

Visibility and cultural voice in Fataluku country Timor-Leste

This study explores the intersection of digital visual communication and traditional culture in the Fataluku community of Lautem, Timor-Leste. Focusing on the Fataluku Research Project as a case study, this paper investigates the effect that community-driven cultural documentation has on the value, perception and visibility of culture by the community, and makes a conceptual link between increased cultural visibility and its potential to contribute to social cohesion in the context of Timor-Leste. This paper highlights how being on camera through a collaborative process can create spaces of dialogue, open channels of cultural expression and reinforce identity for Fataluku people. This paper also explores digital visual communication as a framework that can be applied to other ethnic communities in Timor-Leste and more broadly.

Keywords: digital visual communication, Fataluku, identity, intangible culture, participatory research, Timor-Leste, visibility

Introduction

For the Fataluku community in Lautem District, Timor-Leste, a lost culture amounts to a lost identity. With increasing evidence of the evaporation of ancestral knowledge and disconnection from culture in a post-conflict and developing context (De Carvalho 2011; Arnott 2012; ETWA 2015), people in Lautem are concerned about the preservation of their culture – and their identity. In response, a small group of local Fataluku community members were supported in 2012–2013 by Australian-Timor organisation Many Hands International to seek out, document and digitally re-tell some of the hidden stories and knowledge that make up Fataluku culture. The Fataluku Research Project trained local people in media and research skills, enabling them to work with knowledge custodians in the documentation of critically endangered intangible cultural heritage over 12 months. The process aimed to contribute to the revitalisation, safeguarding and sustaining of intangi-

ble culture by increasing its visibility and raising cultural voice. It was also a process of reclaiming identity and building community capacity to include culture in the nation's growth.

Long before it became the heart of the Timorese Resistance Movement, Lautem was a distinctly unique region inhabited by Fataluku, Lero, Makasa'e and Lovaia people with strong cultures of the same namesakes (Valentim and Pereira 2013). Deeply embedded across these cultural groups and languages were a set of systems, beliefs and values that made up the rich identities of each culture – complex kinships, spiritual ceremonies, animatism, agriculture, medicine, architecture, song, music, instruments and weavings (Brandao 2011; McWilliam 2011; Brown 2013; O'Conner Pannell and Brockwell 2013).

Today in Lautem's lush, green capital, Lospalos, the single main street shows signs of past conflict and neglect, and a victory statue symbolising the district's role in independence marks an intersection. The Catholic church, which still holds three services each Sunday, has merged the shape of an *umu-lulig* (traditional spirit house) where a steeple or cross would normally be. Walls near the church showcase street art as an emotional expression of development, harmony, past, present and hope (Parkinson 2010). Most people walk – motorbikes are few and cars even more so. Some children sell boiled eggs and vegetables in the streets so they can afford school, and unemployment rates are high. Since Timor-Leste's independence, Lospalos has been peaceful, but there have been few opportunities for the local people, and the underlying pressures of development have placed strain on community and cultural survival.

In Timor-Leste, the shift towards development can translate as a disconnection from ancient stories, traditional social norms and community capacity for the younger generation who are interested in pursuing a more progressive life in the city or overseas (De Carvalho 2011; Arnott 2012; ETWA 2015). When Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in 2002, the country was inundated by international agencies working on 'nation building' (UNDP 2015). Yet many of the international development strategies have been poorly administered and are not suitable to the culture and context of the nation, with the disconnect between Western and traditional approaches threatening to destroy customary institutions and practices (Moxham 2005; Batterbury 2006; Niner 2007).

Cultural loss in Timor-Leste is not just the discarding of dress or artefacts – it's the loss of a deep-rooted and complex system that is intangible in nature and yet essential for the social fabric of the people who live it. It's a loss of kinships, sacred stories, symbols, ancestry, ritual and ceremony, relationships with land and, importantly, relationships between people (Brandao 2011). It's these intangible cultures that disappear first when the younger generation is met with new social and economic pressures (Arnott 2012). This is not to say people should not engage in development. Rather, it's a concern with what happens when a lack of employment opportunities is coupled with ex-

pectations of economic gains resulting in a disillusioned youth population who are also losing their culture (Horta 2013).

Intangible culture is closely aligned with the formation of identity over time. It relates to 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage' and it provides communities with a sense of continuity (UNESCO 2015). For example, specific to the people of Iliomar on Timor-Leste's south-east coast is the practice of *Fulidai-dai*, a living socio-cultural system that fosters collective community action and the generational passing of wisdom and traditional knowledge (ETWA 2015). For Fataluku people, there is also *Ratu*, the kinship to which someone belongs and a key social institution that can help form cooperation and social unity through shared spiritual obligations and values (McWilliam 2011). Intangible culture can even be a resource for peace-building. For example, the practice of *Fetosaa-umane* establishes relationships between intermarried families and, while not always ideal, can promote a strong social identity when values and traditions from *uma lisan* (clan traditional houses) are passed between generations (Brandao 2011).

In a globalising society, these practices are inherently fragile, and the tragedy of contemporary cultural loss in Timor-Leste is even greater when we acknowledge local people were able to retain an incredibly strong sense of cultural identity throughout more than 400 years of colonisation and more than 20 years of occupation. This enabled them to nurture a collective identity where narratives were passed down through generations, and recognise key aspects of their culture that were essential for the long-term sustaining of communities (Grenfell et al. 2009). Specific to Timor-Leste's cultural struggle has been the freedom struggle built on the desire for independence and cultural identity. The sense of legitimacy that arrived with independence is embedded in the history of place and ancestors, and 'Timorese culture was powerfully entwined with the drive for resistance and independence' (Brown 2013: 12).

The digital documentation of intangible culture

Increasingly there are examples of societies facing cultural loss turning to digital visual communication and storytelling to help preserve their traditions. Mulka Arts has been using film and photography since 2007, for example, to record and protect Yolngu cultural knowledge in Australia's North-East Arnhem Land (Mulka 2015). Similarly, photographer Jeff Young answered a call by Maasai tribes for 'technologists' to help them preserve their culture – they saw digital storytelling as one way to balance technology with their traditional storytelling practices (Young 2010).

Often stories hold power for the storyteller as a form of survival, causing people to consider how stories inform their present and future lives (Lambert 2013), and technology – particularly in the form of digital storytelling – can

be engaged as a creative tool through which to explore life narratives (Lambert 2015). Not only applicable to personal survival, the ability to tell a visual story creates a way for people to share what they value within culture and community, and can act as a powerful visual tool for sharing ancient and contemporary knowledge systems with others as a counter to modern culture (Photovoices 2015; Snyder 1996).

The enthusiasm for merging digital storytelling and culture is evident, but there is more to the process than just the sharing of knowledge. Ricouer suggests identity can actually be produced when elements of culture and life are re-narrated (in Reitmaier et al. 2011), while the telling of stories in whatever form they take can actually reaffirm them as 'embodied history' (Clandinin and Connelly 1998; Coul-dry 2010). Laurel Smith refers to an Indigenous video project in Mexico with *Grupo Solidaro d Quiatoni* to emphasise the relevance of culture now, and the role of visual communication in keeping culture moving and creating space for local identities in the global sphere (Paulson and Calla 2000; Smith 2008). On placing culture and identity in the context of development, the *Grupo Solidaro d Quiatoni* said: 'We need to know who we are today in order to study our own knowledge and wisdom. This is how we want to progress' (Smith 2008: 183).

But despite the good intentions and possibilities, transferring culture through digital visual communication comes with tensions, especially in regard to less visible intangible culture, which often forms the social fabric, relationships and customs that contribute to a holistic identity. Reitmaier et al. (2011) discuss the importance of oral storytelling for Lwandilean communities, where culture can be obscured in every day interactions and cultural-linguistic contexts. Although the Lwandilean people were enthusiastic to document their culture, they noted 'that recording must be compatible with the features of orality that construct their identity ... [they] felt outsiders did not articulate the meanings that entwine their identity with a setting in which their kin have resided for generations' (Reitmaier et al. 2011: 660).

There is also the question of whether digitising culture can bring about cultural preservation or a change in the community perception of culture, and we cannot expect that technology and community-driven media will automatically save culture, transform communities or create social change (Ramella and Olmos 2005; Zoetti 2013). Robbins (2010: 115) sees an 'uneasy balance between the globalisation this technology brings and the preservation of Indigenous cultures'. He acknowledges there are many Indigenous cultural preservation projects that utilise film and photography but suggests it is naive to imagine documentation alone can revitalise culture – this is just one component of a bigger, integrated project (ibid). Instead, supporting structures in various forms can contribute to a more dynamic cultural preservation rather than documenting tradition as a static end (ibid).

The Fataluku Research Project

The Fataluku Research Project in Timor-Leste was initiated to help re-invigorate critically en-

dangered Fataluku culture by recording forms of traditional expression, such as music, rituals, ceremonies, traditional knowledge and crafts. The project also set out to build local capacity to preserve cultural heritage and provide Fataluku people with an opportunity to learn more about their cultural heritage (Valentim and Pereira 2013).

While historically, outsiders have recorded Timorese culture for 'safe-keeping', this project was dedicated to putting the power in the hands of local community members and allowing the owners of culture to be the sole documenters of their heritage. Four local Fataluku people – three men and one woman – with no prior media experience, were hired and trained as cultural researchers and 'filmmakers'. They attended workshops in interviewing, research, film, photography and video editing.

For the next 12 months, the filmmakers worked with *Chefe de Sukus* (village chiefs) to meet local knowledge custodians in three Lautem sub-districts: Lospalos, Lautem/Moru and Tutuala. Custodians worked with the filmmakers to decide what was appropriate to record and how they would do it. The process included photography, video and written records, and films were shown back to participating communities. The filmmakers interviewed 64 men and 84 women over the 12 months (Valentim and Pereira 2013). Currently the content is shared through an online resource, on social media, and is in the slow process of being archived in the Lospalos Cultural Centre.

Situating the project in participatory media

The Fataluku Research Project utilised elements from participatory video, participatory research and visual anthropology to form community-driven digital documentation of intangible cultural narratives. Participatory video is a tool often used to explore self-transformative narrative and representation (Rodriguez 2001; Bradden 1999), and can work to capture the unique expressive nature of community stories as a contribution to cultural diversity. According to Browne (2005) and Pietikainen (2008), it is close collaboration within a community, for a community – as demonstrated in the Fataluku project – that will truly contribute to communal and linguistic revitalisation where culture is endangered.

The process of participatory video can also be aligned with participatory research and visual anthropology (High et al. 2012), which requires participants to create and project their own images (Yang 2012; Pink 2001). Pink makes correlations between what she terms visual anthropology and collaborative film process similar to the Fataluku project. In particular, she refers to a project with Carlos Flores and Maya Q'eqchi filmmakers in Guatemala where the collaborative process brought about important ethnographic and cultural insights, new levels of engagement and self-awareness and social healing in the post-war context (Flores 2004; Pink 2007).

For Evans and Foster (2009: 105), 'participatory research is fundamentally about transforming communities from passive subjects, objects or

victims of the research gaze into agents', which is very much about supporting community members as researchers themselves, as found in the Fataluku Research Project. Community-led research allows those at the centre of the research to navigate cultural norms and establish spaces of safety and understanding that can support the participation and reflection of local community participants (Wheeler 2009; Low et al. 2012; Miller and Smith 2012; Mistry and Bernardi 2012).

Zoetti (2013: 216) writes that 'being on camera is not only important for the recognition of a group's culture and identity, it can also be of great relevance to the non-dominant sectors of society, simply because of the gain in visibility, which may bring people back from oblivion and into public existence'. This idea is extremely relevant in the context of intangible culture, where 'being on camera' can, for knowledge custodians and community, project images and culture from the forests and villages into another sphere. Being on camera renders culture semi-permanent and present, so long as recordings are viewed and used in supporting structures.

According to Rodriguez (2001), the digital expression of social and cultural content by marginalised people can lead to the survival of cultural identities. For Zoetti (2013: 217), this visibility is a form of 'symbolic power'. He believes the survival of minority cultures is linked to their 'recognition as a distinct group', often best served through broadcasting and reaffirming a group's culture (ibid: 216). Yet Zoetti is also careful to point out that video does not magically empower those without voice, and acknowledges grassroots communities are often already powerfully vocal (Zoetti 2013; see also Gadiloke 2003). Regardless, he highlights the use of video – and other visual communication – as a tool for marginalised cultural communities to reaffirm their identity and their traditions. His writings come with a warning too: 'While filming culture can be seen a first step towards giving marginalised communities a say in their public image, it can also easily connive in their further objectivation-folklorization, once again serving the dominant sectors of society' (Zoetti, 2013: 221).

Testament to the power of digital visual communication, Timor-Leste released its first locally made feature film, *Beatriz's War*, in 2014, which told the story of resistance using local people as actors, many of whom had experienced the conflict first-hand. One of the Timorese producers, Lurdes Pires, said:

450 years of Portuguese colony, then 24 years of Indonesian ruling – we haven't been able to tell our story. When you put the screen up in the districts and the people can see their faces, their people, their story, their language ... it's quite exciting (Radio National 2014).

Yet, like *Beatriz's War*, much of Timor's visual imagery – such as the Tekee Media content produced by Max Stahl and his team that documents the freedom struggle (Tekee 2015) – remains saturated with images of the occupation and resistance, with less space for culture, self-

expression or creative arts. The engagement of local content producers in the construction of their own identities – where visual media is used to explore the relationship between culture and their communities (Ginsburg 2002) – is a relatively new concept in Timor-Leste. In the space of the new nation, where the freedom of cultural expression and storytelling has come with freedom from occupation, the power of stories about local people by local people has particular poignancy.

Case study: Investigating the Fataluku Research Project

Considering these approaches to participatory-based digital documentation, this case study set out to capture the experiences of the Fataluku Research Project filmmakers and community members and investigate the power of cultural voice and visibility. This case study asked: does the use of digital visual communication to document critically endangered intangible culture by local community members contribute to a shift in how that culture is valued? And what is the potential of this practice to contribute to social cohesion?

Four filmmakers from the Fataluku Research Project participated in a focus group discussion that explored their experiences documenting intangible cultural heritage. Three Lospalos-based knowledge custodians and five members from a cross-section of the Lospalos community participated in semi-structured interviews exploring the relationship between culture, development, community and social cohesion. Participants included artists, elders, business people, youth workers and non-government workers. This case study also employed itinerant ethnography as a research tool, where community members became informal interviewees who shared anecdotal data and shed light on certain ways of life by their daily actions, comments and movements (Schein 2000). The following section explores themes relating to the findings of this research.

Findings

The experience of cultural loss

The gradual loss of culture in Lautem began to accelerate during the Indonesian occupation, a period of more than 20 years during which cultural practices were discouraged and destroyed. Displacement and the mobilisation of *Fretilin* (freedom) fighters caused both women and men to leave their villages and established cultural systems. But even for those left in the villages, rituals and ceremonies were stifled and homes and *umu-luligs* destroyed (Brown 2013). As one Fataluku Research Project filmmaker explained:

During Indonesian occupation, we didn't feel free to practice our culture. We couldn't do our culture anymore, because the Timorese people were oppressed by the Indonesian people (focus group discussion, 26 November 2013).

Yet, participants also acknowledged the significant role culture played in driving the Resistance Movement, and that it was the deep desire for identity that gave fighters a cause. For one filmmaker, the feeling that they secured

freedom '*because of our culture*' remains central to his quest to preserve culture. For him, life after independence is equated with a sense of 'loss' without his [Resistance] leader, potentially indicating a loss of clarity around social systems. This loss could also be exacerbated by the context of development. The cultural drivers that led to national freedom can be easily forgotten with the promise of economic opportunity. What some members of the Lospalos community are now experiencing is a wave of outside influences – being free from colonisation and occupation does not necessarily mean a strengthening of identity. One community member explained:

[Now] in the freedom times, there are many people from outside, like the UN, they come to Timor-Leste. Coming are many people with many cultures ... the culture is in danger because of modern development because the young people are focused on the modern. It is in danger because most people don't transfer their knowledge to others (focus group, 26 November 2013).

This can translate specifically to the loss of practices that have been passed down from ancestral times, and that have the potential to contribute to community diversity and be built on for future community strength and enterprise. For example, Assaleino, just outside Lospalos, was once known for its pottery. But these days, those who have the skills to produce pottery are limited. 'The making of pottery comes from our ancestors until now but now it is endangered,' said a local potter. 'Not many people here make pottery, just about 10 people' (personal communication, 20 November 2013). Yet the village is home to hundreds. Many of the girls and boys are going to school, which is wonderful, but which means they are not learning the art of pottery from their mothers and grandmothers. 'If children want to learn we will teach them. But because they go to school they don't have time to learn,' explained the potter. Education, although important, removes young people from the traditional models of learning arts and cultural practices, leaving a gap in the transmission of cultural knowledge between generations. It is hard for people to grapple with because, while they want their children to learn their tradition, the old modes of transmission have been broken with no replacement. One local weaver said:

The first thing my mother taught me is weaving. ... I am happy because my mother taught me about the weaving. For now, because my children are at school they just watch me. It is important for my children to learn, if I don't teach it to my children they will forget. It's ... not good for us, because it's our culture and we will forget it (personal communication, 20 November 2013).

What some are noticing is that losing culture is not just about the evaporation of a unique identity, but that it is a threat to social unity as well, because aspects of culture contribute so integrally to respect and understanding. All community members and filmmakers alike repeatedly articulated the notion of culture and respect during the research. As one Many Hands International local staff member said:

If we lose culture there will be many problems, like people don't respect each other and there is no unity. From my observation, when we have strong culture, old people, young people, women and men have a strong relationship because of the culture (personal communication, 21 November 2013).

Everyone who was interviewed believed culture was essential to life in Lospalos, and Timor-Leste more generally. The passion for their traditions and identity was overwhelming, and yet all stated their culture is in danger. This sentiment translated strongly during the Fataluku Research Project filmmaking process because the filmmakers come from a place where culture is paramount to their identity.

The process of filming: Safekeeping and survival

What was also emphasised during this case study was the mutual learning and social connection that occurred between the filmmakers and the custodians/community during the Fataluku project. For example, after working with knowledge custodians, the filmmakers spent time showing the films and images back to the community. What became evident through this experience was the potential for this process to arouse community pride, and a re-evaluation of what they had shared. According to one filmmaker, the viewing of the intangible culture by custodians and community on screen evoked the idea of beauty and significance:

When we showed the films to the community again, they felt happy because they said 'ooohhh all our culture is very beautiful'. Some people don't think about the process of culture, they just know that [we are] documenting them, but they don't really understand about the process of their culture. But when they see the films again, they appreciate that our culture is important. The process is like that (focus group, 26 November 2013).

Equally important for custodians and community was the representation of themselves on screen, particularly because they have not previously been asked to talk on camera about their culture. This was a positive experience for the filmmakers, as expressed by one when he said:

When the research team played the films again, we felt proud because everyone has the opportunity to show their face on film and it's the first time. The people are very proud of this (ibid).

What was also common was a sense of permanence that the films were creating. By recording culture, it is perceived as captured and 'safe' – both by the filmmakers and custodians. One filmmaker explained: '...they saw that the culture we are filming is not in danger because we have films, photos and writing so it doesn't disappear' (ibid).

Significantly, cultural learning occurred for the filmmakers themselves. One filmmaker knew very little about the culture of Lautem and the process raised her own awareness and understanding about ancestral knowledge:

I can now know many cultures because even though I am from Lospalos, I didn't know much about the local culture. So this project really helped me learn more about my own culture (ibid).

Voice, visibility and social cohesion

One of the biggest outcomes from the Fataluku Research Project was a sense of increased visibility of culture for the filmmakers themselves, and their communities, although how far this goes is discussed further on. There was a feeling among the filmmakers that the project facilitated a greater understanding of local culture, and created connection within community. One filmmaker said:

We are happy because we are talking about our culture or we are recording the information about our culture by ourselves. I can show to everyone what makes our culture (ibid).

Beyond this was a process of connection between local people who may never otherwise have met. For example, there is distance between the filmmakers who live in Lospalos and members of more remote communities. Meeting these people, sharing ideas, ancestral stories and commonalities, as well as inviting collaboration, created a space for dialogue not otherwise available. Expressed simply, one filmmaker said: 'I was able to meet people who live in the rural areas,' while another mentioned he 'discussed about how people can share and talk about their *Ratu*' (focus group discussion and personal communication, November 2013).

This idea of talking about *Ratu* (kinship) relates strongly to the theme of respect, which emerged throughout the interviews conducted for this case study. When asked why culture even matters these days, there was an overwhelming correlation between culture and unity from community members. It's not just about upholding traditions, but it's a glue for the fabric of society. Culture and respect were inherently interconnected for one local weaver who said: 'In Timor-Leste, especially in Lospalos, culture is important because if there is culture we can respect each other. If there is no culture we cannot respect each other' (personal communication, 20 November 2013). The idea of respect, culture and *Ratu*, and the role of all these elements in the promotion of social cohesion was beautifully articulated by a local dance teacher:

Culture can bring *Ratus* together, and from that we can know each other, and we can have good relationships between different *Ratus*. From culture we can create peace, unity. Culture is not just ritual and dancing. But culture is how we can respect each other (ibid).

There was also a sense of expectation by community about the impact filming their endangered cultures could have. Both filmmakers and custodians saw the process of recording stories and knowledge as pivotal to increasing their voice and visibility, and pivotal to cultural preservation where – as the dance teacher said: 'When the young people look for recordings, maybe they can be motivated to share their knowledge about culture' (personal communi-

cation, 20 November 2013). The expectations of some custodians reached further afield than just Lautem. A local potter said:

From the film I hope the children and young people can continue to make the pottery. Culture and life go together, so the children and young people have to know the culture. When they [filmmakers] came to interview, maybe they think it's good for us. I hope this will continue. Many people in outside countries can know about our culture (personal communication, 20 November 2013).

Despite perceptions of safekeeping, preservation and impact, the members of the Fataluku Research Project remained grounded in what they believed the project could achieve on its own. They recognised the project alone would not achieve the outcomes of cultural preservation, but that it was a contributor to a more supported and holistic approach through the structures of Many Hands International, networks and the Lospalos Cultural Centre. Preserving culture was an integrated process. 'We have to archive files, recordings and photos and we can keep it in a safe place ... because if we don't have an archive about culture the next generation won't know what is our culture,' said one of the filmmakers. But he added:

Just films don't encourage young people to learn. But if we can also do the training according to the files that we collect, like learning the keko (wooden music instrument), we can prepare many people to learn to play the keko. When they know how to play, they can conserve the culture (personal communication, 20 November 2013)

Discussion

The findings from the Fataluku Research Project support the notion put forward by Zoetti (2013) surrounding the relationship between being on camera and visibility for culture and identity. One theme that commonly arose during this case study was a fear of culture and identity 'disappearing'. There was also a belief that by recording this disappearing culture, they were counteracting cultural oblivion. If only it was as simple as being 'visible'. Even so, increasing the visibility of intangible cultural heritage through a project like the Fataluku Research Project can contribute to cultural survival, where being on camera through a collaborative and community-driven process creates spaces of dialogue and the reinforcing of cultural identity. Although incredibly grassroots and limited in its impact, the Fataluku Research Project has contributed to a community creation of 'self and environment', as well as a certain level of conscientisation as defined by Rodriguez (2001) and Freire (1970). The presence of a shift in perception by participants indicates there could be far greater levels of change if, for example, the project was ongoing and bigger in scale, more collaborative and employed even greater participatory practices.

When it comes to situating the project within the theory of participatory video, participatory research and visual anthropology, where to place the Fataluku Research Project is arguable. It must be remembered that the project did not set out to be a participatory video project

and, in many ways, the outcomes are equally valuable where the indirect results are just as interesting and relevant (High et al. 2012). We certainly see a process of self-representation (Bradden 2009) by knowledge custodians, which can illuminate the value of their intangible cultural heritage and the importance of transmission. The project also retains strong threads of visual anthropology, which can contribute to transformative change (Pink 2007). It is not only the final product that has meaning but the collaborative processes to get to that point gives rise to 'new levels of engagement in thematic issues and of self-awareness' (ibid: 112). Where the Fataluku Research Project has the strongest fit is as participatory research, which is more closely aligned to the project's purpose and which incorporates key elements of participatory video and visual anthropology. The filmmakers as researchers – or researchers as filmmakers – are researching intangible cultural heritage first and foremost, are driven by community interests, and collaborate with various participants along the way.

The researcher-filmmakers also become involved in the process of transformation, as illustrated by one filmmaker when he said: 'When the research team played the films again, we felt proud because everyone has the opportunity to show their face on film and it's the first time. The people are very proud of this' (focus group, 26 November 2013). This links strongly with the emerging theory of participatory research as having a 'real and positive impact for communities' (Low et al. 2012: 53) because we can see the process has created 'pride' and, therefore, a strong sense of cultural value. It is also an example of inclusiveness, where community has the rare opportunity to be on camera and be seen by others – which can be a potential contributor to better cross-community understanding and social cohesion. Additionally, the filmmakers are novice researcher-filmmakers who, by being given the training and tools to undertake this project, are themselves participants.

Coming back to the question of whether digital cultural documentation changes how culture is valued, the recorded experiences of the Fataluku Research Project participants highlight the simple but transformative effect filming culture can have through a two-fold process. Firstly, for example, when culture is played back to community members and they said 'ooohhh our culture is very beautiful', this indicates that spotlighting 'culture' in a community that has lived it for generations can ignite an appreciation of something previously internalised in normal life, therefore increasing value. Secondly, the project has been pivotal in drawing out some of the hidden elements of intangible culture that have previously been protected by custodian knowledge holders. This is instrumental in making these hidden cultural narratives more visible.

The potential flow-on effect from the project ties in with Zoetti (2013), Couldry (2010) and Reitmaier's (2011) ideas that the retelling of narratives can bring about a reaffirmation of identity, and aligns with Smith's (2008) experiences of cultural narratives as key for shaping local

identities and for re-framing community purpose and place. The Fataluku Research Project is actually quite powerful as a process because it allows local community members the freedom to explore their cultural assets their way, and with their own voice. It's poignant when one of the filmmakers exclaimed that he was 'happy because we are talking about our culture ... and we can show to everyone what makes our culture' (focus group, 26 November 2013). Even if the reach is not great, and immediate change cannot be clearly seen or measured, there was a sense among participants that this is an important step in reclaiming their identity.

Not only about the process, but the creation of a product as a result of the Fataluku Research Project also holds significance. The project was invited to present its work at UNESCO's Workshop for the Implementation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Jakarta in 2013, for which they created a short film of some of the important cultural narratives they had captured. On returning, one of the filmmakers and community cultural researchers told, with pride, of the applause and praise for their work. They were the only team to present work visually. This is significant in placing both the Fataluku people and Timor-Leste on an international platform where they are able to promote their intangible cultural heritage in the public sphere. Not lost is the presence of a Timor-Leste cultural preservation group presenting in Indonesia, a country that for so long had been instrumental in the destruction of Timorese culture.

Culture and social cohesion (respect and peace) in Timor-Leste have a symbiotic relationship – which highlights the importance of allowing space for the representation of culture. This case study makes a conceptual link between increased cultural visibility and the *potential* it has to strengthen society and, therefore, contribute to social cohesion. What is clear in this case study is that among the filmmakers there is a sense that their unity was destroyed during occupation along with their culture, and that this is ongoing in the face of modernisation. Through the promotion of culture, a project like the Fataluku Research Project promotes mutual respect and trust through existing cultural systems. As Brandao (2011: 6-7) suggests, 'culture and traditional practices continue to represent the primary means of conflict resolution and peace building in most Timorese communities' and should 'aim to preserve the spirit and values represented by customs unique to each cultural group as a way to enhance local and national identity'.

At the same time the Fataluku project can act as a mechanism for 'instilling a sense of identity for community members and fostering linkages between generations' (Brandao, 2011: 15). Brandao gives an example of the 2006 crisis in Timor-Leste where tensions arose between those living in the East (Lorosa'e) and those in the West (Loromonu). According to interviews conducted by Brandao these divisions were political and not cultural, and many community members expressed the desire to 'reunite the people of Timor-Leste by reminding them of their interwoven cultural relationships in order to restore a broken peace' (Brandao 2011: 23).

In this space, it is important to acknowledge the role projects like the Fataluku Research Project could have in contributing to this reminder.

Of course, there is danger in the perceived magic of the camera (Zoetti 2013). One filmmaker said: 'When they see the films again, they appreciate our culture is important. The process is like that' (focus group discussion, November 2013). However, the Fataluku Research Project is too small-scale to realise such change on its own and there is little evidence to suggest that any one film project can bring about cultural survival. As the filmmakers themselves acknowledge, just creating a self-narrative about endangered culture is not enough to preserve it. It is therefore important to look at the project in its supporting structure of Many Hands International, and include the organisational mission when understanding the project. As Couldry suggests, voice is most valued when there are diverse, interlinked and sustainable processes of being heard (2010).

Culture is never a final and static entity and the Fataluku Research Project is just one part of an integrated approach to the preservation and revitalisation of intangible culture in Lautem, similar to Robbins' (2010) integrated approach. The Fataluku project is an important process in the capturing of cultural narrative, yet relies on the existence of the Lospalos Cultural Centre, which opened in 2014 as a joint project between Many Hands International and the Timor-Leste Ministry of Culture. Here the cultural narratives will be archived for the community to access and hopefully make more visible in various forms. There are also other cultural-based development projects led by Many Hands International, dedicated to exploring and valuing culture in the community such as cultural festivals, youth arts programmes and music exchange programmes.

Robbins (2010) also highlights a series of risks with the digitisation of intangible cultural heritage that relate to the Fataluku Research Project. Within communities there are fears of 'killing tradition through its flattening into a disconnected media' (Robbins 2010: 118) and the danger of relegating culture to museum status to be viewed from a distance. Archiving material in the Lospalos Cultural Centre and online does pose a risk of ossification if the project stops there. It is important the project is ongoing, allows culture to be revisited and retold, and enables people of all ages to use the recordings and stories to develop knowledge and new forms of cultural expression. Perhaps some of this will bring about inauthentic practice for asset-based development, but that is more desirable than the disappearance of an ancient and unique culture, and it creates space for culture to be rightly included in the development process. Within the Timorese community, a subtle determination prevails to explore and express culture in the spaces left in the post-conflict context. There are many young people engaging with culture and trying to define their identity in different ways. This force is part of the supporting structure needed to celebrate culture and keep it living and breathing. To influence cultural change, projects like the Fataluku Research Project need to better

engage young people in the filming process and as the tellers of stories, creating intergenerational sharing.

Conclusion

What this case study has highlighted is that digital visual communication is a valuable tool through which to open channels of cultural expression and make visible critically endangered intangible cultural heritage. There is power in its form that can realise a certain level of conscientisation for participants, and there is great potential for it to contribute to social cohesion where the recognition of culture is key to bridging divides created in a neoliberal context. If, as Robbins (2010: 118) suggests, the goal of digitising intangible cultural heritage is 'to preserve, develop and learn from endangered traditions, so that not only the form but the goals and experiences live on, finding a growing place in a changing world', then the Fataluku Research Project is an important example of this at play in the unique context of Timor-Leste. While it is a microcosm of what could be achieved, it provides a unique framework from which to build, grow and be reapplied in the nation's context.

In shining a light on the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and social cohesion, this study highlights the significant role that digital visual communication can play in strengthening this relationship in a post-conflict and modernising context. It is widely hoped by community members that 'cultural practices in Timor-Leste can preserve their legitimacy and importance as a positive force for social cohesion, respect and harmony within with a modern democratic state, while also encouraging families to invest in the health, education and development opportunities of their members' (Brandao 2011: 7). As communities consider how to meet development while retaining a connection to and respect for cultural values (ibid), the potential of participatory-based digital visual communication to help facilitate this discussion has been demonstrated in this case study and by the Fataluku Research Project.

The Fataluku project presents an element of diversity that – like so many aspects of life – is important because it invites collaboration and creates channels of voice for people who may otherwise remain oblivious in the context of development. Essentially, those people involved in the project are people who care for and create their community, and who are legitimate custodians of their living culture. Their work deserves to be given space. They should not have to struggle to secure the means to have cultural voice simply because it's not within a dominant economic and technological framework. Intangible cultural heritage deserves a place in the future development dialogue and public sphere in Timor-Leste by increasing its visibility.

If the international community feels it has a responsibility to assist in the development of the nation, then it also has a responsibility to support minority, grassroots projects that promote and preserve intangible culture so that it can become part of the footprint for the nation's future. Established in the context of Timor-Leste by local people, the Fataluku Research Project

has the culturally appropriate framework to be applied in various communities across the country – and the power to contribute to cultural preservation, revitalisation, dialogue and peace-building.

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Note on the contributor

Marian Reid is a Melbourne-based communications specialist and storyteller with a Master's in Communication for Social Change from the University of Queensland's Centre for Communication for Social Change. She works with non-government organisations and communities around the world to help tell important stories.