Film Festivals: Close-up on New Research
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Back in 2021, when film studies scholar Émilie Cheyroux and I discussed the possibility of including a guest-edited section on film festivals in the fourth issue of the Journal of Festive Studies, we realized that many of the submissions we would receive would probably deal with the impact of the COVID pandemic: festival cancellations or postponements in 2020; responses to lockdowns and international border closures; experimentation with new (online or socially distanced) formats in 2021; the return to either in-person or "hybrid" events in 2022.

What we could not foresee was that some film festivals would recover from this health crisis only to be thrown into a second, even more perilous, one. The roundtable organized by Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck, the script of which you will discover in this issue, testifies to the sense of disbelief that seized the Ukrainian film festival community on February 24, 2022. It also highlights the kind of healing or activist work that festivals can perform in times of war—and in its aftermath. All of this indubitably takes us away from notions of joy and pleasure, but then, our journal’s position has always been that elation is never divorced from issues of power, conflict, and indeed war. The recent FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar was yet another reminder that festivity, or in this case the celebration of the world’s arguably most popular game—football—can be overshadowed by myriad concerns (the human rights record of the host country, the environmental impact and cost of the tournament, the treatment of fans and journalists, scheduling issues, geopolitical concerns), producing an altogether "joy-free" event.¹

The entirety of our "Close-up on New Film Festival Research" is permeated by this tension between pleasure and pain, exhilaration and vexation. While some articles in the section showcase the crucial community-building function of festivals in bridging the gap between academia and the rest of civil society (Ana Rosa Marques), in providing small spaces of freedom in prisons (Carole Roy and Lindsey McVicar), or in promoting cultural identities in the absence of a nation-state (Alan Ali Saeed), others explore the inherent power dynamics of the festival circuit (Heshen Xie), the frustrations caused by COVID among small festival organizers (Émilie Cheyroux), or how hard it can be for festivals to escape state control or dependence on economic partners—especially stakeholders in tourism development (Cyril Cordoba). Émilie Cheyroux’s
introduction provides a thorough examination of how these issues relate to the larger literature on film festivals, which has grown considerably since the 2000s.

As usual, our issue also includes nonthematic material—in this case, three articles by a combination of scholars and educators: Panayotis G. Kimourtzis and Anna Mandilara; Ivy Rieger; and Jody H. Cripps, Ely Lyonblum, and Anita Small. In their essay on public ceremonies under the rule of King Otto of Bavaria (1832-1862), historians Kimourtzis and Mandilara analyze the establishment of public holidays in mid-nineteenth-century Greece and try to understand why the steep cost of these celebrations was never questioned by either the monarchy or its subjects, despite the country’s dire financial situation. Their meticulous archival investigations fuel larger debates on the sources we use when tracing the history of festivals, the function of protocol and etiquette in court ceremonies, the role of national symbols in processes of state formation, and the complex relations between official and popular cultures—from competition to occasional appropriation.

In her study of *disfrazado* performances in Mixtepequense communities located in Oaxaca, Mexico, and in Kern County, California, anthropologist Ivy Rieger highlights the importance of embodied practices such as fancy dress to Indigenous identities in a globalized world. Utilizing Peggy Levitt’s well-known concept of “social remittance” and Diana Taylor’s equally famous distinction between archive and repertoire, she specifically elaborates on the role of this carnivalesque tradition in the construction of cultural capital for the transnational Mixtepequense community. She also furthers the conversation on how carnival traditions constitute privileged sites for the negotiation of authenticity, traditional norms of social organization, and gender roles.

The last nonthematic contribution explores the topic of signed music in the deaf community via the study of a signed musical, *The Black Drum*, performed in 2019 at Festival Clin d’œil, an annual event held in Reims, France. The three authors, who embody different subject positions in relation to the deaf community—insider, outsider, and mediator—start by providing the requisite cultural context for the development of signed music as an art form. Then, on the basis of a six-month participant observation, they describe the community-led artistic process by which *The Black Drum* came to be performed “without any reliance on audible sounds.” Finally, they analyze the impact of the piece on festival attendees on the basis of interviews. Their conclusion is that festivals provide an environment that is particularly conducive to experimentation and to the dissemination of new forms of performance art on an international scale. In this particular case, Festival Clin d’œil has fostered growing acceptance of signed music as a musical genre among deaf people in their communities and beyond.

Issue 4 ends with a series of seven book reviews. Spanning a wide variety of topics—from the development of queer film festivals (Ylenia Olibet) to the role of festival performances in the construction of “Europeanness” (Mariann Vaczi), from women’s contribution to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century world’s fairs (Ellen Litwicki) to the way events “do gender” (Cora Gaebel), from everyday festivity in various African nations (David Murphy) to the divisive nature of Independence Day commemorations in the post-Reconstruction US South (Elijah Gaddis), not to mention the politics of drumming in Martinique (Jerome Camal)—they epitomize the multidisciplinary nature of festive studies that this journal has been celebrating since 2019.
Aside from working on issue #4, the editorial team has been laying the ground for future iterations of the journal. Editor extraordinaire Ellen Litwicki decided to step down earlier this year to focus on other scholarly and nonscholarly pursuits. We thank her for the amazing work she has performed at the service of the journal since 2017 (when it was just an idea floating around in H-Net circles) and wish her the best on her post-retirement adventures.

Joining me as coeditor is Isabel Machado, whom some of you may remember as a guest editor for our third issue, on the materiality of festivity. She will bring her terrific organizational and scholarly skills—as well as constant enthusiasm—to the position. Also joining the team are Dr. Emily Joan Elliott, H-Net’s new associate director for Research and Publications, who has efficiently guided the production of this issue, and Dr. Emily Ruth Allen, who will henceforth assume the position of reviews editor for the Journal of Festive Studies.

Finally, we want to announce a few new arrivals to our editorial board (now fourteen members strong): Drs. Evelyn Annuss, Antoinette DeNapoli, Elijah Gaddis, Barbara Grabher, Skadi Loist, Miguel Valerio, Alessandro Vari, and now Ellen Litwicki, whose expertise we will continue to rely on in future years.

The fifth issue of the journal is already under way, and we have just published a call for papers for a guest-edited section on sports and festivity that will be part of issue 6. We are hoping that you will check it out, share it, and continue to follow our work into 2023 and beyond. Thanks for your support of open-access journals and open scholarship in general!
AUTHOR BIO

Aurélie Godet is an associate professor of US history at the University of Nantes and is currently at work on a political history of festivity in New Orleans from the eighteenth century through today, tentatively titled "Festive City: The Politics of Play in New Orleans from the Colonial Period to the Present." She has been the coeditor-in-chief of the Journal of Festive Studies since 2019.

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INTRODUCTION

New Directions in Film Festival Studies

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Writing about Film Festivals after a Pandemic

This fourth issue of the Journal of Festive Studies is dedicated to film festivals, that is, a category of events that dates back to the early 1930s and has become particularly popular since the 1970s. As stated by professor in film and media studies Marijke de Valck in 2016, film festivals provide an exhilarating cinephilic experience that “beckons to be lived,” which was seriously challenged by the recent COVID-19 pandemic.\(^1\) Indeed, several major questions arose in 2020 and 2021: How were events whose raison d’être is to gather people in the same place meant to survive? How was it possible to provide a festive experience to people stuck at home? Would audiences even care to be involved when faced with more pressing problems, including life-and-death situations? For some organizers, canceling events was a heartbreaking yet inevitable decision, while others chose to postpone their festivals, hoping that the sanitary restrictions would loosen and allow them to organize in-person events at a later date.

In the spring of 2020, online virtual events multiplied, rooted in the belief that depressing times particularly required escapist experiences and entertainment. Needless to say, the profitability of an entire industry was at stake, but efforts to organize showcases no matter what also showed that the passion for cinema was a powerful driving force. Films are money-making ventures, but they are also an accessible form of entertainment, a medium with high emotional potential, and a tool for activism, which probably explains why there can be up to six thousand film festivals around the world each year.\(^2\) In the end, despite the unprecedented situation that the pandemic gave rise to, film festivals continued to be part of our lives. The loyalty of audiences, the determination of festival organizers, and the dedication of festival workers were clearly put to the test, but so was their creativity. Today, as it has become clear that the drive to organize film festivals has survived, one cannot help but wonder—with a hint of retrospective dread—how people would have handled the cancellation of all festive events in the absence of online platforms.

Much like film festivals themselves, the field of film festival studies also powered through the
pandemic. In 2016, film scholar Dina Iordanova wrote that “the fledgling field of festival studies [was] only about a decade old” and rejoiced that it attracted growing scholarly attention. Today, the times when studying film festivals amounted to “a stroll in the desert” are over, and the field now boasts a luxuriant variety of methodologies and approaches (history, sociology, anthropology, film studies, tourism or cultural management, etc.) that make it just as multifaceted as film festivals themselves. Scholars can resort to a “highly interdisciplinary arsenal of theories” to study them.

Booming interest in film festival studies is probably what spurred the recent publication of the edited volume Film Festivals: History, Method, Theory, Practice. As the title indicates, contributors to the collection strove to synthesize the main tenets of and research questions pertaining to the field, with a special guiding introduction that offered advice to scholars who may want to join the club. While the study of film festivals is often driven by case studies, the range of tools one can use is fairly diverse. Qualitative studies continue to dominate: the urge to attend film festivals and conduct ethnographic studies based on participant observation is strong and explains why scholars were incredibly disappointed when they were deprived of their objects of study during the pandemic. However, recent years have seen a turn toward quantitative studies (“data gathering and statistical analysis”) to understand the “larger mechanisms” affecting the circulation of film or to map the history of film festivals in certain regions. Film scholar Aida Vallejo’s work on film festivals of the Basque Country is a great example of this type of approach.

One look at the Film Festival Research Network bibliography put together by professor in media industries Skadi Loist and de Valck in 2008 (and updated ever since), at the series of yearbooks that Iordanova has edited or coedited, or at Palgrave Macmillan’s Framing Film Festival book series is enough to realize that the range of topics covered by film festival specialists has considerably broadened since the 2000s. From endeavors to understand the circuit to more specialized issues about festivals and activism, about certain regions of the world, or about the way certain concepts—such as Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities—can shed light on film festival studies, a wide range of topics have motivated scholars in their efforts to develop the field. One can only hope that these efforts will go on and involve an even greater variety of scholars.

A great deal of the most recent literature has focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. De Valck, author of the field-defining Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia (2007), was one of the first to comment on the pandemic’s possible consequences on film festivals. In an essay published in 2020, “Vulnerabilities and Resiliency in the Festival Ecosystem: Notes on Approaching Film Festivals,” she expressed the need for scholars as well as film professionals to reflect on the crisis and the ensuing challenges. Interestingly, she briefly commented on the use of online platforms, touching on the idea that some festivals might embrace the “connectivity” they had gained in past years and keep using online programs to increase their audience membership, while considering that for others, it would only be a temporary solution that would not compensate for the human experience festivals offer. She also pinpointed the “diverging vulnerabilities” that affect film festivals, especially in terms of financing and funding opportunities; indeed, the latter are often secured via networks of support.
that rest on friendship.\textsuperscript{10} The “#Solidarity” issue of \textit{NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies} that de Valck edited a few months later with film festival scholar Antoine Damiens furthered the conversation.\textsuperscript{11} Five contributions highlighted the void the pandemic may potentially leave and the missed opportunities for social justice or human rights.\textsuperscript{12} Research about the impact of the pandemic culminated with the 2023 release of de Valck and Damiens’s edited collection, \textit{Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After}, which involved a wide range of scholars who reflected on the halted circulation of films, on geo-blocking issues, and more broadly on the challenges and solutions that allowed festival workers to envision a life after the pandemic.

Such works are not temporary adjustments to an exceptional situation or mandatory assessments for lack of other perspectives of study; they have truly contributed to highlighting the nature of film festivals and launched a conversation on what on they are. The pandemic did not just hinder the organization of festivals; it also enticed scholars to reflect again on the essence of film festivals. Are festivals about films or filmmakers? Are they a truly festive experience, or do they merely provide film professionals with market and networking opportunities? What role do they assign to audiences? Such questions were famously hard to answer before the pandemic even struck. As de Valck admitted prior to the pandemic: “To ask what a film festival is, then, appears to be a trick question that hopes to fool its audience into thinking it can be answered readily with a clear definition.”\textsuperscript{13} The difficulty in coming up with a clear definition, however, does not mean that the question should not be asked. What do film festivals really celebrate? What is the role of programmers in their organization? Which communities do they serve? Clearly, asking what a film festival is requires us to identify the needs they fill, needs that can be different from one festival to another. Logically, large A-list festivals are not faced with the same issues as small nonprofit festivals. Parameters such as size, outreach, and programming can thus help us understand the differences between the myriad film festivals that exist.\textsuperscript{14} These different aspects determine the diversity of studies and the development of the field and propel it in new directions.

“Small” film festivals usually start small because they cater to an underrepresented community—for example, based on ethnicity, race, or gender—and do not necessarily aim at becoming annual events. Some start with the belief that “films can change the world” and are thus rooted in an activist agenda.\textsuperscript{15} As Iordanova explains, activist film festivals “are engaged in an effort to correct the record on a certain issue by highlighting lesser-known aspects for the benefit of improved understanding. They are driven by intentionality, be it to increase awareness, to expose, to warn, to prevent and sometimes change the course of events. Secondly, they embody the belief that film is powerful enough to have an impact.”\textsuperscript{16} What is interesting with such festivals is that they sit at the intersection of different agendas: based on identity or community or motivated by human rights or activism. Identifications and agendas overlap, which takes us back to the difficulty of providing a clear-cut definition of a film festival.

LGBTQ festivals are good examples of this complexity. They have given rise to numerous publications that strive to understand the “polymorphous or heterogeneous nature of gay and lesbian cinema.”\textsuperscript{17} With the “intense global proliferation of queer cinema, there has been a clear interest in studying the development of LGBTQ film festivals in different regions of the world: in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Oceania, North America, and Europe.\textsuperscript{18} One of the reviews in this issue jointly analyzes scholar Stuart James Richards’s \textit{The Queer Film Festival: Popcorn and Politics}
(2018) and Damiens’s LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness (2020). Without spoiling the contents of film studies scholar Ylenia Olibet’s brilliant write-up, let me just say that it points to the different perspectives and scholarly choices that can be made by academics when studying queer film festivals. While Richards focuses on three large-scale festivals, their organizational structures, and their funding mechanisms, Damiens studies the role that European and North American ephemeral and “minor” film festivals have played in shaping the evolution of queer cinema and explores new approaches to sharing research on film festivals.

Whatever the angle favored by scholars, the program is overwhelmingly seen as the backbone of film festivals. Even though programming has not always been an object of study, more and more scholars now reflect on the responsibility of programmers to global film culture. They are viewed as major stakeholders who are in charge of actively choosing films that correspond to the mission of a specific festival, whether they think the audience will enjoy them or not. In her 2011 book, media specialist Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong pointed out that programmers can be motivated by non-filmic values, such as “human rights, freedom of speech, equality, recognition for different groups.” This confirms the pedagogical dimension of film and turns film festivals into public spheres where discussion and debate take place. Activist film festivals, in particular, often lay out counter-stereotypical principles in their mission statements that, far from making them oblivious to their cinephile goals, stress the idea that film festivals seek to shape counter-publics. For this reason, programmers are often interviewed to share their expertise on the selection of films, as well as their experience in landing a “dream job.” Liz Czach, who programmed for the Toronto International Film Festival (1995–2005), recently confirmed the veneration that her job attracts but also shed light on its drawbacks. She explained that programming, as a form of “affective labor,” comes with a wide array of emotions that go from feelings of excitement to “states of despair, disappointment, and anger.” More importantly, she foregrounded the precariousness of the job, which has led scholars to illustrate the inherent contradictions affecting an industry that generates incredible profits yet leaves some of its workers in financial insecurity.

On a more positive note, the freedom that programmers have—and which they view as a major advantage of the job—is what makes film festivals places of innovation. The Indigenous film festival imagineNATIVE Film+Media Arts Festival exemplifies the twofold desire to showcase films that portray the issues Indigenous communities struggle with and to leave space for innovation.22 Caroline Klimek, an early-career film scholar at York University, has shown how this particular festival, as well as the HotDocs Canadian International Film Festival, “push[es] the boundaries,” introducing new media and, thus, offering exclusive experiences, such as Virtual Reality (VR), to the audience.23 This versatility would not exist without the risks programmers take, which are combined with their desire to make audiences discover, learn, and cultivate their film culture. Even if no programmer can predict the audience’s reaction to a movie, the survival and growth of a film festival undeniably depends on the audience and their potential loyalty. What drives audiences to choose a particular film festival? Is it love of cinema? To what extent does it have something to do with an identity statement? Can their tastes also shape the programmers’ choices? These are the kinds of questions that scholars have attempted to answer while studying film reception, focusing on audience motivation and satisfaction.24 In New York City, for example, where there is a large supply of film-related events, one can expect audience motivations to be different whether they attend Tribeca, DOC NYC, the Nordic Film Festival, or the New York
One may argue that, like an impressionist painting, a closer look at the circuit reveals different aspects of the structure of film festivals. To carry on with Wong’s idea that it is hard to paint a film festival with “a single brushstroke,” one might consider the “circuit,” identifying the difficulty of considering it as a simple and homogeneous structure. Differences among festivals have led scholars to call into question the use of the metaphor of a film festival as a single entity.

Differences among festivals have led to a variety of initiatives showcasing the effort to actively participate in the shaping of global and transnational film culture and in the effort to attract European investors. This is one example among a plethora of initiatives showing that festivals beyond their showcasing role.

The interesting fact about these tendencies is that festivals cooperate to give a leg up to filmmakers: San Sebastián has partnered with Cannes’s film market and with Ventana Sur in Toulouse, France, in a common project titled Cine en construcción (Film in progress). Such collaboration between two festivals, the San Sebastián Film Festival in Spain and Cinélatino Latino Film Festival. Going to a trendy, a genre-based, or an identity-based festival aimed at diasporas does not have the same meaning for audiences. Reception has thus become a crucial part of film festival scholarship and now focuses on aspects other than cinephilia. Reception studies have also been interested in how film festivals reach out and connect with audiences via social media to provide what film and media specialist Kirsten Stevens calls “an extended and enhanced festival experience.” While this directly contradicts the explicit demands of festival organizers to forego the use of technology inside the auditorium, these studies have foreshadowed the growing and inevitable presence of technology in film festival organization.

The contribution of tourism and urban studies highlights another aspect of audience motivation to attend a film festival. Festivals belong in (and to?) cities and contribute to their reputation. It seems that every city wants to be known for its capacity to organize exclusive and unique events, balancing the need for international recognition with catering to local residents. Not only do festivals (any kind of festival, for that matter) bring revenue to cities, but they also participate in their branding, making them more attractive to tourists, investors, potential residents, and creative workers. This is one of the reasons why some cities offer grants to film festivals as part of their support programs for cultural activities. Considering that most film festivals are nonprofit and function “on a bare minimum” hardly enough to sustain more than a few full-time employees, this support is decisive. Funds secured by ticket sales, membership fees, and sponsorship grants undoubtedly offer some leeway; however, most film festivals rely on seasonal workers and volunteers to be able to operate. The details of this economic structure, along with the economic impact of film festivals, have also attracted scholarly attention.

Studies of the economic stakes surrounding film festivals have also stressed the crucial role they play in providing funding opportunities, especially to budding filmmakers or filmmakers from “emerging countries.” The Hubert Bals Fund (Rotterdam)—“the most venerated of all film festival funds”—or the World Cinema Fund (Berlin) are examples of funding initiatives set up by international film festivals. They testify to the responsibility that festival organizers feel to go beyond their showcasing role. In a recent essay, scholar Tamara Falciov has underlined the collaboration between two festivals, the San Sebastián Film Festival in Spain and Cinélatino in Toulouse, France, in a common project titled Cine en construcción (Film in progress). Such programs provide a “stamp of approval” so that filmmakers can then find other sources of funding, particularly through the coproduction film markets also implemented by film festivals (CineMart for Rotterdam) to put filmmakers in contact with potential distributors and investors.

The interesting fact about these tendencies is that festivals cooperate to give a leg up to filmmakers: San Sebastián has partnered with Cannes’s film market and with Ventana Sur (Argentinian film institute), thus creating a bridge between Latin American filmmakers and European investors. This is one example among a plethora of initiatives showing that festivals actively participate in the shaping of global and transnational film culture and in the effort to make up for the discrepancies between filmmakers, industries, and countries.

Differences among festivals have led scholars to call into question the use of the metaphor of “the circuit,” identifying the difficulty of considering it as a simple and homogeneous structure. To carry on with Wong’s idea that it is hard to paint a film festival with “a single brushstroke,” one may argue that, like an impressionist painting, a closer look at the circuit reveals different aspects of the structure of film festivals.
unmixed hues but that the wider picture gives the false impression that the colors blend.\textsuperscript{32} On the contrary, the circuit is characterized by “diversity, differentiation and hierarchical stratification,” which explains why scholars use a few other metaphors to describe it.\textsuperscript{33} Some thus prefer the image of the “archipelago,” which is perfect to describe the “rupture and continuity” of the circuit and to differentiate large-scale festivals like Cannes, Berlin, or Venice—the “Big Three”—from the constellation of other festivals.\textsuperscript{34} These prestigious festivals have stood the test of time, contrary to others, fueling a constant and dizzying movement that has characterized the evolution of the circuit of film festivals in the past century.

A Short History of Film Festivals

The very first film festivals were organized in the 1930s. In her groundbreaking work, de Valck has contributed to our understanding of this history by identifying three phases in the evolution of these events. The first phase (1932–68) was the “nationalist” phase, during which cinema was used to fulfill geopolitical means. Films, considered “national accomplishments,” were supposed to show the best of the countries that made them.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, in the 1920s, cinema had already started to be seen as an art form with great experimental potential, partly because of European avant-garde filmmakers. Clubs and societies in which intellectuals and artists gathered around films flourished. As de Valck explained, before it faded away, the avant-garde movement propelled the emergence of film festivals, whose international visibility offered more opportunities in the context of greater competition between nations.\textsuperscript{36}

The first film festival—the Mostra Cinematografica di Venezia—was organized in Venice in 1932. It was the first to become an annual event and the first to organize a glamorous international event reserved to elites.\textsuperscript{37} Venice was “the beginning of a phenomenon that would develop into the successful network of international film festivals.”\textsuperscript{38} Since the festival was created when fascist leader Benito Mussolini ruled the country, it had to fulfill ideological goals and tried to compete with Hollywood, whose films were forbidden entry into the country. This period was also marked by a desire to revitalize the Italian film industry because it had produced only 8 films in 1940, compared to 371 movies released in 1920, although the difference can be partly explained by the outbreak of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{39} Film schools, clubs, and magazines were therefore created to restore the image of the country through film.

The Venice festival was suspended during the war, just like Cannes, which was unfortunate enough to launch its first festival in September 1939 at the exact moment when Germany invaded Poland. These two festivals were nevertheless very different. Cannes was an ideological response to Venice and opposed fascism, showcasing French, English, and American films. While the American business-oriented film industry is often seen as diametrically opposed to the artistic and nationalist endeavors that characterized European cinema at the time, the emergence of European film festivals cannot be understood without the influence of Hollywood. Cannes was nicknamed “Hollywood’s licentious French mistress,” conveying the idea that the festival was used as an interstitial event for the United States to fulfill its ideological warfare against fascism first and then against the communist Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{40}

Indeed, this dynamic continued into the early years of the Cold War: weary of not being
connected viewing in film festival initiatives," in Loist, "Film festival circuit," 49.


29. Ibid., 88.

30. Ibid., 87.

31. Loist, "Film festival circuit," 49.

32. Wong, Film Festivals, 29.

33. Loist, "Film Festival Circuit," 49.

34. On the "archipelago," see Joshua Neves and Michel Frodon, quoted in Loist, "Film Festival Circuit." On "rupture and continuity," see P. Robbins and V. Saglier "Introduction. Other

represented at Cannes, the Soviet Union got closer to Venice, setting up a divide that influenced the creation of subsequent festivals. The Berlin film festival—or Berlinale—was held from June 6 to 18, 1950, in the western part of the city as the embodiment of the greatness of the democratic world. And in eastern Germany, the World Youth Festival was created in 1951, but contrary to its opponent, its lifespan was short.

This does not mean that all the festivals created were molded to fit the geopolitical trends of the time. In 1946, the Locarno film festival—the history of which one of our contributors investigates—was set up as a tourist attraction, while an Edinburgh festival launched the first event dedicated to documentary films in 1947. These niche events were the early signs of the greater potential of festivals in terms of diversity of goals and focus, which were characteristic of the second and third phases.

The second phase started in the 1960s, "in reaction to social needs as well as to insufficiencies of established festivals," according to Loist. What was then termed "Third World cinema," and generally speaking underrepresented cinema, used festivals to increase its visibility. For instance, the Pan African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) was established in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in 1969. The 1960s was also the decade during which cinema was embraced as an artistic medium that should amaze audiences with the quality of the techniques mastered by filmmakers. The filmmakers of the New Wave, for instance, spearheaded "auteur" cinema to the point where they were sometimes better known than their films. Jean-Luc Godard, who died in September 2022, was probably the best representative of such a trend, and he is also an interesting figure because he was a staunch supporter of the Pesaro Film festival in 1965, which countered the Hollywood model that was in the spotlight at Cannes. The films selected for his festival were both fiction and documentary films that reflected experimental or political endeavors. Pesaro was in fact the first festival to show films from the New Latin American Cinema in Europe.

This phase is also significant because it saw the emergence of the first American film festivals. Up to that point, the Hollywood machine had set a model that had stifled filmmakers' creativity. In 1957, though, the San Francisco film festival was created, showcasing films that had already been released in an effort to educate audiences. A. O. Scott from the New York Times wrote that San Francisco was "a film festival with a penchant for making taste, not deals." The educational stance chosen by San Francisco was poles apart from Telluride, which was created in 1974 as an elitist endeavor. It was impossible to buy tickets, only passes (which cost between 390 and 4,900 dollars), for a total of twenty films (about fifty today), none of which was eventually rewarded. In spite (or perhaps because) of the exclusive experience the festival offered, success was not lacking and Telluride has remained a key festival, whose aesthetic choices fire up conversations before the awards season. Finally, Sundance (originally the Utah/US Film Festival) was created in 1978 as an "anti-Hollywood forum" intended to spearhead independent cinema. Despite a few derogatory comments accusing the festival of having lost sight of its original purpose, Sundance remains a renowned festival and most filmmakers dream of having a film selected to show there.

Eventually, this tumultuous period in which new forms of cinema flourished and new festivals called into question norms and standards progressively gave rise to the third phase identified
by de Valck, characterized by the development of a great range of niches enmeshed in an international network. In 1972, Hubert Bals founded the Rotterdam film festival, the first European festival to showcase Asian cinema as well as international coproductions. The festival was eager to promote “Third World, political, underground, and independent cinema as well as documentary, experimentalism, and avant-garde filmmaking.” It also bet on proximity and inclusion, being organized in downtown Rotterdam and accessible to anyone, contrary to such festivals as Cannes or Telluride, which were reserved to an elite. Rotterdam is a good example of how festival organizers have striven to break down barriers and encourage the creative potential that is at the core of the making of movies. Bals also encouraged coproductions, betting on transnational cooperation to support lesser-known and smaller film initiatives around the world. In a visionary statement, he believed that this was “the future of cinematography.”

At the turn of the twenty-first century, more specialized “niche” festivals proliferated and offered specific types of films. In addition, smaller festivals in developing countries adopted an anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic approach, while others focused on identity-based endeavors. As Loist puts it: “The 1980s and 1990s were a time of massive proliferation of the festival model,” which gave rise to a deeper commitment to guide, promote, and even sponsor filmmakers. More than showcasing films, festivals could embrace marketing strategies and become business events. Cannes probably has the most renowned market, a large-scale event organized alongside the festival that presents thousands of films and involves a great number of film industry professionals and buyers. In that sphere too, inequalities remain: while large-scale film festivals tend to eventually host film markets (Berlin, Hong Kong), some regions barely have any. In Latin America, Mar del Plata—with its Intercine—and Guadalajara are exceptions. Yet recent initiatives, such as Ventana Sur, promise to change the landscape of markets in the future and increase transnational collaboration initiatives.

"Hub" might be a more appropriate word to describe the film festival network. Festivals are hubs: like airports, they draw flows from different parts of the world and involve different types of films and people that converge in the same place, for relatively similar purposes. Arrivals, departures, crossings, encounters, and opportunities are all part of the film festival phenomenon. It is what makes film festivals incredibly interesting objects of study, and it guarantees a fertile future for the field of film festival studies. In this issue, we present to you a sample of what the field has to offer, hoping that it will spur new conversations.

**Contents of This Issue**

In accordance with the multifaceted aspect of film festival studies, the articles of this issue offer a close-up on a variety of topics. While most of the academic articles of our issue are based on case studies, they all concern different areas of the world and different kinds of film festivals.

The issue opens with an article on Locarno, a well-known and prestigious European film festival situated in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Like Cannes, Locarno benefits from a highly attractive location. Situated at the foot of the Swiss Alps and on the northern shore of Lake Maggiore, the festival has built its reputation on the scenery it offers and its open-air screenings in the Piazza Grande. Contrary to most scholars who have written about Locarno, historian Cyril

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Cordoba adopts a historical perspective intertwined with an analysis of the economic stakes of the festival's evolution. His article is the fruit of minute archival work, which confirms, as he states, that getting access to archives for film festival scholars is crucial. The ephemeral and financially unstable situation of most film festivals does not always enable archiving, but one can hope that the digital possibilities that exist today will create new opportunities for festivals to leave their mark.

To study Locarno, Cordoba received help from Pro Locarno, the organization in charge of tourism in the city, as well as the Archivio di Stato (in Bellinzona) and the Cinémathèque suisse (in Penthaz). With impressive subtlety and inspiration from stakeholder theory, Cordoba navigates through the festival’s history, shedding light on the conflicting agendas of the different actors involved. While retracing the history of the festival, he identifies several phases of development that highlight the struggles festival organizers had to deal with. Locarno had to battle to become a legitimate event from 1946 to 1977 and suffered from cancellations in 1951 and 1956. Because of a lack of support from local authorities, the festival was first pigeonholed as a tourist attraction meant to “promote the region” rather than as a cinematic event, despite the fact that classical films were screened. In addition, because of the demands of the local film industry’s most powerful stakeholders—such as representatives of Twentieth Century Fox—at first, only movies that were commercially distributed in the country could be screened in Locarno. Cordoba shows that it was not until the 1960s that a compromise pleasing both the film industry and the tourist industry was found, with a competitive selection that allowed the festival to showcase new films. This new turn was instigated by its new president, Vinicio Beretta, who paved the way for the “internationalization, professionalization, and transformation” of the festival into a meeting point for “cinephiles with an artistic taste for avant-garde cinema.” Locarno illustrates that festivals evolve and change under the influence of key people who make critical decisions with consequences for the future of the event.

The influence of key stakeholders on the evolution of a film festival is also a major element of the following article, written by scholar Emilie Cheyroux. Also using a historical perspective, she analyzes the evolution of Cine Las Americas, a small community-based film festival in Austin, Texas, from its inception to the COVID-19 crisis. Belonging to the broad category of Latinx film festivals, Cine Las Americas founded its core mission on counter-stereotypical purposes rooted in the belief that on-screen representation matters and that film festivals can be platforms for underrepresented filmmakers. The mandates and restrictions of the pandemic prodded the organizers to find a way to set up an event online. Interviews that she conducted with the executive and programming associates shed light on their decision to call it a “showcase” and not a film festival. Their comments add to the conversation on what a film festival is, a concern that affects film festival organizers as much as scholars. Should online film festivals be considered failed events? Or should organizers rejoice that they survived the pandemic?

In the case of Cine Las Americas, the pandemic also revealed that a festival’s local network of connections matters more than the general circuit of film festivals. Drawing inspiration from organizational theory, Cheyroux argues that the festival organizers, while deciding to make the festival sustainable, turned it into a Field-Configuring Event (FCE) that can rely on the support of key organizations—film organizations, film festivals, and the cultural division of the city of Austin—
that showed great solidarity during the pandemic.

Community solidarity is also the focus of film scholar Ana Rosa Marques's essay on CachoeiraDoc film festival, an annual Brazilian film festival organized by the faculty (including the author) and students of the Film and Audiovisual program at the Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB). The article was originally published as a book chapter in 2020 and was translated from Portuguese by Isabel Machado for this issue. It echoes several topics that readers will come across in the other articles of this issue, CachoeiraDoc being a small community-based film festival. What sets it apart is that the festival is not organized by professionals but by faculty and students who progressively, as the article shows, felt empowered by their programming mission, however difficult they considered it to be. Their testimonies, included in the article, are enlightening comments that confirm the unifying role of film festivals in underprivileged communities. Not only does CachoeiraDoc fill a void in the region (the closest movie theater was originally 116 kilometers away!), but it also helps students envision a career in film or film festival organization. Additionally, a webdoc workshop is organized to teach public school students how to direct a short documentary, which can be subsequently uploaded online. The festival also offers teenage directors the opportunity to show their own films during the festival. Not only is the webdoc program a chance for them to learn from professional filmmakers, some of whom were accepted into prestigious universities abroad, but it also allows them to share their stories. The article emphasizes the cross-generational pedagogical aspect of the film festival.

Marques also studied the impact of the pandemic on the curators of the festival, arguing that it made the issues of solidarity and representation even more urgent for them. The representation of stereotyped communities, such as the Black Brazilian community, therefore, became a focus of the festival's program, also because 83 percent of UFRB students identify as Black or Brown. More than redressing issues of underrepresentation for the Black community, Marques argues, the selection of films made by Black Brazilian filmmakers allows audiences to appreciate their talents. While the stories these filmmakers tell can be very personal and unconsciously intent to counter stereotypes, the article shows that the festival contributes to the recognition of their film as quality cinema.

Marques's piece translates with enthusiasm, and also humor, the outreach efforts that are at the core of the festival's mission. Since the region is isolated and lacks basic infrastructure, it has sometimes been a challenge for filmmakers and audiences to get to the festival, but Marques shows, through several comments, that attending the festival, however challenging it might have been, was sometimes seen as a “scavenger hunt” people were happy to participate in.

In the following article, media specialist Heshen Xie also focuses on a small community-based festival founded in 1989, the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGFF), the first LGBTQ film festival in Asia. Arguing that the HKLGFF festival is a second-tier queer film festival, Xie shows that its programming is highly dependent on the films programmed at top-tier festivals. This trickle-down effect, apart from not allowing the festival to embrace full curative autonomy, makes its programming Western-centered. Noticing that HKLGFF’s catalog often mentions that the films selected were previously screened at other major film festivals, such as Cannes or
Berlinale, two festivals with specific sections awarding queer-themed films, Xie brings to light the imbalance in both the general film festival circuit and the queer film festival circuit and zeroes in on the power of Western film festivals, which have more funds and more resources.

Xie participates in the discussion of the definition of the "circuit" and rightfully mentions the geographical disparities affecting scholarly research, which has tended to be "Euro-American-centered." Such statements need to be taken as an encouragement to expand film festival studies to all confines of the world. His article testifies to the fact that the trajectory of a film through the circuit seems contingent on a series of factors that cannot be planned. Though certain elements can predict the circulation of a film (reaction of audiences, reputation of the filmmaker, number of festivals willing to screen it), its success sometimes remains an enigma. So does the success of a festival. Securing the sustainability of a film festival and making it legitimate thus appears to be a constant challenge: showcasing films that were screened or awarded at more prestigious festivals partakes in a strategy to attract more audiences. Interviews of both programmers and audience members allow Xie to understand that the choices of the programmers also come from a strong commitment to please Hong Kong audiences, corroborating that reception is a key component of film festival research.

The next article requires us to stretch the definition of a film festival. Indeed, after conducting qualitative studies on several documentary film festivals, professor of adult education Carole Roy, with the help of organizational change management professional Lindsay McVicar, launched a volunteer project involving the screening of several special-themed documentaries in a Canadian prison for women. Seventeen documentaries were shown to incarcerated women over the course of a month, followed by discussions about the content of the films and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. While most people imagine film festivals as glamorous places where actors and filmmakers display their best attire to celebrate the screening of a film, their project ventured to a place where festivities are not an everyday phenomenon. Therefore, it is not a traditional film festival in the sense that it does not include the main components of most film festivals (filmmakers, actors, film passes, premieres, the red carpet, a film market, etc.), yet it makes the most of the educational potential of film.

It is eye-opening to learn about the restrictions that both authors had to handle to further their project. Most film festival scholars only have to think about getting a film pass and actually going to the festival. In Roy and McVicar’s case, it involved a series of approvals and permissions that dragged on for nine months, testifying to the patience required to conduct ethnographic work in unusual and isolated places and/or with a specific audience. The other challenge the project entailed consisted in selecting the right films for this specific audience, avoiding content that could trigger traumatic responses, for example. As a result, and for the purpose of the study, all documentaries involved people who faced adversity yet who displayed courage and relied on solidarity. Referring to Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of indignation, Roy and McVicar insist on the transformative power of film. Not only were the participants exposed to a series of documentaries, but their reactions were also directly channeled via post-viewing discussions. The article shares the fascinating comments incarcerated women made after watching the documentaries. While such a project might be a small-scale and unique initiative, it offers perspective for film festival scholars to study atypical festivals in atypical settings.
The next piece in our issue makes it clear that film festivals depend on international events, to the point that they can drastically challenge their organization. Barely a year after the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine further disturbed the plans of some film festival organizers. A few weeks after the beginning of war in February 2022, film festival specialists Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist, as chairs of the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) Film Festival Research Workgroup, organized an online roundtable and invited five film festival organizers from all over Ukraine: Anna Machukh, executive director of the Ukrainian Film Academy, which she founded, and executive director of the Odesa International Film Festival, one of the largest film festivals in Ukraine; Bohdan Zhuk, a programmer of the Molodist International Film Festival, the oldest film festival in the country (established in 1971); Yevgeniya Kriegsheim, who works for the MeetDocs Film Festival, a young documentary and feature film festival that takes place in Kharkiv, a city that has been heavily bombed; Victoria Leshchenko, a program director of Docudays UA (Ukraine), one of the biggest documentary film festivals in the country; and Olha Reiter, who works for the Wiz-Art Lviv International Short Film Festival, the most important festival in western Ukraine. Reflecting on the consequences of the war, the participants all commented on the political role of cinema. In spite of the cancellations they had to face, they remained determined to help filmmakers document the war and send the resulting films to international film festivals; some of them live in cities that face air raids and power outages on a daily basis. They also called attention to the responsibility of the programmers of other film festivals, calling for solidarity and support. Interestingly, the pandemic had already made them comfortable with the use of online platforms to the point they were not afraid to use them again during the war. What remains then is a powerful statement of film festival organizers’ determination and passion in times of crises and in their belief that cinema can change the world.

Our thematic section on film festivals ends with an interview of director of communications for the Slemani International Film Festival (IFF) Hemn A. Hussein. Alan Ali Saeed, lecturer in English literature at the University of Sulaimani in Iraqi Kurdistan, presents the Slemani IFF, set in the eponymous city of Slemani, the cultural capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. Even though the festival was set up by people who had no experience in film festival organization and were mainly motivated by their love for film, the festival has become the largest in Iraq. Saeed starts with a short account of Kurdish cinema, starting with an introduction of Yılmaz Güney, whom he considers to be one of the “founding father[s]” of Kurdish cinema. His 1982 film Yol, awarded a Palme D’Or at Cannes, is the epitome of his political activism. Written while Güney was in prison, the script tells the story of men imprisoned in a Turkish jail who were given a one-week furlough, only to notice that repression followed them outside of the prison. The film thus resonates with Güney’s lifelong endeavor to tell stories of the Kurdish community, which is also the mission of the Slemani IFF, created in 2016.

Saeed also mentions that the festival accepts international films. The interview makes clear that the help of international organizations, such as the Goethe Institute of Germany and the French Institute in Erbil, was key to the foundation and sustainability of the festival. Overall, Hussein, while giving an account of the festival’s challenges, including the pandemic, demonstrates the enthusiasm that motivates the organizers to take challenges as opportunities to make the Slemani IFF grow and secure worldwide partnerships.
Overall, this issue provides insights into a wide variety of film festivals that, despite being organized in different regions of the world, testify to the common determination, resilience, and even passion film festival organizers have in setting up festive and unifying events in sometimes unfavorable conditions. This section of the issue is representative of the good health of film festival studies, and we hope that you will find it enlightening and that it will spur new discussions about the significance of film festivals.
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ABSTRACT

The Locarno Film Festival is one of the oldest film festivals in the world. Founded in 1946, it is today widely recognized as an international hub for emerging cinema. However, what remains little known is that it was originally conceived as a touristic attraction managed by a few film professionals, and thus had to fight hard to impose its artistic and cultural ambitions over the interests of the tourism and film industries. This article shows that, considering that Locarno was neither created nor supported by political authorities or cultural institutions, its evolution heavily depended on the economic interests of a tourist organization and professional associations of film producers, distributors, and cinema operators. Looking beyond the official narrative publicized in commemorative books depicting the festival as a privileged place for avant-garde cinema since its early years, the article demonstrates that Locarno’s specialization in new cinema was decided in a context of commercial pressures and increasing competition between film festivals. Focusing on the period during which it evolved from a small-scale, provincial celebration to an international platform for art house cinema, it argues that the so-called cinephile editions of 1966–70—when the directors of the event decided to completely distance themselves from the tourist imperatives and commercial function of the festival—must be understood as a radical and short-lived experience in the history of Locarno, rather than a representative trend.
From the Grand Hotel to the Piazza Grande
The Locarno Film Festival’s Quest for Legitimacy (1946–77)
Cyril Cordoba

Introduction

Today, the Locarno Film Festival (LFF) is renowned as an international hub for emerging cinema. Founded in 1946, the Swiss event is also one of the oldest film festivals in the world, which contributed to the celebration of Italian neo-realism, Czechoslovakian New Wave, Latin American, and Asian cinema. Despite the scarce scientific literature on the LFF, all these elements, proudly highlighted by the current organization of the festival, are common knowledge. However, what is far less documented is the fact that Locarno, originally conceived as a touristic attraction managed by a few film professionals, had to fight hard to impose its artistic and cultural ambitions over the interests of the tourism and the film industries.

As “alternatives to traditional commercial distribution” supposedly driven by cinephilia, film festivals tend to embody the traditional dichotomy opposing art and commerce, industrial entertainment and cultural auteurism. Yet no film festival was created with purely artistic motivations. The first cinematographic competitions ever recorded had mainly commercial objectives, and even the mythical Festival du film maudit in Biarritz (1949), often deemed a cinephile touchstone, benefited from the support of the local tourism industry with its fair share of social events. In that respect, Locarno did not differ from its prestigious counterparts. However, unlike other festivals born during the same period, such as Venice (1932), Cannes (1939), Karlovy Vary (1946), or Berlin (1951), the Swiss event was neither created nor initially supported by political authorities or cultural institutions, but emerged, like the Edinburgh festival (1947), as a “grassroots celebration.”

Rather than considering this characteristic as a token of its cinephile virtue, this article will analyze how, contrary to other European film festivals trying to escape the state’s grip, Locarno primarily struggled to become emancipated from the imperatives of the tourism and film industries by seeking the support of the government. Considering film festivals as “mixed social spaces crossed by commercial interest, specialized film knowledge and tourist trajectories,” the following pages will analyze how the tensions between different stakeholders—particularly a tourist organization called Pro Locarno, as well as associations of film producers, distributors, and cinema operators—influenced the development of the LFF. To do so, this article will retrace the period during which the festival evolved from a small-scale, provincial celebration in the park of a nineteenth-century palace (the Grand Hotel) to an international platform for art house cinema with iconic open-air screenings in the city’s main square (the Piazza Grande). As I will argue, the economic tutelage of the tourism and film industries had a determining influence on the inflections taken by the festival during its first thirty years, as it slowly and arduously specialized in art cinema in spite of the uncertain support from the Confederation.

The present historical examination, focused on the different groups affecting or affected by the LFF, draws its inspiration from the stakeholder theory. This theory, which has led to an important literature in management studies since its development in the 1980s, has increasingly

been used as a descriptive rather than a normative model in different research fields. It has become a particularly common tool in tourism studies, to analyze how hallmark events such as festivals contribute to place-marketing and city-branding processes. To that end, researchers have particularly focused on the categorization of festival stakeholders—who generally assume multiple and changing roles—as well as on their interactions, up to the point that these themes have sometimes been regarded as a subfield of festival studies. Conflicts caused by the opposing interests and asymmetrical power positions of festival stakeholders have thus been a major research issue, as have their mutual dependency and collaboration strategies.

Similarly, with the aim of apprehending “the political and dynamic nature of relationships among event stakeholders,” the following pages provide new insights to the burgeoning field of film festival studies. Far from being autonomous entities, film festivals indeed work in collaboration with various actors defending their own interests, which are situated “at the intersection of art, commerce, technology, culture, identity, power, politics and ideology,” and hold asymmetrical and changing power positions. Contributing to the discussion about the cooperation and conflicts of hallmark events’ stakeholders, this article aims at understanding how diverse agendas shaped the construction of one of the first major European film festivals created after the Second World War.

My reflection will be nourished by Donald Getz, Tommy Andersson, and Mia Larson’s work on the resource dependency and legitimacy challenges of festivals, in considering the two major stakeholders and suppliers of the Locarno Film Festival—the tourism and film industries—which provided it with financial, material, and symbolic resources. Through an examination of the interactions between these two groups and the LFF, I show how the festival’s quest for legitimacy and survival was linked to a constant struggle for more autonomy from tourism promoters, film producers, distributors, and cinema owners, who were the founders of the event.

In so doing, this study fills a historiographical gap. Apart from some articles in edited volumes on the history of festivals, historical scholarship on film festival is scarce, especially compared to the number of books written or edited by film scholars, critics, journalists, or festival curators. Moreover, these historical works, often focused on geopolitical, diplomatic, and ideological issues, tend to push economic issues into the background. In this regard, this article sheds light on one of the lesser-known facets of postwar film festivals, which played a determining role in their foundation.

Despite a growing interest in the dynamic field of film festival studies since the publication of Marijke de Valck’s *Film Festivals* (2007) and the *Film Festival Yearbooks* edited by Dina Iordanova (2009–present), only a couple of academic publications have been dedicated to the LFF. Aside from the commemorative volumes edited by the festival itself and the accounts of art historians, only one article and an M.A. thesis have proposed a historical examination of the LFF. Most of these publications have adopted a film history perspective, underlining, for example, which filmmakers or cinematographic movements were “discovered” in Locarno, with little interest in the external factors shaping the evolution of the festival.

In order to propose a contextual analysis of the LFF, this article relies on the archives of the
festival and the touristic organization Pro Locarno held by the Archivio di Stato in Bellinzona, as well as those of the professional film associations deposited at the Cinémathèque suisse (Swiss Film Archive) in Penthaz. It also uses sources from the federal administration, housed at the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern, and from the national and international press. The following pages first focus on the origins of the festival in 1946 and its early years, when it was still completely under the control of tourism promoters and subject to the goodwill of the film industry. Second, the article examines the crises that led to the cancellations of the 1951 and the 1956 editions, as the commercial interests of its main stakeholders started to hinder the event’s cultural ambitions. Third, it analyzes how Locarno tried to escape economic constraints by specializing in emerging cinema despite the political conflicts generated by this decision. Finally, the article demonstrates how Locarno’s radical choices in the late 1960s, made in hopes of becoming an alternative hub for new cinema, clashed with the agenda of the film and tourism industries, and how an equilibrium was eventually found during the 1970s.

In the Beginning was Tourism

Switzerland has been a popular tourist destination since the eighteenth century. Initially, it was mainly appreciated by British aristocrats who stopped there during their Grand Tour through Europe. Then, in the nineteenth century, its attractiveness and accessibility developed with the construction of roads in alpine passes (Simplon, St. Bernard, St. Gothard) and tunnels through the mountains (especially the Gothard in 1882). The canton of Ticino, the southernmost canton of Switzerland situated almost entirely south of the Alps, benefited greatly from these communication routes. That is how, alongside the emergence of steamboat navigation on the Lake Maggiore and funicular railways in the surrounding mountains, the small city of Locarno turned into a seaside resort in the late century. Tourism progressively became central for this region capitalizing on its mild climate, Mediterranean landscapes, and Swiss tranquility.

In 1892, a few years after the building of a Grand Hotel for rich tourists (1876), a development society named Pro Locarno was founded by the local bourgeoisie (hotel and restaurants owners, bankers, lawyers, shopkeepers) with the aim of promoting the region and developing better infrastructures such as public parks, baths, and street lighting. In 1926, a young lawyer named Camillo Beretta was elected to the presidency of Pro Locarno and dynamized the organization by creating events such as the flower festival (festa delle camelie), which became very popular. To support the tourism industry and entertain travelers after the economic crisis of the 1930s and during the Second World War, Pro Locarno launched different initiatives under his leadership, such as the screening of educational movies.

Some years later, in June 1946, two members of Pro Locarno (Beretta and Riccardo Bollìa) decided to join a few professionals from the movie industry—Vinicio Beretta (a film critic), André Mondini (the owner of Locarno’s cinemas), and Giuseppe Padlina (of the distribution house Sefi Film)—to launch a new attraction: an international film festival. Rather than creating a new event, their idea consisted in moving an existing competition to Locarno, since the population of Lugano had just voted against the construction of an open theater to develop a festival created there a few years earlier.
Set in the park of the Grand Hotel, the Locarno festival became a successful tourist attraction, with numerous social events extending over eleven days (see table 1). Its outdoor cinema, equipped with a screen of eight-by-seven meters and twelve hundred seats (which quickly increased to fifteen hundred and then two thousand) was at that time the largest in Europe. In the official leaflet programs, tourism occupied most of the advertising space, informing visitors that the region was an “ideal vacation resort for all seasons” with its numerous sports clubs, bars and restaurants, concerts, transports, casinos, and luxury boutiques.

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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>14 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>11 days</td>
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</table>

After the success of the first edition, the length of the festival was extended to 14 days. It would later stabilize around 11 days, except for the 1958 edition, when Locarno became an A-ranked festival.

In addition to the cocktail parties, receptions, beauty contests, and fashion shows, excursions to the surrounding valleys and the islands on Lake Maggiore were part of the program. While local newspapers published a social register compiling all the anecdotes and small scandals of the festival, the national and international press unanimously praised the Mediterranean climate and romantic scenery of Locarno. It was no coincidence, since, after Venice and Cannes, many other film festivals would be created on rivieras—Pesaro (Italy), Punta del Este (Uruguay), San Sebastian (Spain), Pula (Yugoslavia), and Antalya (Turkey)—or in spa towns such as Karlovy Vary (Czechoslovakia). In Locarno, despite a program featuring movies from John Ford, Billy Wilder, René Clair, Roberto Rossellini, and Sergei Eisenstein, the early editions of the festival were primarily aimed at promoting the region rather than cinema. In 1948, Alfredo Fanciola (a member of Pro Locarno and one of several hotel owners on the executive committee of the festival) even mentioned that the development of the festival should not put the local flower festival—a purely...
Initially, Locarno heavily relied on the professional and personal networks of vice-president Mondini with (mainly American) film distributors, and particularly on his relations with Fernand Reyrens, director of the 20th Century Fox branch in Switzerland.\footnote{37} At first, only movies that were commercially distributed in the country could be screened in Locarno.\footnote{38} In fact, film distributors exerted such an important influence on the festival that they pressured it not to organize a competition until the late 1950s (with the exception of the 1949 edition). This constraint was also imposed by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF), the "king-maker of the international film festival circuit,"\footnote{39} which considered Switzerland a market too small to be commercially interesting.\footnote{40}

From an artistic point of view, Locarno did not have a very good reputation during its first years because almost all its stakeholders were driven by economic interests. If cinema operators regularly praised the festival as a meeting point for professionals in the movie industry, journalists and film critics often accused it of lacking "a sense of culture" and a real vision of cinema.\footnote{41} The French film magazine L’Écran français even called Locarno, a third of whose program was composed of Hollywood productions,\footnote{42} a mere "trade show."\footnote{43} Just like Cannes in its early days,\footnote{44} Locarno was deemed too superficial, too mercantile, too "commercial," and not sufficiently "cinephile" in cultural circles.\footnote{45}

Because the selection commission was mostly composed of people “linked to the interests of the film industry,”\footnote{46} the LFF was generally depicted as being under the “tutelage” of the movie industry.\footnote{47} Film critics and cinephiles also regretted that the most interesting parts of the program (films d’auteur, documentaries, and special sections such as the retrospective) were shown in the mornings and afternoons at local cinemas (while locals were working and tourists sightseeing), and that the most commercial movies were screened at hotels in the evenings, as pure entertainment products. As for Swiss distributors, they became more and more reluctant to take part in the festival, for fear that their products would be harshly criticized by the international press.\footnote{48}

Because attendance at the outdoor screenings depended on good weather, the festival often suffered severe financial losses. This situation was especially delicate since, during the first three years of the festival, Pro Locarno organized it “alone and without any financial help from the local authorities.”\footnote{49} That is why in 1949, in order to diversify its funding sources and hopefully gain more independence and legitimacy, the festival became an association of its own, legally separated from Pro Locarno.\footnote{50} Although the ties between the two organizations remained extremely tight, this formal separation allowed the festival to ask for public subsidies.\footnote{51}

**The Crises of the 1950s**

Despite this new departure under favorable auspices, the LFF encountered several difficulties in the early 1950s. These crises, mostly caused by conflicts with the profit-driven film industry, illustrated the progressive arrival of a new stakeholder in the organization of the event: the
After the introduction of this classification in the early 1950s, members of the FIAPF were asked to boycott festivals that did not follow the federation’s regulations, thus depriving them of their most crucial assets, the movies. One of the requirements to join Venice and Cannes in the A-list was for the festivals to send invitations to film-producing countries via diplomatic channels. In the case of Switzerland, this would have been official letters from the Federal Political Department (i.e., Foreign Affairs Ministry), transmitted via Swiss embassies abroad. For the festival, this solution would have meant liberation from the tutelage of the distributors and the possibility of establishing a program based on more artistic considerations. Unfortunately for Locarno, the Swiss government refused to do so in order not to give the festival some sort of officiality. Consequently, one year after being ranked B, like the newly founded Berlinale, the LFF was downgraded to the D rank in 1953, following the creation of the B-ranked San Sebastian festival. This sanction deprived Locarno from having an international jury, prizes, and, most importantly, world premieres, which meant far less publicity from the mass media and less interest from the specialized press.

This setback triggered a reaction in Bern. The Federal Council, which refused to plead the festival’s cause to the FIAPF because it was an institution “of private nature,” charged Oscar Düby (representing Swiss producers in the federation) to support the festival from within. More importantly, the government recognized Locarno as an event of national significance in 1954, which meant that Swiss distributors could then import movies out of their annual quota specifically for the festival. Thanks to this incentive measure, which was a requirement of the FIAPF, the festival hoped to receive more interesting films from the distributors.

However, fearing bad reviews from the press, distributors were still reluctant to send their products to Ticino, except for the movies that could easily entertain the evening spectators in the park of the Grand Hotel. Therefore, foreign film magazines criticized the fact that Locarno “remained a film fair for the use of distributors and cinema directors [and that] commercial value … constantly [took] precedence over artistic criteria. [Considering] the organizers [as] too nice and docile people [they suggested to choose] between the film merchants and the public of cinephiles.” Some film critics pointed out that the festival was “under the control and influence of cinema exhibitors, who [were] largely represented on the executive committee and the selection committee.” Yet, rather than intervening with the Swiss distributors and cinema operators, the Federal Chamber of Cinema suggested that film critics could be instructed “not to exaggerate in their comments, so as not to unnecessarily discourage those among the film distributors who will want to collaborate in the success of the event.” It then seemed important...
In 1956, a new hard blow to the festival illustrated the incapacity of the state to support Locarno against economic stakeholders. Initially, the incident started as a commercial dispute about the rental price of movies in Switzerland between Swiss distributors and Italian, French, and German producers (“contractual restrictions for the free exploitation of films shown at the Festival, established by the Swiss distributors”[61]). When the latter considered that no satisfactory agreement could be found, the FIAPF sided with members (despite Düby’s advocacy for the festival) and decided not to recognize Locarno, as a retaliatory measure. Therefore, the festival was cancelled for the second time in its history. The federation’s decision greatly surprised the Swiss authorities, which denounced the FIAPF’s confusion of a private commercial conflict with a public national event.[63]

Bern also failed to support the festival against attacks from the movie industry against its new strategy, which consisted in seeking cultural legitimacy and economic autonomy by selecting movies coming from socialist countries (or, as the festival put it, “films produced by countries that are not, for reasons unknown to us, at Cannes or Venice”[64]). If this daring choice was praised by foreign film magazines such as the Cahiers du cinéma,[65] the very conservative Swiss movie industry protested against what it considered worthless communist propaganda by leaving Locarno’s patronage committee. Interestingly, when Venice and Cannes also tried to gain some independence from the film industry in the selection of movies during the same period, the FIAPF reacted by admitting Berlin and Karlovy Vary in the A category, thus depriving the two major film festivals of their privilege. As for the Swiss authorities, they simply suggested that Locarno select fewer movies from the Eastern bloc.

The second cancellation of the festival triggered a new reaction from the government. In 1957, the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs finally dared writing to the FIAPF, asking the federation not to do anything detrimental to the festival.[66] Locarno could thus place that year despite not being recognized by the FIAPF. In 1959, the LFF finally earned the A-rank, two years after San Sebastian and the same year as Moscow. Among the requirements of the FIAPF, Locarno was forced to change its dates to late July (see table 2)—the peak of the tourist season—despite the heavy pressure that this decision would place on the local hotels. Fortunately for the LFF, the tourism industry was still very keen on supporting it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>DATES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>22 August–1 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>26 June–9 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1–12 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>8–17 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>29 June–9 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>3–13 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>2–12 July</td>
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</table>
After a first edition set toward the end of the tourist season, the dates of the festival were stabilized in early July until 1958, when the FIAPF imposed its displacement in late July as part of a reorganization of the global film festivals calendar. It then progressively moved toward early August (its current dates), except for the 1968–70 editions, set in autumn to attract more young spectators (mainly students).

After the cancellation of the 1951 and the 1956 editions, one of the driving forces behind the festival’s survival was indeed Pro Locarno. Given the economic importance of the event for the region, the tourist organization’s worst fear was that another town would “steal” it, as Locarno tourism promoters originally had done with Lugano. In the 1950s, a great part of the management board of the festival was still composed of people representing the interests of Pro Locarno, which loaned 40,000 CHF to the festival (~170,000 Euros today) and provided one-third of its subventions. That explains why the association had no qualms asking:

Who wanted the festival? Pro Locarno. Who made huge sacrifices to create it and make it a very effective

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**TABLE 2. Dates of the Festival**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>DATES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1–11 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>9–19 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>6–14 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>26 July–10 August</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>9–19 Julys</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>21–31 July</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>19–30 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>18–29 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>17–28 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>22 July–2 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>21 July–1 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>23–31 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>22–31 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>26 September–6 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>2–12 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>24 September–4 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>6–15 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>3–13 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>2–12 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>1–11 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>31 July–10 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2–15 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>4–14 August</td>
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40. Founded in 1933 and revived in 1948, the FIAPF promoted the free international circulation of movies, especially after the arrival of the Motion Picture Association of America as a member. Film festivals were initially seen as a good tool for this purpose, but as they proliferated, the federation established a categorization system in 1951 to restrict the events that could hold previews and competitions via a certification system. Caroline Moine, “La Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films : un acteur controversé de la promotion du cinéma après 1945,” *Le Mouvement social* 2, no. 243 (2013): 91–103.


42. However, it should be noted that on the whole, distributors of American movies in Switzerland never became actively involved in the festival, since it was not considered a commercially interesting place.


45. Memo from the festival to federal councilor Philipp Etter, August 23, 1955, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.


47. Letter from Bolla to Calgari, May
Benefiting from the official support of the Confederation but subject to the goodwill of the film and tourism industries, the festival was then increasingly caught between the cultural and artistic ambitions of leading figures such as Vinicio Beretta (secretary since 1953 and the main initiator of Locarno’s shift toward movies from the Eastern bloc), and the conservative views of distributors, cinema operators, and “the local bourgeoisie” ensuring its economic survival.71

If on the one hand, the festival began organizing highly acclaimed retrospectives in collaboration with the Swiss Cinémathèque to improve its cinephile reputation;72 on the other hand, it proved difficult “to silence the criticism that the Locarno festival had no other purpose than to offer the forestiero [tourist] a form of entertainment out of the ordinary.”73 The event, extended to sixteen days to please tourism promoters (the longest edition yet; see table 1), was still forced to select movies attracting wide audiences to ensure the economic viability of the open-air screenings. While the Swiss media still showed Locarno as a mainly tourist event—with starlets water skiing on Lake Maggiore—without any real comment on the movies in competition,74 the organizers increasingly felt like “the staff of a ‘palace’ in a big Swiss city, who [did] everything to make the stay pleasant for the guests.”75 This uncomfortable situation, resulting from a growing discrepancy between the interests of the different stakeholders, would only find a fragile (and ephemeral) equilibrium in the early 1960s.

**Seeking an Identity**

After some tensions with the film and tourism industries in the 1950s, the following decade was a time for compromises in Locarno. This appeasement resulted from, among other factors, the nomination of a politician as the president of the festival. Enrico Franzoni, mayor of the neighboring town of Muralto (1952–63) and national councilor (1959–75), was chosen in 1957 in the hope that he could defend and support the LFF in Bern. Similarly, several members of the management board of the festival had a political career at the national level. For an event that was frequently subjugated to private economic interests because of its lack of officiality, this new political network certainly weighed in the FIAPF’s decision to rank Locarno in the A category in 1959.

Additionally, during the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s, another key supporter of the festival was Oscar Düby. The Swiss became the FIAPF’s general secretary in 1959 and later directed the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (1963–69), a strategic position that undoubtedly benefited Locarno amid the growing competition between international film festivals. Düby functioned as a mediator who helped the LFF find its own way by specializing in “new cinema” (the first and second movies of young filmmakers). One year before Cannes introduced its “Semaine de la critique” (an alternative selection for more independent films) and four years before Berlin adopted a similar solution, Locarno decided, by mutual agreement with the FIAPF, to be divided into two parallel sections: a competitive one (held in the afternoon for experimental movies and avant-garde cinema) and a noncompetitive one (held in the evening...
for more conventional or “classic” movies). This compromise seemed to please both the film industry (showing its latest productions to a large audience) and the tourism industry (attracting the attention of the media with prizes and appealing to tourists with open-air screenings), as well as cinephiles looking for cinematographic discoveries. The latter even recognized that Locarno had become “more than a simple tourist attraction [thanks to] the independence that preside[d] over the choice of the films presented.”

### TABLE 3. Directors and Presidents of the Festival (1946–77)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECTORS</th>
<th>PRESIDENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Riccardo Bolla (1946–58)</td>
<td>Camillo Beretta (1946–55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandro Bianconi (1966–70) and Freddy Buache (1967–70)</td>
<td>Fernando Gaja (1963–68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moritz de Hadeln (1972–77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While presidents were generally consensual and respected personalities not specialized in cinema (a kind of moral caution with representative but also concrete operational functions), directors were the active managers of the event, adopting a particular orientation depending on their artistic vision. In 1971, a transition edition was directed by an ensemble of local personalities.

In 1960, Vinicio Beretta, who already had been a very active secretary since 1953, became the new director of Locarno. Like Luigi Chiarini in Venice, this journalist really paved the way to the internationalization, professionalization, and transformation of the festival into a meeting point for cinephiles with an artistic taste for avant-garde cinema. While some regretted the absence of celebrities to arouse the tourist’s curiosity in Ticino under his leadership,77 films critics began to praise Locarno’s selection commission,78 which finally made more artistically daring choices to promote young filmmakers instead of “society events, stardom or starlet shows.”

Having gained cultural legitimacy with its special programs and lectures such as “Cinema e Gioventù” (Cinema and Youth), supported by the cantonal Department of Education and placed under the patronage of UNESCO, Locarno finally received organizational and financial support from the Swiss government in the early 1960s. After having granted the LFF its moral support in 1954, the Confederation agreed to transmit official invitations to the festival to foreign countries via diplomatic channels in 1961. More importantly, it granted Locarno its first federal subvention of 20,000 CHF in 1963 (~75,000 Euros today).80 But when the festival definitively decided to specialize in new cinema, renewed tensions with the film and tourism industries arose.

One of the innovations that raised concern was Locarno’s close collaboration with Freddy Buache. In addition to his reputation as a left-wing agitator, the director of the Swiss Cinémathèque was suspected by Swiss distributors and cinema operators of wanting to set up an alternative distribution network. Buache indeed helped Beretta import films he had seen at other festivals such as Karlovy Vary and Moscow. Consequently, more and more movies selected in Locarno came from the other side of the Iron Curtain or from then-called Third World countries.81 Because of the low commercial potential of these films, which were highly popular in...
film clubs, the Swiss film industry showed a certain disinterest in them. Sharing Pro Locarno’s fear that these movies would alienate tourists, cinema operators threatened to create their own international film festival in Zurich, thereby reviving antagonism between commercial and cultural interests.

In addition to these economic and artistic disputes, Locarno was once again the target of violent political attacks from anticommunist distributors and film critics for selecting movies coming from the Eastern bloc. Having drawn lessons from its past, the festival then knew that the situation required an intervention from the state. In reaction to these polemics, the Social Democrat home affairs minister, Hans-Peter Tschudi, suspended state collaboration in the transmission of invitations via diplomatic channels and suggested that Locarno program less “subversive” movies. Faced with persistent criticism, he then proposed a more constructive solution: the creation of a “national” selection commission that would include some of the festival’s most ardent detractors from among the ranks of distributors and cinema operators. Even if Beretta believed that the film industry sought to “practically control the festival,” the director accepted this compromise, which allowed Locarno to pacify its relations with these strategic stakeholders.

Yet tensions with Pro Locarno were also revived when the tourist organization imposed some structural reforms to the event as a condition for its financial support. Among these measures was the improvement of the receptions organized for guests and better public relations/advertising campaigns for the festival. Most importantly, Pro Locarno explained that, in order to assure some revenue during the costly open-air screenings, more “spectacular” films attracting wide audiences should always be part of the program, since the park of the Grand Hotel was equipped with two thousand seats. Henceforth more inclined to negotiate with the aging and weakened tourist office, the LFF promised to respect “touristic requirements” in the selection of movies. That was when a highly sensitive topic was finally addressed by the executive committee of the festival: the outdoor cinema in the park of the Grand Hotel.

For several years, the rental price of the palace had been increasing substantially. In constant financial straits, the festival thus naturally considered giving up the open-air screenings to save money. For most cinephile leaders, this would have also represented an opportunity to give a new direction to the LFF, by definitively breaking with its touristic origins. Immediately, Pro Locarno, which considered tourism to be the event’s trademark, explained that this solution would represent a first step toward the end of the festival, and that other sectors should cut their expenses first. A first formal proposal to cease the partnership with the hotel was unanimously refused by the executive commission of the festival, which was still composed of many members of the tourist organization. Just a few months later, the festival decided to leave the park of the Grand Hotel, whose owner’s financial demands were deemed too high. A new era then began for Locarno, with new directors hoping that the improved relationships with the film and tourism industries would give them room for maneuver to implement their conception of a festival entirely conceived for cinephiles.


68. Letter from the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs to the FIAPF, March 23, 1957, V4, 3.1.15, ASCT.

69. Report by the organizational committee of the festival, January 1953, box 47, 2.2.80, ASCT.

70. Internal document of the festival, 1956, C5, 3.1.15, ASCT.


72. Among the first were Akira Kurosawa (1957), Ingmar Bergman (1959), Luis Buñuel (1960), Fritz Lang (1961), Jean Vigo (1962), and John Ford (1963).

73. Letter from the festival to the FIAPF, March 30, 1956, C5, 3.1.15, ASCT.

74. Excerpts from the Ciné-Journal Suisse can be found online at https://memobase.ch/fr/recordSet/bar-001.

75. Memo from the festival to Philipp Etter, August 23, 1955, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.
An Ephemeral Breakaway

Despite having gained state support and recognition within cinephile circles during the 1950s and 1960s, Locarno still had to engage in a power struggle with its two main stakeholders (the tourism and film industries) to follow its path. The new identity given to the festival by Sandro Bianconi (scholar, movie critic, and leader of the local film club) and Freddy Buache marked a big break with tradition.\(^9\) In addition to the decision to leave the Grand Hotel and show movies only in local cinemas, the directors changed the dates of the festival from summer to fall (see table 2), a decision appealing to apprentices as well as high school and university students. This radical shift of the festival, entirely specialized in the first or second films of young moviemakers, unsurprisingly displeased Pro Locarno, which accused the directors of organizing a festival for film critics only. The Swiss film distributors and cinema operators also completely lost interest in what they called an “anti-economic” ghetto and an “anti-festival,” whose “elitism” they considered contradictory to the financial support provided by the Confederation.\(^9\) They depicted it as “a fiasco … dominated by rowdy youths” and regretted that the two codirectors were “anti-business.”\(^9\)

Additionally, the FIAPF, noting “a significant drop in interest” in film festivals except for Cannes and Moscow, prevented Locarno from devoting its program to then-called Third World cinema because another city (whose name was not mentioned) was already considering this option. As it reminded Bianconi, “it was for refusing to devote himself solely to [new cinema] that your predecessor was unable to rectify the situation at Locarno.”\(^9\) Therefore, the LFF was constrained in its specialization and was forced to abandon the competition in 1966 and 1967, in compliance with Düby’s instructions. In 1968, the festival regained the right to organize an international competition devoted to “new world cinema,” a convoluted way to combine its interest in both young filmmakers and then-called Third World movies. But that year, Switzerland did not escape the protests that had previously shaken Cannes, Berlin, and Venice,\(^9\) and the jury eventually resigned and handed over the responsibility of giving awards to the youth jury, created a couple of years before.\(^9\)

Besides this political unrest, what caused the resignation of both directors after the 1970 edition was the growing pressure from the tourism industry. Under their leadership, Pro Locarno regretted not only the significant decrease in the number of spectators, but also the fact that most of them were students, an audience less likely to stay in expensive hotels, eat in fancy restaurants, and spend their money in luxury stores. The tourist office first asked Bianconi and Buache to put things back on an even keel by selecting movies that could attract wider audiences,\(^9\) knowing that it could not reasonably convince them to reinstate all the society events and the touristic excursions they had previously suppressed.\(^9\)

As for Düby, who explained that another festival (most likely Pesaro, created in 1965) was about to “become, with substantial financial resources, the intellectual, artistic and professional center of tomorrow’s cinema,” his support for the LFF inside the federal administration became rather evanescent. During his meetings with the Federal Film Commission, he did not contradict the criticism that Locarno was too unstable. That is why Bianconi and Buache considered it “wise to obey Düby on certain points in order to better preserve [their] freedom of maneuver on others.”\(^9\)


77. Letter from Elite Film to the festival, May 6, 1960, MF10, 3.1.15, ASCT.


79. Letter from Buache to the newspaper Le Peuple, August 8, 1960, MF12, 3.1.15, ASCT.

80. That year, Pro Locarno gave 31,000 CHF to the festival in subventions (~ 115,000 Euros today).

81. Between 1946 and 1950, American, Italian, French, British, and West German films represented 81 percent of the main program of the festival. This share fell to 66 percent between 1952 and 1957, 52 percent between 1958 and 1962, and 36 percent between 1963 and 1965.

82. Freddy Buache, Derrière l’écran: entretiens avec Christophe Gallaz et Jean-François Amiguet (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 2009), 177.

83. Minutes of the executive commission of the festival, December 23, 1961, C4, 3.1.15, ASCT.

84. Interestingly, the Zurich Film Festival created in 2005 has also been described as a competitor to Locarno.


86. Letter from Beretta to Freddy Landry, September 27, 1961, V&., 3.1.15, ASCT.

87. In 1965, the organization once again loaned 35,000 CHF to the festival (~ 250,000 Euros today).

88. That year, Pro Locarno gave 31,000 CHF to the festival in subventions (~ 115,000 Euros today).

89. Therefore, the LFF was constrained in its specialization and was forced to abandon the competition in 1966 and 1967, in compliance with Düby’s instructions. In 1968, the festival regained the right to organize an international competition devoted to “new world cinema,” a convoluted way to combine its interest in both young filmmakers and then-called Third World movies. But that year, Switzerland did not escape the protests that had previously shaken Cannes, Berlin, and Venice, and the jury eventually resigned and handed over the responsibility of giving awards to the youth jury, created a couple of years before.


91. skadi Loist, “The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies, and Circulation,” in Film Festivals, 49–64.

92. Freddy Buache, Derrière l’écran: entretiens avec Christophe Gallaz et Jean-François Amiguet (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 2009), 177.

93. Minutes of the executive commission of the festival, December 23, 1961, C4, 3.1.15, ASCT.


96. Letter from Beretta to Freddy Landry, September 27, 1961, V&., 3.1.15, ASCT.


98. Letter from Elite Film to the newspaper Le Peuple, August 8, 1960, MF12, 3.1.15, ASCT.

99. Letter from Elite Film to the newspaper Le Peuple, August 8, 1960, MF12, 3.1.15, ASCT.


However, after four editions, they both decided that they could no longer cooperate with the rest of the executive committee and they left, discouraged by “the indifference, incomprehension, and hostility of public opinion.” In a private letter, Buache later explained his disappointment to see Locarno, which was becoming “one of the most original film festivals in world [for] young international cinema, disgusted by the commercial fairs of Cannes or Berlin and the Venice mess[,] returning to the open air, that is to say to tourism.” As it turned out, without proper political support, the cultural ambitions of the cinephiles were kept in check by the economic stakeholders of the event.

Immediately after the resignation of both directors, an ad interim management team composed of Swiss intellectuals and journalists organized the return of the festival to the outdoors. If at first the Piazza Grande was disqualified as a new venue because it caused too many technical problems (echo, public lights, neighbors, shops, traffic), it was eventually considered the most “touristically valid” by Pro Locarno. Considering that tourism in Ticino was in decline, the dates of the festival were reset for the high season (early August, see table 2), and a twenty-by-ten-meter screen—once again the biggest in Europe at the time—was constructed in the center of the city in 1971. This return to the outdoors for an audience of two thousand spectators (a number that increased each year) was primarily supported by Pro Locarno, which “feared that Chur, Lausanne, Lucerne or Zurich would jump at the chance to take their place” after the uncertainty created by the departure of Buache and Bianconi. Of the 210,000 CHF invested to build a giant screen and a projection room on the Piazza, 120,000 were loaned to the festival by the tourist organization (respectively ~ 550,000 and 320,000 Euros today).

Once again, the driving force behind Locarno’s survival was the tourism industry. For that matter, the financial support of Pro Locarno during most of the 1970s remained high, since it represented approximately 50 percent of all subventions received by the festival. In 1972, bragging about having spent 750,000 CHF for the festival since its creation, the tourist office demanded that the executive commission of the event include at least four of its members (as before the Bianconi-Buache editions). As the legal owner of all the material necessary for the outdoor cinema, Pro Locarno also complained about the lack of media emphasis on their contribution (“[this is] an event of the tourist office,” they said). Paradoxically, while Pro Locarno deemed the festival to be insufficiently commercial despite supervising its finances, many cinephiles felt that “the identity of Locarno had been sacrificed and betrayed,” with one writing ironically that “local pharmacists and veterinarians [would] once again be able to dress in tuxedoes and evening gowns to attend tasteful shows.”

However, the tourism industry’s weight on the festival’s organizing committee was not as heavy as in the 1940s and the 1950s. The great disruption of the late 1960s indeed opened the way for more independent programming in the 1970s. Most notably, alternative selections conceived as platforms for new cinema appeared in 1969 in Cannes and in 1971 in Berlin under the names Quinzaine des réalisateurs and Forum des Jungen Films. Similarly, a section called Tribune libre dedicated to more experimental movies was created in Locarno, where change was meant to be personified by the new director Moritz de Hadeln, a young documentary maker who was the first non-Swiss citizen to hold this position.
In 1972, de Hadeln was designated manager of the Swiss Society of International Film Festivals, a newly created administrative entity supported by the federal administration, regrouping Locarno and the Nyon documentary film festival (which Moritz and Erika de Hadeln had created a few years earlier). Often described as a man of consensus, Locarno’s new director successfully reconciled both tourists and cinephiles during his six years in the office. Considering that his predecessors had wrongfully ignored the economic stakeholders of the film industry by transforming Locarno into a giant film club, he clearly stated that for him, a film festival was primarily aimed at the professionals of the branch. With this in mind, he created a Film Market, something that had only been briefly explored in Locarno under the aegis of the FIAPF in 1964.

Nevertheless, de Hadeln, who wished to have Locarno specialize in young filmmakers and then-called Third World cinema like his predecessors, did not exactly enjoy serene relations with the FIAPF. Because the federation, which he described as an outdated “organization which did nothing but defend the interests of established cinema,” wanted to rank the festival in the D category, he invented a rather vague specialization (“new cinematographic perspectives”) for Locarno to stay in the A category. But despite some minor polemics—some believed that the new direction, from French-speaking Switzerland, aimed to move the event to Nyon—the relationships between economic and cultural stakeholders became more harmonious. Taking advantage of the difficulties encountered by its main competitor (Venice), and in close collaboration with some American distributors and film critics, de Hadeln eventually improved relations with the FIAPF, a process he deemed “difficult but beneficial [due to the] economic interests at stake.”

Conclusion: To the 1980s and Beyond

Despite its “cinephile” reputation, the Locarno Film Festival was never free of economic pressures. In the 1940s, as a grassroots event without any political support, it was originally dominated by the commercial interests of its two main stakeholders: the tourism and film industries. After four initial years which seemed to satisfy everyone except cinephiles, the festival emerged as an entity of its own and embarked on a quest for autonomy and independence. But as soon as it demonstrated its cultural aspirations, the LFF entered an area of turbulence. In a weak position because of a lack of support at the federal level, it had to cancel two editions during the 1950s. These difficulties eventually triggered a reaction from the state, allowing the event to find a common ground with the FIAPF with the help of Oscar Düby. Moreover, despite some resistance, its director, Vinicio Beretta, succeeded in specializing Locarno in “new cinema” during the 1960s, to the great pleasure of cinephiles. Nevertheless, the radical attempt to transform the festival into an alternative celebration of world cinema in the late 1960s faced resistance from the tourism and film industries. Without the backing of public authorities, this situation was fatal to the ambitions of its directors. Finally, despite uneven relationships with tourism promoters and film professionals, Moritz de Hadeln succeeded in internationalizing and stabilizing the LFF during the 1970s. Thanks to a new balance between the different stakeholders in the global film festival landscape, and with a strong support from the Confederation, Locarno made a fresh start under better auspices to open a new chapter in its history.

As this article has argued, despite the persistence of a romantic conception of cinema (art for
art’s sake), Locarno’s history eloquently illustrates that “creating the conditions for a cinephiliac experience is not a film festival’s only consideration. These are, after all, film festivals.”122 Just as the “extra-cinematic or para-cinematic events at film festivals are key to their success,”122 the “non-cinephiliac” aspects of these multidimensional events are crucial to their identity building. Every film festival had to negotiate to become emancipated from economic powers and follow its cultural agenda24 while taking into account the changing interests of its stakeholders.22 Yet, if Locarno’s claim for autonomy echoed similar demands from other film festivals during the 1950s and the 1960s, the peculiarity of the Swiss case certainly was that it was not a fight against the state, but on the contrary a quest for more support from the government. For example, while the transmission of official invitations via diplomatic channels (a requirement from the FIAPF to give national producers’ associations a decisive role in the selection of movies) was considered by major film festivals as a constraint and a subjection to commercial logics, it was seen by Locarno as a mean of gaining legitimacy.

Retrospectively, Locarno’s first thirty years appear as a period of increasing divergence between the tourism and film industries on one side, and the so-called cinephiles (film critics, film clubs, Cinémathèque) on the other, since the former’s ascendency within the festival was increasingly denounced as illegitimate by the latter. It was only after the “clash” of the late 1960s that the slate was wiped clean and a more fruitful collaboration started. Post-1977 editions also met several difficulties, but they were no longer hampered by the conflicting agendas of various stakeholders, as during the first decades of the festival. Yet, if these tensions between the agendas of the LFF’s stakeholders seemed settled under de Hadeln’s direction (1972–77), subsequent developments revealed that key issues continued to animate festival stakeholders. Be that as it may, in 1982, film magazines such as the Cahiers du cinéma still considered Locarno to be seeking a compromise “between a sincere cinephiliac desire on the part of its organizers, and bluntly economic calculations (tourism) conducted by the regional authorities.”126

Because of the conflicts between its main stakeholders, the LFF gained momentum only in the 1980s. It expanded by using new buildings such as the Morettina, a high school complex situated ten minutes from the city center, and the Palexpo/FEVI auditorium, slightly closer to the Piazza Grande—to significantly increase the number of spectators.127 The LFF also received increasing financial support and sponsorship from private entities, such as the Union Bank of Switzerland (whose logo was booed by the audience at first). The growth was such that in 1986, president Raimondo Rezzonico estimated that the festival contributed four to five million Swiss francs (six to eight million Euros today) to the local economy.128 All of these transformations took place under the leadership of David Streiff (former director of the Centre suisse du cinema and head of the Tribune libre section of the festival since 1973), who described having had to work hard to reconcile the interests of the tourism industry with his cultural ambitions.129

Further research should thus analyze how these changes unfolded in the decisive decade of the 1980s, shaped by new challenges such as the proliferation of festivals, the globalization of the film industry, and the gentrification of the LFF. What were the strategies of the festival to maintain its “Swiss” identity while affirming itself as an international hub? Why did it start to describe itself as “the smallest of the great and the greatest of the small film festivals” (a formula originally used by Italian film critic Tullio Kezich)? How were its massive public relations and marketing
campaigns—using the leopard as an icon (inspired by the heraldic symbol of Locarno and the name of the trophies since 1968)—designed and implemented? Should this effort to brand the hallmark event with its host city be understood as a remedy to the region’s continual fear of another Swiss town “stealing” the festival in times of crisis? All of these interrogations would help to elucidate how the festival professionalized, and how it further developed its cinephilic identity while maintaining a “summer feeling and vacation mood that makes Locarno so attractive.”


123. Ibid, 145.


125. See, for example, Charles-Clemens Rüling, “Festivals as Field-Configuring Events: The Annecy International Animated Film Festival and Market,” in The Festival Circuit, 49–66.


127. Information about attendance of the festival is extremely incomplete. While the 1946 edition seems to have attracted about 10,000 spectators, the number for the 1982 edition was only 20,000. However, with the construction of the Palexpo/FEVI auditorium in the late 1980s (3,200 seats), attendance rapidly grew to 60,000 in 1985, 80,000 in 1987, 115,000 in 1989, and 145,000 in 1995. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival boasted 157,700 spectators.

128. Schlappner et al., 40 ans, 388.


131. Email exchanges with David Streiff, April 14, 2021 (translated by the author).
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Small Film Festivals Surviving the COVID-19 Pandemic: The “Virtual Showcase” of Cine Las Americas International Film Festival 2020

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic was a major challenge for film festival organizers, who had to resort to online platforms to showcase films they had selected. While virtual film festivals did not offer the same experience, being deprived of the opportunity to gather people in a festive atmosphere, they provided a fairly accessible solution that enabled audiences to watch films they would have missed otherwise. Even major and economically stable festivals, such as South by Southwest (SXSW), decided to cancel, and not all film festivals embraced the opportunities provided by online platforms. Responses to the pandemic were as diverse as the six thousand film festivals organized on average each year. Small nonprofit film festivals, however, tend to be more vulnerable than large-scale events. When the pandemic was at its climax in 2020, their economic sustainability was at stake. This article focuses on Cine Las Americas, a small community-based Latino and Indigenous film festival that takes place in Austin, Texas. Based on interviews of members of the executive and programming team, on research about the history of the festival, and on the experience of the 2020 “Virtual Showcase,” it shows that solidarity between the festival and a wide range of local organizations played a great role in its capacity to survive this critical time. To retrace the festival’s history, the article draws inspiration from organizational theory, illustrating that Cine Las Americas became a field-configuring event (FCE) in the city of Austin, to the point where the friendship that its successive organizers, who have showed crucial adaptation skills over the years, had secured with local partners contributed to its survival.

KEYWORDS

Latinos, film festivals
Community-based film festivals
Austin, Texas
COVID-19
Virtual film festivals
Small Film Festivals Surviving the COVID-19 Pandemic:
The “Virtual Showcase” of Cine Las Americas International Film Festival 2020
Emilie Cheyroux

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic was undoubtedly a challenge for film festival organizers. When the world shut down in March 2020, organizers were faced with an unprecedented situation that threatened events whose core principle is to bring people together. Indeed, film festivals are more than the films organizers select; they are also about the experience they offer in the movie theater and beyond. As media specialist Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong explains, they are “scarcely festive without traditional human interaction,” which is why, for many, canceling was considered the only solution to avoid organizing an event that would just be about showcasing films.1 This is not to say that films are not important. Cannes was first postponed from May to July 2020 and then canceled, but it was decided that a “special Cannes” would be organized online, followed by a small in-person event in October. The organizers were adamant about not wanting 2020 to be a “blank year” (une année blanche), because canceling a film festival also means failing to show and reward the work of filmmakers who were dedicated to a project for years and failing to keep a vibrant cultural industry alive.2

For small festivals with a social mission, especially ones that are nonprofit organizations, the situation was even more challenging. In addition to hindering their mission, the pandemic and its economic consequences jeopardized the funds that could be available in the following years. Professor in media industries Skadi Loist points out that film festival organizers work in “precarious” conditions that contrast with the glamour usually associated with the film industry.3 They often struggle with funds and with an unstable and limited workforce whose utmost pleasure rests in “having pulled off [the organization of a festival] against the odds.”4 This expression could not be more appropriate to describe the situation in 2020 and to some extent 2021: in spite of lockdowns, social distancing mandates, and other safety measures, many film festival organizers lived up to their reputation of being “dedicated” workers and managed to “pull something off.”5 They also had to deal with the extra pressure of proving that cultural events are not “non-essential” as they have “a strong role in supporting communities, screen practitioners and audiences.”6 Not only was it important to entertain audiences at a time when much anxiety reigned, but it was also a way for film festival organizers to feel useful.

Using online platforms was the solution that spontaneously appeared to showcase films, so that people could watch them at home. It allowed festivals to keep providing cultural content at a time when the offer was severely limited. South by Southwest (SXSW), one of the first festivals to cancel, partnered with Amazon Prime to show the few films whose filmmakers accepted to be part of a virtual event, hoping that it would reach a large audience.7 Despite missing out on the social experience, audiences could still have a cinematic experience, one that was greatly different from the thrill of viewing a film with an audience in the same room but that provided cinephiles with films they would have missed otherwise. Thus, when shutdowns became impossible to avoid, film festival organizers had to decide whether they were going to “make do” and exist or cancel and, for some of them, run the risk of not coming back.

Cine Las Americas International Film Festival is part of a small community-oriented identity-

4. Ibid., 271.
5. Ibid.
based group of film festivals that are also nonprofit organizations. Its social mission is dedicated to improving the representation of the Latinx and Indigenous communities in front of and behind the camera. US Latinx film festivals, though part of a loose network with divergences, are “activist” events. Since its inception in 1998 in Austin, Texas, Cine Las Americas has striven to “educate, entertain and challenge” audiences and to offer a diverse program “for everyone.” In March 2020, when several film festivals started to cancel, Jean Anne Lauer (Cine Las Americas programmer 2009–15, director and executive director 2015–20, programmer 2020–present) and Gabriel Ornelas (executive director 2020–present) decided to launch the festival online under the pressure of Ernie Quiroz (lead program associate 2018–present) who argued that most of the work to select the films had already been done since the festival is usually held at the beginning of May. The festival was thus organized on an online platform in June 2020 (June 16–19 and 23–26) but was not numbered the “23rd annual film festival”; instead, Lauer insisted on calling it a “virtual showcase” to make clear that it was not a “real” film festival. In addition to corresponding to a wish to be accurate, her idea exhibited concern and sadness over the situation. Other Latinx film festivals, such as the Chicago Latino Film Festival (CLFF), also “went virtual.” The Los Angeles Latino Film Festival (LALIFF), on the other hand, renamed itself “LALIFF Connect” to insist on the wish to bring people together and on what professor in film and media studies Marijke de Valck has identified as the “celebration of … connectivity.”

This article, based on interviews with Lauer, Ornelas, and Quiroz, on research about the history of Cine Las Americas International Film Festival, and on the experience of the 2020 Virtual Showcase, sheds light on the challenges the festival staff overcame and the strategies they implemented to organize an event that allowed them to survive the pandemic. Even though online festivals can be considered virtual—that is to say, incomplete—they also showed that the pandemic crisis offered a space for festival organizers to make the most of their adaptation skills, illustrating that film festivals are events that constantly reinvent themselves, actively motivated by their mission to serve a community.

The article starts with a historical overview of the festival’s evolution and institutionalization into a field-configuring event (FCE) in Austin; it draws inspiration from organizational theory, especially from professor of organization and management Charles Clemens-Rüling’s analysis of the festival of Annecy and its successive phases of development. While becoming an FCE, Cine Las Americas grew roots in the city of Austin and developed partnerships that played a great role in its survival. The exceptional situation of 2020 confirmed that festivals are part of a network and that loyalty among an organization’s major stakeholders is a consequential element to understand event management. Therefore, this article also contributes to the conversation spurred by de Valck and film festival scholar Antoine Damiens on the role of solidarity and community building, and thus on the future of film festivals after this memorable pandemic.

**Cine Las Americas: The Gradual Institutionalization of a Film Festival**

Cine Las Americas showcases films from the Latinx and Indigenous communities of the Americas and seeks to “promote cross-cultural understanding” through film. Over the years, its crew members have turned it into an annual event that has partnered with important organizations of the city of Austin. Before the pandemic started, it may be argued that the festival
had gone through four phases that had solidified its presence in the city, which undoubtedly contributed to its survival during the crisis (figure 1). These phases follow the regular path of a growing event whose organizers feel more comfortable with experimenting, but they also reveal the strategies adopted to make it an FCE linked to film and film festivals in Austin.

### Phases of development

<table>
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<th>Years</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>1998–2004</td>
<td>Community-oriented event, annual, 501c3 status, surge of Latino film festivals (field creation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–9</td>
<td>Stable format, network growth, regular events throughout the year, Del Bosque + Lauer, institutional isomorphism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–13</td>
<td>Smart growth, consolidation of the field, development of film festival studies</td>
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<td>2014–19</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020–21</td>
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**Figure 1. Growth of Cine Las Americas International Film Festival into an FCE.**

FCEs are “temporary social organizations, such as tradeshows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies[,] that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries.”¹⁸ Most importantly, they form a "community of organizations that partake of a common meaning system," in other words, that believe in the same values.¹⁹ Latinx film festivals, over the course of a few days, gather people from the industry and contribute to the development of projects that go beyond the screening of films and beyond the local area where they are organized but around the same goal of enhancing the visibility of Latinx productions. Some Latinx festivals, such as LALIFF, even have Industry Days.²⁰ Being "arenas in which networks are constructed, business cards are exchanged, reputations are advanced, deals are struck," Latinx film festivals are key events in the shaping of Latinx film culture and exchange in the United States.²¹ These festivals represent an "alternative distribution" network that compensates for the lack of opportunities in Hollywood for Latinx filmmakers and actors.²²

These film festivals’ remarkable development from the 1970s onward has corresponded to the political demands of the growing Hispanic community, gathering around the celebration of “latinidad.” It also coincided with the development of scholarship on the on-screen stereotypes that affected Latinos and Latinas and concern about the “ongoing underrepresentation of Latino/a subjectivities and cinema in the cultural mainstream.”²³ Thus, the festival started as a community-oriented event and progressively built on its success and on its network to transform the organizational field in Austin. It is not so much the network of Latinx film festivals that was affected by its growth but the way different Austin-based organizations started co-operating with...
Cine Las Americas once it gained more legitimacy, giving a larger place to films of the Americas.

During the first phase of development, trial and error (1998–2004), the organizers built a program that responded to the demand for films from the Americas in Austin, which were rarely if ever screened in the city, as indicated on their website: "While programming the initial event, the organizers realized that although Austin was building its reputation as an important city for producing and showcasing independent film, films made by and about Latinos were largely absent from the community's cultural landscape. The overwhelming success of the first festival proved that there was an audience for these under-represented voices."24 A trial event was set up in 1997, with a retrospective of Cuban films. Its success convinced the main organizer, Lara Coger, to venture into creating an annual festival showcasing films from the Americas. The festival was not unique in this mission; since the 1990s, there was a surge in the creation of Latino film festivals, in Los Angeles (1997–2011, 2013-present), New York (1999–2012, 2017-present) and San Diego (1994-present), for example. There was a growing demand across the country since the creation of the first Latino film festival in San Antonio in 1976, and Cine Las Americas was contributing to its development.25 More and more cities followed (Chicago 1985, Boston 2000), demonstrating that the Latino community was embracing such festivals as community-building events at a time when Latinos represented about 12.5 percent of the US population.26

Figure 2. Growth of the Cine Las Americas International Film Festival from 1998 to 2021.27

Cine Las Americas started with six narrative productions and coproductions involving eight countries (Cuba, Colombia, France, Venezuela, Argentina, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), spearheading a desire for diversity. In only five years, in 2002, the program included fifty films and for the 12th annual festival over one hundred, setting an average that was similar in the following years (figure 2). Documentaries were added in the third year (2000).

During the trial and error phase, festival organizers made the event look like other film
festivals—giving out awards granted by a jury of professionals and by the audience—while developing its niche. Indeed, the category “Emergencia” was created to showcase films made by teenage Latinx directors. With these initiatives, the organizers showed that they wished to contribute to film culture by using the power of legitimization of awards and by encouraging young Latinos to tell their stories. Film was thus fully embraced as a tool of empowerment for an underrepresented community, which is the direction that other Latinx film festivals have taken since then. LALIFF, for example, partners with a Youth Cinema Program, set up by one of the festival’s creators, whose ultimate goal is to show students’ films during the festival. In 2000, Cine Las Americas executive producer Maria Martin described the festival as “a natural outgrowth of this burgeoning aspect of Austin,” signaling the “renaissance” of the Latino community.28 Her comments suggest that, on the one hand, Latinos, who represented 28.2 percent of the population in Austin, were embracing the festival to tell their “stories” and, on the other hand, the city of Austin, its main financial contributor, supported their mission to redress inequalities.29

Following this initial phase, the festival entered a period of stability (2005–9) after having found a balanced model with a core program with fewer categories that has not changed since.30 To promote local filmmakers, a new category, Hecho en Tejas, was introduced for films made in Texas. Thanks to a partnership with the Texas Archive of the Moving Image (TAMI), the films rewarded by the festival were offered a chance to be featured on TAMI’s website. This decision showed that, even though the lineup makes Cine Las Americas a transnational event, since the beginning, its organizers were adamant about serving the local community of filmmakers. Not all festivals function this way. Professor of Spanish and Latino/a studies Elizabeth Barrios, in her study of CLFF, points out that very little was done to promote local filmmakers in that festival, which she perceives as a liability.31 On the contrary, clearly one of the endeavors of Cine Las Americas was to grow roots in Austin, to serve not only the Latinx community but also the Texan community of filmmakers, film industry workers, and film aficionados. Thus, more partnerships with influential organizations, such as SXSW, the Austin Film Society (AFS), the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP), developed over the years. UT Austin and NALIP, for instance, organized roundtables about the role of Latinos in the film industry, creating bridges with academia. Support of SXSW and AFS, major stakeholders in the city, has also undoubtedly helped the festival become a key organization in Austin.

The festival grew following a twofold dynamic: selecting films organizers promoted as excellent and serving a community. The program content gained in complexity, involving as many as twenty countries of production, and prioritized diversity, as explained by Jacqueline Rush Rivera, the director of programming in 2007: “The cultural and regional diversity of the program is complimented [sic] by the diversity of aesthetic approaches and subject matter. We have films that are intensely personal, experimental, political, poetic, formal—films that combine great artistry with great technical innovation.”32 In 2009, the festival showcased films that caught national attention, such as Sleep Dealer by Alex Rivera (a fictional film) and The Other Side of Immigration by Roy Germano (a documentary). Both films are about the border, an ongoing theme that mirrors political debates linked to undocumented immigration.

Being a leitmotiv in the history of the festival, the diversity of the program was taken over by subsequent programmers. Lauer started programming in 2009. Coming from an academic
background and having worked for Mexican film festivals, she had sufficient experience to offer a "strong" program, according to Eugenio Del Bosque, who was executive director at the time (2006–14). Because it is "the nature of the specific relationships between a festival’s various stakeholders that largely determines the social standing of a festival within the public sphere," the synergy between these two figures increased the credibility of the event. Credibility is crucial for growing "sponsorship and audience base," that is, securing not only audience loyalty but also financial contributions. In about a decade, Cine Las Americas had become a versatile and multifaceted festival eager to show as many stories as possible in different formats and with a loyal base of supporters. It was thus ready for new phase.

From 2010 to 2013, the festival became an institution of the city. After the festival's rapid development during the previous years, its organizers decided to bet on smart growth to maintain a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Del Bosque chose not to add extra days or an unmanageable number of films, which was an unusual decision since most festivals tend to be obsessed "with growth." And Lauer made decisions that went hand in hand with the festival’s inclusive mission: fiction films were to be screened in a mainstream movie theater and documentaries were to be offered for free at the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) in East Austin. These initiatives sent the message that "Cine Las Americas is for everyone." Locating screenings downtown, in such movie theaters as the Violet Crown Cinema, for example, not only made the festival more visible but also increased its chances of attracting mainstream audiences (figure 3). Screenings at the MACC also sent the message that the festival caters to the Latinx community and offers them a place to come to in a neighborhood where underrepresented communities tend to live. Indeed, in 1928, a city plan divided the city ethnically in accordance with "separate but equal" policies that had been implemented after the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision: East Austin, nicknamed the “Negro district,” welcomed Latinos, mostly Mexican Americans, who also founded their “barrio” around West Fifth Street. Since the 2010s, East Austin has experienced tremendous growth and gentrification, which has led to the building of new skyscrapers, bars, and restaurants around the MACC. This growth and development has made the area more geo-strategic for mainstream audiences, which, in spite of not being the original purpose, adds to the festival’s overall strategy to encourage audiences to travel across the city. At the same time, gentrification has forced many long-time ethnic minority residents

![Figure 3. Map of the main venues used by the festival (Google Maps).](https://example.com/map.jpg)
to move away from East Austin, the “fourth fastest-gentrifying city in the U.S.” While the change does not seem to have affected the accessibility of the MACC, the center could soon seem out of place in a neighborhood in which fewer ethnic minority residents live; the MACC nevertheless acts as a reminder of the history of the city for all kinds of audiences.

Challenging audiences through film is crucial; however, because film festivals are also experiential events, it is just as important for audiences to experiment them physically, in places that have a special meaning. The full experience entails an immersion in parts of the city that have a historical significance in tune with the festival’s purpose. Because Cine Las Americas seeks to educate through film, its partnership with the MACC, whose mission is “dedicated to the preservation, creation, presentation, and promotion” of Mexican American “but also of Native American, Chicano and other Latino cultures,” allowed it to shed light on the niche the festival fills in Austin. The same dynamic motivates the Boston Latino International Film Festival (BLIFF), as professor of Spanish and cultural studies Michelle Leigh Farrell explains: “The de-centered showings encourage audiences to enter spaces where not all Bostonians feel at home while also bringing contemporary and dynamic dialogue to sites associated with past archives.” Cine Las Americas also encourages dialogue about a part of the city whose changes affect the most vulnerable communities. Professor of sociology Paul Brian McInerney notes that this strategy is typical of what he calls “institutional entrepreneurs” when they work to solidify their existence in an organizational field. Because the festival represents a particular niche that is barely exploited in Austin, the organizers act as leaders but also as a crucial link in the chain of cinema. They thus institutionalize “new practices of cinephilia” that encourage viewers to get out of their comfort zones.

Over time, the festival has partnered with the AFS to co-present Latin American films, showing that Cine Las Americas is considered as the specialist of this kind of cinema in Austin. From an organizational point of view, as Rüling explains, the partnership confirms that FCEs can “consolidate and change organizational fields by providing a setting for the emergence, reproduction and challenging of field-level identities, norms and standards.” Cine Las Americas challenges the classical organizational field of cinema in Austin and establishes new ways to watch and talk about film. That it is a festival dedicated to “the Americas” and not just another “Latino film festival” also shows that its organizers strive to break norms while associating with a wide range of partners to make the most of what Austin has to offer. Partnering with other organizations is precisely how the festival can guarantee its sustainability, betting on convergence and compatibility, that in turn can give birth to innovative and creative practices.

Creativity is not an alien concept to Austin. Its designation as a Creative City of Media Arts by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015—the only such designation in the United States—was, in fact, the culmination of decades of work to promote the Texan capital as an ideal city. Already in 1987, a promotional video had praised its quality of life and advertised that “arts, music, and the pleasures of life” were “central to the spirit of the city.” Although it included a few far-fetched statements (such as comparing the city’s cultural offer to that of Paris), the video strove to present Austin as a hedonic place catering to its inhabitants’ cultural and sporting needs. Far from portraying the city as a place of idleness, the video stressed a quality of life that fosters creativity and economic growth. While many cities have the potential to become Creative Cities, only a few excel in the “3Ts” theorized by urban...
studies theorist Richard L. Florida in 2002: technology, tolerance, and talent. He argues that for a city to achieve this level, the group of educated and ambitious people that he calls the “Creative Class” must focus on these three criteria. Florida states that Austin is a model for Creative City development, and according to professor of urban planning Carl Grodach, the city found in Florida’s concepts an efficient way to boost its economic development initiatives. Austin’s Cultural Arts Division, which gives an annual grant to Cine Las Americas, became a part of the city’s Economic Development Department when Florida’s concept was fully embraced by city officials to entice the Creative Class to move to Austin. The strategy was successful: today, the city is a “high-tech innovation hub” that has even been nicknamed “Silicon Hills.” While the nickname establishes a flattering comparison to the Californian Silicon Valley, for its detractors, it also implies that Austin has been invaded by Californians. Such success for the Texan city is not without its controversies; some locals lament the increased cost of living, intense traffic, and potential loss of its soul. It is undeniable, however, that the creative atmosphere of the city is fertile ground for creativity and innovation and that film festival organizers draw inspiration from the city they live in.

The next phase (2014–19) of the festival was ushered in by Lauer becoming the new executive director when Del Bosque stepped down in 2014. Loist points out that the departure of a festival team member can severely upset “the fragile mechanism of the festival organization,” but, by the same token, the entrance of a new member can also be incredibly beneficial. This phase was characterized by Lauer’s use of her programming background to innovate. The festival adapted to content digitization and social media development. Programmers did take risks before, but the door was now open for the development of initiatives that few festivals embraced, except maybe for SXSW, whose core principle is to feature innovative projects, or ImagineNative, a festival that is keen on using “new media.” Thus, Lauer decided to feature music videos, public service announcement (PSA) videos, virtual reality events, and exceptional categories from time to time, collaborating with local filmmakers, as well as with UT Austin’s scholars and librarians, confirming that programmers also have a curating role (figure 4). Indeed, according to doctoral candidate in cinema and media arts Caroline Klimek,
what is interesting with new media, for instance, is that they are “not available to the general public,” which makes festivals exclusive events. As a result, they can potentially generate curiosity or loyalty in spite of “not fitting naturally with the collective experience of a film festival.”

The new programs offered by the festival include Femme Frontera, a Latinx-led organization that supports female and nonbinary filmmakers of the border region. It was cofounded by Iliana Sosa, a local filmmaker who also teaches at UT Austin. The virtual reality event was Lauer’s idea, inspired by the time she attended the ImagiNative festival in Toronto, another Creative City. Then, a partnership with Austin’s Originator Studios was set up through Sharon Arteaga, another local filmmaker. Lastly, the music video program was added to show what Latin American filmmakers, who tend to start out by making music videos, do outside of the traditional film format. Not only did these events strengthen the festival’s network, they also made it an innovating event that resembled the strategies used by the Creative Class, whose members tend to produce “new forms or designs” in resonance with the creative atmosphere of the city, which hosts powerful and creative tech companies (Amazon, Apple, PayPal).

As Rüling explains, new phases are usually ushered in by a crisis. At the end of 2019, Lauer decided to go back to programming. The new executive director, Gabriel Ornelas, came from an event management background. Even if he had been a volunteer for the festival and had sat on the board, his nomination made it clear that film festivals are events that need to be planned and promoted and that the quality of films is not always enough to make the event attractive. Creating a balance between the team members who know about film and those who know about event management is crucial. When the transition was made from one director to another, however, as Lauer said, “March happened,” in other words, they had to deal with a situation that no one had imagined and that made the festival transition into another phase, that of (forced) adaptation.

Although festival staff encountered a magnitude of obstacles, this next phase turned out to be a space for reinvention.

The 2020 Virtual Showcase: Reacting to a State of Emergency

Creating a “Dedicated Platform” for Underrepresented Filmmakers

The festival’s website described the 2020 Virtual Showcase as “an alternative to the 23rd edition.” The term “alternative” points to the idea that the 2020 showcase was not meant to be a mere substitute for Cine Las Americas but something else entirely. After all, film festivals are events that are supposed to be lived collectively; the screenings are at the center of myriad experiences offered alongside, such as Q&As and after-parties, that are arguably just as important, especially for filmmakers. According to the 2020 Filmmaker and Audience Survey, filmmakers value interaction with industry influencers, other filmmakers, and the audience much more than the possibility to win an award. While winning an award usually boosts their careers, networking can be a catalyst for more opportunities. But because the festive component of the event had to be sacrificed, the team’s efforts focused on the films.

In their assessment of SXSW, scholars Phil Hobbins-White and Brad Limov lamented that the 2020
festival did not organize more online events. "Had SXSW at least programmed live discussions with audience engagement through chat features, or even arranged video conferences through Zoom or other applications, then valuable interactions with fellow attendees might have taken place. Breakout sessions could similarly have encouraged this kind of connection, though more artificial than a chance encounter while queuing up for your next film. At the end of the day, little was done to recreate that film festival ‘energy’ discussed in our exchanges with filmmakers.\textsuperscript{61} While it is true that online interaction has become easier nowadays and audiences are accustomed to using social media to share their experience of an event, such a statement neglects to account for the emergency situation of COVID that festival organizers faced. This crisis put pressure on staff at the last minute, and not just for SXSW, which is usually organized in March. Some festivals had more time, and probably more funds, to be creative than others.

Cine Las Americas did not organize video conferences or other interactive events, yet a few staff members recorded videos to present each screening, giving audiences a few minutes of a somewhat human contact. Even with these short recordings, the experience remained lonely for audiences. The organizers’ primary goal was to dedicate a space for films, whatever it might be. Lauer explained that it was crucial to “find a way to give these films and the filmmakers who created them a dedicated platform.”\textsuperscript{62} The use of the word “platform” is particularly meaningful, because, a few years before, it would not have corresponded to an online platform but to a stage that compensated for the lack of opportunities for Latinx and Indigenous filmmakers in the industry.

For that particular purpose, the stakes were higher if we consider the gap that Latinx film festivals fill in terms of representation of minorities in front of and behind the camera. According to the USC (University of Southern California) Annenberg Inclusion Initiative Report that studied 1,300 films released between 2007 and 2019, only 4.9 percent of speaking characters were Latinos, and in general and despite some progress, women were underrepresented in the film industry in front of and behind the camera.\textsuperscript{63} On the contrary, Cine Las Americas pays attention to the inclusion of as many groups as possible. In 2020, for instance, about half of the films showcased were directed by female directors and also included films made by Indigenous, LGBTQ, and people of color (POC) filmmakers.\textsuperscript{64} Therefore, when one year is missed, opportunities are lost to promote better representation and counterbalance other content found on the most popular platforms, such as Netflix. Indeed, according to a report on inclusion on Netflix that was also conducted by USC Annenberg on “US original fictional films and scripted series” released in 2018 and 2019, progress is just starting to be made. Figures show a greater percentage of female leads and co-leads (an average of 52 percent for films and series in 2018 and 2019), which corresponds to the Census Bureau statistics, and compared to the industry, the number of female directors is also on the rise (25 percent for Netflix in 2018 compared to 4.5 percent for the industry). In terms of ethnicity, Netflix features more underrepresented leads and co-leads than the top-grossing feature films of the year, with an average of 35.7 percent compared to 28 percent for top-grossing films. The percentage of Latinx leads and co-leads, however, is substantially lower, with an average of 2.6 percent for films and series and 4.5 percent if the main cast is considered; most are male-identified. The numbers are just as low for producers (2.6 percent), directors (3.1 percent), and writers (1 percent).\textsuperscript{65} The figures thus confirm that such festivals as Cine Las Americas fill a gap and that their presence is necessary to counterbalance mainstream tendencies.
While it cannot be denied that it is hard for a small festival to compete with a multi-million-dollar platform such as Netflix, organizing the Virtual Showcase in 2020 was not so much about competing but about existing in a saturated market of online streaming. As scholars Jamie Chambers and Will Higbee explain, during the pandemic, the organization of virtual events served the "ongoing work of resistance" that small film festivals strive to do.\textsuperscript{66} The organizers were aware that it was going to be a special downsized event, but they insisted that they \textit{did} make the "connections Cine Las Americas is famous for."\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, since geo-blocking options had not been activated, a wide range of people were able to watch the films. The films circulated around the world, to the surprise of the organizers, people logged in from California, from Missouri, and even from a few foreign countries.

Crisis situations, because they force people and organizations to face unusual circumstances, can favor such surprises. By putting pressure on people and testing their resilience, the pandemic offered challenges that led to unexpected outcomes.

\textit{Managing a Crisis Situation: Personal Initiatives and Solidarity}

According to professor of organizational communication Granville King III, an efficient crisis management team has to "possess excellent decision-making skills" and be accustomed to "designing a plan" that assigns roles to the right people.\textsuperscript{68} At the beginning of 2020, when Lauer stepped down due to other professional engagements, the programming team took over because they had already watched and selected the films. Quiroz, who works for a dozen film festivals each year, stepped up to be the main organizer for two reasons: to "keep the local brand alive" and to "support the community during difficult times."\textsuperscript{69} Quiroz's determination, supported by Lauer, confirms the role of stakeholders and the synergy that propels an event to reinvent itself. While acknowledging that she cannot take any responsibility for the organization of the Virtual Showcase, Lauer admits to having "empowered" the programming team to find a way to organize an online event, following the example of other festivals that had already made the decision to go on "forced digital adventures."\textsuperscript{70}

In line with the festival's mission and inclusion issues affecting the Latinx community, Quiroz expressed responsibility to the filmmakers that goes hand in hand with scholars Marisa Hicks-Alcaraz and Eve Oishi's argument about curation being a form of activism\textsuperscript{71}:

I felt for all these filmmakers ... especially when SXSW was canceled. They announced their lineup and they canceled. This was their chance to show their film and to hopefully get it out there and get some sort of distribution deal and, like, advance their career. And then all of a sudden, that's not gonna happen. So I felt like in the same sense, I had a duty and a responsibility. That's what we do as programmers. These are the films, these are the filmmakers that we want to elevate, that we want to promote, that we want to help bring to a wider audience. We have that platform and I felt like ... it sounds cheesy but it is like a sacred duty to promote these films. And whatever I need to do to do that, even if it is in a virtual space, we have to ... sort of ... reinvent what we are ... well, that's what we need to do.\textsuperscript{72}

They selected fewer films than in previous years: the showcase included forty-nine films (seven feature films, thirty-two short films, and ten music videos) from twelve different countries, while usually the festival includes a hundred films from an average of twenty-five countries.\textsuperscript{73} All of the
films were free of charge and the audience was involved in the granting of eight awards. Diversity was still at the core of the program: there were narrative and documentary features from different Latin American countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, and Argentina) as well as from local filmmakers (Hecho en Tejas), long and short films from experienced and budding filmmakers (Emergencia), and music videos. The films dealt with a wide range of topics; however, in almost all of the different categories, immigration was represented, as a reminder that it is still an issue affecting the Latinx community in the United States. The youth film The American Dream, by Janet Cruz, dealt with a Mexican immigrant whose journey across the border made him alter his definition of the American dream. Dear Homeland, by Claudia Escobar, a documentary feature, followed the life of the Mexican singer-songwriter Diana Gameros, described as an advocate for immigration rights. In the Hecho en Tejas category, which featured eight films, the short narrative film When You Clean a Stranger’s Home, by local filmmaker Sharon Arteaga, represented the issue. Arteaga’s film sheds light on the intergenerational and interracial issues Latinos face while trying to make a living in blue-collar jobs in the United States.

The program did not include its traditional categories of New Releases and Panorama (set up during the second phase of development). Due to reduced funds, such a decision was made for financial reasons and also to focus on the categories needing more visibility—Hecho en Tejas and Emergencia—to give them “the stamp of approval” from the team of programmers. Although scaling down represented “difficult decisions,” according to Lauer, such a strategy kept the festival afloat not just for 2020 but also for the following years, anticipating the long-term repercussions of the pandemic. 

The Hecho en Tejas showcase was important strategically because the festival could thus garner support from local partners, such as the AFS and the MACC, which, despite not being able to provide venues to the festival, contributed financially. On top of representing signs of loyalty and solidarity at a time when most organizations, companies, and governments had to deal with financial strain, these relationships underscore the ties among the members of a well-established organizational field and, to some extent, their friendship. Interestingly, in her early assessment of the situation in 2020, de Valck insisted on the need for festival organizers to be able to count on their friends. The city of Austin and its Cultural Arts Division also remained loyal to the festival. Despite having to cut funds, a grant was given to Cine Las Americas, another sign that its organizers had secured the city’s loyalty and trust. After all, festivals are localized events that affect the tourism of a city. Even if tourism was drastically limited in 2020, betting on the future and potential revenue that festivals can bring when in-person events come back is strategically relevant, especially if we consider the location of the people who registered to watch films in 2020. Festivals also often represent a city’s identity card, and with the cancellation of SXSW, it seemed important for Austin to try to exist culturally speaking and keep “the local brand” that Quiroz talked about alive. Assistance from different organizations prevented the festival from having to look for other funding sources, a time consuming and stressful endeavor. As scholars Mariagiulia Grassilli and Alexandra-Maria Colta explain, the pandemic illustrated that “bonds and interconnectedness” become “tools of resistance” in difficult times. Cine Las Americas undoubtedly benefited from the “trust, emotional attachment and commitment” that are at the core of the principle of loyalty. The pandemic revealed that solidarity occurred at several levels: between the members of an organizational field and organizations that are used to working together for similar goals, between film professionals and filmmakers, and between festivals and their audiences.

74. Quiroz, interview. In my interview with her, Lauer explained that the festival pays a fee to showcase some successful films that are not featured in the competitive sections.

75. Lauer, interview.


Quiroz’s assessment of the Virtual Showcase is nevertheless somewhat harsh, as he described 2020 as a “stopgap” year. Lauer was more ambivalent: she talked about “missed opportunities” but considered the pandemic years as not “wasted years.” Ornelas, on the other hand, preferred to see the silver lining and viewed 2020 as a “learning experience” that showed “what Cine has to offer, for the filmmakers and for the community.” The different statements of these three team members may be in keeping with their background: for a film aficionado, 2020 was clearly a missed year whereas from an event management perspective, it was a success in that it existed. Interestingly, Lauer acknowledged that there were hard years before and there will probably be more to come, implying that crisis management is part of film festival organization. As a result, the pandemic offered new interrogations as to the future of film festivals, for scholars and for organizers.

**Conclusion: New Perspectives for the Reinvention of Film Festivals?**

Management of the COVID-19 pandemic did not just concern events in 2020. The following year, social distancing recommendations still made the organization of the 23rd Cine Las Americas film festival a challenge. Most of the June 2021 festival consisted of online screenings, but six in-person events were also programmed, including a screening at a drive-in cinema and a get-together at a local bar. Ornelas described the event as “a quality successful festival” despite the large part that online screenings took; what mattered to him was to bring people and “the community” back together. “If there is an opportunity, even if it is completely scaled back in terms of having the opportunity to bring some people together, even if it is just for a handful of times ... because that’s what the festival is ... I mean that’s the community it represents. So, if we can figure out some sort of way to do that in a safe environment more than anything, then we’ll visit that.” Considering what Lauer, Ornelas, and Quiroz said, Cine Las Americas appears to be a festival that pays equal attention to the films and to the social experience they foster. As a result, de Valck’s categorization between film-driven and festival-driven events falls short for this specific case study. Even though it is a “small festival organization that relies on volunteer labor, community encouragement, eclectic support networks, and creative fundraising,” Cine Las Americas also serves a series of films that would have difficulties finding other outlets in the United States. It is true that it caters to a community, but the festival does not exist without the films it showcases, which are part of an extended market and complex transnational circuit. As Farrell explains about BLIFF, “small festivals such as BLIFF play an important role in both serving their community’s need for representation as well as contributing to the field of filmmaking.” In 2020 and 2021, the pandemic compelled the organizers to set priorities that focused on the local community, which probably explains why the only online Q&A event that was organized in 2021 was about a film made in Texas and showcased in the Hecho en Tejas program.

In 2022, however, the festival recovered its pre-pandemic form, with a selection of a hundred films that fit into the usual categories, in-person screenings and Q&As at the usual venues, and get-together events. In other words, a real endeavor to “go back to normal” motivated the decisions of the staff when restrictions due to the pandemic waned. As de Valck rightfully explains, organizing festivals online is not sustainable: not only is the “festivity” significantly jeopardized, but the isolation of people in their homes also renders cross-cultural interaction—and, therefore, the mission of the festival—impossible.
Efforts made to organize in-person events suggest that the inclusion of online options was only a temporary adaptation strategy to survive the pandemic and that the festival is ready for a new phase yet to be determined. The 24th festival in 2022 did not include any online event, whereas other festivals, such as LALIFF, still offered an online option for local audiences. As Quiroz explained, the pandemic gave birth to “a newly imagined virtual film festival tour,” but it is still too early to determine whether online events will become more than temporary adjustments. Back in 2016, referring to online festivals, de Valck explained that “a new generation of film festivals [was] dawning.” At the time, the creation of such events seemed to be a conscious choice that responded to the inclusion of technology, such as the use of cell phones to make films. There is a difference between the festivals that choose to be hybrid and offer a digital experience because they want to experiment and be as innovative as possible and those that had to use digitization to survive the pandemic. Cine Las Americas is part of the latter: organizing in-person events remains the priority, even if no one can predict how the festival will evolve. Indeed, as cultural events usually seek a balance between continuity and change, new leadership and partnerships can take the festival in a new direction and reshape it. For the moment, it is safe to say that the pandemic was a temporary adjustment that did not have long-term consequences, for the decisions made by the staff allowed them to secure enough funds and sponsorship to carry on.

To answer Chambers and Higbee’s questions as to whether online festivals annihilated “the possibility of the in-person collectivity and conviviality” or if a “sense of community remained, albeit translated into a different form,” one would have to answer that generally speaking, while conviviality was truly challenged, the sense of community remained a resilient component for film festivals, especially for the most vulnerable ones. Even if film was at the origin of a series of creative initiatives during the pandemic, such as watch parties, for film festivals, what mattered was to secure “friends and funding,” and funds are more likely to come from friends or organizations with which one already had friendly relationships.

Can we conclude that the pandemic offered virtual, in other words, incomplete, events that verged on approximation? In spite of the “missed opportunities” that paint a darker picture of the situation, it is still possible to see new practices arise and new forms of solidarity that could solidify some relationships and networks in the future. Ornelas, for instance, mentioned his intentions to reach out to other festivals and “build on partnerships.” In the end, as Lauer explains, despite its magnitude, the pandemic revealed “opportunities to reimagine and reinvent” film festivals. It would, therefore, be a harsh statement to state loud and clear that virtual festivals were not events organizers should be proud of, for “resilience, creativity, and inventiveness” were deployed for what will probably be remembered as an exceptional situation that required extraordinary measures.

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87. Quiroz, interview.
91. Ornelas, interview.
92. Lauer, interview.
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FILM FESTIVALS: CLOSE-UP ON NEW RESEARCH

Film Festivals as Spaces for Knowledge Exchange and Community Building: The Case of Brazil’s CachoeiraDoc

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ABSTRACT

In this article, Ana Rosa Marques discusses the origins and development of CachoeiraDoc, an annual documentary film festival organized since 2010 by the faculty and students of the Film and Audiovisual Program at the Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB) in the Northeast of Brazil. She argues that, beyond an artistic event celebrating cinema, CachoeiraDoc has been a space in which the university and the residents of the small town of Cachoeira enter into a fruitful dialogue, exchanging knowledge and ultimately engaging in community building.
Films are the heart of CachoeiraDoc. Over its nine editions, more than four hundred films representing diverse authors, styles, themes, and origins have been screened at the festival. Here the cinema of great masters such as Agnès Varda, Avi Mograbi, Jia Zhang Ke, and Eduardo Coutinho cohabits with the works of Indigenous filmmakers like Alberto Alvares and Lincoln Pericles, whose work has not yet achieved the same level of recognition but who nevertheless persist in producing images and sounds, whether in the middle of the forest or on the outskirts of Brazilian cities.3

Figure 1. CachoeiraDoc Logo. Courtesy of CachoeiraDoc Archives.
These films, and the debates they generated, have captivated generations of students. Aquila Jamile, for instance, discovered the festival during its first edition, when she still lived in the distant city of Vitória da Conquista. After that, she decided to move from her hometown to Cachoeira to study film at UFRB:

CachoeiraDoc was responsible for my initial contact with documentary film sessions and discussions about the field. I remember being very touched by the films Corumbiara (2009) by Vincent Carelli and Atrás da porta (2010) by Vladimir Seixas. One was about Indigenous people, the other about people experiencing homelessness and the occupation of abandoned public buildings. Both had a strong social appeal.

Over time, some of these students transitioned from simply attending to working in production, mobilization efforts, written or audiovisual coverage, programming, the Youth Jury, and workshops, making CachoeiraDoc a training space that is also run by students. Since its second edition, students from more advanced semesters in the UFRB film program have participated in film selection and, increasingly, in curatorship. In competitive shows alone, over four hundred films are submitted each year. Thousands of images and sounds issuing from different corners of the country, produced by people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, have thus introduced audiences to multiple ways of seeing, thinking, creating, and screening.

The process of envisioning, debating, selecting, and programming is exhausting but revealing. It requires seeing the potential in each work, relating it to the others, and finding a place and a role for it in the festival. Through the films and discussions among the curatorial team, we have deepened our ability to learn, understand, and talk about cinema, the world, and ourselves. Flora Braga experienced this for three years as a curator:
After making difficult choices, a process that inevitably left many great films out of the festival, I understood what actually constitutes the act of curating: to put together a series of films so that they dialogue and strengthen each other’s potentialities. Hence the enormous importance of programming, an activity that in a space of visibility and discussion requires as much sensitivity as awareness of the concrete gesture that these choices consist of. Sharing and debating the ideas expressed in the films made me realize the real reasons I was studying cinema and wanted to make films. I finally found my role in this scenario.

While films that have been featured in other circuits and produced by renowned filmmakers have graced our screens, over the years we have also aimed to develop our own curatorial profile, more in tune with the urgent issues of our time and attentive to the new discursive voices. Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) professor and researcher César Guimarães notes that CachoeiraDoc "posits the need for cinema to be discussed in relation to social life, beyond the scope of mere cinephilia and the need for a particular way of doing film analysis, outside of an academic context or the context of our research." This positions the festival in a "very unique" place, says his UFMG colleague, André Brasil, because "it involves a certain type of curation that tries to escape the particular vices of certain choices. Therefore, it is fresh and open to new films, new directors." Such direction requires questioning or confronting certain judging patterns already established in academia and in the field of specialized criticism. For students like Evandro Freitas, the experience revolutionized the way they saw (and thought about) films:

CacheoiraDoc took a certain turn when it showed me that cinema is also a relationship. I was re-educating my gaze, not only to the formal aspects of the film but also to thinking about how cinema relates to the world. Seeing films that are connected to certain urgencies in the world, not that we can reduce the curatorial experience to categories, but it was very important to find directors who were not in an already established circuit. To me, these films represented a different experience, maybe because they dealt with issues that we are experiencing, issues that are so urgent in real life. CachoeiraDoc was an entryway into this type of contemporary cinema.

In 2020, after a decade of the festival and a two-year hiatus, CachoeiraDoc relaunched with a brand-new curatorial team, assembled without the coordinators’ input but still made up of UFRB alumni and current students of the film program. The participation of people who came from other locations, perspectives, and life stories breathed new life into the group, and the curation remained a training space, now enriched by new collaborators. The festival remained committed to a cinema that embraced the whole world, and its curators were called upon to "dream up new futures" for cinema itself. Yet the curators’ work was strongly impacted by the arrival and spread of the coronavirus. How can you watch films when the largest pandemic of the century is unfolding before your very eyes? Faced with the imperatives of isolation and social distancing to control the virus and the disease, scheduling a festival—that is, an event fundamentally premised on meetings and co-presence—seemed futile. How to think of a future when the present is suspended?

Stirred by these questions and circumstances, the curators collaborated to build not just a festival, but what they called the Festival Impossível/Curadoria Provisória (Impossible Festival, Provisional Curatorship), an experience with films, texts, and online debates intent on thinking/rethinking life, cinema, and the very concept of curatorship. The act of curating, as defined by Flora Braga in 2017, could no longer remain the same in the pandemic world of 2020 and gained new meanings, such as taking care of others and of ourselves through film. According to Alex Antônio:


9. The 2020 curatorial team was composed of Alex Antônio, Evelyn Sacramento, Fábio Rodrigues, Kênia Freitas, Otávio Conceição, Patrícia Mourão, Ramayana Lira, and Rayanne Layssa.

10. There were no editions of CachoeiraDoc in 2021 and 2022, but we expect it to resume at some point in the future.

11. “Curar” means both curate and heal or cure in Portuguese.—Trans.
Most of the time, these films ended up healing us more than we curated them, they ended up healing our wounds. Trindade\textsuperscript{12} made me reflect on how we look at others, and how we take care of others when their experience differs so much from our own... I was struggling with these questions during this curatorship, thinking about how we look at others and about the ethics of curatorship.\textsuperscript{13} For his colleague Otávio Conceição, despite a context permeated by fear, anguish, and waiting, this curatorial action brought some optimism about the future when he was faced with films that presented the perspectives of those erased or stereotyped by hegemonic narratives: “The healing process comes from the understanding that we are finite people and that everything is changeable: the only truth that persists is change.”\textsuperscript{14}

If this broad-minded way of thinking about cinema fed the sensitivity of students like Alex and Otávio, it was also nurtured by them. Alex and Otávio belong to the 83 percent of UFRB students who declare themselves as Black or Brown.\textsuperscript{15} Since its inception, UFRB has adopted affirmative action policies and developed a program to support student retention.\textsuperscript{16} Alumni of the university include some of the brightest talents in Black Brazilian cinema: Larissa Fulana de Tal, Thamires Vieira, Glenda Nicácio, and David Aynan.

Strong Black and female representation on the curating team and the jury have exposed issues and established postures that delineate the current aesthetic and political contours of the festival, making it stand out among other film events.\textsuperscript{17} For Cleissa Martins, the increase in Black curators can sensitize audiences to Black cinema. These curators help introduce films by Black filmmakers into the festival schedule outside of sessions that focused specifically on the issue of race, resulting in more and different people watching the films. It also places Black
cinema in another position, by highlighting its cinematic aspects and not only the issue of representation.  

Several Black directors such as Safira Moreira, Yasmin Thainá, and Vinícius Silva have participated in the festival with works that escape clichés about Blackness. Their presence inspired and encouraged students like Erica Sansil to tell their stories in a very personal way. A Black woman from the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, she was bothered by the predominance of white men and people from the wealthier classes in the production of narratives about universes of which they had scant experience:

The young Black people, slum dwellers, with limited access to education, who died as a result of violence, represented the young people who lived around me. They were my friends, cousins, and acquaintances. I was startled to conclude that our Black bodies were just the work object for white, middle-class filmmakers. At that moment, I knew that I needed to make a documentary, that our point of view should be presented.  

Erica’s graduation project (Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso, TCC) focused on a topic that she not only knew well but also admired: Brazilian funk balls. Her short film, Esperando o sábado (Waiting for Saturday. 14 min, 2017), portrayed several funkeiras and their experiences with prejudice. The women featured in the film invited her into their workspaces, their journeys, and their forms of entertainment. The documentary combined staged scenes and fictional devices that revealed the characters’ subjectivities. The youngest child of a single mother of six who made a living ironing clothes, Erica was the first in her family to go to college. After graduating, she returned to her mother’s home in Rio de Janeiro. Her TCC was the passport to the professional world. The short film was finalized at the production company of Vladimir Seixas, a filmmaker she had met in 2016 when she joined CachoeiraDoc’s Júri Jovem (Youth Jury). Their support with the film’s editing led to an invitation to work on the company’s productions. Encounters like this one are not uncommon at the festival. The welcoming atmosphere of the event and the small size of the city of Cachoeira foster connections between people. Some exchanges begin in the screening room, continue in bars and at parties, and are resumed in courses and lectures. The dialogues initiated at CachoeiraDoc are useful for both hosts and visitors.

All film screenings are followed by debates between audiences and filmmakers with the participation of mediators, which provides information and reflections that are very important for the students’ training. Knowing the trajectory of a film’s creation allows them not only to access the directors’ thought processes but also to learn about the challenges, inquiries, dilemmas, and insights that shaped the film’s final form. While these are very important issues from a pedagogical standpoint, they are still not documented or analyzed by film studies in Brazil, which tend to focus much more on the procedures and effects of a finished work than on creative processes. At the same time, this openness, and the encouragement of audience participation, enables students to publicly exercise cinematic analysis and criticism.

The quality of the debates is related to the experience of the UFRB faculty and students, as well as to an investment in audience formation, among other factors. For its 2017 edition, along with student participation in the curatorship, researchers and professors from other universities served as debate mediators, amplifying the exchange with other
institutions. Panels, lectures, and conferences became spaces for the discussion of ideas and the introduction of research on fundamental topics related to the art, culture, and politics of documentary filmmaking. Through these activities, students came into direct contact with authors they had previously known only through the works they had watched or read about in the classroom.

Audiovisual coverage of the festival, which gradually came to be coordinated by last-semester students and alumni of the UFRB film program, is another important pedagogical activity. These young people are responsible for the production and distribution of all images and sounds from the event, which becomes an intense laboratory of research practices, screenwriting, shooting, and editing. The vignettes they produce alongside UFRB professor Danilo Scaldaferri are crucial to the festival's dissemination. Coordinating this team was the only task Laís Lima had not yet done at the event when she took it on in 2017. She says she had explored everything she could at CachoeiraDoc, going from usher to curator and attending all available courses, including a film editing class with renowned Pernambuco filmmaker Marcelo Pedroso that greatly influenced her study path. Pedroso’s work, and what she learned from him, informed her TCC and also deepened her reflections as a student in the Federal University of São Carlos master’s degree program.

Every year the festival invites an expert from a particular area to teach courses related to documentary filmmaking. In addition to Pedroso, the festival has thus welcomed filmmakers Vincent Carelli, Geraldo Sarno, Aly Muritiba, Rafael Urban, Larissa Figueiredo, and Ernesto Carvalho; film editor Cristina Amaral; and sound directors Nicolas Hallet and Simone Dourado, among others. Free of charge, the courses seek to contribute to the continuing education of students and professionals in the area and have attracted people from different parts of the country.

The affective immersion in documentary filmmaking begins in the UFRB film program, which has at least four modules related to gender in its curriculum. In the classroom, students explore the richness of the documentary tradition and discover some of its newest forms. Raí Gandra Moreira, who organized an LGBT short films festival as a course completion project and participated in CachoeiraDoc as a member of the Youth Jury, a monitor, and a director, highlights the importance of the course in his formation:

> At that moment, it was possible to open new windows for thinking and making films, discovering the documentary as a rich cinematographic field, through its most plural expressions, contents, and forms. Above all, contemporary currents in documentary filmmaking aroused in me a sharp desire and curiosity, satiated through research and experimental productions.20

In addition to both a bibliography and filmography, the modules provide a space for praxis. In 2014, the volume of student documentary production increased, resulting in a special show at CachoeiraDoc: the Kékó show, which comes from a Yorubá word meaning “one who studies.” The event’s curators, then-students Evandro Freitas, Luara De, and Thiago Logasa, stated: “We consider that our documentaries share the urgency of political and subjective expression. They are the message and image with which their directors expand the world, compose their work, and assemble themselves.”21
Some of the films produced in the courses, for instance *CorpoStyleDanceMachine* (Ulisses Arthur, 7 min, 2017), circulated in several festivals and exhibitions across Brazil. The short film originated as a classroom exercise, was developed throughout the course, and deepened and matured through the theoretical reflections of a research project. It introduces us to Tikal, a resident of Cachoeira who walks throughout the city in drag and is often mocked and harassed for doing so. When the film premiered at CachoeiraDoc, Tikal presented and debated it with the audience. After the film’s success, he started carrying the festival catalog with him, as a sort of shield against the provocations he still encountered in the streets. For many months, Ulysses researched and talked to his film’s protagonist in search of an aesthetic and an approach, which developed from this coexistence and relationship. For the filmmaker, the experience contributed not only to his technical and aesthetic training but also to his political development, which helped him seek his place in cinema and in the world.

The classroom is thus the gateway to an integrated CachoeiraDoc circuit that combines teaching, research, and community outreach activities. Its energy remains in students after they complete their undergraduate studies. The principles they learn and experience in the university reverberate in their future projects, which run the gamut of exhibitions and festivals, films, and postgraduate studies, and permeate their personal lives. Jessé Patrício, for instance, used the experience he accrued at CachoeiraDoc to create the Mostra de Cinema Contemporâneo do Nordeste (Contemporary Northeastern Film Festival)22: “After participating in the curatorship of the third edition in 2012, I was absolutely certain that I had to plan a film festival. All I needed was to find a direction.”23

![Figure 4. CachoeiraDoc 2017. Tikal (left) and Marvin Pereira (right). Courtesy of CachoeiraDoc Archives.](image)

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22. The festival takes place in Feira de Santana (Bahia) and has been held annually since 2018.

One of the emblematic images of CachoeiraDoc is a photo of a film-screening session in a public square in which a leafy tree stands out. Its branches protrude onto the screen and its shade welcomes the spectators. The roots that ground it to earth also alter the level of the stones that surround it. There is something tree-like to the festival. Its activities, since its creation, rooted the project in the Bahian Recôncavo. The Recôncavo nourished and was nourished by it.

There were times when the action onscreen was manifested in the audience. One of those instances happened in 2012 during CachoeiraDoc’s third edition. We were projecting A Batalha do Passinho [Passinho Dance-Off], by Emílio Domingos, a feature about a dance style that originated in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas and that traced the careers of its young dancers. At the end of the screening, the film seemed to continue, as the motion it depicted reverberated in the body of little Alderivo and in the eyes of the audience members who contemplated the dance movements of the boy from Maragogipe who had recently arrived in Cachoeira.

I’ve always loved to dance. The movie had a lot of influence on me. Those people who came from the favela, who speak like me. Then I ran to the computer to find out who Cebolinha was, the Passinho guys.

It was the first time Alderivo had entered a film theater, but it wouldn’t be the last. He continued attending the festival and other events at CAHL (Centro de Artes Humanidades e Letras/Center for the Arts, Humanities, and Modern Languages), where UFRB courses are given in Cachoeira. Today he is a member of the Mario Gusmão Cineclube and of the city’s hip-hop dance group, and he smiles when he says that he has already enrolled in the Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio-Enem (National High School Exam) to study film in college.

Alderivo grew up in the CAHL environment. He arrived there because he befriended the students and felt welcome. The story of this encounter sharply contradicts the narratives that mock Brazilian universities as spaces removed from the community’s interests and affections. Over these institutions hangs the stigma, currently fueled by a political drive to disparage higher education, of the ivory tower that keeps knowledge hidden and makes it inaccessible.
and unintelligible to those outside of academia. UFRB was created in 2005 with the express purpose of combating this image. It is open to the culture, history, and values of the people of the Recôncavo. It has a deeply cultivated community outreach profile and is committed to discussing and reflecting local needs and interests, while also affirming and developing the region’s potential through various programs aimed at and conducted with the community.

In 2019, film projects made up 60 percent of the CAHL’s extension and community outreach activities financed by the university’s scholarship program. They included open study groups for the community, film clubs, and collaborative film productions. The projects were often developed by teachers and students not only from the film program but also from other areas, such as the sociology program, that used film as an object of reflection or intervention. CachoeiraDoc is one of CAHL’s most enduring extension and community outreach projects and was designed to attract both the local and national communities, connecting them in the process. In addition to the 2019 film programming, which was free and open to the general public, there were screenings in local neighborhoods, small festivals, and special sessions. The festival also experimented with different strategies of attraction such as courses, shows, parties, and artistic presentations. Almost all the event openings took place in public squares, under the moonlight and trees, cooled by the breeze of the Paraguassu River. The festival’s activities opened with films, caruru, and music. Via talking, dancing, eating or drinking, and, especially, watching and discussing the films, residents and visitors exchanged ideas and experiences.

26. Caruru is a typical food from Bahia and has African origins.

Figure 6. CachoeiraDoc 2017. Courtesy of CachoeiraDoc Archives.
Figure 7. CachoeiraDoc 2017. Courtesy of CachoeiraDoc Archives.

Figure 8. CachoeiraDoc 2014. Courtesy of CachoeiraDoc Archives.
Considering the difficulties of producing an event of this size in a region that lacks basic services and structure, reliable roads, communication, and quality transportation, there were times when the producers felt as though they were in a sort of scavenger hunt, as Thamires Vieira, a student who worked as an organizer in some editions of the festival, recalls. To her, the showing of Batalha do Passinho was a landmark of the festival’s history in this regard:

I remember the session of the film A Batalha do Passinho which included students from the municipal public schools. On that day, buses were supposed to arrive from one of the quilombos. It was almost time for the session when I received a call that the bus had broken down on the way and would not arrive... Communication was very precarious in that region and I could not warn anyone in charge about the problem, so I convinced another driver to make the trip and went with him to get those people [teachers and students]. When I got there, I was greeted by a party, it was incredible... Everyone was eager to participate, and not making it to the screening was never an option for them... That day, mobilizing these people who were committed to being part of the festival, it was amazing!27

Our intense efforts to form audiences paid off: despite several challenges, we observed increasing participation of the city’s residents in the event. Clarissa Brandão, who graduated from the course and was a local producer in 2016 and 2017, credits these difficulties to the lack of art education in general: “People are familiar with a certain repertoire and do not know that other forms exist. That’s why sometimes they are not even interested in going to the film theater.”28 Thus, working with schools was essential to the creation of a film culture in the region. Some of the festival’s screenings and sessions specifically target this audience; they include special mediation work as well as projects and courses for public school teachers and students. In 2010, for instance, elementary and high school teachers participated in a methodology course on the use of audiovisual media in the classroom.29

In each edition, the festival promotes a webdoc workshop for public school students, where they produce short documentaries that can be shared on the internet. The workshop, which covers audiovisual awareness, technical and aesthetic guidelines for equipment use, and production practices, is taught by students of the film program who are members of the Documentary Study and Practice Group. One of the facilitators, Evandro Freitas, reports that when he was discussing with the class how to map their film repertoire, he was told that documentaries were “boring” because “people just keep talking, there is no action.”30 After this initial resistance, Evandro and his colleague Thiago Logasa found ways to shed the “smell of dust and boredom” often associated with documentaries. They proceeded with the activity, and they not only tried to highlight other film references but also considered the students’ own daily realities to imagine and produce works that introduced themes and methodologies that were closer to their interests and concerns. This process generated Webfaixa, a short film that discusses and intervenes in Cachoeira’s vehicle traffic, considered by students to be one of the city’s main problems.31

Conceived and produced collectively, these shorts are now part of the festival’s schedule. For high school students, it is an opportunity to create their own stories, see their discourses projected onto the screen, and be recognized as art and culture producers in the presence of their families, friends, and neighbors. For the university, it is a way to strengthen relationships with the community and learn about and value other forms of knowledge. For film students, it is a pedagogical exercise that challenges their preconceived knowledge in the field and forces...
them to research and question their teaching and learning methodologies. Unsurprisingly, many of the students who taught in the workshops now work in community artistic and pedagogical activities. Their experiences at CachoeiraDoc provided them with a method of learning and doing together, of opening up to the knowledges and questions of others. As Thiago Logasa, who is currently an audiovisual technician at the Federal University of Western Bahia, observed,

This experience was incredible from the point of view of training because from it I was able to understand and develop a method of working with audiovisual language in a short amount of time with significant practical results. And this ended up unfolding in many other workshops that I later taught to various groups and communities, from classes with adolescents of up to sixteen years old to classes with university professors with master’s and doctoral degrees.32

Thiago’s partner on several of his undergraduate projects, Evandro, also remains connected to the university. In the UFRB extension and community outreach projects, where he acts as a technician, he has experienced different forms of collaborative creation through audiovisual media. Through his work with marginalized communities from the Iguape quilombola women and the youth of Acupe and Saubara to the men of the Movimento Sem Terra (Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement), Evandro has directly encountered the issue of alterity: “These projects show that we can also share sensitivities; this encounter that the camera facilitates mobilizes other forms of the self.”33

Diego Jesus, one of the first webdoc instructors, is currently a PhD student at the University of Texas, before which he coordinated an audiovisual training project with residents of the Maré favela, in Rio de Janeiro.34 He attributes his role in the project to his training at CachoeiraDoc in various capacities:

Developed in 2014 by the NGO Redes da Maré, the ECOM (Escola de Cinema Olhares da Maré) would not have been possible without CachoeiraDoc’s intervention in my trajectory. It affirmed cinema as a vehicle for political intervention in the world, to create an echo for the ‘marginal voices,’ for marginalized groups, for the ‘children’ of the country’s re-democratization, like me and, finally, for the authors and disseminators of discourses hitherto invisibilized by official history.35

A few years earlier, Diego had already experienced cinema as an instrument for affirming marginalized or invisibilized groups. In 2010, he participated in a UFRB project organized by the coordinators of CachoeiraDoc in Iguape, a rural area of Cachoeira, that focused on the development of self-representational documentaries.36 Almost a decade later, he happened upon Jeff, one of the teenagers he had worked with on the project. The young man was now studying at the Federal University of Bahia in Salvador and was preparing for a student caravan that was going to the Brazilian capital to defend quilombola and Indigenous rights threatened by government budget cuts. In Diego’s eyes, that child of Iguape was like a mirror reflection. Like him, he believed in the university as a vehicle for the realization of dreams and would join the fight against those who want to prevent the consolidation of this right: “They think they’ve beaten us. They’re actually in more trouble than ever.”37

In addition to the actual festival, we have developed other community outreach projects to stimulate and disseminate interest in, and reflections on, cinema and encourage year-long


33. Evandro Freitas, interview conducted by Ana Rosa Marques, Salvador/Feira de Santana, May 12, 2019.

34. In 2019/2020, Diego was also the first graduate to occupy the substitute teacher position in the UFRB film program.


36. The project “Registros da história e da memória familiar das comunidades tradicionais do Recôncavo da Bahia,” which received an award from the Brazilian Ministry of Education’s Programa de Extensão Universitária (Proext), had a multidisciplinary team coordinated by film program professors Amaranta Cesar and Ana Rosa Marques and by history program professor Isabel Reis. The project sought to document the cultural heritage of the traditional Black communities of the Iguape Valley, fostering the production of self-representations through film and other audiovisual productions.

engagement with it. Our actions, especially those in secondary schools, provide opportunities for thinking about and experimenting with activities that will contribute to the training of more engaged spectators and foster an education concerned with audiovisual expressions focused on the artistic, affective, and intellectual development of students. For Ana Paula Nunes, UFRB professor and cinema and education researcher, in Brazil

the partnership between cinema and education has never been as strong as it is today. There is a great reconfiguration of the production, distribution, and exhibition tripod in the field of filmmaking, increasingly legitimizing collaborative processes and favoring the exchanges between the film/video screen and the classroom’s blackboard. 38

Today’s students, having grown up in an environment shaped by TV, film, video games, the internet, et cetera, are immediately familiar with the audiovisual universe when they start school, hence the importance of approaching and communicating with them in a creative and qualified way in this new reality. As theorists such as Jesús Martín Barbero point out, in the face of the whirlwind of images and sounds that are part of everyday life, it is important to “teach how to see.” 39

Our students have been researching and experimenting with strategies, without resorting to ready-made formulas, to demonstrate the mobilizing potential of images and sounds for both teachers and high school students. The solution devised by Thiago, a scholarship holder in one of these projects, 40 and Cirila Machado, who served as a volunteer, was to combine audiovisual activities with historical and geographical content, securing a commitment from those responsible for that content. Together they debated films and produced a short film. In a project developed by Fábio Rodrigues, on the other hand, some teachers declined to participate. 41 Yet, to him, this ended up fostering greater personal and emotional involvement from the students engaged in activities that dealt with the issue of sexuality, a taboo subject in school that was nevertheless crucial to the lives of these young people. In the school auditorium, he screened short films to generate an experience that led to the collective creation of objects such as photos, sounds, and drawings:

The films presented the possibility of releasing something that the classroom restrained. It was inevitable that painful individual experiences would manifest.... I returned home exhausted. It wasn’t just the film, it was thinking about how to deal with others, with what the films summoned. 42

What is most surprising in the analysis of these project reports is the disposition of UFRB students despite the obstacles they faced, including the university’s lack of resources and the Brazilian government’s neglect of public schools. They had to navigate their surroundings on foot, carrying heavy equipment, and they often encountered spaces that lacked the physical and human resources to support the activities they had planned.

To foster the development of more extension and community outreach activities, in 2017 CachoeiraDoc used its own financial resources to launch a call for applications for projects that would focus on festival awareness and audience formation. One of the challenges we faced was connecting with the various institutions, people, or spaces that had already developed social, educational, or artistic activities in the region. While the call was open to proposals from CAHL
students, teachers, and technicians, most of the projects came from the students themselves, showing that the seeds of interest in extension and community outreach activities had already been sown among them. Many of the projects proposed were transdisciplinary, such as the Social Trainer project, which brought together film and social work students to think about the issues experienced by socially vulnerable women through audiovisual production.\textsuperscript{43}

For the Cinema e Vizinhança (Cinema and Neighborhood) project, three students incorporated a young nurse into the team. Together they went through the streets of Cachoeira and São Félix, entering diners, houses, and terreiros to watch and talk about cinema with the owners and dwellers of the spaces.\textsuperscript{44} The films and the chat, accompanied by some snacks after the screening, turned these young “outsiders” into neighbors. Another shift occurred in this encounter as well. Instead of people going to the theater to watch a movie that is available at a given time, they now chose which film from the students’ collection they wanted to watch and set a time to install the projector in their homes. Students and homemakers sewed together the screen, and children interacted with the film, especially through dancing. The power and knowledge relations between the university and the community were challenged and redesigned. For project creator Olívia Barcellos,

\textit{We believe that the spectator from the local community, as a host—which is primarily their position in this context—can receive the cultural activity brought by the academic community from a place of belonging and not as a visitor, a foreigner in their own land. Hence, by finding their place of belonging in relation to that activity, they are able to represent this practice with greater autonomy and, consequently, bring a more relevant contribution to the intended cultural integration.}\textsuperscript{45}

Beyond just providing social interaction, these encounters further fuel the university’s community outreach program. The academic community and local community coexist and exchange experiences and knowledge. As Fábio Rodrigues recalls, boys who had never seen a professional camera in their lives have learned how to tell their stories in movies. Homemakers who previously did not believe that cinema was a place for them have come to debate films with the enthusiasm typical of initiates. Teachers and students have learned new skills by communing with people who also know how to teach about the world and life, and who, for many generations, have mastered such sophisticated sciences as the musicality of samba de roda, the medicinal power of plants, the flavors of local cuisine, and the power of Recôncavo spirituality. And that is how we have learned how to teach our comrades.
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Ana Rosa Marques is a documentary filmmaker and a professor in the Film and Audiovisual Program of the Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia (Brazil). She is one of the coordinators of CachoeiraDoc (Cachoeira Documentary Film Festival) and served as coordinator for the SOCINE (Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos de Cinema e Audiovisual/Brazilian Society for the Study of Cinema and Audiovisual) from 2020 to 2022, editing thematic seminars. She holds a BA in communications from the Universidade Federal da Bahia, an MA in communications from the Universidade Federal Fluminense, and a doctorate in communications from the Universidade Federal da Bahia.

TRANSLATOR BIO

Isabel Machado is a cultural historian who specializes in the fields of gender and sexuality and celebration studies, and currently investigates carnivals and drag competitions. Her first book, Carnival in Alabama: Marked Bodies and Invented Traditions in Mobile (2023), uses Mardi Gras as a vehicle to understand social and cultural changes in Mobile, Alabama (USA) in the second half of the 20th century.

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Western-Centrism and the Global Queer Film Festival Circuit: The Example of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

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ABSTRACT

Since they emerged in the late 1970s, queer film festivals have turned into a global cultural activity. A complex worldwide network of queer film festivals has also formed. This article establishes the framework of the global queer film festival circuit to examine the hegemonic relationships it produces. The global queer film festival circuit comprises top-tier film festivals and second-tier queer film festivals. As the first queer-themed film festival in Asia, the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGFF) is situated in a subordinate and passive position. Aiming to emphasize the unbalanced relationship among queer film festivals on a global scale, this article argues that due to commercial considerations and the lack of festival resources, the HKLGFF’s programming is dominated by the choices of top-tier film festivals and thus reproduces Western-centrism. Through the analysis of the HKLGFF’s programming process and criteria, it also demonstrates how top-tier film festivals influence the programming of second-tier queer film festivals by dominating the global market of queer films. Overall, this article expands the concept of the queer film festival circuit, addressing the significance of small-scale queer film festivals in the global South to worldwide queer culture as well as the global circulation of queer films.
Western-Centrism and the Global Queer Film Festival Circuit: The Example of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

Heshen Xie

Introduction

As a cultural activity, film festivals generally showcase series of films from certain periods and certain places. The first Venice International Film Festival (Venice) took place in 1932, marking the birth of the contemporary film festival model. Queer film festivals, as a type of identity-based film festival, were born in the late 1970s, when festivals began to diversify. Stuart Richards has proposed a general definition of the queer festival, referring to it as "a series of film screenings that primarily focus on queer themes." In 1977, the very first queer-themed film festival, the Gay Film Festival of Super-8 Films (now known as the Frameline Film Festival) took place in San Francisco. Skadi Loist has described it as "a prototype for LGBT/Q film festivals that followed," as it "performed a social cinematic space where queer artists making films put on a public and inclusive (rather than private and exclusive) show and thus opened up a counterpublic sphere." Queer film festivals first emerged in the West and gradually spread to other parts of the world beginning in the 1990s. Globally, the scale and influence of queer film festivals have increased, and the 2010s witnessed the formation of regional and global networking among queer film festivals. After more than forty years, queer film festivals are no longer simple, informal events organized by a few grassroots queer activists; instead, they have become a major part of the queer movement and the global queer film industry.

The first and longest-running queer film festival in East Asia, the Gay and Lesbian Films Season, now known as the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGFF), was founded by Edward Lam, a well-known Hong Kong film director and gay activist, in January 1989, when the phenomenon of hosting queer film festivals had just reached areas outside the West. The Hong Kong Arts Centre and Lam took full responsibility for organizing the HKLGFF from 1989 to 1998 (the period I refer to as the HKAC period). At that time, the HKLGFF was an experimental, politically oriented cultural event. However, due to various factors (including lack of funding), Lam left the HKLGFF, and the festival faced suspension in 1999. The HKLGFF experienced a rebirth in the new millennium, when Raymond Yeung and Walter Baranchet took over the festival in 2000. The festival then commenced its commercial transformation. As one of the main stakeholders in the HKLGFF in the 2000s, Fortissimo Films has played a significant role in the festival's commercialization, building up the connection between the HKLGFF and other film distribution companies in particular. Since then, the HKLGFF has gradually transformed into a self-sustained, market-driven queer film festival. Concurrently, queer film festivals have proliferated across Asia. The connection between the HKLGFF and other regional and global (queer) film festivals has been increasingly intimate.

When clicking on the official website of the HKLGFF or scanning its catalogue, visitors might notice that some film festivals’ names are repeatedly mentioned on the program page, including the Berlin International Film Festival (the Berlinale), Cannes Film Festival (Cannes), the Frameline Film Festival (Frameline), and the Outfest Los Angeles LGBTQ Film Festival (Outfest). In the HKLGFF 2018 program, for example, among twenty-eight selected feature-length queer films,
ten had been previously programmed by Outfest. The other frequently mentioned film festivals included Frameline (three mentions) and the Berlinale (two mentions). Hence, one can wonder if the HKLGFF’s programmers prefer to select films that have been previously featured at well-known Western film festivals. Given these discursive connections, this article raises two fundamental questions: How does the HKLGFF construct its program? And what is the relationship between the HKLGFF and other film festivals around the world?

Mainly inspired by Loist’s and Antoine Damiens’ discussions on the queer film festival circuit, this article proposes the concept of the global queer film festival circuit to emphasize the unbalanced relationship among queer film festivals on a global scale. The global queer film festival circuit comprises top-tier film festivals and second-tier queer film festivals, with the HKLGFF situated in a comparatively subordinate and passive position. This article argues that, due to commercial considerations and the lack of festival resources, the HKLGFF’s programming is dominated by the choices of top-tier film festivals and thus reproduces a Western-centric approach. Regarding its theoretical contribution, for one thing, this article seeks to extend the concept of the queer film festival circuit to a global context, highlighting the significance of small-scale queer film festivals to the circuit. It also identifies the hegemony existing in the circuit and attempts to counteract the Western-centric trend of film festival studies in general.

### Understanding the Global Queer Film Festival Circuit

The general understanding of “circuit” refers to the way some elements flow along a specific and closed route. Abé Markus Nornes observes that reference to a “circuit” in the film festival context began in 1959, implying “a kind of free circulation, an open system of film prints moving effortlessly around the earth. They alight at one node or another for projection and enjoyment, before returning on their circuitous path home.”¹¹ Nornes’s description highlights the flow of films, which is key to understanding the concept of the film festival circuit. Scholars differ in their definitions and interpretations of the film festival circuit and greatly contribute to the understanding of this term. Thomas Elsaesser’s work laid the foundation for analyzing film festival networks (or the film festival circuit). Illustrating how the networking of film festivals has been shaped, Elsaesser used “nodes” as a metaphor to describe the position of every film festival on the circuit, and highlighted how films flowed within it from one node to another.¹² Since then, this metaphor has been frequently adopted by other film festival scholars. Marijke de Valck regards the film festival network as an “alternative” distribution and exhibition network that “both operates with and against Hollywood.”¹³ In other words, having a complex relationship with Hollywood, the intent and operation of the film festival network is different from traditional theatrical networks. As de Valck further observes, “by travelling the circuit, a film can accumulate value via the snowball effect. The more praise, prizes and buzz a film attracts, the more attention it is likely to receive at other festivals.”¹⁴ In practical respects, this accumulation of value is the pursuit of the films in the flow of the film festival circuit.

The elements circulating within the film festival circuit are more than just films. Loist regards the film festival circuit as “the trajectory of a specific product through a global network of festivals,”¹⁵ with the “specific product” mainly referring to films. In addition to film circulation, there are two additional elements that move around the film festival circuit. Dina Iordanova compares the film
festival circuit to a "festival treadmill," arguing that the circuit can be only constituted if personnel (such as consultants, programmers, critics, and buyers) keep travelling to different film festivals. Moreover, developing Iordanova's argument, Loist points out three elements—films, people, and money—that construct the festival film circuit and circulate within it. This article regards all the elements that circulate within the circuit as film festival resources. Following Loist's clarification, it suggests that three main types of festival resources flow in the film festival circuit, including money (sponsorships, public funding, box office revenues), personnel (festival organizers, volunteers, film-industry insiders, audiences and tourists, critics and scholars, and media representatives), and films (a category which also includes festival logos and awards). Hence, the film festival circuit is a trajectory constructed by the flows of these three types of film festival resources. More importantly, the films that travel around the circuit are the core resource in the film festival since the flow of films mobilizes the flow of other kinds of film festival resources.

In addition, the film festival circuit involves hierarchical relationships. Regarding the relationships between film festivals, Loist highlights the hierarchy within the film festival circuit. Not every film festival is on an equal level with the other film festivals in the circuit; instead, hierarchical relations have existed ever since the circuit started to emerge. The way films flow embodies the hierarchy of the film festival circuit. In other words, films circulate from the film festivals situated in the dominant position of the circuit to those in the secondary position. The possession of film festival resources and festival influence both determine the position of a film festival in the circuit. World premieres are the significant and scarce kind of festival resource that film festivals fight for. According to Loist, "festivals usually aim for international or national premieres because timeliness secures interest and media coverage in this era of the 'attention economy.'" The hierarchy in the film festival circuit rests "on an ideology of premiere status." The ability to attract more world premieres can sustain the dominant position of a film festival in the circuit.

According to Jenni Olson, the queer film festival circuit "came into its own in the early 1990s, just as the 'New Queer Cinema' achieved mainstream recognition." Olson further argues that the queer film festival circuit has become a "queer film ecosystem," explaining, "the film and video makers create the movies, the festival organizers show the movies, the distributors circulate the movies, the publicists draw attention to them so that the gay movie lover will plunk down a few dollars to see the movies, so that the whole process can happen again." Faced with the pressure of other distributing platforms, such as theaters, DVDs, and the Internet, the emergence of a queer film ecosystem shows that queer film festivals can serve as a well-developed alternative distribution path for queer films.

The queer film ecosystem has laid the foundation for subsequent scholarly research on the queer film festival circuit. Developing Olson's concept, Loist suggests that the queer film ecosystem "operates largely on community logic" but that the "ecosystem does not work completely independently of the larger media industry and distribution circuits." The queer film festival circuit serves the interests of queer communities through the selection and worldwide promotion of specific queer films. Damiens argues that the ecosystem "depends on an interplay between various regimes of taste" ("relationship between cultural and economic capital"). To sustain queer films and festivals, the queer film festival circuit operates through both cultural and commercial considerations. Moreover, the interplay in cultural and economic regimes involves conflict, so the queer film festival circuit seeks balance. Both Loist and Damiens concentrate
on the distribution side of the queer film festival circuit, demonstrating how it contributes to the development of queer films as well as queer communities and culture.

Based on these theoretical discussions about the (queer) film festival circuit, in this article, I foreground the concept of the global queer film festival circuit. Borrowing the metaphor of the treadmill used by Iordanova, the global queer film festival circuit can be understood as a treadmill constructed by the flow of festival resources mobilized by the flow of queer films. Whether it is for the general film festival circuit or the queer film festival circuit, most of the research is still distinctly Euro-American-centered. Nornes argues that the geopolitical structure of the world is embodied in the Western-centrism of the international film festival circuit, in the form of “first Europe, then elsewhere.” The geopolitical disparities lead to relatively modest attention being paid by the film industry and academia when it comes to film festivals beyond the West. Nevertheless, in practice, the queer film festival circuit covers most continents in the world. The intention behind proposing the concept of the global queer film festival circuit is to expand existing discussions to include a mass of small-scale queer film festivals in the global South, which have been greatly influenced by the global queer film festival circuit. For instance, Qin points out the lack of works that highlight the multifaceted and complex nature of queer film festivals in different cities connecting different parts of Asia. Jia Tan has explored how the Asia Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance contributes to the rise of Asian queer film festivals to challenge the spatio-temporal hierarchy of the film festival circuit. At a time when regional connections between queer film festivals are on the rise, these queer film festivals in the global South as the main part of the global queer film festival circuit cannot be overlooked. Additionally, this framework particularly accentuates how small-scale queer film festivals in the global South are influenced by major film festivals in the West.

The Hierarchy of the Global Queer Film Festival Circuit

The global queer film festival circuit involves a strongly hierarchical relationship, which is shaped by the possession of film festival resources and influence. The global queer film festival circuit is constituted by two tiers: top-tier film festivals and second-tier queer film festivals. Top-tier film festivals of the global queer film festival circuit can be divided into two kinds, including top-tier general international film festivals and top-tier queer film festivals. Highlighting the complexity of the actual circulation of queer films, Loist and Ger Zielinski observe that “the queer film festival circuit is connected to the larger film festival circuit, but it also forms a separate parallel entity. This network can be further differentiated into several levels.” When queer films commence their journey along the global queer film festival circuit, they not only circulate among queer film festivals; instead, most also circulate between both general film festivals and queer-themed film festivals.

Regarding the top-tier general international film festivals, the “Big Three” (the Berlin International Film Festival, the Cannes Film Festival, and the Venice Film Festival) that occupy the predominant positions in the global queer film festival circuit are the most representative. As queer film festivals cannot compete with the global media attention that these major film festivals draw, a common marketing and distribution strategy is for film distribution companies to first submit their queer films to international major film festivals. With the rise of interest in

28. Skadi Loist and Ger Zielinski, “On the Development of Queer Film Festivals and Their Media Activism,” in Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism, ed. Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 53.
queer films, the Big Three have gradually established queer-themed awards as official awards within their festivals. In 1987, for example, the Berlinale created a specific section and award for queer-themed films in its official program: the Teddy Awards. As Damiens states, due to the establishment of the Teddy Awards, the Berlinale has gradually become “the main market for gay and lesbian films.”

In addition to the Berlinale, many queer films have been programmed by Cannes and Venice since the 1990s, and some have even won major official awards. In seeking inclusivity, Venice and Cannes have each set up queer-themed awards, the Queer Lion and the Queer Palm, in 2007 and 2010 respectively.

In addition to the Big Three, some large-scale international film festivals, such as the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), can be considered top-tier film festivals in this circuit. B. Ruby Rich identified the rise of New Queer Cinema at the 1991 Toronto International Film Festival, observing that, “there, suddenly, was a flock of films that were doing something new, renegotiating subjectivities, annexing whole genres, revising histories in their image.”

To address the diversity of festival programs, the TIFF screens a number of queer-themed films every year. The TIFF can be a suitable choice by film distribution companies for world premieres, as the festival attracts hundreds of thousands of attendees. The TIFF has also collaborated for many years with the Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival, one of the largest global queer film festivals.

Top-tier queer film festivals also occupy a dominant position in the global queer film festival circuit. Compared to most queer film festivals around the world, top-tier queer film festivals possess an abundance of festival resources as well as globally profound impacts. Frameline and Outfest are two iconic top-tier queer film festivals in the circuit. As the first group of queer film festivals in North America, both now have become the largest queer film festivals in the world, screening hundreds of queer films and attracting tens of thousands of audiences annually.

Compared to top-tier general film festivals, top-tier queer film festivals have another role in contributing to the circulation of queer films. As discussed, increasing numbers of queer films prefer to hold their world premieres at the Big Three festivals with the aim of receiving bigger festival buzz. These queer films continue to be showcased in queer-themed film festivals. Although the large proportion of the films they program have been screened previously, Frameline and Outfest work as integration and promotion mechanisms for queer films on the global queer film festival circuit. They assemble and reselect queer films from the last few months of the previous year and the first half of the current year, and then promote them to other queer film festivals. Indeed, some queer films actually choose to have their world premieres at Frameline and Outfest. Even though both festivals are held in North America, their programming scope encompasses the whole world, including the global South. Their globally significant influence can attract queer films from Asia, South America, and Africa, which maintains their worldwide impact on the circuit as well.

Regarding the actual influence of the top-tier film festivals in the circuit, they are also considered to be dominant in the global market of queer films. In other words, the queer films programmed by top-tier film festivals are comparatively more accessible to the global market. The top-tier film festivals are the first choice for many queer films to commence their circulation owing to their vast festival resources and accumulated influence. Hence, top-tier film festivals can select films of relatively good quality from a wide range of submissions from around the world. At the
same time, the reputation that top-tier film festivals have built up over the years ensures that their selections can be well promoted in the global market. Moreover, since top-tier film festivals work with a wide range of journalists from all over the world, their programmed queer films can receive worldwide media exposure. Similarly, as Diane Burgess notices, “smaller festivals are able to draw on the global media attention generated by the A-list festivals in order to attract local audience attention to their program selections.” When other, smaller-scale queer film festivals select queer films previously programmed by top-tier film festivals, the resources required to promote these films can be saved. The top-tier film festivals can control the trends of the global market.

Furthermore, queer awards play an important role in the global queer film festival circuit by increasing the commercial value of the films. According to de Valck and Soeteman, “winning the award leads to media exposure, best of fest screenings and better distribution.” For small-scale queer film festivals, programming films that won awards at top-tier international film festivals like the Big Three can help sell more tickets. Nevertheless, queer awards are comparatively scarce, as in practice only a few queer films find themselves eligible for awards. Moreover, winning awards is unpredictable in film festival competitions. Hence, from a practical perspective, being programmed by top-tier international film festivals (the Big Three in particular) is both more controllable and more significant than winning awards. For queer films in the circuit, festival logos become an alternative to film awards for accumulating symbolic capital, which can translate into box office revenues during their circulation along the circuit. Both festival logos and film awards are significant to the global distribution of queer films, since only a small proportion of queer films can be awarded prizes while festival logos are comparatively easier to achieve.

There are over two hundred queer-themed film festivals currently held around the world, while only a few film festivals, as previously mentioned, occupy dominant positions in the global queer film festival circuit. Most queer film festivals around the world are considered second-tier queer film festivals in this circuit. That is to say, the global queer film festival circuit can be seen to have a pyramidal structure. A few top-tier film festivals dominate the flow of festival resources (queer films, in particular) within the global queer film festival circuit. The scale of second-tier queer film festivals is generally small; they generally possess extremely limited festival resources. Many of them are located outside Europe or North America. As the first queer film festival in Asia, the HKLGFF is situated in the second tier in the global queer film festival circuit. As previously argued, the ability to host world premieres, the possession of film festival resources, and the status of the film festival influence all contribute strongly to festival stratification.

The HKLGFF’s status as a second-tier festival in the global queer film festival circuit can be unpacked from two perspectives. First, the scale of the HKLGFF is comparatively small and the festival possesses limited festival resources. As table 1 below shows, concerning the number of programmed films, apart from the 2020 edition, the HKLGFF screened around twenty-eight feature-length queer films on average from 2015 to 2019. By contrast, the Berlinalle programmed at least twenty-seven new queer-themed feature-length films in 2019, even though it is not a queer-themed film festival. Among top-tier queer-themed film festivals, the BFI Flare Festival screened fifty feature-length films in 2019, and Frameline programmed ninety-one films in 2018. Moreover, the HKLGFF falls into the category of an “audience festival,” since there is no market section for film companies to buy films and for filmmakers to look for investment. Hence there
are no profits available to the HKLGFF from a market section. Although the festival can sustain itself mainly based on box office revenues, the HKLGFF still lacks festival resources (funding, in particular) to offer more services—one result, for instance, is that the festival fails to provide Chinese subtitles for every film. In general, the HKLGFF lacks all kinds of festival resources, such as funding, human resources, contacts with filmmakers around the world, and press cooperation.

More importantly, the HKLGFF lacks the ability to host world or even regional premieres. Analyzing the festival programs of the HKLGFF from 2016 to 2020, I categorized the feature-length films into four types, based on whether the film had been screened at other film festivals or publicly screened in other areas. Table 1 shows that over 70 percent of programmed films had been previously screened at top-tier film festivals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL FILMS</th>
<th>FILMS SELECTED BY TOP-TIER FILM FESTIVALS</th>
<th>FILMS ONLY CHOSEN BY NON-TOP-TIER FILM FESTIVALS</th>
<th>FILMS HAVING WORLD PREMIERE SCREENINGS AT HKLGFF</th>
<th>FILMS NOT SCREENED AT OTHER QUEER FILM FESTIVALS BUT OPENLY RELEASED IN OTHER COUNTRIES OR AREAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These top-tier film festivals typically include both types of top-tier film festivals of the global queer film festival circuit, such as the Berlinale, Cannes, Sundance, the TIFF, and Outfest, Frameline, and BFI Flare (top queer-themed film festivals). In addition, no more than 14 percent of the selected films had been screened at non-top-tier film festivals (including just one in 2016). These non-top-tier film festivals include general regional film festivals, such as the Busan International Film Festival, the Golden Horse Film Festival, the Osaka International Film Festival, and the Champs-Élysées Film Festival, as well as regional-based queer film festivals, like Rainbow Reel Tokyo, the Taiwan International Queer Film Festival (TIQFF), and the Tel Aviv International LGBT Film Festival (TLVFest). Regarding world premieres, the HKLGFF has only programmed three feature-length queer films with world premiere priority in the six years studied, including Berlin Drifters (2017), Fathers (2016) and Love Next Door 2 (2016). Although the HKLGFF is one of the oldest and largest queer film festivals in Asia, the festival still fails to attract Asian queer films that it might showcase through world premieres. Film distribution companies for Asian queer films prefer to submit to top-tier film festivals first before they tour the global queer film festival circuit.
Programming Process and Strategies of the HKLGFF

The timing (when and how long the festival is) and scale (how many films are shown) of the festival are the basis for the festival's programming. Before 2014, the HKLGFF was held around mid-November, but since then, the festival has been held in mid- or late September. From the perspective of scheduling, therefore, the HKLGFF appears in the latter part of the annual festival calendar. As previously stated, festival programs frequently mention the names of top-tier film festivals, such as the Berlinale, Frameline and Outfest, since these (queer) film festivals are organized in the first half of the calendar year. The whole process of preparation for the HKLGFF mostly works in accord with the annual timing of festivals in the global queer film festival circuit. Furthermore, in terms of the scale of the HKLGFF, as discussed in the previous section, the festival showcases a limited number of queer films. Four or five programmers select around twenty-seven feature-length films every year. According to Lillian Liu, who works as a programmer for lesbian and transgender short films, every programmer has their own type(s) of films that they program, and if programmers encounter some good films that are the specific type programmed by other programmer, they will recommend the films to that programmer.35

Regarding the HKLGFF’s programming process, there is no open submission for feature-length queer films, and the HKLGFF mainly relies on visiting the top-tier film festivals to find suitable films. The festival team usually follows the latest line-up of major film festivals. Moreover, as circumstances permit, HKLGFF programmers attend some major film festivals to watch the latest films, then ask for contacts of filmmakers or distributors through paths provided by the hosting film festivals for screening permissions when they identify suitable films for the HKLGFF. Sophia Shek, a festival programmer for transgender and lesbian films, recognized the difficulty of this process, claiming that it is more difficult to look for suitable films for the HKLGFF at small-scale and local queer film festivals.36 Joe Lam, the current festival director of the HKLGFF, admitted that the HKLGFF lacks connections with other filmmakers and distribution companies from all over the world.37 The HKLGFF demonstrates how small-scale queer film festivals in the global queer film festival circuit process their own programming under most conditions. Due to the scarcity of festival resources as well as global impacts, second-tier queer film festivals like the HKLGFF seldom become the first choice of film distribution companies to arrange world premieres. Thus, the festival does not provide a path for feature-length film submission. The process of the HKLGFF’s programming significantly relies on connections with top-tier film festivals. This reliance highlights the passive position of second-tier queer film festivals in the circuit.

To maintain the festival’s programming style and conduct the programming process more efficiently, the programming team for each festival abides by relatively consistent programming criteria. Since Lam works as the festival director for the HKLGFF, according to Shek, Lam sets the tone for the festival, and “Joe has the final say” during the programming process.38 In terms of the programming criteria of the HKLGFF, Lam states that the primary criterion for the team to select a film is “whether the films will touch Hong Kong audiences’ hearts.”39 He further explains, “being able to see yourself, your friends or your family’s experiences in a film is essential; it makes you really connect to the film. In the selection process we had to give up several good productions because the themes were too distant to
Hong Kong audiences emotionally.” The HKLGFF aims to program films that reflect the lives of local queer communities and the issues they face. This is a core obligation of audience-based and locally served queer film festivals. Indeed, from a commercial perspective, queer films reflecting local gay scenes and issues are also relatively more likely to attract audiences.

Another important programming criterion of the HKLGFF is to program the latest queer films. Lam particularly mentioned that the HKLGFF prefers to select feature-length queer films that were released in the previous year or two. Table 2 categorizes the programmed films according to when they were first screened and shows that the HKLGFF prefers to program recent queer feature-length films.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>FILMS SHOWCASED IN SAME CALENDAR YEAR</th>
<th>FILMS SHOWCASED IN THE PREVIOUS CALENDAR YEAR</th>
<th>FILMS SHOWCASED TWO OR MORE YEARS BEFORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
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The table demonstrates that, except for 2019, over half of the films programmed by HKLGFF were only showcased in that same calendar year. At the HKLGFF 2019, there was only one documentary, *Monument of Pride*, that had been screened two years previously, in 2017. As the HKLGFF is scheduled in late September, there is enough time for the team to check the programs of Frameline and Outfest, which assemble many queer films from all over the world in the same calendar year. Moreover, queer films from the previous year that have not been screened in Hong Kong cinemas or online platforms are also considered by the HKLGFF’s programmers. Faced with threats from online streaming platforms and piracy, programming the latest films is a commercial consideration for the HKLGFF.

The programming of the HKLGFF takes the prospective commercial value of the programmed films into account. The films programmed by the top-tier film festivals in the circuit receive more attention in the market globally, which reflects the dominance of these Western-based major film festivals over the business of second-tier queer film festivals. As previously discussed, the top-tier film festivals in the circuit can be regarded as market dominators. The programming of the top-tier film festivals privileges certain films in the global circulation of queer films. More significantly, awards are more likely to contribute to a film’s commercial value since awards can catch media attention and become a selling point for the film. *Blue is the Warmest Colour* is an excellent example, as ticket sales for this film were outstanding at the 2013 HKLGFF. Lam observes that while lesbian films are usually hard to sell tickets for, *Blue is the Warmest Colour* performed extremely well at the HKLGFF. Furthermore, Lam emphasizes that “some audience expressed that they came to watch *Blue is the Warmest Colour* particularly because it won the Palme d’Or at Cannes that year in 2013 [my translation].” In addition, *120 Beats Per Minute*
was another commercial success in 2017, having also won the Grand Jury Prize and the Queer Palm at Cannes. HKLGFF audiences have flocked to films that received awards at Cannes a few months earlier, demonstrating the global impact of major film festivals in the circuit.

From the perspective of the local audience, seeing the names of top-tier film festivals can be regarded as a kind of guarantee of film quality. Two audience members that I interviewed, G and K, considered that they had been at least partly influenced by these highlighted top-tier film festivals in HKLGFF promotional materials when deciding which films they would watch. According to G,

I don't know much about film festivals, I have heard of Cannes, Venice and Berlin[ale], because these three film festivals are always heard in reports. I think the choices of these three film festivals should guarantee a certain quality. Therefore, when I was choosing which films I wanted to watch at the HKLGFF, if the promotional materials mentioned one of these three film festivals, it made me more interested in the films [my translation].

G particularly mentioned the significant impact of the Big Three, indicating that being programmed by these top-tier film festivals becomes a selling point. Similarly, K also declared:

The HKLGFF only provides a brief synopsis, one or two photos and a trailer. Whether or not it is mentioned in the introduction [on web pages or catalogue] that the film has been selected and screened by some well-known film festivals becomes an important index, especially if the film has won awards in the world-renowned film festivals [my translation].

Both G and K acknowledged this promotional strategy. The awards won at top-tier film festivals can be used as a significant selling point, even though the subject matter of the films may not be popular in the market. For business considerations and festival sustainability, commercially run second-tier queer film festivals such as the HKLGFF follow the market trends shaped by top-tier film festivals and program films that have high commercial potential.

Overall, commercial factors have played a significant role in the HKLGFF’s programming. For festival sustainability in commercially oriented, neoliberal Hong Kong, the commercialized HKLGFF adopts what Frederik Dhaenens has termed “traditionalist programming strategies.” The festival has programmed increasing numbers of queer films with highly commercial value that employ naked muscular gay bodies to sell in the West. Yau Ching has criticized the HKLGFF for having been "programmed" to take white, mainly gay, content and for having begun to include a more lesbian content only in the 2000s. Richards has criticized the commercial and gay-oriented programming style of the HKLGFF in the new millennium, reflecting that the HKLGFF strictly follows the logic of the pink economy. In other words, commercial considerations result in the marginalization of lesbian and transgender representation. At the same time, this programming style reveals that the HKLGFF mainly targets gay men as the audience base. As Qin claims, the HKLGFF’s programs are “gay-centric,” “primarily screening films for the gay male community.” Since the HKLGFF began to recognize this issue in the late 2010s, the number of lesbian and transgender feature-length films has increased slightly. Nevertheless, Western gay films with commercial value still dominate the HKLGFF’s programs.
Western-centrism in the Global Queer Film Festival Circuit

Under pressure from top-tier film festivals, small-scale queer film festivals like the HKLGFF reproduce Western-centric approaches in their programming process. As discussed in the second section, top-tier film festivals in the circuit are all major (queer) film festivals in the West. “Western-centrism” is a commonly used critical term in film festival studies and queer studies that reflects unbalanced geopolitical power relations. From the industrial perspective, Western-centrism can be understood as the dominance of Western queer films and non-Western queer films selected by the West. The market for queer films in the West is relatively large, with a significant number of queer films produced in the West every year. There are more resources for queer film production and distribution. The queer films produced in the West reflect the stories of queer communities in the West. Furthermore, the Western-based top-tier film festivals control queer films in the global South. There were increasing numbers of queer films from Asia and South America programmed by top-tier film festivals in the circuit in the 2010s. Only a small proportion of queer films in the global South can circulate outside local or regional areas. In their selection of non-Western queer films, Western programmers more or less consider whether the subject matter or cinematic forms of these films will be accessible to local (Western) audiences. There are more non-Western queer films (amateur productions in particular) that do not receive global attention. As previously discussed, top-tier film festivals in the circuit financially or technically sponsor queer film production outside the West. This is one way in which the West interferes with the production of non-Western queer films. Overall, Western representations, stories, and aesthetics dominate the global circulation of queer films.

In terms of impact on small-scale queer film festivals in the global South, such as the HKLGFF, Western-centrism can lead to a lack of focus on local or regional content. Table 3 categorizes films according to production location and illustrates that, although the HKLGFF’s programs indeed cover most parts of the world, the majority of the films’ stories take place in North America and Europe.

The table further shows that the number of queer films located in a Chinese context is quite limited. Even with the addition of Korean and Japanese queer films, East Asian queer films still make up a small percentage of the HKLGFF’s annual program. The intention of the HKLGFF may be to program queer films that “touch Hong Kong audiences’ heart,” but the HKLGFF overwhelmingly presents stories of queer life in the West. Regarding Western-centric programs, Day Wong criticizes the HKLGFF for overly relying on Western queer culture and for having “failed to capture the Chinese experience of same-sex desire and relationships.” Qin further argues that “this lack of onscreen representation of the local LGBT community and a favouring of Western cinema could alienate the Hong Kong tongzhi community.” In other words, these Western queer films do not necessarily reflect the experience of local queer communities. Although queer people around the world share certain similarities regarding queer living and culture, the comparative data in table 3 still raises the question, in terms of the Western-centric programming of the HKLGFF, of how many of these foreign films represent the difficulties that Hong Kong queer communities face.
TABLE 3: Production Location of Films, HKLGFF 2016–20

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<tr>
<th></th>
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Western-centrism in the circuit can lead to homogenization of programs as well. This homogenization can be approached in two ways. First, the homogenization of programs can be understood as the similarity between top-tier film festival and second-tier queer film festival programs. As mentioned at the start of this article, the 2018 HKLGFF promotional materials mentioned Outfest ten times. Eighteen (over 64 percent) of the HKLGFF’s twenty-eight selected feature-length films were screened at Outfest, around three months before the opening of the HKLGFF. Second, homogenization can also reveal the similarity between second-tier queer film festival programs. For instance, in 2016, the TIQFF programmed eighteen feature-length queer films in total, eight of which were programmed by the HKLGFF three months later. In addition, Front Cover (2015), programmed by the TIQFF in 2016, was the Opening Film of the HKLGFF in 2015. This homogenization of programs also indicates the dominance of Western, urban, middle-class queer representations in commercial cinema and the marginalization of queers of color, working-class, and non-Western representations. Furthermore, due to the unique societal context and the various levels of development among queer movements and queer rights, each queer film festival has its own specialty. As a kind of audience festival, second-tier queer film festivals respond to the needs of local queer communities. Nevertheless, due to the homogenization of programs on the global scale, second-tier queer film festivals fail to capture the sense of local queer communities and culture. In other words, homogenization reveals the lack of investment in or engagement with local, regional, and independent queer productions.

In general, Western-centrism reveals how global queerness has been reproduced in a Hong Kong context, which is the greatest concern for the HKLGFF. These Western-based top-tier film festivals control the programming process of second-tier queer film festivals. Thus, the Western understanding of queerness has radiated outward through the Western-dominated global circulation of queer films. However, Natalie Oswin notes that global queer culture and local
queer specialty are not opposed to each other, and that the globalization of queer culture is not an utterly overwhelming force. Lisa Rofel argues that the globalization of Western queerness is a process that is not without its obstacles, when she analyzes the relationship between gay and lesbian identities and neoliberalism in China. The force of local specificities in shaping local queer identity and culture cannot be ignored. Especially within the global force of the Westernized queerness, second-tier queer film festivals in the global South have a greater need to respond to the demands of local queer communities and to highlight local specificities.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how Western-centrism is constructed in the HKLGFF and how it significantly influences the festival through its programming. The festival acknowledges and periodically attempts to redress the consequences of Western-centrism. To play an increasingly significant role in the global queer film festival circuit, the HKLGFF aims to work as the Asian version of Frameline or Outfest. Thus, mirroring the function of Frameline and Outfest in the global queer film festival circuit, the HKLGFF assembles films from other non-top-tier film festivals and becomes a platform to introduce these selected queer films globally. According to Lam, "some queer film festival programmers in the West contacted me and asked for the catalogues of the HKLGFF in order to have a sense of new Asian queer films and newcomer queer filmmakers from Asia [my translation]." Faced with the Western-centric landscape of queer cinema, the increasing number of Asian queer films and the expansion of the market make an Asian identity more significant to the global queer film festival circuit. Future analysis of the global circulation of queer films should pay more attention to queer regionalism, as it is the key to challenging Western-centrism in the circuit.

This article has expanded the concept of the global queer film festival circuit, addressing the significance of small-scale queer film festivals in the global South to worldwide queer culture as well as the global circulation of queer films. The unequal power relations in the global queer film festival circuit have resulted in small-scale queer film festivals operating under the constraints of other major film festivals. The article has identified the hegemony that second-tier queer film festivals endure from top-tier film festivals on programming. More significantly, it has demonstrated that the Western-centrism constructed in the circuit is not only reflected in Western film festivals’ control over the global flow of queer films, but also in the Western-dominated interpretation of queer issues and queer rights.
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Screening Inspiration: From Documentary Film Festivals to Carceral Setting

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ABSTRACT

Documentaries and film festivals embody in a concrete way Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of indignation, of denouncing injustice while also announcing possibilities. This article examines a study on the learning potential of documentary films for nine incarcerated women in a carceral setting who participated in a documentary film and discussion series. The impetus for this project came from a larger study of three documentary film festivals rooted in community development, activism, and social change. Like many attendees at these festivals, participants suggested that they gained information and new perspectives on themselves, others, and social issues. They reported being inspired by stories of adversity and appreciated the films as a form of informal learning. This article also discusses the unique challenges of adapting film showings to a carceral setting, including logistics and access, participant selection, and film selection.
Screening Inspiration: From Documentary Film Festivals to Carceral Setting

Carole Roy and Lindsay McVicar

Given the consistently positive feedback from attendees in Carole Roy’s previous funded qualitative study of three documentary festivals in small towns in different provinces of Canada (World Community Film Festival [WCFF], Courtenay, British Columbia; ReFrame, Peterborough, Ontario; and Antigonish International Film Festival, Antigonish, Nova Scotia), which included 141 attendees participating in a variety of interviews (ninety-four exit interviews, twenty-three in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, and four group interviews with twenty-four people), in an outreach we decided to share some of these documentaries with people in carceral settings.¹ As a volunteer-initiated, informal educational activity, between 2010 and 2017, Roy and another colleague showed seventeen documentaries to incarcerated women and three documentaries to incarcerated men. Inspired by the rich discussions after these showings, and as an expression of our practice as adult educators and social justice activists, including McVicar working with a group that advocates for maternal health for incarcerated women, this study examines what we learned behind the bars about the educational promise of documentary film showings and discussions with incarcerated women. We consider some of the unique challenges that coordinating film screenings in a carceral setting entailed, from participant and film selection to the power dynamics between ourselves and the participants and the ways we might approach this work in the future.

Documentary Film Festivals: Inspiring Critical Thinking

As film scholar Aida Vallejo’s excellent chapter on the history of documentary film festivals recently showed, these festivals have become popular around the world.² It is interesting to note that while Vallejo’s chapter focuses mostly on examples from highly urban settings, the WCFF started in 1991 in Courtenay, British Columbia, Canada, a small rural community of thirty thousand citizens at the time, two years before the first Hotdocs in urban Toronto in 1993, which takes place annually and has become the second largest documentary film festival in the world.³ This may indicate that innovation is not always from urban settings but can also take place in rural areas, even though these efforts remain largely invisible in academic analysis except in the field of community development.

The WCFF has been an annual event for more than thirty years and to its credit has remained grounded in community development and social justice education. The WCFF uses documentaries by independent filmmakers to make connections between local and international development issues as some of the founders were documentary filmmakers and/or community developers who had worked around the world. In the early 2000s, the festival shared its program with other small communities across Canada through its Travelling World Community Film Festival, including Peterborough, Ontario, and Antigonish, Nova Scotia.⁴ Unlike most film festivals discussed in Vallejo’s chapter, these three documentary film festivals have no corporate funding; instead, working-class organizers developed connections with local organizations and small businesses as sponsors to build their respective audience and to remain closely linked with their local community. For example, the Antigonish International Film Festival in a small rural town of four thousand people had a list of 115 sponsors: the public saw themselves and their interests

1. On Roy’s previous study, see Carole Roy, Documentary Film Festivals: Transformative Learning, Community Building & Solidarity (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), 13.
3. Ibid. On the WCFF, see https://worldcommunity.ca/film-festival/.
4. Roy, Documentary Film Festivals, 20, 22. On the ReFrame festival, see https://reframefilmfestival.ca/; and on the Antigonish International Film Festival, see https://antigonishfilmfestival.com/.
in the list of sponsors. An additional, and most important, aspect of this community fundraising in Peterborough and Antigonish was to be truly accessible to the public: even though the cost of a festival pass was low (a two-day pass was twenty Canadian dollars for those who were employed and five Canadian dollars for those who were not), they also allowed attendance by donation at the door, although they did not enforce donation and let people in for free, space permitting. These festivals also gave free festival passes to local organizations working with various marginalized groups.

The selected documentaries exposed individual and community struggles for social justice, as well as stories of resilience and actual victories, which, despite their inspiring examples, were rarely, if ever, found in more mainstream media. These were often documentaries featuring what film scholar Dina Iordanova calls “ordinary heroes.” These three festivals belong to what Iordanova refers to as “activist film festivals” as they “engaged in an effort to correct the record … for the benefit of improved public understanding. They are driven by intentionality, be it to increase awareness, to expose, to warn, to prevent and sometimes to change the course of events … [and] they embody the belief that film is powerful enough to have an impact.”

According to Roy, these festivals embodied in a concrete way world-renown Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of indignation, of denouncing injustice while also announcing possibilities. As Freire explained: “Changing the world implies a dialectic dynamic between denunciation of the dehumanizing situation and the announcing of its being overcome, indeed, of our dream.” A comment by Freirian scholar Daniel Schugurensky also exemplifies the importance of such a forum in the continued development of a democratic society: “Pluralistic citizenship acknowledges that democratic politics must allow for particularities and differences but at the same time must encourage common actions for collective benefit. This ‘unity in diversity’ approach nurtures cross-cultural dialogue and mutual respect … while it fosters joint struggles based on solidarity principles.”

Documentaries from independent filmmakers from diverse regions and cultures allow audiences to gain new perspectives and contribute to creating an atmosphere that normalizes a pluralistic context, where differences of race, culture, religion, sexuality, and language are the norm rather than the exception.

**Democratic Epistemology**

Documentaries and film festivals contribute to building social movements as they represent the process of knowledge democracy, which UNESCO co-chairs in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education Budd L. Hall and Rajesh Tandon define as “an alternative way to understand the place of knowledge at the heart of society.” Hall and Tandon further suggest that the concept of “knowledge democracy” offers “recognition that the creation, representation, and sharing of knowledge must move beyond the more common academic modes of production based on journal articles, conferences and books for academic audiences. Creative approaches to knowledge production and sharing as elaborated by [Darlene E.] Clover and others have been found to be very effective.” The enthusiastic reactions of attendees, as evidenced by the 141 interviews, spoke to valuable learning and change of perspectives, at times profound, which sometimes included a willingness for greater engagement. A sense of solidarity is key to engagement for social change. Interviewees in the previous study on documentary film festivals even suggested that the film festival in Courtenay helped to prevent burnout for activists.
as they got “a bit of reassurance that they are not alone” and had an opportunity “to recharge their batteries.”¹¹ This resonated with film scholar Leshu Torchin’s 2012 report of human rights activist Igor Blažević’s comment that such festivals “are places for renewal of commitment when one sheds the yoke of cynicism by watching empowering stories and mingling with equally committed people.”¹² While we recognize that documentaries, like all media and print productions, are mediated by filmmakers and authors who often have privileged identities, we also acknowledge that there are those who, although privileged, are committed to exercising critical thinking and paying attention to ethical considerations in order to publicize stories that may otherwise not see dissemination.

The study of the documentary film series in a carceral setting discussed in this article was inspired by the positive feedback reported by film attendees in numerous interviews in a previous study (as mentioned above). Partnership with a retired defense attorney led us to initiate film showings for incarcerated women and men a few times per year between 2010 and 2017. This was a volunteer activity to provide incarcerated people with an educational activity. In the words of Iordanova, “activism takes many shapes and forms.”¹³ Inspired by the insightful conversations after film showings over the years, which could not be written about since it was a volunteer project and not a research project, a study was developed to explore more systematically the learning potential of showing documentary films followed by discussions in a carceral setting.

Adapting Film Showings to the Carceral Setting

In 2019, with ethics approval from research ethics boards, we conducted a qualitative case study with a group of incarcerated women in an eastern Canadian correctional facility who met weekly over four weeks for a documentary film screening.¹⁴ We are required to not specify what type of institution (e.g., provincial jail versus federal prison) and its location in order to protect the confidentiality of participants; however, in this article we use the term “prison” for ease of use. We led a group discussion after each film to reflect and share ideas. In addition to discussions, each woman participated in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview at the end of the four-week series. The experience of taking film showings into the carceral context required adaptation to our conceptualization of the possibilities for films as a tool for learning and growth. Despite the ubiquity of the carceral setting as an institutional fixture in Western neoliberal democracies, citizens are unlikely to have lived experience with them unless they have been directly affected by the justice system. The prison abolitionist and activist Angela Davis spoke to the taken-for-granted nature of prisons, noting that “the prison is present in our lives and, at the same time, it is absent from our lives.”¹⁵ As adult educators, researchers, and Canadian citizens, we came to this study with a broad understanding of the nature of carceral settings, and previous experiences of showing films in a carceral setting helped us effectively navigate the carceral space to organize the project. Our experience highlighted the logistical requirements and coordination challenges that are different than those involved in organizing traditional film showings.

Access and Logistics

An initial consideration for bringing documentary films inside the prison was the question of gaining access. After approval from the university ethics board, formal permission was required by the correctional system for programming by outside organizations. We gained support from
senior corrections staff to conduct our study, which was followed by a nine-month wait for ethics approval from the authority managing research in the correctional system before a meeting could be arranged with senior staff at the specific institution to discuss logistics. Our experience resonated with the academic literature suggesting that gaining entry to prisons to deliver community-led programming can be quite complex. According to research in this area, the very existence of educational programs within prisons can be a highly political and contested subject. Decisions on whether and what programs are approved for delivery within prisons occur within “shifting policy environments” that can change over time. Given the primary security mandate of the prison, educational programs for incarcerated people “can often be seen as a ‘luxury’ and not a ‘right’” by prison administrators. Furthermore, the philosophical differences between prisons and educational community-based programs, which often contrast authoritarian goals with emancipatory ones related to freedom and personal growth, can create tensions and barriers that can affect program design and delivery.

Gaining access, permissions, and clearance to correctional facilities required communication with various correctional staff and, most important, a great deal of time, patience, and persistence. It is common practice for the correctional facilities to screen and approve program-related materials. For our film study, we were also granted permission to bring individual snacks for participants to enjoy during the films. We also provided a detailed list of the materials and recording equipment we would bring, and at each visit we were required to go through typical security procedures for visitors entering a carceral setting. For those wishing to do film showings in prisons, it is important to factor in the planning process time required for approvals and a clear rationale for equipment and materials.

**Participant Selection**

Programs delivered behind bars are subject to review and approval by the correctional facility, and not all elements are within the control of those delivering the programs or those participating in the programs. Correctional facilities are highly structured environments and incarcerated people’s time is organized around their required programming and scheduled activities. In our case, direct access to potential participants was not possible without intermediaries; we had to meet with administrative officials at the institution to discuss the detailed procedures involved in getting access to participants. We were aware of the ethical considerations for this study and its design given participants were incarcerated women, and we recognized a differential in power even more marked than if participants were from the general, non-incarcerated population. The notions of “consent” and “freedom to participate” that we take into consideration when designing qualitative research are problematic when working with vulnerable people who are living behind bars. We were seeking ten participants and had no specific requirements for participation although the institution stated that participants had to be in compliance with their individual carceral plan and approved by the communications officer. Women in a carceral setting have mandatory activities; however, participants were free to participate as they were free to participate in other community-initiated activities taking place at the institution. We clearly stated that potential participants had to be informed of the study before the first activity through an invitation to participate and a signed consent form that were given for dissemination. Although we designed a participant recruitment approach based on expressed interest, we later learned


that the correctional officer invited participants she thought would be “well-behaved” and would benefit from a film program.

Nine participants attended a weekly film screening over the course of four weeks. We did not gather information on participants’ ages, ethnicity, or educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Given the participant selection process, we did not meet the participants until the initial film showing in the series. Each week included a screening of a documentary film followed by a discussion lasting thirty to forty-five minutes. We facilitated discussion to promote reflection and enable the sharing of ideas. At the end of the four weeks, all women participated in one individual semi-structured interview. We did not have contact with participants beyond these activities. Participants seemed enthusiastic during the film screenings and consistently attended unless there was a scheduling conflict with an important event like a parole hearing, which only happened twice. During the course of the four weeks of film showings, we learned from participants that other women would have liked to participate but were not aware that it was being organized. Although the program officer’s influence on the recruitment of participants was different than the study design, in fact participants told us they appreciated the opportunity to take part in this activity and being invited was highlighted as a positive factor by some. In retrospect, if we were to do this again, we would ask to meet all the women eligible ourselves in order to explain the study and allow perhaps a wider group of women to volunteer and pick participants at random if more women volunteered than we anticipated.

**Film Selection**

Film selection is an important aspect of a film festival and was crucial to this research study as well. Film festivals and film screenings provide a liminal space outside everyday life that allows attendees an opportunity to reconsider their views. Documentaries that are relevant to an audience’s concerns and/or current social and political issues often foster reflection. Attendees in the previous study, and participants in this study, appreciated documentaries that exposed a problem and showed transformation toward some resolutions; they were interested in tangible examples that portrayed hope as legitimate and change, toward greater justice and peace, as possible. Documentaries are made by filmmakers, often activists, with a specific point of view, and like all print (articles and books) and media productions, they are constructed. However, as Iordanova points out, they play an important role: “film supplies the human face and the story and provides the much-needed narrative background for activist work.” She refers to a comment by media expert Bruni Burres who suggested that film and post-screening discussions are necessary to communicate human issues and may reach “a broader and more diverse audience than a 200-page report or the legal briefing on these same issues … [as] a great film can emotionally move and affect an individual in a way no legal report can.”

In this case, our point of view as programmers also played a role. We chose films that highlighted women who while facing adversity also displayed creativity, courage, or solidarity with others. While we had our points of view, we also had extensive experience as adult educators and activists: collectively we had seen more than a thousand documentaries and organized hundreds of documentary film showings within festivals and in stand-alone screening events. We had also

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22. Ibid.
shown documentaries in carceral settings a few times per year over a period of seven years and had done an in-depth study on three documentary film festivals that took place in working-class towns. Overall, we had carried out no less than 141 interviews with attendees (in addition to interviews with organizers and sponsors) and had worked with a group advocating for maternal health of incarcerated women. This amount of evidence would compare favorably with Torchin’s conclusion based on her discussions with a few “acquaintances” who had attended a film festival and private conversations in which she questioned what they had seen (apparently as outsiders) as “preach[ing] to the converted.” However, Torchin also included a comment by American singer and activist Harry Bellafonte pointing out that “if one stops preaching to the choir, they may stop singing.”

Seeing concrete examples of individuals or communities facing adversity, analyzing the situation, identifying potential solutions, and organizing effectively to create change can have an impact on our ability to envision solutions and engage in solving problems.

Providing choice at a festival was key to adult learning as it engaged openness and willingness to go on a journey of discovery. However, programming an individual film outside a festival setting is challenging as the film must stand completely on its own excellence. Selecting individual films for screenings in prison was even more challenging. The relevance of the topic, a compelling story that engaged emotions as well as analysis to foster critical thinking, and an arc that showed transformation and resolution in concrete ways were all important considerations in our selection. In addition, we had to ensure that we used films that were in English: women in prison often have literacy issues so subtitles would not be appropriate. Showing films that involved drugs, children, or violence was also inappropriate as they may have triggered past experiences, and we are not therapists and could not be assured that the women would have had timely access to therapeutic support if needed. Providing films that had elements that may be familiar but also introduced new perspectives or ideas was likewise important. Finally, film selection could not be done with input from participants as all materials had to be approved by the institution administrators in advance.

The first film selected for this study highlighted strong women facing challenges with integrity, empowerment, and solidarity. Apache 8 (2011) is about a Navajo women forest firefighter crew who have gained recognition by their peers as being one of the top forest firefighting crews. The Cats of Mirikitani (2006) spoke of the remarkable transformation of an elderly homeless Japanese artist who survived a World War II Japanese internment camp in the United States and later, while living on the streets of New York City, continued to produce art. His paintings are recollections of the trauma he suffered in the camp. As a filmmaker friend invited him in after the damage and destruction following 9/11, over time and with her help he regained his American citizenship and later got his own home. The power of art and friendship to counter trauma are key themes. Trash Dance (2012) follows a respectful and savvy young choreographer who joins sanitation workers in their work for a year and creates a choreographed performance using their mechanical equipment as well as their daily movements to honor the dignity of their labor. Development of authentic relationships and multiple dimensions of identity are central themes in this film. Finally, Humble Beauty: Skid Row Artists (2013) reveals the creation of an art studio for homeless people in Los Angeles. The role of art to support mental health, emotional stability, and, at times, economic survival, is highlighted.
Findings: The Impact of Films

The comments from the nine participants during discussions after viewing the films and individual interviews highlighted the positive impact of documentary films in two critical areas. First, participants were moved by the stories of people showing resilience in the face of adversity, which helped them view their own challenges and circumstances from new perspectives. Second, seeing stories of success and transformation provided hope that they would find new opportunities after serving their sentence.

Adversity and Resilience

Participants were inspired by the hard work, discipline, and perseverance shown by the people in the documentary films. Participants spoke with awe and admiration for the work required by the people depicted in the films, from trash pickers to firefighters, to survive and succeed. Fran commented that “it was inspiring ... just how dedicated they all were, and how hard workers they are.” Claire reflected on “how people struggle in life” when recalling the artists from Skid Row depicted in the film Humble Beauty and expressed admiration for their labor, saying “You gotta do what you gotta do to survive. And that’s what they chose to do.” Participants drew connections between the level of hard work with the passion and dedication that the people in the films had for their work. They reacted strongly to the singular passion for art depicted in The Cats of Mirikitani. One of Barb’s takeaways from this film was to “Never give up. Keep going. Like, be passionate. Love the things that you’re good at.” Participants recognized that transformation can be driven by dedication that brings meaning and purpose to people’s lives.

They also highlighted the passion, perseverance, and solidarity shown by the female firefighters depicted in Apache 8. For Helen, the firefighters made her consider women’s strength:

How hard women work. How hard I used to work. It scares me, but, you know, how strong one can be when they set their mind to it and how much one can accomplish, and the strength, how strong one can be. Goes to tell you, the mind is a wonderful thing when you set your mind to it. They were hard workers, determined, better to the men at times, yeah. But very dedicated, great role models.

Fran was similarly inspired, noting that the film was “kind of proving that women can go out and do anything the guys are doing... It just showed their discipline.” Gina echoed Fran’s sentiment: “Women are good, they’re strong too. And I’m not saying that as a feminist way, but look at what these women can do, right?” These films created opportunities for participants to recognize and be inspired by the efforts and resilience of people in challenging circumstances.

We learned that watching films that involved adversity as well as resiliency, courage, and creativity helped participants view their own challenges in a new light. For some, the films provided the realization that there are other people living in worse conditions than their own. Claire noted that “it could be worse. Some people have it very good and they don’t realize it.... I’ve been through nothing compared to some of the people in there.” Diane reflected on the other women who attended the film showings and how the films helped them see their own struggles from a broader perspective. She stated: “Thinking of who’s around the table, that it took them away from the ‘woe is me’ and is like, okay, these people had some serious issues and they don’t...”
even have a bed to sleep on... I just know from different comments that were made that it’s [films] helped most of us.” Reflecting on the experiences of individuals from the films, Barb commented, “sometimes you think, you know, ‘I have it bad’ and stuff. And then you watch a documentary on how this person is being treated and it’s like ‘woah, I have it easy.’”

These films encouraged a sense of respect and inspiration from seeing others, Iordanova’s “ordinary heroes,” facing challenges with courage and creativity. Seeing documentaries can change the perspective on struggles as a reality of human lives, as opposed to a sign of individual deficiency. This did not negate the systemic nature of problems. For example, during the discussion of Trash Dance, two participants, Claire and Eva, said their partners were garbage pickers and worked hard but they had not realized the importance of their work. They also acknowledged the racial issue as most of the people featured in Trash Dance were visible minorities.

**Providing Hope**

Participants reported that seeing examples of successful transformations offered encouragement that change is possible and allowed them to consider possibilities for life after prison. When discussing The Cats of Mirikitani, many were inspired by the protagonist’s transformation from a homeless artist to someone who, with the support of a friend, is able to come to terms with his painful past and become a community art instructor later in life. Gina observed, “Anything’s possible, look at how far he came.” Claire agreed, responding, “Even at his age, there’s a new beginning.” Barb noted being inspired by stories of people transforming through perseverance, stating, “They’ve worked hard to get where they’re at, so I feel like watching them and learning from them, they kind of maybe helped me understand... there are struggles in life, and to just keep going. Don’t stop.” Alex also expressed being inspired by the hope and transformation shown in the films and linked it back to her own life:

> It’s not a good environment kind of thing to be in, but you make the best of what you got and you just bloom into something beautiful, I guess [laughter]. Overcoming it, and being something that’s worth talking about, telling their story, because it’s good stories, it’s giving people hope, yeah. I like the transition theme because I believe that we are always in transition, regardless of where we’re at, we’re always changing routes and doing other things, and it’s not always the same thing.

Seeing real examples inspired participants and enabled them to see that change is possible regardless of difficult circumstances. Indeed, many participants were inspired by seeing people succeed, or as Gina noted in response to the film Trash Dance, “Average people with average jobs can do great things.” Carla echoed Gina’s observation, stating, “They all overcame adversity and made the best of their situations. That’s inspiring. It gives you hope that if they can do that, anybody can.” Reflecting on the female firefighters in Apache 8, Helen commented on her own abilities: “It just goes to prove, I keep thinking I’m old... Then I saw the first movie Apache and I was like, ‘Wow, if they can do it, I can do it.’”

Participants also recognized the link between the ability to grow and face adversity and having someone who can provide support and opportunity for change. For example, they discussed the impact of the filmmaker in helping the homeless protagonist get off the streets. Helen
noted, “if it wasn’t for that lady, that man probably would have never went [sic] any further in life. So, it goes to prove you, one person can make a difference.” Barb agreed, observing that “one act of kindness, and he’s, you know, went from homeless to having a place.” Margo reflected on the impact on artists in *Humble Beauty* when their artwork was displayed in a gallery: “The opportunity has to be there…. If there were more opportunities for art shows, they could get on their feet by selling their work.” Seeing “average people” (Gina’s term) living with adversity achieving growth helped participants see that transformation in their own lives was also a possibility.

Participants also shared that the films inspired them to think about the possibilities for their lives after prison. Barb indicated that the films “were very inspiring because you watch people with their struggles and where they got to. And I’m in this place, you know what I mean, I’m going through struggles, you know what I mean, and it’s not the end of my story. Like, there’s more to it.” Watching *Apache 8* made Helen reconsider some of her reservations about what she is facing upon release from prison:

> It gives me energy, watching them. It gives me the need to start getting in physical shape, because the real world is coming, and in August, September you need a new life and you need to find work and, like I said to you during the movies, I’m exhausted watching those girls…. Am I going to make it through an eight-hour day? Am I going to have to start out part time? Am I going to have to start out four days a week? But…, but then I see them and I’m going back to my place in minimum, “I can do it!” and excited, here I come, let’s get it out. Yeah, it kind of builds my encouragement that way.

Alex reflected on her own experiences with addiction and how it felt to see the stories of transformation in the documentaries, stating “when you see other people’s success stories it gives you hope, especially being stuck in a circumstance like this…. Maybe seeing it from somebody else’s point of view kind of gives me some hope [laughter]. Yeah. Like maybe I won’t fail.”

Seeing stories of success, growth, and transformation in the films helped participants see that even within the adversity of their current circumstances, they are not limited to their adversity and can envision life and growth beyond their time in prison. All participants were highly engaged; they expressed regret that the film showings were ending and stated a strong desire for the film series to continue. However, it was not possible to do so on a regular basis due to distance and a time-consuming long drive.

**Group Discussions and Individual Interviews**

The richness and fellowship of the post-film group discussions stood in contrast to our experience conducting interviews with each participant after the film series concluded. The objective of the interviews was to provide an opportunity to reflect and share what they had learned from the documentary films, whether they saw any benefits to the film showings, and if they would do anything differently. In a typical research setting, individual interviews are a common data collection method that provides an opportunity for in-depth reflection for participants.
In this study, however, we noticed that most participants seemed nervous and struggled to respond to questions. This was unexpected, as we did not perceive such stress during discussions in the group setting. Upon reflection, however, we attribute this to two potential causes. First, there is support in a group setting, where the free-flowing dialogue provides opportunities to build off the words and ideas of others. Within a group, an individual can contribute to the dialogue by sharing thoughts and ideas, agreeing with a point made by a peer, or using someone’s point to springboard into a different perspective. Smaller contributions are still meaningful and are bolstered by the surrounding dialogue and, in turn, support the movement of the discussion. Within the safety of the group there are multiple ways to contribute, which can create increased comfort and confidence for participants.

In contrast, an interview setting lacked the support of the group, and the onus was on the individual to respond and articulate their ideas. In the interview, there may have been greater inner pressure to perform and the feeling of being put on the spot, which may have triggered past experiences of feeling evaluated and the need to fit a particular standard or expectation. Additionally, within the carceral context we recognize that formal, one-on-one interviews may be strongly associated with unpleasant and stressful scenarios, such as meetings with lawyers or correctional staff. We learned from Barb that she was relieved to discover that the film series would not include tests and that there would be no “right or wrong answers.”49 We learned that the use of interviews may have reintroduced some of the emotional and structural elements that had negative associations of the prison context and past learning experiences. In the future, we would use a group interview in place of individual interviews, as the group discussion in this context offered more support to participants for deeper reflection on the films, ideas, and change in perspectives.

Conclusion

The prison setting offers an opportunity for facilitated group discussion about the films that may not be possible in all film festival settings. In Roy’s experience organizing and attending film festivals, the most common form of organized conversation following film showings is a question and answer session with the filmmaker(s), where members of the audience are invited to ask questions. The nature of these post-film Q and A sessions is largely dependent on the speaker and attempts to have a broader discussion are often less successful. In our study, as noted above, we facilitated a group discussion following each film. Participants reported a number of benefits of group discussions, including creating an atmosphere of openness that promoted sharing and relationship building among participants.50 Indeed, the quick succession of four films in four weeks allowed familiarity and trust to build with researchers and among themselves, as we learned that many of them did not know each other before participating in the film series project, and participants became more relaxed and open about their lives in the last weeks.

Participants appreciated documentary films as a form of learning that differed from past experiences with formal schooling. What was perhaps most powerful about documentary films as a learning experience was the absence of the trappings of formal education that could have limited participation. Viewing and discussing films removed literacy challenges and did not involve tests or learning evaluation commonly associated with formal modes of education. Films

49. Barb, interview by authors.
provide an equalizing pedagogy that can bring people together to learn without requiring literacy, prerequisites, or testing.\(^{51}\) This was a shared learning experience that built connections among participants through an inclusive and enjoyable approach. As a form of learning and growth, documentary films presented new perspectives on familiar topics and shined a light on areas that are less visible and less valued, such as homelessness or the important service provided by trash collectors. In some cases, documentary films challenged assumptions participants held about the film subjects and settings. Film discussions encouraged dialogue and critical thinking on a number of topics and became a shared experience that helped build relationships among participants that continued after the films.

The film screenings enabled participants to temporarily step outside their everyday lives in the prison and offered the opportunity to reconsider their views on various subjects. Participants told us that through these documentaries and discussions they felt, briefly, as though they were no longer incarcerated. They described viewing and discussing films with a group as an escape from worry and anxiety, which allowed them to simply feel "content" and "normal." These descriptions not only demonstrate how film screenings can create a liminal space for viewers to suspend their everyday reality but also highlight how the prison classroom is itself a liminal space that occupies multiple meanings for the people who inhabit it. Indeed, American scholar on prison studies Kaia Stern describes the prison classroom as "a sacred and liminal space … a territory that is both precious and treacherous for the students and the teacher."\(^{52}\) Film screenings created the possibility for learning and growth yet were held within a context designed for surveillance and punishment. Carceral spaces are designed with a specific purpose under the auspices of a mandate that prioritizes security and risk management. As Canadian sociologist Samantha McAleese and criminology professor Jennifer M. Kilty argue, "the prison classroom is not necessarily comprised of the elements required to encourage active participation or sustained enthusiasm for learning."\(^{53}\) Despite this potential limitation, we were able to create a learning experience with films that transformed this space into one of expanded perspectives, connection, and hope. Documentary films allowed us to create an atmosphere that enabled the exploration of ideas attempted in community-based film festivals.

Despite the unique challenges and limitations presented by the prison context, our findings suggest that documentary film showings are a valuable means for engagement and learning with incarcerated people. We agree with criminology scholar Cormac Behan who has pointed out that "despite their limitations, dismissing all courses provided by, or within, prison means that some prisoners will miss out on an opportunity to participate in activities that address issues such as addiction that have blighted their lives and led to criminal activity."\(^{54}\) As the number of federally sentenced women in Canada continues to rise and the reality that, as of 2021, Indigenous women made up 43 percent of federally sentenced women (despite Indigenous people representing only 4 percent of Canada's population), we recognize the limitations of individual programs such as ours in bringing system-level change.\(^{55}\) As educator Caroline Cheung argues, "Reduced recidivism rates, higher education programs in prison, and/or finding a community in prison do not make the prison system just or equitable. They may make it more survivable."\(^{56}\) Although the notion of the liberatory power of films and learning is less appropriate in this setting, we nonetheless recall bell hooks who stated, "The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility."\(^{57}\) Despite carceral settings as sites of restraint, we learned that through films, this space can become a space for altered perspectives that allows envisioning possibility.
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Carole Roy is a professor in the Department of Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University, Canada. Her research interests include women's collective acts of resistance, documentary film festivals, and the role of the arts in adult learning and in movements for social change. From 2005 until the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, she organized annual documentary film festivals and looks forward to reengaging with public film screenings in the near future. She volunteered to show documentaries in carceral settings a few times per year for seven years. She has published numerous articles as well as books, including The Raging Grannies: Wild Hats, Cheeky Songs, and Witty Actions for a Better World (2004), Documentary Film Festivals: Transformative Learning, Community Building, and Solidarity (2016), and Working the Margins of Community-Based Adult Learning: The Power of Arts-Making in Finding Voice and Creating Conditions for Seeing/Listening, a coedited collection (2016).

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Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today: Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action

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ABSTRACT

This roundtable begins with each festival organizer explaining how the outbreak of the current war in Ukraine affected the planning and organizing of their respective film festivals. The discussion that unfolds conveys that the festival organizers stand quite united in their responses to the situation, despite differences in geographic proximity to ongoing hostilities on the ground and opportunities available for drafting up alternative scenarios. They engage in cultural diplomacy and collaborate with international colleagues to create visibility for Ukrainian culture and people. Moreover, there is a shared belief in the need for a boycott of Russian culture. The edited transcript presents detailed argumentation in favor of the Russian cultural boycott as well as responses to concrete issues that had media coverage. Other themes discussed concern the role cinema and film festivals can play in the face of war. The participants acknowledge the trauma that is being inflicted on the Ukrainian people and express hope that safety will be restored quickly, for this is a basic condition necessary to start thinking about and giving substance to the role of cinema and film festivals in dealing with the trauma of war.
Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today: Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action

Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck in conversation with Anastasiia Puhach, Yevgenia Kriegsheim, Victoria Leshchenko, Anna Machukh, Olha Reiter, and Bohdan Zhuk

Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022, the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) organized a roundtable with colleagues of the Lviv Center for Urban History, hosted by the Media and Cultural Memory Workgroup.¹ A few weeks later, we, as chairs of the NECS Film Festival Research Workgroup, also organized a roundtable on Ukraine. “Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today! Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action” brought together festival organizers of Ukrainian film festivals from various regions to share their accounts of unfolding events and give insights into the current situation. The second roundtable was hosted and financially supported by NECS and the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF. This is an edited transcript of the online event that took place on April 6, 2022, on Zoom.

At the time, several of the programmers had fled Ukraine. Our collaborator, Anastasiia Puhach, had left Kyiv and relocated to Berlin, where her colleague, Yevgenia Kriegsheim, was already residing and Victoria Leshchenko was also at the time. Olha Reiter called in from Bautzen, near Dresden. Anna Machukh and Bohdan Zhuk were both in Ukraine when the online event took place; Bohdan left Kyiv at the beginning of the full-scale invasion and was in his hometown in western Ukraine.

The roundtable begins with each festival organizer explaining how the outbreak of the war affected the planning and organizing of their respective festivals. From the discussion that unfolds, we learn that the festival organizers stand quite united in their responses to the situation, despite differences in geographic proximity to ongoing hostilities on the ground and opportunities available for drafting up alternative scenarios. They engage in cultural diplomacy and collaborate with international colleagues to create visibility for Ukrainian culture and people. Moreover, there is a shared belief in the need for a boycott of Russian culture. In the edited transcript, you will find detailed argumentation in favor of the Russian cultural boycott as well as replies to concrete issues that had media coverage. Other themes discussed concern the role cinema and film festivals can play in the face of war. The participants acknowledge the trauma that is being inflicted on the Ukrainian people and express hope that safety will be restored quickly, for this is a basic condition necessary to start thinking about and giving substance to the role of cinema and film festivals in dealing with war trauma.

Since the conversation in April, several festival collaborations have taken place or are planned. For instance, part of the program of Docudays UA (Ukraine) International Human Rights Film Festival with a national Ukrainian competition was held at the Krakow Film Festival in late May, Filmfest Hamburg will host the national Ukrainian competition of the Molodist Kyiv International Film Festival in late September-early October (https://www.filmfesthamburg.de/en/news/festival-im-festival/), and the national Ukrainian competition of the Odesa International Film Festival will be hosted by the Warsaw International Film Festival in October (https://oiff.com.ua/en/festival/news/the-national-competition-of-the-13th-oiff-will-be-held-at-the-warsaw-international-film-festival1654681281.html). Several colleagues have been and are organizing screenings...
of Ukrainian films, also within the context of the Ukrainian Film Festival Berlin (https://www.uffberlin.de/). Meanwhile, at the time of writing this edited version in August, various sanctions against Russia have been imposed and (further) delivery of heavy weaponry is being discussed in Europe and the United States. The war is still ongoing with no immediate peace negotiation in sight.

**Skadi Loist:** I would like to start with a little story of how this event came about. When we first heard about the terrible invasion, I was sick in bed with COVID after the Berlinale [Berlin International Film Festival] and was quite in shock about it. A week or so later, our NECS colleagues, especially Michał Pabśni Orzeszyna and Dagmar Brunow, had already started to organize an event with colleagues at the Lviv Center for Urban History [https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/discussions/preserving-the-now/], which I found very touching and also very informative, and really helpful in terms of connecting to colleagues about their work and not just about them being victims of a war. For me, this perspective was very important. I was starting to think about what we could do from the festival world and how to get in touch. Then, a few days later, I had a call-for-action email in my inbox from Bohdan Zhuk from Molodist [https://molodist.com/en/article/russia-has-started-a-full-scale-war-against-ukraine], whom I had met a few years earlier at Mezipatra, the Queer Film Festival in Prague. Then a couple days later, when I was going out for dinner in Berlin, meeting up with friends, it happened to be the same day that Anastasia arrived in Berlin, finding a refuge in an apartment for a while with those friends. When my friends mentioned that Anastasia was working also in the film sector, I said that when she felt settled, she should get in touch. She did, and she mentioned that she’s actually also working with film festivals, and that’s how it all fell into place. Because, as we realized, it’s a really small world in the festival sector. You can travel around the world visiting festivals and make friends all over. So that’s kind of how it started, trying to set up an event with Anastasiia. We discussed it, and she then really helped to connect with several people and also encouraged us to organize the event in a way so that we get an idea about the whole country. But maybe you want to say a bit more about why you chose and connected us to these colleagues.

**Anastasiia Puhach:** Sure. Here we can find speakers from five Ukrainian film festivals. I’m glad to welcome Anna Machukh. She’s the executive director of the Ukrainian Film Academy and founder of the academy, and also executive director of the Odesa International Film Festival [https://oiff.com.ua/en]. This is one of the biggest film festivals in Ukraine every year. It probably gathered the most important Ukrainian filmmakers and lots of foreign filmmakers and some stars from the film industry. Also here is Bohdan Zhuk. He’s a programmer of Molodist International Film Festival [https://molodist.com/en]; this is not only the oldest film festival in Ukraine but [also] one of the oldest in Europe. Last year it was the fiftieth edition of the festival and this festival specialized in debut films, and I was happy to also be a part of this festival for some years…. Also here is Yevgeniya Kriegsheim [from] Kharkiv MeetDocs Film Festival [https://meetdocsfestival.com/en/]. This is a documentary and feature film festival which happens in Kharkiv. Last year it was the fifth edition and I’m also a part of this festival. Also here is Victoria Leshchenko. Victoria probably was the first person I thought about when this, your idea, came in. She is a program director of Docudays UA [https://docudays.ua/eng/], the international documentary film festival, probably the biggest documentary film festival in Ukraine. It has a competition and a film industry department. After I gathered these four speakers, Yevgeniya
suggest that we should invite a representative from film festivals from western Ukraine, and she suggested to invite Olha Reiter from Wiz-Art Lviv International Short Film Festival [https://wiz-art.ua/festival/en/]. This is the biggest festival in western Ukraine, which also has a competition and film industry department. So here are our speakers.

Figure 1. Map of Ukraine with locations of film festivals. © Nina Dekker.

Skadi Loist: Welcome and thank you for being here with us. Marijke, do you want to start with the first round of questions?

Marijke de Valck: Yes, thank you. We would very much like to start with the basic question of what is going on right now for the different festivals that our speakers are affiliated with. So, may I pass the mike firstly to Victoria?

Victoria Leshchenko: As you may know, Docudays was canceled this year, or postponed, as we like to say. The festival dates were supposed to be the last week of March—March 25 to April 3. Before the war we were actually in the active phase of preparations for the festival. So, we had already closed the program; we were already negotiating with distributors and everything. I clearly remember that on February 23, that was one day before the war, we had a team planning meeting, we were planning some things, were discussing because it was already obvious that something is going to happen, but honestly saying, till the very last moment nobody believed it. So, we were planning the festival, while kind of thinking about a Plan B, but actually we didn’t have that. I remember that when we were on Zoom, my dear colleague said: “well you know I got a message from one of our Ukrainian filmmakers, he’s in the east of Ukraine, and he is saying that tomorrow you should just leave Kyiv because tomorrow the war will start.” And, you know, the
very next day this happened. We were unprepared and we didn’t manage to relocate, because we didn’t plan that. It took some weeks for our team to basically relocate ourselves or whatever, and the biggest part of our team is still in Ukraine—mostly in the western part of Ukraine—some of us are relocated abroad, and there are a few people I know also moved. So, anyway we’re still working and continuing our work because two years of lockdown taught us, in a way, how to operate under strange circumstances and circumstances where you cannot be physically in one office.

At the moment, we are continuing to work on the projects…. Basically, we have three directions where we’re headed. The first one is cultural diplomacy. We’re working with making Ukrainian voices visible abroad, at international film festivals, and we’re also contributing to the campaign of boycotting Russian culture and at least explaining why it’s important to also pause Russian culture a bit. The second thing is, of course, that we support the industry, Ukrainian filmmakers. We have launched an initiative, “Docu help fund,” and are collecting money for Ukrainian filmmakers and providing them with very basic grants, survival grants basically, for equipment or anything like that. The third thing, we are now developing a project; we are going to create an online platform, basically an online closed library, which will be a collection of videos which are proof of crimes. So, this will be videos sent by different people, by journalists; we are going to do a kind of selection work and then structure and gather it and get everything to one place. Ideally that will be a place for professionals to find any content they need for any day of the war. So that’s where we are now.

Marijke de Valck: Thank you, you’re already telling us so much about how you’re handling the current situation. Let’s continue with the inventory of what the situation for the different festivals in the different parts of the country is. Yevgeniya, could you tell us about your festival?

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: I thank you. Hello, I’m Yevgeniya Kriegsheim. I’m a producer based in Berlin and Kyiv, between Berlin and Kyiv, but now unfortunately only in Berlin, and my hometown is Kharkiv; that’s why I founded this, the first time it was a festival of documentary film for human rights [called Kharkiv MeetDocs]. It was launched in 2017 in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine, with the support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in five years our festival has become a significant event in eastern Ukraine. We have already had various formats and scales of the festival, and in 2020, for example, due to the red quarantine COVID zone in the region, we moved completely from a stationary offline format to a full online version in only one week. It was a challenge, but we managed it. The hardest thing was to persuade the filmmakers to agree to give us their films for showing on the web platform and security guarantees, which are used by, for example, international streaming platforms. Last year in order to be able to reach the audience not only in the east of Ukraine but also in other regions, we held the festival in hybrid form for the first time. Also, for the first time in the history of the festival, we launched an international competition, Ukraine through the Eyes of the World, where foreign directors presented their films, which they shot in Ukraine or about Ukraine. Every year there were fewer and fewer films about the war in our program. It’s not a fact of common knowledge, but during the two years before 2022 only sporadic armed conflicts took place. We hoped for diplomatic peaceful settlement, but it ended in a full-scale Russian invasion. All the forces of our festival were focused on the voice of these regions, on the unification of the once-Ukrainian lands. I want
to believe that our contribution to the development of the cultural diplomatic mission in this region has consequences also today. Even though our festival runs always in autumn, I think this year unfortunately we’ll, all of us, have to go back to an online format, and that’s maybe good; we can cover not only Ukrainians in Ukraine, and we have something to talk about and something to say.

Anna Machukh: Hello, I’m Anna Machukh from Odesa International Film Festival. Thank you everyone, thank you for the support, and thank you for the invitation. So, we have the same situation as Yevgeniya said. We have our festival in July, in Odesa, and we were preparing; nobody believed that a full-scale invasion is possible. So, my team is almost all here in Kyiv. I’m also in Kyiv. From the first days of the full-scale invasion, we started to defend on the information front. We threw all our efforts into influencing in this situation and preventing Russia from spreading propaganda, because, you know, it’s the second front; it’s also a weapon. So, from the second day of the war, we started … boycotting of the Russian cinema, because when other countries impose economic political sanctions against Russia, they continue its active work in the cultural field—my colleagues all know the situation—and the result of this activity is it’s not only spreading the propaganda messages, it [also] contributes to increasing loyalty among the population of this country to the Russian culture. So, we call on the global film community to refuse cooperation with this Russian cinema, and our position has already been supported by a lot of different film organizations. The first one was the European Film Academy; also some academies from Poland, Spain, and others—a lot of others; also film production companies, Disney, Warner Brothers, Sony; some associations like the European Producers Club and the UK producers’ body, PACT; and also Netflix and some others. We are also helping our colleagues in Ukraine with equipment, with some aid; partners, friends from Poland and from other countries are helping us with this. A week ago now, we organized, we launched the film marathon for helping other filmmakers. It’s film screenings around the world in support of Ukraine and it’s a common initiative of the Ukrainian State Film Agency and some other Ukrainian organizations. We called it CinemAid Ukraine [https://www.cinemaid.org/] and already started screenings in Canada, Turkey, and Poland, and we have a big list of countries where we will continue our screenings. So, such is the situation for our festival and our activities now.

Bohdan Zhuk: Molodist’s fifty-first edition was supposed to take place from May 28 to June 5 and naturally it’s impossible at the moment, so we have announced officially that we have postponed the festival indefinitely because we are confident that Ukraine will win, and we have hopes that it’s going to happen sooner rather than later. We are of course not clear how the situation is going to develop, but we are still hoping that we will be able to organize the festival this year. It will have to be from scratch, because anything that we have worked on is kind of canceled basically. So, currently we are working, [but] the only thing we can do in terms of organizing the festival is programming, so we are working on the program, but of course we are, like our colleagues, working on the information front and the cultural front. We are involved with cultural diplomacy. We have called on our international colleagues to boycott Russian cinema. We have received numerous requests about curating Ukrainian film programs for other festivals or institutions, and we have stated that we will be cooperating with them only on the condition that there won’t be any Russian films in their programs. We are also sharing

2. On the European Film Academy, see “Unequivocal Solidarity with Ukraine,” European Film Academy, March 1, 2022, https://www.europeanfilmacademy.org/unequivocal-solidarity-with-ukraine/.
information, connecting people, because there is of course a lot of solidarity among our foreign colleagues and they are trying to help and so we connect, we engage them, we support with the funding and each of us is volunteering in one way or another—working together for the common goal of victory. In terms of our team, some of us have stayed in Kyiv, some of us are in other places in Ukraine, like I am in my hometown in western Ukraine and I’m in the darkness because there’s a curfew and we don’t turn on the light in the evenings because of the possibility of air raids, and so all the cities and towns and villages are dark at night, completely dark. One of our colleagues is in eastern Ukraine; she’s a filmmaker as well, Alisa Kovalenko. She’s programming our documentary competition. Some of our colleagues are abroad as well, and we are working on different events abroad as well.

**Olha Reiter:** Hello everybody, Lviv is considered to be a relatively safe place now. We hear bomb alarms sometimes at night, but as you may know many people from eastern and central Ukraine moved to Lviv. The population of the city grew immensely, so we have seven hundred, around eight hundred thousand people in the city and now we have more than a million already registered. Our festival was founded in 2008. I think it’s the oldest short film festival in Ukraine, but we are not huge. That’s our specific feature, so we have a big audience. We planned to have the festival in October; now, we didn’t cancel it. The times of quarantine taught us to have festivals online, and I’d like to show you the online cinema that we created especially for this purpose: it’s www.bigshort.com.ua. Now, we are screening four programs of Ukrainian short films there, and if you buy a ticket, we will donate all the money to Voices of Children Foundation. You know that a lot of Ukrainian children are victims in this war, so this fund is a trusted fund, and it was for those victims. So, I would ask you to watch, share this link within your communities, and combine the pleasure of watching films and donating some money to trustworthy funds. Besides that, our program team is working on some curation, programs for the next edition. Maybe in bomb shelters, maybe only online, but we hope to have at least some events. Our team is partly abroad, partly still in Lviv. I’m abroad personally and three of our male team members joined Ukrainian armed forces. Our press coordinator is defending the south of Ukraine now. So, it’s very personal to all of us, and in 2014 we had the festival after the war started, because it’s an old war; now it’s a full-scale war and our slogan was “stronger than weapon,” and we truly believe that culture is stronger than weapons. But now it seems that this slogan is not true anymore, because what we need now are a lot of weapons, and of course we need to go on with the culture at the same time, so maybe our slogan could be “culture and weapon”—I don’t know, just a joke.

**Marijke de Valck:** It’s great to hear about all the things that you continue to do, all the different activities. There are similarities between the festivals, some that are postponing events or, of course, were forced to postpone because of the timing in the festival calendar. Perhaps you could comment more about how you are collaborating at the moment among the different film festivals. Are you frequently in touch with each other or are you, maybe, focusing on your own festivals?

**Anna Machukh:** I didn’t say anything about our plans regarding Odesa International Film Festival because it’s in July. I still don’t have an answer—whether we will be able to hold a festival live in July in Odesa—because it totally depends on the results of our army, but we have a plan B, we
have a plan C and also a plan D. So, plan B, yes, it's a festival online. Personally, me, I hate online events really, because in 2020 during the first COVID wave all our life was online, and we also had our festival online. Last year we were lucky; we had an in-person festival in Odesa. But this plan B is always with us while COVID is with us, and now especially. And we also have Plan C: to postpone our festival to maybe September or October. And also, regarding your question, we also have plan D, because we've got a lot of offers from our partners from European festivals to hold some programs on their venues, some screenings. So, we appreciate the support, it helped, and so it may be possible that we will have a mixed format of the festival, very international, because screenings will be, for now, in a few different countries and also with some online and live formats. It will be possible in Ukraine.

Skadi Loist: Olha, I heard that you're also going to be in Dresden later this week, as will I. Are you showing a program there?

Olha Reiter: Yes, I will present a program of Ukrainian short films there. The entrance is free, and it's only on the festival website because they didn't expect that the war would begin.... The last couple of weeks, we negotiated about that [entrance fee]. Anyway, the question was about: how do we communicate with the Ukrainian film community? I think now, the film community is part of the cultural community, and we are really united now. Of course, there are some exclusions, but I think right after the war began some messenger chats, groups, were created and people started actively proposing things, some protests, and some cooperation. So, this is not new to us, and I think we were preparing to work online for a couple of years before and I think it's important to stay together as a community. I also know, and I think Victoria knows, that because we are alumni of SOFA School of Film Advancement, there is a possibility for Ukrainian, not filmmakers but film managers, to join their workshop in May, but it will be held online. That's it for me, regarding this question.

Bohdan Zhuk: I'll continue maybe. I guess we are in touch, all the Ukrainian film industry, we are in touch and we are connected and we are sharing information and opportunities and everything. But I have the impression our efforts are focused on the exterior, because we've seen that our cultural diplomacy takes time and now we have to push harder. So, we are working with our foreign colleagues and push for more attention for Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian film in particular, and we are working to oppose Russian propaganda.

Marijke de Valck: Could you give some examples of how you are doing this?

Bohdan Zhuk: Well, for instance, we have made a statement about the boycotts of Russian cinema. So, we--like the Ukrainian Film Academy, like our other colleagues, and I think the majority at least, if not all of the Ukrainian film industry--have called for the boycott of Russian cinema, because we have been quite disappointed, to be honest, in some of the reactions of our colleagues at some of the other international film festivals, especially the bigger ones. We understand that we need to explain that we are not barbarians and we are not against freedom of speech or anything, or freedom of expression, but that this is the first measure that has to take place, because we believe that Russia has to be completely isolated for a long time, until we see not only the withdrawal of its troops from Ukraine and the compensation of all the damage and
the trial in international tribunals but also structural changes in the policies of that country. So, we have to explain why this has to happen, because we understand that the world is very much under the influence of the “great Russian culture” and it’s hard for many people to accept that there can be a boycott in some way, although of course we have pushed for different institutions to cancel cooperation with Russia. And like I said before, we have received requests for cooperation for curating Ukrainian film programs for other festivals, and we told them that this can only happen if there are no Russian films in their programs, in their selection, because neither we nor the filmmakers that we intend to support and promote will find it acceptable to be part of the representation of the culture of the aggressor, whose aim is to erase us and to erase our culture. So, it’s quite simple, and I’m glad to say that there is quite a lot of understanding among our foreign colleagues and several festivals have already agreed to that.

Skadi Loist: Since we are on the topic of how you collaborate and we’ve heard a few examples of having collaborations with international festivals, which sounds like you are promoting Ukrainian film mostly, I would like to ask you to flip it the other way around. Are you also thinking about doing something for the audiences who are still in Ukraine? Is there anything that you can do at the moment?

Victoria Leshchenko: Maybe I can contribute to answering this question. It’s like my personal opinion—maybe my colleagues will disagree with it—but for our team it became really obvious, that at this very sad and tragic moment for our country, a film festival is not something people really are looking for. I mean, I personally had this experience of being in Kyiv for one week, literally being paralyzed and unable to work, just at all, and people, like in Kyiv and other cities, they are now mostly looking for humanitarian help for food, for basic stuff. So, I think now, I understand this is a really huge privilege to attend film screenings or to attend a film festival. To have a film festival is a huge privilege. I never saw it this way, because it was my life in Ukraine and now a lot of Ukrainian filmmakers are not working on their movies. They became volunteers just helping people, transferring them from Kyiv to Lviv or transferring some humanitarian stuff, and this is how we make a brand-new world, a brand-new reality. That’s also connected to the fact why we see it as important to share our situation at international film festivals, to speak for the Ukrainian film community, because lots of people from this community just now don’t have the possibility to speak publicly at these festivals for themselves. This is a huge problem because what we also always mention is that when you are giving a space for Russian filmmakers and for Russian film, it’s just not the same situation, even for Russian filmmakers who are in exile, or in opposition, it’s still very easy for them. They come to festivals, bring their films, but Ukrainian filmmakers can’t do so, they can’t comment on that, on the whole situation. So, that’s why of course, that’s why we still contribute to cultural diplomacy, but for our festival we see, unfortunately, no sense in doing screenings at the moment in Ukraine, and we rather create some projects which are really needed now in our society: for example, if we can at least collect all those videos, proof of crimes of Russians, it’s something which makes sense in this new reality.

Marijke de Valck: I can imagine that there are other speakers who want to respond or add to this.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: Well, I can add only, what Victoria already mentioned, what we can do for our Ukrainians in Ukraine at the moment is to collect, and Docudays festival has already
begun this collection and archiving of this video footage of crimes. And it’s what we can do in this moment and also for the people in Ukraine. Perhaps my colleagues will agree with me, we urge all those who witness these crimes in these terrible days [to] record it on any digital device to transfer such data to this archive. You can use all our platforms; we will organize a central archiving of these documents and give it to Docudays festival. So that’s our first proposal for this year.

Olha Reiter: Maybe I’ll add to this and remind [us] about some other Ukrainian film festival called Linoleum. They created this flash mob within the Ukrainian animators community about the death of [Vladimir Putin, and I think it’s] an artistic way of putting some energy in some action, especially the artists from the cities that are now in the center of war. The question is so complicated for me now, the role of the rest of the film festivals right now, that I don’t have a good answer, even for me. I think our role should be reconsidered, and we will not go back to the way it was held before, after the war, after we win. We should find some other way to talk to the audience, to people. Many people will be traumatized, we are traumatized, and I’m not talking as a victim of all of this, but this is just a reality, and we just understand it from a psychological point of view. It’s not going to happen that the world stops, and we just go back to cinemas and enjoy some films. I think we will talk more and watch films last, that’s my guess, I don’t know. But yeah, I’m not able to watch films right now, even though I’m in safety in Germany. It’s so difficult just to concentrate my attention on some drama, when you have a big drama in your own country, in your own life. So yeah, I think we need to think about it in our teams, with ourselves, and also with our community. Maybe the film academy will unite us.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: Can I say one more thing please. The war in our country was already always there since 2014 and we tried to speak about this in the frame of our festival. Now, I see that after the war, when we get our territories back, we will have therapy, not only the people from the Donbas, Donetsk, and Luhansk region, [but] we will have therapy with our programs and panel discussions also for people from everywhere of Ukraine.

Marijke de Valck: Most of you mentioned that you are using the knowledge that you acquired during COVID to handle this new, and in many ways completely different, crisis. I was wondering if you could comment on that a bit more specifically. What are the things that continued to be helpful and what really is different now?

Victoria Leshchenko: Well, it’s a very interesting comparison, you know—this lockdown time and this new time for us. I would say for me it’s so different, and very difficult to compare these, because when it was lockdown, like two years of online, we’ve been doing the festival for two years online and Docudays was actually the first festival in Ukraine to be converted to online in 2020, and this was a really successful festival edition. But back then, even though the situation was quite challenging, I remember that that was just a problem to solve and somehow you were still in control of your life and you can control a lot of stuff especially on the Internet. It’s very easy to control things; I think it’s much easier than you know in the real physical world. But what we actually learned, what I personally learned from this war, is about this extreme fragility of the world. Once you have this experience, basically of having war in your country, of experiencing these bomb attacks, you realize that the world is so fragile—like you never ever could imagine that, because in normal life you think there are things you have for granted, there are things that
will be still here, and there are some grounds that you can use in real life, but this shows us that there is basically nothing, in one day you can lose everything. This is very difficult to explain to other people because it’s a very personal experience, deep in your body, and once you have it, it’s quite difficult to plan anything, like plan projects, plan festivals. For me lockdown times were really very soft times. I remember those times with nostalgia, those were really good times now. But those new times showed me the extreme fragility of things. It, in a way, creates this wall between me and other people, because people really try to understand; they’re very empathetic, they ask what can we do. But you look at these people and you know that they don’t know, they don’t know that in just one day everything can change so easily. So, I think for making projects, for making festivals, this is all obviously a very new, a very complicated and challenging situation. The Docudays team, 100 percent of the Docudays team, is a team of extreme professionals. So, what we did in 2020 is a miracle, I would say, and so we can basically do anything and create anything we want. But this situation is, I think, is much more dangerous and challenging than it was in 2020 unfortunately, because we deal with things which are dangerous. Well, it already all started ages ago. But already in 2014, when war started in Ukraine, I should admit that personally I and a lot of people we were blind, because we were thinking that it will never happen to Kyiv, because it’s Kyiv and nobody will come to Kyiv, and we were so arrogant in thinking that and actually not realizing about the danger that Russia and Russian people can potentially bring to our country. So that’s why I really don’t know at the moment how to handle these issues, because it’s like a very personal thing; it’s literally genocide, it’s … the story about how to actually erase Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian nation. And when you deal with these kinds of things, you can’t just build a project or create a film festival to oppose that, I don’t know. So yeah, that’s how I personally feel about this.

Marijke de Valck: Perhaps, Anna, would you also like to give your take on that?

Anna Machukh: Regarding COVID? Yes, the COVID experience. You know, I totally agree with Olha Reiter that we will need to change something in our festivals, and I think we will talk about this with my colleagues after. Because we have all technical equipment to hold the festival online; after the COVID situation we know how to do this, but I’m not sure that we could do this, in this situation. Our people [have] had deep trauma after these events of the war, and we will need to change everything. So, I don’t think that the experience of holding festivals during COVID will help us much.

Marijke de Valck: Is there perhaps anyone else of the other speakers who would like to say something about that?

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: Yes, the online format is something that I can say was a challenge for us and it’s something that for the twenty-first century is something normal; maybe festivals of the future will be in VR [virtual reality] space or something like this. But to compare with the war and this situation, you have also as an organizer, sometimes you just have to put your hands down, because you watched the videos or photos from Bucha3 or something like this, and it’s just, if you can do everything with an online format you can because you are professional and that is communication then, now it’s just very hard to believe that it happens with your hometown, homeland, and that’s another feeling on that.

3. In early April, evidence of the Bucha massacre emerged showing images of many dead bodies of Ukrainian civilians murdered by Russian Armed Forces in Bucha, a suburb outside of Kyiv.

Bohdan Zhuk: Yes, I was going to say that we were talking with colleagues after February 24, after this whole thing escalated—the war, you know, affected us more and more—we were talking about our festival experiences, preparing us for this actually, because like now we know what we have been prepared for, because working at our festivals, we have small teams and we are handling a lot of things, so we are multitasking, we are handling a lot of stress and a lot of responsibilities. And so after this started we were not panicking, we were just working on, you know, considering what we can do—like one, two, three things that we can do—and we are handling a lot of things at the same time. In terms of COVID, we, at Molodist, were quite lucky to have in both years physical editions and we did hybrid festivals both years. We had funding to build the online platform in 2020, and we had part of the program online of the films, as well as some industry events were online, but still because the festival was happening physically, our main focus was on the physical events. So, for us the online part was not very successful, and that’s why we are not really excited to go back to that, and we would only do it as a last resort now. But I think we also learned with COVID more flexibility, working remotely, like last year I was volunteering for a few months in Portugal and at the same time I was programming our festival and doing other things and had the same concerns as my colleagues. So, we realized that some of them are a bit more old-fashioned and like to have a hands-on process, and then we just realized that we can do basically anything from anywhere.

Skadi Loist: Maybe we should have another question about audiences and the collective experience of the festival. Coming out of the COVID experience that we all had, like cinemas being closed, the festivals going online, I think all of us felt the urge to go back to the festival experience, to have a space where you actually talk. I’m wondering—and I completely hear what you said before, that, you know, people are traumatized and they might not think about a festival and not about arts and celebration—maybe I’m an idealist or naïve, but I could imagine that a festival could also be a place in the future, getting back the collective space and talking about something else than just the war experience through art but also, you know, not just as a party but as coming together again. And would that also be something that you see in the future of your festivals? Maybe a specific focus of how programming might be thought of when your festivals can happen again?

Victoria Leshchenko: I can only say, you know, like small secrets. I have a friend and he’s now in Kyiv and he’s now part of city military groups—they’re like volunteers but also officially part of Ukraine’s army. And he told me that in the evening they were watching films, actually, like, in their, let’s say, office, if you can say so; yeah, you know, people watch films in Ukraine, but, you know, under these kinds of strange circumstances. But I don’t know, honestly, I think that I know that lots of people are looking forward to Docudays. I got messages not only from audiences but also from filmmakers who really want their films to be on the screen, and I know for sure, as soon as the city and the country will be liberated, we will do the festival. Even so, you know, maybe there won’t be cinemas, I don’t know, so we’ll find a way, and I know for sure that people will come no matter what. Because Docudays is very important, because it’s not only just a film festival, it’s a human rights festival. So, it was always a place of solidarity, it was always about human rights, it’s also about a huge community of activists who are close friends and close people to the festival. So, I see our future somewhere in Kyiv, you know, maybe some broken buildings and everything, but we are doing the film festival, I don’t know, somewhere, maybe it
won’t be a cinema at all, but I know for sure there will be a lot of people watching our films. So, I think, I don’t see a problem here; I mean, I think it’s just a very temporary thing, but the problem, like the main problem, is it’s the worst situation; it could last much longer than unfortunately we expect it to be. So, at the moment, yes, at the moment we can’t say so, [we] only can say that people still watch films, it’s true.

Olha Reiter: I would like to go back to what I said before about trauma. From what I read and from what I experienced myself, war experience is a big trauma. Also it’s a moment of you uniting in your nation with your people. It is a moment of big kindness, and many people in Ukraine and abroad are really united around the war. It’s strange to say but many people feel together. I feel more together than ever with everyone in Ukraine. Many people volunteer, like we have a so-called festival 24/7 in Ukraine right now; it is just not a film festival. People are there together. You’re safer together just doing something, not sitting and waiting until bombs will kill you. I think right after we will get basic privileges like safety and peace—and I think my colleagues will agree—we will do our best to do whatever we can, and I’m sure we can do it sooner than we did before, just to rebuild our festival teams and create the festival and also the cinematic experience together. But what I meant before [is] that we need to live through the events now and to dive into what we’re experiencing now to know what to do later. Maybe we can plan our festivals from scratch now, we can imagine what we will do, but we will know only after we get just basic safety and after we will win and after Russian aggression will be stopped.

Marijke de Valck: That brings us to the many calls to action that you’ve already expressed during this talk. You mentioned cultural diplomacy, the work that you are doing curating programs with Ukrainian films for other festivals, several initiatives that are meant to be raising funds that help people in the film industry and your teams, and also the cultural boycott. Are there other calls for actions that we haven’t dealt with yet that you would like to bring across on this platform?

Olha Reiter: People are very flexible, and I think we will, we can get used to what is going on easily, somehow. Many of my relatives who are back in Ukraine, they say we got used to fire alarms and everything, and I think it’s important not to get used to it. You could support Ukraine by sharing trusted, trustworthy news, you could not stop sharing everything because it’s easy to forget about it, especially when you’re in a safe place somewhere abroad, especially when you’re far away.

Marijke de Valck: Yes, thank you for that. You’re absolutely right about that. That also links to one of the debates that is being raised in the chat about the case of Sergei Loznitsa, one of the Ukrainian filmmakers who was expelled from the Ukrainian Film Academy. There are several people asking what the take of the speakers is on that issue.

Anna Machukh: Yes, I’m also the director of the Ukrainian Film Academy and I already sent a message to guests [in the chat] regarding Sergei Loznitsa. You know the reason, the last reason was that his films were included in the film festival in Nantes, France, titled “From Lviv to the Urals”; it’s a Russian Film Festival and it was the final reason, because if you will search his interviews on the Internet you will find that he’s repeated narratives which are very similar to Putin’s narratives about Ukraine, the country which was founded in 1991, and he also said that
he is a director also from Russia, from Ukraine, and from other countries, so he doesn't identify himself as a Ukrainian director, and we can also see this in his films. So, this decision to take part in the festival with Russian films, with Ukraine and Russian films, was the last point to make this decision. Maybe my colleagues can also add something because you know it was a common decision of, I think, our industry. We received a lot of messages, a lot of calls from my colleagues who supported and who agree totally with the decision of the Ukrainian Film Academy.

Bohdan Zhuk: Well, yeah, I agree that Loznitsa, while he is a prominent filmmaker who has been associated with Ukraine, it’s not very simple, and I think in the past he chose to be Ukrainian when it was convenient to him and in other times he didn’t. So, he should not be the speaker representing the whole filmmaking and film industry of Ukraine, because also he doesn’t live in Ukraine and hasn’t lived there for a very long time and his reality is different. Also, oftentimes he’s reproducing narratives that are very convenient for Russian propaganda. So, we believe that the Ukrainian filmmakers, because a lot of international film media have been addressing him as one of the most prominent filmmakers associated with Ukraine, but we believe that there are a lot of us in the Ukrainian film industry who can also talk about things and who have different opinions and we should be addressed. That brings me to the issue of the narratives that have been taken away from Ukrainians for a very long time because our voices have been muted, have been silenced for a very long time by Russians, also by other Europeans, and so we find that now we should be more vocal and we should assert ourselves and our vision, because we also find in the media that some perspectives are reproducing the colonialist narratives of Russia and they are not seeing Ukraine as an independent separate entity. So, we are fighting basically against that.

Marijke de Valck: Thank you, that is clear. There’s also another question in the chat that has to do with the cultural boycott of Russian culture and this person says, I will just quote it: “Boycotting films which have received support from Russian state institutions is completely understandable, but what about Russian filmmakers who are also under fire and critical of their government, are these examples also red listed?” The person is saying: “I’m very sorry I do not have any concrete example of such filmmakers or their films and am just curious to know if there are also allies in the cultural community in Russia.”

Victoria Leshchenko: I can try to comment a bit on that and I would really appreciate if my colleagues could also contribute to this. This is, of course, a very challenging and unusual topic, you know, because, yes, we are faced with the fact that of course banning Russian culture... is... important..., but this is not something which is going to happen in reality quickly, for obvious reasons. We can like these reasons or not, but under those circumstances, I see our way also to creatively adapt to the situation and explain and share with people why it’s actually so important. For us,... I think that Bohdan mentioned that, a problem of Russian culture is not that we don’t like this culture. The problem is with the whole mindset behind this culture, because this is a very monumental culture which for many ages has been telling us that, yes, we have Dostoevsky, we have Tolstoy, and our culture is primarily important, it’s a great culture, Russian culture, and your Ukrainian culture basically doesn’t exist. So, that was something that for ages was a very common rhetorical device, especially during Soviet times, before Soviet times, and whatever. Nothing actually changed in Russia, over days here. So those messages and personally, they are very deeply in the mindset of Russians, and so I can only ask this question, what kind of
culture is that, this great Russian culture, which makes this awful cultural and humanitarian tragedy, catastrophe possible? So, for me, especially because I have Russian-speaking family of Ukrainians, you know, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, those were my books in childhood and I was pretty much influenced by that culture, I should say, and even for me it’s now obvious, I don’t understand this culture, I don’t want this culture at all, I don’t want it by any chance, no. The problem with this huge Russian culture, this huge narrative, is it’s basically occupied the whole country and it doesn’t appear in one day. So, for a long period, it had been created and some Russian people were contributing openly to that, of course, they were supporting and they were part of propaganda, but some Russian people, and they are also intellectuals, the best people of Russia, they were contributing just in keeping silent or just letting those things happen until they can write their reviews, until they can make films. Well, they can kind of tolerate things or they can criticize those things in the kitchen, but you know until they have possibility to work, they can do this and they will tell us, they will not criticize anything. I think it’s even worse sometimes than open collaboration. We see now what we have, and now those, I would say the Russian cultural elite, they just leave the country. They’re just leaving the country, and I don’t understand actually how we can, how we are going to decide this, because it looks like only Ukrainian people have now to deal with Putin, with his regime, with all these consequences, which were pretty much empowered by Russian culture, and I think it’s my personal belief that it’s their whole task to go home now and to do their homework, because nobody will do that for them. Ukrainians will not do that for them, German people for sure won’t do that for them, and if they all leave actually, what are we going to do here? I think it’s pretty much their responsibility. I understand that it’s scary, I understand that maybe it’s impossible for some people to just tolerate this because of their decisions. Because every second we make a decision, like every second we made a choice; if we choose to keep silent it’s also a choice, if we choose to tolerate some awful things it’s also a choice, and we contribute in every second. I think for many people from the Russian cultural elite, this is their situation now; they were systematically contributing to keeping silence or just ignoring pretty much that big scope of reality, and I think now they have to live those consequences, because otherwise I don’t understand really how we’re going to proceed. That’s why, at the moment, I don’t feel any kind of sorrow for these people. I really get irritated when I see attempts to victimize Russians, Russian people, and the Russian cultural elite. It’s just their situation and they created that pretty much. It’s not just only one Putin you know; it’s 70 percent of people in Russia thinking that war in Ukraine is a good thing to do, and those people were influenced by this Russian propaganda and by this pretty much Russian culture. So, I think this is a very serious thing and just saving Russians, people who are now trying to leave the country, I don’t know. I see this as a big catastrophe and I think it’s our responsibility to deal with that.

**Skadi Loist:** Do you want to ask your question from the chat in person, Elena?

**Elena Razlogova [audience member]:** I will start with the boycotts, just trying to find out whether you are calling for a boycott of films by ethnic Russians or are you also calling for boycott of any film coming out of Russia? And I was thinking of Yakutian cinema, or Sokurov’s former students from Kabardino-Balkaria, such as Kantemir Balagov—because these filmmakers, because Russia is a colonial state still and these filmmakers represent these colonized people in Russia. So, I was just wondering what policy would you suggest in relation to these filmmakers?
Olha Reiter: Maybe I could explain a little bit more about the boycott of Russian culture and how I perceive you understand this. There are a lot of official statements about it, like the one of the Ukrainian Institute [https://ui.org.ua/en/golovna-english/news/]. Also our government talks about it, but it’s important to understand personally why this is going on and why I am personally for boycotting any Russian film, even self-funded Russian film.... First of all, the rate of support of what is going on is very high in the Russian community according to some polls, and I think there is much work that needs to be done within Russian society, and especially those people who have a different point of view should feel an uncomfortable situation. You know, you cannot be a good Russian here and bad Russian there. You just need to feel a little bit uncomfortable, discomfort for yourself, and speak out about this situation, even boycott of your film. So, maybe some of your communities will hear about it and why it happened. Comparing to what Ukrainian people are experiencing now, I think it’s nothing, it’s really nothing, and this is a reason especially for those who have different opinions whether they are abroad, whether they’re in their republics, especially in some republics of Russia who are underprivileged there, they should speak out to their communities and do something about this regime, spread the truth about what’s going on. I think about Loznitsa, it’s the same here. Once here, it was good for him to be Ukrainian when he needed state funding, he became Ukrainian, and another time he was Russian and now he’s Russian again, Russian who thinks Ukraine is just small Russia or something like this. So, for me, I explained this as a temporary discomfort for those who spread culture which kills a lot of civilians and which occupies other countries, which occupied not only Ukraine [but also] many countries, many nations. That’s it, that’s why I am for it.

Victoria Leshchenko: Thank you, Olha, just thank you so much. We also had an idea I know to address, to write these independent Russians directly, to ask them, like as an act of solidarity, to cancel their screenings. So that was also an idea in our community. I don’t know at the moment if it’s active or not, but this is also a really good thing to do, because I think it’s, as Olha said, it’s the only thing actually, I think, if you are a good Russian, still I don’t like this term, I think you can do, because otherwise I don’t know. We have also, this is a bit of a funny idea, but maybe to, you know, program a voice of surrender before the screening of Russian films, which is also a way to do this kind of performance to remind people that Russia is at war with Ukrainians; it’s important to remember that. I don’t know, at the moment, I don’t know actually what is a good and what is a bad decision. I can just be on the side of my people and our community, and we are going to do whatever it is to protect them and I think we can’t just have this kind of dialogue with Russians, this kind of sympathy with Russians, we just, we need to survive, it’s a very basic thing. So, at the moment it is as it is.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: If you don’t mind, I have one suggestion for maybe Russian filmmakers to follow. If you know the Russian director Vitaly Mansky, who just closed his festival in Moscow, like a statement, this is also a position that other directors and filmmakers should follow. But I don’t know if we can still speak about this during the war; we can see the results and look how this is going on after the war. So, for me, this was also one very important signal. My suggestion was that they can do something like this, maybe.

Victoria Leshchenko: Well, just to add to the question of Vitaly Mansky, this is also a very good example, because of course everybody knows Vitaly Mansky for sure and he kind of does lots of
important things, and ArtDocFest, it’s a truly important festival, but also while he was doing the
festival in Russia, he had somehow also to collaborate with the state in a way. And, for example,
we clearly know that one film script at ArtDocFest was filmed by Alyona Polunina, which basically
was a film which kind of empowered the republic—it was pretty much a pro-republic film. Alyona
Polunina was now a filmmaker who signed a list. It was a list of people who signed and said
publicly that war in Ukraine is a good thing to do, and we have those facts. We can easily share
this information, and that’s just one very little example that those things were happening, even with
the best people in Russia, even with such a project as ArtDocFest, because as they had to operate
in Russia, they had somehow to have this balance, to collaborate, to do something to be able to
have this festival in Russia. So, it’s very tricky here, and sometimes when we speak about good
Russians, we need also precisely to speak about every complete person, because there are lots of
things which are not obvious, hidden, but when you start doing research this often is unpleasant.

Bohdan Zhuk: I was going also to add a couple of things. First of all, there is Alexander Sokurov,
who is one of the most prominent Russian filmmakers. He signed or made a statement just
this week, after the entire world has seen the horror that was in Bucha, the town near Kyiv,
this Sunday, and now the whole world is closer to understanding why we call this a genocide.
The statement Sokurov signed was saying: “if this is true.” After all the proofs, all the evidence,
everything that was online, like there can’t be any doubts, but somehow they called this into
question, and they are this way still reproducing Russian propaganda because that’s what is
happening now. That is what we see. In the last few days since Sunday, thousands of Russian
bots, and not just bots, many people from Russia, are calling this into question or saying that
this is false or staged or anything. So, my point is that even if some Russians, including Russian
filmmakers, are against the war and are opposed to anything against Ukraine, they are still a lot of
the time reproducing the narratives and having the same views, the chauvinist, colonialist views.
So, that’s why we call for the complete boycott.

Another thing that I wanted to add was that two days ago I was on the phone with the director
of the European Film Academy and we were talking about the boycotts and related things, and
what he told me was that when they were joining the boycott at the call of the Ukrainian film
industry and of the Ukrainian Film Academy, they also checked with the Russian members, of
which there are I think eighty or something like that, in the European Film Academy, and they
have all agreed to the boycott. So, they have all backed this statement on the boycott of Russian
cinema, which says something as well—that they understand why this has to happen, because
it is to understand that Ukraine has been a colony of Russia for three centuries and now it needs
to decolonize its narratives and we need to reappropriate what has been taken from us and our
voices need to be amplified.

Anna Machukh: Can I add also, regarding the European Film Academy and Russian members
of the academy—they agreed, but they are still silent. They’re still silent, they didn’t make a
statement and the reason to boycott Russian cinema, and also about good Russians, about
opposition, we all know the name of [Alexei] Navalny and his position regarding Crimea, regarding
Ukraine, that Crimea is part of Russia, and it will not go back to Ukraine. So, the boycott of Russia
and Russian culture is the only one way to stop this war, this genocide as Bohdan said, and not to
spread this invasion into other countries, because we should all understand that if Ukraine falls, Putin and Russia will go further to other countries.

**Yevgeniya Kriegsheim:** I urge everyone to boycott Russian modern culture. When Ukrainian filmmakers defend Ukrainian land with weapons, when they die from the hands of the Russian occupiers like Mantas Kvederavičius, when Ukrainian film and culture representatives are sitting in bomb shelters and are forced to flee, separated from their families, to support any Russian content is cynical. Secondly, Ukrainian festivals acutely need support from international partners, organizations, donations and grants, cooperation, roundtables, panel discussions with Ukrainian experts, filmmakers, representatives of culture—right now and here—it’s time.

**Marijke de Valck:** I would like to thank all of the speakers very much for joining us and for not being silent and sharing your voices and your experiences from the different professional and personal backgrounds. These talks were really informative and great…. Thanks also to Anastasiia for helping us put this talk together, thanks to all the people who were present and by being present expressing their solidarity with you all and of course also for the questions that they asked. Skadi, do you have any final words?

**Skadi Loist:** Yeah, I want to also say thank you very much to everybody here, thank you very much to Anastasiia helping in the background, organizing, bringing us all together, and I’d like to finish this by saying that I hope this is not a goodbye but that we continue the conversation.

**Anastasiia Puhach:** I also wanted to thank you and all the speakers and especially about the last point about the boycott of Russian culture, I thank you a lot for this, which I also totally agree with and what will probably also be a point in our next discussions or questions. I’m often thinking about what films will appear after this war, after the victory, which films Ukrainian viewers would like to see.
AUTHOR BIOS

Skadi Loist is a Juniorprofessor (assistant professor) for Production Cultures in Audiovisual Media Industries at the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF in Potsdam, Germany, researching film festivals, global cinema and film circulation, queer film culture, sustainability and equity, diversity, and inclusion in screen industries. Loist is principal investigator (PI) of the research project “Film Circulation on the International Film Festival Network and the Impact on Global Film Culture” (BMBF 2017–22) as well as lead PI of the international research project “GEP Analysis: Assessing, Understanding, and Modeling the Impact of Gender Equity Policies (GEP) in the Film Industry” (DFG/ESRC/SSHRC 2021–24). Loist cofounded the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) in 2008, cochairs the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) Film Festival Research Workgroup, has worked many years with queer film festivals, and is on the editorial board of NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies.

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History of the Slemani International Film Festival: An Interview with Hemn A. Hussein, Director of Communications for the Festival

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ABSTRACT

This interview with Hemn Hussein presents a history of the Slemani International Festival from its inception to the present. The interview looks at the practical issues of funding and running the festival. Attention is focused on its particular context of being a Kurdish yet international festival and its significance within Kurdish cultural aspirations.
History of the Slemani International Film Festival: An Interview with Hemn A. Hussein, Director of Communications for the Festival
Alan Ali Saeed

Kurdish Cinema: From Yılmaz Güney to the Slemani International Film Festival

While the discussion about the beginning of Kurdish cinema remains ongoing, one can state with little controversy that Kurdish filmmaking in general has tended to emerge from nontraditional places: within prison, from the widespread diaspora, and in exile. In the case of one of the earliest Kurdish filmmakers, Yılmaz Güney (1937–84), it came from all three of these places during the course of his career.

It would also be noncontroversial to trace the beginning of Kurdish cinema to Güney, whose later films from the late 1970s and early 1980s were set in Kurdistan and dealt with the marginalization of the Kurds. Güney made his initial fame as an action hero in low-budget films in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and he took part in hundreds of films over three decades as an actor and director. Although his name was only allowed to be mentioned as a Turkish director throughout his lifetime and for years after his death, in reality he was a socialist director from a Kurdish background who employed a Third-World social realist approach in his cinema. Ironically, he spent one of the most productive periods of his life in prison in the early 1970s. Güney was imprisoned for his political views and writings and for harboring leftist leaders of the student movement. Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1970s and early 1980s, a number of films made by Güney in some way relayed aspects of the ongoing plight of the Kurds and their suffering, although at the time, making films in Kurdish—let alone openly mentioning the Kurds in film—was impossible due to Turkish political repression. These films were Seyithan (1968), Umut (Hope) (1970), Endişe (Worry) (1974), Sürü (The herd) (1978), and Yol (The road) (1982). Despite the harsh restrictions he faced, Güney chose to focus on Kurdish characters and tell primarily Kurdish stories, and this approach buttresses Güney’s credentials as the founding father of Kurdish cinema.

Fast-forward fifty years: in 2016, with the help of various city bodies and many inspired volunteers, Danar Omer created and founded an international film festival to allow Iraqi Kurdish audiences to see the best of world cinema and to allow the same audiences to see the variety of Kurdish cinema created across the greater Kurdistan region. Set in the city of Slemani, the festival can be considered both international and specific to Kurdish cultural development (because there is no Kurdish state). The Slemani International Film Festival (IFF) is probably the largest film festival in Iraq and lasts for one week. The festival is divided into two sections and accepts films shot in any format. The World Cinema section shows a series of feature films and short films from all over the world. Kurdish Cinema presents Kurdish films—featuring films and short films—made in the broad Kurdistan region, including Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. There are a number of awards and prizes. In the international competition, there are awards for Best International Feature Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Jury Award, Audience Award, and Best International Short Film. In the Kurdish competition, awards include Best National Feature Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Documentary, Jury Award, Audience Award, and Best National Short Film. The current artistic director of Slemani IFF is Omer and its program director is Lina Raza.

1. The city, which is located in northeastern Iraqi Kurdistan, was founded in 1784 by Prince Ibrahim Pasha Baban as the capital of his principality. Its name can be written in various forms when anglicized, such as Sulaymaniyyah and Sulaimani. However, the festival is branded as the Slemani International Film Festival, sometimes abbreviated to Slemani Fest or Slemani IFF. The city is regarded as the cultural capital of Iraqi Kurdistan and has a long literary and philosophical tradition, especially in poetry and more recently novel writing. It was and continues to be a center for writing in the Sorani Kurdish dialect. Even the main street, Salim Street, is named after a famous classical Kurdish poet from the city: Abdul-Rehman Begi Saheb-Qiran (pen name Salim, ca. 1800–66). Slemani has a reputation of being a cosmopolitan, artistic, and tolerant city, and the film school at the University of Sulaimani (using the different anglicization for the city’s name) is well known for producing film directors, many of whose short films feature in Slemani IFF. As the interview explains, it is this context that propelled the original idea of the Slemani IFF.
Introducing Hemn A. Hussein

Hemn A. Hussein is a Kurdish self-taught artist and painter from Iraqi Kurdistan. Born in 1991 in the city of Sulaymaniyya (Slemani), he received his bachelor’s degree in English linguistics and literature from the University of Sulaimani (a different anglicization for Slemani) in 2014. He also received a master’s degree in political science and international relations from the University of Wroclaw, Poland, in 2019. Being an actor, he has participated in a few short films and worked in production management in Kurdistan and Poland. His first official art exhibition was held in the city of Reykjavik in Iceland where he currently resides. Hemn has been working with the Slemani IFF since the year of its creation in 2016, as director of communications.

This interview was conducted by email on September 20, 2021.

Alan Ali Saeed: I wanted to begin by asking you about the festival’s background. Who originally came up with the idea? What made people think something so novel (for Slemani) was possible? How did the idea develop and who in the city government was involved, as presumably you needed permission? What kinds of local and international agencies were involved?

Hemn A. Hussein: Cinema is the pretense of movement by the recording and subsequent rapid projection of many still photographic images on a screen. Stepping into the twentieth century and beyond, film came to be a medium of mass entertainment, social interaction, and communication. That is how The National Science and Media Museum [Bradford, United Kingdom] describes it.² Film has operated as one of the most influential and comprehensible platforms of cultural diplomacy for the last 120 years, allowing a particular national culture to be seen and understood by those from different cultures. Film, in my view, promotes intercultural understanding. However, for films to be seen, a platform is a necessity, and history has proven that one of the most effective platforms for showcasing films are film festivals.

Annabelle Pangborn writes: “Film Festivals importantly offer a platform for [...] filmmakers to

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present their creative ideas; their singular stories and storytelling; their talent and skill in their making and, not least, their passion to communicate how they feel and think about the world they live in.” Reflecting on statements like these, the idea of creating the Slemani International Film Festival was born.

Seven years ago, Danar Omer, a graduate of the college of fine arts, filmmaker, and film producer, visited Germany to attend the Berlinale [Berlin Film Festival]. This is one of the oldest and most prestigious film festivals in the world. After meeting the organizers of the festival, he had an idea. He said: “After I came back from Germany, I said to myself, that we can do this too. Thus, I put together the first draft and shared the idea with close friends, to which many showed their full support and some turned down the notion, which was a complete disappointment.”

This proposal was shared with some members of the government and the private sector. Omer, the founder and artistic director of the Slemani IFF, found that Masti Film Co., a private film and TV production company in Slemani city, loved the concept and decided to cooperate with him to bring the project to life. In 2016, The Slemani International Film Festival was born. For it to be created in Slemani makes sense, as Slemani has always been the capital of culture in Iraqi Kurdistan.

To answer the last part of your question, once the creation of the festival became a de facto probability, while no one in the city’s government was involved in its creation, they showed their support and gave us permission and help. Indeed, they welcomed such an innovative idea. In the first festival, several local and international organizations and entities were involved in the sense of sponsorship, including the University of Sulaimani, the French Institute in Erbil, the Goethe Institute of Germany, and the US embassy, to name but a few. In addition, several local companies, as well as government and nongovernmental organizations, sponsored us.

Alan Ali Saeed: Did anyone on the team have experience in film festivals? Did you get help from elsewhere from people who had organized film festivals previously? What kind of interest did the proposal generate in Slemani and Kurdistan more generally?

Hemn A. Hussein: Most of the team were young Kurdish intellectuals who loved the project, the city, and cinema in general. Although they had no experience, they researched and learned everything required to make sure the first Slemani IFF held was a success. If by help from elsewhere you mean obtaining training or workshops from people who had organized film festivals previously, then no, there was none. I believe the success of the festival has been based on the enthusiasm and passion of its creators, staff, crew, and volunteers for bringing such an innovative idea into existence. The proposal later generated all kind of interest in Slemani, Kurdistan, and internationally, in terms of possible cooperation, collaborations, and more.

Alan Ali Saeed: How did you go about finding financial support for such an impressive undertaking? It still seems to be amazing something so international could develop here in Slemani.

Hemn A. Hussein: Finding financial funds for any large-scale project is one of the most crucial points of guaranteeing its success, but it is also the most difficult step on the way to its...
realization. At the Slemani IFF, financing the project on such an enormous level has been our greatest challenge. However, once you have a powerful original idea, that takes everything to the next level, to the international arena and beyond, and then you find that people and organizations do tend to want to get involved and fund such an idea, and that is how it became possible.

I have asked the same question to Mr. Danar Omer, and he replied: “In the first edition, the challenge of bringing about the necessary funds that we were looking for, was really made possible when we involved politicians or government representatives who were interested in our idea. I would like to name one who has genuinely made the festival possible by creating a lobby throughout the Iraqi Kurdistan region to get the required funds. This is Mr. Hikmat Mohammed Kareem, known as Mala Baxtyar, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party in Slemani. He was later offered the position of the president of the festival in honor of his outstanding contribution. I cannot thank him enough for his crucial role.”

**Alan Ali Saeed:** Could you talk me through the team please? Who have been the key people over the years and what kind of skills and knowledge do they each bring to the festival? Did everyone know everyone else before, through other projects, or was there an actual recruitment of individuals?

**Hemn A. Hussein:** Although the festival has several departments within it, such as film programs, media department, advertising, marketing, hosting staff, and volunteers, it might come as a surprise, if I say, I could count the team of the festival in 2016 on the fingers of my hands! The key people though are the following: Danar Omer, the founder and the artistic director of the festival; Mala Baxtyar, the festival president; Fuad Jalal, the festival manager and owner of the Masti Film Co.; Lina Reza, the program manager and host of the ceremonies; and myself. I have been honored to serve as the director of communications of the Slemani IFF since its creation.

To answer the last part, some of the key figures knew each other before the festival, and their enthusiasm for the project gathered them together once more, but other than that, there has been an actual recruitment of individuals based on such features as their education level, office skills, experience of organizing events, language proficiency, and computer abilities.

**Alan Ali Saeed:** Film festivals are both about showing films and about categories/genres of film and prizes within each category. How did you come up with the categories and how do you go about selecting suitable juries? What are the categories/genres and which films have won over the festivals held so far?

**Hemn A. Hussein:** Yes, film festivals not only offer a platform for films to be seen but [also] create a practical competition through the different categories which eventually encourages filmmakers to thrive and make better films. One of the biggest challenges for new talent is obtaining funding for the filmmaking process. Film festivals facilitate that with their awards, which come with a monetary renumeration as well.

Slemani IFF since its first edition had international standards in terms of its categories, which include: feature film competition; short film competition (with subcategories, which are national short film and international short film); documentary film competition; and animation
It is worth mentioning that in the national short film competition, films that have been produced in each of the four regions of Kurdistan have been considered as national, which creates a beautiful sense of the unity of Kurdistan through the Slemani IFF.

Regarding the jury selection, we have a policy of choosing the juries based on their profile, background, and experience, and throughout the editions we have had an incredible list of juries for all the competitions, and many of them have served as jury members in the most prestigious film festivals worldwide. Some of our previous juries and attendees include: Maori New Zealand actress Rachel House (from Disney's Moana), who worked with the Oscar-winning director Taika Waititi; Australian filmmaker Rhys Graham, a director of a Netflix series; award-winning Kurdish Iranian actor Navid Mohammadzadeh, who won Best Actor 2017 in the Venice Film Festival; multi-award-winning Iranian director Majid Majidi and Academy member; Linda Olszewski, award-winning producer/director, and Carolyn McDonald, producer of several Hollywood feature films. A list of winners and full details about the nominees, winners, and the juries of all the editions can be found on our official website (www.slemanifest.com) and/or on our official social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram (https://www.facebook.com/SlemaniIFF). If you are interested in films and cinema then please connect with us.

Alan Ali Saeed: COVID-19 disrupted life and film festivals everywhere. However, before COVID I wondered what the team had found to be the largest challenges and difficulties and how the festival team managed to overcome them. Please be as detailed as you wish.

Hemn A. Hussein: Film festivals, like any other large projects, usually face several challenges. The biggest challenges and difficulties for Slemani IFF have circulated around getting enough funding for each year’s plan and agenda. Finding professional and standardized cinema venues that could screen the films with the highest quality has also been an issue for us in Slemani. Travel issues for the international guests and attendees who have traveled from all over the world can be problematic, considering Slemani’s small airport and the limited flights to the whole Kurdistan region. That was another major challenge.

However, the organizers of the Slemani IFF have always believed there are no challenges that cannot be overcome, there are no issues that cannot be solved, and there are no difficulties that cannot be mastered with perseverance. We have worked with such a pragmatic and enthusiastic spirit and always made the festival work with what resources we possessed at that time. We can proudly say that despite all the challenges, all four editions of the Slemani IFF have been held successfully, based on the personal feedback we usually get from our attendees and the audience of the festival each year.

Alan Ali Saeed: How has the film festival developed over the four years it has run, before COVID interrupted it? What do you think are the reasons for these developments?

Hemn A. Hussein: The festival has developed a great deal over the four years of its existence. The development can be seen in every aspect of the festival, for example, in its programs, which showed the increase of several key festival activities, including workshops, seminars, master classes, panels, and so forth. Not only that, but the agenda or the theme of the festival has developed over the years, focusing on global issues, such as women’s rights and world
crises, such as that of climate change. This has given the festival a real and I believe significant international image.

Furthermore, the Slemani IFF’s objective is to become an Oscar-qualifying film festival. This shows the development in the festival as a whole and the fact that the Slemani IFF has established worldwide collaborations and partnership with several well-known international film festivals. For instance, for the past four editions Slemani Fest has attracted filmmakers, actors, film journalists, and programmers from other international film festivals, including Oscar-qualifying festivals, such as Nashville, Atlanta, Rio De Janeiro, Tampere, Docville, Krakow, and Animafest Zagreb. This is just a short list.

To give a further example, the Slemani IFF is an official partner of the Tampere Film Festival (FF) (https://tamperefilmfestival.fi/en/), which is one of the oldest film festivals in Europe. In fact, in the Tampere FF’s fifty-year-anniversary edition, the Finnish festival created a Kurdistan program within their edition, showcasing a package of Kurdish film festivals from all four regions of Kurdistan. They also had some of the Kurdish films in their official international competition, which proves how the Slemani IFF is aiding and facilitating the Kurdish film industry, as well as showcasing Kurdish film culture in a global context.

Alan Ali Saeed: I often think film festivals exhibit a tension between local and international agendas. For example, world cinema is important and prize-winning films often come from all manner of countries, which lets local audiences enjoy films they might never get a chance to see otherwise (as well as to see international directors and actors). On the other hand, film festivals also have the role of promoting the local film industry and in this case Kurdish-language cinema and Kurdish-created films. How do you think Slemani IFF deals with this tension between local and international agendas?

Hemn A. Hussein: Personally, I would not call it a tension. Film festivals usually exhibit an opportunity for local cinema and cinephiles as well as the international community. This turns out to be mutually beneficial in the sense that you have mentioned. It offers the local audience a chance to see films that might never be possible otherwise, but it also gives foreign filmmakers an opportunity to exhibit their films in a completely different and new geographical location. For Slemani IFF, we have dealt with the issue by separating national and international short film competitions, which is our main category in the festival and our main focused category to become Oscar qualifying (as discussed above). This separation gives a fair chance to the Kurdish filmmakers to have their own competition and prize-winning trial, which is as valid as the international competition, but it also considers the challenges that Kurdish filmmakers face in terms of having enough funds to make films and operating in countries whose attitude to Kurdish culture varies greatly.

Alan Ali Saeed: Kurdish cinema is a difficult thing to define as it spans different countries, different dialects, and, like Kurdish nationalism, comes with different and varying political assumptions and principles. These different countries where Kurdish cinema happens are often places where Kurds are marginalized and treated with deep suspicion, if not actively oppressed by the government. How does the Slemani IFF deal with the issue of Kurdish cinema?
Hemn A. Hussein: This is a very good question. I believe the Slemani IFF has dealt with this topic quite properly. We have united all the Kurdish regions together in one category. This means it does not matter which region of Kurdistan the Kurdish film is from: whether it is from Rojawa [the Syrian Kurdish-populated area], Bakur, or northern Kurdistan [Turkey’s Kurdish-populated area], all the way to Roj Helat [the Iranian Kurdish region], eventually to Bashur, the Iraqi region of Kurdistan. Films originating from these areas are all considered Kurdish films and fall into the national category that gives them a sense of belonging to Kurdistan as a whole.

Alan Ali Saeed: My students often ask me about internships at the festival. Are there such things available and what kinds of skills would students who wish to be interns need?

Hemn A. Hussein: Until now, the Slemani IFF does not have any kind of internships for students, but it should and will be considered in the future. Thank you for the suggestion. However, we have always publicly showcased that we need volunteers and there have been many students and volunteer groups that have participated within the Slemani IFF and contributed to its success to date, including students from the University of Sulaimani, as well as students from the American University in Sulaimani. Ordinary film fans and cinephiles, whether students or otherwise, have shown great interest in volunteering for the festival over these years. In fact, as the organizers of the festival, we have been extremely grateful for all the volunteers, and we believe organizing the festival on such a great scale would not have been possible without them. I would like to thank them here.

Alan Ali Saeed: Finally, if your plans are not too secret, how do you think the film festival might develop in the future? Will we see more connections between the different film festivals in Iraqi Kurdistan for instance?

Hemn A. Hussein: One thing I can share with you in terms of our plans and development of the Slemani IFF is our objective to become an Oscar-qualifying film festival. We have already started the early steps toward that process. The pandemic situation has been a big push back to the entire film industry and especially festivals worldwide, including ours. But we are dealing with what we have now, and it is certain that Slemani IFF has come a long way within just four years and four editions. We have achieved more within this short period than many other international film festivals have achieved in decades. Considering this, we believe the Slemani IFF is looking forward to a very bright future and very soon will be one of the most well-known film festivals, not only in Iraq or the Middle East but [also] in the whole of the world.

Alan Ali Saeed: Thank you for such an informative interview. I am sure that I and everyone reading this wishes the Slemani IFF every success in the future. I cannot wait for what the fifth edition will bring to our city.
AUTHOR BIO

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Celebrating in King Otto’s Greece: The Economics of Dynastic, National, and Religious Public Ceremonies during the Ottonian Monarchy (1832–1862)

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ABSTRACT

The heavy-handed regime of King Otto of Bavaria introduced the ritual of national celebrations in Greece in 1833. The monarchy instituted annual celebrations for occasions such as the apovatíria—the anniversary of Otto’s landing in Nafplio—and also organized festivities for some of the king’s other public appearances (departures, arrivals, inauguration of various institutions). The festivities were primarily based on the traditions of European royal courts and secondarily on the protocol of the Orthodox Church. The monarchy and its concomitant institutions, the church (with its religious ceremonies) and the army (with its hierarchy), offered a familiar and safe spectacle with their firmly established rites such as parades, processions, hymns, and chants. Given the scanty financial resources of the Greek state during Otto’s reign, sponsoring such celebrations required a delicate balance. Focusing on the example of the anniversary of the Greek War of Independence on March 25, this article emphasizes the regime’s effort to stage said celebrations in a manner befitting both the significance of each event and the king’s grandeur without provoking public sentiment with the high cost of the celebrations or with events that were unfamiliar to the inhabitants of the Greek capital, Athens.

KEYWORDS

State symbolism
State holidays
State protocol
Festival economics
Nineteenth century
Greece
Ottonian monarchy
Celebrating in King Otto’s Greece: The Economics of Dynastic, National, and Religious Public Ceremonies during the Ottonian Monarchy (1832–1862)
Panayotis G. Kimourtzis and Anna Mandilara

Introduction: The Power of Celebratory Rituals in the Ottonian Period

A foreign traveler spending a year in Athens in, say, 1847 would have, willy-nilly, attended multiple public celebrations in the center of the Greek capital. Athens hosted the bulk of public celebrations. However, other cities and towns also had their share, and most prominent among them was the city of Nafplio, the first seat of the revolutionary government and the port that was to welcome modern Greece’s first head of state, Governor Kapodistrias, in 1828, as well as the minor King Otto along with his entourage and the Regency Council in 1833.

On days of celebrations, our traveler would be awakened at dawn by twenty-one or more gun shots, usually fired from the top of Lycabettus hill, while military bands would play marches in different parts of the city. Between nine and ten o’clock in the morning, he would be drawn by the noise of the crowd and, out of genuine interest or plain curiosity, end up at the church of Saint Irene, where he could see the entire political, religious, and military elite of the newborn state, gathered around King Otto and Queen Amalia. After the end of the service, he would drink his coffee and smoke a cigarette or a hookah at the famous café, The Beautiful Hellas, at the intersection of Aiolou and Ermou streets, where he could also learn the latest news from Greece and abroad. His entertainment might extend into the small hours of the night, when he could drink and dance to the sound of zurnas and davuls in the squares, streets, and taverns of the small Athenian center. Alternatively, if the traveler were a prominent European, one of the few hundred who visited Greece during the Ottonian period, he would spend the evening at one of the formal dinners held at the palace, dancing the “polonaise” with the vivacious queen and drinking fine Rhineland wines, while from the windows of the new palace building (today’s Parliament) he could gaze out at the ships docked at the port of Piraeus as the view to the sea was then unhindered.

Before the arrival of the Bavarian king on February 6, 1833 (January 25, according to the old calendar then in use in Greece), the atmosphere in the new Greek state was completely different. Athens was still a small city, mostly in ruins following the 1821 Revolution. The inhabitants of the Greek peninsula would not fail to honor their numerous saints, but they would usually do so at local festivals in the rural hinterland. In other words, celebration as a public event was not something new for the locals. In fact, during the years of the Revolution, both in Moldavia and in the Peloponnese, central Greece, and the Aegean islands, dozens of public ceremonies were held on the occasion of receiving prominent persons or the blessing of arms. New circumstances, however, were the successful ten-year war, the formation of the independent Greek state, and the establishment of absolute monarchy along with its court.

Who organized festivals in the Greek kingdom and for what purpose? In January 1833, the newly established Greek state did not just welcome one person to Nafplio, its new king. It also welcomed a dynastic regime, and an absolute monarchy to boot. The one who disembarked was the young Bavarian prince Otto Friedrich Ludwig von Wittelsbach (June 1, 1815–July 26, 1867), who had been brought up with the dynastic ideology and day-to-day exercise of power, both real and symbolic.
For this reason, when he arrived at the half-destroyed Nafplio, the harbor was crowded with the massive frigates of the three “Protecting Powers,” their thirty warships, and the thirty-four ships carrying military units, namely the 3,500 men of the Bavarian army who were to replace the French soldiers in the city’s fortress.

From that day on, the dynastic regime established its power and its symbols in every area of the country’s governance—military, economic, legal, educational, and cultural. Each royal appearance was a privileged field for the display of these symbols. The king conveyed them and targeted them—sometimes all together, sometimes singly—to different cultural, political, and economic recipients.

The stereotype of unanimity, joy, and jubilation uniting socially disparate subjects around the absolute monarch was the dominant motif of the ideal image that the newly appointed Bavarian government hoped to impose. It was, in other words, the true image of a model and a vision. The model of monarchy and the vision of the Greek nation, though they had an adequate past, would be forged anew during Otto’s thirty-year reign.

Celebrations in the public sphere of the Greek kingdom were among the most important fields in which the realization of these mutual but also divergent expectations was tested. But they also had to function as the mirror of history: the Greek past was to be reflected in it, but with the new monarch taking central place in the image. The image had to speak of everything: politics, economy, ideology, the rulers and the ruled. Although the mirror would often distort, even the distorted images would become aspects of reality.

In the European environment of the Restoration, the Bavarian ruler Ludwig I and his second son, King Otto of Greece, systematically tried to impose absolute monarchy. They wanted to surround it with a number of activities, primarily in the fields of arts and letters, architecture, and urban planning. In this effort they were helped by the “politically colorless neoclassicism/philhellenism” of the romantic notion of a Greek nation. For at least a while, this served the ideological and political aspirations of the proponents of neoclassicism and philhellenism. This was the time when the “neoclassical sensitivity of romanticism” began being limited to aesthetics while shedding the political significance of ancient Greece, namely democracy. The House of Wittelsbach tried, both in Greece and in Bavaria, to use aesthetics as a substitute for politics in the underpinning of absolutism. Every royal appearance—which included salutes, body posture, dress, dialogues, forms of address, proclamations—was a privileged field for the trappings of absolute monarchy that addressed different cultural, political, and economic recipients simultaneously: local notables, Roumeli chieftains, Morea band leaders, shipowners from the islands of Hydra, Spetses, and Psara, Europeanized politicians and scholars of Phanari and of centers of the Greek diaspora, political party leaders, ambassadors of the European powers, Greek and European military officials. Most royal appearances were made in public ceremonies. They were the privileged field for a condensation of the state’s symbolic power in modern Greece.

The country’s financial situation—already worsened by the so-called independence loans—had troubled the thoughts of the government since the first days of the establishment of the modern Greek state. The young king himself, in his address to the people upon coming of age on May 20/
Within this context, the purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to analyze the establishment of public holidays in the Greek kingdom and, second, to explore the economic dimension of public ceremonies during the Ottonian absolute monarchy and, after 1843, the constitutional monarchy. The main point of this work is that the monarchical system—much too costly for a relatively small, debt-ridden state—reflected a belief that the costs of its “symbolic/aesthetic” presence in the public sphere were inelastic. That is why all official ceremonies were funded by the state. However, the monarchy sometimes had to cut down on the number of dancing balls or the well-attended banquets of the royal court. At the same time, while the people appropriated public ceremonies, especially the national celebration of Independence Day, private gatherings became more frequent in the 1850s, with costs covered by donations and fundraising among citizens.\(^6\)

The Public Profile of “Ottonian Court Society”: Dynastic, National, and Religious Ceremonies of the Greek Kingdom from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

One question that arose early in our research—even before the questions of who organized celebrations and why—was why one should deal with celebrations as an object of history. Although celebrations have been a systematic field of study only since the 1970s, eminent ethnologists, historical anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, working in parallel or in collaboration, had by the early twenty century turned to objects such as the human body, food, myth, climate, books, and public opinion. They thus broadened not only our perception of human activity but also our thinking on subjects that until then had been dealt with exclusively by the natural sciences, such as time and space. One such new subject was celebrations, which, like all scientific subjects, was constructed through multiple approaches, predominantly those that studied a wide range of important issues: from the rituals of the French and English monarchy in the Middle Ages and the rites of religious life, to the rites of initiation or passage of everyday people from one social position/status to another through, for example, marriage, baptism, or death.

After delving into the above approaches, historian Mona Ozouf further historicized the field of research with her pioneering work on the French Revolutionary feasts of 1789–99 and, on the basis of this particular example, reformulated theoretical questions concerning celebration as object and as reality.\(^7\) Inspired by Ozouf’s approach, we intend to show that public celebrations of the Ottonian reign created a new memory, distinguished by an excess of purpose on the part of the organizers, repeating themselves without anyone noticing or complaining: every year, the
present absorbed and ignored the problems of everyday life, power appeared to be immortal and indestructible, and the desire for a glorious past and a better future prevailed. It is precisely here that the greatest difficulty of our project lies. The historian's good fortune to know "what happened next" has been a huge obstacle to the analysis of the "present time of the celebration." Each time, the particular "performance" of the celebration, with its performativity, contained all the vitality and ephemerality of a live impact on reality. For example, even the simple narrative of Otto's disembarking ceremony, let alone its interpretation, would be impossible or at least extremely biased, and ultimately distanced from the reality of that day, if the historian were influenced by knowledge of the king's subsequent unpopularity, the wave of opposition to "Bavarian rule," and the like. Holidays and celebrations are objects of history that significantly change the way we think about historical science and, in particular, the multiple layers of social time.

A second difficulty in the research was that historians usually have access to sources that reveal, if not exclusively, at least to a large extent, the plans of the organizers and, to a much lesser degree, the reception and experience of the celebration by the disparate crowd of participants. Even the major newspapers of the time, with their lengthy articles, provided mediated accounts that were more a reflection of the reporters/columnists' political views than of the contrast between the joy and the discontent caused by each celebration. This difficulty seems to have been overcome, particularly in cases where the facts themselves could not be ignored, as, for example, with the constant mischief, binge drinking, and excesses that took place during the March 25 celebrations, or in cases where different sources could be cross-referenced, such as scholarly reports, Queen Amalia's letters, and newspaper articles.

In the course of our research, concepts such as "rituals," "symbols," and "protocol" had to be clarified and studied, as they were an integral part of the daily life of the monarchy and of public celebrations during the Ottonian period. However, the "scientific paths" we wished to explore led us to "avenues" of research production of an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character, concerning mainly rituals and symbols, and, less importantly, protocol: the perspective of religious anthropology, structural functionality, and the theory of cultural institutions, the ritual aspects of communication, and ritual practices in the field of education are but a few of the fields where ritual practices and symbols have been thoroughly studied. For the sake of simplicity, we will focus exclusively on the discussions that were of primary importance for the needs of our approach.

Inspired by Émile Durkheim, who studied the importance of ritual performance in the formation of social structure, we follow the work of anthropologists and sociologists who showed, among other things, that rituals reinforce levels of power and authority, inspire a sense of belonging and impose social order. Scholars of rituals all agree that traditional rituals are performed at a given time and in a specific place. As Arnold Van Gennep explained in his long-overlooked work, rituals have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end, which are determined by a bell, a song and a dance, or even a shout, while time in rituals is defined on the basis of written or unwritten procedures. Furthermore, the presence of participants in the ritualistic setting (the "space") is a necessary element that strengthens the unity of the community. Only through their presence in the ritualistic "scene" are participants able to feel the venerability as well as the power of the ritual


12. For a comprehensive study of the subject of masters of ceremony in France, see Sarah Hanley, Les Lits de justice des rois de France. L'idéologie
and subsequently increase their sense of collectivity. Another characteristic element of rituals is schematization/standardization, according to which the ritual has to follow certain rules and criteria. This formalization is linked to a certain heritage and its repetition and, as Paul Connerton notes, “all rituals are repetitive, and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past.”10

From his own perspective, Richard Quantz points out that ritual is a “formalized, symbolic performance,” while John David and Frederique Van de Poel-Knotterus, who have studied symbolic ritual practices, suggest that they may display varying degrees of “similarity” depending on how they are perceived in terms of form and meaning.11 The greater degree of similarity brings about the mutual reinforcement of these practices as well as the effect they have on those involved within the context of an embedded group; such comparable (“homologous”) ritualized symbolic practices facilitate the reproduction of the social structure.

The specific festivals of the Ottonian period were not rituals; they contained rituals (or ceremonial), which produced what in the political terminology of the state was called “protocol.” It is indicative that Armansperg, the chairman of the Regency Council, was given, among other things, the title of master of ceremonies, a position created in 1585 by Henry III of France (grand maître des ceremonies).12

In their edited volume Le Protocole ou la mise en forme de l’ordre politique, Yves Déloye, Claudine Haroche, and Olivier Ihl note that in its origins, “protocol seems fundamentally driven by this quest for harmony as well as by this desire for pacification. At the same time, its hierarchy was the source of many conflicts. The history of etiquette and protocol is punctuated by incidents that reveal the outlines of major political issues.”13 Queen Amalia in her letters to her father as well as the newspapers of the time repeatedly noted issues of protocol that led to confrontations between the royal couple and ministers, senators, and members of Parliament. Protocol was—and still is—a “manual,” a “catalog” of memory. In this sense, “the term protocol implies something that is important, guarantees continuity, preserves the memory of political institutions. For it defines the list of classes and hierarchies, the hierarchy of political functions, reminds everyone of their place and of the gestures to be performed, justifies the distribution of bodies in the political space, regulates the movement and rhythm of ceremonies: protocol guarantees the expression of political order.”14

After the Revolution of September 3, 1843, the protocol for official public celebrations and palace balls was not abolished but was changed and even became the subject of controversy. The society of the Ottonian court during its absolute and constitutional government contributed to the development of the institution of political protocol. This is why the study of the protocol of public royal appearances and all kinds of ceremonies allows us to better understand the morphology of power.15

Celebrations contain rituals that crystallize into protocol, and, in turn, rituals and protocol are expressed in symbols. According to Victor Turner, “the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual,” and ritual is but a bundle of symbols with a “dominant” one.16 He appreciates that symbols can, for example, be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures. Recognizing the interconnection of ritual and symbols (as well as religion and symbols), in a later work he concludes that a ritual is “a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and
objects, performed in a sequestered place, [and is] designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests.” Thus he conceives of rituals as “storehouses of meaningful symbols” by which information is revealed and regarded as “authoritative” since they deal with the “crucial values of the community.” The concept of “symbol” refers to “something” that is perceived in a person’s mind in a different way from what is visible and explicit (without, however, it being confused with the concept of metaphor). A symbol, in fact, is determined by what it refers to (e.g., values, memories, emotions) for the perceiver, without necessarily being inferred from the object or event itself. Therefore, the meaning of the symbol often varies to a large extent, depending on who perceives it, in conjunction with the general context. Indeed, according to Ike Verschoor, “the same object can be a symbol for one person, while it does not have any meaning for his neighbor or can be perceived in a totally different way, according to the situation.”

For his part, Maykel Verkuyten proposes that symbols are a “means to experience an abstract content, and not only representing one in a brief and vivid way for the purpose of intellectual understanding as with metaphors” while pointing out that they have the power to affect people’s thinking and behavior.

The concept of “national symbols” has been of particular interest to a number of researchers. K. A. Cerulo points out that the creation and adoption of national symbols “stems from a long tradition in which groups or ruling houses used banners, crests, fanfares, etc. as a form of announcement and identification,” while Ike Verschoor, based on Cerulo’s analysis, points out that in the nineteenth century, more and more nation-states adopted a single set of symbols, so that, by the twentieth century, it had become a globally shared rule.

During the Ottonian reign, national symbols, while already possessing a history of their own, were at the same time in the process of formation within the new context of the state. The Greek flag remained the most important and most enduring symbol. As research has already revealed, in prerevolutionary times various groups of chieftains as well as island shipowners used banners (flamboura) or flags (bayraks) which despite their diversity usually contained the cross, being modeled after the banners of the Orthodox Church.

Some flags bore the symbols of the Society of Friends, others the phoenix of [Alexander] Ypsilantis or the figure of goddess Athena, and other improvised ones followed the old tradition of the brigands (the armatoloi) with the banner of war, using the cross and the saints, or the eagle and the cross, in all possible combinations. But all flags without exception had the cross, and the words “Freedom or Death” in a dominant position. A flag with a cross had to be raised in order to formalize the desire for freedom, the overthrow of despotic tyranny and the resurrection of the Nation. In addition to “Freedom or Death,” mottos that were used included “Jesus Christ Is Victorious,” “God Be with Us,” the “With It or On It” of ancient Sparta, “I Am Reborn from My Ashes,” and “Fight for Faith and Country.”

Soon, however, from the very first “Provisional Constitution” of Epidaurus in January 1822, the “blue and white flag” was defined as the official Greek flag, both at sea and on land, while its shape was fixed, a few months later, by a proclamation of the president of the Executive Body, Alexandros Mavrokordatos. The cross was a plausible symbol, but the choice of the specific colors and the nine parallel lines remains unclear. It was imperative, however, that all symbols
reminiscent of the Society of Friends be replaced with a flag acceptable to the Great Powers. Although officially the flag remained the same until the advent of Otto and the Regency, in times of unrest—such as after Kapodistrias’s assassination—various revolutionary flags reappeared. Otto’s monarchy retained the blue and white flag, adapting only a few details, while the royal flag bore the dynastic coat of arms of the House of Wittelsbach.

During the various public celebrations, and especially on the anniversaries of March 25, the pantheon of heroes of the Greek Revolution was gradually assembled, decorating makeshift arches and trophies under the watchful eyes of Otto and Amalia (represented in portrait). There was no national anthem, since, as is well known, although Otto may have decorated the composer Nikolaos Mantzaros (1845) and the poet Dionysios Solomos (1849) for their “Hymn to Liberty,” he continued to use Bavarian military chants at every celebration, to the great disappointment of the populace.

The new state apparatus introduced and eventually established a number of public celebrations. The only festive days that existed before the Greek Revolution and continued to be observed and celebrated by the entire Greek population were religious holidays. But soon came growing criticism of the excessive number of public holidays, during which—according to an emerging economic and moral rationalism—public order was disrupted while idleness and wastefulness were encouraged among the poor.23 On January 23, 1843, the newspaper Athena editorialized:

There are many reasons, we think, that compel the government not only to make the celebrations of public holidays a simpler affair, but also to reduce the number of such holidays as much as possible so that people regard them with greater respect, and to prevent the movement of masses of idle people to the capital city, who, having nothing else to do, wait for these official holidays so they can come to the capital and renew demands, or at least ask for the King’s special assistance, only to squander it in local coffee shops only to return to their homes poorer and more unhappy than they were when they had set out.24

However, as John Petropulos writes, when the French traveler J. A. Buchon expressed to a villager the view that celebrations should be reduced, the latter replied that if the government thought there were too many holidays, it should stop creating new civil holidays, such as the anniversary of the king’s landing or of his entrance to Athens. He loved the king and the queen, he continued, but he also respected Saint Athanasius very much, and he would “never cease showing him the respect that [his] family always had for him.”25

Taking into account the undisputed religious feelings of the Greek people, the Regency and, even more so, King Otto, introduced a series of public celebrations in which he and Queen Amalia were the focus. For these celebrations, official programs were issued. During the Regency, as well as during the first years of Otto’s reign, the programs were written in Greek, German, and French—in three columns. Later, however, most were printed either in Greek or in Greek and French. The ceremonies can be divided into three categories:

Ceremonies on the occasion of one-off events:
- Otto’s first landing at Nafplio
- Otto’s first proclamation

23. Mona Ozouf estimates that as early as the eighteenth century an economic rationality developed in France in connection with celebrations; it incorporated the moral and religious rationality, which, aphoristically, stipulated that “continuous activity is the mother of innocence.” On the part of the church, there were many who believed that holy days consecrated to piety resulted in drunkenness, debauchery, even murder. As a result, encyclopedists, in order to denounce the abuses of feast days, did not take long to discover the arguments of the bishops (who wished to reduce the number of feast days) and those of civil authorities (who targeted public gatherings during celebrations as an opportunity for illegal acts). Ultimately, Ozouf concludes that, within this moral and religious context, celebrations always provoked criticism from one quarter or another for offending religion, the state, or morals. Ozouf, La fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 8–9.


• Otto's coming-of-age ceremony
• Otto and Amalia's wedding
• Amalia's first landing at Nafplio
• A feast at the Parthenon
• Otto's twenty-fifth birthday ceremony

Annual feasts and ceremonies:
• March 25, Independence Day
• September 3, Anniversary of the 1843 Revolution
• Otto's landing anniversary
• Amalia's landing anniversary
• Otto's birthday celebration
• Amalia's birthday celebration
• Otto's name day celebration
• Amalia's name day celebration
• Otto and Amalia's wedding anniversary

Repeated ceremonies:
• Welcoming ceremonies for Otto or Amalia on their return from tours and trips.26

The above typology includes all public celebrations throughout the Ottonian reign. However, in order to bring out the historical dynamics behind their establishment, two important social spaces must be considered where such ceremonies were planned and carried out: the royal court and the wider society, mainly the capital city of Athens. Also, this categorization does not include the Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendar. Among the latter’s feasts, the initiators of public celebrations were called upon to insert dynastic and national ceremonies. In particular, the dates of civil ceremonies should not coincide with important religious feasts such as Easter and Christmas. Whenever this happened, since Easter is a moveable feast, the official dynastic or national celebration was shifted to a different date.

The year began with the celebration of the new year, which was established as an official ceremony in the Greek state by the Bavarian rule. Of course, the problem was that, as the Julian (old) calendar was still in force in the Greek kingdom and the Gregorian (new) calendar had been established in almost all of the rest of Europe, the royal couple, as Amalia informs us, celebrated New Year’s Day twice: with public ceremonies and in the palace on January 1, according to the old calendar, and then again in the palace along with the courtiers twelve days later, on January 13, according to the new calendar—which made Amalia feel that “there was something fragmentary about this celebration.”27

Immediately after, on January 25/February 6, came the celebrations of Otto’s landing at Nafplio (his arrival in Greece), followed by the anniversary of Amalia’s landing on February 3/15.28 The first two months of the spring were dominated by the national holiday of March 25 and by

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28. “After a journey of fifteen days, Otto and Amalia arrived in Piraeus. Because it was late and there was hardly enough time for the landing and the official reception before dark, it was decided they would disembark on the following day, which is why Amalia in her letters makes a distinction between the day of the ship’s arrival and the day of her landing.” Busse and Busse, eds., Unpublished Letters, 21.
Orthodoxy’s great religious feast of Easter. The end of spring and beginning of summer was marked by the king’s birthday on May 20/June 1. The three months of summer, which did not include any of the royal couple’s birthdays or name days, were devoid of official celebrations. Besides, the season was stifling, especially in the capital, which the queen made a point of commenting on in letters to her father. In the fall, public celebrations started again with Otto’s name day on September 18/30 and Amalia’s on September 25/October 7. The year wrapped up with the winter celebration for the royal couple’s wedding ceremony on November 10/22, the queen’s birthday on December 9/21, and, of course, the great Christmas holiday.

Dynastic Protocol and the National or Religious Spectacles of the Monarchy: Their Economic Dimension

A few days before the celebration of public feasts, Otto’s privy council and, in later times, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, brought out programs printed on luxury single sheets. These programs were an ever-evolving variation of the form and content of the first official program issued, that of the King’s Landing Festival. They were “manuals of Greek hierarchy” that the Royal Bavarian court presented to its main guests: the political, military, and ecclesiastical officials of Greece. The elaborate but exact seating arrangement of the participants was based on a royal protocol that was strict and not at all arbitrary. It attempted to rank, categorize, and compress the Greek and Bavarian presence. One must distinguish between “codified protocol” and “protocol practice,” however. In the same way that there were multiple versions of protocol in the European royal courts from the sixteenth century on, the master of ceremonies or the minister of Internal Affairs, who had overall command of the celebrations, made adjustments to the codified Bavarian protocol and ended up with a “revised” protocol practice, depending on the specifics of each ceremony. In any case, the spectacle that these ceremonies projected before a crowd was the visible order which determined “the invisible hierarchy of Order” that the country’s Bavarian government seemed resolved to impose. The collection of programs stored at the Benaki Museum and the General State Archives is almost complete for the entire Ottonian period and gives us an accurate representation of the way official festivals like the March 25 celebrations unfolded.

On the eve of the feast, at sunset, a twenty-one-gun salute was fired (twenty-one, in this case, in remembrance of the Greek Revolution of 1821) to announce the festive day. This was followed, on the same day, by military bands playing military music in the city and in the army camps. At sunrise on the feast day, twenty-one gunshots were fired and military music was repeated. At eight o’clock the troops took up their planned positions. At nine, a special mass was celebrated in a central church of Athens. After mass, the twenty-one gunshots were fired again. At noon, the kingdom’s warships, docked at the port of Piraeus and decorated with national flags, returned the salute with another twenty-one gunshots. Military music continued throughout the afternoon, and at sunset the final round of gunshots was fired. The festivities usually wrapped up with a ball hosted by the royal couple at the palace. Competition among prominent officials for an invitation to the ball was fierce. The king also used invitations as a symbolic opportunity to send out messages of what he had in mind about hierarchy, those in favor and disfavor at each time.

As demonstrated by the program and other sources of the time, such as newspapers and the queen’s letters to her father, the expenditure for a public festival was fixed and inelastic and
The sixth chapter is the most extensive one. It is titled “How we could add glamour to the official ceremonies of new Greece.” After a brief description of Greece’s contemporary situation (i.e., the situation prevailing in 1835), the author expresses the hope that the means will be found to add glamour to the national athletic events of the festivals. There are recommendations to reduce by one-third the import and export custom duties in the cities of the celebrations during the eight anniversaries and public games of the modern state of Greece. For the first time in 1835, the author expresses the hope that the means will be found to add glamour to the national athletic events of the festivals. There are recommendations to reduce by one-third the import and export custom duties in the cities of the celebrations during the eight

Although no economic data is available that would allow us to come up with even a rough estimate of the costs of a public festival, indicative qualitative documentation paints a picture of hardship and poverty. When, for example, on May 23, 1833, Otto, along with all of the Regency members and his brother Maximilian, made a ceremonial entry into the city of Athens, the glory of the ancient city—which had not yet been selected as the capital of the newly established state—determined the great symbolic value of such an official entry. However, according to the Bavarian Colonel Predl, who was the chief official responsible for the organization of the public ceremony, “as neither the city of Athens nor we had enough gunpowder, we asked for the assistance of Osman Pasha, who was willing to offer it, and thus the greeting of the king of Greece was done with Turkish gunpowder and Turkish gunfire.”

Two years later, on January 22/February 2, 1835, secretary (i.e., the minister) of Internal Affairs Ioannis Kolettis would submit to the Regency a written proposal for the establishment of public celebrations on the occasion of the Greek Revolution, only a few months before the ceremony of Otto’s ascension to the throne. In addition to the official programs of celebrations, this proposal is the only complete Greek scholarly text of the Ottonian period in which opinions on public national spectacles are expressed. It is handwritten and consists of twenty consecutive folded sheets, written originally in French with the above date, as well as a German summary (entitled “Nationalfeste und Öffentlichfeste”) with a later date (March 30/April 11, 1835).

The text is divided into seven chapters with titles describing their content. In the first chapter, titled “The usefulness of these official ceremonies (celebrations),” the author asserts that, since the early nineteenth century, what has guided the Greeks on their way to revolution was their wish to come closer to antiquity and reproduce the glorious classical past. Therefore, as a reward for the Revolution, institutions need to be set up to respond to the wishes of the kingdom’s “thinking class.” Besides, how else can one expect the modern state of Greece to be respected, poor and deprived as it is, next to the huge beacon of civilized Europe? However, this land is still important because it was important once, and its past with its majestic shadow can cover the humbleness of its present. In order to bestow magnificence on the newborn monarchy, it must be invested with the ideal of antiquity, and the eyes of the world will undoubtedly turn to the king of Greece if he reproduces in the Mediterranean Sea ancient images that stir up the admiration of centuries. These official festivals will also have tremendous moral benefits. They will provide momentum to virtue, genius, and the fine arts, through the establishment of national awards, and thus the dynasty will be a source of moral virtue.

The sixth chapter is the most extensive one. It is titled “How we could add glamour to the official ceremonies of new Greece.” After a brief description of Greece’s contemporary situation (i.e., the situation prevailing in 1835), the author expresses the hope that the means will be found to add glamour to the national athletic events of the festivals. There are recommendations to reduce by one-third the import and export custom duties in the cities of the celebrations during the eight
days recommended by the proposal. Continuing with its suggestions (for example, painting and sculpture exhibitions, choirs with twenty-four boys and twenty-four girls crowned with flowers), the proposal recommends the construction of four theaters (in the four proposed cities), which should be built soon, starting with the one in Athens in 1835. The theaters will be similar to those of antiquity, that is, huge, stepped amphitheaters, which should accommodate as many as six thousand spectators. The current difficulties in creating a National Theater in Greece should not deter the government. The Greek nation had theaters even under the Ottoman occupation; the best works of Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, Alfieri, and Schiller have already been translated into Greek. Greece can boast of its actors and dramatists. The government must promote the new talents of Greece.

As detailed as it was, the proposal as a whole was not adopted—not because of its ideological use of ancient classical heritage but because of its inapplicable maximalist spirit, which envisioned the construction of amphitheaters in the poverty-stricken Greek kingdom. However, it remains a rare example of the ideological horizon of the small but energetic group of intellectual courtiers who, since the arrival of the young king, had assumed various governmental positions because of their European studies and Phanariot cultural status, and shared an attachment to a glorious past as well as the megalomania of the royal environment. The “visions of a Byzantine Empire,” which Otto and Amalia never abandoned, always clashed with the actual state of the public finances. As a result, what prevailed was the wish of the rulers to achieve the most positive impressions at the lowest possible cost, since the Greek populace had begun to adore the pompous style of the public celebrations but also commended the administration when such celebrations were state-funded.

The success of the celebrations was almost always guaranteed because of the enthusiastic participation of ordinary people, who enjoyed dancing and singing in public places, an old custom rooted in Orthodox folk festivals. Already during the first celebrations of March 25, Athenian citizens decorated the streets with improvised portraits of Revolution fighters, while villagers arrived in the capital with their families bearing flags, tabors, and zournades (i.e., shawms, folk oboes).

On the other hand, purely private gatherings organized by specific groups with direct access to the press of the era seem to have been increasing in the 1850s. We can assume that the need for private celebration was transmitted to Athenian society by similar gatherings of Greeks abroad (in places such as Paris) or in the Ionian Islands. It found a suitable breeding ground in the capital as the country’s society changed and formed into groups in distinct industries and other areas.

Three such examples were widely covered in newspapers: the 1855 university students’ festival at the “Hotel of England,” the banquet of the Bar Association in 1857, and the three banquets—of the opposition MPs, the Bar Association, and the university students—in 1861, one year before the eviction of King Otto and Queen Amalia. The costs of the banquets were covered by fundraising among participants, a practice which was apparently already sanctified by similar events, which is why these events were usually characterized by journalists as frugal but lively affairs.

State-funded public ceremonies were also accompanied by private rejoicing. Greek citizens,
especially the residents of urban centers, appropriated the feasts and participated at their own expense, expecting, of course, the monarchy to continue financing the splendor in favor of the nation rather than its own glory.

However, as early as the 1840s, Queen Amalia expressed concern in letters to her father about the country’s economic situation, which was reflected in the reduction in number of banquets and balls and even of travel to other cities, for example, in 1842 to Nafplio, where the celebration of Otto’s landing was traditionally performed but which had to be canceled as a result of dissatisfaction with the monarchy’s expenses.

**The Rulers and the Ruled: The Anniversary of the Greek Revolution as a Window on the National Festive Spirit**

For most of the Ottonian period, the celebration of the March 25 anniversary as a celebration of all the people, in which national unity and unanimity could be expressed, largely remained wishful thinking. The rhetoric of the imagined national community did not accurately reflect reality. Aside from the fault-finding of the opposition press and the rhetoric of the friendly press about every minor or major event, the truth is that during the day-long celebration—when feelings of pride, sorrow, joy, and anxiety as well as of widespread "anti-Bavarian feeling" were amplified by the consumption of drink and the excitement of dances and songs—there were many occasions for mischief, binge drinking, and all kinds of excesses, as the writers of the time noted.

Of the mischief that occurred in 1841 we have but scant evidence, although the newspaper *Athena* devoted three articles to the March 25 anniversary. In those, the writer implied that petty misconduct had been provoke by the excesses of the authorities and were not to be blamed on the people, who, when they were happy, rejoiced in a most quiet and orderly manner.

Things were different in 1842, however. The capital of Greece may have celebrated the national anniversary with remarkable decorum, but such was not the case in Nafplio. According to newspaper writers, some "evil demon" took the baton of mischief from one city to another and thus, year after year, scandals broke out in a different region of the Greek kingdom during “the only one of our national celebrations.” The queen, in the aforementioned letter of April 11, 1842, wrote that there were many incidents targeting Germans but that she herself did not yet know the details. The details, however, had already been published in *Athena* as early as April 1, 1842, with wide coverage of the events based on the accounts of subscribers residing in Nafplio.

The story began with the best intentions of Greeks and Philhellenes who wanted to organize, jointly and with contributions from the celebrants, a banquet which would take place in the Governor’s Garden, at the foot of the Palamidi Fortress. A committee of three Greek officers was immediately formed, after a citizens’ vote, in order to hold a collection of money and organize the feast. Trouble ensued when the Bavarians in Nafplio made it known that they wanted to participate but the Greeks refused. Although the people of Nafplio claimed that they had not been suddenly possessed by feelings of “xenophobia,” since they would accept “anyone, including a Frenchman or an Englishman, a Russian or a Turk or even a Jew, if the Turk and the Jew wanted to join us with an open heart in blessing the memorial of our resurrection,” the arguments for the refusal reveal a pervasive aversion to the mentality of the Bavarians, which, according to the

34. *Athena*, April 1, 1842.
36. *Athena*, April 1, 1842.
inhabitants of Nafplio, would have turned cheerfulness into gloom, frozen the momentum in the hearts of the co-celebrants, and imposed “a troublesome ruler’s calculations in the place and time where alone his power must stop.”

Besides, it was argued, the Bavarians were not to take exception to this decision, for the Greeks too had not complained when they were not invited to the ceremony of the dedication of the Nafplio Heroes’ Monument. However, the Bavarians did not stand idly by. They lodged a complaint with the fortress governor, Almeida, who urged them to set up a five-member committee, consisting of Bavarians of Greek birth, which the author of the report strongly objected to. The two committees—the Bavarian and the Greek—met, but in vain as it was impossible to find a solution satisfactory to both sides. Thus, the Bavarians decided not only to abstain but also to ban junior officers and soldiers, whether Greek or Bavarian, from taking part in the banquet.

It was considered important that the usual ceremonial gunfire salute was not carried out either at sunrise or at sunset, and military musicians were also forbidden to play songs or dances. Eventually a new civilian committee was organized which invited both Greek and Grecophile military officers to take part in the banquet, so that all those who preferred to listen to the “friendly voice of their fellow citizens rather than to the unfriendly dissuasions of their alien leaders” could attend.

The account of the banquet began with the appearance of Admiral Konstantinos Kanaris at one o’clock in the afternoon, with many palm-bearing citizens and military men cheering him. He was followed by commanders Nikitas and Rodios, and the three took the position of honor at the banquet table. The table was immense; it stretched from the center of the garden to its eastern end, the trunks of the trees serving as its support and the foliage as shade for the guests. Four guild flags flew at the edges of the table. There was no military music, but the festival was not “without song or dance”; musicians (probably gypsies) from the outskirts of the city arrived with bagpipes and drums. There were numerous toasts, the most important of which were to the victims of the war, to the king and the constitution, to living athletes, to the allied forces, but also to the press, which was, for the writers, one of the successors of the old fighters in this new struggle of the civilized world.

The men, dressed in uniforms of various designs and colors, adorned the open-air space. At sunset, they began to march toward the city to the sound of music from a single instrument, the flags leading the way, while in Platanos Square they shouted “Long live Greece” three times, and the sky was darkened by the colorful headgear they threw in the air. And although rain and hail began in the afternoon, the people of Nafplio kept walking around the city singing songs and dancing.

However, the celebration ended on an unhappy note. The next day three revelers, Botzaris, Diamantopoulos, and Koroneos, were sent to jail, the last one with a more severe sentence than the other two, because some people passing outside the house of a Mr. Hitz—who had ordered the detention—shouted “Good passing,” a wish usually reserved for the deceased!

In the following year, 1843, at the celebration in the capital, some minor trouble was caused by a group of youths, which the newspaper Athena had intimated on March 13, denouncing it as a fraudulent rumor intended to damage the university; the columnist took the opportunity to
preach a brief though pithy sermon on the sanctity and grandeur of the national holiday.

Two days after the celebration, the same newspaper congratulated the populace on their exemplary behavior and merely condemned the disorderly behavior of a small group of youths, without further reference:

No matter how much worry some flatterers and parasites wanted to cause to the Court regarding the March 25 national holiday, the celebration was conducted with the utmost order and decorum—even though Mr. Koutsoyannopoulos found reason to be afraid even of the word MAP on a wreath of flowers. So it may be with eagerness that we hasten to congratulate our fellow citizens on their inclination to orderly behavior, but it is with indignation that we are compelled to deplore some senseless and impetuous slogan found in the hands of youths, among whom some have tried to include a number of university students, but of whom we publicly declare that none took part in such frenzy.38

Although in 1845 the queen noted in a letter to her father that “the people celebrated March 25 joyfully and quietly,” she wrote this in contrast to the opposition newspapers which, according to Amalia, had tried to stir up riots by gathering people in Piraeus equipped with gunpowder and weapons.39 As far as the queen was concerned, there should have been an outcry caused by the fact that the English consul Edmund Lyons had not even attended the National Day church service:

Since the envoys here, by the way they have behaved, have brought about, for example, the September 3 revolution with their startled governments being totally in the dark, they will cause more of the same, since they are allowed to act in this way and reduce state affairs to private ones. What should the Greeks think, for example, when Lyons, on the day of the national holiday, which has always been celebrated with splendor, illuminations, etc., did not even come to church this time, something he had consistently done for seven years. They will say that England no longer wants the independence of Greece, because the ministry is not English. We were right, they will say, Mavrokordatos wanted to sell Greece to England, and other such nonsense. But that is exactly what a diplomatic attitude is: to avoid foolish prattle with a prudent attitude. By not coming, who did Lyons harm other than himself?40

On March 28, 1846, immediately after the description of the anniversary ceremony, which once again took place at the grave of Karaiskakis, there were general reports of an influx of thugs in Athens who stabbed and robbed peace-loving citizens, while at the forecourt of the parliament building, MP Kriezotis struck the Syros MP, Daras. In other words, there was a general breakdown of law and order that was encouraged by the authorities and inspired people to commit criminal acts.41 In contrast, in 1851 and in 1852, while the March 25 celebration took place peacefully, rumors and fear of disturbances led the government to station military detachments with loaded arms on every street.42

The well-known hostility of the Great Powers toward Greece regarding its attitude during the Crimean War took on symbolic—in addition to political—dimensions in 1854, with the conspicuous absence of the English, French, and Austrian commanders from the anniversary of the Revolution, while the English and French ships docked at Piraeus did not fire their guns or pay tribute to the Greek flag.43 Two years later, while the Anglo-French occupation of Piraeus continued, things returned to “normal” and the warships paid tribute to the Greek national holiday.
Nothing untoward occurred during the celebration of 1859, but voices seem to have been raised against the decision of the Athens diocese to stop mentioning the names of commissioners, fiduciaries, and parishioners of the country’s churches during the March 25 service. The decision was described as “bizarre” and, it seems, many commissioners were quick to declare that they would not obey the order.

**Conclusion: The Constitution of Public Holidays in a Context of Economic Scarcity**

New Year’s Day (January 1/January 13), Otto’s disembarking (January 25/February 6), Amalia’s disembarking (February 3/February 15), Otto’s birthday (May 20/June 1), Otto’s name day (September 18/30), Amalia’s name day (September 25/October 7), the royal couple’s wedding anniversary (November 10/22), and the queen’s birthday (December 9/December 21) were, year in year out, the officially established public ceremonies of the Ottonian reign. Although not all festivals were dynastic, the royal power established its public presence by imposing a standard ritual and protocol on all celebrations, including those that were not centered on the royals, such as the two national anniversaries—March 25 and September 3—and the major religious festivals, such as Easter and Christmas. Consequently, we have approached the festivals as an attempt by the monarchy not only to control its subjects but also to mobilize their loyalty to a foreign king in a celebratory manner through an inviolable protocol that established the hierarchy, with its main feature being the rallying of the nation and the church around the throne.

Of course, this desire did not emerge in fully developed form from the minds of the Regency and Otto himself, but evolved in response to the spectacle. That is why every celebration took on special connotations. Still, they all derived their meaning from the pressing need to unite the Greeks for the first time in history around the authority of the king of Greece that the Powers had elected; and most of them, regardless of the different reason for their constitution, embraced, at the same time, the dynastic spectacle, the ecclesiastical tradition of the litany, and the popular elements of “dances and festivals.” All the same, each celebration retained its particular characteristics, which, in turn, were altered with the passage of time; hence the object of our study is not the “ideotype” of celebration, but the annual routine of many different celebrations.

The symbolic power established by the monarchy, with its specific rituals, strict protocol, and the concession to the people of public space and festive time, was interiorized by the Greeks not as an invented tradition and practice but as the normal life of a festival-loving kingdom. In this context, both March 25 and September 3—the former a concession by Otto, the latter imposed by the revolutionaries—retained all the characteristics of dynastic celebrations but also acquired a new popular dimension, with strong feelings of excitement, participation, assimilation, and worry. Although the bureaucratic policies of the Bavarian government prepared the celebratory events in great detail, no one could predict whether these would meet with success or failure (occasionally, the two even coincided, depending on the city or the social groups involved). In a sense, the festive days froze the time of everyday political, economic, and social problems, depicted the immortality and incorruptibility of people and rulers, and expressed the aspirations of a newborn nation. That is why, as Mona Ozouf observes, the time announced by the celebrations was not the linear time of history.

Aside from the programs of the ceremonies and Amalia’s letters to her father, our main sources
have been newspaper articles, most of which are taken up by the written record of official public speeches. For many years, historians passed over sources of this kind as unworthy of consideration, as the “boring tributes” that came with formal procedures, such as, for example, proclamations, the addresses of a bishop to the king, and so on. Formal public speeches have been analyzed in recent years not, of course, for their originality or for the well-known representations they contain, but for their symbolic imposition as the sole and legitimate reflection of the social world—of the world that exists or that the state power in question wishes into existence.

The organization and realization of public festivals was, naturally, not undertaken by the king himself but by the master of ceremonies, the secretariat of the interior, and the versatile group of “court” politicians and intellectuals. The latter proposed various plans to the king and the government of the day. The texts that they composed did not only reflect the desires of a literate public, but they also formed and expressed the views of an emerging elite that hoped to dominate the political and cultural events of the kingdom. From various institutional viewpoints, the official programs of the ceremonies reflected the hierarchy imposed by the monarchical regime on those groups active around the king and queen.

With the anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821 being the most prominent, public celebrations were often marked by mischief, binge drinking, and excesses by both well-known and anonymous participants. And this was no accident. The considerable symbolic power that the monarchy established in the public sphere through celebrations trained elites and ordinary people toward the use of that power against those who had introduced it. The most striking example was the celebration of the anniversary of September 3, imposed on the monarchs almost as a punishment by the leaders of the revolutionary movement.

The public appearances of the king and, shortly after, the queen had every political reason to be festive, but they were also completely performative; that is, they incorporated law and order within their own performance as well as “benevolent” ideals such as the union of people and king, the continuity of the Greek nation from antiquity to the present, the primacy of Orthodoxy, and the “Europeanness” of the small state at the southeastern tip of Europe. Public ceremonies were the safest vehicle for the daily practice of the dynastic protocol, as, without much apparent expenditure of energy, they had an effect on reality through the image they projected.

Despite the Greek state’s perceived poverty, the Bavarian government of the country preferred to diminish the splendor of the court because of economic hardship rather than abandon its symbolic power in public space. Besides, the people’s alleged need for “dances and festivals” obliged the king to continue the funding of ceremonies by the state, while famous and less-than-famous Greeks organized parallel banquets with fundraising, thus revealing the importance they attached to private initiative.
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HOW TO CITE

The *Disfrazados* of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca, Mexico: Practicing Tradition and Cultural Identity in a Contemporary Indigenous Transnational Migratory Community

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores what work the *disfrazados* (jester characters) do to sustain and promote the construction of contemporary cultural identities and senses of belonging among the members of the Indigenous Mixtec community of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. *Disfrazados* are poignant examples of what anthropologist Peggy Levitt termed “social remittances,” key elements for creating social and cultural capital in this transnational migratory community. The article extends theoretical discussions about Indigenous peoples in Mexico beyond traditional analyses of economic remittances by exploring their “non-monetary contributions to development,” specifically regarding the construction, maintenance, and practice of cultural identities and senses of belonging through performance.

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The Disfrazados of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca, Mexico: Practicing Tradition and Cultural Identity in a Contemporary Indigenous Transnational Migratory Community

Ivy Rieger

Introduction

One always hears the disfrazados before one sees them. High-pitched cries in the dead of night, accompanied by drunken, joyful shrieks of “Hi hi hi, ahahahaha!” echoing throughout the otherwise silent streets in the days before carnival, which occurs annually in the spring (typically during late February or early March depending on the Catholic liturgical calendar), and the June festivals (occurring between June 24 and 30), acting as harbingers of the activities to come. These “spirits of the festival” only make their physical presence known when the bells ring to conclude the saint’s mass and the people begin to gather in public spaces to await the continuation of other festival activities. Then, as if on cue, the disfrazados fill the streets, appearing seemingly from nowhere with their masks, black suits, harmonicas, “hi hi hi” shrieks, goat hair “beards,” skirts, canes, beer cans, artificial breasts, lingerie, and high heels. As they march, dance, and twirl their way through the streets they begin to mix with the crowd, inciting cheers, gasps, and laughter as they pass. Once at the festival site they dance chilenas with each other and with members of the public as the spectacle continues to grow.1 The dancing crowd pulsates with the rhythm of the music, and the goat hair “beards” of the disfrazado masks bounce jubilantly up and down with each dance step. It becomes almost impossible to move on the dance floor, as more and more bodies enter the fray. The air becomes thick with the combined scents of leather, sweat, and cologne, an aroma uniquely associated with the disfrazados. After hours of dancing, the disfrazados exit the scene just as they entered, diminishing into the shadows of alleys, fields, and the patios of houses, as if they had never appeared at all.

Disfrazados are costumed jester characters who appear during such occasions as festivals, parades, public social events, and specific holidays as part of the cultural traditions of the Mixtec community of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. They are ubiquitous performative elements historically associated with the local celebration of carnival (known as Kastalenche in the Mixtec language), the patron saint festival of San Juan Bautista, and the religious festival of San Pedro y San Pablo, all of which form part of an annual festival cycle that celebrates approximately thirteen distinct virgins and saints throughout the year.

These three festivals in particular correspond with specific dates or times of year associated with the pre-Hispanic Mixtec cosmological and agricultural calendar, marking important climatic and seasonal transitions that continue to be observed in Indigenous communities throughout the region of the Mixteca Oaxaqueña.2 The disfrazados are also generally associated with concepts of “fertility” and “community prosperity,” concepts embodied by the rituals and other cultural practices that take place during these events. In recent decades, the emergence of local cultural performance groups created by community members and the heightened presence of disfrazados in diaspora communities have extended the contexts within which they appear, as well as their social meanings, beyond traditional boundaries.

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1. The chilena refers to a genre of dance as well as a specific type of instrumental music that is unique to San Juan Mixtepec and performed specifically during festivals and community social events.


5. The use of the term “Mixtepequenses” reflects a general tendency of San Juan Mixtepec residents and migrants to commonly refer to themselves as “Mixtepequenses” and/or as “Mixtepecanos.” Abigail Hernández Núñez and Francisco López Bárkenas, eds., La fuerza de la costumbre: Sistema de cargos en la mixteca oaxaqueña (Mexico City: Centro de Orientación y Asesoría a Pueblos Indígenas, 2004); Ignacio W. Ochoa, Ñuu Shuviko: La Fiesta Patronal de San Juan Mixtepec (San Diego, CA: Center for Latin American Studies, San Diego State University, 2005); and Ivy Alana Rieger, “La tradición camaleónica en las prácticas festivas de una comunidad mixteca transnacional,” Reflexiones 98, no. 1 (2019): 111–29.
Here, I suggest that disfrazados are a valuable lens through which to analyze the construction of contemporary Indigenous cultural identities as experienced through the embodied practice of festive tradition in this Indigenous migratory community. Specifically, I argue that disfrazados and the festival cycle itself are poignant examples of what anthropologist Peggy Levitt has termed “social remittances,” key elements for creating social and cultural capital in this Indigenous transnational migratory community. The article extends theoretical discussions of Indigenous transnational migratory communities beyond analyses of economic remittances by exploring members’ “non-monetary contributions to development,” specifically regarding the construction, maintenance, and practice of cultural identities and senses of belonging. For the residents and migrants of San Juan Mixtepec (referred to forthwith as “Mixtepequenses”), the practice of the disfrazados is interconnected with pre-Hispanic Mixtec sociocultural discourses, cosmological beliefs, a long history of sociopolitical interactions with non-Indigenous peoples in the region, and a longstanding tradition of outward migration within Mexico and to the United States and beyond. Understanding why certain traditions continue to matter in San Juan Mixtepec can inform us about the characteristics of the practice of belonging and the construction of identities in this and other contemporary Indigenous communities. The research presented in this article is directly based on my ethnographic fieldwork experiences with Mixtepequenses living in Mexico and the United States during the years 2013–17 and is intended to represent a snapshot in time of contemporary Mixtepequense social life.

Mixtepequense Festival Practice as Social Remittance: Producing and Practicing Capital through Embodied Performance

The festivals present in San Juan Mixtepec are actively intertwined with the various “norms, practices, identities, and social capital” that form part of social remittances. This reciprocal and dynamic relationship involves sending, receiving, and variably interpreting different knowledges between origin and diaspora communities, where different cultural meanings are situated, produced, and transformed. These social remittances are symbolically expressed by Mixtepequenses through the different performative embodied practices they consider indicative of the cultural traditions present in the community.

The practice of embodiment, and the creation of special social spaces within which acts of embodiment take place, is also an essential part of how Mixtepequenses create social and cultural capital. Because human bodies are, as sociologist Marcel Mauss has observed, “man’s first and most natural instrument,” practices of embodiment are a critical part of how Mixtepequenses reckon who they are, both within and outside of the festival context. It is within the space of the festival, however, that embodiment takes on magnified dimension that speaks directly to questions of belonging, specifically regarding how Mixtepequenses practice embodiment and how others interpret those acts of embodiment. During the fiestas of carnival, San Juan Bautista, and San Pedro y San Pablo, practices of embodiment specifically related to the expression of cultural traditions through the physical embodiment of disfrazados speak directly to the dynamic relationship that exists between embodiment, identity, and belonging.

But what does the concept of “tradition” actually mean for Mixtepequenses, and how is it put into practice? According to anthropologist Nelson H. Graburn, following the work of anthropologist

7. The research conducted for the article was carried out in San Juan Mixtepec in 2013 (twelve months) and 2016 (one month) and in Kern County, California, in 2017 (one month).
Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network ... to membership in a group ... [and] provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.”

Alice E. Horner, “tradition” refers to both “the process of handing down from generation to generation, and some thing, custom, or thought process that is passed on over time.” As “folklore in potential ... knowledge that is secured in the minds and memories of the people only to be performed on appropriate occasions; the sense of appropriateness itself is subject to rules of tradition,” the concept of tradition is also intrinsically multifaceted. Therefore, the festivals in the Mixtepequense cycle, especially the larger ones, such as carnival, San Juan Bautista, and San Pedro y San Pablo, are, in many ways, “mediating agents” in the lives of Mixtepequenses. Some Mixtepequenses participate in festivals because they consider them part of the traditions of their parents or grandparents, and not because they necessarily feel a particular religious, cultural, or social attachment to these practices. Others consider them as representative of the cultural identity of their community and themselves as individuals that should be actively preserved. Still others have no emotional or symbolic attachment to festivals at all and do not participate in them in any way.

The production of cultural capital can occur through what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed the “embodied state”—“a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor.” For many Mixtepequenses, cultural capital is produced through the embodied practice of tradition, be it verbally, through the continued use of the Mixtec language, and/or corporeally, via the physical body, such as in the case of the disfrazados. Many Mixtepequenses living in Oaxaca and abroad actively engage with these practices to express who they are and where they come from.
Mixtepequenses living in and outside of Oaxaca.

Festivals provide rich contexts for the creation of both social and cultural capital and, in the Mixtepequense context, are intrinsic for the practice of social remittances and, more specifically, for the conservation of their intangible cultural heritage, also known as ICH. In the specific context of festive practices, ICH can include dance, processions, language, music, gastronomy, costumes, rituals, and an endless number of other customs and activities. Despite the undeniable influence of such socioeconomic phenomena as migration, Mixtepequenses maintain a complete cycle of traditional festivities. This insistence on the preservation of festive practices speaks to their ongoing importance in the contemporary life of many members of this community, particularly regarding their conceptualizations of tradition and the construction of senses of belonging. It is important to note, however, that conservation of these practices is typically realized through performative embodiment and the passing down of oral traditions and collective memories, although more recently digital recordings of festive events, many of which are posted online on such social media networks or platforms as YouTube, are commonplace and often used as valuable reference points for participants in Oaxaca and in diaspora.

Organized municipal governmental (or, for that matter, at the state or federal level) cultural heritage initiatives in the community have historically been few and directly depend on the political climate at the time. Mixtepequenses have, therefore, generally taken the conservation of their ICH into their own hands, with individuals or independent social collectives creating the “archive,” or textual or audiovisual documentation, while civic and religious authorities, such as the mayordomia, continue to safeguard knowledge of festive traditions and disfrasados as part of their performative “repertoire” as official guardians of these traditions.

Who Are the Disfrazados?

This article explores how the embodied practice of tradition, and the disfrasados, continues to have sociocultural value for many Mixtepequenses living in and outside of Oaxaca today. In many ways, the disfrasados are iconic representatives of Mixtepequense cultural identity at home and abroad. They are both carriers and catalysts for the continued practice of cultural traditions that play an important role in the construction of senses of belonging for participants. They also represent an inversion of social norms through the practice of masking, which is ubiquitous throughout the Mixteca region, especially during carnival.

There are four main types of disfrasados, often referred to as chilolos by the local population: the ñana ñaa (also known as a catrín, comparable to a “dandy”), the tatsanu (anciano or “old man”); the natsanu (anciana or “old woman”); and the ñana ñaa (chicas sexys or “sexy ladies”). A fifth type of disfrasado, also known as the tatsanu, refers to those who wear a generic costume often accompanied by plastic Halloween-style masks that are not considered part of the official canon.

The disfrasados originally only appeared during the festivals of carnival, San Juan Bautista, and San Pedro y San Pablo, their appearance tied directly to seasonal periods of natural transition and growth. However, they now can be found within other performative contexts within and beyond San Juan Mixtepec. Cultural performance groups have appeared over the years and expanded the contexts within which disfrasados appear. Delegations have visited other cities in the region, such as Tlaxiaco, where they have become part of local parades and festivals.
and participate in the state-organized annual Guelaguetza celebrations, hosted every July by the Oaxacan governmental tourism board in Oaxaca City. These cultural groups have also performed in the diaspora community of Abasolo del Valle, Veracruz. Furthermore, because of the “migration” of the festival of San Juan Bautista to the Kern County diaspora community in California, disfrazados have also begun to appear there, thousands of miles away from their place of origin. The majority of disfrazados who appear in Kern County take the form of ñana chaas or generic tatsanus. Some residents are also custodians of cultural knowledge regarding the harmonica songs and special discourses in Mixtec used by the ñana chaas during festivals and have begun to pass along what they know to anyone interested in becoming a disfrazado in this community.

In Abasolo del Valle, a specific local cultural practice involving the disfrazados does not exist. Instead, residents are more likely than their Kern County counterparts to return to Oaxaca, where they participate with a special cultural delegation and as disfrazados during the San Juan Bautista festival. To foment this valuable fraternal relationship between the two communities, the San Juan Mixtepec municipal government has also spearheaded cultural activities in Abasolo del Valle over the years, through such offices as the Coordinación de Proyectos Culturales (Cultural Projects Coordination, or CPC), which was only active during the 2011–13 political administration and traveled to Abasolo del Valle with the cultural group Grupo Yoso nu Viko in 2013.

The cultural performance group Ñana Cha’a Ñana Ña’a, formed in February 2016, continues the pioneering vision of Grupo Yoso nu Viko as an independent community project exclusively focused on the preservation of the disfrazado tradition through performances, trips, and online research. On their official Facebook page, the group describes itself as “a cultural group made up of people originally from San Juan Mixtepec who are making the culture and traditions of our community known.”

Although there exist four “official” types of disfrazados, their presentation varies depending on a variety of factors. Furthermore, the disfrazados call attention to various characteristics of contemporary Mixtequeño sociocultural values imbued with historical relevance. One such characteristic that carries weight has to do with gender. The disfrazados are, in many ways, representative of traditional gender roles, both in terms of how the characters are imagined and who participates. As described in detail below, each character embodies a clear masculine or feminine gender orientation. These representations directly inform the personalities and performative aspects of each. Furthermore, an individual’s gender orientation also directly
influences how they participate. The four principal types of disfrazados are typically embodied by male participants. The reasons for this vary from perspectives regarding the disfrazados as a predominantly "masculine" tradition to practical considerations regarding the safety and well-being of potential female participants. The characters themselves are also usually interpreted by men because they are perceived either as "masculine" by representing the male physical form or as a parody of supposedly "feminine" personality attributes or physical characteristics, making their cross-dressing as "female" characters even more amusing for spectators. Education about the disfrazado tradition is also generally patrilineal in nature, with men typically teaching their sons about it from a young age.

When women do participate, which is rarely, they typically embody the unofficial fifth type of disfrazado, or tatsanu, due to the character's generic characteristics. Some female participants also express their unwillingness to become other types of disfrazados, specifically the ñana űa or the natsanu, as these more "feminine" characters often get physically accosted by the public during their performances. Women do occasionally appear as ñana chaas, but this is highly uncommon, because Mixtepequenses generally perceive the disfrazado tradition, in general, and the ñana chaas, in particular, as more aligned with masculine identities.

Every character embodies a diverse array of movements, actions, voices, dances, language, and personality traits that are specific to each one and are generally taught to participants by other Mixtepequenses, typically friends or family members. They can also be modified by the individuals embodying the character and/or are copied via the direct observation of others without any formal instruction, although some are taught by their parents, specifically their fathers, during childhood. One of the most important sources of inspiration is the observation of other disfrazados. Participants often replicate what they see their friends or acquaintances doing, or they recall from their childhood how male family members, such as fathers, brothers, or uncles, danced.

For many who are involved in the disfrazado tradition as stewards of its preservation and as participants, important considerations include how specific costume elements are physically created, how these elements are represented and distributed within and beyond the community, what aesthetic and performative characteristics count as "authentic," and what the contexts are within which the disfrazados appear. Preservation of the practice of the disfrazado has historically relied on knowledge transference about the tradition via oral, not written, sources based on the personal perspectives and expertise of community elders. This has shifted in recent years, however, with increased accessibility in cellular network coverage and internet service in the area, promoting an increased use of social media platforms and websites, such as YouTube, to document, distribute, and consume audiovisual information about the tradition among a seemingly ever-increasing online audience.

San Juan Mixtepec: Understanding Festival Practice in an Indigenous Migratory Community

To analyze how the disfrazados exist as both carriers and producers of cultural and social capital, it is first necessary to contextualize the community itself and its festivals, the social contexts within which they most frequently appear. When discussing the festivals of San Juan Mixtepec, many Mixtepequenses categorize them as invaluable community cultural traditions. Regularly
referring to them as costumbres, they often speak of the rituals, such as the despescuezada de gallos, the music of the chilenas, the dances, the feasts in the homes of the mayordomos, and, of course, the disfratados, as some of the most noteworthy elements of these events. In general, the festival cycle of San Juan Mixtepec and its diaspora communities can certainly be defined as one of the most “traditional” cultural practices within the community. These festivals are steeped in rich symbolic meanings related to specific cultural knowledges and oral histories. Mixtepequenses remember and continue to honor this tradition of the celebration of festivals based, in large part, on their own childhood experiences; the stories their parents, grandparents, or even great-grandparents told them about these events; and a collective socioreligious obligation regarding their preservation. These ancestral and cultural connections are what also inspire many Mixtepequenses who live in diaspora communities located in other regions of Mexico or the United States to return periodically to San Juan Mixtepec specifically to participate in its festival cycle.

Although a clear majority of Mixtepequenses participate in some way in the traditional festival cycle, whether as mayordomos, spectators, or volunteers, this participation is contingent on a variety of factors, such as geographic distance, active socioeconomic ties to the community, and even religious orientation. The realities of Mixtepequense social life as a transnational migratory community directly corroborates the findings of anthropologist Joyce M. Bishop, who has suggested that “Latin American notions of communal identity, in which locale is symbolized by saints and other sacred figures, make the re-creation of contextually charged ritual dances in new settings difficult at best.” Participation by community members is indeed disproportionate and in many ways contingent on the participation of returned migrants. Although some individuals do indeed return to the community to complete these important social obligations, others consecutively repeat these positions because there is “no one else” to take on the role or avoid service altogether. A minority of Mixtepequenses are also members of the Church of Latter-day Saints and other Protestant religious organizations, precluding their participation in a variety of community events that are associated either directly or indirectly with the Catholic Church. For these groups, the festive celebration of the saints, which includes dancing, music, and, on some occasions, disfratados, is considered idolatry and representative of pagan beliefs.

26. Costumbre translates to “custom.” In conversational Mexican Spanish, the term often serves as a substitute for tradición, or “tradition.” The despescuezada de gallos is a ritual of rooster sacrifice that honors the community’s patron saint, San Juan Bautista. Mayordomos, the plural form of mayordomo/a, refers to both male and female members of the mayordomía.


29. Based on my informal interviews conducted with mayordomos during the 2013 festival cycle.

30. According to my informal interviews conducted with various members of the Church of Latter-day Saints and mayordomos throughout my dissertation research during 2013, religious tensions are indeed present in the community, particularly regarding the barrio-level worship of the cult of Catholic saints. The differing religious beliefs that some barrio members hold from their Catholic beliefs.

San Juan Mixtepec and Its Diaspora Communities

San Juan Mixtepec, known as Ñuu Snuviko or “Place Where the Clouds Descend” in the Mixtepequense variant of the Mixtec language (known as Tu’un Savi, meaning "Word of the Rain"), refers to both the cabecera (head) community of San Juan Mixtepec itself and the sixty-one outlying ranches and hamlets that make up the municipio (municipality) of the same name belonging to the district of the neighboring city of Juxtlahuaca, Oaxaca. The size of the municipio of San Juan Mixtepec is approximately 359,000 square kilometers, or over 8,880,100 acres, stretching over seemingly impassable mountain ranges where forests of tall conifers grow into the principal valley where the cabecera of San Juan Mixtepec is situated between the banks of the Rio Mixteco (also known as the Rio Grande) and a smaller tributary river known as the Rio Chiquito. According to recent census information, the population of the municipio of San Juan Mixtepec is 7,611 inhabitants, with over 93 percent of the municipal population self-identifying as Mixtec speakers.
The community is made up of six officially recognized barrios, or neighborhoods: San Miguel Centro, San Miguel Lado, San Pedro, San Sebastián, Barrio de Jesús, and Barrio Centro. One of the primary ways Mixtepequenses conceptualize belonging is through their natal affiliation with a particular barrio, which is also typically grounded in familial or ancestral lineages. The barrios of San Sebastián, San Pedro, and San Miguel Lado each have their own chapel, within which the saint images of San Sebastián, San Pedro, and Padre Jesús, respectively, reside. Barrio affiliation plays a key role in how Mixtepequenses participate in the mayordomía, in festivals, and in a variety of other social and political situations.

The cultural identity of San Juan Mixtepec also includes that of its diaspora communities, which reflect historical patterns of outward migration that began throughout the Mixteca Oaxaqueña region during the first decades of the twentieth century. Such factors as a general decline in agricultural productivity due to drought, erosion, and the increased sterility of the soil, coupled with a dramatic increase in population, political instability, and a depressed economy, resulted in Mixtecs from communities all over the Mixteca seeking other means of economic support, primarily, although not exclusively, in the form of transnational migration. Mixtepequenses began outward migration to the Mexican states of Veracruz, Baja California, Sinaloa, and Mexico City during the 1930s, establishing diaspora communities in these areas, which continue to prosper today. Seasonal or permanent migration to the United States in particular has been actively documented since at least the 1950s. Although many Mixtepequense diaspora communities have emerged over the years throughout Mexico and the United States, three stand out: Abasolo del Valle, Veracruz; Naples, Florida; and Kern County, California.

Abasolo del Valle is a mestizo (non-Indigenous) community where Mixtepequenses comprise a small portion of the general population. During the 1930s, the state government of Veracruz offered subsidized loans for farmers in the agricultural areas surrounding Abasolo del Valle, and Mixtepequenses began migrating there to "search for better opportunities for themselves and their families." Despite having established themselves in Veracruz for almost a century, many Abasolo Mixtepequenses continue to speak the San Juan Mixtepec dialect of Mixtec, dress in the traditional style, and retain many other cultural traditions, such as the chilena and specific culinary dishes. For many, although Abasolo del Valle is where they physically reside, they still consider San Juan Mixtepec as their ancestral home and the foundation of their cultural identity.

Naples is an intermediate-sized Gulf Coast city in the southern part of the state of Florida where Mixtepequenses have made their home for decades. To date, this diaspora community located in the greater Naples area remains highly influential in terms of remittances as well the actions of its migrants, many of whom return periodically to occupy community cargos and participate in the traditional festival cycle. The migrants of Naples work in a variety of occupations, particularly farming, landscaping, and construction. Although many of these migrant families permanently make their homes in Florida, there continues to be a vibrant socioeconomic and cultural connection between the members of this diaspora community and San Juan Mixtepec. Many of the smaller hamlets surrounding the cabecera municipal, such as El Llano and San Miguel Lado, are home to the families of migrants to Naples, and the landscape in these areas is dotted with multistory constructions built by these migrants for their families and for themselves for use when they periodically or permanently return to Oaxaca.
Another important diaspora community is found in two small farming towns, Arvin and Lamont, in Kern County. Here, Mixtepequenses have made their livelihoods primarily as farmworkers who labor in the surrounding orchards and berry farms that make up this highly productive agricultural region. The origins of this community primarily stem from migrants’ participation in the Bracero work exchange program, which was active in this area beginning in the 1960s. Mixtepequense migrants arrived in the area during the late 1970s, where they worked in the grape and melon fields as well as in local almond and olive groves or, as one interlocutor noted, “in whatever field paid the best.” As time passed and local economic opportunities continued, more Mixtepequenses arrived to work in other farming communities in the area. As of the writing of this article, at least three generations of Mixtepequenses call the Kern County area their home.

The Traditional Festival Cycle of San Juan Mixtepec

The traditional San Juan Mixtepec festival cycle consists of three types of festivals: thirteen religious festivals associated with the adoration of Catholic saints and virgins tied to mayordomías, several festivals that specifically honor Mixtec cosmological beliefs, and Mexican national religious and secular holidays. The festival cycle includes such performative elements as the disfrazados, the chilena dances, music, processions, and a variety of religiously syncretic rituals. As of the writing of this article, the Mixtepequense festival cycle includes the religious celebrations honoring saints and virgins organized primarily by the mayordomía, a festival that honors the beginning of the traditional agricultural cycle and the Mixtec New Year (carnival), and between three and four secular or civic festivals independently organized by the municipal government and other members of the community. The calendrical organization of these festivals intertwines the Catholic religious calendar following the events of the life of Jesus Christ with the Indigenous cosmological calendar, creating a story of planting, growth, harvest, death, and rebirth that frames many Mixtepequenses’ religious, economic, and social experiences throughout the year.

There are twelve mayordomias currently operating in San Juan Mixtepec, each caring for a particular saint’s image and organizing their corresponding festival. The individual saints celebrated by the mayordomías with festivals are: San Sebastián (January 19–20); Día de la Candelaria, also known as Dia del Niño Jesús (February 2); Cristo (March to April, depending on the liturgical calendar); the Virgen de Dolores (March or April, depending on the liturgical calendar); Santísimo Sacramento, or Corpus Christi (late May or early June, depending on the liturgical calendar); San Juan Bautista (June 24–25); San Pedro and San Pablo (June 29–30); the Virgen del Carmen (July 16); San Miguel Arcángel (September 28–29); the Virgen de Guadalupe (December 1–12); the Virgen de la Soledad (December 17–18); and San José (December 12–25).

In Mixtepequense diaspora communities, migrants’ relationships to the traditional festival cycle center mainly on their participation in, or local interpretation of, the patron saint festival of San Juan Bautista. In Abasolo de Valle, Mixtepequenses who reside there regularly send cultural delegations to Oaxaca to participate in the San Juan Bautista festival; these delegations are made up of Abasolo community representatives and trained riders who showcase performances with Paso Fino horses, a local tradition from this part of Veracruz. These delegations are considered guests of the Mixtepequense municipal authorities and accompany them during public events throughout the duration of the festival. For many years, the Mixtepequense
government has also sent a delegation to Abasolo del Valle for their patron saint festival in
honor of San José, which occurs in March. In years past, the delegation has included cultural
performers who reenact different Mixtequequense cultural traditions, such as the wedding
ceremony and carnival, which comes complete with performances from the disfrazados.

Participation in the festival of San Juan Bautista by members of the diaspora community
located in Naples is generally characterized by trends of migrant return to San Juan Mixtepec
(to a lesser extent, they return for other festivals as well). Such factors as the young age of
the Naples diaspora residents (many are, as of the time of this writing, in their forties), the
relative geographic proximity of Florida to Oaxaca, and the presence of an active network of
remittances all contribute to these migrants’ notable participation in social obligations related
to the Mixtepequense mayordomía, festivals, and local tequio projects. Although it is uncertain
exactly how many migrants return to Oaxaca annually for the San Juan Bautista festival, it is
nevertheless common to overhear Mixtepequenses speaking in English and talking about their
lives in Florida during this festival. Mixtequequenses living in Naples do not celebrate a local
mayordomía in their community, but local bands from San Juan Mixtepec do intermittently travel
to Naples to perform chilenas at dances, weddings, and other events in the community.

The Mixtepequense diaspora community located in Kern County is unique in that it celebrates
its own festival in honor of San Juan Bautista. This tradition began in the late 1990s when a
replica image of San Juan Bautista was specially made for the community and transported by a
local religious delegation from Oaxaca to California. Additionally, some migrants even continue
to participate in the mayordomía, returning periodically to San Juan Mixtepec to fulfill these
obligations. Although the residents of Kern County hold a strong nostalgic cultural connection
with San Juan Mixtepec, most migrants from this community do not frequently return to Oaxaca,
as in the case of Naples. Even those who return to participate in community events and serve
in its social institutions note that their visits are usually limited to between two to three months
in total during a given year, when traditionally a complete year of service is required. This has to
do, in part, with geographic distance, overall expense, migratory status, familial obligations, and
time away from work that can be spared, all factors that characterize the Kern County diaspora
community more as an “isolate” community than those more actively connected with San Juan
Mixtepec.

Ñana Chaas, Generic Tatsanus, and the “Authenticity” of Tradition

The concept of “authenticity” plays a large part in how the disfrazado tradition is practiced, what
elements are considered “traditional” by participants, and how social and cultural capital are
produced in the community. What authenticity means for participants depends on a multitude
of factors, and the perspectives of Mixtepequenses on the subject are generally divided into
discussions regarding the two primary socio-spatial contexts within which they appear: festivals
and cultural performances realized beyond the festival context. However, what determines
“authenticity” in a disfrazado has even more to do with its physical appearance and personality
characteristics than with the performative context itself. “Authenticity” is a term that is most often
used by members of the mayordomía, municipal authorities, or individuals directly associated
with cultural conservation projects, as explored in detail below. For the public, however,
“authenticity” is a fluid concept, reflecting both individual and collective imaginings of what it
means to be a disfrazado and what their presence symbolizes, underscoring what anthropologist Dimitrios Theodossopoulos defines as the "co-existence of different simultaneous understandings of the authentic—the negotiation of parallel authenticities in tension," which appears to occur in San Juan Mixtepec.40

This “tension” can be directly observed in the ñana chaa, or catrín, probably the most popular and easily recognized character in the canon of disfrazados (figure 1). The ñana chaa is regarded as the disfrazado whose physical characteristics cannot be altered in any way, due to the character’s supposed complexity and its symbolic status as a representative of the community’s unique cultural traditions. In diaspora, however, the ñana chaa appears in the Kern County festival of San Juan Bautista with a white coat and tails, instead of the traditional black uniform, because these costumes are usually purchased at costume stores in Los Angeles instead of being imported directly from Tlaxiaco. It is also easily the most popular disfrazado to interpret among participants and, for many, is representative of the identity of community itself. The ñana chaa is representative of a collectively shared history of social, economic, and cultural relations between San Juan Mixtepec and the neighboring mestizo city of Tlaxiaco, known as El París Chiquito, or “Little Paris,” due to a period of French immigration that occurred there during the French intervention of Mexico during the 1860s.41 Due to their geographic proximity, the residents of both San Juan Mixtepec and Tlaxiaco engage in a historic regional market and trade system that has

Figure 1. Ñana chaas during the San Pedro festival in San Juan Mixtepec, June 30, 2013.
reinforced social interactions for centuries between Indigenous Mixtecs from San Juan Mixtepec and other communities, non-Indigenous mestizos, and French immigrants living in Tlaxiaco.

The ñana chaa costume directly recalls the collective memory of these diverse historical encounters.

When the French intervention occurred in Mexico, Tlaxiaco was known as “Little Paris” and felt very “French.” [The tuxedo jacket, tails, and slacks] were what the elites of Tlaxiaco wore during this time. So, the people made fun of them, because the Tlaxaqueños always made fun of the indios (Indians) from Mixtepec, and they were always fighting, so they used their own fancy clothes to make fun of them. The mask also imitates the blond beards [of the French residents of Tlaxiaco].

The ñana chaa costume also draws on other historical elements from sociocultural interactions between the people of San Juan Mixtepec and foreigners or perceived outsiders. The miner’s boots complementing the tuxedo coat and tails of the ñana chaa, for example, are indicative of a recollection about how members of an American-based mining company dressed; they worked in a local antimony mine located in the agencia of Tejocotes, San Juan Mixtepec, during the early to mid-twentieth century.

The specific elements of the ñana chaa costume include: a vintage pilot’s or captain’s helmet (black or navy blue); several bandannas to cover the face completely; a felt mask with cut-out eye and mouth holes and hand-painted with a variety of designs, including jaguar spots, and glued-on goat hair “beards”; a tie; a black tuxedo jacket with tails, colloquially referred to as a traje pinguino (penguin suit); a white cotton T-shirt; a vest; a belt; black tuxedo pants folded underneath and tied to the lower leg so they reach only slightly past the knee; long white socks; and miner’s or construction worker’s boots.

Ñana chaas also include musical accompaniments, such as a harmonica, on which they play a variety of songs that change according to the specific context. When dancing in the street moving to certain locations, for example, they play a “traveling” song announcing their impending arrival. This song is distinct from the one played when stopping and entering stores and public establishments to “refresh” themselves with bottled water or alcoholic beverages while talking to gathered patrons. There is a specific song for when the ñana chaas dance during the despescuezada de gallos, another for when they dance in the public baile after the ritual is completed, and yet another for when they “retire” for the evening after all the festivities have ended, their music dreamily filtering into the air as they disappear into the night.

Apart from their harmonica music, ñana chaas adopt specific vocal pitches, accents, and other ways of speaking that are unique to their character. They rarely speak in Spanish, primarily using Mixtec to converse with people they encounter. They use an extremely high-pitched tone while speaking rapidly, producing a hilarious, comically embellished form of speech that is immediately identifiable. Ñana chaas are almost constantly dancing, interchanging dance steps with high-pitched screams of “hi hi hi, ahahahaha!” Their dance steps can best be described as exaggerated foot stomping, which creates bouncing motions that make the goat “beards” adorning their masks shake wildly up and down. Ñana chaas also often add twirling motions to their dances, which make the tails of their tuxedo jackets whirl. Often while dancing, and always
when playing the harmonica, ñana chaas also hold one arm behind their backs, keeping the other hand tucked in a fist underneath one of the jacket tails centered in the middle of their backs while making an exaggerated "bowing" motion at the same time.

Some Mixtepequenses conserve the disfrazado tradition as mask and costume makers, skills, exclusively patrilineal in nature, that were taught to them by their parents or close relatives. Ñana chaá masks, for example, are created from round pieces of felt that are painted with different colors and motifs based on the artisan's imagination, although specific patterns, such as jaguar spots, are generally recognized as "traditional" adornments. To be "authentic," according to community elders, as well as civic and religious authorities, they must also include goat hair "beards," of which there should always be between five or seven attached. These masks are a valued part of the ñana chaá costume; without them, the costume is not a ñana chaá. Although other elements may change depending on the wearer, the masks have an immediately recognizable standard form. Produced by only a few male artisans, they are sold during festivals for between two hundred and four hundred pesos, depending on the intricacy of the design and the producer. A local resident in Kern County also imports them from Oaxaca for the Kern County festival, where they are sold to the public for approximately forty dollars each.

Because the disfrazados primarily appear during the traditional festival cycle, their activities are closely tied to those of the mayordomía. Mayordomía members are, in many respects, stewards of cultural memory and authorities on what practices are considered authentic. They demonstrate this during specific festivals, such as the festivals of San Pedro y San Pablo and San Juan Bautista practiced in San Juan Mixtepec and Kern County, respectively, where authenticity contests are commonly held. During these contests, prizes for the "best dressed," most "traditional," and "best dancing" disfrazado are awarded; these prizes can consist of such items as a bottle of tequila, gift basket, or gift certificate. These contests echo the emergence of an unofficial type of disfrazado, also known as tatsanu, where individuals dress up in masks and costumes that fall outside the canon of the four traditional archetypes. During carnival, the festival of San Juan Bautista, and the festival of San Pedro y San Pablo, these disfrazados are commonplace. One can easily spot the likes of George W. Bush, Che Guevara, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, the Hulk, Chucky, and Fidel Castro, among others, dancing alongside the other kinds of disfrazados. Those who embody generic tatsanus tend to do so because they cannot afford, have not purchased, or are not interested in acquiring the costumes necessary to perform the other characters, or because they do not possess the cultural knowledge or experience necessary to embody the other types of disfrazados. Women, adolescents, children, and visiting migrants typically, although not exclusively, dress up as these tatsanus.

The generic tatsanus’ use of plastic Halloween-style masks and costumes automatically eliminates them from competing in the "best costume" contests, as do incomplete or incorrect representations of the traditional types of characters. Or, as members of the prize committee during the 2013 San Pedro y San Pablo festival announced during one such contest, "if you're wearing plastic masks, you can't participate. We are only giving prizes to the authentic chilolos here." Mayordomos expressed a similar sentiment during the 2017 festival of San Juan Bautista in Kern County, when they requested that "anyone dressed up in a Halloween costume" leave the stage so that judges would not be distracted from evaluating the "real" disfrazados.
The existence of authenticity contests suggests that, although generic tatsanus have increased in number over the years and are not forbidden from participating in festival activities, it is unlikely they will ever be included as part of the formal canon of disfrazados. Furthermore, these activities prove that how the original types of disfrazados practice continues to matter to Mixtepequenses. Giving out prizes by judging dance steps, gestures specific to the characters, and costume elements reinforces this as well as the idea that disfrazados are potent vessels for the practice of Mixtepequense cultural traditions and situates the mayordomía as the prominent authority of what does or does not count as “authentic.” Those who dress up as generic tatsanus, however, justify their participation in several ways, with some simply regarding it as a “fun” activity that takes places during festivals, while others speaking more specifically to the fact that their personal lack of cultural knowledge regarding the traditional disfrazados directly influences their decisions.

Mixtepequenses outside the mayordomía also have specific opinions regarding the concept of “authenticity” as it relates to disfrazados. When the practice is taken beyond its original context—for example, when individuals portray disfrazados as part of cultural performances—some believe that the tradition runs the risk of becoming a “show,” a decontextualized theatrical spectacle well removed from its original cultural origins and significance. Transformations in the practice observed over time are also a sign for some that the tradition is changing and that important elements are being lost. Generations of Mixtepequenses have migrated away from the community, and generations more have continued to return to San Juan Mixtepec to participate in the festival cycle as disfrazados. However, the question remains as to how, and to what extent, Mixtepequenses engage with the established cultural or collective memory of these traditions.

Jorge López Bautista, a lifetime resident of San Juan Mixtepec and participant in various local musical conservation projects, touched on these issues when he discussed his observations of the practice changing over time:

My grandfather told me that when you dress up as a catrín [ñana chaa], when you pick up the harmonica or another musical instrument for songs, there are different dance passes for the different songs, there are songs for when you go near where the women sell tortillas, there are different songs for when you are dancing in the street. And you have to yell, let out a good scream when you do it. And you have to be aware of how you dress, that you dress appropriately. Nowadays, it’s not like that. Young people just dress up like generic chilolos, and you can’t tell them apart. There’s no originality anymore, no authenticity in what is the catrín. The same thing is happening with those who dress up as women too… So this is my concern, that in fifteen or twenty years the tradition will cease to exist. Maybe they’ll continue the festival … but not the originality of the costume, not the real history of it. Everyday it’s disappearing a little bit more because migrants and the children of migrants come for the festivals, and they just want to dress up for a little while, and that’s it. But they don’t even have all the pieces they need to authentically represent the catrín. This is the risk, this is the concern, that one day it will all be lost.

Indeed, generational differences and geographical distance affect the transference of cultural knowledge regarding the disfrazado tradition, thus influencing how community members think about authenticity. Community elders possess the knowledge and history of the tradition but may only speak Mixtec, have passed away, or live outside of the community, making them, in many ways, inaccessible. Some participants are simply not interested in learning the history
or the rules of etiquette associated with "properly" becoming a disfrazado, while others are interested in knowing more so they can more "authentically" practice the tradition. There also appears to be communication issues between elders and younger generations, including an absence of formal organization regarding community-level strategies for cultural preservation, as well as logistical problems related to geographical separation of the population in general. Furthermore, some Mixtepequenses are not interested in maintaining the tradition, stating that the festival cycle and such traditions as the disfrazados are "excuses for people to get drunk" and "are not as interesting or attractive as other festivals like the Guelaguetza." These variable perspectives reinforce individualized practice of the tradition, one that is actively performed, embodied, and recognized as a valuable cultural discourse for many but also situated within the collective memory of the community and subject to generalized processes of forgetting.

**The Tatsanu, Natsanu, and Traditional Norms of Mixtepequense Social Organization**

In San Juan Mixtepec, the construction of social capital is grounded within the practice of traditional norms of community organization, commonly expressed through participation in the civil-religious hierarchy and tequio projects. Community elders are socially valued as authorities on these institutions and a variety of other subjects and generally regarded as respected members of the community and as the symbolic heads of families and households. The tatsanu (old man) and natsanu (old woman) are two types of disfrazados who represent these elders, typically appearing together as a pair, embodying an elderly married couple dressed in traditional Mixtepequense costume (figure 2). The costumes of the tatsanus reflect Mixtepequense gender roles, traditional clothing fabrication methods, the natural materials used in the mask and costume production, and the cultural importance of local mythology. Unlike the ñana chaas and ñana ñaas, becoming a tatsanu or natsanu is not meant to parody foreigners but is instead seen as an homage to the elders and traditional social organization in Mixtepequense society. As one of my interviewees stated: "You can't dress up like a tatsanu to make fun of old people. No. Being a tatsanu is a tribute, a recognition and respect for the elders, who hold la palabra [the sacred word]. So, dressing up like a tatsanu doesn’t mean you’re making fun of them but instead honoring their place in society."49

![Figure 2. Natsanu and Tatsanu pair during carnival in San Juan Mixtepec, February 12, 2013.](image)
The tatsanus’s traditional costume speaks directly to the importance of cultural preservation present in this embodied practice. Masks specifically produced for the tatsanu are extremely rare. The traditional version is carved from the *pipi* or *colorín* tree (*Erythrina coralloides*), an all but extinct practice in the community. As of the writing of this article, no new masks are actively produced because the male artisans who made them are all very elderly. Masks that remain in circulation are prized as important historical testaments to this almost forgotten woodcarving tradition. Other masks tatsanus use include rustic versions made from plastic gasoline canisters as well as generic paper mâché and plastic masks with the face of an “old man” or “old woman” that are produced on a massive scale throughout Mexico.

The tatsanu archetype consists of the following characteristics: a sombrero (a straw brimmed hat); bandannas completely covering the face and head; a mask, either hand-carved from wood in the form of an old man with attached goat hair “beards” or made from plastic or paper mâché; a sarape, or wool poncho, woven with black, white, and gray designs specific to San Juan Mixtepec; a long-sleeved white cotton shirt, embroidered with red *nochebuena* (poinsettia) flower designs, traditional to San Juan Mixtepec; white cotton pants; a cane; and braided leather open-toed sandals. Although seemingly less complicated than those of the ñana chaas, tatsanus also have movements particular to their character. The tatsanu speak in a high-pitched voice in Mixtec, carry a cane, walk with their backs hunched, and even pretend to be blind in some cases. Sometimes, they walk with their arm around another disfrazado, typically a natsanu, pretending they need assistance to walk. When interacting with audience members or with the ñana ñaas (sexy ladies), the tatsanus sometimes flirt with them while carrying a baby doll, adopting a “dirty old man” character that highlights their supposed sexual virility and continued physical ability to father children at an advanced age.

The social activities of a tatsanu performed during a festival historically included jokes and playful games with the audience, especially with young unmarried Mixtepequense girls:

> The ancianitos would walk around with their jokes, predicting the future, and saying things like “Your grandpa has arrived,” “I’ve brought you money so that you can get married,” and things like that. Or, they would jokingly choose a girl from the crowd and offer her as a wife to someone. That was what it was about, making people laugh. Of course there were always one or two who said something offensive, but the majority of them were respectful with their jokes and didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. Before, they would paint the faces of the teenage girls in the crowd. If they saw a pretty girl passing by and they had paint, they would grab her and paint her face black. And sometimes, the girls would get offended or hurt and their mothers would get upset and would chase the tatsanus down with a cane and hit them until they ran away. So, to some degree, being a tatsanu was risky!

The tatsanus have all but abandoned these practices, which many interpreted as an aggressive form of harassment, in favor of a more theatricalized performance they act out only with each other. Now, the tatsanus typically only chase after the natsanus, stealing the baby dolls they sometimes carry, and flirt with other disfrazados instead of directly engaging with members of the crowd.

The natsanu, the feminine counterpart of the tatsanu, frequently appears with her “husband,” often reprimanding him for his lewd behavior by acting like a “crazy” old woman. The
characteristics of the natsanu are: a rebozo (shawl) covering the head; bandannas to cover the face and head; an “old woman” or “grandmother” plastic mask; an embroidered blouse with traditional designs (typically a colorful combination of embroidered brocade floral or animal motifs and ribbons sewn onto the front of the garment in a row pattern); the nagua, the traditional pleated skirt of San Juan Mixtepec; a cane; a tenate (woven palm frond baskets women use to carry tortillas or other food items); and braided leather sandals. The natsanu also speaks in a high-pitched “old woman” tone in Mixtec and, like her counterpart, imitates the motions and movements of an old woman, walking with her back hunched and shuffling her steps while often carrying a plastic baby doll. When dancing, the natsanu typically dances chilenas with her partner, the tatsanu, imitating patterns of traditional gender relations present in Mixtec social organization.

Although tatsanus and natsanus regularly appear during the festival cycle, they are not as frequently interpreted by participants as the ñana chaas or ñana ñaas. A general absence of knowledge about, interest in, and access to the masks and costumes necessary for interpreting these characters coupled with a categorization by many Mixtequeños of these disfrazados as more “historic” representations reflects the realities of the social changes present in Mixtequeño familial and social organization today. Outward migration by members of younger generations has left palpable voids in the community’s traditional social hierarchy. Many families remain in San Juan Mixtepec while the predominately male members of their households migrate for varying periods of time. Household incomes also generally, although not exclusively, depend on economic remittances received from these male family members. Because of migration, some Mixtequeños elders even live alone, without the presence of caregivers or extended family members. This reality stands in stark contrast to traditions of multigenerational living patterns still present in San Juan Mixtepec and its diaspora communities and is a cause for concern for some elderly residents who fear dying alone.

Dialogue with community elders regarding cultural traditions is also an issue: transmission of these knowledges is oral, not written, and relies on younger Mixtequeños actively interacting with community elders, primarily in Mixtec, as apprentices or archivists in order to document and preserve them.

Ñana ñaa and the Practice of Gender

The practice of gender in San Juan Mixtepec is firmly contextualized within binary cisgender norms. Open discussion or acceptance of homosexual, nonbinary, or transgender identities does not exist, although gossip, clandestine sexual and amorous relationships, and even acts of bullying actively situate individuals who never marry and/or never have children into these categories, whether they apply to them or not. The fourth disfrazado archetype, the ñana ñaa, also known as chicas sexys, or “sexy ladies,” uses the liminal context of the festival to play with the norms, tropes, and stereotypes associated with the practice of gender. While either a man or a woman may, theoretically, embody the other three types of disfrazado, women typically do not become ñana ñaas because of the high probability of being groped or physically accosted by spectators. The personality of the ñana ñaa is specifically grounded in performed characteristics of burlesque sexual attractiveness, wantonness, lewd behavior, and scandalous clothing choices. Part of the fun in “flirting” with a ñana ñaa as a member of the public comes from the fact that,
underneath the risqué clothes and artificial breasts, they are usually men.

There are two types of ñana ñaas who appear during festivals. The first, the more “traditional,” has the following characteristics (from head to toe): a cowboy hat; bandannas to cover the face and head completely (this is the only type of disfrazado who does not wear a mask); a rebozo wrapped around the arms; the traditional women’s blouse of San Juan Mixtepec, stuffed with tissue paper or balloons to make artificial breasts; a nagua, or pleated skirt; calf-length socks; and miner’s or hiking boots (figure 3). This disfrazado does not have special speech patterns; tends to speak in a normal male voice; can dance with male or female partners, which include all other types of disfrazados; and makes a twirling motion when dancing so that her skirt and rebozo whirl.

The traditional ñana ñaa costume embodies the collective memory of the community in terms of social relations with outsiders as well as shifting social and gender norms experienced within the community and historical trends in Mixtepequense women’s fashion.

During the Mexican Revolution, women began using the nagua, and the blouses that we see now. Because, before, women’s clothing was made of sheep’s wool, and they used a white huipil, a white rebozo. After the revolution the women started changing the way they dressed, and the disfrazados also began changing the way they dressed to match what the women were doing. They covered their faces with bandannas, and by the ’70s and ’80s you began to see them using plastic women’s masks as well, and they would borrow their friend’s or girlfriend’s clothing so that they would have the appropriate skirt, blouse, etc., for their costumes. Just like with the ñana cha, the finer the clothing, the better the costume.52
The ñana ñaas also incorporate the use of miner’s boots as an homage to the Tejocotes miners. Over time, the ñana ñaas split into two groups: the traditional ñana ñaas and the chicas sexys, the second type of ñana ñaas. Although the chicas sexys are characterized as a raunchier, more contemporary version of the traditional ñana ñaas, both groups continue this long historical tradition of borrowing their friends’, relatives’, and girlfriends’ clothes and underwear for their costume, replicating feminine fashion trends that also speak to generational differences among Mixtepequense women.

The second type, the “sexy lady,” is the lewdest and most ill-behaved of all the disfrazados. These ñana ñaas have the following characteristics, though personal interpretations vary greatly: a synthetic wig; bandannas to cover the face and head; a plastic “baby doll” mask; diverse arrangements of bras, mesh body stockings, tube tops, and all manner of risqué upper body wear and lingerie stuffed with balloons or tissue paper to replicate the appearance of breasts; a mini skirt or skimpy dress; stockings or mesh hosiery; high heels; and a feather boa or other “feminine” accessories, such as satin gloves (figure 4). The ñana ñaas almost always travel in groups, flirting with the public and with other disfrazados as they go, simultaneously waving and blowing kisses with coquettish gestures while raising up their skirts, showing off their legs, and pulling down their tops. When a male “admirer” gets too close or gropes too much, the ñana ñaas typically slap his hands away in an exaggerated motion, yelling in high-pitched, feminine voices with a flirty tone for the assailant to cease and desist.

Parts of the diversion in the contemporary practice of the disfrazado are the anticipation, the associated processes of preparation, the final presentation of the costume, and, of course,
the reactions of the public. Every participant undergoes a process of extreme physical transformation, and many people who may normally be nervous or uncomfortable about wearing clothing that does not align with their personal gender or sexual preferences actively engage with these gender discourses via their experiences as disfrazados, specifically as ñana ñaaas. Ricardo Martínez, a returned migrant who now lives and owns a small business in San Juan Mixtepec, reflected on this process of temporary gender transformation by recounting the first time he dressed up as a chica sexy during the festival of San Juan Bautista:

The first time it happened was in '96. I was dressed up as a woman and this guy comes up to me and says, "Hey, do you want to mount this horse?" I shook my head yes, and he got down. I was so nervous but I didn't think twice about it and just got up there, and my skirt lifted up, and all the people were whistling at me! Hahaha! And then people came over and started touching my bare legs, and they didn't let the horse move, because I was trying to get to where they do the despescuezada and they just kept messing with me and saying "Wow, what legs!" And you know what, they even started a bet about me afterward, because they weren't sure if I was a real woman or not!

As indicated by Martinez’s story, the breaking of cisgender norms is not just limited to participants. The practice of the disfrazado represents an embodied encounter with members of the public that is not demarcated by spatial limitations, such as stages, barricades, or the like. Therefore, being a disfrazado becomes an intimate corporal experience for the participant as well as for the members of the public with whom they interact. In the embodied space of the festival, generations and genders mix as men dance and flirt with men dressed as women, women dress up as men and dance and flirt with women, and an endless number of other combinations and couplings arise that do not normally occur within any other public social context in San Juan Mixtepec. The practice of the ñana ñaa can therefore be said to be, on one level, somewhat of a mix between wholesome entertainment and gender-bending debauchery. On another, the ñana ñaaas are used by some members of the community who identify as homosexual, nonbinary, or transgender to express themselves (albeit temporarily) in ways not traditionally or necessarily openly accepted by the community.

Conclusion

This article has explored the embodied practice of festival tradition as a type of social remittance that (re)produces social and cultural capital and is indispensable for the practice of individual and collective identities for the residents and migrants of San Juan Mixtepec. The expression and variable interpretations of different discourses and knowledges via the disfrazados reflect the reciprocal nature and flow of information present in both the community of origin and its diaspora communities, as shown through the creation of different types of social and cultural capital expressed through a performative medium. The disfrazado is, therefore, a practice of tradition as well as innovation, one that helps shape senses of belonging for both residents and migrants.

The disfrazados form an essential part of the festival cycle and are, for many, representative of the identity of the community itself and its cultural traditions. The image of the disfrazado has even been exported beyond the original festival context, appearing not only in cultural events throughout Oaxaca but also as abstract illustrations that form part of the logo for San Juan Mixtepec.

53. Ricardo Martínez, interview by author, October 11, 2013, San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca.

54. Based on my informal discussions with ñana ñaa participants during June 2013.
Mixtepec taxi companies, as miniature versions of the ñana chaa masks that hang from the rearview mirrors of many cars and trucks driving around San Juan Mixtepec and abroad, and even as tattooed images that adorn the skin of Mixtepequenses living in diaspora. Those who do not become disfrazados look forward to seeing them during the festival, and those who become them often do so not because they are formally educated in the practice but because of the sense of pride and excitement they experience in participating in such an integral part of the cultural traditions of their community.

The embodied practice of the disfrazados reveals that tradition is indeed a diverse and multifaceted concept for Mixtepequenses. The residents of San Juan Mixtepec and its diaspora communities rely on the continued practice of such traditions as the disfrazados to shape senses of who they are, even if they no longer reside in their place of origin. For many Mixtepequenses, the simple act of participating in or observing embodied practice, even if they are not familiar with the historical origins or the subtle intricacies of the characters, helps frame their experiences of belonging. Furthermore, although questions of authenticity figure into the practice of the disfrazado, the continued cultural preservation of this tradition in its many forms is what matters for Mixtepequenses, despite disagreement regarding how the tradition is practiced by individual participants.

For many Mixtepequenses, becoming a disfrazado or seeing them during festivals forms part of their imaginings of what comprises contemporary Mixtepequense identity. Being a disfrazado is a dynamic practice that influences and is influenced by the actions, attitudes, and perspectives of individual Mixtepequenses. The tradition reflects the variable life experiences of Mixtepequenses today, many of whom, although they may live in diaspora in other parts of Mexico or in the United States, actively maintain ties to their cultural heritage through embodied practice and/or a physical return to San Juan Mixtepec to participate in festivals and other community events. Many Mixtepequenses become disfrazados to create senses of belonging for themselves as well as others. The practice is, in essence, a way to demonstrate and approach what it means to be Mixtepequense through the celebration of Mixtec cultural traditions and the community itself. Therefore, “being” Mixtepequense entails, in part, the embodied practice of cultural knowledges, even if that body of knowledge is incomplete. Furthermore, the dynamic relationship between memory and forgetting present in the practice of the disfrazado tradition reveals the constantly shifting natures of identity and belonging on a larger scale. San Juan Mixtepec is an Indigenous community defined by the historically fluid movements of its members, and the nature of belonging, as evidenced by lapses and changes present in its cultural memory, reflects this fluidity. However, belonging is also defined by a stalwart adherence to the practice of tradition and “authenticity” in its many forms, such as the conservation of the San Juan Mixtepec dialect of the Mixtec language, the continued practice of festivals and disfrazados, and the maintenance of traditional forms of social organization, such as the mayordomía and other cargos. It is precisely within this space where the construction of cultural identities takes place and where individuals learn, practice, and reimagine what it means to be Mixtepequense in an increasingly globalized world.
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AUTHOR BIO

Ivy Rieger received her doctorate in anthropology from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2015. She primarily specializes in theoretical questions related to practice, belonging, and performance among Indigenous groups in Mexico where she has conducted extensive ethnographic research focusing on festivals, rituals, cultural memory, and the production of identity. She is coeditor of the volume These Thin Partitions: Bridging the Growing Divide between Cultural Anthropology and Archaeology, published by the University of Colorado Press (2017). Rieger is a Level I investigator in the Mexican National System of Investigators (SNI) and currently works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Autónoma Nacional de Mèxico (UNAM).

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NON-THEMATIC ARTICLE

Signed Music in the Deaf Community: Performing The Black Drum at Festival Clin d’Oeil

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Signed music
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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 2019, the first signed musical stage production was performed at Festival Clin d’Oeil—the world’s largest deaf arts festival that brings thousands to Reims, France, biennially. Surrounded by visual and performing arts, an invited delegation from Canada debuted the musical The Black Drum internationally, incorporating physical theater, signed music, projection, and dance. Signed music is an inter-performance art that demonstrates musical elements by culturally deaf individuals who have explored creating musical performances with their hands and bodies. These performances operate according to a distinct artistic style, incorporating elements of signed languages; rhythmic hand, facial, and/or body motions; and media video arts. This article offers insight into the performers’ process and development of a deaf-created signed musical for an international audience, the ways signed music galvanizes community and identity through self-expression, and the impact of The Black Drum on an international audience at Festival Clin d’Oeil. Through ethnomusicological analysis and reflection with perspectives as insider-outsider-mediator, signed music has been researched by the authors and observed throughout the development of The Black Drum in preparation for its Canadian and European premieres. The festival setting is a place where new types of performances are welcomed and evaluated for their acceptance into the community. Responses from audience members and performers revealed that signed music is an emerging genre of its own.
1. The translation for Clin d’Oeil from French to English is “wink.”

2. Other signed languages in Canada are Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ), Maritime Sign Language, and numerous signed languages of the North American Indigenous population.


5. The research conducted with the deaf cast and production crew in Canada and Europe took place over six months through participatory observation, video ethnography, field notes, and interviews.

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Introduction

Festival Clin d’Oeil held in Reims, France, is the largest ongoing deaf performing arts festival.1 Since 2003 the CinéSourds organization has held this festival every two years, with the goal of featuring signed language with all of its cultural and artistic manifestations. Live performances, street arts, a film competition, concerts, visual and plastic arts exhibitions, and a professional stand exhibition are all available at the festival. The festival organizers work on multiple areas at the same time, including youth education and arts workshops for children aged six to seventeen, as well as research and development related to deaf cultural heritage through seminars, conferences, and professional meetings. More than twenty thousand festival goers attended the 2019 festival (https://www.clin-doeil.eu/en-gb/festival). In this article, we argue that culturally deaf performers expand the present concept of music within the performing arts by exploring the impact of signed music as an art form prior to and during the festival.

The signed musical stage performance called The Black Drum was featured at the Festival Clin d’Oeil in 2019. The Black Drum is the first full-feature signed musical produced, directed, and written by deaf individuals in Canada and internationally. It was produced by the DEAF CULTURE CENTRE, Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) in 2019. This all-deaf cast was selected for the featured performance at Festival Clin d’Oeil as one of ten performances out of hundreds from over thirty different countries that applied. Representing Canada, this signed musical performance is done entirely in American Sign Language (ASL), one of several signed languages in Canada.2 ASL, like other signed languages around the world, has its own set of linguistic features (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) that are both different and similar to those of spoken languages.3 Furthermore, by watching performances from many countries at the event, the Canadian performers exhibited their deaf cultural norms representing Canada, and a variety of cultures and signed languages were exchanged. This festival’s international visual and performing arts and cultural sharing are what brings deaf individuals from all over the world to Reims biennially.

We have investigated and observed signed music throughout the construction of The Black Drum in preparation for its Canadian and European premieres, using an ethnomusicalological approach with our respective cultural perspectives as insider-outsider-mediator.4 The research conducted with the deaf cast and production crew in Canada and Europe took place over six months through participatory observation, video ethnography, field notes, and interviews.5 This article begins with the necessary cultural context of signed music’s development as an art form.
We describe the process of how signed music performances were developed by the culturally deaf performers in *The Black Drum* and how they changed from preproduction to the end of the performances at Festival Clin d’Oeil.

**Context**

**Deaf Festivals**

Various deaf festivals have taken place in North America and internationally. Expos and festivals with performing and visual arts, films, and gatherings of signing adults and youth from around the globe have taken place at DeafNation World Expo, Canadian Deaf Children Festival, and the Rochester Deaf Film Festival. The deaf festival setting is a place where new types of signed language performances are welcomed and, in some instances, accepted into the community. For years, deaf people have been subject to discrimination for using signed language, thus affecting restriction of signed language performing arts. Festivals, in general, are known to welcome new artworks, create innovation, and affect community identity. Playwright and professor of drama Temple Hauptfleisch has examined how arts festivals support cultural change in post-apartheid South Africa:

> In the face of the enormous task of reconstruction, reconciliation and self-realization now facing the country, the arts (in the very broadest sense) have once more been mobilized in a most remarkable fashion in a new “cultural struggle” in which not only the theatrical event but the theatrical system as a whole is once more becoming increasingly important not only in understanding and re-interpreting the past, but also in coming to grips with the present and in shaping the future, thus shifting perceptions across a wide spectrum and the many chasms that divide people and communities. In this process, the arts and culture festival has come to hold a special place.

This experience parallels deaf people facing discrimination related to signed language use. Besides festivals being welcoming, there are some constraints related to festivals as well. For example, the organizers of music festivals are frequently considered gatekeepers, which professor emeritus of management and organizations Paul M. Hirsh calls a “preselection system,” in selecting the music performances. The same holds true for deaf festivals, as the festival organizers select musical performances related to signed language that prominently feature deaf artists to counteract generations of cultural oppression.

One of the first large-scale international performance arts festivals for deaf people was called The Deaf Way, held at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, in the United States in July 1989. The Deaf Way hosted over six thousand deaf individuals from all around the world, who gathered to celebrate deaf performing arts and to honor deaf culture. For years, deaf people have been subject to discrimination for using signed language, thus affecting restriction of signed language performing arts. Festivals, in general, are known to welcome new artworks, create innovation, and affect community identity. Playwright and professor of drama Temple Hauptfleisch has examined how arts festivals support cultural change in post-apartheid South Africa:

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Originally planned as a one-time festival, the popularity of the event led to The Deaf Way II. Like the first iteration, the festival brought together almost 9,700 deaf individuals from around the world in Washington, DC, in July 2002 to share their arts, research, and languages.
Way II recaptured the enthusiasm of the original event. Deaf professor of math Harvey Goodstein and advocate Laura Brown's photography of the festival created a uniquely detailed pictorial record for the deaf community that ranges from the formal grandeur of the opening ceremony to fascinating behind-the-scenes glances at the arts festival and the intellectual conference program. The engaging portraits of the individuals and technology from The Deaf Way II expose a transnational community of deaf people. Like with the first festival, the signed language performers demonstrated their pieces in signed language literature and theater categories.

Both The Deaf Way and The Deaf Way II festivals made a great impact on the planning of deaf festivals globally, including the establishment of Festival Clin d’Oeil in France in 2003. The festival’s director, David de Keyzer, noted that he would like to create a festival that focuses on films and performing arts performed by deaf artists. He then asked the city of Reims if they would be interested in having a deaf performance arts festival every two years. The city of Reims was thrilled to have this kind of international festival and gave their support by providing the festival with ongoing funding. Through Festival Clin d’Oeil, de Keyzer has provided opportunities for deaf performers to create and share their new ideas in theater, film, and other performance arts. In that context, new signed music works were welcomed in this four-day international festival during the summer of 2019.

Creative influence of signed music can be detected across American and European signed language poets from international festivals. Clayton Valli, a well-known ASL poet, performed his poetry at The Deaf Way in 1989. His poetry is strongly influenced by American English poet Robert Frost. Similar to Frost, the genre of his poetry is focused on natural landscapes and the four seasons. Valli was also a signed language linguist who specialized in conducting linguistic analyses of ASL poetry. It was at The Deaf Way that Valli’s work made an impact on Wim Emmerik, a deaf Dutch ballet dancer, mime artist, and theater performer. Emmerik was impressed by Valli’s repeated handshapes and movements to create a rhyme; his use of space, rhythm, meter, and symbols; and the layers of meaning in Valli’s poetry in signed language. Because of Valli’s impact on him at the festival, Emmerik attended Valli’s workshops at Gallaudet and created his own poetry in Dutch Sign Language (NGT). Emmerik later became a renowned NGT poet in the Netherlands and other European countries.

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10. Gallaudet University is the only liberal arts college that serves deaf students through ASL and that focuses on teaching English in the written form. See Carol J. Erting et al., eds., The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1994).

11. Carol J. Erting, introduction to The Deaf Way, xxvii.

12. For further details of signed language literature, see Andrew P. J. Byrne, “American Sign Language Literature: Some Considerations for Legitimacy and Quality Issues,” Society for American Sign Language Journal 1, no. 1 (2017): 56–77. For further information on signed language theater, see Dorothy S. Miles and Louie J. Fant Jr., Sign-Language Theatre and Deaf Theatre: New Definitions and Directions (Northridge: Center on
Valli’s and Emmerik’s poetry pieces share lyrical parallels in that they both feature nature. For example, Valli’s poem “Hands” shows the four seasons with the “five” handshape represented as flurries (going down to and fro), flowers growing (up), grass breezing (to and fro), and leaves falling (down). Figure 2 demonstrates Valli’s “Hands” poetry. Like Valli, Emmerik created a short nature poem, “Falling Leaf.” He uses two hands where one moves from the other alternating dominant hands, to create a Haiku poem with only two handshapes (a “five” and “one” handshape), revealing strong influence from one signed language poet to another. Emmerik learned from Valli, alternating movements, drawing out, continuing flow from one hand to the other. Emmerik, who lived another decade after Valli passed away, continued to grow from Valli’s poetic style to soar with his own. Emmerik’s piece can be seen in figure 3.

Figure 2. Valli’s ASL poetry, “Hands.” Photo: Open source – YouTube (The HeART of Deaf Culture, “Hands,” streamed on November 30, 2018, YouTube video, 0:10, https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=r2VNzOns5q0).


Interviews with renowned European sign language poet, Emmerik, affirm Valli’s profound influence on his poetic style and career framed in the context of their encounter at The Deaf Way Festival, 1989.

I think in terms of internal structure and movement flow—rhythmic flow. That was Valli’s message to use two hands. I didn’t understand at the time, but then later I came to understand alternating movements drawing out...
What Is Signed Music?

Signed music is an artistic technique that includes non-lyric (or less lyric) and non-audible-based pieces as well as signed language lyrics. Signed music is not composed, performed, or recorded with audible sound, and it does not interpret preexisting musical pieces. Performer Pamela E. Witcher, performer and professor of ASL Jody H. Cripps, and performer Hodan Youssouf clarify that signed music is not a form of accommodation. Auditory culture has made attempts to “enable” deaf individuals to hear people’s music by providing accommodations. It is common practice to have deaf people listen to music by having spoken lyrics translated into signed language, imitating audio-centric music (such as deaf hip-hop or dip-hop), and experiencing vibrations. The musical accommodations as detailed here, however, are often met with ambivalence by culturally deaf persons.

Unlike the accommodated audio-centric music described above, signed music is derived from the deaf community. Detachment from the long-held traditional understanding of music as an aural phenomenon is required for this transformation in cultural perspective. Signed music performances can be expressed through visual and tactile modalities. Deaf performers are underrepresented on stage and in the media, and signers’ opinions are rarely highlighted. Through this work, deaf performers were able to express their sense of ownership and engagement while developing signed music pieces for The Black Drum.

The concept of signed music has become better understood and is increasingly accepted by scholars in performance studies and has been defined in its relation to audible music:

[Signed music is] ... wholly autonomous from the auditory experience. While it is pleasing to the eyes, just as conventional music pleases the ears, it has parameters that are completely different from musical forms hearing audiences are used to, such as audible pitch. Specifically, a high-quality music performance (without words) includes handshape variations along with unique movements like circles, motioning up-and-down, back-and-forth, or to-and-fro representing possible notes. Some performances also include lyrics or “words” in ASL (or LSQ).

Cripps, Lyonblum, Witcher, and Youssouf have explained the distinction between non-lyrics and lyrics and their essential use in performance to understanding the concept of signed music. Janis E. Cripps’s performance of “Eyes” is best described as heavily non-lyric (see figure 4 to view the work in its entirety). She is a fluent ASL signer as it is her native language. The performer makes precise moves with both hands (in the signing space and in front of her face). From the beginning until the finale, the performer uses only one basic handshape (stretched fingers and thumb). Without actual signed words, the “Eyes” performance is abstract (no clear meanings as found with lyrics). It is reasonable to assume that her signing experience permits her to execute

This is just one of many examples of the profound impact of festivals on the international deaf arts scene. The impact of festivals expands beyond signED language poetry to other artistic forms that are evolving from within the deaf community. Signed music is a powerful example.
non-lyrics with abstract movements and hands. The performer’s most essential message, maybe, pertains to her hands and herself as a musically powerful signer. Here is another example of how she uses her eyes to send a powerful message: she suddenly opens her eyes at the conclusion, signaling that she is witnessing music, as opposed to closed eyes at the start.34

“Tick Tock,” by Ian Sanborn, the second signed music example, is mainly lyric focused (see figure 5).35 From the beginning to conclusion, a variety of signs (along with classifier constructs) are formed in a logical order with obvious meanings.36 As he signs the composition, the audience sees Sanborn to be always musical. During the piano playing phase, Sanborn does some non-lyrics, as signing appears arbitrary at that point. Sanborn, for example, communicates music notes by “dancing” on the piano keys. In several situations, the hands cannot be identified as people (as he is using “poetic license” with his handshapes) but certainly something moves musically. Sanborn uses the topic of oppression in his piece, which is set in the backdrop of deaf children receiving speech training without regard for signed language. These sessions are compared to a clock, with time moving agonizingly slowly and precision stressed (on how a deaf youngster must practice speaking correctly) over the creative freedom necessary for artistic expression, found in signed music.


Deaf, as well as hearing individuals, make and enjoy music. Jody H. Cripps and his colleagues’ article from 2017 examines the theoretical foundation for signed music. They looked for rhythm, timbre, texture, melody, and harmony in Janis Cripps’s “Eyes” and Pamela Witcher’s “Experimental Clip, version 2 with Luc Ledoux” to see if they were present. They examined musical aspects of the two selected signed music performances using anthropological concepts from anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s seminal essay, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” Their research reveals the rhythm and timbre found in signed music in relation to musical qualities described in non-Western music. While deaf people may not be able to hear rhythm and timbre in audible music, it has not stopped them from creating and combining such elements in their own musical creations in the signed modality. Melody and harmony, on the other hand, are difficult to discern in “Eyes” and “Experimental Clip,” and more research is needed with different signed music performances to study these characteristics.

History of Signed Music

Historically, deaf performers have experimented with signed music on the stage, at social events, and on video media. None of the performances below has been shown at the deaf festival. Regardless, it is critical to comprehend how signed music came to be a part of today’s culture and how it inspired The Black Drum’s performance. Before proceeding with a discussion about The Black Drum, it is necessary to have some prior knowledge of signed music performances dating back to the early 1900s to grasp how The Black Drum came to be.

Through their scholarship, Cripps and his colleagues have compiled a list of historic signed music pieces performed by deaf performers. Typically, deaf people have created percussion singing using signed language, which is a sort of original song. Deaf culture is reflected since it is not a mere interpretation of auditory-based English vocal lyrics. The lyrics originate with deaf performers based on their deaf experience. The original ASL percussion songs use one-two-three rhythm beats for each word, with body gestures from left to right and vice versa.

Another example is a chorus of deaf males signing “Oh Dam, I Hear Nothing!” in ASL, with the

BOAT (left) BOAT (right),
BOAT (left) BOAT (right), BOAT (left),
BOAT (right) BOAT (left),
DRINK (left) DRINK (right),
DRINK (left) DRINK (right), DRINK (left),
DRINK (right) DRINK (left) ...

words meant to be humorous. These early percussion signed songs underwent further evolution in the signed songs of the 1970s.

In the 1970s, a signed song piece was performed. During the My Third Eye production for both stage and television in 1971–72, deaf actors from the renowned National Theatre of the Deaf developed this work. The ensemble song, "Rescue at the Sea," was performed by a group without any auditory-based instrumentation. Rhythmic beats were used in this visually impressive performance. No audible musical instruments were used by the performers.

Throughout the remainder of the performance, one of the performers did "up-and-down" hand motions that mirrored the rhythm of ocean waves (see video clip of this performance below in figure 10).

During the 1990s, the deaf community had more opportunities to enjoy original ASL songs by culturally deaf individuals, either live or on videotape or DVD. "Mexican Cowboy," a percussion song sung in ASL by Mary Beth Miller (one of the performers in My Third Eye), and "A Ballad of the USA Flag," an American patriotic song sung by David Supalla in ASL, are examples of signed music pieces. Supalla’s piece, like Miller’s, featured rhythmic beats through signed lyrics that included soldiers marching in time from beginning to conclusion.

Since 2000, signed music performances have changed dramatically, with many now being disseminated on or created for social media composed entirely without the reliance on auditory instruments and created with ASL lyrics as well as without lyrics or reduced ASL lyrics. While some of these signed music performances have had audible sound added after the signed music composition was complete, such as Witcher’s “Experimental Clip_version 2 with Luc Ledoux,” many have no audible component whatsoever in their composition or performance. Janis Cripps (“Eyes”), Sanborn (“Caterpillar”), Rosa Lee Timm (“River Song”), and Witcher (“Experimental Clip version 1”) are among the participating deaf performers whose work can be readily found on YouTube. Their work presents audiences with new styles of signed musicianship. Their artistic expression uses highly varied rhythmic layers of handshapes and movements—"signed musical notes"—as well as visual media.

A number of deaf performers performed live on stage at the Signed Music: A Symphonic Odyssey event in Towson, Maryland, in November 2015. All of the performers from Canada and the United States were culturally deaf: The Fenicle Brothers (Ron, John, and Jonas) presented “The Food Chain”; Sanborn performed “Rooster Seeks Music,” an ASL narrative-style music piece; and Witcher played "Nice and Slow" with ASL lyrics and non-lyrics. The musical qualities of the signed modality were used in each of these live performances. The crowd, mostly deaf, gave them a standing ovation at the end of their pieces. Presenting old songs alongside the new signed music style had a profound impact on deaf individuals/performers who had recently created their own signed music pieces, including The Black Drum.

**Preproduction and Production**

To analyze the impact of The Black Drum, we worked closely alongside the cast. And as a research team, our perspective is from an insider-outsider-mediator position (Cripps is as an...
position, and movements performed, is another type of fundamental sign. When these morphemic parts are combined, they generate a classifier production that may represent a phrase like "a human figure standing" or "a car passing by a tree." Readers might want to read Ted R. Supalla, "The Classifier System in American Sign Language," in Noun Classes and Categorization, ed. Colette G. Craig (Eugene, OR: John Benjamins, 1986), 181–214, for further details on classifier constructions.

37. Cripps et al., "Case Study on Signed Music."


42. Bahan, “Face-to-Face Tradition,” 34–36, Cripps et al., “Signed Music and the Deaf Community”, Loeffler, “Deaf Music,” 447–48, Carol A. Padden insider—a culturally deaf native ASL user, an assistant professor, and a researcher; Lyonblum is an outsider—a hearing musicologist collaborating with Cripps and Small for ten years; and Small is a deaf community mediator—a hearing linguist and cultural mediator engaged in the deaf community for over thirty-five years). The research for this study attended to the question of how deaf performers expand the current concept of music and situate signed music within performing arts. We investigated this question through interviews, observation, field notes, and recorded documentary video from the preproduction through post-production stages. As signed music is a new area of research in performance and music studies, we observed and analyzed the impact that the performance of The Black Drum had on the cast and crew.

**Development Process of The Black Drum**

The Black Drum is the first signed musical directed, produced, and written by deaf Canadian individuals (see figure 6 for the musical preview). In 2017, Joanne S. Cripps, executive director of CCSD, and Anita Small, CCSD consultant and owner of small LANGUAGE CONNECTIONS, were driven to change the mindset from translated musicals like Spring Awakening and other musicals translated from auditory performances. They envisioned creating a new kind of full-feature show with original signed music pieces throughout. This was an altogether different type of performance that would not rely on translating auditory performances but would rather showcase signed music composition created by deaf composers with no reliance on auditory sound or previously composed auditory-based compositions whatsoever. This would not be about “accommodation” to auditory sound-based musicals but rather its own artistic non-auditory musical exploration using sign language. The Black Drum was conceived during Canada’s 150th anniversary, and they received six hundred thousand dollars in grants for deaf artists to create, perform, and tour it with a mentor program in tandem. It incorporated deaf-led original signed music compositions and with deaf ownership. The play was performed at Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto, Canada, in 2019, and at Festival Clin d’Oeil in Reims, also in 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, it was virtually featured by Inside Out Theatre Company, Calgary, Canada, and the Alberta Cultural Society of the Deaf (ACSD), Edmonton, Canada.
The synopsis is as follows:

*The Black Drum* tells the story of a young woman (Joan), whose life is upended as she mourns the death of her wife (Karen). She is propelled on a fantastical journey to a sinister “in-between” dark world controlled by the “Minister” with no music, laughter, love or freedom. There, her Butterfly and Bulldog tattoos (both Deaf animals) come alive as she grapples with her identity to find her own “place” in the land of the living. She meets Ava, mentor to young children controlled by the Minister; Squib, the Minister’s reluctant lieutenant; and finds Karen as she searches for her inner music and strength. With support from her new friends and live tattoos, she discovers her own signed music, authentic deaf identity, shares her colorful world and defeats the Minister. She must leave her dead wife behind, but returns fortified, having found her own sense of self and purpose in the land of the living. Tattoo art, physical theater, signed music composition, dance, projections and base rhythms enhance the performance.55

The *Black Drum* performance went through a community-led artistic process.54 The play was commissioned by the CCSD, a nonprofit organization, and written by Adam Pottle, a deaf playwright. Culturally deaf features, structure, sensitivities, and themes of identity were all woven into the plot through a collaborative screenplay revision process. Deaf animals (butterfly and bulldog) are among the tattoo characters that come to life. Tattoos have a notable resonance within the deaf community. In 1877, Thomas Edison, who was deaf, patented the electric stencil pen, the forerunner to today’s tattoo machines. The whole cast and production staff is deaf, including artistic director Mira Zuckermann, producer Joanne S. Cripps, the assistant director, the assistant set designer, and the costume designer. The deaf actors also composed the signed music pieces. One aim of the production was to encourage deaf cast and production team members to develop their artistic practice in an environment where they could freely express themselves within a deaf context. Many of the actors have a long history of working with hearing performers and production team members who rely on audible sounds to create music.55 Another goal of this performance was to promote awareness of deaf people’s artistry and cultural identity.

During the preproduction and production of *The Black Drum*, we conducted interviews with each of the deaf cast and production crew members. The interviewees were asked about their understanding of signed music and their process of developing signed music performances. Through the interviews, we were able to find themes related to ownership and engagement among the casts and crews of *The Black Drum*.56 Their thinking processes can be found in the two videos (figures 7 and 8) on ownership and engagement.

We have previously summarized our findings on the casts’ and crews’ responses toward ownership and engagement as follows:

Ownership:

For the first time, cast and production team shifted from the majority influence of auditory music creation in isolation to exploring their OWN music their own way as a collective. (Mira Zuckermann, director, 0:04–1:55)

Intrinsic authentic signed music was created when creativity, body movements, and signs were an outgrowth of experience from the heart of the Deaf community. (Yan Liu, cast, Bree/Butterfly, 3:44–4:10)

Exposing complete identity, including intersectionality, for example, as a Deaf Black Woman, was critical in attaining full ownership of signed music. The ability to break free from absorbing hearing ways and express “the whole me” was a key component to ownership. (Natasha C. Bacchus, cast, Squib, 4:11–4:47)

Engagement:

The challenge in engaging diverse audiences was how to remain true to themselves while simultaneously open and accessible to a combined Deaf and hearing audience. (Mira Zuckermann, director, 0:04–0:54)

The signed music performance mirrored the actors’ experience of breaking free from the fear, shame, and oppression of sign language to no longer be stifled. (Corinna Den Dekker, cast, Ava, 1:36–3:11)

The vibrant, thriving, Deaf signing community growing up was the inspiration for creating an empowering collective performance to show the world. (Dawn Jani Birley, cast, Joan, 3:12–4:09)

We concluded that “through this research and participant interviews, Deaf professionals emphasized the importance of ‘having permission’ to explore signed music performance their ‘own way’ in the context of a Deaf-led production team.”

Production on Stage

In The Black Drum, each performer has an original solo piece that expresses their on-stage character through signed music. The signed music performances incorporate a bass drum.
played live on stage with rhythms composed after and based on the signed music pieces to emphasize the movements and rhythms of the signed music. The bass drum (audible music and vibration) is an additional feature of the musical. A total of nine signed music pieces were composed for this musical. In one particular signed music piece, Yan Liu’s character was the butterfly. Butterflies, born without ears, have become a deaf cultural icon.59 Trained as a dancer, Liu uses signed music to mimic the transformation of a caterpillar trapped within a cocoon to a brilliantly colorful butterfly, hence the title of this piece, “No Cocoon Can Hold Me.” Figure 9 demonstrates the full clip of Liu’s piece.

In the final performance of *The Black Drum*, the cast performs an overture or coda-like piece that draws on each of their individual signed music pieces to conclude the show. The ensemble performs as a group, taking turns to perform sections from their solo pieces. An example of an early ensemble signed music piece is “Rescue at the Sea” in *My Third Eye* (see figure 10). In the last musical scene in *The Black Drum*, the protagonist, Joan (played by Dawn Jani Birley), is featured center stage challenging the audience to consider what music is: how can deaf individuals self-express through their own signed music? Joan leads the cast in a signed music piece demonstrating the feeling of freedom to express their inner music.60 Figure 11 captures the last signed music piece performed in the final scene of the musical.

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60. See Cripps, Small, and Lyonblum, “Ownership and Engagement” for further details on the perspectives of owning music among deaf performers in *The Black Drum*.

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Figure 9. Yan Liu’s “No Cocoon Can Hold Me.” Photo courtesy of the CCSD and Ely Lyonblum (Signed Music, “No Cocoon Can Hold Me,” streamed on December 15, 2022, YouTube video, 5:10, [https://youtu.be/TW2j9xO9Gzs](https://youtu.be/TW2j9xO9Gzs)).

Figure 10. National Theatre of the Deaf’s “Rescue at the Sea.” Photo courtesy of Jody Cripps (Signed Music: A Symphonomous Odyssey) (Signed Music, “Rescue at the Sea,” streamed on September 8, 2022, YouTube video, 3:47, [https://youtu.be/lpw5vFFg0W0](https://youtu.be/lpw5vFFg0W0)).
Production at the Festival and Postproduction Impact

The Black Drum at the Festival

In July 2019, the troupe of The Black Drum traveled to Festival Clin d’Oeil in Reims representing Canada. The theme of the 2019 festival was Canada. Thus, The Black Drum was the first Canadian deaf theater troupe to be selected to perform at this international festival, an honor for the Canadian deaf community. Also, due to the selection of this play being of paramount importance, it was not performed until the last two days of the festival. The Black Drum was the only troupe to perform signed music performances without any reliance on audible sounds and the audible sound was considered superfluous in their performances. The troupe’s first performance drew a full house, and we were there to witness the impressive turnout and sense of excitement from this production, which was performed three times at the festival.

As for the night entertainment, a small number of music performances from deaf bands incorporated audible sounds in their performances, which attempted to replicate the auditory experience of music through their work. Music performances ranged from translated sign song to imitated musical performance. Translated signed songs or audible-based performances have their own lengthy history and can be found in the signed language literature and at other international deaf events. Deaf people frequently have a variety of responses to this translated audible music or imitation of audible music (e.g., dip-hop or deaf hip-hop) because it is part of hearing people’s cultural experience. The cultural differences between these groups’ performances and The Black Drum’s work as well as other signed music pieces as discussed thus far are notable in their respective approaches to musicking and their relationship to auditory culture (i.e., the extent to which they incorporate auditory culture or are created independently from auditory culture). A short clip of other bands with translated songs seen in figure 12 serves as an example.
The Black Drum’s Impact on the Deaf Festival

After viewing The Black Drum, Cripps conducted interviews with audience members asking about their reactions toward the signed musical performance.61 For this article, the focus was on festival audience members. Interviewed deaf audience members consisted of eight Europeans, two Canadians, and one American. Interviewees were pleased with the performance and most found the quality of the performance impressive. Some explained that they enjoyed the play emotionally due to its music and content, which they could relate to—having been oppressed by hearing members as signed language was forbidden in educational settings in the past.62 Due to the differences of signed languages used in Europe, some of them began to understand what signed music meant. For example, one of the audience members said that they normally do not enjoy audible music or translated songs into signed language and would likely sleep halfway through performances with translated songs. However, with this musical they expressed that they felt thrilled right from the beginning and enjoyed it all the way to the end and wanted to see more after the performance ended.

Audience reactions showed how The Black Drum was impactful and how it stood out from other performances and night entertainment at the festival as it was thought provoking, unique, culturally appropriate, and in sync with the deaf community internationally while visually oriented and aesthetically pleasing. Signed music is sometimes erroneously confused with signed language that is superimposed on audible music in an attempt to render an auditory experience for deaf people as they do not hear the audible sounds.63 Instead of focusing on access to audible music, signed music distinguishes itself by creating musicality through a visual and tactile medium that is enjoyed by deaf and deafblind people.64 The notion of having signed music created visually or through movement with a tactile medium makes it clear that the two types of music (i.e., audible and signed) are drastically different in form and cultural context.65 It also highlights deaf people’s own process in creating and appreciating their own type of music. In a related case, our previous article indicates that The Black Drum’s deaf cast and production team members expressed that they finally discovered ownership of the musical, and after having understood and appreciated signed music, it became part of their lives.66

The Black Drum has had an impact on an international level beyond its appearance at the festival.
Featuring the signed musical performance at the festival changed how festival participants (the ones who participated in the audience study) think about culturally appropriate signed music performances and influenced their appreciation of their own music. *The Black Drum* performance at Clin d’Oeil has led to a coproduction begun between Finland and Canada to create a new signed musical (in process). This kind of influence on an international level parallels the impact that Valli’s signed language poetry had on Emmerik’s poetry as discussed earlier in this article.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Through interviews with the deaf performers and production crew from *The Black Drum*, we learned that they felt a sense of ownership of their signed music performances in the musical. In addition, they were able to engage their audience at Festival Clin d’Oeil in a similar manner and cultivated a sense of belonging in music making through signed music. These findings are in keeping with and confirm the findings that traced the mentorship process in the creation of *The Black Drum*. The mentorship research report summarized shared learning, collaboration, and networking of the deaf theater professionals as they were paired with experienced deaf and hearing theater professionals as mentors in the context of the deaf-led theater production, *The Black Drum*, 2019. The report highlighted the learnings of both mentees and mentors. Findings in the mentorship research report point to the vital role of deaf group connection, the value of the collective, collaboration, mutual learning during signed music composition, and permission to do it the “Deaf Way,” as well as institutional partnerships in supporting and asserting credibility in signed music as a valued performance art. Both the mentorship research report and the festival findings elucidated here point to the importance of the collective and sense of belonging needed to generate and generated while composing and viewing signed music performances.

As previously stated, the festival is a special place where performers and production crew members feel free to express themselves in their own way in their performances, including in their music. This preliminary finding includes deaf people discovering their identity and connection to music—that is, through signed music. The well-known mixed feeling or reactions to auditory music among deaf audience members were no longer evident when they watched *The Black Drum* performance. Audience reactions in both Canada and France affirm the connection of deaf audiences to signed music with their own personal experience. Festival exposure and audience reactions reaffirm and solidify the important place of this music as an outgrowth of the deaf community, belonging to the deaf community, establishing connection with the deaf community and its own music beyond national borders, and soliciting sense of belonging from deaf community audiences.

An expanded notion of music is intertwined with our concept of who music belongs to. Music belongs to whatever culture it comes from. Music can be composed and experienced through a variety of senses and enjoyed by all. Festivals play a powerful role in reinforcing the joy of music across borders experienced and shared by deaf people across the globe. Just as signed language poets influenced one another through festivals in the late 1980s, signed music composers are having an impact on one another now, thirty years later. *The Black Drum* at Clin d’Oeil generated impetus and inspiration for more signed musical productions and new coproductions in North America and Europe.
Signed music tours in North America were considered after the festival. Based on the strong turnout at the festival, *The Black Drum* troupe received several offers to perform in the United States (e.g., in Los Angeles for Deaf West). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plans to perform live on tour in the US and Canada morphed into a virtual tour. Inside Out Theatre Company and the Alberta Cultural Society of the Deaf (ACSD) hosted a virtual event in 2021.  

For the future, signed music performances at international festivals need to be promoted by performers and community members. Recognition of signed music performances on an international level sheds a new light for deaf people to finally own their own way of creating and enjoying music. Teatre Totti, a deaf theater in Finland, will coproduce with CCSD a signed musical commissioned by CCSD, also written by Pottle, with signed music pieces composed and performed by deaf signed musicians and supported by the Canada Council for the Arts with an eye toward production in Scandinavia, in Canada, and at Festival Clin d’Oeil in a few years (in process).

Deaf festivals like Festival Clin d’Oeil have a role in sharing new forms of signed language performance art. Festivals provide a strong platform for signed language performers to express and share their new creations on an international level. The "culture struggle" regarding what constitutes deaf art and music is beginning to fade with the performance of signed music at renowned festivals and in theaters. Festival performances, in turn, play an important role in the growing acceptance of signed music as a music genre internationally among deaf people in their communities and beyond.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


AUTHOR BIOS

Jody H. Cripps is a native American Sign Language signer who grew up in a deaf household in Ontario. He is a Canadian deaf researcher who has been researching signed music, particularly in the fields of music enculturation and visual sounds, as an assistant professor of American Sign Language in the Department of Languages at Clemson University in South Carolina.

Ely Lyonblum is the Strategic Research Development Officer in the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto. His projects, largely focusing on cultural equity and music technology, range from the history of sound recording to American Sign Language performance art and storytelling through music. He trained as a documentary filmmaker at Goldsmiths, University of London, and completed a PhD in music at the University of Cambridge. His work has been presented by the MIT Media Lab, CBC Radio 1, the Smithsonian Institution, and the British Library and has been shown at music and arts festivals across six continents.

Anita Small is a hearing sociolinguist, educator, cultural mediator, and researcher. She has worked with the deaf community for thirty-five years and as university educator (York University and University of Toronto) for over twenty years. A specialist in social dynamics, past codirector of the DEAF CULTURE CENTRE, and owner of small LANGUAGE CONNECTIONS, she has engaged diverse communities to cocreate collaborative, empowering award-winning organizations, program innovations, productions, and resources.

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REVIEW


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Film festival studies, now a well-established field of research within film and media studies, has provided, over the last fifteen years, methodologies of research and theoretical frameworks to understand festivals as a crucial component of film cultures in the world. The major lesson that film festival scholarship has taught us is that festivals are more than the films they exhibit, thus inviting researchers to shift the attention from an exclusive focus on film texts to broader conditions of circulation, exhibition, commerce, and spectatorial experience. Historiographical approaches have brought forward the unique histories of film festivals as institutions that promote cinema as a form of art and constitute a self-sufficient circuit of distribution and exhibition.¹ In particular, the theorization of film festivals as a circuit has allowed an understanding of the sociocultural and geopolitical dynamics of global cinema.² Moreover, from a material perspective, the festival circuit has also been analyzed as a formation “upheld by the various stakeholders—filmmakers and studios, journalists and press agents, agencies, tourists boards, cinophiles and others.”³ Finally, sociological and anthropological approaches have also invited us to consider festivals as events that, through their peculiar temporality and material conditions of exhibition, provide an exceptional experience of film viewing as well as modes of socializing.⁴ This last aspect is particularly important for identity-based festivals, such as queer film festivals, in which the curatorial focus of the films exhibited is as equally important as the sensuous aspect of a community coming together. In this respect, two recent monographs on queer film festivals constitute fundamental contributions to queer cinema studies in general and film festival scholarship in particular: Stuart James Richards’s *The Queer Film Festival: Popcorn and Politics* and Antoine Damiens’s *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness*.

Both authors situate their research in conversation with the main tenets and approaches of film festival scholarship, while at the same time they make critical intervention in the field, developing original theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Specifically, Richards, “to address the inherent objectives of the queer film festival’s social empowering capacity and financial sustainability,” combines attention to organizational structures and funding mechanisms of three large international queer film festivals with an analysis of what and how films are programmed (p. 14). Damiens, instead, by focusing on smaller, ephemeral, almost forgotten queer festivals in North America and Europe, puts into question the “conceptual apparatus” of film festival scholarship that “does not adequately apply to the vast majority of festivals: its theoretical and methodological tools, devised for international festivals, do not necessarily account for smaller events” (p. 23). Notwithstanding the two books’ different aims, approaches, and selection of objects of study, they both attest to the understanding of queer film festivals as crucial space in which historical and contemporary sexual politics and cultures are played out.⁵
Richards’s intellectual quest starts from a straightforward research question: “in the exhibition of films at the queer film festival, can economic value and social empowerment coexist?” (p. 2). The question stems from the observation that queer film festivals, from underground and radical forms of media activism linked to social movements, have developed into “an elite film institution,” becoming crucial actors in the promotion of normative models of gay and lesbian identities. To address this conundrum, Richards adopts the heuristic framework of the social enterprise and applies it to three case studies: the Frameline San Francisco International LGBTQ Film Festival (Frameline), the Melbourne Queer Film Festival (MQFF), and the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGFF). The social enterprise is defined as “a non-profit organisation that will engage in economic strategies to fulfill its social mission, where the social entrepreneur will engage with various income streams to create sustainable social transformations” (p. 1). These aspects of the social enterprise allow Richards to untangle queer film festivals’ compromise with neoliberal economic and cultural policies from the social and cultural intervention that they still make. Indeed, the social enterprise’s aim of creating social change fits nicely with queer film festivals’ specific mandate, since the 1970s, of exhibiting films that focus on queer themes and representation and of providing queer audiences a safe space to come together. Yet large international queer film festivals, such as those studied by Richards, increasingly correspond to the logic of the creative industry, depending on private sponsorships, serving stakeholders that have financial interests, and consequently integrating a commercial mandate within their organizational structure.

The neoliberal reshaping of queer film festivals is situated in relation to the depoliticization of gay and lesbian rights movements and the festivals’ assimilation within conservative institutions. This arc that Richards succinctly describes in the introduction, along with the clear-cut explanation of the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity introduced in chapter 1 and developed in chapter 4, constitutes the major theoretical backdrop against which the festival politics of programming are confronted. In this respect, also particularly crucial are some terminological clarifications on the uses of the word “queer” that Richards provides, individuating two main areas in which the term is deployed. First, in the phrase “queer politics and theory,” which was “born out of the limitations of the gay and lesbian liberation movement,” queer means a poststructuralist critique of that movement’s fixation with rigid identity categories (p. 3). Second, queer can be used to describe an “open-ended community whose shared characteristic is ... an anti-normative positioning with regard to sexuality” (p. 4). However, Richards, by defining his objects of study “queer film festivals,” indirectly makes us aware that the use of the word “queer” has expanded to include cultural projects that do not necessarily make an open critique of heteronormative/homonormative ideologies. The large festivals analyzed by Richards seem to prefer the use of the term “queer” to present themselves as fostering progressive gender politics, while often conforming, in their programming, either to rigid identity categories of gay and lesbian or, more broadly, to normative representations of gender and (homo)sexuality.

Throughout the book, the model of the social enterprise, drawn from management and marketing scholarship, intertwines with queer theoretical approaches to the study of film and media. Chapter 1 constitutes the introduction in which theoretical frameworks and methodology are outlined. After that, the book is made up of four other chapters, each one applying a well-defined conceptual framework to the three case studies. Thus, in chapter 2, Richards identifies


cultural policy and creative industry as the concepts that frame his detailed analysis of the history of Frameline, MQFF, and HKLGFF. The inception of each of these festivals is situated within local histories of gay liberation movements and queer cultures, as well as within specific national and regional mechanisms of funds and cultural policies. Moreover, for each festival, Richards individuates a periodization of their different historical phases, sketching a trajectory in their organizational structures from a grassroots, or, in the case of HKLGFF, niche, ethos to the model of the creative industries, which includes increased professionalism and the acceptance of neoliberal economic standards. Thus, these festivals are now major events that play a crucial role in defining the respective cities in which they take place as innovative creative cities. The historiographical method adopted by Richards is in conversation with film scholar Ragan Rhyne's periodization of the queer film festival phenomenon through various phases, from the establishment of the festivals to their commercial growth and global expansion, and their primary complicity in the development of a “pink dollar” economy (an expression that describes gay and lesbian consumerism). However, Richards makes his original contribution in two ways: refusing to accept the description of the film-festival-as-a-circuit as an always valid and applicable model (an argument shared by Damiens, too) and tying the economic growth of queer film festivals to the programming choices of the festivals themselves in chapter 4.

Chapter 3 delves into a detailed definition of the social enterprise, identifying six key aspects of this management model and demonstrating how each of them applies to the three case studies. Methodologically, Richards draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with festival staff members, quoting in particular interviews with festival directors to corroborate the argument that the social entrepreneur is a fundamental figure in the cultural and commercial success of the organization. Yet Richards also reports anecdotes and draws on his insider knowledge gleaned through internships at Frameline and MQFF and through a fieldtrip as a festival attendee at HKLGFF. Corporatization—a specific process of the social enterprise that describes an organization taking on sponsorship agreements—is a hot topic both within queer academic circles and grassroots communities that have heavily criticized the co-optation of Pride parades by capitalism. In this context, Richards leans toward a rather lenient viewpoint on the presence of private sponsors. For example, he justifies Frameline's sponsorship agreement with the Israeli consulate because it eventually allowed the festival to be sustainable while preserving its social mission and providing access to a wide range of films. The risk behind such an argument is the detachment of queer politics and cultural intervention from anti-colonialist, anti-apartheid, and anti-capitalist struggles. However, Richards's overall project of illustrating the main principles of the social enterprise through case studies has the broader purpose of recommending a management model that can foster social empowerment even within neoliberalism.

With chapter 4, Richards shifts the attentions toward the films exhibited in the three festivals to assess to what extent the neoliberal turn in festival organizing affects programming and curatorial choices. The main argument of the chapter is that “the analysis of the queer film festival as a social enterprise and the identification of homonormative trends in the programming share a common relationship to neoliberalism” (p. 144). Through a quantitative examination of the films programmed, Richards comes to the conclusion that the major consequence of the neoliberal restructuring of queer film festivals is the festivals conforming to homonormative identity politics that maintain hierarchical and binary constructions of masculinities and
femininities. In the chapter, he proposes a close reading of some films at these festivals, distinguishing commercial features characterized by homonormative representations from documentaries and art-house films that deconstruct hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, for each of these categories, Richards compiles lists of films programmed at each festival that give a clear visualization of the major trends in festival programming. He also pays attention to other forms of textual productions that contribute to defining the overall vision of the festival: for example, he examines how festival programs put forward queer diversity and how the film stills selected for festival promotional materials usually put forward white masculinities. Finally, Richards takes into account how the decisions on what films will be projected in the various exhibition spaces of each festival contribute to create hierarchies among the films themselves. For example, at Frameline, lesbian and trans films are shown in different theaters than the ones where gay homonormative films are shown.

Chapter 5 carries forward a reflection on the space of the festival, theorizing how the festival as an event suspends conventional configurations of the space in urban contexts. For example, drawing on literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory on the carnivalesque, Richards argues that Frameline disrupts the connotations of the Castro neighborhood in Los Angeles as a predominantly white male gay space by bringing in lesbian and trans audiences to the festival screenings. Yet not only does Richards consider theaters as crucial to the spatial experience of the queer film festival, but he also stresses the importance of ancillary spaces, such as lounges and bars, that extend the spectatorial cinematic experience and potentially offer broader social empowerment.

By defining queer film festivals as social enterprise, Richards emphasizes several times throughout the book that these festivals “are more than just commercial entities” and that they respond to the LGBTI audiences’ needs to access queer cinema and to come together as a community (p. 99). “The very essence of the queer film festival is literally a celebration of community,” writes Richards, arguing that the public dimension of the festivals allows queer audiences to constitute themselves as a counter-public (p. 22). In this respect, even with the advancement of neoliberal cultural policy that has transformed queer film festivals into top-down nonprofit organizations, the audience plays a crucial role not only in negotiating the meaning of the films screened but also in criticizing the festivals’ alignment with corporative neoliberal ethos. Understanding audiences as a stakeholder in the festival environment, during his fieldwork, Richards conducted interviews with audience members. Yet, overall, their voices are not actually put forward in the book; most of the quotations reported belong to managerial figures working for the festivals.

The methodological centrality of fieldtrips and of the blurring of the observer versus participant position in Richards’s research on contemporary configurations of queer film festivals resonates with Damiens’s “labour of love” in conducting research on LGBTQ film festivals and refusal to "claim the objective position of the scholar-as-observer—doing research on rather than with and at festivals” (p. 28). Surely, Damiens’s fieldwork is different from the one performed by Richards. Given the historical focus of Damiens’s research, his fieldwork mostly consisted of archival research trips, at both institutional archives and private or community-based collections. Moreover, Damiens openly reclaims the importance that his own networks of friendship and
scholarly connections have had in shaping his research. In challenging canonical histories of queer film festivals and focusing on festivals that have left behind little historical or material trace, Damiens necessarily had to rely on conversations with scholars, curators, and cinephiles who participated firsthand in the organization of those gay and lesbian film festivals from the 1970s onward. Thus, even though Damiens did not conduct formal interviews with festival organizers, his insider knowledge as a queer scholar, as well as his voice and embodied perspective, informs all aspects of his research.

Damiens’s book is explicitly conceived as a methodological intervention within film festival studies, opposing this field’s monolithic interest in large international festivals and questioning its established methods that de facto preclude the possibility of examining festivals that function on different scales. Even the literature on queer film festivals has mostly focused on the “largest, oldest and most important LGBTQ film festivals,” says Damiens. In this context, it becomes difficult to account for smaller events that might not constitute crucial historical nodes in the development of global film culture but that, nonetheless, maintain the spatial and temporal dimensions of festival events and play a crucial role in the formation of queer cinephilia, queer film criticism, and queer scholarly approaches in film studies. Taking as objects of study “forgotten, minor LGBTQ film festivals,” Damiens notably undertakes a rumination on the mechanisms of the formation and preservation of historical records and of knowledge production determining which objects of study are considered most relevant and which ones are instead overlooked (p. 23). Damiens situates his endeavor of excavating ephemeral festivals in line with the historiographical project of women’s studies (mostly drawing on the work of feminist historians Denise Riley and Joan Wallach Scott) that, in countering the erasure of women from history, has questioned conventional methods of writing history. The application of the methodologies of feminist historiography, which, as Damiens recognizes, might seem “anachronistic” in a study of film festivals, illustrates well the author’s objective of “queering festival studies,” that is, of exploring novel approaches in creating academic knowledge on film festivals. The project of “queering festival studies” is coupled with the commitment in “queering festivals,” that is, in privileging identity-based festivals as objects of study against the dominant focus on the international film festival circuit (p. 25).

The book is consequently organized around the two concepts of “critical festival studies” and “the festival as method.” The first phrase condenses the endeavor of bringing to light the shortcomings of existing film festival scholarship, fundamentally carried over in the first three chapters. The scarcity of historical pieces of evidence found during research conducted at several archives in France, Canada, and the United States prompts Damiens’s meditation in chapter 1 on festivals’ archival practices and mechanisms of selection of what gets preserved and what is lost. Through the metaphor of “cruising,” Damiens describes the “hazardous encounter with historical documents,” “the affective longings invested in historical research,” and “archival failures and mismatches” (p. 41). The result of this archival research is the discovery of “ephemeral” festivals that “failed or happened only once” and, for this reason, have been neglected in historical accounts of LGBTQ festivals (p. 40). For Damiens, sudden findings of traces of queer cinematic culture in archives have the “potential to disrupt or at least suspend linear, heteronormative temporality” and historiographies (p. 41). More generally, the existence of ephemeral festivals that have left few or no records, especially if compared to the documents
preserved by larger, thriving festivals, demonstrates that the existing major theorization within film festival studies—the one of the festival-as-a-circuit—is actually based on a narrow definition of what counts as a “festival.”

In chapter 2, Damiens explores the “queer film ecosystem” in which festivals coexist alongside other institutions, cultural practices, and technologies, each contributing to the emergence of queer cinema as a field. He first sketches the historical development of the queer film ecosystem in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, highlighting for each decade the spaces of exhibition (including adult theaters) and the circuits of distribution that have defined queer cinema. Then, drawing on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory, Damiens argues that, within film festival studies, the understanding of festivals as “legitimising institutions” that determine the cultural value of a film has led to a hierarchization between festivals that “would assert the legitimacy of art cinema” and LGBTQ events that “would simply screen films [and] mark those films as being solely about identity” (p. 92). According to Damiens, film festival studies’ fixation on the field of cultural production cannot take into account “individual films’ patterns of circulation and valuation,” especially significant for gay and lesbian content that “belong[s] simultaneously to various regimes of cultural value” (p. 93). Thus, Damiens invites a shift in attention to the overlapping fields of cinematic cultural production and of queer cinema cultural production. This last one is structured around two extreme poles, one in which “producers [challenge] aesthetic and sexual conventions” and “queerness itself is turned into a symbolic cultural capital” (p. 94). The second pole, instead, corresponds to “the gay niche market” and in it “queerness is seen … as economic capital” (p. 95). New Queer Cinema in the 1990s occupies the middle ground between these poles, with films that appealed to queer audiences but that were legitimized through their circulation within the mainstream festival circuit of art cinema. Similarly to Richards’s categorization of the various kinds of films exhibited in queer film festivals, the description of the field of queer cultural production allows Damiens to draw distinctions among films that make an intervention in sexual politics of representation and commercial films that do not necessarily question dominant aesthetic conventions. Another heuristic concept employed in this chapter is “queer relays,” drawn from media scholar Lisa Henderson, which describe the movement of queer content across different circuits of distribution, from specialized independent venues of film exhibition to high-brow and mainstream contexts. According to Damiens, “queer relay” helps explain the different discourses and regimes of taste through which such films as Laurence Anyways (Xavier Dolan, 2012) and Tomboy (Céline Sciamma, 2011) have circulated in France (where these two films were distributed within art-house circuits) and in the United States (where they were distributed by LGBTQ distribution companies).

In chapter 3, Damiens provides a comprehensive survey of groups, organizations, journals, conferences, reviews, and other forms of publications that contributed to the establishment of the concept of “gay and lesbian cinemas” and of queer approaches in film studies through fundamental debates, various theoretical trends, and links with social movements. In this chapter, he challenges two main assumptions of film festival studies: that festival stakeholders are discrete actors, each with their own specific interest in the festival, and two, that it is necessary to separate the roles of film critics, festival organizers, and festival scholars. Damiens retracts a history of the practices, debates, and scholarly publications, stressing that film critics active within the gay liberation movement were at the same time festival organizers and scholars.
Their organizing of film festivals became a praxis not only of community-building activism but also of knowledge production about gay and lesbian cinema. The chapter is organized by decade, each one characterized by specific debates. This account illustrates that in the 1970s and 1980s, film critics played a crucial role in developing “a history of sexual representation … and sexuality as a form of social discourse” (p. 125). A major shift occurred in the 1990s with “the professionalization of queer cinema,” when LGBTQ festivals “increasingly relied on corporate sponsorship and philanthropy” and when, in parallel, queer theory was institutionalized within academia (pp. 136, 137). Damiens takes the careers of some prominent film critics-turned-scholars, such as Tom Waugh and B. Ruby Rich, as exemplary of these developments.

With chapters 4 and 5, Damiens shifts his attention to the concept of “festival as method,” which describes how, “as curated juxtapositions of moving images, film festivals offer a productive framework for understanding cinematic cultures.” First, in chapter 4 Damiens poses an understanding of festivals as archives, that is, as “a visual historiographical device that uniquely refracts queer cultural memory and affects” (p. 158). Thus, he analyzes festivals’ curatorial practices and “visual architecture”—all those paratexts, such as posters, trailers, and programs, that constitute thresholds to the experience of the festival—to demonstrate how festivals create knowledge and discourses on sexuality. In particular, it is possible, through curatorial choices, to get a historical sense on “the evolution of LGBTQ identity politics” in film culture (p. 165). Moreover, through a close reading of festival trailers that use the technique of collage, Damiens discusses the “cyclical and delimited temporalities” contained within festivals (p. 167). Finally, he delves into the analysis of documentaries made by and about LGBTQ film festivals. These documentaries develop original formal strategies to tell the story of film festivals, paying particular attention to the experience of festival organizers and workers.

In chapter 5, Damiens takes into account linguistic choices and translation practices within festival catalogs to explore how film festivals articulate queerness at the local/global interface. As a space where we experience globalization, festivals not only create geopolitical imaginaries through their programming choices but also negotiate localized understandings of gender and sexuality with Western-centric modes of queerness expressed through the terminology of identity politics in English. Damiens’s major case study is the Montreal-based queer film festival Image+Nation, whose bilingual catalogs present slightly different versions of how the festival brands itself in French, with an insistence on cinephilia, and in English, with an insistence on identity politics. This split actually depends on and reflects the complexity of sexual subjectivities and of gay and lesbian movements in Quebec, historically influenced by Quebec nationalism and American identity politics. Damiens’s concluding chapter attests to the crucial role played by film festivals in projecting global/local sexual subjectivities. This perspective on how film festivals have historically contributed to an imagining of the world through programming choices resonates with Richards’s argument on how the hegemonic framework of homonormativity is intertwined with international power relations that influence programming choice in queer film festivals. In particular, Richards assesses how the HKLGFF programming is dominated by gay male content, overlooks local films, and makes very little use of Chinese subtitles.

Each book makes its own original contribution to the study of film festivals, drawing on a different set of concerns within queer theory. This is mostly apparent in the definitions that each author
Richards defines the queer film festival as "a series of film screenings that primarily focus on queer themes ... to provide a space of the exhibition of films that would otherwise struggle to secure an audience" (pp. 5–6). Damiens, by contrast, attempts to theorize the specific temporality of queer film festivals when he writes that "LGBTQ festivals ... in curating a wide assortment of gay and lesbian films,... fundamentally join queer subjects in and through time, visualize (or evidence) queerness, and entail a specific relationship to temporality" (p. 26). Thus, Damiens situates his research in conversation with queer approaches in critical theory that have challenged normative understandings of time, linear narratives, and progressive historiographical methods. Instead, Richards seems more directly concerned with the politics of representation of sexual and gender identities in films and consequently in film festivals, thus mobilizing queer social theory.

I see both books as critical pedagogical tools that will become core texts not only in specialized courses on queer cinema but also in larger classes in film studies and media industry studies. For example, Richards's critical summary of the assimilation of gay and lesbian social movements' oppositional politics within a neoliberal ethos, as well as the detailed discussion of the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity, can be used to explain, within the classroom, how the current visibility of gay and lesbian characters in mainstream media, often heralded as a form of progressive representational politics, does not always address the political dimensions of sexuality and does not challenge dominant gender models. Instead, Damiens's chapter on "cruising the archives" offers fruitful methodological dilemmas about adapting existing methods and theoretical frameworks to unconventional objects of study, which will resonate with graduate students' struggles in determining and conceptualizing their own methodologies (p. 40).

Overall, both books open the field of festival studies with original and productive methods that pay attention to those spatial and visual elements in festivals that, along with programming, are fundamental aspects constructing a vision of the world, and of gender and sexuality. Certainly, Richards's examination of the material space of queer film festivals and Damiens's analysis of visual architecture will require further investigation in terms of accessibility and disability. If, as both authors ultimately demonstrate, queer film festivals continue to provide safe space for queer communities, it is important to always think of the kinds of body that such spaces materially presuppose.


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REVIEW


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*Heritage and Festivals in Europe: Performing Identities* is an edited volume of thirteen chapters and an afterword. Cultural expressions have been reckoned as social and political resources since the heritage boom of the 1980s, and this book explores the creation, maintenance, transformation, and contestation of tradition in various European contexts. A recurrent common objective is to grasp the elusive idea of “Europeanness” through the identities displayed at festival squares across the continent.

Chapter 1, by Ullrich Kockel, Máiréad Nic Craith, Cristina Clopot, and Baiba Tjarve, is a theoretical overview of the book’s main foci. It emphasizes the fluid nature of heritage as both innovation and conservation, a processual approach to identity, and whether and how the notion of a common European heritage can be defined. The concept of heritage as sense-making and self-exploration is part of the constructivist anthropological understanding of identity, while tensions between the local and the European may emerge. Chapter 2, by Simon McKerrell and Kerstin Pfeiffer, explores the theoretical grounds of performance, how our ideas of performance shape our understanding of heritage, and whether performance goes beyond its immediate effect for self-reflection and understanding. Chapter 3, by Rūta Muktupāvela and Anda Lake, features the Song and Dance Celebration of the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This is a salient example of how tradition is worked upon by strategy experts to turn it into a national or regional brand. The questions remain as to who gets to do the branding, and how to keep it as a “sustainable endogenous brand” (p. 37). Chapter 4, by Cristina Clopot and Catherine McCullagh, focuses on two festivals: Romania’s Proetnica festival, in which members of officially recognized minorities gather to celebrate multiculturalism, and Shetland’s *Up-Helly-Aa* festival, a fire festival of sensory immersion. The chapter concludes that along with positive messages like “together we can,” tensions and Othering along ethnic, gender, and majority/minority lines may prevail, and the challenge is that onstage respect translates into offstage solidarity. Chapter 5, by Babak Taheri, Martin Joseph Gannon, and Hossein Olya, explores the Cappadox festival in Turkey, where nostalgia and identity stimulate feelings of engagement among consumers. Through three festivals (the Solsona carnival in Catalonia, the Masopust “mumming” traditions of Bohemia, and the deer-man pantomime of the central Apennines), chapter 6, by Alessandro Testa, reviews the major dynamics that push festivals toward wanting to become heritage. Situating heritage processes within a complex web of “actions” (p. 48) such as heritagization, institutionalization, commercialization, and taxonomic polarization (tradition vs. modernity, etc.), the chapter concludes that the function of festivals remains integrative in spite of tensions.

Chapter 7, by Laurent Sébastien Fournier, illustrates a shift from “organic” to “organized” tradition through the Processional Giants and Dragons of Belgium, and the Fest-Noz collective dances of
Brittany. For the former, impetus came from the outside as a top-down process when actors had to simply “accept” the heritage title, while the latter was bottom-up in the sense that actors came together to decide what elements to keep. In chapter 8, by Andreas Pantazatos and Helaine Silverman, the Durham Miners’ Gala comes alive after its predicted death along with the pits and the coal-mining industry. The authors identify three factors behind successful revitalization: politicization, community instead of place-centeredness, and the heritagization of mining culture as proper to the identity of pit villages. Chapter 9, by Simon McKerrell, focuses on the European folk festival orchestra La Banda Europa and draws from the premise that sound structures metaphorically relate to social structures. The chapter warns against essentialist categorizations that lie behind labels like “European music;” rather, La Banda Europa created a “social semiotics” that allowed us to “hear” the complex social structures of Europeanness (p. 134). Chapter 10, by Mairi McFadyen and Máiréad Nic Craith, discusses the Scots language as a form of inclusive civic nationalism. The authors trace the Scottish “egalitarian myth” and democratic proclivities through literature, philosophy, and Enlightenment thought, pinpointing that this ethos was expressed in Scots and culminated in such distinctions as “metaphysical” Scotland and “utilitarian” England (p. 146).

Chapter 11, by Cristina Clopot and Katerina Strani, studies the discursive construction of Europeanness in three cities that became European Capitals of Culture (Valletta, Plovdiv, and Galway) in 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively. The authors identify tensions between the topoi of history, heritage, unity, and Europeanness, concluding that cities find the notion of “Europeanness” as vague as academics do. Chapter 12, by Kerstin Pfeiffer and Magdalena Weighofer, looks at how storytelling and theater have brought people together in divided Northern Ireland and the German-Czech borderlands. The Theater of Witness Project (NI) put in contact former Irish Republican Army fighters with the relatives of victims, and German and Czech youth met in order to confront the traumatic past of their communities. By “meeting the alienated ‘Other’” (p. 175) through storytelling and theater, people were able to access their common traumatic past and challenge preconceived notions of identity that had prevented exchange. Finally, chapter 13, by Ulrich Kockel, describes how the vanished homeland is revived for German expellees, whose associations engage in unification efforts to reclaim their “right to homeland” on their annual Tag der Heimat, “homeland day.” Valdimar Tr. Hafstein’s afterword summarizes contemporary politics of European culture as festivals being heritagized and heritage being festivalized.

The great strength of the book lies in the diversity of its festival case studies, its broad conceptual apparatus, its identification of tensions and incongruities, and its up-to-dateness, minus (understandably) the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public sociality. The richness of the volume’s themes and contexts also creates a weakness, however. There could have been, perhaps, greater effort at weaving a few governing principles through the chapters. While identity, heritage, and festival are discussed in their myriad forms, they remain a little disconnected, as the initial promise of conclusions about “Europeanness” was abandoned. Organizing the chapters by theme might have also resulted in a greater coherence across the book.

Nevertheless, exciting problematics emerge here for anthropology, ethnology, folklore, and heritage studies. What are the contradictory impacts of heritage regimes on local engagement
and authenticity (chap. 7)? How to make sure that festivals are not just well-rehearsed “heritage performances” but rather, have lasting impact and create flesh-and-blood “heritage communities” (chap. 8)? And finally, there is that “absolutely irrevocable ontological challenge” (p. 26) for the writer: How to communicate the embodied knowledge so that we understand how performance feels (chap. 2)? The words of the dancer Isadora Duncan remind us of the ultimate failure of language and the necessity of performance to take over: “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it.” This book shows that, even if we struggle to verbalize our Europeanness, there may be many ways to perform it.
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Mariann Vaczi (University of Nevada, Reno) is a cultural anthropologist who works on cultural performance genres and sporting cultures in Spain. Her main work has focused on the social, cultural, and political dimensions of Basque soccer and Catalan human towers (castells). She has published Soccer, Culture and Society in Spain: An Ethnography of Basque Fandom (Routledge, 2015) and Sport and Secessionism (coedited with Alan Bairner, Routledge, 2020). Her work explores the interfaces of sport and popular culture with themes such as national identity, nationalism, the politics of the body, sensory performance, and the anthropology of affect.

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REVIEW


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Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876–1937 is an edited volume that examines the diverse participation of women with the goal of “mov[ing] women from the margins of scholarship on the fairs” (p. 4). Funded by grants at the Université Paris Diderot (now Université Paris-Cité), this research project produced a conference on women and international expositions and subsequently this book. In their introduction, editors Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers briefly rehearse the scholarship of international expositions. World’s fairs have long fascinated scholars, as evidenced by a copious body of scholarship since the 1980s, ranging from holistic accounts of individual fairs to works analyzing them as venues for celebrating industrial technology, promoting consumer goods, proclaiming both nationalism and internationalism, showcasing imperialism and colonialism, and revealing Western/white visions of ethnic and racial hierarchy. More recent literature has focused particularly on the power dynamics revealed in the politics and execution of exhibitions, but the editors assert that these have focused more fully on class and race than on gender. They also suggest that extant work on women and fairs has overemphasized their participation as consumers. In this volume they seek to demonstrate how a broader focus might “open new vistas both for women’s history and the history of world’s fairs” (p. 3). Referencing Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail Markwyn’s edited volume, Gendering the Fair (2010), which they call “an older sister’s companion to our volume” (p. 3), Boussahba-Bravard and Rogers set out to build on its focus on nationalism, women’s activism, and the experiences of fairgoers by exploring the “gendered consciousness” (p. 7) created by women’s participation.

The volume is divided into four broadly defined sections, each containing three essays, highlighting differing types of involvement in exhibitions. The authors come from a variety of disciplines, particularly history, women’s and gender studies, legal studies, and art history, and include specialists on Mexico, Portugal, the United States, France, and Australia. Their essays are firmly grounded in research into sources including private and public archives, manuscripts, exhibition records, pamphlets, fairgoers’ reports, newspapers, and periodicals.

The first section, “Exhibiting Women,” considers women artists, students, and collectors who exhibited at the fairs. Julie Verlaine begins with a look at art collectors and patrons of the arts. Drawing on their private archives, she argues that attendance at expositions influenced women such as Bertha Honoré Palmer, Gertrude Stein, and Phoebe Hearst to become active collectors, to sponsor women artists, and to create new organizations, thereby contributing to “the profound restructuring of the art world and artists’ careers” (p. 39). She suggests that this experience also

KEYWORDS
World’s fairs
International exhibitions
World’s Congress of Representative Women (1893)
World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago 1893)
Universal Exposition (Paris 1889)
Universal and World Exhibition (Paris 1900)
Ida B. Wells
Marie-Joséphine Pégard
Feminism
sparked in some of these women a broader dedication to the support of women’s rights. In the second essay, Ursula Tania Estrada turns to the impact of exhibiting on artists, in this case the first women students admitted to Mexico’s National School of Fine Arts. Five of these students were selected (by their male teachers) to have paintings exhibited in the Woman’s Building at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition (WCE) in Chicago, including Carlota Camacho’s self-portrait, The Huntress, which boldly “construct[ed] an image of empowered womanhood” (p. 55). Nevertheless, Estrada finds that this experience did not notably transform the artistic careers of those who exhibited. Camacho, whose painting garnered the most publicity, left the school after her marriage and referred to herself as just an “amateur artist” (p. 56). Only one of the five made a career of art, as a teacher and landscape artist; perhaps significantly, she never married. In the final essay in this section, Linda Kim examines the controversy over The American Girl, a gold statue paid for by Colorado mine owners and sculpted by Bessie Potter for display in the American exhibit at the 1900 Paris Universal and World Exhibition. The statue, for which actress Maude Adams modeled, represented a standard trope of the (white middle-class) New Woman of the era. The American commission rejected it as personal and commercial rather than national, however, and displayed a statue of Lafayette instead, relegating The American Girl to a commercial building outside the main exposition grounds. Kim suggests this reflected both the marginalization of women at the 1900 exhibition and a pushback against the more prominent roles women had gained through participation in previous fairs.

The second section turns to women who participated as professionals, workers, and intellectual organizers at expositions. In its first study, Gwen Jordan argues that women lawyers united with other women’s organizations to carve out a strong presence in Chicago in 1893 despite their exclusion from the organizing boards. They organized a meeting of women lawyers, participated in sessions such as the World’s Congress of Representative Women (WCRW), and presented papers at the Congress on Jurisprudence and Law Reform. In so doing, Jordan concludes, they created a long-term strategy for the advancement of women in the profession. Next, Teresa Pinto examines Portuguese female apprentices from industrial schools who exhibited their crafts (particularly lacework) at the WCE and the Paris (1900) and Rio de Janeiro (1908) fairs. She finds that, although their lace dominated the country’s artisanal displays and became a national symbol, the ongoing push for industrialization in Portugal led to the exclusion of women from industrial schools and the separation (and denigration) of women’s traditional crafts from the nation’s industrial progress. In the third essay, Anne R. Epstein argues that French women such as Anna Lampériere and Jeanne Weill created at the 1900 Paris Exhibition “a new public role for engaged French women . . . that of the professional organizer” (p. 127). They did so by organizing and promoting two congresses on social education, and although neither considered herself a feminist, they used these venues to promote the role of women in the social sciences and “potentially gender-inclusive approaches to civic education” (p. 141).

Part 3, “Staging Otherness,” turns to the participation of women marginalized not only by gender but by their race, religion, or colonial status. Claudine Raynaud leads off with an exploration of the ways Black women challenged the discrimination they faced from organizers of the WCE in seeking representation, and eventually won several positions. In her famous pamphlet The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition, Ida B. Wells publicized this discrimination and the nation’s horrific lynching statistics, as well as
Black achievements despite this oppression, and then distributed the pamphlet to foreigners visiting the fair. Black women, like many of their white counterparts, found their best avenue to participation was the many congresses held concurrently with the WCE, and many spoke at the Education, AME (African Methodist Episcopal Church), and Suffrage Congresses, as well as the WCRW. Raynaud argues that the Black women participants were not tokens but “enacted the very intersectionality of their experiences” (p. 166) before international audiences dominated by white women and thus developed strategies that Black women activists continued after the exposition. In the second essay, Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère examines the participation of “exotic” female performers in colonial villages and commercial attractions, which straddled the line between education and entertainment. Examining Javanese dancers, Egyptian belly dancers, and Dahomeyan “Amazons” at the Parisian exhibitions of 1889 and 1900, she argues that their performances “construct[ed] a symbolic imaginary within the French public” (p. 177). Journalists depicted the ballet dancers from colonial Java as “keepers of a sacred and secret culture” (p. 180) and the belly dancers in the Streets of Cairo concession as both erotic and world-weary. The Black Dahomeyan women, allegedly including members of the royal “Amazon Battalion” that fought the French colonizers, most clearly conflicted with French gender and racial ideologies. Their performance featured drumming, shrieking, and foot stamping, and advertisements described them as “black female devils” (p. 184). In this gendered exhibit, presumably by design, Dahomeyan women performers symbolized to the French public the “savagery” of sub-Saharan African while the Dahomeyan men demonstrating crafts or learning French depicted the possibility of civilization.

James Keating veers in a different direction in the final essay of the section, focusing on the goals of white Australian and Utah Mormon women who participated in the WCRW at the WCE in 1893. The Australian women, led by Margaret Windeyer, sought to demonstrate the potential for feminist activism Down Under, while the Utah women wanted to show that they were respectable Americans and worthy of statehood. He concludes that the Mormon women succeeded, in part because of strong funding and support from their territory, while the Australian feminists, lacking government sponsorship, remained marginalized and were unable to take advantage of their participation to strengthen their movement at home.

The final section of the book considers women’s efforts to use international exhibitions for feminist organizing. In the first essay Karen Offen contends that Marie-Joséphine Pégard’s 1893 La Statistique générale de la femme en France, a highlight of the WCE’s Woman’s Building for its comprehensive statistical delineation of the lives and work of French women, was “both a consequence of and a major step forward in feminist efforts to build a solid Franco-American women’s network” (p. 216). She suggests that this fair and the 1889 and 1900 French exhibitions provided platforms for French and American feminists’ outreach and organizing efforts, which led to the creation of the International Council of Women and increased French women’s participation in national and international feminist organizing. Next, Tracey Jean Boisseau searches for the transnational aspects of women’s organizing at international exhibitions. She defines transnationalism as a term used by feminist scholars “to describe women’s organizing” that “pose[s] challenges to nationally constituted identities and systems” (p. 235). She traces the development of such organizing from the nationalism of the US Centennial Exhibition (1876) to the internationalism of later American and European exhibitions, which she finds to be predominantly white, male, Western-centric, and imperialist in nature. She argues, however, that feminist organizations at these exhibitions produced to some extent “a specifically feminist
transnational consciousness that both participated in and resisted” (p. 234) masculinist and colonialist internationalisms. This was most fully developed, she claims, at Chicago's Woman's World Fairs in the 1920s, organized by journalist and businesswoman Helen Bennett, run by women, focused on the diversity of women's work, and featuring prominent speakers including reformers, feminists, journalists, and businesswomen. Boisseau concludes that, despite the absence of radical analysis, these fairs evoked “a genuine transnational feminist identity, based on the valuation of women as workers the world over” (p. 247). The final essay in the section and the volume looks at the experience of French women at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition of Arts and Technology Applied to Modern Life. Siân Reynolds finds that this exhibition, occurring at a tumultuous political and economic time, constituted something of a step back, reinforcing French cultural gender ideologies in its coding of technology as male and fashion, social work, and consumerism as female. While women participated in some aspects of the design of key pavilions and exhibited their art with the Femmes Artistes Modernes, the fashion section sought them primarily as consumers. They did take a leading role in the Pavilion for Woman, Child, and Family, which sought to show national progress in social welfare and centered women as mothers; the modernization depicted was not feminist. Reynolds concludes, however, that this exhibition indicated not so much that French feminism had declined but that it had advanced to the point that women had better political and associational avenues for agitating for women's rights than international exhibitions.

The essays in this volume clearly demonstrate that international exhibitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided “potentially transformative experiences” (p. 17) for women participants and for feminist organizing. The essays tend to focus primarily on the World's Columbian Exposition and the various Parisian exhibitions, presumably because of their prominence (and voluminous source materials). One could wish for more attention to women's experiences in other expositions and other countries, and hope that this volume will encourage such work.

Most, but certainly not all, of the essays focus on the efforts of feminists to use international exhibitions to advance the cause of women's rights. The editors assert, and this reviewer agrees, that the book “suggests the potential a focus on women offers to the development of international, global or transnational perspectives within the field of exposition studies” as well as the necessity of including in such studies the experiences of “women marked by geographic, political, national, social, racial, or age-related marginality” (p. 17). This volume is a step in the latter direction, although most contributors examine the participation of elite white women. Raynaud does delve into the motives and experiences of Black American women at the WCE, and Keating does the same for Australian feminists and Mormon women. We gain few insights into the Javanese, Egyptian, and Dahomeyan women performers discussed in Demeulemaere-Douyère’s fascinating essay, however; presumably the lack of extant sources limits her to analyzing the discourse about these women. Similarly, Pinto’s essay cannot tell us how Portuguese women apprentices felt about displaying their lacework at international fairs. This is meant less as a critique than as a lamentation of the dearth of sources on the lives and experiences of ordinary women.

In sum, this volume conclusively demonstrates that women were both “an integral part of the fair

narrative” and “participated in the writing of that narrative” (p. 18). It will be of interest to scholars of exposition studies or feminist organizing efforts at the turn of the twentieth century, and it should, as the editors hope, stimulate further scholarship into “the ways women . . . engaged with modern life within that quintessential modern space—the world’s fair” (p. 18).
AUTHOR BIO

Ellen Litwicki is Professor Emerita of History at the State University of New York at Fredonia and coeditor of the Journal of Festive Studies. Her work focuses on the history of American cultural rituals and traditions, and she is working on a cultural history of gift giving in the United States. Her publications include America's Public Holidays 1865-1920 (2000) and articles on American holidays and gift giving. She previously taught at the University of Utah and was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Szeged in Hungary in 2016.

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REVIEW


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“This book is a plea for a gender-sensitive interpretation of events, festivals and celebrations” (p. 89).

*Doing Gender in Events: Feminist Perspectives in Critical Event Studies* by Barbara Grabher is the third book in the newly established Routledge Critical Event Studies Research Series, which considers underrepresented themes in event studies (gendered violence, well-being, family events) from inter-/multidisciplinary angles.

Grabher’s short volume looks at festivals from a gender perspective, assessing their gender-inclusivity and gender-sensitivity. Her study is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork she conducted at Hull UK City of Culture 2017 (abbreviated to Hull2017) in Kingston upon Hull (Yorkshire, England), a year-long program of festivals, exhibitions, concerts, and lectures from which she culled a few events that had “gender-sensitive profiles in their form, content and/or purpose” (p. 25).

The book is structured in six chapters, beginning with an introduction that also lays the theoretical foundation for the entire book. The next chapter outlines Hull2017 and the author’s methodology. In the following three chapters, Grabher analyzes gender and equality during Hull2017 from different angles: the engagement of audiences, the performances themselves, and the infrastructural frame. The final chapter differs a bit from the conclusions one usually finds in academic works: rather than merely summarizing the contents of the book, it focuses on the (potential) future of gender in event studies and highlights areas for further research: gender politics, event infrastructures, and the meaning of the absence of events.

While Grabher resorts to traditional ethnographic research methods such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation, she also approaches her topic in innovative ways. Especially original is her collaboration with nine “observing-participants,” a term she coins to highlight “their active involvement and crucial contributions to the research process and analysis” (p. 27). These collaborators were free to attend any event they chose and subsequently met with Grabher to discuss and reflect on their experiences, observations, and impressions. Their results informed Grabher’s interpretations. And although I would have liked to learn more about their socioeconomic profiles or biographies, I find this approach heuristically stimulating.

In her first analytical chapter, Grabher focuses on the audiences of the Hull2017 events. She and her team studied these happenings for themselves but also investigated the way participants experienced gender equality during them. Grabher concludes that the events did influence how
audiences, individually and collectively, understand equality. She also shows that the audiences’ engagement as communities and as individuals influenced the events as well. While inclusion was a central theme, participation in these events was sometimes perceived as a privilege. She further argues that although the “celebrations appear[ed] to offer space and time to encounter oneself as well as the wider community within the context of cultures of gender equality,” they ended up being attended by those already sensitive to issues related to gender equality (p. 37).

The next chapter traces the performance of gender equality in a few equality-themed events during Hull2017. Grabher focuses on six events and their performers. In doing so, the author defines performers and performances broadly to include a diverse range of actors and cultural expressions. Her results show that gender equality is perceived differently, but she was able to identify three dominant narratives: representation, awareness, and empowerment. To convey their messages, the performers mainly used two approaches: they tried to incorporate either an entertaining strategy or a comforting one, without really challenging the attendants’ preconceptions. With this latter strategy, as Grabher points out, performers did not take advantage of the opportunity to really initiate change.

Her last analytical chapter discusses infrastructural conditions and institutions and how they potentially both support as well as hurt the cause of gender equality. In her analysis, Grabher looks at three central themes: festivalization, material conditions, and the commodification of equality. She found that festivalization facilitated discussion of gender equality and resulted in a normalization of gender equality discourses. In contrast, though, it often left equality discourses at the events instead of incorporating them into the participants’ lives. In her section about material conditions, the author reminds us that participation does not just depend on monetary, temporal, and intellectual accessibility. Festival spaces such as toilet facilities may exclude as well when they do not offer all-gender bathrooms. Finally, Hull2017 also demonstrates that events often come with corporate and/or political sponsorships that participants might not approve of. Events need funding, but for some who do fund these events, “equality is used as a value, which can be co-opted, commodified and commercialised for the profit of its supporters” (p. 86).

Returning to the initial quote, this book is a very successful plea: the author convincingly demonstrates how important it is to consider gender in events—not only for events with a gender theme, but particularly for those that do not address gender at all. And while Barbara Grabher’s work certainly is of scholarly interest, it reaches beyond academia—or should: her results have important implications for event organizers, sponsors, and policymakers, in particular.
AUTHOR BIO

Cora Gaebel is a cultural anthropologist affiliated with the University of Cologne. She did her doctoral research on two Hindu festivals celebrated in Puri (East India), examining the relationship between these events and the economy in a broad sense. She is currently laying the groundwork for their postdoctoral research project on LGBTIQ+ lives in Bangkok.

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REVIEW


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This interesting and extremely readable edited volume emerges from a research project based at the University of Oregon drawing together four Africanist scholars with complementary methodological approaches and a shared interest in everyday social and cultural practices. The introduction (authored by two of the four editors, Balogun and Graboyes)—building on similar sentiments expressed in the acknowledgements—roots the impetus for the volume in a desire to counter dominant Western media representations of “daily life in Africa as nothing but hardship, violence and despair” (p. 1). The volume is thus presented as a “corrective” to such representations, emphasizing the vibrant creativity of everyday life on the continent: “We define everyday life as the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of lived experiences and daily practices that provide valuable insight into broader social issues” (p. 1). This working definition reveals the outlines of what the editors describe as three key ways in which the volume contributes to a better scholarly understanding of Africa: first, by emphasizing the “intrinsic value” (p. 2) of everyday life; second, by recognizing that analysis of the everyday offers a window on to “many other aspects of society and culture ... illuminating societal values, norms and unstated codes” (p. 2), and, finally, by focusing on “fun, pleasure, and creativity” (p. 2), which, rather than negating the hardships faced by many Africans, offers a more complex understanding of African societies.

The opening section of the introduction concludes with a reference to the celebrated essay “How to Write about Africa,” by Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina, and the grimly satirical comedic advice offered in it. Wainaina’s depiction of everyday topics that do not reference economic hardship as “taboo” very much aligns with the editors’ desire to counter miserabilist representations of the continent. This repeated emphasis on popular (mis)representation of Africa makes abundantly clear to the reader that the primary audience for this volume is not other scholars of Africa—who, whatever other failings they may have, are unlikely to share the Western media’s truncated vision of the continent—but rather neophytes who have only experienced Africa via the Western media. Indeed, the acknowledgements had already explicitly stated that “we wanted to create a book that would be useful in the classroom for undergraduate students who have little exposure to or direct experience with Africa” (p. ix). This desire to address undergraduate students as the primary audience is, in my view, both a strength and a weakness of the volume. As was stated above, the essays are largely written in an accessible style and are unencumbered by a dense critical/theoretical apparatus. At the same time, however, the absence from the introduction of any in-depth discussion of core critical ideas regarding the study of the everyday in Africa means that undergraduates who do engage with the volume are likely to experience it as a loosely connected set of case studies drawn from across the continent rather than a critical endeavor underpinned by shared theoretical and methodological approaches. The introduction provides a two-page overview of “conceptual approaches to everyday life” that...
inevitably offers a somewhat cursory engagement with key scholarship in the field. Indeed, even when major figures such as Karin Barber are cited, a rather truncated vision of their scholarship is presented: so, for example, Barber’s 1997 edited volume, *Popular Culture in Africa*, is (rightly) heralded as a “landmark,” but there is no mention of her even more important 1987 essay, “Popular Arts in Africa,” a groundbreaking piece whose twenty-fifth anniversary was marked by an edited volume by Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome, itself a work that consciously tackles the evolution of critical approaches to everyday African popular culture.1

The editors do provide a certain critical framework, however, by organizing the twenty-nine chapters under six broad, thematic headings: “Celebrations and Rites of Passage”; “Socializing and Friendship”; “Love, Sex, and Marriage”; “Sports and Leisure”; “Performance, Language, and Creativity”; “Technology and Media”; and “Labor and Livelihoods.” This allows the reader to identify some common issues linking what might at first appear to be quite disparate expressions of everyday creativity. Given my twin interests in Francophone Africa and festival studies, my eye was immediately drawn to fascinating essays on the pageantry surrounding Senegalese wrestling matches (Cheikh Tidiane Lo), and the emergence since 2005 of exuberant New Year’s Eve celebrations in Niger (Scott M. Youngstedt). Other noteworthy essays examine the attractions of hanging out in malls in Botswana (Deborah Durham) and night life in Nigeria (Omotoyosi Babalola).

The commissioned pieces also provide wide geographical coverage both in terms of the academic homes of the authors (with far more based in Africa than one might normally expect in a North American publication) and the focus of their research, with chapters spanning almost twenty countries, although perhaps somewhat inevitably the overwhelming focus is on “Anglophone” Africa; that is, two-thirds of the chapters, with a full nine devoted to two former British colonies (Nigeria and Tanzania) while there are just five chapters on Francophone countries as a whole and one devoted to Lusophone Africa. This is not to single out the editors for criticism, as I would fully expect an inverse proportion of coverage in a similar book produced in France or Portugal; it is simply a reminder that the geographical focuses of study in relation to Africa are still often dictated by issues of language and colonial legacies.

In conclusion, then, this volume is a welcome contribution to scholarship on popular culture in Africa. Editorial choices mean that it is primarily student-focused, which is of course no bad thing in itself, but the lack of exploration of key critical ideas means that the average scholar is more likely to dip into the volume to engage with specific essays dealing with their research areas than to engage with the volume as a whole.

AUTHOR BIO

David Murphy is professor of French and postcolonial studies at the University of Strathclyde (Scotland). He has written widely on Francophone African, and particularly Senegalese, culture, as well as on the history of the black community in France. Major publications include a study of the pioneering Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene (James Currey, 2000), a critical edition of the writings of the Senegalese anticolonial militant Lamine Senghor (L’Harmattan, 2012), and the first volume devoted to the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts, held in Senegal (Liverpool University Press, 2016; paperback edition, 2021).

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REVIEW


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It is a universally acknowledged truth that reviewers critique books as they wish them to be rather than as they are. I will strive to avoid that tendency in writing about Jack Noe's new contribution to the voluminous literature on southern memory. This is a nuanced, historiographically driven study of both the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and the larger politics of commemorating the nation at a time when it was still significantly riven across sectional lines. Noe gives us a thorough reading of this banner year and the preparations for it. It is a much-needed study of a particularly crucial turning point in the path toward southern and American nationalisms. As a historian of the US South, I am grateful for a book that so ably builds on and amends much of the best recent work on southern memory.

My chief criticisms lay in the direction in which readers of this journal are most likely interested. Noe begins his work with a description that places the reader squarely in the moment of the centennial celebrations. In that context, he notes that the celebrations served as a "performative expression" of newly emergent and competing nationalisms (p. 1). And yet, for readers attuned to festivity, celebration, and the cultural and social lives of commemoration, this is more potential than fulfillment.

Noe is a master of synthetic historiography across fields. In particular, he takes up questions of southern exceptionalism and applies them to the entanglements of memory and nationalism in the tenuous years of Reconstruction. Far from resolving the question of southern identity and its relationship to the celebration of national identity, he fruitfully complicates the dynamic with chapters that detail the southern relationship with celebrations of American independence from the antebellum period through the centennial.

Noe's reading of the complicated antebellum and immediate postbellum celebrations of Fourth of July is particularly novel. His first two chapters do a fine job of dealing with these complexities while not fully segregating the celebrations across the color line. Indeed, Noe's refusal to deal with southerners as a white monolith is particularly impressive given the relative paucity of sources on African American celebrations in these early years. His documentation of both Black and white southern claims to the holiday suggests the difficulties posed by patriotism for nearly all southerners, citizen or not. The evolving version of Independence Day as he portrays it in these two chapters is of a holiday with capacious meanings to a variety of groups. It was precisely this broad-based understanding of the celebration that led to white southern claims to their exceptional status as the true heirs of the nation's founding principles. These claims grew markedly more complex during and immediately after the Civil War, and Noe's analysis of these often-diverging understandings of southern American identity is rooted in both the scholarly
literature and the ample primary evidence that he provides here.

Still, it is hard for me not to wish that Noe had deepened his analysis of African American celebrations. A narrowed temporal and regional focus like the one Noe adopts here would contribute enormously to histories of the use of festive culture. While the past two decades have seen important publications on such celebratory cultures, they have often been field-defining overviews (Mitch Kachun's *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808–1915* [2003]) or more focused studies on particular uses of festivity (Kathleen Clark's *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863–1913* [2006]). Both works did more to open up avenues of study rather than foreclose possibilities. Yet Noe's engagement with this literature treats the questions and complexities of festivity as a settled matter and not as an area in need of significant attention and additional research.

There are hints in chapter 3 of novel arguments about how the public sphere became a site for debate and celebration. For both the early origins of women's work in Civil War memory and a genuinely new reading of when, how, and to what ends these elite white women entered into this work, Noe's contribution here is important. I wish that he had done more to read these public spaces and their use, as these are potentially some of the best sources to reveal the participation of marginalized groups (African Americans, poor whites) in these cultures of celebration. A further reading of these debates in public would contribute significantly to an understanding of material and conceptual claims to space in the build up to the centennial.

Chapter 4 is a detailed reading of the politics of participation (and nonparticipation) in the centennial. Told mostly through the debate in Texas, it is a useful, readable primer on both the political machinations behind participating in the centennial celebrations and a larger glimpse into the rapidly changing perceptions of national and regional identities among white southerners. In particular, Noe exposes a "reunion rhetoric" that was truly only words and never deeds (p. 117).

After near exclusions of African American narratives in chapters 3 and 4, he returns to the multiple and differing experiences across the color line with chapter 5's accounting of the experience of the actual centennial celebrations in Philadelphia. Here Noe shows how displays of whiteness and of nostalgia for slavery became definitive representations of southern identity. And in his sixth and final chapter, this ascendant southern nationalism is confirmed with the mingling of Confederate and American flags at Fourth of July celebrations. Noe makes note that this was not yet a universal celebration, but nearly anyone who has attended a small-town Independence Day parade in subsequent years can attest that it now certainly feels like a standardized part of the annual celebration ritual. Even in my own state of Alabama (where Noe was born), where Confederate Memorial Day is still officially celebrated, processions on the Fourth continue to frequently host displays that mingle the national flag with its treasonous counterpart.

It is that final point that reveals the particular stakes of Noe's book and of celebratory culture more generally. The relevance of books on cultures of memory has only become all the more
important in recent years as politicians and far-right groups around the world have renewed their use of many of the same broad ideas about exclusionary nationalisms that Noe details here. My ultimate critique of this book’s failure to deal with culture and festivity lies in this realm. Because this is the sphere in which most citizens are likely to experience these beliefs, I wanted Noe to deal with them more. Cultures of festivity are not merely a window into other and more important debates but themselves worthy of consideration. The success of Contesting Commemoration lies in its novel contributions to what would seem like an overcrowded field. But it also suggests the necessity of further sustained attention to the culture and performance of the US centennial and other celebrations like it.
AUTHOR BIO

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REVIEW


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In *La politique des tambours*, Lionel Arnaud gives a detailed historical and ethnographic account of the many and complex ways a group of cultural activists from the marginalized neighborhood of Rive-Droite Levassor in Fort-de-France, Martinique, has managed to deploy once stigmatized popular music and dance as a form of social and political praxis “from below.” Working within a theoretical frame largely influenced by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, Arnaud asks: How do actors apparently devoid of recognized cultural and political capital organize a form of cultural action largely outside of—if occasionally in dialogue with—official political and cultural institutions? How do these militants cultivate a disposition for this kind of cultural action? How do they sustain a form of cultural resistance in the face of assimilationist pressures?

To answer these questions, Arnaud conducted a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Fort-de-France in 2011–12, followed by multiple shorter visits back to Martinique until 2018. In addition to classic qualitative methods (participant observation, interviews), Arnaud made effective use of quantitative methods, using surveys to paint a broad yet precise sociological portrait of the members of Tanbou Bô Kannal (TBK, spelled Tanbo Bô Kannal throughout the book), the carnival organization at the center of his study.

TBK is a leading *mouvman kiltirél* (cultural movement), carnival association, and important actor in the revival and revalorization of the traditional music and dance forms—*danmyè, kalennda, bèlè*—born on the edges of the colonial plantation from African roots. As Arnaud repeatedly highlights, TBK is also, perhaps first and foremost, a neighborhood association, anchored in Rive-Droite Levassor, on the right bank of the Canal Levassor, a neighborhood that its inhabitants have militantly renamed Bô Kannal (canal front) in Creole. Bô Kannal is a geographically and socially marginalized neighborhood, as can be found at the periphery of French Antillean urban centers. As Arnaud explains in chapter 2, the neighborhood emerged in the nineteenth century, as many newly emancipated Martinicans moved toward Fort-de-France and settled haphazardly on land that the local bourgeoisie had deemed unfit for development, in this case, a swampy area that had first been home to fishermen. Because of this double social and geographic exclusion, TBK and its neighborhood form, according to Arnaud, a “privileged observatory for the processes by which what is traditionally perceived as obstacles to collective action and, beyond, to cultural action (agir culturel) of individuals and groups ... can be revealed to be vectors or even incentives to mobilization” (p. 14).1

Chapter 1 offers a relatively short but rich social and political history of the bèlè, Martinique’s own drum-based secular dance, from its emergence on the plantation, through its denigration by the local bourgeoisie, its revival at the hands of folkloric groups, and its conscription by various
political actors, including both Aimé Césaire and the separatist activists of the 1960s–70s. From this historical foundation, Arnaud insists that the actions of contemporary cultural activists, such as TBK, should not be confused with a form of revivalism but rather as an effort to reconstruct a resistant culture that speaks to contemporary conditions from the cultural heritage of the Martinican peasantry.

Chapter 2 focuses on the history of the Rive-Droite Levassor neighborhood to demonstrate that its habitants’ cultural action is anchored in its social fabric. By producing a social and geographic enclave, this history has made of the neighborhood a cultural conservatory, which has contributed to preserve cultural practices inherited from rural lifeways. Through this history, Arnaud highlights the strong relationship that the otherwise marginalized inhabitants of Bô Kannal have enjoyed with Césaire and his Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (PPM). But more importantly, Arnaud emphasizes the strong solidarity that characterizes life in the neighborhood, a neighborhood that many describe as family. The neighborhood’s marginalization has also encouraged a culture of resourcefulness (débrouillardise), bricolage, and resistance that pervades TBK. More than working to preserve traditional rural music and culture (like the martial art danmyé), the group’s founding members have worked to create a new carnival culture, specific to the neighborhood, free from Guadeloupean influences, and rooted in the rhythms of traditional Martinican music, like the chwal bwa and the kalennda.

Chapter 3 is perhaps the most directly concerned with the politics of the drum. The chapter opens with a rapid overview of carnival in Martinique, its politics, and its main opposition between an official—staid—carnival and the bawdy vidé. From there, Arnaud exposes how TBK has opened a “third space” between these two types of performances, one that affirms pride in the neighborhood and its Afro-Martinican culture. Arnaud extends the idea of the third space to discuss how TBK and its members negotiate the tension between political action (associated with a party, an ideology, or a slogan) and strictly cultural activism. Arnaud depicts TBK’s ability to work within the political and cultural fields of Martinique, for example, to channel public funds to their association, in order to assert its culture and create a space for “alternative possibilities between the neighborhood and society” (p. 167).

Chapter 4 turns its attention to the period following the election of the socialist François Mitterrand to the French presidency in 1981 and the decline of Césaire’s influence on the cultural politics and associative life in Martinique. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first exposes how the transformation of the Martinican economy, in conjunction with new urbanization policies, have unmoored TBK from its stable and privileged anchor in the neighborhood. The second focuses on the effects of new cultural policies in the 1990s. This era saw the end of the clientelism of the Césaire era and the rise of a new regime of cultural subventions, in which the region, the French state, and the European Union displaced the city as a source of financing. As Arnaud explains, this new regime effectively separated social from cultural action (the two had been understood as conjoined by the Césaire administration), operated under an entrepreneurial logic, and fostered the rise of a new artistic elite. Destabilized and having lost its social and financial foundation, TBK found ways to adapt to the new regime. Arnaud describes these new strategies in the third and final section.

1. All translations by the reviewer.
Finally, chapter 5 details three contemporary approaches to the transmission and diffusion of danmyé, kalennda, and bèlè, and their associated dance and music forms. Arnaud names the first a “familialist” approach in which entrepreneurial militants attempt to capitalize on the community resources associated with the old popular lifeways. The second, didactic, approach consists of transposing the pedagogical ideology associated with republican education to defend what its proponents see as a rigorous—that is to say, codified and depersonalized—vision of music and dance education and performance. With the third approach, cultural actors seek to combine modern and traditional aesthetics to “gather the Martinican people around renewed sensibilities.” Throughout the chapter, Arnaud exposes how these approaches allow Martinican cultural actors to promote a certain understanding of society and, by extension, their own “beliefs and principles of government, the good life, and justice” (p. 226). However, Arnaud underscores as well that all three approaches contribute to delinking traditional music and dance from their original social environments and, therefore, participate in the emergence of what he describes as a new moral economy.

Overall, La politique des tambours is a solid work of sociology. Those already familiar with Arnaud’s work on l’agir culturel will find here a great ethnographic illustration and extension of the theses introduced in his 2018 book, Agir par la culture: Acteurs, enjeux et mutations des mouvements culturels. The strength of this latest book perhaps contributes to what I see as its main shortcoming. It is a work that effectively uses the tools of French sociology, those developed in the metropole, to analyze social life at its periphery, in the Caribbean. This introduces a particular epistemological bias that could have been countered if Arnaud had engaged with scholarship from and about the Caribbean. In his introduction, Arnaud describes the members of TBK as actors “doubly dispossessed of their capacity for cultural action” and “deprived of their means of action and lacking the cultural and social capital associated with cultural mobilizations” (p. 20). He asks: “How are dispositions to mobilization for and through cultural action created among actors who were a priori deprived of such dispositions?” (p. 15). Unfortunately, this a priori is never really questioned. Approached from a Caribbean(ist) perspective, the cultural and political achievements of TBK appear far from anomalous but rather as a modern-day extension of the work of cultural resistance and social transformation initiated by those enslaved on the edges of Caribbean plantations, a space where those apparently stripped of social, cultural, and political capital gave rise to new languages, religions, music, and dances and came to shape the cultural world of their masters and of a continent. This process, often associated with the concept of creolization, has been explored at length by Caribbean intellectuals as well as Caribbeanist anthropologists and cultural theorists. But perhaps it is the work of Edouard Glissant, the Martinican philosopher, that is most critically missing from Arnaud’s work. If, in addition to the classic class categories of European sociology, Arnaud had incorporated Glissant’s distinction, introduced in Le discours antillais (1981), between a classe dominante (dominating class) and a classe déterminante (influential, or decisive, class), he may have found TBK’s cultural influence and political reach less puzzling. There is truly a missed opportunity here because Arnaud’s mastery of the tools of European sociology would have enabled him to propose a social scientific counterpoint to Glissant’s poetics, offering—as the book already does without naming it—an empirical illustration of Glissantian concepts, such as the détour.
Arnaud’s work in Martinique demonstrates the portability of his previous analyses of *l’agir culturel* and, therefore, contributes to our understanding of French Antillean politics. Yet it also raises questions that cannot be ignored at a time when anthropology faces increasingly urgent calls to decolonize: Who has the authority to theorize? Who is treated as an object of study? Who benefits from the research and in what ways? Arnaud confronts some of these questions in an important appendix, but it would have been good to see matters of positionality, reflexivity, and epistemological authority further woven into the research. In a postcolonial context, the politics of research should not be treated as separate from the analysis, as Arnaud’s interlocutors seemed to have reminded him on several occasions. Nonetheless, the book remains a useful tool for those seeking a deeper understanding of cultural movements and cultural politics in France as well as for those interested in a precise analysis of Martinican cultural policies and cultural life.
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Jerome Camal is associate professor of anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research focuses on music, dance, and postcoloniality across the French Atlantic world. He is the author of Creolized Aurality: Guadeloupean Gwoka and Postcolonial Politics, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2019. He holds a PhD in musicology from Washington University in Saint Louis.

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