Traditiones 55 (2): 83–107 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550205

Photovoice as a Complementary Approach with a Tuareg Family in Agadez, Niger

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This article focuses on collaborative and participatory photography, particularly photovoice, in which the main advantage is the active involvement of research collaborators. This involvement brings researchers closer to the collaborators' life worlds and allows potentially more effective communication with various publics and decision makers. In the second part, the author presents the photovoice approach as a complementary method, using the example of research into everyday life and attitudes toward the countryside among the Tuareg in Agadez, Niger.

▪ **Keywords**: participatory photography, photovoice, collaborative approaches, Tuareg, mobile pastoralism

Prispevek obravnava sodelovalno in udeleženo fotografijo, predvsem fotopripovedi, ki omogočajo dejavno sodelovanje udeležencev raziskave, približanje življenjskim svetovom sodelujočih in možnost boljšega komuniciranja z javnostmi in odločevalci. V drugem delu avtorica predstavi pristop fotopripovedi kot komplementarne metode na primeru raziskave vsakdanjega življenja in odnosa do podeželja Tuaregov v Agadezu.

▪ **Ključne besede**: sodelovalna fotografija, fotopripoved, sodelovalni pristopi, Tuaregi, mobilno pastirstvo

Introduction

Multimodal anthropology, as defined by Collins and Durrington (2024), is inherently collaborative and used to serve the specific community an anthropologist is working with. Collins and Durrington invite researchers to transform visual anthropology with available digital means for this purpose. Among other approaches, they promote photovoice (ibid.: 61–63), a method advocated by anthropology and other social sciences. Other authors such as Grasseni et al. trace new multimodal and digital trends on the basis of continuation of approaches in visual anthropology (2022).

In contemporary anthropology, photography was first seen as a promising technology for recording realistic material for documentation (Mauss, cited in Clifford, 1988: 63, 67), interpretation, and further analysis of research (Bateson, Mead, 1942; Mead, 1975). Collier and Collier (1986) already understood interviewing with photography made by researchers not only as a means to obtain more information, but also as establishing less hierarchical relationships with research subjects, giving them a position of experts (Collier, Collier, 1986: 130, 131).

Sarah Pink further distinguishes between positivist, objective approaches and subjective, reflexive approaches to the use of photography in anthropology (Pink, 2001; see also Turk Niskač, 2011). In anthropological research, the meaning of photos is produced within an intersubjective[1] relationship between the researcher and the research participant, who "use the content of images as vessels in which to invest meanings and through which to produce and present their knowledge, self-identities, experiences and emotions" (Pink, 2001: 68). Meaning is not static, but changes in different conversational and presentational contexts (Luttrell, 2010).

Despite increasing awareness of multimodality and the importance of visual and sensory approaches in research (Howes, 1991; Pink, 2009; Muršič et al., 2022), these research outputs rarely find an equal route to academic publication. As Pink proposed, multiple genres in writing should be extended to the various visual modes used in final publications, aiming for non-hierarchical multi-vocality despite possible ambiguities (Pink, 2001: 117–118). Only recently have journals[2] (such as *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Visual Ethnography*, *Glasnik SED*, and *Svetovi*) and online platforms (such as the project PASTRES) opened space for multimodal presentations, including photo-stories.

In reconsidering established visual anthropology approaches within the context of multimodality, I focus on collaborative and participatory uses of photography, particularly photovoice, to address their possibilities, advantages, challenges, and potential in anthropology. In the second part, I present and critically evaluate photovoice with a Tuareg family in the urban environment of northern Niger, exploring their changing everyday life and their relationship with the countryside. I reflect on the role of photovoice in our relationships and the additional research insights it made possible in my long-term research.[3] The two parts are presented separately and are mainly brought together in the discussion and conclusion because I wanted to provide an overview of the possibilities and challenges of participatory and collaborative photography approaches, and also to keep my research case narrative in a compact form by comparing and analyzing it separately. In this article, selected photographs from photo-stories only slightly exceed illustrative value and only partially represent the richness of photo-stories themselves.

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[1] I understand intersubjectivity in phenomenological terms as lived relationships through which people communicate and negotiate meaning, identity, experience, and emotions (Jackson, 1996: 23, 26, 27; Pink, 2001: 68).

[2] Booklets (e.g., Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, 2016) and books may offer more space for photography (not only photo-stories) beyond mere illustrations, serving as complementary knowledge communication to textual genres, but this is still uncommon (see, e.g., Kohl, 2009; or memories of long-term fieldwork engagement through photography and drawing in Holtedahl, 2023).

[3] The main research for my dissertation was in 2003 and 2004 (fifteen months), with several return visits between 2011 and 2024 on various topics. With participants, we engaged in photo-stories in December 2011 and January 2012.

Terminology: Participatory or collaborative

The terminology in participatory and collaborative visual methods remains unclear. As Nadja Valentinčič Furlan summarizes for film and video, the term *participatory video* refers to projects in which the technical device, such as a film or video camera, is operated by the research subject (2025: 64). For research described as collaborative, the research collaborators must be actively involved in deciding on the topic, structure, and use of the film (Valentinčič Furlan, 2025). According to Ruby, in such cases, competences and power relations should be equal, which in practice is rarely achieved (Ruby, 1991; see also Valentinčič Furlan, 2025: 65; MacDougall, 2022). As can be seen, part of the questions concern who has the camera in his or her hands and therefore concretely participates in research, and another part of the concerns are related to the question of who decides on the research topic, its exploration and presentation, and the use of research outcomes, and therefore collaborates in research. Ideally, research subjects should become collaborators and be able to do both, collaborating with visual technical means, but in practice these elements are used to varying degrees.

In the domain of photography used in research, there are issues similar to those found in the use of film. The terms *participatory photography* and *photovoice* are most often used when the camera is in the hands of research subjects (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2012; Turk Niskač, 2012, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2015; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Plage, 2023; Morteson, Questiaux, 2025). Because photos acquire different meanings, engaging in conversation with photos is an integral part of participatory photography and photovoice.

Other approaches to interviewing with photography are possible, in which photos are not generated by participants and are intended to encourage conversation about specific topics. The term *photo-elicitation* (e.g., McLaughlan, 2025; see also Turk Niskač, 2022: 89) is used in this case. Linda Murray and Meredith Nash use the term *photo-elicitation* as a broader term when a photo is inserted in research, even if it is created by participants (2016: 924). Although the practical aspect of photo-elicitation can be meaningful for participants, the terminological aspect of photo-elicitation seems in contradiction with participants creating their own input through photography. Furthermore, the idea of using photography in contemporary anthropological research is not to extract information, but rather to provide another means of communication and involvement with participants in research.

Another terminological issue that needs to be considered is which term to use: *research subjects*, *participants*, *collaborators*, or *protagonists*. When using video, those that participate or collaborate in research by being filmed, and with whom researchers usually discuss the filmed material, can be referred to as protagonists because they are the main figures in the film. According to the definition of "participatory" in the context of filming given above, participants are those that hold the camera but do not necessarily collaborate in research design, although they do influence the research process, whereas

research collaborators play a crucial role in the research design itself. In photography, the same principle applies: participants hold the camera, and collaborators take part in several phases of the research. Ideally, they would also collaborate in formulating the research question, which is rarely the case due to the current organization of research funding in projects. Those terminological solutions are still not satisfactory because research can be participatory or collaborative even if it does not use any visual media.

The term *research collaborator* is used more widely. As anthropological research has developed from a positivist to a reflexive approach, shifting from observing to collaborating, the term for those we research with, rather than on, has changed from *informants* to *research participants*, and finally to *research collaborators*. Especially in multimodal anthropology and in efforts toward more thorough collaboration in research (Collins, Durrington, 2024), the term *research collaborator* has been increasingly used as a generative label for participants in ethnographic research. Although this reasonably indicates our intentions, it can sometimes be methodologically misleading. In any case, a dynamic relationship in the research process requires reflection on who proposes the research agenda and approaches, whether these are adapted to community needs and developed with research collaborators, what the roles of collaborators and researchers are, who interprets the results, and whether the research is meaningful in any way for the research participants.

Photovoice

Photovoice is based on photos taken by research participants themselves, and these photos form the basis for conversations. They are also intended to be central to the narrative, even when an additional step to create photo-stories is not taken. Photovoice is used not only in anthropology (Bayre et al., 2016; Roque de Piño, 2016; Turk Niskač, 2022; Collins, Durrington, 2024; Morteson, Questiaux, 2025) but also across various social sciences, as well as in NGO and community projects (Wang, Burris, 1997; Luttrell, 2010; Bell, 2015; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Schwartz et al., 2025). Most authors refer to Caroline Wang and Marry Ann Burris (1997) when defining their approach as photovoice. Wang and Burris (1997), researchers in public health, described photovoice in three phases: enabling the community to record and reflect on its concerns, promoting critical group discussion, and reaching policymakers. Their approach is therefore an engaged and empowering process, aimed at defining problems by the community and solving them, which is also in line with certain contemporary understandings of multimodality. Often, however, the last step is omitted in academic research, replaced by analysis, making the entire process less action-oriented but rather reflexive. In the latter case, the approach could be called participatory photography because participants are participating in the researcher's research. Sophie Mortensen and François Questiaux

(2025) proposed expanding the notion of photovoice to research as a methodology for knowledge creation about everyday experiences of participants. In their case, migrant workers in Thailand and Ghana / Burkina Faso created aesthetic and emotional knowledge and political messages about their marginalized situation in the global system. I suggest permitting photovoice use in research beyond marginalized groups as well.

In photovoice, participants learn the basics of using a camera, or they use their mobile phone cameras; this depends on their prior experience and the resources available in the research context. In collaborative research, the research question may be formulated together with research collaborators (Bayre et al., 2016, 2018; Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021). More often, in participatory research, researchers provide participants with some basic questions or guidelines for photographing, usually very open, such as: What is important to you? How would you describe your everyday life? When working with children, questions might include: What would you like to show your family or friends? (Luttrell, 2010; Turk Niskač, 2022). Questions addressed to young people or adults can also be more specific, relating to the particular situation of participants, such as migration or health (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021; Plage, 2023), or to perspectives on local change (Roque de Piño, 2016). Questions can be formulated with direct active impact in mind, particularly in relation to environmental issues, such as pollution (Bell, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015), and may be reformulated based on conversations that reveal what matters most to participants. Depending on the research focus, the expression can be more metaphorical (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021) and artistic (Smit et al., 2025).[4] Artists themselves, within the scope of community art, use collaborative methods (Sajovic, 2016).

Photovoice and participatory photography allow research participants to capture what interests them. They themselves can select what to share with the researcher and discuss it further. The act of creating and sharing photos influences the direction of the research. Photos provide details and associations, allowing participants to choose, remember, associate, and explain, while allowing the researcher to learn about and inquire into specific activities, relationships, and places. This creates another space for dialogue and unexpected insights. As Joana Roque de Piño (2016) has shown, the photovoice method used by villagers near an environmentally protected area was able to reveal alternative perspectives. By actively participating and broadening research questions to include various types of change (in the village, outside the village, and in the water), not just climate change, it became possible to encourage villagers to explore beyond what had previously been assumed by various projects' interventions. In this case, it also meant highlighting other aspects of change important to the villagers, as well as showcasing local practices of environmental services that had gone unnoticed by earlier NGO interventions. The villagers not only became involved in exploring

[4] In art-based methods, Smit et al. primarily analyze drawings, and photography is also included.

their own perspectives but also selected the photos they wished to share and presented them publicly to local authorities and protected area management. It was crucial that the new medium (photography) transformed research subjects into participants and, further, into collaborators that provided their perspectives on environmental and social change. This is essential for equality and overcoming domination: not conducting research on externally prescribed topics, but opening ways and media with the particular community to include their perspectives, experiences, and concerns.

Whose voice and other issues

Wendy Luttrell and Richard Chalfen (2010) questioned the construction of voice in photovoice in research with vulnerable groups. They drew attention to the fact that the idea of "giving voice" reflects the power dynamics of who gives voice to whom and is therefore inherently paternalistic. This issue can be addressed by omitting the ambition of "giving" voice and instead focusing on the motivation to understand and engage in conversation in different situations. Clearly, "voice" is always constructed in social dynamics. Barbara Turk Niskač (2012, 2021) further reflects on how to hear children's voices in photovoice and how to notice when researchers can unintentionally try to guess or presume the meanings of photos. In addition, children and other research participants often pass a camera to others to photograph themselves or because others want to participate in photographing as well (Turk Niskač, 2021). By paying attention to these aspects, as well as to an individual child's refusal to speak, and by carefully re-listening to recorded conversations, it was possible to follow children's intentions regarding the photos more closely (ibid.).

With the construction of voices, I return to the initial questioning of the intersubjective creation of meaning. In her research with children of migrant backgrounds in fifth and sixth grade in a Canadian school, Wendy Luttrell (2010) created various communication opportunities. The children were asked to take photos representing their everyday lives. When each child individually explained the meaning of the photos to Luttrell and her female assistants, the emphasis or entire narrative differed from their explanations during the session of selecting photos for exhibition with peers. Their practice of sharing views of their social relations and communicating everyday experiences was transmitted through different intersubjective relations; therefore, the meaning changed. The authors mentioned above suggest that the research process needs to be revealed and reflected upon to document the construction of voices in different situations and relationships. Taking into account the process of taking photos, the intersubjective relationship, and the intention in selecting and interpreting photos for display, photos allow children and adults to express different aspects of what matters to them.

When a researcher asks a participant to take photos, the participant might have in mind that the photos are intended for the researcher or other audiences to view (Luttrell, Chalfen, 2010; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Plage, 2023). Taking photos is shaped by the intention of what one wishes to share and "for whom" they are created. When Phil Mizen and Oyu Ofusu Kosi (2010) worked with children living on the streets in Accra, they acknowledged that the children brought photos of their daily lives to show the researchers how they lived. The photos were taken to present to the researcher, but the process was not one-sided; the participating children also took photos to express themselves and to show how they lived and who they were. Clearly, when research collaborators present their everyday life "through their own eyes," this does not occur in a vacuum. They bring photos to the researcher and, as in any social research, this activity is shaped by their relationship with the researcher.

Joana Roque de Piño (2016) addresses the potential issue of power relations by actively transforming research subjects into research collaborators and photographers in their work in research projects. Research collaborators discuss photos and present selected images with accompanying narratives to the community and public, including local leaders. Only after this process do academic articles follow. In addition, they acquired a new photography skill, which was particularly significant before the widespread availability of everyday smartphone photography. Taking photos during research also provided an opportunity to capture additional images of their friends and family (Luttrell, 2010; Roque de Piño, 2016, 2022).

Sometimes attempts to take photos fail. Some people do not feel the capacity to photograph or choose to disengage. Josh Packard describes how he showed the basics of photography to homeless participants in research in Nashville, in the southern United States, and how reluctant some homeless people were to use the camera, as well as how disappointed they were when they could not capture what they wanted (Packard, 2008). Perhaps photovoice was not the optimal approach, or it could be improved by providing additional training and building stronger trust with participants. Participatory methods require trust and involvement of the researcher with participants, particularly when they are in a vulnerable position. It is also important that participants find these activities meaningful and engaging. For example, in the case of refugee women in southern Italy, the anthropologist Sabine Tiefenthaler and photographer Gemma Lynch collaborated to offer a photography workshop, enabling women who wished to participate to build competency and express themselves, directly or metaphorically, about their feelings and circumstances (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021). Enskillment in media is necessary to the extent that one can use a camera to achieve the desired outcome (Roque de Piño, 2016). On the other hand, researchers can also clarify that they are not seeking professional photography, but rather photography that is meaningful to the participant (Bandaluko, Arko, 2023).

When photographing or discussing photos, a researcher needs to consider preferred ways of being photographed (Banks, 2001; Behrend, 2003), which can conveniently be referred to as photographic culture (Pink, 2001). Photographic culture is further adapted and developed through social media, influencing what types of photography are considered shareable in different cultural contexts (Miller, Sinanan, 2017). On the other hand, it is also possible to find ways to build relationships and collaborate when the anthropologist is the photographer. Camilo Leon-Quijano (2022) collaborated with rappers and young female rugby players in Sarcelles near Paris to find the best ways and photographic styles they wanted to be represented in. Therefore, photos make possible many ways in which researchers can provide meaningful involvement of participants/collaborators in research.

Photovoice with the family in Agadez

After discussing various aspects of participatory and collaborative photography, in the second part of this article I present my experience of using photovoice with a Tuareg family in northern Niger, in the regional capital Agadez, as a complementary approach to long-term research. When I returned to Niger for the first time in December 2011, seven years after conducting research for my dissertation, my family and I were warmly welcomed by Fatima's family, with whom I was connected, and by their extended networks. I was checking the findings of my dissertation with family members, particularly the young people. In 2011, it was still the analogue era, with no WhatsApp or photos to send, and so my previous follow-ups were limited to phone calls and, more importantly, a visit from Souleymane Mohamed in 2006, who held a photo exhibition in Ljubljana, Slovenia (Lunaček, 2018). Returning to Niger, I intended to focus my research on changes and attitudes towards development, compared to the desired changes in the camps of mobile pastoralists from Souleymane's family. Even then, it was not advisable to stay long in nomadic camps due to insecurity, and we were only able to spend a few days in a camp in Azawak and in pastoralist settlements in Aïr. I therefore had to refocus the research question to include the urban environment of Agadez.

Many Imajeghan (Tuareg) from mobile pastoralist communities, or from communities increasingly focused on gardening and pastoralism, have moved to Agadez for job opportunities and their children's schooling. They maintain close ties with relatives in the countryside, usually keeping their herds with them. Their houses serve as family homes in the city, allowing nephews from the countryside to attend school in Agadez, and accommodating other family members visiting the city (Lunaček, 2020; Gonzales, 2025). In the adapted research agenda, I explored the perspectives of Tuareg in Agadez on changes in mobile pastoralism, how they experience urban everyday life, the aspirations of youth, and their relationships with the countryside and pastoralist life.

I had two small digital cameras, which were easy to use. In Agadez, we stayed with my friend Fatima and her family in a house that was very open, connected, and lively. I offered the cameras to the parents, Fatima and Baye, as well as to some of their high school children and nephews: two boys, Souley (eighteen years old) and his cousin Iliasu (nineteen), and two girls, Salama (sixteen) and her cousin Tabelala (seventeen), who decided to take part in the photography project. I asked if they would be willing to take photos of what was important to them in their everyday lives and then discuss the photos with me. Each of them had a camera for two days, with no limit on the number of photos they could take. Afterward, I uploaded each participant's pictures to my laptop. Sitting together so I could handle the technical aspects, the participants made an initial selection of what to use for the photo-story. We then used PowerPoint, and the research participant told me what to include on each page. Usually, they placed one photo per page. When photos were related and they wanted to include several, I suggested the option of putting three photos together (as in Figure 1). We paused at each selected photo so they could explain why they took and chose certain images, and what was important to them, and the conversation developed further. I wrote down what they told me. Unfortunately, I did not audio record the conversation, which made the co-constructed aspect of the narratives less clear. PowerPoint allowed us to create a visible product: a photo-story. After checking whether any parts needed to be erased before sharing the photo-stories with other family members, I left two computers and an additional USB key with all the stories in the family house. I gave one camera to another cousin that wanted to continue photographing. When I returned next time, I also brought printed copies of the photos.

Photo-stories were not the only approach to understanding; we shared daily life with the people in the house, chatting and cooking, visiting relatives in the countryside, and welcoming relatives arriving for holidays from the capital and those coming from the countryside. I primarily conducted interviews with development agents and entrepreneurs outside the family, but also within the family, speaking with the father and a group of young men – friends and nephews – who had established a cultural organization for the preservation of tradition. After this small joint project, I returned to the family several times, most recently in December 2024, which allowed me to follow the life trajectories of individuals and observe how their aspirations were changing. Here I focus on research insights related to the photo-stories' context, content, and methodology by briefly presenting each person's approach and the main themes in their photography and photo-stories, and I highlight some comparisons and common traits in their approaches. It was a small group of participants, but their diversity quickly became apparent. This was evident in their approach to the camera, the number of photos taken, and their choice of topics.

Fatima, the mother, attended a naming ceremony (*isnauen*) for the grandchild of her good friend and returned the following day with a total of 145 photos from the event.

She was happy to let others use her camera to take photos. She had no difficulty reducing the number of photos to forty slides, keeping some images she did not like technically but wanted to include because they featured dear people and served as memories. Fatima knew what she wanted to photograph. During the naming ceremony, it was important for her to capture the sacrifice of a ram in the morning. She also wanted to show the mother of the newborn with the baby, her room, relatives, and the cooking process. She took several photos of women, including the baby's grandmother, her very good friend. She also photographed another friend, Zejnab, preparing polenta (*eshink n abora*) because it is difficult to make it for so many people, and Zejnab was very skilled at it.

For Fatima, as I understood it, social life from the countryside continued in the city, with slightly modified transition rituals such as naming days and marriages, which allowed for visits in all directions, including her own visits to the countryside. Fatima is a very open person with no formal schooling, and she loved meeting new people. They lived in Agadez, but, as she revealed in our evening conversations, she too would prefer to be in the countryside, in a village with her goats and camels nearby. She did have some goats in the courtyard but did not include them in her photo-story. In other photos, she included all the people living in her house: her children, nephews, my son, and me. To me, her photos confirmed and visualized what I was already learning in other ways: the importance of transition rituals in knitting social relations, and the significance of her home not just as a nest for children, but as a knot in numerous relationships with relatives, friends, and guests. Food and commensality played a role in nourishing these networks.

In contrast, Baye, the father, took only twenty-one photos, all taken by himself except one, with the specific aim of showing adaptation to sedentarization

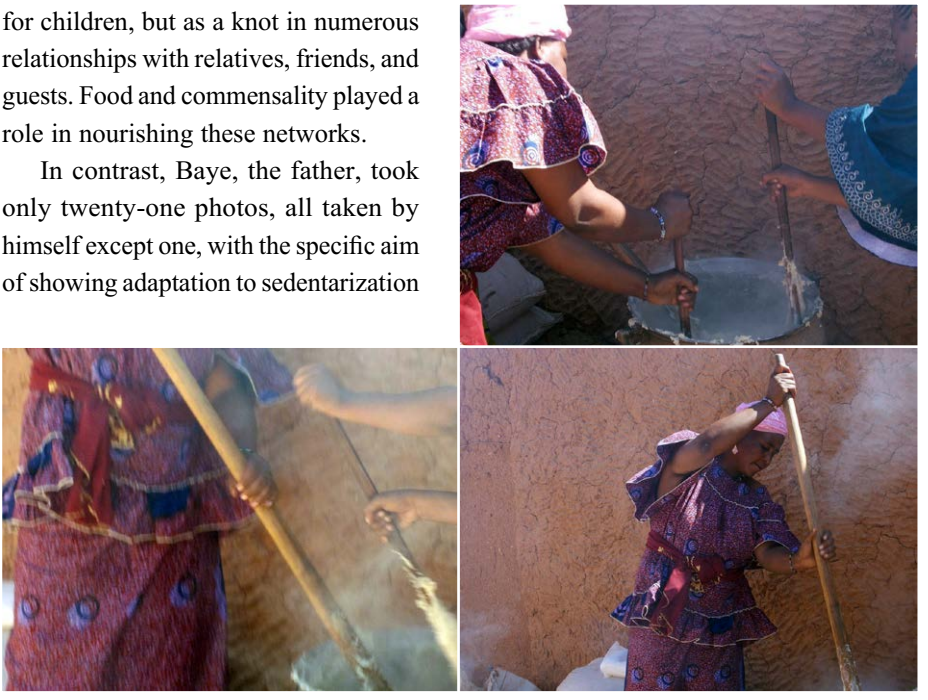

Figure 1: Zeynab preparing polenta. Photos: Fatima Baye, 16 January 2012.

in a nearby gardening settlement. We had discussed this topic in an interview a few days earlier, and so he continued to explore it. Baye explained how people switched from pastoralism to gardening after the drought in 1984 because they lost their animals. Each of his photos was intended to show a particular aspect of irrigated gardening (and irrigation system, growing onions and corn), and a specific type of changing housing and dress. For example, his cousins in the city had "traditional upgraded clothes" with a veil (*taglmust*). He took a photo of an elderly man, his uncle, who came to the city to treat his eyes, to keep it as a family memory. In this case the camera was an opportunity to photograph a dear older relative. Otherwise, technical aspects of gardening and sedentarization took priority over people. Baye is a teacher by profession, teaching in different villages where he was assigned, before moving to Agadez when his children reached the age to attend high school. Otherwise, he said he would prefer living in the countryside, which he often visited on his motorbike. His family from the valleys and mountains of Aïr became experts in gardening, which for them became integrated into Tuareg culture in this mountain massif.

The girls – the cousins Tabelala and Salama, Fatima's daughter – were approximately the same age – seventeen and sixteen years old – and both attended high school. Tabelala had just arrived from Libya, where she grew up with her siblings and mother, who had decided to return to Niger. Tabelala lived with her mother's sister and her



Figure 2: Sedentarization. Photo: Mohamed Baye, 15 January 2012.



Figure 3: Sweeping the school courtyard. Photo: Tabelala Ilel, 18 January 2012.

cousins in another house nearby. Despite having a stomach-ache, she decided to speak with me after taking photos because she felt this was a responsibility toward me and I realized it too late. She took photos "for me", but they reflected her own interests. Her photos were divided among family members such as her brother, her daily household tasks shared with her cousin, and school activities. At school, she chose to show the common activity of sweeping and caring for the school courtyard. At the time, she was attending a Franco-Arabic school and wanted to become a nurse. She said she missed some of the benefits of Libya, such as cheaper food. In one of a series of photos, we see her making tea, which she loves to prepare.

Salama, Fatima's daughter, attended a different school, the same one as her male cousin Abderhmane, who also lived in Fatima's house. She started practicing photography by taking pictures of him. She took two photos of her favorite teacher, a young woman who taught family education. This subject was her favorite because they also learned about family planning and housekeeping. She said she would be too shy to teach a subject like that herself. Her first wish was to finish high school as soon as possible and get married. She told me she had already chosen her future husband. I learned that usually a girl tells her mother her choice, and only then discussions between families begin. In addition to taking photos at school, Salama took very aesthetic and affectionate photos of her closest family members. I thought she might be a little afraid of her



Figure 4: Little sister. Photo: Salama Baye, 12 January 2012.

mother because she obeyed her every call, but through these conversations about the images I learned that she not only respects her but loves her deeply. When her mother is not there, the house feels rather empty, she said. Her mother was the ultimate role model for her. From her focus on family members and the way she photographed them, I was able to feel her care for her younger siblings and understand her values better.

Illias, Baye's sister's son, was deeply engaged in preparing for his final exam. He chose natural sciences as his major because he wanted to study geology or economics. His days revolved entirely around school and lessons. Through photos, he allowed me to gain insight into his class, his male and female classmates of various ethnicities, the solidarity of a Fulani girl that took him to school on her motorbike, and a Hausa friend that shared his larger house for group study sessions. At the time, Iliasu's dream was to finish university and find a job near his home village, where his mother and sister lived. However, he said he would be willing to go far away to earn money to support them if the opportunity arose. Because he was too busy studying, he could not visit the village, and so he borrowed a photo of the village from his cousin Souley (Figure 7). He explained that he felt most at ease in the village, among family members and free to move as he wished, because there was no police curfew like in the city. The village was also associated with holidays, when he worked in the garden to earn money for his school supplies.



Figure 5: Ilias at school. Photo: a schoolmate of Ilias Rhisa, 4 December 2011.

Souley, the son of Fatima and Baye, had just finished high school and did not yet have the ambition to continue his studies. He wanted to develop a garden with onions to earn money, and his dream was to own a shop. Several photos showed onion cooperatives and markets. That year was particularly unfavorable for onion prices, and onions were rotting everywhere. In other years, onions could bring a fortune. Souley included a photo together with his friend in his shop, young friends smiling against a background of essential commodities such as macaroni, sugar, oil, and Maggi seasoning. Souley took time to visit his grandmother's village to see his cousins and other relatives – for example, his older aunt, who was shy about being photographed, but whom he wanted to include precisely because of her importance because older people are valued in the family for their knowledge and as a link to previous generations. In the village, Souley photographed a traditional dwelling (a mobile tent, or *ehan*; Figure 7) and a water pump. He was also critical of a coal mine and power plant, which caused dust to fall on the gardens and pastures. He showed how his cousins had to study at night using torches because their house did not have electricity, despite the proximity of the power plant. A camel running from the road represented the violent impact of the road. For him, the countryside was very important; like Ilias, he also spent holidays gardening.

Because Souley spent much time in the countryside with his grandmother, he also knew the family tree by heart, and I wrote down all the family lineages for myself



Figure 6: Sign for the cooperative. Photo: Souley Baye, 2 January 2012.



Figure 7: A traditional home, or *ehan*. Photo: Souley Baye, 13 January 2012, with commentary by Ilias.

to learn. He drew a map of the entire village with all the houses and the names of the inhabitants. At that point, there were many of us in a room, and the young men began to dream about the future of the village. In an ideal world, they imagined living in the village, in large houses with running water and electricity. If the road was good, they could work in the city and maintain the gardens.

Relation to the countryside and methodological insights

Because I did not specifically ask the participants to focus on the difference between the city and the countryside, these themes appeared in our conversations only sporadically. Several elements associated with the countryside were present in the city, such as milk and tea. Ilias began his story with *iliwa*, a typical morning meal for the Tuareg in both the countryside and the city. Tabelala photographed her brother with a small calabash containing milk from the two goats her aunt keeps in her courtyard. Elements related to milk carry connotations of the countryside, where herds are kept. Milk is valued as the best food, yet it is difficult to obtain in the city because animals are distant and powdered milk is expensive. Tea was another important element in the photos, regarded as crucial to Tuareg identity and everyday life. It appeared in Tabelala's photos, where she is making it, and in images of Souley drinking tea while visiting his cousin.

For all the men participating, the countryside was an important topic to discuss. For the father, our previous interview influenced his focus on sedentarization. For Souley and Ilias, it was their love for the countryside and their relatives there that they both expressed when reflecting on well-being and the future. Souley took his time to visit the countryside, photographing relatives, the well, the dwellings, and the impact of the power plant. He said that, given more time, he would also photograph the gardens. Ilias borrowed a photo of traditional tents from Souley to express his attachment to the countryside.

Fatima and Salama could not visit the countryside with a camera during those two days, but, given the opportunity, they would have been interested in taking photos there. The network of relatives they photographed was clearly extending into the city. As already mentioned, for Fatima, whether in the city or countryside, at home or in other homes, her role was always to create a meshwork of relationships. The girls also discussed their aspirations: marriage for Salama and medical school for Tabelala. Fatima and her daughter Salama primarily focused on social interactions, events, roles, and people important to them. The father conducted his own research and had a point to demonstrate. The boys showed the places most important to them and related to their aspirations (university and business), as well as relationships significant to them; for Illasu, those were at school and in the village, and, for Souley, it was the relatives. Everyone included photos of people they wanted to remember. Passing a camera to others not only meant that some photos were not taken by the participant, but also that

individuals were willing to share the camera as part of their relationships, or that they asked someone else to take a photo of them (cf. Turk Niskač, 2012, 2022; Murray, Nash, 2017). The people appearing in photos, as well as those absent but mentioned in our conversations, revealed which relationships matter to participants and in what way.

Photovoice and photo-stories benefited my research on changes in the city, youth aspirations, and connections to the countryside by providing deeper, more nuanced insights. Although I was already attentive to signs of the countryside in the city (such as milk), these were also reflected by Ilias, Suley, and Tabelala. I gained a better understanding of the importance of gardens for both the father and his son. The mother's photography confirmed her essential role in the network of family relationships. Neither parent spoke explicitly about passing on their knowledge to their children, but the photo-stories revealed that Salama and Souley were interested in learning their parents' skills – Salama by taking her mother as a role model, and Souley by showing interest in onion production and expanding into business. Tabelala considered pursuing further schooling for employment but later chose to marry first. For a girl, it is difficult to insist on her plan to gain a profession, even when her husband supports her in principle. Once married and with children, continuing schooling becomes challenging. Photo-stories also function as a slice of time and shared memory, making it possible to follow and better understand later decisions in the lives of young participants.

Both parents that grew up in the countryside mentioned they would prefer to live there, but they chose the city for their children's schooling. For younger generations, the countryside is also associated with holidays, escaping the city, and spending time with parents and grandparents. At the same time, young people aspire to develop the countryside by bringing more infrastructure such as running water and electricity, and stronger housing to make life more comfortable for their parents, grandparents, and themselves. They continue the traditional principle of going out into the world and returning with new knowledge (Claudot-Hawad, 2002).

The relationship with the countryside is therefore multifaceted, ambiguous, and dynamic, far from being a one-way process. These insights were part of a long-term relationship, following extended families through various means, not only collaborative photography, and are included in other analyses (see Lunaček, 2020, 2023). It is important to ask about what is absent and to seek insights beyond photovoice to understand a broader context and acknowledge the limitations of a two-day photo project with an individual. From the photos alone, it might appear that Fatima and Salama did not care much about the countryside or goats, which was not the case. My understanding of the role of women in networks spanning both rural and urban environments was shaped by various occasions. Ideally, photovoice should be complemented by other research methods, as also proposed by Turk Niskač (2011, 2022). More broadly, anthropologists using participatory approaches tend to combine methods with participant observation and other techniques (e.g., Turk Niskač, 2012; Harper, Alonso, 2018; Roque de Piño, 2020).

Upgrading photovoice to photo-stories also proved to be a way to increase creativity in participation. As a result, personal photo-stories were more satisfactory than just photos and more comprehensive for me to review afterwards. What remained under-reflected was our shared construction of narratives along the slides. I did try to put myself at the service of participants, but not to the same extent as in Souleymane's exhibition (Lunaček, 2018), and I did ask questions. Recording would help to better understand our shared meaning-making, but it would not fully reveal the entire intersubjective process of photovoice (cf. Luttrell, 2010).

Photos allowed me to get closer to experiences of the younger generation. Although we lived in the same house, photos allowed us to focus on what they wished to share from their everyday lives and concerns with me as a researcher in an active and creative way. Because I am of the same generation as their parents, photovoice was effective in building trusting relationships across the generations. I gained better insight into their everyday life, wishes, and aspirations, including family attachment and connections to the countryside.

In this case, the plan was not to seek solutions in the community or make public presentations. Photovoice provided a way to participate in research on topics that interested them. However, it also allowed us to build closer relationships and strengthen our trust and understanding. Participants took photos to share with me, but they also had their own motivations: curiosity about trying something new and using photography to express their concerns and interests (cf. Roque de Piño, 2016, 2020). They also seized the opportunity to photograph cherished people and places for memory, as Ilias most clearly expressed on some slides: "Print this photo on paper!" I brought all the photos featuring persons on my next visit. With open questions and their own agendas and aims, my research became their project as well, moving beyond participation towards collaboration.

Our research orientation was explorative, experiential, and reflexive, not aimed at seeking solutions in the community or communicating political problems directly to decision makers (as in case of Harper, Alonso, 2016; Roque de Piño, 2016; Arku, Bandaluko, 2023). Despite this, many of the issues addressed were indirectly political, such as Souley's critique of the coal-fired power plant and its dust affecting the gardens without providing electricity locally. Ilias mentioned unease in the city due to the police curfew, and Tabelala commented on better bread prices in Libya. The potential of the applied value of photovoice remains for me to explore in the future. Even if I cannot go to Niger at the moment, it may serve as a suggestion to local civil society regarding exploration and communication of environmental issues.

Communicative value and issues in publishing

Photography and photovoice have strong communicative value for community projects (Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, 2016; Harper, Alonso, 2018) and facing decision makers with the voices of a concerned community (Roque de Piño, 2016; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023). Photos have the ability to create affective connections, foster identification, and transmit or evoke meanings. For further communication, photovoice requires both photography, with its immediate content and affective impact on the viewer, and voice or text explaining the meanings participants shared about photos. In addition, it needs context, which is usually provided by anthropologists. Photos can be further arranged in photo-stories, presenting photos with accompanying text. Photo-stories are a result in themselves and have the potential to be the basis for exhibition or publication.

Publishing participatory photography presents additional challenges in participatory approaches because it often does not conform to formal photographic culture and may depict intimate scenes of everyday life and living conditions. The most important aspect of ethical codes and guidelines is to thoroughly consider the principle of doing no harm (American Anthropological Association, 2012; Cox et al., 2014: 7–11). Informed consent is necessary, but sometimes it is difficult to obtain it because researchers cannot always reach all the participants that have been photographed. Compared to text, anonymization in photography can significantly diminish the affective value of the image. Most intimate photos often have greater identification potential but might make the protagonists in photos more vulnerable. For example, I felt that some photos were potentially too intimate for public access; despite informed consent, I preferred to keep them for more controllable settings, such as research presentations in small groups. What to share is more transparent when research participants or collaborators select photos for exhibition and public presentation during the research process. (Roque de Piño, 2016, 2020; Murray, Nash, 2017; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Smit et al., 2025).

Conclusion

Photovoice proved to offer many benefits, the most significant being the active participation and creative self-expression of research participants leading to more collaborative manners of research and its presentation. It is inherently political because it changes or at least challenges the power dynamics within research relationships. Even when taking photos for a research(er), participants also have their own motivations and bring their own perspectives they want to share. The meaning created in the process is inter-subjective, based on trust and motivation, and needs to be reflected. It is technically relatively easy and becoming more widely accessible with smartphones. It is crucial

that this method and its outcomes make sense to participants that need to understand research context so that it doesn't become just a method to efficiently and quickly extract data. Therefore photovoice is at its best when it is conceived as collaborative research from the outset.

Despite checking whether the question about the relation to the countryside as research was meaningful to the participants, my research lacked systematic creation of a collaborative and engaged approach and was rather explorative. Photovoice allowed me to better understand the relationships among participants and persons important to them, and to strengthen my connection with the younger generation, allowing me to gain greater insight into their present and future life decisions. In this way, I better understood their perspective on and relation with the countryside. It confirmed the continuity of a meshwork of relations spreading across urban and countryside spaces, as well as their economic connection. It allowed me additional close insights into everyday life spaces and encounters, aspirations, and values. Research needs to be complemented with other methods, such as participant observation and interviews with other actors, to understand a wider context and aspects not included in photo-stories.

Photo-stories can be a creative extension of photovoice, offering a collaborative outcome that can be revisited later, despite participants preferring to keep tangible printed photos for their memory. In addition to its reflexive power and convenience for collaborative and engaged discussion for desired changes, the (affective) potential of photovoice for wider communication must be carefully considered with participant-collaborators. In publications and exhibitions, a wider context is also needed, in which the anthropologist can serve again in the role of a mediator. In both individual and community engagement, along a continuum of reflexive, engaged, and applied approaches, photovoice fits into the continuum of visual anthropology approaches and gains momentum in the scope of multimodal approaches, aiming to transform participation with a camera in hand into collaboration throughout the entire research process.

Acknowledgements

I am infinitely grateful to everyone involved, especially Fatima Baye and her family for their hospitality. I acknowledge financial support from the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (research core funding Ethnological Research of Cultural Knowledge, Practices and Forms of Socialities, no. P6-0187).

Research data statement

This article is based on ethnographic material, which I do not define as a collection of research data. All further information about the material used is available from the author upon reasonable request.

Data protection statement

For all photos in which the identities of individuals are recognizable, the individuals have given their consent for publication. The authors of the photos participating in the research are not anonymous; the authorship is indicated on the photos and the authors agreed with publication.

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Fotopripoved kot dopolnilni pristop z družino Tuaregov v Agadezu v Nigru

V prispevku sodelovalne pristope pri rabi fotografije umeščam med sodobne večnačinske pristope. Vloga fotografije v antropologiji se je preusmerila od pozitivistične usmerjenosti k subjektivnemu in refleksivnemu razumevanju fotografije v raziskavi. Pri pogovorih ob fotografijah pomen nastaja v intersubjektivnem razmerju (Pink, 2001) in ni statičen (Luttrell, 2010). V besedilu se osredotočam na sodelovalno fotografijo oz. fotografijo z udeležbo in razpravljam o razlikah med udeleženostjo in sodelovanjem. Pri fotopripovedi (photovoice) fotografije ustvarijo sodelujoči_e v raziskavi. Ena od njenih glavnih prednosti je spodbujanje sogovornikov_ic k aktivnemu sodelovanju v raziskavi s pomočjo fotografije, da ti sami_e izpostavijo, kaj je zanje pomembno. S tem udeleženi_e soustvarjajo pomene in usmerjajo raziskavo. Raziskovalcu_ki fotopripoved istočasno omogoči, da se približa izkušnji in perspektivi sogovornikov_ic. Afektivna moč fotografije in besedilo, nastalo v pogovoru ob fotografiji, ima potencial tudi za nadaljnjo komunikacijo, bodisi v obliki lokalne predstavitve ali razstave bodisi kot del akademskega besedila. S podajanjem konteksta raziskave lahko raziskovalec_ka prevzame vlogo mediatorja_ke. Fotografija z udeležbo oz. sodelovalna fotografija tako presega zgolj pridobivanje informacij na podlagi fotografij, saj omogoča nove vpoglede v raziskovalna vprašanja in večjo bližino. Poleg tega je inherentno politična, saj s samim pristopom kot tudi z agendo vidnosti in slišnosti v prizadevanjih daje poudarek podajanju perspektive sodelujočih. Sodelovalno usmerjena fotopripoved ima lahko za cilj

skupnostno razpravo ali pritisk na odločevalce. Prednosti, izzivi in potenciali fotopripovedi so v članku predstavljeni tudi na primeru ustvarjanja foto zgodb z družino Tuaregov v Agadezu, in sicer v povezavi z raziskovalnimi vprašanji o vsakdanjem življenju v mestu in odnosom do podeželja. Poleg navedenih prednosti foto pripovedi mi je ustvarjanje foto zgodb omogočilo odpiranje novih vidikov in poglabljanje raziskovalnih vprašanj, vključno z razmerji med mestom in podeželjem in vlogo žensk. Predvsem je spodbudilo večjo bližino z udeleženci_kami, posebno z mladostniki_cami, in vpogled v njihove življenjske svetove, vrednote in aspiracije. Sodelovalne oblike fotografije v antropologiji razumem predvsem kot komplementaren pristop za boljše ciljno in refleksivno sodelovanje z udeleženimi v raziskavi.