

Collaboration in Conflict: The *Maasai Migrants* Film Project

Peter Biella

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1. Introduction

This essay presents the research and theoretical basis of a pilot project in applied, collaborative, visual anthropology that I conducted in the summer of 2008. I worked in Tanzania with representatives of two Maasai-governed NGOs in the design, scripting, production, editing and preliminary screenings of two videos, *Maasai Migrants* and *Maasai Speak Out on HIV/AIDS* (Biella 2009a, 2009b). These two works have now begun to be used in activist Tanzania Maasai educational work. The project focused on development-centered collaboration as theorized by Paulo Freire (1972, 1985). Such an approach entails a complex, often lengthy relationship between outside educator-collaborators (who have knowledge of educational techniques and technical skills such as media production) and inside, indigenous-collaborators (who have an on-the-ground understanding of the social conditions and problems to be addressed). In the following, I concentrate on the partnerships I formed with Maasai for this film production, addressing particularly how we overcame problems of working together. Personal and concrete pragmatic difficulties that arise in Freirian educational collaborations are not theorized by the master, who is concerned with issues that are more abstract, nor do publications about recent collaborative filmmaking initiatives focus on the warnings and guidelines I offer below (cf. Levine 2003, Englehart 2003, Stadler 2003).

Freire and his followers do provide crucial insights into the way that images can contribute to an activist/development strategy. Freire (eg. 1981:51) introduces such contribution with his concept of *codification*, a noun and verb describing the impact that images and films may have, prompting eye-opening conversations among audience members.¹ Freire makes clear, and this pilot collaborative project makes clear, that a leader or facilitator must direct post-viewing discussions in order to insure that audiences experience the potential impact of image codification. In order to accomplish this key role at the culmination of Freirian film collaborative projects, the facilitator must be highly-focused and well-trained. This report provides a case study of the challenges in training indigenous facilitator-collaborators and offers advice for training. It also describes how the activist messages of our films were sabotaged in one of our screenings and presents countermeasures we developed as a resist.

¹ I am grateful to Ann May for her careful, critical reading of this essay. I thank Shamia Sandles, my American collaborator (and graduate-student) in the Maasai Migrants Project, who led me to the concept of *codifications* in Freire's work.

The media-creation component of this work was completed in March, 2009, with the final editing of the two videos. The finished films are part of this report (attached as a DVD). *Maasai Migrants* focuses on difficulties faced by Maasai men and women who have come to Dar es Salaam. They are not prepared for city life, and sustain very harsh conditions. *Maasai Speak Out* contains unrehearsed documentary footage of Maasai describing their understanding of how their culture and urban conditions heighten the dangers of HIV. Though some speakers express the false belief that Maasai do not have HIV, others insist that it exists and must be combated with systematic changes to their society and sexual culture.

Ethnographic Context

Maasai and other Tanzanian pastoralists constitute only 3% of the national population, yet East African cattle herders are famous throughout the world, their image borrowed, for example, by the national tourist industry in which handsome leaping warriors are a metaphor for the beautiful attractions of the country as a whole. Yet, over the last thirty years, since I first conducted fieldwork with Ilparakuyo Maasai, the image and reality have vastly diverged.

Doomsday predictions of “The last of the Maasai” are more than a century old (Rigby 1992), but historical circumstances have recently congealed into an unprecedented complex of crises that threaten the pastoralist lifestyle more seriously than ever before. The major crises include widespread cattle disease, long-term drought, growing pastoralist birth rates, government sedentarization laws that forbid the transhumant movement of cattle, the increasing number of agricultural enclosures (May and McCabe 2004), as well as the increasing availability of long range rifles that can kill solitary cattle herders at a distance.

The recent marginalization of Maasai is also partly due to long generations of hostile *détente* between the aloof pastoralists and their less wealthy but numerically and politically dominant agricultural neighbors. Now that the wealth producing pastoralist lifestyle is no longer consistently viable, the farmers, *ilmeek* – the uncircumcised majority - do not forget their sense of past injustice (Beidelman 1964).

These cattle dependent people have lost much of their wealth, and as a result in the last ten years tens of thousands of Maasai have migrated to Tanzanian cities (May and Ole Ikayo 2007). In urban contexts, the famous iconoclasm and “undeveloped” traditionalism – which make Maasai interesting to tourists – leave most of the migrant population with very serious difficulties.

In cities, Maasai men are find themselves untrained for almost all except marginal employment as night watchmen and hairdressers; the women act as bead workers and sellers of traditional herbs. Although urban Maasai now feel the weight of economic marginalization, social ostracism and their vanishing patrimony, most men continue to preserve their image of cultural and even sexual otherness with their refusal to don western clothes and their representation of seductive virility. This image is partly due to their insistence on wearing *illkarash*, the traditional togas in bright reds and purples that

distinguish them visually from the city's dominant non-pastoralist ethnic groups (May and Ole Ikayo 2007).

Project Antecedents

Since my first media production with Maasai in 1980, I have made films primarily in Latin America and North America. This work included applied visual studies on HIV, racism and cultural repatriation. Based on that earlier work in anthropological filmmaking (Biella 2008), I chose to concentrate in the pilot *Maasai Migrants* project on three features, *collaboration*, *facilitated screenings* and *message longevity*. Here, I discuss these three features in relation to the 2008 pilot project I conducted with urban Maasai of Tanzania. Our group, composed of members of two Maasai-led NGOs in Dar es Salaam and a San Francisco State graduate student, produced two social intervention films related to the crises of migrant Maasai.

Our collaboration in the design, shooting, editing and screening of these films developed from the educational theories of Paulo Freire whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) champions liberatory collaboration among the poor in Latin America. Like Freire's work, and like many current instances of community-based participatory ethnography, ours sought a non-hierarchical, grassroots-generated educational plan. Our project also took inspiration from the transformation of film screenings into activist interventions. This transformation was first described by Engelhart (2004) and Levine (2004) in the *STEPS for the Future* project of Southern Africa. The promotion of conversations among audience members after films are screened allows personal problems to be recognized as being widely shared. Post-screening activism promotes collaboration in a second sense: when audiences adopt new attitudes and approaches to their problems, they become part of the collaborative process. Behavior change and empowerment of the audience are the reasons for making the films in the first place: all take strength when they recognize that their problems are collective and shared.

The Maasai Migrants project also sought *longevity* through the design of "appropriate messages" akin to appropriate technology. We are attempting to establish long-term collaboration with Tanzania Maasai NGOs, both through the development of a field school in applied visual anthropology in Dar es Salaam, and through the creation of many short educational films – in the Maasai language – that will encourage urban Maasai to grapple together with their collective problems in post-screening discussions.

In the following, I identify the major collaborative challenges we faced in the Maasai Migrants Project.

2. Collaborations

A. My San Francisco students as collaborators

The problems posed by migration and HIV for any cultural group are so serious that a realistic effort at tackling them requires many media campaigns, many people, many organizations and many lifetimes. I, as a media-maker, writer, theorist concerned

with cross-cultural HIV education for more than 20 years, believe that the first step to a modest, systematic and realistic approach to addressing the problem must be to include the education of educators in the program.

The Freirian approach to development is based on the premise that educators themselves must learn through a sequence of exposures to the world they seek to change. My developing premise is that the whole team, not only I as “senior educator,” must keep eyes and ears open to unexpected truths from one another. Moreover, I must insure that my students – who are my first collaborators in future *Maasai Migrants* projects – must also undergo reality-testing first hand, experiencing exposure to the problems and struggles for solutions in the field.

Given the fact that my home base is San Francisco State University’s Program in Visual Anthropology, my primary set of student-collaborators are those who enter my program to study filmmaking and anthropology. By bringing with me, last summer, Shamia Sandles, my San Francisco student, to share the pilot research, I tested the viability of my idea to form a field school in future years. Ms. Sandles was excellent to work with, and because of her success I invited more students to accompany me for further development filming in 2009. The example they set, to themselves and their own future students, will I hope keep the idea and theory of collaboration alive.

Despite the relative economic security of my American students compared with the insecurity of most of our Tanzanian collaborators, my students nevertheless do face profound life difficulties. They have elected to be documentary filmmakers, to follow a career that entails incessant rejection and all but guarantees income expectations well below the norm of America’s educated elite. My students’ moral commitments, dedication to their art, and global vision sustain them in their decisions to pursue advanced education in a frustrating and low-paying occupation. I admire them, but also understand why they are few in number and why they are often anxious.

B. Maasai as pre-production collaborators

Despite the applied anthropologist’s desire to serve an entire community, we only meet only individual people whose individual qualities color the work we do and the constituencies we can serve. *Maasai Migrants* was a pilot intervention, representing the first step of a long process. For it, the collaborators I was able to find and work with were not in every respect ideal. Yet they were very good in many ways: I was certainly lucky to find them given the restricted conditions imposed by the fact that I was only beginning my research. They also eventually led me to other collaborators with skills they did not themselves have. I was, to a degree, learning by doing and playing by ear.

My 2008 collaborators were Maasai from Arusha, a fact which stigmatized them in the eyes of some individuals from other Maasai sections; they were only recently graduated from the University, and their life experiences were somewhat limited to the world of the ivory tower. Still, they were the successful founders of an NGO, and were dedicated to serving the pastoralist communities of their origin. When I met them, however, straight out of the university, they were ill prepared to accomplish their goals.

I was able to discover the existence of these collaborators in the first place precisely because they *were* at the university. They were there because somewhere in their past they had become Christians. They had been recognized by pastors to have a special aptitude and capacity for study, and were encouraged to go forward with formal education. Their removal to academia (and to Christianity) at an early age necessarily alienated them to some extent from those they wanted to serve. These facts had important consequences for our collaborative work: they have been alienated to some extent from their traditional world

My fellow collaborators were deeply committed to serving the Maasai communities of their birth, as well as the migrant communities in Dar es Salaam. They saw film as a means to serve first as a fundraising tool for their NGO and also as a rallying point for community solidarity. Yet because of their youth and inexperience, my collaborators were angered and given to impotent fuming when they received hostility from the leaders in the communities they wished to serve. The leaders refused the idea that a film made by white people with the help of university educated Maasai could be of any help to them. They had heard such promises, they said, many times before. And they demanded payment from our Maasai collaborators for being filmed, just as they would have demanded it from any foreign tourist.

At every turn, when we arrived on the scene with cameras the preparatory work, paving the way for our arrival, had not been done. Camera and collaborator arrived together, unannounced. Small wonder that people were not pleased to see us. They certainly had difficulty appreciating the value of our making a film about the fact that they were forced to sell their wares and were sleeping away their afternoons in a garbage dump! To show the long-term benefits of such a film would have been difficult in the best of circumstances: it was impossible with the film crew waiting right there while the immediate negotiations took place. In the event, I finally realized that our collaborators had to simply failed and that we would not – in the short period of time that we had – succeed in convincing anyone that our idea for a film had long term benefits.

With that realization, against my policy for many years (and even with some bitterness) I twice agreed to play tourist and pay the wildly high prices they demanded. Proper preproduction preparation in the communities to be filmed would certainly have made such payments unnecessary. It seemed clear to us as well that our payment was being pocketed by a few local opportunistic leaders – men whose decisions influenced group behavior but who were not finally answerable to the group or obliged to share it with everyone.

I will discuss this issue again below.

C. Non-hierarchical collaboration in a hierarchical world

The Freirian approach to education emphasizes the need for reciprocity between “educator” and “learner.” Yet my young male and female Maasai counterparts knew nothing of the Freirian method and my own optimistic naiveté about it was also misguided. My status as a European from whom money could rather effortlessly be made to flow created significant collaborative difficulties that I did not completely

understand at the time. My constant visits to the ATM were not only dangerous physically, but also subverted the collaborative method. Bettina², our 27 year old Maasai counterpart, finally confessed to me a joke that had been circulated among her friends when she was in school:

Girls are lipstick. Boys are ATM.

Even before I learned how seriously I had been bled, this joke did not appeal to me. When, six months after returning to the US, I learned that my Maasai collaborators had unblushingly accepted from me three or four times the normal salary for their services, I was able to understand something I had sensed before. There was often an undercurrent of covert manipulation, unwelcome signs of smugness and occasional flashes of resentment that colored the attitude of my male collaborator toward me and sometimes the project as a whole.

In addition to the fact that I was identified and regularly activated as a European-based ATM machine, several other irreducible attributes of my being (or my perceived identity) also influenced the tenor of the collaboration.

Maasai society is strongly segmented by sex and age. My position therefore as an older man, working with Maasai men and women in their late twenties, entailed considerable social baggage.

I found myself, for example, often nagging my Maasai female counterpart to assert herself and exercise in practice the feminist theory she had learned at the university. Yet long before her schooling, she had also been taught modesty and silence in the presence of men. The most telling moment occurred perhaps a week into the project. Four of us were at the dinner table, having been brought the serving bowls or vegetables, *ugali* and stew by our female cook. I stood up to serve individual portions. When I handed Bettina her plate, she nearly fell off her chair. She said, “I have never been served food by a man before.” Later, she told me privately that she “learned more feminism that moment than in four years at university.”

Eventually she told me that none of her professors at the university had ever asked her opinion on anything – much less ever left important decisions up to her. She said she was very grateful to me for showing her something about equality that she had not suspected.

Bettina was the chairperson of the NGO with which I had originally engaged to collaborate. Although I sometimes saw her take a firm hand with the male members of her board of directors – as will be described below - I sometimes also thought I saw a reluctance to criticize them when criticism would in my mind have been appropriate. Thus my efforts to enforce collaborative equality were again frustrated by my inability to convince Bettina that she should take on a leadership relationship with her subordinates.

I had failed to anticipate the extent of Bettina’s Maasai-female sense of subservience. This feeling naturally influenced her performance as project collaborator. I have no doubt of her superior intelligence, but her first reply to most questions or appeals for advice was, “I don’t know, Peta. I don’t know anything about film. You are the

² The names given here are pseudonyms.

expert.” A conscientious Christian, Bettina told us near the end of the project that she had never been inside a movie theater or seen a film. She had somehow formed the idea that whatever film she saw would so thoroughly corrupt her morals that she would become addicted to the movies and waste the rest of her life watching useless trash.

My 27-year old male Maasai collaborator, an *olmurrani* (a man of the “warrior” age grade) was difficult to work with sometimes for very different reasons. He had just received his BS in development economics and had great ambitions for serving his home community. Meitamei was, remarkably, one of 72 siblings, a son of his father’s 11th wife. He and his full brother were the only children to have a university education. Meitamei had deep affection for his parents, often asserting how much his father loved him.

In school, he seemed to me to have spent as much time acquiring leadership roles in campus clubs as at study. It was his keen eye for opportunity that led him in the first place to see my advertisement for a Maa-language translator.

In many ways, Meitamei and I worked well together. He had a strong work ethic and I think he sincerely believed that the film we were making would be beneficial to the Maasai whom he loved. Nevertheless, in the more than 500 hours we spent together, problems in collaboration arose. When, for example, on two occasions I expressed annoyance at something he had done, and on one occasion expressed anger at something I believed had gone very wrong (that was not Meitamei’s fault) he became very resentful and seemed ready almost to abandon the project – accepting as a loss the triple salary I unknowingly paid him.

No doubt I am obnoxious when annoyed and angry, but I do sometimes have grounds for my displeased reaction to events. In any case, even though I was not always in the right, I sometimes found in my Maasai colleague a sense of touchiness, pride or self-love that surpassed in degree what I could accept complacently. Tension resulted, collaboration weakened on these occasions when hurt feelings or seething resentment got in the way. Equally, my ignorance of Maa and my lack of sophistication about local needs and conditions - exacerbated by occasional bouts of irritability and volatility - increased our problems.

Meitamei’s inexperience with filmmaking, like Bettina’s, also understandably made the collaboration difficult. He knew little about the subject apart from which I had taught him, and he sometimes took my off-hand pronouncements literally. He would stridently complain if I changed my mind, or offered a nuanced alternative to an idea I had earlier proposed. Meitamei’s cultural training as a commanding and assertive *olmurrani* – and his subsequent academic achievement – sometimes made him difficult. Although my first goal was to promote non-hierarchical collaboration in the team, that goal also obliged us to respect the expertise of each team member, even when it manifested occasionally in apparently contradictory remarks.

D. Collaborating in selecting the film topic

Before this project began, on an earlier trip to Tanzania, Meitamei and I had discussed the need for several educational films in the Maa language, including ones on civil rights, employee rights, HIV, gongo, and malaria. When I did return, and after a

series of meetings represented in Shamia Sandles' film, *Subject to Debate* (forthcoming), I was anxious to let the topic be selected by my new collaborators, Meitamei and Bettina. I was happy at that time to accept their opinion that a general ethnographic overview of the social conditions of urban Maasai would be more valuable – and more prudent as our first effort working together – than a didactic educational film we might attempt about a specific problem area. This was particularly true given the problematic nature of talking about problems! My Maasai collaborators reasoned that such a film as they proposed could show potential funding agencies that their NGO served a deserving and extremely disadvantaged community. Equally important, the film could spark useful post-screening discussions among Maasai audiences, as described below.

I have not regretted the selection of the *Maasai Migrants* film subject. Bettina and Meitamei both know the problems we were to depict very well, and in a few weeks mastered much of the art of introducing the idea of our project in new areas where we hoped to be allowed to film. They were also wise in selecting a topic that would not be impossibly difficult.

E. Maasai collaborators in the field, preparing the way for filming

In the next two sections, I'll describe the kinds of help I've realized in retrospect would have been most useful from my Maa speaking collaborators.

First would have been a greater knowledge of the local conditions to be filmed, with particular knowledge of the political and religious leaders who needed to be brought on board with the project and persuaded to lend their influence as needed. Because our collaborators had never before sought out or tried to influence such people, they made a number of mistakes. The first of these, as I've mentioned, was that they did not set aside the days or even hours needed for their proposal for filming to percolate and find consensus. They should never have broached the idea of filming for the first time with us in tow. (I had gone believing that they had done preliminary work already. As it turned out, Bettina had casually mentioned the idea to a single person, and he happened not to have been at the market the morning we arrived. A systematic information campaign was required.)

My collaborators did not always choose wisely when selecting people to approach when introducing the idea and seeking permission. Unfortunately, senior elders, who would traditionally be approached with such requests, are conspicuously silent in the urban migrant population. Elected *ilmurran* age-set leaders did exist in the city, however, and should have been approached. Instead, Bettina simply proposed the idea of filming with the first *olmurrani* who would talk to her, with the results described above. This technique apparently only succeeded in branding Shamia and myself as tourists and Bettina and Meitamei as university-educated sell-outs.

This characterization was unfair, and it made our collaborators angry, incapable of dispassionate persuasion. It also set an unfortunate tone from the first day forward, condemning the project to pay by the hour for the privilege of filming Maasai in compromised living conditions. Yet the fact that we were able to pay too much money did again make up for the fact that we had too little experience and local knowledge.

Even by the last week of filming we were still encountering problems of failed communications, potential film subjects who changed their minds at the last moment, and simple things like collaborators who left their cell phones turned off or without any credit so they could not be reached. Confirmed meetings would therefore often fail. I pleaded with Meitamei to put an unusual amount of credit on his cell, so that we would never lose touch, but he consistently failed to do so. Although in Tanzania cell phones are ubiquitous, at least half of the time our colleagues were “unreachable” on cell.

F. Maasai as collaborators during shooting

Given the fact that my partners knew little about filmmaking, it would have been very beneficial to set aside time for special training. I simply did not anticipate the kinds of help I would need from them while filming under documentary conditions. During interviews, either Bettina or Meitamei was needed to direct the questions. Shamia and I would settle down into a camera position and begin, thereby trapping ourselves in paralysis, since once we started filming we could not cry out emerging needs without interrupting the interview’s often rambling and delicate flow. The interviewer needed to be taught about remaining still while the subject was speaking, and using exaggerated nonverbal gestures in place of spoken confirmations. The interviewer needed to know that he or she should encourage brief answers and insure that the question was comprehensibly contained in the answer. Meanwhile, the interviewer needed to stay outside of the picture frame, know about mike placement, about eye-line matches, and where they should place their own bodies.

When one of our two Maa-speaking collaborators was interviewing, the other would usually wander off, assuming that he or she was not needed. In fact, there are always several contributions that the fourth crew person can make. The first is to keep an eye on the visual space being recorded and to dissuade gawkers from entering the shot. On some occasions, the fourth member can record a simultaneous translation in English on a stereo channel parallel with the original recorded track. The fourth person, like the interviewer, must listen very closely to the interview to insure that the needed information has actually been stated. They must not engage in idle, off-mike conversation, since they may be needed at any moment. The fourth can remain on the lookout for the next interviewee, or forestall troubles on the horizon. Above all, the fourth needs to understand that he or she is fundamentally on duty while shooting is taking place. Newcomers to filmmaking are unfamiliar with the extreme tension of that typically brief filming moment (the moment when videotape is actually moving in the camera). If filming seems to be going well, they assume that they have nothing to do.

What requires considerable experience is to realize that a fourth helper is actually not needed about 95% of the time. However, in the remaining 5% such a person is needed desperately and immediately. One must learn that most documentary production time is spent waiting around, for the instant when decisive action is needed without fail or delay.

Collaborators’ impression that they make take a break when others are shooting in *vérité* documentary style is even more hazardous than disappearing during an interview.

In *vérité* style, the filmmakers are sure to need the proximity and fully attentive help of collaborators much more than 5% of the time. This is true despite all good intuitions and good judgments on the part of the camera- and sound operators. It is particularly true when these two do not well understand the language or context.

Thus, film crews should practice ahead of time how to get the best from their local counterparts during *vérité* shooting. One service is most crucial. Collaborators must make sure that the camera and sound operators understand the basic roles of the key players and the basic “plot” of the event being filmed. It is more than likely that one can film an event in an unknown language without understanding who was attacker and who attacked, who victim and who sympathizer. Local collaborators may well remain silent during such filming, staying out of the way and off camera as they were trained, holding the mistaken belief that the filmmakers understand the situation as well as they do. That assumption must not, if possible, be made. The best policy before turning on the camera in a *vérité* situation is for the native speaker to state “the obvious,” who is who, what is going on, and what is likely to happen. If the filmmakers already understand the situation correctly, no harm is done. If they do not, something valuable has been accomplished, and the shooting can be much more intelligent.

The local collaborators’ attention in *vérité* conditions must therefore also remain focused on technical details during shooting. If, for example, conditions were so hurried when this filming began that there was no time to set up a tripod, a third crew member should without instruction take the initiative to get the tripod ready. The third crew member should keep his or her eye on the situation being filmed, and also maintain regular eye contact with the camera and sound operators. This is essential because the sound person may need a chair, a boom, a wind screen or a second mike and cable. The camera person may need a new tape, the tripod, the lens cleaner, the lens hood or a need that is even more unusual, like receiving help getting blood off her forehead.

Finally, as much as possible, the non-shooting collaborators should constantly be thinking about the needs of the film, proposing, at moments of rest, new things to shoot, new ideas to pursue. Learning to think like a filmmaker and thus be able to take this kind of initiative is far more difficult than recognizing when a tripod or new cassette tape is required. Still, the needs of a film become obvious with time spent at the editing bench. A local collaborator’s sensitivity and initiative in this crucial aspect of filming will flourish with encouragement from the more experienced members of the crew.

F. Maasai as collaborating film subjects

I wished also to insure that the Maasai migrant urban community would be represented not only on camera but in the design and editing stages of the project. We created a focus group with a somewhat floating membership. It included all the members of the board of Bettina’s NGO, including Faith, an English speaking Maasai with connections to the local Lutheran church, Mark, a Maasai entrepreneur, and Paulo, a night watchman with a grade school education but letter-perfect memory of long passages from the *New Testament*. On some occasions, we discussed shooting and editing with a migrant mother, Anna, and a few other watchmen, and some university friends of Bettina’s. All

of these individuals gave their time and resources. Faith coordinated with a local church Maasai women's choir, Mark led us to a pool room where *ilmurran* took leisure, and Paulo, the night watchman, became the film's narrator and almost daily liaison with the Mwenge *oloip* community.

The topic we chose, lives in poverty near a dump, although less problematic to film than death by alcohol abuse or AIDS, was still painful. Despite the fact that opportunistic leaders insisted on making us pay exorbitantly, it is equally true that we were never asked for money when we filmed people in conditions of which they were proud, the church, the pool hall, and the hairdresser. In such situations, the thresholds of suspicion were lower, and the credentials of our Maasai collaborators were judged to be adequate. The obvious fact that Shamia and I really were not – and did not behave like – tourists became equally clear.

I am not opposed to paying or somehow otherwise recompensing the energy and assistance given to a film project by its collaborators. Ideally, I should have found a gift that I could have given to the entire community. Elder and Kamerling, for example, provide a useful model in this regard, as they have often found excellent ways to reciprocate for the privilege of filming in Eskimo villages (Elder 1995). Unfortunately, in the event, I was forced to pay bribes to *ilmurran* leaders and then pay each participant individually. Traditionally, Maasai *ilmurran* are under strict control of their elders, but few elders migrate to cities, so the young toughs there were in charge. If my young NGO collaborators had been more experienced, they would have known how to step over the heads of the leaders to win approval for our project from age-set spokesmen. Unfortunately, it was only by the end of our five week stay that we came to understand what we should have done at the beginning.

In the present year, we expect to collaborate with a different Maasai-led NGO whose directors have much more experience than the recent college graduates last summer. My main contact, Luke, is opposed to making any payments for services rendered on legitimate development projects. He argues that such payment will make later projects impossible. After the Americans have gone home and disappeared, his clients will still expect American-sized wages from him. He says that even the gift of a cow to the entire community would be detrimental in the long run. If the community does not see the value of cooperating on a project without pay, Luke argues, there must be something wrong with the project, or the way it's presented. This tough love idea of development is painful to accept, but I see wisdom in it.

3. Facilitated screenings

A. Maasai film viewers as collaborators

In the United States, those who seek public television funding for documentaries are generally told that they need to guarantee an audience of twenty million viewers. In kind of applied visual anthropology I envision, the audience goal is met if we have only twenty viewers per screening, a total perhaps of 5,000 viewers over several years. Because of the difficulty of screenings, we *do not* expect more viewers and we *do* expect

much from those who see the films. This is true because, ideally, our audiences become, in a sense, our most important collaborators. In the vocabulary of media marketing, the film becomes a “trigger” whose goal is to affect viewers so deeply by the conditions they see on screen that they are moved to collective action – first speaking together in post-screening discussions about the filmed conditions, then afterwards in their communities – putting into practice what they discussed theoretically in the screening room, albeit one outdoors and under a tree.

Englehart (2004), Levine (2004) and Statler (2004) discuss the reception that Southern African audiences have given to three dozen AIDS education films in the *Steps for the Future Project* (Chislett et al. 2004). Their accounts of transformed hearts – crowds empowered to the point of ousting gang members from the screening room, expectant mothers choosing to be tested for HIV – inspired me to emulate the model. The theory of practice I proposed for our collaborators was based on the Steps idea and those I had developed in my own work and essays on cross cultural HIV/AIDS education (Biella and Drufovka 1989, Biella, Hennessy and Orth 2004).

The Steps literature did not mention that some viewers may not have wished to come, though we met a number in Dar es Salaam who were instructed by their leaders to refuse attendance without payment. I was unprepared for it and angered: the leader had first instructed his followers that the only reason to be shot in our film was to receive pay, and he completed his efforts with the argument that the only reason to view the film was to receive more pay.

In our first screening we did pass out snacks, sodas and “bus fare” (I was told), and it seems likely that my ATM status and naiveté were again plundered in the transaction balance. In retrospect, I conclude that Luke’s idea is sound, that if people do not voluntarily engage in what seems to be a very beneficial activity, something must seriously be wrong with the activity or the way it is presented.

Despite the partial success of hostile local leaders to transform our screenings into a reverse parody of pay-for-view, many Maasai ignored the command, or never heard it. In two Dar es Salaam screenings, we reached about 120 viewers who seemed enthralled by the film; a rural screening reached 15 more.

B. Facilitated screenings as group therapy

An ideal that I urged our team to strive for was the creation of an audience that would be able to respond openly and passionately. The first public screening of *Maasai Migrants* was to members of the NGO board of directors. Several were close to tears by the end. They asked me to alter the order of two adjacent scenes, because the combined effect was a sorrow that was overwhelming. Mark, the entrepreneur, spoke of a revelation that the film had given him – he was himself a Maasai migrant, little different from the sufferers in the film.

In the many screenings of my films that I have attended over the last forty years, that one was the most moving.

In comparing the encounter with our screenings described by Englehart (2004) and Levine (2004), I see an important analogy between group psychotherapy and a well-

organized post-screen audience discussion. Repeated meetings of the same therapy group have strong beneficial effects, and my long-term goal is to have a collection of Maa language educational films so that the same audience group can meet to screen over several weeks in a row, building on the insights from before, developing a more coherent idea of their situation and how it might be changed for the better.

C. Group therapy

Freire describes the pedagogy of the oppressed as political education, and any film that tackles such issues as gender roles is certainly political. What Freire does not explore, however, are the parallels between group *consciencization* and group therapy. Many of the avertable problems that AIDS films can discuss are dangerous because of the viewers' psychological resistance to change. Post-screening group discussions, like group therapy, lend emotional strength to the decision to change (Spindler 1999).

Yalom and Leszez (2005) evaluate many aspects of group psychotherapy that are relevant to the educational strategy of film discussions proposed here. The most relevant for urban pastoralists are the following: Yalom and Leszez write that group discussions offer *a corrective recapitulation of the primary family group*: open conversation with other group members and with expert facilitators resemble discussions with parents and elders. As May (2003) and May and McCabe (2004) have shown, for most Maa speakers in Tanzania, parents and elders are not capable of giving dependable advice and guidance for adaptation to city life. Although pastoralists' migration is often "circular" (May 2003), migration and urban living are phenomena too recent to be understood by most elders. Group discussions following the screening of a film can thus resemble educational sessions with trusted elders, but will contain information not available to members of the older age-grades.

Yalom and Leszez (2005) also praise group therapy because it permits *interpersonal learning*: skillful facilitators can guide conversations to peaks when the self-disclosures of some audience members lead to vicarious spectator insights in others – insights they would be less likely to have if the information came either from the video or the facilitator.

Further, Yalom and Leszez argue that *self-disclosure* creates the awareness of *universality*, a participant's realization that many other people share problems like his or her own. This awareness not only relieves a personal sense of guilt but can also bring on *catharsis*, an emotional high point. This can result in behavior change when accompanied by the kind of cognitive learning that the video and the discussions will give.

Finally, Yalom and Leszez argue that a sense of *group cohesiveness* is also key to productive social change, because it generates a feeling of empowerment and commitment. All of the project's efforts push toward this goal – not just for the viewers of the video but for the project team members themselves, who are present and future leaders of their community.

Frequent and regular meetings are most likely to encourage the emergence of a sense of group solidarity. Moreover, like group therapy sessions, the topics of each post-screening discussion should be relatively restricted. This will keep conversations focused on problem identification and problem solving. For these reasons, a maximally effective applied anthropological film campaign, based on small group discussions, will ideally have a repertoire of media covering a reasonably large repertoire of social problem

topics. Based on past discussions with Meitamei and others, I believe that HIV, alcoholism, and employee rights are important possibilities for future Maasai films.

D. Facilitated screenings as Freirian pedagogy

Post-screening discussions can be interpreted as opportunities for psychological catharsis, self-discovery and solidarity. In addition, however, they also create the opportunity for very powerful educational insights. Paulo Freire (1972, 1985) shows a close relationship between the pain of self discovery – and the group therapeutic discovery of self in others – with the pain of pedagogical revelation – the political discovery of self-defeating attitudes and practices.

The *Steps/Maasai Migrants* screenings, followed by facilitated discussions, are examples of a classic Freirian pedagogical strategy called codification (Freire 1985:51). The term refers both to texts which educators bring to be discussed and to the process by which they are discussed and deconstructed. Codifications as texts are described by Freire as pictures or representations of *concrete* reality that can be used to stimulate *theoretical* interpretations of reality. Codification images are selected by educators on the basis of their potential to enlighten and underscore the catastrophic, dialectical nature of the “normal.”

[Codifications] problematize situations, present the challenge of reality that the learners confront every day. These texts must embody a challenge in themselves and as such they should be regarded dialectically by the learners and the educator (Freire 1985:22).

The footage of *Maasai Migrants* is “documentary,” not doctored, not acted, not exaggerated. Despite the film’s relentless quotation of the social concrete, of the quotidian and mundane, many of its scenes are quite disturbing.

To take one example, migrant Maasai women in cities are often dependent on unrelated older men for their survival. *Maasai Migrants* begins with a documentary scene as women are waking up sheltered by the wall of a dingy urban factory. A junior elder joins them, making jokes at the expense of a woman whom he hardly knows and who is too ill to reject his sexual play. She always rejected him before, he admits, when she was well.

Peirce (1931-58) suggests a distinction between *tokens* and *types* which advances the present claim. The *token*, for Peirce, is like Freire’s *codification*, a physical instance, a concrete example, of a typical condition, the *type*. We cannot see types, since they are abstractions, but they are evidenced through numerous empirical instances. In the example given here, despite the joking manner with which the elder explains his plan for “rubbing” the woman who is too sick to prevent it, despite even the fact that other women in the sleeping area laugh in shock at the elder’s brazenness – this *token* behavior contains the essence of the *type*, the new urban sexual culture in which utter economic dependence of women and the widespread incidence of HIV have potentially deadly consequences.

The film does not pretend to explain the exact motives of the individuals: this depiction of a concrete event allows many potential interpretations. The purpose, however, is to offer this ambiguous event as a codification which suggests a logical possibility of sexual exploitation under conditions of economic dependence. The ambiguity of the *concrete* invites the audience to discuss conditions of migration, gender inequality and poverty from a theoretical point of view.³

The scene is complex because of its ambiguity. It can also present psycho-cultural difficulties for facilitators who are themselves Maasai men. They may be so invested in their own sexual privilege that they see only the humor in the token and fail to see the potentially dangerous consequences of the type. A commitment to confronting Maasai HIV thus requires of Maasai facilitators substantial self-knowledge. They must be self-critical and courageous – admitting (like everyone in Tanzania) that they are at risk for HIV, and that certain common actions put others at risk. Their battle is to break through the illusion that token examples of sexual dominance are inconsequential. For the facilitator, as for the audience, any critique or move beyond the level of the token is immediately hampered by dominant gender ideologies that disguise the dangers of the type. Thus, Freire frequently speaks of the need to educate the educator as well as the learner, to help all parties unlearn to be what they have been. Then, leaders can cleverly move the audience’s discussion of a mundane, surface event to a recognition of the fatal, underlying reality. This recognition is Freire’s dialectical moment, the *gestalt* – painful and difficult to attain – unforgettable and life changing once attained.

E. Cooption of facilitated screenings

To reach the moment, many other obstacles must be overcome. False steps and the co-option of goals occur. Neither our NGO collaborators nor I anticipated how thorough the co-option could be. Our first screening was scheduled in a Lutheran church, and, as I watched in wonder, the hour-long post-screening discussion was utterly dominated by evangelical proselytizers. Hardly a sentence was uttered about Maasai migrants, urban poverty, social discrimination, or the need for strength and solidarity. The audience had almost no chance to hear anything about the film they had seen –

³ For example, Professor Ann May, who undertook in HIV/AIDS education among Maasai for years, interpreted the scene quite differently: “My reading of the film (viewed perhaps three or four times now) was that the man was joking with the sick woman to distract her or cheer her up. Could this have been the case rather than the darker scenario you describe?” Though I have some additional evidence, I do not know the answer as a fact. Yet the key point is this: in order for audience members to treat the scene profitably as a Freirian codification, they do not need to know what was in the man’s heart. Whatever the truth may be, audience discussion and disagreements about his motives will allow participants to investigate the economic dependence and HIV-vulnerability experienced by the large category of unmarried, urban Maasai women represented in the scene.

women working in garbage dumps, widespread discrimination, and the covert threat of diseases whose existence they denied. We had lost the first battle. (Sandles' [forthcoming] documentary film depicts the evangelical undermining of this screening.)

F. Training the facilitator

After the upset at the Lutheran church, we on the production team spent several hours debriefing. The man we had selected as our facilitator, an eloquent but young Maasai night watchman, maturely acknowledged his errors and promised to do better. He had allowed the priest and evangelicals to speak so long because they were religious cynosures, and because Maasai traditional oratory demands that young men remain silent in the presence of elders. But our facilitator was unable to lead the discussion for other reasons as well.

Neither our facilitator nor his Maasai audiences were prepared to jump spontaneously from the film's visual concrete to abstract criticism. People must be trained to analyze film images abstractly. For example, in this collaborator meeting, I presented an argument about the first scene of the film in which an elder forces himself – semi-jokingly, semi-sexually – on a very sick woman who is under his protection. I argued that the man's behavior need not be understood merely as an amusing example of virility, but rather as a token of a dangerous type. Analyzed in a particular way, this footage depicts the consequences of the traditional sexual prerogatives in the non-traditional context of urban poverty and HIV. All of the women who are dependent on this man for a place to sleep find themselves in the same non-traditional dilemma. Yet, in the film, they only laugh uncomfortably and exclaim at his shocking promise to take sexual advantage of the desired-one's weakness.

Levine (2004) discusses an HIV-positive protagonist in one of the *Steps* films who, facilitating audience discussions, frankly criticizes the consequences of her own sexual behavior. Her public disclosures no doubt required considerable soul searching and courage. Our facilitator for *Maasai Migrants* is himself depicted in the video. He is shown dismissing a young woman with whom he apparently just had a brief but intimate relationship. Using this scene as a token, our facilitator might have initiated audience discussions about the possible dangers of one-night stands. Yet I lacked an adequate understanding of what the film depicted to suggest that he introduce such a discussion. In any case, since his dalliance was not singled out by the *force majeure* of recognized disease transmission, he lacked a powerful motive to critique the typical behavior of which the behavior we filmed was one example.

G. Collaboration stymied by characteristics of traditional Maasai oratory

Women may be present in traditional Maasai elders' moots, but they must be silent. For the purpose of our film screenings, then, the existence of this gender inequality required discussion sessions composed exclusively of women. We did, finally, convene successful all-women screenings (Sandles 2009). I mentioned that traditional Maasai elders orate for as long as they please. Yet the literature on group therapy suggests that conversational give and take is more beneficial than lengthy soliloquies. Facilitators may

find that they need to transform orations into conversations. As young people, they may be perceived as being disrespectful of their elders. The young are more likely to understand the truths of HIV, and so must seek new premises of oratory to contend with the dangers of the new world.

University educated Maasai youth may be more readily prepared to resist the traditional system of top-down elder-centric knowledge. (My Maasai colleague, Dr. Naomi Kipuri used exclusively to speak in Swahili when she addressed Maasai elders. This allowed her, she told me, to escape the traditional infantilization she would otherwise sometimes receive.) But *ilmurran* facilitators, drawn from the pool of night watchmen who are age-set spokesmen, will be likely to have more credibility, if less experience, when guiding film criticism.

4. Message Longevity

A. Essential Messages

Media campaigns must be savvy locally. As demonstrated in the *Maasai Speak Out* video (Biella 2009b), Maasai women know of AIDS through pamphlets in Swahili. Yet some of these same women are perfectly convinced that the disease – postulated by Western medicine – either does not exist at all, is absent among Maasai, or has been confused by Western doctors with *enamuratuni*, a real disease well known to Maasai and easily cured by local healers (May and McCabe 2004). This culturally-specific conviction, which might be called *indigenous denial rhetoric*, is unfamiliar to most Tanzanian health educators but is persuasive to many Maasai. How much more powerful can AIDS medical education be for Maasai if the educator acknowledges *enamuratuni* beliefs! An effective indigenous AIDS education campaign must begin with intensive field work in order to contend with the false beliefs specific to the community. It must anticipate local prejudices and take countermeasures.

In addition to providing accurate medical education – like the existence of viruses and providing the list of common HIV vectors – a media campaign must also provide powerful behavioral education. This entails describing the psychological, gender-specific and cultural barriers to safety. Knowing that HIV is found in sperm and that condoms prevent transmission requires a different set of lessons than suggesting how a woman might effectively insist on condom use, or suggesting to everyone that community health in the new biosphere demands some alteration of traditional sexual culture.

Arhihenbuwa (1995) advocates the indigenous triage approach to behavioral-health education. Culture-specific values and practices that do not affect disease transmission positively or negatively can be ignored in media campaigns. Those that do contribute to increased incidence of disease are prime candidates for media confrontation, and must be combated. Those values that promote safe behavior and mutual protection must be emphasized and repeated like the drum beat of common wisdom.

B. Cost-per-viewer and the idea of a field school

Films presented in the field, made explicitly for small, sex-segregated audiences, scripted in “obscure” local languages, are far more expensive per message-recipient than other media - radio, leaflets, billboards, and even conversations with Maa-speaking health educators. One way to overcome the annihilating restrictions caused by the expense of indigenous-language videos is the field school idea presented here. It seeks to increase the benefits and lower the cost per viewer in two ways. First, it takes advantage of the fact that a continuing number of advanced visual anthropology students are anxious to learn their trade, to produce portfolio-quality works, and to make significant contributions to public health. They recognize the many advantages of supervised field experience, and understand that they must pay for it. Because they are students, they can produce films for very little money. Because a field school exists for many years running, it continues to produce and find use of a growing body of educational films. This increasing number of films can enhance health media collections and provide choices for educators in the field.

From the point of view of in-country collaborators, the field school offers income at an advantageous rate of exchange, offers education in media production and health-education design, and creates new tools for the public health of their people. These benefits – the advanced education of future health care educators and the low cost of the high-quality films produced – must be subtracted from the perceived cost-per-viewer of the films produced.

Film screenings in local languages draw in audiences that other media – especially those in mass-market languages like Swahili – entirely miss. Moreover, the production of videos can do most of the expensive work required in other campaigns. Thirty-second radio or TV spots in a local language can be drawn inexpensively from videos. Flip boards with images taken from local health videos can assist post-screening discussions and be used independently. They may either remind past viewers of issues raised, or allow other kinds of visual insights.

Research indicates that successful media challenges to entrenched values must be waged on multiple fronts. Although the dangers of “AIDS-message fatigue” is familiar in advanced industrial societies, the absence of AIDS messaging is much more common in the rest of the world. People must hear the drumbeat so often, and in media sufficiently diverse, that it becomes part of the rhythm of daily conversation.

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