Film Ethnography

and Critical Consciousness:

exploring a community-based action research methodology for Freirean transformation

Michael Brown, Hari Joshi and Mary-Jane O'Leary

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Abstract: Film ethnography is established within social development academia and praxis, but there is limited impact-evidence of its ability to positively transform participant communities through studies based on credible theoretical underpinnings. This article suggests that Paulo Freire's 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1978) theory, involving self-reflection and transformation, has relevance for film ethnography because ethnographic film can present life situations back to its subjects in ways that allow people to view themselves differently. Fieldwork is presented describing the use of film ethnography as an action research methodology based on Freirean principles where vulnerable Nepali communities (whose lives and livelihoods are heavily dependent on working equines) and their equines engaged in participatory film ethnography, as part of ongoing engagement activities by project partners seeking transformation in working equine welfare and the economic stability of equine-owning communities. The broader historical theoretical underpinnings of ethnographic film are discussed, followed by a description of how they were applied in the action research. Informed by Heider (2006: 2) the authors have resisted the temptation to define and apply ethnographic film as an absolute, but rather as 'various attributes, or dimensions, that effect ethnographicness' in films and filmmaking methodologies. Similarly, participation is presented as characteristics of 'participatoryness' utilising the Johari Window, created by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955. Drawing on Wiek at al.'s (2014: 120) 'effect-capturing approach' an evaluation methodology is described aligned to Freire's (1978) conscientisation praxis using high levels of participant self-reflection.

Initial findings do evidence some effectiveness of community-based film ethnography as an action research methodology for positive change based on Freirean methodologies, showing transformation in participant knowledge of, and behaviour towards, their equines. A longitudinal study is planned to explore whether these changes sustain into the long-term. The community transformations that have emerged from the film ethnography process offer improvement in the health and wellbeing of equines, promoting greater resilience and stability of income generation capacity within communities. Some positive enhancement of the wider socio-political environment for equine welfare is emerging through stakeholder engagement and new equine outreach services. The bespoke evaluation methodology employed contributes to the originality of the research findings and outcomes. This project has attracted interest from other Nepali social development organisations, questioning if the overall methodology is transferable to help address other social challenges in under-resourced rural areas. The authors also believe this project has opened a discussion around Freirean liberation applied to animal wellbeing, in the context of restoring humanity. Finally, the authors suggest that, by going beyond observational cinema and demonstrating ethnographic film as an action research methodology that can catalyse transformation within communities, this article presents the type of participatory praxis that Henley (2020: 481) alludes to, offering 'interesting possibilities for "ways of doing" ethnographic film in the twenty-first century'.

Key words: Ethnographic film; Participatory film; Observational cinema; Relational documentary; Visual anthropology; Anthrozoology; Critical consciousness.

Introduction

Film ethnography is established within social development academia and praxis, but there is limited impact-evidence of its ability to positively transform participant communities through studies based on credible theoretical underpinnings. Consequently, the use of film ethnography as an effective intervention for social development is not fully realised. Paulo Freire conceived a development methodology that 'links the identification of issues with positive actions for change and development' (Silva, 2021). Freire's theory of 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1978) explores the interaction between oppressors and the oppressed. Central is the idea that increased self-awareness leading to collective action can create dialogue between oppressors and the oppressed, restoring humanity and offering liberation for all parties. Freire's theory has relevance as an underlying methodology for film ethnography as action research. Ledwith (2011: 100) emphasises the importance of recognising the different dimensions of Freire's idea of conscientisation: magical consciousness, where people are passive and unquestioning about the injustices in their lives; naïve consciousness, where people have some level of awareness of their problems but tend to self-blame; false consciousness, characterised by fatalism; and critical consciousness, as a state of being where people continually engage in insightful reflection and collective action creating transformation. Ethnographic film can present life realities back to its subjects, facilitating them to see themselves differently and catalysing self-reflection. Comparing visual ethnography to written anthropology Jean Rouch (2003: 220) says that with:

> 'a camera there can be a far more fruitful result. The film can be shown to the subjects. Then they are able to discuss . . . they can have reflection . . . and the chance for them to view themselves from a distance . . .'

Self-identified actions, both individual and collective, can then follow creating positive social change.

Quoting Barnett (2004), Pink (2007: 81) urges 'anthropologists to take more account of the applied role of the discipline', which includes 'development'. Pink (ibid) goes on to say that the role of social anthropologists in creating 'social interventions that might improve other people's conditions of existence' is of international relevance, and that 'visual anthropology is 'thriving in a range of . . . NGO, (and) "community" contexts'. Aligning with Freire's philosophy, the authors embrace social development as a state of being where people continually engage in insightful reflection and collective action creating transformation.

Anthropology is usually defined as a study of human societies and cultures. Ethnography, the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits and differences. White and Candea (2018) state that both anthropology and ethnography have traditionally held 'notions of human exceptionalism'. How, then, do we define studies that include humans and nonhumans as equal entities? Anthrozoology typically describes the study of the interactions and relationships between human and non-human animals. White and Candea (ibid) suggest 'multispecies ethnography' with nuanced subcategories like 'multispecies multiethnography'. 'Film anthrozoology' appears the most accurate term for the action research described in this article, although 'film ethnography' as a term offers more scope for reflecting on wider applications within social development praxis. However, the human/non-human dimension is important because Freire (1972: 21) describes dehumanisation as the 'result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanises the oppressed'. He describes liberation from oppression as the

restoring of humanity. In the context of film anthrozoology as a methodology for Freirean-based social development this introduces an interesting discussion.

Project origins

This article presents the evolution of action research initiated by representatives of Animal Nepal, a Nepali non-governmental organisation and Michael Brown, a social development filmmaker. Working equines, especially mules, play a vital role in the income generation activities of certain Nepali communities who work with them in brick factories and porter goods into the high mountains. For over a decade, Animal Nepal staff have been engaging with lower economically resourced equine-owning communities within the brick factories and high mountains, providing veterinary outreach services and programmes aimed at increasing financial resilience. So, although equine welfare is a major goal, Animal Nepal staff recognise this must be pursued through a community development approach that responds to the socio-economic situation and needs of lower economically resourced communities. Through this community-based work, Animal Nepal staff have developed long-standing positive working relationships within communities and are constantly exploring innovative ways of learning from these communities to strengthen the support services they provide. Michael Brown has worked in Nepal for 30 years and is fluent in Nepali. He has facilitated participatory and ethnographic filmmaking methodologies in Nepal with a broad range of communities and cross-discipline development organisations. With the aim of advancing community engagement and learning from equine-owning communities to strengthen support services, the project partners (Animal Nepal and Michael Brown) evolved a theoretically-underpinned participatory ethnographic film methodology that sought to explore the cultural context and dynamics between people and their mules. Importantly, the project partners regarded the mules themselves as ‘active players’ in the

process and the unifying focal point throughout. The interrelationships between communities, their working equines, the equine outreach teams, brick factory owners and the filmmaker were critical. This project was not a stand-alone, one-off event but an initiative embedded within ongoing interactions between communities, brick factory owners and Animal Nepal equine outreach teams.

The research question

The question posed by the authors asked: Firstly, can film ethnography as an effective tool for social development be demonstrated through action-research informed by credible theoretical underpinnings, where vulnerable communities (whose lives and livelihoods are heavily dependent on working equines) and their equines engage in facilitated participatory film ethnography to catalyse increased critical consciousness, dialogue and collective action? Aligned to Freirean principles, the project partners were looking for (a) transformation (liberation) of relationships between people and their equines, leading to (b) improvement in the health and wellbeing of equines, thereby (c) promoting greater community resilience and stability of income generation capacity, and (d) positively enhancing their wider socio-political environment for equine welfare.

FIGURE 1. A mule and handler in a brick factory in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

The theoretical underpinnings to film ethnography

Heider (2006: 2) makes a strong case for resisting the temptation to define ethnographic film as an absolute, but rather 'to look for the various attributes, or dimensions, that effect ethnographicness in films'. However, he is explicitly clear is saying that ethnography must take precedence over cinematography and 'whenever ethnographic demands conflict with cinematographic demands, ethnography must prevail' (ibid: 2). It is the marriage of ethnography and film that Heider focuses on, asking the question 'how can the (visual capability of film) complement the (lexical capability) of ethnography?' (ibid: 3). Film as a tool for visual anthropology and ethnography can be traced back to the early days of the medium. The French Lumière brothers unveiled their cinématographe camera in March 1895. It was hand-cranked and portable, allowing it to be taken out into communities. The Lumière Company subsequently produced numerous short single shot films depicting unusual social scenes and 'exotic' peoples. Guindi (2014: 424) reflects that throughout the twentieth century, ethnographic films made by Western filmmakers have been viewed with mistrust by

non-Western countries who have their own filmmaking history and traditions. In effect, 'distrust of Western projects grounded in what was perceived as colonialist agendas' Guindi (ibid). This applied especially to the 'exotic' travelogues of the early part of the 20th century. Adolpho Colombres (1985: 17) calls the 'cinema of the exotic' an essential component of colonialism. Faris (1992: 171) warns of 'the tract of reflexivity, which seems essentially to boil down always to some form of "they talk/we listen", and to the idea that this somehow solves the problems of power and conceptual imposition'. This is echoed by Heider (2006: 1) who says 'in ethnography itself there has been a growing concern for allowing the voices of the people to be less filtered through the outside ethnographer'. Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) with Inuit people in the Canadian arctic is considered a seminal work. Although Flaherty is often called the 'father of ethnography', *Nanook of the North* and his subsequent film *Man of Aran* (1934) have been questioned for their constructed narratives. 'Nanook' was shot over a year but presented as two days in the subject's life. Furthermore, both of these films involved events that were set-up including bed-time scenes, a boat capsizing and an igloo purpose-built for filming (Barbash and Taylor, 1997). This has been termed the 'narrativisation of everyday life' (Henley, 2020: 104) and has parallels with the 'constructed realism' of Dziga Vertoz in his *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). However, it was the relationship-building with his subjects that Flaherty's admirers point to. 'When asked how he had managed to achieve this, Flaherty put it down to the simple fact that the Inuit had allowed him to share their way of life' Henley (2020: 107). Whilst Loizos (1993: 5) suggests 'ethnographic films are a subset of documentary films', Guindi (2014: 417) offers more distinction between documentary and visual anthropology explaining that 'a documentary film documents an event or a story constructed in terms of premises . . . An anthropologist discovers, explains, and produces knowledge. The two genres – documentary film and ethnographic film – are different'. Bill Nichols (2001: 99-139) divides documentary

into six modes; poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative. Of particular relevance to film ethnography are elements of the observational mode characterised by 'observing lived experiences simultaneously. Honoring this spirit of observation in post-production editing …' (ibid: 110), and the participatory mode characterised by a methodology where the filmmaker (like an anthropologist) goes into the field to 'live among others and speak about or represent what they experience' (ibid: 116). However, Nichols says they are not the same:

> "Observational documentary de-emphasizes persuasion to give us a sense of what it is like to *be* in a given situation but without a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be there, too. Participatory documentary gives us a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result. The types and degrees of alteration help define variations within the participatory mode of documentary".

The entry into communities is important for relationship building. Schensul at al. (2014) suggest that an anthropologist begins with a general description of the goals and methods of their research, which they explain to key influencers within the community. These explanations are, however, quickly forgotten as the personalities and motivations of researcher and community members take over. Slowly, 'the development of rapport and relationships and the researcher's trustworthiness can create an environment that allows anthropologists to proceed with their fieldwork' (Schensul at al., 2014: 188).

The anthropologist Jean Rouch was heavily influenced by Flaherty. Rouch firmly believed that 'a collaborative relationship between film-maker and subjects could afford a much more profound understanding of the subjects' world' (Henley, 2020: 225). This relationship Henley terms a 'shared anthropology', and he expands 'these attitudes of respect

for his subjects were made manifest in a variety of ways in Rouch's film-making praxis (Ibid). One of the most important was his practice of screening back his films to the subjects. Addressing the interface between visual anthropology and its audiences Morphy and Banks (1997: 1) say 'it is as much concerned with the presentation and consumption of anthropological knowledge as with the production of that knowledge'. Schensul et al (2014: 181) say that 'in action research, the action is meant to be transformative' and that 'brings with it the notion of personal and group transformation that shifts consciousness'. The transformational quality of conscientisation as Freire (2008) describes it is not a one-off event, but ongoing where critical thinking connected to action is a sustained state of being. As Margaret Ledwith (2011: 97) says 'it is a vital aspect of the community development process that we are eternally conscious of the centrality of action and reflection . . . between the individual and the collective'.

Inspired by Vertoz, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin evolved the concept of Cinéma Verité (truthful cinema), filmed with hand-held, lightweight cameras and synchronous sound, and edited without a voice-over narration. The term 'observational cinema' emerged in the 1970s through the writings of Roger Sandall (1972: 192-196). Guindi (2014) discusses the differences between ethnographic filmmaking and observational cinema by citing David MacDougall's early work in observational cinema, using an unengaged, locked-off camera. Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009: iii) explain that observational cinema was originally seen 'as a form of scientism in which a detached camera served to objectify and dehumanize the human subjects of its gaze'. Established ethnographic filmmakers like Jean Rouch criticised this, favouring an ethnographic approach that engaged with the subject and was informed by anthropological knowledge. More latterly, MacDougall (2018) appears to have revised his own perspective on observational cinema which he describes as:

> "a highly authored form of cinema involving close relations between filmmaker and subject and representing the perspectives of individual observers . . . giving the audience a sense of the filmmaker's presence in the situations filmed, paralleling the participant observer's role in anthropological fieldwork".

Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009: 552) concur in saying observational cinema:

> "is about following, indeed respecting, the unfolding of the real. This is clearly reflected in the way such works are edited, with the extended use of the sequence shot, rather than the piecing together of discrete singular shots. The co-presence of filmmaker and subjects, the creation of shared time and space between them (co-evalness), creates a world for the viewer that has a degree of spatial and temporal coherence, constructing an imaginative world that makes sense on its own terms".

Loizos (1993: 19) clarifies three problems with presenting 'structured events' in ethnographic film. Firstly, if an event is interrupted by an unusual occurrence do you accept that as real, or seek to film again when the event might be more typical? Secondly, all cultures contain official ideological accounts of how things are done, but also unofficial practices which might not be so accessible. Thirdly, some events are self-explanatory, whilst others need explanation through spoken words of some kind, like an interview or narration. Henley (2020: 392) says:

> "it is of vital importance that ethnographic film-makers, rejecting both iconophobia and logophobia, confront the challenge of how to reconcile the analytical and contextualising qualities of language with the distinctive sensorial and experiential qualities of cinematic images".

To this, cinematic sound should also be added. Foley sound recorded on location can be used to authentically enhance the audio experience by strengthening the sounds synchronously recorded while filming. Rogers (2015: 2) says that 'according to the dictates of cinéma verité and direct cinema, for instance, only synchronous – or what is known as diegetic – sound was permissible'. This includes music only if it is synchronously captured within the camera's frame. However Rogers (ibid: 3) challenges this idea:

> 'documentary may be underpinned by a realist aesthetic, but it remains persuasive, subjective, emotional and narrative. As soon as an aesthetic decision is made, the line between the real and the fictional begins to flex'.

Cinematography and soundscape decisions inevitably reflect authorship. Henley (2020: 453) suggests that authorship by the filmmaker should not be seen as a negative in ethnographic films because:

> "the relationship between filmmaker and subjects, far from being obscured or ignored, is central to the process of production and is inscribed, in varying degrees, in the filmic text itself. In this sense, they might be considered as examples of what Faye Ginsburg (2018) has recently termed 'relational documentary'".

Discussing ethnographic films that demonstrate authorship by the filmmaker, Henley (2020: 481) reflects:

> "What is particularly valuable, in my view . . . is that they are based in the first instance on a form of committed engagement with the subjects . . . structured by an engaging narrative, of the many connections between practices, ideas and relations in the social lives of their subjects. But notwithstanding the strongly collaborative ethos of these works, there is no pretence on the part of their makers that they have

somehow been authored by the subjects: in all cases, the creative, intellectual and ethical responsibility for the films remain manifestly with the film-makers. These films should not be considered models to be emulated in every particular: they are models of possibility rather than models of perfection . . . But in going beyond observation in their variously reflexive and participatory praxes, while at the same time remaining clearly authored by their makers, these films reach back to the shared anthropology of Jean Rouch while also suggesting interesting possibilities for 'ways of doing' ethnographic film in the twenty-first century".

The theoretical underpinnings to participatory praxis

Similar to Heider's (2006: 2) guidance in the previous section to resist defining ethnographic film as an absolute, the project partners avoided trying to define participatory praxis in a single statement, preferring to focus on the characteristics of 'participatoryness'. These characteristics included informed choice, relationship-building, non-hierarchical dialogue and decision-making, longevity of interaction, and clear mutual benefit. Past experiences of the project partners in community engagement also showed that the level of participation from individuals is often variable over the course of an initiative, waxing and waning depending on many factors like personal circumstances, personal interests and perceived benefit. The project involved active participation from the following: people within the diverse equine-owning communities, their equines, Animal Nepal equine outreach team members, brick factory owners and the filmmaker. The interaction between these players sought to establish dialogue leading to greater multi-perspective understanding for all. Clearly, the participation of the mules did not include their informed choice to participate. However, the other characteristics listed above did apply. As an underlying theory to frame the dynamics and inter-relationships between participants, the project partners drew on the Johari Window,

created by psychologists Joseph Luft (1916–2014) and Harrington Ingham (1916–1995) in 1955.

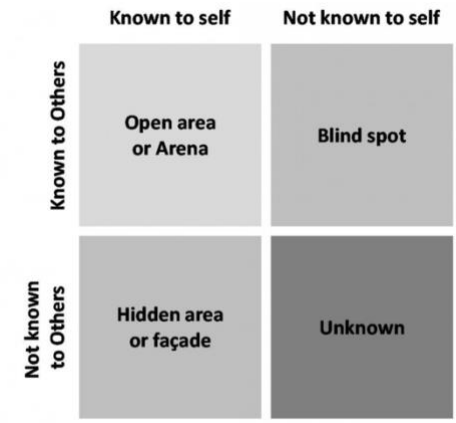

FIGURE 2. The Johari Window.

The four dynamics on the two axes create four panes. Through dialogue involving personal disclosure, sharing of perceptions and listening, the open area (known to self and known to others) can be expanded. Disclosure does not have to be verbal but can also be achieved by allowing others to observe areas of life usually unseen. Increased awareness of both self and others can then, in planned or organic ways, lead to changed knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. This is the dialogue at the heart of Freirean transformation.

Applying the theoretical underpinnings to participatory film ethnography in practice

Research by Animal Nepal and The Donkey Sanctuary India revealed that the vast majority of Nepal's working equines are mules. They are bred and reared in northern India before passing through a diverse range of communities during their lifetime. Therefore, to holistically investigate the mule's lives through participatory film ethnography, the project partners planned a year of community engagement, following a typical mule's life journey, shown in Figure One; bred and reared in Meerut; trucked to the Barabanki fair for sale;

walked to Nepalganj; trucked to Kathmandu brick factories and high mountain towns like Arkhet for labouring.

FIGURE 3. A working mule's typical life journey.

Filmmaker Michael Brown travelled the route shown in Figure Two, engaging with various communities and striving to adhere to the principals of ethnographic filmmaking. Introductions for Brown were made by Animal Nepal field staff who had existing relationships within the communities and with the brick factory owners. Brown undertook filming over the course of a year respecting Heider's (2006: 5) description of ethnography as 'a detailed description and analysis of human behaviour based on a long-term study', rather than a 'come-in-shooting-and-get-out-fast' approach. The most crucial community were the equine-owners and handlers living in the Nepali border town of Nepalganj, who travel to India to purchase animals and then work them or distribute them within Nepal. In the Nepalganj community Brown spent many hours sitting at the local tea-stall, often just nodding namaste to people. Slowly, as people realised he could speak Nepali greater interaction followed. Key to Brown's trustworthiness was his commitment to following the mule's journey. For example, concerned for his welfare the Nepali traders suggested Brown

should not walk with the mules for three days from the Barabanki equine fair to Nepalganj, but instead take the bus and meet them at the other end. However, after Brown completed the journey on foot with the mules, his relationship with the Nepali traders deepened. This echoed the process of 'the development of rapport' and relationship-building that Schensul at al. describe (2014: 188).

FIGURE 4. The annual Equine Fair at Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, India.

FIGURE 5. On the journey from Barabanki, India to Nepalganj, Nepal.

During the filming process Brown did not arrange formative screenings of footage within communities as Jean Rouch had often done. However, Brown and the Animal Nepal fieldworkers did regularly discuss with community members what events they thought should be documented on film. Furthermore, the behaviour and actions of the equines themselves were documented spontaneously. Thus, the film's subjects directly influenced the narrative content. Brown conducted onscreen interviews with various community members across the whole journey. These interviews gave insight into cultural practices and also placed Brown within the filmed material. Furthermore, at various times during filming Brown spoke directly to the camera, describing actions or reflecting on his thoughts and feelings. These instances of the filmmaker's presence reflect elements of Nichol's (2001) participatory mode of documentary giving a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation, as well as Ginsburg's (2018) notion of relational documentary.

FIGURE 6. Owner/handers preparing to castrate a mule in Nepalganj, Nepal.

The filmed material was edited by Brown who sought to represent the typical stages of a working equine's life in Nepal. He organised and selected rushes into the overall narrative with effort to create an authentic-to-life, engaging film made up of events that had been filmed spontaneously, but not falsely dramatised. Informed by Heider (2006: 5) the principle of 'holism' was applied in the edit decisions, setting specific events into the broader social and cultural context. This did not conflict with the desire to produce a film of artistic merit. Brown cared deeply about the cinematography and crafted a soundscape using original Foley sound recorded on location to enhance an authentic experience in a filmic way. In the edited film Brown introduces himself as the filmmaker on screen, making explicit that the film is the result of his interaction with communities. In doing so he accepts authorship of the film and takes 'the creative, intellectual and ethical responsibility' as Henley advocates (2020: 481). On screen interviews with various community members are included in the edit, along with pieces to camera from Brown and additional narration voiced by a Nepali female. Deciding on the use of interviews, pieces to camera and especially voiced narration was

difficult, reflecting Henley's (ibid: 392) challenge for ethnographic filmmakers to 'confront the challenge of how to reconcile the analytical and contextualising qualities of language with the distinctive sensorial and experiential qualities of cinematic images'. Ultimately, the deciding factor was the importance of holism and the need for 'events to be understood in their social and cultural context' (Heider, 2006: 5), for which Brown felt the insights and information provided through spoken words were necessary.

The editing process resulted in a 65-minute Direct Cinema ethnographic cut called 'Brick Mule' (Brown 2019), which was produced in a Nepali and English version. The Nepali film was produced specifically for the community film screenings.

FIGURE 7. A brick factory in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

FIGURE 8. Mules working in a brick factory, Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

FIGURE 9. Mules portering goods into the high Himalayan mountains from Arkhet.

Towards transformation: methodology and outcomes

Kemmis (2010) describes the motivation of action research as 'changing history' and the film *Khacchad:Mule* (Brown, 2019) was never an end-in-itself. Similar to Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin screening 'Chronique d'un été' (1961) to the film's subjects to deliberately stimulate discussion, taking *Khacchad:Mule* (Brown, 2019) back into participant communities was integral to the whole project. Following the Freirean methodology, the project partners engaged participating communities to explore using the film to catalyse increased critical consciousness, dialogue and collective action creating transformation (liberation) of relationships between people and their equines. This community engagement utilised individual and group reflective activities as both (a) elements of the Freirean methodology towards critical consciousness, and (b) tools to suggest evidence of impact. Wiek et al. (2014) recognise that evaluating the impact of action research is a major challenge. Upholding such broad and ontological aims as deepening understanding, enabling critical self-reflection and facilitating transformative action - i.e. changing very states of being - make it extremely difficult to identify and demonstrate specific outcomes (Meyer, 2000; Piggot-Irvine, 2008). Moreover, to establish desired outcomes before the project unfolds is anathema to the respond-ability that should govern fieldwork (Piggot-Irvine, 2008; Zigon, 2017). In recognising these challenges, but equally wishing to highlight the value of action research, advocates for the methodology have developed several frameworks to enable different levels of 'effect capturing' (for example Chen et al., 2007; Piggot-Irvine, 2008, Wiek et al., 2014: 120).

Drawing from this literature, the project partners designed a bespoke evaluative framework for assessing the impacts of the action-research activities in the project as a whole. In the spirit of the participative and Freirean underpinnings, the framework aimed to assess any positive or negative impacts that could be directly linked to the research (the

making of the film, the showing of the film, and the continuing dialogue and actions with the participative communities), but equally to use the evaluation process as an opportunity for further dialogue, critique, reflection and transformation. Consequently, the project partners organised film-screenings, interviews and focus groups with the communities involved. Animal Nepal employed and trained local researchers to carry out the field work where they set up screening events in local community spaces. During these events they distributed pre- and post-screening questionnaires to audience members, set up one-to-one interviews with mule owners and handlers, and facilitated focus groups as action development sessions focused on improving the lives of working mules. The interviews were designed to elicit content-rich, phenomenological descriptions of skills and know-how by the mule-handlers, while film-screenings with audiences from the wider communities aimed at catalysing self and group distanciation and reflection on the everyday life of the equines. The audience questionnaires offered a Likert scale from 1 to 5 through which each member could assess their own pre- and post-viewing knowledge. This method aimed specifically to provide an indication of any increases in equine-care knowledge among the relevant communities. In total 97 respondents were questioned across five community locations: 12 one-to-one interviews and 97 focus group participants.

Quantitative survey

Film audience members were offered a short Likert Scale questionnaire ranging from 'Very Little' to 'Very Much' which allowed them to assess (a) the level of knowledge they felt they had before the screening, (b) the level of knowledge they felt they had gained from viewing the film, and (c) how they might review their prior level of knowledge having viewed the film. Answers from 48 individuals were analysed. The results indicated that respondents reporting 'A Lot' (Figure Two) as their level of knowledge on equine welfare moved from 16.7 per cent before watching the film, to 29.2 per cent after watching the film (Figure three).

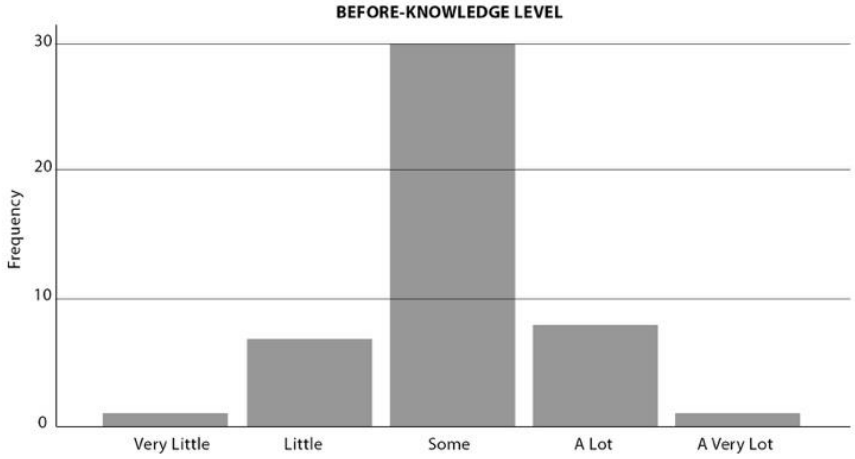

FIGURE 10. Community participant's knowledge levels pre-screening of film.

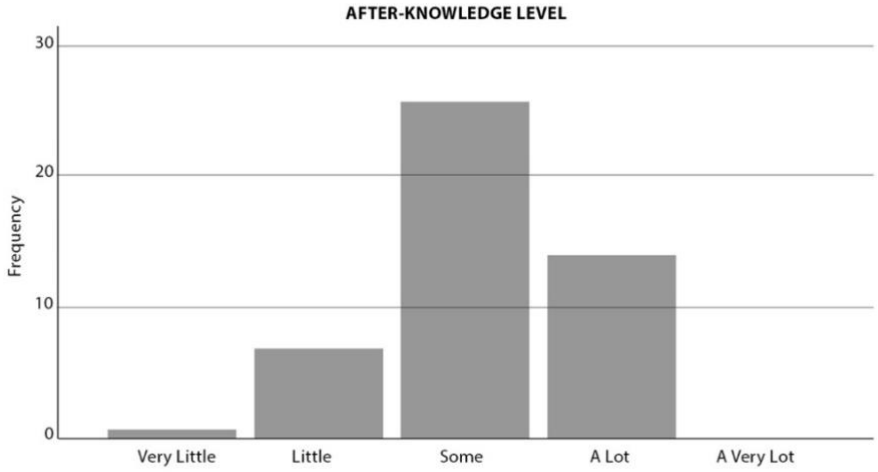

FIGURE 11. Community participant's knowledge levels post-screening of film.

Using a chi-square test, the project partners also determined that there was a significant association between the specific type of relationship to the mule (owner, handler, or owner-handler) and the level of knowledge reported before and after viewing the film. Owners and owner-handlers expressed significantly more confidence in their level of knowledge before watching the film in comparison to respondents who identified as handlers only. However, mule owners acknowledged a significant increase in their knowledge after watching the film while owner-handlers seemed to downgrade their level of knowledge slightly after watching the film. The questionnaires also included a short open-ended

question asking audience members to note any new knowledge they felt they had learned from watching the film.

Interview To The Double (ITTD)

ITTD is a method of data collection promoted by practice theorist Davide Nicolini (2009) who recommends it as a mode of eliciting 'hard-to-reach' embodied knowledges when inquiring about everyday skills and practices. Developed within the Italian Marxist tradition, a founding objective for ITTD was to allow workers to recognise and appreciate the high level of skill and knowledge that they had come to take for granted, and which upon reflection, could contribute to new self-confidence and self-respect; the broader aim being emancipation and revolutionary social change. ITTD was chosen for our project because of this potential to foreground habitual knowledges and practices, to enhance self-reflection and self-confidence, and to facilitate social critique and transformative action. Individually during a one-to-one interview with an Animal Nepal researcher, community participants (those who agreed to be interviewed) were asked to imagine they must return home suddenly during their workday. Before they leave, they must give instructions to a work mate (the interviewer) to cover their usual tasks and duties in such a way that no one notices another person has taken over the role. The interviews varied from 30 minutes to over an hour and generated transcripts rich in descriptive detail.

Community action

Animal Nepal field staff facilitated focus groups as action development sessions focused on improving the lives of working mules. The actions served two purposes; (a) they provided a structure through which participants could begin the process of collective action towards transformation, and (b) they provided a tool to encourage sustained improvement in equine

health and wellbeing practices into the future. Working in small groups, participants were facilitated in discussions built around the internationally recognised Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare and together they established several points for action focused on equine welfare in their communities. These actions were recorded as posters and displayed by participants in their local community. The community actions are not 'smart' (specific; measurable; achievable; relevant; timebound) in the way a plan of action to be carried out as a timebound event might be. Rather, they are principles (expressed as attitudes and behaviours) to characterise an ongoing changed relationship between the people and their equines. This reflects the transformational quality of conscientisation as Freire (2008) describes it, not a one-off event, but ongoing where critical thinking connected to action is a sustained state of being.

Keeping equines free from hunger and thirst	**Keeping equines free from discomfort**	**Keeping equines free from pain, injury and disease**	**Keeping equines free from fear and distress**	**Allowing equines to express normal behaviour**
• Feed timely • Feed as much as possible • Water animal during trip • Feed before work • Let equine graze at station • Carry enough food for trip • Feed equine who are sick • Provide water to sick • Fresh and clean drinking water • Feed timely • Proper medical treatment • Feed 3 times a day • Timely provide water in 3 to 4 hours of gap	• Let them play and relax while resting • Massage body if do no walk properly • Groom at evening • Clean foot after work • Let the harness dry if it is wet after work • Do no walk while it is raining • Provide good shelter • Provide enough space • Keep the shelter clear • Give 3 hours of rest	• Medicine and medical support • Inform vet • Rest if sick • Clean foot if it is lame • Provide good food if weak • Deworm if not eating properly • Provide vitamins time to time • Timely treatment • Timely check up • Don't beat the equine • Give timely treatment • When sick, consult nearby vet or animal hospital • Consult vet	• Do not beat animals • Love them • Care properly • Let them play with their partner • Keep the group together • Always sell the animals with their partner if they have • Keep the mother and their child together • Allow them to graze freely • Let them play • Give 10 to 15 minutes of rest • Treat the equine as their own baby	• Keep in free space • Give love and care • Let them play • Rest if sick • Keep the partners together • Proper grazing land • Keep a watch on any inappropriate behaviour

FIGURE 12. Collective community responses as guiding principles listed under the Five Freedoms for Animal Welfare.

FIGURE 13. Filmmaker Michael Brown with equine handlers, Nepalganj, Nepal.

Discussion of findings and evaluation of the research

While these different methods were carried out with the aim of generating dialogue and transformative action, they also provided qualitative and quantitative data for the research project as a whole. The qualitative data (from the interview transcripts, the qualitative question on the questionnaire and the focus group actions) was compiled, organised and analysed using the data analysis software NVivo. Three questions were asked of this data:

a. Does this data show evidence of any new understandings, critical reflection and/or consideration of new practices and transformative action towards equine welfare, following the participation in and viewing of the film?
b. If so, what is the nature of these new understandings and practices?
c. What does this data tell us about the impact/effectiveness of the research more broadly?

Given the Frierean principles of this project, the data analysis was especially sensitive to the participants' *existential* meanings of working with equines. As Harman states (2011) these meanings are implicit in the participants' discussion of everyday perceptions and practices. After initial NVivo coding, it became clear that there was a general distinction in the data between what we categorised as 'Before Knowledges' and 'After Knowledges' (knowledges here loosely encompassing ideas of understanding, perception, practice, and critico-rational knowledge). The 'Before Knowledges' category was constituted by the references in the data to practices and perceptions of equine care that predominated in everyday life previous to viewing the film. A thematic analysis identified a significant shift in the character of the data from an 'instrumental' view of animal care in the 'Before Knowledges' to an 'experiential' view in the 'After Knowledges'. 'Before Knowledges' were primarily defined by a form of understanding that viewed the working mule as an instrument or an object. In this data, practices and perceptions were governed by the need to provide only the bare necessities for survival, a mode of care akin to maintaining the different parts of a tool so that it functioned smoothly. This theme was illustrated most clearly in the way that participants spoke about caring for their equines in the form of 'to-do' lists. Below we can see Participants A. K., R. K. and K.K. listing their daily tasks in looking after their equines. There is no sense that the *object of* their actions has the potential for any experience of this attention. These three quotations can be compared to R. K.'s final comment below in which he discusses checking a cart and road conditions in much the same mode of expression as the previous comments.

ITTD Participant A. K.: We should feed four times a day at 4am, 11am, 4pm and 8pm. Our feed should contain maize, brans and vitamin powder. We work 6 days a week. They get rest on Friday.

Questionnaire Participant R. K.: Maintain proper hygiene, check food, check water.

ITTD Participant K.K: After that they are taken to work. During work they are given rest at 12:00pm to 2 pm. In that time water and feed is provided to them. After 2 hours of rest they get back to work. They work until 5 pm.

ITTD Participant R.K.: During working time you should look after the cart, whether its parts are well fitted or not, and [check] road conditions.

It is important to note that this 'instrumental' interpretation does not make any judgments about the participants' treatment of the animals. The often-extreme circumstances that the mule-handlers face in their long journeys and everyday working lives are demonstrated explicitly in the ethnographic film. Nonetheless, it is significant that the discursive pattern of instrumentalisation gave way in the 'After Knowledges' to a new mode of understanding the equines *per se*. After watching the film, a concern for animal experience came to the forefront of the participants' discussions. In the quotation below, Participant S.G. takes into account that an animal needs to 'relax', that it must feel periods of release from the harness, and that it has a capacity to manage its own sustenance, each point of which indicates a sense that the animal has its own experience, comforts, and discomforts, as well as autonomy.

ITTD Participant S. G. After walking for eight to nine hours we should decide where to stop. We should choose the station where there is water facility and a grazing area where the animals can

> relax. We have to remove the harness after reaching the station and let them relax and feed them. They can graze in a nearby jungle if available and comeback themselves after they are full.

In these 'After knowledges' terms like relaxing and grazing replace earlier terms like feed and rest. Implicit in both relaxing and grazing is an expanded sense of time and space, a recognition that the equine is dwelling in and experiencing its environment rather than just moving between segments of time and space for work, food or rest. Likewise, bonds and relationships between mules appeared as a new thematic fulcrum in the 'After Knowledges': expressions like 'let them rest with friends'; 'keep the group together'; 'keep the mother and their child together' appear more frequently, again illustrating this shift from an instrumental view to an experiential view. It is the emergence of this experiential view in the participant's discussions following the film screenings that the project partners consider an important impact of the research.

The effectiveness of this project's film ethnography methodology to create sustainable change depends, then, on the experiential view taking root and growing to the extent that it orientates attitudes and practices away from the 'instrumental' approach in the medium to long term. Similar to McCrindle (1998) the project partners align with an ethics of animal welfare that connects animal well-being to human well-being in general, but especially in contexts of hardship and poverty. Echoing McCrindle's (Ibid) experience in Africa, improved well-being for the animal inevitably feeds back into the quality and quantity of the mule's contribution to the development of the communities and the well-being of the people they work with. Hence, increased community resilience.

Paulo Freire (1972) was focused on the liberation of the oppressed, and the relationship they have with their oppressors. This is very relevant to the discussion of the impacts of this action research. Freire recognises that oppression can be deliberate or unintentional. His pedagogy addresses the possibility of deliberate or unintentional 'oppressors' acknowledging or realising the known or unknown impacts of their behaviours on others through dialogue, offering liberation for both parties. Furthermore, people are not fixed within these 'roles'. Those oppressed by stronger forces may, in turn, oppress those weaker than themselves. The equine-owning communities engaged with in the fieldwork are unquestionably living in difficult economic and social situations. However, in many cases they are also oppressors of their equines, intentionally or otherwise. This raises a critical question; has this action research used ethnographic film to allow equines, through their participation and depiction, to liberate themselves and their oppressors in a Freirean way? Relevant to this discussion is the concept of dehumanisation. Freire (1972: 21) describes dehumanisation as the 'result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanises the oppressed'. Participant responses do indicate a new recognition among some participants of the mules' own direct experiences of the world and a shift from an 'instrumental' view to an 'experiential' view. This is not anthropomorphism in the attachment of human characteristics to their mules. Neither is it the restoring of 'the humanity of both' (oppressor and oppressed) (ibid) as Freire would describe between people. However, it does suggest some restoring of the humanity (liberation) of some of those who have been acting oppressively to mules, in the new realisation of mules as living beings deserving of humane treatment and compassion, thus liberating their equines too.

The project partners feel that, collectively, the quantitative and qualitative methods produced clear statistical detail and rich insight into the variable subjective understandings of

equine-care knowledge in the different mule-human relationships. Importantly, the methodology and tools employed were fundamentally essential and integral to Freire's (1972) conscientisation approach that requires high levels of participant self-reflection. The authors also argue that the bespoke evaluation methodology employed contributes to the originality of the research findings and outcomes. The project partners fully recognise the need to conduct future community-based assessments of action implementation and plan to conduct a longitudinal study by revisiting communities after one, three and five years, to explore (a) the extent to which ongoing changed relationships (expressed as attitudes and behaviours in the community actions) between people and their equines have been sustained, (b) the related observable impacts in the health and wellbeing of equines, (c) the associated enhancement of community resilience, and (d) the extent to which critical consciousness as a state of being has been sustained within communities. However, the current findings do evidence some effectiveness of community-based ethnographic film as action research for transformation, based on Freirean methodologies.

The project methodology has enabled participant communities, including the mules themselves, to positively enhance their wider socio-political environment. Material from the ethnographic film has been used to promote engagement with political stakeholders in Nepal, notably in advocating for the Working Animals Directive that emerged during the course of filming, and that has now been adopted by the Nepal Government. A film screening with focus group discussion has been conducted with members of the Federation of the Brick Kilns Association in Nepal, that includes brick kiln owners. Key issues drawn out of the film by federation members included the importance of animal shelter management, the maintenance of equine drinking water facilities, and the construction of isolation stables for animals with contagious diseases. The recognised prevalence of the zoonic disease Glanders

over the past few years in Nepal was also discussed and the ethnographic film highlighted the importance of animal isolation facilities and separate living provision for human handlers. From the ethnographic film Animal Nepal veterinary staff have gained new insights leading to innovations in outreach services; one example being the idea of seed-funding green fodder stations at key points on the mountain routes to address the high prevalence of equine colic in the pack-carrying mules.

FIGURE 14. A brick-factory mule resting after a day's work in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

Conclusion

This article has described the use of film ethnography as an action research methodology for social development and transformation based on Freirean principles. Informed by Heider (2006: 2) the authors have resisted the temptation to define ethnographic film as an absolute, but rather as 'various attributes, or dimensions, that effect ethnographicness in films', exploring 'how can the (visual capability of film) complement the (lexical capability) of ethnography?' (ibid: 3). Similarly, participation is presented as characteristics of

'participatoryness' utilising the Johari Window, created by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955. This article has illustrated how Freire's (1972) idea of 'conscientisation' has relevance as an underlying theory for film ethnography as action research because ethnographic film can present life realities back to its subjects, facilitating and catalysing people to self-reflect. A participatory ethnographic filmmaking process has been described, through which specific individual and community actions are presented within their social and cultural context. Attention to the values of ethnography have been married to the craft of filmmaking, resulting in an ethnographic film that has been utilised within participant groups towards transformational self-awareness. Referencing Cinéma Verité and Observational Cinema, the term Film Anthrozoology has been proposed, describing the filmed interactions between animals and people. Drawing on Wiek at al.'s (2014: 120) 'effect-capturing approach', and integral to the project's action research model, an evaluation methodology has been presented that aligns with Freire's (1972) conscientisation praxis using high levels of participant self-reflection. This bespoke evaluation methodology has contributed to the originality of the research findings and outcomes. Initial findings do evidence some effectiveness of community-based film ethnography as an action research methodology for development and change based on Freirean methodologies, showing transformation in participant knowledge of, and behaviour towards, their equines. The community actions that have emerged from the film ethnography process offer improvement in the health and wellbeing of equines, promoting greater resilience and stability of income generation capacity. A longitudinal study is planned to explore whether these changes sustain into the long-term and if community self-reflection has been sustained as a state of being as Freire emphasised. Informed by the ethnographic film material some positive enhancement of the wider socio-political environment for equine

welfare is emerging through stakeholder engagement and new Animal Nepal equine outreach services.

The authors suggest originality is demonstrated in multiple ways in this project. This initiative is believed to be the first example of a film exploring the whole life story of Nepal's working mules. The use of participatory ethnographic film connecting Freirean conscientisation to explore equine welfare has not, to the project partners' knowledge, been done in Nepal before. The methodology of participatory praxis drawing on The Johari Window and using participatory ethnographic film, leading to community-created principles reflecting a changed state of knowledge, skills and practice/behaviour also offers a model transferable to other social development challenges. This project has attracted interest from Nepali palliative care providers to explore whether a similar methodology could help to realise improved services in under-resourced rural areas. The authors also suggest that this project has opened a discussion around Freirean liberation applied to animal wellbeing, in the context of restoring humanity. This is a discussion that warrants further exploration. Finally, the authors suggest that, by going beyond observational cinema and demonstrating ethnographic film as an action research methodology that can catalyse transformation within communities, this article presents the type of participatory praxis that Henley (2020: 481) alludes to, offering 'interesting possibilities for "ways of doing" ethnographic film in the twenty-first century'.

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