Bridging the Divide with Participatory Video

Usha Sundar Harris

Abstract

Participatory video (PV) projects have put video technology in the hands of the most marginalised in society for self-representation and social reform. PV has gained a favoured place in many development projects and has been used by non-government organisations, development workers and indeed communities themselves to foster dialogue and to instigate change and empowerment. The case study discussed here combined action research and visual ethnography to study the process of PV production and how the community's engagement in it contributes to dialogue and community building in a post-conflict society. This study found that rural women in Fiji use social capital – their relationships and social networks – as a key element in video production to highlight community needs and linkages.

Introduction

For a society to prosper within a culture of peace and goodwill, it should encourage a dialogic and participatory environment in order to create effective links between diverse and disparate segments of its citizenry. It is not enough for communities to have strong 'bonding' elements which bind homogeneous groups; 'bridging' dimensions which encourage associations across gender, ethnic, social and geographic divides (Putnam, 2001) are also necessary to engender inclusiveness and cohesion. Strategic action is required in multicultural societies to encourage this network of linkages to flourish through participatory politics as well as community-based reconciliation efforts which encourage dialogue between alienated groups.

In Fiji, historically, the ruling political elite have encouraged a notion of disparate identities through the political process. This has created two levels of discourse – the dominant political discourse of identity poli-

tics prevalent in urban areas, and the day-to-day relationships based on inter-dependence and goodwill, especially among rural communities. The government information brochure promotes the role of media in Fiji as one of helping 'to increase social cohesion' and 'playing a pivotal and mutual role in nation building' (Government of Fiji, 2004). Unfortunately, mainstream media coverage lends credence to the hegemonic discourses, thus reinforcing the fissures instead of the linkages. Instead of engaging in projects of nation building the media in Fiji has relied on formulaic programming within structures which exacerbate the ethnic division instead of creating innovative programming which can encourage dialogue between the races. In the absence of a national policy of social integration and a nation-building agenda of the mainstream media, civil society organisations (CSOs) can play an important role in fostering bridging ties in the community. This can be achieved through projects of reconciliation which encourage dialogue and community building between ethnic groups using constructive communication methods. Community based media is one form of process-centred communication which can provide a valuable forum for disengaged groups to come together through participation-based production activities to co-operatively produce programmes about issues vital for their communities.

Over the past eight years in Fiji, there has been a growth in community media with several low-power radio stations being operated by diverse groups – femTALK Radio, a mobile radio-in-a-suitcase project operated by femLINK Pacific; Radio Pasifik, an educational, non-profit community radio station at the University of the South Pacific, as well as the proliferation of Christian-based radio stations. These are all clustered in urban centres, with the exception of femLINK radio, which conducts monthly broadcasts in regional centres inviting participation of rural women.

This article includes findings of an ethnographic case study of a participatory video (PV) workshop which the author conducted with a multicultural group of rural women in Navua and discusses its implications for dialogue and community building in a post-conflict society. The idea of participatory media as a dialogic tool is explored within the context of the local culture and the ways in which producers integrate local knowledge, networks, norms and practices in the production process and content. Social capital is used as a conceptual tool to aid in the analysis and understanding of the process of participatory production where community producers appropriate media technology to strengthen their networks of influence. The study locates the discussion of PV within frameworks of

empowerment and transformation thus highlighting the connections rather than the disconnections between people.

Participatory Video for Social Change

Participatory communication is people-centred, process-oriented and contextualised in a local setting, utilising local knowledge instead of top down, professionally disseminated messages with a predetermined agenda. People for whom change is being sought have a say as to the ways in which they want this to occur. The use of participatory media enables people to produce and distribute content according to their own needs instead of being reliant on professional producers. White describes it as 'a democratic process, characterised by dialogue, creative and consensual thinking, and collective action' (2003: 20). Cultural identity of local communities is paramount. For change to occur within a community, people have to engage in the message production - a horizontal process which engages members of a community to exchange views on a range of topics such as literacy, health, agricultural productivity, land ownership, gender and religion (Waisbord, n.d.). Thus, participation of communities in message-making is essential.

While earlier discussion of participatory media occurred around the concept of media democratisation arising from a binary framework of big media versus small media, recent discussion has focused on its transformative potential and its use in communication for social change (Lee, 2007; Rennie, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001). Rodriguez has conceptualised 'citizens' media' as a lived experience whereby the process of message production catalyses a diversity of experiences:

> It implies having the opportunity to create one's own images of self and environment; it implies being able to recodify one's own identity with the signs and codes that one chooses, thereby disrupting the traditional acceptance of those imposed by outside sources; it implies becoming one's own storyteller, regaining one's own voice; it implies reconstructing the self-portrait of one's own community and one's own culture [...] (2001: 763).

In this reading, researchers seek to understand how an individual or group's engagement in message production increases their ability to critically understand oneself, the community and the wider society. It is this conceptualisation of community media that has influenced my research.

Since 1970 participatory video has gained a favoured place in many development projects and has been used by non-government organisa-

tions, development workers and indeed communities themselves to foster dialogue and to instigate change and empowerment. Video has the power to begin dialogue through group work and cultural exchange, thus assisting in reconciliation between communities which have experienced a history of conflict (Rodriguez, 2004). Shirley White recognises the deeper implications of video as a tool for social change when she states:

> Participatory video as a process is a tool for individual, group and community development. It can serve as a powerful force for people to see themselves in relation to the community and become conscientized about personal and community needs. It brings about a critical awareness that forms the foundation for creativity and communication. Thus it has the potential to bring about personal, social, political and cultural change. That's what video power is all about (2003: 64).
> Theories that inform the discussion of PV are derived from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy of teaching and learning with impoverished peasants in South America, and the theoretical discourses in communication for social change and participatory communication (see Jacobson and Servaes, 1999; White et al., 1994; White and Patel, 1994)

PV projects in many parts of the world have put video technology in the hands of the most marginalised in society for self-representation and social reform. Video has given voice to non-literate women in projects such as Video SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in India (Stuart, 1989) and the Mayan women in Guatemala by bridging 'the oral with the technical', thus allowing their voices to be heard in global forums (Guidi, 2003: 253). The best practice case studies have been documented by various authors (Braden and Huong, 1998; Gumucio Dagron, 2001; Johansson, 1999; Riano, 1994; Rodriguez, 2001; White, 2003). There are also hundreds of PV projects which have gone undocumented.

Citizens' video collectives have sprung up to support the work of video activists around the world with online presence. 'Video power' is now well recognised through the incredible success of video distribution websites such as *YouTube*. Videos are available to international audiences through vodcasting and video streaming on websites spanning the many human rights and advocacy efforts of organisations such as WITNESS.org, Oneworld.org, UN.org and others.

Theoretical Framework

Participatory media as a 'lived experience' is explored in this research within the context of the local culture and the ways in which producers integrate local knowledge, networks, norms and practices in the production process and content. The research recognises that to own their media, people must be able to relate it to their own culture and language. It has to be embedded in their culture and has to reflect their everyday life experiences. This approach is supported by Pacific scholars Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo who have noted in their discussion of Pacific epistemologies:

> By indigenous epistemology we mean a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating and (re)formulating, and theorising about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture [...] (2002: 381).

As such, this study draws on local knowledge, norms and practices integrating it with a viable framework within which to discuss the findings. Social capital offers a framework within which social networks as well as participative action can be discussed and offers a link to local norms and practices. Putnam has defined social capital as 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (2000: 19). Fijian scholar Ropate Qalo (1998) has linked the Fijian concept of *Vakaviti* or the *Fijian Way* to social capital. He proffers: '*Vakaviti* should be viewed as social capital', and discusses the various concepts within it 'which enhance the common good more than the self-interest' (Huffer and Qalo, 2004: 108).

This research locates the discussion of PV within frameworks of empowerment and transformation, thus highlighting the connections rather than the disconnections between people. Social capital, participation and empowerment are interlinked in projects of community building and social cohesion. I use social capital theory as a tool to aid my analysis of social networks and community relations during the process of participatory production. The framework I propose is premised on the idea that participatory media practice not only functions well in communities with strong social networks (i.e. high social capital) but also contributes to the growth of social capital. In other words, it not only accesses local networks - bonding capital - but also extends it by enhancing the bridging dimension of social capital where communities can link with other com-

munities across ethnic, gender, social, or geographic divides through dialogue and information sharing. Mechanisms and forms in social capital, such as networks, trust, bonding and bridging, provide a viable theoretical framework within which to discuss PV as a tool for community building in the context of my research in Fiji because it allows for comparisons with concepts in local cultures as discussed above.

The research addresses three key questions:

1. How do participants' social relationships and their levels of trust affect participants' involvement in the message making and consequently their ability to represent their lives and aspirations?
2. What are the dialogic benefits of video both horizontally within and between communities, and vertically to influence policy makers?
3. How do rural women invite cultural and social inclusion in content creation, thus challenging national discourses on race, gender and place?

Methodology

Pacific scholars point out the importance of communicating research outcomes to the community within Melanesian research methodology. In finding a Pacific perspective in research, Fairbairn-Dunlop has argued that Pacific-based research should include a component of community awareness-raising: 'As for all things Pacific, we must start with the community and take them with us' (2004: 5). Thus I embarked on a journey to find an innovative method of data collection and presentation which would provide an important narrative for communities about the way in which their stories and cultural practices could be documented and used for community development. Participatory action research (PAR) was the central methodology used to invite active community participation in the video workshop. Visual ethnography, in the form of video documentation, was used to record the production process as well as interviews with participants and policy makers. This would allow the research results to be easily accessible to both literate and non-literate members of the community, such as the research participants. The ethnographic data produced on DVD would also become a valuable resource for community development workers, non-government organisations, policy makers, and future researchers in the field.

The workshop participants, between the ages of 20 and 60 years, were members of the Navua Rural Women's Telecentre Group

(NRWTG), a multi-ethnic organisation which was established as a pilot project by the government to encourage rural women in small income generation schemes. Initially called the E-chutney project because of the emphasis on chutney production, over the course of the year the women had diversified their products to include pillow-cases, sasa brooms, dalo chips, root crops, and a variety of food products. After a few successful deliveries the group had lost their internet connection as a result of an internal dispute.

When I approached the women about the video workshop and my desire to base my research project within their group they quickly recognised its benefits to them. The women wanted to use their newly acquired video production skills to create a promotional video to help them market their products to a variety of clients in Fiji such as civil servants, hotels and tour company operators. The group exhibited a readiness to *adopt* video technology for their own needs and a desire to *represent* themselves and their work to a specific *audience* whom *they* had identified. Within its multiethnic structure NRWTG offered to me an opportunity to examine the dialogic possibilities of video in building relationships in a culturally diverse setting. As one of the very few multi-ethnic organisations in Fiji, NRWTG has women from three different communities in Navua. These include the indigenous Fijians who live in villages or independently, long-term Indian residents of Navua whose forefathers settled in the district to work on colonial sugar cane plantations, and the newly arrived Indian displaced farmers whose land leases were not renewed in other parts of Fiji.

The participatory video workshop was conducted over five weeks with approximately 10 women who formed the core production team. Other women in the community participated according to their individual circumstances and availability. There were five phases in the production process — camera training, story development session, location shoots, viewing sessions and editing. A six-minute promotional video was produced at the end of the workshop. In addition, five longer programmes, featuring each of the five communities where shooting took place, were completed and given to the communities for their own use. As a participatory project, women had control of content development and the use of technology during pre-production and production phases.

Discussion

During the course of the project, I discovered a powerful use of video by the women within a dynamic environment of social relation-

ships and community engagement. The content produced by the women became an important element in social cohesion, not only because it created bridging ties, but because it reflected the interactions, the goodwill and the inter-dependence of diverse communities, thus capturing the true nature of community in Fiji.

Social agency and community action are the central themes which dominate the films made by the women. Agency is the capacity of human beings to act upon their environment in order to bring about change. It is an empowering act by individuals who have developed an awareness about needs in their community. 'Agency can be understood as the way in which people act on, or assert themselves in, their world […] an element of self determined action' according to Leonard and Onyx). They further state, 'The development of social capital requires the active and willing engagement of citizens working together within a participative community' (2004: 23).

In the promotional video, the women are presented as active citizens who make significant contributions on a daily basis to the family income through the money they earn from their work, as well as to the community through their involvement in clubs. Stereotyped images of rural women usually portrayed in mainstream media within the bounds of their home in scenes of poverty or domestic subservience are replaced by empowering images of women at work. This is depicted in a montage sequence in the promotional video in which the working hands of rural women chopping, frying, mixing, weaving, knitting, sewing, dyeing portray these women as aspiring individuals who are integral to the healthy functioning of their society. In the interviews with women as well as the government officials, this engagement is repeatedly highlighted.

Women's Networks – A Storehouse of Knowledge

Women's civic participation is assisted by their membership and engagement in social and religious clubs which form a rich web of social networks in both urban and rural areas. The majority of Fijian and Indo-Fijian women belong to social clubs, which meet weekly in their local areas. Unfortunately, as is the case in many other social institutions in Fiji, there is limited cross-cultural participation; most have racially polarised membership. Fijian women generally belong to the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama ni Taukei,* which encourage communal activities such as fundraising for village or church projects, the making of traditional and contemporary handicraft, and the preparation of feasts and ceremonial

items during important traditional events within the village or at the provincial level. Indian women generally belong to social clubs known as *Mahila Mandal* in the local settlements. Activities include the study of scriptures, religious and folk singing, sewing, and fundraising for the building and maintenance of local temples or community halls. Some clubs encourage members to begin a savings plan using the club's bank account. The patron of one such club explained to me that each woman deposits a small amount every week for a specific purpose. She may be saving for a festival, a family wedding or a club excursion such as a shopping trip to Suva. Meticulous records are kept by the club's treasurer in the presence of all members, and funds are distributed as the need arises. For many women the club is their only outlet from the daily grind of home duties and farming.

By accessing their social networks through their clubs, the segment producers created dynamic scenes of collective action by the women in their villages and settlements, and became active agents of community building. Vunibau Village, which has a strong and active *Soqosoqo Vakamarama,* was a good example of how a community rich in social capital can provide strong support for community-led production. More than thirty women arrived at the village community hall to show their skills at craft making. The one thing that impressed me most was the organisational skills of the participants. At every village and settlement we visited, there was an amazing display of social cohesion. The success of each shoot was dependent on the networks each participant could access in her community. The producers used their strong links with their community to co-ordinate impressive displays of craft, invite participation of their club members and even organise lunch for the visiting crew. The resources available through the enabling environment of the club guaranteed the success of our shoots. The production process both accessed and enhanced social networks. The producers of each video segment used their support network to create dynamic scenes for our shoots and in so doing gave to the community, especially women, a sense of importance and the ability to represent their lives through a display of their work and talents on camera. This supports White's (2003) assertion that empowering message creation must have the critical elements of participation and inclusion of the community.

The club for these women represented a social lifeline. In order to maintain their level of social capital, they not only harvested its rich resources but also constantly supplemented that resource by giving something back, e.g. helping each other during times of need, thus further en-

riching the network of interdependence. The women strongly identified reciprocity as a strength of their club during the story development session. As the club president Bale noted: 'It's give and take. Whatever I know I give and what ever they know they give.' This exchange of skills, especially between Fijian and Indo-Fijian women, has led to knowledge-sharing and capacity building, which have improved their individual ability to earn an income.

Engendering Trust in the Displaced Community

Establishing trust with the community is vital to the success of participatory projects. Finding a community leader who has the trust of all sections of the community and the authority to engage with them is essential. In my case this person was the Senior Women's Interest Officer, Nanise Gasara, who became the intermediary between the women and me. She had a close and personal relationship with the women and had their respect. Even men in the community trusted her well enough to allow their wives to go for the club meeting in town. Nanise also became an important interlocutor in my understanding of the community, their norms and values.

It was interesting to observe the interplay between the various groups of women. The indigenous women and the long-term Indian residents seemed to have an easy-going relationship with each other and were enthusiastic about becoming involved. They had a sense of ownership about the area in which they lived. The Fijian women were the most enthusiastic participants. The new arrivals in Vakabalea needed much encouragement to join the group, to the extent of my own door-knocking to persuade them to participate. Their participation was a direct result of their trust in Nanise and they came to the workshop 'because Nani had called us'. Here Kothari's (2002) critique of participatory methodology is especially relevant. She cautions researchers that participation can duplicate the social hierarchy at the grassroots. This may happen through the acts of inclusion, self-exclusion and non-participation. The most marginalised may not participate through self-exclusion. This was true in the case of the resettled Vakabalea women who are the most marginalised group in the area. They had excluded themselves from the process, because of their weak links with the wider community and consequently a lack of trust. Their participation was assured through my own doorknocking and, more significantly, their trust in Nanise.

Leonard and Onyx posit that isolated communities (such as the re-

settled farmers), do not need to 'shift' from bonding to bridging in order to 'get ahead', but may find other ways to forge links with other communities such as seeking the assistance of a 'trusted professional' who may become a valuable ambassador in this process. They state:

> Clearly people with this professional status can play a strategic role in facilitating connections across groups. However, professional standing is not enough. In order to be a useful link, the professional needs to have demonstrated a commitment to the values of the community (2004: 70).

In this study, Nanise played this key role ensuring that women returned home on time, and gave assurance to husbands through phone calls if they were late. She also ensured community representation, facilitating a central training location and becoming an information conduit between the participants and me as the researcher/facilitator.

Uslaner and Conley distinguish between the types of trust based on people's engagement in either outward looking or inward looking groups. Outward looking people are *generalized trusters*. They are willing to trust strangers, and believe that sharing common values and social interaction with people unlike themselves can be rewarding. They are the ones most likely to form bridging social capital. Inward looking people are *particularized trusters*, who may play an active role within their own social groups but are less likely to participate in 'civic engagement in the larger community' (2003: 333,335).

As per the three-factor structure (Uslaner, 1997), which distinguishes between various types of trust, the Vakabalea displaced farmers exhibited a high level of particularised (thick) trust, preferring to network with friends and family and a lower level of generalised (thin) trust, such as relating to strangers and a minimal level of trust of government. This community was not as functional as the other communities who demonstrated greater trust and consequently stronger relationships with other communities or government structures. However, they did have strong links within their own units of extended family members. A link between empowerment and social capital is apparent here. Lack of trust of the government, the wider community or the new situation can preclude marginalised communities from engaging in self-development and community action. I wondered how this same community would have performed if the video workshop had taken place in Labasa, their old place of residence in which they had a defined social structure and strong social networks.

Bridging the Divide with PV

Norris states that 'rich and dense associational networks facilitate the underlying conditions for interpersonal trust, tolerance and cooperation' (2002: 3). In Fiji, women belong to these networks through membership in clubs which are strong in the bonding dimension of social capital in what Putnam describes as 'ethnic fraternal organisations' (2000: 22), but weak in forging bridging networks, especially across ethnic lines, which is essential in trust building and social cohesion. The clubs are ethno-specific, formed along gender lines, and exclusive to local villages and settlements. With the formation of the NRWTG, membership was extended to cross cultural groups bringing exclusively local and ethnic groups together, thus creating a bridging dimension. This bridging network brought new skills and knowledge into a common pool, which enriched the social capital of individual members. The women met at a central location for their activities and established closer bonds with their colleagues who came from diverse backgrounds. Building on this resource, the video production then enabled the women to actually extend the bridging ties by visiting each other's clubs, villages and settlements thus leading to greater dialogue and understanding. The visit created a greater transference of knowledge and cross-cultural understanding. One participant of Indo-Fijian background noted: 'Living in Navua, I've never been to a koro (Fijian village) before, but the camera allowed me to experience this opportunity' (Priya, pers. comm., 2005).

Through her involvement in the production process, Priya was able to visit both Mau and Vunibau Villages during the course of the filming. She also formed closer ties with two Fijian girls from Vunibau Village who were also in the production team. Another participant, Josy, who was from Mau Village, asked me if she could be in the production team when we visited Vunibau Village 'because I've heard a lot about that village but have never been invited to visit there'. Similarly, Fijian participants also visited the homes of Indian women, especially in Vakabalea where they had never been before.

Self-Representation

Sue Braden has argued that the camcorder has 'offered *another* reading and writing and removes dependence on the mechanics of alphabetisation in order to record and transmit voices, images and ideas. The tapes can provide a conduit between under-represented, non- or less liter-

ate groups and those they would not normally be able to address' (Braden, 1999: 119). In the case of the NRWTG, the videotapes helped the bureaucrats to reassess their own views of the group. The recorded images created a vital shift in the imagination of the bureaucracy. Suddenly, the women's activities, as presented on video, gained in status and importance in the minds of the bureaucrats. People who sit in their offices making important policy decisions could now be included into this world of the women's everyday lives and aspirations. The video images legitimised women's work and became the catalyst for rural women to be re-imagined by the bureaucrats. By their skilful use of technology and their confident appearance in front of the camera (something the bureaucrats themselves struggled with) the women re-presented themselves as active citizens capable of negotiating their own futures instead of state dependants who waited for top down mechanism to intervene. After viewing the completed video segments produced by the women, the visiting Divisional Head from the Ministry of Women observed how participatory video projects like this can be integrated into the Ministry's policy and practice:

> We've been reading the reports, (rather) than looking at the actual output of what they've done… it tells a lot. This is a very good educational tool even for us, a very beneficial tool that we can use for other projects or issues such as violence against women. This could be a very good tool for mainstreaming women into the development process of the whole community (E. Duinabua, pers. comm., 2005).

People in positions of power saw for the first time what the women were capable of achieving. They were not just a women's group doing whatever women do within the walls of their home, but active, engaged and empowered individuals who had successfully used modern technology to present themselves and their talents to the wider world.

Producing within their local context allowed the women to integrate the social and cultural values of their society and develop their own production culture, instead of using foreign production values. This was an excellent example of how technology can be made to conform to peoples' way of life. If these women had been brought into the studio to talk, they would have been awed by the technology and the urban environment. Instead, the camera came into their life space. The interviews took place in their homes, and in community halls — familiar places in their lives. The cameras rolled as they sat on the floor where they feel most comfortable,

instead of on chairs. Location became an important aspect of their representation. The subjects of discussion were their lives, their skills and their communities, about which they were experts, and they spoke about these things with great ease and delight. It validated their lives and the importance that the camera gave to them. This supports the notion that to own their media, people must be able to relate it to their own language and socio-cultural practices. It has to be embedded in their everyday life experiences.

The promotional video has become much more than a tool through which they can sell their products. It has become a development message in itself as seen in the words of the song *Chalo Chale Bahine Bisnis Karenge* penned by Nirmala Devi. The Fiji Hindi lyrics (left) translate into English as follows:

Chalo Chale Bahine bisnis karenge	*Let us go sisters, let's start a business*
Chalo Chale Bahine bisnis karenge	*Let us go sisters, let's start a business*
Chalo Chale Bahine chutney banao	*Let us go sisters, let's make chutney*
Navua mein chutney banao bahina	*Let us make chutney in Navua,*
Suva mei becho, Nausori mei becho	*Sell it in Suva and in Nausori*
Chalo Chale Bahine bisnis karege	*Let us go sisters, let's start a business*
Chalo Chale Bahine bisnis karege	*Let us go sisters, let's start a business*
Mithai banao, doillie banao	*Let's make sweets and doillies*
Achaar banao, jam banao…	*Let's make pickles and jam..*

Nirmala, a woman who has no formal education, became an important aspect of the promotional video by writing the lyrics of the above song. This aspect of her inclusion and the validation of her skill as a folk singer added to her sense of pride. She told me during the recording process that she liked the fact that she could review the footage instantly after recording. The instant feedback allowed her to revise the lyrics by listening to the song instead of relying on others to write and re-read these back to her. This confirms Padma Guidi's assertion that video has given voice to non-literate women by bridging 'the oral with the technical', thus allowing their voices to be heard (2003). In India, *Video SEWA* members who are illiterate, self-employed women also found that one of the most empowering qualities of video was its instant playback feature, which encouraged collaboration between producers and subjects (Gumucio Dagron, 2002). Video offered a non-written form of communication through which the women could showcase their real talents without being constrained by the written word, over which they did not have mastery.

The women recognised the top-down hegemonic structure of main-stream media when they voiced their frustrations at being unable to tell their own stories in mainstream media or influence media content in en-tertainment programming. For example, Toby wanted to celebrate the lo-cal community effort to support the hospital after the floods in Navua by inviting the mainstream media to cover the event, but was unable to do so. Toby's experience led her to observe: 'My general opinion of the me-dia at that time was very bad; either they build or they destroy'. She rec-ognised the power of media in building social cohesion by highlighting collective agency, or sustaining the rupture through their failure to report on community-centred issues and events. Nanise also reflected this frus-tration when she commented on inappropriate entertainment programmes such as *Desperate Housewives* and *Shortland Street* which infiltrate local cultures and values 'because there is no other programme to see...'.

As the women engaged in the production process and began to un-derstand visual grammar, they also became critically aware of the way in which story telling could be manipulated by the choice of shots or the questions they asked. The capacity-building aspects of PV were reflected in the women's aspirations to become part of the technological change. Kalesi described it as a 'privilege' and realised how this type of training would be out of their reach - 'only available at universities' - and very expensive to undertake.

Dialogue and Knowledge Sharing Beyond the Kitchen Table

The story development session turned into a dialogic encounter be-tween the women as each shared her own perception of what the club meant to her. From these individual insights a theme for the video emerged. The story development exercise demonstrated that the process engaged the women in a constructive dialogue through which they identi-fied the strengths and weaknesses of their club. Again, the multi-ethnic nature of their club emerged as the main strength. The cultural diversity of members allowed for a greater mix of knowledge and skills amongst the women. The Fijian women learned to make chutneys and Indo-Fijian women learned to make new types of jams. But this exchange was of far greater significance than mere activities at the kitchen table. Fijian and Indo-Fijian women were engaging cross-culturally, recognising each other's strengths instead of seeing each other through a prism of fear and distrust. The video images reflected this collaborative partnership be-tween the two races and could be shared with other communities.

Through a feedback loop of viewing and reviewing the videos, the participants also identified strengths and weaknesses in their own prac-tice. For example, the women realised that they had forgotten to use gloves and hair nets while cooking the dalo chips, an important aspect of hygiene required in the commercial production of food. During the script development phase, through the active participation of Nanise and com-munity development worker, Nureen Das, the women also gained a clearer understanding of their club's main objectives and its mission statement. This confirms that when people make their own content, their understanding of their own community grows. Video production encour-ages transactional communication through the various stages of the pro-duction process as an ongoing dynamic process of building relationships where 'communication is truly something we do *with* others and not *to* them' (Adler and Rodman, 2003: 28). True learning is based on dialogue between equals. But to be able to achieve it, a strong 'foundation of love, faith and humility' which engenders mutual trust is necessary (Freire, 1984: 79).

At a meeting with the then Director of the Ministry of Women, Mrs Maria Matavewa, I played the DVD which the women had produced. Matavewa recognised the 'information sharing and knowledge dissemina-tion' potential of video:

I do believe that this technology is a must for our communication and information unit. Not only that, to be able to empower the women's groups that are out there, in terms of the social and economic empower-ment programme, I believe this must be a tool that must be owned by our officers that go out, and also to promote the use of this tool amongst the groups that they work with, to be able to document and have it as a living document for their future reference.

> I really and truly believe that if the facilities are to be sustained
> over the years to come than this technology must be owned by
> the community. But we must facilitate, in whatever way possi-
> ble, that this technical know-how must be able to get out to the
> community at large (M. Matavewa, pers. comm. 2006).

By watching the women in action, the Director realised the value of community-based production in community development and dialogue. Seeing women proactively engaging in the process of production allowed her to link the use of communication technology to empowerment and community development through its knowledge sharing potential. With a new understanding of how communities can engage with video, appropri-

ate government services can provide enabling environments in which communities have access to this technology for their own development.

Conclusion

Through the channel of small-format video, the women in this research found a way to record not only their own voices, but also those of other women in their communities. Healthy and functioning social networks which invite multi-ethnic membership, as in the case of the NRWTG, are essential structures within which the process of PV or other forms of participatory media can become embedded. It is a place where communities can link up, share their knowledge and communicate their concerns. Participatory video assists in shifting knowledge and power away from the elites and locates it within subordinate groups. The video content produced by the women did not address political or economic issues, nor did it voice the mindless infighting of political elites. Rather, it represented women's work, their abilities, their skills and their potential as income producers, as well as their empowering networks. Having found their voices, the women were keen to use video to capture the 'impressions and expressions' of their daily life to effectively communicate their hopes and aspirations to the world. Their knowledge of video production opened up new ways of recording their voices. These women proved that technology was no barrier to their storytelling. The knowledge they had gained had also quietly made them confident about the Information Age, as one of the participants said to me, 'this is the era of technology and we've been invited to become part of it'.

Community based media such as participatory video with its powerful imagery is able to bring the everyday lived experiences of people into the public realm, celebrating the interdependence and collective agency of diverse groups in their daily construction of community. In naming their world, grassroots producers reflect the true nature of their communities through their own lived experiences instead of those framed in hegemonic political debates. By recodifying the established norms and networks, community-based programmes create new opportunities for dialogue and revitalise atrophied relationships within and between communities. Aspects of community building and social cohesion become the underlying themes in the production of local content, not driven by a top down agenda of reconciliation, but through the portrayal of community action in the everyday experiences of the producers and their social networks. Thus the process of production and content development become a dynamic site for community building and reconciliation.

On a personal note, this journey to find a way of connecting the two cultures through the use of communication technology was also transformational for me. As an Indo-Fijian child, I grew up in Fiji acutely aware of the two ethnic groups living side by side with little knowledge of each other's culture and language. By undertaking this research and working alongside Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities, I have become aware of the richness of the two local social systems and the accommodating qualities of the indigenous culture. It has awakened in me a deep respect for Fijian traditions and knowledge systems which 18 years of schooling had not been able to provide in Fiji.

If a concerted effort is to be made towards intercultural communication between the ethnic groups in Fiji, then core traditional beliefs which drive fear and suspicion between communities need to be discussed openly, reframed and given new meanings within the context of the current conflict. Community centred media can play a vital role in the reconciliation process by opening discussions on issues that affect the whole nation and by reflecting the spirit of goodwill and the voices and aspirations of common people in Fiji. This work can be supported by civil society organisations such as the Fiji Media Watch or high schools to encourage interethnic relations between students by incorporating small media in projects of peace building. By watching communities from diverse backgrounds working together, sharing knowledge and information, other communities may also see the benefit of working cross-culturally to build individual skills and community resources. Unity in diversity can create not only a socially cohesive society but also one that is economically and politically viable.

References

Adler, R. B. & Rodman, G. (2003) *Understanding Human Communication.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Braden, S. (1999) 'Using Video for Research and Representation: basic human needs and critical pedagogy'. *Journal of Education Media* 24(2): 117-129.

Braden, S. & Huong, T. T. T. (1998) *Video for Development: A Casebook from Vietnam.* UK and Ireland: Oxfam.

Fairbairn-Dunlop, P. (2004). 'The Impact of PBRF: local contexts, national trends and International Comparisons: A Pacific Perspective', *Royal Society of New Zealand,* Retrieved on 10 November, 2007, from www.rsnz.org/advisory/social_science/media/fairburn-pbrf_forum.doc.

Freire, P. (1984) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder.

Gegeo, D. W. & Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (2002) 'Whose Knowledge? Epistemological Collisions in Solomon Islands Community Development'. *The Contemporary Pacific* 14(2):377-409.

Government of Fiji (2004). 'Fiji Today 2005/2006', *Ministry of Information, Communications and Media Relations,* Retrieved on 18 February, 2006, from http://www.fiji.gov.fj/uploads/FijiToday2005-06.pdf

Guidi, P. (2003) 'Guatemalan Mayan Women and Participatory Visual Media', in S White(ed) *Participatory Video Images that Transform and Empower.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Gumucio Dagron, A. (2001) *Making waves: stories of participatory communication for social change.* New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

Gumucio Dagron, A. (2002). 'Vertical Minds versus Horizontal Cultures. An overview of Participatory Processes and Experiences'. In Servaes, J. (Ed.), *Approaches to Development Communication Part I,* Paris: UNESCO.

Huffer, E. & Qalo, R. (2004) 'Have We been Thinking Upside-Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought'. *The Contemporary Pacific* 16(1): 87-116.

Jacobson, T. & Servaes, J. (eds) (1999) *Theoretical Approaches to Participatory Communication.* Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press Inc.

Johansson, L. (1999). 'Participatory Video and PRA in development planning', *FTTP/Maneno Mengi,* Retrieved on 5 November, 2005, from http://www.zanzibar.org/maneno/pvideo/PV_PRA.html.

Kothari, U. (2002) 'Power, Knowledge and Social Control in Participatory Development', in Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (eds), *Participation: The New Tyranny?,* New York: Zed Books.

Lee, P. (2007). 'Communication is peace: WACC's mission today', *WACC,* Retrieved on 19 February, 2007, from http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/publications/news/communication_is_peace_wacc_s_mission_today http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/content/pdf/3667.

Leonard, R. & Onyx, J. (2004) *Social Capital and Community Building: Spinning Straw into Gold.* London: Janus Publishing Company.

Norris, P. (2002) 'Social Capital and the News Media'. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/politics*7(1) pp. 3-8. 20 January,2007. from http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~pnorris/Acrobat/Social%20capital%20&%20the%20news%20media.pdf

Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone.* NewYork: Simon & Schuster.

Qalo, R. (1998) Vaka-viti: If it is Social Capital, Then We May Be More Advanced Than We Think. *Oceanic Centre for Arts and Culture Seminar Series.* Suva, University of the South Pacific.

Rennie, E. (2006) *Community Media: A Global Introduction.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Riano, P. (Ed.) (1994). *Women in Grassroots Communication,* Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications.

Rodriguez, C. (2001) *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media'.* Cresskill: Hampton Press.

Rodriguez, C. (2004) 'The renaissance of citizens' media'. *Media Development,* no. 2. Retrieved on 16 February, 2005. from http://www.wacc.org.uk/wacc/content/pdf/416.

Stuart, S. (1989) 'Access to media: placing video in the hands of the people'. *Media Development,* vol. XXXVI, no. 4, pp. 8-11.

Uslaner, E. M. (1997) Faith, hope and charity: Social capital, trust and collective action *Unpublished manuscript.* University of Maryland, College Park.

Uslaner, E. M. & Conley, R. S. (2003). 'Civic Engagement And Particularized Trust The Ties That Bind People to Their Ethnic Communities', *American Politics Research,* vol. 31 no. 4, pp. 331-360. 19 January 2007 from http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/uslaner/uslanerconleyapr.pdf.

Waisbord, S. (n.d.). *Family Tree Of Theories, Methodologies And Strategies In Development Communication.* New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

White, S. A. (Ed.) (2003). *Participatory Video Images that Transform and Empower,* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

White, S. A., Nair, S. K. & Ascroft, J. (1994) *Participatory Communication: Working for Change and Development.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

White, S. A. & Patel, P. K. (1994)'Participatory Message Making with Video: Revelations from Studies in India and the USA', in White, S. A., Nair, S. K. & Ascroft, J. (eds), *Participatory Communication: Working for Change and Development.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Usha Sundar Harris, PhD., is a lecturer in International Communication at Macquarie University, Sydney. She is the co-editor of South Pacific Islands Communication: Regional Perspectives, Local Issues (AMIC, 2008). Email: Usha.Harris@mq.edu.au. This article is dedicated to the memory of Nanise Gasara, former Senior Women's Interest Officer in Navua, who sadly passed away in 2007. The author acknowledges Nanise's assistance and enthusiastic support of this project.