

SECRETS FROM PUTUMAYO

by Aurélio Michiles

LAURA P. Z. IZARRA AND MARIANA BOLFARINE (EDS.)

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São Paulo - 2021

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FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE DOCUMENTARIOS
INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL
2020

SECRETS FROM PUTUMAYO

THE AMAZON JOURNAL OF ROGER CASEMENT

"NEARLY PERFECT"
Fernando Meirelles

"A MASTERPIECE"
Walter Salles

STEPHEN REA

as the voice of Roger Casement

a film by **AURÉLIO MICHILES**

24 VPS FILMES presents

Interviews: ANGUS MITCHELL, BARTOLOME A. TOKEMUY, OLAS H.C. CAIMEIRA, EDWIN R. TETEYE, LUZ MARINA REMIY, MANUEL ZAFIAMA, MILLER TETEYE, MILTON HATUOM, Roger Casement, DORI CARVALHO
screenplay by: AURÉLIO MICHILES, DANILO GOLLANE, ANDRÉ FINOTTI, executive producer: PATRICK LEBLANC, director of photography: ANDRÉ LORENZ MICHILES, editor: ANDRÉ FINOTTI
music: ALVISE MIGNOTTO, sound supervisor: MIRIAM BIDERMAN (ABC), sound design and mixing: RICARDO REIS (ABC), additional cinematography: FABIO BARDELLA, sound engineer: LEO BORTOLIN
line producer: SIDNEY MEDINA, co-producers: IMAGEM CÉUVAGEM, associate producers: FOGO FILMES, LOCADORA EQUIPAMENTOS CINEMATográficos, produced by: PATRICK LEBLANC

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SUMMARY

FOREWORD	9
<i>Stephen Rea</i>	
PREFACE	13
<i>Mariana Bolfarine and Laura Izarra</i>	
FILMING SECRETS FROM PUTUMAYO	17
<i>Aurélio Michiles</i>	
<i>Translated by Thiago M. Moyano</i>	
INTERVIEW WITH ANGUS MITCHELL	33
<i>Aurélio Michiles</i>	
<i>Transcribed by Mariana Bolfarine</i>	
INTERVIEW WITH MILTON HATOUM	59
<i>Aurélio Michiles</i>	
<i>Transcribed & Translated by Mariana Bolfarine</i>	
VOICES FROM LA CHORRERA	71
<i>Aurélio Michiles</i>	
<i>Translated by Eda Nagayama</i>	
THE FILMS OF AURÉLIO MICHILES	93
<i>Angus Mitchell</i>	

PREFACE

It is a great honour for the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies to publish this book on the making of the acclaimed documentary *Secrets from Putumayo* by the Brazilian filmmaker Aurélio Michiles.

The film is based on the *Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* and it received an honorary award at the Brazilian Film Festival *É Tudo Verdade* [It's All True]. The film received numerous critical reviews praising its powerful story narrated by the voice over of the Irish actor Stephen Rea and its photography in black and white, which added to the dramatic accusations of the atrocities against the indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazon that Casement witnessed during his journey to the Putumayo region in 1910.

The overlapping temporalities and locations brought to life the violence of colonial power, first in the Congo and then in the Amazon, with the extermination of the indigenous communities seen through Roger Casement's eyes and registered by his voice and pen. The resignifications of archives converse with the present interviews to the descendants of those peoples who perceive how much their present is linked to the past. However, the new generations have chosen to work through the trauma suffered by their predecessors, and this is revealed by their moral stance and strength to preserve their culture and reimagine their future with education and hope of transformation.

Following the investigations, Casement returned to Ireland completely transformed by his experience in the Amazon and turned into a rebel who was hanged as a traitor to the British

Crown for having been caught smuggling German guns for the Irish rebels involved with the Easter Rising in the middle of the Great War.

Aurélio Michiles aesthetically interweaves the three historical facts in the interviews with historian Angus Mitchell, Brazilian writer Milton Hatoum and the indigenous leaders. He makes symbolic parallel shots of the return of Casement's remains to Ireland with the indigenous men, women and children watching an old airplane on the runway of a landing field. The flashing images of these people at the regional aerodrome create a metaphorical dialogue with Casement's full state funeral in 1965 disclosing the Putumayo people's hope in rescuing their history through the publication of Casement's writings at the end of the twentieth century.

This book on *Secrets from Putumayo* opens with a statement by the renowned actor Stephen Rea and his thoughts on Casement as an Irish historical controversial figure. It is followed by Aurélio Michiles describing the origin of his project and the process of creation of this poetic documentary. The full transcriptions of the interviews to Angus Mitchell and Milton Hatoum, together with the statements given by the indigenous leaders, help to understand the importance of Roger Casement as a pioneer of what we nowadays call Human Rights. Finally, Angus Mitchell critically introduces Aurélio Michiles' noteworthy filmmaking career.

Since 2010 the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies has been developing research on Roger Casement with the lead of Angus Mitchell, Laura Izarra and Mariana Bolfarine in order to make Casement's presence in Brazil known through his reports, his journals and fictional representations of his life and work in the beginning of the turn of the twentieth century.

In these last decades when the Amazonian region has become the centre of international debate, the translations of Casement's *Amazon Journal* into the Portuguese language and now into a Brazilian documentary by Aurélio Michiles and his

team – Danilo Guillame (co-screenwriter), André Finotti (editor), André Lorenz Michiles (photography), Alvisé Migotto (music) and Patrick Leblanc (producer), just to mention some of the many collaborators and professionals who made the film possible – have brought the academic work to the general public adding a new chapter to the Brazilian and world history.

Laura P.Z. Izarra

Mariana Bolfarine



Still equipe. Pista de pouso em La Chorrera. April 2019

FOREWORD

Roger Casement was a man of such character and nobility that it seems impossible to personify him with any justice. He was not an ordinary British diplomat. The Ireland he came from, and held allegiance to, had been viciously colonised by the English and this coloured his world view of Western European imperialism throughout the world.

... that is the English character ... to crush an Irish national movement they would commit any crime today, as in the past – they have no conscience when it comes to collective dealing – individually the Englishman is a gentleman often and frequently very charming – collectively they are a most dangerous compound, and form a national type that has no parallel in humanity. Like certain chemicals – apart harmless, brought together you get an infernal explosive or a deadly poison...

While Irishmen are to be armed out of Ireland, to do the work Englishmen themselves cannot or will not do, it is to be high treason to dare to bear arms in Ireland! What consummate tricksters and hypocrites the English are – and what eternal slaves and fools, the Irish!

Who will restore the destroyed Irish race, the dead Irish tongue, the murdered Irish music, the wealth of gentle nature, loveable minds, high temper and brave generous heart of the Irish? It is naive to believe that the coloniser will, all of a sudden, grant their right to freedom. Never! No empire has ever been destroyed without resistance.

Casement's resistance was not merely military. Continuing the cultural resistance of The United Irishmen in 1790, Casement and F.J. Bigger, among many inspired interventions, purchased uilleann pipes for Francie McPeake, helping to create a new line of musicians, restoring the great tradition of Irish music in the North.

In his capacity as diplomat for the British foreign office, Casement traveled to the Putumayo district and witnessed the treatment of the local Indians of Peru. He detailed the rubber companies' continued use of pillories to punish the Indians. Men, women and children were confined in these pillories for days, weeks, often months – whole families imprisoned, fathers, mothers and children and in many cases there were reports of parents dying thus, either from starvation or from wounds caused by flogging, while their offspring were attached alongside them to watch, in misery themselves, the dying agonies of their parents.

Roger Casement was hanged for treason in August 1916 in Pentonville Prison. His remains were finally returned to Ireland for burial in 1965. President de Valera, who was very ill at the time, was advised not to attend the funeral, but he insisted on doing so. The doctor asked him to at least remain in his car and not walk behind the coffin. De Valera said “I think Casement deserves better than that.” De Valera in the funeral speech said “... it requires great courage to do what Casement did...” and that “... his name would be honoured, not only here in Ireland but by oppressed people everywhere, even if he had done nothing for the freedom of our country”.

Though he had asked to be buried in Murlough Bay in County Antrim a location very special to his family, the British refused permission for this as they thought it might anger Loyalists. I visited there myself to pay respects at the small memorial plinth dedicated to Roger Casement and found that someone had recently defaced the stone with a disrespectful spray of urine. I hope my devotion to the life and ideals of Roger Casement outweigh that miserable dribble of Loyalist piss.

It was my honour to provide the voice of Roger Casement for this film.

Stephen Rea

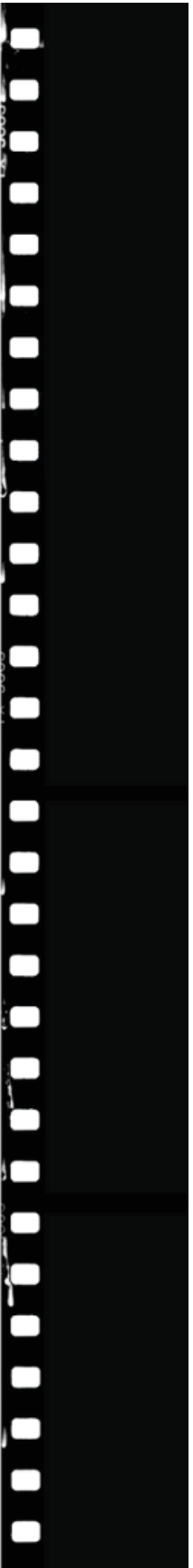


Photograph: Still equipe
Aurélio Michiles, Stephen Rea and Angus Mitchell, February 2020
Windmill Lane - recording studio, Dublin, Ireland

Filming Secrets

Aurélio Michiles

Translated by Thiago M. Moyano



FILMING SECRETS

“Any vision of our life and our environment can, through documentary, reveal unsuspected secrets. In a nutshell: reality, bare reality in its intimate essence.”
- *Michelangelo Antonioni (1937)*

“I shall not be the agent of silence, but I hope of the voice of freedom.”
- *The Amazon Journal Roger Casement
(La Chorrera, Sunday, 11.06.1910)*

I was born in Manaus and at home one could have a glimpse of the Amazonas Theater, probably the reason why I have always been drawn to reflect upon the Amazon’s rubber boom. Who built it? How could that monumental architecture have been erected in the middle of the rainforest?

It can be argued that one of the most recurring themes in film, literature, and journalism is the Amazon. However, the Brazilian cinematography still had not had a film that brought to light questions on the “rubber boom” within the world’s geopolitical trade.

Rubber is a resin extracted from only one plant (*Hevea brasiliensis*) found in the Amazon rainforest, which generated an extraordinary cycle of wealth to the region, placing it as a world economy protagonist between the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

The industry back then developed a growing dependence on rubber – the commodity that made the world run faster. This

wealth cycle of four decades was enough to establish numerous histories and stories that continue to impact the Amazon. These histories and stories are intertwined in the region's modern imaginary. Even if simply as an escape route, something intangible by the new generations.



Still equipe: Aurélio in action. April 2019

The Amazonian mythic vision that startled the first colonizers and explorers was an invitation to reach the end of the rainbow and share the pot of gold. As an act that would take place among peers, in broad day light, why would anyone care about a natural predatory action in light of so much abundance and generosity?

During my childhood, in order to see this looting that had been done for over four centuries, one should only walk through the commercial streets, where offices and warehouses were located, on Teodoro do Souto, Barés, Marechal Deodoro,

Marquês de Santa Cruz, and Ladeira dos Remédios streets, or on Eduardo Ribeiro Avenue... Everywhere piles of *sernambi* (rubber) could be seen alongside piles of exotic animal leather: snakes, otters, alligators, jaguars, ocelots and other animals waiting to be embarked towards the North American or European consumer market.

The city stench with odors from these products, and have become not only part of my own olfactory memory, but also that of some generations of Amazonians.

Those who were born in the 1950s (such as myself) were the last ones to witness the physical presence of this cycle of wealth which was in its economic decadence. The lethargy to which the region had been subjected to was visible. There were certain dispirited characters wandering off in the streets, singled out by others as the heirs of a lost fortune.

Back then, rubber was referred to as if it was itself a life buoy that we had lost in a shipwreck. The city that once prospered suddenly saw its inhabitants leaving almost everything behind; at least their homes, abandoned palaces, became qualifiers: "old-houses". It was not a ghost town per se, life kept on going in endless lassitude and in this atmosphere of "once having had"; statues, bridges, streets, avenues, public squares were like a film set that had been left behind after shootings.

In those abandoned palaces, enormous bold trees grew in the middle of dining rooms, breaking the marble floors, Venetian tiles, molded frescoes on the walls, recreating a pictorial image, with mosses of many green shades that could have been made by a modernist artist; or tree branches and vines creeping up on iron railings recreating an "art nouveau of nature". It looked as if the jungle had reclaimed the space of which it had been expelled. To us, it was merely a refuge to start transgressing against the forbidden, challenging fear, amidst anthills, beetles, snakes, lizards, vegetation (*enviras*, *tajás*, nettles) and dried excrements, recent or petrified. Those "old houses" were our territory of discoveries and adventures.

Many of which were marked by tragic episodes that defied our playful visits. On one occasion, the homeowner had committed suicide upon realizing he had lost all his fortune after the Amazon rubber prices dropped in London stock market. In another one, a mysterious fire transformed an entire family's wealth into ashes. Inside the houses, each family carried an inherited story from this cycle, be it through their grandparents and great-grandparents who had experienced it, be it through grandparents and great-grandparents who had escaped from the Northeastern droughts and sought new opportunities for wealth in the latex collection. Between these two ends of the spectrum was the indigenous heritage, of whom narratives were far from pleasant, and brought horror and prejudice to light...

The indigenous would insert themselves into these narratives as an outsider, who prevented the northeastern man from walking into the rainforest for the milk of the rubber tree. The indigenous man was an impediment, though he was also the one teaching survival skills. One could hear stories such as "my grandfather killed a lot of indians out there, he even had a necklace made of their ears". They dehumanized the indigenous existence and their civilization. The indigenous peoples were "invisible"; therefore, any violence could have been practiced against them, even to the point of extinction. Luckily, the stories heard and told by the women who worked in our houses as domestic servants, many of whom came directly from an indigenous community, gave us access to other versions of the events in the rainforest. These women were the "*cabocla*¹ Scheherazades". They were part of my own story.

Nordestino, Arigó²

My maternal grandfather Joaquim Cândido de Oliveira came from Sobral, Ceará, in 1903. He was very young, not older than 18. He was avid for the opportunities promised by the rubber

¹ Caboclo means mestizo of white with indigenous, with copper coloured skin and straight black hair.

² "Nordestino" is a person who comes from the Northeastern region of Brazil; "Arigó" is a person who works in the fields.

and had heard of migrant northeastern men who had become extremely wealthy. So, made up his mind. But once embarked on the ship that brought not only him, but other dozens of workers, they were not allowed to disembark at the mythic Belém, let alone in the city of Manaus. They were all left along the Solimões River (Amazonas) amidst the rubber tree landowner estates. Then my grandfather, Joaquim Cândido, realized he would be subjected to the orders of some man in Parintins, and that he would be sent to the rubber plantations where jaguars, leopards and mosquitoes abound. He, who had already gathered some information on the atrocities perpetrated against laborers, reports of enslavement and conflicts with indigenous communities, stories of hunger and malaria, he knew right there and then he had been had. So together with other workers, he decided to run away and get lost in the wilderness along the shores of the Solimões River (Amazon). My grandfather was extremely lucky, having been able to survive after facing the rainforest, crossing rivers, reaching the town of Maués, where he asked for the help of a local parish priest. My grandfather was a skilled stone mason and a carpenter. Thus, he soon became "Master Joaquim", a maker of homes, windows, doors, tables, chairs... also a great storyteller. He had heard and told stories about the hardships in the Amazonian rubber plantations. And these stories were somehow kept in my memories.

My Documentaries

As a documentarist, I have always tried to reveal the rubber boom history from the point of view of the workers coming from the Brazilian northeast who had been involved in the extractive economy. During the first wave between 1872 and 1900, approximately 260 thousand northeastern people were taken from the drought of their region towards a drenched Amazon. During World War II, northeastern men were once again the workforce to extract latex, this time amounting around 55 thousand, the so-called "Rubber Soldiers", according to the patriotic propaganda led by Getúlio Vargas' administration. The

Brazilian anthropologist and politician Darcy Ribeiro used to say that this was “the forgotten World War II battle”.

In 1992, I directed the documentary *A Árvore da Fortuna [The Tree of Fortune]* for TV Cultura channel. In this film, the objective was to talk about the rubber extraction in the Amazon. In 1997, *O Cineasta da Selva [The Filmmaker of the Jungle]* sought to narrate the life of Silvino Santos (1886-1970), a cinema pioneer in the Amazon who worked for big rubber entrepreneurs, more specifically the Peruvian Julio Cesar Arana, owner of the Peruvian Amazon Company, at the time accused of mistreating rubber workers – the indigenous people from the Putumayo region. Silvino Santos was the photographer and filmmaker hired to produce images that could disavow Roger Casement’s (1864-1916) powerful testimony.

The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement

I finally became aware of the *The Amazon Journal* of Roger Casement in 1997, having received it from the author and historian, Angus Mitchell, at the time living in Brazil. However, it was only in 2013 that we decided to transform the British diplomat’s journey in the Amazon rainforest into a film. This journal brought about many of the answers that I had been looking for over the years. Even better: the character had had a life story challengingly hallucinating.

In fact, Roger Casement was an Irish man serving the British government who, after denouncing the massacres against workers in Congo and the Amazon and returning to Europe, becomes an activist for the Irish emancipation from British rule, reason why he ended up sentenced to death. He was unfairly considered a traitor by the British Empire, but for the Putumayo’s peoples and Irishmen, Casement is a hero. As said by Miller, a Bora indigenous man, in his statement recorded for the film:

In History we always hear about Roger Casement, his presence in our territory. Had Mr. Roger not been vocal, letting the world know what was going on here, our ancestors would have been completely

extinguished. Many of our clans disappeared, not having a single representative left. So, we are thankful for everything he did for us.

Roger Casement is a “ghost knocking on the door” of the humanitarian consciousness... It had been over a century since Casement wrote his *Amazon Journal* and, even then, the facts narrated therein continue to mirror the present. Not exactly in the same way, of course, but indigenous rights, rights to self-determination, are in evidence and the indigenous peoples we met have stated they have not been able to plan the future of their territory and have expressed their dissatisfaction with the bellicose advances of new “bosses” who openly threaten their existence.

The Journey to the Putumayo

When due to budgetary issues in the production, we had to decide with who, where and how we would shoot the documentary; the journey to La Chorrera, in the Colombian Putumayo-river could not have been left aside. We needed to see and hear stories from Uitotos, Boras, Ocainas, and Muinanes on the tragic events experienced by their ancestors more than a hundred years ago. What would be the memory that was kept alive?

After a long journey all the way from São Paulo, Lima to Bogotá, we drove during eight hours to the city of San José del Guaviare, where we took a small plane, which curiously had been used in World War II, to get to La Chorrera.

La Chorrera

At night we were invited for a collective gathering with the whole indigenous community in La Chorrera. They wanted to know the real reason behind our journey. After some hours with interventions from many local leaderships and further clarifications, we were finally authorized to begin filming.

What had impacted me the most about my short stay in the Putumayo amongst the indigenous peoples from La Chorrera was

that they constantly showed me that hope, in their viewpoint, was always a menu to be served, and never put aside.

One of the interviewed indigenous women, the Uitoto leader Luz Marina, stated: “In the past women only took care of the home, but we are currently involved in the process of leadership, questioning our own resources. That’s why the Secretariat for Women was created within AZICATCH (Association of Town Halls of Traditional Authorities of La Chorrera). Looking ahead, we already have the Arana House, a school that helps us prepare the youngsters. We want to open a university to train professionals, so people would not have to go to the city. In the city one gets lost in interculturality. We often absorb bad examples from the West and we bring them out here. We want to maintain our culture, to have La Chorrera as a great but traditional people, to strengthen our four peoples’ cultural identity, and to keep our mother tongue”.

In an interview recorded with pajé Blas, from the Okaina ethnic group, when asked what the threats experienced by his people were, he answered:

For us today that threat is not far away, it is present in the indigenous comrades that study with the white men. Once finished their studies, they come back to explore their own hermanos that don't have the same knowledge. In the past the missionaries wanted our language and religiosity to disappear. Education was imposed by them. In the last few years, we have seen dealers, groups outside the law, drug trafficking. In 1978 there were hunters for the fur trade. Recently we are threatened by the Free Trade Agreement, neoliberalism and other multinational interests. These are the threats. The State does not want to recognize our rights as indigenous peoples. The State calls them 'indigenous rights' but we, as 'indigenous peoples', think that these rights do not exist just for our own people. South America belonged only to the indigenous peoples when the Spaniards and the Europeans from other countries came and made themselves the owners. Originally the territories of South, North and Central Americas belonged to the indigenous peoples.

As producers of the documentary, we have the historical commitment to give voice to those who have been denied one, and by making *Secrets from Putumayo* I wanted to make a film that would reveal the most horrible side of our heritage, the indelible mark of the colonizer on the indigenous souls and bodies, under the racist brutality that is still a reality these days.

According to estimates from the Institute for Development Studies and Peace (Indepaz), at least 254 leaders and Human Rights activists were killed in 2020 in Colombia, among them some leaderships from the Putumayo region.

Photography

One of the thrills of shooting in La Chorrera was to image the pioneer Silvino Santos registering, in photographs and films, scenes from our hosts’ ancestors. Silvino carried his heavy equipment, with less technical resources, a Pathé camera, wood and iron, fixed focus and a handle. He had filmed in that place under much more adverse



Photograph: Still Equipe. André Lorenz Michiles e Dori Carvalho. April 2019

conditions than our staff had to face. Silvino with his Pathé camera (1910), and us with a digital Sony A7sll (2019).

Since the beginning of the project, photography was central. We wanted to make a film on the most heinous episodes experienced in the Amazon, one that is called by the Putumayo indigenous peoples the “indigenous holocaust”, contrasted with the exuberant landscape of the region. Alongside the photography director André Lorenz Michiles, we decided to use black and white images. The images would be divided between fictional and documental. Documental scenes would be run in regular speed so that they convey a sense of reality. The fictional ones were shot in 48 and 36 grams (depending on the action) creating a suspension of time in a way the viewer could be connected to the past. We used a highly contrasted black and white to guarantee dramaticity to the image. The black and white images were also used to soften the cuts with archival images. As for the use of drones, we wanted to show the character’s loneliness (in a small scale) navigating the rainforest, the waters, the skies,



Léo Bortolin, Sidney Medina, Yeda Oliveira, Dori Carvalho, João Tavares, André Lorenz Michiles, Aurélio Michiles, Johanna Leblanc e Fabio Bardella – Rio Negro April 2019

and also to show how far from the political and economic center dictating the rubber boom the indigenous peoples were.

And Much More

A lot more could be said about the process of bringing the film to life over five years of many stories. The involvement of each and everyone who participated in this journey was key to make it happen. The production almost became a religion with the involvement of the technical and support staff.

Each one engaged in the production, such as the screenwriter Danilo Gullane, the editor and co-screenwriter André Finotti, with whom I had not had the opportunity to work. With Alvis Migotto who worked on the soundtrack from Toronto in many exchanges to reach the final piece. Miriam Biderman and Ricardo Reis (sound editing and mixing), Isabel Lorenz Michiles (costume), Dori Carvalho (actor) were part of the same dynamics. A great deal of this process took place amidst the covid-19 pandemic, when we no longer could meet each other face to face.

In La Chorrera, it was moving to watch Leo Bertolin operating the sound in the middle of the Putumayo forest, many times alone capturing the night sounds. Fabio Bardella operating the drone under the weather and fear that the equipment would be lost in the jungle or the river. Sidney Medina in the production articulating our movements throughout the river.

I would like to highlight, of course, the partnership with the producer Patrick Leblanc, who supervised the entire production for five years and who helped me get to the best film possible. Moreover, he worked as a rigorous and efficient iconographic images researcher.

Narration

Doing Roger Casement’s voice over, we could count with the participation of the Irish actor Stephen Rea, renowned worldwide

with *The Crying Game* (1992). Roger Casement's texts narrated by Rea were added to the metaphors, creating a new level of narrative that was not omissive, in which the narrator is made present, exposing introspectively and explicitly the dramaticity of the Amazon discoveries. The evolution of his outraged messages and nuances of the voice involve us and make us into accomplices of his anger, so that the narration is powerful. Rea with his narration brought about the essence of the indignant testimony.



Photography: Sill equipe. Aurélio Michiles Stephen Rea and Angus Mitchell

Testimonies

The testimonies recorded and used in this film elucidate, move us, and are even didactical regarding historical references, specifically in the accounts by Angus Mitchell and the novelist Milton Hatoum (one who was also part of the generation of Amazonians I described in the beginning of this text).

The testimonies by the La Chorrera indigenous peoples, descendants of the massacre victims, were so strong that it was very difficult to choose which ones should be in the final cut. I thank all of those who were willing to collaborate and reveal their most intimate emotions about the *Secrets of the Putumayo*: Manuel Zafiama Ekirey, Luz Marina Zaita, Blás Candre, Miller Teteye, Edwin Teteye and Bartolomé Atama.



Photography: Sill equipe. Léo Bertolin, Fábio Bardella, Patrick Leblanc, Johanna Leblanc, Angus, Mitchell, Aurélio Michiles, André Lorenz Michiles, Milton Hatoum e Yeda Oliveira.

Finally

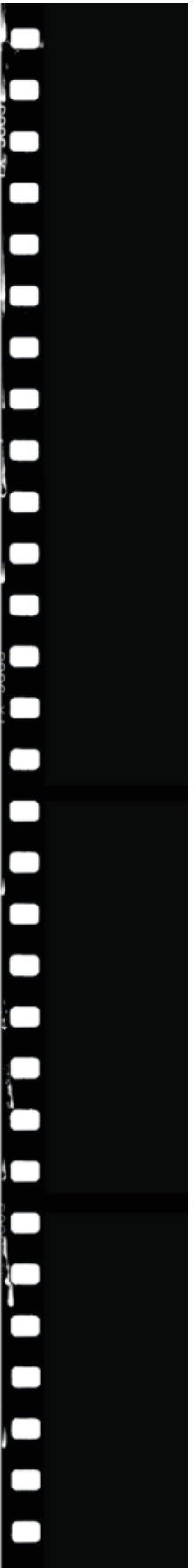
All of this work would not have happened without the partnership with the historian Angus Mitchell, professors Laura P. Z. Izarra and Mariana Bolfarine, as well as Yeda Oliveira, accomplices in the process of turning 469 pages of *The Amazon Journal* of Roger Casement into a film.

The film *Secrets from Putumayo* is an opportunity for a wider audience to get to know this relevant historical figure and this episode of the Brazilian, Colombian and Peruvian Amazon.

Aurélio Michiles

Interview with Angus Mitchell

Aurélio Michiles
Transcribed by Mariana Bolfarine



INTERVIEW WITH ANGUS MITCHELL

In 2019, the XIV Symposium of Irish Studies in South America was hosted by the University of São Paulo when the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies celebrated 30 years of existence. The W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies at its 10th anniversary co-organized the event entitled “The State of the Art: Local and Global Contexts in Dialogue” and invited its researcher Angus Mitchell to deliver a keynote address. As editor of Roger Casement’s Amazon Journal, diaries and reports he has given courses and participated at various events in Brazil since 2010 establishing an enriching dialogue with all those interested in the rubber period and transatlantic economy of the beginning of the twentieth century. At the symposium, filmmaker Aurélio Michiles presented a trailer of his work-in-progress and interviewed Angus Mitchell during his stay in São Paulo to be part of the narrative of Secrets from Putumayo.



Still equipe. Aurélio Michiles and Angus Mitchell in set.

Aurélio Michiles: Angus, would you tell us about Roger Casement as a historical figure of his time, how was life then and what the world was like.

Angus Mitchell: Casement was born within a generation of the Irish Famine. He is part of that collective trauma, the post-traumatic stress disorder, if you like, that Ireland had to somehow process in the late nineteenth century. As he grows up, Ireland is increasingly unstable: the land wars, Fenianism and the discussions around home rule. All this plays a part in his own character formation and world view. In his late teens, having been mainly schooled in Ireland, he decides that he does not want any more of it, so he goes to Africa and signs up as a colonial officer in the Congo Free State, as it became. So, I think in some sense there is always a side to Casement, which is trying to escape from Ireland, but at the same time his whole life is about trying to return to Ireland, which he eventually does, but under very extraordinary circumstances. But his relationship to and understanding of Ireland changes through his experience of the colonial frontier. As he begins to witness colonial violence and colonial slow violence, to borrow Rob Nixon's phrase, his own understanding of Ireland's historic connection with England starts to shift dramatically. He involves himself from the late 1890s onwards with different aspects of the Cultural Revival in Ireland. His fifty-one years life can be read as a long and profound metamorphosis into a revolutionary and there is an evolutionary logic to that transformation.

There is a revealing and cryptic comment by the writer Virginia Woolf, made in about 1924, where she reflects on the advent of modernism. She observed that "On or around December 1910 human character changed". The relationship between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children shifted, she believed, and "when human relations change, there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature". It strikes me as significant that Casement returns to England after his

Amazon investigation in December 1910. Certainly, he has been profoundly changed by what he has experienced in the Amazon. And I often wonder, if Virginia Woolf had Casement somewhere in mind when she made that comment, and the reason I say that is because the first novel she writes, which is a deep critique of global capitalism, is *The Voyage Out*, which is framed within a journey up the Amazon.

Casement profoundly influenced his generation in both England and Ireland, but also everywhere he went; and we can see the result of that a hundred years on: someone who remains culturally dynamic. So, that is the character one is dealing with: a very complex personality, someone who is being radically changed by the events of his day, and someone, also, who is very much born into the tragic context that came to define the relationship between England and Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Michiles: In the 1910s, early twentieth century, there were well known authors who wrote important reflections which would influence the following Irish generations who would fight for the Republic of Ireland. It was a time when people were discussing socialism, new relationships between peoples and technological achievements. How did Alice Stopford Green's ideas motivate Roger Casement's actions?

Mitchell: Alice Stopford Green, in many ways, mentors Casement through the last twelve years of his life. They become firm friends from 1904, when their correspondence begins. There are about 90 letters surviving between them. But it seems to me that they must have known of each other before their correspondence begins. From 1904, it is clear that together they are starting to think about a more radical shift within Ireland – although they are both moderate home rulers they are also supportive of the republican tradition. They are not sure how that is going to be, but they are beginning

to very deliberately record their change in both perspective and attitude towards Ireland and Ireland's relationship with England and the British Empire. In 1904, Casement's twenty-year stint in sub-Saharan Africa, as an official, ends with his report exposing the atrocities of King Leopold II's regime. Stopford Green has also been involved in African affairs, through her work in the foundation of the African Society, dedicated to the memory of her friend Mary Kingsley. In 1905, Casement has a year out from the Foreign Office and it's then that they start to collaborate, mainly over the Congo Reform Association. But they have friends in common such as the Belfast republican, Bulmer Hobson.

It should not be forgotten that one is dealing here with the very early history of a revolutionary organization, the Irish Volunteers (that became the IRA) and it is often quite difficult to get a clear understanding of what's happening. Much communication was verbal and much documentary evidence has been lost. Both Casement and Stopford Green are very conscious that they must be careful of what they put in writing and at the same time they recognise the importance of the written word to defining their own narrative and history. By 1910, Casement is increasingly cautious about the trail of words he is leaving behind him and this is compromised further by his official consular position.

Alice Stopford Green, one of many women who has been written out of both British and Irish history, I like to think of as a high priestess of the Irish revolution. She was an extraordinarily active intellectual and a very capable historian. Few people know, for instance, that she produced a medley of Ibsen plays in London in the 1890s with the legendary Elizabeth Robins, the "Ibsen actress". Think of that: Stopford Green in at the start of Ibsen in London with Oscar Wilde and Henry James. How did we miss that! Stopford Green was seventeen years older than Casement and had an impressive network of cultural and political contacts that helped in widening his own profile. Stopford Green is close to George Bernard Shaw, Beatrice Webb, James Bryce, even Vernon Lee, she mixes in socialist and feminist and Irish nationalist circles in London, but she also has

many friends among the constellation of imperial administrators and politicians. Casement, I get the feeling, is quite besotted by her and she, in turn, admires his courage and enthusiasms. The coterie of intellectuals and politicians she introduces him to would have otherwise been completely beyond his reach. And so, he, in that sense, is beholden to her. Their collaboration in the next decade, from 1904 to 1914, becomes one of the defining friendships leading up to the Easter Rebellion in 1916.

Michiles: Which was Casement's involvement with the Easter Rising which triggered the Irish War of Independence?

Mitchell: Casement's part in the Irish revolutionary movement has never been properly and satisfactorily understood. What's clear from what has recently emerged is that as early as 1904, he was starting to take a far more active role in financing different grassroots revolutionary organizations and to preparing Ireland for defensive warfare. He adopts a far more critical line about what he sees as bad governance and the failure of the Westminster government, the London Houses of Parliament, to deliver devolution and self-determination in Ireland. From an early date, a significant part of his Foreign Office salary is being channelled into supporting these revolutionary groups and financing advanced nationalist newspapers – the mosquito press. As the political situation begins to fragment in anticipation of the third Home Rule Bill, Casement, because of the deepening polarization of politics in Ireland, takes a less compromising position. He is not the only one. He is part of a growing collective across Ireland, of women and men who want to put an end to English government. After the passing of the Home Rule Bill in 1912, and the decision by Carson to defend Ulster and the Union, Casement advocates for more radical formations of resistance.

He is intrinsic to the decision-making process that brings about the founding of the Irish Volunteers at the end of 1913, and

then the following year, a week before the outbreak of the First World War, he is one of a number of figures who successfully and strategically bring guns into Howth, just north of Dublin, and arms the Irish Volunteers. So, at that point he has played a central and critical role in the earliest history of the Volunteers. The Irish Volunteers is a complex organisation. Bulmer Hobson, Alice Stopford Green, Eoin MacNeill and others had welcomed both radical and moderate influences on the committee. There are hard-line IRB men and nationalists. Added to the revolutionary mix there are other groups: Cumann na mBann, the women's volunteer group, the Irish Citizen Army, which is James Connolly's socialist/Marxist organization. They had been raised to defend the rights of the working classes during the Dublin Lockout of 1913. Part of Casement's achievements is that he serves briefly as a go-between between those different groups. His story, defending the rights of the forest communities in the north-west Amazon or the depths of the upper Congo, becomes a unifying narrative. It captures the imagination of moderate nationalist, Connolly socialist and even the social imperialist. This is why his story matters, because it created solidarity. This also explains why the authorities went to such lengths to subvert his story – and still do. Elite power structures hate solidarity.

There has been a reluctance in several ways to accept the part that Casement played in those early months in bringing the Irish Volunteers into being. As the country divided largely down confessional lines between what is somewhat simplistically perceived as the Protestant north and Catholic south those Protestants who sided with the rebels have been hardest to include. What complicates Casement's part in that process even further is the fact that he was from a well-connected Protestant family from Ulster. There is an enduring reluctance to accept the fact that many of the key figures involved in the early formation of the Irish Volunteers were northern Protestants. Bulmer Hobson, who was a Quaker, the founder of the Dungannon Clubs in Belfast and the *Na Fianna Eireann*. This was the paramilitary

youth organization that helped to incubate recruits for both the Irish Republican Brotherhood and eventually, the Irish Republican Army. Casement was also very supportive of the shift in the women's movement towards taking more militant action. His influence and network are very wide-ranging. And although he commanded this enormous level of respect from many of the people who were involved in building capacity of different organizations at that point, I think one of the difficulties of understanding what's happening then is that he himself became tremendously secretive about his own interactions and his communication between different groups. For this, his story is remarkably fragmented and is hard to piece together. There are many silences and many secrets – and those silences and secrets need to be decoded, carefully decoded.

Michiles: There was a war of narratives about the role of Roger Casement in the Putumayo due to the simultaneous downfall of the extractive rubber economy in the Amazon. This was interpreted by Colombian and Peruvian historians as if Casement were the agent who denounced indigenous slavery to cover up the rubber production of the British empire in southeast Asia. The recent publications of the report in Peru and of the *Amazon Journal*, in Spanish and Portuguese, led the Indians to realize that, contrary to all what they have been taught along a hundred years, Roger Casement was of great importance for them to reaffirm an indigenous identity. What do you think?

Mitchell: Casement's reports detailing atrocities in the Congo Free State and in the upper Amazon are part of a much deeper political history of atrocities. At the end of the nineteenth century atrocity tales are used instrumentally to legitimise political causes and ideologies. This begins in 1870s with Gladstone's use of the Bulgarian atrocities to demonise the Ottoman Empire. Included in that genealogy are the crimes against humanity

committed by Porfirio Díaz in Yucatan that helped to trigger the Mexican revolution. The tragedy continues through to the First World War, and most obviously with the investigations of the outrages committed by the German army in Belgium against civilian populations. These events are relevant to what happens to Casement.

When Casement undertakes his journey into the northwest Amazon in 1910, he is very conscious of what is happening, or what is about to happen to the extractive rubber industry in the Amazon. And I have always felt that in some ways his report was quite deliberately constructed to maximize the affect in terms of the horror that was being committed. What the British government do with that report is that they use it to create a huge scandal around the world; and that scandal essentially brings an end, or quite a huge shift, maybe an end is too strong, in the extractive rubber economy in the Amazon. So the story, in some ways, that has come through in different countries bordering the Amazon that Casement brought the rubber industry to an end is actually true. I think, in some ways that is a valid argument to make.

But I suppose the other side to that was that there was another “life” to the report too... a sort of master stroke of subversion. Casement used that report to undermine the reputation of the British Empire. So, the report was used on two levels: by the Foreign Office to undermine the report of the rubber industry and, therefore, bring an end, or a shift in the investment away from the extractive economy in the Amazon, and the new emerging economy in southeast Asia; and Casement was using the report to expose the violence and the injustices and the inhumanity of British venture capitalism on the frontiers of Empire. But it is important to recognise how atrocity reports are being used instrumentally to change public opinion and influence markets.

Michiles: The centenary commemorations of the Easter Rising and the connected remembrance of Roger Casement’s execution

in 2016, the most popular references circulating around the world were about the Black Diaries. I would like to hear from you whether this invention of the British Empire worked or continues to work for the deconstruction of the goals to which Roger Casement dedicated his life.

Mitchell: What you can see with Casement’s life, almost from the time, from those early years he arrives in the Congo, right through into his resignation from the Foreign Office in 1913, is that he is telling stories. And he is telling stories about violence and colonial corruption and the way in which another world, in his view, a very innocent world – an “indigenous” world – is being destroyed, by what we would call today, global capital. And he leaves an immense trail of documentation on the official record attesting to that destruction. One of the great challenges in trying to write the history of Casement is that there is so much material there to be assembled and processed. His writing reaches crescendos of potency. One of those is the publication of his report in 1904 and another is his *Amazon Journal* of 1910. In those investigations he sees with extraordinary clarity the dark side of imperial power. His gaze, that penetrating honesty whereby he critiqued imperial power, was supported at an official, diplomatic level. Until 1913, the British public were incredibly proud of Casement, he was a “champion of the oppressed” and widely celebrated as the good face of empire. This was a man decorated in 1911 by the new king, George V. This was an extraordinary stamp of approval and deserved recognition for someone who had courageously risked his life for decades to defend what we might term “people without history”. This is where Casement’s subversion is fascinating to fathom. In the moment of his execution, essentially all those stories he is told, all that trail of paper that he has left behind exposing colonial violence, they transform from the story of a loyal servant into a revolutionary. His papers logically explain his path to treason to conspiring with Irish republicans, running guns and fleeing to Germany. When Casement’s treason is understood,

and it is understood well in advance of his capture in April 1916, the intelligence chiefs and those “in the know” recognise the threat he has become: an enemy of the imperial order. Months in advance of the outbreak of war he is being closely followed and surveillanced, by different agencies of the secret state.

By the time Casement resigns from the Foreign Office, he is being closely watched and no one’s quite sure which way he is going to turn. As his treason is identified with his flight to Germany in the autumn of 1914 and his letter to Sir Edward Grey of 1915, when he hands back his knighthood and honours, the inner circle recognizes that they have a not just a traitor to destroy but they have a narrative problem on their hands. To understand Casement, you need to understand how his narrative and archive are being managed. The authorities recognize that they must reclaim the critical flashpoints in his life, and they do that by rumouring at first and then producing a counter-narrative, which denies Casement the moral high ground and confuses his meaning in the public consciousness.

So, as much as there is a logic to Casement’s anti-imperial treason, there is a similar logic in the requirement to forge the Black Diaries and thereby unsettle the atrocity he has exposed and the revolutionary road he has taken. So, the Black Diaries ever since have become the way by which we both speak about Casement and we do not speak about Casement, in the sense that they have created a sexual spectacle around his life that masks his investigations on the imperial frontier. They trivialize his gaze and suggest that he is merely undertaking the journey for sexual gratification. They also sexualise the “native” in the tradition of “orientalism” and in a way that is both demeaning and de-meaning. This explains why the Black Diaries frame the most “heroic” moments of his official career: his investigation into Anglo-Belgian extractive rubber interests in the upper Congo in 1903 and his Amazon voyages of 1910 and 1911. The sexual narrative would be far more credible if it dealt with the moments when he is doing nothing, when he is sitting around bored in his

office in Santos or Belém dealing with the problems of drunken British sailors.

Michiles: Angus, what about Casement’s relationship with Germany?

Angus Mitchell: The most unforgiveable aspect of Casement’s life is how, on the outbreak of War in 1914, he decides to go to Germany. Ever since he has been accused of pro-Germanism, which is viewed as a crime in the light of what happened in the 1930s with the rise of national socialism. His actions tend to be read through the prism of the Nazi defeat which of course is incorrect. But it has placed Casement firmly on the wrong side of history.

But a prevailing myth is that the Germany that invaded Belgium in 1914 is the same Germany that goes to war in 1939. We should never lose sight of the fact that Casement is totally opposed to war. And part of what motivates him to go to Germany is his intention to initiate that process of diplomatic separation. He wants Germany to guarantee Irish independence in the event of peace negotiations. He wants to draw attention to the fact that Germany is not the enemy of Ireland. A very different relationship exists between the two countries – it is that cultural connection he wants to amplify and stimulate.

Casement was involved with several German intellectuals who had been supporters and critical figures within the Irish language movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The most obvious one would have been Kuno Meyer, a great philologist who translated early Irish texts that helped to awaken a European understanding of the importance of the beauty of the Irish language. And Casement was very close to that Irish language world. And much of that world was supported not just by German intellectuals, but intellectuals from other European countries. And so when war breaks out, Casement says Ireland has no wish to fight with Germany. Germany is not

our enemy, the Germans are our friends, he claims. The British Empire wants to go to war with Germany, but Ireland doesn't. In that sense, his decamping to Germany, in the first months of the war, is essentially a statement on behalf of an unrecognized independent Ireland, saying that the Germans are our friends. And he was never really forgiven for that. It is hard to understand the level of contempt most felt for him for how he went against the grain of the expected total loyalty expected from British subjects at that time. To this day he is accused of pro-Germanism, as if that was a crime. History is a discipline that is still invisibly determined by positions of patriotic duty.

When Casement is in Germany, he quite quickly becomes very disillusioned with what is happening there. He has no experience of German government beyond what he has witnessed as a consul; he has had friends in the diplomatic corps, and he has known a number of the German scholars involved in the Irish language movement, but he has never really had to deal with the military mind and he finds that very, very, challenging. And he quite quickly falls out with the people who he had hoped would be his allies. So, by early 1915 he has become an exile within Germany too, there is no place for him left to run, and he spends much of the rest of that year encouraging the recruitment and the training of an Irish Brigade of captured Irish Prisoners of War, but that plan is clearly not working, and so, once again, he picks up his pen, and he begins to write very, very, maliciously against, mainly the British Foreign Office, but against the mechanism of imperial power, and he starts revealing secrets, secrets that, really, should never have been revealed. And this has been a part of his biography that has never been included, and it is one that is still a challenge to unpick and process in a comprehensible way.

At the end of his time in Germany, in 1916, when the plans for the Rising start to percolate through to Berlin, Casement has been unwell – both physically and mentally – over the winter of 1915; he has had to commit himself to a sanatorium in Berlin, and he somehow manages to find a last bit of energy in himself, and

he opens negotiations once again with the German Foreign Office and Wilhelmstrasse, and he essentially starts to plan his return to Ireland. And that return is extraordinary. He returns eventually in April 1916 on a submarine; and he undertakes a voyage from Wilhelmshaven, the German U-Boat port, and travels right around the north Atlantic and comes in to Ireland in Banna Strand and there he hopes to liaise with the boat carrying rifles. But the coordination of the plan is a disaster, the AUD, which is the name of the ship carrying the rifles, is intercepted and captured and the boat is scuttled. Casement managed to land with a couple of other men, Robert Monteith and a third man, and they come ashore, and within a few hours Casement is arrested and then taken swiftly out of Ireland to London, and placed in the Tower of London.

Michiles: Casement was a very acute observer during his life in Brazil – in Santos, Belém do Pará and Rio de Janeiro. In his writings, he mentioned Euclides da Cunha, Marechal Rondon, the Chibata Revolt and a series of historical occurrences in the beginning of the century from different points of view. He also wrote about the origin of the name Brazil. Would you talk about it?

Mitchell: Casement gave a lecture when he was consul in Belém in about 1908, which was about the origins of the word “Brazil”. He made an argument that was quite current at that time, that the very word, Brazil, was an Irish word. In Irish folklore, in ancient folk memory, there is this mythical island called Hy-Brazil; and Hy-Brazil was used in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century to encourage sailors to sign up for voyages heading west into the Atlantic. So, in that sense, the myth of Hy-Brazil is comparable to the myth of El Dorado, which drove waves of conquistadores into the floresta in search of great golden cities paved with jewels. My friend Geraldo Cantarino wrote a book about this some years ago *Uma Ilha Chamada Brasil: O Paraíso Irlandês no Passado Brasileiro* (2004).

This mythical/utopian space, Hy-Brazil, as Casement argued, is part of a vernacular register of legends circulating among sailors venturing to the Americas in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Portugal's territorial claims are officially named Terra de Santa Cruz, but Casement argues that that name does not stick, because it does not sound so great, and is a bit of a mouthful, and that the name Brazil was used because it is a beautiful sounding word and retained that sense of mystery and the mythical – island of eternal youth – where everyone smiled and was happy, which, in some ways remains part of the myth of Brazil today. It is a beautiful story, but Casement was not the only person making that argument at that time, there is a rich repository of poems written by different poets paying homage to Hy-Brazil.

Casement has a love/hate relationship with Brazil. On one side he talks with a solidarity about the Brazilian people, he recognises the social injustice and he talks passionately about the environment and the beauty of the land and the remarkable fecundity of the tropics. But he was critical too of aspects of government and sees for himself, the corruption and his racial politics were structured by a very “white” view of the world. Only the indigenous people escaped this criticism. He championed the pre-Colombian world in the same romantic vein that he harkened back to the Ireland uncontaminated by English rule.

Over his seven years in Brazil and South America (1906-1912), he really got to know the country well. He circulated through the trading and diplomatic worlds of Santos, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Petrópolis. He lived in Belém do Pará and made a journey to investigate and report on the building of the Madeira-Mamoré railway. But the part he is best remembered for is the investigation that he makes, not in Brazil, but in the northwest Amazon, which is the frontier region between Peru and Colombia. There is a valuable book or thesis that should be written comparing the cultural intersections in Casement's thinking about both Brazil and Ireland.

Michiles: Did living with the Indians turn Casement into a radical in favour of armed struggles? What did he learn from them and vice-versa during his five months in the Putumayo?

Mitchell: If you read the *Amazon Journal*, what is striking is how deeply Casement identifies with the Indian life, the indigenous struggle. His daily descriptions of what he sees and hears build up into a revealing sociological analysis and history. What Casement recognizes when he arrives into the Putumayo region is that there has been a very strong and settled culture in that region that was thriving before the seringueiros came in search of rubber. What I find endlessly interesting about the *Amazon Journal* is how Casement de-centres himself from that narrative. What he is interested in doing is giving visibility and agency to the Indian, the men, women and children who are enslaved by the system.

The narrative can appear as dense and impenetrable as the floresta but it brilliantly captures the suffering of the people who have been trapped inside this “space of death”. As you read through the book you get that feeling of suffocation of “I can't breathe”. Casement is careful to map the different forms of exploitation. The *Amazon Journal* can be read for what it says about the mistreatment of Indian women. He unpicks the other forms of exploitation that women face within the system of the Putumayo rubber system, which includes their sexual exploitation. Women service the needs of the white men who run the rubbers stations. Carrying water, washing and performing menial tasks during the day and then being forced to provide sexual services. He notes how this is against their inherent cultural traditions. He also talks about how the Indians are natural “socialists”. He is reading this through the lens of the early twentieth-century zeitgeist for all things socialist. In 1910, Europe is a hothouse for new thinking around social justice, workers' rights, equality, and Casement imposes those same issues on his analysis of Indian life and the extractive rubber system.

Another critical aspect of the *Amazon Journal* is the representation of violence that includes sexual violence. Casement weaves together his own observations and the stories told to him by the Barbadian overseers that captures the genealogy of violence, brutality, manipulation of meaning and suffering. We should not forget that the *Amazon Journal* is supplemented by both the transcribed testimonies of the Barbadians and the reports he wrote in 1911 that were published in the *Blue Book*. His own achievement is to produce a mesh of testimony through which the atrocity can be understood as both social reality and historical tragedy. He spent a good deal of time sitting there on the veranda of the rubber stations quietly watching what was happening: Indian life, Indians bringing in rubber and observing in minute detail the weight of the rubber in the baskets. He is watching the exploitation of the children and the reduced physical states of those who suffer the system.



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You can see him identifying, in what can be interpreted as a homoerotic way, with the physical fortitude of the young Indian men, and it was that aestheticizing of the native body that enabled

other forms of interpretative violence to be channelled through the Black Diaries. But the aestheticization of the native body in the Amazon body is completely at odds with the sexually exploitative gaze of the diaries.

There are incredibly moving moments. For instance, the night he spends in a maloca when he is moving from one rubber station to another, and he attends to a woman who is dying before his eyes, from hunger and sickness. Casement spends much of the night just attending to her like a nurse. There is deep empathy throughout. You really get a sense that Casement is feeling their suffering and feeling it deeply and identifying with Ireland's own experience of colonial violence.

Another story he attempts to piece together is about Katenere, a young Indian cacique who rebelled against Julio Cesar Arana's regime in the Putumayo. Casement applauds how he arms other Indians and attacks the rubber stations. There is one particularly revealing moment in his journal where he talks about the fact that he would like to arm the Indians, because he really feels that the only way by which they are going to throw off the shackles of oppression is to respond with violence. We should not forget that within a few days of Casement's execution in 1916 there was a small "rebellion" in the Putumayo. But that comment only becomes significant in the context of what happens later.

After two years investigating the Amazon, Casement returned to Ireland and the disintegrating political situation. He resigned from the Foreign Office in the summer of 1913, and immediately involved himself with a campaign in the west of Ireland to relieve families suffering from typhus. The poverty was such that people were dying from basic malnutrition. Casement makes the point that this is a disgraceful situation to be happening on the doorstep of the most powerful empire in the world. He then fused the tremendous level of public interest around his campaign in the Amazon and Putumayo with his emerging determination in the west of Ireland and refers to an "Irish Putumayo" and

the “white Indians” of Connemara. The enduring anxiety of the famine is also drawn into the mix. He defends this comparison arguing that the social injustice of what is happening in Ireland is part of the same systemic brutality born of global capitalism, functioning out of sight on the periphery and enabling systemic failure that is unaccountable and beyond the rule of law. In that small campaign that he fights with Alice Stopford Green, Douglas Hyde and others in Connemara, he connects his twenty years in the Congo and his seven years as a consular officer in Brazil into an attack on Britain’s imperial “system”.

Michiles: After Roger Casement was arrested he was brought to the British Court which he did not recognize. He was condemned to be hanged as a traitor to the Crown. Could you expand on this? Is this a symbol that represents the existence of the Republic of Ireland and the British Empire?

Mitchell: I think part of the reason that Casement still drifts on the periphery of historical understanding is because he doesn’t naturally belong to any one sphere of history. So, Ireland has never really been able to reconcile the enormous contribution he made to the revolutionary generation, because he spent well over twenty years of his life working for the British Foreign Office. The anti-imperial dimension to the Irish revolution is still seriously undervalued. If you look at the conferences held in 2016 to consider the Global contexts and implications of 1916, Casement was nowhere to be seen. Eradicated.

Conversely, the British Foreign Office and the tensions within British history have never been able to reconcile the fact that the man who was knighted in 1911 and became “Sir Roger Casement”, whose name was boomed around the empire as a symbol of moral integrity, propriety and courage, ended up dangling from the end of a rope in central London at the height of the First World War. In understanding his life, there is this irreconcilable contradiction:

the interminable paradox. It is fascinating to consider how there was still a remarkable level of control and management of Casement’s meaning and relevance to history in 2016. Britain did its best to disremember him. Predictable, perhaps. The best example of that was a documentary made by the BBC on 1916 called “The Enemy Files”, narrated by the former Conservative statesman, Michael Portillo. He succeeded in telling the story of the Rising from a British perspective and avoided all mention of and reference to Casement. Ridiculous!

The silence imposed by history has been filled, to some extent, by the advent of Queer Theory, where Casement’s sexualised narrative determines and dominates his interpretation. Literary interest in Casement fills the silence imposed by his eradication from history. Casement’s queer archive has become a subject of great interest in recent years. The main state sponsored Casement event of 2016 was Fearghus Ó Conchúir’s *The Casement Project*. This amounted to a celebration of the hyper-reality of the sexualised Casement principally through dance. Though this project sought self-consciously to be overtly interdisciplinary and inclusive, it was remarkably intolerant towards anyone who doubted the veracity of the diaries. The weaponising of rumour and scandal about Casement that was adopted during his trial for treason initiated a game of queering and counter-queering of the narrative that has defined the literary afterlives of Roger Casement. Yet the advocates of Queer Theory remain remarkably intolerant to seeing the diaries as the first officially sanctioned example of state sanctioned queering of the narrative. I have trailed the Queer Theory discourse on Casement closely, and while there is much of value in that approach to understanding Casement’s representation, I think that there are times when the discourse slips into an inadvertent defence of the colonial gaze, libertarian capitalism, and the unaccountable shenanigans of the secret state. But that argument is for another day.

Casement has always been essentially caught in the space of tension and difference separating British power and Irish

resistance (currently being played out in the Brexit debacle). Another important point to think about when you consider the end of Casement's life, is that Casement wanted to wear the martyr's crown. Through generations, Ireland had produced men and women who had stood up to British power, and had died for their national beliefs, and had been executed for it – shot or hanged – and Casement was very aware of that history and aspired to be part of that genealogy. And so, those last months of his life, are essentially all about preparing for his execution and martyrdom. He writes these extraordinary letters, often from a future perfect tense. He knows the immense historic scrutiny his end will undergo. He even talks about his ghost and is conscious that he is going to reappear in future years to haunt the establishment. He provides the context and prophecy for W.B. Yeats to later write 'The Ghost of Roger Casement'. And just as he predicted, his ghost has persistently haunted relations between Britain and Ireland to this day. Aurélio's film will doubtless be another haunting intervention in that hauntology.

Britain has always found it very difficult to deal with what is called the protean power of martyrdom. States find it difficult to deal with those who are prepared to die for what they believe. And you can see it in Brazil; you can see it with figures like Tiradentes or Chico Mendes. You can see that those people who are so driven by what they believe in and their beliefs, and prepared to die for them, that when they come into confrontation with the state, and the state to some extent has to control those beliefs and their supporters, then that can lead to some very unsettling situations. You see that with Casement. Various analogies have been made between Casement and other well-known revolutionaries. Personally, I think Casement was the most dangerous revolutionary the British Empire ever had to deal with, with the exception of Mahatma Gandhi. He is still essentially haunting the interstices between Britain and Ireland. He endures as part of that voice that is condemning the continued destruction of the environment and the abandoned communities

living across central Africa and the Amazon region of South America. And that history has not ended; a narrative that is ongoing and has not passed into history. Western historiography is still about spinning yarns of progress and democracy and the legitimization of the nation state. The "native" or Amazindian is still an outsider, part of the "unpeople".

Casement's subversion in terms of his legacy and biography required the collusion of historians. Several eminent historians were drafted into different intelligence agencies during the First World War and their brief was to start framing the history of the war to create a narrative fit for victory. History and propaganda fuse during the First World War in unsettling ways and they have never really been defused. The individual who has been named as the probable author of the sexualised diaries was Frank Ezra Adcock, a distinguished Cambridge historian of classical history, who worked closely in Room 40 (British Naval Intelligence) with Admiral 'Blinker' Hall. Paul Hyde's recent books *Anatomy of a Lie: Decoding Casement* (2020) & *Decoding False History* (2021) have done much to explain this side of things. Casement's story reveals deeper levels of understanding that still permeate British and Irish academic history and designate some areas as "unknowable".

We should be thankful therefore for a figure like President Michael D. Higgins who had the foresight to give a remarkable address in the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during his state visit to Peru in February 2017, which challenged the silence.

So, Casement continues to haunt, to fester and trouble. He continues to reappear, re-emerge, and, I think, that is both destabilizing and enthralling. It was fascinating to observe how the state dealt with Casement in 2016, during the centenary of the Easter Rising, and his execution in central London. On one side the Irish State had to recognise that this was one of the great Irish rebels and subversives, who had been prepared to lay his life down for Ireland. Yet, there was another side that was conscious that enduring myths and many instruments of the secret state

had been used to completely destabilize popular understanding of who he was and what he represented. That created something of a crisis for those who were planning commemoration. Challenging those tensions was what happened to Casement in 2016 in England, which was essentially nothing. After a century of endless talk about Casement and the diaries in terms of books, press reports, parliamentary interventions, films and radio plays, there was suddenly silence.

Transcription by Mariana Bolfarine



Still Equipe. Aurélio Michiles and Angus Mitchell National Library Ireland, February 2020

Interview with Milton Hatoum

Aurélio Michiles
Transcribed & Translated by
Mariana Bolfarine

INTERVIEW WITH MILTON HATOUM

In order to add an Amazonian perspective to Secrets from Putumayo, Aurélio Michiles interviewed the renowned writer Milton Hatoum, who was born in Manaus, where he experienced the decadence caused by the end of the rubber cycle. The historian Angus Mitchell and the photography film director André Lorenz Michiles also participated in this dialogue with the Amazonian writer.



Still Equipe. Aurélio Michiles and Milton Hatoum.

Aurélio Michiles: Milton, the Amazon jungle has always been veiled in a civilizing imaginary between hell and paradise. In this context, where does Roger Casement's journey stand?

Milton Hatoum: Roger Casement's vision has evaded these stereotypes. His journey is also an inner journey, critical and reflective. Casement has a more anthropological view of the other. He is more concerned with this other that naturalists often saw or judged in a derogatory way. In their views predominated a superior gaze in relation to the indigenous and caboclos. In the *Amazon Journal*, indigenous people are not stereotyped. Casement does not highlight the exotic and the picturesque. In the novel *The Jungle*, by the Portuguese writer Ferreira de Castro, the Amazon Forest is a metaphor for a prison, and the indigenous people are barbarians. In travel narratives and other novels from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Amazon conveys an image of hell or paradise. Euclides da Cunha himself intended to write a book called "The Lost Paradise". Casement is concerned with human and labor relations, horror, exploitation, the dehumanization of indigenous peoples. In short, he is already far beyond that stereotyped vision that populated the minds of travelers and naturalists for a long time. He was introduced to the work of Henry Bates, Alfred Wallace and various other European naturalists. He knew about all of this, except that his interest was not focused on scientific research. His question was related to the human, to see the other without detachment, and what he saw was the horror of Putumayo. Casement put himself in the place of the other, that other who was exploited, enslaved, tortured; and he denounced this abomination...

Michiles: Milton, you are from Amazonas; you belong to the last generation who felt the impact of the rubber economy. You met people in person. You saw the buildings, the architecture, which was built with the money, the fortune that derived from rubber.

This certainly influenced you to appreciate the architecture and the stories that were being told everywhere in Manaus, when people talked about this Faustian past, which was decadent, sad, and the wildness of the forest invading those old palaces, reclaiming its place; all of this is mentioned in your works. You describe this landscape very well. I would just wish to know what the impact of the effect of the drop in the price of rubber was, which generated this misfortune in the daily life of the cities of Iquitos, Manaus, Belém, which we knew in our childhood.

Hatoum: Well, Iquitos, and Manaus, and Belém even more, owe their magnificent architecture to the wealth of the extractive economy. The great architectural icons and the metropolitan air that these two cities had in the beginning of the last century, or between 1880 and 1915, were all due to rubber. Without that, what would Manaus have been like, that cosmopolitan Manaus, but terribly unequal? There would be no Teatro Amazonas, no Palace of Justice, no Custom House, no Port of Manaus, and no urban infrastructure. England's economic interest transformed a village into the largest river port in South America. On the other hand, we must not forget that there was a Manaus, a Belém and an Iquitos which were marginal, with very poor outskirts, inhabited by the indigenous and the mestizos. This Manaus was not talked about; not even in schools. Manaus, Belém and Iquitos had a very poor and miserable periphery. This modernity or this "progress" was destined for an elite. And it remains so, even a century later... That is, the exuberance of Iquitos, Manaus and Belém hides the suffering and humiliation of the indigenous peoples; in the case of the two Brazilian cities, we must add the semi-slave labor among northeastern migrants since the 1870s. Behind this urban, architectural, and cultural splendor there was a nightmare, forgotten and humiliated people, who were enslaved and murdered. In 1905, Euclides da Cunha traveled through the Amazon and arrived at the mouth of the river Purus. Along this journey, he became horrified by the life conditions of

rubber tappers. In one of his essays, *At the Margins of History*, he wrote: “the rubber tapper is a man who works to enslave himself”.

Unfortunately, these essays by Euclides da Cunha are not widely read. His trip to the Amazon was made just five years before Casement, but his vision was less naive than Euclides'. Casement did not associate indigenous people with barbarism. Euclides believed in “civilization” and “progress”, in opposition to the “barbarism of the primitives”. Euclides employs the word “*selvatiquices*” [which can be roughly translated as “wildnesses”]. He still believed in racial theories, climate determinism, widespread by positivist thinkers and scientists. But none of this diminishes the enormous relevance of Euclides' essays; he was one of the first to directly criticize the sub-human conditions of rubber tappers and the destruction of the environment. Amazing, or even unusual, was the lucidity of Casement, who was born in Ireland, a country colonized by the British. In addition, he lived for many years in the Congo. He saw the indigenous peoples as he saw the Africans, as part of a humanity to which he, as an Irishman, belonged. For me this is crucial. And that's what impressed me when I read his work. For Casement, there is no longer a scale of values based on race, skin color, or origin in human beings. There is no more racial supremacy. For many Brazilians, and not just the elite, indigenous peoples must be “civilized”, assimilated to civil society. This is also what the current president and his followers claim without any shame. I think the opposite: it is the civilized that must be “indigenized”, because the “civilized” destroys nature and the lives of people who live in (and from) nature. He is a predator, while the indigenous live from nature; he is part of nature and Casement realized how they were brutally taken from the forest to be enslaved. Like Euclides, Casement criticized the destruction of the forest. Arana's company in the Putumayo not only enslaved, humiliated, flogged and punished the indigenous peoples, but also destroyed the forest. Perhaps it was the first big step towards the devastation of the Amazon rainforest in the last century. After that,

in the 1930s, there was Fordlândia¹, in Pará. In the 1970s, in the Brazilian Amazon a much more systematic and violent destruction began. Starting in 1915, when Asian rubber replaced Amazon rubber, Manaus and Belém became stagnant and forgotten.

Michiles: Taking advantage of these tragic events in the Amazon, it would be relevant to discuss the relationship between what Casement witnessed in the Belgian Congo and “The horror, The horror!” that Conrad immortalized in *Heart of Darkness*. This horror crossed continents and still remains.

Hatoum: There is a moment in the *Amazon Journal* when Casement claimed the Putumayo atrocities to be more terrifying than those in the Congo. By the way, there is an incredible passage in which he talks about his meeting with King Leopold, “*le roi des belges*”. Casement writes: “I started thinking about myself. I started questioning many things, including thinking about myself”. He lived with the great writer Joseph Conrad for three weeks, circa 1890, at a station called Matadi. In a letter to a friend, Conrad says: “Casement told me things, things I didn't know.” For a writer, this is fundamental: listening to what you don't know, because Casement's experience in the Congo was of many years, and Conrad spent little time there; so, the three weeks of interaction between the two men were important. *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's masterpiece, would not have the same dramatic force if Conrad hadn't heard Casement's stories, which conveyed what life was like in the Congo. Conrad was somewhat afraid of being directly involved in the Irish independence issue, which is why he did not participate in a petition to try to free Casement before he was hanged. Unlike other great writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, G.K. Chesterton and Arnold Bennett, Conrad wouldn't sign. The

¹ Fordlandia was a prefabricated town created by North American industrialist Henry Ford in order to produce a source of cultivated rubber for the mass production of automobiles by Ford Motor Company in the United States.

fact that Conrad was Polish with British citizenship prevented him from being more steadfast in his defense of Casement.

Michiles: Milton, the historian Angus Mitchell talks about how Casement is somewhat forgotten. However, he is present in literature, music, in politics, as well as in several great novels, like *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, with which I wanted to make a connection because the existing narratives always lead us to orientalism, africanism, indigenism; this is something that you have already talked about, but I mean more objectively in literature, even in cinema.

Hatoum: The first time I read Casement's name was in Joyce's *Ulysses*. The second time was in the famous poem "The Ghost of Roger Casement", by William Butler Yeats, the great Irish poet. I think he keeps knocking on the door, and the echo of that knock will be heard for a long time to come. It seems to have no end. The horror seems to have no end. But I got to know more deeply, let's say, about the importance of the life and work of Casement when I read the books by the historian and professor Angus Mitchell. These books led me to know more in depth about the relevance of Roger Casement, both in Africa and in the Amazon; his relevance to the world. Because what he did is not restricted to this or that country. Literature written by Irish authors, such as theater plays, radio plays and novels, was inspired by Casement's life and work – the novel *The Lost World* by Arthur Conan Doyle. In the remarkable novel *Rings of Saturn* by one of the greatest writers of the German language, W.G. Sebald, one of the chapters is dedicated to Heart of Darkness and talks considerably about Casement. Mario Vargas Llosa wrote a biographical novel, *The Dream of the Celt*, which is also the name of a great poem by Casement, who was himself a poet. He had a poetic sensibility and you can see that when you read his reports and his work, not just the *Blue Book*, but also the *Amazon Journal*. There are many

poetic and beautiful descriptions of indigenous peoples, children and adults.

This passion for the other, which is also an anthropological passion, stems from a poetic sensibility and deeply affects the reader. In the *Amazon Journal* the insurgent and the revolutionary are disclosed, but there is also the sensibility of the writer and of the poet. Anyway, I think Casement was traumatized by the violence and the barbarity of capitalism, by the device of exploitation and domination of the imperialist company. Witnessing this barbarism was perhaps a trauma for him, a trauma which became a ghost. This trauma has lasted, and the ghost begins to reappear with more force, as someone who breaks through the darkness of oblivion and reappears as a radiating power. That is why writers and poets employ the word "ghost". On the other hand, he uses the word "dream". The "Dream of the Celt" is the dream of a better humanity. But every revolutionary has this dream.

Angus Mitchell: You caught me off balance there, Milton. Then, what is Casement's importance for the world today?

Hatoum: I think that today the life and work of Casement have a very strong and relevant meaning, and I am speaking of Brazil, because we are living many things that were pointed out and that were denounced by Casement. For example, indigenous territories are being invaded. Leaders are still being murdered. It means that the horror is not over. What is read in the *Amazon Journal* is related to our times, with what is happening today. What Euclides da Cunha called "ancient brutality" has not ended. Casement's life and work encourage us to think about the present and the presence of this brutality. He did not choose a pacifist path but underwent a radical transformation. This leads us to reflect about the limits of democracy, what happens when an alleged democracy subjugates a people. It is necessary to reflect upon these issues, which are very relevant today, because they

involve the Earth's survival. We must look at indigenous life in a different way, as he did. The indigenous peoples, teach us things that we completely despise. At this moment, there is a real campaign in Brazil to turn the indigenous peoples into a kind of lumpen in the cities. This is the commitment of the current Brazilian government. Casement's desperate nonconformity led him to a radical path: the struggle for Irish independence. Thus, in Brazil we must face the issue of terrible inequality and total disrespect and contempt for the Indians.

Michiles: Milton, after the Second World War set of principles were created, which are known as Human Rights. Could you discuss the relation between the role Casement played in the anti-slavery struggle at that time and the indigenous rights which are part of the Human Rights agenda today?

Hatoum: Nowadays, Human Rights are questioned precisely because people are inhumane. They are totally brutalized. Casement's grand project was a humanitarian project; he fought for it all his life. From the moment the Other is not seen as an inferior being, you become humanized. It is also an anthropological question. When you start seeing the other as equal, as belonging to humanity, you also think about the rights of that other. Many people don't realize this. They think they are superior. This has always led to tragedies. We saw what this meant, not just in World War II, but in the countless genocides committed in Africa, Asia and Latin America. So, the issues of domination, colonialism and imperialism do not involve only force and weapons. Domination also takes place through discourse, language and forms of representation. As a "superior" being, the oppressor displays a rational discourse which is convincing; a discourse, let's say, that demeans and disqualifies the other in order to dominate him/her. This happens to this day in relation to indigenous peoples, in relation to blacks, it happens in relation to Muslims or Arabs, Jews

or Kurds. Today, white supremacist groups have regained strength and are protected by various political leaders, all of whom act with total complicity. And that is extremely dangerous.

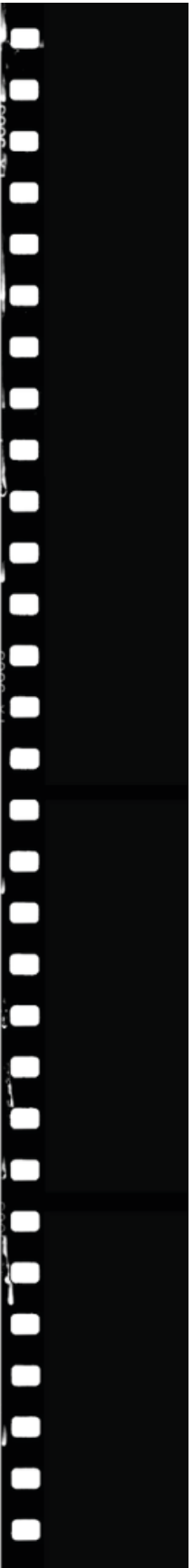
André L. Michiles: Yesterday we showed the teaser and some people questioned us about the choice of making the film in black and white. You are talking about that time of horrors and that somehow today we imagine it would no longer exist. However, deep down we continue living in this same endless time of horrors and we see the past as a black and white. Today we would supposedly think that we are living in a more developed and enlightened place, in a more colored present. So, I was wondering if you could make a reflection about us still living in this past in black and white.

Hatoum: Nowadays, black and white films must have some reason. Is the world today so colorful? Or rather, is this world filmed in the documentary full of colors and dreams or is it that the hues, the subtleties are not exactly in those tones between black and white. Could it be that, in this case, shooting in black and white would be more true? Wouldn't it make more sense to these stories and to this terrible story that Casement witnessed? I do not know. They are reflections. I think of other documentaries and black and white films... *Vidas Secas*, for example, was a great success. So, these barren, decimated lives, flogged lives and bodies, so much humiliation... Why should all this be in color? How do memories of atrocities, with their images, reports and testimonies acquire more accuracy or greater power of persuasion?

Transcription & Translation by Mariana Bolfarine

Voices from La Chorrera

Aurélio Michiles
Translated by Eda Nagayama



SECRETS FROM PUTUMAYO

During the film shooting of Secrets from Putumayo, Aurelio Michiles and his team interviewed the leaders of some of the Putumayo indigenous communities, such as Boras, Huitotos, Muninanes. They represent the different rubber stations of the Peruvian Amazon Company in the region. The statements from the Shaman Blas Candre; the Huitotos Luz Marina Zaita and Manuel Zafiamá Ekirey; the Okaina Bartolomé Attama Toikemuy and the Boras Miller Teteye and Edwin from La Chorrera bring to light transgenerational narratives from the past.

BLAS CAIMERA, shaman (Okaina)

The *seringa*¹ was extracted to be sent abroad by the Arana House. This is the blood our *abuelos* [grandparents] shed to extract the rubber milk... They were burnt, they died. This was the way they used to work.

You could find *seringa* wherever in the forest. According to the Peruvians it belonged to the Arana House.

On a daily basis, the *caucheiros* [rubber workers] were punished and, although famished, they worked extracting the *seringa*... This was an inhuman treatment enacted by the foremen,

¹ *Seringa* is a word used to refer to the latex, or caucho, extracted from the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*).

indigenous people like us, who used to mistreat and beat them, committing atrocities... It was slavery.



Blas Caimera, shaman of Okaina ethnic group, La Chorrera. April 2019

Many tribes went extinct, don't exist any longer... There was no State, they were like a multinational corporation.

South America belonged to the indigenous peoples. After the Spaniards arrived, Europeans started exploiting the land and made themselves owners. The territories of South, North and Central America belonged to the indigenous peoples.

Instead of giving them rights, the government policies were marginalizing them, actually withdrawing their rights.

The grandparents used to tell us that in the beginning life was very good and natural, very peaceful. But a time came to end this good and harmonious coexistence.

From this moment on, many of our grandparents disappeared... Boras, Uitotos, Ocainas... I will tell the story of my grandpa who became a slave in the *caucho* [rubber] labour. Our grandparents told us that they used to be mistreated when bringing *caucho*. They started using the English technique (the

fishbone cut), the Peruvian... There was empty land between Peru, Colombia, and Brazil.

The owners took my grandfather and made him cut wood, the *capatazes* [overseers] made him work, punished him.

One the day they got together and rebelled while being taken by ship from the Putumayo to Peru. It was the occasion when the ancients said: "we are not going to stay here, we will kill the whole crew". They killed and killed... They released all prisoners... Uitotos, Boras, Andoques, Muinanes... Many of the grandparents stayed in Brazil.

And then came the war between Colombia and Peru. The Colombian warship arrived. They dressed my grandfather in military uniform. He said he was neither Brazilian nor Peruvian, he was Colombian. And then the war was declared. They killed all the Peruvians and hoisted the Colombian flag here in the Putumayo.

Day To Day Life

The rubber tappers' everyday life was the same for the Boras, Uitotos, Ocainas, and Muinanes. All of us suffered the same. The grandparents could not sleep due to the fear of being punished, mistreated. They didn't eat nor sleep. They had to leave for work at 5 a.m famished and without food. There was no time to eat or rest. They walked around cutting the *seringa* and collecting the rubber milk afterwards. In that time, the mistreatments inflicted by the *capatazes* were inhuman. Even our own people committed atrocities.

In Providência some did not cut but worked as "mules" carrying the load. They were spanked when they were no longer able to walk, as if they were slaves. They had to carry it to the boat to be taken to Peru.

There were camps with rubber *bodegas* [warehouses]. Santa Luzia, Indostán, Abissínia, Oriente – these were the posts to collect the rubber.

Today we don't know how many were killed. More than 3,000 indigenous of each group: Uitotos, Boras, Muinanes, Ocainas. It may be many more. But we do know that many tribes were extinct. We don't know that group, that clan, because they no longer exist. In that time, there were no statistic data. It's not a lie. What our grandparents told us is true.

For us today that threat is not far away, it is present in the indigenous comrades that study with the white men. Once finished their studies, they come back to explore their own *hermanos* that don't have the same knowledge. In the past the missionaries wanted our language and religiosity to disappear. Education was imposed by them. In the last few years, we have seen dealers, groups outside the law, drug trafficking. In 1978 there were hunters for the fur trade. Recently we are threatened by the Free Trade Agreement, neoliberalism and other multinational interests. These are the threats. The State does not want to recognize our rights as indigenous peoples. The State calls them "indigenous rights" but we, as "indigenous peoples", think that these rights do not exist just for our own people. South America belonged only to the indigenous peoples when the Spaniards and the Europeans from other countries came and made themselves the owners. Originally the territories of South, North and Central Americas belonged to the indigenous peoples.

Arana House

The "Arana Brothers" built the Arana House in the 1920's. Here, in the heart of the Amazonian Forest. This is the house where they administrated the rubber extracted by the indigenous. The ones that were not very productive were put in the dungeon.

They were punished. They were flogged. The indigenous from Caraparaná, El Encanto, Último Retiro, Providencia or

from here, La Chorrera. All of them suffered punishments, they were badly mistreated. Some were burnt, their heads cut off and thrown into the river, right there in the well of La Chorrera. There was also a place where they were imprisoned like animals. These stories are finally been told on a mural where you can see several of these situations.

They shot against our grandparents from up here. The grandparents were kept tied onto the *cepos* [stocks], and if they survived, they were released while the dead were given to feed the dogs.

Nowadays we don't want to live the same way our grandparents did. It has affected us not only psychologically, but morally, humanly. It has, above all, caused damage to nature, to the environment where you cannot find much; the animals disappeared from this forest.

The *manguaré* [musical instrument] no longer plays sounds of joy, but sounds of war, sadness, death....

We have made the sad story of our territory known. Today we are making this documentary film so our neighbors and the globalized international world may know, and the countries may compensate for the damage caused to our people and territory.

The Cemetery for the *Capatazes*

The grandparents used to say and keep on saying that they wouldn't like the new generations to walk around these graves, the place where the major *malandros* [ruffians] of the *caucheria* [rubber exploitation] were buried. The "spirits" of the dead could attack them with lightnings. The children and the youngsters who walked around here could suffer with rheumatism... This was what our grandparents used to tell us.

Here you see, a broken tombstone. As they were not able to kill Peruvians, chiefs, capatazes, they cursed this place, casting a lightning in order to never let this disgrace happen again.

The grandparents got together in their “space of wisdom” and cast a lightning onto the grave, a lightning bolt that shattered the tombstone. It was like a curse. That’s why it’s very rare for one to come here. Because all these graves are cursed by our grandparents.

MILLER TETEYE (Bora)



Photograph: Miller Teteye, La Chorrera. April 2019

This place belonged to the Arana House and we strove to convert it into a school. I studied here in 1994.

Almost all were exterminated. A lot of sadness. We hold ceremonies, keep on resisting. Our grandparents had all the information.

The Rubber Curse

The grandparents majorly used the rubber for the manguaré. But the Arana company explored the plant, causing us psychological trauma. This plant was bad for our people, its sap caused many killings, almost all our population was murdered, close to 50,000 indigenous. It’s something terrible to talk about, it’s very painful for us.

Enviroment

The *caucheria* [rubber] was the first cycle, followed by the fur trade, and then drug trafficking. Nowadays it no longer exists. Today we are strong on the environmental issue. The territory is our life: the water, the forest, the land. We are working on that.

Roger Casement

We have always heard about Roger Casement and his presence here in our territory. If Mr. Roger had not denounced the atrocities, let the world know what was happening here, our ancestors would have been exterminated. Many of the clans disappeared, there is not a single person to represent them. Therefore, we are very grateful for everything he did.

It’s very difficult for us. Remembering causes us a lot of sadness. When our grandparents used to tell us, they were very sentimental. Now we are trying to overcome it.

Future

We will always be on alert of climate change; we are the forest protectors. We will always tell about this genocide in order not to happen anywhere else. We don’t want any people, any nation to suffer atrocities. Life is a subject that has no boundaries for us.

We mean that we want indigenous peoples to also have education and health.

BARTOLOMÉ ATTAMA TOIKEMUY
[Indigenous name: Tukuñuru]
(Okaina)

The forest is our treasure. The Arana House is the place where our grandparents were mistreated. Now we have to keep on living.

This generation doesn't want to experience the caucho slavery again. Not only in relation to caucho, but also to other products that may harm our culture.

Today we know due to our grandparents, our ancestors, that seringa caused many sad things to happen.

Someone arrived from Ireland and told us that a gentleman [Casement] disclosed the events he had witnessed here. He published this concealed information. Then we became aware of things that had never been revealed before. Today we also want to let the world know what happened so it may never happen again.

MANUEL ZAFIAMA EKIREY, *abuelo/tuxáua*
(Uitoto)

My task is to take care of the people of this territory. There are many stories from the caucheria time, many sad stories.

The Arana House was where the massacre took place. There were other places such as Athenas and Entre Rios where many

Uitotos died. The caucheria genocide happened here, in the south, in all this area.



Photograph: LManuel Zafiama, La Chorrera. April 2019

I know about those times. My grandparents were there when the caucheria began. Initially it was the kind of work that all the grandparents, all the indigenous, both men and women, searched for the seringa. The grandparents didn't know. They worked day and night... daily. They didn't know... They had a 15-day deadline. Over the time, the food became rare because the grandparents could not cultivate it. They would be punished.

When they were not able to bring the seringa, they were flogged and chained. The massacres began.

They used this path. This is a sad story, part of the caucheria.

Our grandparents' life became more and more complicated. They began to be mistreated here at the Arana House.

About 48,000 indigenous were killed. Our grandparents could do nothing. They didn't do the *chagras* [plantation plot] nor *mambe* [Amazonian coca leaf]. They didn't have time to talk, they became depleted.

The Uitotos *paisanos* [indigenous] organized themselves to fight the Peruvians... Many clans had already been exterminated. The grandpas then decided to solve this issue and to fight.

They didn't understand anything. They were scared. They killed... It was another life. No one said anything, all of them silent. As some of the paisanos had rifles, they taught how to kill the Peruvians... The total extermination of our people started there.

Our grandparents didn't talk about Mr. Casement. We realized about him due to a person who came here and brought a book that all the tribes were able to see. And all these stories were put together. The grandparents didn't know about this person, they thought he was also a Peruvian. During the recent centenary, they said it was an investigator that walked around here. We are now gaining knowledge about him. Our grandparents lost all this territory in the caucheria time.

We got together to commemorate the centenary. I personally said that we shouldn't feel all this sadness again. If we are going to persist in the investigation of our sad caucheria history, we will never aim for progress and development. We will never forget what we never forgot... Generation after generation.

Let's end this sadness...

LUZ MARINA ZAITA
(Uitoto) Women's Leader

Coordinator for Women, Family and Children – AZICATH

We say "caucheria holocaust" to refer to the slavery, to the killing of the majority of our people, from 80 to 90% of our abuelos and of our clans. It happened mainly here in La Chorrera, on the banks of the Caraparaná river. How did people live with

this killing without anyone saying anything? They were killing our citizens.



Photograph: Luz Marina Zaita, La Chorrera. April 2019

It happened 120 years ago. More than 40,000 people died. Nowadays, we consider that there were many more.

They killed more than 10,000 people inside a large maloca in Athenas. They set fire, shut it and let no one leave it. The indigenous burnt to death. My grandma told me so. No one managed to survive. The clans were eliminated, disappeared and extinct.

This territory was inhabited by a large population of different peoples. The Ocainas, Boras, and Muinanes dispersed... We are the survivors; the last ones of the resistance.

The Peruvians took our grandparents to Peru. They took many in chains in motorboats. One of them sank while leaving the Putumayo river. All drowned for being enchained.

Looking ahead, we already have the Arana House, a school that helps us prepare the youngsters. We want to open a university to train professionals, so people would not have to go to the city. In the city one gets lost in interculturality. We often absorb bad examples from the West and we bring them out here. We want to maintain our culture, to have La Chorrera as a great but traditional people, to strengthen our four peoples' cultural identity, and to keep our mother tongue.

For the future, the role of women is to create our own council, so all resources may be managed by ourselves. It will make a difference, show that women can also manage resources and lead the Association.

The four peoples' women complement the men. We are the sweet *juca* [cassava]. We sweeten the hearts of men, we sweeten the word. We are the equilibrium in the processes we are organizing.

This whole process of the caucho genocide happened here in La Chorrera, it was its headquarters. Many of our grandparents were orphaned. The missionaries helped to strengthen our culture and women were encouraged and had more power to lead. Before, they were just chagras of the home. We are currently involved in the process of leadership, questioning our own resources. That's why the Secretariat for Women was created within AZICATCH (Association of Town Halls of Traditional Authorities of La Chorrera).

My grandmother was called Margarita Kapô and was the last Nonuya. Her parents lived at the time of the *caucho* holocaust. She told me that women were mistreated when they did not bring enough *caucho*. Their hands were tied to the stocks, both legs spread, and after being flogged, they were left there. Then came the insects, wasps, mosquitoes, all kinds. They ate their private parts, the vagina. The women bled... It was very painful to remember all that. It's very sad for us all, the third generation. I feel like crying.

That's why upon completing a hundred years since all this happened, we hope to never live it again. We want all this sadness to turn into something beautiful and strengthen our indigenous resistance.

When we were children, our grandparents used to tell us stories about the *caucho*. They said they had to collect a certain weight of latex. And in the case of not bringing the quantity demanded by the Peruvians, they were punished with lashes. And they had no rest. They worked from 5 am to 6 pm.

Even the children had to work, there was no difference. The children had to collect the same amount as the adults. All the same.

Young people were mistreated, they were laid with their mouths on the ground, then flogged with tapir hide. Then they threw kerosene... They set them on fire, and some were not able to resist.

The Diary Is a Map

About Roger Casement... I read the *Blue Book*. I believe it is his memoirs, isn't it? I do know that he was the British consul and came here to investigate. He then learned of everything that was going on here, the slavery of our ancestors. The *Diary* is like a map of all the places from the mouth of the Caraparaná river to Occidente station. Several generations have read about this gentleman. Thanks to him, the whole caucho genocide that happened to our ancestors became known.

Yes, I have seen some photographs. I don't know much about it, but I saw the photographs in the *Blue Book*. It's very sad. When you read, you feel a knot in your heart, in your throat. It makes me want to cry when I see pictures of our ancestors in chains. We also have other stories told by our ancestors.

**EDWIN
(Bora)**

**Director of the Educational Institution “House
and Knowledge” former Arana House**

La Chorrera



Photograph: Still equipe. April 2019

The history of La Chorrera is very important for us who live in this region. La Chorrera emerged during the rubber period, a process that deeply affected our culture: Uitoto, Bora, Ocaina, Muinanes.

We have information that 60,000 indigenous people from four ethnic groups lived in La Chorrera. According to the census, there were only 302 people left in 1934, each one living in their own maloca [Indian thatched house]. These 302 people survived the genocide carried out by the rubber company owners, while others were forcibly taken to Peru.

This was the former Arana House and it later functioned as an orphanage for the children orphaned by the conflict between Colombia and Peru in 1932, 1933. It was the time when the process of reconstruction began, a very complex one. In some ethnic groups only 4 adults were left. They had to start creating myths and healing practices again.

Collection of Plants

The seeds were lost during the caucheria because it was forbidden to cultivate. People didn't have time to plant for their own survival. Since early morning, they collected the caucho for the “cauchero bosses”, and during the night there was no time to take care of their own things. When the period of caucho came to an end, people were left with nothing, without any seeds. Many died of hunger.

The Reconstruction

The rebuilding period was very complex. From small pieces of cassava and banana they gathered, they started a planting plot again.

As for the population, it was very difficult. There were very few people left, many of them relatives. So they had to look for new partners in other places, from other tribes. This process of reproduction was very difficult. So much so that from 302 people in 1932, according to the census, today we are no more than 4,000 indigenous people. The Uitotos are the majority, about 2,500; the Boras, 600-700; the Ocainas, 300; the Muinanes about 50 here in the region of La Chorrera.

Today we can say that much of this ancestral history also has a spiritual work of the ancients related to the sacred effects of tobacco and the coca leaf – the mambe. The ritual practices connected with spiritual knowledge recover the language and songs which are transmitted to the new generations. The ancestral

authorities who live in the malocas, the civil authorities at the level of the indigenous organization, and we ourselves are responsible for the educational institution.

Casement

Casement came after denunciations had been made. Due to the extractivism our people had already suffered even before the rubber trade... Merchants of the Japurá river, also known as the Caquetá, traded goods and even people.

There were wars between the tribes and prisoners used to be taken. And these prisoners were sold and exchanged for products. This was the dynamic of the peoples here.

When the rubber time came with the Arana brothers, they resorted to a brutal way of extracting latex. The individuals who did this work had their planting plots and rubber trees close to their malocas. But each time they had to look for the trees further into the forest, farther away from their homes. And they went into debt, they had to pay for the latex extraction tools, clothes, food. It was a huge amount of money, resources they could not gather to pay off their debts.

Casement, Barbadians, Killing of Indigenous

When they couldn't bring in enough rubber, they were garroted and put into the dungeon. So, all of this had already been denounced. When Roger Casement appeared, he initially had the excuse of confirming if there was violence committed against the blacks of Barbados who were brought as labor force to that region. It turned out that it was not the blacks who were being abused, but the indigenous people. And that's what Casement wrote in his *Diary*, what was really experienced by our ancients.

Resistance

We have other reports, reports of resistance in the malocas. On the one hand there was domination by the rubber company, but on the other, there was resistance from the indigenous people. They gathered, rebelled, hunted and killed some of these caucheros.

At a certain moment the indigenous decided to attack but unfortunately when they arrived, there were already Peruvian soldiers prepared to protect the *caucheros*. The *muchachos*, indigenous trained by the caucheros, had blown the whistle on the ancients' plan. They reacted, attacked and set fire to a maloca with all the residents inside.

Vestiges, Archaeological Work

By then, the process of violence had already become international and they started taking our ancients to Peru. Roger Casement's presence was very positive, these atrocities were known thanks to him. The reports in his *Diary* were evident. Today we are able to find vestiges and remains of the constructions that he mentioned. No archaeological work has been done yet, no revisions of these vestiges; the ditches where the murdered were thrown into still exist.

Massacre: A Forbidden Subject

During this process of remembering we had to talk a lot to the ancients who kept these stories for themselves. They didn't want to share them for a long time. It was traumatic, they had closed themselves. It was a forbidden subject for any of us.

On the other hand, we convinced the ancients that the story needed to be told. We can't forget; we all need to know what really happened. And in order to remember we went to the places where it all happened, where the bodies were buried.

Here, precisely here, we have the dungeon where they put the shackles on the prisoners. They flogged and left them, then killed and threw them into the ditches.

The managers lived in the back of this house. The alcoholic beverages from England arrived here. We found traces of bottles around. They used to get drunk and behave violently.

There are stories of throwing kerosene on the boys, setting them on fire and making them run... If they were able to reach the river, they would save themselves, otherwise they would burn to death.

They used to put one, two, three boys here in the courtyard, and then shoot their heads with the rifle. It shows the alcoholic state they were in. They used to take girls and abuse them. They raped girls of 10, 12, 13 years old who had just started shaping their woman's body.

These true reports are in the *Diary*. Many of our grandparents have told us these stories.

The Rubber Value

All the uses of rubber are positive for indigenous peoples. When misused, the natural existence of this product is lost.

Rubber has always been used by our culture to cover the manguaré's lid to produce better sounds as the ancients' tool for communication.

Rubber was also used to make the ball for the sport that had been practiced for a long time. And it was also used by our culture in different ways.

Covering the wheels with rubber, as the foreign cultures do, is a very positive usage. The problem was the practice used to extract latex, willing to have more and more... It generated violence. People couldn't extract more rubber, but they wanted more wealth and power. That's what made Mr. Arana become a

politician in Peru, a senator. His international business created wealth and power through the practice of exploiting and killing communities. And ever since 1889 several generations inherited debts from their parents who had worked in this system.

The Rubber

Rubber is positive as a natural element, but the practice created to exploit it and the related historical events are different... For us it became a trauma that has been transmitted from generation to generation.

Translation by Eda Nagayama

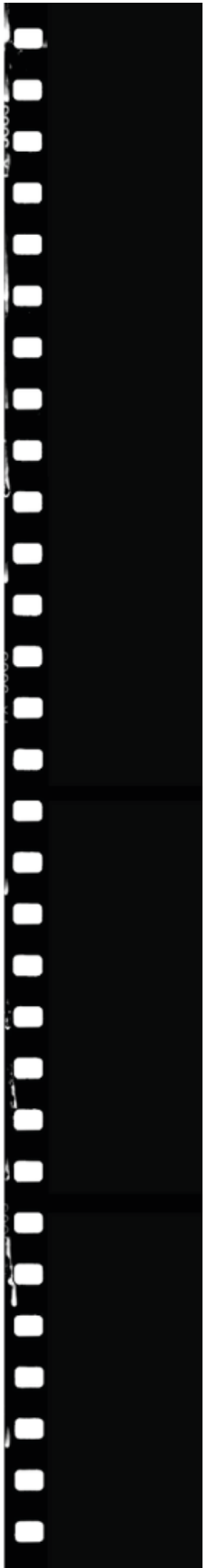


Still equipe

Fábio Bardella e Aurélio Michiles – La Chorrera. April 2019

The Films of Aurélio Michiles

Angus Mitchell



AFTERWORD

THE FILMS OF AURÉLIO MICHILES



Aurélio Michiles - Rio Negro, April 2019

During Aurélio Michiles' long career in film-making the history of extractive rubber has been a recurrent theme to which he regularly returns. His work interrogates the political ecology of rubber extractivism and how it revolutionized one world through laying waste to another. As an intellectual born and raised in the Amazon, he grew up aware of the stories of Amazonia's Belle Époque and the great march of progress, innovation and global modernity that resulted from rubber

extraction. His two-part television documentary film *Árvore da Fortuna* (1992) [*The Tree of Fortune*] appeared in the year that Rio de Janeiro hosted the Earth Summit and world leaders met to sign the Rio Declaration in an unsuccessful attempt to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. *The Tree of Fortune* was an affective pedagogic tool informed by oral history and interviews with anthropologists, *seringueiros* (rubber tappers), historians, and filmmakers. It placed the environmental history of rubber within a longer context of settler colonial violence extending back to the Spanish and Portuguese navigators and conquistadors beginning with Columbus' arrival in Europe's "New World". The *seringueiros*, mainly of *nordestino* extraction, rather than the Native¹ Latin American communities, took center stage in this narrative. The analysis of the relationship between extractivism and slavery continued up to the present and the campaign of the socialist and environmentalist, Chico Mendes, assassinated in 1988. Within this deep history of extractivism and the Amazon frontier wars that define relations between Europeans and the pre-Columbian world, Michiles made a brief reference to the Putumayo scandal at the end of the rubber boom. He interpreted it as a moment of cunning political opportunism enabling British investors to divest from the extractive industry and keep their reputations intact as the Amazon rubber economy started to crash and cheap plantation rubber pulled the rug from beneath the extractive market.

In 1997 Michiles returned to the theme of Amazon cinematography with *O Cineasta da Selva* (1997), [*The Filmmaker of the Forest*], a hallucinatory bio-pic about a pioneer of Brazilian cinema, Silvino Santos, the earliest filmmaker on the Amazon, whose earliest experimentation into moving pictures included *Putumayo* (1913) and *Índios Huitotos do Rio Putumayo* (1916). The early career of Santos is inextricably entangled with the patronage of Julio César Arana and his efforts to sell to the outside world the success of his "civilizing mission" on the Putumayo. After studying

¹ Nordestinos is the term used for labourers and farmers who were forced, often by excessive drought, to migrate from the dry north-eastern states of Brazil and find new lives in the Amazon. The expanding rubber economy encouraged opportunity and a new frontier for Brazilian expansion

cinema in Paris, Santos married the adopted niece of Arana and returned to the Amazon to make a film in defence of Arana's business interests. From this originating moment of Amazon cinema survive some of the earliest sequences of rubber tapping, the extractive economy and indigenous life on the Putumayo. Fragments of these Santos films are reused and recontextualized in *Secrets from Putumayo*. In 2002 Michiles completed a documentary study on Teatro Amazonas [Amazon Theatre] providing a visual history of Manaus's spectacular opera house: the enduring architectural symbol of global cosmopolitanism.

Besides the history and legacy of rubber and the Amazon's economic golden age, the other interest for Michiles is the cinematic archive, addressed in his film *Tudo por amor ao Cinema* (2015) [*Autobiography of a Film Fanatic*] about the film archivist, Cosme Alves Netto, acknowledged as an embodiment of Latin American cinema. Born into a wealthy family from Manaus, Alves Netto devoted his life to the collection, restoration, and preservation of films from destruction and the construction of an archive stored in the Cinémathèque in Rio de Janeiro. During the dictatorship in Brazil in the sixties and seventies, Alves Netto was a backstage leader in the counter-cultural underground. Involved in the people's movement, Ação Popular, he organized direct action against the dictatorship while struggling to exhibit and preserve films and documentaries made by filmmakers opposed to fascism. The work of Michiles has always engaged with the ideas and aspirations of Latin America's intellectual avant-garde and the idea that art has the potential to be transformative while denouncing the injustices and inequalities of structural power across the Americas. This is the politics that underpins *Secrets from Putumayo*.

Angus Mitchell



W.B. Yeats
Chair of Irish Studies



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*All the photographs taken during the film footage
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