women reporters were more numerous and did more glamorous work in fiction than in real life (Good 49, Saltzman 2, Ghiglione). Quoting Ghiglione, "while the young female reporter on a real newspaper might be restricted to the 'women's page' and 'society' news, the film newswoman did everything" , as exemplified by the characters played by Joan Crawford and Bette Davis in *Dance, Fools, Dance* (Harry Beaumont, 1931) and *Front Page Woman* (Michael Curtiz, 1935) respectively.

Probably the most prominent woman reporter of the 1930s was the protagonist of the Torchy Blane film series, played by Glenda Farrell (except for two movies in which the character was played by Lola Lane and Jane Wyman). As Saltzman remarks, Torchy Blane was "no sob sister"; this popular series presented the reporter as independent and feisty, as well as passionate about her profession (3). To the claim that she should stay at home once she marries, she replies: "I got ink in my blood and a nose for news that needs something besides powder" (*Blondes at Work*, Frank McDonald, 1938). Not only was Torchy Blane a brilliant reporter, but also a notably mobile one. On many occasions, Torchy is told to stop, to stay behind, to wait outside. However, that does not stop her from being constantly on the move—trains, cars, boats, or planes appear recurrently in the Torchy films. The second instalment in the series, *Fly-Away Baby* (Frank McDonald, 1937), takes the reporter on a round-the-world flight across the Pacific, Asia, and Europe with stops at Honolulu, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, and several other cities. Far from being portrayed as less mobile than her male colleagues, she is eager to travel and prove herself as a reporter. "Here I'd be, in a race around the world against two men and I'll beat them too!", she says.

The popularity of Torchy Blane was followed by the presence of female protagonists in well-known "working comedies" of the 1940s (Echart 185) such as the aforementioned *His Girl Friday* and *Woman of the Year* (George Stevens 1942), which stars Katherine Hepburn as Tess Harding, an international affairs correspondent. Although both films revolve around a romantic relationship and explore whether these women's career in journalism is compatible with marriage, they not only portray Hildy and Tess as talented and dedicated professionals but also have them retain their right to their own identity and career at the end of the film. According to McNair, after World War II, the prominence of war narratives in the journalist film genre almost systematically

excluded women (103). Furthermore, as men who served in the war returned to their jobs and regained their position as the sole providers for their families, narratives started to relegate female characters to more domestic roles (103). Films about women journalists dealt with the characters' struggle to reconcile their professional ambition and their womanhood and feminine passiveness (Saltzman 5). For instance, in *Crime of Passion* (Gerd Oswald, 1957) ambitious newspaper columnist Kathy Ferguson (Barbara Stanwyck) gives up her career to marry detective Bill Doyle (Sterling Hayden) and become a homemaker. However, she resents the homemaker lifestyle and her husband's lack of ambition, so she takes it upon herself to move up in the world at all costs.

After several decades of relative latency, and in a different sociohistorical context, the woman journalist re-emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s with films like *The China Syndrome* (James Bridges 1979), *Absence of Malice* (Sydney Pollack 1981), and *Broadcast News* (James L. Brooks 1987) (McNair 103, Langman 4). Films from this era were equally shaped by second-wave feminism and the backlash it provoked. Howard Good brings attention to the negative aspects of the portrayal of women journalists from the late 1970s onwards, since displays of authority, courage, and initiative, as well as subversion of traditional gender roles, were disapproved and/or punished, sometimes with violence (137). The "media bitch" became a recurrent figure during this period (McNair 103). A more or less apparent sentiment against the liberated career woman who represents a threat to the traditional family continued to be echoed in 1990s films about women in journalism. For instance, *The Paper* (Ron Howard 1994) stars Glenn Close as newspaper managing editor Alicia Clark, a powerful character that has made it to the top but is disliked by her colleagues. At the end of the film, during a bar fight, Clark gets accidently shot in the leg by way of symbolic punishment for her "unfeminine displays of authority" (Good 123). Punishment of female ambition gets harsher and more explicit

in *To Die For* (Gus Van Sant 1995). Its protagonist, Suzanne Stone (Nicole Kidman), is a vain, ruthless young woman who works as a weather girl at her small-town cable station but aspires to become a world-famous media personality. She is determined to manipulate or get rid of anyone that gets in the way of her career goals, to the extent of plotting the murder of her husband. Kidman's character embodies a negative stereotype of the woman journalist as extremely ambitious, unscrupulous, and willing to do anything—usually taking advantage of her sexuality—to advance in the media industry—a "super-bitch" in McNair's words (103). These powerful and threatening women were in line with a wider trend of evil woman characters—psychotic, monstrous, castrating—which reflected a paranoia related to gender relationships at the end of the century, with prominent films such as *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne 1987) and *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven 1992) (Deleyto 1997, 21).

McNair notices a rise in female representation in films about journalism since the late 1990s and 2000s. According to his research, in thirty-two of the films about journalism made between 1997 and 2008 at least one of the main journalist roles was a woman (52). However, he also identifies a "re-evaluation and re-assertion of femininity, and what used to be dismissively referred to as the journalism of 'women's issues'" during this period (106). In 2000s films, onscreen female journalists often work in the beauty, fashion, gossip, or lifestyle sections of newspapers and especially "girl" magazines. *13 Going on 30* (Gary Winick, 2003), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (Donald Petrie, 2003), *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006), and *Sex and the City* (Michael Patrick King, 2008) are just a few examples of this trend. Women's raised status and socio-economic power during this period is reflected by this wave of films about "style journalism" since, even if professional parity within journalism had not been achieved yet, media audiences were comprised of more educated, affluent, and

demanding women (McNair 53, 111). According to McNair, these films were targeted at a "post-feminist generation of working women with money to spend, time to play, and the confidence to celebrate their femininity through guilt-free conspicuous consumption" (111).

In the late 2000s and 2010s, it is possible to observe an emergent tendency among journalism films: the biopic. Even though the relationship between this genre and topic goes a long way—with well-known titles such as *All The President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976)—, following films like *Veronica Guerin* (Joel Schumacher, 2003), the prominence of biographical films about women journalists in the last decade is noteworthy. 2015 film *Spotlight* (Thomas McCarthy), winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture, follows *The Boston Globe*'s "Spotlight" team—which included reporter Sacha Pfeiffer, played by Rachel McAddams—and their investigation of child molestation cases within the local Catholic Church. The same year, *Truth* (James Vanderbilt), a biopic about Mary Mapes starring Cate Blanchett, was released. In Spielberg's *The Post* (Steven Spielberg, 2017), Meryl Streep plays newspaper publisher Katharine Graham, who presided over *The Washington Post* when the content of the *Pentagon Papers* was published. The controversial *Richard Jewell* (Clint Eastwood, 2019) casts Olivia Wilde as real-life reporter Kathy Scruggs, the reporter who broke the story that the FBI was investigating security guard Richard Jewell as a possible suspect in the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics bombing. *Bombshell* (Jay Roach, 2019) is based upon the accounts of the women at *Fox News* who exposed CEO Roger Ailes for sexual harassment, with Charlize Theron as Megyn Kelly and Nicole Kidman as Gretchen Carlson.

Among the group of journalists' biopics, films about women war reporters have experienced a particularly notable rise in the last decade, since earlier war narratives tended to focus on male journalists, who constituted the majority in conflict coverage.

This chapter will analyse the films *A Private War* (Matthew Heineman 2018) and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (Glenn Ficarra and John Requa 2016), two examples of the relevance of the war reporter biopic in the last decade. Overall, it aims to examine the representation of women war reporters as mobile professionals in contemporary films. For that purpose, the analysis of these two films will start with a brief overview of filmic portrayals of this group of professionals.

3.3. Journalism and Mobility: The War Reporter in Film

The war reporter stands out as one of the most mobile figures featured in films about journalists, and one that is, in McNair's words, "ripe for cinematic treatment" (77). Cinema has long been fascinated by this figure and its travels around the world, depicted in films such as *War Correspondent* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1932) and *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (Henry King, 1955). According to McNair, one of the reasons for filmmakers' strong interest in stories about foreign correspondents is that they have the potential to "take [them] to exotic locations" (47). The aforementioned films, for instance, are set in China and Hong Kong respectively. Later films take the action to different locales in keeping with the changing historical context, as is the case of *The Killing Fields* (Roland Joffé, 1984), set in Cambodia, and *Salvador* (Oliver Stone, 1986), set in El Salvador, for example. McNair notices a change in the representation of the role of the war reporter through the decades that reflects the changing nature of conflict, especially the blurring of the good/evil identification that characterised conflict coverage for a long time (21). Mobility, however, remains a defining feature in the representation of war journalists.

In addition to standing out for their portrayal of a highly mobile job, films about war coverage are marked by the connotations attached to war itself, especially those that stem from the strong link between war and masculinity. War is time and again presented as a masculine activity, one that has shaped men's identity throughout history (Hutchings; Donald and McDonald 2016, 1; Chambers et al. 174). Although masculinity is in no way a homogenous concept, qualities deemed exemplary or necessary for war—courage, rationality, aggressiveness, physical strength—are traditionally associated with ideals of masculinity (Hutchings 392). Consequently, the war zone is portrayed on screen as a man's world ruled by a hierarchical distinction between masculine and feminine (Donald and McDonald 2016, 1; Donald and McDonald 2011, 3; Hutchings 392). This results, as Maroto Camino writes, in the "exclusion of women from the discourses and practices of war, from war journalism, and from the books and films dealing with them" (124). Thus, most of the roles in films about war journalism have been played by male actors. To the films mentioned above, we could add Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), the two adaptations of the novel *The Quiet American* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1958; Phillip Noyce, 2002), *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Peter Weir, 1982), and *Welcome to Sarajevo* (Michael Winterbottom, 1997).

By contrast, women's roles in war films tend to be determined by gender stereotypes associated with femininity. They usually appear in these narratives as victims, vulnerable subjects with little to no agency who suffer the consequences of war and are subjected to multiple forms of psychological, physical, and sexual violence. For example, women are victims of war violence in Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War* (1989) and *Redacted* (2007). Another recurrent role occupied by female characters in war films is that of the woman waiting for a man—her lover, father, or son—to come back home from the front. "Waiting", Tasker states, "is a key function for women in wartime

representations" (2011, 25). War brides, and analogous roles like the war widow, appear in films such as *Since You Went Away* (John Cromwell, 1944), *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001), and *Dear John* (Lasse Hallström, 2010). Given that women's "nurturing and non-belligerent nature" is generally emphasised in war fiction (Donald and McDonald 2016, 1), female characters also take the role of carers in these films. Oftentimes, they are portrayed as nurses, whether professional or volunteers, with examples such as *War Nurse* (Edgar Selwyn, 1930), *So Proudly We Hail!* (Mark Sandrich, 1943), *M*A*S*H* (Robert Altman, 1970), and *Testament of Youth* (James Kent, 2014). When women are portrayed as professionals working in war zones—whether as medics, members of the military or of the press—their femininity and/or femaleness is often brought to the fore as an issue with which films must deal. As will be noted below, this portrayal is approached in various ways, which go from underlining the characters' femininity to understating it or even depicting them as mannish or masculine.

For Tasker, the "auxiliary presence" is one of the recurrent roles reserved for women in war narratives (2011, 9). As she puts it, women play a both *supportive* and *supporting* role in wartime culture (my emphasis). They are supportive because they assist those in combat by filling jobs considered as "women's work" in civilian life (25). They are supporting because their roles are usually secondary ones, and women journalists are not an exception here (9). This is the case of *Green Zone* (Paul Greengrass 2010), a film about the 2003 US occupation of Iraq. Among its cast, headlined by Hollywood star Matt Damon, there is Amy Ryan as Lawrie Dayne, a foreign correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* who investigates the Bush administration's claims of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. She is approached by US Department of Defense official Clark Poundstone (Greg Kinnear), who provides her with information from an Iraqi informant code-named "Magellan". She publishes several

articles about Iraq's WMD program, citing this source as highly reliable, but the information she discloses turns out to be false. Dayne is confronted about the false reports of WMD by Damon's character, military officer Roy Miller, who has been hunting for the weapons unsuccessfully. Dayne admits that she did not verify the information nor the source; she just published the intel she got from Poundstone. It is finally discovered that Poundstone was feeding her with bogus information, using her to spread fake news that justified the US intervention in Iraq. *Green Zone* portrays the woman reporter not only as a supporting character, but also as a rather passive one inasmuch as she is used by others to get what they want. Without her knowing, she and her reports become a propaganda tool, a real weapon in the conflict. Furthermore, Dayne is portrayed as unprofessional for taking information at face value, publishing it without checking its veracity, a highly negligent practice.

Another aspect that contributes to the portrayal of the woman war correspondent in the film, and one that bears significance in the analysis of mobilities, is space. The spaces where Dayne is shown can be located within Baghdad's "Green Zone", a secure international zone. While working in Iraq, she stays in a comfortable hotel room and hangs out in safe, westernised places away from the war zone. She first meets Miller in a poolside bar decorated with US flags, where non-Iraqi people "have Domino's pizza and beer". She is shown in Baghdad's international airport and the US government headquarters, but never in the streets or moving around the city. As Miller indignantly mentions, she has not been to the places where the armed conflict is actually taking place, not even to the alleged locations where the weapons of mass destruction are stored according to her sources. As will be mentioned below, the characters' interaction with space plays an important role in the filmic portrayal of women war reporters.

The woman journalist is also a supporting character in *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006), although its depiction differs from the character in *Green Zone* in certain aspects. In this film, Jennifer Connely plays a US journalist who wants to expose a plot of illegal diamond trade in Sierra Leone. The reporter, Maddy Bowen, is presented as an intelligent, passionate, and dedicated journalist strongly committed to contributing to social justice with her work. The film's representation of the Fourth State is less critical than in the previous case, as well as shows a greater interaction of the character with the war-ridden space that surrounds her. Maddy travels alongside the protagonists, Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Vandy (Djimon Hounsou), across the country regardless of the dangers the journey entails and interacts with locals she encounters along the way. However, despite her involvement in the mission, at some point she is forced to evacuate the country and get to safety while the male lead characters continue their journey to the diamond mines, thus perpetuating the notion that women need protecting and should be barred from action (and mobility), encapsulated in tropes like "This Is Something He's Got to Do Himself" or "Stay in the Kitchen" (TV Tropes). Furthermore, Maddy's role in the film is defined not so much by her profession or work as journalist as by her role as the protagonist's romantic interest.

On screen, femaleness clearly sets woman war journalists apart, bringing to the fore gender stereotypes. Films often present women's experience of war coverage as different from (and more dangerous than) men's. Gender differences can be observed in films like *Camille* (Boris Lojkine), a 2019 film that illustrates the growing prominence of the war reporter biopic in recent years. It tells the story of Camille Lepage, a French photojournalist who was killed at 26 years old in the Central African Republic in 2014. One scene early in the film already establishes a contrast between the young photographer and her fellow (male) journalists. In a bar frequented by white, Western people, Camille

(Nina Meurisse) approaches a group of journalists, all male and visible older than her. She introduces herself and praises their work, with which she is clearly familiar, but they do not show much interest. When she asks them to join their party since she cannot afford the ride to their next destination on her own, they refuse to take her. The lack of soundtrack music and minimal background sounds, together with the use of hand-held, over-the-shoulder shots to frame the men's faces and their expression of awkwardness, underline the tense tone of the scene, which conveys the journalists' reticence about Camille. The scene suggests that their reservations about letting her—not just a woman, but a young, unexperienced one—join their group are caused by doubts about her competence as a photographer and as a mobile subject, that is, whether she can make it across conflicted areas or whether she will be a burden to them.

Age is portrayed in *Camille* as a factor that adds up to the gender difference mentioned above. Camille's youth further distances her from the rest of journalists, whose view and experience of the job is unlike hers. Their approach to war photojournalism and its implications is different, as can be inferred from a conversation between Camille and Mathias (Bruno Todeschini), one of the French journalists who eventually befriends her. Mathias is constantly on the move, not staying anywhere long enough to establish any bonds in any of the places he visits. Camille, by contrast, spends time with local people, especially young students, with whom she develops friendly, sometimes very close, relationships. In fact, she stresses the importance of meeting people in the places where she works. She displays an openness towards Others who positions her as an agent of "borderwork"—ordinary people's "making, shifting or dismantling" of borders (Cooper and Rumford 262-264)—and allows her to experience potentially transformative cross-cultural exchanges, that is, "cosmopolitan moments" of "world openness" (Delanty 27-29). However, Mathias warns her against doing this and calls her attention to the border

that separates her from her local friends. This border is metaphorically materialised as the camera lens: photographers and local people are on opposite sides of it, Mathias remarks. According to him, this border makes it impossible for them to put themselves in the shoes of the real protagonists of wars. Journalists' mobility, privileged and relatively frictionless, is yet another aspect that set them apart: in the end, Mathias and Camille will go back to France while those they have photographed stay in the conflicted area.

Yet, that will not be the case with Camille since the film ends up with the protagonist's corpse lying on the back of a truck among the dead bodies of a group of anti-balaka rebels, with whom she had been travelling for days. Her determination to report the Central African conflict from the inside and her inability to keep her distance from the real protagonists of the conflict have fatal consequences for her. Films about women war journalists recurrently emphasise the dangers they face in such a hostile environment, as well as reflect on the sacrifices they are willing to make for the sake of their careers. *Thank You For Bombing* (Barbara Eder, 2015) is yet another example. It follows three correspondents on assignment in Afghanistan at a tense moment when a Quran has been burnt by US soldiers. The film is divided into three sections and makes US correspondent Lana (Manon Kahle) the protagonist of the middle section. Her segment opens with a group of women reporters at a Zumba class—"Smile, you're in Kabul!" screams the instructor by way of motivation. This scene, which sets the satiric tone of the film, already highlights women's experience of foreign correspondence as markedly different and ruled by the cultural norms of femininity. In the changing room after the session, these women comment on and criticise their colleagues' appearance. They police other women's bodies and bash those who are not slim, which they remark is a fundamental requirement to work in broadcasting. As Chambers et al. note, women's appearance is still a decisive factor for working in broadcasting even with regards to war

journalism (188). The attraction of the feminine figure is especially exploited in television journalism as a "pleasant distraction" from the horrors of war, that is, from "male action", and as a "dramatic and emotional intensifier" in war reports (Chambers et al. 188, Van Zoonen 44, Buonanno 803). This 2015 film reflects on this by depicting the world of women war correspondents as a sexist and superficial one in which women strive to comply with the beauty standards of hegemonic femininity. These women's superficiality is exaggerated to the point that they seem to be completely disconnected from the reality that surrounds them. For instance, during another Zumba session, one of the reporters wears a t-shirt that reads "pain is good", a rather inappropriate saying in the context of an armed conflict. Later, a freshly-showered Lana poses in front of the mirror, looking at her reflection and telling herself she is "a fucking bomb".

However, Lana's femaleness and feminine appearance is shown to be a liability in the context of war. The film suggests that she is frequently harassed in the street. At a certain point, Lana is preparing herself to do a live report from a market square. We see a close-up of the microphone cable being pulled under her shirt under the attentive gaze of local men. Then, they start gathering around her, getting uncomfortably close to her, and even start groping her. She keeps her composure on camera and tells the men off once the report is brought back to the studio. The film emphasises the tension of the scene by cutting away from Lana several times as she does her report, inserting shots of the camera crew that show their reaction to what is happening to the reporter before actually showing it. This use of shot/reverse shot, in particular of reaction shots, enhances the way in which the situation gets increasingly awkward as men surround and touch Lana. Finally, as she leaves the location, a man attacks her and calls her a whore.

The segment's climax is reached when Lana gets to interview the two soldiers who allegedly burnt a Quran. Once the interview has been recorded, one of them takes

the memory card from Lana's camera while the other flirts with her, praising her looks. Taking advantage of her professional ambition, they demand her to get undressed in order to get back the footage she needs for her story, convincing her that "this controls the rest of [her] career". Once she is naked, they take her clothes away and continue to degrade her, finally trying to sexually abuse her. When she tries to defend herself, they hit her and literally throw her out the barracks. Lana lies fully naked on the ground for some minutes, then she collects herself and goes back into the room, demanding to get her memory card back and claiming she has kept her side of the bargain. This appalling scene, which includes point of view shots of Lana taking her clothes off that make the spectator a witness of the abuse, shows not only the ways in which women are used and abused in situations where they are viewed as powerless, but also points at one of the film's central topics: the price of journalistic integrity.

This topic is a recurrent one in films about women war journalists. For instance, *A Thousand Times Good Night* (*Tusen ganger god natt*, Erik Poppe, 2013) explores a war photographer's personal crisis as she weighs the cost of her mobile profession. Rebecca (Juliette Binoche) is not only an experienced, well-travelled photographer, but one that is very passionate about her job, to the point of being willing to sacrifice herself for a good shot. She is driven by an impulse to travel and take photos, which at times makes her seem like an adrenaline junkie, but that she understands as a moral obligation to go to these places and document what happens there for the world to see. To a significant extent, her identity is grounded in her work and, therefore, in her mobility. However, she is also a wife and mother of two daughters, who resent her extended absences from home and live in constant fear of something bad happening to her while she is working. After a bomb severely injures Rebecca in Afghanistan, she is sent home to recover. There, her husband, Marcus, who has assumed the role of primary carer for their children, confronts

her about her excessive dedication to her job and the risks she takes at it. Rebecca finds herself in the position of having to choose between her career and her family. Determined to make family life work, Rebecca promises to quit her job and never go back to war zones.

However, she is visibly conflicted about her decision. The film emphasises Rebecca's feelings of out-of-placeness and discomfort with her new life of "immobility". At times, she seems suffocated, not only due to her punctured lung (and the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that she suffers), but also because she seems to feel overwhelmed by the idea of not going back to war zones and the challenge of adapting to a homebound life. At one point in the film, she is haunted by visions of war while she is looking at a window. The window blinds create an image that resembles a cage inside which the protagonist feels locked up. The film uses an extreme close-up to frame Rebecca's face in a way that emphasises her feelings of confinement.

In its portrayal of Rebecca's mobility as highly complex and problematic, the film tackles two issues that will appear in the analyses that follow. The first one is femininity, which in this case is encapsulated in motherhood and the cultural norms of female care. The character's mobility is problematised by her role as a mother. Her mothering struggles are portrayed as a direct consequence of her mobile job in a way that differs from the conventional "absent father" story. As Chambers et al. remark, "it is likely that female correspondents who do put their lives on the line to bring us the news will continue to be vilified as irresponsible towards their families for as long as women's professional role is subsumed under their domestic role" (186). The second one is space. The film establishes a contrast between the quiet and open spaces that surround Rebecca's home in Dublin, where she feels out of place, and the dirty, chaotic spaces of war to which she

travels. The spaces of home are associated with cleanliness, family, nature, and life, whereas the spaces of mobility stand for dirtiness, dust, destruction, and death.

As this overview of war films featuring women journalists illustrates, discourses on gender and, more specifically, discourses on masculinity and femininity permeate most onscreen portrayals of the woman war reporter. The pervasiveness of such discourses is reflected in the two films analysed below, *A Private War* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, two biopics based on the experiences of two renowned war reporters: Marie Colvin and Kim Barker, respectively. Their portrayal of the woman war reporter is examined taking into account the strategies used in each film to meet the challenges that this figure poses.

3.4. Negotiating the Mobile Professional's Femininity in *A Private War*

For most critics, the biopic is a problematic genre. To begin with, there is no consensus on whether it can be considered a genre in itself or whether it would be more accurately described as a multi-generic and multi-subgeneric cinematic form (Hollinger 2020, 5). The biopic is a hybrid form that changes in contact with other generic conventions and whose boundaries are particularly porous (Brown and Vidal 10, Hollinger 2020, 6). As Hollinger argues, depending on the subject matter and the historical figure being dealt with, biopics can also be described as comedies, musicals, melodramas, war films or historical epics, to name just a few (5). Yet, as has been widely and convincingly argued, generic hybridity is a defining feature of most films since genres should not be seen as groups of films or closed categories but as sets of conventions that evolve over time and that specific texts mobilise for a specific purpose. That is, movies do not belong to one

(or more) specific genres, they participate and make use of the conventions of one (or more) genre (Altman 49-82, Deleyto 2009, 1-17).

In the case of the biopic, the hybridity that characterizes most films also extends to their content since they are partly factual and partly fictional accounts of a real person's story. This mixture of fact and fiction is another of the aspects that make the biopic a much-debated genre. The fact that it is, in Robert Burgoyne's words, an "act of imaginative recreation" (even if built upon elements of biography, history and documentary) makes critics and viewers have reservations about a genre that they consider untrustworthy (Brown and Vidal 3, Hollinger 2020, 6). Furthermore, critics have condemned the biopic for being simplistic, formulaic, tepid, fated and old-fashioned (Brown and Vidal 2, Hollinger 2020, 6). Hollinger remarks that it has been critically despised for its reductionist and backward-looking glorification of historical figures and their deeds, and its neglect of social issues in favour of the cult of the individual (2020, 6). Nevertheless, as Vidal notes, "the biopic is as maligned as it is prolific and durable" (Brown and Vidal 2). Biopics not only continue to be a staple of Hollywood film production, but they are also industrially celebrated. They stand out for their box office popularity, promotion as prestige projects, star-making performances, and award worthiness (Brown and Vidal 2, Hollinger 2020, 6). The biopic's strong presence in movie listings and major award ceremonies indicate that, despite critical neglect and claims of it being on its deathbed, the genre is alive and kicking (Hollinger 2020, 2). One could not expect anything else from an industry that, almost from its inception, has thrived on the cult on film stars, those chosen few from the acting profession that, as Richard Dyer has argued, manage to reconcile structural contradictions and be both ordinary and extraordinary at the same time (25).

Several scholarly works have underlined the need to reconsider some of the well-known claims and complaints about a genre that seems to be more complex and significant than it looks at first sight. For instance, Hollinger calls attention to the gender aspect of the biopic. She describes the biopic as "overwhelmingly male" and acknowledges that, for a long time, the male-oriented content of these films and their focus on male protagonists might have led to the assumption that women have no place in the biopic (2020, 1; 2012, 159). Statistics confirm that women are highly underrepresented in biopics: the percentage of biopics of women has never amounted up to more than 25% of the number of biopics made (Hollinger 2012, 160).

However, Hollinger argues that there is a significant number of female biopics that merit consideration since they challenge some of the common conceptions about the genre. She disagrees with Dennis Bingham's claim that men's biopics centre on heroism and women's centre on victimisation (2020, 127). According to her, biopics of women feature victimisation, failure, and suffering, but also "heroic survival", triumph, and redemption (128). Women protagonists exist in these films not exclusively as pitiable victims, but they are often portrayed as admirable figures (128-129). For instance, she points out certain examples that underline female power in male-dominated environments or present women as exemplary advocates of social justice, as are the cases of biopics of queens and what she calls headliner biopics, which centre on people who have made the news for some reason (128-129). Hollinger's view of the female biopic as a complex type of film which is not reduced to the time-worn "victimology-fetishism" formula proves useful to understand the recent flourishing of the woman journalist biopic, which despite depicting the obstacles and dangers these women face in a male dominated world, often portray them as heroic figures who play a relevant part in social history.

A Private War is a biopic about the famous correspondent Marie Colvin, who worked for *The Sunday Times* for twenty-five years, until 2012 when she died while covering the siege of Homs. The film follows the last ten years of Colvin's life reporting on conflicts in Sri Lanka, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria, along with her struggles with PTSD and alcohol abuse. The script was based on the 2012 article "Marie Colvin's Private War" in *Vanity Fair* by Marie Brenner. The film premiered at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival as Matthew Heineman's narrative feature debut. The US filmmaker was known for his critically acclaimed and award nominated documentary films such as *Cartel Land* (2015) and *City of Ghosts* (2017). Heineman's former work as a documentary filmmaker contributes to blurring the boundaries between the biographical fiction film and the biographical documentary, which according to Brown and Vidal are located on the same "fact-based spectrum" (15). However, they differ in that, while the historical figure is generally absent from the documentary film—according to Brown and Vidal, the use of archival footage and sound recordings amplifies his or her absence—he or she is doubly present in the biopic, a genre grounded on re-enactment of an actual person (Brown and Vidal 12-16). Jean Louis Comolli described this phenomenon as the "body too much", arguing that a filmed historical character has two bodies: that of the actor that portrays the character and the imagery constructed around the character (in Brown and Vidal 12-13). The "additional" presence of the actor brings particular meanings to the film, not only through their performance but also through their public persona (Brown and Vidal 14).

In *A Private War*, Marie Colvin is played by British actor Rosamund Pike. Colvin is not the first not-entirely-fictional character that Pike has portrayed. The actor has played the role of Elizabeth Wilmot, Countess of Rochester in *The Libertine* (Laurence Dunmore, 2004), Ruth Williams Khama in *A United Kingdom* (Amma Asante, 2016),

Lina Heydrich in *The Man with the Iron Heart* (Cédric Jimenez, 2017), Brigitte Kuhlmann in *7 Days in Entebbe* (Jose Padilha, 2018), and Marie Curie in *Radioactive* (Marjane Satrapi, 2019). Her considerably wide experience in the biopic genre evidences not only an aptness to embody remarkably diverse characters, but also a certain inclination to widen her representation of women's experiences with heterogenous roles. She resists the label of "English rose" she was stuck with after her early performances as Bond girl in *Die Another Day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002) and Jane Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (Joe Wright, 2005) (Loughrey). She has also been described as an "icy blonde" *à la* Hitchcock—beautiful, sophisticated, poised, with an air of mystery and sex appeal (Loughrey). However, she finds these labels reductive and objectifying, and she has tried to subvert her initially imposed "English flower" persona by playing "unruly", "difficult women", one of her most acclaimed roles being the psychopathic Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014) (Loughrey). *A Private War*'s Colvin is one of those difficult women that Pike embodies and that, consequently, are imbued with the actor's star persona and its connotations. The following analysis centres on the portrayal of this character as a woman war correspondent and revolves around the conflict between mobility and femininity that exists in the film.

3.4.1. Badass Correspondent: The Mobile Professional as a Tough Heroine

In a career spanning more than 30 years, US born Marie Colvin travelled the world covering conflicts wherever they broke out. *A Private War* depicts the reporter's itinerant life by following her through every major conflict in the last ten years of her life. The film's action takes place in six different locations, constantly jumping between conflict areas and London, Marie's home base, highlighting the fact that she is constantly on the move without paying attention to how long she stays in any of those places. A narrative

structure that revolves around a plurality of locations, as well as the abrupt transitions between them, contributes to underlining mobility as a particularly noteworthy aspect in the film. Marie is portrayed as a highly mobile woman, an experienced globetrotter ready to set off anytime and reach even the most remote places. She is driven by an urge to document what happens in any part of the world even if that means putting her personal life on hold. Her relentless mobility and the little friction she encounters when travelling are portrayed on screen by means of abrupt jumps in time and space, since the actual journeys from one location to another are never shown. At the beginning of the film, for example, we see Marie with her boss at the *Sunday Times*' office in London. While he wants her to travel to Afghanistan, she insists on going to Sri Lanka instead to meet with a Tamil rebel leader, regardless of the country's ban on international journalists' access to the war zone. even though he warns her that she faces grave danger if the government catches her in Tamil regions, Marie ends the conversation with a bald and firm statement: "Sri Lanka". In the very next shot, the action has already moved to Vanni, in northern Sri Lanka, an area which journalists are not allowed to enter, but which Marie has managed to access.

Onscreen women do not always enjoy Marie's frictionless mobility, let alone in war contexts. Even female members of the press, who are granted special travel permits and therefore stand out for being privileged individuals mobility-wise, tend to be portrayed as less mobile than their male counterparts—as the aforementioned titles show, some of them must stay within restricted, clearly demarcated international "green zones", as in *Green Zone,* or are forced to limit their mobility in order to meet social expectations for women's family and domestic commitment, as is the case of *A Thousand Times Good Night*. Generally, women's mobility, especially in male-dominated environments like war zones, is presented as something exceptional. Quoting Scharff, when women move, "it's

a departure from their real stories" (3). Therefore, films seem to have the need to resort to certain strategies to aptly introduce highly mobile women characters in the narrative. Since gender roles are strongly marked in war narratives—maleness is associated with battle while femaleness is generally victimised—the presence of the mobile professional woman calls for a renegotiation of those roles. When women are portrayed as professionals working in war zones, films must deal with the conjunction of their mobility and femaleness, which continues to be perceived as an odd one. An examination of the portrayal of these characters' gender performance suggests that aspects like femininity are complex and problematic when it comes to mobile women in fundamentally male environments.

The modern-day onscreen heroine disrupts the essentialist dichotomy that constructs masculinity as active and femininity as passive (Genz 152, Purse 77). Characters like Colvin, which to a great extent can be read in similar terms as female action-adventure characters and female military characters, are "far from being immobile and passive" (Genz 152). They are deemed agents of gender trouble (Butler) for blurring the otherwise clear-cut limits of the masculine and the feminine (Tasker 2004, 9; 2011, 3). A recurrent trope both in action-adventure and war films is the masculinisation of the active heroine. Through it, she adopts several characteristics and attitudes that have been traditionally understood as masculine or male in order to enter the macho world of action, strength, and power (Genz 152; Tasker 2011, 4; Inness 2006, Tasker 2004). This concerns the characters' physique—Tasker coins the term "musculinity" to describe the masculinisation of the female body through its muscles and physical strength (1993, 3)—and behaviour (traits like courage, independence, leadership, toughness, etc.). As Jeffrey A. Brown remarks:

> "By assuming the traits of maleness, [women in action films] gain access to a form of power (both physical and social) that has been systematically denied to women while simultaneously demonstrating that the association of "maleness" with "power" is not innate but culturally defined" (in Inness 2006, 57).

For instance, Gladys L. Knight describes how in *G.I. Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997) Lieutenant O'Neil (Demi Moore) "can only achieve success as a Navy SEAL by putting her femininity behind her" (147). Feminine symbols such as her hair, her soft physique, and her menstruation must be cast off in favour of a masculinised body and behaviour that grant O'Neil the acceptance of her peers and the possibility to advance in her military career (Knight 147). The "masculinisation" trope was especially prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, when action heroines like Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in the *Alien* saga (Ridley Scott, 1979; James Cameron, 1986; David Fincher, 1992; Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997) and Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) in *Terminator 2* (James Cameron, 1991) displayed traditional markers of masculinity such as muscular, sweaty, and bloody bodies, physical aggression, anger, and toughness (Tasker 2015, 42-43; Purse 77; Knight xx, Inness 2006, 3). The rise of this type of role was influenced by the advances of second-wave feminism and its effects on the workplace (Knight xix; Inness 2006, 5). In the 1980s, women pursued jobs that had been considered too rough for "ladies", showing greater authority, power, and toughness, and adopting a more "masculine" look in the workplace (Inness 2006, 5; Knight xix). A new vision of womanhood, one tougher than before, emerged (Inness 2006, 6).

A breed of "tough women" has gradually proliferated in popular culture, attracting both positive and negative attention for their potentiality to either secure or challenge gender roles and stereotypes or even do both simultaneously (Inness 2006, 6; Genz 152-153; Tasker 2015, 67-68). Many authors stress the enduring scrutiny to which female

bodies are subjected in this type of film, since active heroines are still very much marked as women (Tasker 1998, 67-88; 2004, 169-218; 2015, 67; Inness 2006; Purse 76-93; Genz 152-169; Schubart; Knight). In some cases, women characters are approached as male impersonators, transvestites, and female "men in drag", focusing on the masculinisation of their bodies through, for instance, cropped hair and a pronounced musculature (Genz 152-169; Tasker 1993, 143). In other cases, these heroines' bodies are fetishized and presented as visual spectacle, as exemplified by the "action babes" of the late 1990s and the 2000s, such as Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie), Xena (Lucy Lawless), or Charlie's Angels (Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz, Lucy Liu) (Tasker 2004, 201-218; Purse 78-79). Their femininity and sexuality are brought to the fore as to compensate for their toughness and physically capable bodies (Tasker 1993, 19; Inness 1999, 31-49; Genz 168). The heroine's femininity tends to be read either as a "as a visible sign of gender conformity or as a polar opposite that she wants to distance herself from by embracing a masculinized image" (Genz 153).

This, however, seems to be more of a matter of ambiguity. Inness sees ambiguity as an essential element of tough women in popular media (1999, 49). Similarly, Genz conceptualises the active heroine as an "intrinsically ambiguous persona" (153), while Schubart argues that the female hero represents a position of in-betweenness (2). Purse claims that the polarised opposition between masculinised, butch heroines and feminine action babes that has dominated mainstream action-adventure cinema is dying out in favour of more "naturalistic portrayals of active female bodies" that are not approached as gender switches (91). According to her, the growing presence of "credibly powerful, convincingly physically potent women" is opening more spaces for women to be active without being qualified as either "tough as a man" heroines or feminine action babes (91). The portrayal of the active woman in contemporary films continues to rely heavily on

gender expression in a way that marks her as a woman in a prominently male environment while problematising binary conceptions of gender identity by being brave, strong, or tough without renouncing her femaleness. She may not experience the same levels of masculinisation as the hard-bodied heroines of the 1980s but, since her femininity remains a problematic issue, defeminisation is still a recurrent trope.

As critics have noted, *A Private War* captures Colvin's "badass image" (Bradshaw) in a way that resembles the defeminised action heroine, whose "qualities of strength and determination and, most particularly, her labour and the body that enacts it, mark her out as 'unfeminine'" (Tasker 1998, 69). The reporter is considered, both in real life and fiction, as a tough woman who knows how to navigate her way around the fundamentally male world of war correspondents. In order to make the character "function effectively within the threatening macho world of the action scenario" (Tasker 1993, 149) (in this case, a war zone), the film defeminises her to some degree. She seems to adopt some characteristics and attitudes that are deemed masculine so as to fit the stereotypical image of the daring war correspondent and blend in with fellow journalists and soldiers. Her bold behaviour is far from lady-like. She is characterised by her toughness, determination, self-reliance, recklessness, and bravado. She is no damsel in distress: even after losing her eye in an unexpected blast in Sri Lanka, she refuses to get any help. She struggles to express and handle her feelings, which she represses by taking a new assignment that takes her far away. Her drive and ambition show in her complete dedication to her job but also in her reckless behaviour in the face of danger. She is nonconformist and outspoken, unafraid to assert her authority and assume the leadership. Besides, she smokes and drinks heavily, and she swears "like a trooper" (Pike in Renzetti).

Her "masculine" features are also emphasised in the way the character played by Rosemund Pike moves, talks, and looks. Her physical characterisation includes a hunched posture and eventual limp, as well as Marie's distinctive gruffy, low-pitched voice. Furthermore, the film accentuates the character's unfeminine appearance with her messy hair, rugged field gear and, primarily, her pirate-like eye patch, as well as the progressive deterioration of her looks as the years—and the wars—go by. Shots of her bruised body or a dead tooth she pulls out of her mouth allude to her physical decay, caused partly by ageing but greatly aggravated by her mobile job, and distance her from the stereotypical image of femininity presented as a spectacle in the media.

Lindsay Palmer, writing about the non-fictional Colvin, reflects on the fact that she was not presented in the same sexualised terms associated with other prominent reporters like Lara Logan. Logan is known for her work as a correspondent in conflict areas such as Afghanistan and Iraq, but also for becoming a recurrent tabloid target. Formerly a swimsuit model, Logan's feminine, attractive looks have been the subject of much debate and have earned her a reputation as a "war reporter barbie" (Palmer 105). Palmer points out that Colvin, who as a matter of fact was fifteen years older than Logan, was not perceived as particularly attractive, since she "was not conventionally beautiful" "by the stringent standards of television news" (149). However, Colvin was known for her distinctive style and taste for beautiful clothing and accessories. Articles about her mention that, even in the war zone, she liked to wear Prada clothes, pearls, and fine lingerie. Marie Brenner's piece for *Vanity Fair* recounts how Colvin's "nails were perfect scarlet" and Alex Shulman, in an article entitled "Cashmere and Pearls beneath the Combats," describes her as "the most feminine of women, the girliest of girls". The film makes a nod to this aspect of the real-life Marie Colvin by showing the character wearing a blue satin and lace La Perla bra while on assignment in Libya, and explaining that "if

anyone's gonna pull [her] corpse from a trench [she wants] them to be impressed". Yet, Colvin's fictional version does not look like "the girliest of girls" and, while her nails are sometimes painted, they are shown to be dirty at times.

The character bears a closer resemblance to others like Charlize Theron's Imperator Furiosa in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015), whose subversion of gender boundaries and embodiment of female empowerment has received much attention. Theron's character, a skilful driver and mechanic, sports a buzz cut, her body often smeared with grease and a prosthetic metal forearm that covers her maimed limb. Furiosa's defeminised, disabled body and stereotypically masculine mobile job have contributed to laying the foundations for the representation of characters such as *A Private War*'s Marie, a physically impaired but tough woman who possesses the skill, agency, and mobility to inhabit the macho environment of war. In line with such representation, the film chooses to tone down the character's femininity in order to highlight that it has no place in these scenarios.

3.4.2. La Perla Under a Flak Jacket: Femininity in Conflict

The way in which Marie's performance of gender is constructed in the film is determined by her profession in more ways than one. Since hers is a mobile profession, her construction of gender both is affected by and bears on the film's discourse on mobility. Scholars such as Alice Elliot and Susan Hanson call attention to the general inclination to focus on how gender affects mobility, that is, on the different qualities of movement generated by gender difference (76; 9). This approach can be found in the previous chapter's discussion of how gender differences regarding work-life balance determine women's experience of corporate travel and its portrayal. As to this chapter, susceptibility to sexual victimisation and social expectations for domestic commitment have already

been mentioned as gendered factors that affect women reporters' mobilities. The fact that the fictional Marie Colvin undergoes a defeminisation process motivated by her job can be read as a representation of how mobility affects gender. As Elliot remarks, mobility has a transformational power in its own right (76), and therefore can create, reinforce and change the meanings and practices of gender (Hanson 9). The notion that mobility has the capacity to shape gender is founded on conceptualisations of gender as performative developed by scholars such as Judith Butler. Butler's work is instrumental in the formulation of gender performativity whereby a body performs or "does gender" (34). For Butler, gender is performatively constructed through the repetition of socially shared and historically constituted gender acts which include bodily actions, gestures, and movements (191). Therefore, following Elliot, women's mobility is not only the result of culturally-constructed gender norms and expectations but also a constituent of their gender identity (81). Consequently, different forms of movement can shape how gender is "done". In Elliot's words, "framing movement as something that can change people's very subjectivity opens up the conceptual possibility of imagining mobility as a form of gender in its own right" (85). *A Private War* seems to align itself with the idea that gender is moulded by mobility: Marie's mobile job shapes her gender performance by requiring her to "toughen up" and tone down her femininity in order to function effectively as a war reporter.

However, the film's recurrent use of scenes in which Marie is seen looking at herself in the mirror suggests that she struggles with her unfeminine appearance and resents how her experiences in the war zone have taken a toll on her looks. The first mirror scene takes place during her recovery from the grenade attack in Sri Lanka in which she loses her eye. At her London home, Marie sits in front of her vanity mirror after a dinner party with her friends and ex-husband, looking visibly upset. During dinner, in an attempt

to cheer her up, they have listed famous people who were blind in one eye—all of them men—and tried to convince her to wear an eye patch. We see Marie, now in tears, looking at herself in the mirror. After a few seconds, she takes the gauze off her eye. She visibly struggles to look into the mirror and, when she finally looks up at her reflection, she breaks down at the sight of her permanently damaged eye. The side view used for the shot, which prevents the spectator from seeing Marie's point of view, that is, her whole face, enhances the tension of the scene. The use of lighting also contributes to the tone of the scene. The harsh, low-key lighting coming from a small table lamp in her dark bedroom creates a strong contrast which emphasises the scene's dramatic atmosphere and the character's emotional distress over the realisation that her face will be disfigured forever.

The second time one of these mirror scenes appears takes place in Tony Shaw's (Stanley Tucci) London apartment, where Marie and her friend Rita (Nikki Amuka-Bird) are invited to a party. Marie, who is drunk, says goodbye to Rita, referring to herself as "Aunt Marie, the pirate". Then, she comes across a mirror and looks at herself for a moment. She has a puzzled expression and touches her face as though trying to assimilate her piratical appearance and her permanently (physically and psychologically) scarred self. The last time that Marie is shown looking into a mirror is particularly meaningful, especially since it is part of a montage sequence that aims to capture her experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder. In front of the bathroom mirror, Marie applies face cream and, as she rubs it on, she pulls on her skin in a way that deforms her face. A montage of horrifying images of war is then inserted. The soundtrack combines a tense music score, sounds of the war zone (women's wails, explosions, gunshots and thuds, among others), and the reporter's heavy breathing, all of which progressively escalate. When the scene takes us back to the bathroom, Marie takes off her eye patch and again deforms her face

with her hands, touching and observing her blind eye. Then, she examines her naked war-worn body in the mirror. By quietly confronting her reflection, she seems to assess the consequences that years of war coverage have had on her face and body. The juxtaposition of images of the reporter's traumatising experiences in war zones, including the loss of her eye in Sri Lanka, and her distorted image in the mirror emphasise the cost of becoming a tough, daring correspondent and of navigating the "masculinity" inherent in that role. Marie's masculinisation and relentless mobility come with a price, one that seems to be leaving more than one permanent scar on the female character.

This scene conjures up the words that Marie's ex-husband said to her by way of a reproach towards the beginning of the film: "look at you, you were so beautiful". David (Greg Wise) resents her blind devotion to war coverage and its consequences, one of them being her fading feminine beauty. He also resents her mobile disposition and reproaches her for "constantly leaving [him] for some faraway place". He expresses her will for her to quit her dangerous mobile job and accuses her of choosing it over their relationship, arguing that she is drawn to conflicts "like a moth to a bloody flame". During an argument following David's flirtation with another woman at a party, he implies that they could have saved their marriage had she not gone to Sri Lanka. For David, Marie's mobility has deteriorated their relationship, leading to his promiscuous behaviour, which leads to the couple's breakup. Professional mobility, especially when performed in an unfeminine way, is once more portrayed as incompatible, or at least extremely hard to reconcile, with coupledom or family life.

It is precisely in the lack of a family that the ultimate defeminisation of the character lies: Marie is physically unable to start a family, meaning she cannot have children. She expresses her desire to be a mother like her sister, but she has already suffered two miscarriages and the chances of getting pregnant again are bleak due to her

age. The film underlines Marie's barrenness with a montage of a sexual encounter between her and a fellow reporter intercut with shots of her writing a piece on the exhumation of a mass grave. Rather than representing a juxtaposition of life and death, with sex symbolising the prospect of procreation, the way in which the sex scene is filmed conveys Marie's traumatic sterility. The use of low-key backlighting, which reveals only the silhouettes of the lovers, and the placement of the camera in an adjacent room as if peeking through the door, showing them from a distance, gives the scene an unsettling feeling instead of creating a warm, intimate atmosphere. Coldness is also enhanced using green lighting. The shade of green that tinges the scene is not an organic or grass green, but a brilliant bluish green or verdigris which, following Eva Heller's theory of colour, can be read as a symbol of toxicity and disease (113-114). Furthermore, Marie's voice-over narration during the entire montage sequence establishes a connection between both events. Her description of decaying corpses is heard over shots of the sexual encounter, suggesting that no life can result from it. Despite her passionate commitment to the journalist profession, the film shows the psychological toll of renouncing that component of her femininity by including the recurrent image of a dead child in her haunting visions. Her infertility seems to be yet another price she has to pay for the film to justify her portrayal as a mobile professional woman in general and as a woman war correspondent in particular.

It is in her most feminine or womanly facets, like her maternal inclination, that Marie's vulnerability is most exposed. She has toughened up to be able to do a job as brutal as reporting on the horrors of war, but the film's focus on her psychological struggle and PTSD suggests that she is not tough enough to stomach it. She is haunted by visions of her former (undamaged) self, of her deserted house, and of the warzone, which respectively stand for a longing for her lost femininity, a mourning for her unfulfilled

desire of a family, and the severe trauma of witnessing so much death and destruction. As a war journalist, Marie is highly sensitive and empathic to people's suffering, especially that of the innocent and defenceless, like women and children. Her goal as a journalist is to report on the human costs of war and give voice to the victims. In Syria, Marie visits a group of women and children trapped by the siege of Homs. She patiently listens to each person's stories, promising she will make them known. This interest in the human side of war reporting has been described as feminine and is presumed to be characteristic of women journalists (McLaughlin 170). However, her "global compassion" (Höijer 20) makes her vulnerable since she is unable to detach herself from the tragic events she witnesses, which as a matter of fact ends up rendering her immobile. Due to her psychological struggle, she eventually needs to take a break from reporting and seek treatment at a psychiatric hospital for a while, a place where this mobile woman feels trapped. In fact, she asks the newspaper's editor to get her back in the field even if she is not fully recovered and, in the next scene, we see her back in the war zone.

All in all, the film finds it hard to integrate aspects associated with femininity with a mobile profession such as war reporting. Marie's mobility is presented as exceptional and her presence in the (fundamentally male) theatres of war calls for a renegotiation of gender roles. Consequently, the protagonist's femininity needs to be toned down as a way for her to blend in the spaces in which she works. Yet, both her commitment to mobility and her masquerade of masculine toughness come with a physical and psychological price. In typical biopic fashion, the film ends with real footage of the reporter, middle-aged and one-eyed, wearing her signature eyepatch, during an interview where she is asked to reflect on her career as a war reporter. This is followed by a credits sequence composed of a series of newspaper clippings of Colvin's articles and photographs, including a shot of Marie convalescing from the blast that injured her left eye, that

functions as a recapitulation of significant moments in the journalist's career. The choice of images and the way in which they are arranged have ideological implications. Meaningfully, they appear in reverse chronological order, the last shot before the screen fades to black showing a young and beautiful Marie. By choosing that shot to close the film, attention is drawn to Marie's femininity (mainly understood as womanly attractiveness) and its loss as a consequence of war reporting. Thus, the film ends by stressing the repercussions of her mobile career and the fact that it comes into conflict with femaleness. After all, the film, described by the director as a "psychological portrait of Marie Colvin" (Kermode), revolves around, as the title implies, the "private war" that Marie is in and her internal conflict between the professional and the personal, the masculine and the feminine, mobility and immobility.

3.5. W.T.F Is She Doing There?: The Mobile Professional and Comedy in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*

The war in Afghanistan marked a paradigm shift in media coverage of international conflicts. Regarding women's reporting, while the number of women war journalists, which had risen with the 9/11 media blitz, did not grow significantly, their visibility increased notably (Chambers et al. 185). *Independent* reporter Gill Swain declared that "a whole new breed" of women war correspondents had emerged during the war in Afghanistan (in Chambers et al. 184). US journalist Kim Barker, the real-life character on which *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* is based, was one of the well-known reporters who covered the conflict. Barker was the South Asia bureau chief for *The Chicago Tribune* from 2004 to 2009. In 2011, she published her memoir *The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan* about her experiences covering the resurgence of the Taliban in these areas. Unlike many other war reporters' testimonies, her book not only covers

the horrors of war but uses humour and satire to expose the absurdities of life in the war zone. Barker has also given voice to issues such as the harassment suffered by women journalists in the midst of war. She later quit war reporting and devoted herself to investigative reporting.

The abundance of stories of varying format and genre (memoirs, novels, documentaries, fiction films) about the war in Afghanistan reflects the sociocultural significance of the conflict and its narrative potential. Regarding cinema, films about this conflict abound, many of them by or about war journalists. For example, the documentaries *Restrepo* (2010) and *Hell and Back Again* (2011) were directed by the war journalists Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger and the war photographer Danfung Dennis respectively, while *Kandahar Journals* (2015) was co-directed by its protagonist, photojournalist Louie Palu. Women tend to appear mostly as war victims, war brides, and in similarly "passive" roles in films like *Afghanistan Unveiled* (Brigitte Brault, 2003) or *Dear John* (Lasse Hallström, 2010), while men are more likely to play "active" roles as warzone workers (members of the military, press, etc.). Yet, there are some exceptions of this trend, as is the case of professional women characters such as Jessica Chastain's CIA analyst in *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2012) and Meryl Streep's journalist in *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007). Women reporters covering this conflict can be found in films like *Forces Spéciales* (*Special Forces*, Stéphane Rybojad, 2011), *A Thousand Times Good Night*, *Thank You For Bombing*, *A Private War* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*.

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot (hereafter *WTF*) was inspired by Barker's memoir. It stars Tina Fey as Kim Baker, a fortysomething TV news copy writer dissatisfied with the state of her career who, in 2003, decides to leave the relative comfort of her New York desk job and accept the assignment to work as on-camera reporter in war-torn Afghanistan.

With a slightly different name, Baker is presented as a fictional character rather than the film version of the reporter, signalling the film's departure from Barker's original account. Characters and plotlines are made up and modified for the film and, as will be discussed, most of these changes have important implications for the story. The film makes the print journalist a TV reporter, has her appointed for the job rather than having her volunteer as Barker did, and gives her a love interest and a female colleague, relying on romantic comedy conventions to portray these relationships. However, a feature that the book and the film have in common is humour. Both texts use comedy and satire to tell their stories. The casting of comedy star Tina Fey as the main character adds to the comic tone of the film. The following analysis explores the film's strategic use of comedy in the representation of the mobile professional woman and how the disruptive presence of woman war reporters in the masculine context of war is renegotiated through humour.

3.5.1. Kim: the Butt of the Joke

Meet Kim. The sign on her office cubicle introduces her as a news producer. Then, a shot of her tuna and corn salad on her desk and another of a bottle of daily vitamins for women over forty tell us about the type of life she leads and her age. Both the cinematography and the soundtrack suggest Kim's state of boredom and dissatisfaction with her desk-bound job. The dull mise-en-scène of the office setting, characterised by its cold colours, artificial lighting, isolating cubicles, and scarce windows, creates a gloomy atmosphere that echoes the protagonist's situation. The sense of confinement and stagnation is also conveyed through framing and composition. In a shot of Kim sitting at her desk, she is positioned slightly off-centre in the frame, highlighting the seemingly endless row of cubicles, which seem even more constricting due to the placement of the camera at sitting-eye level, resulting in a low angle that emphasises the cubicle walls. Other spaces, like

her gym, are filmed in a similar manner. Kim is shown cycling on a stationary bike at a windowless, artificially lit gym room where there is no one but the cleaning staff. The cold tones and dim setting, in conjunction with the fact that the shot is taken through a glass panel, generate a claustrophobic environment. While pedalling, Kim looks at a TV screen right in front of her, which shows an attractive blonde woman reporting from Afghanistan. She suddenly stops and medium close-ups of her face imply that she has come to a realisation and/or decision.

Previously, she had been summoned to a meeting along with all unmarried, childless personnel at her department to consider a three-month assignment covering the war in Afghanistan. This represents an opportunity to move from news copywriting to being on camera, just like the woman she is watching on the fitness room TV, whom she seems to look at with desire, wishing to be like her. Taking this job would bring her closer to this inspiring figure by enabling her to escape her mundane life, which the film keeps unfolding visually by means of several detail shots. Her unopened mail lies next to an open wine bottle. A child's drawing on her fridge, surrounded by photos of young children, reads "Love you aunt Kim". A photo with her boyfriend, who as we instantly learn is in a different city, is also displayed on the fridge on top of a printed work schedule. These shots hint at a prosaic and solitary existence and an unbalanced work-life situation. They suggest that Kim is devoted to her career and does not have much going in her personal life: she lives alone, her boyfriend is often away for work, and she has no children of her own. Under these circumstances, Kim decides to seize the opportunity and calls her boyfriend to break the news that she is soon off to Kabul.

The primary motivation behind Kim's decision to accept the job in Afghanistan is a growing fear of stagnation and immobility. As she explains, she noticed that her gym stationary bike had moved backwards after using it every day, leaving a mark on the

carpet where it used to be. That made her realise that she had spent a long time doing "thousands of miles on this bike" and she had not gone anywhere, or worse, she had gone backwards. She realises that unless she goes to Afghanistan, she is bound to marry her "mildly depressive" boyfriend and settle for her unfulfilling job. Therefore, her desire to break with her unexciting life and advance her career as a journalist seems to go hand in hand with becoming a mobile professional. During the flight to Kabul, she openly states that war reporting is not her profession, but one that she has had to adopt in a matter of days. Unlike in other films, the woman character in *WTF* is not presented as a war reporter from the beginning, but rather the film constructs Kim's new identity as a mobile professional woman as the character herself adjusts to her new situation. Therefore, specific cinematic strategies are used in the portrayal of Kim as a war reporter that reflect her abrupt transition, her sheer lack of experience, and the challenges she poses by occupying a complex position in the world of war.

The film's approach to the portrayal of the mobile professional woman is to a great extent determined by its comic tone. As mentioned above, *WTF* echoes the humorous and satirical style of Barker's memoir in an attempt to deal with a complex figure like the woman war reporter, as well as the conjunction of her mobility and gender. Given that the presence of the woman journalist in the war zone, like in the case of the military woman, represents gender trouble, comedy emerges as an important generic site for the representation of such a disruptive figure (Tasker 2011, 7). Quoting Tasker, "comedy allows the potential staging of female unruliness […] in a rule-bound situation" (7). She alludes to Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's "unruly woman", a carnivalesque figure that uses humour and excess to undermine patriarchal norms and authority (3). Thus, *WTF* makes use of comedy conventions to explore the supposed disruption associated with women and war and aptly introduce a character that embodies such disruption, an "unruly

woman" who dares to enter the masculine world of war, often breaking its strict codes and hierarchies. Comedy's light-hearted treatment of topics, events, and characters defuses the tension that the woman war reporter generates, while humorous exaggeration underlines the notion that femaleness is out of place in that context, turning the mobile professional woman into a comic spectacle.

From the moment Kim arrives in Kabul, the film uses a comic tone to highlight that Kim is out of place, unprepared and unsuited for this job. She is portrayed as not only inexperienced but also very clumsy and bungling. Still at the airport entrance, she carelessly takes out a wad of banknotes only to have it immediately blown away in a gust of wind—wind that we learn is polluted with faeces. On the same spot, a local woman sneers at her uncovered head, calling her a "shameless whore" when her head scarf slips off. Using gags like these, which are especially prominent during the first half of the film, Kim's ineptitude and clumsiness are ridiculed as part of her depiction as a rookie war reporter, and a female one at that. The comedy of Kim's fish-out-of-water portrayal is enhanced by her status as a woman in a seemingly alien context. By way of illustration, let us examine the journalist's first embed with US Marines. The Marine colonel in charge of the unit, Hollanek (Billy Bob Thornton), takes a dim view of Kim for being not only a distraction for his men—he expressly warns her not to sleep with them—but also a great nuisance. He tells her off for carrying a bright orange backpack, which she bought because "the girl at the North Face store said it was military grade". She keeps messing up, especially since she is not familiar with the slang and customs of the military. For instance, she is startled when offered a "wet hootch" which, far from being something dirty as she thinks it is, is a tent with a shower. Furthermore, when she needs to pee, she humorously jiggles and squeaks trying to hold it, until finally they have to stop the whole convoy for her to urinate. This leads to the comical image of Kim squatting behind a bush,

shielded by a dozen armed Marines waiting for her to finish in order to resume their journey.

Her first attempt at interviewing the Marines proves to be utterly fruitless. The scene is composed of alternate shots of the interviewees as seen in the camera viewfinder, which have a professional look, and the reverse shots of the reporter and the camera operator, which are messier and emphasise Kim's incompetence in carrying out this task. She constantly struggles with the wind blowing her hair all over her face and turning the pages of her notepad. She proves unfamiliar with the country she is in and its situation. She confuses Afghan, the demonym, with Afghani, the country's currency, and is corrected by one of the Marines. Besides, the answers she gets from the interviewees are not what she expects. When asked about his motivation to enlist, a Marine declares being inspired by the film *Predator* (John McTiernan, 1987) and its lead actor Arnold Schwarzenegger instead of having a nobler, deeper motive. Another interviewee refuses to answer her questions, while another does not even pay attention to her because he is distracted by a random sticker on her trousers. Performance plays an essential role in conveying Kim's awkwardness and amateurishness: the actor touches her face and hair nervously while she repeatedly stammers and apologises excessively. As will be examined below, the casting of Tina Fey for the role adds to the comic tone of the character's portrayal.

This first embed scene exemplifies the film's use of comedy to depict the early stages of Kim's newfound life as a war reporter in Afghanistan. Such a humorous depiction, which centres on her struggles to come to terms with her new identity, underlines that she is not a fully mobile professional yet. However, she undergoes a transformation as the narrative progresses. As Kim gains experience in war reporting, she becomes progressively more mobile. By the end of the film, she has become a daring,

successful correspondent who knows how to navigate her way around the war zone. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the mobile professional woman turns darker when Kim starts to get hooked on the adrenaline of war coverage. As in many other films about women war reporters, such as *A Private War*, *A Thousand Times Good Night*, or *Thank You For Bombing*, this mobile profession is associated with a dangerous and irrepressible drive to keep oneself on the move in search of new stories regardless of the serious consequences that might ensue. However, *WTF* approaches the issue from a comic, satirical stance. This is in part due to the connotations that comedy star Tina Fey brings to the film, which will be examined below.

3.5.2. From *SNL* to *WTF*: Tina Fey as Kim Baker

Long before a film adaptation was even envisaged, Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times* wrote in her review of *The Taliban Shuffle* that, in her memoir, Barker "depict[ed] herself as a sort of Tina Fey character". It was only fitting, then, that the famous comedian played the part of the reporter in the film. The *Times* article caught Fey's attention, who, together with producer Lorne Michaels and writer Robert Carlock, turned the book Into the film *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, released in 2016 and directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa. Incidentally, all these people had a background in comedy—Lorne Michaels created the TV comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (known as *SNL*), Robert Carlock was the show runner of the sitcom *30 Rock* (Tina Fey, 2006-2013), where Fey played one of the protagonist roles, and Ficarra and Requa had written and directed comedies like *Cats & Dogs* (Lawrence Guterman, 2001), *Bad Santa* (Terry Zwigoff, 2003), *I Love You Philip Morris* (2009), and *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (2011). For her part, Tina Fey is widely known for her involvement in *SNL*, first as head writer and then as a performer as well. In fact, Fey was the first woman to ascend to the position of *SNL* head writer and was credited

with changing the show's tone into a more "women-friendly mode of comedy" and encouraging a greater female presence both on and off camera (Havas 347, Mizejewski 66). Fey made the leap to the screen with her appearance as co-anchor of *SNL*'s satirical news segment "Weekend Update", a role for which she was praised and remembered, and which laid the foundations for her brainy persona through her witty one-liners and her signature dark-rimmed glasses. She later created, wrote, and starred in the NBC series *30 Rock*¸ where she plays the role of Liz Lemon, the head writer of a fictional late-night comedy show known as *The Girlie Show* (or *TGS*) which greatly resembles *SNL*. Likewise, Liz Lemon bears resemblance to the star, evoking her trajectory at the NBC show, and therefore can be said to be a disguised version of Fey herself. Media representation of professional women is at the centre of the series, with Fey embodying a creative, liberal-minded career woman with a complicated, often unsatisfactory personal life. Havas describes the character of Liz Lemon as "a more realistic working woman" whose imperfection, awkwardness, and unglamourous life "provide the basis for comedy but also for points of identification in the politics of representation" (358).

WTF's Kim Baker could also fit this description. The similarities begin with the character's and actor's shared backstory. Like Fey, Kim works behind the scenes as a writer for a TV programme until she is offered a chance to be on camera. Kim can be considered to partake of Fey's "geek girl" roles, which started with her role in "Weekend Update" and were consolidated with *30 Rock* (Mizejewski 59). Most of these characters match the description of the nerdy, single professional woman, focused on her job to the point of becoming a workaholic, while unsuccessfully trying to get a handle on her personal life. However, the implications of the actor playing this role go beyond the fact that, as Havas states, she "usually performs a version of herself" (352). The character is deeply imbued with Fey's star persona, which is certainly well-defined and recognisable.

She is known as a witty and critical comedian who stands out for her clever jokes, self-deprecating humour, and deadpan delivery. Scholars like Mizejewski and Havas use terms such as "cerebral", "brainy", and "intellectual" to describe her, while the press dub her "the geek goddess", "the thinking man's sex symbol", or "the sexy librarian", positioning her as not only cleverly funny but also attractive (Mizejewski 59-61, Havas 351-360). As will be further discussed below, Fey finds herself in the rare position of being in the middle of the pretty/funny dichotomy according to which women in comedy are classified. On the one hand, she is "a comic who is being taken seriously" for doing "quality" comedy (Mizejewski 11, Havas 350). On the other hand, her reputation as a brainy (traditionally read as masculine) comedian is renegotiated due to her "cover girl" image, constructed over the years (following a major weight loss during her time on *SNL*) upon her perceived "beauty unusual in a woman comic" (Havas 360, Mizejewski 71). She, however, not only minimises but also sometimes mocks media's emphasis on her appearance (Lauzen 2014, 110). Both in and out of character, she usually makes jokes about her average-woman appearance, such as the few times she has joked about having to wear Spanx underneath tight-fitting dresses (she once took off her dress on *The Late Show with David Letterman* to show her undergarments). Her public image is built upon the idea that she is a "real" woman, one that ages naturally, wears shapewear, and, ultimately, one with whom the audience can relate (Johnson 2012, 66). Relatability is central to Fey's persona, in large part because it makes the star unthreatening despite her intelligence, sophistication, and success (66).

Moreover, her star persona is greatly defined by her public association with feminism. Particularly as a writer and comedy auteur, the comedian is perceived as an astute observer of gender relations and politics (Havas 347-351). Her gender-based humour and creative support of other women comedians have granted her the reputation

of a feminist icon, despite her having declared herself an "untrained" feminist because she supports the movement but is not educated on the matter (Lauzen 2014, 113). According to Havas, Fey's feminism is articulated mostly through her observational comedy while she shows little interest in political activism (349), a point also encapsulated in Amy Poehler's remark to *The New Yorker* when she pointed out that Fey is not "the first girl to belly-flop into the pool at the pool party. She watches everybody else's flops and then writes a play about it" (in Heffernan). Fey's alleged lack of political activism has earned her a fair share of criticism, as well as the not-so-uncommon perception that her brand of "superfunnysmart" feminism (Van Meter) is too attached to white, abled, cisheteronormative privilege (Doyle, Traister). For instance, scholars Michelle Colpean and Meg Tully criticise the use of white feminist comedy as a shield against criticism for the offensive nature of racial discourses in *WTF*. The film, they argue, is read alongside the popular feminist politics of the star and does in fact employ an overt feminism, but the feminist message overshadows questionable tropes and practices regarding race, such as a whitewashed casting (the two main Afghan characters are played by white actors), problematic jokes, and an Orientalist narrative that revolves around the white protagonist's process of self-discovery in a foreign land. As articles like Colpean and Tully's illustrate, even the projects that are not authored by Fey are aligned with her brand of feminism (163).

Fey's witty comedy style is reflected in the film. For instance, when the network is trying to recruit new reporters to cover the war in Afghanistan among the unmarried, childless personnel, one of Kim's woman co-workers bursts into tears. The manager asks Kim whether she will join in, to which she answers: "the travel or the crying?". Even though she did not write the script, her signature self-deprecating humour and biting sarcasm seem integrated into the film's use of comedy. Also influenced by Barker's

satirical writing, it recurrently makes the protagonist the butt of the jokes and focuses on underlining the flaws and absurdities that abound in the story. Fey's influence can also be observed in the several *SNL*/*30 Rock*-type gags included in the film, especially during the prominently comical first half of the film. Kim Baker's humour is characterised by her witty remarks and playful one-liners (she, for instance, imitates *Terminator*'s "I'll be back" line when she leaves for Afghanistan). These jokes combined with the comedian's sharp delivery, provides the audience with the full Tina Fey experience.

Fey's physicality also plays a role in setting the comic tone of the film. While the real-life Kim Barker is 1,78 metres tall (5'10"), Tina Fey is only 1,64 metres tall (5'4"), a physical feature that the film also uses to enhance the fish-out-of-water trope around which most of the film's comedy revolves. By making the character more petite, she stands out even more among the people with whom she works (burly soldiers and security staff, seasoned journalists, local guides, etc.), characters that, unlike Kim, do belong or have already found their way in this harsh, testosterone-infused environment. Physical comedy is used to portray women's mobility in a whimsical, almost parodic way in a way that reminds us of films like *New in Town,* mentioned in Chapter 2. Kim being squeezed against the plane's window during a rough corkscrew landing brings to mind the image of Renée Zellweger's character ineffectually pushing an excessively heavy cart of suitcases as her stilettos slip on the airport floor. Like *New in Town*, *WTF* uses physical comedy to construct Kim as a clumsy, awkward mobile professional.

Comedy in *WTF* determines not only the representation but also the audience's perception and interpretation of the mobile professional woman. The casting of Tina Fey is instrumental in constructing the comic meaning of the film and therefore has an impact on the meanings attached to this figure. After all, Fey is read first and foremost as a comedian, a title that encompasses her facets as a writer, producer, performer, film star,

TV personality, etc. Her strongly marked star persona and almost inescapable conflation between the star and the characters she plays creates certain expectations in spectators about her role in the film. Thus, the pathetic, neurotic, nerdy woman trope associated with Tina Fey is projected onto this woman journalist and her mobility is expected to make for a joke-worthy topic. Furthermore, given Fey's reputation as a feminist, a feminist sensibility is expected of the film's representation of women and gender relations in a markedly gendered context like the one it presents. As Colpean and Tully note, her feminist persona "lend[s] weight to the gender politics of [her] films" (163). In line with this, Fey's distinctive observational comedy reflects the gendered dynamics of the war reporting world—how women journalists are a minority, often not taken seriously, at risk of sexual harassment, etc. Finally, the portrayal of the mobile professional woman is shaped by Fey's relatability. The star's self-mockery, which characterises both her onscreen and offscreen personae, makes her seem more accessible and relatable, softening her (and most of her characters') status as an independent, smart, career-driven woman. Kim is also portrayed as an independent woman who has the determination and freedom to go to Afghanistan and start working as a war reporter, a narrative that, as discussed in relation to *A Private War*, is uncommon and exceptional in film. However, the character is imbued with Fey's humour and relatability, which make her be regarded as unthreatening, thus resulting in the mobile professional woman being read as unthreatening as well.

Kim, however, is not the only mobile professional woman in the film, nor is Tina Fey the only big Hollywood female star. The following section analyses the film's representation of women war reporters taking into account the secondary character played by Margot Robbie and the implications of this character.

3.5.3. Two Chicks in Kabul

WTF distances itself from Barker's book by introducing a character that does not appear in the source material: Tanya Vanderpoel (Margot Robbie), a BBC correspondent with a longer experience in war coverage than Kim's. The character was apparently created by Robert Carlock to serve as a friend and foil to the protagonist, to mentor and guide her in navigating the world of war reporting but also to serve as cautionary tale for Kim to be aware of the shortcomings of the job (Brayson). Tanya is glad to have another woman with whom to talk about "lippies" and men. She takes newcomer Kim under her wing and encourages her to leave behind her old ways and embrace her new identity in Kabul's chaotic journalism scene. Tanya inspires Kim to pursue personal and professional growth. However, what starts out as healthy competition between the two women turns into a rivalry fuelled by jealousy and ambition. Eventually, it is revealed that Tanya has negotiated a contract with Kim's network that puts the protagonist's job in jeopardy.

Tanya, who as a seasoned correspondent knows her way around the spaces of the international community in Kabul, introduces Kim to the idiosyncrasies of the social microcosm created by and for Western journalists and aid workers known as "the Kabubble". This space is depicted as an "expatriate ghetto" or an "expatriate bubble", a particular space where a community of skilled temporary migrants settles which shelters them from the host society and where the lifestyles and cultural values of the "home country" are often maintained (Cohen 37; Fisher et al. 268). Although there is a tendency to mould this kind of expat communities in the image of the home countries, they usually end up having their own rules and standards. Conduct that tends to be viewed negatively at home, such as heavy drinking, use of illegal drugs, and random sex, is accepted as a standard practice within the confines of the bubble. In his blog about his experiences as

an expat in Afghanistan, David Marshall Fox describes the so-called "Kabubble" as "the closely-knit community of expats who frequent alcohol-serving restaurants and underground clubs together". He recounts that in Kabul expat workers tend to be "cloistered" in their guest houses, which he refers to as "gilded cages", and are not allowed to move around freely and interact with their neighbours and members of their local community. Similarly, when they have leisure time, they only visit those social venues considered to be "approved" for foreigners.

Fox's description of the Kabubble matches its representation in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. Kim, Tanya, and the other foreign members of the press live in a dorm-like building where they sleep, work and party. In their leisure time, they socialise with other expats in Western-friendly bars where men and women can drink, smoke, and wear whatever they want. These spaces, where, for instance, women do not have to wear headscarves or *burqas*, are oases of freedom in an Islamic society whose restrictions have been tightened even further by Taliban rule. The borders of the Kabubble create a safe space shielded from the dangers of war-ridden Afghanistan, which are even greater for women like Kim and Tanya. The contrast generated by these borders between inside and outside is underlined. Anytime they leave the security of the bubble, they must be escorted by their own security guards and drivers, but within its boundaries, they lead a lifestyle of freedom and excess that taps into the conventions of comedy. As Kim Barker wrote, "it took Hollywood's exaggeration to accurately evoke the absurdity of our lives in the Kabubble".

WTF recurrently resorts to the conventions of comedy to tell the story of this Barker-inspired journalist. In that vein, the inclusion of the character of Tanya not only serves to shepherd Kim into a space of comic excess, but also makes for a plotline of female friendship and rivalry that takes the film into chick flick territory. In typical chick

flick fashion, the two women share several scenes in which they bond over drinks and encourage each other with "you go, girl" type of affirmations. Kim's relationship with Tanya is instrumental in her journey of self-discovery and exploration of her mobility. It prompts her to constantly move around in search of new stories regardless of the challenges and dangers she may face. Furthermore, Tanya introduces Kim to Iain (Martin Freeman), a cheeky Scottish freelance photographer. Although Tanya warns her against doing so, Kim starts an affair with him, only aimed at satisfying her sexual needs at first but which ends up becoming a romantic relationship. As a result of introducing this love plotline, the representation of the woman war reporter is further influenced by the conventions of romantic comedy. Karlyn considers romantic comedy as the most socially acceptable version of comic female unruliness (Karlyn 19, 20). Tropes of heterosexual love can potentially bring the unruly character closer to a socially accepted position that complies with gender roles. In *WTF*, both the friendship and love plots work to readjust Kim's ambition and mobility. When Kim discovers that Tanya has knowingly endangered her colleagues in order to reach a deal with the network, she realises that she no longer wants that be like her. Similarly, Iain's kidnapping while travelling cross-country makes her aware of her feelings for him and of the dangers of mobility in a war zone. Both events ultimately lead her to quit her job as a war correspondent and settle in New York. In a way, the fulfilment of a happy ending seems to entail the abandonment of the mobile correspondent life and the choice of a "rooted" job that conforms to traditional gender norms. Thus, the film ends with Kim working as a TV news anchor—a highly static job in which Kim becomes the object of the gaze—, professional mobility relegated to being an anecdotal episode in the protagonist's life.

Given that Tanya's embodiment of the mobile professional woman differs significantly from Kim's, the inclusion of this character provides the film with two

different approaches to the woman war reporter. Tanya is presented as a savvy reporter who has been stationed in Afghanistan for longer than the protagonist. She is self-confident, ambitious, and independent, both personally—she enjoys singlehood very much—and professionally, since working for a news network does not stop her from "finding her own luck", actively seeking new opportunities to advance her career. Unlike Kim, she is introduced as a fully mobile professional from the beginning instead of having to figure out the mobile profession throughout the film. The film conveys that she moves at ease without experiencing much friction, painting her as a competent and successful reporter. She is by no means messy and clumsy like Kim, but rather she is well-prepared, talented, and on top of her job. She clearly knows her way around the war zone and the social scene. She is portrayed as more fun-loving and sexually liberated than Fey's character—who is imbued with the star's "monastic" quality (Heffernan)—and has adopted a lifestyle of adrenaline, travel, and wild parties.

Tanya is played by Australian star Margot Robbie. As in the case of the leading role, the casting of Robbie as Tanya affects the construction of the character. Robbie's star text is for the most part determined by her identification with the archetypal blonde bombshell. Especially in the first stages of her career, the blonde beauty label became intertwined with the actor and many of her early roles played on her beauty and sex appeal. The star made her Hollywood breakthrough in Martin Scorsese's 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, in which she played the role of a sexualised trophy wife, described in the screenplay as "the hottest blonde ever". Since then, Robbie has been included in numerous sexiest woman lists and compared with other iconic blondes such as Marilyn Monroe or Grace Kelly (The Take). Some of her high-profile roles following *The Wolf of Wall Street*, such as a con artist in *Focus* (Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2015), Harley Quinn in *Suicide Squad* (David Ayer, 2016), Sharon Tate in *Once Upon A Time in*

Hollywood (Quentin Tarantino, 2019), or even her cameo in *The Big Short* (Adam McKay, 2015), continue to draw on her attractiveness and sexual magnetism, despite the actor's efforts to redefine her image by consciously choosing roles that depart from the bombshell type, often in independent or smaller projects. As an essay by *The Take* points out, her attractiveness is the focus of attention not only at a media and reception level but also at a narrative level: especially in her early films, characters consistently comment on her looks. Therefore, the essay explains, "her beauty (and how her character responds to being 'the beautiful one') in part defines her". Feminine beauty remains ingrained in her star persona, only currently Robbie has a greater control over the implications of her looks, especially since she co-founded her own production company. The star seems to have reappropriated her bombshell image, and one of the most effective strategies to achieve that is humour. Her *Vogue* parody video of her "psychotically perfect" beauty routine exemplifies how the actor has made fun of her blonde beauty persona (Vogue).

Considering the film's setting (a war-ravaged country where women must cover themselves in public) and the fact that Kim and Tanya appear to be the only female journalists in the group of correspondents stationed in Kabul, it is not fortuitous that the film chooses to draw attention to the characters' physical appearance, especially when played by "the geek goddess" (Fey) and "the bombshell of the 2010s" (The Take) (Robbie). Already during their first conversation, Tanya introduces Kim to the concept of being "Kabul cute". As she explains, attractiveness is assessed according to specific standards in the Kabubble, and therefore the few Western women that live there are perceived as more attractive than they would be in their home countries. Thus, a woman like Kim, who would be rated a "six" in the US, is considered a "nine" by the men in Kabul. Acknowledging Tanya's (or rather Margot Robbie's) attractiveness, Kim wonders what her fellow reporter's score is according to Kabul standards. "What are you here, like

a fifteen?", she asks, only for Tanya to confidently confirm it. Colonel Hollanek also tells Kim about this phenomenon, only he refers to it with the term "four-ten-four" (four back home, ten in Kabul, four when going back home). "Are you saying I'm a four?", says a slightly offended Kim.

Much of the film's comedy rests on the premise that Kim is not an attractive woman and that she is just average looking. Yet again, the film exploits Tina Fey's star text and her frumpy, nerdy-looking characters in order to portray this otherwise beautiful woman as only semi-attractive. In addition to the Kabul cute and four-ten-four gags, there are other jokes about Kim's appearance, like when two different men say: "put a turban on her, she'd make a very handsome boy". Kim is not necessarily ugly, but she is over forty and does not put much effort into her looks. For example, she arrives at Fahim's wedding wearing her regular war zone clothes and having washed only the front of her hair under the disapproving gaze of the elegantly dressed guests. Kim's messy appearance contributes to her portrayal as a bungling war reporter. Moreover, the protagonist is made to look particularly unattractive by pairing her with Margot Robbie's character. As Iain (Martin Freeman), remarks, by being next to the dazzling Tanya she reminds men that she is "only okay looking". Even in a war context, Robbie's character always looks put-together and sexy, wearing flattering (and apparently war-proof) hair and make-up. She is effectively portrayed as a bombshell in a flak jacket and, in line with *The Take*'s argument, her character is to a great extent defined by her strongly emphasised beauty. Thus, Tanya's blonde bombshell appearance is used to generate comedy out of Kim's unattractiveness, which is only such by comparison with the secondary character.

Despite poking fun at the fact that Kim is not as attractive as Tanya, the way in which women war reporters' gender expression is depicted in *WTF* differs considerably from its portrayal in *A Private War*. Except for the occasional "handsome boy in a turban"

joke, the female characters in *WTF* are in no way masculinised. While Marie's body had to be defeminised for her to function effectively in the male world of war, *WTF* uses an alternative strategy to deal with the disruption caused by the juxtaposition of women and war. Humour is used to approach a disruptive, unruly figure like the woman war reporter by making fun of her femaleness and its implications in the context of the film. The aim of the film is not that the female characters blend in with the male mobile workers, but to stress that they stand out and that their exceptional status leads to funny situations. Its comic tone makes it possible for the characters to be portrayed as mobile professional women without toning down their femininity.

Chapter 4. Female Special Agents and the Cinematic Portrayal of Mobilities

4.1. Special Agents Outside Film: Women in Intelligence

This chapter deals with the rather heterogeneous group of female professionals that I will be referring to as "special agents". This label functions as a sort of umbrella term used specifically for film that covers a range of diverse but identifiably related characters and activities. The moniker "special agents" is mainly used to describe characters that work as investigators, detectives, spies, or analysts for governmental or independent security and intelligence agencies and organisations such as FBI, CIA, MI5, MI6, or Interpol, among others. They are involved in national or international security, law-enforcement, counterintelligence, counterterrorism, cyber security, military intelligence, and other activities. In addition to intelligence operatives, the term is also applied to agents trained and assigned to kill on behalf of a given entity, who may or may not be spies. In film, there is sometimes a fine line between spies and assassins, which is mostly a matter of perspective and ideology. Therefore, the term "special agent" proves useful to group these nuanced roles into a single common category.

Depending on the remit of their organisation or their role within it, intelligence officers may operate in domestic or foreign locations, but, in any case, mobility is a characteristic of their job. Their professional status grants them a hypermobility that allows frictionless movement in physical and cyber spaces. Apparently, they have the resources to access almost every area regardless of borders and restrictions, can move swiftly and smoothly, and are even able to use cover identities if necessary. Their professional training and skills also contribute to their hypermobility—they generally

have a good command of technology and foreign languages, interpersonal skills, and physical training. Special agents are among the top members of the kinetic elite. Furthermore, their job and mobility are idealised in the collective imagination due, on the one hand, to the secretive nature of intelligence work and, on the other hand, to the imaginary of spies and secret agents constructed in popular culture.

The figure of the special agent has thus been stylised into a cultural stereotype, one that epitomises social privilege. This figure is usually white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, well-educated, determined, and resourceful. As scholars have noted, the popular view of intelligence officers not only has a real-world impact, but also reflects to a great extent the reality of the intelligence world. The history of the agencies has conformed to the "white, male, well-spoken and educated" stereotype (Shahan 2019, 2), since for decades the intelligence workforce has not been very diverse in terms of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Writing about the US, Robert Callum describes the Intelligence Community as "insular", "culturally homogeneous", "overwhelmingly white and disproportionately male" (27). British agencies are described in similar terms by authors such as Tammy M. Proctor and Daniel W. B. Lomas. As the latter puts it, the lack of diversity in intelligence has perpetuated the "Bond-like cliché" (996).

The existing literature remarks that women, non-white, and LGTB+ groups have limited and unequal opportunities to have a career in intelligence. In the case of women, their presence and role in the intelligence community has been different from men's from the beginning of these organisations. Even though women have historically been present in intelligence agencies—and involved in espionage even before an intelligence community was established (Van Puyvelde 676)—, they have often remained in the background, relegated to lower-grade or support positions. Structural barriers have resulted in the formation of a glass ceiling that limits women's career progression in

intelligence, one also subject to a marked horizontal occupational segregation (Shahan 2021, 569; Lomas 1001; Van Puyvelde 693). Quoting Jessica Shahan, "women's opportunities in intelligence organizations have been mediated by policies and everyday practices derived from gendered assumptions about their capabilities, ambitions, and family obligations" (2021, 580). Hence, their role has been and continues to be mainly in clerical and administrative positions, while they rarely work as frontline operational officers (Lomas 1001, Van Puyvelde 677, DCAF 11). As usual, women have occupied the less mobile roles, mobility proving to be a limiting factor for most women workers. Both Helen H. Yu's and Towanda Thorne's studies call attention to the detrimental impact of mandatory mobility requirements for most US law-enforcement agents on the careers of women, who often find themselves unable or unwilling to travel or relocate because of obligations and responsibilities outside their professional employment. Similarly, the 2015 report "Women in the UK Intelligence Community" points out that operational work has not been considered a viable option for women with children, largely because of the travel involved, and so, upon their return to work after maternity leave, they have been assigned to corporate, administrative, or human resources positions instead of field work (HC 24-26). All in all, family-related issues and unequal standards for men and women are yet again the main reasons for the restriction of women's professional mobility.

Notwithstanding these ongoing inequalities, intelligence agencies have in recent years acknowledged the need to increase and encourage diversity in their workforce, launching several campaigns and initiatives to foster a more inclusive culture. For instance, MI6's Chief Richard Moore stated the agency's commitment to diversity on Twitter and their determinations to leave behind stereotypes about intelligence work, encapsulated in his use of the hashtag #ForgetJamesBond (Moore). MI5 sponsors the

National Diversity Awards, which recognise the work of individuals and organisations across the UK towards equality, diversity, and inclusion. In the United States, the FBI and CIA have implemented Diversity and Inclusion programmes to promote a diverse workplace (FBI n.d.(a), CIA). In short, the agencies' common objective is the recruitment and retention of diverse, qualified talent. As a result, women's situation in the intelligence community is gradually changing and advances are being made towards gender equality. Current data shows that the presence of women at intelligence agencies and organisations is greater than before. For example, at the CIA it increased from 39% in 1953 to 46% in 2013, and from 10% in 1992 to 36% in 2018 at senior level (Van Puyvelde 695), while 45% of the FBI's current workforce are women (FBI n.d.(b)). In the UK, MI5 has a 43% of women in its staff, and a 39% of women in senior managerial positions (MI5).

However, despite efforts to ensure a more balanced gender representation, workforce inequalities persist in the intelligence community. As Van Puyvelde puts it, "equal opportunity and diversity are not only about representation. Statistics and high-level nominations are important, but they provide only a limited understanding of discrimination" (695). To this date, women in intelligence continue to face prejudices, discrimination, and sometimes harassment (695). Issues of sexism and misogyny are yet to be more directly addressed and tackled since, as Shahan argues, organisational culture and secrecy hinder their eradication (2021, 580). She identifies yet another problematic issue: for her, the official record on which intelligence studies generally rely is gendered and, therefore, it diminishes or leaves out key aspects of women's experiences as intelligence workers such as obstacles for career progression, discriminatory everyday working practices, emotional impact of intelligence work, work stress, and added personal responsibilities (571-580). She highlights career progression and work-life balance as the central concerns and challenges for women currently working in

intelligence. Regarding matters of childcare and family life, the impact of travel or foreign postings is mentioned in these women's personal narratives as an issue that affects them more than their male colleagues (578). Lastly, intelligence work is still widely perceived as male dominated, largely because the "Bond stereotype" is very much at work in the cultural imaginary. Similarly, intelligence officers' mobilities are idealised, assumed as completely frictionless without exception, while that is not always case.

4.2. Mata Hari's legacy: Women Special Agents On Screen

The hypermobility of special agents has fascinated cinemagoers since the beginning of the cinema. The spy genre offered a highly entertaining form of escapism, not least because of their recurrent use of exotic locations. The first spy films can be traced back to the silent era. These stories, which reflected the fear of invasion and xenophobia of the time, bloomed with the outbreak of World War I (1914-1919), with films like the British *The German Spy Peril* (Bert Haldane, 1914) and *O.H.M.S.* (Alexander Butler, 1913) or Hollywood's *Our Secret Wires* (Tom Chatterton, 1915). Since then, spy films have established themselves as a significantly prolific group which feeds off the historical context. Different historical events, such as World War II (1939-1945), the Cold War (1947-1962), or the Global War on Terror (2001-present), have served as background for narratives about special agents. Moreover, the conventions of spy fiction have been approached from many angles and combined with those of the thriller, action, comedy, science fiction, melodrama, or animation, for instance. A highly profitable subject matter, numerous film series and franchises about special agents have been created throughout the years, while this type of fiction has also had a strong presence in television. Due to the popularity and resultant abundance of espionage films, it is not such a hard task to

find women spies in some of them, even though a marked gender divide exists among characters and most of the films' leading spy roles are played by male actors.

Female agents are featured in early spy films such as Fritz Lang's *Spione* (*Spies*, 1928), where evil mastermind Haghi (Rudolf Klein-Rogge) runs a covert international spy network that carries out all kinds of schemes to obtain confidential documents and information from different world powers. Among his body of secret agents, there are also women, prominently young and attractive, who vamp their victims for information following Haghi's orders. One of these seductresses is Kitty (Lien Deyers), who lures and seduces the head of the Japanese secret service Dr. Matsumoto (Lupu Pick) to steal a copy of a secret treaty which, if made public, could spark a war. Kitty's embodiment of the femme fatale is depicted through the use of cross-cutting to show the female spy enjoying her reward, a pearl necklace and a nice meal, as her victim, Dr. Matsumoto, suffers the consequences of having failed his mission and commits suicide.

The film gives a more central role to the more experienced Sonja (Gerda Maurus), a beautiful Russian spy whom Haghi entrusts with several tasks. Like Kitty, she plays the damsel in distress to attract her targets' attention and seduce them. Sonja is assigned to gain the trust of a young agent known as Number 326, whom Haghi seeks to neutralise. However, she falls in love with 326 and eventually turns against her employer. The female spy is portrayed as passionate and emotional in contrast to the more rational male agents. *Spies* also shows the lack of agency of female spies like Sonja, who are totally subordinated to a male authority figure, Haghi, that controls them and has the power to curtail their freedom of movement, as he does by forcing Sonja to live in his headquarters and eventually imprisoning her there. "You will be free when one of us two men triumphs", he tells her (*"Du frei sein wirst, wenn einer von uns zwei Männern Sieger ist"*, my translation).

The representation of women spies as artful seductresses whose greatest asset is their attractiveness and sexuality continued to dominate screens for years and lies at the heart of prominent films such as *Dishonored* (Josef von Sternberg, 1931) and *Mata Hari* (George Fitzmaurice, 1931). These films brought the woman secret agent to the fore by turning her into the protagonist of the film and casting big-name stars Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo respectively. The lead characters in both films were inspired by the Dutch exotic dancer and courtesan Mata Hari, condemned for espionage during World War I. Her name became synonymous with the woman spy, consolidating the spy-courtesan stereotype which was founded on notions of female sexuality and betrayal (Wheelwright 2016, 175). The myth of Mata Hari, a self-supporting woman who uses her powers of seduction to survive and thrive in a male world, conveys concerns about women's changing status in society that surfaced at the time of the First World War and have resurfaced repeatedly to the present day (White 2007, 1; Wheelwright 2019, 16). Rosie White argues that Mata Hari "represented a disturbingly *mobile* femininity" and that "her trial was an attempt to fix that *mobility* within the regime of sexual and imperial relations" (2010, 74, my emphasis). It is noteworthy that White uses the terms mobile and mobility with regard to Mata Hari, who was actually an extraordinarily mobile woman even during the war, since as a Dutch subject she was able to cross national borders freely due to her home country's neutrality (Williams). She was resented for her international status and fluid identity, as well as her embodiment of the New Woman who exercised control over her life, valued her personal, social, and economic independence, and rejected the constraints of domesticity, moving into the public realm through professional work and education (Wheelwright 2016, 170; White 2007, 35).

The two heroines in *Dishonored* and *Mata Hari* are linked to the legend of Mata Hari through their embodiment of some of the most feared and desired characteristics of

the modern woman. Dietrich's and Garbo's characters are strong, independent women, sexually liberated and unashamed of their lifestyle, as well as crafty professionals. The German actor plays Agent X-27, a prostitute recruited by the Austrian Secret Service to spy on the Russians. She is a war widow getting by on her own, unafraid of life or death, as she says. The Chief of the Secret Service (Gustav von Seyffertitz) overhears this and asks her to do what he thinks is "the most ignoble [job] on earth": that of a spy. He is interested in her "woman's charm" and what that charm can accomplish that a "man's brain" cannot. Yet, she turns out to have both charm and brains. She is a clever, cultured woman and an accomplished pianist. As Tamara Tracz remarks, she presents a threat to patriarchy.

Garbo's Mata Hari is also more than a charming vamp at the service of the nation. A hugely popular dancer in wartime Paris, she is presented as an enchantress with loose morals and countless liaisons with powerful political and military figures. She secretly works as a spy for spymaster Andriani (Lewis Stone), although he does not trust that she will not betray him and give information to whomever it suits her, if only for the excitement of it. Mata Hari is portrayed as capricious, temperamental, uncompliant, and individualistic, an uncontrollable, undomesticated force that both attracts and threatens men. Like X-27, Mata Hari is a "sexual, unashamed and able" woman and therefore she is doomed (Tracz). In both films, it is by falling in love with the men they are spying on that the heroines meet their tragic fate. In spite of their extraordinary espionage skills, they fail as spies when they give in to their emotions. X-27 allows Russian agent H-14 (Victor McLaglen) to escape, while Mata Hari seals her own fate so as to prevent her beloved Rosanoff (Ramon Navarro) from being charged with treason. Their affection and loyalty for these men send both female spies to death, an ending that, in both cases, has a dignifying, redeeming, and even triumphant quality. For Tracz, death is the only possible

closure for these woman spies' subversion of patriarchy, which they actively embrace as a form of female masochism.

Female spies also play a key role in Alfred Hitchcock's films. *The 39 Steps* (1935), for instance, starts with the assassination of female agent Annabella Smith (Lucie Mannheim). However, as Alan R. Booth mentions, Hitchcock's woman spies are mostly relegated to auxiliary roles in narratives dominated by male characters (171). As he puts it, "gone, at least for the moment, were the days of the female prime protagonist" (171). In comparison to the films mentioned above, Hitchcock's films stand out for their extensive use of and careful attention to movement, travel, transportation, and space. Their spies typically travel, run, pursue, and drive. The mission in *Secret Agent* (1936) involves not only a trip to Switzerland but also a dangerous train ride to Constantinople. The protagonist is joined in this mission by seasoned agent Elsa Carrington (Madeleine Carroll), who refuses to fall into the aforementioned "Wait Here" trope and follows the hero into enemy territory.

Hitchcock also explored the figure of the sex-spy, particularly in his films *Notorious* (1946) and *North by Northwest* (1959). Both Alicia Huberman's (Ingrid Bergman) and Eve Kendall's (Eve Marie Saint) jobs as secret agents entail seduction and deception, positioning them as Mata Hari-style spies. *Notorious* introduces Alicia as a young woman trying to get over the recent conviction for treason of her father, who unbeknownst to her, was a Nazi spy. She is recruited by government agent Devlin (Cary Grant) to infiltrate a group of Nazi sympathisers settled in Brazil by flirting with their leader, Alexander Sebastian (Claude Rains), an old acquaintance of hers who used to have feelings for her. Alicia, who has become romantically involved with Devlin, is hurt by his apparent indifference to the fact that he is forcing her into the arms of another man or, as Nora Gilbert puts it, "pimp[ing her] for political gain" (6). *North by Northwest*'s Eve

is recruited to perform a similar service, in which her charm and sexuality must be put at the service of the government. She is approached by the US Secret Service and informed about her lover's criminal activities. Her relationship with Cold War spy Vandamm (James Mason) makes her "uniquely valuable" for the Secret Service, and hence she goes undercover to gather information about Vandamm's organisation. Maintaining her cover has some collateral damage, like having to seduce and deceive the wrongly targeted Roger Thorhill (Cary Grant), who, upon discovering her treachery, accuses her of being a femme fatale. However, as Gilbert argues, neither Eve nor Alicia are one-dimensional femme fatales, but rather "three-dimensional human beings who are wrongly read as one-dimensional 'bad girls' by the male characters who interact with them" (11-12).

As in *Dishonored* and *Mata Hari*, the woman spy's sexuality is portrayed as both powerful and degrading, but its portrayal in these two Hitchcock films underlines the fact that the female body is used as a commodity. The degrading sexual nature of the heroines' work can be read as an aspect that constrains their ambition and tempers the sense of empowerment that landing an important government job gives them (Gilbert 10). Their mobility and gender can be argued to be reconciled in similar terms. Both Alicia and Eve are shown to travel with ease, navigating the stylised space of spies' hypermobility, but they are not in control of their own mobility. They are used as pawns in a political game played by men which dictates their actions and movements.

The history of the onscreen woman spy is also marked by one of the most popular film franchises of all time: the James Bond series, which started in 1962 with the release of *Dr. No* (Terence Young) and continues to add new titles to the list. The role of women in Bond films has been widely debated, often due to their sexist portrayal of women. Women are undoubtedly essential to the Bond franchise, even if they are only cast in supporting roles as 007's lovers, accomplices, and enemies. Each Bond mission involves

at least one "Bond girl", yet only a few of them share his profession. According to Tom McNeely, by the end of the twentieth century, only four leading woman characters could be considered as Bond's competent equals: KGB agent Anya Amasova, a.k.a "Triple X" (Barbara Bach) from *The Spy Who Loved Me* (Lewis Gilbert, 1977), CIA agent Holly Goodhead (Lois Chiles) from *Moonraker* (Lewis Gilbert, 1979), contract CIA operative Pam Bouvier (Carey Lowell) from *Licence to Kill* (John Glenn, 1989), and Chinese agent Wai Lin (Michelle Yeoh) from *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997) (179). In addition, the evolution of the female characters in Bond films can be observed in aspects such as the introduction of a female "M", played by Judi Dench, in the film *GoldenEye* (Martin Campbell, 1995) and subsequent instalments in the series. The spy world depicted in the franchise is characterised by its glamourisation of intelligence work and its fascination with travel, mirrored in the numerous, mostly exotic, locations featured in the films. Thus, in order to keep up with 007, the woman agents in Bond films need to be mobile. In *The Spy Who Loved Me*, Anya and Bond travel by land, air, and sea—even under water. *Moonraker* takes mobility a step further by taking the woman agent to space. Given the massive popularity of the James Bond saga, its portrayal of special agents' mobilities has had a profound impact on current accounts of the mobile professional woman, particularly regarding mainstream Hollywood productions. Bond films contributed to the construction of a spectacle of mobility that has become a staple of action films and that, as will be mentioned below, is tied to a specific cinematography for the depiction of movement and space.

The figure of the special agent woman in action films was also deeply influenced by the Blaxploitation cycle of films in the 1970s. As can be seen in this brief overview, the representation of black women special agents has been very limited throughout the history of spy cinema. Blaxploitation films included some of the first black female special

agent characters at the centre of their stories, such as Cleopatra Jones (Tamara Dobson), a government agent whose missions take her to exotic places like Turkey and Hong Kong in *Cleopatra Jones* (Jack Starrett, 1973) and its 1975 sequel. Blaxploitation entailed a change from former derogatory and reductive depictions of black womanhood and portrayed black action heroines as strong, independent, sexy, and aggressive women or, in Rikke Schubart's words, "super bitches". However, these films focus heavily on women characters' physicality, as epitomised by figures like Pam Grier. On the one hand, women characters tend to embody a "masculine" strength and aggressiveness, and, on the other hand, their bodies are often objectified and hypersexualised. The end of blaxploitation also meant the decline of black women special agent protagonists in film.

The representation of the woman special agent in the late twentieth century tends to reflect the sensibility of the time regarding the moral authority of state powers, the role of the individual, and the position of women in the workplace (White 2007, 106). The French *Nikita* (Luc Besson, 1990) and the US remake *Point of No Return* (John Badham, 1993), as well as other versions and remakes of the story of a violent young woman, a street punk and drug addict, who is recruited and trained as a government assassin, are relevant examples of late-twentieth-century representations of active/violent women and their enduring connection with the figure of the femme fatale, which enjoyed a renewed prominence in the neo-noir cinema of the 1980s and 1990s in movies such as *Basic Instinct* and *Fatal Attraction*, among others (105-106). Nikita (Anne Parillaud)/Maggie (Bridget Fonda) is portrayed as a subversive figure, not only for her criminal, anti-establishment behaviour, but also as a "deviant, androgynous" woman (113). Thus, her training includes her physical and social transformation into acceptable femininity. Once more, the woman agent's body seems to be governed by the system.

Nikita/Maggie is rehabilitated to become a professional woman, but she rejects her employment and the principles of the organisation that employs her (White 2007, 110). For one, this job is forced upon her in a way that gives her no choice: either she accepts it, or she is eliminated. Since the secret service appears to be corrupted, serving one's country is not viewed as a noble cause anymore (112). White reads the work of the secret agent in these films as representing another form of corporate business, suggesting that capitalistic interests drive government agencies in the postmodern era (112, 118). The protagonist also rejects the power that her employers exercise over her freedom, first by locking her up in their training facility and forcing her to forge a new identity, and then by controlling and dictating her actions and movements. Thus, the film's portrayal of mobility is connected to a topic that has become a staple of special agent films: surveillance. The organisation's command centre is depicted as a panopticon that allows Nikita/Maggie to be watched at all times, preventing her from escaping. Once her training is completed, she apparently acquires a status of mobility as a secret agent, but the surveillance continues even if it is not explicitly shown as it was previously. Her mobility is in the hands of the agency, who keep watching over her so that she can be called into action anytime and anywhere. This becomes especially evident when, during a romantic trip with her boyfriend, she is unexpectedly commanded to shoot a target from the window of the very hotel room that the couple share, revealing the organisation's omnipresence and absolute control over every aspect of the female agent's life.

As will be discussed in the following section, some of the aspects that characterise twentieth-century representations of the woman special agent are echoed in contemporary spy films, while the changing social, political, and economic contexts of the period continue to produce distinct strategies for the portrayal of this mobile figure.

4.3. Spies, Assassins, and More: Women Agents in Twenty-First-Century Films

Special agent films have continued to be among the most popular and prolific films in twenty-first-century cinema. Long-established franchises like the *James Bond* series have not ceased to grow over the years, popular 1960s and 1970s TV spy stories such as *Mission: Impossible* (Bruce Geller, 1966-1973), *The Man from U.N.C.L.E* (Sam Rolfe and Norman Felton, 1964-1968), and *Charlie's Angels* (Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts, 1976-1981) have experienced a revival in film form, and new top-grossing film series, like the *Bourne* franchise (Doug Liman, 2002; Paul Greengrass, 2004, 2007, 2016; Tony Gilroy, 2012), thrive. The technological advances that the new millennium brought about have contributed to the growth of special agent films, which are nowadays widely identified with the high-tech blockbuster. Many films capture these technological developments not only at a narrative level by featuring highly sophisticated weapons, gadgets, and surveillance systems, but also at a formal level through the use of digital filmmaking techniques such as special effects, CGI, or rapid editing, drawing on a visual style analogous to David Bordwell's notion of "intensified continuity" that for the most part characterises the cinema of special agents. This hyperkinetic style strongly influences the representation of mobility—generally a hypermobility based on frictionless movement, constant border crossing, and multimodal transportation—and space—notably liquid spaces—, giving rise to a cinematic space of mobilities. Regarding gender representation, if women spies had a significant presence in twentieth century cinema, these characters have risen to even greater prominence in the past decades. This type of mobile professionals is possibly the most abundant in fiction, with numerous examples of female special agent characters either in leading or supporting roles, Hollywood or "world" cinemas.

Twenty-first century films about women special agents often reflect the idiosyncrasies of the socio-historical context following 9/11, a period marked by the war on terror, global political unrest, outbreaks of xenophobia, financial, environmental, and health crises, and mounting concerns about mass surveillance and cyberattacks. The crisis in the Middle East is reflected in films such as *The Kingdom* (Peter Berg, 2007), which casts Jennifer Garner in a secondary role as Special Agent Janet Mayes, stationed in Saudi Arabia, Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2013), starring Jessica Chastain as a CIA operative involved in the manhunt for al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, and *The Operative* (Yuval Adler, 2019), with Diane Kruger as a Mossad agent undercover as an English teacher in Tehran. Yet, there is also a consistent trend for historical pieces featuring women spies. For instance, films about female secret agents during World War II are particularly recurrent, with examples such as *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, 2001), *Zwartboek* (*Black Book*, Paul Verhoeven, 2006), *Les femmes de l'ombre* (*Female Agents*, Jean-Paul Salomé, 2008), *Inglorious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino, 2009), *Allied* (Robert Zemeckis, 2016), *Red Joan* (Trevor Nunn, 2018), *A Call to Spy* (Lydia Dean Pilcher, 2019), or *Spionen* (*The Spy*, Jens Jonsson, 2019).

As some of the titles above show, women special agents have also been explored in films made outside Hollywood and, although not the focus of this thesis, in non-English speaking films. For example, it is worth noting the presence of women special agents in Bollywood films in relatively prominent roles. This subject matter enjoys great popularity in the industry, to the point of having created a whole "spy universe" of films featuring various fictional R&AW (India's Research and Analysis Wing) agents. For instance, the *Tiger* franchise, one of the highest-grossing ones in Bollywood's history, stars Katrina Kaif as Zoya Humaini-Rathore, an ISI (Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence) agent who accompanies the male protagonist on adventures that take them to multiple locations.

Initially just Tiger's (Salman Khan) love interest, she eventually teams up with him, proving to be as competent an agent as India's finest, yet remaining in a secondary role. Other examples of Bollywood special agent films featuring women agents are *Raazi* (Meghna Gulzar, 2018), *London Confidential* (Kanwal Sethi, 2020), *Lahore Confidential* (Kunal Kohli, 2021), and *Bell Bottom* (Ranjit M. Tewari, 2021), among others.

The twenty-first century has also brought about a sort of revival of blaxploitation female special agents in the form of spoof comedies such as *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (Jay Roach, 2002), in which Beyoncé plays Foxxy Cleopatra, and *Undercover Brother* (Malcolm D. Lee, 2002), with Aunjanue Ellis as Sistah Girl. These comedies draw on the hypersexualised portrayal of the black action heroines of blaxploitation, as well as other popular stereotypes about black women. In recent years, by contrast, black women characters featured in special agent films have received a notably different treatment. Their portrayal has intended to convey a greater sense of equality and distance itself from discriminatory racial and gender stereotypes. Some of these roles mark milestones in the history of black women special agents on screen: Naomi Harris as James Bond's sidekick in *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012), the first black Moneypenny and the first Moneypenny to be a MI6 field agent, 2019 film *Charlie's Angels*' introduction of the first black Angel, played by Ella Balinska, in the history of the franchise (as well as the first brown Angel, played by Naomi Scott, of Indian descent), and black actor Lashana Lynch's role as Nomi in *No Time to Die* (Cary Fukunaga, 2021), which made history as the first female 007 and, therefore, the first black female 007 altogether.

The cinema of special agents is often a cinema of spectacle that tends to use of the conventions of action/adventure films. Special agent films are known for their action-packed plots, intense fight scenes, fast-paced chase sequences, exotic locations, and,

using Tasker's terminology, "spectacular bodies" performing extraordinary feats (1993). Tasker calls attention to the important part played by issues of gender in spectacular action films. The female body plays a crucial role in the construction of spectacle, both as an active (the action subject of the narrative) and passive element (the erotic object of visual spectacle) (O'Day in Tasker 2004, 203). The Bond franchise, which is arguably the pinnacle of cinematic spectacle as far as spy films are concerned, clearly shows this. NSA agent Jinx (Halle Berry) coming out of the ocean in an orange bikini in *Die Another Day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002)—an intertextual reference to 1962 Bond film *Dr. No*—is as much a part of the film's spectacle as the fight or chase sequences set in remote locations like Cuba, Iceland, or Korea. In the Bond franchise, Jinx is one of those few female characters that are portrayed as perfectly competent, professionally trained special agents, with skills equal or even exceeding those of 007. Yet, she is also portrayed as canonically beautiful, seductive, and sexually available. Jinx fits Marc O'Day's description of the "action babe heroine", a conceptualisation that applies to most early twenty-first-century female special agent characters. These characters are usually "physically strong, independent though often emotionally vulnerable, typically glamorous and even overtly sexy" (Tasker 2004, 9).

Special agent films from the early 2000s are also influenced by the sociocultural background of the time—marked by phenomena like postfeminism, "girlie" feminism, and "girl power"—and, as a result, usually draw on the post-feminist spectacle of (hyper)femininity and female empowerment. The film *Charlie's Angels* (Joseph McGinty Nichol, 2000) and its sequel *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (Joseph McGinty Nichol, 2003) are paradigmatic examples of Y2K trends in the portrayal of "action babe" agents. A revival of the 1970s TV series, Cameron Diaz, Lucy Liu, and Drew Barrymore play a later generation of Angels who stand out for their integration of sexualised femininity and

physical and intellectual prowess. The characters are constructed following the "beauty, brains, and brawn" trio trope, each of them embodying an archetype (the girly nerd, the ace, the rebellious rocker) and even colour-coded (the blonde, the brunette, the redhead) in a way that contributes to the overall cartoonish style of the films. As Simone Knox has argued, this style stands out for its excess, both in narrative and visual terms. The films are excessive, for instance, in their portrayal of female bodies and their movements. The Angels' attractiveness is always foregrounded and, coupled with their ability to manage feats of action that defy the laws of physics, is depicted as a key ingredient for the film's spectacle. The films' formal style, a hyperbolic version of the conventional spy action fast-paced cinematography, emphasises the characters' movements. Knox analyses several scenes from the 2000 film, in which elements such as zoom, freeze-frame, extreme camera movements and frame distances, and slow motion are used, in connection with Lyotard's concept of "acinema", which conceives of "an experimental, excessive form of filmmaking that uses stillness and movement to shift away from the orderly process of meaning-making within mainstream cinema" (1). She examines the film's "moments of excessive movement and stillness" which are not concerned with functional order or an economy of sense (they are not "productive" in Lyotard's terms) but are included for the mere enjoyment of the movement itself and its portrayal (5-10). In these moments, Knox argues, "representation is not economised, restrained, brought back to the commensurate and the productive, but is pointless in its excessiveness" (10).

Other 2000s films like *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Doug Liman, 2005) bear resemblance with the representation of the action babe in *Charlie's Angels*. The 2005 film, a battle of the sexes flick, stars Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie as a bored married couple who eventually discover their partner's secret life as skilled assassins when they are assigned to kill each other. An action-packed narrative, with the couple repeatedly fighting with

fists, guns, and explosives, its portrayal of the woman special agent relies on the spectacle of Angelina Jolie as an action babe star (already established through her portrayal of action heroine Lara Croft) through her body (depicted as hyperfeminine) and her swift movements. However, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* puts a greater emphasis on the deadly quality of the woman special agent, of her professional skills, her sexuality, and her mobility.

The trend in film representation of women special agents has moved progressively away from the "primary-coloured spectacle" (Knox 8) of sexy femininity in *Charlie's Angels* and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* towards a darker, less humorous approach to the matter. For instance, the image of Angelina Jolie's tortured body at the beginning of *Salt* (Philip Noyce, 2010) deviates from the perpetual sexiness of her character in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith.* Although not limited to this period, special agent films of the 2010s tend to rest on the conventions of the action thriller, spawning a generation of kick-ass, deadly women agents. The protagonists of *Salt*, *Hanna* (Joe Wright, 2011), *Atomic Blonde* (David Leitch, 2017), *Red Sparrow* (Francis Lawrence, 2018), *Anna* (Luc Besson, 2019), and *Ava* (Tate Taylor, 2020) are all women agents trained to spy, fight, and kill. These films involve large doses of violence inflicted by and upon women, sometimes sexual violence as is the case of *Red Sparrow* and *Anna*. Female sexuality plays an important role in many of these films, yet it always bears certain negative connotations; it generally represents a threat either to the women characters or those they seduce. Films like *Red Sparrow, Anna* and *Ava* revisit the stereotype of the femme fatale by portraying their protagonists as deadly seductresses trained to use their beauty to lure in their targets. *Red Sparrow*'s Dominika Egorova (Jennifer Lawrence) is a beautiful ballerina recruited by the Russian secret service and taught the ropes of sexpionage. In *Anna,* a film made by the director of *Nikita*, KGB assassin Anna Poliatova (Sasha Luss) takes advantage of her beauty to go undercover as a fashion model in Paris. Similarly, the title character in *Ava* (Jessica

Chastain), a top-level hit-woman, assumes different identities (all equally charming), changing her appearance through wigs and make-up and speaking different languages, to carry out assignments all over the world.

As *Ava* and the rest of films mentioned above exemplify, extraordinary mobility is a defining feature of these special agents. These women's movements, either while fighting or travelling, generate a visual language—characterised by elements such as rapid editing, constant camera movement, use of hand-held camera, urban settings, or up-tempo music, among others—that has a direct impact on the construction and perception of space in these films. In the twenty-first century, these films' portrayal of movement and travel has become even more extensive and detailed, with narratives that move around multiple international locations as both a defining feature and an attraction of the genre. For instance, the 2019 instalment of the *Charlie's Angels* franchise, directed by Elizabeth Banks, turns the Townsend Agency into a global organisation, suggesting that the film's leading trio, formed by US agent Sabrina (Kristen Steward), British ex-MI6 Jane (Ella Balinska), and Germany-based MIT engineer Elena (Naomi Scott), are not the sole set of Angels. In the course of the film, the Angels travel to Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Hamburg, Berlin, Istanbul, and Chamonix in a display of their elite status as hypermobile professionals. The film's depiction of mobilities is reinforced by formal aspects such as aerial shots of cities like Rio, Hamburg and Istanbul, mise-en-scène and sound changes matching the different locations, or faster editing during chase scenes.

The heist film *Now You See Me* (Louis Leterrier, 2013) is also an example of the spectacle of global mobilities that characterises special agent cinema. It stars Mélanie Laurent as Alma Dray, a French Interpol agent who chases a team of magicians involved in bank heists alongside FBI agent Rhodes (Mark Ruffalo). She is introduced as a desk agent with no previous experience in a case like the one she is working on at the moment,

yet she turns out to be a highly mobile professional, the case taking her to Las Vegas, New Orleans, and New York. *Now You See Me* depicts the story's hectic movements making an extensive use of hand-held camera, camera movements and editing, and constructs spaces such as New Orleans' streets during Mardi Gras or Queens' 5 Pointz as labyrinthine and organic, the crowd of people constantly transforming the space while opening and closing passageways for the moving subjects, thus establishing a contrast between the agents' laboured movements and the magicians' prodigious mobility.

Lastly, the female special agent has also been approached from a comical, sometimes even parodical perspective. Spy comedy sagas such as *Austin Powers* and *Johnny English* have achieved popularity for their parody of the conventions of popular spy films like the Bond franchise. These conventions, which rest heavily on gender roles and stereotypes, are the source of comedy for a film like *Spy* (Paul Feig 2015). In it, Melissa McCarthy plays Susan Cooper, a desk-bound CIA employee whose job is to remotely assist Bond-like field agent Bradley Fine (Jude Law), for whom she is a mix between a motherly figure, errand girl, personal cheerleader, and devoted admirer. She was a top-trainee at the academy and is now very competent at her job, and yet she is not taken seriously, overlooked and even bullied by her colleagues, due to her clumsiness and self-deprecating manner. She was raised to "just blend in", "let somebody else win", and "give up on [her] dream", so she considers it impossible for her to work as a field agent. However, a turn of events requires her to step up and go on a hunt for the bad guys across Europe. The spectacle of the female body functions in a different way than in the case of the action babe: her uncanonical body and unthreatening femininity are played up for comic purposes by giving Susan the most unexciting, unglamorous cover identities, like a Midwest, cat-loving housewife. However, these qualities also allow her to go unnoticed and infiltrate the criminal organisation. As the operation progresses, Susan develops not

only confidence on her special agent skills but also a greater mobility, engaging in spectacular chases and flying a plane and a helicopter.

These are some of the traits that can be identified when looking at the representation of women special agents in twenty-first-century films, although, this group of films being a very prolific one, there are possibly more. In the following pages, the aforementioned traits and tropes, as well as additional ones, will be analysed in more detail in relation to the films *The 355* (Simon Kinberg, 2022) and *Fair Game* (Doug Liman, 2010).

4.4. The Spectacle of Hypermobility in *The 355*

The film *The 355* captures the essence of post-#MeToo and Time's Up Hollywood. After the events that took place in late 2017 and early 2018—thousands of women's testimonies of harassment and abuse, allegations and charges against Harvey Weinstein and the so-called "Weinstein effect", and women in the film industry joining to launch the Time's Up campaign—an intense debate over gender equality sparked off in Hollywood which had an impact on subsequent releases. Narratives about women gained momentum, and filmmakers took the opportunity to make more women-led films, not least because these had become potentially profitable. The volume of female-fronted films increased and women characters started to populate more "traditionally male" genres such as action and science fiction. The gender-flipping trend that has characterised Hollywood productions in recent years illustrates one of the ways in which the industry has taken advantage of the renewed (and even progressive) feel that recasting male roles as female in tried-and-tested stories produces. Films like *Ocean's 8* (Gary Ross, 2018), a gender-flipped reboot

of the *Ocean's* saga, exemplifies the significance of female-driven ensembles in the wake of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements.

Apparently, Jessica Chastain, one of the most vocal stars regarding gender equality in Hollywood, had the idea for *The 355* back in 2018. She envisioned a female-driven action film about a group of special agents from different national agencies who form their own team, named 355 after US Revolution female spy Agent 355. She worked on the project with writer and director Simon Kinberg, and they gathered a multinational A-list cast. The project was presented at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, where it caused a stir due to the star power of the cast, which included several Academy Award winners and Chinese megastar Fan Bingbing. Distribution rights for the film sold quickly, in what the press reported was one of the biggest deals of the Cannes market (Siegel).

The movie, released in January of 2022, involves the existence of a flash drive that contains a potentially dangerous software that can bring world chaos with just a few keystrokes, a device that falls in the hands of rogue Colombian agent Luis (Edgar Ramirez). CIA operative Mace (Jessica Chastain) and her partner Nick (Sebastian Stan) are sent after the drive, as is rival German agent Marie (Diane Kruger). Mace seeks the help of British tech expert Khadijah (Lupita Nyong'o) to trace its location. Luis's agency colleague, the psychologist Graciela (Penelope Cruz), is sent to bring him back to Colombia, but finds herself dragged into the fray when Luis is killed. Eventually, the women realise that they must team up to stop the device from falling into the wrong hands. This takes them on an international chase from Paris, to Marrakesh, to Shanghai. Along the way, they discover that Nick and other CIA agents are behind the criminal plot. They also meet an unexpected ally, the Chinese agent Lin Mi Sheng (Fan Binbing). With Lin's help, the team finally destroy the weapon and make Nick pay for his crimes.

The film was marketed as an "original approach to the globe-trotting espionage genre" (The 355 Movie). The message behind this phrase is two-fold. On the one hand, it establishes a connection between the film and a long-established tradition of espionage fiction. In fact, *The 355* has been compared to special agent stories such as the James Bond, Jason Bourne, and *Mission: Impossible* franchises. It adheres to standard conventions of spy action films such as perfectly choreographed fighting and chase scenes, double agents, a MacGuffin, and hi-tech equipment, among others. The promotion of the film consistently tried to cash on the film's originality on its deviation from the well-known gender roles of the spy genre. Chastain, who co-produced the film, announced half-jokingly on Twitter that the crew was looking for a "Bond boy" to serve as "eye candy" in the film (Samhan). Natasha Doris of *Screen Rant* praises the film for "deliver[ing] the feminist female-led spy film that the James Bond franchise has avoided". However, the general response to the film was predominantly negative, deeming it too generic and cliché-ridden despite its declared originality.

On the other hand, the advertising campaign highlights the importance of mobility in spy films in general and in this one in particular. "Globe-trotting" is used as a defining feature of these films, which involve not only a variety of locations around the *globe*, but also fairly quick and steady (*trotting*) movement within and between those locations. *The 355* follows an ensemble of highly mobile women professionals around the world, to places like Paris, Marrakesh, and Shanghai, and in trying to keep up with them adopts a visual language of movement that underlines the special agents' mobilities as extraordinary and glamourous. The cast chosen to play these roles is one of the most crucial elements of the film. The film's five globally acclaimed stars are key to the specific portrayal of female mobility that we see in the film.

4.4.1. A Multinational Cast and the Glamour of Mobile Identities

The female-fronted cast of *The 355* is a step towards gender diversity as regards action special agent films, where sexist gender roles have traditionally been the norm. The cast is also notably diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, unlike the vast majority of spy-themed films. The film also features characters of different nationalities and stresses each character's origins in different ways. One of them, for instance, is the decision to have the cast speaking languages different from English (Spanish, German, French, Arabic, Chinese, Romanian) and English with pronounced accents (which were widely commented on, mostly negatively, in the media). In addition to the linguistic diversity that this brings to the film, it effectively delineates each character's national and cultural identity. All these elements are bolstered by the star power of a multinational cast of global and/or transnational stars.

Before examining each of the five main cast members, it is worth devoting a few lines to explaining the reason for making a distinction here between the terms global and transnational even though they are sometimes used as interchangeable. Writing specifically about film stars, Celestino Deleyto argues that a star can be global and transnational at the same time but, if that is the case, they are global in a different way, or for different reasons, than they are transnational (2022, 92). As he explains, each term has different meanings and implications when applied to film stars. On the one hand, global stars have a global reach, which for the most part means being associated with Hollywood, and have global cultural resonances, that is, they "offer cultural meanings that may be shared by a great number of people around the planet (88). On the other hand, transnational stars "evoke more localized mobilities" and tend to offer more geographically concrete meanings, which have to do with their identities as border

crossers (88). These identities are more explicitly connected with the interplay between two or more national identities that derives from their mobilities, although national markers may be strong or may become diluted as a result of multiple border crossings (88, 92). *The 355*'s main cast, which will be subsequently discussed, is made up entirely of global stars. However, their unique star personae bring different, specific meanings to the film. As we will see, in some cases these meanings are directly connected to the star's transnational persona.

Jessica Chastain leads the film as CIA agent Mason "Mace" Browne. The US actor is known for her acting talent and versatility. The star is a vocal advocate for women and minorities' equality in the film industry, often speaking out against sexual harassment, pay gap, gender imbalance in film crews and positions of power, lack of women film critics, and the problematic portrayal of women characters (Mumford, Bhattacharya, Chastain). As an actor and producer, she is committed to expanding the range of roles that women are allowed to play and the angles from which these roles are approached, as well as to creating opportunities for women in cinema (Dickinson). The star has been celebrated for playing a variety of strong, complex female characters that often subvert gender expectations. If there is one particular type of character with which the versatile actor can be identified, it may well be that of the "hypercompetent woman in a man's world" (Johnson 2022). Chastain has played many professional women, many of them mobile. She plays a fierce lobbyist in *Miss Sloane* (John Madden, 2016), her characters work for NASA in *The Martian* (Ridley Scott, 2015) and *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014) and, most significantly for this analysis, she has considerable experience portraying special agents in films such as *The Debt* (John Madden, 2010), *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Ava*, and *The 355*.

As a result of her acting choices, Chastain's on-screen persona is that of the strong female character able to make her way in male-dominated environments. This persona makes her one of the most prominent representatives of the mobile professional woman in film. Furthermore, her ventures into action cinema and her experience playing tough women characters also seem to be positioning her as a familiar face in special agent cinema, in a similar way to other women performers like Angelina Jolie. Chastain's role in *The 355* is imbued with her on- and off-screen personae and her performance draws from her previous experience portraying special agents. As a result, Mace is depicted as a highly experienced, skilled, and competent agent with a borderless mobility, embodying the typical "best of the best" agent type traditionally reserved for male heroes such as *Mission: Impossible*'s Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise). Furthermore, the heightened sense of social justice that characterises the star's persona is reflected in Mace's unmovable moral compass and openness towards women's cooperation beyond borders.

Lupita Nyong'o plays MI6 agent and cyberintelligence expert Khadijah "Dij" Adiyeme. The Kenyan-Mexican actor brings black representation to the film's cast. In line with recent films featuring black women special agents, Khadijah's portrayal in *The 355* challenges stereotypes about black women action characters' hypersexualisation and aggressiveness. Attention must be drawn to the character's minimal physicality. Khadijah is a computer expert with a career in academia. She has retired from field work and settled in London. While other teammates like Mace and Marie are constantly engaged in chases and fighting (with the film's cinematography very much focused on and emphasising their moving bodies), Khadijah tends to operate remotely, tracking targets, collecting intel, or detonating explosives using all sorts of electronic devices, digital networks, and surveillance cameras. Her combat skills are shown at times, but physical prowess does not define her character. The film also underlines Mace's and especially Gabriela's

physicality in that they use their beauty and sex appeal in the mission, for instance, during the auction of the cyberweapon they are trying to retrieve. This is not the case with Khadijah, whose attractiveness and sexuality are never brought to the fore. As to costuming, she is dressed in a menswear-inspired, sartorial style, trousers and blazers being staples of her attire, which gives her a professional look instead of a stereotypically feminine or sexy one. By centring her portrayal on her intellectual abilities, the black female body is not emphasised or exploited in any way, subverting the mind/body dichotomy that permeates the social imaginary of black women.

Penélope Cruz stars as Graciela Rivera, a Colombian psychologist working for the DNI (Colombia's National Intelligence Directorate, in Spanish *Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia*), the main intelligence agency of the South American country. "Graci" is portrayed as a fish out of water, a DNI employee with no field experience who finds herself dragged into a round-the-world race against an unknown enemy. She is appalled by violence and is not prepared to engage in fights and shootings. Yet, once she has become a target, she cannot allow any harm to happen to her family. She is presented as a devoted wife and mother, constantly calling her family to promise that she will come back from her work trip soon. Apparently, Cruz wanted the character to feel like a "normal" person rather than the genre's conventional hyper-capable agent type (Blanes and Palacios). This specific approach to the character also rules out Graciela's identification with the "fiery Latina/Hispanic" stereotype, a role for which Cruz is known among non-Hispanic, particularly US, spectators due to her performances in films like *Bandidas* (Joaquim Rønning and Espen Sandberg, 2006), *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008), or *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (Rob Marshall, 2011).

The use of "Latina/Hispanic" here encompasses some of the complexities of Cruz's star persona. The Spanish actor has had a highly successful career both in Spain and abroad. In fact, her star persona is largely defined by her transnational trajectory. Most of her work, including her various roles in Pedro Almodóvar's films and her Oscar-winning performance in Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, has positioned her as a symbol of Spain and Spanishness (Davies, 12). However, with her first ventures into Hollywood, the borders of her persona started to blur, transforming it in many ways, since, as Ann Davies points out, in a US context "the specificity of Spanish nationality is elided into an idea of a wider Hispanic identity" (1). Throughout her career, Cruz has been cast to play Latinx roles on many occasions: Mexican women in *Bandidas* and *All the Pretty Horses* (Billy Bob Thornton, 2000) and of Mexican descent in *The Hi-Lo Country* (Stephen Frears, 1998), Colombian women in *Blow* (Ted Demme, 2001) and *Loving Pablo* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2017), a Brazilian cook in *Woman on Top* (Fina Torres, 2000), and a Cuban student in *Elegy* (Isabel Coixet, 2008). Currently, her persona is not just a symbol of Spanishness. She seems to represent a pan-Hispanic identity that sometimes encompasses an overall Mediterranean identity as well—due primarily to her portrayal of Italian characters in the film *Nine* (Rob Marshall, 2009) and the FX series *The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story* (Scott Alexander, Larry Karaszewski, Tom Rob Smith, 2018), and Greek in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (John Madden, 2001).

However, despite Cruz's global stardom and transnational persona, the casting of a Spanish actor in a Colombian role faced controversy since the moment it was made public. The film has been deemed a "missed opportunity for Latinx inclusion" and accused of perpetuating the idea that "every Hispanic is a Latino" (Davis). For her part, Chastain issued a statement explaining the casting decision, arguing that the character is

thought of as “a descendant from the colonization of Spain in the New World” (Davis), a justification that did not quell scepticism over the casting of a white Spanish actor and debates about colourism in the film industry. Clayton Davis raises concerns about understated but enduring racist practices that result in a systematic omission of non-white, Afro-Latinx performers and their typecasting as drug mules, gang members, or prostitutes. Chastain’s statement concluded by arguing that the film’s goal was to “move beyond nationalism” and explore “the international common thread that connects us all” (Davis). “At the end of the day”, she said, “it wasn’t important where the characters came from, but that they all come together to form an alliance beyond borders” (Davis).

However, this statement needs and deserves further explanation, since it may be ambiguous as regards the film’s approach to the national and the global. On the one hand, it articulates well the idea around which the story revolves: five women must set aside their differences to face a common enemy and a global threat and, by doing so, they become stronger. At a diegetic level, the characters’ “move beyond nationalism” is epitomised by their resolution to work not exclusively on behalf of a national intelligence service, but as agents of global security. On the other hand, however, this statement is given to discuss not the plot but the reasoning behind casting and character development. It is used to justify that the actor’s national, cultural, and ethnic background was not seen as a restriction when casting her as a character of a different nationality because, allegedly, it does not matter where the character comes from. However, an examination of the five roles suggests that this is not entirely accurate. Character development is arguably not approached in a homogenising fashion, portraying these women as global subjects (citizens of the world) without paying attention to their national, cultural, or racial background, or to the connotations that the actors who play them give to the characters. As the characterisation of the two remaining cast members illustrates, in some

cases, the film lingers on national, cultural, and/or racial markers to the point of enhancing them and sometimes even perpetuating stereotypes, while in others marks of national identity are diluted due to the star's transnational dimension.

The case of Fan Bingbing as Chinese MSS (Ministry of State Security) agent Lin Mi Sheng is significant regarding the film's approach to national/cultural/racial identity. Fan is probably the least known of the cast for Western audiences, but she has a long and successful career in East-Asian television and cinema, being considered one of the biggest Chinese stars so far this century (Flannery, Schwartzel 259). After a much-derided cameo in *Iron Man 3* (Shane Black, 2013), Marvel's *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Bryan Singer, 2014) granted her an entrance to Hollywood's line-up of global stars with a five-film contract for the *X-Men* franchise. The opportunity to join the cast of *The 355* came up as another important move in her career towards Hollywood stardom. As to her character in the film, and bearing in mind Chastain's statement about casting choices, it would not be fitting to say that this character's nationality and ethnicity ("where she comes from" in Chastain's words) is not important. Mi Sheng is clearly delineated as Chinese in ways that go beyond an explicit script mention of her involvement in the Chinese intelligence service. In addition to the actor's strong Chinese accent, Lin's portrayal conforms to some of the usual stereotypes about East-Asian people and culture. She displays an astounding command of Chinese martial arts, which is underlined in a scene solely devoted to filming her kung fu moves, and even her use of a lamp rod as a staff weapon (a *gun* or *bang*), in typical action film fashion. Similarly, her knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine and herbal therapy is strongly emphasised in the film, to the point that it plays a key role in the plot, since it is a Chinese poison that is used to drug the main villain and bring him to justice. Lin's Chinese origin is even reinforced visually through costuming by dressing

her in a bright red gown, red being the colour of the Chinese flag and one widely associated with China.

In contrast to the non-stereotypical portrayal of black female identity, Lin's Chineseness is emphasised in the film by using traditional conventions which generally imply the exotisation of Asian cultures, while simultaneously positioning her, not as an Other, but as a key player for the formation of a powerful transnational alliance. While her fighting scenes hint at a long tradition of Western fascination with East-Asian (principally Hong Kong) action cinema, Lin's representation of the Eastern ally evokes East-Asian characters in Hollywood special agent films such as Michelle Yeoh's Bond girl Wai Lin in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997). Like Yeoh's character, Fan's Mi Sheng rejects stereotypes of Asian femininity and "oriental sexuality"—such as the "Dragon Lady" (a cunning, aggressive, and sexually alluring woman) and the "Lotus Blossom" (a fragile and submissive woman who is eager to please the white male hero)—while embodying characteristics conventionally associated with East-Asian identity, like mastery of martial arts, that function as an engaging attraction for global audiences (Funnell, 175-177). But, most importantly, both Wai Lin and Lin Mi Sheng are portrayed as "transnational mediators facilitating connections between 'the East' and 'the West'", a characterisation that Lisa Funnell attributes specifically to East-Asian action women figures (171).

Diane Kruger was the last to join the cast after Marion Cotillard, who was part of the team that presented the film's concept at Cannes in 2018, had to pull out of the film (Kroll). Cotillard was originally cast to play a French agent called Marie. When Kruger was signed for the project, the character was altered slightly by making Marie, finally named Marie Schmidt, a German BND (Germany's Federal Intelligence Service, in German *Bundesnachrichtendienst*) agent. The character's backstory is moulded around

her German origins and her apparently unswerving loyalty to the nation—even above family, having reported her father, also a German intelligence agent, for being a Russian mole. Kruger's character speaks primarily German and English with a strong German accent, but also a perfect French. Soon in the film, it becomes apparent that Marie possesses the ability to masquerade with her command of French and her default "white woman" appearance. This correlates strongly with Kruger's star persona. The actor was born in Germany, studied in London, lived and worked in Paris, and eventually became a US citizen. She is fluent in German, French and English (a language she speaks without a strong accent). Her star persona is defined by an "absence […] of strong marks of national identity" (Deleyto 2022, 102). Just like Marie, she displays what Deleyto refers to as a "translucid quality", owing to her canonical beauty and model physique (she actually started her career as a model), her linguistic malleability, and her weakly defined national identity, which allows her to embody exceptionally diverse roles while rendering her foreignness invisible (102-103). As Deleyto puts it, Kruger represents a "radical form of transnationalism" (107). Thus, although a decision was reached on the need to adjust the originally French character to the star's national origins and have her embody a greater "Germanness" than she generally displays, the star's transnational persona imbues the character with a certain "borderliness" (103) that brings it closer to Chastain's project of a union beyond borders.

The relevance of grasping the nuances of this cast lies in the implications that it has for the film at many levels. As regards audience response, for instance, the film's attempt at a diverse and inclusive portrayal of women special agents' experiences by giving the characters different and distinctive personal and professional backstories is bolstered by the casting of global stars for those roles, which work as points of identification for people all around the world, that is, for global audiences. On a narrative

level, as mentioned above, characterisation is influenced by the connotations that stars carry and pass on, intentionally or unintentionally, to their characters. Given that, in Chastain's words, the film centres on the idea of a group of women who "come together to form an alliance beyond borders", the fact that these five stars come together to make it takes on a new significance as regards the portrayal of mobilities. One of the implications of having globally recognised, highly mobile stars as the cast of this film is that the perception of mobilities is affected by their celebrity status. Global stars like those in *The 355* are publicly positioned as highly mobile subjects. Firstly, because theirs is a notably mobile profession, one that often involves travelling and, secondly, because they traditionally represent a model of privileged mobilities and mobile lifestyles. Consequently, these stars imbue their characters with an enhanced sense of mobility.

It is certain that having an unknown actor playing the role of a mobile special agent does not convey the same meanings than casting a hypermobile superstar for that same role. That kind of casting generates an appeal that goes beyond box-office success. The actors' stardom results in a glamourisation of special agents and their mobilities. This effect is especially evident during the auction sequence that takes place towards the end of *The 355*. As the "355 team" arrive at the auction house by car, the camera goes around the car in a 360-degree movement to show the four women (Marie, Khadijah, Graciela, and Mace), dressed up for the event. Costume is designed in accordance with the character's personality traits: Marie, which embodies the "tomboy" archetype and always dresses in black, wears a burgundy jumpsuit. Khadijah, in keeping with her sartorial style, wears a trouser and blazer suit. Graciela wears a form-fitting black lace dress that enhances her curves. Mace dons a floor-length strapless gown which does not prevent her from outfighting, in hand-to-hand combat, a brawny thug. Thus, the stars' display of glamour and beauty is as much a part of the film's spectacle as their special agent skills.

Furthermore, in typical spy film fashion, the agents have customised equipment for this operation concealed as their jewellery and cosmetics. Their necklaces have imperceptible cameras, their earrings double as communication devices, and perfume bottles can be used to fabricate explosives. Symbols of femininity are renegotiated as tools and weapons as part of the film's process of glamourisation of the woman special agent, suggesting that normative conceptions of gender are likely to shape the way in which special agents are portrayed in cinematic terms.

The sequence discussed above seems to echo the auction scene in *North by Northwest*, in which Cary Grant's character meets undercover agent Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) at an auction house in Chicago. However, there is a major difference between the portrayal of women agents in both films. During the auction, Eve is sitting beside master spy Vandamm (James Mason) and does not change this position but for a moment, when she briefly stands up and then sits down again. She remains virtually immobile for the whole duration of the scene. This contrasts starkly with the *335* characters' mobilities and the feeling of constant movement that the film creates in scenes such as the auction one. The following section will examine the ways in which the film portrays women special agents as mobile subjects and its use of film language to create a world of hypermobility.

4.4.2. Cinematic Mobilities: The Hypermobile World of Special Agents

In line with the conventions of the special agent film, *The 355* revolves around movement. We have the characters' movements around the world and the characters' movements in cities, roads, buildings, and the like. To these we should add the movements of the camera, actors' movements on the set and actors' journeys to the different locations where the film was being shot, among others. Movement is inherent to film as a medium, but it

is not always treated or perceived in the same way. Some movements are highlighted. Others are meant to go unnoticed. But, in the context of this analysis, movement of any kind is the backbone of a film that, as will be argued, puts mobilities on the spotlight. This section will cover the centrality of mobilities in *The 355* and the way in which they are portrayed, the formal mechanisms used to do it, and the meanings they convey.

As some of the items in the enumeration above suggest, the movements that are explicitly shown on the screen are not the only relevant ones. Those that are just implied also play an important role. The movements of the actors that star in the film, for instance, deserve special attention As mentioned above, mobility is considered as inherent to global stars like those that make up this cast. The cast's mobility is even more evident in the case of stars who are identified as foreign from a US/Hollywood perspective or as transnational for their involvement in various film industries and transnational projects. By casting four non-US actors (despite having become a US citizen, Kruger is not US American by birth), three of them with solid careers outside Hollywood (Cruz, Fan, Kruger), all of them representative of the mobile lifestyle of global stars, attention is drawn to their border-crossing mobilities. In keeping with the link established in the previous section between casting and characterisation, some aspects of the film's character development can be interpreted along the same lines. As mentioned, each character is given an easily identifiable nationality: US American, British, German, Colombian, and Chinese. By clearly defining the characters' place of origin, all different from the other, their mobilities are underlined. Again, this gives prominence to the movements made by these women as part of the story, including those that are just implicit and never shown, like Graciela's trip from Colombia to Paris, although examples abound.

The emphasis on mobilities that can be observed in elements of the film such as its multinational cast and multinational characters contributes to the formation of an

overall sense of hypermobility. The world of *The 355* is portrayed as a hypermobile one in which people, information, capital, and objects (like the film's MacGuffin, a dangerous cyberweapon) are constantly moving, and they do so relatively fast, smoothly, and frequently. Furthermore, the film constructs a system where mobility inequalities and friction are not contemplated. In particular, gender-based friction is not overtly noticeable in the film. Women characters are not only as mobile as men, but their mobility sometimes exceeds that of men characters. Mace, Marie, Khadijah and Graciela all have men waiting for them "back home", either professional or personal partners, who remain static while they move across the world, reversing a long-standing, dominant tendency of women characters that stay still, often waiting at home, while men characters are on the move. The film's world is also constructed as a highly interconnected system. The plot presents an event, the development of a software that can access anything on the net (and therefore a master key for electronic systems located anywhere in the globe) in a remote place in Colombia, which has global effects, setting in motion an international scheme that involves multiple intelligence agencies, a secret criminal organisation, and the entire world's population if put to use. Bringing back Chastain's press statement, the film explores the idea of an "international common thread that connects us all", establishing a "network of connections" (Sheller and Urry 2006, 209) that connects all places.

This network is supported by and dependent on a system of mobilities and movement which functions not only at the level of the story, but also at a formal level. As will be discussed below, the use of film language to portray movement significantly contributes to the portrayal of the women characters as mobile special agents, as well as of the spaces of mobilities where they operate. Moreover, this network of mobilities is attached different connotations depending on the mobile subject involved. As regards women special agents, their mobilities represent the pursuit of global safety, and even

take on a uniting quality as they enable the union of these women across and beyond borders in a mission of "cosmopolitan solidarity"—a solidarity that goes beyond the boundaries of class and nation and is founded on the imperative of universal human rights (Fine 379-380). Thus, in *The 355* the mobile woman spy is dissociated from the femme fatale, deadly seductress, and assassin archetypes and depicted as a symbol of cooperation and justice.

In the film's highly interconnected system, borders do not isolate nations and do not seem able to restrict people's ways of relating to the world. This means, on the one hand, that they do not hinder the union of this diverse group of women and, on the other, that they do not act as firewalls to contain potentially global threats. Even the border between the virtual and the real realms is depicted as permeable. The blurring of limits between these two dimensions is shown visually in the film. The team is planning to infiltrate the auction, held in Shanghai, where the device will be sold to the highest bidder. Mace, Marie, Graciela and Khadijah are gathered around a table in an apparently deserted restaurant. The latter accesses a CCTV network that shows the auction house where the bidding will take place on her computer's screen. As she explains the details of the plan to her teammates, she turns the laptop around for them to see. After a cut, the women are no longer in the shot, which now shows the screen of Khadijah's computer. The following shot shows the laptop frontally while steadily zooming in on the computer screen, which offers a front view of the venue. The zoom-in shot cuts to similar straight-on, push-in shot of the actual location as the 355 team arrive by car, entering through the left side of the frame. By continuing the movement of one shot in the following one, never breaking its rhythm and direction, the shots provide a smooth transition between the digital image of the building and the place itself. Thus, virtual and physical space are blended, their borders no longer perceptible, just as they are during the auction that ensues. The auction

for the device takes place simultaneously at the two levels: physically, at the auction house in Shanghai, and virtually, on the dark web, where criminal organisations are secretly bidding for the cyberweapon. Likewise, the agents' operation is carried out on site and through Khadijah's control of surveillance cameras, power systems, and communication networks. The anxiety about the power and threat of technology in a sort of "network society" (Castells 1996) is a central theme in the film, which evokes the idea of a "world risk society" in which financial, environmental, and terrorist dangers are not controllable (Beck 2009 [2007], 15).

However, this interconnected society, despite its apparently blurred borders, resists the homogenisation that some believe is attendant on globalisation. In its construction of this society, the film emphasises the continuing relevance of the national, not only due to its use of marks of national identity for character development, as mentioned above, but also through its focus on places. *The 355* is established in between the "space of flows" and "the space of places" (Castells 1996), characterised by the duality of a network of mobile players and a fascination with cinematic locales. While other types of films about work-related mobilities, such as those about corporate travel, for instance, centre largely on non-spaces (airports, hotels, office buildings), special agent films, particularly those of the action, Bond-esque type, are conventionally associated with a use (sometimes even exploitation) of places as part of their spectacle. Locations are a crucial element in this type of films. They are purposely chosen for the meanings they bring to the film and the opportunities they create. *The 355* makes use of place-based imagery to enhance the portrayal of mobility. Exotic locations like the one that opens the film, a majestic Colombian *hacienda* located 150 miles South of Bogota, create an aura of mystery and excitement. Urban locations such as a Shanghainese skyscraper hotel create the opportunity to stage spectacular action scenes where characters climb up the

façade, go through shattered windows, and blow up rooms. The multiplicity of locations used in the film (Paris, Marrakech, London, Shanghai, etc.) is the backbone of the environment of mobility that the film aims to create, as well as of the portrayal of women characters as hypermobile special agents. These locations are meant to be recognised by the spectator, whom the film guides throughout the narrative by means of aerial establishing shots accompanied by titles. These shots look like moving postcards of these travelogue locations, hinting at what could be considered as another hallmark of "globe-trotting" special agent films. In these films, and surely in *The 355*, the construction of cinematic space hinges on the production of visual spectacle. Places are mediated in a way that exaggerates the features that contribute to the film's discourse. The film's portrayals of Paris and Marrakesh are interesting examples in this regard.

Upon arriving in Paris, while preparing for the retrieval operation, Nick describes the French capital as "the most romantic city in the world". Even if just for some moments (before the operation goes wrong and a chase ensues) the spectator gets a glimpse of the romantic Parisian vibe. Mace and Nick, undercover as a couple of newlyweds on their honeymoon, walk down a street of quaint boutiques and galleries with brightly coloured (saturated red and blue) wood frames and flower stands, where people chat in little café tables. They arrive at a typical Parisian café, where the transfer of the device is supposed to take place. Mace even orders croissants to complete the Parisian experience. The mise-en-scène is topped off by the extremely warm tone of the sequence and the use of bright lighting, as though filming the city through a yellowy, sunny filter. The "artificial warmness" of this Paris is more obvious when the film cuts abruptly to a shot of the BND's Berlin headquarters and cold, bluish tones are used to show this location. Likewise, the "artificial Parisianness" of this version of Paris is even more evident in contrast to the film's later glimpse at "the other Paris" in the fish market scene, a far less

romantic working-class location. Mace's remark to Nick that Paris "is a little cliché" seems to encapsulate this sequence's visual approach to the location. After approximately a minute, and marked by a change in the music, the sequence turns into a hectic chase scene and, as a result, the city becomes a space of hypermobility. Mace chases Marie around the same Paris that was previously introduced—warmly coloured, full of cafés and shops—only the two women, their mobilities in fact, are now the spectacle. The visual style of the chase highlights movement, as it is shot with a shaky hand-held camera, using fast camera movements and fast cutting to different types of shots (from wide to extreme close-up shots).

Later in the film, the already formed 355 team (Mace, Khadijah, Marie, and Graciela) track the device down to Marrakesh. The Moroccan city is similarly portrayed as an exotic, stylised locale and a space of mobility. Once more, the mise-en-scène emphasises the typically Moroccan aesthetics of the place through the use of warm colours, bright lighting, costuming, props, and set design, as well as music. The action is set in three main locations: a crowded square, a *souk*, and a *hammam*. The agents inconspicuously follow the mercenaries in possession of the device around these locations. This chase is filmed in similar ways to the Paris one, although there are some differences. The first one is determined by the different nature of this location. These spaces are portrayed as messy and chaotic. This is mirrored by the visual style, which shows a more irregular rhythm, a combination of static and hand-held camera, of longer and shorter shots, and of standard ground level shots and more elevated, wider shots that emphasise the key element in the construction of Marrakesh as a space of mobility: the crowd. The Moroccan spaces are less constrained by a rigid urban structure of buildings and regulated traffic areas, but rather present an organic architecture made up of people, that is, they are spaces in constant transformation due to the movement of people. All the

characters involved in this persecution must make their way through a crowd that constantly opens and closes passageways, producing a predominant feeling of disorientedness. However, the agents seem to have an advantage over the men they chase in this space of mobility. Eventually, they put on headscarves to blend into the crowd, which allows them to move without being noticed. An over-the-shoulder shot of the man that is being chased emphasises the women's movements as they swiftly walk pass him, while he is halted. Close-ups of the agents' hands show how they easily pick the device out of the man's pocket, while fast POV pans blurry the figures of the people that surround him. The scene ends with an overhead, boom shot that diminishes the male figure and emphasises the crowd. Thus, femaleness becomes a disguise and a tool for mobility.

However, despite portraying the women characters as hypermobile professionals, the film also hints at some limitations to these women's mobilities. For example, it shows both Mace and Khadijah at home packing for their trips. They are not equipping themselves with tactical gear, hi-tech gadgets, and weapons in an agency's equipment wing or a secret vault, as is customary of action spy films such as the *007* films, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, or *Spy Kids* (Robert Rodriguez, 2001), but packing a suitcase of mostly their own regular clothes in their own bedroom. These two scenes provide a glimpse at these women's personal space, and, by doing so, they emphasise the traditional association of women with home. Likewise, home is presented as a potential hindrance to the special agent's mobility. For instance, for Graciela to become a hypermobile agent she must fight her instinctual drive to go back to her family, about whom she is constantly worried. In *The 355*, motherhood and domesticity seem irreconcilable with the hypermobility of special agents.

The 355 epitomises the spectacle of hyperkinetic action spy films, especially in its portrayal of a fantasy of mobility. It builds a world of hypermobility tailored for an

ensemble of women special agents befitting post-MeToo Hollywood—a fantasy of female mobility. From its cast of global stars to its construction of place and spaces of mobility, movement and mobilities are at the centre of the film, a film that participates in the "spectacle of human bodies moving at dangerous velocities" (Kendall 112). The centrality of mobilities is highlighted and portrayed by means of a particular visual style founded on intensified continuity (Bordwell 2006) and accelerationist aesthetics (Shaviro 2013) and, above all, especially suited for the representation of movement in time and space. This style has become a staple of twenty-first-century special agent cinema, characterised by the use of film language in the construction of both cinematic spaces of mobility and mobile characters. The following section looks at the distinct use of film cinematic techniques in special agent cinema through the analysis of an earlier special agent film, *Fair Game*.

4.5. The Plame Identity: The Im/Mobile Special Agent in *Fair Game*

The main promotional poster for the 2010 film *Fair Game* includes three phrases which provide relevant information about the movie and advance some of its key thematic and formal aspects. Firstly, it reads "inspired by true events". *Fair Game* tells the story of CIA operative Valerie Plame, played by Naomi Watts, and his husband, US ex-diplomat Joseph Wilson (Sean Penn), who in 2003 were caught up in one of the biggest scandals in US history, known as the Plame affair or "Plamegate". The film fictionalises this episode, which begins when Wilson is sent to Niger by the CIA to gather information as to whether the African nation has sold uranium to Iraq for use in the construction of nuclear weapons. He finds no evidence of such transaction, but his report is ignored, and military action is taken. When the White House cites the Niger-Iraq uranium deal as

evidence of Saddam Hussein's WMD programme and hence as justification for the US military incursion into Iraq, Wilson publishes an op-ed article critical of the Bush administration's handling of intelligence reports in which he publicly states that he did not find any evidence of such weapons development. A campaign to discredit him ensues. As a result, Valerie's classified position as a CIA counterproliferation operative is leaked to the press. Since her cover identity is compromised, she is instantly dismissed from the agency, and the Wilson-Plame family are subjected to media and public harassment, which takes a toll on their professional, personal, and marital lives.

The film captures the tense socio-political climate of post-9/11 US. The growing threat of terrorism got US society into a state of fear, anxiety, and paranoia which led to a series of political and military actions that were grouped together under the heading "War on Terror". Vincent M. Gaine identifies *Fair Game* as part of a specific cycle of paranoid thrillers released between 2004 and 2010 which touch on the US politics and policies of counterterrorism in the post-9/11 era (148). He describes the "visionary paranoia" of these films, whose development rests on the use of certain thematic, stylistic, and narrative tropes shared by the films that constitute the cycle, such as complex and fragmented narratives, unsteady and disrupted cinematography, and plausible settings (148-151). As to *Fair Game,* the 2010 movie is one of the films that close the cycle of policy paranoia thrillers (Gaine, 162). It displays most of the cycle's defining features, both as regards narrative content, like suspicion and critique of US antiterrorism policies, and style, which Gaine describes as "disconcerting" and "intimate", characterised by handheld cinematography, rapid editing, jump cuts, use of news images and real footage, a chaotic sense of disorientation and threat, and an uncomfortable proximity to the action (158-161). Some of these stylistic features play a crucial role not only in the creation of

visionary paranoia but also in the representation of the woman special agent's mobility, as will be examined below.

The tropes of paranoia films bring us to the second of the elements in the movie's promotional poster. It reads "from the director of *The Bourne Identity*", alluding to the film's director, producer, and director of photography Doug Liman. This reference to Liman's work, particularly to *The Bourne Identity,* one of the most influential special agent films of the early twenty-first century, establishes thematic and stylistic connections between his earlier films and *Fair Game*. Liman had explored the topic of mobile special agents on several occasions, like in the *Bourne* films, the 2005 film *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, and the TV series *Covert Affairs* (Matt Corman and Chris Ord, 2010-2014), which he co-produced in parallel with *Fair Game*. The filmmaker himself establishes links between these works, pointing out his disposition to approach special agent films with a specific point of view characterised by a sharp focus on characters and an inclination to explore their human condition (Radish, Giroux). Liman expresses a fascination with the intersection of the world of special agents with the world the rest of us inhabit, including the interplay between the professional and personal spheres of a spy's life (Radish, Giroux). For Radish, Liman's special agent films convey a sense of heightened reality. Their characters are exceptionally clever and skilled but ultimately human, which is combined with a distinctive fast-paced, shaky handheld style. By juxtaposing *Fair Game* with *The Bourne Identity*, the movie's promotional poster brings to the fore certain themes that run through both texts, such as conspiracy and paranoia, agency panic, institutional corruption, and, most significantly for this analysis, mobility, and identity.

Lastly, the poster includes one of the international taglines for the film: "Wife. Mother. Spy". These three words are used to define Valerie, drawing attention to these three components of her multifaceted identity. In keeping with Liman's treatment of the

espionage subject, *Fair Game* is interested in the different sides of Plame's identity and the complex interplay between them. Like many films about mobile professional women, it deals with the complexities of such an identity and the challenges of reconciling family and social life with travelling the globe as an undercover CIA operative. The film revisits *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*'s motif of "spies living in suburbia" (Giroux), and the strain of leading a double life. As will be discussed below, identity is a central theme in the film's portrayal of the woman special agent, and one that is closely linked with mobility.

4.5.1. Mobility and Identity Formation

Fair Game raises a crucial question: who is Valerie Plame? As mentioned above, hers is a multifaceted identity. She is a suburban wife and mother of two, but also a committed professional operating all over the world for the sake of national security. Her identity is even more complex due to her covert CIA job, which obliges her to lead a double life and adopt many aliases. She is adept at liquefying her identity and embodying a mosaic of different women. In the film, Valerie introduces herself as a venture capitalist, a sales representative, and a physics professor. If there is something in common between her cover identities, it is the fact that they all are mobile professionals. Mobility is the component of Valerie's liquid and heterogeneous identity that the film chooses to underline during the character's introduction. In fact, Valerie's identity as a highly mobile woman was emphasised even before the film was released. The official US trailer opens with Valerie running on a treadmill while she says, in voiceover: "I have to be in the airport in forty-five minutes". In just a few seconds, movement is visually and narratively emphasised. The first piece of information that the audience is given is that this woman's life is marked by movement, that she is on the move.

Similarly, the film introduces the character as a mobile individual before revealing her true identity. It opens with one of Valerie's work trips. An establishing shot sets the action in Kuala Lumpur, where Valerie, undercover as a Canadian businesswoman based in Düsseldorf, carries out a counterproliferation operation. For a couple of minutes, her true name and occupation are concealed both from the characters and the audience, but her mobility is stressed from the beginning, conveying the idea that movement and mobility are intrinsic to the character and, as will be discussed below, a key theme in the film. Furthermore, this pre-credits scene highlights the mobile quality of Valerie's job as an intelligence agent by choosing to open the film with one of her overseas operations.

However, the film explores different ways to portray and emphasise the special agent's inherent mobility, even when the character is not travelling. This can be observed, for example, the first time that Valerie is shown at the CIA headquarters. She strides across the office floor while exchanging information on the Malaysian case with her colleagues. Then, she chairs a meeting about the plans for the operation when she is called in by her boss, who instructs her to drop the current case and assigns her to lead a newly established task force in Iraq. The sequence is filmed in a way that highlights movement. On the one hand, the characters' movements are enhanced by having the camera follow them around the office as they talk and walk, creating the impression that intelligence workers in general and Valerie in particular are always on the move. On the other hand, the film emphasises movement even when characters are not physically moving by means of cinematography. A shaky hand-held camera is used to film Valerie and her co-workers sitting in the conference room where they discuss the Kuala Lumpur operation. The scene's visual style appears to be even more unstable that the one used to shoot the characters' conversations as they walk through the halls and corridors of the office. Rather than adopting a conventionally stable and more static style to film the meeting, such as

the shot/reverse shot technique, aimed at clearly showing the speaker's face and her colleagues' reactions, the camera constantly makes jerky movements while moving in a circle around the conference table, and a shot of a new character entering the room is inserted midway through the circular movement. The camera does not stop to focus fixedly on Valerie, but rather, with its restless movement, it enhances the fast pace of the scene and the dynamism of intelligence work. In sum, the scarcity of static shots and extensive use of hand-held camera that characterise the visual style of the sequence create the feeling of incessant movement which works to strengthen the association of the special agent with mobility.

Mobility is so intricately woven into Valerie's self that it becomes intrinsic to her identity, and movement seems the natural state of a character mediated in notably kinetic terms. As Cresswell and Dixon remark, the mobility that characterises film as an inherently kinetic medium "enables a destabilization of the fixed and the static" and produces the effect of a "mobile gaze" (5), which *Fair Game* clearly does in its representation of the mobile professional woman. The destabilisation that comes with mobility, they argue, problematises the notion that identities are essentially fixed and rooted (6). Being a woman, for instance, carries a series of long-established biological and social connotations, as well as it is "mapped" onto particular spaces like the home (6). Therefore, the "mobile woman" identity, which subverts in many ways the fixity and rootedness of traditional understandings of female identity, constitutes a source of gender trouble (6). Scholars point out that mobility is a practice and discourse of identity formation and re-formation. Elliott and Urry argue that the mobilisation of the world reshapes the self and restructures the private and public spheres of people's lives, transforming the nature of personal identity (3, 7). They cite the appearance of specific

identity forms founded on fast mobilities such as that of the hypermobile class to which mobile professionals like Valerie belong.

Movement and mobility are central to the construction of the character's identity both in narrative and visual terms. For instance, the film underlines Valerie's mobile identity by indicating that it goes back to her childhood. The daughter of an Air Force colonel, she moved several times and lived in places such as Germany, Singapore, Australia, and England, as her father mentions during her visit to the family home late in the film. The fact that she has led a mobile life since she was a child, exposed to the idiosyncrasies of the mobile professional identity and raised as a mobile individual, reinforces the idea that mobility is deeply ingrained in her. At one point, her father tells her: "you had twenty different chances to introduce yourself as someone new", referring to the transformative effect that mobility has had on her identity. According to Elliott and Urry, the "most consequential feature of accelerated mobilities for people's lives is the recasting of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and instant transformation" (2010, 7). In the era of liquid modernity, identities are intrinsically volatile and unfixed, fluid despite our efforts to solidify them and give them form (Bauman 2000, 82-83). Bauman uses the metaphor of the crust on top of volcanic lava, which hardens but then melts again, to argue that a "solid" experience of identity is a mere fantasy (2000, 83). Valerie has embraced the liquid identity that has developed as a result of her personal and professional experiences of mobilities. She has pursued a highly mobile career that requires her identity to be flexible and adaptable and in which fluidity is a major advantage.

As has been mentioned, the film employs different methods to portray Valerie as a truly mobile subject, able to travel with ease and without experiencing much friction. One of the ways in which this is done is by never showing her travelling, or rather, never showing her engaged in the literal act of travelling. The film includes Valerie's trips to

Kuala Lumpur, Cairo, Cleveland, and Amman, but the film never shows the journey to or from these places. The formalities of travelling (packing, going through customs, crossing borders) and the non-spaces of mobilities (airports, stations, planes) seem irrelevant to her portrayal. The omission of the mundane components of travel generates a sense of effortless movement and erases any trace of potential friction that could hinder it, creating the impression that Valerie simply "appears" in her destination. In this sense, she seems to be a citizen of a "shrinking world", one that, as María del Mar Azcona has argued represents a "culturally specific fantasy of mobility and limitless resources […] in which remote geographical locations seem to be round the corner and can be reached with just a change of shot and even without a change of clothes" (210).

By contrast, Valerie's husband, Joe (also a mobile professional), is repeatedly shown en route to different destinations. On the several occasions when Joe travels over the course of the film, we see him engaged in travelling protocols: he is shown getting off a plane, passing through the security check at the airport, taking a taxi upon his arrival, and waiting for a return flight at the terminal. Travelling takes time for Joe. He cannot escape the formalities of travel. The contrasting portrayal of Valerie's and Joe's experiences of mobilities hints at a reversal of stereotypical gender roles regarding work, work-related travel, and everyday activities. The images of a woman waiting for the return of her husband or bidding him farewell before a trip are deeply rooted in the filmic imagination. In *Fair Game*, the roles in these familiar scenes are swapped. Joe is the one that sees her wife leaving the house in the middle of the night and resents her frequent and unannounced trips, the risks she faces abroad, and her secrecy. He gets lied to by a protective spouse who tells him that she is going to Cleveland right before the film cuts to a shot of Amman. Joe cannot but bid farewell to her wife and take care of domestic affairs.

The film's discourses on the gendered patterns and understandings of professional mobilities are conveyed in a sequence towards the beginning of the film that crosscuts the different nature of Joe's and Valerie's jobs. The sequence opens with Joe working at home while his children play in the background. The shot frames Joe slightly off-centre, leaving the desk out of the frame and showing instead the sofa and bookshelf behind him, where the children are playing. The image of Joe wearing a suit and tie in a domestic space stands out as an unconventional one since it departs from the traditional imaginary of the professional man. The camera pans slowly to the left to bring the desk and computer into the shot. As it does so, the children gradually disappear from the frame, but they continue to be aurally present since they can still be heard playing. The next shot suddenly cuts to a close-up of Valerie wearing a headscarf and sunglasses and dashing through the streets of Cairo. The rhythm changes radically, on the one hand, due to the busy urban setting (the sounds of traffic and crowds can be heard over the musical score) and, on the other, because of the fast-paced cinematography of the scene, characterised by short framing distances, fast camera movement, quick editing, and shaky hand-held shots. A combination of jump cuts and tracking shots emphasise rhythm and movement as Valerie heads to a university building, where she goes inside a lecture hall and sits among the students. As the camera pans across the room, the film cuts back to the Wilson house, where the young boy causes one of the shelves to break and its contents to fall. Joe, still focused on his work, turns around to check that the children are unharmed and, at that moment, the babysitter arrives. Instead of greeting her, the children ask: "when's mommy coming home?". The sequence's crosscutting continues with a sudden cut to a point-of-view shot of the lecture and a reverse shot of Valerie in the audience. It is then revealed that she has travelled to Cairo undercover as a Physics doctor to persuade an Iraqi scientist who has taken refuge in Egypt into passing on information about Iraq's former nuclear

weapons programme to the CIA. Their conversation is interrupted by a sudden cut to Valerie walking to her hotel, entering her room, and taking notes on her laptop, a scene composed of extremely short shots. The following scene is set back in Washington D.C. and starts with a fast-paced, short drive-by tracking shot of the White House that is followed by aerial shots of cars driving through the Arlington Memorial Bridge. This scene portrays Valerie's journey back from Egypt, without explicitly showing her, as almost instantaneous.

By crosscutting between Joe trying to get some work done at home while babysitting the children and Valerie's CIA work in Cairo, the sequence points to the renegotiation of patriarchal norms that women's work-related mobilities entail and establishes a contrast between the characters' experiences of mobile life. It illustrates the couple's attempt at reconciling the demands of Valerie's mobile career with those of suburban domesticity, which in this case imply the "immobilisation" of Joe. Furthermore, it draws attention to the alleged transgression that the mobile special agent represents by doing a highly active, dangerous, and even dirty job and either renouncing womanhood, maternity, and domesticity or daring to develop that side of her identity as well. The sequence conveys this breach of the established social order by juxtaposing the children's inquiry about their mother's return with the manipulative methods employed in her overseas operation. The children's question encapsulates the pressure to which mobile professional women are subjected to achieve a balance between their work and family duties and never divert from maternal gracefulness. As reflected throughout this thesis, the domestic component pervades the majority of narratives about mobile professional women, which tend to comment on the female characters' personal background. Moreover, the sequence takes a step further into transgression by implying through editing that, after her trip to Egypt, Valerie heads to the Langley CIA headquarters, rather

than portraying Valerie as a homesick woman eager to go back to her husband and children.

This sequence depicts Valerie's travels as quick and frictionless by omitting an explicit representation of the journey, enhancing the perception of mobility as intrinsic to her identity. However, Valerie's mobility experiences a drastic change as the film's central conflict unravels. The story then goes on to explore the interdependent relationship between mobility and immobility and how it affects Valerie after her identity is exposed.

4.5.2. Who is Valerie Plame?: The Immobilisation of the Mobile Professional

Following the publication of Wilson's article "What I didn't find in Africa", the Vice President's Chief of Staff Scooter Libby (David Andrews) and the President's Advisor Karl Rove (Adam LeFevre) meet to discuss how to divert media attention away from the government's manipulation of intelligence about WMD and answer to Wilson's allegations. Rove asks: "who is Joe Wilson?". Libby remains silent, but the actor's performance and the staccato of the rising music reflect that an idea is forming in his mind. Joe Wilson is a powerful white man with a distinguished diplomatic career and significant public exposure, hence being a tough opponent that they cannot easily beat. Surely aware of Wilson's position of power and influence, Libby refrains from taking the plunge of answering Rove's question and therefore attacking Wilson directly, and instead seems to come up with a different question: who is Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame? In Rove's words, Plame is "fair game". She is an easier target: a suburban "trophy" wife and mother of two, a working woman who has applied herself to building a promising career at CIA, and, ultimately, an unknown, ordinary woman who has much to lose. A few seconds later, a close-up shot draws attention to some documents that Libby carries in his hand, suggesting that he is in possession of valuable information. The camera tilts up to

reveal a smirk on his face as he walks with a triumphant and confident air. It is almost as if he could foresee the denigratory rumours that would follow Plame's outing, whose career and integrity is later scrutinised and called into question by the media and the public, circulating that she is a minor figure in the CIA, a "mediocre", "third-rate" agent or "just a secretary".

The shot of Libby triumphantly carrying the documents cuts to a shot of a hand emerging from a car window and holding a newspaper that is then thrown into the Wilsons' driveway. The date is 14 July of 2003, and a shot has been fired against the couple. While Valerie is getting ready for work, Joe walks into the bedroom and hands her the newspaper in which her covert CIA status is publicly revealed. By leaking her name and occupation to the press, Valerie is involuntarily dragged into the White House's vendetta against Wilson. She becomes a pawn in a men's game, just as she, as a hypermobile intelligence operative, is a woman navigating a male-dominated world. From the beginning of the film, she has held an extra-ordinary position as a spy heroine with the gift of frictionless global mobility and, in addition, with a position of relative power as a top CIA agent (she is promoted to head of operations early in the film) with the gift of information. As mentioned above, her reformulation of the traditionally female identity in mobile terms creates gender trouble and her enactment of the hypermobile professional identity is an act of defiance of a deep-rooted tradition of immobilised women compelled to prioritise their domestic duties over a public presence. However, it seems that her subversion of gender roles cannot stand. Her mobile, liquid identity, job, and lifestyle become a threat to the (patriarchal) system and therefore must be stopped. The position of privilege that she has enjoyed is now revoked by those that hold the power. Thus, the film represents mobility not as a right but as a privilege that can be lost anytime.

The realisation of the consequences of being outed hits Valerie like a wave: not only will it end her career and affect her personal life but, most importantly for her, it jeopardizes operations and assets she has in the field. In a highly mobile, networked world, the disclosure of this information, which apparently only concerns a single, ordinary woman, has international consequences. Due to her mobile job, the leak affects a matrix of all the people that she has come into contact with since she is a covert CIA operative. Due to the mobility of information in the network society, the contents of the newspaper's column are internationally accessible. The fantasy of a mobile, interconnected world turns into a nightmare in which the "shrinking" of the world suffocates Valerie. As the sequence progresses, a mood of paranoia is increasingly acute, emphasised by the tense music score and agitated hand-held visual style. Valerie goes out to take her car to work and she takes a moment to look around as though checking whether the people around her have already learned of her secret. The film includes point-of-view shots of newspapers still lying on her neighbours' driveways as bombs waiting to be set off. Valerie's eyeline meets a neighbour glancing at the newspaper in his hands, who then looks up and waves at her. The visual style and overall frenzied feeling of the scene makes the man appear menacing and provokes paranoia. As Gaine describes, the film's intimate style, which resembles a home video or YouTube aesthetic, places the spectator in a position of uncomfortable proximity to the action while denying a sense of control and order, thus creating an atmosphere of disorientation and threat by offering a partial and subjective vision of events (158-161).

Valerie drives away and a frantic montage sequence ensues that is composed of three different elements. Firstly, it continues the storyline with shots of Valerie driving and taking notes on a notebook. Secondly, these shots are interwoven with the character's visualisation of her face being circled in a series of photographs, as if a mysterious

figure—which is later visualised as an anonymous Middle Eastern man—were identifying her in the images and digging through her CIA history. The third element is the voice-over heard over the scene and in which three different voices can be discerned. The first one is Valerie's enumerating different covers she has used. She is apparently making a list of all the identities she has created and the places she has visited as an exercise in damage control and playing out in her mind the now likely scenario of being targeted for her involvement in counterproliferation operations. The second one is the voice of one of her acquaintances, who asks her about her occupation. The final one is a male voice—which symbolically stands for that of her pursuers—asking repeatedly and in an increasingly harsh tone, "who are you?".

The question echoes like a haunting cry for the remainder of the film, since the revelation of her secret shakes not only Valerie's life, but also the bedrocks of her self. During a conversation with Joe, she explains the repercussions of the leak as follows: "I'm taking different routes to and from school. I'm looking in empty rooms, under beds, every time I come home. A home we're going to lose pretty soon because your work has dried up and your clients are running for cover". First of all, Valerie stresses the negative impact that the recent events have had on her mobility. Once a hypermobile globetrotter, her mobility is now restricted and she experiences, probably for the first time in her life, a substantial degree of friction, having been turned into the target of public scrutiny and attacks (causing her to pay attention to her routes) and expelled from the ranks of mobile CIA agents. From the moment that she outed, the CIA turns its back on her, suspends every operation in which she is involved, and deprives her of privileges such as complete freedom of moment. When she goes to the agency after the leak, she finds herself escorted by internal security officers and confined to an empty office. The same institution that granted her a hypermobile status later strips her of it, suggesting that the mobile identity

of the special agent is controlled and governed by an apparently all-powerful organisation. Since the kind of frictionless mobility that she experiences as a CIA agent becomes deeply ingrained in her self, the loss of this job comes as a hard blow that shatters her identity into pieces, affecting all areas of her life. The film visually foretells this the first time that it shows Valerie at the CIA headquarters, when she is promoted to head of operations of the Iraq WMD case. The film uses an object POV shot to track the movement of a trolley loaded with an overwhelming pile of document boxes labelled "Iraq" as it is wheeled into Valerie's office. Valerie, who is sitting at the desk, is shot from a long to medium distance and positioned on the side of the frame, in a way that makes her look small in comparison to the trolley, which invades the frame just as it invades the office. The case files' constantly close distance to the camera makes them seem a menacing element that stampedes into Valerie's office, taking too much of her (physical and figurative) space.

This scene functions as a premonition that her job will overrun the non-professional spheres of her life and self. The aftereffects of the Plame scandal inevitably take a toll on her marriage. The film examines the strain of handling a complicated situation and underlines the couple's conflicting postures towards it and their different personalities. The idealistic, outspoken, and impulsive Joe is fixated on exposing the government's wrongdoings, whereas Valerie, always discreet and controlled, seems more concerned with protecting the family and picking up the pieces of her shattered life. After an argument, Valerie lies in bed while Joe sets the couch for him to sleep on that night. Joe enters the bedroom to take a pillow. Valerie is visibly upset and does not interact with Joe, remaining in the same position with her back turned to the door. After a few seconds, Valerie starts to reminisce about her training for the CIA and recalls how she was the only one who did not fail the more demanding tests. That, she says, made her feel special. She apparently held onto the idea that she did not have a breaking point as a feature that

defined her. Close-ups of her blank stare and troubled face show how, despite her efforts to hold back the tears, she is gradually overcome with emotion. “I was wrong”, she finally says. The film’s distinctive hand-held camera is used to shoot both Joe and his point of view, whereas shots of Valerie are conspicuously static, a visual reminder of her drastic immobilisation. The formal techniques used to film the character as she voices the grief of having lost herself suggest that the loss of her mobility is directly connected to a fracture in her identity. Valerie is haunted by the question of who she is now that an integral part of her identity has been ripped off. Her immobilisation precipitates a crisis of identity that calls for a rediscovery and renegotiation of her own self.

Feeling overwhelmingly lost, Valerie decides to go back to her roots and travel to her parents’ home. There, she finally allows herself to release the feelings that she has hidden behind her unbreakable spy façade. In front of the mirror, Valerie breaks down for the first time, sobbing at the thought of her life falling apart. She seeks comfort and advice in her father, who reminds her of her resilience and adaptability. The Plame family home functions as a safe space where Valerie can come to grips with her new reality and experience an epiphany. The film revisits the trope of the urban professional woman who returns to the hometown during a crisis of identity (Negra 2009, 15-21). Negra describes the role of the hometown as “the defining site of female identity formation” in narratives in which women must rediscover their identity (2009, 19). It is in that idealised space that a “retreatist epiphany” can take place whereby the professional woman comes to realise the immense value of home and family (2009, 21). Thus, a visit to her parents’ home helps Valerie leave her past self behind—that of the mobile professional woman—and reprioritise her role as wife and mother. Hence, the hometown trope serves in the film to trigger the “redomestication” of the mobile professional woman (2009, 16).

Valerie arrives at her home in Washington D.C. unannounced at night, where she is reunited with her husband. The couple have a conversation in which they try to patch up their marriage. Joe apologises for jeopardising his family with his actions and ruefully tells Valerie: "If I could give you back who you were...". Her facial expression, however, is not of grief or bitterness for what she has lost, but of determination and acceptance. "This is who I am", she replies with a calm assurance. She seems to definitively let go of her past mobile spy self and accept her new identity, adopting a more active stance towards the White House's attack on her family and resolving to testify before a Congressional committee. Thus, the film concludes with Valerie coming to terms with her immobilisation and focusing solely on restoring her family's peace and stability.

The immobilisation of the mobile professional woman in *Fair Game* takes us back to the beginning of this thesis. It opens with a reference to the 2009 spy film *The International*, also starring Naomi Watts, this time in the role of a district attorney not dissimilar to Valerie. Both are competent and dedicated professionals working in male-dominated fields. Both travel around the globe as part of their jobs without experiencing any sort of friction. Both have a family to protect from the dangers of their work. And, most relevantly, both are mobile until there comes a time when their movement is stopped. In the case of *The International*, the woman is persuaded to stop by the male hero, as if denying her the opportunity of taking the hero role, on account of the threat that continuing the operation poses to her family. As to *Fair Game*'s Valerie, she finds herself immobilised by the exposure of her family name and her marriage to Joe Wilson. The fact that she has a family turns out to be a liability for her mobile career and puts her in the hands of a system that can use that to immobilise her. Apparently, had she not had a family, she would still be a CIA mobile operative. Yet, in the end Valerie is relegated to the two elements of her identity mentioned in its promotional tagline that correspond

to family roles, that is, wife and mother, while being stripped of her professional role as spy.

Conclusion

When I started working on this thesis, the world was at its most mobile moment in history. Massive social phenomena such as globalisation, mobile and communication technologies, and intensive consumerism had contributed to the hypermobilisation of the world. Mobility was, and still is, a momentous topic in both the academia and the media. Travel-centric lifestyles and hypermobile jobs have developed throughout the twenty-first century, reaching an unprecedented stage in the years following 2014 due to societal changes such as the emergence of new digital practices, the development of decentralised finance and cryptocurrencies, the proliferation of coworking spaces, and the increasing flexibility of work, among others (Hannonen, Schlagwein). At the same time, the global nomadic condition of the current world has brought about a growing awareness of mobility practices and their consequences, such as the environmental impact of travel. Also during this period, the large flow of work travellers, moving faster and easier than ever before around the globe, contrasts with the mounting restrictions imposed on less privileged groups: the refugee crisis in Europe dominated the headlines from 2015 onwards and xenophobic politics gained momentum in different parts of the world.

Then, in 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought mobility into the spotlight as the virus paralysed the whole world. This global crisis caused substantial changes to the former system of mobilities, such as the stigmatisation of public transport, which was no longer perceived as a safe activity, and a re-evaluation of mobility, which aroused hopes of change in travel habits at the realisation that the stoppage imposed by the pandemic could be beneficial in some ways, especially environmentally. Work-related travel was abruptly brought to a halt by the outbreak of the pandemic, forcing people to explore every option available to work without leaving the workplace and even the home.

Telework became a widespread practice and several online platforms served as virtual workspaces where people could work remotely. The restriction of movement resulted in an intensification of already existing relations of inequality in terms of mobility. Kinetic elites were able to keep their mobile lifestyles through protective bubbles while safe movement was limited for the mobility poor for a longer time. Furthermore, it reinforced the relationship of interdependence between immobility and mobility—for some workers to safely stay at home, other workers had to move at the risk of contracting the virus. All these changes transformed the general approach to work travel. Once that it has become apparent that some work travel is dispensable, those trips that do take place take on a greater significance, leading us to consider who the people that still travel for work are, what their experience is, and what the connotations of the trips they undertake are.

The pandemic further stressed gender differences. Working women are among those who have been the most exposed to the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The unprecedented school-closures, social distancing measures, and stay-at-home orders severely affected employment in sectors where women are more likely to work, and exacerbated gender divides in domestic labour, which proved a heavy load for women working from home (Nivakoski and Mascherini, Zamarro and Prados). To a significant extent, containment measures resulted in a "redomestication" of women, who were forcibly driven back to the domestic spaces and roles to which they had traditionally been relegated. Studies show that, during the most critical stages of the coronavirus crisis, household and childcare tasks, such as food preparation, care for dependent relatives, and children care and homeschooling, fell to a greater extent on women (Nivakoski and Mascherini, Zamarro and Prados). Furthermore, it has been observed that women are more likely to take up telework and reduce their work hours so as to accommodate their careers to the new situation (Nivakoski and Mascherini, Zamarro

and Prados). All this makes it even more difficult for women to return to the workplace and combine family responsibilities with a job that involves travelling.

Within this context, an exploration of mobile professional women in film seems even more momentous than it already was when I started writing this thesis. To this we should add the growing awareness of the inequality of representation of certain groups in the media. Feminist initiatives such as the #MeToo and Time's Up movements have called attention to issues of gender inequality in the film industry both on and behind the screen. This thesis has not taken industrial matters into account, with the exception of occasional references to producers, directors, or writers behind some of the films mentioned. Yet, I am aware of the fact that this is an angle that deserves careful consideration. At the same time, since this thesis has focused on what is represented on the screen, it also shows a lack of diversity concerning racial, queer, disabilities, and body representation, since mainstream cinema is still dominated by white cis-heteronormative models.

As this thesis has argued through the analysis of the filmic portrayals of female corporate travellers, journalists and special agents, there are recurrent meanings, topics and conventions that permeate the narratives about these mobile women regardless of genre, style, budget, and country of origin. These conventions emphasise the characters' femaleness and link them to issues that are largely related to the personal aspects of women's identities. As mentioned in the introduction, the choice of the three professions analysed is not arbitrary but responds to their relevance in the cinema of the 2000-2022 period. The choice of a different temporal framework would have resulted in a different selection of topics since the popularity of certain mobile occupations in films is historically contingent.

A good example of the changing trends in the filmic representation of mobile professional women is the figure of the flight attendant. Historically, flight service work is one of the earliest and commonest mobile occupations among women since it is in line with the service and care work traditionally done by and considered as suitable for women. Consequently, the flight attendant is probably one of the first mobile professional woman figures to appear in film. In the early decades of commercial air travel, the flight attendant was perceived as "an icon of non-threatening female independence" (Negra 2009, 109). However, with the passing of time, and as air travel evolved from a special to a casual practice, the figure of the flight attendant underwent a de-glamourisation and by the 1990s it had lost momentum (Negra 111, 167). Yet, the flight attendant re-emerged in the early 2000s. Diane Negra notices a trend in postfeminist culture towards traditional flight attendant iconography that she refers to as "flight attendant chic". She connects this form of nostalgia with a mobilisation of female care labour to repair several crises of uncertainty faced by US society at the time, among which are the traumatic connotations of air travel after 9/11 and the anxieties over the "career woman" (115-116). According to Negra, the idealisation of the hyperfeminine flight attendant in 2002-2004 is linked to a representation of women's participation in the labour force as "at best an opportunity to display skills of emotional care and nurturance that will 'earn' them the reward of romance" (116). "Flight attendant chic" dissipated fairly quickly and films about flight attendants gradually became scarce. Recent films gravitate towards other mobile professions that seem more relevant to the current context.

However, it is possible to find a thematic correspondence between the mobile professional women in the "flight attendant chic" cycle and more recent titles. In *View from the Top* (Bruno Barreto, 2003), Donna (Gwyneth Paltrow) realises, after much effort to advance in her flight attendant career and get the position she desires, that none of that

matters unless she can maintain a relationship with the man she loves. *The Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004) at first positions the flight attendant Amelia (Catherine Zeta-Jones) as icon of idealised female virtue but ends up suggesting that her "geographical promiscuity" (she has an affair with a special "friend") makes her unfit for the deeply virtuous Viktor (Tom Hanks). The more recent *Baggage Claim* **(**David E. Talbert, 2013**)** centres on a flight attendant's desperate expedition to find a potential husband before she becomes the only unmarried woman in her family, something she has not have the opportunity to do because of her mobile career. These films do not pay as much attention to the characters' work experiences as they do to the effects that their mobile jobs have on their personal lives. This predominance of the personal over the professional is not limited to films featuring flight attendants but extends to other films featuring mobile professional women. *Return* (Liza Johnson, 2011) explores a national reservist's difficult transition back into her former small-town life on her return from an overseas tour of duty. The film underlines the strain that Kelli's (Linda Cardellini) mobile job causes on her marital, family, and friendship relationships as she struggles to adjust to "immobile" life, falling into a depression and almost losing the custody of her two daughters. In *The Whistleblower* (Larysa Kondracki, 2010), Nebraskan police officer Kathryn Bolkovac (Rachel Weisz) has lost custody of her daughter because, apparently, she is "married to her job". Unable to get a transfer to be near her, she impulsively accepts a job as a United Nations peacekeeper in post-war Bosnia hoping that the money she earns will enable her to eventually move closer to her daughter. Later on, when her mobility poses a threat to the corrupt, male-dominated system that hides and benefits from a sex trafficking ring, those who try to stop her take advantage of her greatest weakness: her status as a mother living away from her child. Films about women astronauts like *Proxima* (Alice Winocour, 2019) also explore the discrimination and work-family struggles faced by mobile

professional women. Sarah (Eva Green) is a French astronaut getting ready for a year-long mission in space that implies separating from her eight-year-old daughter, for whom she is the primary caregiver. She bears the double strain of having to prove herself to her male colleagues and having to balance her mobile career and professional ambitions with the needs and responsibilities of motherhood. The film focuses on the emotional strain associated with mother-daughter separation while space travel fades into the background.

Flight attendants, military personnel, police officers, and astronauts are roles that have not been explored in this thesis, which focuses on the filmic portrayal of corporate workers, journalists, and special agents. Yet, the thematic and narrative aspects that stand out from the analysis of these three screen figures can generally be extrapolated to films featuring any other female mobile professionals. Thus, this thesis concludes that filmic representations of mobile professional women are heterogeneous but inescapably gendered. The vast majority of films featuring this type of characters underline the character's femaleness in one way or another. Woman characters rarely, if ever, play an exclusively occupational role, but they always play a woman's role. As Flicker puts it, "the professional stereotype is overlapped by a gender stereotype" (316). Regarding the portrayal of mobility, every aspect of these characters' mobilities—their practice, experience, and meanings—is represented as gendered in films and often becomes entangled with the gender stereotypes that largely dominate the portrayal of women figures. This brings to the fore a series of elements that recurrently appear in all kinds of films featuring mobile professional women. For instance, it is common for these films to draw attention to the limitations and exceptional nature of these women's mobility—on the one hand, by portraying them as not entirely suitable for a mobile job, less mobile than other (male) characters, or highlighting the friction they experience, and, on the other, by emphasizing their extra-ordinariness, either presenting their frictionless

mobility as one-of-a-kind or pointing to the ways in which it threatens the status quo. Moreover, mobile professional women in film are defined by the pervasiveness of certain issues and themes. Motherhood, singlehood, femininity, sexuality, division of domestic tasks, family relationships, discrimination in the workplace, and travel safety and risks are all issues that are frequently addressed in this type of films, and which are not as frequent, if not infrequent altogether, in films about mobile professional men. Apparently, male characters are allowed to be just business travellers, war reporters, or special agents, but their female counterparts must necessarily transit the realm of womanness. Female characters are mobile professionals, but they are also mothers, wives, lovers, or friends. Male characters may also be these things as well, but their stories can omit those aspects and focus on something else, while these issues seem inescapable in women's stories. Most of the narratives about women characters touch upon and often centre on personal matters such as family matters, personal relationships, and female identities, which gives the impression that women's experience of professional mobility is inextricably linked to the private spheres of their lives.

That seems to be, ultimately, what characterises the representation of mobile professional women in twenty-first-century films, at least for now. It would be very interesting to see whether this representation changes in the coming years, as well as to explore different types of films (such as independent films, experimental films, or non-Western films, for instance) and even other audiovisual products such as television series or short films. The topic of this thesis is one that faces an uncertain future, and which therefore allows for and deserves further study, since debates over media representation of social groups and identities are far from coming to a conclusion. Maybe, in the near or not so near future, gender representation will have evolved towards a narrowing of the gaps between men and women characters or even towards a collapsing of binary

structures altogether. Yet, to this date, the portrayal of mobile professionals in films continues to show substantial gender differences. If films both mirror and construct the society that creates them, the films analysed in this thesis make it clear that there is still a long way to go on the journey towards gender equality. In any case, the exploration of the mobilities of female professionals onscreen has brought to the fore some features that characterise women's mobility and some of the obstacles that, more often than not, curtail or try to put an end to the trajectories of these "women on the move".

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