Taking Rapid Photovoice online during Covid-19:
Critical Reflections on the NRF project
"Student Wellbeing in the Aftermath of Protest Violence"

Higher Education Close Up 10: Critical approaches to close-up higher education research,

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Related to the Think Piece by Bruce Macfarlane: *'Faking' close-up research?: the risks of strategic deception in a post-truth world*

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The problem in a nutshell and presentation

- What is photovoice?
- The Rapid Photovoice (RPV) methodology
- The trouble with online RPV: Contrasting assessments
- Rescuing online RPV: Emphasising impact over process

- In a nutshell: The #FeesMustFall / Student Movement's Violence and Wellbeing project: original methodology and Covid 19

Photovoice concept and design

What is Photovoice?

*"Photovoice is a community-based participatory research approach
by which taking and discussing photos supports a process through which people identify and reflect on particular issues relevant to their well-being (Wang & Burris, 1997). In certain instances, it also supports participants in changing their circumstances, with further reflection on the effects of such efforts to initiate change." (Musoke et al, 2016: 683)*

Key characteristics of photovoice research:
- Community-based, participatory
- Taking and discussing photos
- Process through which people identify and reflect on particular issues
- Relevant to well-being, circumstances
- Seeks to initiate change

David Musoke, Rawlance Ndejjo, Elizabeth Ekirapa-Kiracho and Asha S. George (2016). Supporting youth and community capacity through photovoice: Reflections on participatory research on maternal health in Wakiso district, Uganda. *Global Public Health,* 11(5–6): 683–698. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2016.1168864

What is different about Photovoice?

Photovoice	Many other qualitative methods
Co-production of knowledge and action (participation for most of project cycle)	Short involvement of participants (only data collection and verification)
Participants are involved in the problem definition; research design, data collection, dissemination and advocacy	Little or no involvement pre- and post- data collection
Mixed media: Photographs (and short videos), caption titles, caption stories	Typically spoken/written word only (audio, transcripts)
Anonymity is difficulty; personal investment can produce authenticity	Anonymity can produce authenticity

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RPV Methodology for the #FeesMustFall Violence and Wellbeing Project
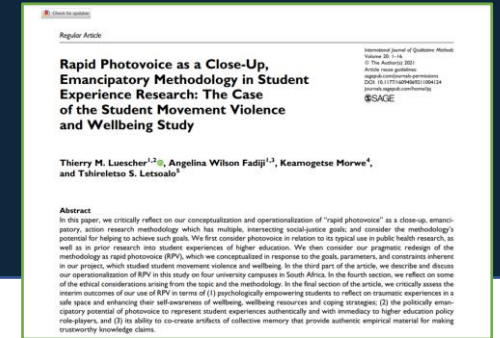
- Rapid photovoice (*International Journal of Qualitative Methods*)
  https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/16094069211004124

- Institution-specific, 3-4 days of photovoice workshops, face-to-face (4), online (1)
- 5 universities with 4-10 student participants each: UWC, UFS, Univen, UFH, DUT
- Diverse research team (in terms of demographics, disciplines, institutions)
- 35 student participants: criteria for participation were experience of violence as part of student protests on their campus - whether as observers, victims or perpetrators.
- Issues: research ethics, trustworthiness, emancipatory and advocacy goals

Awareness, advocacy and knowledge-sharing
- During RPV workshops: campus-specific exhibitions & world café sessions
- Online exhibition (SAHO) and travelling exhibition (SU, UB, UP, Wits, UCT, & planned UKZN)
- Advocacy meetings: USAf (HELM), exhibition-related events; seminars; conferences
- Publications: Student affairs manual; scholarly photo book; methodology articles; articles on findings

From 'Rapid Photovoice' to Online RPV in the Context of C-19

Photovoice and online research: literature

- C-19 in the South African context has shown varied impacts on research and knowledge production (Kibone et al, *unpublished*):
  - Orientation of research funding priorities, funding timelines
  - Covid-19 as challenge per se: psychological wellbeing and health of researchers and participants
  - Challenges and opportunities of technology-mediated research
    - Research collaborations and partnerships, webinars, online conferences
    - Unequal access to technologies (devices, platforms, broadband, data) for differently located researchers as well as differently resourced communities
    - Online tools tend to be less useful in social research (missing out on non-verbal communication)
    - Home-office based work may exacerbate gender inequalities (e.g. regarding care work, house work)
- Different student groups were unequally affected by the pandemic, restrictions, and mitigating strategies (for domains including personal, socio-cultural/familial, infrastructural/public domain, and academic/faculty-domain) with low SES, FG and FY students being most affected in the African context (Schreiber et al, 2021)
- Asynchronous online photovoice: "can address the need for rapid response, offering an essential role in uncovering structural inequalities and amplifying participant voice" (CohenMiller, 2022, p. 21)

| Team assembly, design, methods, goals | Data collection, reflection, level 1 analysis | Advocacy, level 2 analysis, knowledge sharing |

Three major process steps in Rapid Photovoice (RPV)

- RPV has already certain (asynchronous) online elements.
- The major novelty with online RPV was the attempt to introduce (synchronous) online elements into the data collection step.

Team assembly, design, methods, goals → Data collection, reflection, level 1 analysis → Advocacy, level 2 analysis, knowledge sharing

Core research team
- Design research project and method
- Contact potential student participants

Researchers and student participants
- Share take-home guide (RPV info) with student participants
- Review project goals and methods

Online RPV engagement platforms:
- Zoom (video conferencing)
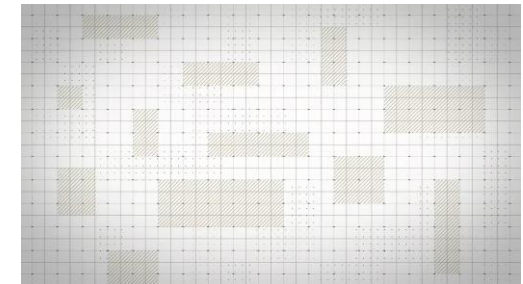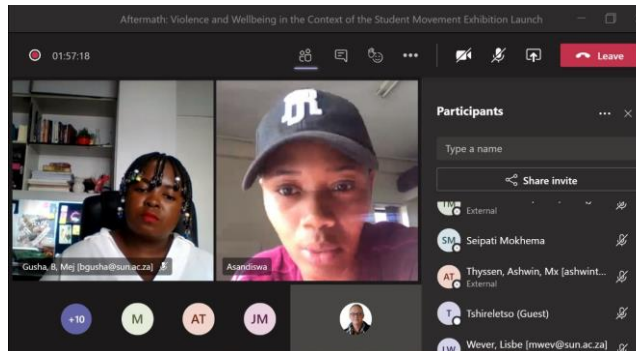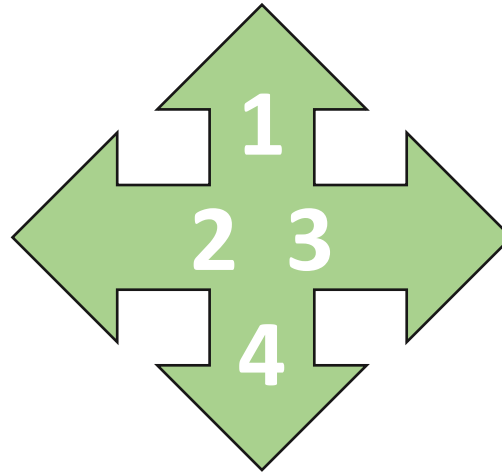- Email
- WhatsApp
- Hybrid (in situ plus Zoom)
- Offline

Asynchronous / Synchronous.

Student participants are involved in most

Campus-based workshops
Day 1
- Session 1 & 2: Introductions and training in photography and ethics
- Session 3: Discussion of goals, research questions and key conversation points

Between day 1 and day 2
- Session 4: Taking photographs /searching personal archives
- Session 5: Sharing selected photos

Day 2
- Session 6: Reflecting on photos/creating photo stories
- Session 7: Preparing the mini exhibition

Day 3
- Session 8: Reflecting on the mini exhibition
- Session 9: World café event
- Session 10: Debriefing and way forward

Advocacy and training events
- Campus mini exhibition plus World café with SAS professionals and students
- National exhibition (online and travelling in situ)
- Exhibition-related engagements and publicity
- Student Affairs manual and workshops

Knowledge products
- Scholarly seminars and conferences
- Articles
- Exhibition photo book

Reflections on method
- Evaluation surveys with student participants
- Methodological reflections
- Keeping in touch, ongoing information, sharing news

Online RPV process

Synchronous and asynchronous, collective and one-on-one engagements: Three days plus

1 2 3 4

The trouble with Online RPV

Research team's voices

Issue	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3
Recruitment of participants	Main challenge was not to have an insider activist who would champion the project and rally participants.	All was done by email. Only data could be supplied as incentive.	-
Zoom sessions (workshops): technology hiccups	Internet was poor for some participants. Another participant did not know how to join a Zoom call.	Only two participants could participate throughout with Zoom; some participants would join on WhatsApp.	A huge mistake on our side was not doing a trial run with the student activists to establish their Zoom competency.... and internet connectivity ... in rural areas.
Other commitments / challenges	Life was happening for all of them: one [had to attend] a funeral; one was late on the 2nd day because she was needed elsewhere.	On and off – sporadic participation. Only two really participated throughout.	Students had other priorities and commitments; (one was also baby-sitting.)
Overall experience	I enjoyed trying a new methodology. Being able to take RPV virtual was exciting.	RPV with its intensity might not work so well.	Despite the remoteness, the students narratives were still touching and their contributions impactful.

Student participants' voices

Issue	Response 1	Response 2
How did you participate?	Zoom and WhatsApp	Zoom
What were your main challenges to participation?	The poor network signal was one of the most challenging issues	I had bad network connections
How did you address them?	One had to identify a spot where there will be a perfect network signal	I changed the location
Were there any other challenges?	I would say, there were no challenges as the workshop was during study period, as a result one was available to participate in the workshop without having to compromise other activities	None

Contrasting assessments

Student Participant
(Durban University of Technology)

"This was my first online workshop understanding that at that time, the country was still trying to normalise having online sessions.

At first, I didn't see it working, however as time went by, I was excited and overwhelmed as one could attend at the comfort of his home without having to deal with a number of logistics.

I must also give credit to the researchers and organizers of the workshop, they did an amazing job in planning and facilitating the whole workshop. In conclusion, the experience was top tier."

Researcher
(Human Sciences Research Council)

"So, [we are] supposed to be doing photovoice typically, but we tried to do it online this time around. We had a three days photovoice workshop online, but it was a debacle.

We had seven people who said they would show up, but only two showed up. Out of the two, one dropped out. So you can already get the sense that I would have said one methodology we adopted was online photovoice, but it didn't work out."

Online RPV: Faking close-up?

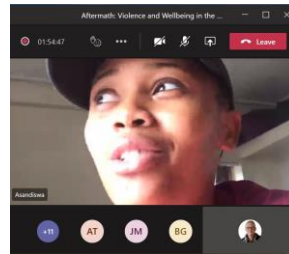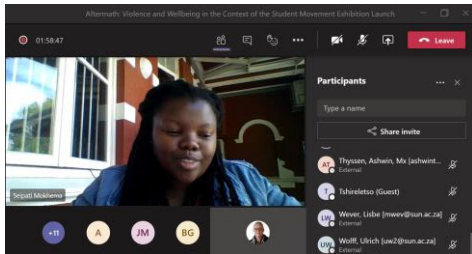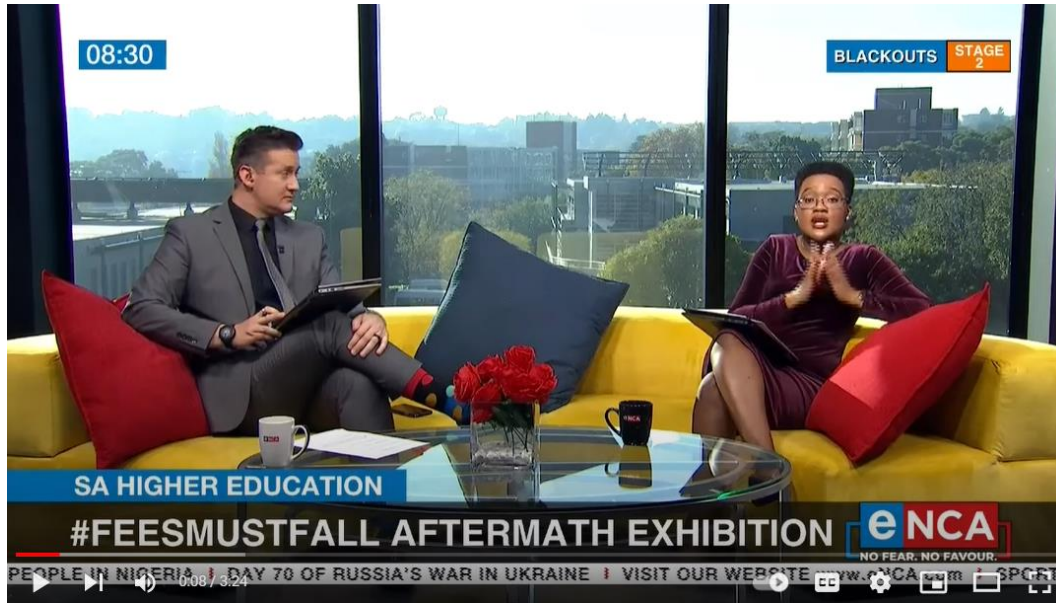| Issue	Student participants' responses	Researchers' responses
Trust in research team	"Yes, there is no doubt. One was comfortable to participate without having to feel bad in any way possible"	Yes, but less than offline, yet trust developed. "The students spoke candidly about a number of personal issues as well as narrating their experiences".
Online space as 'safe space'	Yes	The online space is impersonal which can have positive and negative aspects in this regard. It was less 'safe' for identifying and counselling distress.
Empowering to share difficult experiences	"Absolutely, it also provided a platform where one could deal with matters that were negatively impacting one's mental health. This was amongst many things that made me to feel safe and enjoy participating in the workshop	Mixed responses – some say it was empowering as it gave that opportunity for self-reflection, others are not sure.
Empowering to reflect on wellbeing	Yes	To some extent. However, only the pictures of one student engage deeply with questions of wellbeing and wellbeing resources. The others focus mostly on violence.
Emancipatory potential	Yes, but "will what was raised be addressed?"	To some extent – the limitations are the process of workshops (data collection, collective reflection, etc.). It was worthwhile in terms of the outputs.
Authentic outputs	Yes.	Full agreement – "The materials gained from DUT are as authentic as those gained from all the campuses." "The DUT study was as impactful as the other institutions".

Emphasising advocacy and knowledge sharing

Advocacy and knowledge outputs

Exhibition & related events

Scholarly photobook

Articles & SAS manual

Advocacy through publicity

Sunday Times, 22 May 2022

Cape Argus, 5 May 2022   **eNCA, 4 & 5 May 2022**

Concluding thoughts

- ✓ Student participants' views on how to improve 'online RPV':
  - ✓ Needs more time allocation, participation online vs. offline
  - ✓ The four students who were involved at DUT would do it again.
- ✓ Research team argues that:
  - ✓ Online RPV has a space in the creative methodologies arena
  - ✓ There are limitations
  - ✓ There is need to pilot with participants
  - ✓ Important is that participants are online enabled and capacitated.

Thank you!

The goals of the project (and exhibition) are to:

- ✓ understand and expose the unacceptable, high levels of violence on university campuses during student protests
- ✓ the impact of violence on student wellbeing
- ✓ create awareness in the public, government and among higher education policy makers and university leaders
- ✓ advocate that student grievances are taken seriously without the need for protesting.
- ✓ advocate for banning riot police and riot security services from university campuses.
- ✓ de-stigmatise student mental health issues at universities
- ✓ expand student counselling and mental health services.

Photovoice Team

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University of the Western Cape: Azania Simthandile Tyhali, Sphelele Khumalo, Ncedisa Bemnyama, Asandiswa Bomvana, Siyasanga Ndwayi.
University of Venda: Bob Sandile Masango, Abednego Sam Mandhlazi, Mabore Machete, Blessing Mavhuru, Frans Sello Mokwele, Conry H. Chabalala, Tshepo Raseala, Anyway Mikioni, Mulaedza Mashapha, Dimakatso Ngobeni
University of the Free State: Tshepang Mahlatsi, Tshiamo Malatji, Thabo Twala, Sonwabile Dwaba, Anonymous, Kamohelo Maphike, Bokang Fako, Xola Zatu
University of Fort Hare: Madoda Ludidi, Yolokazi Mfuto, Anonymous, Siphelele Mancobeni, Wandisile Sixoto, Akhona Manyenyeza
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Exhibition curators / chaperone: Carl Collison, Aldo Brincat

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