Evolving Social and Political Dialogue through Participatory Video Processes

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Abstract: Spaces for social and political dialogue within communities and across social levels in inequitable contexts generally do not incorporate difference across community, or enable the most marginalized people to participate meaningfully. In this article, we propose that participatory video can contribute to building agonistic pluralism, namely a recognition of the unavoidable tensions between perspectives, and maintaining, rather than erasing, difference when working towards positive change. We draw on our comparable experience using participatory video methodologies to consider how it can be used to progressively build agency and deeper criticality, address difference across communities and to collectively construct political leverage.

Key words: Agonistic pluralism, governance, inclusion, participatory video, political dialogue

I. Introduction

There is intensifying academic concern about how the discriminatory norms and intractable social dynamics that maintain inequalities are to be shifted for those 'left-behind' by global economics (see Burns et al., 2013; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Halloran, 2016; Howard et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2016). This demands investigation of social and participatory accountability processes in context, and particularly whether citizens can hold the public institutions that serve them to account (Howard et al., 2017). Participatory local governance is assumed to enable this (Newell and Wheeler, 2006), and community-led approaches to development and conservation are the current trend, with buzz words (Cornwall, 2007) such as 'participation', 'collaboration', 'co-design' and

'co-management' commonly appearing within project proposals and policy circles. However, critical questions remain about how the most excluded groups can really participate meaningfully (see Shaw, 2015).

Governance is often typified as a fundamentally deliberative process (Connelly et al., 2006), yet optimistic notions of partnership belie the tendency of state agencies to set the terms of 'controlled-decontrolling' (Boonstra and Van Den Brink, 2007). In actuality, the spaces created for potential influence are defined by power imbalances (Derkzen et al., 2008) and dominated by middle-class groups with greater social capital (Chattopadhyay, 2015). There are examples of how the preconditions for inclusive dialogue with excluded groups can be instigated on the one hand, and enabling and receptive governance processes on the other (e.g. Gaventa, 2004; Shahrokh and Wheeler, 2014). For instance, participatory budgeting goes some way towards bridging the gap between 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' action (Souza, 2001). However, connecting social levels (e.g. local, county, region, global) to achieve genuine inclusiveness in contexts weighted by power imbalance requires innovative, contextualized approaches (Howard et al., 2018). Significantly, social accountability processes are unlikely to be equitable unless they also shift the unequal power dynamics at the root of marginalization, which needs longer-term action (Shaw et al., 2020). Time must be invested in building trust, mutual understanding and deeper insight within communities through iterative steps. It is important for decision-makers to involve local people and local knowledge to avoid the unintended consequences from their programmes and policies. However, there is also a need for academics and practitioners, who play a facilitating role in many of these participatory processes of engagement, to reflect on the end goal of social change and action, and the means of achievement (Wheeler et al., 2020).

Over the last decade, there has been a rapid expansion in the use of participatory visual methods to unearth neglected perspectives on complex issues (see Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006; Gubrium et al., 2015; Lewin and Shaw, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2017). Along with the accelerating evolution of digital media, participatory video has re-emerged as a promising participatory methodology for practitioner-researchers wanting to include overlooked and hidden perspectives, and build new relationships and social dynamics between marginalized communities and external agencies (Shaw, 2015). Participants can use video to show and tell (Humphreys and Lorac, 2002), and it incorporates other creative forms such as art, drama, comics and storytelling, in order to connect individuals, groups and wider publics (Shaw, 2021). Moreover, its relationship to television both motivates and re-positions participants (Shaw, 2012a). Yet, it is only more recently that claims of real-world influence as a consequence have been interrogated more critically (see Milne et al., 2012; Shaw, 2012b). Important ethical and intellectual questions have been raised, which echo those faced by other emerging visual methods, such as the politics and ethics of public exposure and reception (e.g. Kindon et al., 2012; Milne, 2012; Shaw, 2020; Wheeler, 2012), and the power dynamics between project actors (e.g. Mistry et al., 2014a; Shaw, 2016; Wheeler et al., 2020). Mindful that the tensions are unavoidable and intrinsically connected with the purpose, in this article, we present the theoretical underpinnings that have shaped and currently inform our participatory video practice to drive participatory action and learning through social and political dialogue.

Jay is an environmental geographer who has been using participatory video with Indigenous groups in South America for over ten years in the context of conservation and natural resource management (Bignante et al., 2016; Mistry and Berardi, 2012; Mistry et al., 2014b). Her participatory video journey began by exploring personal narratives around resource management, which exposed the external and internal factors driving social

and environmental change (Mistry et al., 2013). However, as noted by Barker and Pickerill (2019: 2), 'while many geographers seek to understand colonialism, few commit to supporting decolonisation, to putting their scholarly labour in the service of Indigenous communities resisting the imposition of colonial hegemonies – a crucial and critical leap.' Moving beyond just understanding, Jay's participatory video work then progressed towards changing government and policy discourse on Indigenous knowledge and practices, promoting Indigenous community owned solutions for sustainable environmental management (Berardi et al., 2017; Bilbao et al., 2019; Mistry et al., 2015a, 2016). Her current work focuses on combining science and Indigenous knowledge, researched through participatory video, for environmental governance (Mistry and Berardi, 2016), with a particular focus on protected areas, fire management and Indigenous rights. In 2016, she co-founded the Cobra Collective, a social enterprise that works to empower marginalized communities using technologies such as participatory video.

Jackie is a social psychologist, development geographer and participatory video practitioner with over 30 years' experience working in diverse community, health and development contexts in the Global South and North (e.g. Shaw, 1986, 2007, 2011, 2020). Motivated by participant's responses to the group process benefits, she co-founded the NGO Real Time in the 1980s specializing in participatory video with disadvantaged groups, and training for practitioners/researchers; she also co-wrote an early definitive guide (Shaw and Robertson, 1997). Critical of the unproblematized participatory video discourse (Shaw, 2012b, 2016), she completed her PhD thesis to build more nuanced theory and deeper knowledge about how to navigate both the possibilities and challenges more ethically and effectively in reality (Shaw, 2012a). She currently works on multi-country research programmes on themes of inclusion and accountability which apply visual and performative methods to drive participatory action research processes and pathways towards greater influence for marginalized groups in unaccountable contexts (Howard et al., 2018; Shaw, 2015, 2017a, b; Shaw et al., 2020).

Despite acknowledgement by decision-makers of the importance of listening to marginalized voices and local knowledge systems, it became apparent to Jackie and Jay that showing participatory video films to decision-makers at single events was not enough to change the situation for these groups. Furthermore, the tendency to view participatory video predominately as the means for representation or raising voice makes co-option and the consequent curtailment of transformative social possibilities more likely (Shaw, 2015). This is because conceptualizing participatory video *solely* as the means for groups to tell stories (often through short, quick-fix interventions) makes the video products the key outcome, and the endgame for decision-makers (Shaw, 2017a). Approached like this, as a diluted or state-led form of participation, once videos are watched, communities have been consulted, and participation achieved. In contrast, as Mistry et al. (2014b) showed while working with Indigenous communities in Guyana, communities are not static and pre-existent but dynamic, and different members surface and participate at different times through the participatory video processes. As Shaw (2015) explains, building community emergence is part of the purpose. However, methodological understanding, and navigation of the ethical and practical challenges associated with them, have been compounded by the tendency to theorize participatory video as a data production method (e.g. group film-making – Walsh, 2016; text production – de Lange et al., 2008; and interview recording – Lomax, 2012), rather than the means to drive social and political processes.

We do not wish to imply that the video content or 'text' is not important. What is produced during the iterative project stages is part of the communication context and

mediates interactions back and forth between people in the social and political spaces that evolve over time. Consequently, drawing on our research experiences, we focus not on the video content in isolation, but on the interplay between video activities, the recorded material and the conversations that are prompted in relationship to the specific forum. We make the case that participatory video, as a mechanism for social transformation in inequitable contexts, must be approached as a longer-term community engagement and mobilization process, which also works over time to foster inclusive, collaborative and responsive relations between participants and decision-makers, through 'video-mediated dialogue' (Shaw, 2017a, 2020).

At the same time, we are both acutely aware of our positionality as privileged, Western academics, and the questions these bring to participatory video processes (Mistry and Berardi, 2012; Mistry et al., 2014a; Shaw, 2016; Wheeler et al., 2020). Nevertheless, like Wheeler et al. (2018: 7), 'our commitment to a humanizing approach challenges the conception of research as an objective process of evidence building or knowledge extraction. Rather, the research process is itself a part of our social world and itself has a role in humanizing and transforming our realities.' In our experience, participatory video has a unique way of building social dialogue and more equitable relationships within and across community, and between communities and external stakeholders. This is different and, we argue, more ethical than the typical participatory video approach of singular short-term group film-making (Shaw, 2017a, 2020). In order to make change in inequitable contexts, it is critical to address the underlying causes of marginalization. Despite uncertain consequences and necessary risks, participatory video can facilitate social and political dialogue through supported, iterative and long-term processes. In this sense, following Rose (2007), we utilize participatory video's potential to generate new knowledge, but take a wider view of how and

where learning happens and resides; not only in the video output, but in the interactions, deliberations and dynamics prompted during video recording, editing and playback (Mitchell et al., 2017; Shaw, 2017b, 2021).

In the next section, we theorize our approach to participatory video using the concept of agonistic pluralism as a foundation for understanding the transformative possibilities and barriers in context. This is followed by a discussion on the unavoidable and intrinsically connected tensions that arise when using participatory video to facilitate a space for agonistic pluralism. Issues that have become apparent from our experiences include the pre-conditions and interactions within a group needed to create meaningful wider social and political dialogue, social and political dialogue within groups and across communities, and vertical/diagonal dialogue with external audiences. We end the article with some thoughts and questions for community practitioner-researchers using or thinking of applying participatory video in their work.

II. Conceptualizing social and political dialogue: Agonistic pluralism through longer-term participatory video processes

Many mechanisms for managing participatory and governance processes have an implicit goal to pursue consensus through activities of structured deliberation. This notion of 'consensus politics' is based on Habermas's (1989) idealized public sphere in which differences, such as gender, class and race, are put aside and all members of society can participate on an equal footing. In this vision, 'socially optimal solutions' are achieved through deliberative democracy and by eliminating conflict through rational argumentation. Habermas' theory of communication action (1987), and the allied notion of 'speech acts' (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1979), provide appropriate frames for exploring the application of participatory video processes to drive and mediate social and political dialogue. This is because they establish the

context for dialogue as 'in-between' social spaces (Shaw, 2015: 6), where a group comes together to consider a common concern, with the purpose in reaching mutual understanding through deliberation, in contrast to the pursuit of individual strategic goals and influence (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Communicative action ideally takes place in an accessible forum that disregards inequalities of status and affiliations, and establishes the necessary intersubjective conditions for inclusive and honest exchange of different viewpoints (Fultner, 2011). The speech acts that ensue are thus understood as performative; they do something in the world beyond the words spoken, such as building social bonds or driving group action (Austin, 1975).

While many have criticized Habermas' idealized interactional context as unrealistic (e.g. Fraser, 1990), his theory fulfils a productive function in clarifying both that mutual purpose cannot develop unless those involved are able to recognize each other perspectives as legitimate (Jovchelovitch, 2007), and why inviting marginalized groups to take part in representative public forums is not sufficient to engender open communication (Gaventa, 2006), due to the prevailing power dynamics that constrain their participation (Shaw, 2015). Corson et al. (2015), for example, describe how non-state actors representing the interests of civil society at the Rio+20 Earth Summit had to abandon their radical positions and unpopular views so as not to jeopardize access and formal participation in future opportunities. Fletcher (2014) in his analysis of the 2012 World Conservation Congress illustrates how strategies such as segregating attendees by theme, limiting time for questions and promoting 'politeness' were used to suppress dissenting perspectives while advancing neoliberal conservation policies. This 'erasure of difference' through the domination of powerful interests cannot be overcome only through tokenistic inclusion. Matulis and Moyer (2017) argue that as well as addressing gender and cultural bias issues and widening the pool of participants in environmental governance, it is

also necessary to take into account the multiple unique perspectives and contested visions that underrepresented individuals might bring; 'we can, and should, embrace their diversity of ideas as well – including the ones that exist in tension with, or directly challenge, our own' (p. 281).

Consensus politics is ultimately concerned with eliminating conflict in the form of antagonisms (or opposing arguments) between different actors. However, Mouffe (1999) argues that antagonisms are fundamental and persistent, and cannot be eliminated from social relations. Social order is created, and the meaning of social institutions is fixed through 'hegemonic practices' or the arrangement of power relations between antagonistic parties. Nevertheless,

> every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices.... What is at a given moment accepted as the 'natural' order, jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices. It is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that is exterior to the practices that brought it into being. Every order is therefore susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices that attempt to disarticulate it in an effort to install another form of hegemony. (Mouffe, 2013: 2)

For Mouffe, the antagonistic dimension is the 'political'; the site of unproductive contestations 'between enemies' marked by an absence of respect for the divergent positions of others. 'Agonism', on the other hand, represents the dimension of politics, which is 'the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organise human coexistence' (Mouffe, 2013: 2–3). It thus encompasses respect for diversity between 'adversaries', through promoting the right to defend her or his position (Mouffe, 2009). Agonistic pluralism acknowledges, therefore, that it is conflict, expressed as tension, friction and dissension, that defends against the erasure of difference (Hage, 2012), and that the dimension of politics is a space

where difference does not disable the commitment to work through and produce social outcomes. It also has the important implication that rather than inclusive spheres of public deliberation, minority or alternative perspectives are better represented by contrasting counter-narratives (Fine, 2016; Fraser, 1990).

Participatory video can play a crucial role in communicating alternative stories as agonistic interventions within the context of counter-hegemonic development and conservation struggles. For example, Mistry et al. (2013) show how the state discourse on the 1969 Rupununi Uprising in Guyana, a local movement for autonomous determination led by non-Indigenous residents, had largely concealed the brutality and oppression of Makushi Indigenous inhabitants. While state narratives focused on national security and territorial integrity, emerging themes from the participatory video process focused on the unexpectedness and surprise of the event, how external forces had manipulated and betrayed the Indigenous communities, and how the resulting brutal repression was used as a way of instilling fear in order to maintain external control. Working with the same Indigenous communities, Mistry et al. (2014b) illustrate the performativity of contemporary indigeneity, and how Indigenous representations articulate multiple identities to promote particular environmental interests and worldviews to the local, national and global scales. The participatory video process allowed the Makushi participants to make '…symbolic border crossings between Indigenous and 'modern' identities in ways that are both self-aware and that serve to reproduce the image of a simultaneously traditional and progressive peoples' (p. 706).

Participatory video thus provides a means to bring counter-narratives and unvoiced interpretations to wider public attention, which can help if marginalized people do not currently have the confidence, capacities, access or resources to present them in person, or if the communication spaces do not enable them to be meaningfully included. This occurred with slum-dwellers with disabilities in Kenya (Shaw, 2017a), whose experiences were brought to county and national decision-makers, despite the barriers to attending in person such as the lack of wheelchairs and financial resources, and the discomfort. It is also possible to incorporate dissenting views on an issue in one film, or in a compilation to be shown together, which supports agonistic pluralism.

However, we argue that approaching participatory video solely as the means for storytelling, particularly within one-off, short-term participatory video interventions, often assumes community consensus on an issue through the production of a group 'output' (e.g. a film), which can easily lead to missing the differences of experience or opinion amongst people, or the silencing of dissent. For example, during the Citymakers participatory video project in India (Praxis, 2013; Wheeler et al., 2020), people living precarious lives in three urban contexts, and brought together because they build or service the city without reaping economic benefits, produced a *film* (https://vimeo.com/74282091) on shared issues across the continuum of their experiences as homeless street-dwellers, slum-dwellers and tenement residents relocated following slum clearance. However, the most important research learning on how change can happen came from the differences between the settings (see Wheeler et al., 2020). In contrast to the assumption that street-dwellers must be in the worst situation, people here had regular work, strong support networks and were feeling empowered through their successful action to secure electricity and pension provision. By comparison, the tenement residents who had been forcefully removed from livelihoods, now lived outside the city with poor services and limited transport, and alcoholism and sexual abuse were endemic due to community norms breaking down. This revealed how lack of hope, anger and stigma constrain positive change, and how solidarity and collective action enables it (Shaw, 2017b).

Although these insights informed the research learning (Burns et al., 2013), and the

stories were incorporated in the *Participate* (https://vimeo.com/showcase/4488354/video/80075380) documentary, they were not in the original Citymakers film—they came from the interactions and dynamics of the participatory video processes, which also revealed gender aspects that required a second iteration of women-only research engagement. Indeed, complex knowledge like this can be hard to convey in a single video, and this means less tangible understanding can be missed if the focus is on 'output' films rather than the dialogue they prompt (e.g. Kindon, 2003; Shaw, 2015). These difficulties can be reinforced in situations where different actors in a project have different visions of the purpose of participatory video; Mistry et al. (2014a) describe, for example, how specific civil society organization project partners felt that participatory video was something they did not need to deal with directly, but that the end products would have great potential use in their advocacy work. The production of a 'dissemination' material thus precludes the possibilities of further discussion and debate within a project. The pertinent question is, therefore, what are the elements of the participatory video process which maximize the potential for creating agonistic pluralism through longer-term iterative processes?

III. Navigating towards agonistic pluralism in reality/in context

In this section, we discuss what participatory video offers in generating agonistic pluralism. Through case examples, we raise some unavoidable tensions between the possibilities and the intrinsically connected tensions, and how they can be navigated most successfully. These include the tension between relational context for inclusive dialogue, as well as between superficial knowledge (in short-term projects) and criticality; the tension between building collective narratives/knowledge and uncovering differences in the group, or across a community, and the tension between building awareness/mutual understanding as a

basis for collaboration with external agencies, and challenging audiences through bringing contestations and differing understandings into wider political spaces.

Progressively building agency and deeper criticality

The first contribution of participatory video towards agonistic pluralism is to generate the trusting relations and interactive context required for participants to develop confidence to express their differing opinions within the group; and then reflect more deeply together on damaging assumptions, dominant narratives and underlying/systemic causes, in order to transform their understandings. Research in contexts of marginalization often involve people with limited self-efficacy, or the sense of 'can-do', due to a lack of previous capacity-building opportunities, or internalized stigma which cause them to doubt their own abilities, or the value of their knowledge. Participatory video projects generally begin in 'safe' spaces or counter or semi-public forums (Fraser, 1990), in which marginalized groups can build agency and re-frame experiences, before later entering into video-mediated dialogue with external audiences. Participants are motivated by gaining skills they perceive as valuable, and it is well documented that success at the new challenges afforded can increase their sense of capacity and expand future possibilities (e.g. Shaw, 2012a, 2017c). For example, a woman slum-dweller in India reported 'I don't even know how to read or write. And now…. telling people our problems on video' (Wheeler et al., 2020: 56), and a father on a comparable project about education issues in rural Indonesia said 'I thought cameras were only for educated people, but we can do it' (Shaw, 2017a: 19). In contrast, handing out cameras unsupported can be a disempowering experience, which is likely to perpetuate within-group power dynamics (e.g. Bivens et al., 2017; Shaw, 2020). For example, on a mixed women's project in the UK, exploring group-building, experience diversity and

critical reflection processes, one woman said 'if you gave me a camera and sent me off, I'd probably go and sit on a wall. All that would do would make me think, oh shit, I can't do this', and another said '… if you don't feel confident you tend to stay in your comfort zone. I would have … stood at the back and never actually had a go with the camera' (Shaw 2012a: 169).

Consequently, practitioners need to facilitate videoing activities in order to avoid processes being dominated by the most confident. In illustration, one young man in the Indian Citymakers project kept trying to push the women off the camera. One local facilitator took him aside, and pointed out that he was doing what others did to him as a Dalit, for example when work opportunities were barred due to stigma. They then reassured him he would get a fair share of turns (Wheeler et al., 2020). It is often necessary to intervene in the dynamics to achieve an inclusive relational context for agonistic pluralism; for example, through ensuring everyone takes turns in every role, which is consistently highlighted by participatory video participants as enabling (Shaw, 2012a, 2016, 2017a, 2017c). And it is the practitioners input at the beginning to facilitate activities to build participants' agency and group collaboration, which provides the possibility for shifting dynamics. For example, during the community screening at the end of the Indonesian education project, the village chief asked how the women had got so confident speaking on camera, as they did not usually talk in public meetings (Shaw, 2017a). We propose this is a consequence of the intervention in the gender dynamics achieved by the participatory video process. In this way, participatory video provides a foundation for people to take action socially and/or politically, but these shifts in power are likely to be transitory unless reinforced over time.

In discussing a community-based participatory video project with young women in Hyderabad, India, Singh et al. (2017) suggest that everyone has agency within them to resist power (even if restricted), either in an overt or covert way. However, due to the pervasiveness of power relations, they draw attention to how it was the long-term and supported nature of the participatory video process that engendered agency, thereby enabling the young women in their study to resist social norms, pursue their valued goals and become agents. This was through, for example, monetary resources in the form of stipends that gave the women earning power, as well as technical skills that meant they could pursue further video-related careers and opportunities. We have similar findings from our own research: in Guyana, long-term participatory video helped Indigenous community researchers with their technical abilities, but more importantly building confidence, leadership and agency has positively contributed to their own, as well as their communities wellbeing (Mistry et al., 2015b). Similarly, in Nairobi, Kenya, young slum-dwellers explored solutions to personal insecurity and sanitation through recording video material, and using it to engage wider community audiences in discussing what could be done and then acting together. For example, during a video-mediated meeting, community stakeholders realized how torches are shined onto security light sensors to turn them off, galvanizing the young men to form patrol teams to scare muggers and create safe passage home (Shaw, 2017a). Videoing activities have a performative aspect (see Shaw, 2012a, 2017a), which grows leadership capacities and re-positions participants more influentially. In the Nairobi case, the young people reported that they now felt that the wider community viewed them as respectable, and saw themselves as social change actors, and have continued active involvement in community improvement projects (Gathigi and Shaw, 2014; Shaw, 2021).

It is also apparent that time and facilitation input is needed to enable participants' agendas to emerge, and for them to move beyond superficial discussions, and re-frame their experiences more critically. Researchers using participatory video have often noted that

the videos produced, particularly during early process iterations, can be relatively shallow or reproduce stereotypes. For example, Rogers (2018) illustrated how some films, co-produced by students and teachers in a school-based project in Canada to explore a range of social justice issues, including intersecting dimensions of class, gender and dis/ability, actually reproduced sexist, homophobic and heteronormative narratives despite the critical intention. It is, however, not surprising that participants reflect normative assumptions initially, as discriminatory structural aspects are internalized, and it takes trusting relations and time to unpack and question damaging social norms and attitudes in order to develop deeper critical insight. In the example of the UK women's project mentioned above, the group reflected that they picked the impact of technology as their first issue of focus just because they were prompted by using video, and felt that time for another production cycle would have enabled them to choose more critically (Shaw, 2012a). Adults with learning disabilities also reflected on how much time it had taken to assert their own agendas rather than make videos to external priorities (Shaw, 2012a).

Our experiences running longer-term and iteratively progressing participatory video processes suggest that participants themselves should be seen as the first audience for their productions in the 'safe' group context (Shaw, 2015). Recording and playback can assist people in standing back from what they have said, and reflecting more critically through facilitated dialogue about what the video means and what is missing. For example, Mitchell et al. (2017: 50–58) consider how rural teachers 'spoke back' to the adult-centric and moralistic attitudes to youth sexuality in their first films on sex education for HIV-AIDS prevention in South Africa. They then made more nuanced films covering the critical issues they became aware of on reflection, with greater attention to the audience. In our own approach, we also emphasize that agonistic knowledge may arise in the discussions after playback, and does not need to be recorded on video to be of value,

but should be documented as crucial research learning (Shaw, 2017b).

Navigating between fostering collective agency and recognizing difference

Community emergence, the idea that communities are not static and can surface and evolve through participatory video processes (Shaw, 2015; Shaw et al., 2020), supports the notion that small-scale gains (Maurer and Githens, 2009) acquired through participatory video help shift power relations to build collective identities and action. 'Collective relationships evolve through group interaction, and then the resulting sense of solidarity provides the basis for social transformation through …. the shared capacity to mobilize resistance and political leverage' (Shaw, 2015: 629). Undertaken over an extended time, participatory video can lay the foundations for collective agency needed to drive social action and influence a governance response. We interpret this as reflecting an agonistic politics at the local level, where those with different experiences or opposing views arrive at a common goal to change the hegemonic order, facilitated through participatory video. However, moving from a focus on individual to collective agency through participatory video generates a number of practice tensions. These include establishing inclusive dynamics versus the balance of individual, group and wider community needs, as was raised in the last section. It also includes the tension between constructing collective narratives and reflecting the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences about an issue (Shaw, 2012a, b; Shaw et al., 2020). This was illustrated by the Citymakers example described earlier. Citymakers seemed an appropriate collective identity to mobilize around to influence urban policy, but the different contextual knowledge that emerged in the process raised questions about it as an anchor for collective action. It was necessary to explore intersectional issues with subgroups, such as Dalit women,

to build inclusion of more marginalized viewpoints in the group, but this could have undermined the collective effort to challenge unaccountable policy makers (Wheeler et al., 2020). This was not predicted by the local partners and illustrates the need for practice adaption as processes unfold, such as by dividing into subgroups to explore intersectional issue aspects in this case. Nevertheless, our experience suggests it can be better to start participatory video with more homogeneous groups before bringing people together to find common ground across difference, especially when there are intransigent power dynamics at play (Shaw, 2016).

Longer-term participatory video processes can provide an opportunity for multiple strands of inquiry in a specific context, where different community groupings initially take part in separate participatory video processes to develop different perspectives on an issue. To illustrate, in highly patriarchal Indigenous communities in Guyana, supporting women, youth and men to explore challenges around protected areas and traditional knowledge separately through participatory video, showed that men are particularly worried about natural resources such as fish and game, women's focus is on food preparation and associated healthy lives, while youth emphasize a lack of knowledge on the management and governance of protected areas (D. Jafferally, 2019, personal communication). Currently, the '*Seeing Conflict at the Margins'* project (https://seeingconflict.org) is using a similar approach to explore conflict generated by green-energy development. In Kenya, local peer researchers have been trained to run participatory video processes with multiple stakeholder groups in rural communities living near large geothermal and wind power developments, in order to build knowledge on the different ways conflict is experienced and interpreted. This has included separate engagement with groups of women, men, elders, youth, elites, village-dwellers and pastoralists, from different tribal communities affected by the changes. The focus has been

on maintaining a multiplicity of meanings, or agonistic pluralism—including from those who benefit from the development, and those who do not, and the nuances in context—in the range of video materials produced. There are some collective narratives or messages, aimed at external audiences, but they resulted from deep collective analysis of the pluralistic stories, and also include contrasting experiences (Lind and Shaw, 2019). After an event at the Rift Valley Forum in Kenya for a diverse audience of academics, duty bearers and activists, one Nairobi resident commented that it was completely eye-opening as her assumption was green energy was altogether good, and another official professed to be completely shocked, but thought hearing how local people have experienced developments is vital feedback to avoid or mitigate future unintended consequences (JS in personal communication).

Focusing more on the process within an agonistic framework also allows us to see participatory video as a method that mediates tensions and dissension while engendering reflection and agency. Whiting et al. (2018), for example, show how paradoxical tensions in participatory video between participant–observer and intimate–distance roles are accommodated and embraced in ways that go beyond a simple redressing of power relationships. In their research on how contemporary technologies and social media affect work–life boundaries, the combination of verbal and visual data both captured and helped manage the tensions arising from the participatory video process. Atehortúa (2015) worked with a group of barrio women who were about to establish their 'socialist commune' in Chacao. At the time this was the most elite municipality in Caracas, Venezuela, and the collaboration shows how the audio and visual cues in participatory video represented an 'extended language', i.e. people's emotions, expressions and gestures (Mistry and Berardi, 2012; Ramella and Olmos, 2005), which allowed spokeswomen much greater depth of communication in managing conflict. In a

study focused on water and sanitation issues in underserved settlements of Accra, Ghana and Cape Town, South Africa, Tremblay and Harris (2018) describe how an enhanced sense of empathy and emotion through participatory video helped to develop embodied understandings and narratives of the complexities of those living with (in)access to water and sanitation. The materiality of the video camera, through recording, play back, editing, sharing and reviewing digital video data also enhances opportunities for self-reflexivity and managing tensions amongst participants. Whiting et al. (2018) found that the technological affordances of the video camera offered the participants a reflexive tool to note their tensions, and this has been observed by other practitioners (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2017; Yang 2012), and in some cases create solution pathways and improvements for themselves.

Working with marginalized communities in Kenya and Palestine, Shaw (2015) identified that negotiating the unavoidable tensions that arise is underpinned by the longer-term relationship building at the heart of practice, and by providing safe spaces for dialogue and learning in progressively diversifying sites. Mistry et al. (2015b) highlight the messy, contested, dynamic and constantly evolving nature of participatory video research, and how Indigenous researchers in Guyana navigated the day-to-day conflicts and tensions through their long-term, tacit and reciprocal relationships in the communities. This can enable differences between people to be surfaced and worked through. For example, Shaw (2018) highlights the strong relationships forged between diverse transgender communities in Chennai, India, as a main achievement of the participatory video project. However, at one stage, tensions between the different groups erupted, connected with intra-group dynamics between the more and less powerfully positioned participants due to differences such as caste and relative wealth. This emphasized the barriers to participation for the most stigmatized transgender participants, and the importance

of addressing intersectional inequalities (Howard et al., 2018; Shaw, 2018). However, the bonds formed in the participatory video process, and time for the iterative processes, enabled these underlying issues to be expressed and worked through, and the conflict resolved, with the previously disparate groups continuing to collaborate afterwards.

Political receptivity and responsiveness
In the examples discussed above, the participatory video processes of sharing knowledge across communities and between generations, helped to surface representation contestations, as well as multiple identities shaped by a nexus of social relations, which could be used to counter political and colonial tactics of denigrating or commodifying local cultures and diversity, i.e. a form of political listening (Wheeler et al., 2018). However, while agonistic politics maintains the importance of voice and deconstructing identity, only focusing on these could risk '…placing too great a stress on the aspect of freedom understood as action in the context of speech acts and the presentation of the self, and not taking seriously enough the issue of justice, of what is to be done' (Mouffe, 2013: 13). The third aspect of participatory video practice that needs to be addressed to maximize the possibilities of agonistic pluralism is the tension between building awareness as a basis for collaboration with external allies, and provoking these audiences to think critically by bringing challenging views and interpretations of reality into wider political space.

Many practitioner-researchers motivated by social justice are enthusiastic about using visual methodologies because of the inherent possibilities of 'speech action' through the outputs produced (Gubrium et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2017). For example, women in the occupied Palestinian Territories communicated to global decision-makers about the social effects of life behind the separation wall, which was an important outcome for them (Shaw, 2015), and the aforementioned parents

and students in rural Indonesia were able to raise their problems with education authorities and agencies in Jakarta (2017a). However, many academics using visual methods, such as participatory video for vertical communication, have interrogated not only whether decision-makers are listening (Alexandra, 2015; Braden, 2004), but what they actually do in response (Couldry, 2019; Shaw, 2015).

Plush (2016) defines the 'equitable voice' pathway in participatory video as processes that focus on increasing citizen influence, where participants are adequately equipped to actively engage in formal and informal policymaking spaces and claim a response. In her analysis of participatory video practitioners' approaches, she identifies three key qualities: strengthening participants' agency so they can socially and/or politically act using their own knowledge, capabilities and power; generating voice receptivity or more responsive listening by decision-makers; and fostering more equitable exchange between citizens and decision-makers through greater connectedness, empathy and mutual trust (Plush, 2016). This resonates with our approach: we have already highlighted the need to build agency to generate the conditions for meaningful participation, and the time, trust and iterative process necessary for agnostic pluralism across difference. Furthermore, becoming knowledge producers through video-making, and utilizing presenter–audience conventions during screenings to disrupt the status quo of 'who speaks' and 'who listens', are understood to position marginalized groups more influentially than usual (Shaw, 2012a). For example, being in control of video-mediated engagement enabled children with disabilities and their parents in Kenya to draw influential duty bearers to the informal settlement, deliver strong policy messages and record national leaders commitments to hold them to account (Shaw, 2017a).

However, encouraging the 'valuing of voice' (Couldry, 2019) is much more difficult to achieve when building dialogue between the most marginalized groups and decision-makers.

This is because development and conservation practice still tends to 'position people living in poverty… as potential "listeners," receivers of information and aid' (Tacchi, 2010: 9). And no matter how persuasive their message, positive change cannot occur if those in power choose to divert attention elsewhere. For example, a UN high-level panel member promised to support young slum-dwellers message that 'we cannot tackle wider social problems alone, so we want you to work with us' (Shaw, 2017a: 29), but this never materialized. Indeed, both groups in Kenya found that leveraging meaningful support (financial or political) from local and county-level leaders was the biggest sticking point in video-mediated engagement—'when we started going uphill… the community… they expected a lot… because we… involved the area chief and other NGOs….' (Shaw, 2017a: 28). In actuality, social change does not happen predictably, and persevering when things are difficult can be part of the process (Green, 2016). Having galvanized the local community and experienced some local attitude shifts, despite the entrenched stigmatization of children with disabilities and their parents, the participatory video team continued to engage with and lobby local leaders. Then, following further video-mediated dialogue, they managed to build alliances with NGOs, businesses and churches, secure weekly allowances for children with disabilities previously hidden at home, and run a weekly therapy facility at the informal school (Shaw, 2017a). This illustrates that it is important to invest time in fostering relations with influential leaders and other stakeholders through longer-term engagement processes, as well as with participants.

However, moving from antagonism to agonism requires acute attention to enhancing 'listening across difference', defined as a 'subtle shift, from seeking better understanding of an 'other' to listening for better understanding of relationships and complicities, issues and the workings of privilege' (Dreher, 2009: 451). It acknowledges that oppressive systems often

benefit from the silence of others or in withholding responses (Dobson, 2014; Fine 2016), and that participatory video must pay attention to systemic power if it is to contribute to social and environmental action. As Mouffe (2013: 6–7) postulates

> …the fundamental question is not how to arrive at a consensus reached without exclusion, because this would require the construction of an 'us' that would not have a corresponding 'them'. This is impossible because…. the very condition for the constitution of an 'us' is the demarcation of a 'them'. The crucial issue then is how to establish this us/them distinction, which is constitutive of politics, in a way that is compatible with the recognition of pluralism. Conflict should not be eradicated….. [and] others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned.

The argument for using participatory video to foster political receptivity is that it can bring people's realities to decision-makers in a credible way (Shaw, 2017a), and videos, along with other visual outputs, are assumed to generate empathy through human-to-human emotional connection, which Jupp et al. (2014) argue can compel decision-makers to act. In practice, our research has identified that decision-maker's responses after watching participant's videos are more nuanced and uncontrollable, with associated risks such as misinterpretation, mistrust or negative reactions. While some county-level and national decision-makers in Indonesia and Kenya emotionally connected with people's stories, and this led to some following supportive action, others reacted aggressively. For example, one Kenyan dutybearer was offended by a participant video that concluded that disabled children have been forgotten and ignored. He was angry that it gave the wrong impression of government efforts, rather than seeing it as a way into understanding how people experienced the reality—potentially a valuable feedback

mechanism (Shaw, 2017a). A similar reaction was given by a protected area manager in Guyana who became defensive of his actions rather than respond in a constructive way to feedback from Indigenous groups on how to improve relations between them and the authority (D. Jafferally, 2018, personal communication). In many cases, decision-makers find it hard to transcend their 'expert status' and patronize participant's views or criticize them for their actions, rather than recognizing their own lack of understanding of the grinding reality and impossible choices involved in living in poverty (Shaw, 2017a).

While encouraging decision-makers to listen more responsively and value agonistic pluralism, fostering more accountable relations and equitable collaboration between marginalized groups and influential allies is even more problematic. For example, a project with township residents in South Africa used a transformative storywork methodology, including personal digital storytelling, storyscapes and participatory video, to tackle police corruption with residents facing 'everyday' township violence (Wheeler et al., 2018). This required 'political listening' within the group as they worked through their 'political subjectivities' or different positions and perspectives on what should be included in their collective film *Gangsters in Uniform*, in particular how much it should focus on police corruption as a key source of township violence. Despite recognition of residents lived experiences when the film was shown publicly, some police responded negatively to the content, and this was thought by local project partners to impede the development of ongoing collaborative relationships with potential police allies. Nevertheless, this was part of the research learning about what enables and constrains the building of accountable relations (Howard et al., 2018).

Our experience of participatory video-mediated dialogue with decision-makers highlights the importance of preparing audiences as

to the engagement purpose, including attention to framing in invitations and at the event, and fuller introduction to the context and the participatory video process. We have found that using participatory video exercises with decision-makers can increase the likelihood of both understanding and the development of ongoing working relations with allies. For example, some Indonesian decision-makers suggested that they could incorporate participatory video in participatory planning processes as a way to instigate 'social dialogue', and local-level chiefs and leaders wanted to actively collaborate with young slum-dwellers to tackle security issues once they had both experienced some participatory video activities and watched the group's videos. In contrast, a protected areas manager in Guyana missed the opportunity to connect with the method and appreciate Indigenous communities' knowledge and ideas, because he sent junior staff to the video screening, and this led to later misunderstandings and antagonistic behaviour. These experiences highlight the need to be much clearer about whether the purpose of a particular video-mediated engagement is to build Habermas' mutual understanding or provoke critical thinking through challenging audiences (Shaw, 2017a: 41). There is clearly much work to do with decision-maker audiences to build awareness of the importance of agonistic pluralism and knowledge about participatory video's potential contribution in generating the conditions for it.

IV. Conclusion

In her book on agonistic pluralism, Mouffe (2013) highlights the important role of critical art in unsettling the dominant hegemony, by creating a multiplicity of sites for alternative perspectives and counter-narratives, and more specifically, how creative practices reach people at the affective level to engender emotional responses. We have found that as a communication practice, participatory video allows expressive, open and responsive engagement with people, both within the group as they create and discuss their video materials and with external audiences who watch and reflect on their outputs. It can provide the context for marginalized people to deepen insight on their issues through progressive videoing and reflection cycles, and also the means for them to use this knowledge to raise awareness or influence others.

We have focused in this article on participatory video, but other participatory creative methodologies offer parallel possibilities as Mouffe (2013) envisaged. For example, there are comparable examples of other visual and performative methodologies such as theatre, music, dance and collaborative film being used for longer-term community engagement and as the context for and process of social and political dialogue (see Fine, 2016; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2008; Lewin and Shaw, 2021). As participatory projects like this tend to happen in contexts of highly unequal power relations, it is impossible with these comparable approaches to compel influential decision-makers to actively respond through one-off encounters (Bivens et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2018; Johnston, 2016).

In their reflections and critique of participatory video used in the context of water and sanitation issues in underserved settlements of Accra, Ghana and Cape Town, Tremble and Harris (2018) caution that participatory video is unlikely to affect broader power dynamics and top-down governance, and that 'despite the intention to empower communities, the reality of designing, facilitating and implementing participatory video in an ethical, sustainable manner remains complex, and often out of reach (particularly with a long-term view)' (p. 181). We would turn this around, and say its only through approaching participatory video as a longer-term process of both community and decision-maker engagement which helps 'to understand the circuits of dispossession' (Fine, 2016: 363), that it is possible to progressively work through the intra- and inter-group tensions and conflicts towards an agonistic pluralism.

Despite seemingly simple from the outside, participatory video is a complex, non-linear and progressively unfolding process, which needs sensitive and power-aware facilitation. As we have shown, the relational context for inclusive dialogue and criticality needs to be generated and supported. Practitioner-researchers need to be aware of the tensions between building collective narratives and knowledge, and uncovering differences in a group, or across a community, and also develop knowledge of how to navigate them effectively and ethically. In developing an agonistic pluralism within and across communities, there is also a tension between building mutual understanding as a basis for collaboration with external agencies, and challenging audiences through bringing contestations and differing opinions into wider political spaces, which requires careful thought during research design, investigation and audiencing activities and in the ongoing work to develop allies and collaborative relations.

In order to make real change for those 'left behind', those considering using participatory video for participatory research or community development purposes need to ask themselves why it is suitable to the project purpose, and how best it can contribute in context. In particular, it is important to realize that one-off interventions over a short timescale can do more harm than good, and therefore whether using them in this way is ethical or appropriate. Maximizing the potential for building agonistic pluralism involves applying participatory video as an *extended* process to ensure meaningful inclusive governance which is more able to recognize and thus respond constructively to the diversity of perspectives and experiences in context.

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