

Collecting, Exposing, and Denouncing: Photographic Repositories and the Construction of Visual Narratives of the Rubber Era

Recolectar, exponer y denunciar: repositorios fotográficos y construcción de las narrativas visuales de la época del caucho

Juan Carlos La Serna

Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM), Lima, Peru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0350-3709>

juan.laserna@unmsm.edu.pe

Abstract: In Peru, the commemorations of the centennial of the 'Putumayo Scandal' offered the ideal conditions for discussing the meaning of rubber exploitation and its impact on the indigenous population of the Amazon through different artistic, journalistic and academic perspectives.

The present work offers some insight into photographic archives and their uses in the construction of the visual memory of the Peruvian Amazon. It recognizes the way in which recent exhibitions and illustrated publications covering the rubber period insist on a timeless and Manichaean display of this phenomenon and the actors involved in it. In this way, we reconstruct the production process of the clichés referred to the rubber exploitation and its early circulation emphasizing the context in which they were created, the compilation of these images in various collections and repositories and, finally, their so-called 'discovery', as well as their selection, exhibition and use in the construction of contemporary narratives about the history of the Amazon and its link to the rest of the country.

Keywords: rubber atrocities; historical photography; exhibition; Putumayo region; Peru.

Resumen: En el Perú, la conmemoración del centenario del 'Escándalo del Putumayo' ofreció las condiciones idóneas para que, a través de diferentes iniciativas artísticas, periodísticas y académicas, surgieran espacios de reflexión acerca del significado de la explotación cauchera en la Amazonía y, en especial, el impacto de esta actividad sobre la población indígena de la región.

El presente trabajo ofrece una reflexión acerca de los archivos fotográficos y sus usos en la construcción de la memoria visual sobre la Amazonía peruana, reconociendo la manera en que las recientes exhibiciones y publicaciones ilustradas referidas al período del caucho insisten en una exposición atemporal y, en muchos casos, maniquea del fenómeno y los actores involucrados. En este sentido, reconstruimos el proceso de producción de los clichés referidos a la explotación de la goma y su temprana circulación en el contexto en que fueron generados, el acopio de estas imágenes en diversas colecciones y repositorios y, por último, su reciente 'descubrimiento', selección, exposición y uso en la elaboración de las narrativas contemporáneas sobre la historia de la región amazónica y su vinculación al resto del país.

Palabras clave: horrores del caucho; fotografía histórica; exposición; Putumayo; Perú.

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The 2012 commemoration of the Centenary of the ‘Putumayo Scandal’ offered the ideal conditions for the emergence of spaces of discussion on the meaning of the exploitation of rubber in the history of the Peruvian Amazon, and especially the impact of this activity on the future of the indigenous population from those regions, through different artistic, journalistic and academic initiatives. And, although the discussion began around a small group of anthropologists, writers and activists, a contemporary narrative of the ‘horrors of rubber’ was gradually constructed which, through different platforms – illustrated publications, photographic exhibitions and museum displays – has managed to position itself as a discourse within national public opinion.¹

This viewpoint has highlighted the colonialist character of the Peruvian State in relation to the practices of territorial domination and social control in the Amazon region, producing a revisionist discourse that is strongly critical of national history, and which highlights the violence with which the urban elites, both in Lima and in the region itself, sought to assimilate the indigenous people into their modernizing project.

Politically and academically correct, the narrative of the ‘horrors of rubber’ has been widely reported on in the media over the last decade, generating significant impact on the culture industry: the production of educational materials, artistic initiatives (visual, theatrical and new media). Furthermore, it has strengthened the critical discourse that organizations and indigenous representatives, prominent in the national scene – especially visual artists – have put forth about the complex interethnic relations in the Amazonian world, especially in scenarios of conflict and recent violence, such as the ‘Baguazo’ case.²

However, in its eagerness to construct globalizing explanations, this narrative happens to replicate many of the gaps and generalities that ‘official’ Amazonian history has suffered from, being unable to offer a deep insight into the rubber production process itself that makes visible the complex dynamics, conflicts and negotiations that were

1 The ‘Putumayo Scandal’ is the name given to the public debate that arose after the publication of a series of complaints in the Peruvian and international press in the early 1910s, surrounding enslavement practices, mistreatment and massacres suffered by indigenous people inside the rubber plantations and the rubber production centers in the Putumayo river region, on land controlled by the Peruvian Amazon Co. owned by businessman Julio C. Arana, a complaint that led to trials in national and British courts.

2 A series of violent clashes between police officers and civilian protesters (both indigenous and mestizo) in different parts of the provinces of Utcubamba and Bagua in the Amazon Department in early June 2009 is commonly referred as the ‘Baguazo’. The conflict ended with 33 deaths, including civilians and law enforcement personnel. These events were widely disseminated in national and international media and have had a deep impact on recent debates about state policies in the Amazon, especially those initiatives linked to indigenous territories and populations.

generated between diverse social actors.³ Thus, it ends up reaffirming old paternalistic clichés that portray an indigenous population without agency, as eternal victims of both rubber entrepreneurs' insatiable greed and the state's projects of internal domination, which demanded their sacrifice for the sake of 'national progress'.⁴

The aim of this text is to shed some light on the use of photographic archives in the construction of a visual memory about the Peruvian East and, by doing so, recognizing the way in which recent exhibitions and illustrated publications refer back to the period of rubber exploitation—more specifically, to the 'Putumayo Scandal' – to insist on a timeless and, in many cases, strictly dualist exposition of the phenomenon and the actors involved. In this sense, I reconstruct the process of production of visual clichés that capture the rubber industry, as well as their early circulation in the context in which they were produced. Further, I discuss the way these images were gathered in various collections and repositories and, finally, their recent 'discovery', selection, exhibition and consumption toward the elaboration of contemporary narratives on the history of the Amazon region and its links to the rest of the country.⁵

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- 3 Throughout the 20th century, the 'official' narrative understood Amazonian history as a process of domestication and *Peruvianization* of the territories and indigenous populations, highlighting facts that marked a significant advance in this sense, such as the European settlements of Chanchamayo and Pozuzo (in the Peruvian Central Jungle Region), the contexts of the extractive boom (the rubber and oil 'booms'), the border conflicts with Colombia and Ecuador or the establishment of the fluvial port in Iquitos, emphasizing significant figures in this process, such as businessmen Carlos Fitzcarrald and Julio C. Arana, or explorers Antonio Raimondi, Joaquín Capelo and Pedro Portillo. On the other hand, taking as a precedent the uprising of Juan Santos Atahualpa in the central jungle, in the middle of the 18th century, this historical narrative understood the processes of indigenous resistance to the 'internal conquest' as obstacles on the way to progress and modernization of the region.
 - 4 The prevalence of the narrative of the 'horrors of rubber' is linked to the visibility that has been achieved by the recent production of a series of academic pieces that have assumed the veracity of the acts of violence and exploitation on the indigenous population in the rubber plantations of Putumayo, at the beginning of the 20th century. On this narrative, see Chirif and Cornejo (2009); Cornejo and Parellada (2012); Chavarría (2015). For the case of Colombian academic literature, with a perspective similar to the previous one, see Pineda (2014); Zárate (2019). Imbued by this critical view of the Rubber Era and coinciding with the centenary of the 'Putumayo Scandal', novelist Mario Vargas-Llosa published *El sueño del celta* ('The Dream of the Celt', 2010), a story that details the participation of then consul Roger Casement, commissioned by the British Crown to investigate *in situ* the veracity of these accusations and give testimony in the trials initiated in England, a novel that exposed this reading of Amazonian history to a global audience.
 - 5 A first effort to reflect on the limitations of the use of historical images in contemporary exhibitions aimed at Lima audiences was developed by the author of this essay in conjunction with Valeria Biffi (La Serna and Biffi 2016).

Repositories and Research on Historical Photography

It is a fact that in the last three decades interest in historical photography and, in general, studies on visuality, has awakened in Peru.⁶ From history and anthropology to the visual arts, the importance of archives and photographic records for the study of social reality, imaginaries, and their use in the construction of narratives about territory, population and nation has been under the spotlight as never before.

This interest, however, must confront obvious limitations arising from the complex construction of visual memory and the reality of the photographic repositories in the country. Many Peruvian archives and libraries suffer from a condition that could be regarded as 'feudal'. That is, beyond the initiatives of institutionalization of public repositories toward proper preservation, organization, and availability to visitors, accessibility often continues to depend on the degree of 'noteworthiness' that each researcher may demonstrate – institutional letter of presentation in hand – before the institution. If we add to this the fact that archives and repositories have generally only collected photographic documents, without producing descriptive guides or virtual catalogues which could offer necessary information for the researchers to initiate their inquiry, we understand that working with historical photographs requires many hours of research and relies, ultimately, on the sympathy or good memory of the officer in charge of each collection.

Beyond these conditions, initial efforts have been made in the country to build, from photographs, a visual memory of national and regional scope. Public and private initiatives that are explained on the basis of the value that visual records have achieved, both in the academic world and in public space, are being employed and redefined within contemporary narratives of identity and memory. Although there is no heritage policy yet aimed at conservation of historical photographs – there is no specially designated national photo library in the country – libraries, museums and historical archives, which are the most important repositories of our documentary heritage, have started to organize their photographic collections, making them available to researchers and – usually – people interested in historical images.

In this sense, it is possible to name those public institutions that contain the most important repositories of historical photographs in the country. The photographic collection of the Biblioteca Nacional del Perú (BNP) is noteworthy, as it brings together a variety of items from private collections, apart from its own acquisitions.⁷ Likewise,

6 Among the pioneering works on the history of photography in Peru, see Peñaherrera (1983); McElroy (1985); Majluf and Wuffarden (2001).

7 The Biblioteca Nacional is the most important public repository of historical photographs in the country. It contains collections corresponding to the Courret Studio, the collections of Augusto Thorndike (custody), Ricardo Palma, José María Eguren, a copy of the album *República Peruana 1900*, edited by Fernand Garreaud, among others. The Courret Collection alone consists of over 55 000 photographic images, including glass negatives, wet collodion, silver bromide gelatin and cellulose nitrate from photographic images (1863 to 1935). The photo clichés taken from this collection have been used

the photographic collections housed by institutions such as the Museo Nacional de Arqueología Antropología e Historia del Perú (MNAAHP), the Museo Nacional de la Cultura Peruana (MNCP) or the archive of the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (MRREE), contain photo clichés that originated from their own administrative functions and research work which, in many cases, include images that depict the social and cultural life of the population in their regions. The same applies to the archives of military institutions such as the Archivo Histórico de Marina (also the Instituto de Estudios Histórico-Marítimos, an associated institution) and the Instituto de Estudios Aeroespaciales, whose collections offer images of various regions in the country that have been of interest to the Peruvian military.

Apart from these state initiatives to collect and organize photographic documents, there are private institutions that have consolidated important iconographic collections, underscoring the historical – and in some cases, commercial – value that these photographs represent. In Lima, the project associated with the Centro de la Imagen and the Jan W. Mulder collection, the photo gallery of the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) and the photo library of the El Instituto Riva-Agüero of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (IRA-PUCP) are the most significant examples.⁸ In Cusco, we also have the Fototeca Antina, an institutional repository of the Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (CBC), with an important collection of historical photographs of natural regions.⁹

in different exhibitions and publications referring to Peruvian social and cultural life (from women, death or 19th century sociability), with a strong bias: they are seeing the country through the images produced and consumed around the urban elites, especially from Lima.

- 8 See Majluf and Contreras (1997); Majluf and Wuffarden (2001). The archive of the Instituto Riva-Agüero contains some important historical photographic collections, such as the Alberto Giesecke Collection (custody), the Félix Denegri Collection, the Aspíllaga Collection and the Riva-Agüero Heritage. <https://ira.pucp.edu.pe/archivo-historico-riva-aguero/> (11.02.2022).
- 9 The Fototeca Andina collects around 32 000 photo clichés, in various formats – glass plates, printed on paper and reproductions of old photographs. It was created at the end of the 1980s on the initiative of the American researchers Deborah Poole and Fran Antman, in order to safeguard the visual memory of the South Andean region, although, for budgetary reasons, beyond a few exceptions, its funds are limited to the city of Cusco and its hinterland. In this sense, the exhibitions and publications produced by the institution have focused on themes linked to the history of the city of Cusco and the so-called ‘Cusco School of Photography’ (see Velardi and Sadurni 2011). A remarkable fact is that in the late 1970s, a historical photo library of Cusco was organized within the old Museo Histórico Regional de Cusco, inaugurated in 1977 based on donations from local families: “In the photo library the student will find everything related to the history of Cusco, trunks of families, illustrious characters, ecclesiastics, military, civilians, artists and everything that has contributed to raising the cultural level of this land [...] will be able to appreciate the physiognomy of Cusco, with its narrow streets, trams, arrival of the railroad, the first plane, electric light, bridges, balconies, the earthquake of 1950, and everything that has been captured by the documentary lens of the life of this land” (Museo Histórico Regional del Cusco. “Valiosa colección fotográfica organizada”. Cusco, June 1977. Central Archive of the Ministry of Culture, Instituto Nacional de Cultura Serie, box 186 (Translation from the Spanish original by the autor).

There are also important photographic collections about Peru abroad that have recently received the attention of academics interested in historical photography. Examples include the picture library of the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, the collection of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut and the Ethnologisches Museum, both in Berlin, the photographic collection of the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt in Hamburg (MARKK, once Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg), the archives of the Smithsonian Institution, university archives and museums such as the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, the Stahl Center Museum of Culture at La Sierra University and the Library of Congress in the United States, just to name a few significant cases. As part of its policies of openness to users, some of the materials contained in these repositories have been digitized and their catalogues, as well as some clichés, can be located by the researcher through the services offered by institutions in the network.¹⁰

In the case of Peruvian public repositories, much of the photographic documentation is not classified in catalogs and is therefore unknown to researchers. There are budgetary reasons that partly explain this situation. And, although efforts have been made to rescue some of these collections and facilitate access, the selection of images that have been integrated into digitization and cataloguing projects has to do with how related those photographic documents are to certain topics emphasized in their content. They are useful regarding only certain historical and narrative interests. Thus, we have the collection of the Courret Studio of the National Library – a collection of clichés linked to the sociability of the elite of Lima at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century – whose importance has paved the way for its digitization, organization and use in different artistic projects, exhibitions and illustrated publications.¹¹

However, apart from institutional collections – public or private – different publications referring to historical photography in Peru – and their exhibition – have been made on the basis of private and family archives, legacies of renowned artists and photographers active in Peru between the last third of the 19th century and the first half

10 These collections, however, remain distant for Peruvian researchers interested in historical photography. Apart from the publication of Deborah Poole, based on the Yale University collection, in the late 1980s, the publication of a selection of images from the Heinrich Brüning collection, made by the Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde, in the 1990s, or the recent works of Gisela Cánepa, interested in the contemporary uses of the ‘Moche’ photographs from the Heinrich Brüning collections, in Berlin and Hamburg; and Andrés Garay, on the Max T. Vargas’ clichés, located in the special collections of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut in Berlin, there are no known major academic works that have explored these important photographic collections about Peru (Poole 2000; Garay Albújar 2017; Cánepa 2016; Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg 1990).

11 Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (2009) and Elmore (2003). Similar entry to the one proposed by the recent exhibition and publication referring to the photographic studio of Elias del Águila, in Lima during the first half of the 20th century (Instituto Cultural Peruano-Norteamericano 2017).

of the 20th century.¹² Thus, these works have underlined the trajectory of individual photographers and the impact that their work has had in terms of the development of activity in the regional or national space.¹³

In regional terms we can say that much of the interest in historical photography has been confined to few spaces. In the past decade, the work of photographers Sebastián Rodríguez (Morococha) and Baldomero Alejos (Ayacucho), both in the central highlands, drew some attention.¹⁴ However, it is certainly the photography from the south Andes that has aroused the greatest interest among academics. And it is the cases of Cusco and Arequipa that have concentrated all research efforts and exposition initiatives.¹⁵ Thus, the images that account for the ‘Historical Cusco’ have been incorporated into various exhibitions and publications, as have the works on photographic studies associated with the social evolution of Arequipa.¹⁶ More recently, the ‘discovery’ of new collections has allowed work to be done on the lives of photographers within local or regional spaces that had not previously received the attention of academics.¹⁷ In the case of Piura, on the northern coast, Andrés Garay has been interested in the work of photographers Pedro N. Montero, Rubén Quevedo – active in the Piura highlands of Ayabaca – and the amateur Manuel Sixto Zapata (Garay Albújar 2016).

Beyond the academic world, the importance that historical photographic materials have achieved in recent times, within the public sphere, explains the rapid circulation that some of these clichés can acquire through social media, web pages, and blogs about local or regional history. In many cases, the selection of certain images, their appropriation and exhibition by certain groups and individuals becomes a fundamental task for

12 An effort to offer a periodization of the professional activity of Peruvian photography can be seen in Majluf and Wuffarden (2001), where they point out the first half of the 20th century as the time of the “boom of the photographic studios” referring, specifically, to the photographic houses in Lima, Cusco and Arequipa.

13 For example, publications from the collections of J. Manuel Figueroa Aznar, Martín Chambi, Walter Runcie, Max T. Vargas, Emilio Díaz or Carlos Dreyer, among others (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú 2012; Grupo Editorial COSAS 2016; Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano 2017; Barrios and Hare 2011).

14 Kusunoki and Majluf (2008); Fischer, Noack and Ziehe (2008).

15 In the case of Puno, the first effort to make the importance of historical photography in the construction of memory visible to the local public was the exhibition “Puno Antiguo”, organized in December 2015 by the Dirección Desconcentrada de Cultura de Puno and the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, in the ICPNA gallery in that city.

16 As an anecdote, in the recent VIII Congreso Nacional de Historia held in August 2018 in the city of Arequipa, the session “Historia de la fotografía en Arequipa” was organized, the only one on visuality, with nine presentations on Arequipa’s photography. See also Majluf and Ranney (2015); Garay Albújar (2006); Garay Albújar and Villacorta (2017); Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (1994).

17 In the case of Cajamarca, see Jannsen (2007). An effort to reflect on photography in the construction of a local space of internal ‘frontier’, appears in Angulo (2011).

the reaffirmation of heritage initiatives, in the construction of identity narratives and in particular readings of memory and social and cultural history.¹⁸

Historical Amazonian photography: Between collecting and exhibition

The study of photography and collecting in the Amazon requires us to know about the historical process of this ‘frontier’ region, in order to understand what the dominant motifs have been in the production of images, as well as the role of local photographic studios and the marketing circuits that allowed local production to be linked to national and transatlantic markets. The construction of the Peruvian Amazon as a location has gone through a process of occupation promoted by the Peruvian state since at least the mid-19th century. At the same time, since the end of the 1860s, photographic technology arrived in the region and, since then, a set of images was created that provided an account of the external imaginaries constructed about the rain-forest: A territory to be domesticated, and its population, colonists and indigenous people alike (La Serna and Chaumeil 2016).

Unlike Lima or the southern Andes, there are no public archives or repositories with historical photographs of the Amazon region. The study of historical Amazonian photographs necessarily involves reviewing different collections in national and foreign archives or libraries, as well as private collections. The only exception is the Biblioteca Amazónica of the Centro de Estudios Teológicos de la Amazonia (CETA), in the city of Iquitos. The collection of photographs in this repository includes different albums of local families (e.g. Morey, Cauper, Loayza or Arana), official commissions and illustrated postcards, whose clichés have been included in some publications referring to the history of the city and the department of Loreto.¹⁹ Apart from this case, most of the known historical clichés on Amazonian themes – which, by the way, have been exposed or incorporated in recent publications – correspond to private collections.²⁰

In the case of the national repositories, photo clichés with Amazonian themes are found loose or included in some albums. None are integrated into collections or ‘Amazonian’ series. The Peruvian National Library’s photo library contains photographs of European explorations and colonization in the central jungle and in Loreto. Similarly,

18 For example, the Facebook accounts: “Puno: fotos de antaño”, “Tierra de leyenda”, “Chosica vieja”, “Nuestra Lima de antaño”, “Lima antigua”, among others. For contemporary appropriations and resemantization of ethnographic and historical photographs, see Cánepa (2016).

19 The foundation of this library and the photographic collection it contains dates back to 1973, based on a series of donations from priests, families and local journalists, and it is undoubtedly the most important collection of documentary material on the Peruvian Amazon created until now (La Serna and Chaumeil 2016).

20 For instance, the Amazonian collections of Alberto Chirif, Jean-Pierre Chaumeil, Humberto Currarino, Jan Mulder, Christian Bendayán, Mario La Rosa, José and Rubén Guadalupe, Thomas Moore, Augusto Dreyer, Carlos Runcie, Juan Carlos La Serna, Gustavo Buntinx, the Schlaefli family and the Schafferer Museum stand out.

Catholic orders have many photographs of their missionary and pastoral activities in the region.²¹ The Amazonian theme is also highlighted in the archives of the Instituto de Estudios Históricos Aeroespaciales del Perú, the Archivo Histórico de Marina, the Instituto de Estudios Histórico Marítimos del Perú, and the Archivo Histórico de Límites of the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. In all the cases above, the review of these holdings shows a visual correlation to the initiatives of occupation, colonization and ‘civilization’ of the region: bridges and roads, river navigation, border military forces, missionary centers and indigenous population, cultivated fields, urban populations and constructions, European colonization, extractive economy, etc.

There are two main regional areas that are underlined in the collections of historical photographs of the Amazon: the central jungle (i.e. the settlement or colonizing of the Chanchamayo-Perené, Oxapampa and Pozuzo Valleys),²² and the Loreto region, with its cultural production center in Iquitos.²³ And, it is precisely from these two cases that the clichés that have been used to construct the visual imagery about the Peruvian Amazon as a whole have been selected.²⁴ Clichés that, in turn, have been used locally for the construction of narratives about memory and the incorporation of these ‘frontier’ spaces in the imaginaries about the nation. Narratives that, not infrequently, put into question the images of remoteness and exoticism constructed from the literate world of the coast and mountains about what lies in the East of Peru.

Likewise, in recent decades, initiatives have been carried out to recover the regional photographic memory of people from Loreto. For instance, around 2006, the management of the then Instituto Nacional de Cultura – today, the Dirección Desconcentrada

21 In the case of photographs of the Catholic Missions, the Archivo Fotográfico de las Misiones Dominicanas, a documentary series within the Archivo de la Provincia Dominicana de San Juan Bautista del Perú, has recently been organized. Some of these materials were included in the exhibition “50 años en el Bajo Urubamba. Exposición fotográfica”, which in 2005 brought together about 120 clichés of the Dominican missions since the first decades of the 20th century. In the case of the Augustinians, their photographs have been exhibited and reproduced in books and periodicals linked to CETA, such as *Kanatari*. Similarly, as early as the 1970s, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, in Spanish) had made use of its photographic materials, taken since the mid-1940s, for publications and exhibitions to a national audience (Instituto Lingüístico de Verano 1971; Misiones Dominicanas 2003).

22 Diana Millies’s works are highlighted, with images of the German colonization in Pozuzo and Oxapampa taken from private collections (e.g. Schlaefli family and Schafferer Museum) and Manuel Zanutelli, which includes some clichés from Mario La Rosa’s Collection referring to Italian immigration in Chanchamayo (Millies 2007; Zanutelli 2001).

23 This is the case of the exhibition “La Amazonía de Ch. Kroehle. Fotos y postales de fines del siglo XIX y comienzos del XX”, organized at the Centro Cultural Inca Garcilaso in Lima, in 2010, based on the illustrated postcards edited by Eduardo Polack, drawing on the photographs of Charles Kroehle who, precisely, integrated in his Amazon journey the central jungle and the department of Loreto.

24 This is the case of the ‘globalizing’ look that the exhibition “En el país de la Amazonas”, organized at the Asociación Cultural Peruano-Británica between April and May 2017, tried to put forth (Bendayán and Cornejo 2017).

de Cultura of Loreto – started awareness campaigns so that local families would donate their photographs to them. Similarly, web pages and blogs began to appear on the internet, with some photographic material circulating, especially illustrated postcards and clichés from the most renowned studios in the city at the beginning of the 20th century, with the works of Antonio Wong, Manuel R. Lira, Victoriano Gil, Jesús Menacho and Augusto Falconi as standouts.²⁵

Recent exhibitions on historical photography in Iquitos have focused on two of these local photographers: Wong (Iquitos, 1910-1965) and Falconi (Yurimaguas, 1950). According to artist and curator Christian Bendayán, the emphasis placed on these two pioneers of Loreto photography marks two moments of regional photography and two different views on the construction of the imagery that has emerged in that fluvial city. On the one hand, while Wong was a leading member of the 1940s generation – the generation that ended up building the localist narrative of the Loretan Amazon –, which understood photography as a commercial tool, projecting images that reproduced old stereotypes of exoticism for tourism and the national press.²⁶ On the other hand, Falconi's photographs would become the visual expression of the effervescent 'mestizo' world of Iquitos, with its images of the marginality and everyday struggle of the population at the urban periphery – as the case of the Belén neighbourhood –, and the character of the *chauchero*, the docker of the port, a kind of cultural intermediary, a hinge between the rural world and urban life.²⁷

Apart from these two image production centers, the central jungle (departments of Pasco and Junín) and Loreto, very little work has been done on historical Amazonian photography. Just as Peruvian Amazonian historiography has focused its interest on the study of Iquitos and its hinterland, the apparent inexistence of photographic material referring to other regions of the Amazon, such as the Cusco jungle, Madre de Dios or

25 For information on early Iquitos photography, local studios and the circulation of printed images, see La Serna and Chaumeil (2016).

26 On the contemporary exhibition of Antonio Wong's work in Iquitos, the Instituto Nacional de Cultura in Loreto and the photographer's heirs organized the exhibition "Luces y sombras del Paraíso. Loreto en la fotografía de Antonio Wong Rengifo", coordinated by the Centro Cultural Irapay, in 2010.

27 Christian Bendayán. Personal interview, August 21, 2018. Augusto Falconi was a self-taught Loreto photographer, active since the early 1960s, who reflected in his photographs the rejection of a stale iconographic tradition that insisted on perpetuating the exotic and bucolic image of what was called the '*Iquiteña arcadia*' of the days of the rubber boom. In its *fotosociales* (photo-socials), the daily life of the different actors that make up the city of Loreto is underlined, highlighting the theme of marginality and decadence that occurs within an expanding, bursting and conflictive city. His works were printed in important local media, such as *Kanatari*, *Pro y Contra*, *Proceso* or *La Región* and selected for exhibition to the public of Iquitos. On Falconi's work, recently the Office of the Ministry of Culture in Loreto, together with the Peruvian North-American Cultural Institute in Iquitos and the Bufeo Association presented "Fotosociales. Retrato de Iquitos, 1960-1990" (Bendayán 2018).

the Upper Marañón, has ended up projecting to the national public a vision of territories and populations of only recent contact and conflict.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning the collection and contemporary consumption of historical photographs by Amazonian indigenous organizations. While political use of images has been very important for the visibility of indigenous demands in recent decades, both in the national and international public arena (Espinosa 2011), there have been very few initiatives by these institutions to build their own photographic repositories, as an exercise in memory or as a tool for media activism.²⁸ The historical photographs that are already known, produced since the middle of the 20th century, correspond to particular initiatives, carried out by missionaries, anthropologists and indigenous activists as part of field work done inside indigenous groups or publicity strategies that these actors sought to promote before national and international public. Subsequently, some of these materials were bequeathed to, printed or – more recently – digitalized by certain indigenous actors, generally political leaders, who safeguard these photographs as their belongings and make particular use of them.²⁹

Memory, exhibition and denunciation: The photographs of the Rubber Era

Most of the photographic production during the Rubber Era was the result of state and private efforts to recognize the economic potential of rubber exploitation for the regional and national economy, and the importance of the nationalizing activity of rubber entrepreneurs in what was known as the ‘frontier’ territories. It should be noted that various companies with interests in the rain-forest at the beginning of the 20th century, including rubber tappers, miners and agro-exporters, financed the production of various photographic collections that became widely known on a national scale during the period of their production.³⁰ This is the case of Julio C. Arana’s photographs, allegor-

28 In this sense, the only exception would be the case of AIDSESEP (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana), the organization with the greatest presence among the different indigenous groups of the Peruvian Amazon, which has a documentation center and a photo gallery, although its corpus is composed of images of indigenous populations and recent institutional activities (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/aidesepueblosindigenas/> (11.02.2022)). Institutions such as AIDSESEP, when dealing with issues related to regional history, such as the rubber era, use resources reproduced via virtual platforms for indigenous organizations such as the Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) or Servindi.org.

29 There are no known institutional initiatives by religious organizations (for instance, Catholic or Protestant), museums or universities that have developed programs to ‘return’ photo clichés to the populations photographed in the Peruvian Amazon. In cases that this has occurred, the return of the images has always been at the initiative of individuals, based on the interest of activists or academics who recognize the value of photographs for local memory and the importance of such items toward strengthening indigenous demands against external actors.

30 In addition to the rubber entrepreneurs, companies such as the Peruvian Corporation Lt. in Perené Valley, the Inca Mining Co. in Sandia Valley (Puno Department), and the various coffee producers in Chanchamayo produced propaganda photographs for consumption purposes aiming at a national public.

ical images produced by the Peruvian Amazon Co. through photographers contracted and commissioned to portray daily activities in the *caucherías* (rubber plantations or tapping fields) – *v.gr.* R. Lira, E. Robuchon or S. Santos –, materials that served to present the perspective of the company as it faced charges of exploitation and violence in the region, while reaffirming its ‘nationalist’ labor (Figure 1).³¹

The photographs produced or ordered by Arana have been ‘rediscovered’ and widely exhibited in recent years. These are the clichés that make up three particular repertoires: the Alberto Chirif Collection, the Album of the Consular Trip the Putumayo Region (1912), which was owned by Loretan journalist Jaime Vásquez, and the Pablo Macera collection.³² These pictures were recovered and integrated into exhibitions and publications, where the image of the Rubber Era ended up being the central element in the debate over the Putumayo affair. Likewise, the appearance of these images strengthened local narratives, from literature to journalism, produced in the literary circles of Iquitos. Within the context of the exhibition of these images, a series of Iquitos authors elaborated fictional texts focused on the rubber experience, pieces that were released in the local Loreto press during the 2010s and that, in various cases, served as textual correlation to the photographs produced by the Peruvian Amazon Co.³³

Thus a series of documents and exhibitions were produced that insisted on the memory of the ‘horrors of rubber’. However, even when the use of these images is included in spaces of discussion that sought to denounce the model of rubber exploitation developed at the beginning of the 20th century, in many cases the photographs shown in exhibitions and illustrated publications in fact only continued to reaffirm the old stereotypes that from their production, enmeshed in apologetic stories about the activities of *señores* (wealthy men) and the government in Amazonian land alongside

31 Such is the case of Julio C. Arana’s photographs, widely reproduced in the national press between the 1910s and 1940s, displayed in the information and propaganda offices established by the Peruvian government in Paris and London, since the early 1910s and also exhibited in the Peruvian pavilion at the London Rubber Exposition in 1911 (La Serna and Chaumeil 2016). On photography as a testimony of the Rubber Era, see also Flores (2011); Kraus (2018); La Serna (2018).

32 The Chirif Collection comprises a couple of photo albums that were part of a family legacy. It includes views of the city of Iquitos, rubber tapping and river navigation, by different authors (*v.g.* Silvino Santos, Manuel R. Lira, Cesáreo Mosquera) from the beginning of the 20th century. The Macera Collection includes materials from the 1960s collected by myself, purchased in flea markets. The album of the 1912 Consular Trip to Putumayo was acquired by journalist Jaime Vásquez. Clichés from these collections have been included in the following publications (Chirif and Cornejo 2009; Vílchez 2012; Chirif, Cornejo and De la Serna 2013; Chirif 2015).

33 “The contemporary Amazonian exhibitions could be carried out as long as the historical photographic materials were accessible, cataloged and in good condition. The success of these plans happened due to the interest of private collectors, who keep these materials and treasured them. All of this, however, stems from a process of decontextualization of these images. To take the photographs out of their initial use in order to reposition and redefined them for contemplative, aesthetic and historical purposes in front of contemporary audiences” (La Serna and Biffi 2016, 131. Translation from Spanish original by the author).



Figure 1. Image of the Putumayo rubber plantations produced by businessman Julio C. Arana as a propaganda tool. Photograph by Silvino Santos, 1910s. The signature “J.C.A.” and the numbering in the margins of the prints. Legend “Children’s games, around the huts - Putumayo River” (J. C. La Serna Collection).

the indigenous population. In other words, the contemporary exhibits overlooked the fact that these photo clichés were actually produced in order to visually reaffirm the image of indigenous people as ‘savages’ who were domesticated and introduced to national society through labor and trade.³⁴

³⁴ This set of photographs produced by Arana were incorporated into the following exhibitions temporary: “Álbum de Viaje. Fotografías de la Comisión Consular al Putumayo & Afluentes”, curated at the Centro Cultural de España in Lima, in 2014 (later the exhibition was replicated in Iquitos and some cities in Spain); “Julio C. Arana. Álbumes fotográficos inéditos”, organized at the Instituto Seminario de Estudios Rurales Andinos of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (SHRA - UNMSM),

Parallel to the images produced by businessmen like J. C. Arana, there had been other photographs that had, in fact, served to denounce the abuses inside the rubber factories. In other words, during the Rubber Era there were exercises in the production and selection of certain pictures by particular individuals and state officials in order to expose the violence carried out by local *caucheros*, not only against the indigenous population, but also against settlers, who were dependent or indebted to them, in order to draw the attention of the authorities and public opinion to the excesses and excessive ambitions that the rubber industry caused in the region.³⁵ Since the 1890s, the press in Lima had been collecting testimonies and accusations about the abuses to which the Amazon Indians had been subject by those businessmen, the cause of plenty of conflicts and uprisings in different regions of Loreto and the central region of the Peruvian jungle.³⁶ In some cases, these complaints led to the intervention of judicial authorities, initiating proceedings against the rubber tappers, complaints which included the use of photography as reliable evidence.³⁷

The use of photography as credible proof was put forth through images printed in different books and popular magazines at the time. Some of these clichés were then taken up by travelers and, most importantly, decontextualized, incorporated into the descriptions of ‘rubber events’ in the Putumayo region. In some cases, judiciary commissions such as those of consul Roger Casement or judge Romulo Paredes collected photographic images which they included in their accusatory reports (Valcárcel 2004 [1915]). However, it is worth noting that those clichés, due to lack of professionalism of the authors, technological difficulties, and low image quality, could not be shown. The commissions themselves might have used engravings and drawings “based on photographs” (Chaumeil 2009, 48), a feasible conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of the material.

held in Lima in 2014 (that same year the exhibition moved to Iquitos); and were also exhibited in the exhibition “Memorias del caucho / Revelaciones del bosque humano” held at the Lugar de la Memoria and inaugurated in March 2017 (Figure 2).

35 The use of this type of image in Lima media of the early 1910s such as *Variedades*, *The Inca Chronicle* or *Peru To-day in the* must be stressed.

36 On the history of ‘humanitarian photography’ and its use to denounce the suffering, atrocities and abuses of the non-western population, since the end of the 19th century, see Twomey (2015) and Grant (2015).

37 This is the case of the trail against the Zenón and Reátegui brothers, accused of the flogging and kidnapping of indigenous people from their hacienda on the Parinari River (Loreto), in whose file a photograph is included as incriminating evidence :“An involuntary oblivion made the attached photograph remain [in] the last mail that has been sent to this Office by the Sub-Prefecture as further evidence of the act of complaint and presentation that the indigenous people of the Hacienda del Parinari practiced before this authority” (Quiroz, Rafael. Oficio del Comisionado Especial a Loreto, Rafael Quiroz, al Ministro de Justicia sobre las investigaciones seguidas a Z. y M. Reátegui por acusaciones demaltratos a los trabajadores en su propiedad de Parinari. In: Archivo General de la Nación. Prefecturas Serie, File 57, May 1898).



Figure 2. Image from the “Memorias del caucho” exhibition at the Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social (LUM), March 2017. Photo by Robert Laime, taken from: <https://tvrobles.lamula.pe/2017/03/31/lum-opens-la-exhibition-memories-of-rubber/tvrobles/> (05.03.2022).

In recent years, the selection of historical photographs and their artistic appropriations for inclusion in contemporary publications and exhibitions for the national public has been returning to the old romantic image of the indigenous Amazon people as timeless subjects in need of ‘protection’ from the threat of external agents, whether the State or private individuals, while at the same time merging it with the new global narrative of the ‘good ecological savage’, who calls for a return to territorial autonomy and *buen vivir* (‘the good life’). A strongly paternalistic discourse seems to be reaffirmed in their *representation* as ‘minors’ and ends up ignoring the complexity of Amazonian historical processes.³⁸ Thus, this reading has been unable to recognize the indigenous view of the

38 Take, for example, the historical reflections on which the successful play *Savia*, directed by Chela de Ferrari, presented in Lima in 2017 (and which was performed again in August 2018), or the documentary *Historia del caucho en la Amazonía peruana*, directed by Wilton Martínez and released in 2016. In both, copious use is made of the photographs of the rubber stamps produced by J. C. Arana – and the narrative underlying his contemporary exhibition –, both in the production and in media advertisements of his work (Planas 2017; Gómez 2017; Fowks 2017; Centro Amazónico de Antropología 2017).

rubber process beyond victimization, when it is a fact that the interactions between the rubber tappers and the indigenous populations were not always marked by relations of exploitation and violence. Rather, there was also an expression of agency and interest of the Amazonian population to “domesticate the White” through networks of exchange and mutual dependency (Santos-Granero 2018, 97).

With the end of the rubber boom and reduced public interest in the ‘events’ in Putumayo, those charges against the rubber tappers were losing steam. This was to the point that, during the economic decline of the region (1930s and 1940s), the most idyllic images of the indigenous life in the *caucheries* were recovered and exposed again before the national public opinion, many times thanks to the requests that editors and journalists presented to Julio C. Arana, by then a recognized public man settled in Lima.

In recent years, however, some studies have begun to question the dualist perspective with which they have tried to reconstruct the rubber process. To question the ‘Aranian’ image of rubber tapping fields and their physical violence as quotidian and, above all, one-directional. Like any period of violence, power relations are exercised in discontinuous ways and in diverse directions (La Serna and Biffi 2016, 133; Santos-Granero 2018, 95-98).

Therefore, the contextualization of the process of image construction and their early uses opens the opportunity to rethink and reinterpret, through the lens of our current history, the strategies of representation of indigenous people to propose critical and revisionist views of our own national history. A visual history of the Amazon containing different voices demands, in many ways, to get out of the old clichés, to escape from J. C. Arana’s photography and to look in other repositories for the opportunity to find heterogeneous views and divergent perspectives of that period.

Contemporary exhibitions were designed thinking with the materials ‘on hand’ (Figure 3): The selection of images of *caucheries* from the Chirif Collection; the Album of the Consular Trip (1912), and the Arana Collection, owned by Pablo Macera. Historical research, however, allows us to find other photographs that express different views about what the rubber process meant. From the collections that consuls produced after their trip to Putumayo – today, stored in repositories in the US, Ireland or the UK –, to the many other ‘little stories’ that the rubber industry was a part of at that time.³⁹

39 In this way, the British and North American archives contain photographic materials of members of the consular commission that, in 1912, travelled to the Putumayo river in response to allegations of indigenous exploitation by the Peruvian Amazon Co, a rubber company with British and Peruvian capital. In a recent edition of Agnus Mitchell’s work (2016), a series of photographs taken by Consul Roger Casement is reproduced. These images are housed in the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) in Washington and the National Photographic Archive at the National Library of Ireland in Dublin. When he returned to England, Casement gave copies of these photographs to Sir Edward Grey, the crown’s foreign secretary, clichés containing notes from the consul himself. This book also includes various images taken from other books, magazines and archives, in particular photos, apparently unpublished, of the United States Consul Stuart

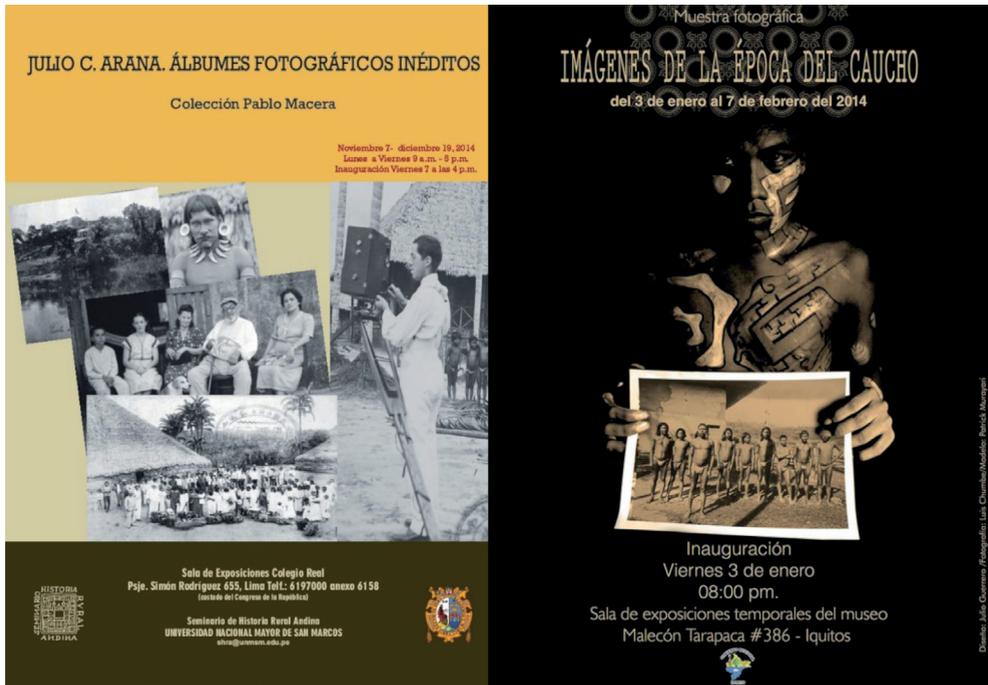


Figure 3. Posters of the exhibition on the Rubber Era and the Putumayo region. Left: “Julio César Arana. Álbumes fotográficos inéditos. Colección Pablo Macera” (Colegio Real Exhibition Hall, November-December 2014). Courtesy of the Seminario de Historia Rural Andina (ISHRA-UNMSM). Right: Traveling exhibition “Images of the rubber era” (Museo Amazónico de Iquitos, January-February 2014), taken from: <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad/98695> (05.03.2022).

Not only from the apparent opulence that – we believe –, was achieved by most of the non-indigenous subjects who gave themselves to the rubber adventure, but also from experiences, conflicts and sufferings of other less fortunate actors: boatmen, outlaws, poor immigrants, persecuted politicians or national settlers who, in many cases, ended up succumbing to the dreams of progress, fortune and immeasurable wealth projected from the Peruvian Amazon rain-forest.

Fuller during the 1912 consular trip (NARA, College Park, Maryland) and the album of Thomas Whiffen (Royal Anthropological Society in London (RAI)), as well as photos of the explorer Eugene Robuchon (Robuchon’s Album - Les Herbiers), taken during the French explorer’s journey through the Putumayo *caucheries* in 1903 (Mitchell 2016) [information provided by J.P. Chaumeil].

Conclusions: Visual Narratives of the 'horrors' of the Rubber Era

Historical photography has managed to arouse diverse interests in recent years. This is a phenomenon on a global scale. From academia to social activism, its contents and capacity to deliver them has made it a noteworthy source for discussion not only over the past, but also other topics such as memory. Therefore, for historians it is no longer just an image that accompanies a textual narrative, but has become a source itself with relevant information for the reconstruction of social processes.

Contemporary debate on the history of the Amazon region presents a series of biases that are projected on the search, selection and uses of old photographs. There is a strong influence from Iquitos in our understanding of the Amazon. In this sense, the prominent role that this port city had reached since the late nineteenth century and the emergence of *Loretanism*, a regionalist narrative about the jungle and its incorporation into the national project, highlighted since the 1940s, has ended up fixing the main place of Iquitos within the national imaginary about the East. This fact, however, has led to the marginalization of the historical study of other Amazon regions, hence appearing to public opinion as territories and populations of recent contact and conflict.⁴⁰ Secondly, much of the academic debate over the Amazon in Peru necessarily involves projecting the conditions that defined the Rubber Era beyond its specific time frame. Consequently, the periodization of the history of the Peruvian Amazon is ordered between 'before and after the rubber boom'. And finally, in relation to the above, there is a strong '*Aranization*' of this period. In other words, the figure of the businessman J. C. Arana and the experience of the rubber exploitation in the Putumayo area has been used to explain what was happening in the whole region.

In the last decade, marking the centenary of the indictment of *cauchero* J. C. Arana in Putumayo and the intervention in that case of British Consul Roger Casement, which ended up making the 'scandal' worldwide, there were a series of exhibitions, talks and publications organized in Lima, Iquitos and abroad about the violence generated by the rubber trade against the indigenous population. In general terms, the underlying narrative strongly questioned the inability of the Peruvian state and its ruling elites to carry out political initiatives that would effectively incorporate the indigenous population into the national project and – just as *Indigenismo* denounced exploitation in *haciendas* in the early 20th century – projecting the conditions of violence and exploitation of the South Andean region to the rest of the highlands, the contemporary narratives of rubber have served to evaluate the marginality of the indigenous Amazon population in the face of a national project – today claimed to be diverse and intercultural –, still unfinished.

40 In the case of the southern jungle, moreover, the powerful Andean and Incanist narrative, dominant in the Cusco and Puno academic world since the first half of the 20th century, ended up generating a profound distance from local academics with the Amazonist theme until very recent times.

Thus, these assessments have impacted the ‘discovery’, selection and exhibition of historical Amazonian photographs. Priority has been given to images that accompany critical discourses about the rubber industry and indigenous exploitation, even though rescued images do not offer a visual correlation to the constructed textual narratives. The problem stems from the fact that there is no systematized repository of national or regional photographs in the country. Thus, academics and activists interested in rubber have had to make use of few known visual references, taken from few private collections and a small number of publications of the time.

All the spaces for discussion have required the use of images exhibited in audiovisual projects or integrated into particular illustrated publications. In the vast majority of cases, the images that have been selected for their informative character and artistic value are the same images produced by rubber industrialists. This has meant that they are the same photographs, taken from a handful of private collections, that were selected for exhibition, with the aggravating circumstance that all of them were produced at the initiative of Julio C. Arana, the main defendant in the ‘Putumayo Scandal’, as a propaganda tool for the rubber industry. They were never meant to denounce conditions of indigenous exploitation, which is what academics, artists, and activists who make contemporary uses of images claim.

While it is true that there are serious difficulties in accessing visual materials within the national archive and library systems, it is well known that outside of the clichés that have been circulating in the last decade accompanying the narratives of the ‘horrors’ of rubber, there are plenty of collections that contain photographs of that period that would allow us, if necessary, to question the allegorical images produced by Arana.

On the other hand, the problem is exacerbated when a discourse that wishes to be critical of national history happens to reproduce recurrent mistakes such as deep romanticism and paternalism, expressing an inheritance of dualist and schematic discourses of traditional history, projecting itself through its circulation in the media, as a ‘truth’ beyond other more heterodox looks of the Amazonian historical process. This pertains specifically to the understanding of the rubber period to explain other regional historical dynamics. This narrative of ‘denunciation’, however, is not new. It emerged in Peru around the 1960s and has been fundamental in favoring the political emergence of the Amazon indigenous movement, strengthening its demands *vis-à-vis* the state and the rest of non-indigenous social actors in the Amazon territory. It also has strong academic support from non-governmental organizations, activists and professional anthropologists, who have participated in large part in its construction and consolidation within the public debate and even in the elaboration of recent state policies.

The academic and activist perspective – which today is dominant – that seems to reaffirm the timelessness of rubber – and, in many cases, of the indigenous population of the Amazon – is reflected in the selection of historical images and in their exhibition. Nevertheless, a regionalist production has insisted – with its own Loretanist slant – on

reaffirming the complexity of the Amazon process from the experience of indigenous actors and settlers, mestizos and immigrants, who have actively participated in the construction of local spaces, as it has been underscored in recent exhibitions of Antonio Wong's work or Augusto Falconi's pictures in the city of Iquitos.

Just as at the beginning of the 20th century the literary world continued to talk about the Amazon in terms of exoticism and remoteness, and the cultural, political and business elites with a presence in the region undertook the construction of a photographic corpus that would influence the modernization and nationalization of spaces within the country as an exercise in self-definition of the modern national state, today the character of 'truth' acquired by visual narratives built on historical photography should require us to assess the efforts needed to construct a critical insight that accounts for the complex process of national construction in this 'frontier' territory.

Reaching these other views of rubber requires us to go into various regional, national and foreign repositories, archives and collections. And, from these visual documents, to question the apparent veracity that the narrative built around the – recently 'discovered' – photographs of rubber tapper Julio C. Arana has acquired in the last decade.

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