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PAPERS

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PARTICIPATORY ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING: TRANSCULTURAL COLLABORATION IN RESEARCH AND FILMMAKING

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces an approach of Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking I developed by making films together with rural dwellers in Namibia, Botswana and Angola. Grounded in the field of ethnographic filmmaking, it aims at making anthropologically informed films together with groups of people with no previous filmmaking experience. Workshop participants shape the form and content of the film and contribute to its practical making. In this paper, I explain how such films can be made in a wide range of different settings. Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking gives the participants the possibility to shape their own media image and generates new forms of collaborative knowledge.

KEYWORDS

Visual anthropology, ethnographic film, participatory filmmaking, collaborative filmmaking, collaborative research, audio-visual ethnography, collaborative knowledge

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INTRODUCTION

Participatory elements have become fashionable in film, research, and development projects around the world. Today, it has become almost impossible to implement any major project without including those who are believed to be most affected. The rational behind this is to put research participants, who are often marginalised, in the position to influence the decisions affecting their lives. In anthropology, since the authority of representation has come under debate, collaboration with research subjects seems like an effective way for ethnographers to not only continue making films about the people they study, but to possibly make even better films. Participatory filmmaking has also become an important asset in diverse fields, such as development cooperation, town planning, youth work and to academic research. However, generally speaking, while positive effects of “participation” or “collaboration” are usually taken for granted, the practices, underlying intentions and methods, as well as the outcomes, often remain obscure. In this paper I discuss an approach of Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking I developed through making films in collaboration with natural resource users in the Okavango River Basin of Namibia, Botswana and Angola. The filmmaking combines my anthropological perspective with multiple local perspectives in a collaborative process of knowledge production. I will first give an overview of the context in which the filmmaking approach was developed and then discuss three overlapping fields that contributed to its formation, namely anthropological filmmaking, indigenous media and participatory video (PV). This is followed by an account of the production of three films in Namibia, Botswana and Angola, roughly in its chronological order. The paper will close with an evaluation of the approach and its epistemological implications.

BACKGROUND

I started experimenting with participatory elements of filmmaking during the production of “Wiza Wetu - Our Forest” in 2007. Aimed at local audiences, the film promotes the sustainable use of forest resources in the Kavango Region of Northern Namibia (Pröpper & Gruber 2007). Following my visual anthropological background, my co-director Michael Pröpper and I produced the film largely within the conventions of observational filmmaking combined with some re-enactments and interviews. We included two Namibian project assistants into the film team, as we believed their input would make the film more meaningful for local audiences. Moreover, we worked closely together with representatives of the intended audience during the entire production. Two years later, I implemented a film workshop together with my commissioner Ute Schmiedel, based on ideas and methods originating in participatory video (PV) (Braden 1998; Lunch & Lunch 2006). The workshop was organised as training for

South African and Namibian research assistants of an international research project. The participants conceived and shot the entirety of the resulting film, "Bridging the Gap", which depicts their daily work for the project (Schmiedel et al. 2009). The combination of methods from ethnographic filmmaking and PV seemed like a worthwhile activity. Firstly, the resulting films were extremely popular amongst local audiences, as they were based on local language, imagery and narratives. Secondly, they reached broad audiences in the countries of production and elsewhere, constituting a form of cross-cultural mediation (Ginsburg 1995). Thirdly, they resonated with the demands of donors of international research and development projects to include "local stakeholders" into their projects.

I advanced this approach during my PhD within an international research project investigating resource management and climate change in Angola, Namibia and Botswana (Gruber 2015). Based on a transdisciplinary agenda, over 100 social and natural scientists worked together in "The Future Okavango" research project (TFO).[1] Developed as a means by which to investigate the complex and interconnected character of environmental problems, transdisciplinary research intends to transcend disciplinary boundaries and develop overarching methodologies and perspectives. By definition, transdisciplinary research is collaborative, implying not only the collaboration with other researchers but, even more importantly, external stakeholders (Wickson et al. 2006; Russell et al. 2008). Therefore, the principal aim of the films I made was to include local stakeholders into the research process by feeding their knowledge back to the project so their perspectives could be taken into consideration in further research. A secondary task was to raise awareness and communicate their concerns to wider audiences in the respective countries and beyond.

METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Three overlapping fields, ethnographic filmmaking, indigenous media and participatory video, served as my methodological foundation. In the following I will discuss those aspects most relevant for my own practice. Participant observation has been anthropology's central method since Bronisław Malinowski's forced stay on the Trobriand Islands during the First World War. The researcher takes part in the everyday lives of his or her "informants" – usually through extended periods of fieldwork and in-depth relationships. This concept of participation is also widely perceived as an important asset of observational ethnographic filmmaking, intended to represent the fieldwork experience (MacDougall 1995; Grimshaw 2001; Henley 2004). At the same time, the more active inclusion of research participants into the filmmaking process also has a long tradition in ethnographic film and one can certainly speak of such participation as a distinctive or even defining characteristic of the genre (Durington 2009: 197). Both no-

[1] For further information see: *future-okavango.org* last viewed on 4.4.2016

tions of participation – the filmmaker's participation in the lives of his or her research participants and the protagonists' participation in the filmmaking – can be traced back through the history of anthropological filmmaking.

Robert J. Flaherty's (1922) *Nanook of the North*, shot in 1920 and 1921 was based on "intense and long-term engagement with the people and the landscape in which they lived" that made his filmmaking "akin to ethnographic fieldwork" (Grimshaw 2001: 48). However, guided by the idea of expressing his admiration for the people living in this harsh environment, Flaherty was not interested in showing his protagonists' realities as experienced in the early 1920s, but rather in portraying a romantic and idealized version of their lives before Western contact. The film thus contains a lot of staging and re-enacting, for example of "traditional" subsistence activities. While this approach was later criticised as a distortion of reality and as "salvage anthropology", it required the active and creative involvement of its protagonists. Jay Ruby (2000: 88-91) cites extensive passages from Flaherty's records in order to demonstrate how these re-enactments were conceived in cooperation with his protagonists, rather than simply being directed by him. The protagonists' active participation is both a prerequisite and an outcome of conceiving and enacting these sequences.

Jean Rouch, French filmmaker and anthropologist, took Flaherty's ideas further and included his protagonists in the process of filmmaking more substantially. Rouch did not believe in an objective scientific truth and neither in the film camera as a passive recording device. For him the presence of the camera created the situations he wanted to document as the cinematic truth – *cinéma vérité*. He adhered to a principle of *shared anthropology* that was based on a mutual exchange with his protagonists (Rouch 2003: 43ff; see also Henley 2009: 310ff). As part of this reciprocal relationship, Rouch regularly screened his rushes and rough cuts back to his protagonists in order to discuss the ethnographic content of the footage and the filming yet to come. Moreover, he also went back to the communities that had participated in the filmmaking in order to show them his finished films as a form of reciprocal exchange.

However, Jean Rouch proposed a more radical shift in the politics of representation through a

> camera that can so totally pass into the hands of those, who until now, have always been in front of the lens. At that point, anthropologists will no longer control the monopoly on observation; their culture and they themselves will be observed and recorded. (Rouch 2003: 46).

Despite these futuristic visions and his ground-breaking reflexive approach, Jean Rouch always retained a high level of control over his filmmaking and never literally handed the camera over to his protagonists. He later reinforced this position

through his rejection of video technology, with its democratising effects, as expressed in an interview I conducted with him in 2001 (Gruber 2006).[2] However, I want to direct the attention to another central element of Rouch's work, which is particularly important for my own filmmaking, namely the interaction with his protagonists during the shooting, described by himself as follows:

> the filmmaker stages this reality like a director, improvising his shots, his movements or his shooting time, a subjective choice whose only key is his personal inspiration. And, no doubt, a masterpiece is achieved when this inspiration of the observer is in unison with the collective inspiration of what he is observing... (Rouch 2003: 185).

Visual anthropologist Paul Henley highlights that "the presence of some element of risk and chance, to which the filmmaker would be required to improvise an inspired response" was a central element of Rouch's filming (Henley 2009: 255). These *inspired performances* (Henley 2009) were certainly most keen and innovative in Rouch's early *ethnofiction*[3] filmmaking. During his anthropological fieldwork on labour migration in West Africa, Rouch found it "impossible to show the full range of the migrants' experience within the limitations of a conventional documentary" (Henley 2009: 73). He therefore asked his protagonists to improvise significant situations from their daily-lives, resulting in two feature-length films *Jaguar (1967)* (shot in 1954/1955) and *Moi, un Noir (1959)*. Situated between fiction and documentary, these films combine a "laboriously researched and carefully analyzed ethnography" with a fictional framework (Stoller 1992: 143). Rouch produced his ethnofictions largely as documentaries, "without a script and with minimal direction, relying primarily on the protagonists to determine the way in which the action of the film would develop" (Henley 2009: 259; see also Sjöberg 2009: 236). After agreeing with the protagonists upon what would happen in a particular scene, Rouch shot it without direction or interruption. They normally filmed the sequences in the chronological order of the storyline, and tried to film only one take and angle per shot (Jørgensen 2007: 63). This documentary style of filming allowed the presence of intuition, play, chance, and risk which Rouch found so important.

The role of ethnofiction as a form of ethnographic enquiry is elaborated by Johannes Sjöberg (2008, 2009) on the basis of his own filmmaking. Sjöberg's point of departure is Peter Loizos' notion of *projective improvisation,* "the use of improvisation and fantasy as projective methods" (Loizos 1993: 46). This implies that ethnofiction films are based on the protagonists' lived experiences, projected through improvised acting. Johannes Sjöberg differentiates between the *descriptive* and *expressive* functions of acting (Sjöberg 2009: 6ff).

[2] Various scholars and filmmakers criticised Rouch's practices as paternalistic, apolitical, colonialist and even racist. For a comprehensive overview of the critique see Henley (Henley 2009: 330ff).

[3] While Rouch himself called this approach "ciné-fiction" or "science fiction", it later became referred to as ethnofiction. The origin of the term is however unclear (Henley 2009: 74f see also 441).

Expressive improvisations refer to the possibility of revealing the protagonists' feelings, dreams and fantasies. The anonymity provided by their fictive characters allows the protagonists to disclose emotions, secrets or other intimate issues that may be difficult to express otherwise. *Descriptive* improvisations, on the other hand, serve to illustrate or demonstrate certain activities, which may be especially helpful if the subject is difficult to represent through other filmic approaches, for example, in the case of illegal or socially unacceptable activities. They are, however, not merely applied out of necessity, "because there is *no other way to tell it* ... [but because] ethnofiction could be *a better way to tell it* from an ethnographic point of view" (Sjöberg 2009: 8; emphasis in the original). The anthropological knowledge is generated by the process of filmmaking, much as in conventional ethnographic filmmaking:

> Unlike modern drama-documentaries where most of the research is conducted before the shooting and developed into a script, the research in Rouch's ethnofiction continued during the shooting ... The projective improvisation thus stands at the very centre of the research process in ethnofiction since the protagonist are not merely re-enacting events, but actually expressing partly subconscious knowledge of ethnographic value through their improvisations. (Sjöberg 2009: 7).

Inspired by the work of Jean Rouch, I adopted re-enactments and improvised acting into my filmmaking. Based on their shared experiences, imaginations, dreams and fantasies, as well as local narratives and all sorts of models from the media, these were extremely popular amongst the protagonists and local audiences. I want to argue that the introduction of a fictional layer not only has an effect on the protagonists but also changes the relationship between protagonists and filmmakers: they become players of the same (Rouchian) game rather than being bound into the more rigid hierarchical relationship between observer and observed that is characteristic of more conventional documentary filmmaking.

Ideas of *handing over the camera* (Rouch 2003), *filmmakers putting themselves at the disposal of their subjects* (MacDougall 1995) and other forms of *collaborative filmmaking* (Elder 1995) were extremely popular in the field of ethnographic filmmaking from the early 1970s. Nevertheless, none of the anthropological filmmakers actually gave up authorship and yielded practical aspects of filmmaking to their protagonists.[4] This discrepancy was counteracted a number of years later, in the late 1980s, when indigenous peoples around the world started to produce their own films, television programmes and other media forms – often supported by anthropologists. In the same period, the authority of anthropological representations, and especially of ethnographic film, was being questioned both within and outside the field (Clifford

[4] A notable exception is the "Navajo Project" undertaken by Sol Worth and John Adair (1972), who trained their Navajo participants to make 16mm films. However, they took these films as data to be analysed in order to find out if there was a distinctive Navajo way of seeing the world as well as to draw more general conclusions about their perception and culture.

& Marcus 1986; Nichols 1991; Weinberger 1994). Discussions of *indigenous media* (Ginsburg 1991) and its relationship to ethnographic filmmaking became extremely prominent in anthropology. While some scholars presented indigenous media as inauthentic, and its introduction as potentially harmful to the respective communities (Weiner 1997), others argued that the appropriation of video technology by indigenous peoples was an important step in their struggle for self-determination, and opened up an important new area of research and activism (Michaels 1986; Ginsburg 1991; Turner 1991; Aufderheide 1995).

Anthropologist Faye Ginsburg defines indigenous media rather exclusively as the work of "original inhabitants of areas later colonized by settler states … struggling to sustain their own identities and claims to culture and land, surviving as *internal colonies* within encompassing nation-states" such as can be found in Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Canada, and Latin America (Ginsburg et al. 2002: 25; emphasis added). Their efforts to appropriate video and television technology were "provoked" (to use her term) by several factors, such as these peoples' growing desire to control the images made of them, the often unwelcome introduction of cable television, and the advent of relatively inexpensive video equipment (1995: 67). In the context of increasing cultural and political pressure on indigenous communities, Ginsburg perceives their activities in this field as a form of "cultural activism" – a conscious form of "self-determination, cultural maintenance, and the prevention of cultural disruption" (Ginsburg 1995: 70). While their work is frequently produced and consumed exclusively within the communities to which its makers belong, it may also be shaped by a more cosmopolitan context and aimed at a wider, and even international, audience.

> Indigenous media work has shown itself to be a particularly robust form of contemporary cultural objectification. From small-scale video and local radio to archival websites to national television stations and feature films, indigenous media makers have found opportunities for cultural creativity of all sorts. (Ginsburg 2011: 238).

Faye Ginsburg suggests that ethnographic and indigenous media are complementary expressions of the wider project of "representing, mediating, and understanding culture" (Ginsburg 1995: 65). Inspired by Jean Rouch's "regards comparés", Ginsburg proposes contrasting the work produced in different genres in order to provide a wider more comprehensive view of cultural or social phenomena.[5] Although the individual works may have originally been intended for other purposes, in advocating the juxtaposition of multiple contrasting genres, Ginsburg proposes an approach to ethnographic and indigenous media that allows the consideration of individual cases within a common analytical framework (1995: 70).

[5] Events he organised in order to provide insights into a certain ethnic group or geographical area by presenting films made by anthropologists, filmmakers and artists, along with those made by members of the group under consideration. For an overview see the website of the "Comité du Film Éthnographique" (2016).

Anthropologist and activist Terence Turner, who was involved in introducing video technology amongst the Kayapó in the Brazilian Amazon area, was interested in the social, political and cultural impact of filmmaking on indigenous communities and their relationships with the dominant society.

Turner offers a detailed description of the social and political dynamics triggered by the medium's introduction into Kayapó society (Turner 1992, 1991). While, in Turner's accounts, access to the technology was mainly regulated through existing power structures, he describes how specific actors tried to improve their position through filmmaking: the people who worked as camerapersons or video editors combined a prestigious position within the community with the possibility of mediating with the outside world, and thereby accumulated symbolic capital and other resources necessary for political leadership (see also Flores 2009: 215f). Many Kayapo working with Turner were thus able to gain or reinforce their political power, while some politically ambitious young men took up filmmaking in order to enhance their careers (Turner 1992: 6f; see also MacDougall 1987: 56). The "monopolization of control" over video production counteracted Turner's efforts to provide equal access to the whole community and reinforced numerous social conflicts (Turner 1991: 73). At the same time, filmmaking became significant for the Kayapo's relationship with the dominant society. During their protest against the planned "Belo Monte" hydroelectric dam near Altamira on the Xingu River, Kayapo camera-operators became a preferred image of international journalists. In order to achieve a high-profile media presence, they began to intensify their filming activities during public events, not only to make documents of their struggle but also to make their struggle visible to the public (Turner 1992: 7). The work of Terence Turner suggests that filmmaking can become a tool of political struggle.

Indigenous media relates to my work in numerous ways. Firstly, Terence Turner reminds us of the potential for (internal) conflict when introducing the medium of film into a small meshed community. It is important to note that dispute over access to such projects are by no means restricted to indigenous or non-Western contexts, but are likely to occur in any kind of setting. Secondly, both Turner and Ginsburg emphasise the significance of film as a form of cultural and political activism, which can be mobilised for different purposes. Thirdly, Ginsburg's work suggests viewing the films I make together with other media products (for example ethnographic films) in order to understand certain cultural phenomena. This suggests that they can be seen as a form of anthropological enquiry. However, while indigenous media aims at giving the respective communities long-term independent access to video technology and thus provide them sustainably with a tool of self-expression, my own projects were extremely short-term and took place under my constant guidance. This

mode of production situates them in the field of applied visual anthropology (Pink 2009).[6]

I incorporated an applied visual methodology into my filmmaking that until now has received little attention in anthropology. *Participatory Video* (PV) is an approach intended to enable representatives of marginalised groups to discuss and communicate their concerns by means of video – initially within their own peer group, and subsequently to outside audiences. The participants of PV workshops receive some basic training in operating a video camera (and sometimes editing), and are encouraged to make films about a subject that is agreed upon within the workshop (Braden 1998). The process of filmmaking is the central aspect of PV, viewed as a "tool to facilitate interaction and enable self-expression" (White 2003a: 65), while the resulting films are often perceived as less important.

They typically consist of interviews or activities filmed in a straightforward documentary style, but may also incorporate dance, drama, songs and poems (Braden 1998: 92). While PV is mostly employed within development projects, it may also be applied in a range of other contexts, such as academic research (Kindon 2003; Mistry & Berardi 2011), capacity development (Menter et al. 2006), and youth work (Wang et al. 2012). PV projects, by their very nature, are not supposed to follow a given template, but rather are meant to be carefully adapted to the given situation.

The foundations of PV lie in the 1960s, when scientists and policy makers started discussing the involvement of individuals in political processes under the notion of *citizen participation* (Verba & Nie 1972). The exclusion of marginalised groups from decision-making processes, and the question of how they could be included, played an important role in these discussions (Arnstein 2007). These developments must be seen in the context of the broader social and political developments of the time, such as the struggle for racial and gender equality. Community media projects that saw film as a possible tool of participation and social change emerged in different places in Europe and North America (Nigg & Wade 1980).[7] Such concerns were paralleled by demands to liberate marginalised people in the so-called Third World. One work, often referred to as pioneering, is Brazilian Paulo Freire's, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", in which he argues that the development of a critical consciousness "empowers" the poor to understand their situation and to take measures against poverty and oppression (Freire 1977). "Empowerment" was seen as a form of radical societal transformation through individual and class action, resulting in changes in law, property rights and other aspects of society (Cleaver 1999: 599). From the late 1970s, these ideas gained increasing acceptance amongst development scholars and practitioners: the rural poor who were usually the "beneficiaries" of development projects should be able to influence "the forces which control their livelihoods"

[6] Applied visual anthropology encompasses a great variety of activities united to the extent that they are "using visual anthropological theory, methodology and practice to achieve applied non-academic ends" (Pink 2006: 87). At the same time these projects have the potential to feed back into academia, contributing to theory building and methodological innovation (Pink 2009: 25)

[7] One such project that is usually represented as having contributed to the development of PV is the Fogo Process, which was part of the National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) Challenge for Change programme (see for example Lunch & Lunch 2006; White 2003b; Frantz 2007).

(Oakley 1991). Due to the perceived shortcomings of the top-down approaches of donor-driven and outsider-led development, development workers and donors increasingly began to adopt participatory methods based on the inclusion of local perspectives, priorities, knowledge and skills in the planning and execution of their programmes (Cooke & Kothari 2004). Since the 1980s, participation has dominated the development discourse and practice to the extent that it has become its "new orthodoxy" (Henkel & Stirrat 2004).

Today it is, politically speaking, almost impossible to implement any substantial project in research, development or planning that does not incorporate elements addressing the issue of "stakeholder inclusion". At the same time, participatory approaches have been placed under increasing critique since the 1990s. A basic argument is that local knowledge is not a commodity, readily available to local people, as it is often represented as being in participatory discourse, but is rather "culturally, socially and politically produced and … continuously reformulated as a powerful normative construct" (Kothari 2004: 141).

Geographer Uma Kothari (2004: 144f) emphasises the difficulty of unveiling the underlying power relations, as these are accepted as given and reproduced through processes of self-surveillance and *normalization* (Foucault 1995).

David Mosse (2004) points out that participatory processes are themselves characterised by control and dominance: "project staff 'own' the research tools, choose the topics, record the information, and abstract and summarize according to project criteria of relevance" (19). He further argues that participants' priorities and needs are usually shaped by their perception of what the project with which they are involved is able to deliver (23f). Participatory processes may therefore legitimise and implement decisions already made by development agencies or donors. This argument is supported by Uma Kothari (2004: 148f). Drawing on Erving Goffman (2010), she interprets participatory processes as performances:

> The development practitioner … is asking participants to adopt and play a role using certain techniques and tools, thus shaping and, in some instances, confining the way in which performers may have chosen to represent themselves. The stage and the props for the performance may be alien to the performer. The tools provided can limit the performance so that the performers are unable to convey what they want to; the stage has been set by others and the form of the performance similarly guided by them. (Kothari 2004: 149).

Kothari claims that the participants need to be "good actors" and that those people who either do not possess the required skills or do not wish to perform within these predetermined frameworks will be misrepresented, or even not represented at all. At the same time, drawing on Michel Foucault's (2010)

and Anthony Giddens' (1984) work on structure and agency, Kothari acknowledges that the participants "can have enough power to carve out spaces of control" in these performances (2004: 150) and that individuals have capacity "to fashion their own existence" as active agents more generally (2004: 151). These ideas are elaborated by geographer, Mike Kesby (2005), who contends that agency, self-reflexivity and "empowerment" are not attributes of individuals, but have to be maintained through discursive and practical means. He argues that participatory workshops may constitute temporary social arenas in which it is possible to practice and perfom discourses and activities leading to what he calls "empowered agency":

> Within them, normal frameworks of privilege are circumvented by the discourses and practices of equity, free speech and collaboration. Participants … can … construct themselves as reflexive agents and constitute/represent their opinions and experiences to themselves, one another, and facilitators. Within this field, opportunities open up for people, first, to disentangle the complex web of everyday life … second, to deconstruct norms and conventions; third, to reflect on the performativity of everyday life; and finally, to rehearse performances for alternative realities. (Kesby 2005: 2055).

In summary, assumptions of a direct causal connection between participation, "empowerment", and sustainable development seem out-dated in the light of the critique of the underlying concepts of participation and development (see Ferguson 2007). Nevertheless, the above discussion suggests that activities performed and discourses engaged with in participatory film workshops can be both meaningful and beneficial for the participants in various (albeit limited) ways. If undertaken critically and with a carefully defined focus, PV offers an interesting avenue of investigation for both academic and applied research. I thus borrowed from PV and incorporated some of its methods into my participatory filmmaking.

PARTICIPATORY ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING: CONTEXT

Between 2011 and 2013, I made three films for "The Future Okavango" (TFO) research project in villages situated in the Okavango Basin. They were conceived and shot by villagers during film workshops I organized together with local project members. The films are 32 to 39 minutes long and consist of observational footage, re-enactments and interviews. All three films deal with different aspects of natural resource use. The first film, "Liparu Lyetu – Our Life" (Gruber et al. 2011), was made in Mashare, Northern Namibia in 2011. It introduces techniques and problems related to farming, fishing and gathering wild fruits. The seconds film, "The Secret of

our Environment" (Gruber et al. 2013), was made in Seronga, North-West Botswana in 2013 and deals with different aspects of resource use but has an emphasis on the relationship between wildlife and tourism. The third film "Honey" (Antónia et al. 2013) was made in the Cusseque area in Central Angola in 2014 and depicts local beekeeping practices and the use of honey.

Following my project proposal, it was my task to make films together with "local stakeholders". While the TFO project worked with an inclusive "stakeholder" notion encompassing local decision makers, NGOs, governmental institutions and so forth, I imagined that local villagers would be most directly affected by the project with the least say. I therefore decided to make my films with villagers exclusively. From my previous experience, I expected that the decision-making-process necessary to make a single film together with a group of people would be fruitful and result in a product with a high degree of audience-identification. I thus decided to make one film in each country with a group of residents of the respective research site. As with most of my previous films, I took the communities in which the films would be produced as my primary intended audience. These choices formed the framework of my filming – all the rest would be decided with my local co-workers and the participants of film production workshops I would recruit in each country. In the following, I will focus on different steps of Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking along certain themes, which seem most significant to me.

LOCAL CO-WORKERS

In each of the three countries, I worked together closely with local project members who had been employed and trained to work as translators and research assistants. I needed those co-workers for translations and for their cultural expertise but made a central element of my work out of this necessity. I shifted as much control as possible to my collaborators: we conceived, organised and moderated each of the workshops together and I tried to step back and let them do the moderation independently at times. However, his position within the respective community and the different ways in which each collaborator interpreted his role changed the workshop dynamics and outcomes considerably. During the first workshop in Namibia, my two collaborators Raphael Sinkumba and Robert Mukuya came from the provincial capital Rundu, about 40 km away from the actual research site. They had worked with me on previous films and acquired a lot of expertise in filmmaking. In a way, they were outsiders too, and personally much closer to me than to the workshop participants. Their position was in between me and the villagers with whom they shared their language and ethnic background. During the production, we moderated the process mutually and tried to influence the group's decisions as little as possible.

CO-MODERATOR RAPHAEL SINKUMBA IN MASHARE, NAMIBIA

In Botswana the situation was different. I had never met my co-worker Meshack Kwamovo before. He was native to the town of Seronga, where the workshop took place, and had close personal and kinship ties with the participants. With no previous film experience, he utterly wanted to learn how to make films, which he perceived as a professional qualification that might be beneficial for his future career. Meshack thus took part in the entire filming behind and in front of the camera and became a driving element in the process. His position was that of a moderator and participant at the same time, which, I believe, made the resulting film more engaged and messy. During the third film, I found myself in yet another situation. My co-moderator Miguel Hilario was neither from the villages in which we worked, nor did he speak the local language *Chokwe*. We had to communicate with the workshop participants, who perceived Miguel as an outsider, through the *linguae francae* Portuguese and *Umbundu*. In-depth discussions, which had formed the core of the two previous film productions, were impossible. In order to deal with this situation, we adopted the classical role of anthropologists, trying to understand what was going on around us by watching and taking part in activities. The resulting film is more exploratory than the others and probably the most visual. These examples show how collaboration with local co-workers was an essential aspect of my approach. Their impact on the dynamics within the group and the outcome of the entire project changed considerably depending on their personality and their position in relation to the work-shop participants.

FILMMAKING AS A RESOURCE

Together with my co-workers, I recruited between four and seven workshop participants for each film. Our aim was to organise a democratic selection process leading to a balanced team with participants of different gender, age, social background and with representatives from different locations within each research site (which often consisted of several villages). However, certainly reinforced by our decision to compensate workshop participants financially, the recruitment turned out to be extremely tricky – especially in rural Namibia and Angola where so-called "traditional leaders" play an important role in the social and political life. In Namibia, the participants were selected through consensual decisions during village meetings. These were however dominated by the respective head(wo)man – powerful political leaders introduced by the South African administration (d'Engelbronner-Kolff 2001).

In Angola, the Sobas appointed the workshop participants more or less directly. Our idea of recruiting workshop participants through a democratic process during village meetings only succeeded in Botswana, where comparable kinds of selection processes were common practice, for example in the case of casual labour offered by the government or NGOs, and where political processes seemed to be more transparent. While local decision-makers tried to manoeuvre family members and friends into our workshop in both Namibia and Angola, we experienced some resentments and rumours in Mashare, Namibia. This culminated when one person who apparently felt excluded, secretly told people not to attend our final village screening and personally discredited one of out participants. Filmmaking definitely was the contested resource with potential for conflict, anticipated by Terence Turner in the context of indigenous media (Turner 1992, 1991). Material aspects such as the catering we provided during the workshop and the financial compensation we paid the participants after the completion of the films thereby certainly played a role. However, unlike anthropologist Peter Anton Zoettl, who believes that the participants of research and development projects "rarely see any direct benefit (for themselves) in the doing of anthropologists and social activists" and mostly participate in order to "benefit from the monetary by-products of scientific research or humanitarian action" (Zoettl 2012: 5), my experience suggest a much broader notion of filmmaking as a form of social, cultural and political capital. While the participants themselves portrayed their engagement as an interesting personal experience and an important vocational training, I believe that participation in our project was also deployed to enhance an individual's position in his or her community (see Turner 1992).

I assume that some of the various stakeholders of any participatory film project will try to influence the selection process according to their purposes, irrespective of the geographical or cultural setting. As long as filmmaking offers benefits to pos-

sible participants – financial, political, personal or otherwise – it has the potential to raise or reinforce conflicts. In order to minimise this unwelcome side-effect, more public and more transparent procedures should be applied. This would make powerful actors – including the researchers – more accountable. A more diverse mixture of participants within the production team could be achieved by implementing the recruitment according to a stricter matrix of selection criteria such as age, gender and social status, amongst others.

FILM TRAINING AND THE WORKSHOP SPACE

We started each workshop with an introduction to camera and sound recording as well as different camera exercises. I taught within the conventions of observational filmmaking and made use of peer-to-peer training and other methods I used for teaching ethnographic filmmaking to university students in Germany. At the same time my co-workers and I moderated the process of conceiving the film. We began very broadly by asking the workshop participants what they would like to make a film about within the broader topic of the natural environment.[8] As most villagers depended heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods, they unanimously decided to make these the focus of their films. The workshop participants then chose different activities to be depicted in the films, they acquired protagonists and interviewees, devised questionnaires and developed production schedules. These parallel processes took place within two to three weeks before the actual shooting.

Learning how to operate the camera and how to film was generally seen as the most important aspect of the training. However, the participants developed diverse interests and acquired different skills such as acting, interviewing or composing and singing a song. While some of the groups found it

CAMERA TRAINING IN CUSSEQUE, ANGOLA

[8] In Angola, I decided to take a different approach, as I found it cinematically interesting to make a more focussed film. A TFO colleague conducting anthropological research in the area had told me that bees were an important means of subsistence and cash income. I therefore asked the participants if they would like to make a film honey. The participants confirmed its significance and decided to make a film about different aspects of beekeeping.

important that the different tasks of filmmaking were distributed equally, other groups were less rigid about this issue and each participant took over his or her preferred part. While we made use of roughly the same approach in each country, the outcomes are strikingly different, depending on the workshop participants' and my co-workers' differing intentions and the way we all negotiated the process differently during each workshop. One important factor was my increasing capability to "let go" and experiment in a playful manner.

It was our aim to moderate the process of filmmaking in a way that each participant found meaningful and felt adequately represented. The participants highlighted the intense discussions and negotiations across gaps of age, gender, as well as social and cultural background, as an extraordinary experience, supporting Kesby's notion of participatory workshops as "empowering performances" (2005). However, while Kesby believes that in order to render their effects sustainable, the associated discourses and practices have to be established in everyday space, for example through establishing long-term and self-sustaining social groups. I want to argue that even a temporally limited engagement has a positive impact on the participants' situation and their personal development. In the following paragraph, I want to discuss the act of shooting as a central element of participatory filmmaking.

COLLABORATIVE SHOOTING

As I outlined above, the workshop participants perceived filming as the most important activity and rapidly appropriated the technology. Consequently the films discussed here were shot almost entirely by villagers with no previous filming experience. The filmic approach varied considerably within each film and across the different films. On the one hand, each participant used the camera differently and developed a different style of shooting. More importantly, the workshop participants, my local co-workers and I interpreted and negotiated our roles differently in each film. In order to give an idea of the different forms of collaboration I will briefly describe each film.

The first film, "Wiza Wetu – Our Life" produced in Namibia, takes a somewhat romantic view on resource related activities perceived as "traditional" and "local" – such as traditional fishing, millet farming and the collection of wild fruits. The workshop participants had asked neighbours and friends to demonstrate their activities, while they operated the camera and directed the film. Except for an introductory scene, the filmmakers remain invisible behind the camera. The participants thus adopted the role of researchers and documentarians, while my local co-workers and I followed and supervised their work with as little interference as possible. This shift in roles was maybe most evident when the filmmakers interviewed local politicians and bureaucrats who were extremely irritated to be interviewed and filmed by local villagers instead of the outside expert.

SHOOTING IN SERONGA, BOTSWANA

In the resulting film, farmers are portrayed as proud and knowledgeable experts of their environment, while the local elites seem more than disconnected and misplaced. While the participants included the interviews to valorise their film, their juxtaposition can be read as critique of the existing power relations.

"The Secret of Our Environment" produced in Botswana in 2012, is much more overtly political. While the film first introduces "traditional" resource use, such as fishing and gathering wild fruits, the film's main focus are the conflicts in a social arena dominated by wildlife, tourism and farming. Wildlife and the natural environment are communal resources in Botswana, but international players of the tourist industry make the biggest share of the income through tourism in Seronga. A number of villagers earn small wages as tour-guides or service staff in one of the surrounding lodges, but most locals work as subsistence farmers and face problems as elephants and other game regularly destroy their fields. Significantly, the workshop participants decided not to film the "real" actors involved in the business, such as lodge owners or tour operators, but to re-enact significant situations and discussions through improvised acting. Most of the film shows the workshop participants following their regular jobs as farmers, fishermen and tour guides – however in self-ironic and somewhat theatrical performances facilitated by the introduction of a fictional layer, much as in ethnofictional filmmaking. At other times, these idealized self-representations slip into a more serious tone. In one particular sequence, the participants asked me (acting as a tourist), to raise the question of income disparities. The question was then elaborated through an improvised discussion of four Botswanan workshop participants. These re-enacted sequences are juxtaposed with a number of interviews with politicians and officeholders, on the same issue of uneven distribution of income through natural resources. The same subject matter was thus discussed in two different modes – fictional and realist. At first, I was surprised that the partici-

pants were so overtly critical towards their political representatives while they preferred to discuss other aspects of this issue through a fictional framework. Later, I realised that the participants discussed the issue with outsiders such as politicians and bureaucrats on realist terms, while they preferred the fictional framework to negotiate the situation within the village.

During this film, the roles and hierarchies within the workshop were more fluid than in the other two films. Firstly, my local co-moderator was simultaneously an active member of the production team. Secondly, the workshop participants decided to re-enact the activities to be filmed themselves. Their constant shifting from behind to the front of the camera blurred the boundaries between observers and observed. Thirdly, as mentioned above, the participants asked me to act for them in one of their plays, challenging the conventional hierarchy between workshop facilitator and participants more thoroughly. This had important consequences for the workshop dynamics and the way the participants related to the product. The significance of changing roles and the researchers' acting in front of the camera has been discussed by geographer Sara Kindon in the context of a PV workshop she organised during her research:

> Such movements of our bodies behind and in front of the camera ... symbolize a degree of destabilization of conventional power relations in the research relationship and of particular claims to the unquestioned transparency of the image. As a result, these movements have facilitated a more explicit recognition of the agency and situatedness of all participants in the politics of knowledge production associated with the project's focus, and have contributed to a deeper level of trust and understanding within the research partnership itself. (Kindon 2003: 146f).

"Honey", produced in Angola in 2013, was yet a different experience, mostly because my co-worker Miguel Hilario and I were struggling to communicate verbally with the participants of our workshop. Miguel originated from a region a few hundred kilometres away and had only recently moved to a town near the research site. He spoke *Nganguela, Umbundu* and Portuguese, but not the local language *Chokwe*. While we managed to communicate some practical issues with the workshop participants, elaborate discussions on the form and content of the film, which had been a central element of the previous workshops, were impossible. When I realised this problem we used images as an additional means of exchange. For example, the participants made quite elaborate drawings of activities they wanted to film. However, while the participants of the previous workshops had perceived the extended discussions and negotiations as a new and enriching experience, it was rather frustrating for all parties in Chitembo.

I therefore asked the participants to show us what they wanted to make the film about. We took a long walk through the forest and the participants showed Miguel and me their beehives and demonstrated to us how they work. It was decided that Quintas, one of the workshop participants who was an experienced beekeeper, should demonstrate the making of a traditional beehive and the harvesting of honey for the film. Bino, a second participant who also had a lot of beekeeping experience and therefore knew all the different steps, proved to be an extremely talented camera-operator. During the filming the two men connected perfectly, resulting in some ethnographically dense observational material. The respective sequence first shows the beekeeper moving easily through the forest, serving himself of all the different materials needed for constructing a hive. Its production is then displayed in great detail: skilled hands and simple tools constructing a sophisticated piece of craft. The film represents this embodied knowledge perfectly and is a fine example of audio-visual ethnography.

Remarkably, the Angolan participants also negotiated their relationship with the researchers not verbally but by improvisation and play. When shooting a scene demonstrating the use of honey for cooking, the two women performing the activity, told Miguel and me during the shooting that they wanted to film us tasting the dish they just had prepared. While the participants of the Botswanan film discussed their decision to include me as an actor prior to the shooting, the Angolan participants improvised us into the story during the shooting itself. To our surprise, we found out only during the editing (with a translator) that Adelina and Fátima were already talking about us long before they told us to become a part of the film. By talking (rather patronizingly) about us (and not with us) they were forcefully positioning us as Others.

The three films described here exemplify different ways in which participatory filming can extend and enhance the performative space constituted by participatory workshops (Kothari 2004; Kesby 2005). While the medium of film has been portrayed as inappropriate or limiting for non-Westerners (Faris 1992; Weiner 1997), other scholars have pointed out how people from all over the world successfully appropriated the medium for their own purposes (Turner 1995, 1992; Ginsburg 1995, 1991; Flores 2009). My own experience suggests that the entire process of filmmaking with its inherent elements of joint decision-making, improvising and acting, constitutes a unique space to negotiate and construct meaning in collaboration between researchers, workshop participants and outside actors. The act of shooting is a central element, promoting improvisation, play, risk and chance – aspects that Jean Rouch found so important for calling forth an “inspired performance”. The introduction of a fictional framework creates an ambiguity between fiction and reality that facilitates the acting and flattens the hierarchies within the research and filming arena.

COLLABORATIVE EDITING

The basic idea of these films was to show aspects of resource use and talk to people that the workshop participants found interesting. Our filming was inspired by ethnographic filmmaking, combining observation and fictionalisation with informal conversations and interviews. As the limited timeframe made it impossible to teach the participants the editing software, I did the editing together with my respective co-worker(s) and under continuous feedback by the group.[9] My editing was based on the conventions of continuity editing and self-contained sequences. The local co-workers and I usually made a pre-selection of material from the entire footage and presented it to the group. In the case of observational footage and re-enactments we made rough cuts to give an idea of how a certain activity would look like; in the case of dialogues and interviews we excluded the redundant or incomprehensible material. We would then meet with the group, view the material and discuss with the participants which activities, dialogues and interview extracts should be edited into the film and which could be left out. Usually these choices were based on consensual decisions, in some cases we organised a vote. We would then implement the participants' editorial decisions in the further editing and meet a few days later to continue this process of selection and montage. The overall narrative was agreed upon later during the editing process and we usually had to film some additional material to fill gaps, such as introductions or a song for the film's ending. The editing was framed by the conventions of documentary realism and ethnographic film as well as my personal preferences. At the same time, the workshop participants made important editorial choices. I want to argue that the way we implemented the editing constituted a collaborative process of meaning making.

PARTICIPATORY RECEPTION

Each film workshop ended with several screenings the participants organised in their respective villages. The feedback of community members was generally positive and initiated numerous discussions. At the end of the project, when all films were complete, we organized village screenings of all three films in several locations of the research sites in Angola, Namibia and Botswana. The audience reactions during these screenings strongly suggest that the viewers were able to relate their own situation to the ones represented in the films from the neighbouring countries. Apparently the images were able to convey a sense of common identity across gaps of nationality, language and ethnic background. The film screenings in the presence of the filmmakers and protagonists offered the opportunity for discussion (Stadler 2003; Englehart 2003). I would like to argue that the powerful performances represented in these films are extended to the audience during their reception.

[9] In Angola we hired a young man fluent in Chokwe and Portuguese to translate and give his cultural expertise during the editing.

COLLABORATIVE EDITING IN SERONGA, BOTSWANA

OUTLOOK

One might perceive this kind of filmmaking as a form of "pseudo participation" – as the impact on the overall research and the people's living conditions was clearly limited. However, I want to take a positive outlook. First and foremost, the workshop participants perceived the filmmaking as an important and worthwhile experience and local communities saw the films as one of the more important outputs of the project. On a broader level, the films visualise rural dwellers, which might otherwise stay invisible - within the research project and the broader public. The films portray them as experts of their environment and as active and multifaceted personalities. More importantly, representatives of marginalised communities largely decided the form and content of these films and had leading roles in their practical production. Finally, I understand these films as a form of anthropological enquiry.

Despite the numerous overlaps, there are a number of methodological and epistemological differences between ethnographic film and media made by non-anthropological filmmakers. Explorative in nature, ethnographic films "seek to interpret one society for another" (MacDougall 1992:96).

FILM SCREENING IN MASHARE, NAMIBIA

Informed by anthropological theory and based on ethnographic fieldwork, the genre usually (but not exclusively) represents an outsider's view of the culture or group under consideration (see for example MacDougall 1995; Ruby 2000). Indigenous film and other "subject-generated media" (Ruby 2000) are self-representations primarily aimed at members of the same society or culture (see Crawford 1995; Ginsburg 1995). These films are usually predicative and codifying rather than exploratory, often contributing to the negotiation of cultural identity (Ruby 2000:196). Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking is not aimed at enabling individuals or groups to make their own films, such as indigenous media or the recent work of David MacDougal (MacDougall et al. 2013). The films I described here combine anthropological and local perspectives in a process of transcultural collaboration interesting and meaningful for local, broad and anthropological audiences alike. Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking may be applied in a whole range of contexts. Literally handing the camera over to research participants is one of its principles utterly changing the process of filmmaking and consequently its outcome.

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