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The Voicing Hidden Histories Project: Participatory Video in Development, Soft Power and Film Language

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Abstract:	In this article, we wish to reflect upon some of the findings of a recent Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Global Challenges Research Fund Participatory Video (PV) project 'Voicing Hidden Histories'. Working in South Africa, India and Brazil, this project has been using PV to support specific marginalised communities in each country to challenge the way their nations present themselves - and in particular their national history - to the world via 'nation branding' and other 'soft power' initiatives. Specifically we ask: why use filmmaking as an international development tool? What are the enablers of - and barriers to - successful PV initiatives and what does 'success' mean in this context? Moreover, while such projects invariably make claims for PV as a particularly effective method for 'giving' communities 'voice' - however such potentially patronising terms might be defined - very little space is usually dedicated to the exploration of the films produced in such projects, that is to the specific articulation of this 'voice'. Thus, we also wish to challenge a trend in the analysis of such projects that focuses entirely on questions of methodology and an understanding of PV as a process, largely ignoring the products made.

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The *Voicing Hidden Histories* Project: Participatory Video in Development, Soft Power and Film Language

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Participatory Video in Development: the Voicing Hidden Histories Project, Soft Power, Community Advocacy and Film Language

This article reflects upon the findings of the recent AHRC project ‘Troubling the National Brand and Voicing Hidden Histories’. Working in Brazil, India and South Africa’ the project used participatory video to support specific marginalised communities in country to challenge the way these nations present themselves to the world via 'nation branding' and other 'soft power' initiatives. In so doing, the project sought to raise awareness nationally and internationally of these communities' precarious place in society and to support them in campaigning to effect change in their lives.

Why use filmmaking as an international development tool? What are the enablers of – and barriers to – successful PV initiatives? What does ‘success’ mean in this context? What is the role of the filmmaker? Is s/he an artist? A community worker? A therapist? Moreover, while such projects invariably make claims for PV as a particularly effective method for ‘giving’ communities ‘voice’, very little space is usually dedicated to the exploration of the films produced in such projects, that is the specific articulation of this ‘voice’. Thus, we also wish to examine the ways in which ‘Voicing Hidden Histories’ used film language both to reflect upon, and communicate, the experience of the participants involved.

Keywords: participatory video; development; India: South Africa: Brazil; soft power

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Introduction

In recent years, ‘participatory arts’ (PA) generally, and ‘participatory video’ (PV) in particular, have become something of a ‘go-to’ methodology within the International Development sector, considered by Zelizer, for example, as an ‘an essential component of peacebuilding work’ in post-conflict societies (2003: 62), or, as Flinders and Cunningham suggest, playing a key role in the production of civil society in the developing world, helping to ‘nurtur[e] engaged citizenship’ (2016: 5). In this article, we wish to reflect upon the findings of a recent Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded PV project ‘Voicing Hidden Histories’. Working in South Africa, India and Brazil, this project used PV to support specific marginalised communities in each country to challenge the way their nations present themselves to the world via 'nation branding' and other 'soft power' initiatives. In so doing, the project sought to raise awareness nationally and internationally of these communities’ often precarious place in society and to support them in campaigning to effect change in their lives. In South Africa, we worked with the Bishop Simeon Trust, Themba Interactive and a number of community-based organisations (CBOs) examining the legacy of the past in order to support vulnerable children and young people in townships across Gauteng Province. In India we worked with Budhan Theatre which is associated with the ‘Denotified Tribes Rights Action Group’ (DNT RAG) to explore the historical predicament of these ex-‘Criminal Tribe’ communities in the cities of western India. In Brazil, we worked with Plan International to support groups of vulnerable girls in Codó, a region within Brazil where the country’s African heritage is particularly visible and which has one of the lowest scores on the Universal Human Rights Index. In each case, the groups had to reflect upon the role of ‘participation’ as both a tool for creativity, on the one hand, and the delivery of ‘practical’ development outcomes on the other. Why use filmmaking as an international development tool? What are the enablers of – and barriers to –

successful PV initiatives? What does ‘success’ mean in this context? What is the role of the filmmaker? Is s/he an artist? A community worker? A therapist? What happens after a project takes place? It is these questions that our article will explore. Moreover, while such projects invariably make claims for PV as a particularly effective method for ‘giving’ communities ‘voice’ – however such potentially patronising terms might be defined (Bery 2003: 108) – very little space is usually dedicated to the exploration of the films produced in such projects, that is the specific articulation of this ‘voice’ (White 2003: 64). Thus, we also wish to examine the ways in which ‘Voicing Hidden Histories’ sought to communicate the experience of the participants involved through its use of film language. Here we are not looking to make any subjective claims for the ‘quality’ of PV films versus films in other contexts. Rather, we wish to challenge a trend in the analysis of such practice that focuses entirely on questions of methodology and an understanding of PV as a process, largely ignoring the products made.

Using PV to Develop Youth Leadership in Gauteng, South Africa

In South Africa we worked with two NGOs, the Bishop Simeon Trust (BST) and Themba Interactive (TI) and a number of CBOs who use a variety of PA methods to build the confidence of the vulnerable children and young people they support across a number ‘Isibindi Safe Parks’ (ISP) that they run. ISPs are educational and feeding programmes which provide some of the 1.3 million vulnerable children and young people living in Gauteng with a warm meal and a safe space to do their homework and undertake recreational activities before and after school (UNICEF 2017). In order for an ISP to be eligible to receive statuary state funding, and thus to ensure its sustainability, it must have a functioning youth committee that can help to steer its development. BST/TI’s PA programme is designed to support the development of these youth

committees, helping their end-users to cultivate the requisite leadership skills both to take on a role in this structure and to help them effect change more broadly in their own lives and the life of their communities.

While BST/TI had used various PA practices before this project, most frequently ‘Forum Theatre’ (Boal 1993) and ‘Grassroots Comics’ (Sharma 2017), they had not used PV. As a starting point for this project, we began by holding a workshop where a group of community support workers in one ISP came together to discuss the way images of South Africa circulates on World Cinema Screens, a key trend within which is the legacy of apartheid and the story of the nation’s democratic transition. As a group, we discussed how these images relate to the issues that *they* saw as being particularly important to them. This discussion was used to develop short comics to draw out the issues they were interested in focussing on in their films. The comics were then used as a starting point to develop screenplays, using Forum Theatre techniques. The group workshopped the screenplays, producing a shooting script, which they then filmed and edited over the course of three days. The project culminated in a screening of the films to their local community.

Feedback from the project was generally positive, with participants experiencing a confidence boost from being trusted with professional equipment and from their ability to raise issues that were important to them, issues which are pervasive in their community but which they felt were not widely discussed – most notably in this case gender-based violence (Cooke 2016). The main issue they raised, however, was the question of sustainability. Participants felt that they would not be able to replicate the project on their own without the equipment and support of Cooke and the other facilitators involved (Cooke 2016). This led to further iterations of the project with groups of young people who use the ISP aged between 6 and 14, and a group of student

interns from the University of Leeds. Although we largely followed the same model as the first iteration – making comics and using Forum Theatre –, we simplified the filmmaking process, with the aim of lowering the technical barriers and so making the PV process more accessible to this community without professional equipment. Thus we used simple cameras (such as one finds on a mobile phone) to shoot silent films, over which participants recorded a voiceover that told the story of their film. Again the films focussed on social issues that were important to the young people involved (gender-based violence, bullying, community crime). We also now explored a specific issue that had been raised by BST/TI as important to these communities and that fitted with the wider remit of the 'Voicing Hidden Histories' project: the legacy of Apartheid and its relationship to human-rights education, with a particular goal of challenging the issue of xenophobia in South Africa today. Simultaneously, we began to focus explicitly on the advocacy potential of this work. Here we were supported by the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Foundation, which provided a week-long seminar focussed on the issue of xenophobia and the role of our participants as 'youth leaders' in challenging this. Over the course of this iteration a number of films were made that addressed issues connected broadly to xenophobia, following our previous model. However, at this point, it became clear that there needed to be much more of an explicit focus on the question of leadership – in and of itself – rather than focussing on filmmaking and assuming that through their participation in this process the young people involved would develop the kinds of skills that would allow them to take on leadership roles in their youth committees. It was only through this explicit self-reflection that the young people began to understand the overall aims of the project, and to see a value in taking ownership of this process. It was at this point that many participants began to see that their voices could matter in their community and that '[human] rights are [not just] for people with

money', as one young participant in the project explained poignantly to our team facilitator, as the facilitator sought to generate a discussion early on in this iteration on the question of xenophobia (Cooke 2017a). This shift in focus also brought with it a shift in both the form and content of some of the films produced. While participants broadly agreed that the social issues examined in the films to that point were 'priority concerns', it became increasingly clear that a greater priority was that their ISP could simple operate and that those who used this service had been fed (Cooke 2017b).

Here feedback from participants again focussed on the question of sustainability. Yet, while the issue of a lack of equipment continued to be raised by participants as a barrier to their independent engagement with the process, it also became clear that the 'real' problem was the gap between the issues that the groups independently wanted to raise with their wider community and the issues the project elicited from the groups to that point, issues which had led us to consider that xenophobia would be an appropriate focus for this iteration. Consequently, towards the end of the project, focus shifted explicitly to the sustainability of ISPs and the role of the youth committees themselves. Somewhat ironically, perhaps, this, in turn, ultimately allowed for more explicit reflection on the role of human rights in their everyday experience (our starting point for this iteration), as participants could now see the relevance for them of this discussion. This shift in focus also saw groups moving from producing dramas to documentaries, as they sought to present their ISPs more directly to the outside world in order to raise awareness of the specific challenges they and their communities face due, primarily to a lack of resources (Leth'iThemba 2017).

The emphasis of the project also moved to the role of exhibition as an advocacy tool. Groups began to think about the kind of events they wished to organise that could both showcase their films and draw in the key community stakeholders they wished to

lobby, such as church leaders or local councillors (Wegrostek 2017). At the same time, the arts practices included in these events widened to showcase the talents of a broader range of ISP users than those involved in the films. In particular, groups of young people put together heritage dance and singing performances as well as writing poems and short stories. It now also became clear that the young people we were working with were keen to move beyond a focus on the social problems that had initially been at the heart of the project's approach to PV as a tool for advocacy. Consequently, this strand of the project learnt, somewhat belatedly perhaps, a lesson that we could have taken from the *Fogo Process*, often cited as the starting point for many contemporary PV projects, namely that PV tends to be more effective if social commentary is mixed with what Crocker calls 'more lyrical […] uplifting affirmative films' in order to provide a more rounded image of community life (Crocker 2003: 127).

Going forward with this work, it is clear that there must be more explicit focus on leadership development. Through more detailed exploration of what leadership means, and what is understood by advocacy, our partners felt that the young people involved will be able to take greater, and earlier, ownership of the process, to which, participants also agree, filmmaking should be a key, but not an exclusive, artistic practice. Crucially, it would appear that it is this issue, rather than the question of technology, that is the main barrier to sustainability. Exploring this further is to be the emphasis of our work over the next year. That said, as we also learnt from project feedback, the work that the young people have produced to date should not be dismissed. Participants are very proud of what they have achieved thus far and the value of raising the issues they have explored with their wider communities (Wegrostek 2017). Consequently, we wish to finish our discussion of this strand of the project with a brief look at one of the films produced, and how this film can further highlight both

the issues these young people face in their everyday lives, and their ability to reflect in complex ways on the nature of these issues.

One of the most striking aspects of the films produced, particularly in the South African and, as we shall see, in the Indian strands of 'Voicing Hidden Histories', is their impulse towards 'denotative' rather than 'connotative' forms of representation. *Tit for Tat* (Tshepo Hope 2016), for example, culminates in a violent attack on a young girl (Amanda) by her boyfriend (Pelican).[1] We see and hear the boy repeatedly stamp on what the film suggests is the girl's head, a reflection, the male actor says, of both the reality of their lives and the way his community is frequently presented on screen. As aesthetic points of reference, he refers both to Nollywood, which often has a similarly denotative approach to film communication (Okwuowulu 2015: 106), and to some of the films about South Africa that tend to circulate internationally (e.g. *Tsotsi*, Gavin Hood, 2005; *Jerusalema*, Ralph Ziman, 2008). While the group's insistence on local reference points in their filmmaking reminds us that any cinema which seeks to empower specific communities must be *situated* if it is going to be effective, the group also maintains that its denotative approach to filmmaking is a deliberate strategy. In discussions during the production of *Tit for Tat*, the group insisted upon showing the violence directly because, they argued, this is the reality of their lives (Cooke 2016). However, crucially they also demanded that their film had a happy ending. Amanda eventually marries a doctor who diagnoses that she is HIV+, having been infected by her boyfriend. Here the film plays on classical forms of theatre. Weddings provide the conclusion for comedies, as opposed to the death and destruction of tragedies (Lowe

[1] We do not have permission to use the real names of the people involved in the project in this article, hence my using their characters names throughout. Similarly, the 'director' of the film is attributed to the relevant community group as opposed to an individual.

2000: 46). Such an ending would seem to be out of place in this story, which has all the hallmarks of a tragedy. Nonetheless, the group insisted that its use here is yet another denotative declaration of the reality of their lives. Their lives are violent and precarious. However, their use of narrative conventions ostensibly out of kilter with the content of their story also points to their refusal to present their lives as tragic. It is possible for them to continue to survive and have a ‘happy ending’ (Cooke 2016).

Advocating for Recognition of the ‘Denotified Tribes’ in India

In India, our partner organisation was a community theatre group, Budhan Theatre, based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, led by a documentary filmmaker and director, Dakxin Chhara Bajrange. Budhan was established in 1998 by Gandesh Devy, literary critic and activist, who in 1998 founded the ‘Denotified Tribes Rights Action Group’ (hereafter DNT RAG), with the acclaimed Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi (D’Souza, 1999). The formation and work of Budhan relates to the complex predicament of an extensive array of communities across India, who were defined in the late colonial period as ‘Criminal Tribes’, or hereditary criminals under a specific legislative enactment (The 1871 Criminal Tribes A). This resulted in a range of restrictions on movement, collective incarceration, even after India’s independence in 1947, following their ‘denotification’ and the end of formal ‘Criminal Tribe’ status (Radhakrishna, 2007). Budhan Theatre is an organisation representing, largely, the Chhara caste who are collectively identified with a larger community of Bhantu, which in recent years has established its own lobbying organisation – the Sansmul Bhantu Samaj.

Chharanagar today, when compared to other neighbourhoods of its kind, contains a large proportion of university graduates and professionals, famously being particularly noted for the number of advocates. Ahmedabad is also currently one of the

main centres for the Sansmull Bhantu Samaj, having organised a large celebration of Denotification Day on 31 August 2017 in the city. The Chharas of Ahmedabad therefore have a deep-rooted sense of both the historical stigmas associated with denotified-tribe status and some of the cultural and political resources to help lead larger-scale movements. This is the context for the development of Budhan Theatre, which since 1998 has used a specific participatory arts practice (community theatre) to mobilise younger members of the Chhara community and to publicise the predicament of DNT communities more generally to the wider urban public of western India. Influenced by the Indian People's Theatre Association, forms of protest/street theatre and Bertolt Brecht (Schwarz 2010; Boal, 1993), Budhan Theatre first made its mark on the political landscape of India via the performance of a play which re-enacted the custodial death of Budhan Sabar – a member of an ex-criminal tribe – in West Bengal in February 1998 (Devy, 2000), since which time it has developed numerous pieces of theatre and, latterly, films.

The project with Budhan Theatre involved the development, from storyboard to final cut, of two short fiction films, based on real-life experiences (in the first film) and a historical representation of settlement (open-prison) life in the second. The first film will form the main focus of this discussion as a reflection of the fully formed transition from PA to PV within Budhan Theatre and its associated communities. None of the participants, which across both films numbered 15 members of Budhan and 10 members of another local community residing outside the city on the chosen location, had previous film-making experience. This allowed the participants to reflect upon the relative experience of film, in relation to theatre practice, in the video-diary sessions that followed the filmmaking itself (see below). Most of the actors and assistant producers were in the age range of 15 to 24, although one of the lead roles was played

by a 9 year old girl and two older members of Budhan also took on appropriate roles for the purposes of the film.

Both films were initiated – early concept, storyboard, and production – via group discussions involving all of the Budhan actors and production team. The latter involved around half of the participants, who doubled up as cast as well as assistant producers, allowing maximum exposure to the process of filmmaking. Finally, both films had three co-directors – senior members of the Budhan group – who, according to the feedback sessions, had been chosen for those roles via a process of group discussion. Although casting within Budhan took place in a similar fashion, which has been common practice within the theatre work too for the organisation, casting from among the DNT communities outside the city was organised via short auditions on the two days of shooting. The second film employed the same cast, and developed the themes of the first film via a historical narrative around a protest in a fictional 1930s Criminal Tribe Settlement.

The first film, *Maim Kaun Hum?* (*Mother, who Am I?*) recreated a narrative deliberately chosen by the group as representative of a common predicament faced by members of DNT communities in modern India. A young girl, Rohita, resides with her extended family in a Tanda (makeshift settlement) in the semi-jungle outskirts area of a town. At the start of the film we are provided with a sense of the semi-rural setting itself, a taste of the everyday activities of the inhabitants, and most importantly a short sequence depicting a *panchayat* (community council) meeting led by community elders, to decide the fate of a man who had mistreated his wife. Rohita overhears the panchayat head making reference to Maharana Pratap, a Sixteenth Century Rajput ruler, as an ancestor and role model for the community. After enquiring with her mother about the ruler, Rohita is informed that the noble qualities of the Maharana, and his

battles against injustice, are qualities that are followed by the community as a whole. References to the warrior traditions of the Maharana are common among nomadic communities in the north west of India, and especially prevalent among DNTs (Channa, 2008). Rohita is subsequently asked to make a short walk to a local shop to collect some milk, and she leaves with a friend. What follows is the central climax of the film – a scene in which the shopkeeper overhears the two girls talking in Bhantu. He immediately assumes that they are around the shops to steal, and chases them away from the area. Rohita runs back to her mother and in tears simply asks the question 'mother, who am I?'. In the final scene of the film, we are left with an image of the tears of Rohita and an expression of distress and defeat on the face of her mother.

In the video-diaries that followed the filming and initial editing, we asked the directors and assistant producers about the significance of the film's themes. Interviewees stressed the 'inquisitive mind' of Rohita, marked off against her mother, which reflected a community anxiety experienced across the neighbourhood: the need to find a means of using education and youth culture to instil a new generation with the cultural capital to break-down older stigmas. The casting of female lead roles – young women whose lives were sandwiched between two reflective patriarchies – one traditional (the panchayat in the Tanda) and the other 'modern' (the shopkeeper), illustrated a further predicament for DNT identity strategies: In negotiating modern stigmas surrounding caste and nomadism, DNTs have resorted to traditional community structures. Yet these institutions have often led to the reinforcement of specific gender roles and violence (Vincentnathan, 1996; Mayaram, 2002). *Mai Kaun Hum* creates a deliberate visual representation of this dichotomy in Rohita's travel by foot between two locations – the semi-rural Tanda to the town outskirts and back to the Tanda.

A great deal of the discussion in the video diaries surrounded the importance of finding this 'real' location (the Tanda was a genuine temporary settlement of DNTs – Bhat Gaon – on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, some of whose members acted in the *panchayat* scene), and the importance of the materials and structure of the panchayat. One of the assistant producers talked of the *lagri* or large ceremonial stick, used by *panchayat* heads during meetings to strike the ground, which was acquired from within Chharanagar itself. Again, participants reflected on the relationship between Rohita's experiences of Tanda versus town, and the relationship between Chharanagar and Bhat Gaon. We discussed the implications of an organisation of trained actors, such as Budhan, making contact with communities who were more directly threatened by relocation, and for whom PV would have a very different resonance. Clearly members of Budhan were sensitive to the levels of privilege that operated through the project, yet there was (potentially misplaced) optimism about the 'revolutionary' power of PA to transform public views about DNTs in general.

As a result of attention to detail, right down to the *lagri*, the film is visually not unlike a short documentary. The main dialogue is interspersed with longer shots of everyday tanda life, mundane chores, incidental sections of children playing or movement of carts and animals. The result is reminiscent of the work of Anand Patwardhan and Rakesh Sharma in its deliberate visual mixture of everyday realism with indirect political commentary. More specifically, the film captures the directness of incidental dialogue throughout, reminiscent of both filmmakers (Korossi, 2015): Rohita overhears the discussion of the *panchayat* and reflects back on what she has heard in informal fashion to her mother. Rohita and her friend are subsequently overheard too by the shopkeeper, leading to the film's climactic shock.

Simultaneously, the storyline doubles up as a commentary on a fundamental paradox in the strategic identity politics of India's DNTs. At least since the formation of DNT RAG in 1998, this politics has attempted to develop PA and historical projects to challenge national narratives of social dominance. We might even view this as a distinctive challenge to the soft power strategies of the state. Yet a fundamental weakness, or fault-line, in such strategies has tended to be the need to re-publicise the historical causes of DNT marginalisation – ie. histories of criminality. The reference to Maharana Pratap is immediately reflective of a common identity strategy in both the Dalit and Adivasi movements in India, to project new forms of historical status. These hagiographies have their roots in early Twentieth Century caste reform movements (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1960; Carroll, 1978). Caste movements of that time, and the contemporary Dalit movement in India effectively challenged the claims to social (and sometimes ritual) dominance of upper castes, by inverting those histories and arguing for forms of 'original' high caste status or indigeneity. In contrast, and in the light of Dalit movements, DNTs have fought for a separate schedule of reservations, which requires them to historicise the notion of 'hereditary' criminality as the base cause of their marginalisation. Nomadic peoples were, in these narratives, employees, often performative entertainers and retainers, to the great Rajput kingdoms. Yet this creates a further bind, via a colonial legal edifice in which street performers and artists were often branded as 'vagrants', public nuisances, agents for petty forms of crime and prostitution. As such, the colonial state, and that which succeeded it, established a notion of criminality that rested on normative readings of caste hierarchies, in which certain forms of artistic expression continued to be associated with transgression. PA and PV, although able to capture some of the most important nuances of DNT marginalisation and political mobility, are consequently perhaps of limited strategic

value in the context of India's current structures of social welfare and affirmative action.

Young Women's Voices in Brazil, African Heritage and the *quilombos*

On the Brazil leg of the project we worked with young people from a remote region of Brazil (Codó, in the Northeastern state of Maranhão) whose community history and traditions seem to reject any ethos of national inclusion. These young people have in their daily lives access to technology (TV, the internet, social media such as Whatsapp, Facebook) and thus access to contemporary representations of the nation. Building upon their confidence in using social media in their daily lives, we worked with Gilberto Sobrinho, a filmmaker and academic whose recent film work (2015; 2016; 2017) focuses on marginalised Afro-Brazilian communities and cultural practices, to reflect on video upon their 'fit' within both the traditions of their community and these national representations, and the space they have to support and challenge such representations.

Codó is the fifth largest municipality in the state of Maranhão, with a population of around 118,000. It is home to a large number of *quilombos* or communities originally set up by fugitive slaves in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and as a result its racial and ethnic make-up is more Afro-Brazilian than that of other north-eastern states, with the exception of Brazil's most 'African' states, Bahia. Thanks to the work of the Palmares Foundation, *quilombos* can now gain official recognition and access to federal sources of support (there are 682 officially recognised *quilombos* in the state of Maranhao alone (*O Estado* 2017), but prejudice against such communities, which have by their very nature been marginalised within Brazilian society, continues to be rife. They constitute some the most economically deprived regions in Brazil, and while there is a clear distinction drawn between these spaces and the urban area of Codó, from

where our participants were drawn, the region is often broadly prejudiced against in the national imaginary as a result of the presence of so many *quilombos* in the region.

Many young people in Codó find themselves doubly prejudiced against by the municipality's close association with *umbanda*, a syncretic religion that mixes indigenous, Christian and Afro-Brazilian religious practices. Non-Christian religions are currently on the receiving end of widespread prejudice, partly as a result of the growth of evangelical Christianity in poor and rural areas of the country, and within National Congress and the Senate. Much of this prejudice is expressed via social media. *Umbanda's* traditions in the North East are not widely known, given that the religion developed in, and is closely associated with, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo in the Centre-South of the country, viewed by most as the cultural epicentre of Brazil. Such cases of everyday and rarely contested prejudice go against the image of Brazil projected internationally, while at the same time the existence of communities such as Codó in many ways trouble the national brand (modern, urban, inclusive, forward-thinking, and so on).

The choice of community to work with on this project was guided by our NGO project partners, Plan International, a development and humanitarian organisation that is tasked with advancing the rights of children and young people, and promoting equality for girls. Plan has been active in Brazil since 1997, working with young people on consciousness-raising and empowerment projects that focus on developing financial survival skills, and campaigns to improve gender equality and reduce violence against young women in particular. Plan were responsible for recruiting the young people (young women, in this case) to work with us: our participants all had previous experience of working with Plan on personal development and/or leadership courses set up through their secondary schools.

Plan also provided us with an audio-visual space set up and funded by them at a local municipal school, which comprised a room with sofas, standard a/v equipment (but no internet connection) and the all-too-important air conditioning. The space itself was indicative of the kinds of problems relating to supporting audio-visual education that NGOs and local government frequently encounter: while the donation by Plan of the infrastructure was certainly generous and a potential asset for the otherwise very poorly equipped school, a lack of personnel support meant that it was in practice hardly ever used.

But by far the most important 'resource' that Plan contributed to the project was the time and input of senior staff member and Afro-Brazilian feminist activist Viviana Santiago, Head of Gender regionally for Plan who, together with Inés Soria-Turner, a participatory-arts practitioner based in Leeds, worked with the young women in a workshop format to encourage them to reflect on their identity, relationship with Codó, and so on. The creation of trust and mutual respect was a particularly important part of the process of producing this strand's video, and given the importance of these workshops for both team-building and fostering a sense of self-confidence in the young women in terms of understanding the importance of their own voices and views, some of the footage of these workshops is captured in the final video. Thus, in this strand, rather than reflecting explicitly on the historical, racial and religious questions highlighted above in relation to Codó, and echoing the experience of the South African strand, the young women were much more concerned to share details of their everyday lives: hence the title of the video *Um Pouco de Tudo, talvez* (*A Little of Everything, Perhaps*), which they chose themselves. The young women were at pains to emphasise that they liked Codó and their community, but most of them expressed a desire to leave,

through frustration at a lack of opportunities, resources and access to higher education and well-paid jobs.

The video opens with filmmaker Sobrinho onboard a flight from Campinas (a relatively wealthy, 'white' city) to Teresina, capital of the north-eastern state of Piauí and home to the closest airport to Codó. The first image is notably a breaking of the fourth wall, as Sobrinho stares silently directly to camera. It then follows his journey by car to Codó itself, showing images captured on a Go-Pro. All the while the filmmaker, in voiceover, reflects on the significance of the journey, hinting in his commentary at the original motivation behind the choice of Codó and demonstrating the extent to which the filmmaking journey took a rather different course than expected.

The opening sequence, with its focus on the filmmaker, also demonstrates the extent to which Sobrinho took a different approach to participation from the other two strands. He was more involved in shaping the aesthetics of the participatory process. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the project constituted a personal journey for him too, as the son of northeastern migrant workers who moved to the centre-south region out of the kind of necessity described by the young women in workshop discussions and on-screen interviews. This explains Sobrinho's decision to capture himself on screen in the opening sequence, as it serves as a point of identification with the young women from Codó, on both a physiognomical level, and in formal terms within the film itself. After his filmed 'selfie', the focus briefly shifts to Sobrinho's choice of inflight reading: Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (2016), thereby signalling an academic, as well as a personal curiosity driving his journey to the northeast and his input into the project. It is worth noting here that Sobrinho has documented in his films little-known Afro-Brazilian cultural practices in the city of Campinas, interior of the

state of Sao Paulo, where his focus is often oral history and the women who have key roles in keeping both the histories and the practices alive.

Both the facilitators and the participants were keen to demonstrate in their film how much could be achieved by using mixed and in some cases highly accessible forms of media that they might be able to produce themselves on a future occasion, for example photographs (digital and hard copies), snippets of conversations recorded on phones, and images captured on Go-Pros. After screening excerpts from a range of Brazilian documentaries in the workshops, a focal point of discussion was the effect of separating sound from image, and the video response they produced reflects these discussions. A particularly poignant sequence of the video, for example, shows pleasant and seemingly innocuous stills and some moving images of the town of Codó, with a specific focus on house fronts (including the young women's homes), while the accompanying sound captures the 'hidden' stories of sexual harassment and threats to their personal safety, predicated on their gender, to which they are regularly subjected in their day-to-day lives. The video response also includes footage shot in Codó by Sobrinho, in the company of the young women, of popular cultural and religious manifestations such as *bumba-meu-boi* and an *umbanda* religious service, but these take second place to the faces and voices of the young women themselves and the expression of their own desires, dreams, sense of agency, future, and so on. Almost half of the running time is taken up with 'talking head' sequences involving four of the five young women, echoing both the work of Brazil's foremost documentary filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, and in particular his final documentary *Ultimas Conversas* (*Last Conversations*, 2015), which had been viewed in its entirety and widely commented on by the young women during the first workshop, and Day Rodrigues's *Mulheres Negras, Projetos de Mundo* (*Black Women, World Projects*), which with its frank exposition of

everyday racism and calls for resistance as related by a group of inspirational black women, resonated particularly strongly with the participants when they viewed it in the workshop.

In order to make effective use of the aforementioned mixed-media materials, we felt that it was vitally important to acquire the services of an experienced editor, and thus a certain proportion of the relatively small research budget was set aside for this. This part of the project was conducted separately from the participants, but this was more for logistical reasons (the remoteness of Codó and the cost of travelling there from Sobrinho's home and HEI in Campinas; and the tight deadline afforded by the AHRC grant by which the three project films needed to be completed and simultaneously launched). The young women were included, however, in discussions regarding dissemination and the use of film and video as an advocacy tool was discussed in the preparatory workshops. On their suggestion, it will be screened in 2018 at Codó's local cultural centre which, like the a/v facility at the school, is very rarely used. The young women expect a large turn-out of townspeople and hope for a positive reaction in relation to the issues they raise in the film.

Conclusion

The three stands of the Voicing Hidden Histories project produced very different types of films. This was largely related to the prior experience of our groups with PV. Plan had never previously used PV. Thus, the project here was fundamentally shaped by the participatory-documentary practices of Sobrinho. Bhudan, on the other hand, has years of experience in developing participatory theatre. While the Brazilian strand probably had more explicit reflection on the group's aesthetic approach to the production of the video and how it relates to the history of documentary practice, as we have discussed

here, each of our project strands was also situated within a specific cultural and aesthetic tradition. Like Bhudan, BST/TI's approach was informed by their approach to forum theatre, read through the prism of Cooke's approach to an iterative, self-reflexive understanding to PV, informed by a tradition of practice that goes back to the *Fogo Process* of the 1960s. This has also shaped the project's various approaches to advocacy, which are on going and are similarly informed by each strands previous experience of using PV. What was new for all of the strands, however, was the potential for them to use this project to network with other communities. Towards the end of the project, the Brazil strand became particularly keen to find out about the groups working on the project from India and South Africa, and was instrumental in encouraging discussions, via video, between the three groups. These discussions have continued since the completion of the films. Through these discussion the groups were able, *inter alia*, to discuss the impetus behind each strands approach to PV and also to see points of common cause across the groups. This was particularly strong between the Indian and South African strands of the project, where both groups were very focussed on both questions of ethnic discrimination and land rights. All three strands of the project are keen to continue the dialogue initiated through this project. Such dialogue is difficult to generate and sustain, reliant as it often is on the internet and social media, to which two of the three communities (South Africa, and India) have limited access. Here, however, PV has shown itself to be a particularly valuable approach, allowing the generation of asynchronous communication between the groups, provoking, via organised screenings of the videos produced, a higher level of reflection on their shared experiences than might be generated via, for example, a Google hangout discussion in a place where bandwidth can be prohibitively narrow.

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The *Voicing Hidden Histories* Project: Participatory Video in Development, Soft Power and Film Language

Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison and Will Gould

In recent years, 'participatory arts' (PA) generally, and 'participatory video' (PV) in particular, have become something of a 'go-to' methodology within the International Development sector, considered by Zelizer, for example, to be 'an essential component of peacebuilding work' in post-conflict societies (2003: 62), or, as Flinders and Cunningham suggest, playing a key role in the production of civil society in the developing world, helping to 'nurtur[e] engaged citizenship' (2016: 5). In this article, we wish to reflect upon some of the findings of a recent Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Global Challenges Research Fund PV project 'Voicing Hidden Histories'. Working in South Africa, India and Brazil, this project has been using PV to support specific marginalised communities in each country to challenge the way their nations present themselves, and in particular their national history, to the world via 'nation branding' and other 'soft power' initiatives. Each strand of the project is led by a researcher from the University of Leeds, supported by a country-based filmmaker. Working along side small groups of young people (typically groups of 5-12 people), each project strand undertook a process of discussion and negotiation, in which all participants had an equal voice, to co-produce one or more short films. In each case, the films took their creative stimulus from some aspect of the national soft power narrative, the legacy of the past and the specific human rights issues the young people involved face today. The particular type of film made and topics explored were decided collectively by each group, leading to the production, in India of two dramas, in South

Africa of six dramas and two documentaries and in Brazil of a single documentary. In so doing, the project is seeking to raise awareness nationally and internationally of these communities' often precarious place in society and to support them in campaigning to effect change in their lives.

In India we have been working with Budhan Theatre which is associated with the 'Denotified Tribes Rights Action Group' (DNT RAG) to explore the historical predicament of these ex-'Criminal Tribe' communities in the cities of western India. In South Africa, we have been working with the Bishop Simeon Trust, Themba Interactive and five community-based organisations (CBOs) examining the legacy of the apartheid past for a generation that has grown up in the post-apartheid era, focussing in particular on groups of vulnerable children and young people living in townships across Ekurhuleni, a municipality to the East of Johannesburg. In Brazil, we have been working with Plan International to support groups of vulnerable girls in Codó, a region within Brazil where the country's African heritage is particularly visible. In each project strand, the groups have had to reflect upon the role of 'participation' as both a tool for creativity, on the one hand, and the delivery of 'practical' development outcomes on the other. At the present time, the project is on-going, with each strand looking to develop the advocacy dimension of the project, exploring ways to utilise the films to effect change in the lives of the participants. This article is therefore focussed primarily on the process of production, which is now complete. Here we are particularly interested in the project's approach to filmmaking practice, drawing on a series of focus group discussions and interviews (between December 2016 and August 2017) with the young people who made the films, as well as an evaluation workshop held at the University of

Leeds (13 November 2017) for the partner organisations involved. Specifically we ask: why use filmmaking as an international development tool? What are the enablers of – and barriers to – successful PV initiatives and what does 'success' mean in this context? Moreover, while such projects invariably make claims for PV as a particularly effective method for 'giving' communities 'voice' – however such potentially patronising terms might be defined (Bery 2003: 108) – very little space is usually dedicated to the exploration of the films produced in such projects, that is to the specific articulation of this 'voice' (White 2003: 64). Thus, we also wish to challenge a trend in the analysis of such practice that focuses entirely on questions of methodology and an understanding of PV as a *process*, largely ignoring the *products* made.

Searching for Identity amongst the 'Denotified Tribes' in India

In India, our partner organisation is a community theatre group, Budhan Theatre, based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, led by documentary filmmaker and director, Dakxin Chhara Bajrange. Budhan was established in 1998 by Gandesh Devy, literary critic and activist, who in 1998 founded the 'Denotified Tribes Rights Action Group' (DNT RAG), with the acclaimed Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi (D'Souza, 1999). The formation and work of Budhan relates to the complex predicament of an extensive array of communities across India who were defined in the late colonial period as 'Criminal Tribes', or hereditary criminals under the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act. This resulted in a range of restrictions on movement and collective incarceration, even after India's independence in 1947, following their 'denotification' and the end of formal 'Criminal Tribe' status (Radhakrishna, 2007).

The project with Budhan theatre involved the development, from storyboard to final cut, of two short dramas, based on real-life experiences (in the first film) and a historical representation of settlement (open-prison) life in the second. The first film will form the main focus of this discussion as a reflection of the fully formed transition from PA (specifically theatre) to PV within Budhan Theatre and its associated communities. None of the participants, which across both films numbered 15 members of Budhan and 10 members of another local community residing outside the city on the chosen location, had previous film-making experience. This allowed the participants to reflect upon the relative experience of film, in relation to theatre practice in two focus-group sessions that followed the filmmaking itself. Most of the actors and assistant producers were in the age range of 15 to 24, although one of the lead roles was played by a 9 year old girl and two older members of Budhan also took on appropriate roles for the purposes of the film.

Both films were initiated – early concept, storyboard, and production – via group discussions involving all of the Budhan actors and production team. The latter involved around half of the participants, who doubled up as cast as well as assistant producers, allowing maximum exposure to the process of filmmaking. Finally, both films had three co-directors – senior members of the Budhan group – who, according to the feedback sessions, had been chosen for those roles via a process of group discussion. Although casting within Budhan took place in a similar fashion, which has been common practice within the theatre work too for the organisation, casting from among the DNT communities outside the city was organised via short auditions on the two days of shooting.

The first film, *Maim Kaun Hum?* (*Who Am I?*) recreated a narrative chosen by the group as representative of a common predicament faced by members of DNT communities in modern India. A young girl, Rohita, resides with her extended family in a *tanda* (makeshift settlement) in the semi-jungle outskirts area of a town. At the start of the film we are provided with a sense of the semi-rural setting itself, a taste of the everyday activities of the inhabitants, and most importantly a short sequence depicting a *panchayat* (community council) meeting led by community elders, to decide the fate of a man who had mistreated his wife. Rohita overhears the *panchayat* head making reference to Maharana Pratap, a Sixteenth Century Rajput ruler, as an ancestor and role model for the community. After enquiring with her mother about the ruler, Rohita is informed that the noble qualities of the Maharana, and his battles against injustice, are qualities that are followed by the community as a whole. References to the warrior traditions of the Maharana are common among nomadic communities in the North West of India, and especially prevalent among DNTs (Channa, 2008). Rohita is subsequently asked to make a short walk to a local shop to collect some milk, and she leaves with a friend. What follows is the central climax of the film – a scene in which the shopkeeper overhears the two girls talking in Bhantu. He immediately assumes that they are around the shops to steal, and chases them away from the area. Rohita runs back to her mother and in tears simply asks the question 'Who are we, Mom?'. In the final scene of the film, we are left with an image of the tears of Rohita and an expression of distress and defeat on the face of her mother.

<insert Fig 1: 'Who are we, Mom?', *Maim Kaun Hum?* (Budhan Theatre, 2017)>

In the focus group discussions that followed the filming and initial editing, we asked the directors and assistant producers about the significance of the film's themes. Participants stressed the 'inquisitive mind' of Rohita, marked off against her mother, which reflected a community anxiety experienced across the neighbourhood: the need to find a means of using education and youth culture to instil a new generation with the cultural capital to break-down older stigmas. The casting of female lead roles – young women whose lives were sandwiched between two reflective patriarchies – one traditional (the *panchayat* in the *tanda*) and the other 'modern' (the shopkeeper), illustrated a further predicament for DNT identity strategies: In negotiating modern stigmas surrounding caste and nomadism, DNTs have resorted to traditional community structures. Yet these institutions have often led to the reinforcement of specific gender roles and violence (Vincentnathan, 1996; Mayaram, 2002). *Mai Kaun Hum* creates a deliberate visual representation of this dichotomy in Rohita's travel by foot between two locations – the semi-rural *tanda* to the town outskirts and back to the *tanda*.

A great deal of the discussion surrounded the importance of finding 'real' locations (the *tanda* used in the film was a genuine temporary settlement of DNTs – Bhat Gaon – on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, some of whose members acted in the *panchayat* scene), and the importance of the materials and structure of the *panchayat*. As a result of this attention to detail, the film is visually not unlike a short documentary. The main dialogue is interspersed with longer shots of everyday *tanda* life: mundane chores, incidental sequences of children playing, of carts and animals. Indeed, the result is reminiscent of the work of Anand Patwardhan and Rakesh Sharma in its

deliberate visual mixture of everyday realism with indirect political commentary (Korossi, 2015).

Simultaneously, the storyline doubles up as a commentary on a fundamental paradox in the strategic identity politics of India's DNTs. At least since the formation of DNT RAG in 1998, this politics has attempted to develop PA and historical projects to challenge national narratives of social dominance. These might be viewed as a distinctive challenge to the soft power strategies of the state. Yet a fundamental weakness, or fault-line, in such strategies has tended to be the need to re-publicise the historical causes of DNT marginalisation – namely the community's histories of criminality. Nomadic peoples were, in these narratives, employees, often entertainers and retainers, to the great Rajput kingdoms. This creates a further bind, via a colonial legal edifice, in which street performers and artists were often branded as 'vagrants', public nuisances, agents for petty forms of crime and prostitution. As such, the colonial state, and that which succeeded it, established a notion of criminality that rested on normative readings of caste hierarchies, in which certain forms of artistic expression continued to be associated with transgression. As a result, PA and PV, although able to capture some of the most important nuances of DNT marginalisation and political mobility, are consequently perhaps of limited strategic value in the context of India's current structures of social welfare and affirmative action.

Dissecting Discrimination and the Legacy of Apartheid in South Africa

In South Africa we have been working with the two NGOs, the Bishop Simeon Trust (BST) and Themba Interactive (TI) and five CBOs that provide out-of-school support for

vulnerable young people, many of whom are the children of illegal migrant workers and are consequently 'undocumented', that is without birth certificates. As a result, they are unable to access social services or high-school education (Alfaro-Velcamp et. Al 2017). All these organisations use a variety of PA methods to build the confidence of their service users. While BST/TI had used various PA practices before this project, most frequently 'Forum Theatre' (Boal 1993) and 'Grassroots Comics' (Sharma 2017), they had not used PV. As a starting point for the project, we held a workshop where a group of Community Support Workers, who support groups of service users aged between 6 and 15 in one CBO in Tsakane Township, came together to discuss South Africa's national soft power narrative via the way it circulates on World Cinema Screens, a key trend within which is the legacy of Mandela, the 'Rainbow Nation' and the story of the nation's democratic transition to social inclusivity (Cooke 2016a). As a group, we discussed how these images relate to their everyday experience of life in South Africa today, and the issues that *they* saw as being particularly important to them. The topic they wished to focus on was the continuing legacy of discrimination and social exclusion, and in particular the issue of gender-based violence in their township, an issue which, they felt, directly challenges the representation of the nation as it is frequently propagated in the official 'soft power' narrative. This discussion was used to develop short comics to draw out their particular approach to this issue. The comics were then used as a starting point to develop screenplays, using Forum Theatre techniques. The group workshopped the screenplays, producing a shooting script. They then chose the roles they wanted to take – in front of or behind the camera – before filming and editing their stories over the course of three days, with those choosing

technical roles being given ‘on-the-job’ training by the project facilitators, the main emphasis being on an ethos of ‘learning by doing’.

Focus group and interview feedback from the project was generally positive, with participants experiencing a confidence boost from being trusted with professional equipment and from their ability to raise issues that were important to them, issues which are pervasive in their community but which they felt were not widely discussed. As one participant put it, ‘If […] it’s just your story and no one knows about it, it might relate to someone else, but they will never know that they are facing the same situation or challenge’ (Cooke 2016). The main worry they raised, however, was the question of sustainability. Participants felt that they would not be able to replicate the project on their own without the equipment and support of all the facilitators involved (Cooke 2016). This led to a further iteration of the project, during which we worked directly with small groups of service users (typically 4-6 participants) from Tsakane, Vosloorus and KwaThema townships, all aged between 6 and 15. Although we largely followed the same model as the first iteration – making comics and using Forum Theatre –, we simplified the filmmaking process, with the aim of lowering the technical barriers and so making the PV process more accessible to this community without professional equipment. Thus, we used a range of ‘point and shoot’ cameras (Go-Pros and Kodak PlayTouch Cameras) to film short silent dramas (approximately 3-4 minutes long), over which participants recorded a voiceover narration that told the story of their film. Again, the films focussed on social issues that the group decided were relevant to them. In this case, gender-based violence, bullying, community crime and discrimination.

One of the most striking aspects of the films produced in the South African strand of 'Voicing Hidden Histories', is their impulse towards 'denotative' rather than 'connotative' forms of representation. *Tit for Tat* (Tshepo Hope 2016) – a film about an abusive relationship between a teenager and her older boyfriend – for example, culminates in a violent attack by the boyfriend on the girl. We see and hear the boy repeatedly stamp on what the film suggests is the girl's head, a reflection, the actor who plays the boyfriend says, of both the reality of their lives and the way his community is frequently presented on screen. As aesthetic points of reference, he refers both to Nollywood, which often has a similarly denotative approach to film communication (Okwuowulu 2015: 106), and to some of the films about South Africa that would seem to challenge any soft power narrative of democratic transition (e.g. *Tsotsi*, Gavin Hood, 2005; *Jerusalema*, Ralph Ziman, 2008). While the group's insistence on local reference points in their filmmaking reminds us that any cinema which seeks to empower specific communities must be *situated* if it is going to be effective, the group also maintains that its denotative approach to filmmaking is a deliberate strategy. In discussions during the production of *Tit for Tat*, the group insisted upon showing the violence directly because, they argued, this is the reality of their lives (Cooke 2016). However, crucially they also demanded that their film had a happy ending. The girl eventually marries a doctor who diagnoses that she is HIV+, having been infected by her boyfriend. Here the film plays on classical forms of theatre. Weddings provide the conclusion for comedies, as opposed to the death and destruction of tragedies. Such an ending would seem to be out of place in this story, which has all the hallmarks of tragedy. Nonetheless, the group insists that its use here is yet another denotative declaration of the reality of their lives.

Their lives are violent and precarious. However, their use of narrative conventions ostensibly out of kilter with the content of their story also points to their refusal to present their lives as tragic. It is possible for them to continue to survive and have a ‘happy ending’ (Cooke 2016).

<insert Fig 2: a happy ending in *Tit for Tat* (Tsepho Hope 2016)>

Young Women’s Voices in Brazil, African Heritage and the *quilombos*

On the Brazil leg of the project we worked with young people from a remote region of Brazil (Codó, in the north-eastern state of Maranhão) whose community history and traditions seem to reject any ethos of national inclusion. These young people have in their daily lives access to technology (TV, the internet, social media such as Whatsapp, Facebook) and thus access to contemporary representations of the nation. Building upon their confidence in using social media in their daily lives, we worked with Gilberto Sobrinho, a filmmaker and academic whose recent film work focuses on marginalised Afro-Brazilian communities and cultural practices, to reflect on video upon their ‘fit’ within both the traditions of their community and these national representations, and the space they have to support and challenge such representations.

Codó is the fifth largest municipality in the state of Maranhão, with a population of around 118,000. It is home to a large number of *quilombos* or communities originally set up by fugitive slaves in the 18th and 19th centuries, and as a result its racial and ethnic make-up is more Afro-Brazilian than that of other north-eastern states, with the exception of Brazil’s most ‘African’ state, Bahia. Thanks to the work of the Palmares Foundation, *quilombos* can now gain official recognition and access to federal sources

of support (there are 682 officially recognised *quilombos* in the state of Maranhao alone (*O Estado* 2017), but prejudice against such communities, which have by their very nature been marginalised within Brazilian society, continues to be rife.

Many young people in Codó find themselves doubly prejudiced against by the municipality's close association with *umbanda*, a syncretic religion that mixes indigenous, Christian and Afro-Brazilian religious practices. Non-Christian religions are currently on the receiving end of widespread prejudice, partly as a result of the growth of evangelical Christianity in poor and rural areas of the country, and within National Congress and the Senate. *Umbanda's* traditions in the North East are not widely known, given that the religion developed in, and is closely associated with, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo in the Centre-South of the country, viewed by most as the cultural epicentre of Brazil. Such cases of everyday and rarely contested prejudice go against the image of Brazil projected internationally, while at the same time the existence of communities such as Codó in many ways trouble the national brand (modern, urban, inclusive, forward-thinking, and so on).

The choice of community to work with on this project was guided by our NGO partner, Plan International, a development and humanitarian organisation that is tasked with advancing the rights of children and young people, and promoting equality for girls. Plan has been active in Brazil since 1997, working with young people on consciousness-raising and empowerment projects that focus on developing financial survival skills, and campaigns to improve gender equality and reduce violence against young women in particular. Plan were responsible for recruiting the young women to work with us: our participants all had previous experience of working with Plan on

personal development and/or leadership courses set up through their secondary schools.

Throughout the production phase of the project Viviana Santiago, Head of Gender regionally for Plan and Inés Soria-Turner, a participatory-arts practitioner based in Leeds, worked with the young women in a workshop format to encourage them to reflect on their identity, relationship with Codó, and so on. The creation of trust and mutual respect was a particularly important part of the process of producing this strand's video, and given the importance of these workshops for both team-building and fostering a sense of self-confidence in the young women in terms of understanding the importance of their own voices and views, some of the footage of these workshops is captured in the final video. Thus, in this strand, rather than reflecting explicitly on the historical, racial and religious questions highlighted above in relation to Codó, and echoing, to a degree, the experience of the South African strand, the young women were much more concerned to share details of their everyday lives: hence the title of the video *Um Pouco de Tudo, talvez* (*A Little of Everything, Perhaps*), which they chose themselves. The young women were at pains to emphasise that they liked Codó and their community, but most of them expressed a desire to leave, through frustration at a lack of opportunities, resources and access to higher education and well-paid jobs.

The video opens with filmmaker Sobrinho onboard a flight from Campinas (a relatively wealthy, 'white' city) to Teresina, capital of the north-eastern state of Piauí and home to the closest airport to Codó. The first image is notably a breaking of the fourth wall, as Sobrinho stares silently into camera. It then follows his journey by car to Codó itself, showing images captured on a Go-Pro. All the while the filmmaker, in voiceover,

reflects on the significance of the journey, hinting in his commentary at the original motivation behind the choice of Codó and demonstrating the extent to which the filmmaking journey took a rather different course than expected.

The opening sequence, with its focus on the filmmaker, also demonstrates the extent to which Sobrinho took a different approach to participation from the other two strands. He was more involved in shaping the aesthetics of the participatory process. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the project constituted a personal journey for him too, as the son of north-eastern migrant workers who moved to the centre-south region out of the kind of necessity described by the young women in workshop discussions and on-screen interviews. This explains Sobrinho's decision to capture himself on screen in the opening sequence, as it serves as a point of identification with the young women from Codó, on both a physiognomical level, and in formal terms within the film itself.

Both the facilitators and the participants were keen to demonstrate in their film how much could be achieved by using mixed, and in some cases highly accessible forms of, media that they might be able to produce themselves on a future occasion, for example photographs (digital and hard copies), snippets of conversations recorded on phones, and images captured on Go-Pros. After screening excerpts from a range of Brazilian documentaries in the workshops, a focal point of discussion was the effect of separating sound from image, and the video response they produced reflects these discussions. A particularly poignant sequence of the video, for example, shows pleasant and seemingly innocuous images of the town of Codó, with a specific focus on house fronts (including the young women's homes), while the accompanying sound captures the 'hidden' stories of sexual harassment and threats to their personal safety,

predicated on their gender and ethnic background, to which they are regularly subjected in their day-to-day lives.

<insert Fig 3: Hidden stories of sexual harassment. *Um Pouco de Tudo, talvez* (2017)>

The video response also includes footage shot in Codó by Sobrinho, in the company of the young women, of popular cultural and religious manifestations such as *bumba-meu-boi* and an *umbanda* religious service, but these take second place to the faces and voices of the young women themselves and the expression of their own desires, dreams, sense of agency, future, and so on. Almost half of the running time is taken up with 'talking head' sequences involving four of the five young women, echoing both the work of Brazil's foremost documentary filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, and in particular his final documentary *Ultimas Conversas* (*Last Conversations*, 2015), which had been viewed in its entirety and widely commented on by the young women during the first workshop, and Day Rodrigues's *Mulheres Negras, Projetos de Mundo* (*Black Women, World Projects*), which, with its frank exposition of everyday racism and calls for resistance as related by a group of inspirational black women, resonated particularly strongly with the participants when they viewed it in the workshop.

PV in Development

Returning to the questions posed in the introduction to this discussion, our three project strands offer very different perspectives on the potential of PV within an international

development context, all of which are shaped by the previous experience each group has had using PV. Plan International had no prior experience of PV. Thus, the project here was fundamentally shaped by the participatory-documentary practices of Sobrinho. While the Brazilian strand probably spent the most time explicitly reflecting on the group's aesthetic approach to the production of the video, and how this relates to the history of documentary practice, as we have discussed here, each of our project strands is clearly situated within, and cognisant of, a specific cultural and aesthetic tradition of film practice, be it Nollywood in South Africa or the work of Anand Patwardhan and Rakesh Sharma in India. Both Bhudan and BST/TI's approach was informed by their experience with forum theatre, their approach to PV, in turn, being informed by a process of iteration and reflection in line with a tradition of practice that goes back to at least the 1960s (White 2003). It is important to consider the ways in which these films fit into their wider socio-political and aesthetic contexts not in order to make any value claim as to their quality relative to other forms of film practice. Rather it allows us to reflect on the particular expression of these communities' 'voices' and thus the particular value of PV as a form of community expression in each context. This is an aspect of such projects which, as we noted at the start of this article, is often ignored in a more frequent focus on the *process* of community engagement. However, we suggest, that the value of the communication (in whatever way this is to be understood) should not be divorced for a consideration of its aesthetics and the role of participants as filmmakers in their own right.

PV was almost universally considered to be an empowering form of communication, able to amplify community voices in order to help these same

communities advocate for change in their lives. At present, all three strands are developing this side of the project, exploring how best to exhibit and curate their films in order to engage relevant stakeholders. The scale and ambition of this engagement has also been shaped by the previous experience of each of our partners in using PA for community advocacy at a range of levels, be that within their local community (in the case of the South African strand), or at a national level. The Bhudan Theatre, for example, is looking to use the films they have produced to raise awareness of the stigma surrounding their community with national policy makers, by including copies of the films in their submission to have the status of their community changed (Soria-Turner 2018: 7). This was seen, our partner suggested during the project evaluation workshop, as the particular value of PV, as distinct from other forms of PA, in that it allows their work to be shown more widely than is possible for a piece of live theatre and so consequently has the potential for greater impact. At the same time, the power of PV can at times be over stated in this context. As we have discussed, in India the continued stigma surrounding street performance and other forms of PA, for all their public popularity, can also limit the ability of such work – and in turn the messages it seeks to propagate – to be taken seriously by policy makers.

This leads us to consider other limitations of PV in a development context. In our discussion of the South African strand during the evaluation workshop, a good deal of emphasis was put upon the value of PV as a way of creating what our partners' described as a 'breathing space', to not only reflect upon the particular issues that they were exploring in the films but, increasingly as the projected developed, for them to

reflect upon everyday life and, ultimately, what they were *beyond* these particular issues:

> Life in South Africa is inherently political, and I think the young people are aware of the fact that the way they are [is] because of apartheid and what was done, but we don't really want to be talking about that because I go back home and I know that. (Soria-Turner 2018: 7)

The wish to move beyond a use of film to voice the types of social issues the project initially wished to explore (gender-based violence, discrimination and so on) has become ever more important to the South African strand as it has begun to develop its approach to advocacy and as the groups have started to think about the kind of events they wish to organise that can both showcase their films and draw in the key community stakeholders they wished to lobby, such as church leaders or local councillors (Wegrostek 2017). Consequently, participants have decided to broaden the arts practices included in these events in order to showcase the talents of a broader range of service users than those involved in the films. Groups of young people have put together heritage dance and singing performances as well as written poems and short stories. This has also led to the production of two short documentaries by two of the CBOs, who wished to showcase directly the achievements of their organisations. Consequently, this strand of the project learnt a lesson that we could have taken from the *Fogo Process*, often cited as the starting point for many contemporary PV projects, namely that PV tends to be more effective if social commentary is mixed with what Crocker calls 'more lyrical […] uplifting affirmative films' in order to provide a more rounded image of community life (Crocker 2003: 127). In the process, it has also become clear that this was at the heart of some of the earlier discussions around sustainability. Sustainability is, it seems, really about finding a sustainable place for PV

in the CBOs repertoire of activities, rather than just about a lack of equipment (Soria-Turner 2018: 7).

Understanding the particular value of the PV experience, and how it genuinely aligns with community needs, as well as the strategic goals of our NGO partners, has also been at central of the Brazilian strand's approach to advocacy and the wider sustainability of the project. For Plan, the project offered them a new way to articulate the narrative of empowerment that is at the core of their wider suite of advocacy tools (Soria-Turner 2018: 5). The starting point for this is to be a screening at Codó's local cultural centre, curated by the young women in order to generate a community-wide discussion of the issues raised in the film.

Towards the end of the project, the Brazilian strand was keen to find out about the other groups involved in the project, and was instrumental in encouraging discussions, via video, between all three strands. Through these discussion the groups have been able to discuss the impetus behind each strands' approach to PV and also to identify points of common cause across the groups that were not necessarily addressed in the films they chose to make. This was particularly strong between the Indian and South African strands, where both groups were interested in questions of discrimination (discussed in the films) and land rights (which was not discussed). All three strands of the project are keen to continue the dialogue initiated through this project. Such dialogue is difficult to generate and sustain, reliant as it often is on the internet and social media, to which two of the three communities (South Africa, and India) have limited access. Here PV has shown itself to be a valuable tool, allowing the generation of asynchronous communication between the groups, provoking, via organised

screenings of the videos produced, a higher level of reflection on their shared experiences than might be generated via, for example, a Google hangout discussion in a place where bandwidth can be prohibitively narrow. The generation of links between the project strands would appear to be a particularly important outcome of the project. The sharing of ideas, challenges and practice is certainly seen as valuable by our partners and it is an aspect of this work that we wish to develop further in future projects, broadening our network of partners, as the advocacy work of all three strands continues.

All project films can be found here:

India: http://yarncommunity.com/stories/634

South Africa: http://yarncommunity.com/stories/635

Brazil: http://yarncommunity.com/stories/632

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Revised Manuscript (marked up changes not displayed)

The *Voicing Hidden Histories* Project: Participatory Video in Development, Soft Power and Film Language

Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison and Will Gould

In recent years, 'participatory arts' (PA) generally, and 'participatory video' (PV) in particular, have become something of a 'go-to' methodology within the International Development sector, considered by Zelizer, for example, to be 'an essential component of peacebuilding work' in post-conflict societies (2003: 62), or, as Flinders and Cunningham suggest, playing a key role in the production of civil society in the developing world, helping to 'nurtur[e] engaged citizenship' (2016: 5). In this article, we wish to reflect upon some of the findings of a recent Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Global Challenges Research Fund PV project 'Voicing Hidden Histories'. Working in South Africa, India and Brazil, this project has been using PV to support specific marginalised communities in each country to challenge the way their nations present themselves, and in particular their national history, to the world via 'nation branding' and other 'soft power' initiatives. Each strand of the project is led by a researcher from the University of Leeds, supported by a country-based filmmaker. Working along side small groups of young people (typically groups of 5-12 people), each project strand undertook a process of discussion and negotiation, in which all participants had an equal voice, to co-produce one or more short films. In each case, the films took their creative stimulus from some aspect of the national soft power narrative, the legacy of the past and the specific human rights issues the young people involved face today. The particular type of film made and topics explored were decided collectively by each group, leading to the production, in India of two dramas, in South

Africa of six dramas and two documentaries and in Brazil of a single documentary. In so doing, the project is seeking to raise awareness nationally and internationally of these communities' often precarious place in society and to support them in campaigning to effect change in their lives.

In India we have been working with Budhan Theatre which is associated with the 'Denotified Tribes Rights Action Group' (DNT RAG) to explore the historical predicament of these ex-'Criminal Tribe' communities in the cities of western India. In South Africa, we have been working with the Bishop Simeon Trust, Themba Interactive and five community-based organisations (CBOs) examining the legacy of the apartheid past for a generation that has grown up in the post-apartheid era, focussing in particular on groups of vulnerable children and young people living in townships across Ekurhuleni, a municipality to the East of Johannesburg. In Brazil, we have been working with Plan International to support groups of vulnerable girls in Codó, a region within Brazil where the country's African heritage is particularly visible. In each project strand, the groups have had to reflect upon the role of 'participation' as both a tool for creativity, on the one hand, and the delivery of 'practical' development outcomes on the other. At the present time, the project is on-going, with each strand looking to develop the advocacy dimension of the project, exploring ways to utilise the films to effect change in the lives of the participants. This article is therefore focussed primarily on the process of production, which is now complete. Here we are particularly interested in the project's approach to filmmaking practice, drawing on a series of focus group discussions and interviews (between December 2016 and August 2017) with the young people who made the films, as well as an evaluation workshop held at the University of

Leeds (13 November 2017) for the partner organisations involved. Specifically we ask: why use filmmaking as an international development tool? What are the enablers of – and barriers to – successful PV initiatives and what does 'success' mean in this context? Moreover, while such projects invariably make claims for PV as a particularly effective method for 'giving' communities 'voice' – however such potentially patronising terms might be defined (Bery 2003: 108) – very little space is usually dedicated to the exploration of the films produced in such projects, that is to the specific articulation of this 'voice' (White 2003: 64). Thus, we also wish to challenge a trend in the analysis of such practice that focuses entirely on questions of methodology and an understanding of PV as a *process*, largely ignoring the *products* made.

Searching for Identity amongst the 'Denotified Tribes' in India

In India, our partner organisation is a community theatre group, Budhan Theatre, based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, led by documentary filmmaker and director, Dakxin Chhara Bajrange. Budhan was established in 1998 by Gandesh Devy, literary critic and activist, who in 1998 founded the 'Denotified Tribes Rights Action Group' (DNT RAG), with the acclaimed Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi (D'Souza, 1999). The formation and work of Budhan relates to the complex predicament of an extensive array of communities across India who were defined in the late colonial period as 'Criminal Tribes', or hereditary criminals under the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act. This resulted in a range of restrictions on movement and collective incarceration, even after India's independence in 1947, following their 'denotification' and the end of formal 'Criminal Tribe' status (Radhakrishna, 2007).

The project with Budhan theatre involved the development, from storyboard to final cut, of two short dramas, based on real-life experiences (in the first film) and a historical representation of settlement (open-prison) life in the second. The first film will form the main focus of this discussion as a reflection of the fully formed transition from PA (specifically theatre) to PV within Budhan Theatre and its associated communities. None of the participants, which across both films numbered 15 members of Budhan and 10 members of another local community residing outside the city on the chosen location, had previous film-making experience. This allowed the participants to reflect upon the relative experience of film, in relation to theatre practice in two focus-group sessions that followed the filmmaking itself. Most of the actors and assistant producers were in the age range of 15 to 24, although one of the lead roles was played by a 9 year old girl and two older members of Budhan also took on appropriate roles for the purposes of the film.

Both films were initiated – early concept, storyboard, and production – via group discussions involving all of the Budhan actors and production team. The latter involved around half of the participants, who doubled up as cast as well as assistant producers, allowing maximum exposure to the process of filmmaking. Finally, both films had three co-directors – senior members of the Budhan group – who, according to the feedback sessions, had been chosen for those roles via a process of group discussion. Although casting within Budhan took place in a similar fashion, which has been common practice within the theatre work too for the organisation, casting from among the DNT communities outside the city was organised via short auditions on the two days of shooting.

The first film, *Maim Kaun Hum?* (*Who Am I?*) recreated a narrative chosen by the group as representative of a common predicament faced by members of DNT communities in modern India. A young girl, Rohita, resides with her extended family in a *tanda* (makeshift settlement) in the semi-jungle outskirts area of a town. At the start of the film we are provided with a sense of the semi-rural setting itself, a taste of the everyday activities of the inhabitants, and most importantly a short sequence depicting a *panchayat* (community council) meeting led by community elders, to decide the fate of a man who had mistreated his wife. Rohita overhears the *panchayat* head making reference to Maharana Pratap, a Sixteenth Century Rajput ruler, as an ancestor and role model for the community. After enquiring with her mother about the ruler, Rohita is informed that the noble qualities of the Maharana, and his battles against injustice, are qualities that are followed by the community as a whole. References to the warrior traditions of the Maharana are common among nomadic communities in the North West of India, and especially prevalent among DNTs (Channa, 2008). Rohita is subsequently asked to make a short walk to a local shop to collect some milk, and she leaves with a friend. What follows is the central climax of the film – a scene in which the shopkeeper overhears the two girls talking in Bhantu. He immediately assumes that they are around the shops to steal, and chases them away from the area. Rohita runs back to her mother and in tears simply asks the question ‘Who are we, Mom?’. In the final scene of the film, we are left with an image of the tears of Rohita and an expression of distress and defeat on the face of her mother.

<insert Fig 1: ‘Who are we, Mom?’, *Maim Kaun Hum?* (Budhan Theatre, 2017)>

In the focus group discussions that followed the filming and initial editing, we asked the directors and assistant producers about the significance of the film's themes. Participants stressed the 'inquisitive mind' of Rohita, marked off against her mother, which reflected a community anxiety experienced across the neighbourhood: the need to find a means of using education and youth culture to instil a new generation with the cultural capital to break-down older stigmas. The casting of female lead roles – young women whose lives were sandwiched between two reflective patriarchies – one traditional (the *panchayat* in the *tanda*) and the other 'modern' (the shopkeeper), illustrated a further predicament for DNT identity strategies: In negotiating modern stigmas surrounding caste and nomadism, DNTs have resorted to traditional community structures. Yet these institutions have often led to the reinforcement of specific gender roles and violence (Vincentnathan, 1996; Mayaram, 2002). *Mai Kaun Hum* creates a deliberate visual representation of this dichotomy in Rohita's travel by foot between two locations – the semi-rural *tanda* to the town outskirts and back to the *tanda*.

A great deal of the discussion surrounded the importance of finding 'real' locations (the *tanda* used in the film was a genuine temporary settlement of DNTs – Bhat Gaon – on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, some of whose members acted in the *panchayat* scene), and the importance of the materials and structure of the *panchayat*. As a result of this attention to detail, the film is visually not unlike a short documentary. The main dialogue is interspersed with longer shots of everyday *tanda* life: mundane chores, incidental sequences of children playing, of carts and animals. Indeed, the result is reminiscent of the work of Anand Patwardhan and Rakesh Sharma in its

deliberate visual mixture of everyday realism with indirect political commentary (Korossi, 2015).

Simultaneously, the storyline doubles up as a commentary on a fundamental paradox in the strategic identity politics of India's DNTs. At least since the formation of DNT RAG in 1998, this politics has attempted to develop PA and historical projects to challenge national narratives of social dominance. These might be viewed as a distinctive challenge to the soft power strategies of the state. Yet a fundamental weakness, or fault-line, in such strategies has tended to be the need to re-publicise the historical causes of DNT marginalisation – namely the community's histories of criminality. Nomadic peoples were, in these narratives, employees, often entertainers and retainers, to the great Rajput kingdoms. This creates a further bind, via a colonial legal edifice, in which street performers and artists were often branded as 'vagrants', public nuisances, agents for petty forms of crime and prostitution. As such, the colonial state, and that which succeeded it, established a notion of criminality that rested on normative readings of caste hierarchies, in which certain forms of artistic expression continued to be associated with transgression. As a result, PA and PV, although able to capture some of the most important nuances of DNT marginalisation and political mobility, are consequently perhaps of limited strategic value in the context of India's current structures of social welfare and affirmative action.

Dissecting Discrimination and the Legacy of Apartheid in South Africa

In South Africa we have been working with the two NGOs, the Bishop Simeon Trust (BST) and Themba Interactive (TI) and five CBOs that provide out-of-school support for

vulnerable young people, many of whom are the children of illegal migrant workers and are consequently ‘undocumented’, that is without birth certificates. As a result, they are unable to access social services or high-school education (Alfaro-Velcamp et. Al 2017). All these organisations use a variety of PA methods to build the confidence of their service users. While BST/TI had used various PA practices before this project, most frequently ‘Forum Theatre’ (Boal 1993) and ‘Grassroots Comics’ (Sharma 2017), they had not used PV. As a starting point for the project, we held a workshop where a group of Community Support Workers, who support groups of service users aged between 6 and 15 in one CBO in Tsakane Township, came together to discuss South Africa’s national soft power narrative via the way it circulates on World Cinema Screens, a key trend within which is the legacy of Mandela, the ‘Rainbow Nation’ and the story of the nation’s democratic transition to social inclusivity (Cooke 2016a). As a group, we discussed how these images relate to their everyday experience of life in South Africa today, and the issues that *they* saw as being particularly important to them. The topic they wished to focus on was the continuing legacy of discrimination and social exclusion, and in particular the issue of gender-based violence in their township, an issue which, they felt, directly challenges the representation of the nation as it is frequently propagated in the official ‘soft power’ narrative. This discussion was used to develop short comics to draw out their particular approach to this issue. The comics were then used as a starting point to develop screenplays, using Forum Theatre techniques. The group workshopped the screenplays, producing a shooting script. They then chose the roles they wanted to take – in front of or behind the camera – before filming and editing their stories over the course of three days, with those choosing

technical roles being given ‘on-the-job’ training by the project facilitators, the main emphasis being on an ethos of ‘learning by doing’.

Focus group and interview feedback from the project was generally positive, with participants experiencing a confidence boost from being trusted with professional equipment and from their ability to raise issues that were important to them, issues which are pervasive in their community but which they felt were not widely discussed. As one participant put it, ‘If […] it’s just your story and no one knows about it, it might relate to someone else, but they will never know that they are facing the same situation or challenge’ (Cooke 2016). The main worry they raised, however, was the question of sustainability. Participants felt that they would not be able to replicate the project on their own without the equipment and support of all the facilitators involved (Cooke 2016). This led to a further iteration of the project, during which we worked directly with small groups of service users (typically 4-6 participants) from Tsakane, Vosloorus and KwaThema townships, all aged between 6 and 15. Although we largely followed the same model as the first iteration – making comics and using Forum Theatre –, we simplified the filmmaking process, with the aim of lowering the technical barriers and so making the PV process more accessible to this community without professional equipment. Thus, we used a range of ‘point and shoot’ cameras (Go-Pros and Kodak PlayTouch Cameras) to film short silent dramas (approximately 3-4 minutes long), over which participants recorded a voiceover narration that told the story of their film. Again, the films focussed on social issues that the group decided were relevant to them. In this case, gender-based violence, bullying, community crime and discrimination.

One of the most striking aspects of the films produced in the South African strand of ‘Voicing Hidden Histories’, is their impulse towards ‘denotative’ rather than ‘connotative’ forms of representation. *Tit for Tat* (Tshepo Hope 2016) – a film about an abusive relationship between a teenager and her older boyfriend – for example, culminates in a violent attack by the boyfriend on the girl. We see and hear the boy repeatedly stamp on what the film suggests is the girl’s head, a reflection, the actor who plays the boyfriend says, of both the reality of their lives and the way his community is frequently presented on screen. As aesthetic points of reference, he refers both to Nollywood, which often has a similarly denotative approach to film communication (Okwuowulu 2015: 106), and to some of the films about South Africa that would seem to challenge any soft power narrative of democratic transition (e.g. *Tsotsi*, Gavin Hood, 2005; *Jerusalema*, Ralph Ziman, 2008). While the group’s insistence on local reference points in their filmmaking reminds us that any cinema which seeks to empower specific communities must be *situated* if it is going to be effective, the group also maintains that its denotative approach to filmmaking is a deliberate strategy. In discussions during the production of *Tit for Tat*, the group insisted upon showing the violence directly because, they argued, this is the reality of their lives (Cooke 2016). However, crucially they also demanded that their film had a happy ending. The girl eventually marries a doctor who diagnoses that she is HIV+, having been infected by her boyfriend. Here the film plays on classical forms of theatre. Weddings provide the conclusion for comedies, as opposed to the death and destruction of tragedies. Such an ending would seem to be out of place in this story, which has all the hallmarks of tragedy. Nonetheless, the group insists that its use here is yet another denotative declaration of the reality of their lives.

Their lives are violent and precarious. However, their use of narrative conventions ostensibly out of kilter with the content of their story also points to their refusal to present their lives as tragic. It is possible for them to continue to survive and have a ‘happy ending’ (Cooke 2016).

<insert Fig 2: a happy ending in *Tit for Tat* (Tsepho Hope 2016)>

Young Women’s Voices in Brazil, African Heritage and the *quilombos*

On the Brazil leg of the project we worked with young people from a remote region of Brazil (Codó, in the north-eastern state of Maranhão) whose community history and traditions seem to reject any ethos of national inclusion. These young people have in their daily lives access to technology (TV, the internet, social media such as Whatsapp, Facebook) and thus access to contemporary representations of the nation. Building upon their confidence in using social media in their daily lives, we worked with Gilberto Sobrinho, a filmmaker and academic whose recent film work focuses on marginalised Afro-Brazilian communities and cultural practices, to reflect on video upon their ‘fit’ within both the traditions of their community and these national representations, and the space they have to support and challenge such representations.

Codó is the fifth largest municipality in the state of Maranhão, with a population of around 118,000. It is home to a large number of *quilombos* or communities originally set up by fugitive slaves in the 18th and 19th centuries, and as a result its racial and ethnic make-up is more Afro-Brazilian than that of other north-eastern states, with the exception of Brazil’s most ‘African’ state, Bahia. Thanks to the work of the Palmares Foundation, *quilombos* can now gain official recognition and access to federal sources

of support (there are 682 officially recognised *quilombos* in the state of Maranhao alone (*O Estado* 2017), but prejudice against such communities, which have by their very nature been marginalised within Brazilian society, continues to be rife.

Many young people in Codó find themselves doubly prejudiced against by the municipality's close association with *umbanda*, a syncretic religion that mixes indigenous, Christian and Afro-Brazilian religious practices. Non-Christian religions are currently on the receiving end of widespread prejudice, partly as a result of the growth of evangelical Christianity in poor and rural areas of the country, and within National Congress and the Senate. *Umbanda's* traditions in the North East are not widely known, given that the religion developed in, and is closely associated with, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo in the Centre-South of the country, viewed by most as the cultural epicentre of Brazil. Such cases of everyday and rarely contested prejudice go against the image of Brazil projected internationally, while at the same time the existence of communities such as Codó in many ways trouble the national brand (modern, urban, inclusive, forward-thinking, and so on).

The choice of community to work with on this project was guided by our NGO partner, Plan International, a development and humanitarian organisation that is tasked with advancing the rights of children and young people, and promoting equality for girls. Plan has been active in Brazil since 1997, working with young people on consciousness-raising and empowerment projects that focus on developing financial survival skills, and campaigns to improve gender equality and reduce violence against young women in particular. Plan were responsible for recruiting the young women to work with us: our participants all had previous experience of working with Plan on

personal development and/or leadership courses set up through their secondary schools.

Throughout the production phase of the project Viviana Santiago, Head of Gender regionally for Plan and Inés Soria-Turner, a participatory-arts practitioner based in Leeds, worked with the young women in a workshop format to encourage them to reflect on their identity, relationship with Codó, and so on. The creation of trust and mutual respect was a particularly important part of the process of producing this strand's video, and given the importance of these workshops for both team-building and fostering a sense of self-confidence in the young women in terms of understanding the importance of their own voices and views, some of the footage of these workshops is captured in the final video. Thus, in this strand, rather than reflecting explicitly on the historical, racial and religious questions highlighted above in relation to Codó, and echoing, to a degree, the experience of the South African strand, the young women were much more concerned to share details of their everyday lives: hence the title of the video *Um Pouco de Tudo, talvez* (*A Little of Everything, Perhaps*), which they chose themselves. The young women were at pains to emphasise that they liked Codó and their community, but most of them expressed a desire to leave, through frustration at a lack of opportunities, resources and access to higher education and well-paid jobs.

The video opens with filmmaker Sobrinho onboard a flight from Campinas (a relatively wealthy, 'white' city) to Teresina, capital of the north-eastern state of Piauí and home to the closest airport to Codó. The first image is notably a breaking of the fourth wall, as Sobrinho stares silently into camera. It then follows his journey by car to Codó itself, showing images captured on a Go-Pro. All the while the filmmaker, in voiceover,

reflects on the significance of the journey, hinting in his commentary at the original motivation behind the choice of Codó and demonstrating the extent to which the filmmaking journey took a rather different course than expected.

The opening sequence, with its focus on the filmmaker, also demonstrates the extent to which Sobrinho took a different approach to participation from the other two strands. He was more involved in shaping the aesthetics of the participatory process. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the project constituted a personal journey for him too, as the son of north-eastern migrant workers who moved to the centre-south region out of the kind of necessity described by the young women in workshop discussions and on-screen interviews. This explains Sobrinho's decision to capture himself on screen in the opening sequence, as it serves as a point of identification with the young women from Codó, on both a physiognomical level, and in formal terms within the film itself.

Both the facilitators and the participants were keen to demonstrate in their film how much could be achieved by using mixed, and in some cases highly accessible forms of, media that they might be able to produce themselves on a future occasion, for example photographs (digital and hard copies), snippets of conversations recorded on phones, and images captured on Go-Pros. After screening excerpts from a range of Brazilian documentaries in the workshops, a focal point of discussion was the effect of separating sound from image, and the video response they produced reflects these discussions. A particularly poignant sequence of the video, for example, shows pleasant and seemingly innocuous images of the town of Codó, with a specific focus on house fronts (including the young women's homes), while the accompanying sound captures the 'hidden' stories of sexual harassment and threats to their personal safety,

predicated on their gender and ethnic background, to which they are regularly subjected in their day-to-day lives.

<insert Fig 3: Hidden stories of sexual harassment. *Um Pouco de Tudo, talvez* (2017)>

The video response also includes footage shot in Codó by Sobrinho, in the company of the young women, of popular cultural and religious manifestations such as *bumba-meu-boi* and an *umbanda* religious service, but these take second place to the faces and voices of the young women themselves and the expression of their own desires, dreams, sense of agency, future, and so on. Almost half of the running time is taken up with 'talking head' sequences involving four of the five young women, echoing both the work of Brazil's foremost documentary filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, and in particular his final documentary *Ultimas Conversas* (*Last Conversations*, 2015), which had been viewed in its entirety and widely commented on by the young women during the first workshop, and Day Rodrigues's *Mulheres Negras, Projetos de Mundo* (*Black Women, World Projects*), which, with its frank exposition of everyday racism and calls for resistance as related by a group of inspirational black women, resonated particularly strongly with the participants when they viewed it in the workshop.

PV in Development

Returning to the questions posed in the introduction to this discussion, our three project strands offer very different perspectives on the potential of PV within an international

development context, all of which are shaped by the previous experience each group has had using PV. Plan International had no prior experience of PV. Thus, the project here was fundamentally shaped by the participatory-documentary practices of Sobrinho. While the Brazilian strand probably spent the most time explicitly reflecting on the group's aesthetic approach to the production of the video, and how this relates to the history of documentary practice, as we have discussed here, each of our project strands is clearly situated within, and cognisant of, a specific cultural and aesthetic tradition of film practice, be it Nollywood in South Africa or the work of Anand Patwardhan and Rakesh Sharma in India. Both Bhudan and BST/TI's approach was informed by their experience with forum theatre, their approach to PV, in turn, being informed by a process of iteration and reflection in line with a tradition of practice that goes back to at least the 1960s (White 2003). It is important to consider the ways in which these films fit into their wider socio-political and aesthetic contexts not in order to make any value claim as to their quality relative to other forms of film practice. Rather it allows us to reflect on the particular expression of these communities' 'voices' and thus the particular value of PV as a form of community expression in each context. This is an aspect of such projects which, as we noted at the start of this article, is often ignored in a more frequent focus on the *process* of community engagement. However, we suggest, that the value of the communication (in whatever way this is to be understood) should not be divorced for a consideration of its aesthetics and the role of participants as filmmakers in their own right.

PV was almost universally considered to be an empowering form of communication, able to amplify community voices in order to help these same

communities advocate for change in their lives. At present, all three strands are developing this side of the project, exploring how best to exhibit and curate their films in order to engage relevant stakeholders. The scale and ambition of this engagement has also been shaped by the previous experience of each of our partners in using PA for community advocacy at a range of levels, be that within their local community (in the case of the South African strand), or at a national level. The Bhudan Theatre, for example, is looking to use the films they have produced to raise awareness of the stigma surrounding their community with national policy makers, by including copies of the films in their submission to have the status of their community changed (Soria-Turner 2018: 7). This was seen, our partner suggested during the project evaluation workshop, as the particular value of PV, as distinct from other forms of PA, in that it allows their work to be shown more widely than is possible for a piece of live theatre and so consequently has the potential for greater impact. At the same time, the power of PV can at times be over stated in this context. As we have discussed, in India the continued stigma surrounding street performance and other forms of PA, for all their public popularity, can also limit the ability of such work – and in turn the messages it seeks to propagate – to be taken seriously by policy makers.

This leads us to consider other limitations of PV in a development context. In our discussion of the South African strand during the evaluation workshop, a good deal of emphasis was put upon the value of PV as a way of creating what our partners' described as a 'breathing space', to not only reflect upon the particular issues that they were exploring in the films but, increasingly as the projected developed, for them to

reflect upon everyday life and, ultimately, what they were *beyond* these particular issues:

> Life in South Africa is inherently political, and I think the young people are aware of the fact that the way they are [is] because of apartheid and what was done, but we don't really want to be talking about that because I go back home and I know that. (Soria-Turner 2018: 7)

The wish to move beyond a use of film to voice the types of social issues the project initially wished to explore (gender-based violence, discrimination and so on) has become ever more important to the South African strand as it has begun to develop its approach to advocacy and as the groups have started to think about the kind of events they wish to organise that can both showcase their films and draw in the key community stakeholders they wished to lobby, such as church leaders or local councillors (Wegrostek 2017). Consequently, participants have decided to broaden the arts practices included in these events in order to showcase the talents of a broader range of service users than those involved in the films. Groups of young people have put together heritage dance and singing performances as well as written poems and short stories. This has also led to the production of two short documentaries by two of the CBOs, who wished to showcase directly the achievements of their organisations. Consequently, this strand of the project learnt a lesson that we could have taken from the *Fogo Process*, often cited as the starting point for many contemporary PV projects, namely that PV tends to be more effective if social commentary is mixed with what Crocker calls ‘more lyrical […] uplifting affirmative films’ in order to provide a more rounded image of community life (Crocker 2003: 127). In the process, it has also become clear that this was at the heart of some of the earlier discussions around sustainability. Sustainability is, it seems, really about finding a sustainable place for PV

in the CBOs repertoire of activities, rather than just about a lack of equipment (Soria-Turner 2018: 7).

Understanding the particular value of the PV experience, and how it genuinely aligns with community needs, as well as the strategic goals of our NGO partners, has also been at central of the Brazilian strand's approach to advocacy and the wider sustainability of the project. For Plan, the project offered them a new way to articulate the narrative of empowerment that is at the core of their wider suite of advocacy tools (Soria-Turner 2018: 5). The starting point for this is to be a screening at Codó's local cultural centre, curated by the young women in order to generate a community-wide discussion of the issues raised in the film.

Towards the end of the project, the Brazilian strand was keen to find out about the other groups involved in the project, and was instrumental in encouraging discussions, via video, between all three strands. Through these discussion the groups have been able to discuss the impetus behind each strands' approach to PV and also to identify points of common cause across the groups that were not necessarily addressed in the films they chose to make. This was particularly strong between the Indian and South African strands, where both groups were interested in questions of discrimination (discussed in the films) and land rights (which was not discussed). All three strands of the project are keen to continue the dialogue initiated through this project. Such dialogue is difficult to generate and sustain, reliant as it often is on the internet and social media, to which two of the three communities (South Africa, and India) have limited access. Here PV has shown itself to be a valuable tool, allowing the generation of asynchronous communication between the groups, provoking, via organised

screenings of the videos produced, a higher level of reflection on their shared experiences than might be generated via, for example, a Google hangout discussion in a place where bandwidth can be prohibitively narrow. The generation of links between the project strands would appear to be a particularly important outcome of the project. The sharing of ideas, challenges and practice is certainly seen as valuable by our partners and it is an aspect of this work that we wish to develop further in future projects, broadening our network of partners, as the advocacy work of all three strands continues.

All project films can be found here:

India: http://yarncommunity.com/stories/634

South Africa: http://yarncommunity.com/stories/635

Brazil: http://yarncommunity.com/stories/632

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Fig 1: 'Who are we, Mom?', Maim Kaun Hum? (Budhan Theatre, 2017)

Fig 2: a happy ending in Tit for Tat (Tsepho Hope 2016)

Fig 3: Hidden stories of sexual harassment. Um Pouco de Tudo, talvez (2017)