

# Whose Pictures Are These?

Re-framing the promise of participatory photography



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## Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own. References to the work of others has been cited and indicated throughout.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tiffany Fairey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'T' and 'F'.

Tiffany Fairey

Cover picture:  
Willy looks through his TAFOS prints,  
Still taken from *These Photos Were My Life*.  
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## **Abstract**

Participatory photography initiatives promise to ‘empower’, ‘give voice’ and ‘enable social change’ for marginalised communities through photography. This thesis questions this promise, demonstrating participatory photography to be a contested practice defined as much by inherent tension, ethical complexity and its limitations as by its potential. Caught up in governmental practices and instrumental discourses, ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography has lost its purpose and politics. Using multiple case-studies and presenting empirical research on TAFOS, a pioneering Peruvian participatory photography project, this thesis explores under examined areas of participatory photography practice, including its governmentality, spectatorship and long term impact on participants. It establishes the effectiveness of photography as a tool for fomenting an enduring critical consciousness (Freire 1970, 1973) while questioning the romantic narrative of participatory photography’s inherently empowering qualities and capacity to enable change. Pluralism is used as a theoretical and conceptual framework for re-framing the promise of participatory photography. It is argued that a pluralized notion of participatory photography highlights the paradoxical, uncertain and negotiated character of the practice. It re-conceptualises the method as a mode of mediation that enables a plurality of seeing, that supports emerging and unrecognized claims and that cultivates a critical engagement with difference; qualities that are vital to democratic pluralism. The notion of a ‘Photography of Becoming’ re-imagines the critical and political character of participatory photography and the complex and vulnerable politics of voice in which it is immersed.

## Acknowledgements

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## Contents

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>7</b>   |
| From Participatory Photography to Pluralist photography                            |            |
| <b>1</b>   | <b>31</b>  |
| Reviewing the Literature: Governmentality, Plurality and Participatory Photography |            |
| <b>2</b>   | <b>61</b>  |
| Methodology  |            |
| <b>3</b>   | <b>82</b>  |
| Critiquing The Promise: ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography                       |            |
| <b>4</b>   | <b>106</b> |
| A Radical Promise: Historicising participatory photography                         |            |
| <b>5</b>   | <b>139</b> |
| The Promise to Empower: Pluralising power and negotiating ethics                   |            |
| <b>6</b>   | <b>172</b> |
| The Promise to Change: Examining impact over time                                  |            |
| <b>7</b>   | <b>197</b> |
| The Promise of Authenticity: The spectatorship of participatory photography        |            |
| <b>Conclusion</b>  | <b>221</b> |
| A Photography of Becoming  |            |
| <b>Bibliography</b>  | <b>240</b> |
| <b>Appendix</b>  | <b>266</b> |
| 1. Glossary of Interviewees and Projects   |            |
| 2. TAFOS workshop chart  |            |
| <i>These Photos Were My Life</i> film<br>(DVD inserted in the back cover)          |            |

*'Sam thought for a while, and turned to Worth and asked a lengthy question which was interpreted as, "Will making movies do the sheep any harm?"*

*Worth was happy to explain that as far as he knew, there was no chance that making movies would harm the sheep.*

*Sam thought this over and then asked, "Will making movies do the sheep any good?" Worth was forced to reply that as far as he knew making movies wouldn't do the sheep any good.*

*Sam thought this over, then, looking around at us he said, "Then why make movies?"' (1972:4)*

Account of a visit to Navajo elder, Sam Yazzie, to seek approval for a project teaching film to the Navajo community, taken from *Through Navajo Eyes* (1972) by Sol Worth and John Adair

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*'We all have grandiose aspirations for, and expectations from, photographs and this leads to a plethora of concepts, as well as aesthetic and critical theories which, when heaped on the back of photography, bring the medium to its knees, not in homage but in defeat. The fact of the matter is that photography cannot bear the intellectual weight with which it is fashionable to burden it. Photography is not an intellectual game but an emotional response to charged living.'*

Bill Jay, *Occam's Razor* (2000:26)

# Introduction

## From participatory photography to pluralist photography

Recent decades have seen a proliferation of participatory photography projects around the world that aim to ‘empower’ and ‘enable positive social change’ through photography by providing marginalized communities with the means to show the world on their own terms. These initiatives are centered on a romantic narrative of photography as an inherently empowering activity that gives people a voice to speak out. However, critical reflection on the dynamics of these projects indicate a field of practice that is ethically complex, replete with tensions, paradoxes, power struggles and defined as much by its limitations as by its potential (**PhotoVoice**<sup>1</sup> 2007, 2008, Lykes et al 2003, Bishop 2012, Kester 1997, Rooke 2014).

Participatory photography has gained increasingly in currency within a broader trend that has seen arts and cultural activities used to meet social objectives (Yudice 2003). Within the NGO and community development world, participatory photography has gained traction alongside related fields such as participatory theatre, participatory media, participatory arts and participatory video as Freirian - influenced community workers have come to harness culture, arts and media as tools for social education and empowerment (Mayo 2000). Within this arena, participatory photography initiatives have become increasingly mainstream and models and practices increasingly standardized.

Caught up within the restrictions of governmentality, some have declared the participatory photography model broken (Wilson-Goldie 2008). They question whether projects enable meaningful change beyond the tokenistic for marginalized

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<sup>1</sup> All projects, people and organisations written in bold are included in the glossary contained in the Appendix

communities (Ballerini 1995, 1997; Kester 1995, 1999). They highlight how projects can disempower rather than empower, create negative outcomes and silence rather than enable voice, (Foster Fishman 2005, PhotoVoice 2008, Purcell 2009). Practitioners highlight the juggling act involved in trying to meet the diverse – and often conflicting, - demands, of the various project stakeholders (PhotoVoice 2007, Orton 2002, Rooke 2014).

While instrumental narratives of the social impact of the arts and converging evidence certifies to the ‘empowering’ and positive self-developmental benefits of participatory photography and arts projects at the individual level in the short term (Matarosso 1997, Reeves 2002, Jermyn 2004, Venice Arts 2005), there is very little evidence to validate its claim to affect social change more broadly (Belfiore 2002, 2006). Observers have critiqued the exaggeration of impact (Belfiore 2002, 2006, Godden 2009) while noting that there has been a failure to interrogate the idea of change in participatory arts work, to root it in relation to political theory and to understand the link between personal transformation and wider political change (Thornton 2012). Our understanding of how we interact with and are affected by images and our methods for investigation and evaluation are limited (Campbell 2011, Belfiore 2006). There is a recognized lack of longitudinal research on the impact and dynamics of socially-engaged participatory arts practices (Germination 2008, Merli 2002, Belfiore 2006) and their spectatorship (Bishop 2012). Given this backdrop, it is unsurprising that serious questions have been raised about the purpose, politics and impact of participatory arts practice (Ballerini 1995, 1997, Bishop 2012, Kester 1995, 1999).

My research works at two levels. It offers a critical evaluation and outlines a new imaginary for participatory photography. Using contemporary ‘NGO-ised’ models of participatory photography as a focus for critical analysis, I examine how participatory photography is implicated in regimes of governmentality within NGO and socially-engaged arts practices. I argue that this has led to a de-politicisation of practice and a neutralization of its critical potential. Whose pictures are these? The thesis title focuses on the issue of ownership in participatory photography and highlights sensitive debates around power, ethics and the question of who gains from these images. This research looks to probe these questions but also push



beyond them, to sketch a new framework that re-situates participatory photography in a contemporary politics of voice that supports emerging claims for justice and recognition. It presents research into underexplored aspects of participatory photography practice, specifically its power dynamics (Chapter 5), the long term impact of projects on participants (Chapter 6 and in the film, *These Photos Were My Life*) and its spectatorship (Chapter 7), in order to build a pluralized conception of participatory photography that enables a re-imagining of its promise.

The Foucauldian concept of ‘governmentality’ is used as both a theoretical framework for the investigation and neo-liberal critique of NGO-linked participatory photography practice and as a critical ethos that grounds the investigation in an analytics of regimes of power, politics and truth from a perspective that attempts to grasp multiplicity in photography over time<sup>2</sup>. My bid to construct a new imaginary for participatory photography draws on notions of becoming (Butler 1999, Connolly 1995, 2005), political theories of pluralism and agnostic democracy (Connolly 1995, 2005; Mouffe 2013) and photographic theory that seeks to reclaim the medium as a plural, civil activity (Azoulay 2008, 2012). I argue that we need to reinstate participatory photography within a civil tradition of photography and propose participatory photography be conceived within an expanded notion of ‘pluralist photography’ (Bleiker and Kay 2007), a practice dedicated to enabling a plurality of seeing and developing platforms of critical responsiveness (Connolly 1995) between different ways of seeing. I present the notion of a ‘Photography of Becoming’ as a framework to understand the political character of contemporary participatory photography practice and the vulnerable politics of voice it entails.

Driving this thesis is the sense, developed thorough my own career as a participatory photography practitioner, that an adequate response and contribution to debates around the purpose and parameters of practice involves a critical re-conceptualization of its promise and definition: a new ontology of participatory photography that incorporates the practice’s inherent tensions and instability, as

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<sup>2</sup> For Foucault critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are but rather it is a matter of pointing out the kind of taken for granted assumptions on which our accepted practices rest. He wanted to ‘make facile gestures difficult’ and in that process to generate new ideas and to re-fashion concepts (1988:155). I aim to examine the assumptions in participatory photography’s rhetoric while re-imagining the practice by engaging with other systems of thinking that might provide a way for us to re-conceptualise its practice.

well as its potential, and re-frames its emancipatory potential. This new imaginary of participatory photography is built on multiple case studies and captured through the non-linear film, *These Photos Were My Life*, presented in the accompanying DVD. Acknowledging the performative character of research work (Law and Urry 2005), this investigation seeks to establish the multiplicity of participatory photography activity. This is achieved by drawing on interviews with a range of leading practitioners and diverse contemporary projects with refugee youth in Nepal (Chapter 5) and in the UK (introduction and Chapter 8) and longitudinal research on TAFOS, a pioneering participatory photography project that took place in Peru from 1986-98 over the years of its bloody internal conflict (Chapters 4, 6 and 7).

I build a picture of a participatory photography that foments an enduring critical consciousness (Freire 1973) in participants while concurrently involving a dynamics that are conflicted, negotiated and unpredictable. There is a need to re-connect participatory photography's narrative to the politics that are involved in the process of critical consciousness. Emancipatory political narratives now seem outdated and the Freirian inspired notions of empowerment and participation have become detached from political theory. Working beyond the realm of grand political ideologies there is a need to revise participatory photography's sense of the political. Participatory photography initiatives that seek to engage in a form of critical artistic practice that 'questions the dominant hegemony ... that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (Mouffe 2007:2) involve inherent risk and instability. Singularly positive narratives that seek to contain the plurality and unstable character of the practice need to be re-framed. The call is for a re-politicised notion of a pluralised participatory photography that re-connects it to a politics of change and voice and that revitalizes interventions while recognizing their negotiated, fragile and open-ended character. The aim is to focus practitioners on the question of the kind of worlds they seek to make through their initiatives.

### **The outdated promise of participatory photography**

There is an often-quoted story in participatory photography circles that illustrates

something of its promise<sup>3</sup>. It is about a group of workshop participants living in a *barrio* on the edge of Lima, Peru, who were asked to take a picture of exploitation. Photographs of landlords, shopkeepers, policemen and government offices came back; images that depicted a variety of people and issues that shaped the lives of the workshop participants. In amongst them, there was a picture of a bare wall taken by one of the younger boys, a shoe shiner. In the middle of the wall there was a nail. The facilitators were going to pass over the picture, presuming that it had been shot by accident, but seeing the image of the wall, other boys in the group immediately nodded their heads and voiced agreement. Further discussions revealed that many of the boys worked as shoe shiners in the city. Their shoeshine boxes were too heavy to carry back and forth from the centre to the *barrio* and so they rented a nail on the wall in a shop where they could hang their boxes for the night. The price to rent the nail was, in their view, unjust but they had no choice but to pay. To them that nail represented exploitation.

John Berger says every image embodies a way of seeing (1972) and it is on this assertion that the promise of participatory photography and its claim to empower rests. The practice puts cameras in the hands of ‘ordinary’ people who are not normally in charge of directing our gaze. Used by practitioners, working with communities, it is a method that combines photography with grassroots social action. Initiatives are largely directed towards groups deemed to be marginalised (Kia Keating 2009), ‘those whose voices are typically not heard’ (Strack et al, 2010:630) or that are ‘excluded from the decision-making processes’ (Foster-Fishman et al 2005:277). In participatory photography, the non-professional, the marginalised other, the person who has always been the subject of the image, becomes its creator (PhotoVoice 2007). They are provided with a platform and are empowered to share their view of the world on their own terms. Their images inform spectators and, it is imagined, act as catalysts for change (Wang and Burris 1997).

Much as the photographic medium itself, participatory photography runs ‘in all directions’ (Edwards 2006:xi). There is not even a single agreed name for the

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<sup>3</sup> The anecdote was originally recounted by Augusto Boal in his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1973). In my years as a participatory practitioner I have heard the story repeatedly retold at conferences, workshops, in interviews and conversations by people who often claim it as their own.

practice that has evolved numerous applications in a range of contexts, from arts and therapeutic work to social research<sup>4</sup>. Neither is there a single straightforward definition of participatory photography. Its methods, meanings and practices are as fluid as the worlds and contexts in which it operates. However a basic model has emerged that consists of a series of workshops, a ‘collaborative intervention’ (Kia Keating 2009:385), where a facilitator, often working in conjunction with a local organization or NGO, introduces photography to a group and the participants set about taking pictures around specific themes or issues. Workshops normally culminate in an event where the images created are displayed publically. The duration of projects, the numbers of workshops given, the numbers of participants, the level of photographic training provided, facilitation and management styles, standards and methods of working all vary widely. (Catalani and Minkler 2010, PhotoVoice 2007). Each initiative has its own priorities, parameters and agendas.

Notwithstanding this diversity, this research looks to examine the common ethos and promise that underscores these varied initiatives. The practice is driven by the ideological desire to use photography to empower and enable social change<sup>5</sup>. Central to this vision and intrinsic to the symbolism of the handing over of the camera is the notion of inversion, an upturning of traditional power hierarchies both in the societal and photographic context. The perceived power of the camera is re-assigned and ‘given’ to the subject, traditionally understood as powerless to shape their own image, in order that they might self-represent. Their images provide an ‘alternative’, unseen and ‘authentic’ insider view for spectators.

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<sup>4</sup> There is a huge diversity in the appropriation and application of participatory photography methods. A brief review of the different terms used illustrates the range of disciplines and fields in which participatory photography methods have been applied and used. In the world of the arts the term ‘collaborative photography’ is popular to describe the work of photographers such as Wendy Ewald (2000) who seek to create art-work in collaboration with subjects and communities. Psychologists have worked with ‘self-directed photography’ or ‘auto-photography’ (Ziller and Lewis 1981, Noland 2006), a method where subjects are asked to take pictures to engage in a process of self-definition. Therapists use ‘therapeutic photography’ or ‘phototherapy’ techniques to enable people to use photographs and the taking of pictures as part of a healing, self-reflexive process aimed to build personal capacity (Weiser 1999, PhotoVoice 2009). Social scientists often use ‘participant-led photography’ or ‘subject-led photography’ to refer to a research method where cameras are given to subjects with the aim of getting them actively involved in the research process and at times in advocating for change. In the field of public health research Caroline Wang named her influential action research method ‘photovoice’ (1996) and initiatives going under that name have proliferated all over the world. Community based activists, youth workers and socially engaged photographers involved in community empowerment initiatives have used terms such as ‘emancipatory photography’ (Hubbard 2007) and ‘community photography’ (DeCuyper 1997). Those referring to localized photographic production or non-professional media production often use the term ‘indigenous photography’, video and media (Ginsburg 1991, Flores 2004). In the context of this thesis I have chosen to use the term ‘participatory photography’ which has emerged as the label with the most currency amongst practitioners specifically those working in affiliation with NGOs and internationally.

<sup>5</sup> What kind of change and what it looks like depends on which practitioner or project you consult. There are those who emphasise personal transformation as the process of participatory photography offers chances for self-expression, self-guided reflection, reconciliation and personal growth (Kia Keating 2009:386). Others insist that while participatory photography ‘aims to influence the critical consciousness of individuals, its end goal is to address root causes by targeting policy and systems change’ (Strack et al, 2010:630). Interrogating the idea of change and what kind of change is at stake in participatory photography lies at the root of many of the questions pursued in this thesis.

But can power really be understood as a solid object, like a camera, that can be handed over? Can change really result from the act of taking or viewing a picture? What kind of authentic view do participatory images provide? This thesis identifies the simplistic assumptions in three claims that are regularly made in participatory photography's narrative: firstly, that photography empowers and gives voice (Chapter 5); secondly, that photography enables change (Chapter 6); and thirdly, that participant-produced images provide a more 'authentic' insider viewpoint (Chapter 7). When theorists highlight photography's nebulous purchase on 'truth' and social theories of power and change show them to be complex and distributed phenomena can participatory photography continue to validate itself through these claims?

The broad promise of participatory photography mixes together notions of activism, human rights advocacy, emancipatory pedagogy, therapeutic methods and ideals of self-actualisation pertaining to a wider democratising project that rejects 'top-down' approaches and elitist culture and champions 'bottom-up', grassroots, community and 'citizen' initiatives and knowledge. The noted positive acceptance of participatory photography projects (Kester 1995, Ballerini 1997, Godden 2008), also reflected in the accounts of project organisers<sup>6</sup>, indicates that the practice chimes with the mood of the times. This encompasses both a social appetite for self-representation and global processes of decentralization and democratization (Ginsburg 1991).

Giant leaps in digital technology have made photography economical and accessible. The internet makes the distribution of images immediate and open to anyone with access to a computer and the world wide web. Notwithstanding the concerns of those who temper the 'blind optimism' displayed by enthusiasts of the digital revolution (Levi Strauss 2007) the change in scale in how we use and share photography is indisputable<sup>7</sup>. The Bhutanese refugee youth, discussed in Chapter

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<sup>6</sup> Project founders interviewed for this research told similar stories of how their small initiatives, generating immensely positive responses, snowballed into something much bigger than initially imagined (N.McGirr, 2012, interview; Z.Briski, 2012, interview; J.Hubbard, 2012, interview).

<sup>7</sup> In 1990 it was estimated that we took 57 million pictures annually. In 2012, 300 million images were uploaded onto Facebook everyday (statistics taken from <http://blog.1000memories.com/94-number-of-photos-ever-taken-digital-and-analog-in-shoobox> , accessed May 20th 2014). However rapid advances in digital technology and the opportunities provided by the internet have not obliterated issues of access, misrepresentation, communication inequalities and knowledge sharing.

5, whom I first worked with in 1998 had never taken a picture before our workshops and few had ever had pictures of themselves. Now they update their Facebook profile pictures and post photographs more regularly than I do. People are using images to curate their own identities, tell their stories and communicate issues in ways that when participatory photography first emerged was not possible. Given this landscape, the inversion paradigm presented in the traditional participatory photography discourse seems not just outdated but almost obsolete for its failure to reflect how photography has transformed and is now used.

Sociologists recognize that social and political reality has altered. Along with digitalization, globalization signals a time less about territorial boundaries and more about connection and flow. Law and Urry argue that the character of social insecurity has changed as revolutions are complemented by insecurities that flow down and through global networks of finance, trade, military power and terrorism (2005:405). They describe a world in which we are ‘confronted with a newly coordinated reality – one that is open processual, non-linear and constantly on the move’ (2009:16). In this world, social phenomena are not contained; they cannot be explained through a singular story and linear causal models. They are plural and distributed, fleeting and unstable, involving processes and dynamics that cut across specific times and places.

The ‘evident truths’ of traditional models of socialist emancipatory politics – the very meaning of the Left’s struggles and objectives – have been ‘seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical mutations which have riven the ground on which those truths were constituted’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:xxi). New social movements<sup>8</sup> have emerged giving new life and form to social protests and movements for social change. They also have thrown into crisis classical radical theoretical and political frameworks; the centrality of the working class, the role of revolution, the prospect of a unified collective. The plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggle has dissolved the foundations of the

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Figures state 4.4 billion people globally people are still offline (ICT Development Index 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-24426739> , accessed May 27th 2014). New opportunities created by the digital revolution are empowering for some but for those without access and the means to participate the new status quo only compounds issues of marginalization and disempowerment. Hamelink has argued that digital technology disempowers people ‘through new forms of dependence and vulnerability’ (1995:127).

<sup>8</sup> New social movements is a term coined by theorists to distinguish the unique character of social movements that have evolved in the post industrial economy (Buechler 1995, 1999; Pichardo, 1997; Scott, 1990).

political imaginary on which the classical discourses of the Left were based (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Hardt and Negri argue there is a new era of opposition where the ‘multitude’ replaces the masses (2005)<sup>9</sup> and in this context numerous writers are acknowledging that the politics of resistance is being reconstructed (Gills 1997, Fox and Starn 1997).

All these rapid shifts are happening in a world where levels of social inequality and marginalisation are spiraling<sup>10</sup>. There is urgency to the task at hand. We need a new imaginary of participatory photography because its current narrative fails to account for the dynamics of contemporary practice and the social and political realities in which we live. When participatory photography evolved to challenge domineering power relations, there was something within the act of ‘handing the camera over’ that carried a symbolic weight in terms of the power shift it advocated (E.Gottesman, 2013, interview, 10<sup>th</sup> April). However, Foucault’s work (1970, 1975) has since established the profound changes that have taken place in the mechanisms of power.

The promise of participatory photography needs to be updated, given new significance and re-connected to a political imaginary that makes sense of the complex and multiple power imbalances within the contemporary visual, digital, social and political landscape that leave many communities marginalised and voiceless. I propose its promise is, to a certain extent, stuck in nineteenth and twentieth century epistemological and political models, reflecting their preoccupations and reproducing their realities. However, this sensibility is under pressure from approaches that highlight the plural, the complex and the unstable character of social and political life and it is through this lens that the promise of participatory photography can be updated and reconceived within a new language.

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<sup>9</sup> Hardt and Negri (2005) argue that globalisation requires us to re-think new forms of democracy that can expand the rule of the people beyond national borders by creating new forms of authority drawn from decentralised pluralistic networks. Central to their vision is the notion of the ‘multitude’ which re-imagines the Marxist concept of the proletariat as a heterogenous webs of workers, migrants, social movements and NGOS. The ‘multitude’ is not the people but rather many peoples acting in networked concert creating new circuits of cooperation and collaboration.

<sup>10</sup> A recent report by Oxfam highlights that economic inequality has reached extreme levels (Seery and Caistor Arendar 2014). See also The Global Wealth Report 2014 (<https://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file/?fileID=60931FDE-A2D2-F568-B041B58C5EA591A4>, accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015).

## **The governmentality of participatory photography**

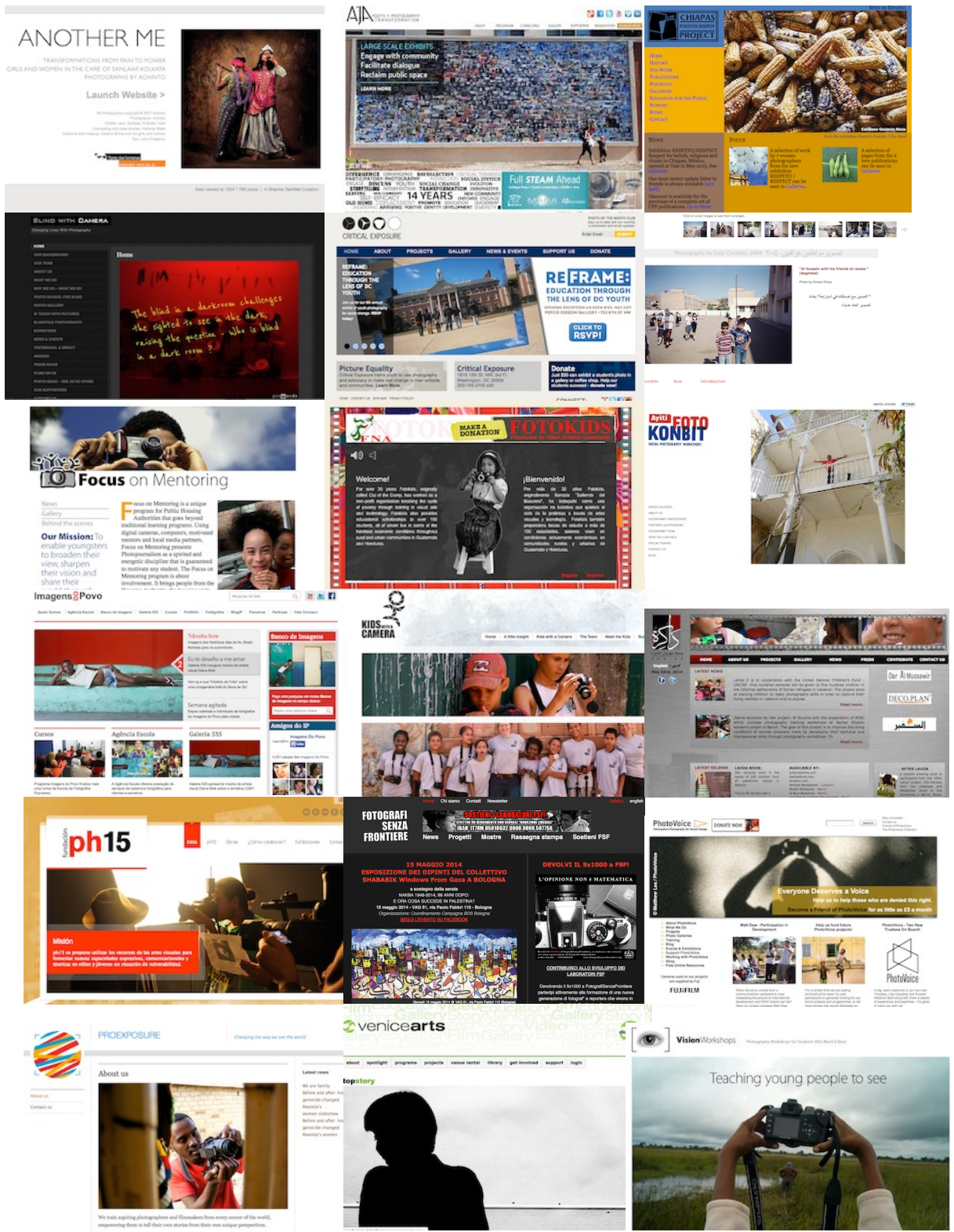
The concern is not only over the epistemological and ideological shortcomings of participatory photography's promise but also over how the open-ended promise has been applied and put to work. Within the NGO sphere, the last few decades have seen growth from a few isolated examples of projects to an emerging field that ranges from hundreds of small community-based initiatives, longstanding projects to specially designed ventures enacted by large agencies as part of wider strategic initiatives and dedicated organisations running multiple programs<sup>11</sup>. These days the bulk of participatory photography initiatives are enacted within the networks of NGOs, institutional and localized community development and educational programmes or socially engaged arts activity linked to these contexts and their funding frameworks. NGOs themselves are increasingly managing and commissioning arts and culturally based programs and there is a significant level of interaction between activist groups, NGOs and artist practitioners engaged in collaborative projects (Kester 2011). In this sense participatory photography has been 'NGOised' (Yudice 2003) and come under pressure to formalize methods that can be replicated, made economically robust and 'scaled up' (Mayo 2000).

An 'NGO-ised' mode of participatory photography has developed in which its diverse forms and applications have become tied to a standardized model of practice shaped by sectorial demands in the spheres of arts, culture and international development in which it operates. This is a model in which projects and their objectives are pre-defined around established criteria and the governmental modes of thought operating in these spheres. In this sense, participatory photography has developed its own form of governmentality that has come to be the focus of much critique of the field. An investigation into this governmentality provides insight into the tensions inherent to the practice and the conflicted nature of its application.

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<sup>11</sup> Projects often start as independent initiatives but as they develop they tend to work in partnership with NGOs or establish themselves as their own NGOs in their own right.





Screen grabs from a selection of participatory photography projects currently active online.

From top left: Another Me, Aja Project, Chiapas Photography Project, Blind with Camera, Critical Exposure, Daylight Community Foundation, Focus on Mentoring, FotoKids, FotoKonbit, Imagens do Povo, Kids with a Camera, Zahra, Ph15, Fotografi Senza Frontiere, PhotoVoice, Pro Exposure, Venice Arts and Vision Workshops. (accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014).

**Transparency** was a participatory photography project that I ran with unaccompanied refugee youth in London. The project's intention was for the young participants to be empowered through their photography to present their own stories as refugees to a wider audience, raising awareness and enabling change by influencing negative public attitudes towards refugees. The project culminated in a successful travelling exhibition that generated significant positive audience feedback and press coverage (Orton 2002, PhotoVoice 2004b).



Transparency featured in The Guardian, July 2002

The young people were proud of their photography and the response it received. Despite this a number were not willing to engage in media work that focused on their images in terms of their 'refugee' experience. They did not rush to claim a 'voice' as young refugees and resisted taking on self-advocacy in any kind of planned or systematic way (Orton 2002:14). The project evaluation recorded that this 'was a challenge for the project which, to some extent, relied on 'personal stories' to publicise and explain the project to the media' (Orton 2002:8).

This tension, between the project and participants' diverging intentions for the photography, became a defining feature for myself, the project manager, as balancing the conflicting goals of the project became a delicate task. How could the project fulfill its stated aims to empower participants and enable self-expression while also engaging in awareness-raising and media work when one goal

compromised or negated the other? As project organisers we had assumed that self-advocacy would automatically flow from having a group of marginalised young people with common experiences ‘given’ a voice through photography. However, it soon became clear that no definitive assumptions could be made about how the young people would respond to the participatory process and about how they may or may not want to use their photography. A number of the young people rejected the refugee label and did not want the stigma of being identified as young refugees. This was a key part of their coping strategy as they tried to integrate and settle into a life in the UK. Tatiana, one particularly talented young photographer, retorted to a comment about the success of the exhibition; ‘But they are only coming to see our pictures because we are refugees’. Tatiana did not want to be pitied because of her refugee experience and she did not want to be defined by it. However her stance was not shared by all of the participants. There were others who wanted to tell their stories, to proactively use their images to change negative public attitudes to refugees.



Tatiana's Self Portrait, 2004  
The writing on the collage reads, 'This is me and all I've got. How far do you think I will get?'

The experience of this project demonstrates that the relationship between photography, self-expression, advocacy and activism is complex and unpredictable. Participatory photography projects, in dealing with marginalization and exclusion, are implicated in a politics of voice and directly tied to vulnerable and politically sensitive processes of identification and difference. Experiences are not common and ways of dealing with them are not uniform. The way people choose to engage with and use photography are multiple and this often creates tensions when a project framework seeks to contain activity within pre-defined agendas and parameters.

This example highlights what Dean calls the 'inconvenient dissonance' between the claims and objectives of programmes and the 'intentional but non-subjective' character of regimes of practice (2010:4). It is precisely this line of critical inquiry that motivates my own research, born as it has been out of the disjuncture I felt as a practitioner between the promise and claims of participatory photography and the complexities and tensions that underline how projects play out in practice. In this sense this investigation examines the disparity between how participatory photography is represented and how practitioners, participants and audiences experience it. It is not simply about highlighting the differences between the envisioned aims of participatory photography projects and their actual effects and referring to the purity of the program and the impurity of the reality or vice versa. Rather the focus is on examining the different realities and taking into account conflicts, tensions and resistances. The aim is to view them as part of the projects themselves, not as signs of failure, but as a very condition of their existence, actively contributing to the paradoxes and compromises inside them (Lemke 2000:9).

Working with the notion of the 'governmentality' of participatory photography I seek to highlight the mechanisms in which the field has become caught up as it has been incorporated into the NGO field. The focus is on the ways in which projects are managed, categorised, validated and evaluated by funders, organisers and partners that together amount to a mode of thinking that shapes and mobilises interventions. Trends of managerialism and instrumentalism exert increasing influence within socially-engaged arts practice requiring that projects operate

within pre-designated criteria that define their social impact, value and efficacy. This push has created tensions within a process that practitioners argue must retain its organic, creative openness to allow its producers to shape and define it anew in each context according to their own parameters (Z.Briski, 2012, interview; E. Gottesman, 2013, interview; Y. Eid-Sabbagh, 2013, interview; JC. Paucar, 2011, interview).

While project governmentality proposes one narrative, participants often have other priorities, other pictures they want to take. The result is that initiatives are tangled webs of agendas and expectations with practitioners often struggling trying to meet multiple agendas (Rooke 2014, PhotoVoice 2007). Mitchell proposes we account for photography, not only in terms of its power, but also in terms of its powerlessness and impotence (2005). Focusing on these tensions and their negotiation defines participatory photography not only in terms of its potential and promise but also in relation to its powerlessness, in terms of its limitations and failures.

**Whose pictures are these?**



Self-portrait: In England I don't know who I am. I know my name and others things but I do not know what I am doing here. In my own language I could tell you many things about myself but I find it hard to speak in English.

© Florian / Transparency / PhotoVoice

I took this picture. It is Florian's self-portrait and is credited to Florian but I pressed the shutter. It was taken on the road outside my house. Florian, Bajram and Lawrence had come round so we could spend the afternoon working on

portraits that they had been invited to submit to a national self-portraiture competition<sup>12</sup>. The boys were unaccompanied refugee youths and had been participating in PhotoVoice's **Transparency** project for 8 months. They were good friends and there was plenty of joking around as they worked on their portraits. Florian had chipped in with ideas for his mates' pictures but remained quiet when it came to his own. I tried to push him on what he wanted to do. He looked at me with a small smile and kept repeating, 'I don't know'. Later he explained in more detail. 'I want to do a picture; it is just that I don't know what to say about myself. When I was in my country I could tell you all sorts of things about who I was but here in England, I still don't know who I am'.

This then became his portrait. We were all involved. Bajram directing the picture while Florian worked out how to arrange himself, Lawrence standing in the middle of the street to stop any cars from running him over. There had been a fair amount of chat as to how to photograph 'I don't know'. I cannot remember whose idea it had been for Florian to pose in the shape of the question mark. Bajram acted as a substitute and Florian working with me to set up the shot. For the final image, I was the one behind the camera. I took two versions of the image, one wider, which included the cars, parked either side of the street but, not quite satisfied, I pulled in, focusing on Florian alone in the road. It was this image that was submitted for the competition. Florian dictated the caption to me after we had taken the picture.

In her critique of participatory photography projects, Ballerini asks the question, 'whose pictures are these?' (1995:88). Her concerns are multiple but largely come down to issues of ownership and authorship in participatory photography and the question of who benefits from projects. She queries the control that project organisers and facilitators hold over the project participants, suggesting that projects are 'new sites for an ambivalent neo-colonialism' (1997:174) that involve only a 'nominal transfer of authorship' (1995:90). In the context of her argument we might well ask who the 'true' author of Florian's self-portrait is. How do we designate authorship in the context of a collaborative endeavor?

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.media19.co.uk/projects/spuk/> (accessed May 14<sup>th</sup> 2014)

Many of the critical debates around participatory photography focus on issues of photographic control and ownership. Discussions around best practice and ethical working deal with subjects such as crediting and consent that relate back to specific conceptions of photographic authorship. These matters are, undoubtedly, important to the participatory process but within this thesis I propose that the current narrow focus of debate on questions of photographic ownership has resulted in limited critical discussion and a failure to build a coherent theory that can account for the dynamics and complexities of the field. How useful is an inquiry into the question of who the ‘true’ author of Florian’s self-portrait is? I have repeatedly been in participatory photography workshops with both adults and children where participants defined ownership of the image according to whom was the main subject of the picture rather than according to who was behind the camera<sup>13</sup>. Notions of photographic ownership are culturally and historically constructed and are vested with varying levels of importance. In this context how are we to define the parameters for photographic authorship and control?

### **Re-conceptualizing photography**

A fundamental part of the task of re-imagining participatory photography lies in a re-framing of how we understand photography, its processes and effects. Ariella Azoulay argues that for approximately 150 years photography has been conceptualized from the perspective of the individual positioned behind the lens (2012:12). Photography has become institutionalised ‘through its identification with the photographer, as his or her property, and as the point of origin of the discussion of photography’ (2012:23). In the participatory photography narrative the question of who presses the shutter is everything to how the practice and resulting images are perceived, assessed, judged, discussed and imagined. Implicit is the misconstrued suggestion that the person behind the camera is in charge, that it is possible for a photographer to have complete mastery of their image and that this is the ultimate aim of these projects.

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<sup>13</sup> Ballerini notes that Jim Hubbard of Shooting Back makes a similar observation, when he describes that one of the most difficult ideas to get across to children in his workshops is that a photograph is owned by the person who took the picture, not by the person in the picture (1997:179). However while Ballerini takes this as evidence of misconstrued conceptions of authorship and ownership in this type of photography I would argue it is more evidence that multiple conceptions of photographic ownership exist which should lead us to consider the appropriateness of imposing a singular notion of photographic authorship (of images as pertaining solely to the photographer) in the context of this work.



The task then is to revise the notion of photography. For Azoulay this involves an ontological investigation of photography that moves beyond a focus on the technology of the camera or the photograph alone. She presents a ‘new political ontology of photography’, a rich and detailed thesis for a form of photographic practice which involves a ‘human being-with-others in which the camera or photography are implicated’ (2012:18). Rejecting photography’s conception as a decisive moment (Cartier Bresson 1952) that pivots around the actions and intentions of the photographer, photography is reconceived as an event, ongoing and never-ending, with multiple participants and under the sole control of no one (Azoulay 2008, 2012).

Azoulay’s ideas highlight the collective labor involved in photography. The focus is on the multiple participants implicated in the encounter<sup>14</sup> and a conception of photography in which not even the most gifted photographer can claim complete ownership of the image. Photographs are understood as an encounter between the photographed, the photographer and the spectator, none of whom have the authority to determine the meaning of the image (Azoulay 2008:10-11). Concepts of ownership are foreign to the logic of photography because they negate the possibility that others can lay claim to it. Photography is always a ‘joint action’ (2008:411), ‘an action taken in the plural’ (2008:143).

Designating from the outset that photography is a plural, jointly owned activity opens up new channels for examining and understanding participatory photography practice. The task is not one of defining the parameters of participation in terms of photographic control and methodological and ethical models of practice that ensure the participant photographer’s ownership. Rather, the task becomes one of tracing the influence of the various participants on the event of photography, the different claims they make, establishing how they use and put the participatory photography process to work and to what ends. Investigated from this perspective we start from a place that designates participatory photography as a negotiated practice.

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<sup>14</sup> Azoulay names the camera, the photographer, the subject and the spectator all as active participants but concedes there may be more (2008). In the case of participatory photography there are undoubtedly other participants such as facilitators, project organisers, funders, project partners and community members.

Participatory photography is thus understood in terms of the encounter it creates between spectators, organisers, practitioners and advocates as well as its protagonists, the participant-photographers and their subjects. From this perspective, the effects of photography are multiple and not always image-related. Participatory practitioners highlight that the processes they are engaged in often have very little to do with making photographs (S.Alam, 2012, interview; N.McGirr, 2012, interview). They refer to questions of power and politics, to matters of responsibility and ethics, processes and ideas of change, questions of sustainability and of the impact of their work. Ultimately it is these themes and the question of the role of photography has in facilitating and shaping these processes that is the focus of this research.

Central to Azoulay's political ontology of photography is the idea of photography as a means to re-establish citizenship. Her ideological call is for a 'civil contract' between the various users of photography, a political space and encounter between people who take, watch, and show other people's photographs, that opens up new possibilities of political action and forms new conditions for its visibility (2008:24). She posits that photography—as an ensemble of social practices—constitutes a “bind” or set of “political relations” between all parties involved (2008:17). This research builds on that manifesto by exploring what the political makeup of these relations look like in the context of participatory photography. What is their character, how are they imagined by those involved and how do they function? If participatory photography is imagined in terms of an 'ethics of spectatorship ... that begins to sketch the contours of the spectator's responsibility toward what is visible' (Azoulay 2008:130), then what framework can we give to shape this ethics and the new forms of civic engagement and politics it entails?

### **Re-framing (my) version of participatory photography**

I come to this research as both a practitioner and purveyor of participatory photography and its promise. Since 1999 participatory photography has made up the large part of my professional life<sup>15</sup> and my involvement in the field is central to

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<sup>15</sup> I first worked with participatory photography when I set up a project with Bhutanese refugee youth in Nepal (Chapter 5) as part of my undergraduate anthropology research. This evolved into my co-founding **PhotoVoice**, a participatory photography charity, which I ran for ten years.

my research motivation. **PhotoVoice**, the organization I co-founded, was started out of the conviction of photography's potential to empower and it is a belief I still subscribe to. The reader should understand that I am not a neutral observer-researcher of the field but someone who is fully invested in its imagined promise.

As is the experience of many practitioners, I found the more I worked in the field the more I became alive to the limits, contradictions and ethical complexities of the work and the extent to which they define practice. I also became increasingly frustrated by how these issues were edited out of the narrative. My professional work required me to promote the method to funders, partners, participants and viewers, to name its value and to package its promise. Advocating for the method left me with limited scope to explore its contradictions and tensions. Coffey argues that 'in self-consciously seeking to acquire knowledge of social organisations and cultures the fieldworker may be involved in a more personal process of redefinition' (1999:27). As such this research is intimately tied to a personal process of inquiry and exploration, to a need to critically examine and review my own practice and to explore new ways of speaking about and realizing it.

Sociologists have recently come to emphasise the performative character of social investigation. They argue that social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) make social realities and social worlds. They do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it (Law and Urry 2005, Back 2012, Giddens 1990). These perspectives highlight the relational and interactive nature of social investigation that helps to make and re-make social action, creating knowledge and 'truths' that shape the world and how we understand it.

Participatory photography itself is a social and visual intervention that is performative, that seeks to create change, to make and shape action. It is a practice with real consequences in the world. This has crucial implications: it focuses us on the question of what we want these consequences to be. This research into participatory photography is thus not simply about uncovering and analyzing its dynamics and impact but it is also about exploring how we might bring something new into being. If participatory photography projects help to make the realities

they describe and that their images mediate, ‘then we are faced with the question: which realities might we try to enact?’ (Law and Urry 2005:398).

This thesis joins with wider calls for a renewed political purpose for socially-engaged practice<sup>16</sup>, for an engagement with political and ethical issues ‘without arrogance or the drum roll of political piety’ (Back 2012:14). Politics can no longer be put on hold but this is not about fixing a politics of grand theory or specific ideologies. As a practitioner, the purpose is to explore my political commitments. Back points out that these do not need to bind us (2012:36) but that they can enable us, as practitioners, to make judgments about the work in which we are involved and the ‘truths’ it enacts. For this reason the tone and purposes of this thesis are deliberately exploratory and open-ended rather than definitive. My aim is to raise questions about what is meant when people talk of ‘empowering’ with photography. The aspiration is to broaden the discussion around the practice of participatory photography, to move beyond celebratory narratives in the hope that we might be more cautious and thoughtful about what is claimed by way of empowerment and change.

### **Thesis structure**

This thesis is made up of this written text and a non-linear film, *These Photos Were My Life*, contained on the accompanying DVD (it is also available online at <http://thesephotos.korsakow.tv>). Images are dispersed throughout the thesis. It is indicated when the reader should refer to additional material in the Appendix. Interviewees and specific participatory photography projects included in the glossary are highlighted in bold.

The first two chapters consist of a literature and methods overview. Chapter 1 reviews the key literature on governmentality and pluralism that underpins the case built throughout the thesis while Chapter 2 describes the methodological processes undertaken within the context of a ‘live methods’ (Back 2012). Chapter 3 focuses on the critique of ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography initiatives linking it to wider critical debates around humanitarianism, development interventions and

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<sup>16</sup> See Back (2012) in sociology, Campbell (1998) in political theory, Bishop (2012) and Mouffe (2013) in arts theory, Barnett and Weiss (2008) in development theory.

NGO visual politics and practice. It is argued that the method is stuck in an impasse, detached from a meaningful politics of social change and unable to reconcile the tensions between its participatory, bottom-up ethos and the standardized NGO model that often characterizes its delivery.

Taking a step back from its contemporary application by NGOs, Chapter 4 historicises participatory photography, examining the changing ideological frameworks that have driven its practice. The story of TAFOS is used to illustrate how shifting political climates have come to shape the participatory photography enterprise and to recover a ‘potential’ history (Azoulay 2014) for participatory photography within a tradition of grassroots civil photography activism.

Chapters 5 - 7 use case studies to establish a notion of participatory photography as a pluralized and contested practice from the perspective of the power and empowerment relations it involves (Chapter 5), the question of its impact on participants (Chapter 6) and the affect of its images on spectators (Chapter 7). Chapter 5 examines a project with Bhutanese refugee youth in Nepal and urges that practitioners broaden their understanding of what it means ‘to empower’ with photography and root their negotiation of the power dynamics involved within an ethical framework that seeks to play with as little domination as possible (Foucault 1998). Chapter 6 considers the impact of participatory photography projects and presents the findings of the film *These Photos Were My Life* which explores the long term impact of participation in TAFOS for a group of its former photographers. Chapter 7 turns to the lives and spectatorship of participatory photography images and proposes that participatory photography has developed a problematic narrative around its ‘authenticity’ in order to claim the attention of spectators. Research on the use of TAFOS images demonstrates how participatory photography images can get taken up and employed within regimes of truth to lend authenticity to one particular narrative at the cost of plural ways of seeing which nurture audiences’ ‘critical responsiveness’ (Connolly 1995).

The conclusion brings together the multiple strands of a re-imagined notion of a pluralized participatory photography. The concept of a ‘Photography of Becoming’ is proposed as a framework for understanding the character of the

emergent politics of becoming and voice at work in many contemporary participatory photography initiatives. Participatory photography re-imagined as a form of photography of becoming highlights the fragile and uncertain character of this visual practice while re-affirming the vital contribution it makes to enabling emerging claims and making visible unheard and unrecognized voices.

# 1

## **Reviewing the Literature: Governmentality, Plurality and Participatory Photography**

The existing field of literature pertaining specifically to contemporary participatory photography practice consists mainly of project showcases and descriptive methodological accounts and manuals<sup>17</sup>. Most related academic literature has been written around participatory photography as an action research methodology and specifically on ‘photovoice’ (Wang & Burris 1997, Wang 1999, Hergenrather et al 2009, Catalani & Minkler 2010). There is limited writing that moves beyond the descriptive guidelines for projects. The critical research that does exist is indicative of a practice more focused on method than ontological, epistemological or evaluative issues (Foster-Fishman et al 2005:276). Authors have expressed dissatisfaction with quality and research standards in existing literature (Catalani & Minkler 2010, Hergenrather et al 2009).

Given the relatively underdeveloped nature of literature specific to the field, my own research has utilized a wide array of writing to examine the diverse themes and contexts that shape the participatory photography project. The fluidity of the field and breath of issues that the practice entails has made it a necessity to draw on literature from sociological and photographic theory, development and cultural studies and political, educational and art theory. Barthes notes that it is hard to put

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<sup>17</sup> Many projects and practitioners have published image-based photographic books including Ewald (2000, 2002), Shooting Back (Hubbard 1992, Banks & Hubbard 1994), Shoot Back (Wong 2000), PhotoVoice booklets (2007-10), New Londoners (PhotoVoice 2008), Out of the Dump (McGirr 1996) and Born in Brothels (Briski & Kaufman 2005), Pais de Luz (TAFOS 2006), My World, My View (Carpenter 2007), Lahza (Zakira 2008), Camaristas (Chiapas Photography Project 1998), Inside Eye (Schlossman & Berger 1997) and Seeing Beyond Sight (Deifell 2008). They serve as documentation of the projects, showcases of the photographs produced and as a means of communicating the stories to public audiences. There also exists of a body of specialist participatory photography methodological literature aimed at practitioners looking to run participatory photography projects or use the methods. This includes Ewald & Lightfoot (2000), PhotoVoice’s (2007) manual and methodology series. Other manual and tool-kit based publications include FotoLibras (2009) and Save the Children (2003). These publications provide detailed ‘how-to’ information on the implementation, delivery and facilitation of participatory photography projects.

boundaries on what gets discussed in relation to photographic practice (1982:6). My research examines participatory photography from three overlapping perspectives: as an NGO practice, as a photographic practice and as a socially engaged or community arts practice. I have created parameters by focusing on literature relating to these areas that provide a critical framework to give insight to participatory photography's contemporary use, the context in which it is practiced (development and cultural/arts fields), the ideas of change, power and empowerment in which it trades (development, social and political theory) and the notion of its promise and potential (photographic, social and political theory).

To provide coherence I review the literature according to the structure of my overall thesis, which involves two inter-related sections. Firstly, the review starts with a consideration of governmentality literature that is used to set the analytical framework for a critique of 'NGO-ized' participatory photography initiatives and the managerial and instrumental regimes in which they are immersed. Secondly, it considers the work of writers who have pushed for a revision of photographic theory and frameworks for understanding socially engaged arts practice (Bishop 2012, Bourriaud 2002, Kelly 1984, Kester 1997, Mouffe 2013). It goes on to examine the notion of becoming and pluralistic ideas in photographic, social and political theory that provide a conceptual frame for the new imaginary of participatory photography posited through this thesis.

### **Governmentality: a framework for an analytics of power and truth**

I have chosen governmentality as a theoretical lens because it provides a critical framework that focuses on the interweaving dynamics of power, truth claims and politics and an exploration of how these play out both in practice, in the context of lived experience, and discursively, in the context of rhetorical and visual narrative. A framework that works at these multiple levels is central to this thesis that examines participatory photography both as an experienced 'empowering' practice in the development and cultural context, as a practice of looking and as a form of ontological and narrative promise.



Governmentality is a multifaceted concept first conceived by Michael Foucault and since developed by numerous thinkers. Fundamental to the term is understanding its meaning as reaching beyond traditional political definitions of 'government' as concerned with matters of the state. Foucault defined the term as being concerned with the 'conduct of conduct'; the activities and practices aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons (Foucault 1982) which ranges from 'governing the self' to 'governing others'. Government thus encompasses not only how we exercise authority over others but also how we govern ourselves (Dean 2010).

Foucault proposed a radical re-appraisal of the concept of power, making a crucial differentiation between power and domination (Stewart 2001). He bemoaned the predominance of narrow and overly simplistic binary concepts of power; views of power as repressive and dominating and based on the fundamental dichotomy between those that exercise it and those who undergo it. Foucault argues that since the eighteenth century a new 'economy of power' has been established, a 'bio-power' that has involved the development of procedures, technologies and disciplinary controls that has neutralized power and allowed it 'to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and 'individualised' through the entire social body' (Foucault 1984:60). The old power of death that symbolised sovereign power has become supplanted 'by the administration of bodies and calculated management of life' (Foucault 1984:262).

For Foucault, government is dependant on knowledge because in order to govern subjects, they need to be known. Thus the production, circulation and organization and authorization of knowledge (truths) that incarnate what it is to be governed, which make it thinkable, calculable and practicable becomes central (Rose 1999:6). Mechanisms of power produce knowledge which collate information on people's behaviour and existence. This knowledge reinforces power. Knowledge and power are joined together through 'technologies of power', sets of operations and procedures which control and direct behaviors. In this context, power is not identified with individuals but 'becomes a machinery no one owns' (Foucault in Gordon 1980:156).

Foucault emphasised how the art of government privileges systematic and rational ways of thinking - emblematic of the modern age - over symbolic, mythic or poetic modes. This mode of thinking is explicit and embedded in language and other 'technologies' of government but is also relatively taken for granted. Every society has its own 'regime of truth', its own discourses which it accepts and makes function as true (Foucault 1984:73). In producing knowledge, power creates a circular relation with truth. Thus truth cannot be considered outside of power but rather it induces regular effects of power.

In a study of power, knowledge, truth and the politics they entail in the context of participatory photography, the question that needs to be asked is not what do these narratives mean, but rather how are these truths produced and whom do these discourses serve? (Gordon 1980:115). Governmentality involves an analytics of 'truth', for the battle, Foucault insists, is not 'on behalf' of the truth but is about 'the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays' (Foucault 1980:132)<sup>18</sup>. From this perspective there is no 'truth', matters of truth and knowledge are an element of government which helps to create a discursive field in which certain truths or rationalities are taken for granted or understood as rational (Lemke 2000:8).

In highlighting the genealogy of 'truths', the process of their construction and invention within a socio-historical space, the concept of governmentality problematises and examines the consequences of truth-effects as a form of 'truth politics' (Lemke 2000:14). An examination of the 'truth politics' in participatory photography works at two levels. Firstly, as an investigation into the governmental modes of thought (and the power and 'truths' they involve) that shape and influence the sectors in which participatory photography projects operate. Secondly, as an enquiry into the assumptions inherent in the 'truths' put forward by the narrative of the practice and its promise to empower with photography and how these 'truths' affect and shape the practices of looking at participatory photography.

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<sup>18</sup> Dean highlights how touching on questions of 'truth' focuses on the 'intensely moral activity' of government (2010:19). Policies and practices of government presume to know what constitutes good, appropriate and responsible conduct and attempt to affect and shape in some way, who and what individuals and collectives are and should be (Dean 2010:20), including how and why they should be 'empowered'.

Examining participatory photography through the lens of governmentality requires that we build a genealogy to understand how its discursive narrative has evolved and come to be organized into a practice, discourse and field of activity. It involves looking at the socio-political context in which it has been formulated and has transformed, its bid for acceptance and survival, the implications of the 'truth-politics' it espouses and the dynamics of what it makes possible.

Foucault points to the 'productivity of power' (1984:61). Technologies of government do not simply restrain; they also enable. Within liberal forms of government, power becomes foremost about guidance (Lemke 2000). Determining the 'conduct' of others is not intrinsically wrong. On the contrary, as participatory photography aspires, it can result in the 'empowerment' of people to be decision makers in fields of action (Lemke 2000:5). In addition, relations of power produce resistance. The history of 'government' as the 'conduct of conduct' is interwoven with the history of dissenting 'counter-conducts' (Gordon 1991:5). Given this reality, the scene is set for a conception of power as 'never a fixed and closed regime but rather an endless and open strategic game' (Gordon 1991:5).

How is it that participatory photography has evolved its own forms of governmentality and how is it that the governmentality of other sectors has shaped its practices? How are these forms of governmentality resisted and negotiated by those involved? An aspect of this research looks to examine the tensions that define the field of contemporary participatory photography and understand them as a struggle between different forms of governmental thought and 'truth politics' at play in the participatory photography encounter.

### **Neo-liberal critique**

It is impossible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality that underpins them (Lemke 2000:2). A feature of many governmentality studies is their use of neo-liberalism and advanced liberal government as a framework for situating contemporary techniques and rationalities of government. Collectively the literature can be taken as a broad critique of neo-liberalism and its spread into diverse aspects of life (Dean 2010). It is themes

pertaining to neo-liberal critique that underline much of the critical literature used in this research.

Neo-liberalism is a term frequently used to represent a novel and complex set of notions about the art of governing that has emerged out of liberalism and is aimed at implicating the individual citizen, 'as player and partner', into the market game (Gordon 1999:34, Dean 2010). Neo-liberal globalization (NLG) is the term used to describe a system of liberal market-based imperialism (Gills 2002). Leftwing political thinkers argue that inequality and its resultant ills are structural, systemic flaws, intrinsic to the capitalist system which is an inevitable part of NLG and the neoliberal market-based democracies of the Global North (Zizek 2009). NLG promotes an individualistic agenda that tends to a state politics that protects the interests of capital and capital accumulation. While the governing systems are called liberal democracies, the quality of democracy is contested (Mouffe 2009). Leftist thinkers cite increasing political apathy (low voter turnout, declining political engagement) as evidence of disengagement resulting from our transformation from citizens to consumers (Thornton 2012, Hardt and Negri 2005).

For many, neo-liberalism has become the 'bogeyman', an ideology that has resulted in the dismantling of social protection and the unchecked free rein of markets. It is often given as the prime reason for the many social ills in which participatory photography projects engage - increasing social injustice and inequality, marginalization and poverty. However, some argue that many forms of neo-liberal critique fall short because their arguments rely on the very same concepts they intend to criticize, namely dualisms of knowledge/power, state/economy, and subject/power (Lemke 2000).

Lemke suggests that notions of governmentality can bridge the binaries in dominant neo-liberal critiques by examining how neo-liberalism functions as a 'politics of truth'; how it produces new forms of knowledge and invents new notions and concepts that contribute to the 'government' of new domains of regulation and intervention (2000:8). A Foucauldian critique of neo-liberalism thus reveals it to be not an end in itself but 'a prolongation of government, a

gradual transformation of politics, that restructures the power relations in society’ (Lemke 2000:11).

Within neo-liberalism new actors, such as NGOs, have appeared on the scene of government and government has penetrated new spheres of social life, such as culture and arts. For Lemke, these developments indicate fundamental transformations in politics and new regulation between state and civil actors, ‘the development of forms of sub-politics *beneath* politics in its traditional meaning’ (Lemke 2000:11). This thesis calls for participatory photography to be re-connected with politics. However, this is not simply a matter of re-imagining the practice through a neo-liberal critique that relies on classical political dualisms to mount an ‘opposition’ and agenda for change. Rather, the task is to understand how politics is changing and how this has manifested itself in the ‘sub politics’ at play in participatory photography practice in order that we might carefully re-build a notion of the political imaginary to which the practice can be tied. This takes themes of the neo-liberal critique but combines them with pluralist theory and notions of becoming to develop a narrative that relates to the fluid, multiple and unpredictable character of the practice.

### **The art of governmentality in NGOs and neoliberal paradigms of development**

This thesis examines participatory photography in the context of its application as an NGO and development practice and as a tool for cultural development<sup>19</sup>. Foucauldian analysis has been applied extensively in the area of development studies by writers engaged in building a critical literature around the rapid rise and spread of the field of international development and humanitarianism, its discourses and modes of operation.

A substantial part of the critical literature links the rise of non-governmentalism to the ascendancy of neoliberal ideology and its signaling of a general shift away from the idea of state-led development (Green 2008). Neoliberal ideas came to fill the void left as Marxist approaches failed to suggest practical ways forward in the

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<sup>19</sup> The term cultural development acknowledges that development is not just a question of economic growth alone and that culture is central to sustainable development policy and practice. Championed by institutions such as UNESCO, the term promotes cultural diversity and incorporates the use culture as a tool and a means to promote and enable development. See <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development> (accessed March 19th 2015)

struggle against global poverty and there was a general loss of confidence as to whether paternalistic top down state initiatives could successfully produce development (Barnett & Weiss 2008, Craig and Mayo 1995, Lewis 2008:43). From the 1990s, globally, the NGO sector boomed as these groups were seen as the answer to longstanding development problems. NGOs thrived with the emergence of a new set of ideas about alternative 'counter-development' practices centered on attractive but ill-defined notions such as empowerment and participation (Craig & Mayo 1995, de Chaine 2005, Lewis 2008).

Studies that encompass themes of governmentality into their analysis of development and NGOs often focus on the increasing influence of development 'managerialism'. My own analysis on the governmentality of participatory photography focuses on how managerial tendencies in broader NGO practice have come to shape and define an 'NGO model' of participatory photography. Cooke and Dar's volume examines how technocratic ideas of management have been invoked to legitimize dominant development philosophies and practices (2008). Their argument is not a complete rejection or dismissal of the place of management in development. Rather, their goal is to reflect on how particular, apparently neutral or benign, ideas about management have been universalised to guide and justify specific conceptions and forms of development at the cost of plurality. They argue managerial logic in development has constructed a regime of truth that makes particular realities more legitimate than others. Within this rationality, the diversity of social and economic life that development deals with gets homogenised under notions of project management that seek to bring order through models, procedures, systems, bureaucracy, timeframes and other tools. These practices appear mundane but culminate in a singular project logic that has a de-humanising effect on the lives of those who are supposed to be the 'beneficiaries' of development (Cooke 2008:5).

Authors argue the rise of managerialism in NGOs is the result of much wider ideological changes at the level of development policy (Lewis 2008) and encroaching 'global managerialism' (Murphy 2008). In this sense managerialism remains closely tied to the social imaginary of modernity (Srinivas 2008). The seepage of managerial discourse and practices has gathered force as NGOs have

sought to reshape and optimise their organisation and performance. In response to a competitive political and funding context which demands improved results and efficiency, NGOs have come to operate in increasingly business-like ways as they struggle to cater to a marketplace of ideas and funders (De Waal 1997, Lewis 2008, Vaux 2004).

Lewis (2008) notes a trend in NGOs that I have seen often in the context of participatory photography practice: NGOs or projects, that started as resource-poor, small-scale groups located on the fringes of alternative development, that, as they have grown closer to mainstream agencies, have been required to develop new systems of accountability when their efficiency and effectiveness have been challenged. Thus much NGO management has taken form of ‘an imposed managerialism, rather than emerging organically as part of an NGO’s own agenda’ (Lewis 2008:48). If initiatives wish to secure funds and implement donor-funded projects they are obliged to comply with bureaucratic systems for reporting and accountability (Lewis 2008).

Notions of accountability and capacity building, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and other prescriptions have come to shape the field<sup>20</sup>. It is impossible for any initiative to avoid them. Furthermore, authors highlight an insidious side to managerialism as development projects have become cloaked in the alluring rhetoric of participation, networking and partnering to lend legitimacy to their activities (Cooke 2008).

These studies emphasize that ‘any encounter with management is an encounter with power’ (Escobar 2008:199). Collectively they reflect a growing disquiet and their analysis points to something ‘intrinsically wrong’ with the very idea of management in development (Cooke and Dar 2008:6). This is not a simple story of management as modernization but rather a malleable field that is continually being realized by practitioners in different ways and with different effects (Dar 2008:196). There is a fragmented and contested raft of values and ideas associated

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<sup>20</sup> Dar argues that meanings and ideas in organisations are constructed through report writing and related accounting practices which reflect the modernist preoccupation with unlocking a single truth (2008). The report is instrumental in creating a semblance of a cohesive history, of stabilizing and grounding reality in a distinct report reality (Dar 2008:196). As a technology of governance the project framework takes the place of project manager in the hierarchy and projects become techniques of control and surveillance sidelining or making irrelevant the lived experiences of practitioners (Kerr 2008). The ubiquitous ‘logical framework’ has also become the focus of much critique (Kerr 2008, Roche 2001).

with development management that make it an area of continual becoming, negotiation, struggle and re-definition. Within this context, this thesis focuses not only on how managerial trends shape NGO-linked participatory photography initiatives but how practitioners navigate and negotiate their effects.

The debate over managerialism within development reflects a central tension within NGO work and ‘NGO-linked’ participatory photography practice. Dar describes this as the push and pull between ‘homogeneity’ (the drive to standardize and formalize practice) and ‘heterogeneity’ (the drive for bottom-up, participatory approaches) (2008:179). There are those that see the need and value of mainstream management practices and those that see NGOs as site for resisting such practices and developing alternatives (Lewis 2008:45).

Projects such as participatory photography initiatives, purporting to empower and be driven by participation from the bottom up, have to negotiate these tensions while operating strategically within managerial regimes of government if they are to survive. The dynamics of these tensions within participatory photography and how they relate to a politics and ethics of power, truth and change is a central theme of this research.

### **The ‘NGO-isation’ and governmentality of arts and culture**

Culture and the arts, which have come to be viewed as vital instruments for human development, have increasingly become incorporated into the remits of NGOs and international organisations (Mayo 2000, Yudice 2003). It is argued that culture will ‘strengthen the fiber of civil society, which in turn serves as the ideal host for political and economic development’ (Yudice 2003:2). In this context, cultural methods such as participatory arts, theatre, media and photography have gained currency (Mayo 2000).

Yudice argues that the notion of ‘culture-as-resource’ had gained significant purchase in recent decades as the arts and culture have become increasingly presented as a means for both sociopolitical and economic amelioration and for increasing participation in an ‘era of waning political involvement’ (2003:9). He



describes the transformation of social strife 'into a resource that 'NGO-ized' cultural groups can mobilize to seek empowerment' (2003:6). Kester notes 'an increasing permeability' between art production, cultural practices and organisational forms with the work of activist groups, social movements and NGOs providing a particularly important point of contiguity, as well as differentiation for examining contemporary collaborative and participatory arts (2011:116). Recognising the diversity of the NGO world, he warns that the analysis of practice needs a nuanced understanding of the various individuals, groups and institutions involved (2011:124). This diversity means that while projects share commonalities there are also clear points of differentiation.

A number of cultural theorists have pursued themes of governmentality in the analysis of culture and cultural policy (Bennett 1989, Gray 2002, McGuigan 2004, Miller and Lewis 2003, Yudice and Miller 2002), highlighting emerging fields of social management where culture has become both the object and instrument of government (Bennett 1992:26). They insist that cultural studies must foreground a specific focus on cultural policy (Bennett 1989, Yudice and Miller 2002, McGuigan 2004) and refer to the institutions, their bureaucratic practices and the regulatory guides that shape how organisations solicit, train, distribute, finance, describe and reject some artistic and cultural actors and activities (Yudice and Miller 2002:1, Lewis and Miller 2003).

For these authors, the sphere of culture has been 'so deeply governmentalised' that it makes no sense to think of it outside the domain of government or of providing an arena through which 'government' might be resisted (Bennett 1989:30). They locate the fashioning of culture as an adjunct to – or indispensable component of – the reforming practices of government (Bennett 1989). For Bennett the task is to look at both the discursive properties that inform the programs of cultural institutions and then also to look at the ways in which audiences, visitors (and, I would add, practitioners) interpret, navigate and make sense of these (1989:11). The focus has to be three-fold: on politics, policy and pedagogy as sites of practice for culture.

In addition they identify the task of theorizing culture so that it can be used by social agents to bring about changes (Bennett 1989:27, Lewis and Miller

2003, Yudice and Miller 2002). This ‘reformist project’ is central to my own thesis which engages in ‘a disciplined imagining of alternatives’ (Lewis and Miller 2003:2) within the conceptualisation of participatory photography to ‘further a radical-democratic cultural politics’ (Yudice and Miller 2002:34).

### **The instrumentalisation of the arts**

Central to debates around governmentality and cultural policy is the pervasive trend, identified and highlighted by numerous cultural theorists, of the ‘instrumentalisation of the arts’ which calls attention to the increasing emphasis upon the use of “culture”, and particularly the “arts”, as instrumental tools for the attainment of non-cultural, non-arts, goals and objectives (Belfiore 2002, Gray 2007, McGuigan 2004, Merli 2002, Yudice 2003). This trend is of particular significance to the discursive frames of community and socially-engaged arts practices to which participatory photography is tied.

The end of the Cold War saw a new legitimising narrative for culture – that it can solve social problems, enhance education, prevent racial strife, reverse urban blight, create jobs, reduce crime and perhaps make a profit. It saw artists channeled like service providers, to manage the social and the cultural sector burgeoning into an enormous network of mediating arts administrators (Yudice and Miller 2002:20). Belfiore writes that previously public contribution to the activities of ‘high quality’ arts was considered a matter of course but once the principle of equivalence entered the cultural debate, ‘decisions made on the basis of excellence, quality and artistic value were not so easily justifiable’ (Belfiore 2002:94). The arts sector looked for new means to argue their case for funding. Firstly they emphasized the economic aspects of activities (Reeves 2002) but this developed into a focus on the social benefits of the arts with activities becoming attached to other sets of policy concerns, from urban renewal to social inclusion, in a manner that has a specific set of consequences for both their design and for the intentions that underlie them (Gray 2007:203)<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Belfiore (2002, 2006) documents the trend of the instrumentalisation of the arts in the UK. She demonstrates how the major arts institutions and bodies in Britain have come to justify funding of the arts in terms of an ‘investment’ which will bring about positive social change and contribute to alleviate social exclusion in disadvantaged areas of the country (Belfiore 2002:94). References to the alleged social impacts of the arts take ‘pride of place’ in contemporary British cultural discourse, ‘highly emphasised’ by government and funding bodies (Belfiore 2006:23). Other writers point to how this is a European, even global, shift (Belfiore 2002, Yudice 2003). Yudice designates the transformation of culture into a resource

Writers link this trend to neo-liberal ideological shifts (Gray 2007, McGuigan 2004) and the structural weaknesses of the cultural and arts policy sectors (Gray 2007, Kelly 1983). Due to the lack of political interest and power associated with these areas, policy flexibility has become an essential aspect to ensuring the political survival of the arts and cultural sectors. The instrumentalisation of arts and cultural policy is thus in part the consequence of a conscious strategy pursued by policy makers and political actors, as well as cultural workers and practitioners, to generate the support needed to pursue their activities (Gray 2007). This point seems particularly relevant in the context of participatory photography, which piggybacks on a range of other agendas to garner funds and backing.

Kelly's highly relevant critique of the community arts scene in the UK in the 1970-80s argues that the movement became subject 'to a slow but effective process of co-optation' (1983:22) by funders who encouraged a move away from political ideology to a framework built around educational and cultural terms. He highlights how a liberal pragmatism that allowed for short-term gains in funding and recognition crippled the political development of the community arts movement. Pursuing a 'strategy of deliberate vagueness' that left the movement without clear definition, community arts groups progressively lost control over its direction as they came to define and organize their activities around the criteria espoused by funding agencies (Kelly 1983:21). In Kelly's analysis this created two separate problems for community artists (1983:24-25). Firstly, their work became known for reasons that were tangential to its real purposes and, secondly, that community arts groups became known as a kind of 'social provision'.

For Gray what is significant is not necessarily that this instrumentalisation of arts and cultural policies is taking place but, rather, the implications for how they are understood and their value and purpose defined (2007:205). He highlights a 'burden of expectation' on arts and cultural programmes as they are called on to provide a host of solutions to problems that are originally economic, social or political in nature (2007:207).

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as having 'epochal significance' altering what we understand by culture and what we do in its name (2003:10). He argues that art 'has completely folded into an expanded conception of culture that can solve problems' and because all the key actors in the sphere have latched onto this strategy, 'culture is no longer experienced, valued or understood as transcendent' (2003:12).

It is within this instrumental framework that participatory photography initiatives promise to ‘enable social change’. Their proposed social impact has become crucial in validating and marketing their activities to funders and wider audiences. Writers note that a key consequence of this trend is that, when claims are made for the positive social impact of the arts, these claims then need to be proved. As a result the evaluation of the social impact of arts programmes has assumed paramount importance with policy criteria setting the parameters and scope for research, monitoring and evaluation in the field (Belfiore 2002; Selwood 2002). Participatory arts practices have thus become caught up in regimes of government that seek to measure and evaluate their activity within a pre-set criteria.

The sector is under pressure to deliver upon expectations alongside a pervasive management culture that places high priority on measurable indicators, outputs and results (Selwood 2002). Initiatives have to provide proof of their value for money. Monitoring and evaluation is key for gathering data that will satisfy donors and to demonstrate externally that funding is being appropriately used. Under these pressures, commentators argue that initiatives are progressively becoming target-rather than process-oriented (Belfiore 2006:24). The implications of these pressures on the evaluation of the impact of participatory photography are the focus of Chapter 6.

### **Re-conceiving photography: photographic truth, spectatorship and photography over time**

The work of John Tagg brought Foucauldian ideas to bear upon on photographic theory and history. His central argument is that, what Barthes defined as, photography’s ‘evidential force’<sup>22</sup> is a complex historical outcome exercised within certain institutional and discursive practices, particular historical relations and specific relations of power. Tagg urges that researchers look at the ways in which all that frames photography—the discourse that surrounds it and the institutions

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<sup>22</sup> Photographic theorists have long emphasized and discussed photography in relation to its role as an instrument of evidence, record, document and truth. A characteristic defined by Barthes as lying in the unique connection that the photograph has to its subject, ‘the necessarily real thing that has been placed before the lens’ (1982:77). The photograph as a ‘certificate of presence’ (Barthes 1982:87) asserts the overwhelming claim that ‘the thing has been there’ (Barthes 1982:85) which served as the basis for photography’s claim to truthfulness.

that circulate it— determines what counts as truth (2009). From this perspective, the meaning and power of participatory photography come not from some ‘magic’ of the medium but are the discursive effects of the regimens that produce them, that infuse the photograph with a specific significance, value and potential (Tagg 1998:10). This starting point is used to unpick the practices of looking and the discursive narratives around authenticity that frame the circulation and spectatorship of participatory photography images (Chapter 7).

Tagg’s work disrupts the liberal, human reformist story of documentary so central to socially-engaged photographic practice and to the discourse of participatory photography. It pushes an investigation of participatory photography towards alternative discursive and genealogical frames. Here my own research (Chapter 4) seeks to build a ‘potential’ alternative history for participatory photography (Azoulay 2014) out of photography’s ‘lost histories’ of grassroots radicalism (Evans 1997, De Cupyer 1997, Ribalta 2011, Pinney & Peterson 2003)<sup>23</sup>.

Other writers have urged researchers to examine the myriad of ways in which photography has been appropriated by subjects and communities, put to work at a grassroots and localized level (Pinney & Peterson 2003). Azoulay is one of those theorists seeking to re-conceptualise photography as a pluralized medium within the context of civil politics in the digital age. Her new political ontology of photography, described in the introduction, is central to my own thesis for a new imaginary of participatory photography.

Azoulay argues that a unique form of temporality characterizes the event of photography in that it is made up of infinite series of encounters in different places and times that do not necessarily unfold in linear sequence (2012:26). She argues photography holds the permanent possibility of renewal due to the spectator who can re-open a photograph and re-negotiate its meaning and significance at any point (Azoulay 2012:27). Her description throws up two key ideas that are fundamental to my own call for broadening the scope of enquiry of participatory photography and that define the focus for my empirical research on TAFOS: the

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<sup>23</sup> Chapter 4 specifically highlights The Worker Photography Movement of the 20s-30s (Ribalta 2011) and community photography activism in the UK in the 1970s-80s (De Cupyer 1997, Dennett & Spence 1979, Evans 1997) as crucial forerunners to a contemporary participatory photography.

temporal investigation of participatory photography and inquiry around its spectatorship (Chapters 6 & 7). To grasp an understanding of its shifting appropriations, impact and re-inventions participatory photography needs to be investigated as a multi-layered activity over time. It needs to be understood as a practice that involves not only the production of images but a diverse ensemble of activities that includes the distribution, exchange and consumption of images. The aim is to move beyond a focus on participatory photography as a methodological process and pedagogical approach and to understand the discursive frames tied to its spectatorship.

Vital to Azoulay's notion of a civil contract of photography is an account of photography's spectatorship and the role of viewing in the event of photography. My concern extends to the neglected role of spectatorship in constituting the event of participatory photography and its role in realizing its potential as a tool for social change. Azoulay talks of looking at pictures as being an 'inseparable part of photography's institutionalization' (2008:93) as an image becomes valid not simply in its taking but also its viewing. Thus the practice of looking and viewing needs to be understood as tied to a complex field of visual relations that defines people in relation to one another. My interest lies in the question of how participatory photography creates a relation between its makers and its viewers, the character of that encounter and the kind of world it aspires to.

There is an extensive body of scholarship that considers questions of spectatorship in photography. The first of relevance is the large body of theory that highlights the role of photography in the colonial project, the place of images in processes of 'othering' and the building and perpetuating of negative, offensive and damaging stereotypes (Alloula 1986, Bhabha 1983, Hall 1977, Said 1978). Building on this literature, theorists have reflected specifically on the effect of images of suffering on spectators (Baer, 2004, Benthall 1993, Moeller 1999, Sliwinski 2004, Sontag 1977, 2003). Others have gone on to explore whether images might be able to engender equitable relations through facilitating more ethical ways of seeing others (Boltanski 1999, Chouliaraki 2006).

These debates serve as an important backdrop to my own research as they explicitly deal with the crucial debate around spectatorship, power and discursive, visual and ethical frames for viewing others. However, this literature is not covered in detail, partly because it is discussed elsewhere, specifically within writing on images of suffering and debates around the future of documentary photography (Rosler 1989, Sliwinski 2004, 2011) and in part because I want to pursue the theoretical lens of pluralism to discuss the spectatorship of participatory photography and the encounter it enables.

Mitchell advocates that researchers seek to understand images as ‘ways of world making’ and examine their social lives (2005). How and in what way do images have lives of their own, how do they reproduce themselves over time and migrate from one culture to another (2005:92)? He insists that the focus cannot just be on what an image means or does but on what an image wants; what claim they make upon us and how we are able to respond (2005:xv). This requires us to ask what it is that we want from pictures (2005:xv). This question is crucial to my own investigation of participatory photography images (Chapter 7) which looks, not only at what TAFOS images do, how they have been utilised and put to work but also considers what it is that audiences ‘see’ in participatory images and how they tap into our desire for authenticity.

### **Re-imagining models for socially engaged and participatory arts**

The work of art theorists who have examined and debated how we might develop new parameters for understanding the field of socially-engaged artistic practice has been instrumental in shaping my sense of how we can build a framework for evaluating participatory photography’s workings and impact (Bishop 2012; Bourriaud 2002; Kelly 1984, 2003; Kester 1999, 2011). Rejecting the governmental trend of the instrumentalisation of the arts, these writers put forward new frameworks for theorising socially-engaged and participatory artistic projects that recognize the governmental and other constraints that shape and define this area of work and that ‘we are free to change but not free to abolish’ (Kelly 1984:4).

How we go about judging what constitutes good or bad participatory photography projects is a key issue this investigation seeks to explore. What does successful participatory photography look like? What criteria can we use to define ‘good’ in participatory photography? Is it ethical standards? Social impact? Participatory processes? Political aspirations? Actual outcomes and outputs? These writers use different lenses, arguing varying priorities, but all point to a conception of a substantive, fluid and critical practice that has to connect socially-engaged and participatory arts to a political project and imaginary.

Bourriaud proposes the notion of relational art that takes as its theoretical horizon ‘the realm of human interactions and its social context’ (2002:14). In his mind art, depending on its participatory character, gives rise to a specific ‘arena of exchange’ or state of encounter (2002:18). It is relational in the sense that it takes two to make an image and it is dialogue that is designated as the origin of the image-making process.

Kester also focuses on the dialogical nature of arts and argues for a new critical and aesthetic paradigm based on a consideration of socially-engaged artistic work as a process rather than as just a physical product (1999). He locates collaborative and participatory artwork as rooted in ‘a discursive aesthetic based on the possibility of a dialogical relationship’ that breaks down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork and viewer (1999:2). Despite warning of the danger of ‘discursive determinism’ (the reductive belief that dialogue in and of itself has the power to radically transform social relations), Kester proposes an evaluative framework that rests on the condition and character of the dialogical exchange itself and the specific effects produced by the exchanges it involves in any given context (1999:4).

Bishop, on the other hand, guards against too much focus on questions of process over matters of aesthetics and argues that it is ‘crucial to discuss, analyse and compare this work critically as art’ (2012:13). Motivated by a ‘profound ambivalence’ about the instrumentalisation of participatory arts as a ‘form of soft social engineering’ (2012:7), she notes that the 1960s discourse of participation, creativity and community no longer ‘occupy a subversive, anti-authoritarian force’



but have become central government buzz-words and the cornerstone of post-industrial economic policy' (Bishop 2012:14). However, she points out that artistic practice has 'an element of critical negation and an ability to sustain contradiction that cannot be reconciled with the quantifiable imperatives of positivist economics' (2012:16).

Acknowledging its contentious nature, Bishop argues for the need to rehabilitate the idea of an aesthetics connected to politics and to revive its understanding in the sense of 'aesthesis', an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality. The goal is to find a more nuanced language to address the artistic status work so that practice is not discussed in solely positivist terms or in relation to its demonstrable impact or ethical credentials. Bishop highlights the recent trend to frame participatory arts projects through ethical models<sup>24</sup>. She notes a tendency to compare projects on the basis of an 'ethical one-upmanship' based on the degree to which artists are judged to model good or bad examples of collaboration or participation (Bishop 2012:19). This has led to 'an ethically-charged climate' in which participatory and socially-engaged art has become largely exempt from art criticism (Bishop 2012:23) and in which an ethical discourse has come to prevail over a politics of social justice (2012:25).

Bishop's concern is that humanism pervades the critical discourse surrounding participatory art resulting in an aversion to disruption, and an atmosphere in which controversial ideas are subdued and normalized in favor of consensual behavior. Her point is that unease, discomfort, frustration, fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity all have a role to play in art but that within an ethical framework such disturbance is avoided and risk is often deemed unacceptable<sup>25</sup>.

It is not that ethics are irrelevant but Bishop insists 'they do not always have to be announced and performed in such a direct and saintly fashion' (2012:26). The

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<sup>24</sup> In the field of participatory photography and digital media, this is most clearly illustrated through the efforts of organisations to ground their work in relation to ethical frameworks or statements of ethical practice (see PhotoVoice 2009, Silence Speaks, 2012, Centre for Digital Storytelling 2010).

<sup>25</sup> For Bishop, 'An over-solicitousness that judges in advance what people are capable of dealing with can be just as insidious as intending to offend them' (Bishop 2021:26). Bolt also highlights how the notion of 'benefit' as defined in much participatory arts practice is linked to ethical codes that seek to minimize harm, discomfort or risk (2014). The result being that there is no space for aesthetic strategies that might disrupt, shock and engage with ambiguity. For Lyotard, it is in its potential to challenge and 'shock' the receiving community that the foundations for the transformative power of art lies (1984).

suggestion of an ethical 'black' and 'white', of assessing projects against models of 'good' or 'bad' collaboration, presents a misleading picture of the 'grey artistic work of participatory art' which often involves deciding how much or how little scripting to enforce (Bishop 2012:33).

Mouffe also highlights the 'ethical turn' as part of a wider zeitgeist in which there has been a displacement of the political by the ethical (2013:16). She argues that while the common argument is that the commodification of the arts has left no space for artists to play a critical or subversive role, there is still a vital part for arts and cultural practices to play within an 'agonistic democracy'. Mouffe argues that one of the greatest triumphs of neo-liberalism is that it has become an invisible system in which unequal relations have been naturalised (2009). If we cannot see the system, we cannot change it. Thus, critical art is needed to create a space which brings to the fore the existence of alternatives to the current political order and to make visible that which is obscured or obliterated by the dominant consensus (2013:93).

Mouffe's vision for critical art lies in its capacity to foster 'agonistic public spaces where counter-hegemonic struggles could be launched against neo-liberal hegemony' (2013:xvii). Her ideas are rooted in theories of pluralism and agonistic democracy that are central to the conceptual framework for participatory photography proposed in this thesis. This framework pursues the call to re-connect participatory arts to politics by exploring the concept of participatory photography as an expanded version of 'pluralist photography' (Bleiker and Kay 2007) and within frameworks of becoming (Butler 1999, Connolly 1995).

### **From Participatory Photography to Pluralist Photography**

The term 'pluralist photography' was coined by Bleiker and Kay in their 2007 article examining different modes of photographic representation of HIV / Aids in Africa. They envisage a mode of photography 'whereby the represented person takes an active role in the process of inscribing social meaning, but does so without attaching to it an exclusive claim that silences other positions and experiences' (2007:150). Bleiker and Kay do not provide a precise definition of 'pluralist

photography’ but rather they describe it in opposition to other modes of photographic representation, namely naturalist and humanist modes, which they argue feed negative stereotypes about HIV and Africa. Using the example of a participatory photography project with young people affected by HIV/Aids living in Ethiopia<sup>26</sup>, they advocate for more local, diverse photographic engagements that use photography as a catalyst for change through validating local photographic knowledge and creating multiple sites for representing and understanding the issues at stake while disrupting existing hierarchies and power relations (2007).

Although their example is of a participatory photography project, and they talk of pluralist photography as being ‘local’, Bleiker and Kay do not exclusively define pluralist photography as participatory photography practice but rather use the term to encompass photographic approaches that ‘try to open up a different way of seeing’ (email correspondence with Bleiker 12/09/14). They situate pluralist photography within a set of broader approaches to development communication methods that seek ‘to promote multidimensional and dialogic ways of representing and engaging communities and replace centralized, professionalized and consumer-orientated communication practices which tend to silence people living at the margins of society’ (2007:152).

Bleiker & Kay reference the work of Debrix & Weber who describe three different modes of mediation (representation, transformation and pluralisation) that produce different modes of social meaning (2003). They propose that the mediation for transformation mode challenges taken for granted dualisms between subjects and objects creates contested spaces for action and identity, initiates novel forms of thought, announces the emergence of different aesthetic sensitivities, makes visible radical political choices and ushers in new creative possibilities (2003:xxvi). However, they argue that while this mode is appealing to critical enterprises, proponents frequently seek to impose new subjectivities on behalf of ‘so-called emancipating ideologies’ and often end up privileging a dominant subject position (2003:xxvi). In contrast, the pluralisation mode of mediation resists the temptation of closing up cultural interpretation and of imposing a certain, privileged meaning.

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<sup>26</sup> Named Sudden Flowers, the project involved a collaboration with a group of young people in Addis Ababa and the American photographer, Eric Gottesman (who was interviewed and contributed to this research). Started in 2003, the project recently published a book: *Sudden Flowers: May The Finest In The World Always Accompany You!* (2014), [http://www.fishbar.ph/Sudden\\_Flowers.html](http://www.fishbar.ph/Sudden_Flowers.html) (accessed May 2nd 2015)

It instead encourages a plurality of cultural meanings, enabling the deployment of multiple political possibilities and supporting further debate and discussion.

For Debrix & Weber, the objective of pluralisation is not to convey meaning or even assign a different signification by dislodging a previous belief system, the point is to leave open as many social and cultural meanings as possible, unleashing a ‘whole range of signification possibilities that the observer can chose to appropriate or not’ (2003:xxvi). In the context of this thesis, it is my contention that much of participatory photography activity is currently framed within the transformative mode of mediation. I advocate a shift towards locating it within the pluralisation mode. This specific point is illustrated in the context of the TAFOS images in Chapter 7.

It is from the starting point provided by Bleiker and Kay that I wish to build an expanded conception and explanation of what participatory photography might look like within a pluralistic photography framework. Bleiker and Kay coin ‘pluralist photography’ but provide limited grounding for the term. They cite but do not detail the influence of the ideas of William Connolly (2007:151). I seek to build on their notion by exploring it in more detail in relation to theories of pluralism (Connolly 1995, 2000 Eck 2006), agnostic democracy (Connolly 1995, Mouffe 2013) and the notions of becoming they build on. I sketch out an expanded sense of what it might entail and demonstrate how it can breath new life into participatory photography’s promise, and reconnect it an agonistic politics of voice.

This final part of the review introduces the relevant literature and ideas in plural philosophy and political theory crucial to my re-conceptualisation of participatory photography. It should be noted that my intention is not a full espousal of the political models proposed by authors such as Mouffe<sup>27</sup> or a direct linking of participatory photography to a specific political ideology. My interest is to examine the ideas underpinning pluralism, to think of their significance in relation to photography practice and to illustrate how they can help us re-politicise

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<sup>27</sup> Mouffe argues for a model of ‘radical democracy’ in response to the failure of liberal and deliberative models of democracy (2013).

participatory photography practice and re-invigorate debate around its promise and conceptual framing.

### **Agonism and Antagonism, a model for agonistic democracy**

Working with post-Marxist and hegemony theory, Mouffe's central call is for a reintroduction of the political into our understanding of pluralist democracy. The 'political' she defines as 'the antagonistic dimension inherent to all human societies' (2013:3). Dominant liberalism, she contends, is driven by the belief in the possibility of a universal consensus based on reason but such a view fails to account for antagonism – the conflict, disagreement and 'radical negativity' (a form of negativity that cannot be overcome dialectically) – that underlines society. Antagonism is ineradicable, it is an ever-present possibility because society is permeated by contingency and power is constitutive of hegemonic social relations (2000, 2013). The denial of 'the political' in its antagonistic form is, Mouffe asserts, 'what prevents liberal theory from envisioning politics in an adequate way' and highlights its impotence when confronted with the emergence of antagonisms and forms of violence (2013:3)<sup>28</sup>.

Mouffe calls for the abandonment of a politics that seeks consensus in the hope of a perfectly reconciled and harmonious society because 'not only are people multiple but they are also divided' and this division cannot be overcome (2013:xv). If we accept this then the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values (2000:23). Her vision is for a democratic model called 'agnostic pluralism' which grasps the nature of the political beyond the domain of morality and ethics by confronting rather than denying, the ever-present possibility of antagonism and transforming it into agonism.

The idea of agonism emphasizes the potentially positive aspects of certain forms of political conflicts. A pluralist democracy in fact recognises and legitimates 'agonistic' (rather than antagonistic) forms of conflict as the very constitution of a vibrant democracy which calls for the confrontation (rather than suppression) of

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<sup>28</sup> Mouffe contents the tendency of liberal democracies to place too much emphasis on consensus and to deny confrontation has resulted in apathy and disaffection with political participation (2000:27).

different democratic political positions (Mouffe 2013:7). Opponents are treated not as enemies to be destroyed but as legitimate adversaries, with whom we have some common ground because of a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality (Mouffe 2013:xii).

The central thesis of ‘agonistic pluralism’ is that it is possible to envisage a democratic order in which conflicts take place in ‘agonistic’ form, where the opponents are adversaries among whom exists a ‘conflictual consensus’ (2013:xii). The aim of democratic politics is to construct the “them” in such a way that they are perceived as somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question.

Transforming ‘antagonism into agonism’ (Mouffe 2000: 25) involves providing channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues, which, while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an enemy. Within this context, arts and culture, given the key strategic role they play in producing effect, can by providing public spaces for agonistic debate, Mouffe contends, foster new forms of social relations and subjectivities, create spaces for resistance in the form of agonistic interventions and challenge dominant discourse. This is achieved not by aspiring to lift a supposedly ‘false’ consciousness but through a strategy of disarticulation of the framework in which the dominant process of identification takes place and the creation of new modes of identification (Mouffe 2013:101-103). Such a framework calls for an abandonment of the illusion of the privileged position of the artist and the revolutionary conception of politics that accompanies it (Mouffe 2013:103).

Mouffe’s ideas point to a vision of participatory photography as a platform and mediation that strives to enable different communities or groups to put forward their claim and have a public voice while resisting the temptation to construct an ‘other’ or enemy. The suggestion is not that projects currently intentionally construct antagonisms but rather that projects in the process of proclaiming one voice suffocate others and the multiplicity of experience. The ethos of participatory photography has to be about providing a channel that challenges the

dominant discourse while building ‘new modes of identification’ (Mouffe 2013:101) that do not suppress plural narratives and that move away from using old binaries of difference. This calls for a mode that grapples with difference through an agonistic framework that recognises and builds solidarity through both commonalities and the multiplicity of difference. A mode that resists exoticising or a benevolent form of othering.

### **Identity / Difference and agonistic respect**

Key to understanding Mouffe’s ideas and broader conceptions of ‘new pluralism’ is its emphasis on the fundamental interdependence of identity and difference and its convergence on what has become the central problem in political theory: how to eliminate violence toward difference within a democratic society (Campbell and Schoolman 2008:15). The political theorist, William E Connolly, credited as the architect of a ‘new pluralism’ (Campbell & Schoolman 2008), writes, ‘there is no identity without difference. Everything, my friends, depends on how this paradoxical relationship is negotiated’ (1995:xxi).

In *Identity/Difference* (1991) Connolly argues that identity only makes sense in relation to what it opposes. Identity depends on otherness. Democratic theory and politics cannot presume a stable or autonomous identity from which politics arises. The creation of identity always implies the establishment of difference and hence bears traces of exclusion. If identity is relational and the affirmation of difference is a precondition for the existence of identity then we can understand why politics, which always deals with collective identities, is about ‘the construction of a ‘we’ which requires as its very condition of possibility the demarcation of ‘they’ (Mouffe 2013:5). Not all relations are antagonistic but there is always the possibility that the us/them relationship can become the locus of antagonism. This is especially the case when others previously considered as simply different start to be perceived as calling into question our identity and threatening our existence (Mouffe 2013:5).

It is in more unified nations, Connolly argues, that the drive to convert differences into modes of otherness becomes more powerful. He argues that the biggest

impetus to fragmentation, violence and anarchy is the suppression of political engagement with the paradox of difference (Connolly 1995:xxi). To prevent this possibility, Connolly calls for the cultivation of agonistic respect for the other (a striving both against yet with one's enemy) and for practices of critical responsiveness that develop this respect (1995). Pluralism, he contends, requires a set of civic virtues to support itself and critical responsiveness is an 'indispensable lubricant of political pluralisation' (1995:xvii).

An ethos of critical responsiveness, exceeding any fixed moral code, cultivates an approach to difference which presses people to 'to rethink the ethics of engagement and to rework their relations to the diversity of ethical sources that mark a pluralistic culture' (1995:25). Altering your recognition of difference, Connolly argues, requires a revision of your own terms of self-recognition (1995:xvi). Re-defining your relation to others requires modifying the shape of one's own identity and thus critical responsiveness, operating on these two plains, is always political and involves unavoidable risk, uncertainty and ambiguity<sup>29</sup> (1995:xvi).

Connolly advocates an ethos of critical responsiveness that takes the form of careful listening, presumptive generosity to those struggling to move forward and be recognized, a cultivation of creativity, close attunement to new circumstances, preliminary receptivity to negotiation and a readiness to explore (2005:127). It is linked to the notion of agnostic respect, 'a kissing cousin of liberal tolerance' (2005:123), which grows out of mutual appreciation for the ubiquity of faith and a reciprocal appreciation of its contestability set against a backdrop where participants share some understanding about obligations and rights (Connolly 2005:123).

A focus of this thesis, developed in Chapter 7, explores how participatory photography might re-develop its promise as a means for opening up relational possibilities to cultivate forms of critical responsiveness through an ethics of spectatorship. How is it that a re-imagined participatory photography can work to

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<sup>29</sup> A common criticism of pluralism is that it slides into relativism and amounts to nothing more than a 'philosophy for wimps' for those whose beliefs are too saturated with uncertainty and ambivalence to take definitive action (Connolly 2005:3). Connolly responds by acknowledging that pluralism does entail a bicameral orientation to political life which means keeping a foot in two worlds, straddling two or more perspectives, in order to maintain tension between them. Such a position does involve 'a tolerance of ambiguity in politics' however he clearly defines a limit to the pluralist's tolerance arguing a preparedness to join others in militant action when necessary to support pluralism against counter drive to unitarianism (2005).



realize an agnostic plurality of seeing and critical responsiveness? Enabling people to see the world differently through the images of others and contributing to the production of a critical plurality of seeing that ensures that singular modes of vision do not come to dominate, this conception of participatory photography seeks to reconnect the practice to a pluralist politics of voice. In this mode, participatory photography does not propose to deal with difference and the tensions that result from different views of the world by brushing over it or absorbing and re-framing it to fit within a dominant consensual model. Rather, the different modes of seeing and being become the content at the heart of the photographic encounter and their negotiation within a framework of critical responsiveness becomes the core of the activity and its spectatorship.

### **The Pluralist Outlook: Complexity in a World of Becoming**

Connolly's arguments are not only political but extend to the metaphysical as he argues that not just modern society but the universe is pluralistic and that time and experience itself is multi-dimensional and riven with difference. Key to his 'pluralist imagination' are ideas from complexity theory and the philosophical notion of becoming (2005).

The concept of 'becoming' dates back to ancient Greek philosophy, when the philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus argued that nothing in this world is constant except change and becoming. Becoming can be broadly understood as the process or state of being coming about in time and space. A number of thinkers have since worked with the idea, Nietzsche developed the vision of a chaotic world in perpetual change and the notion of becoming was further pursued in the work of Judith Butler (1999) and Stuart Hall (1990). Hall argues cultural identity is not something that is fixed but rather is 'subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power' (Hall 1990: 225). In this sense, identity must be understood as a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being', not as an essence but as a positioning which lacks final resolution (Hall 1990:226). Butler uses the framework of 'becoming' to propose that the subject is always involved in the endless process of performing and evolving that has neither origin or end (Butler 1999, Salih 2002). Her theories of performativity emphasise that there is no self before the

performance of self, that the performance itself is what constitutes the self (1999). Researchers thus need to concentrate on the process by which identity is constructed and its conditions of emergence. Chapter 7 uses these ideas in the context of participatory photographs, examining their performativity and the means by which participatory photography images ‘become’ through the discourses in which they are inserted and the encounters they facilitate.

For Connolly, the notion of becoming is central to his vision of ‘deep pluralism’ (2005). The pluralistic view is that there is no ‘all-form’ rather experience is replete with connections that are loose, incomplete and susceptible to change, connections that can never add up to a complete whole. The substance of reality may never be fully contained or collected but rather consists of a distributed form of reality. Within this pluralist imagination, time is experienced not only as linear and successional but also as folding and forking back and forth between future, past and present. The dominance of ideas of progressive time is rejected and the door is opened to the notion of time as becoming. Such a perspective has implications for the study of temporality in participatory photography and the question of its effects over time (Chapter 6). Pluralist theory requires that we move beyond classical linear models of action to research and conceptualise a distributed form of participatory photography and its impact.

Connolly recourse to complexity theory to explicate his vision of political plurality arguing that plurality and complexity theory feed each other and point to a larger world of becoming. In this world, the notions of time and politics as becoming are crucial to understanding the open-ended character of the pluralistic universe and to thinking more dynamically about a pluralistic political culture (2010:233). Sociologists have also picked up on the relevance of complexity theory to the study of contemporary social phenomena (Law and Urry 2005). Ontologically-speaking, complexity theory suggests that social life escapes our capacities to make models of it, that it is resistant to the process of being gathered together into a single account or description, and that instead it is characterized by complexity, fluidity and uncertainty. It brings out the way in which ‘liquid modernity’ is unpredictable and irreversible, full of unexpected time-space movements and moves social investigation a long way from conventional linear

analysis of structure or causality (Law and Urry 2005:403). Within the broad 'pluri-verse' envisaged by Connolly he defines himself as a 'connectionist' ... 'exploring loose, incomplete and partial connections in a world of becoming' (2010:233). A world of becoming is one that exceeds human explanation or control, for in this world the emergence of new formations is irreducible to patterns of efficient causality, purposive time, simple probability, or long cycles of recurrence (Connolly 2010:225).

The notion of time as becoming is closely aligned to the idea of a politics of becoming, defined as the 'paradoxical politics by which new and unforeseen things surge into being' (2005:122). Connolly explains that pluralism is marked by the tension between already established pattern of diversity and the periodic eruption of new constituencies seeking a place on 'the register of legitimacy' (2005:48). The introduction of a new possibility of being, out of old injuries and differences, contains a paradoxical element as the 'drive to recognition precedes consolidation of the identity to be recognized (1995:xv). Thus, a politics of becoming encompasses a 'risky, disruptive politics of enactment' that is indispensable to the identification and redress of social injuries (2005:70).

Connolly emphasizes that in the accelerated pace of late modern life the paradoxical politics of becoming is more active, widespread and visible than before (2005:122). Pluralism is characterized by this tension – between the established pattern of diversity and the emergence of new constituencies – but also defined by multiple sites of potential citizen action that enable this politics of becoming and shape the pluralistic ethos. It is within this civic space that this thesis locates a pluralist participatory photography. It is identified as a form of politicised expression and mediation in a politics of becoming that is central to the pursuit and realization of social justice. The conclusion uses the notion of becoming to propose the idea of a 'Photography of Becoming'. This is defined as a fragile, unpredictable activity through which participants claim and define a voice within a politics of becoming.

This thesis proposes that participatory photography is reimagined through the framework of pluralism sketched out by these writers. This includes a new

conception of participatory photography as tool in facilitating criticality, in cultivating critical responsiveness, in providing an agonistic space for different ways of seeing and as a platform for new constituencies seeking to address social injury. In this framework, I propose that understanding contemporary forms of participatory photography through a notion of Photography of Becoming allows for a conception that acknowledges the negotiations, tensions and contradictions involved in the practice while recognizing its significance as form of mediation and communication vital to enabling a pluralistic politics of voice.

# 2

## **‘Live’ Research: design, process and methods**

This thesis brings together a textual thesis containing still images and audio-visual work, on the accompanying DVD, to create a multi-layered narrative. The DVD features a non-linear film, *These Photos Were My Life*, which is the focus of research presented in Chapter 6<sup>30</sup>.

This chapter outlines the research strategy, methods and activities undertaken in the pursuit and production of my final thesis within the framework of a ‘live’ sociology (Back 2007, 2012, Back and Puwar 2012) that combines ethnographic and visual methods in the context of a critical, longitudinal and discursive enquiry. The development of case studies, the use of the ‘active’ interview, photo elicitation and other visual methods has been central. Inevitably my own background in participatory photography has also been key to my research process.

A critical strand of the debate around participatory arts research and evaluation has highlighted its role in advocacy for the field (Belfiore 2010, Rooke 2014). With projects dependent on the evidencing of positive outcomes in order to secure funding, monitoring and evaluation generally works to confirm beneficial results and re-inforces discourses of ‘good practice’ found in commissioning and evaluation literature (Rooke 2014b:7). As a result there has been limited work that examines the paradoxes and tensions in the field. Rooke draws attention to the potential of evaluation as a critical practice, that is integral to the creative process, and that prioritises learning and reflection over sectorial recognition and positive publicity (2014b).

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<sup>30</sup> *These Photos Were My Life* is also available to view online at <http://www.thesephotos.korsakow.tv/>

This thesis harnesses this approach to evaluation as critical practice – as a ‘compound of dialogue and critique’ that amounts to a ‘critical attentiveness’ (Back 2012:29) - and, in the context of participatory arts evaluation, seeks to unshackle it from its advocacy role (Rooke 2014b:7). It looks to engage in modes of knowledge that move beyond the ‘impact agenda’ (Back and Puwar 2012:13) and explore more open-ended avenues. Self-funded PhD research affords what in institutional contexts could be deemed as a ‘risky strategy’ (Rooke 2014b:7): a focus on the limitations of practice, a questioning of its epistemological assumptions and an engagement with self-doubt and reflexivity.

This approach has significant implications for research design, strategy and methods. Back’s notions of ‘live sociology’ and ‘live methods’ (2007, 2012) provide a guiding framework. The challenge of a ‘live’ sociology is how to create data that makes new forms of critical imagination possible and that provides insight into the newly co-ordinated forms of social reality manifest in the contemporary world. It draws attention to the use of multi-modal, multi-sensual methods and to the potential of digital media. It pushes researchers to attend to larger-scale and longer historical timeframes, argues for the need to develop capacities to see the whole without a totalizing perspective and to curate sociology for new public platforms (Back and Puwar 2012). Law et al argue that standard social science methods are not particularly well adapted to the realities of global complexity (2011:405). They deal poorly with ‘the *fleeting*... the *distributed* ... the *multiple* .... with the non-causal, the chaotic, the complex... with the *sensory* ... with the *emotional* ... and the *kinaesthetic*’ (Law & Urry 2005:405).

The goal of a ‘live sociology’ is to address these shifting, negotiated aspects of sociality through research techniques that are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points (Back 2012:29). My research strategy has sought to investigate participatory photography from multiple perspectives – from the point of view of its photographer-participants, its organisers and commissioners, its practitioners and facilitators and its spectators – and from the points of intersection and relational perspectives of all these players. The aim has been to use ‘messy methods’ (Law & Urry 2005:390) to develop an attentiveness to the embodied social world of participatory photography in motion and to pluralise our

understanding of its makeup.

This research pursues methods that constitute modes of questioning, ‘which also produce realities as they interact’ (Law & Urry 2005: 399). Multi-layered methods that work across time and locations, through the visual, textual and digital, are used to curate a narrative that embodies and enacts the pluralised world the research seeks to evoke. Methods and formats such as the non-linear Korsakow film, photo-elicitation, the ‘active’ interview, longitudinal case studies and reflexive research from my own professional practice elicit and present research constitutive of and that works to produce the realities it describes – non-linear, performative and unpredictable. The sense is that neither the methods or the social world described are settled, but rather are always in formation (Law et al 2011:12).

### **‘Insider’ research and professional practice as fieldwork**

My challenge as a sociologist and researcher has been to try to contain, make sense of and structure the many questions, issues and themes that have developed out of a professional career of almost 15 years. I first worked with participatory photography as an undergraduate anthropology research student in 1998. On graduation, I co-founded an NGO called **PhotoVoice**. By its 10th anniversary PhotoVoice had delivered over 50 participatory photography projects in all parts of the world, the majority of which I worked on in some capacity as a facilitator, project manager, trainer, fundraiser and consultant. My day-to-day professional life focused on the application of participatory photography in a wide range of countries and contexts from groups with disabilities to refugee communities. I have co-authored various resources (PhotoVoice 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a), designed and delivered training on participatory photography methods internationally and frequently take part in events, conferences and symposiums.

There is an assumption that over-identification and rapport is a source of failure in research and that it is only with distance that good analytical work can be achieved (Coffey 1999). Researchers have been encouraged to produce accounts from which the ‘the self has been sanitised’ in a bid to establish authority and validity (Okely & Callaway 1992:5). However, in recent decades it has been argued that reflexivity and an awareness of how fieldwork research and ethnographic writing

construct, reproduce and implicate relationships and personal identities is crucial to insightful research (Coffey 1999). This position rests on the recognition that research and fieldwork is personal and emotional.

Ethnographers are not always strangers to their field. There are those who become insiders over time and then there is the specific experience of those researchers who have an embodied knowledge of the field they study (See Hockney 1986 and Salisbury 1994). I am a participatory photography 'insider' having played an active role in the scene's recent development. As a result my professional standing, contacts and networks has facilitated a means of entry to the field, lending credibility and retrospective access (Coffey 1999), helping to identify case studies and practitioners as well as to secure interviews.

My professional background as practitioner has invariably shaped how I have been able to interact with research subjects, how they have viewed me and the kinds of conversations we have had. I was often interviewing people with whom I had previous contact in my professional work or who knew of PhotoVoice. Conducting interviews, much of the preliminaries could be dispensed of and with a certain level of knowledge already a given, conversations were able to quickly move to a more intimate level, covering sensitive topics and questions.

Wright Mills spoke of experience as useful for original intellectual work but he also instructed that being able 'to trust yet be skeptical of your own experience is the mark of a mature workman' (1959:217). Others have reflected that while their 'insider' status was opportune it was something on which they had to continually and critically reflect (Coffey 1999). The messy and complex position of the 'insider' fieldworker requires self-awareness and reflexivity. Coffey talks of it in terms of the necessity to be 'intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness' (1999:31).

Essential to this balancing act for me has been stepping back from my professional commitments to undertake this research<sup>31</sup>. Creating distance and space has been

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<sup>31</sup> This involved resigning from my position at PhotoVoice and stopping all work for the organisation from 2010. For the beginning of my PhD, I still held a position at PhotoVoice and it was challenging to switch between the different intellectual and relational modes demanded by my professional and researcher positions.



vital to developing my capacity for critical and intellectual analysis. However, my embodied knowledge and history within the field continues to be a primary influence on my research. I can claim no objective standing. I am intrinsically embroiled in the field and am full of biases as a result of my professional experience and background. My insider status not only affects how I relate to the work but my aspirations as to how I might be able to affect, shape and influence the field itself.



Pages from my notebooks kept while doing project work in Nepal, 2000

This thesis focuses on empirical and literature research conducted during the PhD period but it draws on my professional experience. This begs the question to what extent material sourced from professional experience can be argued to constitute research data or fieldwork activity<sup>32</sup>. There have been many incidents in the course of my professional experience that have stuck with me for the questions they sparked. These issues were what led me to undertake this research and so it is inevitable that some of them have found their way into the narrative of the thesis. What must be critically considered is how these stories have been enshrined in my memory and how memory shapes our ethnographies, which are essentially ‘processes of self presentation and identity construction’ (Coffey 1999:1).

I have been concerned with any tendency I might have to romanticize these

<sup>32</sup> During my work as a practitioner I kept journals, notebooks, reference lists, project lists, other materials and data which I have repeatedly made reference to during the doctoral process. I was engaged in workshops, seminars, conferences, all of which I documented, and from which conversations, debates and discussions have served as an invaluable material for furthering my ideas and thinking. This is most apparent in Chapter 5 where a project with Bhutanese refugee youth, that I founded in 1998 and ran for 10 years, forms the central casestudy.

experiences that have become written into my own personal narrative as formative moments. They are snapshots of a career that has shaped and influenced my life. Ultimately memory informs our data collection, analysis and reconstruction of the field and we draw on recollections to try and make sense of the field dynamics. My hope is that in making my own history explicit and by inserting myself into the research process - setting my 'situatedness' – the reader will be able to decide for themselves on its significance for my research agenda and findings.

### **Visual strategy**

Visual sociology has been described as the use of photographs, film and video to study society as well as the study of the visual artifacts of a society (Becker 2004) and this research engages with the visual on both these levels. It seeks to use the visual to examine the visual. It employs visual methods and produces and curates visual content and material to investigate a specific type of visual practice.

In the context of this work the visuals multi-task, they do not fulfill a single role. Newbury talks of images as serving three distinct purposes: illustration, analysis and argument (2011) and this thesis utilises images to all three of these ends. In Chapters 3, 4 and the conclusion the images are largely illustrative, serving to bolster, embellish and bring to life the arguments detailed the written text. In Chapter 5, images taken by Bhutanese refugee youth raise questions and become the focus of the analysis in a discussion around empowerment, self-definition and editorial and visual control. In Chapter 6, the film *These Photos Were My Life* becomes the main vehicle for an argument around the long-term impact of participatory photography and participatory photography as a tool for critical consciousness.

My multi-layered use of the visual aims to communicate the complex visuality and activity of the research subject itself, the field of participatory photography<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Whilst the PhD thesis format imposes limits as to what can be achieved in terms of digitally interweaving textual and visual data I have been much inspired by Ritchin's concept of 'hyper photography' as a way to imagine the multi-vocal possibilities of visual research presentation (1990). Ritchin's ideas chime with those of Florian Thalhofer, the developer of the Korsakow software which I have used to put together *These Photos Were My Life* (Thalhofer 2011, Cohen 2012, Soar 2014)

Images are notable for their ability to operate on multiple levels simultaneously and in the spaces in between (Newbury 2011:654). I have sought to harness this multi-dimensionality in order to build a multifarious picture of participatory photography practice. I layer the textual and visual in a range of layouts to allow for fluid interaction between materials and information, argument and description, theory and story and between different points of view and ways of seeing. At times the images, directly illustrating or relating to what is being written about, are used on the page within the written text. In other instances the images take charge of the pages, carving a space to communicate their own narrative as distinct from that contained in the written text. Strategically speaking the aim has been to use the layout of the images on the page and in relation to the text to communicate and express relations between different elements of the argument and to enrich the reader's perception by creating a network of observations from multiple angles.

Newbury suggests that as visual researchers we need to learn to take care of images and this requires that we think about where they come from, what they can tell us and how we can use them to make arguments and communicate feelings (2011:653). Taking care of images involves having a respect for their paradoxical and duplicitous nature. While the aim is to harness their potential to illuminate, I do not want to lose sight of their ambiguous, unknowable character that is often loaded with historical and political significance. I have made an effort to give the images used a context and to specify authorship and copyright information. In places where this is not shown alongside the image I have tried to give a clear indication of where the information can be found. Permission for the use of all the images has been granted by the photographers, organisations and agencies concerned.

### **The Use of Case Studies**

This research uses multiple instrumental case studies of participatory photography projects from around the world that have taken place in the last 30 years. It utilizes and repeatedly returns to the central case-study of TAFOS, while also drawing on the experiences of a number of other projects which are discussed to varying degrees of depth.

Stake uses the term ‘instrumental’ case study to describe when a particular case is used to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization (2005). ‘Multiple’ or ‘collective’ case studies are used when there is less interest in one particular case but rather the focus of study is ‘a phenomena, population or general condition’ (Stake 2005:445). The subject of this investigation is participatory photography and its use as an emancipatory and humanitarian tool. My aim has been to engage with participatory photography as a photographic genre that involves a particular form of politics and practices of looking. Hence the purposeful decision was made to draw on multiple projects, practitioners and experiences to gain a broad perspective on the practice rather than rooting the discussion in the situated experience of a single project. Participatory photography practice is diverse and highly context-dependent but by drawing on common themes, dynamics and characteristics across divergent examples the aim is to build the picture of a field and discuss its assumptions, aspirations and implications.

Uprichard has argued that many case studies, stuck within short timeframes, are not sufficiently ambitious enough to generate the kind of descriptions or theories that enable us to radically re-think social dynamics (cited in Back 2012:8). The use of a number of case studies taking place over a 30-year timeframe has been intentionally employed within a research agenda that seeks to frame the field as a pluralised sphere of activity that shifts over time with changing political, social and visual contexts. Revisiting projects I previously worked on has been a means to re-evaluate tensions that surfaced while in turn providing a vital reflexive space to re-imagine practice from the practitioner’s perspective. This has worked in conjunction with examining other projects that I have long been familiar with but that I have never previously had the chance to properly research.

The projects referenced include a combination of some I have personally worked on and some by other practitioners and organisations. Case study data has been collated from a range of sources including personal diaries and documents, practitioner interviews, secondary sources – newspaper articles, films, project websites, evaluations, project publications, exhibition materials – and in some cases project visits or personal involvement. The table below outlines the

principle case studies used and where in the thesis they are discussed. Numerous other projects are also referred to and referenced. The glossary provides basic information and links for each project.

| <b>PROJECT</b>  | <b>WHERE IT IS USED IN THE THESIS</b>                   |
|---|---|
| TAFOS   | Main case study in Chapter 4, 6 and 7                   |
| Transparency / New Londoners – PhotoVoice projects with unaccompanied refugee youth in London | Discussed in Introduction. Main case study in Chapter 8 |
| Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum, Nepal   | Main case study in Chapter 5                            |
| Shooting Back   | Discussed in Chapter 3 and 5                            |
| Born Into Brothels  | Discussed in Chapter 3                                  |

### **Why TAFOS? An opportunity for longitudinal research**

TAFOS was a landmark, award-winning project, a pioneer in the lexicon of participatory photography, that warrants investigation. It is one of the first examples of an international participatory photography project that worked in partnership with localized community organisations and gained financial support from international NGOs and grant-giving institutions. While TAFOS is fairly well known within Latin America there has been little written about it in the English language. It is my sense that the experience of TAFOS needs to be documented and recognized for English-speaking audiences. Falconi states that ‘the history of Peruvian photography cannot be considered without TAFOS’ (J Falconi. 2012, interview). I would add that the history of community-based photographic production or, to use Azoulay’s term, ‘civil photography’ (2014) cannot be considered without reference to TAFOS.

The case of TAFOS provides the unique opportunity to investigate and consider the issues pertaining to participatory photography over time, a priority for this research project. This functions at three levels. Firstly, the narrative of TAFOS, what it

stood for, how it had to adapt to keep up with changing political times and how it ultimately declined and closed, provides a vivid illustration of how participatory photography's frameworks have shifted over time. Secondly, interviewing former TAFOS photographers over 15 years after the project's end provides a rare opportunity to investigate the significance of projects for their participants in the long term, to examine the nature of the impact and how this has endured, transformed, deepened or been negated with the passing of years.

Thirdly, the TAFOS archive, its changing audiences and recorded user data represents a distinct research opportunity to investigate how participatory photography images circulate in the world years beyond the lives of the projects which created them. There are few examples of participatory photography projects that have been formally archived and safeguarded for posterity as such TAFOS archive data offers an invaluable insight into the circulation of participatory photography images and their appeal to spectators.

Wright Mills recommends placing research subjects in a framework of history (1954). TAFOS represents a unique opportunity to do just that in a field where the literature is dominated by short-term evaluations and snapshot project descriptions (Belfiore 2006). My TAFOS research constitutes qualitative longitudinal research which is predicated on the investigation and interpretation of change over time (Holland et al 2006). Longitudinal research aims to build a long-term picture by focusing on the temporal dimension of experience and exploring agency, social practice and subjective experience, drawing attention to the psychological and biographical processes, the 'lived through experience', through which social outcomes are generated and mediated (Holland et al 2006, Saldana 2003). It recognises time as fluid and infinitely varied and can be understood as part of a dynamic turn in social inquiry linked to rapid social change in contemporary society (Saldana 2003).

Advocates argue that qualitative longitudinal research can be understood as a theoretical orientation as it seeks to shed light on the micro-processes and causes and consequences of change, how it is created, lived and experienced, while also tracing the dynamic interplay between agency and structure (Farrall 2006, Holland

et al 2006), or, as Wright Mills put it, between biography and history (1954). At the heart of longitudinal research is the goal of trying to capture trajectories and to understand change, with a retrospective description allowing for the consideration of causality and for the development of predictions about possible future trajectories (Uprichard cited in Back 2012:9).

My research on TAFOS specifically constitutes a ‘follow-up study’, a piece of research that returns to a research site or follows up with participants (McLeod and Thomson 2009:125)<sup>34</sup>. It was made up of three research objectives, all orientated to understand an aspect of the temporality of participatory photography; firstly, to reconstruct the TAFOS story as a point from which to compare and understand the development of the contemporary field of participatory photography; secondly, to investigate the use of TAFOS images since the project’s end as a means of understanding the circulation and spectatorship of participatory photography; thirdly, to investigate the significance assigned to the project by former TAFOS photographers to build an insight into the long-term impact of involvement in participatory photography projects for participants.

A fieldwork trip to Peru (May-June 2011) was central to my research on TAFOS. I spent my time doing archival research at the TAFOS archive, tracking down and conducting interviews with former TAFOS photographers in both Lima and Cusco and interviewing other key TAFOS figures.

### **The ‘active interview’**

The format of the semi-structured interview has been central to the production of this research. In total 40 interviews were conducted with 31 people in seven countries over the course of four years in person and via Skype and telephone<sup>35</sup>. Holstein & Gubrium’s idea of the ‘active’ interview has been central to informing my approach to interviews (1995). Their conception rejects the idea that interviews objectively extract information from subjects and, recognising the performative

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<sup>34</sup> McLeod and Thomson highlight the follow-up study allows for comparisons between different points when it has not been possible to track developments over time. They argue that curiosity and ‘human interest’ guide desires to find out what has happened to people and that follow up studies ‘dramatically capture the criss-crossing of past, present and future in research processes’ (2009:142).

<sup>35</sup> See the Appendix for a complete glossary of interviews

aspect of interviewing, proposes that the interview plays a part in shaping the form of what is said. They argue that ‘interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents’ (1995:3). In their view, both parties – the interviewer and the interview subject - are unavoidably ‘active’ in making meaning through the interview process.

This perspective seemed pertinent given my own background knowledge, experience and participation in the research subject. It is inevitable that this would impact on my interviews. Acknowledging this, Holstein & Gubrium encourage researchers to recognise how they and their subjects shape the interview and incorporate them into the production and analysis of the interview data. ‘All interviews are reality-constructing, meaning making occasions, whether recognized or not’ (1995:4).

The active interview cultivates this meaning-making in that it ‘prospects’ for information (1995:5). In this sense, I did not seek to obscure or withhold my own knowledge from the interview subjects, a proportion of whom knew me through my professional practice, but rather allowed my own experience and opinions to actively shape the dialogue with subjects about their own perceptions of the subject. This often meant that there was the opportunity to debate directly with subjects.

### **The research process and activities**

This investigation employs a multi-method approach that combines ethnographic and visual techniques with desk-based, literature, archival and longitudinal research. The initial chapters (Chapters 3 & 4) examine the development of participatory photography, locate it as a ‘NGO-ised’ practice and explore its critique. Thus, the research task was to map the field of participatory photography and build a history, tracing its development out of photographic, community development and NGO traditions. This involved

- The construction of a database of participatory photography projects, categorizing projects according to location, duration, organizational structure, participant group and numbers and outcomes.



- Literature and historical research into radical photography traditions and community photography
- Literature review on participatory photography and its use in multiple fields including as an action research method, therapeutic and community psychology method, visual research method, community development tool and participatory arts / media tool.
- Literature review on humanitarianism, NGO visual politics within humanitarianism and theories of empowerment.
- Interviews with participatory photography practitioners
- Interviews with NGO communications and photography staff
- Project visits

Literature reviews were conducted in a number of areas, specifically academic and journal articles on the use of participatory photography methods; reports and research carried out around the fields of participatory and community arts and media; literature that has been published by participatory photography projects, organisations and practitioners including methodological resources, project evaluations and image-led publications. Literature was sourced through a variety of libraries in London, internet research, personal contacts, inter-library loans and the British Library. All literature and other research material has been catalogued using the open source reference management software Zotero.

I developed my database of participatory photography projects database over two years and it proved to be a key tool in building a picture of the existing field. The final database contains over 80 projects. I focused on projects that achieved some standing, duration and profile as well as those individuals and organisations that pitched themselves as purveyors of participatory photography. The categorizing and mapping of projects within the database allowed for the cross-referencing of a diverse groups of initiatives and institutions and the identification of certain trends and patterns across the field of activity including common rhetoric and organisational makeup and networks.

A total of 31 people were interviewed with subjects falling into three groups: participatory photography practitioners, Heads of Photography at NGOs and people

involved in TAFOS. A glossary of all the interviewees is provided in the Appendix. I selected a range of 10 key participatory photography practitioners to interview on the basis of their standing, track record, profile and experience in the field. Interviews focused on the specifics of each practitioner's project, engagement and application of participatory photography, reflection on key lessons learned in their practice and discussion around their positions in relation to identified themes in the contemporary practice of participatory photography.

Interviews with the Heads of Photography in UK-based NGOs were conducted in order to build a picture of participatory photography and its contemporary application as a development tool, in terms of its use within the NGO sector and position in relation to visual strategies and broader NGO communications policies. Interviews focused on the subject's own experience and knowledge of participatory photography, their opinions of its standing as a method within the NGO sector, its use by NGOs and its value as a strategic tool for humanitarian ends.

Both groups of interviews were transcribed and analyzed for thematic commonalities. Interview data was then ordered according to key issues that arose and the central points made by each interviewee. These thematic guides were related to the case study and literature research to orient and build the broader discussion contained in the thesis.

Chapter 6 focuses on the impact of participatory photography and presents the findings of empirical research with former photographers from TAFOS in Peru in the form of both a non-linear film and a written analysis. The process for this part of the research involved:

- Focused literature review to ascertain existing evidence on the question of impact in relation to participatory arts and media projects
- A survey of key participatory photography projects and organisations to locate existing non-published independent evaluation reports.
- Field trip to Peru, May 22nd- June 8th 2011
- Interviews with TAFOS staff – in Peru
- Interviews with TAFOS participants – in Peru

- Archival research in the TAFOS archive in Lima and desk-based, secondary source research on TAFOS

Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on the circulation and use of participatory photography images and the meanings assigned to them. It presents empirical research carried out on the ‘lives’ of the TAFOS images since the project end. The research process entailed the following:

- Data collection in the TAFOS archive on the users and usages and interviews with archive staff
- Literature review on approaches to visual theory and culture, the concept of ‘authenticity’, the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and theories around photography and memory
- Interviews with key commentators on the TAFOS archive and the photography scene in Peru

My research focuses on the circulation of the TAFOS images and their subjective ‘audiencing’ by spectators (Rose 2007). Empirical data on the TAFOS images was collated from the archive on all the images’ usages and archive visitors from 2003 – 2011. Details from handwritten log sheets kept by archive administrative staff were recorded and catalogued in an Excel database for analysis. Gaps in the recorded information were investigated by cross referencing with other archival records, in the form of copies of the articles, materials and publications produced. Archive users were categorized according to type and category of ‘image use’ in order to analyse trends in image circulation and use. Interviews with archive staff further supplemented this data. Next, the specific uses of the TAFOS images within Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission were examined. Using secondary sources (journal articles, press articles and publications) and interviews with archive staff and Peruvian academic and commentators, I built a picture of the cultural, historical and political context in which these images became prevalent and were assigned with meaning.

### ***These Photos Were My Life: finding and interviewing participants***

The main visual piece of this research is the non-linear film, *These Photos Were My Life*, which brings together the testimonies and images of a group of former TAFOS photographers reflecting on the significance of the project and the impact of photography in their lives. Over 270 photographers were involved in TAFOS. The huge diversity of the workshops and in the socio-economic backgrounds of the photographers involved means that the sample of photographers interviewed was far from reflective of experiences amongst TAFOS participants as a whole.

‘Snowball’ sampling was used to make contact with former TAFOS photographers. This is a technique where initial contacts are used to locate other subjects through their own acquaintances and personal contacts. It is often used as a method for locating people of a specific population who are difficult to find (Morgan 2008:816). The local organisations to which the photographers had all once been associated had closed many years before. TAFOS took place in the pre-mobile phone age, many of the communities where workshops took place were isolated with limited communication. Contacts had been lost, relationships had not been sustained, lives had moved on and people had died or re-located.

To make the task more manageable I concentrated efforts on locating photographers from the most accessible workshops in the urban centres of Lima and Cusco. Starting with Rosa Villafuerte as a contact in Lima and Justo Vargas as in Cusco, a total of 10 photographers were found and interviewed. They represented four workshops that took place at different periods in TAFOS’s development. Inevitably, those contacted reflected a sample of participants who had been highly engaged with TAFOS, who had maintained contacts with others on the project and this fact has been incorporated into the analysis of the research findings in Chapter 6.

All interviews took place in Lima and Cusco in May/June 2011. Questioning took a similar format each time, using photo elicitation that focused on the photographer’s memories of TAFOS, how they got involved, what they did, what

they learnt from their involvement with TAFOS and the role that it had played in their lives.

Photo elicitation is a technique that sees photographs inserted into the interview process to act as a stimulus and elicit response (Hurworth 2003). Harper argues that photo elicitation enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research as it ‘mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews’ (2002:23). Within the interviews the photographs by the former TAFOS photographers were used to stimulate memory, to provide a framework for free-flowing conversation and as a tool for reflection. Interviews were structured to allow for an initial period of questioning that did not involve photographs. Then the photographs were used to instigate a more open-ended conversation led by the memories and thoughts they provoked<sup>36</sup>.

The aim was to investigate the meaning assigned to the TAFOS experience by its former participants, to understand something of the impact of the project on them and how learning and using photography had affected their lives. Schutz argues that ‘streams of consciousness’ are the constant backdrop to all our lives but that we bestow significance and meaning to an experience, both in retrospect and in prospect, only when something is lifted out of this stream. Thus, he explains meaning is ‘merely the special way in which the subject attends to his lived experience’ (1967:241). Schutz and others (Taylor 1992, Goffman 1956) highlight that subjects may not always be able to articulate a coherent explanation of their intentions so that in looking to uncover subjective meaning suitable questions need to be asked, stimulating ‘thought experiments’ (Gauld and Shotter 1980:81).

Many of the participants had not looked at their images for 15-20 years and they served to evoke feelings and memories that created a vivid picture of TAFOS and the role it had played in their lives. They led, as Harper puts it, to ‘deep and interesting talk’ (2002:22). He describes photo-elicitation as ‘breaking frames’ because viewing photographs can jolt subjects into a new awareness of their social existence (Harper 2002:21). In the context of this research, photo elicitation served

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<sup>36</sup> The main photographs used were the interviewee’s own images that they had taken during their years as TAFOS photographers. Some brought their own prints and pictures to the interviews. For others, images were viewed in the TAFOS book or on the computer where I had prepared portfolios of their images, curated from the TAFOS archive.

to enlarge the process of remembering, aiding a process of self-reflection and self-analysis. They would look at the photos and then their eyes would flick to look out of the window as they reflected and their minds jumped back and forth from the past to the present. Returning to the notion of an ‘active’ interview, that acknowledges the role of both the interviewer and interviewee in the co-creation of meaning, photo-elicitation acted as an aid in this process by enabling a collaboration and the building of a rapport as we poured over the images together<sup>37</sup>.

### ***These Photos Were My Life: visual strategy and production process***

The interviews form the core of what has become the non-linear film, *These Photos Were My Life*. The film was produced using the Korsakow system which is an open source computer application for the creation of database films and non-linear narratives<sup>38</sup>. Korsakow films are interactive in the sense that the viewer shapes the narrative by navigating their own way around its different scenes. Non-linear or multi-linear narratives are made up from smaller, discrete components that are viewed in sequences partly prescribed by the maker, partly chosen by the viewer (Soar 2014)<sup>39</sup>. Korsakow films are generative, with the order of the scenes being calculated by the viewer in the process of watching.

Korsakow films are part of the emerging genre of interactive or database documentaries<sup>40</sup>. These formats seek to open a new relational mode between author, object and spectator that consists of an open circular dialogue which lends to a collaborative process in the creation of new meaning. Gaudensi argues that

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<sup>37</sup> As Harper notes, ‘When two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together. This is, I believe, an ideal model for research’ (2002:23)

<sup>38</sup> <http://korsakow.org/> Invented in 2000 by Florian Thalhofer, a Berlin-based documentary filmmaker, Korsakow is available for download on the internet and free for those undertaking non-commercial projects.

<sup>39</sup> In Korsakow these components are called ‘Smallest Narrative Units’ (SNUs), the ‘fundamental building block’ of a Korsakow film (see <http://korsakow.org/learn/faq/quick-start/tips-tricks/tutorials/>). In the case of *These Photos Were My Life* there are a total of 11 SNUs, edited pieces of film made up of stills, audio and bits of video each between 1 ½ to 4 minutes in length. SNUs are keyworded and organized within the Korsakow system to relate to each other in a certain way however the director-programmer is not able to create fixed paths for the viewer to follow.

<sup>40</sup> These genres have proliferated in recent years as digital technology and its potential for expanding story telling and non-linear, interactive narrative formats has been harnessed by practitioners and researchers alike. Database documentaries use digital media and online platforms and encourage the use of non-linear forms of interaction such as browsing, linking and sharing, to project rich and diverse story elements while ‘proposing varying approaches to how the stories will be accessed and ordered’ (Cohen 2012:329). There is a vibrant and active scene of practitioners and academics working and collaborating in this area, notably the MIT Open Documentary Lab (<http://opendoclab.mit.edu/>) who have developed a comprehensive database of interactive documentaries (<http://docbase.mit.edu/>); idocs.org (<http://i-docs.org/>); the Digital Cultures Research Centre (<http://www.drc.org.uk/>) based at the University of West England and Idfa Documentary Lab (<http://www.doclab.org/>).

interactive documentaries create means to construct and experience the real rather than represent it (2013). Non-linear, interactive formats enable the spectator and producer to become collaborators and co-authors in the narrative process. It is argued that they are 're-defining the fundamental tenets of documentary practice and authorship', signaling a shift from 'authorship to authoring' and by extension proposing a new knowledge formation (Cohen 2012:328). Hypertext documentaries construct multiple pathways through a set 'reality' to provide a range of perspectives on a common set of themes or issues. In this sense their negotiation of reality is in part constructed through the navigation of the user/participant (Aston & Gaudensi 2012:132).

These notions of multiplicity, collaboration, participation and non-linearity reflect broader theoretical concerns in this thesis. Korsakow's developers argue that it is as much as philosophical intervention into the politics of story as it is a media software (Soar 2014). I chose to use Korsakow for this very reason, because it facilitates the telling of multiple stories instead of imposing a single deterministic narrative, and thus chimes with the broader positioning of this research in relation to plurality and enabling multiple ways of seeing.

*These Photos Were My Life* is my first Korsakow film and makes only limited use of its potential for storytelling and presenting research data within the context of visual sociology. The making of the film involved various stages. Cohen describes the role of database documentary producer as being closer to designer or curator (2012:328). For me, this curation process involved firstly transcribing and translating<sup>41</sup> the audio from the interviews with the TAFOS photographers. I then analysed the interview data and ordered it into a list of key themes for each interviewee. I used these to direct the editing of the interviews down from their full recordings to short audio pieces lasting from 1 ½ to 4 minutes each. These edited audio pieces formed the key narratives for the short films which were edited together with images, videos and titles using Adobe Premiere software. These sequences were then imported into the Korsakow system where they were programmed together to make the final film.

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<sup>41</sup> Translation work was completed by myself with support from a bi-lingual editor

The film editing process and its technical elements were completed by myself with supervision and support provided by a professional video editor, Jorge Dominguez Dubuc. The final film went through a number of rough cuts conducted over the course of a year, receiving input and feedback from various parties until the final version was completed. The former TAFOS photographers featured in *These Photos Were My Life* were all invited to view a rough cut of the film and a couple responded with input and feedback.

## **Ethics**

Ethical considerations within this research have primarily focused on ensuring that I fulfilled my responsibilities to participants whose stories and work I have utilised. While the focus of this study is on participatory photography projects that work with marginalised groups, the research process has not involved work that engaged directly with vulnerable participants. In instances where the publishing of photographic work by vulnerable participants is still deemed as having potential protection implications, names have been changed and pseudonyms used in order to protect the identities of the photographers concerned. The TAFOS case study involved fieldwork with former TAFOS participants all of whom were adults well versed in issues of consent and informed about research processes and outcomes. Whilst during its period of active operation (coinciding with the years of internal conflict in Peru) there were safety issues for TAFOS participants, with the passing of time, these were no longer a concern. All participants felt at liberty to talk on the research subject without concerns for personal repercussions or risk. The purpose and nature of the research was clearly explained and discussed in advance of the recorded interviews and, for the relevant interviews, the intention that the recordings would be used within a film was made evident. All participants provided their consent and, when relevant, gave copyright clearance for their portrait and images to be used.

## **Dissemination of research**

At the heart of this research are questions about participation, access and the democratisation of communications and image-making and so it seems



appropriate to briefly discuss my own intentions for the sharing and dissemination this work. In sketching out a new imaginary for participatory photography the aim is to provide practitioners with research that will expand understandings and act as a catalyst to debates around its practice, ethics and purpose. It is hoped that my research might support practitioners engaged in a critical and self-reflexive practice. I intend to publish a series of articles, essays, case studies, interviews and blog posts that use the research to pose key critical questions to the practitioner community. These will be disseminated to target practitioners and organisers through partnerships with existing participatory photography organisations and my own network, built over 10 years in the field, of practitioners and organisers.

# 3

## **Critiquing the Promise: ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography**

This chapter explores and defines the tensions at the heart of the participatory photography project in the context of critical debates around its use as an NGO ‘empowerment’ method, participatory tool and visual communications strategy. I argue that the frictions they highlight all point towards a crucial task: the need for a urgent re-politisation of participatory photography practice. This chapter focuses on the critique of an ‘NGO-ised’ model of participatory photography and its use within the context of NGO visual communications and ‘new humanitarianism’ (Fox 2001, Leebaw 2007). It highlights the contradictions between the rhetoric of rights, participation, dignity, empowerment and their implicit suggestion of a creative, self-determined, organic process of ‘giving voice’ and the reality of the practice’s constrained application, subject to regimes of NGO managerial and visual governmentality.

To understand contemporary participatory arts practice it is necessary to examine the larger discourses of development against which these practices define themselves (Kester 2011). I explore the debates around the politics and governmentality of humanitarianism, the critique of empowerment and participation in development and the visual dynamics of NGO imagery in order to build an expanded understanding of the context that has shaped the NGO participatory photography project. Presenting research with NGO Heads of Photography I examine the contradiction between the largely positive endorsement of participatory photography and its actual limited use within NGO communications, arguing that this is due to the irresolvable tensions at the heart of the ‘NGO-ised’ model that make it complex to categorise and implement.

I work with the notion of a ‘NGO-ised’ model of participatory photography for analytical purposes, to enable a generalized discussion of participatory photography, but it is important to emphasize that the suggestion is not that such a definitive model actually exists. Rather, the idea is offered as a crude encapsulation of tendencies in the field that have become the subject of critique. The reality of the field of participatory visual arts is far more diverse and complex (Mayo 2000, Kester 2011). Kester notes that while there is a significant level of interaction and partnership between participatory arts practice and non-government organisations these workings are characterized by both ‘correspondence and differentiation, both symmetry and resistance’ (2011:123). Participatory photography has both absorbed the ideals and rhetoric of new humanitarianism while also responding to their critique. This goes some way to account for its often contrary and paradoxical nature.

### **Critiques of participatory photography**

Critiques of participatory photography can be understood as falling into three main categories; those that accuse projects of neo-colonialism; those that assert projects are tokenistic and fail to be linked to any meaningful agenda for social change (having been governmentalised and appropriated to serve the ends of organisers rather than the participants); and those that argue that projects, naïvely executed, end up disempowering participants and doing more harm than good. At their most extreme, critics have questioned the validity of the whole participatory photography exercise, arguing the practice has traces of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Kester talks of well-intentioned artists tortured by the desire to do good who run the danger of treating community groups as ‘a material to be converted’ by the transformative creative experience (1999:4). Some initiatives have been accused of projecting images of savior (white) artists going into save poor people with their art and propose that the charitable gift of photography ‘often may be found to serve donors more than recipients’ (Ballerini 1997:162).

**Zana Briski** of **Born into Brothels** has been accused of this. The film documenting her photography project with children living in Sonagachi, Kolkata’s red light district, received an overwhelmingly positive response from Western

audiences and critics, winning an Oscar and numerous other accolades (Briski and Kauffman 2004, 2005). Its great success brought unprecedented attention to photo empowerment initiatives, introducing the practice to new audiences all over the world (Hubbard 2007). Hailed as the ultimate uplifting film, press and reviewers have described it in turn as ‘inspiring’, ‘moving’, ‘piercing’, ‘touching’, ‘compelling’ and as leaving audiences feeling ‘buoyant’ (Sirohi 2005). However, for a number of South Asian critics the film provoked ‘a growing feeling of disquiet’ at Briski’s portrayal of herself as the ‘knight in shining armor’ and the ‘missionary zeal’ of her efforts to save the children from their doomed existence (Frann 2007). One acid-tongued critic summarised it thus,

*‘If Born Into Brothels were remade as an adventure-thriller in the tradition of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, its posters might read: “New York film-maker Zana Briski sallies forth among the natives to save souls.”* (Swami 2005)

He and others deplore what they perceive to be the film’s self-congratulatory and paternalistic tone. They object to its omission of the work of local activists in Sonagachi and the roles played by local NGOs in assisting the film makers, its indifference to sex workers’ own advocacy efforts, its portrayal of the children’s parents as unfit and abusive and its inference that removal of the children from the brothels was the only way of saving them (Banerjee 2005, Frann 2007, Shah 2005, Sirohi 2005, Swami 2005). The criticisms largely highlight the ‘exploitative character of the film’ (Swami 2005). They assert that it did not lift the children involved from poverty but rather left them in a worse position due to the attention they received (Banerjee 2005, Sirohi 2005). While the film makers gained considerable prestige by winning an Oscar and other awards which have furthered their careers. Briski herself strongly refutes such claims<sup>42</sup>.

However, Briski’s is not the first participatory photography project to be accused of paternalism and upholding myths of the crusading ‘Romantic-artist-outsider’ (Ballerini 1997:174). **Shaidul Alam** highlights the NGO-model of participatory photography in which international photographers enter into communities to run workshops over short periods and then exit failing to leave in place any

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<sup>42</sup> Briski rejects many of the criticisms, claiming them to be either untrue, motivated by jealousy at the film’s success, or tied up with NGO politics and territorialism in Sonagachi. She states that all of the children featured in the film who want to be educated are currently been supported with scholarships. Two of them are studying in the States, one – Avjit – attends NYC Film School. (Zana Briski, 2011, interview, 12th October).

mechanisms to enable community members to pursue what was started with the projects or deal with its knock-on effects (S.Alam, 2012, interview, 28<sup>th</sup> August).

Many highlight the tokenism of participatory photography projects that are not aligned to any consequential social change strategy, resulting in negligible benefits for the community (Kester 1999, Ballerini 1995, 1997). There is an issue of inexperienced practitioners starting projects without doing their ‘homework’ and using broad concepts such as creativity, self-worth and empowerment ‘without understanding the broader ethical and practical issue’ (Godden 2007). While people might be motivated by the desire to make a difference in the world, ‘humanitarian yearnings are often too vague to guide our action’ (Kennedy 2005:22), resulting in projects that fail to understand or cater for the needs of the communities that they claim to be supporting. One of Alam’s concerns is that initiatives get hijacked by organising and funding bodies looking for seemingly innovative projects that make them look ‘sexy’ with their ‘attractive’ end product – powerful pictures that draw in audiences (S.Alam, 2012, interview, 28<sup>th</sup> August).

**Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh** is highly critical of projects in which she believes a schematic way of working with photography is applied. In her mind the participatory photography model is broken (Wilson-Goldie 2008) having been appropriated by NGOs and the practitioners to the point that the insistence on participation has become meaningless<sup>43</sup>. The main points of her critique, she argues, are relevant to any kind of NGO or development work that it is short-term, donor-oriented and outcome- rather than process-focused (Y.Eid-Sabbagh, 2013, interview). Her concerns echo critiques of development (discussed in Chapter 1) which highlight how managerialist tendencies and techniques of governmentality have come to exert increasing influence over NGO activities, imposing a set of requirements and operating structures that suffocate the critical potential of initiatives supposedly rooted within processes of creative self-determination.

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<sup>43</sup> In her recent work **Eid Sabbagh** has attempted to re-invent the participatory photography model in full recognition of its complexities, dynamics and unknown quantities. She jokes she has banned the term participatory photography from my own work (Y.Eid Sabbagh, 2013, interview, 11<sup>th</sup> February). In her 2006 project, she moved to live in the Palestinian camps with no fixed timeframes in mind, setting up a workshop space for young photographers to use as they wanted. She did not accept funding that would dictate ways of working, outcomes or interfere and allowed the young people to define the work process as they went along. ‘I went there with time and the will to listen, more than to teach, and to create a dialogue with the group of young people with whom I worked with’ (Y.Eid-Sabbagh, 2013, interview 11<sup>th</sup> February).

The notion of a ‘NGO-ised’ model of participatory photography is emblematic of the type of project at the heart of **Eid-Sabbagh’s** critique. It points to a practice that professes to ‘empower’ and ‘give voice’ through photography but that in reality is defined by a raft of managerial concerns such as those coined by Srinivas (2008): technocratic decision making power over intended aid and project beneficiaries, efforts to standardize tasks and toolkits, and techniques that attempt to define and measure development related outcomes (2008:74). ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography has developed a project model that can be implemented within a finite time and that generates quantifiable outputs (structured around a series of workshops culminating in a presentation or public exhibitions). Such models stand in contrast to approaches that advocate a more open and adaptive way of working, suggesting the possibility of a ‘one-model-fits-all’ approach to the participatory photography process.

A number of researchers and practitioners also highlight the potential of participatory photography projects to create negative outcomes by raising hopes that they fail to fulfill (Foster Fishman 2005, PhotoVoice 2008, Purcell 2009). **Alam**, the founder of long-running participatory photography project **Out of Focus**, describes the opportunity and hope that the project brought to its young participants, ‘we had provided a dream and then we had to ensure that we could enable them to realize that dream... One of the things I recognized through this work was that you could not enter into people’s lives and then back out again’ (2012, interview)<sup>44</sup>. The concern is that projects build expectations by exposing participants to opportunities and experiences and by providing them with a network and platform that dissipates and cannot be sustained once the project cycle is completed.

A project end does not necessarily mean that the project and the processes it instigates for participants are finished. At the end of a PhotoVoice project with young refugees in London, one of the young participants protested, ‘But I still have room on my memory card ...’ (Orton 2009). Despondency can set in when

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<sup>44</sup> Despite requests, **Alam** has been reluctant to get involved in repeated projects due to their time bound nature that results in practitioners and their resources moving on. He highlights that initiatives often end up creating problems for their participants which they need support to solve. ‘These were children who lived very different lives in their homes and then they would come to DRIK, and live another life, have exposure to many things ... we could not walk away or abandon them, for each of the kids we have had to find innovative, particular ways to solve things which didn’t work in terms of a one size fits all which is the way that these projects are often designed.’ (S.Alam, 2012, interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> February).

momentum and valued networks built at the height of project activity stagnate after the project ends (Slater 2009). Foster Fishman et al highlight that participatory photography can also be a ‘vehicle for dis-empowerment’, when a new awareness of the need for change is not coupled with opportunities for improvement (2005:289).

### **The de-politicisation of humanitarianism and development**

These critiques are not unique to the field of participatory photography. They mirror broader critical debates around development and NGO practice that question the conceptual core of the humanitarian ethos and argue humanitarian activity has become de-politicised and subject to regimes of governmentality. In the last 50 years humanitarianism has become big business with the humanitarian movement<sup>45</sup> and human rights<sup>46</sup> discourse coming to dominate contemporary global governance and politics (Barnett & Weiss 2008, Kennedy 2009, Dousinas 2007, DeChaine 2005). However, despite its ubiquity the founding principles of the humanitarianism ethos have been called into question (Barnett & Weiss 2008, Douzinas 2007). Douzinas is one of many to highlight that ‘the triumph of humanitarianism is drowned in human disaster’ (2007:14) as genocide, conflict, famine, poverty and human suffering continue unabated. A growing body of literature has drawn attention to the ‘darker sides of humanitarianism’ (Kennedy 2005:329). Its practitioners acknowledge their work often does bad as well as good (Vaux 2004, Reiff 2003, Terry 2002), theorists and philosophers question humanitarianism’s flawed conceptual basis (Arendt 1951, Dousinas 2007) and others suggest the humanitarian movement has been hijacked and corrupted to the point that it resembles colonialism (Cooke & Kathari 2001, Reiff 2003).

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<sup>45</sup> Humanitarianism asserts that every human being is of equal moral worth and seeks to promote human welfare. Early humanitarians took up causes such as the abolition of slavery, poor working conditions and child labor. Since the end of the Second World War, the international humanitarian scene has developed to involve a complex and thriving network of organisations, institutions, NGOs, government bodies, aid workers, campaigners policies, codes, international frameworks, initiatives and events (DeChaine 2005). The last twenty years has seen giant leaps in the scope, scale and significance of humanitarian action with a rapid expansion of activities and agencies, funds and workers working under the mantle of ‘broad-brush humanitarianism’ (Barnett and Weiss 2008:35).

<sup>46</sup> Devised in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR 1948) enshrined the notion of humanity in terms of universal inalienable and fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because they are human. Since its creation the doctrine of human rights has become the bedrock of public policy and global governance. Beitz argues that ‘if the public discourse of peacetime global society can be said to have a common moral language, it is that of human rights’ (2009:1).

Humanitarianism's critics draw attention to questions of politics and power and represent a growing intolerance of the two key unresolvable tensions at the heart of the classic humanitarian model: the essentialising nature of its conception of the universal human and the impossibility of its non-political stance. Douzinas contends that the fundamental flaw of humanitarianism lies in the very idea that there is a human essence. In supposing a universal human core humanitarianism implies 'the differences that create our identity are superficial and accidental, contingent characteristics of no major importance' (2007:2). The individualism of humanitarianism fails to acknowledge that every person in the world comes into existence in common with others and that our history, our rootedness in our families, relationships, cultures and networks are what forms our humanity. The particular qualities that makes everyone unique, that make up human plurality, is 'replaced by a grey, monolithic humanity, the very opposite of the infinite diversity of human experience.' (Douzinas 2007:20).

The discursive issue with humanitarianism's universality is that it presents a totalizing view that 'occupies the field of emancipatory possibility', crowding out other ways of understanding, conceptualizing and working with harm and recompense (Kennedy 2005:9). It denies the plurality of human experience, perspective and knowledge. In proposing a universal concept of 'what counts as a problem and what works as a solution' other versions of reality, promising local political and social initiatives, are passed over. For DeChaine, ultimately what is at stake is the question of 'truth' and whose truth counts (2005:7). If we abandon the essentialism of humanity, 'human rights appear as highly artificial constructs, a historical accident of European intellectual and political history' (Douzinas 2007:3) driven by Western ideals and values<sup>47</sup>.

Agencies' claim to be apolitical is also posited as 'a convenient fiction' that is increasingly unsustainable (Barnett & Weiss 2008:18). While many in the humanitarian world seek to define their work as opposed to politics the majority now acknowledge that it is impossible to remain separated from it when

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<sup>47</sup> Tension has always existed between the presumed universality of humanitarian organisations and their Western roots (Barnett and Weiss 2008:7). DeChaine calls attention to the fact all of the top NGOs operate out of either the UK, France or the US (2005:12) and the western profile of humanitarianism 'exact particular costs when combined with the highly structured and unequal relations between the modern West and everyone else' (Kennedy 2005:20). For Douzinas the rhetoric of human rights seemingly legitimising what the West all ready possesses (2007:24).



humanitarianism is involved in activities that seek to transform. Many humanitarian workers are drawn to the work precisely because it makes a 'clear political statement' (Barnett & Weiss 2008:37). Despite this the issue of politics is often sidestepped or obfuscated in rhetoric. Kennedy argues that the human rights movement diverts the focus, by suggesting that 'rights, rather than people taking political decisions, can bring emancipation' (2005:22). Problems of participation and procedure are prioritised at the expense of discussions about distribution. Increasingly complex humanitarian situations have resulted in a steady rise in the number of actors involved – from donors to government and the military as well as NGOs (Douzinas 2007, Nan 2010). How is impartiality possible when ever more intricate relations and dependencies are at play?

These themes are 'intimately tied to questions of power: who speaks and who is spoken for in a globalised world?' (DeChaine 2005:13). The denial of politics, critics argue, has led to the failure of humanitarian organisations to be honest, reflexive and transparent. They exist in 'painful self-denial' about their relationship to power and control (Barnett & Weiss 2008:9). Ultimately, humanitarian organisations wield influence since they are involved in determining who receives aid and who does not. The concern is that a lack of transparency and a totalising, sentimental rhetoric obscures issues that has led many to conclude 'modern humanitarianism is a Gordian knot of participation in power and denial, a willful blindness posing as strategic insight.' (Kennedy 2005:357).

Additional concerns, discussed in Chapter 1, coalesce around growing governmentality in the sphere evident in the field's increasing professionalisation and encroaching managerialism. Critics of an 'NGO-ised' notion of participatory photography echo a wider critique of how managerial tools and techniques have come to exert an increasing influence within NGO operations and funding requirements (Cooke and Dar 2008, Lewis 2008). The concern is that while these practices might appear to be routine administration - part of a benign effort to organise and categorise NGO activities using procedures, bureaucracy and management systems - they in fact result in a shift that is ultimately depoliticising as administration eclipses politics, service delivery trumps advocacy and welfare

policy upstages popular democracy as the ‘experts’ take control and grassroots representation is downplayed (Srinivas 2008:87).

### **Empowerment and Participation: the rhetoric of ‘new humanitarianism’**

In response, there has been a struggle to (re)define the humanitarian identity. Many NGOs have embraced the concept of a ‘new humanitarianism’<sup>48</sup> (Fox 2001) increasingly defining their activities through a ‘rights-based’ approach that seeks to address the persistent tensions around the question of power and politics (though many counter that it still fails to do so<sup>49</sup>) (DeChaine 2005, Manzo 2008, Slim 2000). The concept of human dignity has become central to the language of new humanitarianism. Dignity involves notions of respect for the person and their rights and is conceived as ‘the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’ (DeChaine 2005:47).

These ideals have permeated the discursive framework of contemporary participatory photography that has evolved a conceptual apparatus steeped in notions of dignity and people’s ‘right to voice’. Implicit in the act of handing over the camera is the sense that people are re-assigned with dignity as they gain a voice and the capacity to represent themselves. Participatory photography is understood as a technique within a spectrum of strategies, ideas and initiatives that have gained currency as the field has sought to re-invent the humanitarian image by prioritizing the dignity and agency of its subjects and their right to a voice.

Participatory photography promises empowerment and participation, notions that have become increasingly popular within the field of international development since the 1980s and are central to the rhetoric of ‘new humanitarianism’. Based on a rejection of the traditional ‘modernist’ project of development and located within

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<sup>48</sup> The concept of ‘new humanitarianism’ seeks to re-legitimise the arena of aid by connecting relief to longer-term projects in development, conflict resolution, and human rights (Fox 2001). Rejecting neutral humanitarian relief as both naïve and morally questionable, the dominant rhetoric of ‘new humanitarianism’ is voiced in terms of human rights. As ‘thinking NGOs’ have come to focus on power, its abuse and imbalance, as the essential determinant in the construction of poverty and suffering so development has been re-framed in terms of human rights which provide ‘a countervailing force to challenge and make just demands of power’ (Slim 2001:290).

<sup>49</sup> Leebaw notes a paradox in the current ethos of ‘impartial activism’ that combines the transformative moral judgement associated with human rights and the pragmatic avoidance of judgement associated with humanitarianism (2007). This amalgam of idealism and pragmatism ultimately results in a response to political dilemmas that is ‘simultaneously accommodating and denigrating political compromise’ (Leebaw 2007:224).

a push to re-frame activities from a ‘bottom-up’ perspective, empowerment<sup>50</sup> and participation<sup>51</sup> are at the centre of a ‘paradigm shift in the reconceptualization of development and poverty alleviation’ (Singh and Titi 1995:6). The notions have become all-pervasive as they have graduated from being the preserve of progressive NGOs to gain increasing institutional support, to the point that ‘empowering the poor has become an almost universal slogan’ (Craig & Mayo 1995:2).

At a generic level the concepts of participation and empowerment have been hailed as the moral saviours of development since they promise inclusiveness, transparency and accountability while reassigning people their rights and being compatible with notions of democracy and sustainable development. They are driven by the imperative to designate agency to the subject of the development process; to enable people to take control of matters that influence their lives. They look for people to become active agents, to define their own priorities and push for the required changes to meet their needs..

However many call attention to the fact that in their prolific use the concepts have lost their meaning (Cheater 1999, James 1999, Tandon 1995, Troyna 1994). Their widespread espousal has concealed their definition based on different perspectives (Craig & Mayo 1995:5). Practitioners and academics have started to ask whether their extensive application, their ‘monopolisation’ of development contexts (James 1999:13), have led to them becoming ‘victim to gross abuse’ (Tandon 1995:32). Criticism occurs on two levels, mirroring what has already discussed in relation to humanitarianism more broadly. The first argues that the ideas of participation and empowerment have been co-opted into a neoliberal and managerial discourse and the second proposes that their ascendancy to ‘buzzword’ status and their subsequent facile, unreflective use means that the concepts have become hollow

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<sup>50</sup> A broad working understanding of empowerment designates it as a multi-dimensional social process that enables people to gain control over their own lives; a process that fosters power (in terms of the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important (Page and Czuba 1999). Within development discourse the concept of empowerment has evolved from Paulo Freire’s radical philosophy of emancipatory education which proposes every human being can develop an awareness of self and reclaim the right to define their own worlds (1970, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> Within NGO rhetoric, the concept of empowerment goes hand in hand with the idea of participation. The two ideas share the same concerns. Championed by Robert Chambers (1997) and his development of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), at the heart of participatory approaches lies the aim to increase the involvement of marginalised groups in decision-making over matters that affect their own lives. Frierian principles form the basis of participatory approaches to facilitation and training used in international and community developments contexts (Hope and Timmel 1995).

and dislocated from their radical, politicised roots. In short, their fetishization has impeded their intellectual and emancipatory potential (Archibold and Wilson 2011).

When the term empowerment first became prevalent in the 70s it was linked to a politicised concept of power within economics and the control of resources. Radical empowerment discourse, with its roots in Freirean philosophy, is associated with action, with the transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights and society's institutions. Similarly, models of 'participation' implied that their practitioners worked alongside poor people to actively push for change. However now these terms have become empty 'buzzwords' in development,

*'an essential objective of projects, its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost. The concept of action has become individualised, empowerment depoliticised'* (Cleaver 2001:37).

As empowerment has become defined in broad humanist terms (as 'a capacity to act effectively') its ability to challenge social or political positions, institutions or groups has been interrupted (Archibold and Wilson 2011). For Leal, participation's legitimisation within the institutional world has resulted in its 'political decapitation' as it has become victim to 'technification' (2007:544). Reduced to a series of methodological packages and techniques, the once radical concept has slowly lost its philosophical and ideological significance and become a 'tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari 2001<sup>52</sup>). Emphasis is now placed on the techniques of participation rather than its meaning, with empowerment presented as a de facto conclusion to the initiation of a participatory process (Leal 2007:545).

Agencies seek to empower but within managerial parameters that they control and define. Participatory ideals are often limited according to institutional and managerial goal-driven agendas (Tandon 1995, Mosse 2001, Leal 2007). The alluring rhetoric of participation is an important part of the project as a 'system of representations' orientated towards external parties such as donors (Mosse

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<sup>52</sup> Cooke and Kothari outline four fundamental problems with participation: firstly, the 'the naivety of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes' (Cooke and Kothari 2001:13); secondly, how the discourse of empowerment masks an agenda for managerialist effectiveness (in this context managed participation masquerades as democracy (Murphy 2008:18); thirdly, the 'quasi-religious' associations of participatory rhetoric and practice; and finally the issue of how a focus on the micro level of intervention and interaction can divert attention from broader macro-level inequalities and injustice.

2001:31). Agencies talk about ‘empowering people, as if power was for them to give and not for the powerless to take’ (Tandon 1995:33). All these writers are disturbed by the fact that in their prolific usage the terms of participation and empowerment have acquired ‘an aura of respectability... and even social status’ (Tandon 1995:31) which means that they are no longer questioned or contested. The concepts are used like ‘magic bullets’ (Archibold and Wilson 2011) as discourses cloaked in their rhetoric are ‘implicitly assumed to have a greater value’ (Cleaver 2001:37). In the context of participatory photography, practitioners have utilised the open-ended discourses to give their projects a framework and legitimacy without giving much consideration to what it actually means to ‘empower’ with photography in relation to a politics of voice and social change.

### **The visual politics of humanitarianism**

Critiques of humanitarianism, governmentality in the NGO sector and of the application of notions of empowerment and participation in development practice all provide a wider context and grounding for an assessment that insists that ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography is, if not completely broken, then in urgent need of reappraisal. However, this task can only be undertaken within an evaluation that examines its dynamics not only as a ‘development’ practice but also as a visual practice within a politics of voice.

In participatory photography rhetoric notions of ‘empowerment’ and ‘giving voice’ are often used interchangeably or are conflated<sup>53</sup>. The notion of voice is central to participatory photography discourse<sup>54</sup>. From the 1990s onwards the concept of empowerment has been incorporated into a discourse that is ‘above all about being vocal, having a right to voice’ (Cheater 1999:6). This has evolved in response to the serious rhetorical challenge faced by NGOs of how to cultivate the perception that they are democratic in their values and practices. To establish their reliability they need to demonstrate that they engender the values and morals of those whom

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<sup>53</sup> Troyna argues there is an important distinction between empowerment and ‘giving voice’ and there is a need for researchers and practitioners to draw analytical, political and methodological lines between the two. She argues the promise of ‘empowerment’ emerging naturally out of giving students ‘a voice’ constitutes one of the ‘repressive myths’ of critical pedagogy (1994).

<sup>54</sup> Projects make statements such as, ‘When you give a child a camera, you give a child a voice’ (taken from Venice Arts website, retrieved 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011).

they claim to represent (De Chaine 2005:56). They need to cultivate a public image that underscores their moral integrity, competence, legitimacy, and honesty (DeChaine 2005:59). The idea of ‘giving voice’ is central to these strategies. Participatory photography needs to be understood as part of a group of methodologies that have become increasingly fashionable as NGOs have looked for new techniques that address their failure to give voice to beneficiaries.

In the context of NGO visual communications there has been extensive debate and condemnation around the widespread use of famine and victim imagery that strip subjects of dignity and voice. Critical debates centre on images of suffering, their predominant use within NGO communicatory practices and their role in validating humanitarian action. Authors have highlighted various humanitarian visual icons that project a vision of helplessness vitally linked to ‘the constitution of speechlessness’ (Malkki 1996:388). They include the nameless famine victim, the starving child with bloated belly, the impoverished ‘Madonna’ and child (Van De Gaag 1987), the lone child in close-up (Manzo 2008), the impoverished rural peasant (Dogra 2007) and crowds of people fleeing (Malkki 1996)<sup>55</sup>. The suggestion is that these helpless victims need protection and someone to speak for them.

This imagery is not unique to humanitarianism but rather a feature of broader Western media practice that tends to represent the majority world in simplistic and negative terms resulting in distorted public opinions and perceptions of the developing world (Benthall 1993, Smith et al 2006, Van De Gaag & Nash 1987, VSO 2002). Authors link these images to a Western imperialism in which unequal relationships between the ‘West and the Rest’ are sustained through the production of a narrative of the subordinate ‘Other’ (Hall 1992, Said 1978). Such images, it is argued, act as an ‘extension of colonialism’, reinforcing existing patronising stereotypes (Manzo 2008:650)<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> The Imaging Famine research project is an invaluable resource on how famine has been represented in the media. <https://www.david-campbell.org/photography/imaging-famine/> (accessed January 14 2015)

<sup>56</sup> Scholars such as Foucault have named the process of othering as being central to production of knowledge and the imposition of a particular political agenda that aims to dominate (1982,1984). Manzo draws parallels between the iconography of childhood, the colonial iconography of savagery and the way missionary iconography worked in the colonial age and argues images of lone children used by NGOS tap into ‘cultural associations of childhood with dependence, innocence, and the need for protection and care’ (2008:652).

In this analysis the notion of the 'unseen' (Foster 1988:xi) and the idea from visual culture theory that representation is about absence (what is not in the picture as well as what is) is crucial to understanding how visual stereotyping in humanitarianism works (Manzo 2008:643). Sontag wrote that 'to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude' (2003:46). What is left out of the images of suffering victims and lone children or women is the parents, partners, family or community members and local agencies - in short, any suggestion of people's local network of support, care and protection, implying their failure and the victim's total dependence on outside forces (Gidley 2004, Manzo 2008, Dogra 2011). Another key visual absence is politics. When NGOs use endless decontextualized images of women and children that fail to provide a history or explanation for the problems they face they fail to tell the whole story and hide the political-economic connections that link viewers' histories with those of 'those poor people over there' (Malkki 1996:388).

The issue of humanitarian communication is not simply a problem of the field but, it can be argued, is an issue of the very relation between humanitarianism and politics (Boltanski 1999)<sup>57</sup>. The dominant media images of the majority world 'promote emotion without understanding, charity without structural change' (Manzo 2006:11). The real danger is that neo-colonial images 'minimize rather than maximize' the impact of NGO work in general for, while NGOs perpetuate a language of partnership, their underlying vision is one of handouts (McGee 2005:12).

The denunciation of 'negative imagery' began in the 1970s with the media coverage of the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine marking a watershed as commentators deplored the gratuitous use of 'famine pornography' (Dogra 2007, Manzo 2006). NGOs and agencies undertook various initiatives. A Code of Conduct on Images (Dochas 2006) was developed that urged NGOs to avoid 'pathetic' images and those that homogenise, falsify, fuel prejudice, and 'foster a sense of Northern

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<sup>57</sup> Boltanski takes up Hannah Arendt's famous critique of a 'politics of pity', a feature that defines the modern era by providing a perspective that distinguishes between those who suffer and those who do not. Within its framework the spectacle of suffering becomes central as one is encouraged to substitute action with the observation of the unfortunate (Arendt 1963). In contrast a politics of justice Boltanski argues seeks justification, the resolution of disputes and distinguishes between the great and the small without attaching this status to persons indefinitely. The politics of justice asks those that suffer to determine what is just. Choularaki argues that what Boltanski calls the 'crisis of pity' today can largely be understood as 'the crisis of a particular conception of politics' (2010:108), a conception which is understood as not only an inadequacy of political practice but in part as an inadequacy of the discourse of pity (2010:109).

superiority<sup>58</sup>. Its key watchwords were reality, dignity and empowerment (Manzo 2008:638).

Another response saw the proliferation of ‘positive image’ campaigns in which negative images were supplanted with more optimistic pictures (Lidchi, 1999). This saw the ‘starving child’ replaced with the ‘smiling child’ as NGOs made conscious attempts to reject the image of the sufferer as a victim and to focus instead on their agency and dignity. Subjects become personalized, assigned with names and identities, and the images use an emotional regime of ‘empathy, tenderheartedness and gratitude’ (Choularki 2010:116). For Dogra, the enthusiasm for this style of optimistic visual strategy has resulted in the ‘dogma of positive imagery’ (2007:167) which she and others see as equally problematic in terms of NGO’s visual vocabulary. Positive images provide a ‘lazy way out for NGOs’ (Dogra 2007:168) for like negative images they fail to provide a context for understanding development issues. Instead they show donors how wonderfully their contributions worked, relying on the subtle evidence of the victim’s gratitude for the imagined alleviation of their suffering (Choularaki 2010:116)<sup>59</sup>.

### **Contrary agendas shaping NGO images**

Research exposes the contradictory priorities and messages of image use by different NGO departments (Van de Gaag & Nash 1987, Dogra 2012). On one side, development educationalists advocate the use of images that educate the public about the wider context and realities of poverty. They push for images that are consistent with stated aims of partnership, justice and equality. On the other side, fundraisers seek to utilize the emotional hit achieved by images of suffering victims to motivate the public to donate funds.

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<sup>58</sup> In April 1989 the General Assembly of the European NGOs adopted a *Code of Conduct on Images and Messages relating to the Third World* which was updated in 2006 (Dochas 2006). It specified the avoidance of the cropping of images, providing good captions, avoiding stereotypes that sensationalise and discriminate, ensuring that informed consent is always gained and establishing how subjects want to be named or identified. Images, they state, ‘should not perpetuate an ‘us and them’ attitude but instead foster a sense of our inter-connected common humanity’ (Dochas 2006b:5). Larger NGOs developed organisation-specific guidelines. Save the Children’s *Focus on Images* (1991), which was referred to as ground-breaking for the time (Benthall 1993, Manzo 2008), demanded respect for dignity and cautioned against representing entire communities, continents and worlds as helpless recipients of handouts.

<sup>59</sup> Recent Save the Children research (2011) explored how the people depicted in Save the Children’s photographs felt about how they have been represented. Many participants actually affirmed ‘the value of depicting suffering’ as they wanted the reality of their situations to be communicated (2011:7). They wanted to see examples of agency, resilience and change alongside depictions of vulnerability and poverty (2011:7). Subjects’ repeated interest focused less on a concern with dignity but on the failure of representations to tell the ‘whole story’ (2011:8).



Humanitarian visual clichés of suffering victims persist because such pictures secure the institutional survival of NGOs (Clark 2003, Manzo 2008, De Waal 1997). This survival depends largely on two factors: the funds they raise and the ongoing validation of the humanitarian identity. Images of suffering are incredibly effective at raising money. NGOs need to raise donations from the general public to sustain activities and to ensure their stability and continued existence. In this sense suffering is ‘one of the principal currency earners for humanitarian organizations’ (Kennedy 2009:3) undermining Moeller’s widely utilized argument about public compassion fatigue (Manzo 2006, Campbell 2012). This is all the more crucial in the contemporary NGO market where there is fierce competition between agencies as they all vie for attention and funds from public pockets (Gidley 2005). A competitive fundraising environment means that, more often than not, the fundraisers gain the upper hand in the internal battle over images (McGee 2005, Manzo 2006). Communication processes and their power to mobilise public sentiment are central to broader humanitarian processes and thus humanitarian visual icons are integral to a larger rhetorical and discursive apparatus ‘through which humanitarian identity is constituted, revised and reaffirmed’ (Manzo 2008:634).

For many the question of image use strikes at the heart of the ethical responsibility and purpose of humanitarian work. Hall’s work established that social struggle involves a linguistic struggle and to modify representation is to challenge ideological and cultural hegemony (Hall 1997). Questions of meaning, significance and value are fought through articulatory practices, that if forceful enough, can challenge dominant ideologies. Rhetoric can play a mediating role in the forming, shaping and shifting of public opinion. So, within this landscape what is the duty of humanitarian communications? To employ the strategies that generates the most funds to alleviate human suffering or to challenge dominant ideologies and to push for social justice for the poor and marginalised?

While the overt use of famine imagery might have fallen out of fashion, NGOs have failed to find alternative visual strategies that produce the results required to uphold both the humanitarian identity and vital public funds on which they depend.

Therein lies the dilemma for NGOs: it remains expedient for them to show images of helplessness. The situation relates to the core tension at the heart of humanitarianism and its 'impartial activism' (Leebaw 2008), the amalgam of ideology and pragmatism that creates the paradoxical push-and-pull illustrated in debates over visuality in the field.

Dogra argues that a longitudinal examination of NGO image-use reveals that the conflicting actions of NGOs have always been reflected by and through their images (2007:167). Images act as a mirror of the pressures faced by NGOs and the complex nature of their competing agendas and priorities (Dogra 2007:166). She argues that a dual logic of difference and oneness is the master code to understanding NGO messages where images on the one hand distance the other while on the other hand represent the world and humanity as 'one' (2012)<sup>60</sup>. In this sense the continued reliance on humanitarian icons is paradoxical rather than unprincipled in the way it simultaneously endorses and undermines the humanitarian principles espoused by NGOs (Manzo 2008). For despite the best efforts of NGOs to align their symbolic world with their politics there is often a considerable gap between the two (DeChaine 2005)<sup>61</sup>.

### **The use of participatory photography by NGOs**

In the midst of these debates the promise of participatory photography as an alternative visual strategy for NGOs is tantalizing. It holds the potential for a more 'ethical' image, one that 'gives voice', defies stereotypes, that re-designates agency, dignity and authority to the subject and that can provide viewers with new perspective and insight into development issues. Participatory photography initiatives have become increasingly modish. **Müller** commented that as TAFOS

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<sup>60</sup> This enables them to show to their audiences the global poor as different and distant from the developed world but yet like us by virtue of their humanity. The NGO condemnation of social injustice relies on the assumption of oneness and so their discursive strategies work to contain the paradoxical links between difference, distance and othering versus oneness and universality (Dogra 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Commentators have also highlighted NGO's failure to commission and work with indigenous photographers. Advocates argue it is a moral responsibility of NGOs to support this form of 'fair-trade photography' as part of their wider commitment to enabling more equal trade and development practices (Alam, 1994, Fenton 1995). Picture editors and communication staff cite a number of reasons for this failure including lack of resources and equipment, communications obstacles and most crucially the concern that local photographers do not understand the 'agenda' and 'compositional grammar' demanded by the international image market (Clark 2004:695). Others point to indigenous photographers limited access to clients who are concentrated in the US and Europe as well as the issue of western misconceptions of their professional capacity and vision (Alam 1994).

gained a profile he lost count of the number of NGOs that came and asked him to ‘do a TAFOS’ with them (T. Müller, 2011, interview, June 3rd).

‘Participatory photography is in the air’, comments **Joseph Cabon**, Head of Photography at Christian Aid, as NGOs have come to place increasing value on beneficiaries’ stories and voices as a means to communicate their work to audiences<sup>62</sup>. For **Watts**, Head of Photography at Action Aid, telling the full story of the person depicted is crucial to their dignity, showing people ‘as multi-faceted and not just in a single picture... their background, their dreams and hopes, not just grabbed images’. He highlights that NGOs are in a person-to-person business, and in terms of connecting people there is huge value in what participatory photography has to offer; ‘Participatory photography is often very powerful and it can tick a lot of boxes’ (L.Watts).

However, despite recognising its potential and currency the larger NGOs make limited use of participatory photography. Whilst many have run small, contained projects, participatory photography has not become mainstream within humanitarian communications. The NGO staff interviewed all spoke about wanting to work more with participatory photography but none had any concrete plans to initiate projects or intentions to adopt the method more widely within their communications strategies. When questioned about this – NGOs’ wholesale endorsement of participatory photography but seeming reluctance to commission projects – issues of money and funding aside, the communications staff interviewed spoke of a certain wariness, echoing critiques of the field already discussed. They all refer to having seen many ‘shoddy’ (J.Cabon 2012) and ‘tokenistic’ (J.Crombie, 2012) projects that apply participatory photography methods ‘lazily’ (J.Crombie, 2012). **Crombie**, Head of Film and Photography at Save the Children, has the sense that many projects ‘are making a nod towards doing something more right on’ but are more interested in the media hit than engaging communities (J.Crombie, 2012).

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<sup>62</sup> The rest of this chapter draws on interviews with three ‘Heads of Photography’, working in the communications departments at the UK offices of 3 big NGOs. Rather than repeated referencing of the interviewee detail and interview dates they are listed here: Joseph Cabon, Head of Photography at Christian Aid, interviewed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012; Jessica Crombie, Head of Photography and Film at Save the Children, interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2012; Lawrence Watts, Head of Photography and Film at Action Aid, interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2012.

Despite numerous requests and much interest internally to do participatory photography projects Crombie has not done any. She explains that often the time constraint and organizational agenda proposed mean that she cannot see what is in it for the communities, beyond a few photographs. ‘It feels like it is a short term kick for the NGO and I haven’t been able to find a way to make it something different to that’ (J.Crombie, 2012). Müller, TAFOS’s founder, similarly commented that the requests he received from NGOs for projects were more in response to an organisational logic than to the community concerned (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> June).

In addition, the NGO staff cited a number of practical challenges to running projects; their points attesting to the complex nature of participatory photography initiatives. These included the recognition that organisations do not necessarily have the skills or staff capacity to organize and manage projects that can be time and input intensive. Often lasting over a number of years and requiring on-going support and contact, projects do not always sit comfortably within NGOs’ annual funding cycles (L.Watts, 2012). Other obstacles include the challenge of getting buy-in from the various different departments of the organization that need to be involved to run a successful project, having the right partner organisations and the challenge of finding funding (L.Watts, 2012).

The question also arose of where participatory photography belongs in the organisation (which department) and who ‘owns’ it. Is it communications work or is it programme work? Are the images to be used to raise funds, to advocate and campaign, to do media work or should it be left to the communities to decide? Who, and what department within an NGO, is championing a particular participatory photography initiative becomes crucial in defining the project’s agenda and aspirations. As a method it can be applied to meet multiple objectives. There is the danger however, Watts claims, that it gets lost between departmental agendas and no one ends up doing it (L.Watts, 2012). This matter echoes Dogra’s point on the complex and conflicting demands that NGOs put on images (2007) and indicates a chameleonic practice and method, a ‘jack of all trades’ (Godden

2008), that has evolved opportunistically rather than focusing and establishing itself within a specific arena<sup>63</sup>.

Watts points out that despite Action Aid's significant history with participatory methods more broadly it has done only limited participatory communications work because, in part, communications is viewed as a service department rather than as a strategic element of the NGO's work. Working in communications, he needs to receive raw material that he can shape for the NGO's different uses and there is a difficulty doing that with participatory work that should be defined by the people using it. This tension is key, he says. For while he is very much in favour of participatory photography work as a NGO communications professional he finds it hard to use. 'Maybe it just doesn't find its natural home in an NGO, if it is properly participatory it has got to belong to the people who produce it. They need autonomy, NGOs want to control' (L.Watts, 2012, interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> October).

His point reflects trends in the organisational make-up of the field of participatory photography. Independent practitioners and photographers who may have their own motivations but who do not carry the baggage or restrictions of an institutional agenda and framework, more often than not, instigate projects. While the large majority of these practitioners work in partnership or affiliation with NGOs, secure NGO funding or themselves establish NGOs or community organisations through which to manage their projects, the endeavors are, initially at least, able to develop their own agendas. It is often these individual practitioners who pioneer methods rather than the NGOs themselves.

Cabon thinks that despite its apparent currency, participatory photography use by the NGO world has 'plateaued' because despite people's excitement over its potential as a tool it has not been used appropriately. 'Maybe expectations were put upon it that it could not realistically deliver' he surmises, with practitioners learning as they went along about the dynamics of delivering projects (J.Cabon, 2012). People are taking a step back and reviewing what is possible with

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<sup>63</sup> Here we see illustrated how participatory photography projects in failing to adequately define their activities and purpose and choosing instead to cloak themselves in an open-ended rhetoric of empowerment and participation ultimately end up undermining their own purchase. In their broad claims, they posit themselves as part communications project, part advocacy project, part educational project, part therapeutic project - the list could go on. The danger is that these projects, in the NGO operational landscape, fail to find a home and belong to no one.

participatory photography, which is a good thing as they become more aware of what projects involve and do not walk blindly into the work (J.Cabon, 2012, interview, 28<sup>th</sup> August).

Cabon hopes that soon there will be a spat of higher profile participatory photography projects taking their part in NGO communications and believes its time will come around again. In his mind, the complexity of what NGOs need to communicate and the possibilities of what can come out of participatory photography projects in terms of communicating complexity means that the potential partnership is still as potent as ever. ‘All kinds of things can happen out of participatory photography, you never can be certain what to expect... There is always that tinkle of excitement that you might just get a new way of looking at something.’ (J.Cabon, 2012). Ultimately though, while participatory photography may have a valuable and powerful role to play in humanitarian communications, Cabon believes that for NGOs the photographer, regardless of whether they are amateur or professional, an insider or parachuted in, has to be able to communicate the complexity of the subject and produce convincing images. ‘It is the power of the image that is most important not who took the photo’ (J.Cabon, 2012).

### **Concluding thoughts**

Despite the apparent widespread approval and sanctioning of participatory photography by NGOs, its actual use is limited due to the irresolvable tensions at the heart of the ‘NGO-ised’ model that make it complex to categorise and implement. This chapter points to two characteristics that define contemporary ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography: its ‘de-politicisation’ or detachment from a critical politics of social change and its navigation of the tension of two seemingly contrary modes of working - the top-down managerialist mode of the institutional world in which it operates and the bottom-up, self-determined mode of its participatory and emancipatory ethos. This could be described as clash between singular and plural modes. Despite NGO workers’ apparent desire to pursue participatory photography projects the tensions that define the sphere constrain and govern its potential, limiting its value and purchase within the context of NGO communications. As a result the practice has reached an impasse.

Practitioners emphasise the organic, unplanned beginnings and development of participatory photography projects<sup>64</sup> and the creative and intuitive character of photography that is stifled by managerial practices that attempt to control and contain initiatives rooted in creative processes of self-representation. They raise the question as to the extent to which creative processes of self-discovery can or should ever be planned or pre-determined (Belfiore 2007, 2010, Schwarzman 1993, Newman et al 2003). They bemoan having to ‘jump through hoops’ and ‘tick boxes’ in order to build the case for support that is required for funding sources<sup>65</sup>. Managerial and instrumental modes consistently undervalued and distorted the critical and creative work of participatory arts that harnesses qualities outside of its epistemological frameworks – qualities such as imagination, perceptivity, criticality, subjectivity, emotion, affect, relations, dialogue, collaboration and exchange.

How are practitioners to navigate the contrasting sectorial discourses and modes of operation in which the practice is emerged? This analysis has focused on the international NGO field but all participatory arts work takes place within a network of partnerships between people and organisations from different sectors who do not necessarily understand one another’s ways of working (Rooks 2014a). The result for practitioners is that they must become skilled jugglers of clashing agendas if they are to succeed, balancing an organic, open, responsive approach that does not impose frameworks with the need to navigate the labyrinth of competing desires of communities and the obligation to meet predetermined aims and objectives of project delivery. Contemporary participatory photography practice is defined by tensions that require practitioners to negotiate a path that involves ongoing brokering and compromise.

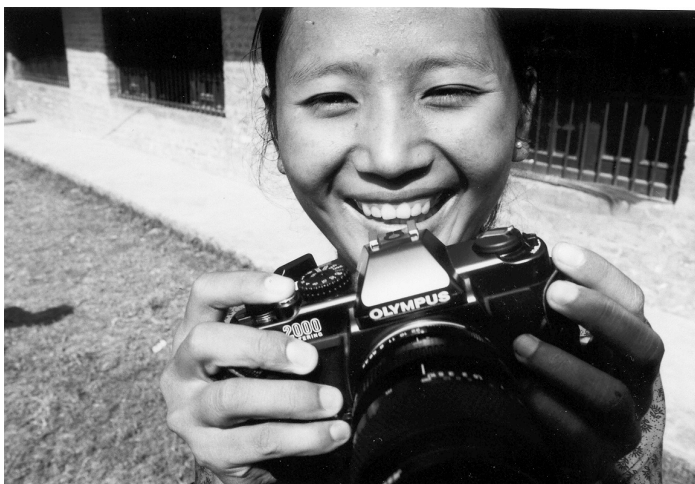
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<sup>64</sup> For **Duarte**, the **Chiapas Photography Project** was ‘just an idea, there was no plan, no programme and no money but I thought it would be valuable and an important thing to do’ (C.Duarte, 2008, interview, 13<sup>th</sup> April). For **Briski**, the whole process and development of **Kids With Cameras** and **Born Into Brothels** was ‘very organic, my vision was quite nebulous, it just developed, there was no big intention’ (Z.Briski, 2011, interview, 8<sup>th</sup> October). For **Germain** and his work with Brazilian street-children, ‘the project just is the way that it is, it is just the way it has evolved and happened, it has rarely been planned in a long term way’ (J.Germain, 2013, interview, 7<sup>th</sup> February).

<sup>65</sup> Practitioners interviewed for this research, including **Germain**, **Gottesman**, **Eid-Sabbagh** and **Briski** repeatedly touched on these issues, bemoaning the limitations of projects which involved predefined processes, outputs, timeframes and objectives and that failed to provide participants and practitioners with space and time to define and build a project on their own terms.

The critical debates explored in this chapter demonstrate that in its ‘NGO’ model, the governmentality of participatory photography has cloaked the practice in a vague language that avoids tying it to a grounded position or application. The flexibility of the medium of photography lends it to a constant, ongoing process of appropriation, re-negotiation and re-articulation. This can be interpreted as both strength and weakness. It can be seen as indicative of a powerful tool that can be re-molded anew each time, tailor-made to meet to the needs of each specific context of its application or it can be seen as characteristic of a method with no real basis or foundations, that cloaks itself within the narrative of social justice and empowerment, but that is applied pragmatically to meet a range of contradictory ends.

Given these concerns, what is the future of an NGO-ised model of participatory photography? This analysis argues that a mode of governmentalised participatory photography has the potential to dehumanise those subject to it. If projects continued to be standardised by managerial tendencies there is a real danger that the practice becomes appropriated to the point that the picture of the smiling child with a camera in their hand becomes just another NGO visual cliché.



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For practitioners of participatory photography this indicates the need for a concerted effort to find a theoretical and conceptual framework that can move the practice on from this impasse, that acknowledges the modes of governmentality in which it is embroiled, but that ties it to an analytics of power and politics and re-defines its emancipatory promise. Foucault's writing suggests that humanism could re-conceive itself by connecting people through history rather than human essence. This requires building a historicity, that acknowledges narrative authority, historical agency, and political memory (Malkki 1996:398) and constructing a concept of autonomy situated not in a metaphysical notion of an essentially free 'humanity' but as lying in 'an analytics of power' (Campbell 1998:519). Projects that seek to 're-politicise' must also be exercises that aim to 're-historicise' and that problematise relations to power. This then is the task of the next chapters.

# 4

## **A Radical Promise: Historicising participatory photography**

This chapter writes a ‘potential history’ for participatory photography rooting it in a tradition of civil photographic activism. It uses the experience of TAFOS, to illustrate how changes in political contexts have shaped shifting articulations<sup>66</sup> of participatory photography and to reclaim a history for the practice out of photography’s ‘lost chapters’ (Evans 1997, Ribalta 2011). Moving away from participatory photography’s common framing as a participatory method or ‘alternative’ to social documentary photography, this chapter looks to re-connect its development to a long-established, but under the radar, civil tradition of grassroots photographic activism ‘wherein citizens claim their right to photography, to view, use, archive and share it’ (Azoulay 2014:69)<sup>67</sup>.

McLeod and Thompson (2009:2) warn against the seductions of nostalgic narratives when considering themes of social change. The aim here is not to look back wistfully or to celebrate an imagined history in which a more perfect form of participatory photography (that never was) existed. The idea is to ‘re-presence’, to revive materials that might have been overlooked and to identify moments in order

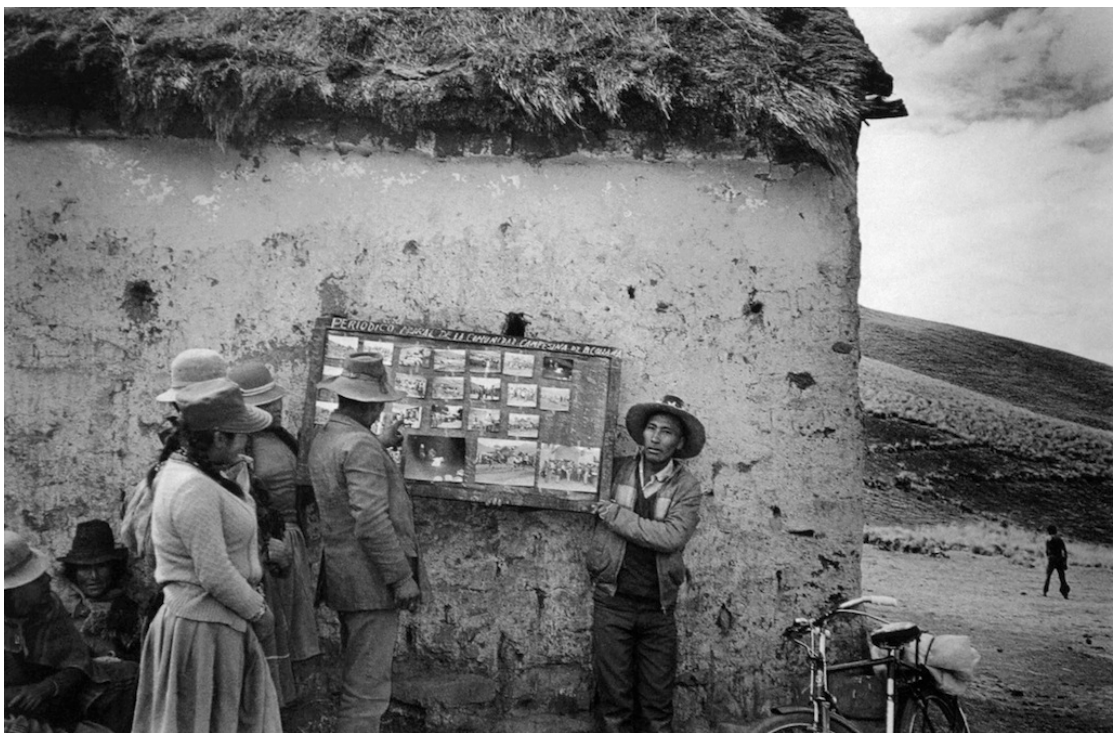
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<sup>66</sup> I use Hall’s theoretical concept of articulation (1997) as a framework to explore how the discourse and conceptual underpinnings of participatory photography have shifted. The concept refers to the process by which people or groups appropriate cultural practices, connecting ideas or things together, in order to meet their interests or objectives (1973, 1997). It allows us to consider how different groups have over time have appropriated the possibility of photography as a tool for self-representation and tied its practice to different political ideas and ideological concepts.

<sup>67</sup> This chapter hinges on Azoulay’s notion of ‘potential history’ and its purpose within her proposed new political imaginary of photography (2014). Writing a ‘potential history’ she suggests is the work of interfering in historical narratives and reviving as active materials that which might have been repressed, removed or overlooked. The idea is to use such moments as central threads and axes to construct an alternate history (Azoulay 2014:24). Building a civil discourse and history of photography is crucial to Azoulay’s commitment to a ‘renewed articulation of photography as a civil practice held not only in private hands and that enables us to re-imagine relations among individuals and between them and the world’ (2014:28). It is about creating a history when photography is understood as an ‘activity of the many’ (2014:40). In this sense an investigation of participatory photography is located as one of ‘the numerous contrary projects, uses and moments’ that needs to be assembled and threaded into an alternative tradition which might form the basis for a new regime (Azoulay 2014:30).

to weave an alternative narrative (Azoulay 2014:24). The aim is to build a genealogy which can help to re-focus participatory photography's orientation, to root it within a specific narrative of civil photography that helps us re-imagine its future use. The story of TAFOS, well established within Latin American photographic histories<sup>68</sup> but which has been rarely written about in English, is described in part to illustrate the shifting frames of community-based photographic activism and in part to elaborate a mini genealogy that can be located within and connected to other 'moments' (such as The Worker Photography Movement and UK community photography in 1970s-80s) within a wider photographic history of civil activism.

### The TAFOS story



Wall newspaper in Alto Collana, Melgar, Puno, 1989  
Jacinto Chila, Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS

*'It all started in 1986, when Gregorio Condori asked to borrow a camera.'*  
(Müller in TAFOS 2006:20)

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<sup>68</sup> TAFOS is often featured in Latin American photography anthologies such as Mario Testino's (ed) *Lima Peru* 2007, Damiani; Billeter, Erika, 2007, *Canto La Realidad: Fotografía Latinoamericana 1860-1993*, Planeta and Alejandro Castellote (ed) 2007, *Mapas Abiertos: Fotografía Latinoamericana, 1991-2002*, Lunwerk Editores

Condori, a campesino leader, had seen the photographers, Thomas and Helga Müller, working around Ocongate, a small highland community near Cusco where he lived. He needed the camera because he needed proof. A judge was demanding a highbred alpaca as a bribe to ensure the ruling in a litigation case came out favorably for the community. Gregorio took a picture of the judge with his alpaca and went to Cusco to file an official complaint against him.



Gregorio Condori's picture of the judge with his alpaca, 1986  
© TAFOS

On his return, Condori and Müller put a proposal to the Ocongate Committee of Human Rights to run some photography workshops. It was suggested that the local committee choose some of their members who could act as community photographers and Müller would show them

how to use a camera. This group became the first workshop of what was to be called *Los Talleres de Fotografía Social (TAFOS)*.

From 1986 until its closure in 1998, TAFOS ran almost thirty photography workshops in 8 districts across Peru<sup>69</sup>. They worked with 270 people from *campesino* communities to miners, women, youth, communities living in the barrios of the cities, Afro-Peruvian communities and communities from the rain forests. These grassroots photographers shot over 4,200 rolls of black and white film and produced over 150,000 images (Llosa 2006:34).

At the outset there were no such grand plans. It started organically, in response, says Müller, to a great need felt by those who participated. This, Müller believes, is key to understanding it all.

*'In TAFOS images you see pictures that are very impactful, naive, powerful, almost coming from a perspective of rebirth, and this is because people were very clear in their minds what they wanted to say. They had a deep-felt need to communicate, to leave the isolation in their minds, in their*

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 2 for a chart that gives full details of all the TAFOS workshops, their durations, locations and community group.

*forests, in their barrios and to say, 'Carajo, this is me and I am proud of it. I do not want to be manipulated.'* (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> June)

For Condori, the camera was a tool he could use to denounce, to speak up against corruption in his village. For the many TAFOS photographers who followed, photography fulfilled a similar function, providing them with a way to document, explain, protest against, defend and celebrate the circumstances in which they were living. Talking to anyone involved in TAFOS they all insist that to understand the project you had to understand the context out of which it grew.

The project took place during one the most violent and desperate periods of Peruvian history. Economic collapse meant the large majority of the country from the isolated indigenous communities in the mountains to the swelling barrios of the large cities was living in dire and precarious circumstances. In 1980, Peru had its first elections after twelve years of military rule. However, the hope inspired by the return to democracy was short lived. Political corruption, violence, hyperinflation, crime, a dramatic fall in real wages and spiraling debt led people to call this period the 'Lost Decade of the 80s' (Starn et al 2005:440). The numbers of people living in poverty exploded while the country's infrastructure started to crumble. Huge numbers of *campesinos* migrated to the cities looking to build new lives.

As the economic crisis deepened and people's discontent with traditional party politics grew, the Communist Party of Peru, better known as Sendero or The Shining Path, started to wage their revolutionary assault on the Peruvian state. It was to become one of the bloodiest and most violent internal conflicts in Latin American of the late twentieth century<sup>70</sup>. Most Peruvians, of all backgrounds, rejected the violent authoritarianism of the Shinning Path and they failed to build up a broad support among Peru's poor (Starn et al 2005:319). However, their terror tactics drastically affected the lives of many people, who were already living hand-to-mouth existences in the isolated rural communities of the Peruvian Andes where much of the violence was waged.

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<sup>70</sup> The Sendero advocated a Maoist class based Marxism with armed revolution as its central force. Driven by a fierce sense of destiny, the movement called for the destruction of the state and the building of a Maoist utopia in its place. Its militants swore to kill and die for the revolution. Abimael Guzmán, Sendero's leader, called for his troops to cross the 'river of blood' in their destruction of the state (cited in Starn 2005:287). Their tactics ranged from bombing to kidnap, torture, rape, murder, massacre and intimidation.

From 1983-85 the emergency zones had grown from nine to 27 provinces and the government initiated a fierce response, condemning anyone who exposed the slightest indication of leftish leanings or support for human rights. Security forces used ‘disappearances’ to instill fear and, much as their adversaries, employed murder, rape and intimidation in their quest to eliminate the rebels. Army sweeps would destroy and upturn communities. As the government troops moved in to try to crush the Maoist rebels the *campesino* communities found themselves stuck in the middle of two lethal forces with violence escalating as they retaliated and counter-retaliated against each other<sup>71</sup>.

**Juan Carlos Paucar**, one of TAFOS’s facilitators who now works as a taxi driver in Lima, explains that in this context photography and TAFOS’s activities fulfilled a vital ‘role of denouncement, to confront abuses and unjust situations’ (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> June). The need was not just to protest and denounce. Photography also enabled a process of ‘*autoreconocimiento*’, of self-recognition, for those involved (Llosa in TAFOS 2006:40). **Annie Bungereoth**, a British photographer who worked at TAFOS from 1989-93, recalls ‘there was that need to work on the self-respect and the strength of people, to build some sense of their own value so they could defend themselves against the terrorism of the Sendero on one side and the counter-terrorism from the military on the other’ (A.Bungereoth, 2012, interview, 1<sup>st</sup> February). TAFOS offered up photography as a means to explore the familiar details of their lives, to celebrate their culture, to take back control of their representation and reaffirm identity (TAFOS 2006)<sup>72</sup>.

From the 1970s onwards there had been a sharp growth in the popular movement in Peru linked to the rise of the left and to socio-economic factors that saw increasing economic hardship, huge rural-urban migration and agrarian reform. The number of community-based committees, NGOs and progressive church-led organisations, working to attend to the needs of the working population grew significantly

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<sup>71</sup> The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in 2001 to investigate abuses committed during this period of bloody internal conflict put the death toll at 69,280. Their report revealed that the Shining Path were responsible for 46% of the deaths, with the government security forces killing roughly a third (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2004). 75% of the victims who were killed or disappeared spoke Quechua as their native language despite the fact that the 1993 census found that only 20% of the Peruvian population spoke Quechua or other indigenous languages (CVR 2004).

<sup>72</sup> This rallying cry had its roots in the indigenista movement active since the turn of the century. Those leading TAFOS were part of a leftist, middle class, intellectual scene that supported the reclamation of indigenous identity and the right of the working man to define themselves and assert their right to life (A.Bungereoth, 2012, interview, 1<sup>st</sup> February).

(Schonwalder 2004). As the crisis deepened, new forms of grassroots social mobilization sprouted up. Soup kitchens, peasant patrols, mother's clubs, youth groups, unions, internal refugee organisations, agrarian leagues, community associations and 'Vaso de Leche'<sup>73</sup> committees created a bottom-up support network and lifelines for many of the population struggling to keep their heads above water. Communities rallied to co-ordinate and defend themselves. Starn notes that 'the tremendous ability to organize in the face of what appeared to be certain defeat was surely the decade's greatest achievement' (2005:441).



*March, Cusco*  
**Justo Vargas**, Cusco workshop, TAFOS

It was within this web of activities that made up the popular movement of the day that TAFOS found its place and *raison d'être*. TAFOS identified itself as 'a popular communication project that aims for representatives of the popular movement to become protagonists in their own communication' (Müller 1988<sup>74</sup>). The photographers were referred to as '*los fotógrafos populares*', the people's photographers. TAFOS defined their work by the concept of 'social photography'.

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<sup>73</sup> 'Vaso de Leche' was a feeding programme aimed at reducing malnourishment

<sup>74</sup> MÜLLER, Thomas. "Proyecto Talleres de Fotografía Social (TAFOS)". In: *Informes de Planificación y Evaluación de Talleres 1988 – 1989*. Lima: Archivo Fotográfico TAFOS / PUCP, 1989. Without page.

It viewed itself as a project of ‘accompaniment and support’ (Pastor 2007:3) to the associations fighting for structural change in Peru. They lacked the tools and the expertise to document and protest and TAFOS saw photography as ‘a hinge and a bridge for these organisations’ (Müller in TAFOS 2006:22) as they sought ways to communicate their concerns to those around them.

### **The rise of TAFOS**

The workshops in Ocongate sowed the seed. Müller soon instigated a second pilot workshop in the barrio of El Agustino in Lima and by the end of 1987 there were 39 social photographers working with 20 cameras, assisted by Müller and his wife Helga, organizing localised exhibitions and wall newspapers. Initially the project received no formal funding. Costs were covered by donations from family and colleagues of the Müllers in Germany. As attention around the project started to build the funding started to come in. El Centro de Estudios y Accion para la Paz (CEPAZ) provided the initial funds to cover the organizational costs and as TAFOS grew it attracted funds from a range of international donors and development agencies<sup>75</sup> to underwrite the costs of the workshops, the offices and their dissemination activities.

By the end of 1988 the Müllers created a central staff team to respond to the increasing demand that the project was generating. Two offices were set up in Lima and Cusco. In 1990 TAFOS registered officially as a non-profit organization. They also created their first formal strategy document and laid down a three-year plan (el Trienal 1991-93). Building an institution was never intended but that is exactly what TAFOS was becoming.

By the end of 1990 TAFOS was supporting 12 different workshops and running to keep up with the interest that was being generated. The expansion of workshops in the Southern Andes meant that TAFOS had a presence that extended across the area where the Shinning Path was most active. The pictures produced during these workshops reflected the militancy and urgency of the times. Documenting abuses

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<sup>75</sup> Over the years these included Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED), Brücke der Bruderhilfe Switzerland, Evangelisches Missionswerk Germany, Schweizer Missionsgesellschaft Bethlehem Switzerland, Fastenopfer der Schweizer Katholiken Switzerland, Lutheran World Relief de Estados Unidos, Oxfam and Christian Aid.



and the *campesino*'s struggle to survive and defend themselves, the TAFOS photographers put themselves at great risk. In the mines, the Federacion Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros Metalurgicos y Siderurgicos del Peru (FNTMMSP) saw photography as having the potential to give them a new tool to use in their strikes and other protests. Despite huge obstacles and opposition from the authorities the miners documented the inhuman and often mortal conditions in which they worked.



*Miner in a workshop*  
**Daniel Pajuelo**, Morococha workshop, TAFOS



*Photos in a miner's strike, Lima*  
**Felix Asto**, Morococha workshop, TAFOS

A buzz surrounded the project; unions and local organisations came calling, wanting their own photography workshops. Intellectuals and activists were drawn to the powerful images and messages being produced and others were keen to access and engage with the thriving network of grassroots leaders that the project had created. With wider recognition galleries started to open their doors and the press began to publish the work regularly. Dissemination happened principally through two channels; through local organisations and workshops who would focus on local, regional and sometimes national circulation and then through the TAFOS

team, who would focus on dissemination through channels at national and international level.

The photographers and their organisations were prolific and inventive with how they used their images, singularly focused on getting their message out and free of conventions for how images ought or ought not be displayed. Exhibitions, from formal to makeshift, were held anywhere possible - on walls, in the streets, in market places, at conventions, community meetings and cultural events. Collections of pictures would be produced and laid out on the floors of plazas, in offices and in the middle of the path as people stopped and talked. Images were held aloft as people marched and demonstrated, they were incorporated into wall newspapers, made into flyers and posters. Mobile exhibitions would be created on carts that could be pushed around at public gatherings.



*Exhibition at a regional congress*  
**Gabino Quipecondori,**  
Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS



*Exhibition at campesino federation meeting*  
**Gabino Quipecondori,**  
Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS

Galleries and universities in Peru's cities hosted more formal exhibitions creating a considerable audience among Peru's middle class, its creative scene and intellectuals. Exhibitions were opportunities to agitate and protest. Whenever the images were being shown removed from environments where the photographers had direct control, TAFOS sought to maintain the coherence of their perspective and message. **Llosa** writes that TAFOS understood itself as 'transmitter of the discourse', its role being not to intervene in 'its formulation, only in its presentation' (Llosa 1995:23)<sup>76</sup>.

According to Müller TAFOS tried to build a public at a point at which this was very difficult for the organisations to do themselves (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> June). The images caught the interest of the international press and featured in numerous highly respected publications all over the world. Exhibitions were held globally and the project was recognized with honors and accolades in both NGO and photography circles<sup>77</sup>. 1991 marked the peak of TAFOS's activity. Its team had swelled significantly to 30 members; there was a total of 14 workshops, hundreds of '*acciones de difusion*' (dissemination activities) and a strong sense of collectivism, camaraderie and a buoyant team spirit. The project's reach was broad. Its presence was felt on a localized, national and international level. Llosa has written that, at this time, TAFOS was in its 'own private paradise' (1996:5) while the rest of the country was in disarray.

### **TAFOS's strategy and ways of working**

There were two visions that drove TAFOS (Llosa 1995). One was to create a national movement of social photographers and the other was to bring about the complete transfer of workshops to the local organisations to which the

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<sup>76</sup> The 1991 exhibition in London's Photographer's Gallery reflected this ethos. David Chandler commended an exhibition born out of a 'collective effort of communication' (The Photographer's Gallery 1991:5) with TAFOS members inputting into the show's direction, curation, edit and catalogue. He wrote in the exhibition catalogue,

*'The means to control images, to take charge of the form and function of photography has perhaps never been more significant or widely coveted. In this context, the work of TAFOS is an important initiative, when seen also against the background of years of oppression and misrepresentation, it is a vital of resistance in what remains a constant struggle for survival.'* (Photographer's Gallery 1991:5)

<sup>77</sup> TAFOS was covered in numerous publications including *Caretas* in Peru, *Der Spiegel* and *Geo* in Germany, *el Pais* and *Cambio 16* in Spain, *The New York Times* and *Time* in the USA, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* in the UK. Exhibitions were held in USA, Spain, Germany and in London at The Photographer's Gallery (Chambers 1991). The project built a name within photography circles winning a coveted Mother Jones award and within NGO and development circles, with UNESCO naming TAFOS as a constituent part of the Decade of Education and Communication (1987-1996).

photographers belonged (1995:21). The transferal of workshops was seen as ‘the only guarantee of long-term continuity of the experience – of TAFOS and the workshops – and its real insertion into the life of the country’ (TAFOS 1991). The emphasis was always less about the continuation of TAFOS and more about the continuation of social photography as an alternative form of communication.

The local organisations were viewed as ‘indispensable’ (Llosa in TAFOS 2006:40) on numerous levels as active partners in delivering the TAFOS mission<sup>78</sup>. The photographer-TAFOS-organisation dynamic was the backbone of the TAFOS endeavor. There was huge diversity within the 27 TAFOS workshops. The TAFOS workshops table (see Appendix 2) indicates how some were much more prolific and productive than others. Some workshops ran over years, others over months. Group sizes varied from just two to twenty eight photographers. Despite the differences the methodology and logistical framework used was relatively consistent.



*A meeting of the Ocongate workshop, 1987*  
**Serapio Verduzco**, Ocongate workshop, TAFOS

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<sup>78</sup> Practically they took charge of a certain amount of the co-ordination and centralization, for example selecting participants, and in terms of reach they gave TAFOS its local, regional and national scope. Often the workshops were made up of members of various different organisations that were all associated with a centralized body. In this way the workshops became places where activists that shared common interests came together.

Most of the TAFOS photographers had never laid their hands on a camera before they started the workshops. They would work initially with small automatic cameras (Yashicas T3s or Nikon L35AF) in order to avoid lengthy technical training and so that the photographers could get shooting straightaway. The facilitators used intuitive teaching styles rather than any form of set curriculum. They did not teach theories about composition and photographic technique rather encouraged an atmosphere where people learnt through trial and error, by taking pictures and making mistakes and critically discussing, debating and analyzing their images (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> June).

The TAFOS workshop facilitators saw their role as one of support. They provided basic training on technique, camera care, visual language and diffusion techniques. Otherwise the priority was to enable the photographers to define their own ways of making and using photographs. Participants devised their own constitutions and elected leaders, decided on subject matter and edited their images for local dissemination. Paucar, a TAFOS facilitator, emphasizes that fluidity was central to their approach because they never knew what would be in the images and how they might be used (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview). Talking at a photography conference in 1989, Enrique Larrea, explained,

*‘The workshop assumes not only a place for technical training but primarily a space for analysis, debate and collective judgment, where a photographer nurtures something much more important than good technique: ideas, objectives, projects’* (Larrea 1989).

Photographers would meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to discuss and debate their images, plan activities and respond to requests that they had had to photograph one thing or another. Some groups with access to labs in Lima, Cusco and Puno received darkroom training but for the majority of workshops films would be taken off by facilitators to be developed in TAFOS labs and then brought back<sup>79</sup>. In the meetings photographers would receive back their contact sheets from films taken the month before and the work prints of the images they had selected from the previous months contact sheets (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> June).

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<sup>79</sup> Developing of films and the making of prints was all done by hand. Taking charge of developing and printing meant that TAFOS could maintain professional standards and this was one of the primary reasons why the project almost exclusively used black and white film (A.Bungeroth, 2012, interview, 1<sup>st</sup> February).

## Shifting politics and shifting purpose

In 1990, Alberto Fujimori was elected as president of Peru. His record was to be ‘mixed and controversial’ (Starn et al 2005:481). His free market economic policies brought hyperinflation under control but unemployment spiraled and record levels of poverty were recorded in three states. Frustrated by the slow progress with which anti-terrorism laws were being passed through Congress, he took drastic measures and assumed quasi-dictatorial powers in a bloodless coup that saw the suspension of the constitution and the abolition of Congress, regional governments and judicial power. He continued to rule with a populist outlook but combined this with a firm belief in the ‘*mano dura*’ (firm hand) and that only authoritarian rule would solve Peru’s problems. He refused to punish human rights abuses. Public meetings were banned and popular groups were practically dismantled under his anti-terrorism legislation.

Fujimori’s policies were not only abrupt ‘but decisive for projects like TAFOS’ (Llosa in TAFOS 2006:41). Extreme neo-liberalist policies, popular patronage used by the Fujimori regime, the militarization of the civil population in the countryside and new labor legislation left little space for the work of the unions that had been so active. Growing political violence prevented the free functioning of community organisations with leaders being threatened and murdered.

The changing political landscape reduced the demand TAFOS was receiving for workshops from organisations. Müller wrote that many of the organisation’s leaders sympathized with the Fujimori regime and did not now feel the need to communicate themselves to the country (Müller in TAFOS 2006:32). Furthermore, there was a broader move that discredited socialism and the politics of the left, the ideological fuel of both the grassroots community organisations and TAFOS. TAFOS acknowledged this gradual shift, asking,

*‘If the left is now archaic, what then happens with our organisations, the majority of which were born and have grown within it? Are we also archaic?’<sup>80</sup>*

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<sup>80</sup> TAFOS. “Informe Evaluativo 1991”. In: *TAFOS: Informes de Planificación y Evaluación de Talleres 1990 – 1991*. Lima: Archivo Fotográfico TAFOS / PUCP. p. 2

The issue was not just external. An internal document reflected that ‘the majority of the team believed in the viability of TAFOS, but without believing at the same time in the work that underlined the foundation of TAFOS: socialism and the popular movement’ (cited in Llosa 1996:10). An internal review in 1992 concluded that TAFOS had to think in terms of a significant overhaul and reformulation of its aims and activities. The final report bluntly stated,

*‘In reality it is evident that TAFOS’s problems are much more serious than what was thought. There has been a large deterioration in the quality of the workshops and the few transitory initiatives have not been made concrete ... the defeat of the popular movement prevents the fulfillment of the original aims and the costs of financing TAFOS do not justify its actual existence’<sup>81</sup>,*

With the changing political landscape there had been a creeping shift in the nature and form of the TAFOS workshops. Llosa remarks that their direct impact was ‘no longer a given’ (1995:7). While they still fulfilled their primary function of mobilising public opinion the level of activity in some workshops was very low. There were few localised dissemination activities and the organisations were increasingly failing to take charge of workshops or provide centralized spaces with the political vision that had previously underpinned the activities.

It was accepted that workshops could no longer run indefinitely and TAFOS began to deliver workshops with defined timeframes and outcomes. Gone was the responsiveness as ‘the institutional timetable set the agenda’ (Llosa 1995:25). The idea of the workshops being transferred to the local organisations disappeared. TAFOS began taking charge of most of the tasks and staff tried to systematize its ways of working – choosing the areas and communities it wanted to work with, setting themes that the workshops would cover, limiting the number of films shot.

For **Villafuerte**, a TAFOS photographer and staff member, it was a natural progression for the project, ‘the political conflicts had diversified and the images needed to follow suit, it was less a world of ‘*denuncias*’ and a change was necessary’ (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> March). The work still continued to build ‘the longed-for wider image of Peru’ (Müller in TAFOS 2006:32) with

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<sup>81</sup> Hinojosa, Iván. “Informe Comisión de Proyecto”. In *TAFOS: Informes de Planificación y Evaluación de Talleres 1992*. Lima: Archivo Fotográfico TAFOS / PUCP, 1992. p. 2

workshops in the jungle and with Afro Peruvian communities being added to the TAFOS portfolio.

TAFOS's final years saw a shift in how its organisers sought to frame and give meaning to its activities. Bit-by-bit TAFOS modified its focus, language, and its political and ideological framework in the absence of the energetic popular movement and the changing parameters of the political struggle. By the final workshops the rhetoric had completely shifted and focused on the desire for a free, just and democratic society for all of the inhabitants of Peru. The championing of 'lo popular' was all but gone (Llosa 1995-6:20). In many senses TAFOS's final workshops more closely resembled contemporary 'NGO' participatory photography projects with their organization-led agendas, set timeframes and practitioner-directed workshops.

The organization began to envision a wider field of activities that proposed the gradual reduction of its workshops and the formation and growth of profit making activities through a new self-financing TAFOS agency which would incorporate the work of professional photographers and supply images to press and NGO clients. The new direction was divisive and led to internal wrangling. Müller's words echoed the general feeling of many,

*'... it has to be understood that TAFOS was always a project in support of the workshops and that it would not have become institutionalized or made sense as a NGO without them'* (Müller in TAFOS 2006:33).

As the workshops closed so the team got smaller and as such 'the big family that had been built within TAFOS was eliminated' (Llosa 1996:9). As disagreement over TAFOS's future surfaced the management committee increasingly took charge of all decisions. In 1995 the last two workshops took place and a new director, Mariella Sala, took charge. With experience in both the NGO and communications world, it was hoped that she would be able to see TAFOS through the transition it was undertaking.



## The closure of TAFOS

In December 1998, Müller closed TAFOS. Peruvian non-profit law invests the founders of an organisation with the power to shut it down even in the face of resistance from staff and participants. Although new initiatives were being undertaken and targets for income generation were being met, in his mind the discrepancy between the investment and outcomes had become too big (Müller in TAFOS 2006:33). TAFOS, with its large staff and administration, had become unjustifiably expensive to run, 'it was expensive as an institution, not as a movement of photographers'<sup>82</sup>. Sala, the director at the time, says there was more to his decision,

*"It was because it was no longer what he (Thomas Müller) wanted ... the donors were still on board and did not want it to close, it was him who wanted the change... ultimately, the explanation is that he was fed up with it all"*<sup>83</sup>

Bungeroth suggests that part of it was that Müller had lost interest in the content of the images being produced (A.Bungeroth, 2012, interview, 1<sup>st</sup> February). His own words echo this sentiment; 'the photographers of the previously combative workshops only documented leaders' parties and aspects of daily life' (Müller in TAFOS 2006:32).

For Müller, it was not simply a matter of reviving the workshops. The politics had changed and with the demise of the network of popular organisations it was no longer possible for the workshops to run as they were originally envisaged. Whilst the funds to sustain activities were still there, the ideology to drive them forward was not. 'It was a moment and the moment had gone' (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> June). Despite efforts to realign and rearticulate TAFOS's vision around themes of culture and rights, Müller preferred to see it end rather than to continue so far removed from its original articulation<sup>84</sup>.

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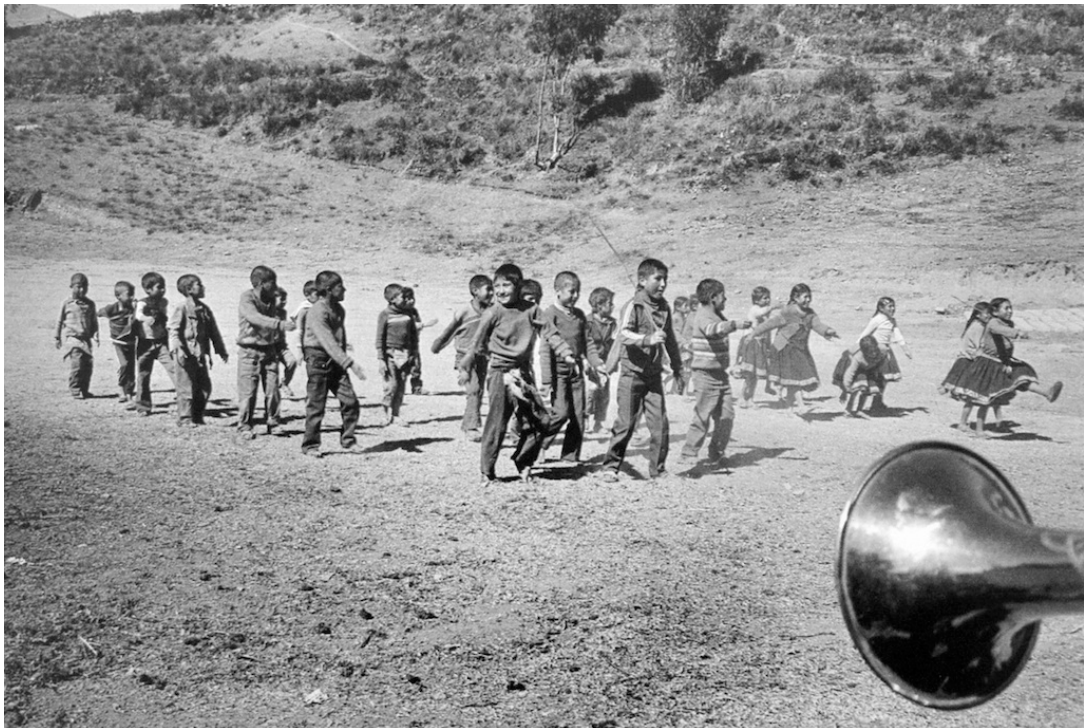
<sup>82</sup> Müller cited in Colunge (2008:73)

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Sala quote in Colunge (2008:73)

<sup>84</sup> Many others in the TAFOS team saw it differently. They felt there was still a need and reason for workshops. The gentler images of later workshops had their own value in the recording of the intimacies of the day-to-day, customs and traditions. For these people TAFOS and its workshops still had a role to play in the building of a democratic Peru and had not been given an opportunity to fulfill its potential. The division, tension and anger felt over the closure of TAFOS is clearly reflected in numerous documents and interviews. For a number of people the issue was not that TAFOS no longer had a purpose but rather an issue of control and Muller not being able to let go and allow other people to find new directions for the organisation.

In Peru, NGOs filled the gap left by the death of the popular movement and its associated organisations. In its latter years TAFOS had attracted numerous funders and had significant donors from the development community including UN bodies, Oxfam, Christian Aid and others. Just like today's participatory photography scene, the project became immersed in the NGO world. It is revealing that it was these funders who were more opposed to its closure than the actual photography workshops and local organisations involved, many of which had already ceased to operate (Colunge 2008:73). It would seem that in its final years the donors had more invested in the idea of TAFOS than the participants it had been created to support.

### **A selection of images by TAFOS photographers**



*Parade for the nation, Chichina community*  
**Melquiades Ramos**, Ocongate workshop, TAFOS



*Communal work to fix the roof in the Killi Killi community*  
**Gabino Quispecondori, Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS**



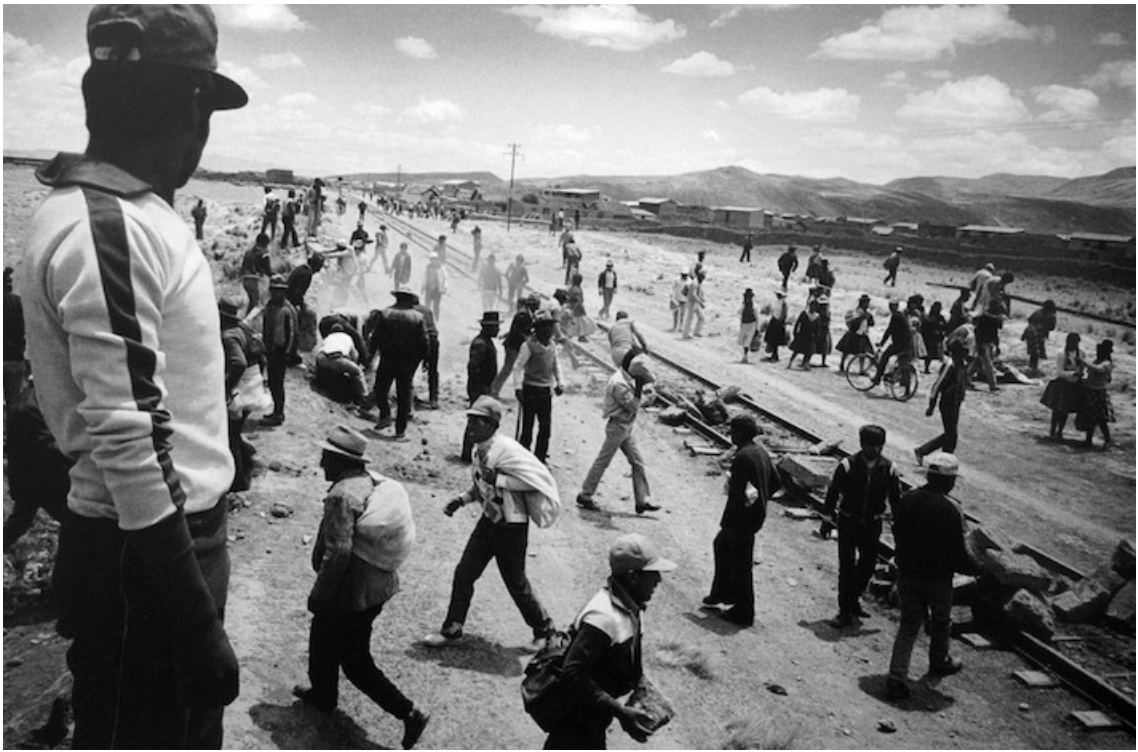
*Potato harvest on the community farm*  
**Gabino Quispecondori, Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS**



*An accident on the way to a mobilization*  
**Gabino Quispecondori**, Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS



*Landgrab by the Quisuni Agrarian Workers Co-operative*  
**Sebatian Turpo**, Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS



*Blocking the train line during a regional strike*  
**Melchor Lima**, Ayaviri workshop, TAFOS



*Military intervention on the university campus, Lima*  
**Victor Bustamante**, San Marcos workshop, TAFOS



*Coming to wash clothes in the river, Maceda*  
**Jairo Isuiza**, Rio Maya workshop, TAFOS



*Ronderos (voluntary patrolmen) in Mishqiyacu valley*  
**Eusebio del Aguila**, Tres Unidos workshop, TAFOS

## **The loss of politics**

The story of TAFOS provides an insight into the shift in the articulation of participatory photography that has heralded the evolution of the ‘NGO-ised’ version of participatory photography and the ‘empowering with cameras’ narrative that is common today. As the era of big politics has fallen out of fashion so the practice of community-based photographic production has sought new languages to give itself meaning and attach itself to in order to survive. The transformation has involved ‘an overarching shift from political action to pedagogy’ (De Cuyper 1997:9). ‘Politics’ has become defined as the right to self-representation or the ‘right to voice’. Whereas the practitioners of TAFOS’s times talked in terms of political activism and struggle, contemporary practitioners speak of empowering and giving voice. Their focus is less on action (what happens with the images) and more on method and pedagogy (workshop content, teaching and facilitation styles). There is now an emphasis on personal transformation at the cost, some commentators argue, of a focus on meaningful social change (Ballerini 1995, 1997, Kester 1995).

This debate is illustrated by the discussion surrounding **Shooting Back**. Despite its apparent success, a number of critics took issue with its enterprise suggesting that, far from improving circumstances for the children involved, the project tended to ‘reinforce the status quo rather than question it’ (Ballerini 1997:169) by engendering conservative ideologies of poverty (Ballerini 1995, 1997, Kester 1995, 1999). Kester highlights the issue as lying in the persistent use of the concept of empowerment that places a priority on personal transformation and in doing so moves the focus away from the systematic causes of poverty, marginalisation and disenfranchisement, ‘putting in its place a closed circuit of creative personal transformation’ (1995:7).

Critics question the transformative potential of projects that frame their activities in a therapeutic model that focuses on cultivating self-esteem rather than a politically framed critical consciousness. They argue that projects that encourage participants to believe that their own efforts and self-motivation are necessary for progress, that it is ‘up to them’, do not give them a chance to understand their own position as

‘underprivileged’ and the social and economic conditions that make them so. It does not help them to develop a political critique. Cruikshank argues that the empowering approach with its emphasis on ‘self-esteem’ replaces the political with the personal and promises to solve social problems by heralding a revolution, not against capitalism, racism, the patriarchy but against the (wrong) way of governing ourselves (Cruikshank 1999). The focus on individual transformation leaves little space for an emancipatory political vision.

The concern is that contemporary participatory photography as it has come to frame itself around educational, cultural or empowerment values has lost its link to an ideology that enables it to be part of a political critique seeking to affect systemic social change. When practitioners fail to clearly define the terms on which their endeavors are grounded they avoid having to deal with the tensions and contradictions inherent to their work. The easy way out has been to concentrate, ‘without articulation, description or evaluation’, on practice (De Cuyper 1997:9, Kelly 1983). This is a framework that stands in contradiction to the historical reasons for the development of community photography (Kelly 1983:22).

### **Reclaiming a ‘potential’ politics for participatory photography**

To re-establish the political character of participatory photography it is necessary to connect to a sense of the method’s political past. I propose that the story of TAFOS is but one example within a tradition of civil photographic activism, one of photography’s many histories, that once revived can aid contemporary practitioners to reflect on and ground their own practice within a political ethos. Here participatory photography initiatives of recent decades are framed within a vibrant but overlooked tradition of community-based, civil photographic activity that has stretched back to the popular beginnings of the medium.

Azoulay argues that for too long ‘vertical’ photography (an instrumental-possessive-sovereign framing of the medium) has been the established logic and dominant model of photography (2014). There is a need to contest this historiography of photography and build a ‘competing’ tradition by tracing moments that have left tracks but have been marginalised, forgotten or committed



to oblivion (Azoulay 2014:69). The aim is to re-claim ‘the civil dimension of photography as an activity of many’ (Azoulay 2014:40).

The narrative of contemporary ‘NGO-ised’ participatory photography is rarely linked to a civil tradition of photographic history. It is more frequently elaborated as an ‘alternative’, a re-formulated mode of socially-engaged photographic practice which is defined in relation to traditions of social documentary and concerned photography<sup>85</sup>. It is understood as part of a search for new, more ‘ethical’ ways of working with photography, at a point where the critique of the social documentary tradition has thrown into question photography’s potential to make a difference and affect social justice issues (Rosler 1989, Solomon-Godeau 1994, Sontag 1977)<sup>86</sup>. Many practitioners of participatory photography come from a background in social documentary and photojournalism<sup>87</sup>. This is unsurprising given the dominance of these traditions in the context of socially engaged photographic work. When listening to these photographers speak about what brought them to the field a similar story emerges – one of seeking a different way to work with photography, of a commitment to working on themes of social justice but of disillusionment with the existing models in the social documentary visual tradition. **McGirr**, founder of **FotoKids** was formerly a Reuters photographer who had covered the war in Nicaragua. She communicates a creeping sense of doubt about what her pictures achieved.

*"I got tired of observing, of saying to myself, 'Here's a picture of a problem, I hope somebody will do something about it because I can't.' And moving on to the next assignment,"*<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> From photography’s earliest days social campaigners such as Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis (1971) picked up the camera to document issues of social inequality and injustice, using imagery to agitate and push agendas of social change. Committed to representing the human condition, the social documentary tradition has focused on documenting the lives of disadvantaged people or social issues with the aim of instigating political or social reform. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, generations of documentary photographers have taken up the humanist mantle seeking to record the human condition, to call attention to inequality, poverty and war, to expose social injustice and highlight the plight of those who suffer and this photographic tradition has become central to photography’s history and narrative. See Arthur Rothstein’s text ‘*Documentary Photography*’ (1986, Focal Press) for an overview.

<sup>86</sup> Despite its much lauded status and history, recent decades have seen the unpicking of the social documentary and concerned photographic tradition. Its motivation, achievements, values and ethics have all been under interrogation (Rosler 1989, Sliwinski 2004, Solomon-Godeau 1994, Sontag 1977). Rosler summarises the critique writing, ‘the expose, the compassion, the outrage, of documentary fueled by the dedication to reform has shaded over into combinations of exoticism, tourism, voyeurism, psychologism and metaphysics, trophy hunting – and careerism’ (1989:305). Fierce debate around its effectiveness, its role in perpetuating stereotypes and a questioning of its ethics and power dynamics has shot holes in the romantic narrative of social documentary’s power to enable social change.

<sup>87</sup> Some have studied and trained as documentary photographers, others have been working photojournalists. A large number of the founders / lead practitioners of projects discussed in this thesis were working as photojournalists when they came to initiate participatory photography projects including Jim Hubbard (Shooting Back), Zana Briski (Kids with Cameras), Thomas Mueller (TAFOS), Nancy McGirr (FotoKids)

<sup>88</sup> quoted from a 2006 Reuters interview with Bernd Debusmann, available at <http://www.banderasnews.com/0602/art-outofdump.htm> (retrieved 22nd February 2012)

McGirr's sense of unease and frustration is familiar to many contemporary socially-engaged photographers. Bleiker and Kay contend that this moral confusion underlines a key problematic: 'the privileged position of the photographer and the consequences that issue from this position' (2007:148). Numerous commentators stress that whatever its good intentions, the practices of representation in social documentary are unequal, even exploitative (Rosler 1989, Solomon-Godeau 1994, Sontag 1977). Ultimately, the photographer who parachutes in, and the western press in general, has the privilege to frame, objectify and thus politicise another person's suffering. Such critiques link the invoke an image of social documentary photography as a form of domination, resonant with colonial residues, that violate its subjects (Sontag 1977).

The rhetoric of participatory photography salvages the positive potential of photography to enable change and empower. The discourse of participation and photography proposes an alternative, a new means of engaging, collaborating and documenting injustice which reinvents the problematic power hierarchy between photographer and subject while sustaining the possibility of creating images that aim to transform and impact social issues. For McGirr, everything changed when she started handing out cameras to children on the rubbish dump in Guatemala City and she realized she had stumbled across her 'vocation' (N.McGirr, 2012, interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> February). Participatory photography proposes a new model for the photographic exchange that turns the photographer from an aggressor into a facilitator, educator, champion and mentor. It reinvents the photographic dynamic. It seeks to challenge notions of documentary authorship by reversing the traditional photographer-subject hierarchy. However, while presented as an alternative, aspects of participatory photography mimic the traditional social documentary model and understandings of 'vertical' photography (Azoulay 2014). Significant emphasis continues to be placed on the authorship and ownership of the image but in place of a romanticized image of the crusading professional photographer there is the idealized image of the authentic community-based, insider photographer.

Other notions of photography have been largely sidelined. In the history of photography moments of radical grassroots photographic activism have been

largely overlooked which is surprising given the inherently democratic character of the photographic medium and that the civil discourse and popular use of photography is nothing new. Evans (1997) and Ribalta (2011) have referred to lost chapters of photographic history, which can be located as key moments within a ‘potential’ history of civil photographic activism (Azoulay 2014). Ribalta argues that the Worker’s Photography Movement has been ignored by historians, in part, because of its communist affiliations but also because of the dominance of a documentary discourse in the West which is articulated around the social documentary ‘Lewis Hine-FSA-Life magazine paradigm’ and involves a ‘reformist social-democrat narrative of the role of documentary as a paternalistic depiction of the working class and the dispossessed’ (Ribalta cited in Lane 2011). This hegemony, he suggests, has left little space for the recognition and exploration of more revolutionary applications of the documentary form. Sketching out alternative histories of photography thus highlights the power relations through which certain accounts gain a position to deny others who took part in the same history (Azoulay 2014:24, Tagg 1998).

### **Participatory photography’s antecedents: building a genealogy of civil photographic activism**

While much of the contemporary rhetoric and discourse of participatory photography has been shaped in response to critiques of the social documentary tradition and in the apolitical humanist language of empowerment, its activities, politics, methods and pedagogy also draw directly from more hidden, less glorified chapters of radical photographic history. If the aim is to weave together a history out of moments that can be identified and revived within a tradition of grassroots photographic activism then it is worth looking briefly at other moments, beyond TAFOS, that demonstrate how photography has been used historically by community and grassroots-based activists. I have chosen to highlight a couple of endeavors – The Workers Photography Movement and the UK community photography scene of the 1970-80s – although if space and time allowed I could have elaborated on others<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> Such as the New York Photo League (Klein & Evans 2012) or the Archivo Panateca El Salvador.

Linking these enterprises is purposeful in the sense that it draws a trajectory between what are neglected and isolated moments in photographic history concerned with civil use of the camera and photographic activism. It connects them together with a contemporary form of participatory photographic practice that seeks to challenge and pluralise dominant and mainstream practices of looking. The aim is to insist that these moments have not passed, to demonstrate that these ‘alternative’ moments of photographic history have precedents and historical context. It is not only about recognizing these endeavors but rather an effort to think of them in time, tracing the different events they generate and reflect on the junctures where they are reborn anew in different times and contexts (Azoulay 2014:25). It is about insisting on the vitality of a photographic tradition that is not held in the hands of private individuals but that draws on an articulation of photography as a civil practice ‘that enables us to reimagine relations among individuals and between them and the world’ (Azoulay 2014:25)

In the story of TAFOS, the organic nature of its beginnings is often referenced (TAFOS 2006, Llosa 1996, Pastor 2007). It is important, however, not to confuse its lack of premeditation with a lack of direction. Müller clearly places TAFOS within a genealogy of grassroots photographic activism and radicalism, naming the Worker’s Photography Movement as a direct influence on the project (TAFOS 2006). TAFOS was conceived as an initiative within the existing movement of grassroots popular organisations in Peru. For Müller, TAFOS belonged in a tradition of ‘*la fotografía como denuncia*’ (TAFOS 2006:16), ‘photography as a means to denounce’, in which non-professional photographic production became an essential tool of grassroots political activism.



Young Communist Miners at the Svoboda mine in Makeyevka, M.Alpert reproduced in USSR in Construction 3, 1931 (p24 of Ribalta (2011) *The Worker Photography Movement (1926-1939) Essays and Documents*)

The Worker-Photography Movement (WPM), a crucial inspiration to Muller's vision for TAFOS, started in Germany in the 1920s when the communist-linked workers magazine *AIZ* published a call to its readership to send in images portraying proletariat life and working conditions. The call stemmed from an acknowledgement of the new role of the illustrated press in the social and ideological reproduction process and the need to create a proletarian media power to counter the dominance of the bourgeois press (Ribalta 2011). The movement soon spread to the USSR and across Europe, developing various interlinked branches and giving rise to numerous country specific organisations and publications<sup>90</sup>. It thrived until the mid 1930s when the advent of the Second World War signaled its demise.

Whilst WPM involved many professional photographers, in Germany at least, the movement was largely led by groups of amateur worker-photographers fuelled by communist ideals and committed to using photography to expose the iniquities and social ills of capitalism. There was a strong political component as they declared photography as 'an outstanding and indispensable means of propaganda in the revolutionary class struggle' (WPM manifesto cited in Lane 2011). With their images they sought to articulate a critique of paternalism, and a claim for self-representation and for insurgence<sup>91</sup>.

Decades later just before the years in which TAFOS became active, UK community photography activists looked directly back to the Worker's Photography Movement for inspiration and located their own activities within its legacy (Dennett and Spence 1979, Holland et al 1987). From the 1970-80s there was a thriving UK community photography scene that actively linked photography to a notion of empowerment infused with a radical social activism. Community photography was broadly defined as photography produced by non-professionals within a context relevant to the lives of the producers, and it was fundamentally tied to processes of social democratisation (De Cuyper 1997). Influenced by the

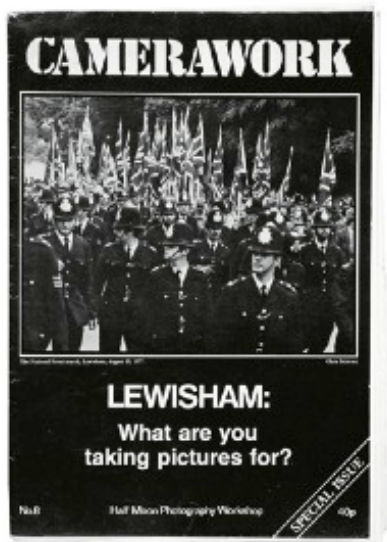
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<sup>90</sup> For detailed research and overview of The Workers Photographers Movement see Ribalta 2011

<sup>91</sup> One of its contributors, Hoernle, defined the 'proletarian eye' as being antagonistic to bourgeois humanism in which compassion was a symptom of class superiority (cited in Ribalta 2011:15). In Russia, the Russian Association of Proletarian Photo Reporters, ROPF, issued a manifesto that conceived photography as 'a weapon for the socialist reconstruction of society' (cited in Ribalta 2011:16) and inherent to the movement was the project of visual education for the proletarian (Ribalta 2011:18).

politics of socialism, Marxism and feminism, activists tied to Labour politics were able to operate within a favorable climate of state funding that supported numerous initiatives from photographic collectives, community groups and darkrooms to exhibitions spaces and publications<sup>92</sup>.

In this scene, practitioners recognised photography's inherently political characteristic and explicitly rejected its use as an instrument of colonisation and exploitation. It was a movement that aimed to put photography back in the hands of the people. The camera was seen as a radical tool that enabled communities to question, self-represent and build political capacity. The language used was revolutionary. It was a struggle for liberation, for new ways of seeing, communicating and understanding relations between things (Spence 1995, Evans 1997).



Camerawork magazine, published from 1970-85

Hackney Flashers, Poster (Who's still holding the baby?), 1978

Photographic activists made a conscious connection between the photographic act and a political outlook and activism that enabled communities 'to achieve some degree of autonomy in their lives' (Spence 1995:35). Practitioners wore their politics on their sleeves, asserting that 'photographers cannot be anything but

<sup>92</sup> Community photography practitioners formed collectives such as East London Photography Workshops, Bootle Art in Action, the Docklands Project and the Hackney Flashers. They got involved in a range of activities, from education programmes to image-based campaigns. They held exhibitions, staged interventions, mounted billboard and poster campaigns. They wrote critically about their work and actively critiqued mainstream photographic practice. Much of their ideology was captured in the Camerawork magazine, published for 10 years from 1975-85 (Evans 1997). See De Cuyper (1997) for an overview of practitioners and projects active in the community photography scene of the 1970s. Dewdney and Lister (1988) is a good example of the community photographic educational materials developed at the time.

political... all photographs are message carriers' (Spence 1995:38-39)<sup>93</sup>. While there was some confusion in their political outlook - Evans notes that even in the same issue of *Camerawork* the tone oscillates 'between 'hardline Marxism, humanist individualism, and the rhetoric of 1960s counter culture – often with blissful unawareness' (1997:21) – there was no doubt that the process of photography was not intimately concerned with political identity and critical pedagogy. From the mid 1980s the community photography movement started to demise. A principal cause was the withdrawal of public funding schemes from local government and arts bodies as Labour politics died and Thatcherism took hold. Many organisations lost their funding. The active scene lost its impetus as the politics of Marxism and socialism declined in popularity<sup>94</sup>.

The political radicalism of these moments would seem to have little in common with the contemporary, seemingly apolitical, incarnation of 'NGO-ised' participatory photography. Evans argues that the kinds of debates and political disputes that featured in the community photography scene have largely been forgotten (1997:15). However, she highlights that it was during this period concepts such as 'empower', 'representation', 'the politics of representation' and 'stereotypes', so vital to contemporary socially engaged practice, gained currency (1997:16). It was in these contexts that the notion of the camera, in the hands of ordinary people, used as a radical and critical tool for community empowerment took seed and developed.

Whilst participatory photography, along with many other participatory and educational trends, owes a debt to Freire (1970, 1973), ideas around photographic outreach work in the community, image activism, working with vulnerable and mis-represented communities, producing community-generated images that challenged and disrupted mainstream image stereotypes and directing community image-led actions were all pioneered in this tradition of grassroots community photographic activism. It was in this environment that practitioners developed pedagogy and advanced methods for teaching and facilitating photography

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<sup>93</sup> Many defined politics in terms of the class struggle and its related economic, cultural and political sites (Dennett and Spence 1979; Holland et al 1987). In this context practitioners questioned many angles of traditional photographic production from the right to represent, stereotypical imagery, the privileging of some images over others and the role played by images in the creation and re-creation of social relations, class, power and race.

<sup>94</sup> See Kelly (1983) and De Cuyper (1997) for a fuller discussion on the decline of the photography community scene.

projects, linked photography to therapeutic arts and self-development work (Spence 1995, 1996, Martin and Spence 1988, Weiser 1999) and tested modes of photographic activism and protest.

‘Proletariat photography’ (WPM), ‘social photography’ (TAFOS), ‘community photography’ – whichever term we use for each of these different movements, it was this work that laid the foundations for the methods and activities developed under the banner of participatory photography. Renaming is often about concealing links with the past (Cooke 2008:127) and the history denied here is one immersed in the radical communist and socialist politics of those eras. TAFOS’s founder, Thomas Müller, drew inspiration directly from Worker’s Photography Movement and its radical blend of communist and socialist politics. By contrast, contemporary participatory photography practitioners seem unwilling to draw attention to their political positions (Kester 1999) or perhaps are unable to, given a funding and institutional regime that requires neutral politics. Despite their political reticence, many contemporary practitioners would agree that TAFOS embodies a number of the ideals to which contemporary practitioners aspire.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Rose advocates a ‘history of the present’ (1999:xi). The aim of this chapter has not been to build a unified or linear story but rather trace the confluence of a whole variety of different shifts and moments linked to contemporary participatory photography practice and its development. Looking at photography’s ‘disavowed history’ (Pinney 2003:3) forms part of a growing need for understanding a global civil tradition of the medium that can pose ‘a counter-weight’ (Azoulay 2014:33) against common readings of photography and its history. I propose that if participatory photography is going to build its theoretical foundations it needs to re-engage with the politics and promise out of which it developed and move beyond a frame that locates it in relation to social documentary traditions of photography. My argument is not a call for the revival of an emancipatory politics of times gone by but rather it seeks to draw on the historical trajectory of participatory photography in order to focus our efforts on a re-politicisation of contemporary practice.



The aim must be to critically explore these contested movements of grassroots, civil photography, examine the contexts in which they played out, how they used photography and the character of the images produced, in order to trace, out of fragmented movements, a broader civil history of photographic activism. This approach, as Pinney (2003) suggests, requires a radical re-appraisal of how we understand and consider the photographic medium itself. It leaves open questions and takes no answer for granted, understanding the need to preserve ‘the openness and uncertainty which marks the activity of photography (Azoulay 2014:33).

The key tension at the core of participatory photography is a political one: what kind of change does the practice seek to engender, one of revolution, one of gentle reform, one of personal transformation or one of political activism? Contemporary practitioners sidestep dealing with these questions by omitting discussions of politics from their practice. Such tensions and disunity are not new. Ribalta points out the Worker’s Photography Movement should not be viewed as a homogenous field, ‘for within it there was structural conflict and antagonism, mainly between revolutionary and reformist positions, motivated by the double catalyst of solidarity and dread towards the potential of those popular metropolitan masses’ (Ribalta 2011:5)<sup>95</sup>.

These tensions and disunities over politics and purpose were corrosive for TAFOS. Ultimately, it was Müller, TAFOS’s founder, who had the final say as to where its identity, politics and legacy lay when he stopped short its transformation by shutting its doors. The division, stress and anger over the closure of TAFOS is evident in the numerous documents from the period and to the present day in the interviews conducted for this research. Many still saw a future despite Müller’s concerns. The question that remains then is who gets to decide? Who should have the final say as to what participatory photography’s agenda should be? Should its participants and their political vision drive it, as Müller’s position suggests, from

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<sup>95</sup> Ziff (1979 cited in De Cuyper 1997) has noted the internal political contradictions that also marked the UK community photography scene of the 1970-80s. De Cuyper (1997) summarizes these as firstly the difficulty of reconciling the contradiction of purporting to be in opposition to the state but being funded by it, secondly the representational issues raised by increasingly complex social categories, thirdly the realization that the ‘working class’ did not necessarily uphold socialist values and finally the problem of defining community.

the bottom up? Or is it valid for the criteria to be set by its organisers and practitioners?

# 5

## **The Promise to Empower: Pluralising power and negotiating ethics**

Participatory photography seeks to empower marginalised groups through photography but often fails to specify how, why and for what purpose. This chapter follows the call of a number of theorists to examine the meaning of empowerment in the context of its root-concept: power (Cooke & Kothari 2001, Rowlands 1995). Using the case study of a participatory photography and arts projects with Bhutanese refugee youth in Nepal, it offers an analytics of power with the aim of broadening the discussion around the workings of power and empowerment in participatory photography. It argues that a pluralized understanding of power is vital for capturing the multiplicity of power relations at work in the participatory photography process and understanding their implications for a negotiated ethics-in-practice.

Underlying participatory photography projects' claim to 'empower' are two implicit assumptions. The first is that becoming a photographer 'empowers' you, which suggests that photography in and of itself is an empowering process. The second is that the camera itself possesses an essential empowering capacity that can be 'handed over', from one user to another. These naive assumptions seem particularly problematic when commentators have called attention the myth of participatory photography as an entirely empowering experience (Foster Fishman 2005, PhotoVoice 2008, Purcell 2009). They reveal the practice's reliance on romanticized notions of photography's power to change and outdated and overly simplistic conceptions of power.

The key discussion in relation to empowerment is perhaps not the question of 'how much' are people empowered but rather the 'what for' (Henkel and Stirrat

2001:182). In this chapter this question becomes central as I present a constantly shifting picture of power and empowerment, in which the ‘what for’ alters depending from whose perspective you are talking and whose agenda you prioritise. It explores how power relations between the various stakeholders in the participatory process shape its practice, enabling and constraining each other’s visions and agendas. A pluralised notion of power looks to re-frame our understanding of empowerment dynamics as an activity of the many that involves shifting, unpredictable and negotiated processes that are both conscious and unconscious.

A discussion of the workings of power cannot be had without incorporating a discussion of ethics. There are those that argue the recent tendency to apply ethical frames skews the focus away from politics (Bishop 2012, Mouffe 2013). However I propose that ethics does not displace politics but rather is integral to a discussion that recognises power inequalities as fundamental to people’s political capacity to be ‘empowered’. At the core of participatory work is a raft of unstable power relations and the negotiation of ethical quandaries that requires this work is delivered in conjunction with a form of ‘participatory’ ethics (Cahill et al 2007) that can provide those involved with parameters for navigating its complexities.

Previous chapters discussed power in terms of the discourses and regimes of governmentality that shape participatory photography. This chapter focuses on the micro-politics and dynamics of power in participatory photography through the consideration of specific case study. The Bhutanese refugee youth project involves a particular set of circumstances and politics but its investigation indicates the complicated terrain inhabited by participatory photography initiatives more broadly. It highlights the multiplicity of positions and agendas that feed into the politics of power they involve and the tensions and inconsistencies that result. It reveals the contested ground on which participatory practitioners stand, ‘grappling with the politics of collaboration, positionality, accountability and responsibility’ (Cahill et al 2007:305) and calls into question how this ground is to be steered. How can we negotiate ethics in a process which, rooted in a commitment to social transformation, is inherently volatile, unpredictable and risky?

## Empowering refugee youth: pluralising the binary view of power in participatory photography



Participants from the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum, 2007  
© Tiffany Fairey / PhotoVoice

The **Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum (BRCF)** was a participatory youth and arts project that ran in the Bhutanese refugee camps located in the southern lowlands of Nepal from 1988-2008. It was a project that I initiated, developed and managed over this period in collaboration with volunteers, NGO partners, funders and colleagues<sup>96</sup>. Since its inception, the Bhutanese refugee youth project was

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<sup>96</sup> See glossary for a full summary of the project.

based on objectives that aimed to empower the young refugees to make a positive and active contribution to their community by providing a platform, ‘tools and channels for self-expression and self-advocacy’ (PhotoVoice 2004). The project aimed to tackle the despair and frustration felt by many of the youth growing up ‘in limbo’ as refugees with no immediate repatriation process in sight (Amnesty International 2002). An objective was to target the disempowerment felt by young people by enabling them to represent ‘their own experiences, needs and views with dignity to local and international audiences’ in order that they could gain ‘a sense of control over how others perceive them’ (PhotoVoice 2004).

The project rationale was rooted in the common participatory photography narrative. The Freirian notion of ‘empowerment’ is fundamental to participatory photography ethos (PhotoVoice 2007, Wang & Burris 1997). It frames power as something that individual agents can harness and expand. Empowerment initiatives foster the power - that is, the capacity to implement - in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important (Page and Czuba 1999). The focus here is on the agency of constituents, their capacity to do things: their ‘power to’.

Participatory photography aspires to empower by re-assigning the subject of the image as its author and upending the traditional power structure between the photographer and their subject. Framed as such, this narrative relies on a binary view of power that mixes two positions, the alignment of power with domination, ‘power over’ (the notion of a passive dominated subject) and the alignment of power with agency and autonomy, in a Freirean notion of ‘power to’ (the notion of an empowered subject becoming the photographer and gaining the power to self-represent) (Stewart 2001:6). The assumption is that by handing over the camera, the power dynamic is inverted and a notion of ‘power over’ is transformed into the possibility of ‘power to’. The Bhutanese project narrative suggests that participants’ disempowerment is allayed as they gain the power to self-represent.

Contemporary social theorists have rejected this binary view of power for its one-dimensionality. These theorists recognize the ‘elusive’ (Bachrach and Baratz

1962:947) and ‘contested’ nature of power (Lukes 1974:26). Foucault’s radical reappraisal of power, explored in Chapter 1, moves the concept beyond notions of domination and repression. He argues that a single formula cannot be applied to the study of power, for it is constantly being transformed, as society itself transforms (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 156). His ideas provide a conception of power that traverses the binary view. They indicate a mechanism that does not simply restrain and control but that also enables and creates. As such his conception incorporates the two faces of power presented in the participatory photography narrative.

Rhetoric by its very purpose seeks to simplify, to communicate complex issues clearly and quickly. However, in its simplification, the empowering narrative of participatory photography in fact undermines its own activity by suggesting a theoretical superficiality that distorts and misguides its practice and the understandings and complexities of power it involves. As will be further explored in the context of the Bhutanese project this means that initiatives struggle to ever meet their own objectives.

Foucault’s perspective focuses thinking on relations of power rather than power per se (Campbell 1998). An analysis of these relations of power in the Bhutanese refugee youth project highlights the necessity for a Foucauldian approach that encourages a pluralised notion of power as multifaceted, changing and that permeates all aspects of social relations. An approach is needed that distinguishes between different types of power and that recognizes that power is seen and understood differently by people who inhabit various positions in power structures (Lukes 1974). Acknowledging the various faces of power, there is a need to relate its workings to a ‘satisfactory account to agency and knowledgeability’ while also recognising how power works through structures, treating these dynamics not in terms of a dualism but as a duality (Giddens 1984:257). This involves a consideration of how power differentials affect peoples’ capacity for, and forms of, agency (Ortner 2006). The way agency is exercised by different people is far from uniform; it differs in both form and content from person to person and from context to context. It also involves a consideration of the unconscious exercise and unintended consequences of power (Giddens 1994, Lukes 1974).

Recent theory has pluralised understandings of power and requires that the workings of power and empowerment in participatory photography are re-framed. The dynamics of practice, full of tensions and discrepancies, necessitate multiple perspectives on how power operates. Empowerment relations are constituted within a distinctive rationality, technology and strategy of power that works beyond zero sum analogies. Thus the actual workings of empowerment practices diverge significantly from how they are often viewed by their advocates (Cruikshank 1999). They need to be probed from multiple perspectives, through the various aspects and levels of the participatory photography process. This then is our focus as we explore the agency and ‘self-governance’ of the individual participants and communities involved, the intention and bias of the facilitators and organisers and how power manifests itself in relation to the curation and circulation of images. The aim is to examine the tensions that coalesce around different visions of empowerment, their actualization and both the intended and unintended effects of these dynamics.

### **Participants and Communities**

Commonly overlooked in the analysis of participatory photography is the question of how power dynamics and hierarchies, within the community and between participants, affect the process. When the project first started in 1998 it worked with only 17 participants from the population of over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees housed in the seven camps in the lowlands of Eastern Nepal<sup>97</sup>. As the project grew, and its activities increased to include a vocational photography programme, regular photographic and arts workshops for new groups of young people and the management of a photographic studio, hundreds of young people came to be direct participants. As project organisers we became aware that there was an issue with the recruitment of new participants, as it emerged that they only represented the more able and educated children in the camps. These were the motivated, more vocal children, the natural leaders that largely hailed from the higher caste families and the more privileged refugee homes. Despite a number of targeted initiatives to

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<sup>97</sup> Since 2008, a re-settlement programme has led to a gradual decline in the population of the camps as families have been re-settled, to start new lives in third countries.



encourage the inclusion of the more marginalised young people, the project was failing to actively engage them (PhotoVoice 2006a).

The issue relates to questions of discrimination, prejudice, and competition for resources within the Bhutanese refugee community. With over 60,000 young people living in the camps and resources for only a few hundred to directly participate, it was the most able who most readily managed to access activities. There was evidence that the children themselves discriminated against each other, giving preferential treatment to family and friends, keeping the opportunities afforded by the project within a small circle of peers (PhotoVoice 2006a). Thus the project, despite its inclusive rhetoric and aspirations, buoyed discriminatory practices and pre-existing divisions in the Bhutanese refugee community<sup>98</sup>.

Writers warn against romanticizing community or participation. There is always the possibility that exercises of privilege and power may be reproduced by the very participants who claim to speak on behalf of others in their own communities (Cahill et al 2007:311). Turner, writing about the Kayapo Video Project with the indigenous Kayapo people of Brazil, argues that these projects inevitably affect 'internal social relations and level of social consciousness among members of the community' (1991:74). He describes how, on realizing the potential importance of video and the power attaining the individual who could control and use video, certain community leaders came to lay claim to and monopolise the key 'mediating' roles in the project and its prestigious equipment and resources (Turner 1991).

In the Bhutanese camps the young participants not only discriminated against each other but with their cameras. In one instance, much sniggering was prompted by a discussion over the inclusion in an edit of an image of a woman washing. After

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<sup>98</sup> **Wong** talked of a similar issue amongst the young Kenyan **Shoot Back** participants of Nairobi's Mathari slum. She described a 'jealousy factor' that came into play between participants and also between participants and their peers that affected project dynamics (L.Wong 2011, interview, 8<sup>th</sup> November). She highlighted a number of flash points around which jealousy issues flared up including the attention generated by media interest, travel opportunities that came about due to exhibitions and debates over what to do with the income generated by the sale of images. **Alam** also describes, when the Out of Focus participants came into contact with another group of disadvantaged kids, his shock as the Out of Focus participants treated the other group of children as 'lower class', dealing with them with disdain. He makes the point that while as practitioners and organisers we might hold a whole raft of beliefs as to what these interventions might achieve we need to take on board that also they involve, create and lead to their own type of class barriers or power-based discriminatory prejudices that need to be confronted (S.Alam, 2012, interview, February 2<sup>nd</sup>)

questioning the young photographer revealed that the picture was of a woman with special needs and that he had taken the photograph on the sly, without her permission. Taking pictures of women washing would normally be a cultural taboo, considered insulting and intrusive, yet the young photographer had taken advantage of this woman's learning disabilities to get his shot.

The incident demonstrates the often-forgotten point that participant photographers, just like any other image-maker, bring their own prejudices to their photography. As the photographer Salgado remarked 'you photograph with all your ideology'<sup>99</sup>. The participant photographer's insider status is much lauded in the literature and there is an implicit suggestion that their perspective constitutes a more 'ethical' and 'authentic' view. Much emancipatory rhetoric implies that 'oppressed' communities in question (and their images) are able to access an actual or potential greater truth. However, participants do not exist outside of power relations. They are immersed in their own complex fabric of power struggles and negotiations. It is naïve to suggest that community photographers do not have the same potential to exploit and discriminate against their subject as any other photographer. However it is also important to question whether such an incident would even be viewed as exploitative in Bhutanese refugee society where notions of disability rights did not carry the same significance.

The key point is that participatory photography is 'not intrinsically democratic or representative' (Godden 2009). Many chose to do participatory work for ethical reasons, but doing so does not circumvent ethical dilemmas; it raises new ones (Cahill 2007:306). Projects ordinarily involve small numbers of people who cannot be said to speak for all their community. Participant photographers can be just as susceptible to bias and stereotyping as someone viewing their community from the outside. Handing over the camera does not dissolve the ethical issues and power inequalities that accompany the photographer-subject relationship.

While participant photographers live in their own complex power dynamics with their subjects and communities, projects often present a misleading homogenized image of marginalization (De Cuyler 1997, Kester 1999). There is a tendency to

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<sup>99</sup> 2008, *Popular Photography*, March 2008:127

work with a fixed notion of community that assumes identities are ready-formed, waiting to be worked with (Kelly 1983, Evans 1997 and De Cuyler 1997). The concept of community is used to elevate common over individual concerns, to focus on an issue to draw in attention from outside groups such as funders and audiences. In doing so a static version of community, ‘a catch all term’ (De Cuyler 1997), is created. Lumping people together creates a lifeless and misleading version of that community which does not account for the inequality, marginalisation and tensions within it – factors that are all crucial in understanding how the power dynamics operate within that community (PhotoVoice 2009).

### **Facilitators and Project organisers: negotiating an ethics**

The ‘lynchpin’ facilitator is a key player in the participatory photography dynamic (PhotoVoice 2009:5). I was struck by how, during our first exhibition in the Bhutanese camps, visitors from the community passed by the young participants and stopped to thank me, not the photographers, for the work. What was obvious to the community was that the images on display were as much about my intervention as the young people’s participation. I was so engrossed in the participant’s experience that I had written myself out of the equation. However much facilitators might want to play down their role, Foucault reminds us it is impossible to ever be outside of power relations (1984).

Projects talk of enabling ‘self-representation’ but it is perhaps more honest to label it, as Ballerini does, as a process of ‘assisted self-representation’ (1995:88). Participatory photography projects started by individuals invariably involve an outsider coming into a community, bringing with them a bag of cameras and ideas of self-representation, empowerment and change. The issue of facilitators raises questions of the ‘interface’ between the project participants, the ‘impoverished’, and the ‘political power’ (Tandon 1995). Facilitators’ experience levels range from those who ‘haven’t done their homework’ (Godden, 2008) to those ‘champions’, discussed by Rooke (2014), skilled at riding the multiple horses that the roles requires. These professionals have learned to juggle and negotiate the agendas and demands of the various parties involved and the tensions that result from the ‘uneasy fit between a tradition of arts participation evolved out of radical

practice... and the instrumental deployment of arts participation' (Rooke 2014:4) but they often face complex ethical and political dilemmas.

The Freirean frameworks underpinning the ideas and methods in participatory photography designate the relation between facilitator and participant as collaborative, non-hierarchical and based on mutual learning, respect and trust<sup>100</sup>; they designate it as a form of 'power with' (Page & Czuba 1999). However, the reality is that projects ordinarily involve a person or organisation of greater privilege (in terms of economic and political advantages) working with groups who have less access to opportunities and resources. It is important that practitioners do not imagine that they can transcend these differences with a 'well-meaning rhetoric of aesthetic empowerment' (Kester 1995). Strong relationships may be built between facilitators and participants but ultimately the differences in their social standing mean that these relations are unequal. Researchers working with marginalised communities are faced with multiple dilemmas that require them to be critical of their own positionality, reflexivity and the power relations involved (Cahill 2007:309).

Facilitators rarely set out to explicitly exploit communities but the concern is that there is a 'fine line between collaboration and exploitation' (Ruby 1991:65). Facilitators might unintentionally exercise their power or influence if they are unable to self-reflexively monitor themselves (PhotoVoice 2009). This calls attention to what theorists have termed the unconscious and unintended consequences of power (Giddens 1994, Lukes 1974). Giddens refers to the 'accordion effect of action' that describes how a person may do something with one intention but the act may in addition have unintended consequences. He reminds us that, 'human history is created by intentional activities but is not at intended project; it persistently eludes efforts to bring it under conscious direction' (1984:27). A lack of shared knowledge, agendas and cultural understanding between facilitators and participants can lead to any number of unintended consequences.

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<sup>100</sup> Practitioners often talk of their desire not to be referred to or defined as 'teachers' of photography (Z. Briski, 2011, interview, 8<sup>th</sup> October; C. Duarte, 2008, interview, May 4th) and follow Freirean principles in their facilitation of photography workshops. Paulo Freire advocated a form of mutual, collaborative 'co-intentional' education (1970:51) based on dialogue where learners are understood as the co-creators and 'co-investigators' of knowledge and critical thought (1970:64).

An additional concern is that people's interests might be unarticulated, unobservable or even unconscious (Lukes 1974). Many models of power are overly concentrated on overt and actual behaviour. Lukes encourages an approach that considers the 'mobilisation of bias' that can occur when power functions as unconscious collective forces and social arrangements that direct and influence our behaviour and decisions (1974). The facilitator's role gives them influence over participants' decision-making process; how they understand the project purpose and agenda, how they view and are viewed by other stakeholders in the process and ultimately how the project gathers shape and direction<sup>101</sup>. Facilitators have multiple opportunities to influence or even appropriate the 'voice' of the project participants whether this happens consciously or not.

Among experienced practitioners there is a growing and concerted recognition of the complexities of power issues within participatory work and their ethical implications<sup>102</sup>. Practice is increasingly being framed in terms of self-reflexive, responsible and ethical approaches in which power issues are made conscious, confronted and debated, and their implications unpicked in order to ensure work is not exploitative. PhotoVoice's Statement of Ethical Practice provides a good overview of some of the key issues at play as it recognises the 'dynamic and delicate', contrary effects of participation (2009:2).

Interviews with practitioners highlighted a number of recurring themes relating to ethics. These include the need to recognise your limitations<sup>103</sup>, the importance of

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<sup>101</sup> In their position as intermediaries, Foucault's notion of the power-knowledge relation is key to thinking through the power inherent in the facilitators role. The facilitator holds not only an awareness and 'knowledge' of the participants needs, interests and priorities but also of the needs, interests and agendas of the other project stakeholders including the NGO organisers, partners, funders and the audiences they want to attract. This position provides them with a specific authority as they work to translate and represent the different groups involved to each other.

<sup>102</sup> Within the 'participatory' sphere there is growing literature that discusses the ethics of participation, this includes Cahill et al (2007), Hickey & Mohan (2004), Fine et al (2000). Among participatory photography and socially engaged arts organisations and practitioners are increasingly engaging in critical conversations around ethics and producing ethical frameworks: see Centre for Digital Storytelling 2010; Lowe 2014; Oval House Theatre 2009; PhotoVoice 2009; Silence Speaks 2015; Wang and Redwood 2001

<sup>103</sup> **McGirr** spoke of knowing her limits when she realised that she did not have the skills for rehabilitating children but that she was capable of taking children that were motivated forward. She structured FotoKids accordingly (N.McGirr, 2012, interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> February). **Wong** also understood the limits of what she could achieve with **Shoot Back**, as an 'American Chinese woman in a Kenyan slum' (L.Wong 2012, interview, 31<sup>st</sup> January). With this in mind she established the project in partnership with MYSA, a local NGO, embedded within their structures and in collaboration with their staff who were from the community. **Germain** talks very clearly about the parameters of his role as a photographer engaged in collaborative work. Given the complex, chaotic and difficult nature of the lives of the street youth he collaborates with, he has always been aware that, in terms of their 'rehabilitation' or 'empowerment', the photography only serves a limited purpose. He is more candid than most about his own motivations for engaging with this collaborative work.

*'Honestly speaking if the kids had taken boring pictures we would not still be there. We are clear about our own motives and limits and we acknowledge that a strong motive for us is the generation of that strong set of photographs' (J.Germain, 2013, interview, 7<sup>th</sup> February)*

letting go of control<sup>104</sup> and the responsibility to not raise expectations that cannot be met. For **Alam**, committing to a project over the long term is essential. If not, projects become ‘gimics’ and serve to raise hopes that go unrealised. In his mind youth photography projects are not ‘so much about photography but about bringing up kids’ which brings with it great responsibility (S.Alam, 2012, interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> Febuary). Writers acknowledge that what differentiates participatory work is the quality and value of the relationships that emerge and that this also characterises the work as ethically challenging and rewarding (Cahill et al 2007, Pain et al 2007). Whether all practitioners would equate the work they do to the duties of parenthood as Alam does there is no doubt that it carries a weight of responsibility.

The difficulties in identifying the process of exercising power lies in the ambivalent relationship between power and responsibility (Lukes 1974). An attribution of power can at the same time be an attribution of responsibility and the point of locating power can be to fix responsibility. Such an approach does not sit easily within a Foucaultian perspective that designates power as relational or a Freirean perspective that is focused on a dialogical process that aims to see power and responsibility re-assigned and reclaimed. However, for the facilitator, a self-reflexive and ethical approach to their practice starts with an acknowledgement of their own power and their responsibility to think through how it operates both consciously and unconsciously. They must anticipate and be consistently alert to how they might influence and impact on the participatory photography process and the lives of its participants, for good, for bad and for the grey area in between.

### **Images and editorial control**

Participatory photography projects often produce thousands of images yet only small selections of those are seen beyond the walls of the workshop space. The following pages show a series of photographs taken by a Bhutanese refugee boy

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<sup>104</sup> **Alam** reflects that in his participatory work he has learnt that ultimately he has had not control over the way it goes (S.Alam, 2013, interview). **Duarte**, founder of **Chiapas Photography Project** talked of how she has had to consciously make the effort and learn to let go of control even when it went against her instincts. She recalled an incident when some of the participants were offered a prestigious opportunity to exhibit with a highly regarded photographer that they turned down. The offer was not of sufficient interest or a priority for them. She jokes it was the kind of opportunity that as a photographer she would have killed for but she observes that the community did not place the same value on it. It was not her position to adjust, to shift or redefine those values but rather to respect them (C.Duarte 2008, interview, 4<sup>th</sup> May).

called Dinesh<sup>105</sup> in 2003. The images consist of a re-enactment, staged by Dinesh and his friends, of people being arrested and tortured by the Bhutanese authorities. Dinesh directed and shot the pictures, with the help of his friends in costume, in the woods that surround the refugee camp where they lived. He took these pictures because he wanted them to be published and circulated. In his mind what they told was fundamental to the story of his community.



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<sup>105</sup> Dinesh is not the photographer's real name. A pseudonym has been used for protection purposes.



Images taken by Bhutanese refugee youth, Dinesh, depicting a re-enactment of the alleged torture suffered by the Lhotshampa people (southern Bhutanese) at the hands of the Bhutanese army when being forcibly evicted from Bhutan. The 6 images shown on these pages are edited from a series of 26 photographs taken on a single role of film. The final image consists of a cast line-up of the young people involved in the performance.







Dinesh's images need to be understood within the context in which he was growing up. He had lived in the camps since he was six years old when his family were forced to leave their farm and go into exile<sup>106</sup>. Within the camps, the refugees' narrative of their forced exile from Bhutan was central to their identity and history. The human rights abuses and torture suffered by the refugee community while still in Bhutan was well documented and utilised by refugee-led political and community organisations<sup>107</sup>. Their pamphlets and publications displayed graphic images of mutilated bodies and torture victims who had suffered at the hands of the Bhutanese army. Dinesh had grown up surrounded by these images and they were central to his and his friends' sense of who they were and where they came from. Human rights abuses were an often-repeated theme and focus of the imagery produced by the Bhutanese refugee youth in the project.

Such politically-loaded and graphic imagery was problematic for us as project organisers. Despite Dinesh's desire for his images to be exhibited and published they were never shown publically<sup>108</sup>. The editorial decision was taken despite his wishes and the project's claim to give Bhutanese youth like Dinesh a voice. The question of editorial control in participatory photography is hotly debated. For observers, participants' lack of editorial control presents a serious challenge to the projects' claim to empower and undermines their claim to authorship (Kester 1998, Ballerini 1995). Participants are not, as suggested in the rhetoric, given the freedom to show the world as they see it but rather their world is presented according to an editorial and curatorial framework decided by other parties beyond the immediate community. While participants often input into ongoing edits and have the power of veto over the inclusion of specific images, final image edits for exhibitions, publications and circulation are invariably made by project organisers.

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<sup>106</sup> The Bhutanese refugee population belong to a ethnic group called the Llotshampas, the southern Bhutanese whom are of Nepalese ethnicity, and who fled and were forcibly evicted from Bhutan in the early 1990s in connection with discriminatory government legislation and practices (Amnesty International 1994, 2000, 2002; Hutt, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2003). For a full background to the Bhutanese refugee situation please see [www.bhutanese-refugees.com](http://www.bhutanese-refugees.com) (accessed May 10<sup>th</sup> 2015)

<sup>107</sup> As well as by international NGOs and human rights organisations (Amnesty International 1994, 2000, 2002; Norwegian Refugee Council 2008)

<sup>108</sup> The decision on these specific images was taken by myself and my fellow project manager in consultation with project advisors from inside and outside the refugee community and NGO partners working in the camps. While local and national exhibitions did include some paintings and comic drawings that depicted torture and human rights abuses these were never exhibited internationally and no photographic images were ever shown.

In response to editorial criticisms **Hubbard** of **Shooting Back** argues that to reach a large, if not global audience, project images have to compete with the professionals and that demands the selection of compelling and saleable images according to media industry standards (2007:20). He emphasizes the advocacy efforts in which Shooting Back was involved and their agenda to get issues of homelessness on the political and media agenda. Professional editors curated the images strategically to give them maximum media appeal. He argues that the project production and editorial processes simply reflected wider practices and norms in the photographic industry where editors often retain final editorial control and photographers rarely have complete say over how their work is seen and presented (2007).

These debates focus on a conception of power as being manifest through its exercise in decision-making (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). It links to the historically dominant discourse in photography that focuses on the photographer and their claims to ownership and control of the image (Azoulay 2012). They posit that the question of who decides, and how, is key to understanding power and where control lies. My concern with these debates is that they locate power in and around specific decisions – who presses the shutter, who decides an edit – and suggest that complete ownership or control of the photographic processes is possible if mastery of those moments is realised. But the participatory photography process consists of an endless series of decisions: What to photograph? How to photograph? Why am I photographing? What do I want to say with my photographs? How shall I edit? Which pictures shall I use? Who is my work for? How do I want my work presented? Who do I want to see my work? What do I want my work to achieve? Is it possible or even desirable for these decisions to remain under sole control? When photography is framed as a collaborative encounter and a multi-participated, ongoing event then attempts to claim full ownership of the process seem misconstrued and fruitless.

### **Coercion or informed consent?**

A concept of power focused on decision making control has been critiqued for its basis on the assumption that power is totally embodied and is ‘fully reflected in

concrete decisions' (Bachrach and Baratz 1962:948, Lukes 1974). Power may be exercised by individuals choosing to support the 'non-decision-making process' (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). Crucially, it is important to assess the values and bias that affect and define the decision-making process, that give meaning and designate what matters are deemed of significance and what are not. While one face of power is visible and reflected in concrete decisions, it is this second face of power, that is unseen and reflected the 'mobilisation of bias', that is key to understanding power (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). While decisions are choices consciously and intentionally made, bias is mobilised and reinforced unconsciously (Lukes 1974:21). From this Orwellian perspective, A can also exercise power over B by 'influencing, shaping or determining his very wants' (Lukes 1974:23) thus it is crucial to fashion a definition of power that 'embraces coercion, influence, authority, force and manipulation' (Lukes 1974:17). The question must be asked: who stands to gain from existing biases and who is constrained by them (Bachrach and Baratz 1962)?

Ethical models of participatory photography practice attempt to deal with some of the complexity around the question of editorial decision-making within a framework of 'informed' consent (PhotoVoice 2009)<sup>109</sup>. Participants are asked to give their consent to the public use of their images and in doing so they implicitly sanction the editing and curatorial choices that are been made. Dinesh did not dispute the decision not to exhibit his photographs. He seemed acquiescent of the explanations given to him as to why the images were not appropriate to show and at the time the images were simply filed away with little discussion or challenge. In this sense it could be argued that he gave his 'informed consent' to their exclusion.

Could this be an example of what Lukes terms the 'most effective and insidious' use of power, to prevent people from having grievances by shaping their perceptions in a way that 'they accept their role in the existing order of things' (1974:24). Do empowerment programmes involve what Cruikshank calls a

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<sup>109</sup> Informed consent refers to the process whereby participants give permission for their involvement in a particular intervention and the use of data that results on the basis of a clear understanding of the facts, implications and consequences.. Authors such as Homan (1991) argue that the notion of true informed consent, where participants are given a full explanation and are able to reach a clear understanding of what participation involves, exists more in rhetoric than reality.

‘voluntary and coercive exercise of power upon the subjectivity of those to be empowered’ (1999:35)? Theorists highlight that a characteristic of the contemporary practice of government is the way it relies upon the agency of the governed themselves (Dean 2010:82). In this sense empowerment, as a qualitative transformation of subjectivity, acts on people so that they come to recognize their common being within a unified administrative category that makes them compliant citizens and participants in social reform (Dean 2010:87).

The decision not to publish Dinesh’s pictures was taken for numerous reasons that were well-intended rather than insidious but they reveal something about the ‘mobilisation of bias’ within the project and participatory initiatives more broadly. Reasons included concerns for Dinesh’s personal protection if the publication of the images garnered significant attention, the impact and appropriateness of using graphic torture-related imagery with youth and a psychosocial concern that Bhutanese youth were overly focused on past events instead of looking forward and imagining a future. There was also a concern that the publication of such politically loaded imagery could alienate international audiences<sup>110</sup> with whom the project, the refugee community, and us as its organisers, sought to raise awareness of the Bhutanese refugee issue. Much as Jim Hubbard discussed the need for professional curation of the Shooting Back images to ensure they commanded attention, so too were editorial decisions in Nepal made on the basis of the determined needs and expectations of an external and foreign audience.

Hidden within these reasons there is a sense that we, the project organisers, knew more and knew better than the participant concerned. In humanitarian work, it is often assumed that beneficiaries’ poverty, literacy, situation and provincialism affects their capacity to make informed decisions (Barnett & Weiss 2008:47). In participatory photography this often manifests itself in two ways. Firstly, a paternalistic concern, arguably justly founded, based on the presumption that participants do not have enough of an awareness of the possible consequences of having their images out in the world to make a fully informed decision about their publication and dissemination. Secondly, an assumption made by project organisers, that participants do not have enough of an understanding of the

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<sup>110</sup> Kester has argued that when content crosses a line that moves it into the realm of the personalized and political its moral authority vanishes, audiences switch off, untrusting of its content and message (1998).

expectations and demands of audiences and the international image market to make decisions about how to most effectively edit, curate and present their images to attract attention and an audience. Project organisers' knowledge of what is implicated in disseminating and finding audiences for images lends them an authority when it comes to editorial and publication decisions. Barnett & Weiss define authority as slightly different to power: 'the ability of one actor to use institutional and discursive resources to induce deference from others' (2008:38) and they argue its exercise often contains elements of consent and coercion.

Is there not the possibility in editorial processes, that purport to be guided by notions of informed consent, that the gaining of consent or unchallenged editorial decisions can be coerced or unduly influenced through a mobilisation of bias that asserts the authority of project organisers? Are there not elements of both assent and coercion when participants are either persuaded or dissuaded as to the inclusion or exclusion of certain images under the belief that the facilitators have the greater understanding of what is right, wrong or most appropriate? Practitioners interviewed<sup>111</sup> relayed that when there was a difference of opinion with participants over an image edit it was normally resolved through debate and discussion over the image, sometimes with the individual, sometimes within the group, which resulted in a final decision over its inclusion or omission. Ultimately it is a question of compromise and negotiation. In practice, consent and editorial control become questions of ongoing process rather than one-off decisions (PhotoVoice 2009:4). Debates around participatory ethics emphasize an emergent process of negotiating ethics with participants based on their concerns (Cahill 2007:309) but it remains unclear as to how these issues are to be negotiated when, ethics, images and empowerment narratives are understood to be socio-culturally and contextually specific.

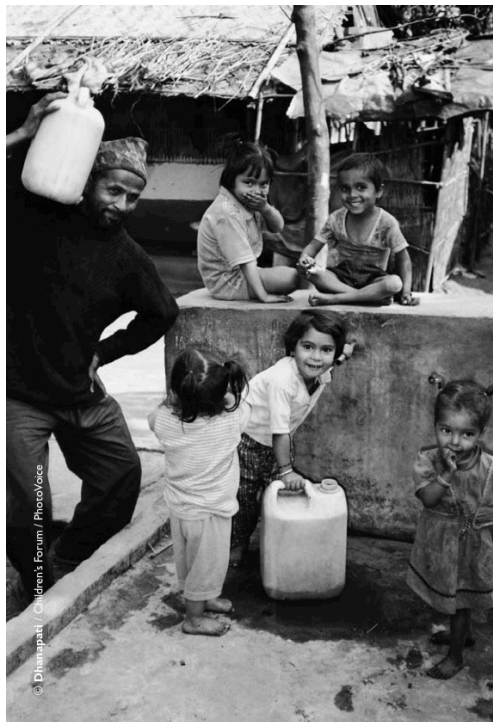
### **Contrasting visions**

Dinesh's unpublished images stand in contrast to an edit of photographs that were selected for publication. The following pages shows a selection of pages from

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<sup>111</sup> E.Gottesman, 2013, interview; J.Hubbard, 2011, interview; J.C.Paucar, 2011, interview; C.Duarte, 2008, interview; A.Levner, 2011, interview.

*Voices in Exile* (PhotoVoice 2006b), an A5 colour paperback publication of 58 pages that was produced by PhotoVoice as a showcase of the project and an advocacy tool to raise awareness of the Bhutanese refugee issue for international



◁ Collecting water

"There is a saying that many drops of water make an ocean. Like that we must share our good ideas together and solve our refugee problem."

Dhanapati

▷ "Women queue at the health centre with their children. It can take hours of waiting."

Til Maya

Pages from the '*Voices in Exile: Bhutanese youth photograph their lives in refugee camps*', photographic booklet published by PhotoVoice, 2006.





© Nar Bdr / Children's Forum / PhotoVoice

◁ Hidden style

"This photo denotes the hidden style of Bhutanese boys. They are people that possess wonderful skills but being refugees they are unable to fulfill their potential. They are very close friends and united even though they fall into different castes."

Nar Bdr

▷ "Some of the children in the camps roam free and make lots of noise."

Ajay



© Ajay / Children's Forum / PhotoVoice



© Mon Maya / Children's Forum / PhotoVoice

▷ "Small children are innocent and do not know about the history of our forefathers, Bhutan and the refugees. Sometimes my small sister asks our parents when we will return to Bhutan and who made them come here to this refugee camp."

Mon Maya

▷ "Refugee people are poor in wealth but rich in kindness, helpfulness and ability."

Yadap



© Yadap / Children's Forum / PhotoVoice

and national audiences<sup>112</sup>. The selected imagery depicts day-to-day life in the refugee camps covering themes such as food, health and religion. Editorial decisions were taken by the project organisers (myself included) with the aim of attracting an international audience and getting them to engage with the plight of the Bhutanese refugees. Quotes and an introductory text provide a brief political context to their situation but give limited detail. There are no visual references to the human rights abuses so central to the identity of many in the camps. This editorial strategy relied on our presumed ‘know-how’ on how best to appeal and garner support with the targeted audiences.

These images, it can be argued, illustrate how the apolitical humanitarian stance constitutes a ‘mobilisation of bias’ (Bachrach & Baratz 1962) that shapes how NGO-linked participatory photography projects are edited, curated and presented to audiences. *Voices in Exile’s* editorial strategy involved a conscious choice to not make the content too ‘political’ for fear that it would alienate international audiences. Like Dinesh, many of the young participants clearly wanted to concentrate on the political roots and background to their exile but as organisers we deemed this content as inappropriate for advocacy and awareness-raising work. Instead we relied on universal ahistorical humanitarian categories to tell the Bhutanese story, a version of humanity that has come to form the basis of liberal, progressive politics (Campbell 1998, Malkki 1996). The images are taken by the refugee youth, by ‘insiders’, but they have been curated to tell a familiar tale that makes nods towards, but fails to delve into, the complex politics in which these photographers are immersed.

The classic close-up image of the child is central to the humanitarian visual lexicon (Manzo 2008). *Voices in Exile* includes a total of 38 images by participant photographers, nearly 60% of which are of lone children, youth or prominently feature children. The photographers are themselves young people so it is inevitable that their imagery focuses on youth in the camps but to what extent was the edit biased towards the inclusion of more images of children under the (unconscious)

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<sup>112</sup> 1000 copies of *Voices in Exile* were distributed to participants, camps schools and libraries, agencies working with the Bhutanese refugees, key institutions and figures within media and political scene in Nepal and through selected book shops in Kathmandu (PhotoVoice report to Comic Relief, 2007)

belief that such images would have a greater appeal to international humanitarian and NGO audiences and ‘tug the heart strings’ (Hubbard 2007:14)?

Multiple factors and agendas influence editorial and curatorial agendas beyond that of self-representation. Chapter 3 highlighted how images are employed by NGOs to validate humanitarian ideals. For NGO-led participatory communication initiatives, self-representational agendas will always have to negotiate with the NGO’s own communications priorities. This gives rise to the tensions, challenges and paradoxes discussed by the NGO photography heads (Chapter3). When communities are provided with the means to ‘self-represent’ in the humanitarian mode they might want to talk of the political and systematic issues that shape and affect their lives but whether this ‘voice’ is given a public airing would seem to depend on the discursive and communicatory strategies and biases of the NGO partners involved<sup>113</sup>.

These contrasting sets of images also demonstrate an aversion to risk. When editorial decisions are taken on the basis of the perceived risk to the participants, as was a factor in our decision on Dinesh’s pictures, on what grounds is that risk assessed and who has the right to decide what is deemed too risky? Ethical considerations are often negotiated with the protection of participants deemed as of paramount importance (PhotoVoice 2009), encouraging practitioners to be risk-averse. Similarly, in the context of visual and communicatory strategy, images that are politically potent, that challenge and disrupt audiences are often passed over in favor of more familiar visual messages as seen in *Voices in Exile*. However there is a danger that ethical frameworks that encourage an aversion to risk patronise both participants and audiences and negate the critical potentiality of participatory arts (Bishop 2012).

So who, in the context of participatory photography projects, should get to decide what image is best? The tone and aesthetic of the two sets of images represent two very different versions of many possible ways of seeing the Bhutanese refugees.

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<sup>113</sup> Lisa Malkki’s research with refugees in Burundi offers interesting parallels. She highlights the gap between how the Hutu refugees came to appropriate the category of ‘refugee’, powerfully shaped by the collective memory of violence and past atrocities in Burundi, and how the staff of the international organisations administering the camps defined refugee identity in terms that made this historical and political identity unusable (1996).

Projects emboldened by the noble desire to ‘give voice’ often fail to conscientiously recognise the multiple ways there are to see and that, in the context of self-representation, there is never only a single story. Clifford and Marcus remind us that,

*‘Cultures’ do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship’* (Clifford and Marcus 1986:10)

It becomes a matter of whose narrative is given priority and in what discursive context. It highlights that power in these projects coalesces around ‘the ability to establish narrative authority over one's own circumstances and future, and, also, the ability to claim an audience (Malkki 1996:393).

Despite *‘Voices in Exile’* seemingly providing a clear example of participant-produced imagery being curated to fit a clichéd NGO or humanitarian visual agenda it was actually within the refugee community that it found an unexpected popular audience. While its intention was to inform and raise awareness of the Bhutanese refugee issue with audiences within the international community, demand for its reprint came not from this targeted audience, but from an unintended refugee audience. Within the refugee camp community the publication became popular as many faced the prospect of re-settlement in third countries and wanted a copy as a memory of life in the camps. Is this evidence of the refugee community simply absorbing their own humanitarian image or does it not aptly illustrate Azoulay’s point that the meaning of an image is never final (2012)? While an image might be intended for one purpose, no one can ever control or predict how it will actually be used and re-imagined.

### **Who gets to define empowerment?**

Part of the concern over Dinesh’s images was their violent and graphic content. The Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum (BRCF) defined itself as a non-political, social organisation working for child protection, development and participation (Evans 2008:55). Its vision and motto was ‘to create a violence-free children’s society’ (BRCF, 2007). It was assumed that through their participation in the project young participants would be inspired to use peaceful group action to improve their situation (Evans 2008:55). Given this agenda, it is no surprise that

Dinesh's images and others of torture were deemed problematic.

A few years after Dinesh's pictures were taken independent research uncovered that refugee youth involved in BRCF were simultaneously engaged with refugee-led political groups advocating radical and violent political action and urging a call to arms in order to return to Bhutan (Evans 2008). This was not only a case of Bhutanese participants producing violent imagery but a question of them being actively engaged in violent activities. Inspired by the Maoist rebels in Nepal, refugee political groups established a communist movement aimed at enabling a return to Bhutan by force and to push for radical political change in Bhutan<sup>114</sup>. The young people involved were not, as the agencies purported, aimless school drop-outs, but rather young people who had been actively engaged in the NGO-led children participation and empowerment programs (Evans 2008). They were even using some of the skills they had acquired through participatory programmes, such as street theatre and public speaking, within their activities for the Maoist movement. For the young people involved their simultaneous engagement in children's participation projects promoting a pacifist society and violent political activities was neither contradictory or problematic. They viewed both as work which supported the community and the nation (Evans 2008:50).

When empowerment is defined as a process through which people access or create opportunities to enhance their capacity to influence decisions affecting areas of their lives (Lane 1995, Chambers 1997), then it follows that this involves the transformation of socio-political structures and behavioural norms which are experienced by such individuals as constraining. However, the structural, social political and economic difficulties faced by the refugees meant that there were limits as to the ability of agency-led participatory projects to 'empower' the young refugees (Evans 2008). The participatory projects offered them creative, educational, networking and numerous other opportunities but could not directly

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<sup>114</sup> The Bhutanese refugee youth had been growing up in 'temporary' refugee camps for 15 years with no prospect of any durable solution on the horizon. There was an increasingly protracted refugee situation. With a strong consensus and desire amongst the refugee community for repatriation to Bhutan, organisations operating in the camps built 'assisting the refugees to repatriate with honor and dignity' into their project aims (Evans 2008). However despite numerous attempts at bi-lateral negotiations and a failed verification process no resolution to their situation or prospect of repatriation had been realised. From 2006, the announcement of a re-settlement programme in 3<sup>rd</sup> countries (Human Rights Watch 2007) split the refugee community with some refugee leaders and political groups opposed any durable solutions outside of repatriation. By 2007-8 political polarities had heightened with refugee Maoists groups intimidating and attacking activists who spoke openly in favor of third country resettlement and collecting donations from the camp community, sometimes through threats of physical violence (Evans 2008:54).

offer them a resolution to their political limbo which was what the political groups sought to actively address.

Agency, Giddens' argues, must be defined as people's capacity to do things, not as the intentions they have in doing things for many acts have unintended consequences (1984). While agencies in the camps might have worked with the intention to empower and their projects might well have played important roles in terms of enabling refugee youth to gain new skills and confidence they did not have the capacity to address the 'disempowerment' experienced by the whole community in terms of their lack of citizenship, basic rights, freedom of movement and access to social and economic opportunities. In such contexts participants may seek alternative, potentially violent, strategies to improve their situation (James 1999). While the NGOs may not have intended for the young people to use the skills and capacities gained through their participation in NGO programmes to further a radical political movement that advocated violence, it would seem that this was happening<sup>115</sup>. This scenario provides a clear illustration of an unintended consequence of the mobilisation of power enacted by the agencies (Lukes 1974).

Many point to the fact that outside professionals cannot expect to control the outcomes of empowerment; 'real empowerment may take unanticipated directions' (Rowlands 1995:104). Institutionalised development, it is argued, attempts to contain the process in part by having designated power as something that can be 'given' (by the powerful to the powerless) (Leal 2007:545). But if empowerment is conceived alongside a notion that power is not there for the giving but for the taking then the idea of 'empowerment' becomes a contradiction in terms, 'there can only be self-empowerment' (Tandon 1995:34). Sharing through participation does not necessarily mean sharing in power (White 1996) and thus it is argued that 'genuine' empowerment is about people seizing and constructing power through their own praxis (Leal 2007:545). Or as Freire (1970) put it himself: 'Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift'. Change often involves social and political upheaval which NGOs struggle to incorporate into their thinking, preferring as they

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<sup>115</sup> Evans points out that the Bhutanese youth are not an isolated example. Other researchers working Nepal noted a relationship between development projects which aimed to empower women and children, and their subsequent recruitment to the Maoist movement (2008:55). Some have argued that the promotion of critical thinking skills through empowerment projects 'may have paved the way for them to engage with Maoist ideology as fully conscious political subjects' (Pettigrew & Shneidermann, 2004:4).

do to work within an essentially reformist framework and existing institutions and systems (Green 2008:441). From this perspective the Bhutanese youth's engagement with radical politics not only evidences their 'self-empowerment' but also is viewed as an inevitable stage in the process of empowerment. Conflict is to be expected in processes that challenge power relations.

What is at stake here is the question of what kind of change the process of empowerment involves and who gets to decide. From the perspective of the Bhutanese youth actively engaged in these seemingly contrary activities both undertakings made up different parts of the jigsaw, different branches and elements on their route to self-empowerment. It should of course be noted that their views were not shared by the majority of Bhutanese youth in BRCF or in the camps more broadly. In this context, divergent and multiple understandings of empowerment, what it constituted and how it should be achieved circulated.

A focus on agency as doing, rather than intention, shifts the goalposts in how we might consider notions of empowerment. Within Giddens' definition, agency does not presuppose intention it only assumes capacity (1984). Indra, a participant on the project, once challenged me on this matter, 'What is the point of receiving an education if as young refugees, without basic opportunities and rights to work and live freely, we do not have the capacity to use it?'. What are the ramifications for initiatives that strive to 'empower' marginalised groups if the intention to empower is designated as futile when people, due to structural conditions, do not have the capacity to be empowered as they envisage? Can empowerment only be 'genuine' if it involves structural change and conflict? Is empowerment not also about aspiration? Is there not value in enterprises that, unable to change structural conditions, seek to work on enabling empowerment at the level of thought and aspiration? I wonder how Indra, now living in Australia as a result of a re-settlement programme and working as a financial advisor and translator while being active in his community through radio and journalism work, would answer the question of his younger self<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> I have asked and he said he would get back to me!



Agency, when viewed as ‘a kind of property of social relations’ is almost always unequally distributed (Ortner 2006:151). Free agents do not exist because people do not operate in social vacuums. In this sense, people are not free to define their own version of ‘self-empowerment’; agency is something that is always haggled over. The issue of empowerment thus comes back to the question of each community’s own definition of empowerment, how different definitions of empowerment are negotiated by the various stakeholders in any given context and agents’ capacity to define and realise it.

In long-term participatory photography projects this process often has very little to do with photography. **Eid-Sabbagh** posits that while the intention might be to ‘empower’ with cameras the process had little to do with photography and everything to do with open dialogue and negotiation (Y.Eid-Sabbagh, 2013, interview, February 11<sup>th</sup>). Just as the notion of power is ever circulating, constantly re-creating itself and impossible to pin down so definitions of empowerment are continually reconceptualised depending on who you ask, at what point and in what circumstances. Thus empowerment can only be viewed as a process of multiple negotiation between various different agendas and visions of what it constitutes in any given context. The case of the Bhutanese refugee youth and their contrary notions of empowerment and its processes raises the question of whose version is or should be prioritised?

### **Concluding thoughts**

Participatory photography practitioners are increasingly seeking to paint a more complex picture of what the participatory photography process entails and are producing accounts and debates that serve as correctives ‘to overly purist and naïve ideas ... regarding the possibilities of “giving voice” to or empowering the marginalised and disenfranchised’ (Lykes et al 2003:89). These involve moving away from one-dimensional views of power that fixate on themes of ownership and control in the photographic process and building understanding of how specific pluralised relations of power mold and define projects in unpredictable ways.

When we understand photography as an ongoing multi-participated event in which all the participants - the photographer, the subject, the facilitators and organisers, the community, the implicated organisations, the donors and funders, its disseminators – have the possibility, within their own capacities and interests, of laying claim to the process (Azoulay 2008, 2012) then photography, like a Foucauldian concept of power, becomes something that no one owns. In this context a zero-sum concept of power becomes redundant. Empowerment becomes something that needs to be examined and critiqued anew in each element of the photographic process in the context of both its observable and unobservable behaviors. Its investigation reveals that the central challenge for practitioners lies in creating parameters for the negotiation of ethics.

Participatory approaches aim to create social change rather than to do no harm (Cahill et al 2007). This is challenging and ethically complex work which is unpredictable and involves risk. There is a danger that an aversion to risk results in projects that patronise or obstruct emancipatory efforts. Ultimately an ethical commitment to participation involves an explicit interrogation of power and privilege both within its processes and in terms of thinking through its intended impacts. In practice this means grappling with the tensions and ‘excavating disjunctures’ within collectives rather than smoothing over dissent in the interest of consensus’ (Cahill 2007:311). It is key that practitioners self-reflexively probe their own sense of what it is they mean when they aspire to ‘empower’ with cameras, to question what kind of change they are striving for and how their intention and capacity to ‘empower’ is shaped by their own motivations, regimes of governmentality and dynamics in the community. A re-politicised participatory photography is driven by the possibility of addressing asymmetries of power, privilege and knowledge production, of opening up spaces for marginalised voices and of challenging the dominant hegemonic paradigm but all the while acknowledges that these processes and those involved can never stand outside of power. It involves a political commitment rooted in an ethical approach based not on a fixed set of rules but rather on a fundamentally open attitude (Bleiker 2005:196) that roots itself in an ethos of critical responsiveness (Connolly 1995), an ongoing reflexive and negotiated process of engagement with power and its dynamics.

If relations of power are understood as the strategies by which people try to control the conduct of others, then practitioners need to judge which strategies are good and which are bad (Campbell 1998:512). Emancipatory politics must be determined by a politics of power (which involves action that potentially or actively transforms structures of domination) as distinct from a politics of domination (Stewart 2001:19). Avoiding domination has to be the 'hinge point of ethical concerns' (Foucault 1998:16). Minimising domination whilst realising that a process devoid of power relations is impossible is a principle that can act guide practitioners trying to negotiate the 'limits that are imposed' and to 'experiment with the possibility for going beyond them' (Foucault 1984:50). The concern here is for autonomy, but not in an idealised sense, rather for a concept of autonomy situated within an analytics of power (Campbell 1998:512).

# 6

## **The Promise to Change: Examining impact over time**

Participatory photography aspires to enable positive change on multiple levels – to have an impact on the participants directly involved, as well their communities, and at a societal level through attitude and policy change. These are lofty ambitions and projects have been accused of a tendency to overstate benefits (Bodle 2008, Foster Fishman 2005, Godden 2009). Initiatives are charged with failing to explicitly define the kind of impact they aim to have, couching themselves ‘in wishy-washy terms’ (N.Pursesey, 2012, interview, 28<sup>th</sup> February). This has led some commentators to ask, ‘just what kind of change is at issue here?’ (Kester 1995:9).

This chapter examines participatory photography’s claim to enable positive change through an analysis of *These Photos Were My Life*, the film contained on the accompanying DVD that examines the long-term impact of TAFOS on its participants. The current evaluative regimes and techniques in the participatory arts sector are problematised. It is argued that the failure of participatory arts practice to build up a convincing evidence base is due to significantly flawed theory grounded in linear, causal models of change that do not succeed in capturing the complexity and plural dynamics of its practice. Caught up in trying to satisfy instrumental and managerial objectives and produce ‘solid’ objective evidence of impact, evaluation is unable to grasp the subjective and unstable character of participatory photography practice and the transformative processes it involves.

When participatory photography is re-imagined as an unfinished event (Azoulay 2012) then the concept of how the photographic encounter plays out over years is given a new significance and meaning. It requires that we think of participatory

photography practice as an ongoing process over time. *These Photos Were My Life* examines the long-term significance of TAFOS for 10 of its former participants, 15 years after the project ended. It explores the impact of TAFOS not in causal terms but in performative, affective, temporal and visceral domains rooted in subjective experience. Building on work that seeks to advance alternative criteria for understanding and evaluating the social impact of arts (Belfiore 2006, Bishop 2012, Kester 1999, Mouffe 2012), it establishes that the long-term potential of participatory photography lies in its capacity to act as a catalyst to develop, nurture and cultivate criticality and critical consciousness (Freire 1973). It also highlights the limitations of participatory photography's impact in terms of its sustainability and the complexities of causal attribution.

The chapter aims to harness the potential of evaluation as a form of critical practice that is generative and integral to the creative learning process (Rooke 2014a). Following the call to unshackle evaluation from its advocacy role (Belfiore 2006 2009, Rooke 2014), it urges practitioners to work with humility and to engage with an open-ended approach that contributes to broadening knowledge and understanding in the field while tempering the tendency to romanticize and exaggerate impact. The research presented supports participatory photography's claim to impact participants and establishes that its transformative effect endures over time. However, the objective is not to produce concrete and definitive evidence of participatory photography's impact. The aim is to examine its long-term significance for participants in order to work on an imaginary of participatory photography that makes connections between participatory photography's impact on individuals, a wider politics of social change and a more intricate understanding of a politics of voice within processes of social change.

### **The failure of evaluation and causal models of change**

Research into the social impact of arts has been marred by confusion between genuine research and research for the sake of advocacy (Belfiore 2006, 2009; Rooke 2014a/b). There is an assumption that the social impacts of participatory arts exist and it is just a matter of uncovering them (Belfiore 2009). As the field has struggled to prove its worth within competitive instrumental and managerial

regimes, there has been a tendency to exaggerate and insinuate rather than substantiate impact. As a result existing research appears to reveal more about the field's ambitions than its actual impact.

Within the NGO sphere there is now consensus that 'results matter' (Barnett & Weiss 2008:7). Initiatives have to provide proof of their value for money<sup>117</sup> and monitoring and evaluation is key for gathering data that will satisfy donors and demonstrate results. Evaluation reports thus become 'marketing tools for commissioners' (Rooke 2014). Many small-scale participatory arts projects, under-resourced and time-poor, are unable to engage in in-depth monitoring and evaluation activity<sup>118</sup>. The culture of 'results-based management practices' (Belfiore 2002, Merli 2002, Yudice 2003), are bias towards short-term measurable results over efforts to engage with projects that pursue longer-term change and less easy to quantify outcomes (Green 2004:373). Within this dynamic the great critical and reflective potential of evaluation is lost and the learning required for the field to move forward, evolve and innovate does not occur (Rooke 2014).

Considering the dominance of the instrumental view of the arts it is perhaps surprising to consider the actual evidence of their social impact is 'paltry' (Belfiore 2002:94). There is now a substantial literature that reviews and assesses the evidence base for the social impact of the arts (Arts Council 2004; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Merli 2002; Reeves, 2002; Ruiz, 2004; Williams 1996)<sup>119</sup>. There is a sense that the quality of evidence is poor and that evaluation methodologies are still unsatisfactory (Catalani & Minkler 2010, Hergenrather et al 2009, Belfiore 2006).

Authors identify five weaknesses with the existing evidence that highlight the shortcomings of theoretical and methodological models (Belfiore, 2006; Merli

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<sup>117</sup> Pursey, PhotoVoice's fundraiser, contends this of particular issue in the context of participatory photography projects that often involve only a small number of direct participants. Projects are often viewed by donors, looking for value for money, as being costly in terms of their 'cost per head' (N.Pursey, 2012, interview).

<sup>118</sup> From experience, I am aware of how initiatives often survive on minimal funding and are headed by project managers who are overloaded and focused on the task of project delivery. In such an environment monitoring and evaluation often gets overlooked, associated more with fulfilling donor requirements than project learning and development.

<sup>119</sup> Reports have also focused on specialized areas such as health (Staricoff, 2004), criminal justice (Hughes, 2004), mental health (APU/UCLAN Research Team 2005), social inclusion (Jermyn, 2001; Newman, Curtis, & Stephens, 2003) and regeneration (Evans & Shaw, 2004; Kay 2000).

2002; Reeves, 2002; Ruiz, 2004). Firstly, the question of casual attribution as arts research has failed to establish a relation between the transformation observed and the cultural project or activity being evaluated (Belfiore 2002, Galloway 2009). Participatory photography projects often make assumptions based on a linear model of change that presumes a direct casual link between photography, the process of being 'empowered' and the positive social change that results from it<sup>120</sup>. This linear framework of cause and effect characterizes current thinking within the NGO sector and carries significant weight (Green 2008:440). The majority of empirical studies on the social impact of the arts thus rely on a form of before and after measurement tool. Many participatory photography evaluations use a version of this (Hafford 1994, Hockton 2008, Venice Arts 2005).

However, authors note that being able to show change in relation to a predefined indicator does not prove that the change was produced by the project being evaluated (Belfiore 2006:26, PhotoVoice 2007:69). Such a simple linear model of change fails to account for contextual complexity. Transformative processes are unstable and outcomes cannot easily be predicted. Project experiences demonstrate that the relationship between photography and change rather than being direct is complex and fragile, molded and shaped by multiple factors. There can be no assumptions about how the participatory process will impact participants and that multiple goals can be pursued with one objective automatically flowing from the other.

The second failure of evaluation models is their routine omission of unforeseen outcomes and negative impacts from the measurement of the social impact of the arts (Belfiore, 2002; Evans & Shaw, 2004). Thirdly, there is the issue of a reliance on 'anecdotal evidence' and participants' declarations that cannot be transformed into robust qualitative data (Belfiore 2002; Merli 2002). Participatory photography projects that claim impact on a social, attitudinal and policy level often fail to substantiate their claims with anything more than anecdotal evidence such as visitor exhibition feedback which is then used to make generalized claims about

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<sup>120</sup> The assumption is of a direct, successional relation between an intervention and a pre-defined outcome - that participants will be empowered and transformed through the photographic experience leading to improvements in their lives; that their new photographic 'voice' will be channeled towards the task of instigating and pushing for positive changes in their own and their communities' lives; that their images will inform and influence audiences who will in turn take action that will lead to positive change in the lives of the community in question.

impact<sup>121</sup>.

Fourthly, concerns have been raised over the value and appropriateness of statistical and quantitative methods and evidence in the context of arts evaluation (Belfiore 2006, Merli 2002)<sup>122</sup>. Finally, and crucial to the framework of this investigation, there is a dearth of research that identifies long-term impact (Belfiore 2002, Germination et al 2008). With most evaluation happening soon after the activity has taken place, the alleged life-changing effects of the experience are completely omitted from any form of monitoring (Belfiore 2002, Germination et al 2008). The logistical difficulties of longitudinal research for organisations and researchers make it challenging to carry out (Germination et al 2008) and there is little incentive in a sector looking for short-term demonstrable results.

For this research, I conducted an extensive literature review and consultation with professionals in the arts evaluation field but was unable to find research that examines the long-term impact of arts participation for participants<sup>123</sup>. Whilst the importance and relevance of long term impact has been argued repeatedly (See Evans and Shaw 2004), the research and the challenges that it entails, including the costs, logistics and the sustaining of contacts have not been properly tackled to date. In this context this chapter details the first known research that examines the impact of participatory photography on participants over the long term<sup>124</sup>.

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<sup>121</sup> Catalani and Minkler (2010) note that while a number of studies argue the intention to impact policy, none adequately discussed or evaluated the impacts, if any, on the policy level. Wang writes of how photovoice 'may help contribute to attitudinal change' (1999:190) and talks of its 'potential' to affect policy change but there is no concrete evidence given of where and how photovoice has impacted at such a level. Clover (2006) and Hafford (1994) provide examples of project evaluations / case studies that rely on anecdotal evidence and fail to substantiate their claims of impact on a public and political level. Tools such as exhibition feedback books and exhibition visitor questionnaires and interviews are often used by projects attempting to gather information on awareness raising and attitudinal impact (Furness 2003, Orton 2004). Projects and organisations often do not have the resources to conduct wider research to establish impact. However the idea of social change resulting from image making and viewing is very complex and difficult to measure through such data.

<sup>122</sup> An evaluation of Positive Negatives (Furness 2003), a participatory photography project with HIV+ women in DR Congo, used data on the commercial monetary value of the amount of press coverage generated by its UK exhibition to qualify its success. However it begs the question of what such data lends to explaining and understanding what the project achieved in terms of impact – it provides no insight into how audiences responded to the exhibition and its media coverage or to what extent it affected attitudes and encouraged viewers to take action around the issues it advocated.

<sup>123</sup> I found a small number of studies which considered impact some time after activities has ceased but they were still only within 3months – 3 years of the project end.(Branding and Wall 2009, Furness 2003).

<sup>124</sup> In the case of TAFOS long term specifically means 13 years after the formal end of project activities although for many participants it is up to 25 years since their initial involvement



***These Photos Were My Life: Developing an alternative model***



Maria looks through TAFOS photographs. Still taken from *These Photos Were My Life*.  
© Tiffany Fairey

**Please see the accompanying DVD to view *These Photos Were My Life***

Given the failure of traditional evaluation models, there is the need for a significant reconfiguration of thinking (Belfiore & Bennett 2007a, Bishop 2006, Kester 1999, Schwarzman 2003, Rooke 2014). *These Photos Were My Life* pursues an alternative framework by defining impact not in terms of short-term quantifiable and demonstrable outcomes but by focusing on the subjective experience of participants and the question of how they have come to define the impact of TAFOS over the long-term. The film consists of interviews with 10 former TAFOS photographers conducted 19-25 years after their participation in TAFOS. The experiences captured indicate the enduring transformative affect of the project. These impacts are not uniform and neither are they always easily communicable or apparent. They are personal and, at times ambiguous, but significantly in every case they are formative and lasting.

*These Photos Were My Life* examines the issue of impact from an approach that understands change and causality, not in linear terms, but as nebulous and contextual. It seeks to capture the particular character of the critical, creative experience and the temporality of its impact. Authors emphasize that the complex, subjective, emotional, multidimensional and collaborative nature of artistic processes make them challenging to quantify (Belfiore & Bennett 2007a, Bishop 2006, Kester 1999, Schwarzman 2003). Scientific methods cannot account for the emotional and psychological component of artistic experiences and how they might operate at an unconscious level and change over time (Belfiore and Bennet 2007a). The challenge is how to measure the communicative dimension characteristic of the particular type of ‘flow experience’ in the artistic encounter (Belfiore and Bennett 2007a: 227). How to capture the ambiguity and rupture involved in these projects?

If the creative, aesthetic experience is understood as a space for perversity, paradox, risk, tension and negation, as well as empowering positives, then accounts of participatory art that do not accommodate for this undermine their own potency and negate their own artistic and political purpose to critically challenge and question relations of power (Bishop 2012). *These Photos Were My Life* harnesses an alternative approach that sees evaluation as the negotiation of differing opinions and that acknowledges that ultimately the significance, attribution or longevity of change is a matter of judgment (Roche 2001).

Such a perspective asks what ‘judgments of what change are considered ‘significant’ for whom and by whom’ (Roche 2001:363) and who decides. It acknowledges that if governmental regimes privilege systematic, scientific and rational ways of thinking over other modes (Foucault 1984), the battle between different frameworks and approaches to evaluation can be understood in terms of a ‘dispute over truth’ (Rose 1999:xv). The question of whose version counts is fundamental. *These Photos Were My Life* starts from the premise that the research subject’s own definition of what is significant is central. The methodology involved participants in a longitudinal study formatted to provide space for them to define their own versions of how the project has had an impact on their lives over

time<sup>125</sup>.

If the subjective nature of aesthetic and critical encounters means they will never satisfy the criteria of scientific objectivity, it would seem a researcher must decide; ‘either one trusts the words of the person who reports the experience or one does not’ (Belfiore and Bennett 2007a). *These Photos Were My Life* starts with this trust and from the premise that only through dialogue with people can researchers hope to understand the significance, value and meaning of peoples’ experiences. This approach posits that it is through the collation of multiple subjective experiences of particular phenomena that we can assemble a picture of how an experience has affected the people involved. This allows us to make observations on both the variations and commonalities in an attempt to make sense and find patterns with the complexity<sup>126</sup>.

To capture multiplicity we must reconfigure how we think about change and causality. An alternative framework for the evaluation of participatory photography needs to be based on understandings of change that push beyond linear, casual frameworks that are ‘ill-suited to describing or influencing the kind of chaotic and complex changes that often characterize development’ (Green 2008:440). While traditional evaluation focuses on the intervention itself, recent models of change examine how diverse contextual factors all contribute to how and why change happens in development settings (Green 2008). These factors interact to create a complex, unpredictable dynamic of change as becoming; a process that involves peaks and troughs of activity, cumulative and sequential progress, chaotic change, more predictable, foreseeable moments of change and change instigated or coalescing around key leaders, organisations, movements, public demonstrations or market movements (Green 2008:438-39). It is these contextual dynamics that combine with the activities of a given project to bring about change. Change is

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<sup>125</sup> This is not to deny my own role in editing and producing these stories. The film production process described in Chapter 2 describes how their 2-4 minute stories in the film have been shaved, chopped and whittled down from hours of conversation. This has involved a process of selection and judgment on what is to be deemed as significant and what is to be discarded. However the editorial process involved a generative method where thematic reviews of the interviews were developed to ensure that the final edit adequately reflected the key points made by the interviewees.

<sup>126</sup> Belfiore & Bennett talk of the historical dimension of the artistic experience, acknowledging that each of us is located at a unique point in space and time from which we imagine a personal and collective history and that our understanding of our experiences is shaped by how we locate it within some part of that imagined history (2007a:245). The active interview format, described in Chapter 2 that was the basis of the film, sought to delve into these personal histories, motivations and expectations in collaboration and dialogue with the participants. The non-linear format of the film enables the telling of multiple stories within a single framework.

never solely the result of NGO and agency intervention but involves broader processes that are the outcome of many social, political and environmental factors and potential upheaval (Roche 2001:363).

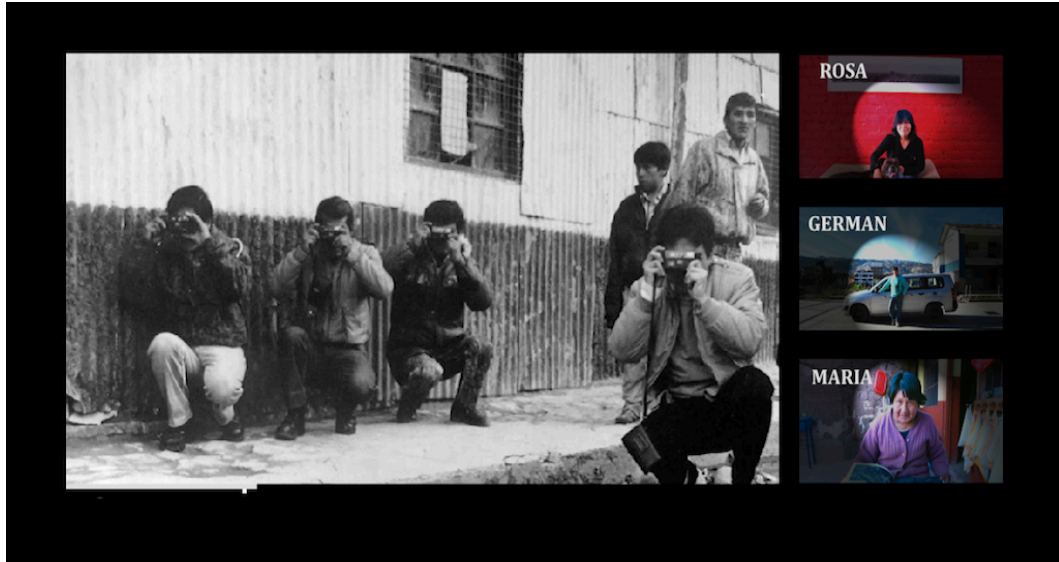
Such a theory of change pushes us towards a conception of causality that is plural and contextual rather than linear and successional. The approach used in *These Photos Were My Life* makes the temporality of experience central and develops a conception of causality as emerging. Connolly's 'deep pluralism' rejects the dominance of ideas of time as linear and progressive, he pushes for an understanding of 'time as becoming' which acknowledges that experience consists of interfolded elements of time. His argument is that as the world spins faster, new experiences challenge conventional ideas of time. There is an urgent need to think of political time as operating on two levels - of 'clock' and 'durational' time (2005). While conventional conceptions of meaning and causality are tied to 'an image of punctual time in which the past determines the future' (constitutive of a politics of being), a perspective that recognizes 'durational time' reflects the flow of time as becoming, where things become real as flow back and forth between several layers of past, present and future (constitutive of a politics of becoming) (2005:112). A dual perspective on time allows us, Connolly argues, to attend to complexity and avoid shallow theory (2005).

In this world and time of becoming there is a need to revisit classical conceptions of 'efficient' causality in which you separate factors, link them in succession and show how they affect each other (Campbell 2008:298). The notion of a 'world of becoming' is one that exceeds human explanation and control, 'for the possible points of fateful contact between emergent formations are too immense for either' (Connolly 2005:104). Thus when attending to the visceral we need to develop a conception of an 'emergent causality' where elements have effects at multiple levels, infusing areas and issues beyond their domain and then changing in response to these influences (Campbell 2008). Emergent causality thus refigures causality as resonance (Campbell 2008:298). Connolly's ideas draw from complexity theory that is central to the 'live sociology' that seeks to understand non-linear relationships and flows (Law & Urry 2005). Complexity theory takes social investigation a long way from conventional linear analysis as it demonstrates

that relationships between variables can overlap, combine or alternate and be non-linear with abrupt switches. Thus the same ‘cause’ can produce qualitatively different kinds of effect in specific circumstances.

Connolly’s pluralism puts the matter of time at the centre of the issue of causality while complexity theory designates that the initial conditions and the local context are vital to understanding and attributing complex causality and change. The narrative of TAFOS and the context in which it unfolded, as detailed in Chapter 4, is thus vital to the framing of *These Photos Were My Life* in providing a contextual background for the project’s affect on its participants. When acknowledging the intricate interplay of conditions, contexts, initiatives and subjective agency, attributing causality becomes a matter of negotiating the influences of multiple factors and of tracing their resonance. This theme is explored further in the story of Rosa Villafuerte later in the chapter.

### ***These Photos Are My Life: impact over time***



*These Photos Were My Life*, a Korsakow film  
Please view the film contained on the accompanying DVD

A growing body of correlating evidence demonstrates the immediate and short-term self-developmental benefits of participatory arts<sup>127</sup> and participatory

<sup>127</sup> Arts Council 2004; Reeves, 2002; Ruiz, 2004; Williams 1996; Matarosso 1997, Newman et al 2003, Jermyn 2004

photography projects<sup>128</sup>, particularly with reference to youth<sup>129</sup>. They provide converging evidence that participatory arts can be empowering for individuals. Yet while there is mounting evidence that points to the transformative effect on its direct participants in the short-term there has been no exploration of how this impact alters over time or whether benefits are sustained (Germination et al 2008, Jermyn 2004, Belfiore 2006, Merli 2002). *These Photos Were My Life* contributes to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating that participatory photography projects can constitute transformational and formative experiences that retain significance over the course of a participant's lifetime. The film presents participants' varied experiences but demonstrates how all spoke of TAFOS primarily in positive terms, of their involvement as having engendered an enduring transformative experience that developed their capacities and sense of self. These findings correlate with the evidence that demonstrates the self-developmental benefits of participatory arts in the short-term<sup>130</sup>.

Existing research establishes a direct relationship between the quality of participation experienced by the participants, project durations and project outcomes that involved 'getting to action' by the participants. Projects that involved a high level of empowerment resulted in some participants becoming 'agents for change' (Catalani & Minkler 2010). *These Photos Were My Life* demonstrates that participants experiencing a high level of participation over a significant period (more than 2-3 years) continue to feel the 'empowering' benefits of their experience many years after the project ended. Their life stories illustrate many examples of 'getting to action' resulting from their participation in TAFOS and involvement with photography.

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<sup>128</sup> References include Venice Arts 2005, Foster-Fisherman 2005, Kia Keating 2007, Hafford 1995, Hockton 2008, Orton 2002, Slater 2009. Venice Art's evaluation concluded the project enabled excluded youth to build positive relationships and contributed to a sense of community and positive outlook. PhotoVoice has also carried out a number of independent evaluations on their work in the UK with young refugees (Orton 2002, Slater 2009) and for their work with vulnerable adults suffering mental health issues they worked with a psychotherapist (Hockton 2008) and mental health experts (Branding and Wall 2009). The evaluations reported improved sense of self-esteem and self-confidence among the participants and highlighted the therapeutic potential of participatory photography work given the appropriate frameworks, facilitation style and support (Hockton 2008, Branding and Wall 2009) and that 'PhotoVoice methodology was 'extremely effective in building skills and confidence' (Orton 2002:7). Aja's research demonstrated that photography was used by young refugees to aid a process of adjustment and healing as they settled into their new lives in the US, supporting their coping strategies, developing a sense of self and identity and motivating them to reach for new goals (Kia Keating 2007, 2009).

<sup>129</sup> Venice Arts 2005, Kia-Keating et al 2007, Orton 2002, William 1996, Matarosso 1997, Newman et al 2003, Jermyn 2004, Merli 2002, Dowmunt et al 2007, Gidley and Slater 2007

<sup>130</sup> Reports and studies highlight a range of beneficial outcomes, including increased self-esteem and self-confidence, positive relationships, improved communication skills and a better sense of community. See previous footnotes ,no 11-13.

The most conspicuous outcome of participation in TAFOS is that it created career pathways for participants. Of those interviewed, half went on to work or continued to engage in fields related to photography, community and communications development work, with three of them working for a while within the TAFOS institution itself as facilitators or staff members<sup>131</sup>. Pablo currently works as a video editor, Walter as a photographer, Rosa as a curator and archivist, Raul spent ten years earning a living as a photographer. All these people had been youths when they got involved in TAFOS and the skills they picked up, the exposure and experience gained has had a defining influence on their career trajectories. The TAFOS experience in this respect mirrors recent projects a number of which have former participants working in photography and related industries<sup>132</sup>.

However, to capture the full range of long-term outcomes we need to adjust our understanding of what ‘getting to action’ by participants and ‘agents of change’ means. Research to date has focused on the outcomes relating to advocacy and campaigning work or career development (Gidley 2007) orientated as it is to assess the demonstrable impact of participatory photography to affect policy and social change. But if the criteria are expanded to include other instances where participants have acted as a result of the views, sentiments and perspectives garnered through their participation then we can build a more complex picture of the long-term project impact beyond immediate self-development and advocacy benefits.

Participants talked of the long-term influence of the experience as affecting a wide range of activities, from how they chose to raise their children (Gloria), how they consumed media (Justo), the network of friends that had seen them through life (Raul) and the development of a spirituality and way of being in the world (Willy and Susana). The participants all agreed on some aspects of the influence of TAFOS on their way of thinking; the experience had engendered in them a critical way of looking at the world that became the foundation for how they chose to live their lives. They described an experience that had encouraged them to observe,

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<sup>131</sup> See Pablo, Rosa, Raul, Walter, Susana and Justo’s stories

<sup>132</sup> Most established participatory photography projects have examples of participants who have gone onto develop careers in photography and as photographers including a number of **PhotoVoice** projects, **Out of Focus**, **FotoKids**, **Kids With Cameras** and **Shoot Back**, to mention a few.

explore and question and that had instigated in them a critical engagement with the world that crystallised a sense of social justice and purpose.

This relates to a concept of empowerment as enshrined in Paulo Freire's notion of critical consciousness (1973). It is my contention that the potential of photography as an emancipatory tool can be found specifically in its value as a tool for developing a critical consciousness. Concentrating on photography's capacity to awaken, and nurture critical consciousness is key to re-connecting it to a politics of voice that moves beyond vague and grandiose notions of empowerment and social change.

Before developing the discussion further I would like to take a moment to note that *These Photos Were My Life* needs to be understood in the context of research that has already established the huge variety of experience across the participatory spectrum in photography projects and that has concluded that the greatest impact and benefits are felt by those who are the most highly engaged (Catalani & Minkler 2010). The former TAFOS photographers interviewed were arguably the more active participants, involved in the earlier workshops that ran over longer periods and that were based in the urban centres of Cusco and Lima where TAFOS had offices<sup>133</sup>. Given the huge diversity of the TAFOS photographers and their geographical locations it is safe to say there would have been a wide range of experiences and potential impact. This research does not seek to make generalised findings applicable to all TAFOS participants. **Müller** suggests that for many of the participants photography did not have any long-term relevance or value.

*'A campesino is not a photography aficionado. If it is no longer useful to them after a particular moment then they will stop using it. It is a simple thing. At that moment (the time of Tafos) it was very useful – to explain, to transmit, to be listened to and so that they could listen. But when the moment passed they put the camera down.'* (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> June).

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<sup>133</sup> The limitations of the subject sample, the group of former TAFOS photographers interviewed for the film, are discussed in Chapter 2.



## **Participatory photography and critical consciousness**

With this broader qualification in mind, I want to focus on the one characteristic of TAFOS's legacy that came up repeatedly among those interviewed. They spoke of a perspective, a critical and analytical outlook, and an engagement with the world that the project had ignited and cultivated in them and that had stayed with them to the present day. Justo described how photography 'helped me to understand things that I did not understand before' (J.Vargas). Gloria spoke of it in terms of a sensitization to the world, an outlook that she has passed down and cultivated in her children (G.Calderon). German talked of how TAFOS opened his eyes and gave him a way of looking at society that has stayed with him (G.Gammara).

While each participant expressed it in different terms, they all pointed to a sense of Paulo Freire's notion of 'critical consciousness' (1970, 1973). Freire's concept is synonymous with theories of empowerment and participation and his dialogical teaching methods are foundational to many concepts of grassroots social change (Mayo 2000, Chambers 1997, Cahill et al 2007). His ideas inform much of the theory behind participatory photography methods (Carlson et al 2006, Hubbard 2007, PhotoVoice 2007, Wang 1997). The Brazilian educationalist was concerned with the process by which the individual becomes conscious of the reality that they live in and then seeks to change that reality. He strove to enable the 'oppressed' to become empowered through a process of 'conscientisation' where they come, through dialogue, to critically understand reality. They could use that understanding to challenge the powerful, and then ultimately to transform that reality through conscious political struggles (Freire 1970, 1973).

Freire recognized three levels of consciousness that affect human behavior (1970). In the third and final level of critical consciousness individuals become aware of the assumptions that shape their interpretations of reality and conscious of their own responsibility for choices that maintain or shape that reality. Freire used an explicit process to move individuals from one level of critical consciousness to a higher level where the goal is to engage people to participate in their own learning. Dialogue is central. Man, he argued, cannot create himself in silence.

*'If it is in speaking their world that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.'* (1970:69)

At the core of his pedagogy was the need for people to 'develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world' (Freire 1970:64). This process of developing critical thought that then results in transformation and action has been absorbed as the central tenet of the participatory photography method<sup>134</sup>. It is through learning photography, observing the world, deciding what pictures to take, editing your images, discussing and reflecting on them, deciding what you want to communicate, sharing them with others and presenting them publically that dialogue and ultimately transformation is initiated.

In the interviews for *These Photos Were My Life* the sense of an awakening critical consciousness is communicated in Justo's description of how TAFOS transformed his walk to his classes as he suddenly found himself noticing things he had previously just walked by. Susana reflects that it made her a more active person as it pushed her out on to the streets, to look at the world around her. She felt compelled to move from one place to the other, photographing everything that caught her interest and has done to the present day, amassing a huge personal archive of images. For those who already had a developed sense of political engagement such as Willy, photography provided a channel for all the pent up frustration and anger he felt regarding the political situation in Peru. It gave him a means to record, protest and denounce that he believes prevented him from resorting to violence. For Maria, who already worked as an activist, it gave her an instrument to record, communicate and push for community issues. Photography enabled something unique for each participant whom were all at their own specific point in their own personal histories and development but collectively their experiences pointed to how photography instigated and facilitated in them a critical way of being in the world.

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<sup>134</sup> Carlson et al's identify 3 levels of engagement that participatory photography participants pass through when examining and discussing their images. Firstly they developed an emotional engagement from which evolved a cognitive awakening in which there was a growing recognition of responsibility and complicity and finally they reached a phase of 'intentions to act' (Carlson et al 2006:849).

Carrying a camera gave participants a tool, a sense of purpose and means through which to communicate and connect with what was going on in their communities. The process of taking the pictures meant being in the community, walking the streets and participating in events. The process of reviewing and editing images provided a separate and equally important opportunity for reflection and dialogue. The photographs act as a stimulus and code that reflects the participants and community back on itself (Wang 1994). Willy speaks of photography as allowing him to theorise. Justo speaks of images as having given him a means to think and a way to ask questions. This potential of photography to foster deep reflection is an element critical to a process of empowerment (Foster Fishman 2005:281).

However it is the combination of the activities of taking pictures and then talking about and presenting pictures, that gives photography its potency in terms of emancipatory possibility. Azoulay talks of photography as an activity that takes place in two modes – in relation to the camera and in relation to the photograph (2012:9), It is this dual modality that is key to understanding its effectiveness and potential as a tool for nurturing a process of conscientization which links to a politics of voice. Photography provides multiple and flexible paths to critically engaging with and exploring the world. The fixed image works as a catalyst to discussion and understanding the different realities within a community (Lykes et al 2003).

The sense of emerging criticality described by the former TAFOS photographers as they used photography to connect with their community and find a new way of being in world evokes the notion of photography as involving ‘a certain form of human being-with-others’ (Azoulay 2012:18). Justo speaks of sharing his pictures with people on the bus and the importance of giving back the image. Susana talks of photography making her more social. TAFOS as a project brought people together through images to fight for a common cause. Herein lies its possibility as an emancipatory tool. For when cameras are in the hands of many, new modes of questioning and arguing over how citizens coexist and how they are governed open up (Azoulay 2008). Previously people who held cameras had the power but this power is transformed when cameras are in the hands of many (Heiferman 2012). Photography as a tool of the masses allows, as Azoulay argues, for the enactment

of a new form of civil relations because photography links people and their capacity for political imagination (2008:142).

*'Imagination is always shot through with splinters of images that have their source in the outside world and in other people' (2012:4).*

In *These Photos Were My Life* what emerges is the sense of critical consciousness and the political imagination TAFOS instigated continues to shape participants' outlooks despite the fact that the majority did not continue with their photography. Susana talks of it as a 'lifestyle' that has stayed with her forever (S.Silva). In this sense, photography facilitates a critical way of being in the world that has effects that last over a lifetime.

### **Limitations of impact: the question of sustainability**

Whilst participant's perspectives on TAFOS were primarily positive, the interviews did raise issues relating to the limitations of the project impact that echo points made in existing research on short-term participatory photography projects. Two participants spoke of their on-going desire to take images but their inability to do so due to financial circumstances (Maria) and lack of purpose and structure (German). Maria spoke animatedly about what she would have taken pictures of in the last two decades if she had access to a camera. She regretted all the pictures missed. Others expressed their disappointment at the project end and their on-going desire that it had been able to continue (Rosa, Justo, German, Willy). Justo lamented that there was no organisation currently in existence through which he could channel his aspirations and realise his desire to teach and work with photography.

Various participatory photography studies and resources raise the issue of project sustainability in relation to impact as they refer to participants' disillusionment when project activities come to an end (Furness 2003, Orton 2002, PhotoVoice 2008, Purcell 2009, Slater 2007, Strack et al 2010). The recurring theme, discussed in Chapter 3, is that projects have the potential to create a negative outcome by raising hopes but failing to fulfil them (PhotoVoice 2008). Deep bonds and networks are often formed over the course of a project and aspirations ignited so it is no surprise that participants feel the loss of a project. TAFOS, as an

organisation, lasted twelve years, which is significantly longer than the majority of participatory photography initiatives. However, its end disappointed many.

This raises an important question in relation to the matter of project sustainability and duration and its close link to impact. Experienced practitioners emphasise that long-term commitment to projects is not only central to maximising and deepening impact but also a crucial ethical matter (S.Alam, 2012, interview). The projects surveyed for this research attest to the belief that longer-term projects do result in more lasting transformations for participants. This is achieved through the provision of ongoing support and networks and by opening up an array of opportunities for participants, often beyond the narrow focus of developing image related careers<sup>135</sup>. While the issue of project duration is not clear cut – a long project does not guarantee increased impact – there is growing recognition that it is of key consequence to the quality and level of participation achieved (Catalani & Minkler 2010, Eid-Sabbagh, 2013, interview; A.Levner, 2011, interview). The matter of a project's end is always going to place limits on and influence the nature of its impact.

It is also important to recognise that there are limits to what a participatory photography project can achieve when there are other needs and priorities to be addressed. German's film raises an important point in this respect. He observes that despite his good intention and desire to continue with his photography and related activities that society 'absorbed him' (German). The reality of quotidian life and needing to earn a living did not leave him with the space to pursue his photography. It was not that the project failed or left him disempowered but that his responsibilities and priorities moved on and changed. His testimony highlights that people do not always have the time and capacity to engage in these activities, embroiled as they are in meeting their day-to-day responsibilities to earn a living and take care of their families. Mayo makes the crucial point that 'global patterns of economic, political and social inequality are not going to be resolved by cultural strategies alone' (2000:192). If projects are going to have a meaningful impact in terms of transforming participants' lives then photography becomes only a small part of the equation. Acknowledging this committed practitioners who have

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<sup>135</sup> See **FotoKids** for example

worked over years with small groups of participants recognise that over time photography becomes only a small part of what their projects involve (Alam, 2012, interview; Briski, 2013, interview, Eid-Sabbagh, 2013, interview). Alam elaborates,

*'I think photography is a very tiny part of the process but most projects tend to have photography as the central part of the process. I think that is the wrong way to look at it. I think photography is a tool, a very powerful tool but what we need to see it is as a key and it's the wider context we need to deal with. Unless we are prepared to deal with that context I don't think we should be opening that lock.'* (S.Alam, 2012, interview)

### **Assigning impact: the case of Rosa and the need for humility**

*'It started when I was a teenager and it planted the possibility... '*  
(R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, 16<sup>th</sup> June)



Rosa at home beneath one of her panoramic images of Lima barrios, still taken from *These Photos Were My Life* © Tiffany Fairey

The issue of attribution is a central challenge for evaluation. How is it that research can attribute an observed change to the intervention in question? *These Photos Were My Life* pursues an approach that seeks to question linear models of change and cause and effect by demonstrating the complexity of causality given the multiple elements and contextual factors that shape peoples' personal narratives.

Rosa Villafuerte's story allows us to consider the challenge of attribution in more detail. Rosa got involved with TAFOS through the Jesuit organization, SEA, whose youth group she was a part of where she lived in the barrio of El Agustino in Lima. Twenty six years on she is still Lima-based and works freelance as a photographer, archive consultant and curator, skills that she first learnt as a TAFOS photographer and working in the TAFOS office.



'I had a picture of the police hitting a woman at a demonstration. They used this as evidence, saying I had taken the pictures of the police because I planned to kill them. The incident made me very fearful and I gave up photography completely for a number of years' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, 16<sup>th</sup> June)

Rosa was one of the most active members of the El Agustino workshop until an incident with the police meant she stopped photographing. During evictions by authorities in her barrio, police used a photo Rosa had taken as evidence to accuse her of being involved in terrorism. She was cleared but the incident scared her and she did not touch a camera for a number of years. She took up theatre and music but was unable to find a means of making a living so when she was offered a job to

photograph a human rights event through TAFOS she took it. From there she got involved managing the restoration of the TAFOS archive while pursuing her own photographic work once more. It took time to regain her confidence but she started a long-term documentary project on street children in Lima that was published. Subsequently, with TAFOS's help, she secured a scholarship to study photography in Barcelona. By the time Rosa returned from her studies TAFOS had closed down but she continued to work, freelancing as a photographer, archivist and curator, a career that has sustained her to this day. One of her most recent jobs was the curation of a TAFOS archive exhibition of Daniel Pajuelo's work, *La Calle Es El Cielo*, for the Lima Photo Festival 2012<sup>136</sup>.

Listening to Rosa's story it would seem reasonable to assume the considerable impact that photography and TAFOS had in shaping the course of her life. But for Rosa it is not so clear-cut,

*'I don't know if it was the photography and TAFOS that were the vehicle which made me who I am today or if I had the predisposition to be who I am...'* (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview)

She explains that she always had diverse interests and was open to many things; it was just that photography was the easiest and most viable route. For Rosa, it is presumptuous to assume that a photography project was the greatest influence on her life and to locate and define her in those terms (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 4<sup>th</sup>). As she sees it there has to be a predisposition to change, for while 'photography can make things visible and act as a catalyst we cannot presume it is the reason for change' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 16<sup>th</sup>).

*'In my philosophy of things you succeed because interests collide... It has to be in your interest and in the interest of the other. If both coincide then great... Opportunities are there but you need to make every effort to take them... I think it depends on your character, on your interests to grab those opportunities. I feel it has been like that for me. I have taken the opportunities I have seen. I have tried and what remains for me is the photography'* (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 4<sup>th</sup>)

NGO evaluation regimes have led to a situation that exaggerates the importance of the intervention and diminishes the role of other factors, 'not least people's own ingenuity and agency' (Roche 2001:367). Rosa's narrative demands that the power, capacity and the predisposition of participants is made central to understandings of causality and impact in participatory photography. Others

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<sup>136</sup> See: [https://www.facebook.com/lacalleesecielo?fref=pb&hc\\_location=profile\\_browser](https://www.facebook.com/lacalleesecielo?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser) (accessed 19<sup>th</sup> January 2015)



acknowledge that those most shaped by the photovoice process were influenced by a combination of opportunities, not solely their engagement with photography and question whether there might be some who were more predisposed and receptive to the photovoice process than others (Foster-Fishman et al 2005). For **Müller** it is clear; TAFOS worked because there was a genuine demand for it, it was an intervention that people wanted. Projects are misguided, he argues, if they have to develop 'what we had given to us - the interest and desire of the people to do it' (Muller, 2011, interview). People's will to engage and participate and to make something of the photography is crucial.

Rosa attributes her own choices and will as having the defining influence and impact on her experience, not outside interventions or the photography itself. Her perspective reflects a broader sentiment that ran throughout TAFOS. According to **Paucar**, TAFOS as a project did not have grand pretensions to change things, neither did it romanticise the capacity of photography to empower. He explains,

*'Photography can help you to understand a situation but change happens according to the choice of every person ...TAFOS understood that change doesn't happen because of an NGO's ambitions, it happens because of the community, because of the decision of everyone that lives there... What photography allows and what was the aim of TAFOS was not to change reality but to denounce a situation. It's role was not to promote change, its role was to offer tools to the population so that they had the resources they needed'. (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview June 5<sup>th</sup>)*

Müller states that TAFOS, as a workshop, never pretended to have made impact on its own because it would not have known how to (T.Müller, 2011, interview, June 4<sup>th</sup>). It inserted its activities into a broader movement that was fighting for change. He argues,

*'Photography is not political, it is a tool, an instrument that can be, in the hands of people who think politically, a tool for change. But photography in itself isn't (political) .... It is the person, the organization, the moment that makes it into a political tool.'* (T.Müller, 2011, interview, June 4<sup>th</sup>)

At TAFOS it was understood that it was the photographers, their organisations and the political moment that made the photography transformative not the other way round. There was no assumption that the photography instigated change in and of itself. It was viewed as a tool in support of broader political movement for change and recognition. The distinction is subtle but the shift is significant in terms of how we understand the relationship between photography and change.

This position undermines the idea of an all empowering photography. It pushes for the contemporary participatory photography narrative to take a more humble approach to how it lays claim to impact and seeks to attribute causality to its interventions. While photography might act as a catalyst to action other factors shape people's experiences. There are contextual and resource constraints surrounding the empowering effects of participatory photography (Foster-Fishman et al 2005). The matter of local conditions and people's capacity for change is fundamental to what is possible. TAFOS predated the contemporary focus on empowerment and did not frame its goals in these terms but there was an underlying ethos that designated the participants as already being 'empowered', that acknowledged their political capacity and potential. They did not need empowering but rather the tools and means to further claim and realize their own empowerment. The transformational experience of the project for participants was not understood in terms that attributed this experience to the project and medium of photography itself. Rather the experience of TAFOS illustrates that the capacity and agency of participants, their predisposition to and desire for change, and their networks and alliances play key roles in determining the impact of participatory photography projects.

The contemporary participatory photography narrative tends towards a rhetoric that mythologizes the capacity and power of photography to empower and enable positive change. It is time we adapted our expectations as to what the image makes possible (Mitchell 2005). Campbell points out that 'being a site for contemplation does not necessarily make the photograph an instrument for political change', for the image itself cannot create a possibility that otherwise does not exist (2003:100). There needs to be a more realistic portrayal of what projects can achieve on their own and a focus that resists the urge to look inwards and turns to look out, to understand how participatory photography might most effectively be used to impact social change. Participants, partners, local contexts, political moments and movements are all crucial in shaping and determining what projects achieve. The call is that practitioners might work with a great degree of humility, that recognizes the work of others, the limits as well as the potential of photography and that acknowledges the essential uncertainty of the enterprise.

## Concluding thoughts

Participatory photography needs to temper its romanticisation of the role and contribution of photography to social change. To date the field has been involved in a simplistic debate with a focus on measurable ‘impacts’ that has taken place at the cost of a rigorous exploration of the complexity of the issues involved, leaving a number of fundamental assumptions unchallenged. *These Photos Were My Life* demonstrates that participatory photography interventions can instigate effects for participants that are transformative and that endure over the long-term. The case of TAFOS also demonstrates that an understanding of context, local power relations, politics and social dynamics is a fundamental precondition to achieving impact. Whatever practitioners might aspire to achieve, the crux of what is possible in terms of meaningful, long-term change lies not within photography and the images themselves but within the local conditions, how they are made and used by the communities, the participants and practitioners in question and within the ties they build and opportunities they create for developing a critical way of being in the world.

Does photography change everything, as a recent book title claims<sup>137</sup>? Or is it, as Goldberg describes, that photographs change nothing but spread their influence everywhere (1991:17)? Our approach to research has to be more cautious and exploratory. It needs to acknowledge how much is still unknown about how people interact with and are affected by images. It needs to recognise that the workings of photography on people’s psyche are unpredictable and hard to measure. The argument is for, as Rooke describes it, the value of an ethics of doubt and uncertainty about the nature of projects, their potential and their impact while acknowledging that there is currently little space for this ethics of doubt and the critical reflection and honesty it entails within many participatory arts commissions (2014). There is a need to deconstruct our idea of evidence and to experiment with new methodologies that allow us capture the cognitive, emotional and subjective effects of people’s interactions. The call is for an ‘anti-bullshit’ research ethos dominated by an intellectual humility (Belfiore 2009) that puts to rest the idea that ‘the value of the arts can somehow be conclusively ‘proved’ (Belfiore 2007a:263).

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<sup>137</sup> Photography Changes Everything, Heiferman, Marvin (ed), Aperture, 2012

A more modest, critical approach urges us to re-think what participatory photography can achieve within wider strategies for social change. There is relatively little known about the ‘ample and charged territory’ between large-scale macro revolutionary change and small-scale micro transformation (Fox and Starn 1997). How is it that the personal affects the political? *These Photos Were My Life* demonstrates how modest forms of subjective change endure and resonate through people’s lives, shaping their professional outlooks and careers, the way they raise their children, their perspective on the world and their engagement with their community. Change that endures and is felt over decades, however modest, has to be designated as meaningful in the context of a politics of voices aimed at challenging dominant discourses and feeding into wider strategies of social change. Thinkers agree that pre-requisites for change include a challenging of the status quo, a re-imagining of political concepts and that people are engaged as citizens rather than as consumers, (Mouffe 2005, Hardt and Negri 2005). The need is for new stories to create new narratives for living and the role of projects that enable people to think critically about their place in the world is central to these efforts.

The photographer Susan Meisales talks of the power of the image as being about potential rather than certainty (Open Society Institute 2010). It is an observation that is particularly apt in the context of a pluralized participatory photography practice that affects the manner in which people see and engage with the world rather than generating definitive outputs. For Rosa, attributing all power to photography is simply misguided.

*‘Can photography be a tool for social change? Maybe. I have my doubts. I think that whatever happens we are going to change’ (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 16<sup>th</sup>).*

# 7

## **The Promise of Authenticity: the spectatorship of participatory photography images**

If participatory photography's aim is to democratize visual politics and enable alternative, marginalised voices to be heard then the question of how its images circulate, are assigned meaning and what they make discursively possible is crucial to understanding its promise. The focus of this chapter is on the 'civic space of the gaze' within participatory photography and the relations it makes possible (Azoulay 2008:18). The spectator is a vital, and often woefully neglected, participant in the (participatory) photography process<sup>138</sup>. The aim is to explore the process of spectatorship in participatory photography and examine its implications for the 'mode of mediation' (Debrix & Weber 2003) the practice facilitates. It is argued that participatory photography's 'ethics of spectatorship' (Azoulay 2008) be framed not around an appeal to its supposed authenticity but rather be based upon a pursuit for plural ways of seeing.

This chapter investigates the lives of the TAFOS images (Mitchell 2005:xi) over the last 30 years<sup>139</sup>. An examination of their circulation and celebrated status as 'visual history' leads to a consideration of the tacit claims to truth, authenticity and

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<sup>138</sup> I use the term spectator to designate the audience and viewers of participatory photography and their spectatorship in terms of their practices of looking at this specific genre of photography. I take a lead from Barthes' definition (1982) who designates three different producers of photographic knowledge – the 'Operator' (the photographer taking the picture), the 'Spectrum' (the person or thing photographed) and the 'Spectator' who he refers to as 'ourselves, all of us who glance thorough collections of photographs' (1982:9). My discussion focuses on the responses of sympathetic spectators, those who actively engage and respond to the images however this research does not assume that all spectators are moved by participatory photography images.

<sup>139</sup> Appaduri (1986) advocates a sociological perspective that focuses on the circulation of commodities and the social lives of things. He argues that commodities, like persons, have life histories and that can be followed, their meanings inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories (1986:5). In this sense, the starting point has been to overview the changing use and users of the TAFOS images in the last twenty years to build a picture of their shifting meanings and their changing contexts of circulation.

voice that lie within the narrative of participatory photography. It is argued that participatory produced images have become discursively dependent on their suggested authenticity and petitions to their 'genuineness'. This becomes problematic when the images get caught up in discourses that advocate one narrative and deny others thereby undermining an appeal to pluralism. The illustration of how TAFOS images were used within Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission demonstrates how participatory photography images can be appropriated and used within regimes of truth to lend authenticity to one particular narrative at the cost of plural ways of seeing. Moving beyond an appeal to authenticity, I argue that the spectatorship of participatory photography be re-framed within a narrative that imagines the practice as a platform for enabling a plurality of seeing and that cultivates critical responsiveness and agnostic respect to different ways of seeing (Connolly 1995).

In this chapter the notion of the performativity of the image is used to focus on the question of the work images do. The ontology of photography is intrinsically linked to performance (Levin 2009:328). Theories of performativity propose that there is no "doer behind the deed" but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed' (Butler 1999:195). In this framework the image is understood to have no inherent meaning but rather its significance is dependent on social, political, historical and cultural context and the conditions in which it is presented and interpreted (Sturken and Cartwright 2001). The notion of performativity inserts images into a world of becoming, locating them within an ongoing process of performing and evolving which has neither beginning nor end. The focus is on how an image 'becomes' and its conditions of emergence. By examining the discourses into which they are inserted the attention also turns to the meanings images mediate and the encounters they facilitate. Despite the frequent claim that photographs mirror the world (a claim often made in the TAFOS literature), the interest here is on their role in 'world-making' (Mitchell 2005:xv) and as a force in the mediation of social relations. What meanings are assigned to participatory photography by the discourses in which it is immersed? What is the character of the social relations and politics that they mediate and engender? Can participatory photography claim to 'give voice' when its performative narrative risks suffocating or closing off alternative or dissenting voices?

## The TAFOS archive: performing visual history

*'The first question must always be: Who is using this photograph, and to what end?' (Levi Strauss 2003:74).*

A consideration of the changing lives and users of the TAFOS images over the last 30 years illustrates how shifting terrains and contexts shape the characters of images involved in the endless process of becoming. The TAFOS archive of images was first established during the project's height and was a key component of its operations (A.Bungeroth, 2011, interview). Images were distributed for free to the NGOs, institutions and grassroots organisations that came calling to use them in their organisational, campaigning and protesting activities. During this period TAFOS images were dynamic and active, inserted with purpose and imagination within social and political initiatives, they were used to rally people, to demand recognition and to denounce. They circulated through traditional media, publications, exhibitions but they were also in the streets, used in demonstrations, impromptu displays, wall newspapers, talks, meeting and passed around hand-to-hand.



Workprints from the TAFOS archive at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

© Tiffany Fairey

The archive was active until the project closure in 1998 when the negatives and prints were boxed up and stored in a warehouse. In 2000 Muller donated the TAFOS photographic and document archive to the Faculty of Science and Arts of Communication at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru (PUCP). Motivated by the archival 'twin aims of preservation and access' (Breaknell 2010:98), over the next three years, the university authorities organized and catalogued the entire collection. Consisting of some 240,000 images, the physical archive has been open to the public since 2003 as well as having an online presence with a website, in both English and Spanish, that hosts some 8000 photographs<sup>140</sup>. In addition the archive produced a travelling exhibition, published a photographic book showcasing TAFOS photography (TAFOS 2006) and has hosted various events, talks and conferences that commemorated TAFOS's work.

Recorded in the archive data from 2004-11 users consist of a mix of NGOs, social institutions, academics, researchers, educational organisations, cultural and media organisations, museums and news publications<sup>141</sup>. With the decline of the popular movement TAFOS images are no longer deployed within the direct protest activism of its former network of now defunct grassroots and local organisations. However users do employ the images to educate, illustrate and campaign on issues relating to social, human, civil and political rights through publications, exhibitions and media work. In particular, the TAFOS images have come to acquire a widely acclaimed status as visual history, put to work by users as a means to explicate, document and commemorate the period of the Peruvian internal conflict.

The archive manager, **Angel Colunge**, summarizes users as belonging to one of two camps: those who want to deepen their knowledge of the project of TAFOS itself and its methodological experience; and those looking for images that relate to the history of the period including specific events, places or social themes captured by TAFOS photographers (A.Colunge, 2012, interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> May). However, a closer examination of the detail of how TAFOS images have been employed suggests it is not so easy to draw a clear line with many users falling into both

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<sup>140</sup> <http://facultad.pucp.edu.pe/comunicaciones/tafos/>, accessed May 12 2015.

<sup>141</sup> TAFOS archive data from 2004-11 holds a total of 133 records each recording a request to the archive from a total of 119 separate users. This research grouped users into six types: NGOs, government bodies and other social institutions (25%), academic and educational organisations (24%), individual academic researchers (17%), other individuals and researchers (5%), cultural organisations and museums (18%) and media organisations and news publications (11%).



camps, seeking to research or illustrate an aspect of the wider historical context of the time through the example of TAFOS and the ethos it symbolised. Archive users repeatedly employ TAFOS images as emblems of the period<sup>142</sup>. Synonymous with the narrative of the Peruvian internal conflict, they are used as gateways into the history of those years.

TAFOS images have gained a reputation and legitimacy afforded to few community-based photography projects that often struggle to gain an audience and official sanction. They are described as a form of ‘visual memory’ by commentators<sup>143</sup>, included in anthologies of Peruvian and Latin American photography and in the archives of national and international museums<sup>144</sup>. Müller speaks about the long-term significance of TAFOS not in terms of the photographers and their communities but in relation to the impact the project had on the psyche of people from the left-leaning high and middle class. These academics, intellectuals, writers, journalists and professionals have come to view the images as fundamental within the lexicon of Peruvian visual history (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3<sup>rd</sup> June). Falconi, a Peruvian photographer and curator based at Harvard University, asserts that any Peruvian with an interest in culture and recent history knows TAFOS images.

*‘TAFOS has become part of the repertoire of vernacular images that we have in our heads. There is no more glory for a project like this than creating images that enter into peoples’ heads to the point that they come part of the visual social makeup of a society. There is no better indicator of how successful the project was’ (J.Falconi, 2012, interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May).*

To understand the authority, genealogy and legitimacy of an archive, Derrida emphasizes the importance of exploring its institutionalization (1995). For Müller, Lima’s private Catholic university was the obvious home for the TAFOS archive. The Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), one of the country’s top universities, is an institution with a strong social ethos, politically aligned to the

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<sup>142</sup> Some examples to illustrate the point: the Institute of Peruvian Studies requested 100 images because they wanted to ensure TAFOS was adequately featured in an archive they were building on campesino movements; PUCP used large scale TAFOS images all over their campus on the event of large human rights conference; documentary makers used TAFOS images in a film they were making about the construction of adolescent identity in Lima after terrorism violence. All these examples and many more utilize the images within a context that involves both the narrative of TAFOS itself but in terms of how it was tied to the wider politics of the period.

<sup>143</sup> Müller 2006, Pastor 2007

<sup>144</sup> TAFOS images are in collections at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the National Museum of Peru as well as in published photography anthologies such as Mario Testino’s (ed) *Lima Peru 2007*, Damiani; Billeter, Erika, 2007, *Canto La Realidad: Fotografía Latinoamericana 1860-1993*, Planeta

left. TAFOS staff had developed significant ties with PUCP professors and researchers and it was the former TAFOS director, **Susana Pastor**, a Professor and Coordinator of the photography section at the Faculty of the Arts and Science of Communication, who suggested that Muller donate the TAFOS archive to the PUCP. For TAFOS, its location within the PUCP brought certain kudos. It gave credence to the TAFOS images and ensured their status within the academy<sup>145</sup>. If the archive is, as Derrida has suggested, a gathering together of a version of events (1995:3), then TAFOS's alliance with PUCP gave their vision of events legitimacy. Pastor recalls that everyone at PUCP recognised 'the great photographic, historical, sociological and anthropological value of the archive' (Pastor 2007:4) and the unique character of this 'priceless' body of images,

*'it was an archive that could not be recreated, of images by the very same people who had been living through those difficult times, ... we had a responsibility to host, conserve and make it available' (S.Pastor, 2012, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May).*

Müller describes the work of the TAFOS photographers as 'not so much a mirror (but) as a memory, authorized by the collective' (Müller in TAFOS 2006:22). In the case of Peru, the question of collective memory is paramount to understanding how the country sought to process and recuperate from the upheaval of the internal conflict. Images played a vital role in this process (Saona 2009, Poole and Perez 2010). As the TAFOS images emerged as vibrant protagonists within the grassroots activism during the internal conflict, emblematic of the struggle and spirit of '*denuncia*' of the period, the years that followed saw them adopted into an unfolding wider discourse and social process that has sought to come to terms with and commemorate the horror and loss of those years.

### **Truth and Reconciliation**

An examination of the archive clearly demonstrates how TAFOS images have been put to work to commemorate, illustrate, represent, narrate, stand as witness and memorialize a particular version of events and specific rhetoric around the tumultuous period of Peruvian history that they document. The dynamics of this discourse and the role of images within it is nowhere more evident than in Peru's

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<sup>145</sup> Falconi, a Peruvian curator and academic, remarks that, 'TAFOS has a very secure place in the anthropological and sociological discourse of the country. PUCP is a highly regarded institution that contributes to this' (J.Falconi, 2012, interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Established in 2001 after the fall of the president Alberto Fujimori, La Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR) examined abuses during the internal conflict of the 80s and 90s as the country sought to transition to a more democratic regime. While the principle vehicle was a written report (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2004) uniquely, amongst other Truth and Reconciliation initiatives globally, images played a central role in developing its unfolding narrative (Poole and Perez 2010).

The CVR committee commissioned two photographic editors and curators, Nancy Chappell and Mayu Mohanna, to lead a process that resulted in the creation of a photographic archive made up of over 1600 images. Images were gathered from 80 different collections around the country that included newspaper and institutional archives, private collections, family photo albums, military, human rights organisations and NGOs' records and numerous images from TAFOS's archive. From this selection a 'critically acclaimed' <sup>146</sup> permanent and travelling exhibition and photographic book called "*Yuyanapaq. To remember*" were produced as well as an online archive and database<sup>147</sup>. A number of the TAFOS images, a couple of which are shown overleaf, became part of the core edit which made up exhibition, book, publication and catalogue edits<sup>148</sup>. During its first year and a half, more than 200,000 people attended the main exhibition (World Press Photo 2005). It is still on permanent display at the Peruvian National Museum featuring a number of TAFOS images. Five smaller versions of the exhibition travelled through the Peruvian countryside.

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<sup>146</sup> Forero, J (2004, June 27). Peru photo exhibit captures pathos of 20 years of war. New York Times

<sup>147</sup> The archive is available online: <http://www2.memoriaparalosederechoshumanos.pe/apublicas/galeria/index.php> (accessed May 25th 2014)

<sup>148</sup> It is hard to give precise figures on the exact numbers of TAFOS images used as different exhibitions involved different edits. In the various versions of the *Yuyanapaq* exhibition surveyed for this research between 1-5 TAFOS images featured each time and a TAFOS image was included in every edit examined - including in exhibition catalogues that only featured small edits of 10-15 images.



View of the Pan American highway blocked with stones. During an armed strike called by The Shining Path in 1990 the Pan American highway was blocked as a form of protest.  
© Walter Chiara / TAFOS  
Image archived in Peru Truth and Reconciliation Commission image bank



Remains of the Quisuni Co-operative, burnt by The Shining Path in Orurillo, Melgar province. On August 16<sup>th</sup> the Quisuni Co-operative was set alight by The Shinning Path who burnt the buildings and killed the cattle. The Quisuno co-operative ran projects to improve the quality of cattle and agricultural production.  
© Damaso Quispe / TAFOS  
Image archived in Peru Truth and Reconciliation Commission image bank

The TAFOS images and the other photography used in the context of the CVR were employed with a clear intent to get things done<sup>149</sup>. The president of the Commission was Salomón Lerner Febres, a philosophy professor and rector of the same institution that houses the TAFOS archive, the Pontificia Universidad Católica De Peru (PUCP). With photography, he and his fellow committee members recognized that they could attract a level of public engagement with the Commission's work that a written report alone could not achieve. The prominent use of images through the CVR and the overwhelming positive response to the *Yuyanapaq* exhibition paved the way and helped establish and widely circulate a visual history that became foundational to their narrative of Peru's reconciliation (Poole and Perez 2010). For Lerner and the CVR committee images taken during the conflict provided 'an invaluable legacy to reconstruct, from the spiritual memory that the sight of the images brings, that history of ours that we shouldn't forget nor abandon in oblivion' (Lerner Febres 2003). They used photographs to communicate their central message which was consistent with TAFOS's call to recognise, to not forget, to denounce, to honor and commemorate the strength of the common man, 'lo popular'. In both visual projects, images were used to weave a collective narrative that reclaimed both memory and the dream of a different future in Peru.

Iconic pictures are now an integral way a society chooses to think about itself. Photographs lay down reference routes and 'serve as totems of causes', helping to construct and revise our sense of a more distant past (Sontag 2003:85). These ideas are called 'memories' but Sontag argues they are more of a fiction. What is called collective memory is not simply about remembering but also an act of stipulation and instruction in what is important, in what happened. Seen from this perspective, the CVR can be understood as a 'carrier group' in charge of articulating and reconstructing a history of trauma experienced by Peruvian society (Saona 2009). The commission was assigned with the delicate task of enabling Peruvian society to acknowledge the abuses and violence that had occurred while simultaneously building meaning in order that people could recuperate from what

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<sup>149</sup> Academics working with notions of performativity and imagery, using the theories of J.L. Austin (1962), have discussed the idea of the photograph as speech act. The history of linguistics had always viewed language as a way of making factual assertions. Words were understood to describe or make statements but Austin proposed a different view of utterances as 'performative', when a sentence is, or is part of, doing a certain kind of action (1962). They not only reflect a meaning but get things done

had happened and look forward. Its challenge was to convey the experience of trauma to those who did not experience it first-hand (Saona 2009:213), awakening Peruvians from their indifference to the suffering of their compatriots. It did this through the creation of a collective 'post memory' (Hirsch 2012) which used images to evoke a sense of feeling and suffering with the other.

The CVR capitalised on photography's unique capacity to both offer proof of the tragic events that took place and to evoke an emotional response in those that did not have a direct experience of the pain and suffering (Poole and Perez 2010). The desire was to create a narrative of social shame and solidarity that would strengthen the social fabric of the nation. Chappell and Mohana, the curators, (cited in Hoecker 2007:56) believed, 'Peru did not need a photographic chamber of horrors, but a sanctuary of truth... aesthetics and history would be combined to evoke a response of compassion, solidarity and reconstruction'. For Lerner, the CVR not only had to present a truth that need to be acknowledged and understood but 'a truth that has to be felt as our own truth in order to build a more peaceful and humane country' (2003).

### **Whose truth?**

Unsurprisingly, this version of the 'truth' was not shared by all of Peruvian society. Many on the political right strongly disagreed with the CVR's mission to convince Peruvians that a democratic future was possible if a consensual understanding of the past was arrived at (Poole and Perez 2010). Their answer for moving forward was to forget and get on. Much hatred and misunderstanding was stirred up over this battle over memory, illustrated in the debate over the government's initial rejection of an offer by the German government to pay for the construction of a Museum of Memory which would have housed the *Yuyanapaq* exhibition and extended the visual project of the CVR. Garcia, the incumbent president, at first refused the donation on the grounds that it did not reflect a 'true' national memory: 'Memory is national' he said, 'and not the province of just one political sector' (cited in Poole and Perez 2010:no page).

However, it was not just the political right that were unable to substantiate the CVR's version of the 'truth'. Poole and Perez (2010) argue that an examination of the *Yuyanapaq* exhibition visitor books and the responses of audiences to the exhibition in the provinces (communities directly affected by the conflict) indicate that the personal experiences of visitors did not always concur with the CVR's version of events. Responses did not go so far as to question the CVR's mission but they did raise the question of 'half-truths' and highlighted its failure to recognise the plurality of experiences (Poole and Perez 2010). While the CVR claimed to be representative of national memory in the same way that Müller claimed that the TAFOS images presented a memory 'authorised by the collective' (Müller in TAFOS 2006:22), not all sectors of Peruvian society were necessarily in agreement or acquiescent of its narrative.

The CVR's visual project rubs up against a historical tradition in which visual images are used to provide empirical evidence for truth claims that are 'understood to be inherently unstable and subject to change' and are in reality 'a series of partial and shifting truths' (Poole and Perez 2010:no page). Photographs propose a particular purchase on truth. However, within the discourse of the CVR, and of TAFOS itself, they are presented as self-evident, historical and perceptual grounds from which individual emotions and feelings can be articulated in terms of a collective moral engagement with the past. It is assumed that photographs convey the truth of what happened and are credited with the ability to 'speak for themselves'. They perform a script for what they propose to be the 'true' visual story of Peru's armed internal conflict, invoking their own 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1984). This agenda can be understood as being rooted in a desire to control and claim a version of history, 'not only in terms of constituting particular truths—and silences—about the war, but also in terms of imagining a (neoliberal) future for the political community' (Poole and Perez 2010: no page).

Despite the honorable intentions of the CVR to commemorate, recognize and reconcile by presenting their vision as 'a sanctuary of truth', in doing so they deny the possibility of other visions and interpretations of events. There is an inherent suggestion in their claim to truth that crowds out and denies other or dissenting narratives of what happened, implying them to be 'untrue'. The implications of

this in the context of participatory photography practice aimed at providing a space for unheard and marginalised voices are far-reaching. If such images, created with the critical agenda of disrupting and challenging dominant versions of events<sup>150</sup> seek to validate themselves in terms of how they constitute an alternative ‘truth’ then is there not a danger that, as their claim becomes legitimized (as has happened to a certain extent with the TAFOS images) they simply become the vehicles for ideological assumptions that oppress the voices of other groups of people or alternative dissenting views in society?

Crucial to a new imaginary of participatory photography is the recognition that framing participant-produced images within a narrative that appeals to their ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ undermines their potential to make alternative voices heard and to facilitate an engagement with difference. Butlerian theories of performativity seek to emphasise the endless process of ‘becoming’ as an open-ended dialectic that has no resolution. It recognises that as soon as notions and narratives become fixed as ‘truth’ they become dangerously anti-democratic (Salih 2002). In the same vein, Connolly argues that the biggest impetus to violence, anarchy and fragmentation today emerges from doctrines that try to impose totalising narratives and suppress political engagement with the paradox of difference (1995). When participatory photography is framed discursively within a narrative of authenticity it implies that there exists a hierarchy of voice in which some are truer than others and which denies the plurality of human experience. It is my proposition that if participatory photography images are to realise and re-imagine their potential then this must be achieved through a performative framework that does not depend on the idea of participatory photography as being ‘truer’ than other types of images but rather that uses the framework of civil pluralism to aspire towards enabling a plurality of seeing and facilitating a critical engagement with difference. I will expand on these ideas later but first the task is to try to further contextualise and analyse participatory photography’s claim to truth and its appeal for spectators.

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<sup>150</sup> See Mouffe’s (2013) definition of critical art discussed in Chapter 1



## **Pictures taken by the ‘very’ people: witnessing, romanticizing voice and regimes of truth**

In recent years a number of theorists have focused on the sphere of witnessing (Peters 2001, Guerrin & Hallas 2007, Ashuri & Pinchevski 2008), recognising its contemporary role ‘as a key form of approaching and transforming reality’ (Behar 1996:27)<sup>151</sup>. Historically, the autobiographical account is considered the most authentic because it spoke from an individual and deeply personal experience that did not claim to represent the experiences of all who suffered; thus ‘survivor testimony locates its truth value precisely in its subjectivity, in its production of embodied knowledge’ (Guerin and Hallas 2007:7).

Photography’s great power has always, in part, derived from every photograph acting as ‘a certificate of presence’ (Barthes 1982 :87). Likewise, witnesses are designated as having a privileged relation to an event by virtue of ‘being there’ (Peters 2001). In this mold, the narrative of participatory photography designates its images as having unique properties by virtue of the fact of the photographer’s proximity to its subject. It is suggested that because that they are taken by the very people who are ‘there’, living the lives that the photographs depict they command an intimacy and credibility not possible in other forms of traditional and professional social documentary and humanistic photography. Participatory photography seeks to disrupt existing hierarchies of seeing by providing people with the power to define their own images and truths. However, in pitching the promise of its images in terms of their capacity to undermine ‘the authority of professional photographers and commercial organisations to tell the truth’ (Bleiker & Kay 2007 :158) the implicit suggestion is that it is because they constitute a form of alternative or new ‘truth’.

The discourse surrounding the TAFOS images repeatedly emphasizes that these are pictures taken by ‘los mismos pobladores’, ‘the very people’. The special status of

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<sup>151</sup> Peters (2001) traces the history of the concept of witnessing examining its ontological baggage as coming from 3 inter-related sources: the law, theology, and atrocity, where the witness is a survivor of suffering, exemplified by the Holocaust survivor. He argues it is the combined lineage of these three domains that has endowed witnessing with extraordinary moral and cultural force (2001:708).

participant photographers is derived from their standing as ‘participant-witnesses’ as their lived experience is used as criterion for truth and truthfulness (Peters 2001). Pastor described the great culminative value of the TAFOS images as lying in the fact that they were taken by people living those situations, not by professionals coming from the outside (S.Pastor, 2012, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May). When pushed to further explain she says that it is not the case that the professional photographer cannot go to these communities and also create valuable images but that this is not an easy task. These are closed communities that are hard to penetrate. She argues that in the TAFOS images you feel the presence of the photographer; they have an affinity and a shared identity with those they photograph.

*‘It is intimate work. Other photographers from outside the community of course could take interesting pictures but theirs would be a work more about observing it and less about living it’ (S.Pastor, 2012, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May).*

Despite the wide consensus within photographic theory that ‘the power of images cannot be said to result from qualities internal to the picture’ (Campbell 2005:16) there is a suggestion in participatory photography that their ‘insider’ authorship imbues them with a distinct intimacy and ethical ‘truth-value’ when considered alongside other types of ‘outsider’ imagery<sup>152</sup>. This notion of ‘living it’ is crucial to understanding the claim of participatory photography images as they construct their promise in relation to their status as an embodied, lived ‘truth’. Participatory approaches start from the premise that people hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences (Cahill et al 2007:309). However, the romanticisation of this perspective has resulted in a fetishisation of the local (Ginsburg 1997).

Within a politics of voice appeals to truth are used to establish the veracity of some voices over others. Voice is ‘a vulnerable site for making meaning from authenticity’ and the desire ‘to give voice’ is often privileged because it is assumed ‘that voice can speak the truth of consciousness and experience’ (Youngblood

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<sup>152</sup> This is reflected in other literature about participant produced or ‘local’ photography. Lucas (2012) talking of Viva Favela, a participatory photography project in Brazil, contrasts local photographic production with press images of the favelas and suggests that the local view is more authentic to the mainstream press perspective because they tell the stories that are not normally heard. Kozloff argues photographs provide a form of pseudo intimacy and when we find a picture interesting we lend it a past and a future (1987). Participatory photography puts the viewer in a direct relationship with the photographer providing the illusion that they know something about who they are and their intentions.

Jackson and Mazzei 2009:5). Paradigms that evoke the voices of ‘victims’ – the marginalised and the poor – as a form of higher expertise rest on implicit assumptions that the oppressed are able to achieve an actual or potential greater access to the truth (Dean 2010:81). This perspective intimates that voice is something present, stable and authentic that is there ‘to search for, retrieve and liberate’ (Youngblood and Mazzei 2009:2). It presumes that there is a single voice, a single version of events, waiting to be heard. However there are, more often than not, numerous versions that involve complicated struggles over history and truth.

The concern is that any claims of ‘truth’ are deeply flawed for their denial of other positions. The case of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission demonstrates that there are always multiple narratives and multiple versions of the ‘truth’ circulating which are open, subject to contestation and constitutive of political struggle. Ultimately, spectators must choose to believe some and not others. The struggle is one of building trust; a ‘dynamic game’ in which agents compete for verisimilitude and strive to achieve agency, obtain a voice and find a receptive audience (Ashuri and Pinchevski 2008).

At issue here is the way that participatory photography advocates have developed an argument around its authenticity in order to build trust with audiences, to assign the worth of the images for attention, circulation and credibility. In the art world, groups compete for attention to gain aesthetic validation by building an argument as to why they deserve presentation in order to access the rewards that come from being judged as ‘good’ (Becker 1992). These heated debates around aesthetics involve a moralistic tone that seeks to separate the ‘deserving from the undeserving’ (Becker 1992:137). Participatory photography has harnessed the notion of its ‘authenticity’ to carve a claim that it is deserving of an audience. Bemoaning the lack of support and interest for participatory photography from traditional institutions, galleries and museums<sup>153</sup>, practitioners and advocates have pursued a discursive strategy whereby the ‘worthiness’ of these images is based on the supposed resonance and significance that derives from their authentic

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<sup>153</sup> This came up repeatedly as a theme in the interviews undertaken with participatory photography practitioners (E.Gottesman, 2013, J.Hubbard, 2011, Z.Briski 2012). Jim Hubbard spoke of his frustration as a result of the lack of commitment from funders and donors and equally from the galleries and museums that he approaches about his projects, ‘they think it is cute idea but they don’t take it seriously’ (J.Hubbard, 2011, interview, 11<sup>th</sup> October).

character<sup>154</sup>.

The value assigned to the TAFOS images partly rests on the fact that they tell a different version of history to the ‘official’, ‘expert’, ‘professional’ version. They tell the version of ordinary people, people who not only witnessed but lived the ‘reality’ of those events. Kujundzic links the principle of archiving with the idea of survival and proposes a ‘counter archive’, a recollection of the world of voices that have been silenced or buried (cited in Merewether 2006). The TAFOS archive, and participatory photography more broadly, fights for recognition by defining its significance and value in terms of its status as a ‘counter archive’. However, the case of the TAFOS images, as used within the broader rhetoric of the CVR, raises questions as to what happens when the ‘counter archive’ is taken up and officialised. What are the implications when the ‘alternative’ truth becomes the official ‘truth’ suffocating the possibility of multiple versions of events?

### **Building a plural ethics of spectatorship: moving away from a yearning for authenticity towards an ethos of visual pluralism**

Participatory photography’s ‘fetishization of authenticity’ (Kester 1995:2) is not only the result of the discursive strategy of its producers, organisers and curators but also plays on its spectators’ own yearning for authenticity. Morris talks of our ‘collective need to endow photographs with intentions’ (2011:20). While images may appear to have minds of their own they often involve the projection of a collective desire obscure to those ‘celebrating around or inside an image’ (Mitchell 2005:105). When spectators yearn for the authentic so they seek out visual experiences that they believe to be ‘authentic’ and endow them with authenticity<sup>155</sup>. The ‘turn to authenticity’ is a trend within modern culture (Lindholm 2008) connected not just to notions of truth but also to concepts of freedom and modes of

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<sup>154</sup> Kester points out that traditionally art is evaluated on the appearance of the physical object and highlights, as we have noted in the discourses surrounding the TAFOS images and participatory photography more broadly, a tendency in contemporary cultural politics to push towards the reclamation of ‘authentic’ experience, to regain contact with the ‘empirical’ basis of a given thing, to recognize inter connections (1999).

<sup>155</sup> Even in the post modern age, when there is an accepted awareness that there is no such thing as an unmediated image, even though we know images are not true we still want them to be. In the age of the selfie, participatory photography trades on an ‘ethics of authenticity’ based on the very simple notion that taking a picture of yourself or your own life is more ‘authentic’ than someone else taking a picture of you. Morris argues that because vision is privileged in society we trust it and put our confidence in it; ‘photography allows us to uncritically think. We *imagine* that photographs provide a magic path to the truth’ (2011:92).

being in the world<sup>156</sup>. The philosopher Charles Taylor designates the powerful moral ideal of authenticity, the notion of being true to oneself, as being a defining characteristic of the modern age (1989). A close analogy has developed between self-discovery and artistic creation as we are understood to find our sense of self through attempts to articulate it and through what we create (Taylor 1989). The therapeutic, self-development and personal empowerment potential of participatory photography is articulated in these terms as participants are said, through the process of photography, to define and communicate a sense of who they are and what is important to them<sup>157</sup>. Crucial to understanding the spectators' encounter with participatory photography is the matter of how the modern yearning for authenticity shapes criteria for judging the validity and value of images. This process of judging its authenticity prescribes both the limits and full possibilities of its spectatorship<sup>158</sup>.

When the validity of participatory photography's 'authenticity' is problematised, the matter for inquiry becomes how to build a new ethics of spectatorship for the genre that re-frames its mode of mediation. The driving argument of this thesis is that participatory photography should be re-conceived within a 'pluralist imagination' (Connolly 1995) that involves building an ethics of spectatorship through which the viewer feels a duty towards what and who they see (2008). The aim is to construct new formulations for forms of civil politics, relations and activism, to re-imagine the discursive parameters for the spectatorship of participatory photography by linking it to a new political imaginary. An expanded

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<sup>156</sup> In modern liberal society 'an ethic of authenticity' has come to prevail in the place of external codes of moral judgment and is tied to criteria of evaluation that pitch authenticity in opposition to hypocrisy (Rose 1999). When identities are unstable it has been argued that we turn to authenticity in a quest for certainty and it has come to be taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary life, signifying a set of principles that include sincere, essential, natural, original and real and conferring an 'aura of moral superiority (Zukin 2009:xi) (Lindholm 2008)..

<sup>157</sup> As notions of authenticity have evolved they have become bound up with the aesthetic and notions of artistic and creative originality (Taylor 1991:63). Spectators read a sense of authenticity into participatory photography images not only in connection to the assumed truth-value of the photographic medium but also in relation to its process of production as involving a person engaged in a creative process of self-definition and self-expression. Participatory photography can be viewed as a practice within what Rose highlights as a complexity of new practices for the articulation of identity in terms of the individual crafting of a psychological subjectivity within a personal biography' (1999:268).

<sup>158</sup> Frequent viewers of participatory photography projects interviewed for this research – NGO people and participatory photography practitioners – all spoke of participatory photography in terms of examples of 'good' and 'bad' projects. Experienced practitioners and spectators view projects as bad when they perceive them to be tokenistic, exploitative or generally misguided. In this sense the 'authenticity' of the project is judged in relation to the perceived quality of the participatory image-production process and its ideological intention. This chimes with the new critical framework and aesthetic paradigm proposed by Kester for the critical analysis of dialogical and engaged art practices (1999). He argues the new locus of judgment cannot be the appearance of the object but is to be found 'in the condition and character of the dialogical exchange itself' (Kester 1999:3).

notion of pluralist photography (Bleiker & Kay 2007) provides a starting point. Bleiker and Kay's vision is for a mode of photography 'whereby the represented person takes an active role in the process of inscribing social meaning, but does so without attaching to it an exclusive claim that silences other positions and experiences' (2007:150). Through the framework of visual pluralism, participatory photography becomes about enabling and building a relation and dialogue between multiple ways of seeing rather than the promotion of one photographic voice over another. Connolly, speaking about a trade union friend of his father's, Charlie, writes, 'I wanted Charlie to have a voice in the world, not to be its Voice' (2005:5). This designates a visual mode that enables different 'unheard' voices beyond the mainstream and dominant position but that allows us to hear competing points of view, that vocalizes tensions and presents multiple perspectives as opposed to presenting singular or romanticised 'authentic' victim narratives.

The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) used spectators' reactions to photographs to ask them to rethink their ethical responsibilities with the many different "others" that form the Peruvian nation. However, by presenting photographs as facts and the "nation" as a singular historical subject, the CVR suggests that our interpretations of facts and our interpretations of the moral grounds for building a (better) social collectivity are grounded on similar forms of agreement (Poole and Perez 2010). There is an appeal for and imposition of consensus as opposed to an acknowledgement of differing narratives and perspectives. If the terms of moral and ethical engagement are constituted around notions of visual 'truth' and 'authenticity' that seek to impose a consensus, we are left with a scenario where one 'truth' is simply set against another and the struggle becomes a misguided contest between 'truths' which can never be reconciled. Such a scenario cannot then accommodate for disagreement or plurality.

The CVR's approach follows Debrix & Weber's description of 'transformative' modes of mediation in which advocates seek to impose 'unheard' voices in the name of emancipatory ideologies that ultimately end up privileging one position over the other (2003:xi). In contrast, the pluralisation mode of mediation uses a strategy that enables the emergence of a plurality of views and narratives to support and open up, rather than close down, opportunities for debate, reflection and

negotiation. Spectators are provided with a range of narratives that they can choose to adopt, or not. An appeal to visual pluralism as opposed to visual authenticity provides a means by which participatory photography can engage with difference. It provides a framework that can incorporate and communicate plurality and tension without closing off voice while enabling spectators to understand context-specific complexity.

While participatory photography in its current framework aims to enable ‘different’ perspectives to be heard, the critical question is how its advocates and spectators frame what difference constitutes. Ideas around identity and difference and how we deal with them, Connolly argues, are central to issues of violence in democratic society<sup>159</sup>. Relating to difference in terms of truth and authenticity brings with it problematic totalizing assumptions about the nature of things. However, if difference is framed in plural terms then it is possible to consider multiple ways of seeing without pitting one against the other and immediately inserting different ways of seeing within a struggle about different versions of the truth. An ethics of spectatorship that frames a spectator’s duty to what they see in terms of a commitment and an appeal to visual pluralism seeks to cultivate an open and enquiring engagement with difference rather than relying on short-cut appeals to ‘truth’ that bypass and homogenise issues and tensions relating to difference.

### **Cultivating an engagement with difference**

A pluralist democracy calls for the confrontation, rather than suppression, of different democratic political positions (Mouffe 2013:7). Agonistic approaches accept that issues of division and difference are inherent to social relations and they seek to address difference through a framework of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness (Connolly 1995). This enables engagement in a space of ‘conflictual consensus’ (Mouffe 2013) grounded on a shared commitment to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy - liberty and equality (Mouffe 2013:xii). In this framework, difference, which had tended to be construed in dichotomous terms, becomes more distributed and multiple (Connolly 2010:224). Preventing difference from being turned into an otherness that can be used to

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<sup>159</sup> See Chapter 1 for an outline of Connolly’s key concepts and arguments

exclude or isolate is fundamental to the pluralist engagement with difference. Critical responsiveness and fundamentalism, Connolly writes, represent ‘two contending responses to the same movements of difference’ (1995:xvii). Thus, the role of a reimagined pluralised participatory photography is to provide a discursive space which develops and supports an ethos of critical responsiveness, providing the ‘cizenry of photography’ (Azoulay 2008) with a means to actively engage with and negotiate their relations to each other.

Participatory photography, from this perspective, is understood as one of the multiple sites of potential citizen action that participate in shaping an ethos of critical responsiveness (Connolly 2005:7). This ethos pursues an ‘ethic of cultivation’ rather than aligning itself with any fixed moral command, nurturing a cultural space through which the other might consolidate itself into something that is unaffected by negative cultural markings (Connolly 1995:xvii). The aim is to cultivate an ethical connection ‘flowing across fugitive experiences of intrasubjective and intersubjective difference’ that opens up ‘relational possibilities of agonistic respect, studied indifference, critical responsiveness, and selective collaboration between interdependent, contending identities’ (Connolly 1995:xix).

Photography is inherently plural. Its paradoxical, flexible and unknowable nature makes it the medium *par excellence* for exploring, communicating and debating the multiple ways in which people see the world. Pictures, as a point of encounter and as catalysts for new subjectivities, can facilitate a dialogue that enables citizens to negotiate through, rather than flee from, the paradoxical relationship of identity and difference, to express and contemplate rather than brush over or deny difference. Images enable new ways of seeing, communicating and understanding, facilitating both the internal reflection and public negotiation required to develop ‘agonistic respect’ and a critical responsiveness that takes the form of careful listening and presumptive generosity to those citizens struggling to be recognized (Connolly 2005:126).

In this mode, photography, as a medium that works on the personal, emotional and collective level, is employed within tactical work that seeks to develop the civic duties needed to support pluralism - activity which requires ‘considerable work on



the visceral register of the responding constituency' or spectator (Connolly 2005:127). Participatory photography creates a shared space where citizens can grapple with, debate, examine, explore, question, uncover, and understand the different ways of seeing and understanding the world whilst also recognizing and advocating for oppressed or silenced voices. In this scenario, participatory photography projects are judged according to whether they offer a new way of seeing - not new because the participatory or collaborative nature of their production makes them more authentic or ethical, but new because the collaborative nature of their production enables a different way of seeing and as a result enables a plurality of voices. Gottesman argues that when a context is given through which spectators can read participant produced photographs – an image context that allows the spectators to assess them within a historical, political and aesthetical setting and in the context of their production – it alters spectator's perceptions by enabling them to understand participatory images within a plurality of images (E.Gottesman, 2013, interview, 11<sup>th</sup> February).

Four key points expand our sense of what a pluralist participatory photography involves. Drawing on Eck's understanding of pluralism these points provide guidance about how we might re-imagine participatory photography as a renegotiation and active encounter with difference<sup>160</sup>. The first is that pluralism is not diversity alone but an 'energetic engagement with diversity'. In modern society diversity is a given but pluralism is not. It is something that has to be achieved and cultivated. Secondly, pluralism moves beyond tolerance and involves the 'active seeking of understanding across lines of difference'. The goal must be the removal of ignorance of one another, the removal of half-truths, stereotypes and fears about others and the enriching of a perspective that values rather than vilifies difference. Thirdly, pluralism is not relativism but 'the encounter of commitments'. Pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and commitments behind but rather build an encounter with others where we hold our differences in relationship to one another. Fourthly, pluralism is based on dialogue: its language is one of encounter, give-and-take, criticism and self-criticism. It involves both speaking and listening and a process that reveals

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<sup>160</sup> Eck's ideas are described in various papers, reproduced on Harvard University's 'The Pluralism Project', headed by Eck. The specific pages I have drawn on are: [http://www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what\\_is\\_pluralism](http://www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism) and <http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges> (accessed May 26th 2014)

common understandings and real differences. It is not presumed that everyone will agree but pluralism involves a commitment to being in a dialogue with others.

Notions of dialogue and encounter chime with the current ethos of participatory photography. However, located in a framework of pluralism they enable a re-articulation of participatory photography's conceptual base. Critics of pluralism warn of its slide towards relativism. However a multi-dimensional pluralism allows for genuine commitment to a position while demanding receptivity of others (Connolly 1995)<sup>161</sup>. In each specific project context, participatory photography promises to enable its producers to frame the world on their own terms and in this sense it does aim to privilege a certain meaning and perspective - that of its participant photographers. However, in terms of how these images are then packaged and inserted in a discourse, the concern is that participatory photography does not undo its push towards democratisation by proposing one photographic voice over another or by attempting to contain multiple voices within a singular homogenizing narrative.

This line of thinking is less concerned with participatory photography as a participatory methodology and technique that 'empowers' and more focused on participatory photography as a practice of looking and mode of mediation. It is about re-imaging what photography can enable and facilitate in terms of a dialogical encounter. It is about defining contours for a re-formulated ethics of spectatorship in participatory photography based on agonistic respect, careful listening and active engagement. A view of the universe that cannot be fully encompassed by any one position and a belief in the fundamental need to engage conflicting claims of different positions lies at the core of the pluralistic position. The hope is that through engagement with this multitude, it resonates for people so that they can arrive at a pluralist position-making and theory of reality 'built upon the pluralistic shoulders of the worlds population' (Chicka 1999:125).

A pluralistic participatory photography is dedicated to the process of creating a society through critical and self-critical encounter with one another,

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<sup>161</sup> Connolly talks of pluralism as involving a 'bicameral orientation to political life' that means 'you keep a foot in two worlds, straddling two or more perspectives to maintain tension between them' (2005:4).

acknowledging, rather than hiding, our deepest differences<sup>162</sup>. Communicated through a pluralist framework participatory photography enables marginalised voices to be heard, provides them with a space and platform to promote their way of seeing but without designating them as the definitive view, closing off the possibilities of other ways of seeing. Within this structure, the spectator is required to actively engage with different ways of seeing and their own relation to them. They are not served with a single, simplified position but rather provided with an opportunity to engage with complexity so that they can decide for themselves their own position.

### **Concluding thoughts**

What participatory photography, as a form of mediation, can make possible depends in part on the active relations it builds with audiences and spectators. The main point of this chapter has been to critically question the framework through which the promise of these relations is made in terms of an ‘ethics of spectatorship’ (Azoulay 2008) for participatory photography. There is a ‘perpetual fragility’ in witnessing that has driven the participatory photography narrative to build its claim for an audience on ‘the enduring moral centrality of its foundation in embodied experience’ (Frosh and Pincevski 2008:13) and its implied relation to ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’. The rhetoric needs to shift away from its focus on moralistic authenticity and a romanticized notion of the ‘insider’ perspective. Another language is needed to describe what participatory photography images have to offer spectators and can build in terms of relations between its producers, subjects and viewers. The spectatorship of participatory photography must be based on an appeal not to authenticity but to pluralism and plural ways of seeing.

This appeal is premised on an understanding that images are involved in an endless process of performative becoming that means their meaning is never fixed. The TAFOS archive’s recent move to commercialise its images in an effort to raise funds could bring new audiences, new ties and a new engagement with the images that shift their discursive potential at a point that archive user numbers have begun

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<sup>162</sup> See Eck: <http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges> (accessed May 28th 2014)

to dwindle<sup>163</sup>. Derrida's designation of the archive as 'a question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow' (1995:36) chimes with the context of participatory photography. Participatory photography can be viewed as a leap of faith driven by a 'belief that there will be someone to use it, that the accumulation of these histories will continue to live, that they will continue to have listeners' (Joyce Sallam in Merewether 2006:186).

The call is for the performative force of participatory photography to be imagined within a political project that seeks to diversify the way we see and understand the world. The notion of plurality and an ethics of spectatorship rooted in pluralism that asks spectators to acknowledge and enter into a dialogue with multiple ways of seeing offers greater possibility in terms of visual empowerment than a strategy that unconsciously pitches one visual 'truth' against another. The aim is to magnify the voices of marginalised communities through a pluralized mode of mediation (Debrix & Weber 2003) which enables a 'togetherness through photography' (Azoulay 2008), rooted in the cultivation of critical responsiveness.

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<sup>163</sup> **Villafuerte** feared that when the TAFOS archive was donated to PUCP that it would be 'anthropoligized, reduced to material for academics' (R.Villafuerte, 2012, interview). In some senses her fears have been realized. The majority of the TAFOS's archive users are connected to academia, research and education. The direct ties to the photographers, their communities, affiliated organisations and the community activism from which TAFOS was born, have all but disappeared. The hope is that the archive will start to generate income from image sales by capitalizing on Peru's growing commercial market for documentary photography (A.Colunge, 2012, interview; S.Pastor, 2012, interview) and that these funds can be used to initiate initiatives that focus on re-establishing contact with the photographers and the zones where the workshops took place.

# Conclusion

## **A Photography of Becoming**

This thesis has questioned the assumptions upon which the narrative of participatory photography is based. It builds a picture of a pluralized, evolving and negotiated method shaped by the agendas of its multiple participants and the governmentality of the sectors in which it circulates. The case studies presented reclaim the criticality, the politics, inconsistency, open-endedness and multiplicity of the participatory photography enterprise. The enduring significance of TAFOS for its participants demonstrates participatory photography's profound transformative potential as a tool for fomenting critical consciousness (Freire 1973). Concurrently, the story of TAFOS and examples from other projects illustrate the shifting frames, limitations, uncertainties and complexities of the practice and the ambivalence contained in its promises to empower, give voice and enable social change.

Starting with the contention that the 'NGO-ised' model of contemporary participatory photography has become compromised, this thesis has highlighted the shortcomings of participatory photography's simplified narrative. Chapter 3 argued that instrumental and managerial tendencies have come to shape contemporary international participatory photography initiatives which have been accused of being tokenistic and, at worst, exploitative. Detached from a meaningful politics, contemporary participatory photography practice has reached an impasse, unable to reconcile the tensions between the push of rhetoric that romanticises its creative, organic and emancipatory character and the pull of its restricted utilization within institutionalised development work.

I have argued that pluralism offers a framework for re-imagining and re-politicising the dynamics and promise of participatory photography. Pluralising our understanding of photography recasts the medium as an unending activity of the many allowing for an expansion of the debates pertaining to participatory photography. In politico-philosophical terms, pluralism offers an ethos and structure that emphasises a world of becoming, an engagement with difference, multiplicity and unpredictability. Pluralism is defined by the tension between the prevailing social diversity and the upsurge of new claims that throw social relations into question. It thus provides a model that engages with tensions and acknowledges the vulnerability of emerging claims. In doing so it offers a framework that enables participatory photography to confront the tensions that constitute its practice while connecting it to a politics of social justice. A pluralist lens has been used in Chapters 4-7 to pursue and re-appraise various aspects of the participatory photography story. These chapters argue that we must be attentive to the unstable character of the practice and to its temporal and performative nature. Together they point towards to a pluralised notion of becoming.

Chapter 4 started the re-framing process by building a ‘potential’ history (Azoulay 2014) for contemporary participatory photography that inserted it within a tradition of civil photographic activism. The story of TAFOS illustrated how changing political climates have shaped the participatory photography project. In addition it connected together various moments of seemingly disparate photographic history to demonstrate a lineage of politicised antecedents that serve to re-orientate contemporary participatory photography.

Chapter 5 turned to the question of the power and argued that only a pluralised perspective captures the multiplicity of power relations at play in participatory photography. Understanding power and empowerment from the individual and collective perspectives of all the protagonists involved in the process reveals the fractured, contrary and endlessly negotiated character of projects and the importance for practitioners to ground their practice within a reflexive ethics that is open, vigilant and that seeks to curtail domination.

Chapter 6 established both the long-term, enduring impact of participatory photography and the limitations of its impact in relation to its sustainability. It highlights the failure of linear, causal models to capture the visceral, performative character of participatory arts and its capacity to foment a long-lasting critical consciousness. It argues for practitioners to acknowledge change not as a definitive end-goal but as an unstable process of 'becoming'. Working with humility, practitioners need to re-define their expectations of the role of participatory photography and how they attribute its contribution towards a politics of voice and social change.

The final chapter argues that participatory photography must re-frame its spectatorship to enable a mode of mediation that supports a plurality of seeing, rather than a mode that homogenises voice in an effort to advocate a single narrative. It argues that an ethics of spectatorship for participatory photography be grounded in an appeal to pluralism, not in an appeal to its authenticity. Participatory photography needs to cultivate a practice of looking that encourages and challenges viewers to critically connect with difference, pushing them to adjust themselves and their understanding of and engagement with others.

In this conclusion I draw together these various strands of a pluralised participatory photography and hang them around the notion of a 'Photography of Becoming'. The aim of this thesis has been to re-politicise participatory photography. The challenge has been to find a political framework that establishes the practice in an ethos of social justice without imposing a definitive ideology, a framework that is sufficiently open-ended to accommodate the unpredictable, grassroots, context-specific character of the practice. The idea of a 'Photography of Becoming' is invoked to describe the political character of the performative activity of participatory photography with groups involved in a 'politics of becoming' (Connolly 1995, 2005). My research has demonstrated the enduring impact that participatory photography initiatives can have in shaping the critical consciousness of participants. Understanding the political process that this involves as a form of 'Photography of Becoming' provides practitioners with a new means for understanding the intuitive and emergent politics of voice that projects entail.

## **The challenge of the political**

I have argued that in participatory photography, the denial of the 'political' has prevented the practice from understanding its dynamics, engaging with its critical potential and re-imagining its purpose. The challenge is how to re-define the political within participatory photography. TAFOS thrived in an era of localized activism and grand emancipatory political ideologies but this time has gone. Much of TAFOS's imagery was shot not with the open-ended aim of documenting communities but with the specific focus of making visible the efforts of its constituents and the grievances and injustices that they identified. The communities, despite being poor and marginalised, were represented by community organisers and leaders and their narrative was clearly rooted within a rhetoric of social justice and '*denuncia*'.

Contemporary initiatives do not always work with groups with this level of community organization and political focus. Practitioners are largely unclear about their political standpoints and are reluctant to give their enterprises an explicit political narrative or context (Kester 1995). Projects are often shaped by the humanist ethos of the NGOs they work with rather than the grassroots organization of communities. Reflecting on contemporary participatory arts practice, Kester queries whether projects with communities that are not 'politically coherent' are viable (1995, 1999). His concern is that initiatives that work with groups that do not already have some form of cultivated political identity or consciousness are characterised by a form of paternalism that neutralises any engagement with processes of critical transformation (1995). He argues that a 'discursive collaboration on a more equal footing' (1999:7) emerges out of a project produced by a politically-coherent community, which has a sense of its own political interests, such as occurred with TAFOS.

How are we to understand a notion of political coherence in a globalised world defined more by flow than consistency? Kester himself recognises that community is now more commonly defined as an ongoing process (1999:7) yet his suggestion is that the 'political' involves a linear process by which communities go through a process of self-definition and reach a final endpoint of politicisation. This feels far



removed from the political reality in which contemporary initiatives are often engaged and denies the role, demonstrated in the case studies discussed, that participatory photography projects play in supporting that process of self-definition.

In many instances the politics of marginalised communities and their claims are not coherent or readily accessible. The community itself may not have a sense of its own political identity or if they do, over time, this might change. Groups may be dispersed, isolated or recently formed. They do not necessarily have a shared ethos, history or position. Energies are often consumed with day-to-day survival. By its very nature, work to 'make visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (Mouffe 2007) often involves groups and communities that have been obscured and marginalised to the point that they have no form of representation or organisation. In such a context, where the politics are uncertain, how can practitioners give shape to the political in participatory photography without pre-determining its character?

### **A Photography of Becoming**

The notion of a photography of becoming derives from the concept of a 'politics of becoming' (Connolly 1995, 2005). A pluralistic perspective is distrustful of the idea of 'political coherence'. Connolly uses the notion of a politics of becoming to designate the existence of fragile spheres of emerging political identity formed in an unstable process of becoming (2005). The concept describes a nascent politics, a notion of how groups emerge with a new claim within the globalized political sphere. A politics of becoming occurs when a group, suffering under its current social conditions, strives to reconfigure itself, to be recognized and to change the social register (Connolly 1996). It is indicative of emerging politics of resistance that often characterizes movements or claims in the arena of global civil society in which much of contemporary participatory photography is enacted.

In a contemporary society where the pace of life has accelerated, Connolly argues the politics of becoming has become more widespread than before (2005:122). The concept highlights the fragile character of emerging political claims - that are

still in the process of being formulated and of locating and defining an identity and position. This nascent quality makes these kinds of politics especially vulnerable because they cannot fully declare themselves and they can induce panic in established identities that often resort to judging them ‘through disabling identifications already sedimented in the old code’ (Connolly 1995:xv).

It is my contention that the contemporary participatory photography project is immersed in this politics of becoming, occupied in the uncertain work of enabling hidden, marginalised or unheard voices to be recognized and stake a claim within a politics of social justice. If we understand participatory photography as a form of photography of becoming, as an expressive and communicatory process within a politics of becoming, it designates it as a tool that must be molded within an ethos of critical responsiveness. It defines participatory photography as an open method and practice rooted in a receptiveness to new claims and a commitment to engage with, support and cultivate emerging demands for recognition. This is a politics of tracing and enabling voice. It is a politics that deals in incomplete narratives, with stories that are seeking a language through which to define themselves.

The TAFOS photographers described an evolving criticality that developed through their involvement with the project (Chapter 6). In these initiatives an engagement with photography requires participants to critically examine the world and locate themselves within it. It aids them to locate and define themselves by presenting what they see back to them and engaging them in a dialogue with others and their spectators. This involves a process in which people shape and form a voice both individually and collectively in relation to others. A photography of becoming posits participatory photography as a form of mediation that supports its participants to define and negotiate a political voice and to make a bid for recognition. It proposes a form of mediation that exposes spectators to the plurality of marginal experiences, asking them to adjust their perspectives to accommodate others, to engage with difference and in a politics of social justice. If we think of identity as an ongoing production rather than as an accomplished fact (Hall 1990), the idea of a photography of becoming encapsulates the character of this process where people, through the performance of their photography, enact and communicate an evolving identity and emerging politics. It designates this process

as uncertain and replete with tension but also as vital to the functioning of a pluralistic society and democratic ethos. It highlights the ‘risky, disruptive politics of enactment’ that is indispensable to the identification and redress of social injuries (Connolly 2005:42).

The notion of a photography of becoming acknowledges the incomplete and paradoxical character of the emerging politics in which these projects are engaged. Often the drive to recognition ‘precedes the consolidation of the identity to be recognized’ (Connolly 1995:xv). The new identity emerges out of old identities but it does not follow a fixed model as it moves towards definition and, because it often meets resistance from other groups, the end result is seldom clear at the outset. A photography of becoming begets images that evolve out of undeveloped claims and aspirations. Their politics may not always be defined until after the fact, when a new identity has emerged through which injuries can be measured retrospectively. Thus it is often the case that it is only in looking back that the great significance of these images is realised.

### **A Photography of Becoming in action**

This is evident in the case of TAFOS. In the years following their creation the TAFOS images were validated and given a renewed political definition within the visual history of Peru and its broader political discourse surrounding a quest for truth and reconciliation. This sought to recognize and commemorate the suffering of communities represented in the images, the injustices to which they were subjected and the rhetoric of their struggle. However, a politics of becoming is an unpredictable politics. Some movements succeed and others do not. Concurrently, in a photography of becoming some images, such as the TAFOS ones, flourish and others do not. Many survive but become scattered and fragmented and find new meaning as politics and circumstances shift, as it could be argued has happened with the Bhutanese refugee images<sup>164</sup>. It is an irregular process spurred by

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<sup>164</sup> With the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees in 3<sup>rd</sup> countries and the dispersal of the refugee community around the world, the project images no longer have a purpose as originally intended in terms of their advocacy for repatriation for the Bhutanese refugees. In the published booklet (PhotoVoice 2006b) and website ([www.bhutanese-refugees.com](http://www.bhutanese-refugees.com)) the images have found a significance by serving as a document and testament to the period the Bhutanese refugees lived their lives in limbo in the camps. However it will only be known in time whether the images succeed in terms of playing an active role in establishing a narrative and story about the Bhutanese refugees. As Sallam reminds us the archive can be viewed as a leap of faith driven by a ‘belief that there will be someone to use it, that the accumulation of these histories will continue to live, that they will continue to have listeners’ (Joyce Sallam in Merewether 2006:186).

changes, pressures and conditions that lie beyond the scope of the images and their advocates.

A photography of becoming is involved in a politics that entails the re-configuring and re-positioning of claims and modes of suffering as they jostle to become visible and find leverage to push their way onto the scene of official contestation (Connolly 2010:226). This politics moves something that was under the radar of paradigms of social justice on to a register whereby its language - injury, discrimination, injustice and oppression – can then be applied. There are no clear criteria by which this succeeds. Connolly points out that the crude practice of justice often impedes a politics of becoming by defining some modes of suffering as more worthy of responsiveness than others (1996). It is people's responsiveness to new movements that enables their struggles to be framed in the recognized terminology of social justice.

This is pertinent to the discussion in Chapter 5 on the Bhutanese refugee youth projects' images and the question of how to package and present a photography of becoming to best succeed. While groups might claim a voice through photography there is no guarantee that it is a voice that others will listen to, that their claim will be deemed as worthy alongside the range of other claims struggling for visibility. If Dinesh's images, re-enacting the human rights abuses suffered by his community, had been shown publically would they have instigated the responsive ethics of spectatorship vital for a photography of becoming that hopes to succeed? How do projects decide which of the images produced best cultivate a response in spectators? A photography of becoming requires certain conditions of possibility. It can only succeed in a culture that is to some degree pluralistic and that can cultivate a critical responsiveness to new claims and movements. Participants – producers, organisers and spectators - have to open themselves up to transformation.

The paradox of working to establish an identity that is not yet fully established brings us back to the tensions that underline and characterise the participatory photography project and that define the notion of a photography of becoming.

Projects engage participants to use photography to assert a voice but more often than not it is a voice that lacks a stable definition through which to present itself (Connolly 1996:xvi). It is this paradox that makes it so important for interventions to not impose outside agendas, to work open-endedly and organically in order to provide the space for identities and voices to form.

It should be noted that the idea of a photography of becoming is not reflective of the political character of all participatory photography projects. It is not intended as a general metaphor that applies across the practice. Initiatives often do engage with groups campaigning on a specific articulated claim within a conscious political agenda, already defined within a language of social justice. These projects may produce a more defined and united body of photography, less obviously fragmented or characterized by plurality and a sense of becoming.

However, what the concept of a photography of becoming does look to highlight is the uncertain politics of voice at play in projects where claims are not fully formed. I propose this is a form of politics that is becoming increasingly common in the rapidly evolving conditions of a globalized liquid modernity. Globalization, with its convergent, overlapping and irreversible interdependencies, is re-making societies, not in a closed, linear and finalized form, but in an unpredictable and disjointed manner (Law and Urry 2011). It is within these contexts that many current initiatives and their participants are embroiled.

Projects often work with newly emerging marginalised groups that lack an established political language of their own. Some are fragmented or recently formed due to changing circumstances brought on by war, migration, displacement, illness or chronic poverty. They are often dislocated from family networks and lacking in political capacity. Participatory photography methods have been particularly noted for their success in engaging and enabling the participation of youth, hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups (Purcell 2009). In the case of groups struggling with long-term or chronic marginalization, established discourses have denied them a voice or deemed their claim invalid, exacerbating cycles of deprivation and invisibility.

Projects groups are often un-established, unrecognized and marginal, pursuing claims without ready or receptive audiences, political networks, structures or resources and often in the face of powerful adversaries. This designates a photography of becoming as a particularly fragile space, vulnerable to appropriation. The challenge for practitioners is to create a process that gives a photography of becoming its full expression while creating an encounter with the spectator that facilitates a critical responsiveness to its images and claims. The task is to enable a photography that is fully reflective of plurality, that captures the multiple, porous identities involved, the range of experiences, both divergent and common, and that does not seek to contain or deny multiplicity and differences in a bid to claim attention, authenticity or legitimacy.

A notion of the pressing and divergent character of a photography of becoming is evident in the projects discussed throughout this thesis. It captures the evolving political identity of the Bhutanese refugee youth whose images flick between playing out the specific overt politics of their community, their concerns as youth keen to establish an identity beyond their refugee status and their preoccupations with their day-to-day life in a refugee camp. It highlights the various unique ways that the TAFOS photographers spoke of how photography had nurtured in them a developing critical and political awareness.

However, it is arguably the project work with young refugees discussed in the introduction that most exemplifies the nascent vulnerability of a photography of becoming. This thesis has been in part about finding a framework to make sense of the constitutive tensions that I felt as a practitioner defined participatory photography work. Reflecting retrospectively on the work I was involved in with unaccompanied refugee youth in London, the notion of a photography of becoming captures the complicated and intuitive politics of voice in which these young people were involved.

The images generated in these projects<sup>165</sup>, a number of which are shown on the following pages, communicate the challenging transitions these young people were

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<sup>165</sup> PhotoVoice worked with unaccompanied refugee youth in London from 2002-2008, running 3 separate projects in partnership with the DOST project in Newham, East London. **Transparency** (2002-3), **Moving Lives** (2004-6), **New Londoners** (2007-8). See the glossary for further information on these projects.

dealing with: leaving home and loved ones, rebuilding their lives in a strange place without the family support, navigating through a maze of paperwork and regulations, the stress of immigration legal proceedings, trying to find their way around and work out how to look after themselves while becoming adults – and all the psycho-emotional upheaval these processes involve. There is a profound and illuminating but splintered photography, as they point their cameras to capture fragments in the flux of their new worlds: people and places of importance, sights that are unfamiliar and strange, moments when they are reminded of home, moments that enable them to look forward and moments where they want to make memories. These young people used their photography to make sense of the new worlds in which they found themselves, to process and reflect, to record and commemorate, to explore, find and develop a new voice and identity.



I came to the UK in 2001. My first impressions of London were strange. I was in East Ham and it was not like the London I had seen on the television. I lived with a foster family. They were Indian and I had never seen people eating with their hands before. The experience of seeing different customs and lifestyles was new. After a while, I got to know about these cultures and came to respect them. Once you get over the strangeness of difference you understand how many things are the same.

Bajram Spahia, excerpt from *Waiting for Amy*, *New Londoners* (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008)



Maybe I'll be happy here. I have not chosen to be here, and I have no choice if they want to send me back. I should be happy but I am not. I am not able to start my life yet. Not until I get my visa. I am here but I am always thinking about my city, Kirkuk. I want to live in my city but I can't. My thoughts are like this all the time, I want to be here, but I don't know if they will let me stay. I want to be there, but can't be there either. So what can I do? ... The photos I have taken were put together to show how my thoughts are. Always in twos, for every happy thought, an unhappy thought. For every time I think of being here, I think of being there. Wanting to be here but missing there. Not being a part of here but also beginning to be.

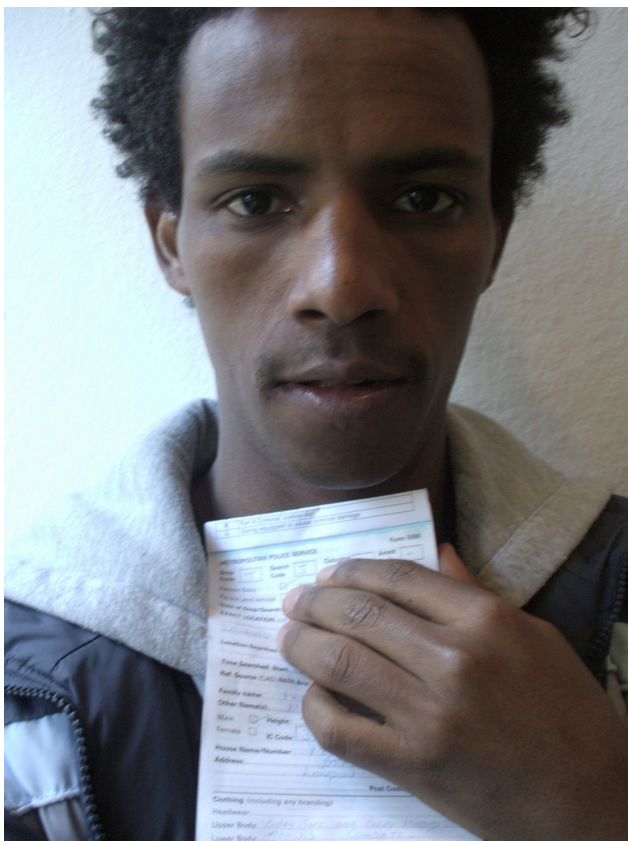
Chalak Abdulrahman, excerpt from *Maybe ...*, *New Londoners* (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008)





At home we make injera and bread as well, by grinding grain to flour. We make dough and cook it on a flat aluminum sheet with fire underneath. We burn wood usually, though you can make your own charcoal. When I was very young we had sheep and goats to make yoghurt but they all perished in the drought.

Mussie Haile, excerpt from *They Seem To Be Ours But They Are Not ...*, New Londoners (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008)



This picture is interesting and makes me wonder. It was the first time I came into contact with the police in England. I was stopped and searched when I was waiting for Crispin outside Downing Street. Afterwards I took this self-portrait holding the piece of paper they gave me.

Mussie Haile, excerpt from *They Seem To Be Ours But They Are Not ...*, New Londoners (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008)



I didn't actually know that I was going to be coming to this country... London for me is like being blessed by God because so many opportunities that I have had here, others do not have... But life in London is also really hard... you have to fly for yourself at such a young age when you haven't been trained for so many things. Sometimes you can be really lonely, frightened and worried... I really enjoyed taking these photos. Through photography I have looked at things more deeply, like looking into my life, and seeing how to move on... Photography has been a therapy for me, I learnt how to break free of myself.

The pictures of my priest and my church are my favorites. The church is so special to me. It is a refuge.

Loria Siamia, excerpt from *I Am Not Alone, New Londoners* (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008))



I had my citizenship ceremony last summer and to my surprise it was quite emotional... I have an interest in how the ceremony affects and shapes one's personal identity, and in how it is reshaping communities in cultures already established. I also wonder how the apparent 'equality' being given to the new citizens will affect the obvious cultural, financial and social inequality. Only the future will tell but at the moment it is a privilege to be present while such developments take place.

Tatiana Correia, excerpt from *New Citizens, New Londoners* (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008)

For many of the young people, the process of finding their photographic voices was not smooth (Orton 2009:4). They did not come to the project with a specific message to communicate. The process was often exploratory and uncertain. It was highly personal and private at the same time as being collaborative, social and public. Their experiences consist of interfolded elements and contrary emotions. Their images are one minute excited and hopeful, the next poignant, another angry, the next frustrated or confused, another reflective. In them, elements from the

present fold into the past while pointing towards an unknown future. In many senses, photography is the medium *par excellence* for communicating a sense of becoming as visual perception consists of an encounter between inter-sensory memory and a new situation (Connolly 2010:232). It allows fluid movement between past, present and future and facilitates the negotiation and development of an evolving sense of self.

The substance of the realities of these young people can never be totally collected. For the spectator their photography of becoming offers a prismatic view of contradictory apertures. A collection of their images<sup>166</sup> enables a complex processing of information from different, non-continuous points of view, providing a sense of their individual and collective experiences, the differences and the commonalities. A photography of becoming designates that a politics of voice is understood as a matter of embodiment, a coupled element of thinking and experience, which is shaped, subdued and made possible by discourse. In this context, participants' articulation and disarticulation of a possible world is the realization of a kind of ontological politics (Dumm 2008). A photography of becoming rides on the uncertain promise that participation in this specific form of visual civil politics enables participants to trace a voice that expands on their possibilities, and the possibilities for others, to be free.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In evoking the idea of a 'photography of becoming' the aim is to acknowledge that political and cultural identity is as much a process of 'becoming' as a matter of 'being' and this is often even more the case in the fluid, contested, marginal communities in which participatory photography interventions are immersed. A re-imagined participatory photography does not 'give voice' but rather enables participants to claim a voice. Through the very process of its production this photography of becoming engages in an ongoing process where participants are developing and finding their voice at the same time as claiming it. In this way, a photography of becoming is not just a metaphor of the process of political self-definition; it is very much a part of the process. It requires that people who often

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<sup>166</sup> See PhotoVoice 2004b, 2008b

have few choices available to them, make choices about what they want to say. It is entwined in a politics of voice that seeks to bring new claims and stories to our register. Those pursuing a photography of becoming examine and question established codes and ways of seeing the world and as such play a vital role in a functioning pluralism that requires an active engagement with difference and the cultivation of a receptivity to others.

Through this thesis I have argued that participatory photography initiatives are defined by tensions. These are multiple and context-specific but can be summed up in terms of the strained relation between the pictures that people want to take and the pictures that others want to see. The negotiation between these positions defines the dynamics of projects. Throughout this thesis what emerges is the crucial difference between a form of pluralist participatory photography that, grappling with these tensions, is dedicated to multiplying ways of seeing and the existence of a 'governmentalised' form of participatory photography that, disregarding these tensions, serves (not necessarily intentionally) to homogenize or appropriate the images of those to which it claims to give voice.

The key implication for practitioners must be an ongoing alertness to the ways in which contemporary approaches to participatory photography projects may end up closing off, hijacking or subduing an emergent politics of voice rather than enabling it. It cannot be assumed that the promise to 'give voice' involves or results in activity that enables different ways of seeing. Contemporary participatory photography initiatives, caught up in transformational modes of mediating (Debrix & Weber 2003), governmental modes of thought and pursuing coherence, validity and an audience, often suppress or deny difference in a bid to advocate or standardize voice to make it more easily marketable. In doing so they close down the possibility for dialogue and engagement with plural ways of seeing the world. Cultural democratization must, at its core, embody a productive ambiguity that resists attempts to allow one side or the other to dominate. Practitioners must strive to safeguard the ambiguous potential of participatory photography in a climate that pushes towards standardization.

Pluralism is a possibility to pursue rather than a certain effect. If attained it

remains a fragile achievement (Connolly 2005:42). The notion of a 'photography of becoming' highlights this precariousness. It designates participatory photography as a fragmented, intuitive process immersed in vital but nascent and vulnerable politics of voice. It reveals how efforts to 'speak out' and 'find a voice' involve complex representational politics that go beyond the simple binary opposition of silencing versus giving voice (Lykes et al 2003). Awareness of this fragility is vital for practitioners. The narrative to date has presented an overwhelmingly confident and positive perspective on the power and potential of participatory photography that misdirects contemporary initiatives. An honest assessment reveals that the impact of projects is often contested or uncertain. Practitioners need to work with a sense of perspective that acknowledges their limited capacity and the unreliable nature of their work but that cements their resolve and commitment to re-imagine what their projects aspire to.

Seeing the world through multiple lenses is essential to democratic pluralism. A pluralistic perspective highlights that for every dominant meaning and application of a concept there exist multiple interpretations open to us (Campbell & Schoolman 2008:21). It is vital that we hear competing points of view. When we acknowledge the essential instability of the image it is clear that our shifting realities are composed of a multiplicity of ways and practices of seeing and looking. It becomes crucial that we have the chance to engage with the different ways people see and understand the world. It is within a commitment to pluralizing and enabling new ways of seeing that participatory photography can re-frame its promise and ground its politics of voice and pursuit of social justice.

This thesis advocates a retrospective research. It is a form of inquiry that looks back and re-visits in order to find a way to move forward. Re-fashioning participatory photography within a 'pluralist imagination' (Connolly 1995) requires a shift in rhetoric, a move away from notions of photography as 'empowering' towards a sense of participatory photography as facilitating a plurality of seeing. This research is, by its very nature, incomplete and exploratory. Further investigation is required to build a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of participatory photography initiatives out of the context specific

experiences of projects, their workings over time and the lives and spectatorship of their images<sup>167</sup>.

This investigation has sought to insert participatory photography into a pluralized civil politics of late modernity. The aim is to locate participatory photography as part of the pursuit for new configurations of plurality and difference; to re-imagine itself as a method, medium and mode of mediation within a democratic struggle to safeguard and affirm difference, to contest the discursive practices of dominant groups, to support a politics of becoming and to enhance autonomy and solidarity. Participatory photography is then understood not only as a form of photographic technique, method or activism but also as a mode of mediation that supports the realization of a new form of social relations and civil politics.

Participatory photography advocates recognize that photography can become ‘one of the last lines of defense in the battle over citizenship’ (Azoulay 2008:131). There is a need to challenge injustice and dominant practices but this must be combined with a valorisation of difference that re-imagines a new kind of unstable and vulnerable transformational politics. This work is uncertain: those engaged in a politics of becoming ‘make a difference without knowing quite what they are doing’, amplifying underappreciated dimensions within human agency (Connolly 1996:263). A rapidly changing digital and political landscape constantly shifts the parameters of participatory photography. However, I contend that its role remains vital if its language and conceptual framework can shift to orientate itself within a pluralized politics of voice and in the struggle of some to stake their claim for recognition.

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<sup>167</sup> Themes for future studies might include investigations that further probe the questions of project sustainability; of photographic marginalization; of how spectators interact with participant produced images; of the impact of different kinds of image dissemination strategies; of voice in self-directed photography; of the activity of other archives of participatory photography; of the experiences of less active project participants; of the negotiation of ethics by practitioners; of the use of social media in the context of participatory photography initiatives.

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Zukin, S., 2009. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press.

## Appendix 1. Glossary of Interviewees and Projects

### **ALAM, SHAHIDUL**

*Photographer and Director, DRIK, Pathshala, Chobi Mela*

*Interviewed via Skype, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012*

DRIK is an advocacy focused multimedia organization based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Founded by Alam in 1989, Drik started ‘**Out of Focus**’ in 1994 with working class children in Dhaka. The work of the core group of children won awards and was exhibited internationally. A number of the children went on to develop professional careers in the photography and media industries and work at DRIK to this day.

[www.drik.net](http://www.drik.net)

Foster, Jane & Naidoo, Kumi, eds (2001) *Young People at the Centre: Participation and Social Change* Commonwealth Secretariat

### **BHUTANESE REFUGEE CHILDREN’S FORUM**

Initially called The Rose Class, this participatory photography project ran from 1998-2008 in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal. It was founded by myself as an undergraduate researcher with a group of Bhutanese refugee youth. Run for 2 years on a voluntary level by the group of original 17 participants, it was one of the two founding projects of PhotoVoice. In 2003 it was incorporated in the Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum, a children’s participation project established by Save the Children UK and from 2004-07 received funding from Comic Relief UK. Over this period it was run by PhotoVoice in collaboration with local partner LWF and a camp-based project manager.

The Bhutanese Refugees Children’s Forum (BRCF) worked with several thousand young people in three of the seven Bhutanese camps. At the peak of its activities the project delivered a wide range of activities including a vocational photography programme, regular photographic workshops, the management of a photographic studio, the publication of a monthly newspaper and arts workshops. The project exhibited internationally, received local, national and international press coverage, published a photographic booklet (PhotoVoice 2006b) and its archive has been used to create an advocacy website on the Bhutanese refugee story and their lives in the refugee camps, [www.bhutanese-refugees.com](http://www.bhutanese-refugees.com). In 2008, the project wound down its activities and closed as a resettlement process for the refugees got underway. In the years since over 90,000 Bhutanese refugees have been re-settled in 8 countries including the USA, Canada, Australia, Norway and the UK. As of 2014, there is a population of 24,000 refugees living in the 2 remaining camps in southern Nepal (<http://www.unhcr.org/50001f3c9.html>, accessed May 12<sup>th</sup> 2015).

[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

[www.bhutanese-refugees.com](http://www.bhutanese-refugees.com)

### **BORN INTO BROTHELS**

Oscar Winning 2004 film directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman that documented Briski’s project running photography workshops with a group of children of sex workers in the red light district of Sonagachi, Kolkata

<http://www.kids-with-cameras.org/bornintobrothels/>

**BRISKI, ZANA**

*Photographer and filmmaker; Founder, Kids with Cameras; Director, Born into Brothels*

*Interviewed via Skype, 8th October 2011*

Briski ran photography workshops with a group of children of sex workers in the brothels of Calcutta over a 3 year period and went on to found **Kids with Cameras**, a non-profit that sought to transform the lives of marginalised children through learning photography. Her film about the project in India, *Born into Brothels*, was highly acclaimed and the 2004 winner of the Academy Award for Documentary Feature. In 2010 Kids with Cameras closed down having raised the target for funds to build a school in Kolkata whose running is managed by a local NGO

[www.zanabriski.com](http://www.zanabriski.com)

[www.kidswithcameras.org](http://www.kidswithcameras.org)

**BUNGEROTH, ANNIE**

*Photographer and photo educator*

*Interviewed 4 times between 2009-12 via Skype and face to face in London*

Photographer and photo educator. Founder / Director of ProExposure. Staff member at TAFOS from 1991-94, helping to set up and manage the TAFOS archive.

[www.anniebungeroth.com](http://www.anniebungeroth.com)

[www.cic.proexposure.co.uk/](http://www.cic.proexposure.co.uk/)

**CABON, JOSEPH**

*Head of Photography, Christian Aid*

*Interviewed in London, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012*

Cabon has worked at Christian Aid for over 30 years

**CALDERON, GLORIA**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Lima, Peru, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2011*

TAFOS photographer, El Agustino workshop. Involved with SEA (Jesuit NGO) at the time of the workshop, Gloria is now a house wife and mother

**CARDENAS, WILLY**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Cusco, Peru, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2011*

TAFOS photographer, Cusco workshop, Willy was involved in a youth group at time of workshop. He now is working as an accountant.

**CHIAPAS PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT**

The Chiapas Photography Project provides indigenous Maya peoples in Chiapas, Mexico with opportunities for cultural and artistic self-expression through photography. Founded in 1992 by Carlota Duarte, it has worked with over 300 indigenous men and women from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds undertaking projects that celebrate and engage members of their communities. The project has exhibited around the world and produced over 10 publications. Over 35,000 photographs are cataloged at Archivo Fotografica Indigena, a digital archive available for anthropological research, based at a study center near San Cristobal de Las Casas in Mexico.

www.chipasphoto.org

**COLUNGE, ANGEL**

*TAFOS archive manager, Photography Department, Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru*

*Interviewed via email, May 2012*

Colunge has managed the TAFOS archive since 2004. His PhD was on TAFOS's El Agustine workshop.

**CROMBIE, JESSICA**

*Head of Photography and Film at Save the Children*

*Interviewed via phone, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012*

Crombie has worked as Head of Photography and Film at Save the Children since 2010. Previously she was Picture Editor at Water Aid.

**DUARTE, CARLOTA**

*Founder and Director, Chiapas Photography Project*

*Interviewed in San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico, May 4<sup>th</sup> 2008*

Duarte founded the Chiapas Photography Project in 1992 to serve the indigenous Maya in Chiapas, and has coordinated its activities in the years since with long-term funding from The Ford Foundation.

www.chipasphoto.org

**EID-SABBAGH, YASMINE**

*Photographer and artist*

*Interviewed via Skype, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2013*

Eid-Sabbagh has been working with participatory photography since 2001 and initially worked on a project in Lebanon that she describes as a 'traditional NGO participatory photography project' that saw cameras handed out to large groups of children over a number of months of workshops (Y.Eid Sabbagh, 2013, interview, 11<sup>th</sup> February). The experience left her highly critical of schematic projects and focused her on the task of developing an alternative collaborative photography project model. In 2006 she moved to Burj al-Shamali, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, where she lived until 2011. There she conducted a photographic project with a group of young Palestinians as well as archival work on family and studio photographs. "A Photographic Conversation from Burj al-Shamali Camp," an interactive outdoor installation of photographs taken by Palestinian youth toured five Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan. The project also included the creation of a permanent archive of the work, housed at the Arab Image Foundation. Eid-Sabbagh is completing a PhD on collaborative photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria.

**FALCONI, JOSE LUIS**

*Curator, photographer and academic*

*Interviewed via Skype, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012*

Falconi is a Peruvian photographer and curator working within American academia. He is currently a Fellow in the Dept of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University and was previously coordinator/curator at the Center of Latin American Studies at the David Rockefeller center at Harvard.

## **FOTOKIDS**

Fotokids, originally called Out of the Dump, was founded in 1991 by Nancy McGirr who ran photography workshops with children living on the rubbish dump in Guatemala City. Fotokids is one of the longest running international participatory photography youth projects. The organisation now has projects in six urban and rural communities, including an environmental education project in Honduras. It has served hundreds of at-risk children affected by poverty and violence. The program provides children with technical expertise in photography and design, an international mentoring program, and traditional scholarships from first grade through university. The children's photographs have been exhibited throughout the world in over a dozen countries and in numerous publications.

McGirr highlights how the project has evolved into an integrated programme where photography is used as a tool within a broader set of educational and developmental objectives (N.McGirr, 2012, interview). Once the project had run the course of the 'traditional' participatory photography model focused on workshops and press, exhibition and publications they continued adding elements - educational scholarships, internships, the establishment of a graphic design studio. Thus developed a long term project model in which photography is a central strategy and tool but one element in a more holistic approach aimed at supporting and enabling sustainable transformation in young people's lives. FotoKids now has a considerable track record with numerous participants having graduated from university and the large majority of its activities and administration now being led by former participants.

<http://www.fotokids.org>

## **GAMARRA, GERMAN**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Cusco, Peru, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer, Qosqo workshop. Musician at time of workshops, German now working as a taxi driver in Cusco

## **GERMAIN, JULIAN**

*Photographer and artist*

*Interviewed via Skype, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2013*

Since 1995 Germain has been working with Brazilian artists, Patricia Azevedo and Murilo Godoy on a number of photography projects which are conceived and executed as collaborations with groups such as favela communities and street children, who produce the imagery themselves. In 1998, the book 'No Mundo Maravilhoso do Futebol' was published by *Basalt*. The 'No Olho da Rua' collective has specialised in bringing imagery made by these marginalised groups directly to the public, in the form of posters, newspapers and flyers displayed and distributed on the streets of the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte.

<http://juliangermain.com>

## **GOTTESMAN, ERIC**

*Photographer and artist*

*Interviewed via Skype, 11<sup>th</sup> February and 10<sup>th</sup> April 2013*

Gottesman is photographic artist and organiser engaged in collaborative community based projects. He has been working with the **Sudden Flowers Collective**, a group of young people affected by HIV in Ethiopia since 1999. A

book is forthcoming. He has also worked in collaborative projects in Lebanon, Jordan and in the USA.  
<http://ericgottesman.net>

**HUBBARD, JIM**

*Founder and Director, Shooting Back, USA*

*Interviewed via Skype, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011*

Founded Shooting Back in 1989, an organization dedicated to empowering children at risk by teaching them photography. He initially worked with homeless youth in Washington and went on to work with native youth on reservations around the USA.

<http://shootingback.net/>

<http://www.jimhubbardphoto.com/>

**LEVNER, ADAM**

*Founder and Executive Director, Critical Exposure, USA*

*Interviewed via Skype, 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2011*

Levner is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of **Critical Exposure** which he established after working as a teacher and community organiser. Critical Exposure trains youth to use photography and advocacy to make real change in their schools and communities. Through campaigns and visual storytelling, CE helps students raise their voices in conversations about education policies and build the public support and political will needed to address the issues they face.

<http://www.criticalexposure.org/>

**LLOSA, ELEANA**

*Sociologist*

*Interviewed via email, May 2012*

Sociologist, Head of Content and Research at TAFOS, 1990-96 and Director of TAFOS, 1994-5.

**LOPEZ, PABLO**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Cusco, Peru, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer, Qosqo workshop. At time of workshop Lopez was involved in local youth group. He now works as videographer and editor

**McGIRR, NANCY**

*Founder, FotoKids, Guatemala*

*Interviewed via Skype, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2012*

McGirr, a former Reuters photographer, is the founder and Executive Director of **Fotokids**, a non-profit program that began in 1991 when she gave cameras to children living in Guatemala City's vast garbage dump and had them document their lives. Fotokids is one of the longest running international participatory photography youth projects.

<http://www.fotokids.org>

**MENDEZ, RAUL**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Lima, Peru, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer in the El Agustino workshop. A youth leader with SEA (local NGO) at time of workshop, Mendez is now working in communications for the municipality. He worked for 10 years as a photographer.

### **MOVING LIVES**

PhotoVoice worked with young unaccompanied refugees in London from 2002-2008 in partnership with Project DOST. I worked on these projects in various capacities as a facilitator and manager/director. Moving Londoners was a digital storytelling project that ran from 2004-06. It ran regular photography workshops with young refugees, a group of whom produced DVD of digital stories

See Orton (2009), PhotoVoice (2008c).

[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

### **MÜLLER, THOMAS**

*Founder and director, TAFOS*

*Interviewed in Lima, Peru, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2011*

German photographer who co-founded TAFOS in 1986 with his ex-wife, Helga Muller. Still based in Peru Muller continues to work as a photographer and community development consultant.

### **NEW LONDONERS**

PhotoVoice worked with young unaccompanied refugees in London from 2002-2008 in partnership with Project DOST. I worked on these projects in various capacities as a facilitator and manager/director. New Londoners was a project that ran from 2006-08. One strand of the project worked with newly arrived young refugees, integrating photography within the introductory English education program run by Project Dost for young refugees that did not yet have school places. The second part of the project worked with a group of 15 unaccompanied refugee youth who were mentored by professional photographers to produce photo essays on their lives in London. The images were brought together in the photography book, *New Londoners; reflections on home* (PhotoVoice / Trolley 2008) which was launched at the Tate Modern by Ed Balls, Secretary of the State for Children. See also Orton (2009), PhotoVoice (2008c).

[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

### **OUT OF FOCUS**

Out of Focus was a photography project with 10 disadvantaged children in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that was started in 1994 by **Shaidul Alam**. The work of the core group of children won awards and was exhibited internationally. A number of the participants from the project continue to work as photographers, editors and technicians at the Bangladeshi photographic agency and educational hub, DRIK.

[www.drik.net](http://www.drik.net)

### **PASTOR, SUSANA**

*Head of Photography Department, Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru, Worked in the management team at TAFOS from 1995-98*

*Interviewed via Skype, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012*

Academic and researcher working in social communications, cinema and documentary photography. Head of Photography Department, Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru. Pastor worked in the management team at TAFOS from 1995-98.

## **PAUCAR, JUAN CARLOS**

*Former TAFOS facilitator*

*Interviewed in Lima, Peru, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2011*

Former TAFOS facilitator. After TAFOS he worked as a youth worker and in community development. Now working as a taxi driver

## **PHOTOVOICE (Photovoice)**

A participatory action research technique pioneered by Wang and Burris (1994, 1997) that combines photography with grassroots social action, photovoice has been used extensively by researchers in the fields of community development, health and education. The term, photovoice, is often used interchangeably with participatory photography in the fields of academic and policy research where the method has become more widely established. There is a considerable academic literature that focuses on the photovoice method. Articles include Carlson et al (2006), Castlelden and Garvin (2008), Gant et al (2009), Lykes et al (2003), Strack et al (2010), Truchon (2007), Wang et al (1996, 1998), Wang & Burris (1994, 1997), Wang (1998, 1999, 2000, 2004) and Wang & Redwood (2001). Literature reviews of photovoice have been conducted by Catalani & Minkler (2010) and Hergenrather et al (2009).

## **PHOTOVOICE (PhotoVoice)**

PhotoVoice is an award-winning UK based NGO that builds skills within disadvantaged and marginalised communities by utilising participatory photography and digital storytelling methods that enable individuals to represent themselves and create tools for advocacy and communication. It is an organization that I co-founded in 2000 and ran until 2010. Working in partnership with other NGOs, PhotoVoice has delivered more than 50 projects working with marginalised groups in the UK and around the world.

[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

## **PURSEY, NIC**

*Institutional Support, PhotoVoice*

*Interviewed via Skype, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012*

**Pursey has worked as PhotoVoice's trusts and foundations fundraiser since 2007. He has 15 years' experience working with institutional donors in the UK NGO sector.**

## **SHOOT BACK**

American photographer **Lana Wong** started the Shootback Project in August 1997 with Kenyan youth leader **Francis Kimanzi, in partnership with** the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), to help give young people in Nairobi's Mathare slums the means to tell their own stories. Equipped with \$30 plastic cameras, a group of 31 boys and girls, aged 12 to 17 photographed their lives and wrote about them every week for almost three years. A book of photography by this original group was published (Wong 2000). Two decades later the MYSA Shootback project continues to train young photographers in Mathare and their photos are displayed both in the slum and in international shows. Participants from the original Shootback group have gone on to forge careers as photographers, one – Julius Mwelu – has set up his own foundation to continue the legacy of youth empowerment through photography that Shootback started ([www.mwelu.org](http://www.mwelu.org)).

[www.shootbackproject.org](http://www.shootbackproject.org)



## **SHOOTING BACK**

Initiated by the photojournalist **Jim Hubbard**, Shooting Back initially worked over two years in the 1980-90s with almost 200 children living in homeless shelters in Washington DC and received wide visibility. Shooting Back's driving aim was to draw attention to issues of homelessness, to get exposure and generate debate in the media, among the public and within the policy and law makers on Capitol Hill. The project gained significant media coverage and featured in several hundred articles around the world and on television programmes such as Oprah. The children's images became part of collections at major art institutions and participants from the project testified in Congressional hearings and met privately with the president (Hubbard 2007, Carroad 1994, Hafford 1994). Shooting Back went on to work with young people living in American Indian reservations. See Hubbard (1992,1997), Hubbard and Banks (1997), Carroad (1994), Hafford (1994). [www.shootingback.net](http://www.shootingback.net)

## **SILVA, SUSANA**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Cusco, Peru, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer, in the Qosqo workshop, Cusco. An art student at time of workshop, she now works in theatre and as an artist.

## **SILVERA, WALTER**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Lima, Peru, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer in the San Marcos workshop, Lima. A law student at the time of the workshop he went on to become a facilitator for TAFOS workshops. He now works as a photographer and photo educator

## **TRANSPARENCY**

PhotoVoice worked with young unaccompanied refugees in London from 2002-2008 in partnership with Project DOST. I worked on these projects in various capacities as a facilitator and manager/director. Transparency was the first project that ran from 2002-2003 running photography workshops with a group of 13 young refugees over a year culminating in an exhibition that travelled around the UK during 2003-04. The project produced a documentary (See: [http://socialfilms.org/?page\\_id=348](http://socialfilms.org/?page_id=348) , accessed May 12<sup>th</sup> 2015) and a photographic booklet (PhotoVoice 2004b). [www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

## **VARGAS, JUSTO**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Cusco, Peru, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer in the Cusco workshop, involved in a youth group at time of workshop. Went on to become a facilitator and head of the TAFOS Cusco office. Vargas now works as a community development consultant

## **VELASQUEZ, MARIA**

*Former TAFOS photographer*

*Interviewed in Cusco, Peru, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011*

Former TAFOS photographer, in the Cusco workshop. Head of local Vaso de Leche (community organisation) at time of workshop, she continues to work as a community leader and in the community crèche.

**VILLAFUERTE, ROSA**

*Former TAFOS photographer, TAFOS staff member 1993-98*

*Interviewed in Lima, Cusco, May 22<sup>nd</sup> and June 5<sup>th</sup> 2011 and via Skype, 23<sup>rd</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> June 2011 and 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012*

Former TAFOS photographer from the El Agustino workshop, Lima. Rosa was a youth leader involved with SEA at the time of workshop. She went on to work within the TAFOS staff team on the archive and is now a freelance photographer, curator and archivist consultant.

<http://rosavillafuerte.wordpress.com/>

**WATTS, LAWRENCE**

*Visual Content Manager, Action Aid*

*Interviewed via Skype, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2012*

Watts has been Head of the International Picture Desk at Action Aid in London since 2001. He previously worked as a picture researcher and editor.

**WONG, LANA**

*Founder, ShootBack, Kenya*

*Interviewed via Skype, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011*

Wong was working as a freelance photographer when she founded ShootBack, a photography youth development project in Nairobi, Kenya in 1997. She ran the project until 2000 when she left Kenya but the project continues to operate. She is currently working as a media and communications consultant for NGOs and development institutions but continues to run Shootback workshops with young people in the Washington DC area.

[www.shootbackproject.org](http://www.shootbackproject.org)

<http://www.mwelu.org/2007/11/13/message-from-lana-wong/>

Wong, Lana (2000) *ShootBack: Photos by Kids from the Nairobi Slums* Booth-Clibborn

## Appendix 2. TAFOS WORKSHOP TABLE

Information collated from various sources including the TAFOS website and Pais De Luz book (TAFOS 2006).

| WORKSHOP NAME            | REGION | GROUP: NOS. MEN / WOMEN           | YEAR    | PARTNER  | NO OF FILMS SHOT | THEMES SHOT  |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|---------|--|------------------|--|
| MOROCOCHA                | Junin  | Miners: 16<br>15 / 1              | 1989-92 | Unions from 5 mines, mineworkers Federation, Defense Front of Morococha  | 366              | Working in the mines, living in the camps, accidents on the mine, graveyard, life in Lima when mine closed |
| LA OROYA                 | Junin  | Miners: 7<br>5/2                  | 1989-91 | Centromin Peru Workers Federation (state company), La Oroya's Min Housewives Committee, Mining National Federation (FNTMMSP) | 79               | Smelting, daily life, syndical organisation, smoke pollution   |
| EL AGUSTINO              | Lima   | Barrio dwellers: 14<br>8 / 5      | 1986-98 | SEA (El Agustino's Educational Services)   | 213              | Neighbourhood living, young people activities, neighbourhood organisations, Children                       |
| RIBERA DEL RIO           | Lima   | Barrio dwellers: 9<br>2 / 7       | 1989-93 | SEA (EL Agustino Educational Service), UPMIRR (People's Union of the Left Bank of the Rimac River)                           | 322              | Neighbourhood orgs, soaail life, children, women in orgs ie. Vaso de leche                                 |
| SAN MARCOS               | Lima   | University students : 11<br>8 / 3 | 1990-93 | San Marcos Students Federation, human rights group, christian communities, university depts - education & Sociology          | 326              | Living on the uni, downtown lima, neighbourhoods   |
| CHORRILLOS               | Lima   | Barrio women: 2<br>0 / 2          | 1991    | "Vaso de Leche' committee, CELAT   | 25               | Vaso De Leche committee activities, daily living, domestic life  |
| ORGANIZACIONES JUVENILES | Lima   | Urban youth: 7<br>5 / 2           | 1992    | CEAPAZ / Church groups   | 44               | Youngster neighbourhood life, activities relating to church, city life                                     |
| MUSICOS                  | Lima   | Urban youth: 6<br>6 / 0           | 1993    | Youth music groups / bands - relationships was with band members themselves rather than directly to the bands                | 89               | Musicians activities, downtown Lima, nightlife, streetlife, middle class young people from Lima            |

|                   |            |   |         |  |     |   |
|-------------------|------------|---|---------|--|-----|---|
| BARRIOS ALTOS     | Lima       | Barrio dwellers: 5<br>3 / 2                 | 1994    | Jiron Junin neighbourhood group, Carrillo Maurtua House (from the Cayetano Heredia University)   | 138 | Housing, religion and culture, daily life, jobs   |
| VILLA EL SALVADOR | Lima       | Barrio women: 12<br>0 / 12                  | 1994    | Villa El Salvador Women Popular Federation (FEPOMUVES)   | 69  | Organisational activities, streets and schools, daily life  |
| YAPATERA          | Piura      | Campesinos (community farmers): 12<br>9 / 4 | 1996    | Movimiento Negro Francisco Congo   | 46  | Black Culture, Daily Lives  |
| RIO MAYO          | San Martin | Campesinos: 9<br>6 / 3                      | 1995    | Mothers Clubs, Municipal Agency, Community Defense Committee, High Jungle Research and development Centre (CEDISA)                               | 109 | Agriculture, River, fishin, Craftwork, Domestic living, festivities, housing                        |
| TRES UNIDOS       | San Martin | Campesinos: 5<br>3 / 2                      | 1995    | Mothers Clubs, District Council, peasants groups, SUTEP, High Jungle research council (CEDISA)   | 68  | Agriculture, community and social activites, river, craft work, daily life, army                    |
| ABANCAY           | Apurimac   | Urban professionals: 7<br>5 / 2             | 1994-95 | ASARA, Apurimac Artists Association  | 66  | the city, education, children, daily life, field, transport   |
| OCONGATE          | Cusco      | Campesinos: 10<br>0 / 10                    | 1986-91 | Peasant communities, Alpaca owners association, CODEH Ocongate (Human Rights Commission), Agro Industrial Training Centre "Jesus Obrero" (CCAIO) | 349 | cattle and agriculture production, local daily life and customs, peasant organisations              |
| GUAMAN POMA       | Cusco      | Barrio dwellers: 14<br>7 / 7                | 1988-89 | Guaman Poma Centre, Cusco - young leaders from the NE zone and promoters from the centre   | 99  | Neighbourhood, organisational activities, festivals, downtown city life, homelessness, children etc |
| YANAOCAS / CANAS  | Cusco      | Campesinos: 11<br>10 / 1                    | 1989-93 | Canas Peasant Provincial Federation, Peasant communities from Canas, IAA - Agrarian Support Institute  | 257 | Organisational activities, peasant life, livestock and agricultural production, life in Yanaoca     |
| CUSCO             | Cusco      | Barrio dwellers: 10<br>9 / 1                | 1990-93 | Cusco's Salesmen Association, Northeast zone neighbourhoods, right bank Neighbourhoods (Vaso de Leche), Neighbourhoods from Santiago             | 193 | daily neighbourhood living, downtown city, carpenters workshops, life in the fields                 |
| ESPINAR           | Cusco      | Campesinos: 9<br>6 / 3                      | 1993-95 | Espinar's Peasant Province federation  | 65  | Agriculture, festivals, organisational  |

|                     |       |                          |         | (FUCAE)   |     | activities  |
|---------------------|-------|--------------------------|---------|---|-----|---|
| QOSQO               | Cusco | Urban youth: 10<br>6 / 4 | 1993    | None, associated with some youth groups   | 158 | City life, young people and women   |
| JOVENES QOSQO       | Cusco | Urban youth: 9<br>7 / 2  | 1994    | None  | 74  | General urban life  |
| HIERRO PERU-MARCONA | Ica   | Miners: 7<br>7 / 0       | 1992-93 | Hierro Peru's Mineworkers Union   | 57  | Work on the mine, organisational activities - hunger strike, assemblies, life in Marcona          |
| CHANGUILLO          | Ica   | Campeños: 3<br>3 / 0     | 1993-95 | Nazca's Church, 3 public dinings from small neighbourhoods  | 98  | Costal agriculture, festivals, everyday living  |
| SOL DE ORO          | Ica   | Miners: 2<br>2 / 0       | 1993-94 | Sol de Oro's mineworkers Association (ATRAMIN), Nazca's Church, Mother's Club, District Council, peasant groups, SUTEP, CDISA | 45  | Work at the undermines, processing of mines, daily life   |
| CHINCHA             | Ica   | Campeños: 18<br>6 / 12   | 1997-98 | Movimiento Negro Francisco Congo  | 146 | Festivals, children , agriculture   |
| AYAVIRI             | Puno  | Campeños: 28<br>25 / 3   | 1988-92 | Province of Melgar's Farmers Unique Federation (FUCAM), farming communities   | 464 | Organised actions, land taking, assemblies, strikes, cattle and griculture production, daily life |
| PUCARA              | Puno  | Campeños: 15<br>11 / 4   | 1990-92 | Pucara's Peasant Provincial Federation, Pucara Church, local youth groups   | 119 | organisation of peasant communities, daily life in the fields                                     |
| JULIACA             | Puno  | Miners: 6<br>6 / 0       | 1990-91 | Unions at 3 mines nr city of Juliaca  | 26  | Mining on high altitudes and camps, prgansational activities, daily life                          |

