5. Positionality, Immersive Methodology, and Collaboration in Film Festival Research

Estrella Sendra

Abstract: Film festival research is largely informed by ethnographic methods, guaranteeing access and participation in events defined by their liveness and multi-faceted dimension. By self-reflecting on the experience of conducting fieldwork in Senegal, this chapter invites reflection on the researcher's role and research methods. In an effort and commitment to contribute to decolonising academia, it identifies three main phases in the research design. These are the researcher's positionality, their immersion in the film festival, and the collaboration with festival participants and fellow researchers. By reflecting on these three dimensions, this chapter engages with a key research question: how do researchers arrive at film festivals and subsequently move along its circuit, in order to examine them?

Keywords: methodology, ethnography, decolonisation, Africa, festival, collaboration

Having been invited to join a reflexive and supportive space whose aim is to share insights on film festival research and methodologies, I feel compelled to acknowledge Hélène Neveu Kringelbach's work, whose self-reflexive writing style and methodological reflections have inspired my presence and work on this fascinating ever-growing field of film festivals and cultural festivals more broadly. This piece draws largely on my fieldwork research on cultural festivals in Senegal, where I spent nine months between October 2015 and September 2016, as well as short periods for the purpose of my doctoral thesis, from 2014 to 2018. Whilst the focus in this chapter is on

Ostrowska, D. and T. Falicov (eds.), *Shaping Film Festivals in a Changing World: Practice and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025
DOI 10.5117/9789463725576_CH05

film festivals, my main case study during that fieldwork research in Senegal was the Festival international de folklore et de percussion, also known as FESFOP, located in Louga. This is not a film festival, but a music festival, which has largely informed my engagement with further cultural festivals in the country and the world. However, this chapter is also inevitably shaped by the context in which I wrote it, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted festivals and the way in which we research them. Such disruption has shed light on the need to rethink film festivals and encouraged the adoption of innovative formats where issues of access have been raised upfront. This chapter seeks to contribute to the collective effort to work towards the decolonization of film festival research (Dovey and Sendra 2023), by identifying three main phases in the research design. These are the researcher's positionality, their immersion in the film festival, and the collaboration with festival participants and fellow researchers. By reflecting on these three dimensions, this chapter engages with a key research question: how do researchers arrive at film festivals and subsequently move along its circuit, in order to examine them?

Accessing and Arriving at Film Festivals

Film festival research is largely informed by ethnographic methods (Burgess and Kredell 2016; Dickson 2017; Lee 2016; Vallejo 2017). These involve the data collection from participant observation in the festival and its multifaceted presence in the everyday lives of people and places, before, during, and after the official festival dates. Ethnography, understood as "being there" (Lee 2016) and "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998, 2001, quoted in Lee 2016, 124), becomes a crucial research method. This is because festivals are defined by their liveness and multifaceted dimension. Festivals are "multisensory" and "multifocal" events (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 57–58). They are not to be seen "*simply* as public events" (Dovey 2015, 22). Instead, they are "a site of negotiation of diverse (and sometimes) opposed agendas, in which each participant's task (curating, presenting the event, writing critical reviews or presenting a film) can—and actually does—have multiple purposes" (Vallejo 2017, 254). Daniel Dayan makes this very clear when speaking of the existence of a "double festival," and the need to read print paper (the written festival), other than engaging in participant observation (the audiovisual festival) (Dayan 2000, 52, cited in Lee 2016, 130). This multidimensional nature fosters a need to adopt multiple positionalities in the research field (Lee 2016, 123; Neveu Kringelbach 2013, 20). Toby Lee describes ethnographic

fieldwork as "an ad hoc process, with the researcher improvising on-the-spot responses to unexpected circumstances and tricky interactions—playing different social roles as needed, listening to whoever is willing to talk" (Lee 2016, 123).

Yet, the reflection on potential new directions in film festival research forces us first and foremost to ask ourselves: How do we, researchers, arrive at film festivals? In other words, what motivates us to conduct research on festivals, and how do we access their "behind the scenes?" How does such an arrival shape our situated journey along its circuit? As multifaceted events, festivals are "a space of flux" (Burgess and Kredell 2016, 165). Access to their various layers is crucial (Dickson 2017, 261), inviting reflection on our positionality (Vallejo 2017, 257; Burgess and Kredell 2016) and its impact on our research process and findings (Burgess and Kredell 2016, 160). Acknowledging our positionality entails the introduction of ourselves in the festival circuit, reflecting on who we are, our research motivations, and our background stories. By doing so, we can start seeing the connections between our concerns and those of our research subjects, favoring an ethical approach towards the people who make research possible. This is because film festival research is a collective endeavor, involving research *subjects*, and not just objects. It is inscribed within arts, humanities, and social sciences, hence, dealing with people, in structures shaped by their "social capital" (Bourdieu 1986; Quinn and Wilks 2017). I seek to illustrate the importance of positionality by sharing my experience conducting research in Senegal, reflecting on the way in which I, a white Spanish woman researcher based in London, landed in this prolific cultural and festival region, in order to then examine how this positionality shaped my access and movement to the multiple dimensions of film and cultural festivals.

My first physical encounter with Senegal was triggered by my dissatisfaction with the representation of the African continent in the Spanish media. They offered a repetitive image of Africa as a homogenous and very distant mass defined by its poverty and "under-development," without any critical insight into the centuries of slavery and colonialism by Europe, or the wide range of cultural practices and heritage across the continent. Such problematic media coverage fostered a psychological distance which contrasted significantly with the geographical proximity between Africa and Andalusia. A road-trip from Algeciras to Tarifa would offer sufficient evidence: confused sonic waves, swapping from Arabic to Spanish radio stations, welcoming messages by telephone providers, wishing consecutive happy arrivals to Morocco and Spain, roaming charges as if we had actually traveled from one place to the other, and panoramic views from Tarifa

to the African continent. This frustrating contradiction motivated me to make a documentary film featuring African migrant communities in Spain, which, in my region, Seville, were mainly from Senegal and Nigeria. I was fortunate to be put in touch with Mariama Badji in November 2012, a Senegalese journalist then living in Madrid. She became the leading voice of the documentary, and the co-director of the second part, which was shot in Senegal the following year.

My first trip to Senegal was thus as a filmmaker, to host a screening of *Témoignages de l'autre côté/Testimonials from the other side* (2011). This first experience of positionality was complemented by that of a journalist, since, thanks to Mariama Badji, I was offered an internship in the national newspaper *Le Soleil,* in 2012, where I wrote a series of articles for the cultural and region sections. It was then, as a journalist, that I started my journey to the cultural and festival landscape in Senegal. At that time, I was also a postgraduate student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, where I continued to examine the representation of cultures as mediated through festivals. I then made a preliminary study of the Festival International de Folklore et Percussion (Sendra 2012), also known as FESFOP, in Louga, which I later chose as my main case study for my doctoral thesis on festivals in Senegal, since I soon noticed that it required much more in-depth research.

My multiple positionalities did not end there. Having been privileged to take the module Aspects of African Film and Video at SOAS in 2011, at the time in which its module convenor, Professor Lindiwe Dovey, was also co-founding and launching Film Africa at the Royal African Society in London, I soon became involved in African film festivals in Spain and the United Kingdom, adopting multiple roles, such as media officer, photographer, complimentary tickets manager, interpreter, to become the director and co-curator of the Cambridge African Film Festival from 2014 to 2016. In one such involvement, as the international media officer for the African Film Festival of Cordoba-FCAT 2012 (now hosted in Tarifa and Tangiers), I met two young Senegalese filmmakers, Keba Danso and Pape Bolé Thiaw, and a journalist, Kodou Sene, who would introduce me to a key film figure in Senegal, Abdel Aziz Boye, now deceased, founder of Ciné Banlieue, a free film training school located in the outskirts of Dakar, and organizer of the Banlieue Films Festival. Ciné Banlieue would then host screenings of my various films, positioning me as a filmmaker. I have been writing news (Sendra 2017a and 2017b) and academic articles (Sendra 2021 and 2023) about the space and festival, positioning me also as a journalist and researcher. I also appointed two filmmakers trained there, Mamadou Khoma Gueye

and Nazir Cisse, for the documentary film co-directed and co-produced with Mariama Badji, *Témoignages… "wa suñu gaal"/Testimonials from the People in Senegal* (2016), becoming also a co-producer. Some submitted their films to the Cambridge African Film Festival, positioning me as a curator. However, by association, I would also be seen as a financial partner, at least, potentially, due to my Spanish nationality and relation with the African Film Festival of Cordoba-FCAT and Aula Cervantes, the cultural attachment of the Spanish Embassy in Dakar.

In December 2014, at the beginning of my PhD, I went to the fourteenth FESFOP in an exploratory trip to select my case studies. After this exploratory trip, an official letter was sent to FESFOP informing the organizers of the selection of the festival as my main case study and requesting access and collaboration for the purposes of my research. This was responded to positively and I was granted an extra role, introduced often as an "intern" ("stagiaire") rather than as a researcher. These multi-positionalities and background in Senegal prior to my arrival for fieldwork research, mainly over a period of nine months between October 2015 and September 2016, shaped my access to the festival scene, and informed my research methods and findings. It allowed me to immerse myself in the various dimensions of festivals, beyond the dates in which these were celebrated.

Immersing Ourselves in the Festival

An immersive methodology invites us to move from the ethnographic focus of the importance of "being there" to the self-reflexive and critical question of how *we* are *(t)here*. "[F]ilm festival scholars are usually insiders of the culture they aim to analyze" (Vallejo 2017, 257). The challenge, in such a case, is to be able to achieve some degree of detachment. However, it is worth examining what happens when this is not the case, when the researcher is an outsider, and thus needs to try and immerse themselves in the festival. As Lesley-Ann Dickson notes, "[a]ccess requires a 'necessary connection' to the research setting, however close or distant that connection may be" (2017, 266). Despite the identified potential lack of critical distance, she argues that "insider status is arguably the preferred researcher position within film festival studies because it means that the research has benefited from access to some/many/all of the event's assets" (Dickson 2017, 257). In her study of the Glasgow Film Festival, she suggests "a fluid positioning and a multi-method approach" (Dickson 2017, 273) as "a 'critical core'—a non-aligned position where distanced, reflexive understanding could take

place" (Dickson 2017, 268). Similarly, Toby Lee discusses her immersion in the Thessaloniki International Film Festival by adopting various roles and being open to the value of the "unexpected encounters" (Lee 2016, 124–27).

There is thus an agreement as to the value of qualitative ethnographic methods and participant observation, in order to immerse oneself in festivals (Loist 2016; Vallejo 2017; Lee 2016, among others), as well as of the need to perform different roles beyond and as researcher. It is the norm to find ourselves looking for alternative "excuses" other than conducting academic research, to approach festivals, since sometimes participants "do not seem, for some reason, to find academics of much use at all" (Iordanova 2013, 4). Fewer studies have specifically focused on the challenges of approaching social interaction with festival participants in research in a postcolonial context. This soon became an important point of concern when reflecting on my presence and research in festivals in Senegal.

I was deeply inspired by Neveu Kringelbach's ethnographic work on dance in Senegal, where she referred to the Festival Kaay Fecc in Dakar (Neveu Kringelbach 2013). She shares the view of the difficulties of justifying the researcher's presence in the festival field. In her book, she reflects on dealing with a constant feeling of having "to give something back." She also became a dance apprentice, enrolling in sabar percussion and dance workshops to help legitimize her presence in the field (2013, 20–24). To her, a key obstacle to access and immersion in festivals in Africa is the local perception, arguably "distrustful of the ethics of research in Africa by outsiders," because a scholar from outside Africa travels to observe, learn from people, draw conclusions and "go back to be called an 'expert'" (Neveu Kringelbach 2013, 24). Neveu Kringelbach's reflection and self-reflexive writing style fostered critical thinking into ways of conducting research ethically, based on relationships of mutual trust, on "reciprocity practices" (Peirano 2020, 64; Vallejo 2017, 253–54). Such relations contribute to moving from a methodological shift, from ephemeral, self-interested one-way encounters, which has led to the criticism of ethnography as "zoological," "Orientalist and exoticising" (Alexander 2006, 401), to sustainable, reciprocal relationships, encouraging dialogue between practice and research, and thus with an activist potential to foster social change. In fact, it resonates with the recent call from The Care Collective to radically transform the political system into one "that puts care front and center" (The Care Collective 2020, 5). This is one that identifies the need for "caring communities," based on "mutual support" and a "sharing infrastructure" (The Care Collective 2020, 45–46). Applied to film festival research, this would mean a research project informed by a caring method, based on a caring community of researchers, practitioners,

and festival participants concerned with the sustainable growth of these festivals, for research, cultural, and social purposes.

Aware of the much needed self-criticism and reflexivity of immersive methods and my early career researcher status, I seek to share here some of my practices and approaches in Senegal. I hope that this experience will offer some insight into the collective challenge and duty of decolonizing academia. My humble aim is then just to engage in caring practices, by sharing some tips for fellow film festival researchers, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Immersive research relies on the acknowledgment and embracement of multiple positionalities; it requires mixed methods, an ability to grasp the multifaceted nature of festivals, namely, participant observation, qualitative interviews and oral (their)stories, archival research, audiovisual and visualization methods, and digital ethnography; it approaches festival research diachronically, decentralizing the festival time-space and extending the research period beyond the festival dates; it is collaborative, engaging in dialogue with practitioners and researchers on the ground; and it is aware of the emotional labor involved, respecting implicit rules of confidentiality and acknowledging the difficulties of "leaving the field."

Despite selecting FESFOP, a music rural festival located in Louga, as my main case study during my doctoral research, I was interested in tracing, for the first time, a genealogy of all sorts of cultural festivals in Senegal (including film festivals), in order to situate FESFOP within the broader festivalization in the country, both in urban and rural areas. This required the combination of a series of methods during fieldwork. Thanks to my background as a journalist, mentored by Omar Diouf, then Editor Chief at *Le Soleil*, and collaboration with the sociologist Saliou Ndour, I was able to access (written) print archives, in particular, the National Archives of Senegal, now located in the intersection between Malick Sy Avenue and the highway, meters away from the National Grand Theatre Doudou Ndiaye Coumba Rose and the Canal Olympia cinema in Dakar; the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) archives of the *Dakar-Matin*[1] coverage of the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres; the archives in the headquarters of the newspaper *Le Soleil,* with digital access from the year 2010 of their publications; and the FESFOP archives. I further accessed a variety of digital "archives," such

1 This is the same newspaper that would eventually become *Le Soleil*. *Le Soleil* was a name given by Senghor. The national newspaper had previously been called *Paris-Dakar* (1933–1961), stressing the link between the two colonial capitals, and since independence, *Dakar-Matin* (1961–1970). It is after then that the newspaper was re-named *Le Soleil*, suggesting a rupture with the colonial origins of the newspaper.

as the PANAFEST archive, the printed and digital archives of the Cultural Department of the Spanish Embassy and its cultural center, Aula Cervantes, in Dakar, as well as Senegalese-based online platforms and networks, with articles, images, and videos.

These offered varied accounts of what Dayan has described as "the written festival" (2000, 52), as mentioned above. However, my aim to trace the genealogy of festivals required a much more *in situ* collaborative, multi-sensory, and multidimensional positionality, with close attention to oral testimonials, as well as participant observation (with different degrees of participation) in several festivals (seventeen in total) across the country. While "being there," immersed in the territory of Louga and the cultural scene of Senegal, more broadly, I adopted multiple roles, shaped by my background experiences in the country. In order to access oral stories of festivals, filling the notorious gaps identified in the written archives, I relied on oral sources, through first-hand oral testimonies of festival participants and cultural actors. I conducted twenty-three semi-informal, semi-structured interviews, and fifty-eight formal interviews, as well as engaged in a large number of casual discussions and meetings among festival participants and journalists. Consent forms were completed by interviewees in the case of formal and semi-informal interviews, as well as formal letters both from SOAS and FESFOP. In the case of filmed interviews, consent was expressed orally, as well as in the case of casual discussions and meetings.

My fieldwork research was divided into three two-to-three-month trips, from October 2015 to January 2016, April to June 2016, and July to September 2016. However, while "back" in London, I continued to be "inside" the festival and cultural scene, even if from abroad, to the extent of being considered by some a "cultural actress," that is, as a person within the Senegalese cultural sector. My constant communication with cultural actors and journalists made me part of the "festival circle," participating in local discussions on festivals, among organizers, journalists, and artists. Although it would be misleading to assume this was the case for all stakeholders and participants, as the network kept growing over time, I am sure I remained a complete observer for many. During my first fieldwork trip, in Louga, I became part of the "FESFOP delegation," acting as a videographer, photographer, and researcher of the festival, and was often introduced by the FESFOP president, Babacar Sarr, as "an intern." This period was also key for networking and for collaboration with local researchers both at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar and the Université Gaston Berger (UGB) in Saint-Louis, the latter being the home of Saliou Ndour, the sociologist whose term "two-tier music," referring to its local and international dimension, had inspired

my understanding of festivals in twenty-first-century Senegal as "two-tier festivals" (Sendra 2018). I attended five other festivals in this period, in Saint-Louis, Kaolack, Dakar, and Louga, including the International Festival of Documentary Film in Saint-Louis (StLouis' DOCS), and the Banlieue Films Festival in Dakar. During my second trip, coinciding with the spring festival season, I went to seven festivals in these same locations, with different forms of participant observation. This proved to be indispensable for the study of FESFOP in relation to the broader festivalization of the country. It was also key to interviewing more festival organizers and cultural actors.

The third trip took place just after the end of Ramadan, and thus there were a very limited number of festivals, of which I attended four. The purpose of this trip was threefold: first, it allowed me to fill gaps through further data collection, interviewing key festival organizers and cultural actors; second, it would offer access to festival locations outside of the festival dates; and third, I was able to engage in a tangible research collaboration with Senegalese sociologist Saliou Ndour, analyzing together the archives of the coverage of the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres in Dakar-Matin, in light of the festival's fifteenth anniversary in 2016.[2] This collaboration allowed me to research from within, or rather "nearby" Senegalese academic reflections on festivals and creative and cultural industries, quoting Trinh T. Minh-ha, who very rightly points out that "a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them' is a conversation in which 'them' is silenced" (Trinh 1989, 67).

Digital ethnography is indeed key to complete and contest the written and unwritten accounts of festivals. Facebook operates as a crowd-sourced grassroots collaborative archive and site of celebration of these festivals. In a context where websites are often outdated or non-existent after a certain period of time, there is always a Facebook page of a journalist or a former festival director, where dates, images, and experiences are collected. Even if Facebook requires access to the Internet, it remains a largely accessible platform. This is because of its efficient use through a mobile application, in a context where mobile phones exceed the Senegalese population (Sendra and Keyti 2022, 84). I found observing Facebook particularly relevant, especially when I was not physically based in Senegal. Through Facebook, I was able to participate digitally. My continuous digital engagement allowed me to witness one of the first initiatives of online programming during COVID-19, by

2 The results were presented in the International Conference of Pan-Africanism: From Colonial Exhibitions to Black and African Cultural Festivals, celebrated from 20 to 22 October 2016 in Florida State University, in Tallahassee , and in a co-authored article in *Interventions—International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (Sendra and Ndour 2018).

the Yennenga Centre, where password-protected film screenings were made available over a certain period of time, as was a live talk with Abderrahmane Sissako. The Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/CentreYennenga) of this young yet promising film hub in Dakar led by Alain Gomis became a carefully curated online film festival program, that inspired other film festivals hosted later in the pandemic in a blended format. This proves the importance of digital ethnography as a method, because it allows us to move along the circuit when we cannot be present in person; and even when we are, it offers multiple festival experiences and stories.

Equally enriching in accessing the multifaceted feature of festivals was the adoption of both visual and visualization methods. Visual methods consisted of the integration of still and moving images in my PhD thesis and further research outcomes, that is, photo-reportage and practice research of a range of festivals, as well as the production of a documentary film on my main case study. Visualization methods contributed to the dissemination of the data collected in a concise way, inviting further researchers to use the produced materials for further research purposes. These included maps of festival spaces (showing performative spaces and ways of interacting and participating); the distribution of festivals across the country before and after the year 2000 (illustrating their increasing decentralization); maps of specific locations (to contextualize these geographically); calendars of festivals (evidencing the rich festival scene in the country and thus moving beyond the study of festivals in isolation); and chronological tables of festival editions and of the foundation of festivals in the country (offering a historic overview of festivalization in Senegal). Visual and visualization methods have greatly contributed to the collaborative ethos of immersive methods, offering materials to be potentially used by festival organizers and participants for fundraising among other purposes, as well as by fellow researchers interested in this region.

Immersive methods are further determined by continuous ethical considerations. Most importantly, I am aware of how my positionality as a white European woman researcher shapes the way in which festival participants share their various experiences and understandings of the local and international dimensions of the festival. Yet, at the same time, being visually identifiable as a white European woman gave me privileged access in certain arenas where a black body may have encountered greater barriers or the need for special clearance. For instance, during the opening of the Biennale de Dak'Art, featuring a speech by president Macky Sall, despite the strict security controls and need for a badge or official invitations to access the National Theatre Sorano where the opening was held, a completed

and printed application form from me was enough (prior to collecting my badge) to let my three Spanish visitors and me in.

I was only able to trace a comprehensive genealogy of festivals in Senegal thanks to relationships based on trust. During my fieldwork period in Senegal, the boundaries between trust and friendship became at times quite blurry. It was in this context that some critical and controversial statements arose. However, I preferred not to include them in my thesis, for ethical reasons, as they were implicitly confidential or told me as a "friend" rather than as a researcher.

Immersive methods involve affect, that is, emotional labor, as it also leads to implicit rules of confidentiality. These have sometimes prevented me from making explicit or even implicit references to some of the critical views and aspects of festivals. I still consider the respect of such rules crucial in this and any other kind of research, which I see as collaborative. I think that it is that respect for "silence" of the unsaid that has made possible what has been said throughout my research. I have also anonymized certain statements and people mentioned to illustrate certain festival dynamics, whenever the information was not received first-hand or authorized, stressing the phenomenon rather than specific personal situations. The testimonials did not derive solely from relations of trust. They often led to expectations of achieving further visibility, funding, or mobility opportunities, due to my international networks and multi-positionality. While the realization of such expectations was enlightening for the purpose of my research, to examine the ways in which ideas of the "international" are understood by artists and other festival participants, I have also avoided excessive personification, that is, naming specific people to illustrate examples. This takes me to the closing section of this chapter, where I emphasize the multi-directional aspect of film festival research, based on dialogical and collaborative relationships, where the researcher is committed to the idea of "giving back" (Neveu Kringelbach 2013, 24). It is thus, as suggested before, the direction that can prompt the shift towards establishing sustainable, reciprocal relationships between practitioners and researchers.

Giving Back: Dialogical and Collaborative Methodologies in Film Festival Research

This chapter has stressed the value of oral sources, of social capital at festivals, and thus, the importance of "being there" and of "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998, 2001 quoted in Lee 2016, 124). Access is thus social, and "[t]o gain and retain social access entails the active creation and maintenance

of personal relationships" (Carmel 2011, 552). This feature has led scholars to compare ethnography to gossip, with negotiations of access and an attempt to grasp as many perspectives as possible, and shared curiosity (Carmel 2011, 554). This is why we can never say anything final about a festival, as it is experienced differently by the different people who attend it. There is a Wolof proverb that captures this idea of "ethnography as gossip"—"*Lu gan xam ci dëkk, ku fa dëkk ko ko wax*" ("what a stranger knows about a town, someone living there has told them"). This proverb shows the collaborative dimension of the social capital entailed. Even if single-authored by me, any research outcome I have shared is polyphonic and only possible thanks to multiple voices, all invested in the same cause—festivals and creative industries in Senegal—in a context where this investment has a highly activist dimension, that my work hopes to shed light on.

Crucial to the participation in gossip was multilingualism. I was honored to receive the SOAS Language Acquisition Fund to be given private Wolof tutorials.[3] While my Wolof is still not at a native proficiency level, I am able to understand the vast majority of any oral conversations, particularly in relation to the topic of festivals and the everyday. Most of the interviews have been conducted in French, at times shifting from French to Wolof, or vice versa. However, a large number of interviews in Louga were conducted in Wolof, sometimes with help from Wolof speakers. Other interviews were conducted in Spanish, with Spanish cultural actors or institutional figures, or Senegalese people who can speak Spanish because of their education or travel experiences. Being able to understand Wolof was also indispensable to interacting with people, as well as to following meetings and identifying the difference in speeches at festivals or cultural events, when switching from French to Wolof. It enabled dialogue, and encouraged collaborative relationships which I am currently developing through co-authored publications and projects.

An immersive methodology is collaborative and dialogical. It is decolonizing in that it is multi-directional. It does not end in data collection "in the field," traveling "back" and disseminating it for a reduced academic circle. It is much more multi-directional, that is, it takes into account issues surrounding equality, diversity, and inclusion. It is about going back and forth. An immersive methodology is not constrained by the festival dates. Instead, it extends its time and space beyond the festival date and location. It seeks to give back, involving different forms of emotional and symbolic labor. Throughout my PhD research, I performed various kinds of labor, adopting

3 These were delivered by Miriam Weidl, from November 2014 to May 2015 and then again from November to December 2016 at SOAS, University of London.

multiple positionalities for purposes other than my research, such as being a photographer, videographer, or graphic designer of reports and portfolios. However, these actions never seemed enough. When I finished my PhD it was clear to me that I needed to go back to Senegal and share my results with the participants. I needed to show them what I had done thanks to our interviews, trust, and shared time together. I presented my results in French in three different locations: the Regional Cultural Center in Louga, home of my main case study; the Sunu Xarit Aminata Cultural Centre in Gandiol, a rural region undergoing a social transformation through the Hahatay Association; and Aula Cervantes in Dakar, which had been a great source of support and access to information throughout my thesis. A hard copy of the thesis, written in English, but orally presented in French, was left in Louga, and a digital one in Dakar. The results were overwhelmingly rewarding. I felt it was then that people became aware of my positionality as a festival researcher, and of the potential social and transformative impact of academia. Yet, more importantly, it was then that participants understood that this thesis had only been possible thanks to being so polyphonic, thanks to including such a large range of voices. It was also then that participants realized that such genealogy and analysis of festivalization in Senegal had only been possible thanks to the various forms of access I had been granted. In the last few years, I have been moving my research focus to film festivals in Senegal, which were still young at the time of my PhD. The ongoing engagement with Senegalese cultural festivals involves a high degree of emotional labor, at times invisible, intangible, yet somewhat evident, I hope, through ethics of research. I continue to question ways in which my research could foster some local impact, generating and sharing resources and establishing synergies, increasingly more structured, that can further engage in reciprocity practices among festival researchers and practitioners.

Bibliography

Alexander, Claire. 2006. "Introduction: Mapping the Issues." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 3: 397–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870600597792.

Asch, Timothy. 1995. "The Ethics of Ethnographic Film-making." In *Film as Ethnography*, edited by Peter Crawford and David Turton, 196–204. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Reprinted in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy, 2011. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 81-93.

Brown, William John Robert Campbell. 2009. "The Festival Syndrome: Report on the International Film Festival Workshop, University of St. Andrews, April 4 2009." In *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, edited by Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne, 216–25. St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies.

Burgess, Diane, and Brendan Kredell. 2016. "Positionality and Film Festival Research: A Conversation." In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, 159–76. London: Routledge.

Care Collective, The. 2020. *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*. London: Verso.

Carmel, Simon. 2011. "Social Access in the Workplace: Are Ethnographers Gossips?" *Work, Employment and Society* 25, no. 3: 551–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017011407969.

Comunian, Roberta, Brian J. Hracs, and Lauren England, eds. 2021. *Higher Education and Policy for Creative Economies in Africa: Developing Creative Economies*. London: Routledge.

Dayan, Daniel. 2000. "Looking for Sundance: The Social Construction of a Film Festival." In *Moving Images, Cultures and the Mind*, edited by Ib Bondebjerg, 43–52. Luton: University of Luton Press.

Dickson, Lesley-Ann. 2017. "Insider/Outsider Positions at Glasgow Film Festival: Challenges, Issues and Opportunities in Industry-Partnered Ethnographic Research." In *Film Festivals and Anthropology*, edited by Aida Vallejo and María Paz Peirano, 261–76. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2015. *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Dovey, Lindiwe, and Estrella Sendra. 2023. "Towards Decolonised Film Festival Worlds." In *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After*, edited by Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens, 269–89. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. 1995. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Iordanova, Dina, ed. 2013. *The Film Festival Reader*. St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1998. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press.

Lee, Toby. 2016. "Being There, Taking Place: Ethnography at the Film Festival." In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, 122–37. London: Routledge.

Loist, Skadi. 2016. "Part III. Method: Introduction." In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, 119–21. London: Routledge.

Loizos, Peter. 1993. "Nichols on Pornography and Ethnography." In *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From Innocence to Self-Consciousness, 1955–1985*, 206–7. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Neveu Kringelbach, Hélène. (2013). *Dance Circles: Movements, Morality and Self-fashioning in Urban Senegal*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Nichols, Bill. 1991. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Peirano, María Paz. 2020. "Connecting and Sharing Experiences: Chilean Documentary Film Professionals at the Film Festival Circuit." In *Documentary Film Festivals Vol. 2: Changes, Challenges, Professional Perspectives*, edited by Aida Vallejo and Ezra Winton, 55–72. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Quinn, Bernadette, and Linda Wilks. 2017. "Festival Heterotopias: Spatial and Temporal Transformations in Two Small-Scale Settlements." *Journal of Rural Studies* 53: 35–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.05.006.

Ruby, Jay. 2000. *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Sendra, Estrella (2023). "Traveling to Audiences: The Decentralization of Festival Spaces at the Festival Films Femmes Afrique in Senegal." *Journal of Festive Studies*, 5: 304-325. https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2023.5.1.140.

Sendra, Estrella. 2021. "Banlieue Films Festival (BFF): Growing Cinephilia and Filmmaking in Senegal." *aniki: Portuguese Journal of the Moving Image* 8, no. 1: 245–72. Special Issue: Film Festivals and their Socio-Cultural Contexts. https://doi.org/10.14591/aniki.v8n1.734.

Sendra, Estrella. 2017b. "Le cinéaste et formateur Abdel Aziz Boye décédé jeudi." *Le Soleil*. Accessed November 12, 2017. https://en.calameo.com/read/000275347792e6128c745.

Sendra Estrella. 2012. "A Critical Analysis of the Representations of Senegalese Cultures in the Context of the Festival of Folklore and Percussion in Louga (FESFOP)." MA diss., SOAS, University of London.

Sendra, Estrella. 2017a. "Luto en el cine senegalés tras la muerte de Abdel Aziz Boye." *Wiriko*. Accessed November 14, 2017. https://www.wiriko.org/cine-audiovisuales/luto-cine-senegales-abdel-aziz-boye/.

Sendra, Estrella, and Keyti. 2022. "Use of Senegalese Music to Raise Coronavirus Awareness on Social Media." *Journal of African Media Studies* 14, no. 1: 81–94.

Sendra, Estrella and Ndour, Saliou. 2018. "Fiftieth Anniversary of the First World Festival of Negro Arts: A Comparative Study of the Involvement of the Population in the World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966 and 2010." *Interventions*, 20 (7): 965–986. doi: 10.1080/1369801X.2018.1487329.

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Vallejo, Aida. 2017. "Ethnographies of Film Festivals: Reflections on Methodology." In *Film Festivals and Anthropology*, edited by Aida Vallejo and María Paz Peirano, 251–60. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

About the Author

Estrella Sendra is a researcher, filmmaker and festival organiser, working as Lecturer in Culture, Media and Creative Industries Education (Festivals and Events) at King's College London. Estrella has published on festivals, film, creative industries in Africa and video essays. Since 2011, when she directed *Témoignages de l'autre côté,* an award-winning documentary about migration, she has been developing a regional expertise in Senegal. She is the co-principal investigator of the "Decolonizing Film Festival Research in a Post-Pandemic World," New Frontiers in Research Fund. She is Associate Editor of *Screenworks: The Peer-Reviewed Online Publication of Practice Research in Screen Media*, an editorial board member of the *Journal of African Media Studies*, and an advisory board member of *Screen,* the ERC-funded research project "Screen Worlds: Decolonising Film and Screen Studies," and *Film Africa* in London. She was the director of the Cambridge African Film Festival from 2014 to 2016.