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"Folk Filmmaking: A Participatory Method for Engaging Indigenous Ethics and Improving Understanding"

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On an assignment to produce videos promoting Cross River gorilla conservation to indigenous communities in Nigeria and Cameroon, I invited community members to join me. I followed decolonising and feminist methodologies to develop a form of participatory video production, "Folk Filmmaking," in which participants present their own accounts of wildlife, conservation, and environmental values by performing stories. Through the films, participants shared their knowledge as morality tales, providing contextual nuance to moral challenges, clarity on local concerns, and opportunities for better understanding of local conflicts with conservation. Most films use gorillas as a plot device but orient the moral issues not to the ape's plight but to communal struggles with challenges such as marginalisation, modernity, and corruption. The films do not say how best to conserve the last 300 Cross River gorillas but they help articulate indigenous values and show the challenges conservation must overcome. This paper shares an account of lessons learned during the project through continual, critical reflection on my process. It describes my methodology and the films produced then offers an analysis and evaluation of the project. It concludes with notes on the potential and pitfalls of participatory video in contexts of cross-cultural conflict over conservation. (Text from author's abstract)

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