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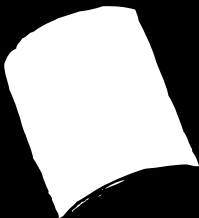
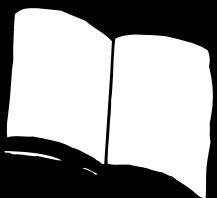
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## **BACKTALK:**

**The participatory film and  
its residency in the space of  
cultural violence and creative  
education towards a conceptual  
understanding of peace.**

Ruchika Gurung  
University of East Anglia



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UNESCO MGIEP

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# Abstract

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Cultural violence is defined as the beliefs, attitudes and values that justify structural and direct violence (Galtung 1990). It dulls us into seeing exploitation and repression as normal or in not actively witnessing it, and the media plays a vital role in its dissemination. Media and in particular film studies occupies a space through which notions of culture, ideology, peace and violence are negotiated. While the observational approach to film is well established in education, participatory filmmaking as an educational tool is what this paper addresses, with reference to concepts of cultural violence and peace education. This paper uses Brantmeier's (2011) five stage model, that encourages social and cultural change towards a future that is nonviolent, sustainable and renewable, and Bery's (2003) conceptualisation of empowerment to propose that participatory film functions as a transformative creative process and challenges notions of identity and culture while helping learners describe the world around them (Zembylas & Bekerman 2013). Through analysing existing cases in the field of participatory video (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014), I argue that participatory film functions as a tool for creative education practices that promotes a more hands-on approach to raising awareness about cultural violence and engaging with identity formation, and as a creative tool for knowledge creation and dissemination.

**Keywords:** Participatory film; cultural violence; peace education; back talk; counterstories.

# Introduction:

## Back Talk and Participation

The term 'back talk' and its association with rebellion is a familiar concept that most children would have grown up hearing, when the opportunity to confront or argue with a parent or figure of authority arose. Back talk is observed as a rude reply to a person of some authority. A term associated with resistance movements and figures of resistance who questioned patriarchy, imperialism, gender and any other idea that was put down as the ultimate truth. Referring to bell hooks' (1994) critique of the education system, Davidson and Yancy (2009) write about her association with the term back talk; hooks writes, 'I did not feel truly connected to these strange people, to these familial folks who could not only fail to grasp my worldview but who just simply did not want to hear it' (as cited in David & Yancy 2004, 2). Back talk became her act of rebellion, grounded on experiences with ideological variations of race and gender and functioning as 'a mode of self-assertion, a way of being agential... recognized, and valued' (1). Educative and societal structures normalise patterns of behaviour and address how learners approach the world around them, establishing normative patterns of learning and challenging the status quo, often rendering terms such as back talk superfluous, discourteous and hostile to the cognitive growth of a learner.

The terminology associated with the term back talk and its implication on a critical and creative understanding of the role that cultural violence can embody in education practices, is what this paper will be discussing when addressing the concept of participatory culture and its impact on understanding cultural violence and peace. If back talk is associated as an act of rebellion against authority, the dominant power, then ideas and practices that challenge the normative establishments of education, culture and patriarchy exemplify the idea of

back talk. If a normative education system congratulates itself on a top down system of rigid knowledge flow, then practices that challenge that system become the other, the back talk- or counterstories. Participatory culture, and the tools associated with it, takes on the form of counterstorytelling to address the prevalent ideas that dominate learning systems. If learners engage in participating and creating knowledge in a classroom system or outside- this system of learning essentially becomes their way of back talking the dominant education system that controls and confines the flow of knowledge. These methods can negotiate the spaces of violence and peace, or provide a forum where learners can attempt to understand these ideas by actively engaging in how they are consumed and redistributed.

Examining the power of personal storytelling to relay the experiences of teachers and youth workers outside an educational space, hooks (2003) claims that 'analyzing the disparities between personal narratives and the dominant narratives can raise awareness for both the oppressed and the oppressor', this in turn can lead to building 'solidarity and lead to widespread change' (as cited in Subramanian 2014, 224). One form of counterstorytelling, that is increasingly promising as children gain greater and greater access to different types of media, is participatory film (PF). The relevance of PF to development studies and towards social change, representation and empowerment has been researched by various scholars (Stuart & Bery 1996; Shaw & Robertson 1997; White 2003b; Lunch & Lunch 2006; Evans & Foster 2009; Lange 2011). The platform of a conventional media curriculum promotes discussion and understanding of socio-political and cultural identities, limiting itself to the medium of observational film. PF can function

as a pedagogical tool that encourages active participation, practical learning and encourages learners to discuss how they understand concepts like violence.

Scholars like Moll (1992) discuss the use of participatory approaches, such as interactive and meaning-based teaching practices, that highlights active learning, 'applying literacy as a tool for communication and thinking' (212). Cairney (2000) argues that there is a growing scholarship on the alternative approach to education that focuses on the home and community aspect of learners, aimed at reforming school practices by changing 'interaction patterns, participation structures, curriculum content and classroom practices' (166) to adhere to the diverse socio-political backgrounds of the learners, drawing on their strengths to improve on the nature of education. The emphasis lies on an approach to learning that is participatory and appropriates learning through resources in the community and emphasises the 'inseparability of the individual from the social' (Moll 1992, 239).

However, while scholars like Buckingham (2003) and Fleetwood (2005) address the impact of media literacy on the nature of education, prompting the ushering of a new era of digitized literacy and the progression towards media education that bases its practice in community and informal practices, others like Soep (2006) argue for practices that encouraging learners to be part of co-creative and participatory models of learning which functions 'not as a process of internalizing and transferring information, but as a way of engaging in an actual community of practice' (209). If the emphasis is on education practices that adopt alternative forms and allow the learner to partake in them, understanding the nature of popular culture today drives the argument of education towards a media dominated approach. While these scholars make interesting cases for the relevance of a new kind of active media literacy that needs to be addressed in educational sphere, this paper addresses the specific medium of PF and its relevance as

a creative educational tool for learners, that emphasizes on participation, to negotiate ideas of violence, peace, identity and culture.

The ideology of participation, is structured on 'democratic ideals: of the people, for the people, by the people' (Anne 1999, 68); especially focusing on a development model, these ideals are plausible in its application to educative structures. The ideal of participation is aimed at advocating development as a process initiated by people, from the 'inside out' (ibid). The individualistic nature of affect that participation has, which stems from a communitarian approach makes it a highly fecund model that education has yet to successfully embody. Education can incorporate this ideology of being an 'inside out' model as well, successfully nurturing an environment of dialogue and critical thinking with the suitable guidance and encouragement from educators. The role that participatory media, especially PF, can play is creating a space wherein issues of violence, culture and community can be addressed and counterstorytelling as an educational and informative medium can be adopted.

This paper highlights the benefits that participatory culture, focusing primarily on PF, can have on educational practices, by discussing two cases undertaken by Schwab-Cartas and Mitchell (2014) on the use of participatory media that indicates the conducive environment it constructs for creating counterstories that discuss and challenge ideas of identity, culture and community. I argue that PF can be beneficial in instigating social and cultural change that can be achieved through a nonviolent, empowered (Bery 2003) and renewable future, over the course of five stages outlined by Brantmeier (2011). This paper takes into account work done on participatory video (PV), as the terminology of PF is limited in its use but I argue that the structure of a film is useful in its creative nature and the concrete structure it applies in its narrative format. The terms of participatory video and film have been used interchangeably in the research

I have encountered on participatory media and this paper attempts to create a distinction and specifically instigate a dialogue around the critique and practice of PF as a tool to discuss

how violence is discussed in the education and cultural arrangements that learners find themselves immersed in.

## Participatory Film

The critical study of film has been dominated by an aesthetic analysis of film's ability to draw attention by becoming art, through reproducing and arranging sound and images (Turner 1994). Contemporary analysis of film now incorporates studies in critical reception, fan studies and ideological analysis discussing the space that film occupies in a historical, political and cultural space. Most of the programmes on film studies still find themselves limited to traditionally observing and analysing film, rather than research through producing film. However, there are courses on electronic media production which focus on filmmaking purely as a creative practice. Film represents the cultural, political and fantastical realities around us; to engage in that process of representation leads to more active, aware and independent learners. If film is such an integral part of our cultural and daily experience, how does the concept of participation adhere to our understanding of film, culture and education?

To understand participatory film, this paper will first address the terminology of participatory video and discuss the similar characteristics they share, addressing how PF can function as a medium that challenges the normative banking system of education<sup>1</sup> and is directed at creating a space for 'critical awareness and engagement' (hooks 1994, 14). PV functions as a communal or group activity that develops 'participants' abilities by involving them in using video equipment creatively to record themselves and the world around them' (Shaw & Robertson

1997, 1), producing their own narratives. It can be used as an aid in the cultivation and recognition of people's abilities to create an environment that both encourages individuals and promotes group development, which eventually leads to the learner's confidence growing, and provides them with a space where they can form their own opinions. Video works as a medium for the learners to communicate their ideas and methods to a broader audience.

PF, similarly, is a co-creative process through which untrained individuals or a community create a film with the help of an experienced educator or community worker, engaging with resources and technology available or made available to them. It is 'based on the premise that being actively involved in collective artistic expression can change people's awareness of the world around them, as well as their perception of themselves' (Shaw & Robertson 1997, 13). By this definition, PF has the potential to be a transformative learning experience. Feuerverger (2011) has discussed the potential of PF as a creative tool for skill development, informal and fluid learning specifically in peace education, claiming that 'meaning-making' (41) grounded in personal life history can provide a slightly varied view of peacemaking in education. This essentially implies that the social, linguistic and cultural stories of the learners play a crucial role in promoting individual and collective empowerment and PF is a tool through which this can be achieved.

<sup>1</sup> A banking system of education refers to an approach to learning that is rooted in the ideals of learning which targets students through a top-down structure, where they are taught to consume knowledge given to them by their teachers and is meant to be memorized and churned out (hooks 1994).

Servaes (1996) writes that the significance of PF can be further understood through a model which involves two approaches to participatory communication; the dialogical theory of communication by Freire (2003) and the idea of access, participation and self-management as formulated by UNESCO<sup>2</sup>. Freire (2003) states that teachers and students 'content on reality are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge' (69). He wrote that the attainment of that knowledge of reality is achieved through 'common reflection and action'; the Subjects discover that they are the 'permanent re-creators' of this knowledge and this presence of the 'oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement' (ibid). The discussion is based on the conception of a teaching system that promotes a collaborative atmosphere and acknowledges that both students and teachers should be given an equal opportunity to learn and teach one another. The oppressed, for Freire, would be given the opportunity to actively engage with the creation and recreation of knowledge, and the participatory model aims to achieve this by providing opportunities to learners to share their counterstories and be an active part of the creation of new knowledge.

Freire's (2003) dialogical structure stems from a 'dual theoretical strategy', which combines a Sartrean existentialist notion of respecting 'otherness' and a Marxian insistence on 'collective solutions' (as cited in Servaes 1996, 17). This includes respecting the independent personhood of each human while simultaneously emphasizing the need for cooperative and communal solutions to issues of violence and inequality. In contrast, UNESCO focuses on ideas of providing access, participation and self-management in terms of public engagement (17-18). While the UNESCO

model focuses on individual capacity building, in contrast Freire's model focuses on collective action as being the key to dismantling structures of oppression.

This paper discusses the act of participatory culture in an educational space, addressing the notion of participation that changes based on the context of its construction. White (1994) writes that the 'word 'participation' is kaleidoscopic; it changes its color and shape at the will of the hands in which it is held... it can be very fragile and elusive, changing from one moment to another' (as cited in Balit 2003, 8). Participatory culture, works to establish an environment of creative engagement and peaceful endeavour where barriers to creative endeavours and social engagements are relatively low and offer encouragement and motivation for creating, sharing and providing a space where mentors and participants- both experienced and novices- can create and share knowledge. Participants are encouraged to believe in their contributions and formulate social connections with each other which provides a sense of worth and purpose to the process of learning (Jenkins, et al. 2009).

The approach this paper seeks to validate is an amalgamation of both, essentially looking at participatory communication as a process wherein the public is given respect through the collective, creative process of communicating narratives of their culture and identity in the form of a film. Thus, collective action requires individual transformation which can be achieved through activities that bring people together. Using examples of PF projects researched by various scholars, this paper claims that PF can have a significant impact on attitudes and beliefs associated with peace education.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's theme, since its creation in 1945, 'to contribute to the building of peace, poverty eradication, lasting development and intercultural dialogue, with education as one of its principal activities to achieve this aim' (Taken from the UNESCO: Education in the 21st Century website).



# Participation as Critical Awareness

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Individuals are immersed in the act of participation from the time they begin to vocalize their thoughts, by participating in the act of speaking, and then participating in the premises of education. White (1999) defines three phases to the process of participation; the first phase involves the ‘activation of people, engaging their interest, their thinking, their creativity, their understanding of participation’. The second phase requires the employment of ‘various techniques or approaches to enable participation’ and the third phase, which is considered to be an outcome of participation is ‘community-building’ (19). In a classroom setting, participation can be based on using various forms of communication and technology resources to encourage interaction and active engagement, such as using and creating videos, trailers, film clips, social media feeds, online game sources as well as using more traditional forms of media, to using creative methods involving Lego playdough, and others (Gauntlett 2015).

The focus of this kind of engagement is on a communal approach to learning, which encourages independent research skills, self-reflection, critical awareness and discussion on the subject matter of interest. PF functions as a forum where learners can create knowledge that is different from what is made available by the media, and is something created entirely by the learner’s active participation. One of the key principles of media that makes it participatory is its ability to eradicate the filters, both abstract and in the real world, that professionals in the filmmaking community impose when they gain access to the narratives of people, events and places (Chalfen 2011). There is a need to look through and beyond these filters and ‘gain access to more authentic views- fully realizing that completely ‘unobstructed views’ are impossible’ (ibid, 187). While one of the motivations to engage with PF would be to gain insight into more authentic views, it essentially functions as a tool

to actively engage with issues that are relevant to individuals/communities.

Mitchell and de Lange (2011) discuss the difference between collaborative and PV projects: the former being a process where the researcher or community worker works with a group of participants to create a video and the latter a process where the group of participants create their own video with minimal assistance from the researcher or community worker. For a film to qualify as a PF project, the entire creative process from the storyboarding, filmmaking and editing process has to be solely accomplished by the learners, with guidance and mentoring from the educator or community worker. The power shifts from the hands of the educator to the hands of the learners, with mentoring from the educator or community worker. In this way, participatory filmmaking requires the creation of narratives, and narratives are inherently influenced by the structures of oppression and privilege that shape the lives of individuals. PF is, in fact, an avenue through which participants can “talk back” to narratives that they see in the world about themselves, providing a platform for back talk or counter stories.

Galtung (1990) defines cultural violence as ‘those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence- exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)- that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence’ (291). His definition states that violence is justified by the different nuances of culture, a culture that is disputed and legitimizes violence through the different domains of human existence. If media becomes the cultural apparatus through which knowledge is consumed and disseminated, then the manner in which this apparatus is utilised can play a crucial role in creating non-violent alternatives in understanding cultural and socio-political

issues, and navigating through cultures that normalise different forms of violence. The notion of violence, and cultural violence, is discussed in this paper not just as a 'commonsense category but an ideological one' (Boyle 2005, xii). PF plays a vital role in creating a space where learners can discuss and challenge this ideology of violence and actively engaging with how they consume and re-distribute these ideas. By creating an innovative space for discussion PF allows learners to negotiate ideas of violence, that can bring social and cultural change. Brantmeier's model provides an imperative framework that can bring about a sustainable and nonviolent future, which can be applied to the format of the PF model.

Brantmeier (2011) lists five stages that promote 'social and cultural change toward a nonviolent, sustainable, and renewable future', which are: 'raising critical consciousness through dialogue, imagining nonviolent alternatives, providing specific modes of empowerment, transformative action, and reflection and re-engagement' (356-357). These stages clearly map onto PF projects: the first step is to provide learners with the skills and tools to create a film, with mentoring relevant to the subject of their project. The second step involves learners, in their groups researching their material, critically engaging with and addressing it through a nonviolent and creative medium. The third step of empowerment is procured when the learners develop skills related to production as well as understanding the socio-political, cultural, and historical underpinnings of their personal experiences and narratives. The learners then find themselves empowered in their ability to research, create and critical address the issue of their choosing. Thus, the fourth and fifth stages of transformative action, and reflection and re-engagement are inherently linked forming a linear projection in the learner's engagement with Brantmeier's model. The transformative action is the process of development in the learner's skills based on independent research, time and project management. Teamwork encourages communal research and work through a more hands on system, rather than

through a top-down classroom structure. The final step is the reflection of the skills acquired by the learners and their ability to create new forms of knowledge, that challenge or extend other forms of knowledge available to society. This reflection and ability to re-engage with the material created by learners, and making it available to other learners and society members finalises the model that Brantmeier argues promotes social and cultural change.

Brantmeier's fourth step of transformative action is linked to Bery's (2003) conceptualisation of empowerment. The model incorporates four key elements: 'a psychological concept of the self that includes self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence; a cognitive understanding of the power structures and one's placement within existing systems; economic independence', that provides individuals or communities with the power and freedom to 'think, explore, and take individual risks' and finally 'political analysis and the will to change the systems themselves' (103-104). PF can engage in this transformative action, through peaceful dialogue to create a counterstory and raise awareness, creating a sense of self and change.

While White's three stages of participation is what PF as a form of participation adheres to, Brantmeier's model is how PF as a process can encourage learners to negotiate ideas of cultural violence and peace, critically addressing and challenging these concepts to promote social and cultural change through a creative, innovative and nonviolent procedure. Peace education functions as an extension of traditional education by working to establish discussions based on what violence is and how learners can challenge and confront such ideas, being critical of what is presented in the form of the media, history, sociology, science etc. The pivotal aim is to create a collaborative environment where learners and educators 'create a more just and peaceful order' while encompassing various aspects of education that formulate its identity- 'citizenship education, democratic education,

environmental and sustainability education, multicultural education, and violence-prevention education' (Harris & Morrison 2013, 4-6).

Participatory methods pave the way for practices that have the potential to turn the current education system on its head, making it more participatory and transformational, and through that process create and honour counterstories. PF provides learners with tools to critically confront their reality and transform that criticism into a concrete text to further relay that knowledge to others, in the process transforming the learner's own perspectives relating to normative ideas of violence. In this paper, I utilise the framework

provided by Brantmeier's (2011) model to promote change towards a sustainable future, and Bery's (2003) conceptualisation of empowerment that can be derived from transformative action, to analyse two cases of PV. The cases represent the power of participatory video and film to create transformative action through reflection and re-engagement, to demonstrate how PF can be used as an effective tool for peace education. These cases focus on "learning through doing" (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 612), which allows learners to learn as they create their own spaces and constructively research, argue and present their ideas of culture, identity, violence and peace.

## Participatory Film as a Tool for Peace

Brantmeier and Bajaj (2013) declare that effective peace education is designed for bringing out the desire for peace from individuals, 'which is necessary to cultivate the "soft" infrastructure of peacebuilding- thoughtful and emotional engagement to create sensible, peaceful futures' (142). This argument calls for examining alternative methods to managing conflict that is non-violent in nature. It suggests that people have an inherent understanding and desire for peace that needs to be accessed and activated in order for people to take the next step in developing and sustaining a peaceful future. This could include nonviolent communication activities, active engagement through listening and participating, and community based processes that involve tackling and resolving issues which are regarded as crucial to understanding the paradigms that are essential in promoting peacebuilding and understanding in communities that are affected by violence (ibid).

Schwab-Cartas and Mitchell (2014) refer to PV<sup>3</sup> as a significant method utilised within numerous

disciplines in academia, and understood to be a 'conscious attempt by researchers to not only address discourses and practices of dominance, but also explore the critical nexus between academia and activism' (604). Their research was demarcated into two participatory projects: The first centred around Mitchell's use of cellphones to create cellphilms<sup>4</sup> with two groups of rural teachers in South Africa, and the second incorporated Schwab-Cartas' use of participation in his grandfather's village in Mexico to create a film (collaborative in nature) with an elder from the village. In this section, I will discuss these two cases that incorporate PF, following the suggestions outlined in Brantmeier's (2011) model and Bery's (2003) analysis of empowerment. I argue that PF is a powerful and under-utilized tool for promoting peace and nonviolent alternatives to disseminating knowledge pertaining to matters of socio-political and cultural significance.

<sup>3</sup> While Schwab-Cartas and Mitchell's (2014) research engages with two PFs made, their literature addresses them in line with the research available on PV. However, I would like to point out that their literature addresses the concept of PF and is the reason I have specifically chosen their research in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Cellphilms refer to films made on a cellphone or mobile phone, a hybrid term derived from cellphone and film.

## CASE 1: CELLPHILMS AND REPRESENTATION

Mitchell describes shooting films through her cellphone with her daughters on a holiday to Iceland and how this fuelled her motivation of using the cellphilm in her community-based research in rural South Africa as a tool that can not only be used for self-representation but also for ‘family filming and reflexivity’. She writes that the cellphone ‘offers ‘the “on site” reflexive eye’ (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 605), implying that it provides a spontaneous and accessible means to record one’s stories. The project involved working with two groups of rural teachers, from Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal who had already been working in their own small groups to produce cellphilms on topics of their choice. These included challenges and solutions on issues as HIV, AIDS and poverty in their communities.

Only two of the teachers involved in this project used their cellphilms to document their environment at school. The cellphilms made by the other teachers centred on their families with titles like *Kimberley Nerwande*, *Lindi’s Family Christmas Party*, *Julia’s Home Video*, *My Beloveth Kids*, and *Village Family Gathering*. Mitchell writes, ‘It is Nikiwe’s cellphilm, *Village Family Gathering*, that totally captures my attention — perhaps because it feels less staged and, indeed, is perhaps a perfect “insider” film’ (606). The emphasis on the “insider film” is a crucial point that PF must address, due to the participatory nature of the production of the film being created by the community of learners, the film essentially offers new knowledge because it presents the perspective of the insider (community). Education that aims to promote non-violent methods of learning can encourage people to move away from cultures that perpetuate violence, causing a shift towards a sustainable culture of peace that promotes active engagement and knowledge creation in the form of counterstories (Brantmeier 2011). Mitchell’s cellphilm project tackles that very task of active engagement and counterstorytelling,

which strives to use non-violent methods.

The duration of the film is four and a half minutes and is filmed at a rural homestead (kraal). Mitchell’s (2014) description of the film reads: ‘Her [Nikiwe] carefully filmed segment depicts a group of male relatives and friends just outside the main house cutting up a sheep that has been just slaughtered ... There is no real sound track in the film except for banter, a steady “Q and A” of what is happening and why’ (606). Nikiwe’s film provides an insider’s perspective through the narration of her counterstory, in the context of a patriarchal culture. The participants refer to the “men’s head”, which refers to the head of the sheep that is cooked and the brains served solely to the male members of the family/community. One of the participants remarks, ‘No, women don’t get anything! The head belongs to men, all of it.’ (ibid). The film presents a narrative through its reference to certain cultural norms: ‘the idea of the “men’s head” as reminder of the deep rootedness of gender inequalities... all attached to the social realities of HIV and AIDS: mobility and migration (between the city and the country)’ (612). None of the men partaking in the activity of butchering or the filmmaker herself actually live around the homestead, there are references to notions of wealth and consumption of material goods and the cellphilm emphasises on the ritual of slaughtering and butchering the sheep as ‘part of tradition and patriarchal culture’ (ibid).

The film creates a peaceful dialogue, a documentation of the realities of one such rural community in the Eastern Cape and touches upon the notion of gendered language and the implications it can have in actualizing ‘possibilities and impossibilities, so that certain social worlds only become imaginable’ to the audience and community in question (Confortini 2006, 336). The process of production is inherently social (Buckingham 2003), providing a collaborative space between learners (participants) to share their counterstories. This process accommodates

the first step as issued by the Brantmeier model addressing the significance of promoting a peaceful dialogue by raising the awareness and consciousness of the participants involved in the projects. The cellphilm, through creating a peaceful dialogue with the participants, provides them with the opportunity to engage with alternative non-violent methods, using them as tools for empowerment and self-reflection.

These counterstories provide a space to discuss existing discourses of the community and region in question, in a peaceful and creative manner, and getting these narratives out into the world. PV has been described as a 'special kind of storytelling that ideally involves the community' and 'interpreting the story through its own lens and being empowered to retell and change it to create a community - a political reality - that matches one's desired condition' (Bery 2003, 102). Bery addresses a key point of participation that includes empowerment through the telling and retelling of the story, and the kind of empowerment that is associated with being in control of the narrative and what it addresses. The term empowerment is a complex concept, which when applied to participatory projects needs clarity and focus.

Brantmeier's fourth step of transformative action links fluidly to Bery's (2003) conceptualisation of empowerment incorporating a sense of self-worth- 'self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence' (103). Nikiwe's cellphilm (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014) presents a counterstory of her community through the transformative reflection of this narrative, representing her community and herself with awareness and confidence that is two-fold. Firstly, the self-worth is on an individualistic level in that it provides her with a sense of self-awareness and confidence in her ability to represent her community. Secondly, this cellphilm presents a documentation of norms and rituals that are inherent to her culture and provides her community with an audio-visual documentation from an inside perspective, for a wider audience to witness as well.

The second element in Bery's (2003) model addresses 'an understanding of the power structures and one's place within these existing systems' (102-103), Nikiwe's role as an educator and as an individual documenting her community presents her as the insider as well as someone who understands the norms of her culture, providing her with the opportunity to re-examine and engage with them. Being an educator she is aware of the process of knowledge dissemination and engagement with learners, however this film provides her with the opportunity to engage with other members of her community. The third element of reaching economic freedom is limited to what this project may have achieved as Mitchell does not refer to matters pertaining to economical interest or value that might have impacted the entire project or Nikiwe's film in particular. However, it does provide the participants with the opportunity to explore, think and visually discuss issues that affect their culture and community.

The fourth element of 'political analysis and the will to change the systems themselves' (Bery 2003, 104) is presented through the circulation and documentation of Nikiwe's counterstory. Her cellphilm presents the audience and her community with a wider narrative of HIV, AIDs and poverty in South Africa and a political stance in providing a platform for these issues that can be accessed by a wider community because it provides a counterstory of that community. Thus the power comes in the dissemination of that PF, provoking and embracing the notion of empowerment through its affiliation with an understanding of self and community and their placement within the wider narrative of similar narratives in South Africa.

Finally, the transformative and empowering action (Bery 2003; Brantmeier 2011) comes in the ability of creating knowledge for other learners and for the general audience. The cellphilm produces knowledge that can empower learners to comprehend Nikiwe's perspective as 'a woman from the community, who is capturing all of this

on her cellphone... in a context of patriarchy and... the deep rootedness of gender inequalities' (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 612). Though her project essentially touches on the impact of HIV, AIDs and poverty in the Eastern Cape, it also becomes a story of her place in that film and the condition of her community in the larger scheme of things. This inadvertently becomes a

film for learners to get an insider's perspective of rural South Africa and the problems faced by the communities there, reflecting on the power of PF to produce new knowledge and disseminate it through the creation of a peaceful dialogue, unto a larger audience who would not be exposed to such counterstories.

## CASE 2: PARTICIPATIVE ACTION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Schwab-Cartas begins the narration of his experience of creating a PF in his grandfather's village with the lines, 'This is a story I often tell and retell because it is through its retelling that I continue to learn more about our ancestral Isthmus Zapotec traditions and further develop my relationship to our traditions and ancestral practices' (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 607). His participatory project, is different to Nikiwe's cellphilm in that its significance lies in the process of retelling the counterstory produced. It is also not a wholly participatory project, more collaborative in nature, but his work is 'as an "insider" using participatory video in his grandfather's village in Mexico' (605). The project is the second documentary, part of the Zapotec media collective and is titled *Na Modesta*, named after the woman who the documentary centres around. He writes that Na Modesta expressed her interest in making a film that documented her recipe for guetabiza or black bean tamale, 'She told us that she was getting older and wasn't sure how long she would be able to continue her practice' (607). The relevance of the project from the onset is labelled as a documentation and reclamation of the tradition and heritage of the Zapotec community.

The project documents Na Modesta, an 83-year-old woman, creating the traditional dish, guetabiza, and the procedure and ritual that

accompanies the process of making the dish. She narrates 'stories or *ní nizaacaa* — personal stories about her childhood, about our [the author's] community and how much it has changed since she was young' (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 608) and includes the entire crew in the entire process, from collecting firewood, washing the corn and going to the 'molinero [the grinder] to process the corn into *cuuba* [dough]... grinding the beans, chile and epazote on the upright pestle and mortar... to placing the tamales into the *Zuquii* (clay oven)' (609). Schwab-Cartas remarks on how Na Modesta made the filming crew repeat the names of the ingredients in Zapotec, for her the transmission of her knowledge was the crucial task that the film was meant to achieve. The main aim of this project was in the documentation of traditions and practices, and providing an archive for community members and others to share in that knowledge.

This case study represents the power of PF to create transformative action through reflection and re-engagement. The film does engage in a peaceful dialogue to create a counterstory and raise awareness of the language and traditions that are unique to Union Hidalgo, a small Zapotec community situated in the Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. The emphasis, as Na Modesta encourages among the crew members,

lies in ‘learning through doing’ (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 612), wherein she includes the entire film crew in the process of creating the dish, providing a platform for the community to witness, discuss and preserve their counterstories and pass them down to the younger generations. Though different from the project done by Mitchell and different in the nature of its participation, the film *Na Modesta* addresses a key characteristic that is significant to a PF- transformative action.

The film provides a sense of empowerment in the transmission of knowledge and provides the subject- both *Na Modesta* and her *guetabiza*-with the power and authority of providing a medium through which the traditional dish and the language that is native to the region can be preserved, the relevance of the film lies in the nature of its production and the impact it has on the community. Schwab-Cartas (2012) notes that the screening of the completed film did create a forum ‘to discuss and think of many important issues such as language loss, rapidly changing traditions, and increasing rates of Type 2 diabetes due to non-traditional diet’ (as cited in Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014, 613), and also remarks ‘that cultural continuity transcend technologies like video or cellphilm, such that they are not ends in themselves, but merely tools in a larger process of learning’ (613). Individuals should be able to educate themselves, learn by becoming more self-reflective and reliant through the development of their thinking and problem-solving abilities (White 2003b). PF offers people the opportunity to learn from and teach one another, simultaneously, and as an educational tool would have a significant impact on the cognitive and social growth of learners.

While Schwab-Cartas’ PF documents *Na Modesta*’s recipe, it essentially does create a

counterstory that is subject to dissemination among her community and a wider audience through a peaceful dialogue, documenting a tradition that may not be prevalent among the newer generation and unknown outside that culture. The participatory process provides the participants with opportunities to gain self-confidence, to be able to think for themselves and to speak out and create their own narratives; this nurtures the internal facet of empowerment. The external facet of empowerment enables the participants to be seen, i.e. taking on a ‘visible role’ (Bery 2003, 107). For example, *Na Modesta*, an elderly woman of a Zapotec community is seen passing on a traditional recipe of *guetabiz*. She is essentially playing a role in documenting an aspect of Zapotec tradition that is not well known, and by doing so is playing a role in preserving a traditional dish, language and keeping the tradition of oral storytelling alive.

The creation of new knowledge or re-engagement with old forms of knowledge is being made available to generate a sense of awareness and replacement of this tradition and *Na Modesta* within the existing social and cultural space, by engaging with these external forces may bring about change in the ‘social context that ultimately shifts the dynamics of power over political will and process’ (Bery 2003, 107). The retelling of this counterstory is crucial to its empowerment and its impact. PF impacts this larger process of learning and becomes the first step in changing the nature of learning processes especially through its characteristic of self-reflection. White (2003a; 2003b) links participatory communication to an experiential process towards social change and both these PF projects, by relaying experiential processes, result in social change through the creation of new knowledge and re-engaging with knowledge that is established in society.

## Conclusion

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The nature of schooling and the education system has been critiqued by scholars, claiming that pupils are being “schooled” to equate ‘grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new’ (Illich 1971, 8). The notion of formal education and learning function as synonyms in contemporary culture, the concept of learning is one that comes with and outside formal education system. The nature of how individuals learn is often casual, take into account toddlers for whom language learning is both casual and experiential. There arises a need to implement informal learning that is casual and experiential with an emphasis on the deschooling of society by implementing and embracing the ‘multifaceted nature of learning’, which proposes that ‘skill-learning and education for inventive and creative behaviour can be aided by institutional arrangement’ (27-28). Schools need to change the way learners are being educated, the education systems need to be re-examined and should focus on a system that stresses on learning through doing (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014) and encourages the learner to be confident in their abilities. The idea that learning is dependent on the educator is problematic and limiting (Kelley 2008) and though acknowledged, still exists today.

Engaging in activities linked to participatory culture has been associated with promoting and boosting skills relating to performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgement, transmedia navigation, networking and negotiation (Jenkins, et al. 2009). This list also includes an enhancement of social responsibility, cultural engagement, time-management and independent research skills. The use of PF in education can serve as a transformative process, encouraging ‘informal learning within popular culture’ (ibid, 9) which apart from being

innovative sustains a more provisional structure where the focus of learning is through actively engaging with that form of learning. Innovative practices such as participation should be incorporated into education systems, not on a selective and temporary basis but as a model that aims towards long-term learning.

Jenkins (2006) calls for schools to include participatory practices, stating that: ‘Schools as institutions have been slow to react to the emergence of this new participatory culture; the greatest opportunity for change is currently found in afterschool programs and informal learning communities’ (4). The two PF projects done by Schwab-Cartas and Mitchell (2014) have depicted what PF can achieve and also how it can work in an educational set-up. Both projects engage with the creation of a peaceful dialogue to address issues that are of importance to Nikiwe’s community and Na Modesta’s culture. Both projects can be seen to adhere to the model presented by Bery (2003) and Brantmeier (2011), the amalgamation of these two models displays how PF can serve as a useful tool through which learners can engage with issues of socio-political and cultural relevance, while learning through the communal process of actually participating and re-engaging with issues of concern.

Brantmeier’s (2011) research emphasises on the transformative action that PF instigates, empowering the participants and causing them to re-engage and reflect on what matters to them. Some scholars have called for a more active and political stance on the notion of participating in change and social injustice, highlighting what participation should go beyond (Arnst 1996). Participation projects, though applauded, do not always take into account the power relations between the organisers and facilitators of these projects, and the so-called egalitarian nature of dialogue does need to be addressed;



participatory culture though not perfect has a lot to offer to education that promotes ideas of peace (Carpentier 2009). If educational systems strive to cultivate an environment of peace, working together to tackle problems of violence, create awareness and approach them through creative processes that focus on a model of learning through doing, such as PF, then learners would have the opportunity to be part of a more dynamic model of learning through which they simultaneously learn and teach each other.

Utilising a creative tool such as PF can have a transforming and empowering effect on the nature of learning; the process of reflecting on the action taken by the learners to reflect on their culture, history or identity becomes the main task that PF addresses, becoming a critical intervention as the learner confronts their reality. Reality as a construct does not reform itself, neither does it adhere to change on its own. The learner by confronting this reality and attempting to understand and critique it becomes the catalyst that sparks change and leads to a transformation, when they find themselves in an education system where the rigid curriculum and practice create a hierarchy between learner and educator in terms of knowledge dissemination.

Education has incorporated the study of film and, increasingly so, popular culture to teach and understand the ways in which learners navigate through their objective and subjective realities, and the kind of information they consume. Participatory methods provide a course for turning the current education system on its head, making it more participatory and transformational in nature, honouring and providing a forum for the dissemination of counterstories. A growing body of scholars have attempted to define the changing contours of peace education (Galtung 1969; Fountain 1999; Hantzopoulos 2001; Gur-Ze'ev 2005; Page 2004; Trifonas & Wright, 2011; Zembylas & Bekerman 2013; Brantmeier & Bajaj 2013) and there are scholars like Illich (1971), Hantzopoulos (2011) and Brantmeier (2011) who write about the

importance of having schools incorporate the methods and practices of peace education into their policies.

These methods need to incorporate embracing creativity and encourage students to understand, express and question their and the counterstories of other learners. Pamuk (2015) writes that our 'common sense tells us that creativity works against rules and regulations, traditions, bureaucracies and habits' (96). The creative process of producing counterstories utilises various mediums such as film, video, radio and poetry that aims to create a space wherein ideas of culture, race, gender and identity can be discussed. Creativity and practicality become the key words here, providing education with new innovative tools to captivate the learner's comprehension and engagement skills regarding education.

Through the course of this paper I have focused on the medium of PF and how learners can address and understand the world through the counterstories they co-create. The impact that PF can have on peace education is what this paper has explored, using examples from some participatory video research projects. The practicality of a PF project rests on the technology and culture of the participants and can often prove to be a barrier, especially when the researcher is the outsider. As mentioned in the sections before, researchers and learners alike bring their own preconceived notions of gender, equality, peace, culture, identity, race and class and they determine the impact that these stories will have on a wider audience (Bery 2003). There are several problems that can arise while utilising visual methods such as PV and PF, such as being too celebratory, insisting on or expecting participation, and authorship (Schwab-Cartas & Mitchell 2014). This can also be negated by the attitude it invokes amongst its disseminators as well as the learners involved in the process.

However, there are considerable benefits to

incorporating a participatory culture into education systems especially creative practices such as PF. This includes providing participants with the opportunity of ‘collective self-reflective enquiry ... in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social ... practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out’ (Kemmis & McTaggart 1998 as cited in Wheeler 2009, 11). This model also

applies to educators who through the process of participation finds themselves confronted with the ideas and barriers presented by learners. The impact that education and contemporary media have on individual learning today is both immense and limitless, and adequate resources such as participatory communication projects-participatory video, film and radio need to be utilised to provide learners with the opportunity to learn in creative and unique environments.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### Recommendations for educational policy

- Training and encouraging educators to implement participatory forms of teaching in the curriculum. This could include, something as small as putting aside 10-15 minutes of class to discuss issues of popular culture, current affairs, cultural studies, gender etc. with learners.
- Implementation of participatory methods of teaching and discussion: incorporating discussion groups (formal and informal), giving learners small participatory projects in groups and letting learners take charge of these projects with supervision from educators.
- Organization of informal groups, workshops within and outside an educational forum to discuss the idea and impact of participatory projects.
- Organizing symposiums, study days, conferences and workshops for educators and researchers to discuss participatory projects, what works and what does not and the impact that it has on learners.
- Create an encouraging environment with the basic facilities for learners to learn about, research and practice using equipment for their participatory film projects.
- Provide learners with safe and subsidized (if not free) access to resources, digital and physical, for researching their projects.

### Potential Future Research Questions

- How do questions of power and moral dilemma, between learners and educators or facilitators, impact the production of participatory film projects.
- The aspects of funding and procurement of technical equipment in participatory projects.
- The impact of participatory film project on learners with complex needs.
- The problems faced by learners, coming from traditional education systems, in adapting to participatory educational projects.
- The impact of mainstream cinema on effecting the ways in which learners consume and comprehend different forms of violence.
- How can peace education be incorporated into participatory projects and what are the most suitable practices to efficiently implement this?

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