

LA MEMORIA DE LAS MARIPOSAS The Memory of the Butterflies

Regie Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski

Peru, Portugal | 2025

77 Min. | Spanisch, Murui Huitoto mit englischen Untertiteln

Buch Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski. **Kamera** Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski, Isabel Madueño Medina. **Montage** Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski, Fernanda Bonilla, Elizabeth Landesberg. **Sound Design** Félix Blume. **Ton** Félix Blume. **Executive Producers** Isabel Madueño Medina, Ico Costa. **Koproduzent*innen** Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski, Isabel Madueño Medina, Ico Costa. **Produktionsfirma** Miti Films (Peru).

Synopse

Ausgangspunkt von Tatiana Fuentes Sadowskis Film-Recherchereise in die Vergangenheit ist eine alte Fotografie, auf der zwei indigene Männer zu sehen sind. Um 1900 brachte man sie nach London, um sie zu „zivilisieren“: Omarino und Aredomi – bis auf ihre Namen ist kaum etwas über sie bekannt. In **LA MEMORIA DE LAS MARIPOSAS** folgt Sadowski ihrer Spur und dekonstruiert die Geschichte des kolonialen Kautschuk-Handels in Lateinamerika im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert. In handentwickelten Super-8-Schwarzweißaufnahmen, die sich chameleonartig in die Montage mit Archivmaterial und historischen Fotos fügen, entwirft der Film eine Gegenerzählung zum kolonialen Narrativ, in der auch Sadowski selbst ihre Position als Filmemacherin hinterfragt. Sie begnügt sich nicht mit dem Archiv, sondern geht weiter, zeigt das Foto den Indigenen im heutigen Peru, Omarinos und Aredomis Nachfahren, und filmt den indigenen Aktivismus heute. **LA MEMORIA DE LAS MARIPOSAS** holt verlorene und übersehene Geschichten ans Licht – die Geschichten einer Generation, deren Leben durch den Kautschuk-Boom zerstört wurde, und gibt den Geistern der Vergangenheit jenseits des offiziellen Erinnerns ihren Raum. (Ted Fendt)

Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski ist eine peruanische Filmemacherin, deren Arbeit eine Brücke zwischen experimentellem und dokumentarischem Kino schlägt und sich mit Themen wie Erinnerung, Kolonialgeschichte und kollektiver Heilung auseinandersetzt. Sie studierte Darstellende Kunst in Peru sowie Film und Neue Medien am Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains. Ihre Filme wurden auf Festivals wie Doclisboa, Oberhausen und Art of the Real gezeigt. **LA MEMORIA DE LAS MARIPOSAS** ist ihre opera prima, ihre neueste Erkundung der Archivforschung und des indigenen Geschichtenerzählens.

Filme: 2012: La Huella / The Imprint (Kurzfilm). 2013: Yo marco los árboles para reconocerlos después / I Mark the Trees to Recognize Later (Kurzfilm). 2015: Bam bam pum lol. 2020: Carta para Amadeo / Letter to Amadeo (Kurzfilm). 2025: La memoria de las mariposas / The Memory of Butterflies.

Kommentar der Regisseurin

Wenn ein Foto lockt

Offizielle Narrative dekonstruieren, um zu enthüllen, was Bilder verbergen

LA MEMORIA DE LAS MARIPOSAS (THE MEMORY OF BUTTERFLIES) entstand wegen eines einzigen Fotos: dem Porträt von Omarino und Aredomi, die sich in London an den Händen halten. Ich fühlte mich von ihnen gerufen. Also beschloss ich, ihren Spuren zu folgen und begann mit Recherchen in Archiven in Peru, Brasilien, Irland, England, Portugal, den Vereinigten Staaten und Frankreich. Meist fand ich Propagandabilder von Abbau-Projekten und kolonialistischen Expeditionen aus dem Amazonasgebiet. Sowohl Omarino als auch Aredomi wurden von dem damals mächtigsten Kautschukunternehmen, La Casa Arana, versklavt, und ihre Geschichte ist Teil der mehr als 40.000 indigenen Menschen, die im brutalen System zur Kautschukgewinnung ermordet wurden.

Der Film erforderte eine Montage von Schnitten und Verknüpfungen, um die offiziellen historischen Narrative zu dekonstruieren und zu enthüllen, was diese Bilder verbergen. Die Bilder wieder und wieder zu zeigen bedeutete, den geisterhaften Rufen zu antworten, gleichzeitig fragte ich mich, warum dieses Bild immer wieder auftauchte und was es mir zu sagen hat. Um die Geschichte aus einer kritischen Perspektive zu erzählen, musste ich meinen Platz und meine Herangehensweise an sie hinterfragen. Spekulationen ermöglichten es mir, unsere Herkunft und unser Erbe zu konfrontieren, und mir eine neue Zukunft vorzustellen, in enger Verbindung mit den Anliegen der Gemeinschaften der Nachkommen, bei denen wir filmten. Ich bin ständig bemüht, meinen Blick und meine Einstellung zu dekolonisieren, mir Omarino und Aredomi als historische Subjekte mit Handlungsfähigkeit vorzustellen und gleichzeitig eine Unschärfe in ihren Identitätskonstruktionen zuzulassen.

Ich habe in Schwarz-Weiß auf Super-8-mm-Film gedreht, um eine zeitlose Optik zu schaffen, die eine Brücke zwischen den Archiven und meiner Reise schlägt. Die Materialität des analogen Bildes wurde zur Materialität der Erinnerung, einer spekulativen, mehrdeutigen und undefinierten Realität. Auch die Klanglandschaft wurde als Medium gestaltet – ein Aufruf an alle Geister in dieser Geschichte und die Naturgewalten dieses Gebiets: Wasser, Wind, Feuer und Erde. Sie sollen die Geschichte als Zeugen der Ereignisse erzählen.

In der Produktionsphase trafen wir indigene Gemeinschaften, Nachfahren der Überlebenden des Kautschukbooms, entlang der Flüsse Ampiyacu, Putumayo und Igarapará in Peru und Kolumbien. Durch Workshops und gemeinsame Diskussionen wurde der Film stark von diesen Begegnungen geprägt. Unser Verständnis von Erinnerung hat sich verändert. Geschichten wie die von Omarino und Aredomi werden oft von vorherrschenden offiziellen Erzählungen überschattet. Dieser Film versucht, diese verschwiegenen Biografien zurückzugewinnen, indem er Licht auf eine brutale Vergangenheit wirft und gleichzeitig die Widerstandsfähigkeit derer würdigt, die sie durchgestanden haben. Indem der Film ihre Geschichte mit ihren potenziellen Nachkommen teilt, belebt er ihr Andenken in der Gegenwart neu.

Von Anfang an war mir klar, dass das Erzählen dieser Geschichte über das Objektive hinausgeht und die Kommunikation mit unkontrollierbaren Kräften impliziert. Der Film ist eine Schwelle zwischen den Archiven und der Gegenwart, zwischen den Lebenden und den Toten. Er versucht, ein Medium zu sein, eine Erfahrung, die diese Übergänge zulässt.

Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski

Interview

Respect the Silence, Respect the Not Knowing, Respect the Pain

Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski talks to Asja Makarević and Lisabona Rahman about film as a medium of memory and the necessary limits of knowledge

DAS INTERVIEW WURDE AUF ENGLISCH GEFÜHRT.

Asja Makarević: I would like to start from your title of the film, THE MEMORY OF THE BUTTERFLIES. Can you elaborate on that?

Tatiana Fuentes Sadowski: The title is a secret of the movie. In the process of making the film, we heard that in the Amazon, for these communities, the ancestors become butterflies. We didn't say this in the movie directly. There are in fact a lot of subjects that we do not reveal entirely. We kept that wisdom for the communities. So yes, the title refers to the memory of the ancestors.

AM: The focus of the film is on Omarino and Aredomi, a young man and a boy, and the single photograph of them. It seems to trigger your exploration of colonial history. Could you reflect on why you chose to focus on them, rather than, for example, on Roger Casement, the British consul?

TFS: We could have chosen Roger Casement as a main character. But for us, it was very important to be on the side of these two main characters and the communities. In these archival propaganda images, the focus is on the side of the colonizers. They were created with violence and colonialist intentions. We knew from the beginning that we did not want to place the gaze in that direction. In many ways, we had to destroy and deconstruct this universe of archive images and documents in order to attempt to be on the side of Omarino and Aredomi. Of course, it is all speculation and I cannot even say that I am closer to them because there is a big distance between us. That distance is important in the film. We are not taking their voice and we are not talking for them.

Lisabona Rahman: I find it interesting, but also mysterious that we do not exactly know from which position you are narrating in the film. There are multiple alignments with the city, the people, the photographs. And then, you address Omarino and Aredomi and the ancestors of your son. Could you talk about these positions in the film?

TFS: In all these years, I had a question inside me: why do I need to tell this story? Because it is not my story. Omarino and Aredomi are not my ancestors, nor the ancestor of my son. I think there is a lot of art that takes stories that do not belong to the artist, with many good intentions, but this risks an appropriation of the pain of others, and taking charge of the pain of others. So I had this question but I did not arrive at an answer. When I went to Iquitos for the first time, I discovered the role of the place in the family of my husband during this historical period. When I discovered this, I thought, okay, maybe this is not a coincidence. I have a lot of personal answers that are not in the film and I think it is not necessary to have them there. But the tension is important. What do we do with what stays with us? What are we transmitting?

This position allowed me to tell this story from a unique perspective. Now I feel that this is my story, too, in some way, or the story of my son. I discovered the photo in 2015. I was not married then and did not have my son. But I received this charge, this responsibility or transmission. I did not know what it was, and even now, I do not have an answer. The important thing is to confront ourselves with these questions and to take charge of what we do in the present.

LR: Maybe there is no final answer because your life develops and the knowledge that will come out, not only about Omarino and Aredomi, but also about the community, will continue to open up. Perhaps we have to accept that the answer is not stable and final.

TFS: Yes, completely. One of the important things was to take this story back to the communities. When we were there, nobody knew about them. No one had heard of their story. In some way, this was a symbolic return for them to their homelands. I want to share what happened when we came back to the communities with the images of Omarino and Aredomi, and other archival images. When the descendants were in front of these images, many of them made for propaganda purposes, the relationship was not like my impulse with these images, that I need to deconstruct this official narrative. It was a loving and affectionate welcome of these images. In the film you can see the moment of their intervention on the images with a drawing. There is a symbol of protection, a written prayer for them. And this moment was magical in many ways. So it is different what these images can provoke or awaken in the communities.

AM: You mentioned the word 'charge' - the image has a charge, too, and there is a transmission to you, the possible receiver of its message. But there is also a lot of silence. The images were not made by well meaning onlookers. They are staged and little cues are provided. But there are other images as well, which helped you connect with this one in order to tell this story. Can you talk about the process of making your way through these other images and the network they create together?

TFS: We need to say that the majority of the images that are in the film are propaganda images from the beginning of the 20th century. These are images used for extractivist projects in the Amazon or with intentions to civilize the Indigenous and to impose the idea of progress and early capitalism. The photo of Omarino and Aredomi belongs to this universe. There are just three or four photos of them. The film uses other images that I call relative images. These images are of other people, other communities that were suffering the same situation in this period. They were made with the same intentions as the images of Omarino and Aredomi. In my process, I felt that I could use these images because they are in the same position, telling the same story. It is like the people depicted in these images lend their bodies to Omarino and Aredomi. For this reason, many of the images are fragmented as well. Also for the idea to not reveal everything, to leave the lacunae or holes in the information, in the imagination, in order to let in speculation.

The silence of these images is also the silence of violence. It is a situation that we cannot imagine. Even in the community, they said that in that time, people did not share stories, because it was really violent what was happening. They just needed to survive. So in this context, I felt that I need to respect this silence, and I need to respect the not knowing. It is a way to respect the pain. But this is not a silent movie. This was also a collective process with my beautiful small crew, with my two co-editors and my producer Lali Madueño Medina. We thought that the only voice that could tell what was happening at that time is nature. Nature was, and still is, a witness. When you are in the Amazon, you are living with death, and with many different ghosts, presences, spirits.

AM: The soundscape is important to maintain the presence of nature. The images of water also come to mind. There is

a geographical explanation to them, but they also serve as a connecting point between different sequences in the dramaturgy of your film. Can you reflect on the presence of water and its function in your film?

TFS: I wanted the elements to talk. The wind, the water, even the earth. For that reason, we even buried the film in the ground in the Amazon. We were careful not to contaminate the place. But it was important to see the elements in all their force. The water, the river is important because it is present in all these communities between Peru and Colombia, where the rubber exploitation was happening, between the rivers Putumayo and Igara Paraná. Near the principal station of the company, there is a waterfall that crosses a red zone. This part of the river has an important meaning for the communities of that area. It is a sacred place, the origin of their ancestors. The river, like the forest, is one of the main witnesses of what happened. The river also connects with the ocean. Omarino and Aredomi take the river to traverse the ocean to arrive in London. For me, the water has many meanings in the film. Water symbolizes the relationship between mother and son. My son is also a part of the film. He appears briefly, but is connected. Everything is connected.

AM: Your investigation of the story surrounding Omarino and Aredomi brings you also closer to the story of your own family in this village. Your voiceover suggests that you are ready to leave the story of the boys in the village and to deal with the story of your own dead. I felt it is a strong, intimate moment in the film. We get a glimpse into the history of your family, into how it could have been implicated, not directly, but by staying silent and not actively protesting. Would you like to reflect on that?

TFS: Some parts of the voiceover I cannot explain in a rational way. But I felt that I was seeking for this voice for maybe six or eight years. I was looking for knowledge. And when I arrived in the communities, I learned that it is not necessary to know everything. Even more than that, we need to stop searching for answers to these memories. We are not allowed to know everything about the destiny of these boys, because for the communities, memory is like a basket and there is a limit to how much you can know. For me, that point was the limit. The charge or responsibility that I was speaking of is maybe not Omarino and Aredomi's story, it is my own story. This echoes my reflections about why I needed to tell this story, to take on the pain of others, even with good intentions. The research continues, but in a more personal way. It is not necessary to have that in the film, because it is my own process. But it is relevant to know the story of Omarino and Aredomi in all its complexity. What it means to take charge of my own dead is a mysterious sentence for me. I am still discovering it.

LR: Can you tell us how you started this project in the first place?

TFS: I started this project in 2015, when I found the photo of Omarino and Aredomi on the Internet. An old photo album had appeared in Iquitos, in Peru and among these images was the photograph of Omarino and Aredomi. Something about that photo stayed on my mind for years. I started to investigate it. First, there was this whole archive universe about the rubber exploitation in Peru and Colombia. La Casarana was the name of the main rubber company in that period. They were responsible for more than 40,000 deaths. But it is difficult to find information about any of these 40,000 deaths. That was a push for me, it made me very sad. I went to archives in Peru, Brazil, and in Ireland, because Roger Casement, who was the British consul in Brazil, was an Irish human rights activist. Many archives of these communities are in England, Ireland, France, or in the United States. It is not easy to access these archives, and it is expensive. We are glad that we arrived at an agreement with the institutions of the archives so we could put the images in the film. I was privileged to access this information, but the communities do not have this access, even though these are their memories.

Then we started to retrace the journey of the two boys between London and Iquitos. When I travelled to Iquitos and the Putumayo and Igara Paraná rivers, the images of the present started to enter in this investigation. It began with archive images, but then it was research, editing, and shooting all in parallel. We edited for two years and a half. I started to shoot with a Super 8 camera in black and white because I wanted to follow this transmission flow between the archive and the people. For that I wanted a temporal image, about which you don't know whether it is past or present. You need to get in touch with different temporalities. So the Super 8 appeared like a snake of connection. When I was editing, I was interested in these glimpses of memory, because the experience of memory is not linear but more like flashes. You are trying to see something, and then it disappears.

AM: Like a dream-logic?

TFS: I struggle with this idea of dreaming, or I call it day-dreaming. I try to draw a clear line, because for many Indigenous communities, dreaming is a practical tool. It happens, like you dream that you need to go to hunt in this place. I find it exciting that you can dream answers for your life in a practical way, and that you can receive wisdom like that. I don't want to appropriate this use of dreams, because I do not dream in that way. But I see that these images are my way to make it visible. It is in this editing dialectic between the present, their archive, what is dream or fact. I think this is the human experience of remembering. It is fragmented and nothing is certain.

LR: It is impressive how you take the materiality of film into this whole process. It is not just a thing that you expose your images in and then say goodbye. The film is not just something to carry the image, but it is made visible. We see the splices, the perforations, the colours as a feature of the film itself. Why did you engage with film in this way?

TFS: I am an artist who wants to experiment with light and materiality. For me, the reality of the film is a medium. It is an excellent medium to express all these ideas that I have about memory and transmission. How can the film capture the light that the bodies emanate? How can film capture the auras? When I was thinking about transmission, about the force of these spectres, it was natural to give the movie this materiality. I wanted the approach to this story to be intimate and for me, intimacy involves the body. Much of the Super 8 footage was developed by ourselves or in homemade laboratories in Iquitos, which was the capital of the rubber trade. And this is a symbolic act, to develop with the same water a hundred years later. It was important to fill the film with the force of this territory.

LR: I see, it is a record not only of the past, but also of your present experience. Did you treat the sound in a similar way?

TFS: Yes. We had the French sound artist Félix Blume with us, a wonderful sound seeker. We were interested in capturing the sound of the animals, insects, the atmosphere of life. For example, in Puerto Arica, we heard a monkey every morning. A spectral sound. We all thought that we need to record this. And Félix took a boat to other islands to record these monkeys. It is similar to what is going on in the archives with the images: because what you see is not what is going on. These are propaganda images, you need to imagine more than what you are seeing. The idea was similar in sound: we need to hear other beings living in the forest and also the idea of metamorphosis. We could not do a sound design that jumped quickly between past and present. We needed something that would join the past and present in certain moments, that was the natural sounds and the animals.

LR: The sound creates a sense of continuity. And it is a resistance countering the silence in the images. It brings up the disorderly, the natural, whereas the picture is always in order. So the sound created the organic world that was lived in by Omarino, Aredomi and their community.

TFS: I have another story on hearing more than what you see. We used microphones that we put in the water because we wanted to hear the dolphins. And we used these sounds in moments when we wanted to create something strange. You can hear the dolphin in the middle of the forest. We made such transgressions because we were not seeking for the natural, but the spectral reconstruction of the atmosphere. Repetition is also an important element in the film because we have only three or four photos of Omarino and Aredomi. So we need to repeat the images a lot to create an answer to this question: what does this photo want to tell me? It is like a recurring dream.

LR: A person who can speak to spirits compares the past to a basket that is contained. "It's not that we do not want to open it, but we lack the word to close it again." I think that really sums up your film: when we look at the past, we also need to find a way to deal with it. I feel that your film is an offer of how to deal with the past. It is not conclusive, but maybe there is no conclusive way to deal with it.

TFS: I read somewhere that this desire to know is a very occidental way to understand the world. For many communities, it is not like that. When we put our hands in some stories, we deal with the past, with pain, many questions that were not closed. We open that and often we do not find a way to deal with this and leave it open. For me, that is the idea of the limit. I learned this from the communities and it is something that transformed the film. We cannot open this basket, which contains a lot of good memories and very painful memories. When you open it there are all these energies, all these stories that come out. For the communities in the Amazon, the dead are among them. You can hear and see them, you can even have encounters with them. They said that the dead do not want us to talk about this pain. This point is important to respect now. So we decided to put this closure into the film, the decision not to research any more.

LR: Tatiana, thank you very much for revisiting all the memories of working on the film. It is impressive.