THE TAFOS STORY

Los Talleres de Fotografia Social (TAFOS): pioneering collective social photography practice

The history of socially engaged photography is full of stories of the greats; of the outstanding concerned photographers and their iconic images. However the significance of photography as a tool to highlight inequalities and catalyze social change lies not only in the stories of its celebrated heroes but in the diverse ways ordinary people and grassroots activists have taken charge of the camera and put images to work.

TAFOS[1] was a landmark project, a pioneer of socially engaged photographic practice. While established within Latin American photographic histories[2], it has been rarely written about in the English language. Involving a network of over 270 community photographers working across Peru, TAFOS sought to enable ordinary Peruvians, struggling in the middle of violent internal conflict, to reclaim their image. Running from 1986-98, TAFOS worked closely within the popular movement arming people with cameras and getting their pictures seen nationally and internationally. The grassroots TAFOS photographers shot over 4200 rolls of film and produced over 150,000 images creating an archive that 'preserved the visual memory of 12 fundamental years in the history of Peru' (Pastor 2007). While TAFOS closed in 1998, its archive continues to the housed at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru (PUCP) and its images are widely regarded as key to the lexicon of Peruvian visual history.

In the story of TAFOS photography is conceived of as a collective labor. Here photography is framed as a collaborative and plural, rather than individualistic and singular, experience; as a multi-participated process and ongoing encounter that brings people together; as an instrument harnessed by diverse communities of people to communicate, to protest, to challenge and denounce. Moving away from dominant narratives of 'vertical' photography, histories such as the TAFOS story help to build a renewed articulation of photography as a civil practice which 'enables us to re-imagine relations among individuals and between them and the world' (Azoulay 2014:28).

The aim of this essay is to bring the TAFOS experience to the attention of English speaking practitioners in order that it might inform and orientate contemporary socially engaged photographic practice. Elsewhere I have written about the long-term impact of TAFOS and of the experience of working with photography on its participants (Fairey 2015, Fairey 2017). Here the focus is on re-telling the story of TAFOS: how it began, evolved and eventually closed, about its ways of working, harnessing and articulating photography as a tool to enable social change. It is a story about photography as an 'activity of the many'

[1] TAFOS website: http://facultad.pucp.edu.pe/comunicaciones/tafos/tafos_project.htm Accessed 27th April 2017

[2] 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: Fotografia Latinoamericana 1860-1993*, Planeta and Alejandro Castellote (ed) 2007, *Mapas Abiertos: Fotografia Latinoamericana, 1991-2002*, Lunwerg Editores.

(Azoulay 2014:40) and what that activity enabled in one specific context of social and political upheaval. It is a story about the organizing and politics that underpinned these endeavors in the pre-digital era. Charting TAFOS's rise and shifting articulations alongside the changing Peruvian political landscape it explores how the photography's potential as a tool for social change is defined and shaped by the people that drive these projects and the political, social and structural context in which they take seed and evolve. It raises and provides insight into questions that remain salient to this day. Who owns and leads these initiatives? How should collaborative and collective photography endeavors be organized and managed? What happens to these projects and the images that they generate? How do we define their success and significance? Through looking back, the TAFOS story is offered as a means to critically reflect on both the present and future of photography and its potential as a tool for social change.

The beginning

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

The judge with his lama © Gregorio Condori / Ocongate, Cusco 1986 / TAFOS

Gregorio Condori, a campesino leader had seen the photographers, Thomas and Helga Müller, working around Ocongate, a small highland community near Cusco where he lived. They were taking pictures and using a projector to display the images at village meetings. The German couple who had been based in Peru for a number of years, were working with Jesuit priests in the village on a community development project. Condori needed the camera because he needed proof. A judge was demanding a high-bred alpaca as a bribe to ensure the ruling in a litigation case came out favorably for the community. With the borrowed

camera he took a picture of the judge with his alpaca and went to Cusco to file an official complaint.

On his return, Condori and Thomas Müller put a proposal to the Ocongate Committee of Human Rights to run some photography workshops. It was suggested that the local committee chose some of their members who could act as community photographers. Müller would show them how to use a camera. This groups became the first workshop of what was to be called *Los Talleres de Fotografia Social* (TAFOS).

A meeting of the Ocongate workshop © Serapio Verduzco, Ocongate, Cuso, 1987 / TAFOS

From 1986 until its closure in 1998, TAFOS ran almost thirty photography workshops with communities in 8 districts across Peru. They worked with 270 people from campesino collectives to miners associations, from women and youth in city slums to Afro-Peruvian communities on the coast. These grassroots 'social' photographers produced over 150,000 images[3] that continue to be exhibited and distributed to this day.

But at the outset, there were no such grand plans. It started organically, in response, says Thomas Müller, to a demand from those who participated. This he believes is key to understanding it all.

> *"To have meaning (these projects) need to arise from a need felt by the people who are going to take the pictures. This gives it meaning not only because the impact afterwards is greater but also because the images are better. 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*

[3] Statistics taken from Llosa 2006: 34

> *what they wanted to say. They had a deep felt need to communicate, to leave the isolation in their minds, in their 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 June)*

For Condori, the camera was a tool he could use to denounce, to speak up against corruption in his village. For many of the TAFOS photographers who followed photography fulfilled a similar function. It providing them with a way to document and decry, explain and protest, defend and highlight the circumstances in which they were living. Juan Carlos Paucar, one of TAFOS's facilitators, who now works as a taxi driver in Lima explained,

> *'People were living in extreme poverty and it was a violent situation with both the Shining Path and armed forces present. People found themselves in the middle of two belligerent forces without any way out… photography fulfilled a need to denounce, to confront abuses and unjust situations. The photographers were important for their communities, for themselves. Important in the sense that they were useful.' (JC. Paucar, 2011, interview, 4 June)*

The context

Talk to anyone involved in TAFOS and they all insist that to understand the project you have to understand the context out of which it grew. TAFOS 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, were 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 – roads, schools, communications systems and hospitals – started to crumble. Huge numbers of campesinos migrated to the cities looking to build new lives away from the harsh rural subsistence existence but found the urban centres to be no less unforgiving.

As the economic crisis deepened and peoples 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 during the late twentieth century. Initially no one took the threat of the Sendero that seriously. Their activities were isolated to small bombings and graffittied threats in provincial towns that hardly made the headlines in the Lima press. However, this changed as the ferocity of their guerilla campaign gained ground.

Led by philosophy professor, Abimael Guzmán, who inspired religious devotion in his followers, 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. So confident of their cause, Shining Path rebels would stop at nothing in order to further the revolution and their tactics ranged from bombing to kidnap, torture, rape, murder, massacre and intimidation.

Most Peruvians, of all backgrounds, rejected the violent authoritarianism of the Shining Path. Sendero doctrine was notable for a complete absence of appeals to Indian or Andean pride (Starn et al 2005) and they failed to build up a broad support amongst Peru's poor. Their terror tactics however drastically affected the lives of the many people, who were already living hand to mouth existences in the isolated rural communities were much of the violence was waged. Guerillas insist that villagers close markets to cut off food supplies to the city. Unable to trade, they were forced to survive on even less. People with any ties to the state such as mayors, teachers, civic leaders were murdered along with anyone who displayed any kind of dissent or protest. Local leaders were killed or threatened if they refused to co-operate with rebel demands, public executions were carried out and hostile villages attacked. Whole areas were dubbed red zones and ceded over to the Sendero.

From 1983-85 the emergency zones had grown from nine to twenty seven 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.

Attack by The Shining Path against the Quisuni Agrarian Workers Co-operative © Damaso Quispe, Orurillo, Puno 1989 / TAFOS

Strategically, the Sendero's guerilla campaign was focused on gaining control of rural areas before making their final assault on the cities. This meant that the indigenous villages of the Peruvian Andes bore the brunt of their ferocity. 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.

The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in 2001 to investigate abuses committed during this bloody period of 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. The rest of the deaths were attributed to a smaller guerilla group and local militias while a number remain unattributed. It was the indigenous communities that disproportionally suffered. A revealing statistic was that 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 population speak Quechua or other indigenous languages as their native language[4].

Against this backdrop of severe insecurity, economic hardship, huge rural-urban migration and violence ordinary people came together to organize and defend themselves. From the 1970s onwards there was a sharp growth in the popular movement in Peru. The numbers of community based committees, NGOs and progressive church led organisations, working to attend the needs of the working population that the State were not meeting, grew significantly. 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[5]' committees created a bottom-up support network and lifelines for many of the population struggling to keep their heads above water. 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). As communities rallied to co-ordinate and defend themselves their activities 'belied the images of chaos and helplessness so often invoked in the media' (Starn el al 2005:441).

Land grab in the peasant community of Macara © Melchor Lima, Melgar, Puna 1989 / TAFOS

[4] · CVR. Tomo VIII. Chapter 2. "El impacto diferenciado de la violencia" "2.1 VIOLENCIA Y DESIGUALDAD RACIAL Y ÉTNICA" pp. 131–132

[5] 'Vaso de Leche', 'Glass of Milk' was a feeding programme aimed at reducing malnourishment

It was within this web of grassroots intiatives that TAFOS found its place and raison d'etre. The need as recognized by Müller existed on a number of levels. From these organisations there was a clear necessity to be able to communicate to those near and far. The organisations lacked the tools to document and to get their messages across and this is where TAFOS felt that they could play a role. "The language of photography became a hinge and a bridge" for the organisations (Müller in TAFOS 2006:22). Enrique Larrea, another member of the original TAFOS team noted that TAFOS never had a problem explaining the potential of photography to the organisations rather it was impossible to meet the demand because the organisations so rapidly caught on to its huge possibilities (Larrea 1989).

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). It fulfilled a dual role, to reflect on and re-build identity and to speak out to those outside (Müller in TAFOS 2006:22). Annie Bungeroth, 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-terroism from the military on the other" (A. Bungeroth, 2011, interview, 1 Feb). Photography thus also became a way to explore the familiar details of their lives, to celebrate their culture, commemorate their values and traditions and reaffirm their identity.

TAFOS themselves defined their cause in this passage:

> *'One of the ways to create a new social order in a fragmented country is for the people to re-build their image, their face, their words …this work must be carried out by the popular sectors of society and must assume an indispensible part of their fight for survival and even more so for their right to be protagonists and directors in the life of the country … It was out of this drama and the need to recover their own image that the TAFOS project rose… This is what gives it meaning and direction… we believe that with this confrontation we are playing today for the future of the country. In this context photography is not an end but a means: of local, sectorial and national identification, a means to denounce on the one hand and a weapon for ideological confrontation and for recovering the right to identity and difference on the other' (TAFOS blurb quoted in Llosa in TAFOS 2006:39, originally from TAFOS Proyecto Trienal 1991-93)*

In the story of TAFOS, the organic nature of its beginnings are often referred to (TAFOS 2006, Llosa 2006, Pastor 2007). It is important, however, to not confuse its lack of premeditation with a lack of intentionality. Those driving TAFOS were informed and motivated by a strong political conscious aligned to the popular movement of the day which was a condition without which the work of TAFOS and its workshops could not have happened (Llosa 1996:22). Thomas Müller places TAFOS within a genealogy of grassroots popular photography movements including the German Workers-Photographers movement in the 1920-30s and the New York Photo League. In emulation of these forerunners, TAFOS was conceived as an initiative within the existing movement of grassroots popular

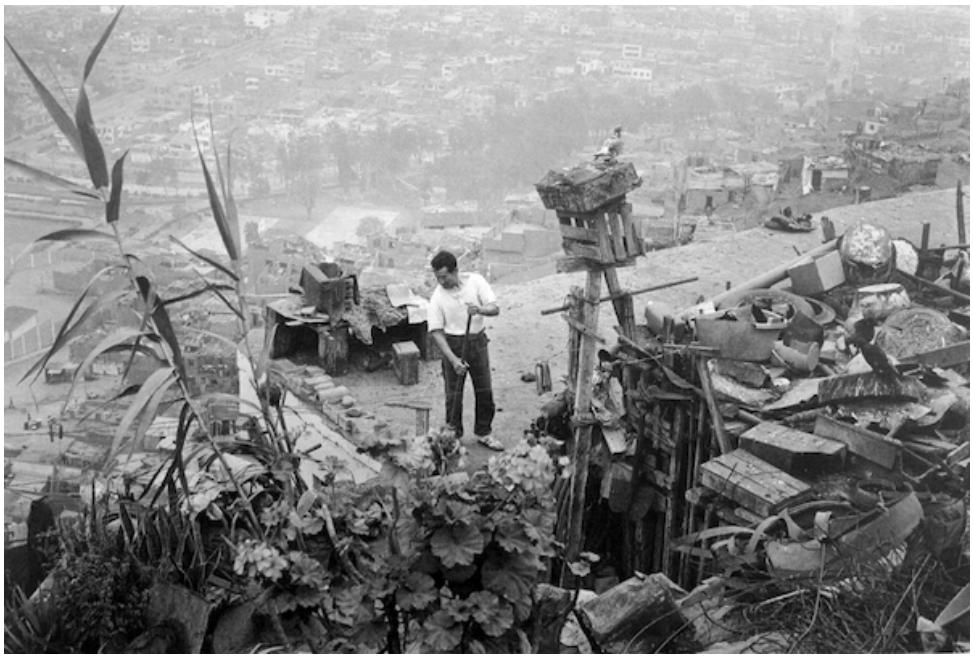
organsations, a project of 'accompaniment and support' (Pastor 2007:3) to the associations fighting for structural change in Peru.

The photographers were often referred to as 'los fotografos populares', the people's photographers and TAFOS chose to define their work by the concept of 'social photography'. Fundamental to this idea was the aim that the visual document should confront and intervene into social, political and cultural problems rather than to record in the abstract (Llosa 2005:7). For TAFOS, 'photography was the instrument through which society recognizes itself and is moved' (Llosa 1996:24).

Llosa writes that more than specific objectives, it was a utopia that drove the TAFOS project: to create a self-sustaining national movement of grassroots 'social' photographers (1996:21). This was to be achieved through the complete transfer of workshops to the local organisations which would be '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' (quoting from the 1991 TAFOS strategic plan). The vision was for 'social' photography to become established as an alternative form of communication within Peru.

The rise and spread of TAFOS

The workshops in Ocongate sowed the seed. The Müllers 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 organizing localised exhibitions and wall newspapers. Their work started to generate attention. In 1987, some of the images from the Ocongate workshop won the 'Premio Ensayo Fotografico, Casa de las Americas' and the project was able to buy some extra cameras. In 1988, TAFOS images were published in Caretas, a respected Peruvian weekly news magazine, for the first time.



The pigeon-shed © Enrique Watanabe, El Agustino, Lima, 1986 / TAFOS

Initially the project received no formal funding. Costs were covered by donations from family and colleagues of the Müllers in Germany. However as attention around the project started to build so the funding started to come in. El Centro de Estudios y Accion para la Paz (CEPAZ) provided the initial funding and as TAFOS grew it attracted a wide range of international donors and development agencies[6] keen to underwrite the costs of the workshops, the offices and their dissemination activities.

By the end of 1988 the Müllers drew up a work plan and encouraged the sociologist Enrique Larrea Oviedo to get involved. By 1989 they had created a central staff team to respond to the increasing demand and attention that the project was generating. Two offices were set up in Lima and Cusco. In 1990 it was decided that TAFOS should register officially as a non-profit organization. They created their first formal strategy document and laid down a 3-year plan (el Trienal 1991-93).

While the intention was never to build an organisation, that was exactly what TAFOS became. A management team with the support of a board made all key decisions although the importance of internal democracy was insisted upon. The lab, archive, dissemination and regional offices made up sub-teams and the wider group would meet annually to plan the year's work. Much of the team was made up of the facilitators who went out to support the workshops. They were people with and without photographic expertise. For Müller, it was "enough that we get to know where this person's heart lies, the rest can be learnt"' (quoted in Pastor 2007:2-3).

In 1992, TAFOS brought a house in Lima. It became a meeting place where people congregated to used the darkrooms and catch up on what was happening. Twenty years later, former TAFOS photographers and staff talk with conviction about the TAFOS 'family', the camaraderie and the significance of the relationships made. Gloria Calderon, a photographer in the El Agustino workshop, remarked that the relationships she formed have helped her through the hardest times of her lives, "the value of these friendships to me have been huge, they don't have a price" (G.Calderon, 2011, interview, 4 June). Juan Carlos, a TAFOS facilitator, re-iterates her sentiment, "I think friendship is basic for a project like TAFOS. We were often working in difficult, complicated circumstances… it was worth it because of the friendships" (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview, 5 June).

1991 marked the peak of TAFOS's activity. Its team had swelled significantly to 30 members, their frenetic activities following 'the agitated rhythm of that era' (Müller in TAFOS 2006:27). There were a total of fourteen workshops and hundreds of 'acciones de difusion' (dissemination activities). The project's reach was broad. Its presence was felt on a localized, national and international level.

[6] Over the years these included Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED), Brucke 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.

Break to look at photos, Ccollcca community © Nicasio Chara, Canas, Cusco 1993 / TAFOS

Dissemination was happening principally through two channels. The local organisations and workshops would focus on localised, regional and sometimes national circulation and then the central TAFOS team would focus on dissemination through channels at national and international level. TAFOS featured on the pages of many international publications including 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. 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).

Meeting exhibition © Gabino Quispedondori, Ayaviri, Puno 1989 / TAFOS

The photographers and their organisations were prolific and inventive with how they used their images, often free of conventions about how images should and should not be displayed. Exhibitions, from formal to makeshift, were held anywhere that was 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 in to flyers and posters. Mobile exhibitions would be created on carts that could be pushed around at public gatherings.

Galleries and universities in Peru's cities hosted more formal, traditional exhibitions creating a considerable audience amongst Peru's middle classes, its creative scene and intellectuals. Exhibitions were opportunities to agitate and protest, through the images and their messages. The photographers of the San Marcos workshop in Lima held one such exhibition in 1989. The focus of their work had been human rights and they were determined to present to the people of Lima the victims of the conflict and the atrocities committed. The walls of the university had become a battleground between the Sendero, the MRTA, the left and rightist organizations. Political posters and graffiti covered the walls, each side denouncing the other. The TAFOS photographers chose this space to paste their images and in doing took a shot at the other political groups who never dared to deface the photographs.

TAFOS exhibition at The Photographer's Gallery, London, 1991

International exhibitions sought to maintain the ethos of the collectivism and activism in which TAFOS was rooted. For example for the 1991 exhibition in

London's Photographer's Gallery all the TAFOS members inputted into the show's direction, curation, edit and catalogue. David Chandler 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... It is powerful but purposeful work, not merely an alternative expression but an integral part of an unfolding social process.' (The Photographers Gallery 1991:5)*

The workshops

There was huge diversity within the twenty seven TAFOS workshops. A quick glance at the list[7] indicating the number of films taken by each group reveals that some were more prolific and active 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.

The local organization recruited the photographers from among their members. Often the workshops were made up of members of various different organisations that were all associated with a centralized body. In this way they became places where activists that shared common interests came together. For example different campesino leaders came together through the Federacion de Campesinos de Canas, or the workshops that brought together leaders from the same areas such as the barrios of North East Cusco or different miners associations in Nazca. The images were then used not only by the local organization but also by the central body giving them a regional and sometimes national, as well as local, audience.

The photographer-TAFOS-organisation dynamic was the backbone of the TAFOS endeavor. The local organisations were 'indispensible' (Llosa in TAFOS 2006:40) and central to TAFOS's vision: it was their network that would sustain their envisaged national movement of social photographers. Practically the local organisations took charge of a certain amount of the co-ordination and centralization, they selected and supported the photographers and gave TAFOS its national and local reach and coverage through their dissemination.

Most of the TAFOS photographers had never laid their hands on a camera before starting. They would work initially with small automatic cameras (Yashicas T3s or Nikon L35AF) which could be mastered quickly and, bypassing the need for any lengthy technical training, meant the photographers could get straight to work shooting.

The facilitators used intuitive teaching styles rather than any form of set curriculum. They did not teach theories about composition and photographic

[7] Available in TAFOS 2006 and Fairey 2015.

technique instead they encouraged an atmosphere where people learnt through trial and error. They learnt through taking pictures and making mistakes. The TAFOS 'promotores', workshop facilitators, saw their role as one of support. They might provide basic training on technique, camera care, visual language and diffusion techniques otherwise it was more about letting the photographers get on with it themselves and define their own ways of making and using photographs. Talking at a photography conference in 1989, Enrique Larrea, explained,

> *'The workshop assumes not only 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).*

Juan Carlos, a TAFOS facilitator, spoke of fluidity that was central to the approach they took.

> *"In these kinds of project you need to be very flexible, working with photography you need to be even more flexible. Because you never know what the result of the pictures will be, you don't know what will be in the photos, you don't know in what space they will be seen … In the case of Tafos this was one of our greatest strengths, we were able to be flexible… We had the capacity to be receptive; when you go some where you cannot impose you have to be open. If not you lose many valuable things… Photographers would come and ask us – can we do this, can we take school pictures etc etc. We would think, great – you are finding another use for the photos, great … we were receptive, we would listen, we would never say no no no… If they found an extra use for the photography then great, we could aggregate the value of what we were doing. It is like going to a shop and asking for a packet of biscuits and being given two. It is like a present, this learning and we accepted it gratefully". (JC.Paucar, 2011, interview, 5 June)*

Miner and TAFOS photographer © Daniel Pajuelo, Morococha, Junin 1991 / TAFOS

The priority was for the photographers to take charge of their own photography (Larrea 1989). It was not the role of the facilitators to direct activities. The workshop participants managed themselves, devised their own constitutions and elected leaders. They made decisions on subject matter and editorial choices. Photographers would meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to look over the pictures that had been taken, discuss and debate their images, plan dissemination activities and respond to requests that they had had to photograph one thing or another. Often in charge of press or communication within their own organisations, the photographers also planned their own photographic and diffusion activities.

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. In the regular meetings they would receive back their contact sheets from films taken the month before and the work prints (9x12cm) of the images they had selected from the previous months contact sheets. Orders for the prints required for dissemination activities could be made each month or photographers and members of the local organisations would visit either Lima or the regional offices to make larger selections for an exhibition, at times working with exhibitions team.

TAFOS photographers shot almost exclusively in black and white and developing of films and the making of prints was all done by hand. Commercial labs of the time did mainly color processing but few were proficient in black and white. Taking charge of developing and printing meant that TAFOS could maintain professional standards and keep costs down. At its height there were labs in Lima and Cusco however most work was focused at the lab in Lima. Their ways of working and making pictures was 'almost artisan' (Llosa in TAFOS 2006:41) when compared to the speed and ease with which digital images are produced today. However TAFOS' handling and supervision of the photographic production process in a sense enabled them to retain their own autonomy and control.

The camera as a weapon

Each TAFOS workshop had its own character. Some photographers were shooting over years and some only for a few weeks. El Agustino, the first and long-running Lima workshop, has been the focus of specific investigation (Colgune 2008). During TAFOS initial years the expansion of workshops in the Southern Andes co-incided with the strengthening of the campesino associations in Puno as the Shining Path penetrated the zone. From 1988-1990, with the workshops in Yanaoca and Espinar in the Cusco highlands and then the Pucara and Juliaca workshops in the hills around Puno, TAFOS had a presence that extended across the area where the Shining Path were competing with local organisations for the leadership of the campesino communities.

The 1990s saw the rise in the semi-autonomous rural militias, civil defense committees and *rondas campesinas*, that patrolled the areas and attempted to defend the villages from attack. The pictures produced during these workshops reflect the militancy of the times and marked the work of TAFOS during these years. The work of the local organisations, the photographers and their efforts to disseminate their images was frantic, agitated and nervous. Müller writes respectfully of their efforts,

> *"Many of the community leaders as photographers went around armed with pictures and were always ready to make any moment into an opportunity to show them. In the community meetings, they circulated images of the murdered community leaders such as Tomas Quispesayhua and Porfirio Suni… At times when a public exhibition was not possible due to the particularly deadly cocktail of Shining Path and Army, the photographers would take a set of pocket sized pictures out of their hats and discuss them with the people present. It was*

> *admirable how they fought with the camera and photograph in their hands and how they managed as a campesino movement to finally overcome such powerful adversaries" (Müller in TAFOS 2006:26)*

The Shining Path were themselves aware of TAFOS's work. They even gave them a tacit approval when at the end of 1999, in response to a TAFOS group exhibition[8], they released the comment that the images were 'born of the gun and not of bourgeois revisionism' (TAFOS 2006:24).

Blockade of the Pan American Highway © Walter Chiara, Lima, 1990 / TAFOS

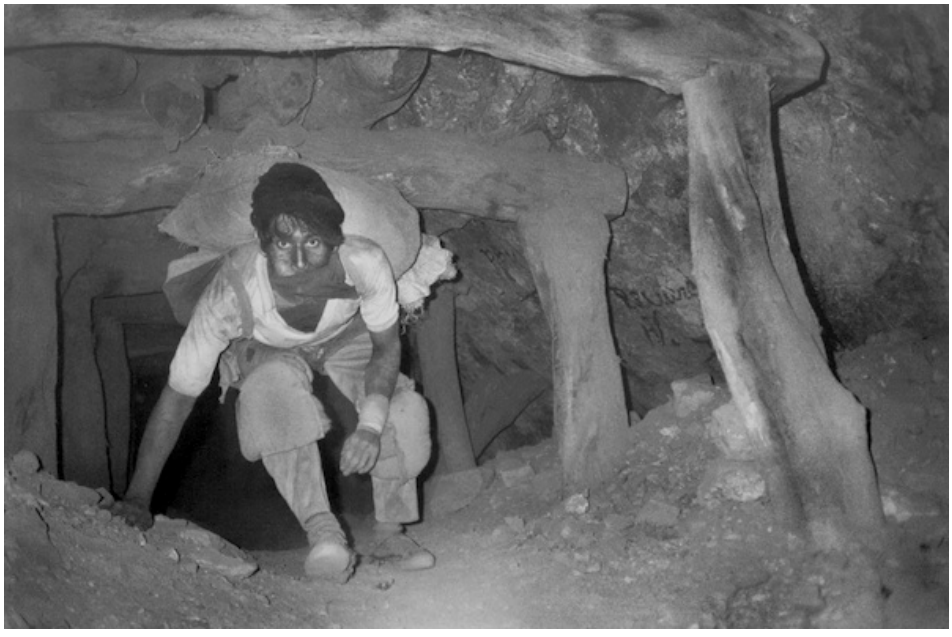
At the TAFOS office in Lima security was taken seriously due to the potential risk that either the Sendero or military might come looking to retrieve or destroy the negatives. There was a strong commitment to the photographers and efforts to keep them safe. Security procedures were drawn up for a number of eventualities. With TAFOS photographers denouncing the violence and fearing reprisals, their safety and the protection of the negatives were given the highest priority. Vargas, then co-ordinator of the Cusco office, recalls the atmosphere of the time.

> *'The organisations we worked with wanted to be bold and to make a difference. We were always scared that the army would intervene at any time but they never did... We had a very efficient means of communications. The Shining Path were in the places we were working and we had knowledge of more or less where they going. The photographers came first, they came before the pictures, we could not put these people at risk. A lot of films were destroyed when a troop past through the area, we would call them through the radio, 'Stop all activities, don't come'. But in spite of this there were bold photographers who continued to take pictures, to document what was happening' (J.Vargas, 2011, interview, 2 June)*

[8] '*Mirrors with Memory*' held at San Marcos University in Lima, a hub of Sendero activity

In such an atmosphere it is unsurprising that the camera became referred to as a weapon but it was not a weapon just in the context of the national conflict. In conversation with TAFOS photographers the potency of what they saw as the power of the image to assert themselves and their rights is palpable. There is the story of the women in a barrio in Cusco who was having a problem with the rubbish truck dumping its load behind her house. That was, until she got her camera out and started taking pictures. The truck never came back (J.Vargas, 2011, interview, 2 June). And then there was the campesino woman and her daughter who were being photographed by tourists while she was working in the fields. She took much delight in their shock when she stopped what she was doing, got out her camera and started taking pictures of them. (T. Müller, 2011, interview, 3 June).

In the Morococha y La Oroya workshops with miners and their leaders TAFOS's activities were directly tied into the workers and unions movement to expose bad working conditions and campaigns to fight the practice of 'selling your health' which referred to the acceptance of small wage increases in exchange for working in unacceptable conditions (Müller in TAFOS 2006:28). The photographers however faced huge problems as the mines had been militarized and leaders were threatened and murdered by the Shining Path and paramilitaries. Soldiers and private agents closely monitored miners' activities and they were unable to photograph inside the mines and document the inhuman and often mortal conditions in which they worked. The mine owners definitely did not want images that showed the conditions in the mines to be seen.



Roberto Vera, member of Sol de Oro workshop, coming out of the mine © Walter Silvera, Nazca, Ica, 1993 / TAFOS

However an unexpected turn of events changed things. The Ministry of Energy and Mines, when re-negotiating the national tender, overlooked the paragraph that related to the photography workshops and unintentionally authorized that the unions could have a photographer in the mines. As a result, the officials had

to grudgingly accept the presence of the camera in the mines. Despite this, whenever there was an accident the supervisors would hunt out the films. These would be passed hand-to-hand through the tunnels to avoid destruction by the security men.

Shifting times, shifting focus

In 1990, Alberto Fujimori was elected as Peru's president with the hope that he might be able to steer a path between the political extremes of the far right coalition government and the Marxism offered by the Shining Path. His record was to be "mixed and controversial" (Starn et al 2006:481). His neo-liberal free market economics brought hyperinflation under control but unemployment spiraled and record levels of poverty were recorded in three states. In 1992, frustrated at the slow progress with which anti-terrorism laws were being passed through Congress, Fujimori assumed quasi-dictatorial powers in a bloodless coup that saw the suspension of the constitution, the abolition of Congress, regional governments and judicial power. He ruled with a populist outlook combined with a firm belief that only authoritarian rule and drastic measures would prevent economic collapse and a Shining Path victory. He refused to punish human rights abuses, restricted due judicial processes, concentrated power into the hands of the executive and banned public meetings. Popular groups were practically dismantled by his anti-terrorism legislation.

Fujimori's policies were not only abrupt 'but decisive for projects like TAFOS' (Llosa in TAFOS 2006:41). Extreme neoliberalist policies, popular patronage used by the Fujimori regime, the militarization of a large part of the civil population in the countryside and new labor legislation left little space for the work of the unions and collectives that had been active previously. Growing political violence prevented the free functioning of community organisations with leaders being threatened and murdered. The changing political landscape reduced the demand for workshops on the part of the organisations. The local organisations could no longer sustain long-term workshops, or provided the centralized spaces with the political vision that had previously underpinned activities. Müller wrote that many of the rganization'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).

In addition there was a broader move that discredited socialism and the politics of the left, the ideological fuel of both the local organisations and TAFOS. The issue was not just external, an internal document[9] 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). The political vision that had sustained the workshops and organisations was disintegrating.

With the changing political landscape there was creeping shift in the nature and form of the workshops. With much lower levels of activity, Llosa remarks that

[9] , taken from an unauthored internal TAFOS document believed to be written by Thomas Muller around 1992

their direct impact was 'no longer a given' (Llosa 1996:7). There were less dissemination activities. Some of the organisations were having internal problems and increasingly failing to take charge of the running of the workshops. It was accepted that workshops could not run indefinitely and from 1993 TAFOS began to deliver pre-planned initiatives with defined timeframes and outcomes. Gone was the responsiveness; 'the institutional timetable set the agenda' (Llosa 1996:25) as TAFOS tried to systematize its ways of working – choosing the areas and communities it wanted to work with, deciding the duration of the workshops in advance, setting themes that they would cover, limiting the number of films shot. Despite this while the work from the later workshops was less politicized it still continued to build 'the longed for wider image of Peru' (Müller in TAFOS 2006:32) with workshops in the jungle and with Afro Peruvian communities being added to the TAFOS portfolio. The rhetoric and the ideological framework shifted away from a championing of 'lo popular' to centre around the desire for a free, just and democratic society for all of the inhabitants of Peru.

With less demand from popular organisations they tried working with different kinds of groups. In Cusco, they set up a workshop with arts and communications students with the aim of stimulating a new generation of Cusqueno photographers. The training, in contrast to earlier workshops put more emphasis on technical training and individual development. This way of working was repeated in 1994 and while a number of participants went on to work in photography the model failed to replace the organisations' lost vigor. As the workshops gradually closed down so the team got smaller and the big TAFOS family fragmented (Llosa 1996). The last 2 workshops took place in 1995.

Coming from washing clothes by the river, Maceda © Jairo Isuiza, lamas, San Martin, 1995 / TAFOS

Questioning the future of the workshops, an early internal review concluded that the organization had to think in terms of a significant overhaul and reformulation of its activities, arguing that

> *'…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[10]'*

People began to envision a wider field of activities linked more broadly to communication and commercial work. The TAFOS Institute was to consist of both an NGO and an agency that would run the parallel activities of social photography workshops alongside commercial photographic activities with professionals. The objectives of the agency were to diversify dissemination and generate income to finance the organization.

TAFOS's change of direction angered many and led to much internal wrangling. Many felt that TAFOS existed because of the workshops and should not consider functioning without them. In 1995, 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

TAFOS's strategy was to become self-funded within three years. Things were moving forward and targets were being met. It was getting involved in different kinds of activities, such as the travelling exhibition 'Con Ojos de Mujer' which brought together images by 43 female photographers from all over Latin America. But then, in December 1998, Müller decided to close TAFOS.

Peruvian non-profit law invests those who start an organization with the power to shut it. This is what he did with the following explanation,

> *'The discrepancy between the investment and outcomes was getting bigger all the time. For this reason we decided in 1998 to close TAFOS" (Müller in TAFOS 2006:33)*

He expanded in an interview, "it was very expensive to run TAFOS, it was expensive as an institution, not as a movement of photographers… we had an enormous amount of administrative and organizational staff"[11]. Mariella Sala, the director at the time, argued that TAFOS still had committed donors who were happy with how the organization was developing. She suspects that the real reason he chose to close it was because he had had enough[12].

Llosa in her accounts repeatedly refers to the TAFOS 'of before' with a certain whistfulness[13]. Many within TAFOS saw the workshops as core to the organization and believed that without them it lost its purpose. For Müller it was not simply a matter of reviving them. The politics had changed and it was no longer possible for the workshops to run as they were originally envisaged. For him the political urgency of the early TAFOS workshops was what gave them their power. "It was a moment and the moment had gone" (T. Müller, 2011, interview, 3 June).

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[10] HINOJOSA, Iván. "Informe Comisión de Proyecto". En: *TAFOS: Informes de Planificación y Evaluación de Talleres 1992*. Lima: Archivo Fotográfico TAFOS / PUCP, 1992. p. 2

[11] Colunge (2008:73)

[12] Interview with Mariella Sala quote in Colunge (2008:73)

[13] in her chronicle of the organisation's history (Llosa 1996)

Many of the others in the TAFOS team saw it differently. They felt the gentler images of later workshops had their own value in the recording of the intimacies of the day-to-day, customs and traditions and still played an important role in the building of a democratic Peru by validating and communicating the culture and experiences of its diverse people. They believed there was still much work for TAFOS to do. For Villafuerte, 'it seemed like a logical evolution of the project… the political conflicts had diversified and the images and workshops needed to follow suit, it was less a world of denouncements – the organization needed to evolve" (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, 16 June).

Müller's decision to close TAFOS was unpopular with many especially facilitators, staff and long standing participants who still believed TAFOS's had purpose and relevance. However neither did these people chose to set up something anew. Bungeroth suggests that this is maybe because the team had deteriorated gradually over the years to the point that by the time it closed there was not the drive and spirit amongst those remaining to carry something through to a new incarnation. Colunge notes that 'a social movement does not have an immediate end' (2008:73). It peters out perhaps much like TAFOS had done before its actual closure.

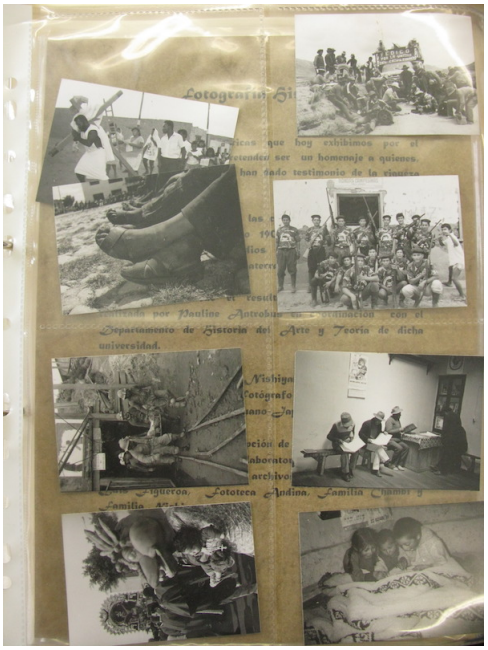
The TAFOS archive

TAFOS had started systemizing its archive in 1991 and it was an active component of the project's operations distributing and disseminating images for use in campaigning and protesting activities. In addition to the organisations active in TAFOS, activists, academics, community leaders, journalists and sociologists all came to use the archive. When the project closed the negatives, prints and other documents were all boxed up and stored in a warehouse until 2000 when Müller donated the full TAFOS photographic and document archive to the Faculty of Science and Arts of Communication at the highly regarded Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru (PUCP), an institution with a strong social ethos, politically aligned to the left, with which TAFOS had long-standing ties.

Over the next 3 years, the university authorities organized, catalogue and archived all that had been donated[14]. They constructed an air-conditioned space for the conservation of the material. All the negatives were cleaned and a selection was digitalized for the web.

Consisting of some 240,000 images, the physical archive has been open to the public since 2003. Data from 2004-2011 shows that nearly half of its users are linked to academia and the PUCP. Ties to the TAFOS photographers and organisations were largely lost before the archive arrived at PUCP and the

[14] The archive contains much more than just the TAFOS images and negatives. As well as contact sheets, work and exhibition prints, the archive holds records of promotional materials from TAFOS's exhibitions and events and the publications and media in which TAFOS has been featured. There is also all the internal documentation produced by the project while it was running such as project reports, plans and evaluations and detailed research work carried out by Eleana Llosa and her team in 1995-96 which included extensive interviews with a number of the TAFOS photographers. The breadth of the material contained in the archive ensures that the many aspects of the TAFOS experience are represented excluding documentation of the organisations' finances.



Work prints in the TAFOS archive
© Tiffany Fairey

location and character of the university would make access hard for some of the far-flung communities who participated in TAFOS (E.Llosa, 2012, interview, May 17th). Other users consist of a mix of NGOs, cultural and media organisations, museums and news publications. People coming belong 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 (Fairey 2015). The numbers of people using the archive have gradually dwindled over the years.

Since opening to the public, PUCP have undertaken a number of initiatives to promote the archive and ensure the continued circulation of the TAFOS images. The website[15], which hosts over 8000 images and is available in both English and Spanish, has ensured that the archive is available to people beyond the university campus in Lima. 2006 saw the publication of 'País de Luz, TAFOS Talleres de Fotografia Social, Peru 1986-1998', a 192-paged hard back photographic book. 500 copies of which were donated to the national library system with the hope that the images would then be available in the communities where they were produced. A collection of 100 archival prints was donated to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2004. A specific collection of 50 digitalised images was created and made available for exhibitions within and outside of Peru and PUCP themselves have periodically arranged their own exhibitions with materials from the archive as well as organising and participating in a number of events, talks, conferences and festivals. TAFOS images also played a part in Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission featuring in *Yuyanapaq: To Remember*, a photographic exhibition and publication that was launched alongside the Commission's written report (REF).

When the archive was first donated to PUCP Rosa Villafuerte, TAFOS photographer and archivist, feared the whole TAFOS experience would be 'anthropoligized, reduced to material for academics and swallowed up by the bureaucracy of a big institution' (R.Villafuerte, 2012, interview, 12th May). The archive managers are keen this is not the case, they want to keep the images alive and have ideas for initiatives but are hampered by limited funds (S.Pastor, 2012, interview XX). Most recently a street-art exhibition took place during Peru's 2012 photography bienalle of TAFOS's photographer, Daniel Parejo's work, 'La Calle es el cielo' (The Street is the Sky) which saw TAFOS images back

[15] http://facultad.pucp.edu.pe/comunicaciones/tafos/

on the streets of Lima and being used in conjunction with educational activities and street tours[16].

Conclusion: TAFOS's legacy

Müller insists that you cannot talk in terms of TAFOS's legacy, 'you leave a legacy once you are dead so it is not a legacy, the archive is there, it is a unique witness to part of the country's history' (T. Müller, 2011, interview, June 3rd). How then should we conclude and take stock of TAFOS's achievement and impact? Hinojosa, a historian at the PUCP specializing in contemporary Peru, argues that the archive's 'success' cannot be measured in the short term, it is 'a wager that is going to take time' because it goes against the mood in Peru today that wants to demonstrate its success and emerging business men rather than campesino culture' (Hinojosa quoted in Pastor 2007:6). His words echo Derrida who wrote of the archive 'if we want to know what it will have meant, we will only know in times to come' (1995:36).

TAFOS's legacy lies in its creation of a 'counter archive' that tells a different version of history from official narratives, one told collectively by ordinary people. The TAFOS archive constitutes a leap of faith by its custodians who are 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).

For some of its photographers interviewed in the non-linear film *These Photos Were My Life* (Fairey 2015), TAFOS made an enduring impact on their lives, shaping their careers, critical outlook and way of being in the world (Fairey 2017)[17]. Justo Vargas described photography as having given him a means to think and ask questions (J.Vargas, 2011 interview, June 2nd). But photography did not have a long-term value for everyone,

> *'A campesino is not a photography aficionado. If it is no longer useful to them then they will stop using it. It is a simple thing. At 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, TAFOS founder 2011, interview, 3rd June).*

For Müller the long term significance of TAFOS lies in the impact the project had on the psyche of people from the left-leaning high and middle class - on the academics, intellectuals, writers, journalists and those involved in social organisations and institutions (T.Müller, 2011, interview, 3rd June). He claimed that everyone in these circles knew of TAFOS. Jose Luis Falconi, a Peruvian photographer and curator based at Harvard, concurs. He asserts that any Peruvian with an interest in culture and recent history knows of TAFOS.

> *'TAFOS is part of the repertoire of vernacular images that we would 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*

[16] For more info see: https://www.facebook.com/lacalleeselcielo/ Accessed 27th April 2017
[17] *These Photos Were My Life* can be seen here: http://tiffanyfairey.co.uk/#/these-photos-were-my-life/ Accessed 27th April 2017

> *visual social makeup of a society. There is no better indicator of how successful the project was'* (J.Falconi, 2012, interview, 2nd May).

The small man, Ccalacocha © Mariano Chillihuani, Ocongate, Cusco, 1987 / TAFOS

TAFOS's major achievement lies in the fact that ordinary people, campesinos and workers, were for the first time on a Peruvian public platform listened to and taken seriously.

> *'Society recognized people, that apparently did not have the ability to make good images, as photographers on a level with the professionals… Few of the photographers had secondary education let alone university education. They lived in precarious economic conditions and these photographers, without being professional, made memorable images. The official sector of this country, the formal world accepted the images of these people as something valuable. This couldn't have been possible in any other way. In a society such as ours no opportunities are given to people who don't come with a reference. TAFOS was the reference that enabled these photographers who never in any other way would have had means to disseminate their images at those levels*' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, 16th June)

The story of TAFOS, its impact on its participants and the legacy of its images, provides a vivid illustration of photography as an instrument and catalyst for grassroots, civil resistance and representation. However TAFOS's articulation and treatment of photography also throws into relief the contemporary tendency to romanticize the power and potential of photography as a tool for social change. TAFOS never assumed that photography in and of itself was inherently empowering; 'photography can make things visible and act as a catalyst but we cannot presume it is the reason for change' (R.Villafuerte, 2011, interview, June 16th). TAFOS on its own did not try to have an impact, it inserted itself into a

wide grassroots movement that was fighting for change and in that context it became potent as a tool to reclaim identity and rights. Müller is clear; at the time that it thrived TAFOS worked because there was a genuine demand for it; it was an intervention that people embraced and ran with. Political and social conditions and people's will and agency are crucial to a socially engaged collective photography. Photography cannot create a possibility that otherwise does not exist (Campbell 2003).

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