

Amateur photography in Mexico: Club Fotográfico de México and the presence of folklorization in the construction of Mexico's national identity - 1950¹

Abstract

In this study, we present Club Fotográfico de México, an institution that focuses on amateur photography in Mexico city, in the first years of its operation, in the 1950s. We understand that photo clubs are a path to be explored by photography history, from the moment they are presented as social spaces in which several issues that involve the practice and theory of photographic image can be observed, from the photograph statute to the country's propagandistic image. In this sense, Club Fotográfico de México had a central role in the construction of a 'folklorized' image of the country and its popular culture and landscapes, thus contributing to consolidate a pro-government identity model, mainly through its guidelines for the creation of photographic image, leading amateur photographers from their choices of topics, going through the techniques and aesthetics that may be used to photograph the country, its landscapes, its culture, and its people.

Keywords: Amateur photography; Photo clubs; Mexico; *Mexicanidad*.

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A fotografia amadora no México: Club Fotográfico de México e a presença da folclorização na construção da identidade nacional mexicana - 1950

Resumo

No presente trabalho, apresentamos o Club Fotográfico de México, instituição voltada para a fotografia amadora na Cidade do México, nos primeiros anos de seu funcionamento, na década de 1950. Entendemos os fotoclubes como uma via a ser explorada pela história da fotografia, a partir do momento em que se apresentam como espaços de sociabilidades em que várias questões que envolvem a prática e a teorização da imagem fotográfica podem ser observadas, indo do estatuto fotográfico à imagem propagandística do país. Nesse sentido, o Club Fotográfico de México teve papel central na construção de uma imagem “folclorizada” do país e de sua cultura popular, de sua paisagem, contribuindo dessa forma para a consolidação de um modelo identitário governista, principalmente através de suas diretrizes para a criação da imagem fotográfica, conduzindo o fotógrafo amador desde a escolha do tema a ser abordado, passando pelas técnicas e estéticas que poderiam ser utilizadas para fotografar o país, sua paisagem, sua cultura, sua gente.

Palavras-chave: Fotografia Amadora; Fotografia - Clubes; Fotografia – México; Mexicanidade.

1- Amateurship and photo clubs as a possibility for pluralizing photography history

A kind of flâneur. That is how Mexican historian Patrícia Massé characterized the amateur photographer, a figure that has already risen as an “anonymous mass”, characters who “entertained themselves with and on the street”, an element that, while wandering, was capable of assimilating the “stridentist” modernity² from the early 20th

² Stridentism was a vanguard Mexican movement in the 1920s that was founded by Manuel Maples Arce. According to Jorge Schwartz, stridentists became distinguished through the way they coupled aesthetics and revolution, as the group's motivation came from the Mexican revolution of 1910 and the Russian revolution of 1917. Cf. SCHWARTZ, Jorge. **Vanguardas Latino-americanas: Polêmicas, Manifestos e Textos**

century in Mexico, when the movement and the unexpected events on the streets were starting to be attractive (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 10). However, the fact that the street and its characters started being attractive did not mean this photography amateurs practiced - with the amateurs themselves as photographers (either weekend or photo club photographers) - was anyhow considered as a record or art. If we think about a hierarchization of photography uses from late 19th century and early 20th century in Mexico, we will see it was no different from the rest of the western world in the roles it played: the recognition of a photographic tradition, according to Massé, was linked to the portraitist figure, but also to landscape documentarians (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 9).

Denounced for causing a device that had fundamentally been created for scientific purposes to lose its dignity (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 7), the images produced by this new character, which were made with the easy-handling portable equipment, showed a series of new topics that were then understood as unworthy of being portrayed: dogs, cats, horses, donkeys, drunkards, hoboes, and ugly people. This is a list of the interest of the ones who wandered around Mexico city in 1899, according to *El mundo Ilustrado* magazine (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 7). The jokingly tone of the list did not mask the thought behind it: photography, when available to amateurs, lost its roles and uses, the reasons why it had been created:

(...) testimonio del progreso (...) concebida originalmente al servicio de ambiciones pragmáticas investidas de formalidad, como el registro arqueológico, el topográfico o el criminalístico, la nueva modalidad tecnológica de la fotografía, al ser puesta al servicio de una masa anónima, vendría a desafiar un modo de relacionarse con el mundo, en el que lo productivo y utilitario había moldeado una mente materialista. (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 7)³

The photography produced by amateurs/flâneurs was supposedly the antithesis of photography as a useful tool to document our modern world. It supposedly gave room to

Críticos. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo: Iluminuras: FAPESP, 1995, p. 215-216. Also on stridentism, Mexican researcher Carlos Córdoba, in the first chapter of his book on Mexican pictorialism, presents the relationships between stridentism and modern times, especially with the radio. Among the new technologies that left people confused and aghast was photography. Cf. CORDOVA, Carlos. *Tríptico de sombras*. México: Centro de la Imagen, 2012.

³ “(...) progress testimony (...) originally conceived in the service of pragmatic ambitions embedded on formality such as the archaeological, topographic and criminalistics record, the new technological mode of photography, to be placed at the service of an anonymous mass, would challenge a way of relating to the world in which it was molded, productive and utilitarian, a materialistic mind” (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 7).

idleness, making way for the insignificant, for activities without productive or profitable purposes. This trite photography (or of trivial things) questioned, according to Massé, the materialistic conception of photography uses and roles, granting the act of taking photographs another possibility as a distraction (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 7). This interpretation the author made of amateur photography (highlighting in this case the anonymous people, the amateurs Brazilian researcher Maria Teresa Bandeira de Mello, in her book **Art and Photography: Brazil's pictorialist movement (Arte e Fotografia: o movimento pictorialista no Brasil, 1998)**, distinguished from photo club goers, calling them "Sunday photographers", the ones who were not concerned about artistic issues), is shown to be very interesting as a contrast to the common interpretation that was made about this production that was not tied to either the practices that were connected with the capitalist world or to the discussions about photography as an art.

This shift of perspective in the approach of anonymous photographers highlights the fact that, within a dominant way of using photographic production in the related period, there was a new way to be in and to see the modern world, which involved the use of new technologies that were presented as small cameras. From a historical perspective of photography, this line of interpretation points towards the appreciation of this character, who was long denied the position of intermediary between documentary-photography and the pictorial photography of club goers⁴:

(...) el desplazamiento de lo trascendental a lo instantáneo pudo haber sido percibido como un deslizamiento de la fotografía desde las cumbres de una cultura elitista, relacionada con un mundo orientado hacia la productibilidad, y atento al saber científico, hacia los territorios ordinarios de una colectividad sumergida en el entretenimiento, la diversión y la vagancia. Sin duda se trataba de una nueva manera de ubicarse en el mundo. (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 8)⁵

This article by Massé, "La exagerada práctica de la fotografía en México", is part of issue 24 of **Alquimia** magazine, an important information periodical of Mexico's

⁴ According to Massé, various characters that are today recognized as important photographers (which were either famous for the scientific development of their production - the case of, for example, Fox Talbot or Daguerre - or for their artistic concerns - the case of Jacques Henri-Lartigue) had practiced photography as amateurs, since the rise of photography (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 8-9).

⁵ "The displacement from transcendental to instantaneous can be perceived as a slip of the photograph from the top of an elitist culture, related to a productivity-oriented world, attentive to scientific knowledge, to ordinary territory of a submerged community in entertainment, fun and play. No doubt it was a new way to locate the world" (MASSÉ, 2005, p. 8).

National Photographic Library System. Named “Anónimos y aficionados”, this issue presents a series of articles that deal with the various ways of amateurship in photography, from the anonymous photographers on the street to the collectors and associations of amateur photographers in Mexico city in the early 20th century. This magazine's editor, José Antonio Rodríguez, while presenting this issue, mentioned the topic of amateurship/anonymity in photography as a way to take a stand “contra la mirada opulenta” (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005 a, p. 4). The publication of an issue of **Alquimia** that was dedicated to amateurs and anonymous photographers would be a way to recover an important photographic production that, by dealing with this topic, addresses issues such as the micro-history and the local history of photography as a way to take a stance against the Eurocentric way of thinking and writing the history of photography, by giving visibility to the understanding that accepts several histories of photography (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005 a, p. 4):

Si bien conocemos la historia opulenta de la fotografía, esa que sólo aborda los nombres más evidentes y reconocidos y que ha querido ser impuesta como modelo a seguir, ¿qué hemos hecho en México para recuperar las imágenes surgidas del fotoclube, del anonimato o de aquellas tan despreciadas por haber sido hechas por aficionados o por las personas comunes de la calle? (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005 a, p. 5)⁶

Towards the same direction, we located the essay by Carlos Córdova, **Tríptico de Sombras** (Triptych of Shadows), which was published in 2012 and covered the Mexican pictorialism of the 1920s. It stated it was the first international movement of photography (CÓRDOVA, 2012, p. 30). Also in Mexico, as in a great deal of western countries, pictorialism went on for a long time as production that sought to respond to the massification of commercial photography and to “Sunday amateurs”, and the artistic interest in these works was confined to its similarity with the pictorial processes of the 19th century. It was mentioned as a movement with unique characteristics and without differentiations. Affirming the existence of both many pictorialist photographers and

⁶ “If we know well the opulent history of photography, which only addresses the most obvious and recognized names, and which wanted to impose itself as a model to be followed, what did we do in Mexico to recover images from the photo club, from anonymity or those so despised for having been made by amateurs or common street people?”

many forms of pictorialism (even mentioning Brazilian historian Maria Teresa Bandeira de Mello and her recognition of three phases in Brazilian pictorialism), Córdova states:

Una amplia revisión colectiva para la historia de la fotografía en Occidente que va desarticular las nociones de metrópoli y periferia. (...) Toda historia de la fotografía es hipotética. En las pasadas dos décadas, ha tenido lugar una profunda revisión. Nuevos sujetos y nuevos temas ocupan la investigación y las publicaciones. Esta fascinante relectura – y reescritura – ha involucrado cambios del horizonte de interpretación sobre lo que ha sido el pasado fotográfico, sus métodos y fuentes. Aun así, buena parte de la literatura especializada permanece anclada al pobre entendimiento de que el pictorialismo era una reivindicación del estatuto artístico ante la progresiva popularización y tecnificación del medio (CÓRDOVA, 2012, p. 30)⁷.

Then, there would be a need for investigating the characteristics of the different kinds of pictorialism (CÓRDOVA, 2012, p. 31), by searching the particularities of photography histories, far from the already praised “mirada opulenta” (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005 a, p. 4) We see that before this need for pluralizing the history of photography are the topics that, during the last decades of the 20th century, were on the fringes of the interests of historians: pictorialism, photo clubs, amateurs in their most diverse definitions according to the most diverse ways for inclusion in social, cultural, and political realities. In the specific case of Club Fotográfico de México, we found their members producing images within the pictorialist aesthetics still in the 1950s⁸, which, connected to the general idea of creation of other national popular figures, helped intensify a certain folklorization of determined sections of the Mexican society.

Including photo club discussions and production in the discussions about the popular Mexican types and landscapes that should be disclosed was in agreement with the issues regarding the search for *Mexicanidad*, a problem which had troubled

⁷ “A wide collective review to the history of photography in the West that will disrupt the notions of metropolis and periphery. (...) The whole history of photography is hypothetical. In the past two decades, there has been a thorough review. New subjects and new themes occupy research and publications. This fascinating reinterpretation - and rewriting - involved changes on the horizon of interpretation about what was photograph's past, its methods and sources. Still, much of the specialized literature remains anchored to the impoverishing understanding that pictorialism was an artistic status claim on the gradual popularization and technological development of the area”.

⁸In that period, pictorialist aesthetics was already making room for new experiments even within photo clubs, as we can see, for example, in the case of the most famous Brazilian photo club, Foto Cine Bandeirante, which started producing what would later be called modern Brazilian photography in the mid-1940s. Cf. COSTA, Helouise; SILVA, Renato Rodriguez da. **A fotografia moderna no Brasil**. São Paulo: Cosac Naif, 2004.

intellectuals and governments since the post-Mexican revolution period. Thus, it is clear that photo clubs, despite their general characteristics that were always reproduced (hierarchization, stylization of their participants, pictorial aesthetics, internal contests, international rooms, bulletins, photographic excursions), connected themselves to specific issues in the places they were established, and these issues were greatly important for their strengthening in the social space of cities.

2 - Club Fotográfico de México: issues regarding folklorization in photography

2.1: Historical background of Club Fotográfico de México:

Photography has figured in Mexico as an interest of political elites since the late 19th century, not only as a way to document a government or a society, but also as a practice. According to researchers Olaria García Cárdenas and Juan Monroy de la Rosa, photography appears as an amateurship that is shared by Porphyrian political and cultural elites (CÁRDENAS; ROSA, 2005, p. 23). Based on a famous photograph by Fondo Casasola, *Fiesta en el Hipódromo de Pevalvillo para celebrar el natalicio del Kaiser*, from 1904, which shows Porfirio Díaz facing forward and looking at the camera, beside a woman (who was identified as the German ambassador's daughter in Mexico) who was looking away and holding a bellows camera on the side of her body, the authors go on questioning the practice of amateur photography by the elite: they know, for example, that Federal District governor Guillermo de Landa y Escalón was an amateur photographer:

Una estereoscópica en vidrio, del Fondo Ezequiel A. Chávez, perteneciente al Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, nos muestra a este personaje sosteniendo una cámara fotográfica, durante una excursión realizada el 27 de septiembre de 1909 al cerro de Xico por un grupo de prohombres porfirianos, entre los que se encuentran Olegario Molina, Ramón Corral, Landa y Escalón y el propio Chávez. La foto tiene una nota manuscrita de Chávez que señala a Landa y Escalón como el personaje del primer plano que se retira de la escena después de haber tomado una fotografía. (CÁRDENAS; Rosa, 2005, p. 23)⁹

⁹ "A stereoscopic glass, of the Ezequiel A. Chavez Fund, part of the Archivo histórico de la UNAM, shows that character holding a camera during a tour held on September 27, 1909, in Xico hill, by a group of

It is possible to find, in the same file, several photographs in which unidentified characters hold photographic cameras. It is information that is very important in the mapping of societies and photo clubs already in the beginning of the 20th century, which connect the practice of photography to the people in the Porphyrian elite, in the rising bourgeoisie in the country: Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana was founded in 1904:

Como es sabido, en mayo de 1904 nació en la Ciudad de México la Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana, presidida por el licenciado José Luis Requena y formada por profesionales y aficionados, que tuvo por objetivo la celebración de excursiones fotográficas y concursos especiales para premiar el trabajo de sus socios. En la sociedad participaban, entre muchos otros: Miguel Cortina, el ingeniero Ignacio Hidalgo, el licenciado Benjamín Barrios, los doctores J. García y J. Armendáriz, los señores Alejandro Rivera Fontecha (vicepresidente de la Sociedad), M. Jules Gargollo, J. Luis Requena Jr., Ignacio del Collado, F. Muñoz, M. Prado, Júlio César y Jenaro Cortina. Algunos de ellos eran personajes importantes. (CÁRDENAS; ROSA, 2005, p. 24)¹⁰

Through the documents preserved by UNAM in Fondo Ezequiel A. Chávez ¹¹, it was possible to find a profile of the Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana's members, with many important characters such as Benjamín Barrios, who was a lawyer and a federal congressman, and the very president of the society, José Luis Requena, who was a lawyer and a businessman with connections in the mining industry, who was running for president by Partido Felicista Nacional¹², (CÁRDENAS; ROSA, 2005, p. 24). Chávez himself was nominated justice and public education sub-secretary and reformed elementary

prominent *porfirianos*, among those: Olegario Molina, Ramon Corral, Landa y Escalón, and Chavez himself. The photo has a manuscript by Chavez that points Landa y Escalón out as the foreground character who retires from the scene after taking a picture”.

¹⁰ “As known, Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana was born in May 1904 in Mexico city, and it was presided by graduate José Luis Requena and comprised professional and amateurs photographers. It aimed to celebrate photographic excursions and special contests to reward the work of its members. Among many others, the society included names such as: Miguel Cortina, engineer Ignacio Hidalgo, graduate Benjamin Barrios, PhDs J. García and J. Armendáriz, Alejandro Rivera Fontecha (vice-president of the society), M. Jules Gargollo, J. LuisRequena Jr., Ignacio Del Collado, F. Muñoz, m. Prado, Júlio César, and Jenaro Costina. Some of them were important characters”.

¹¹ According to the article, UNAM has been in charge of Fondo Ezequiel A. Chávez since 1967. There are 128 boxes and 1,717 printed items (books, booklets, magazines, and other periodicals) in the files, besides 3,013 images that make up the fund's graphic section. A great deal of these images comprises photographic originals of various techniques and media, and many of these were taken by Chávez himself, his brothers, Samuel and David, and also his daughter, Leticia. Many of Chávez's personal letters are about the practice of photography (CÁRDENAS; ROSA, 2005, p. 25).

¹² About Requena and the Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana, please refer to Cláudia Negrete's article, who was used here, for further information (NEGRETE, 2005, p. 38).

education and Escuela Nacional Preparatoria at the end of the 19th century. He also cooperated in the reopening of Mexico's National University in 1910, being assigned dean on two occasions, in 1914 and 1924 (CÁRDENAS; ROSAS, 2005, p. 24-25) Historian Claudia Negrete complements this profile, when she highlights that the society was understood at the time as a scientific society (besides providing data on the periodicity of the society's meetings and its location) and when she points towards the fact that studio photographers were also members:

La Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana surgió como toda una hija de la ciencia: “por sus muchos puntos de contacto y relación con la física y la química experimental, la clasificamos entre las sociedades científicas”. La fundó un personaje importante para la historia de la fotografía mexicana: el ingeniero Fernando Ferrari Pérez, quién fungió como su presidente por muchos años. Entre sus miembros destacados se encontraban los hermanos Torres y los Valletto, que eran los fotógrafos de estudio. Tuvieron actividad constante, ya que se reunían mensualmente en el edificio del ex arzobispado de Tacubaya hasta los primeros años del nuevo siglo XX, en que un amateur, el abogado José Luis Requena, tomó el lugar del ingeniero Ferrari Pérez. (NEGRETE, 2005, p. 38)¹³

Fondo's documents also allow establishing characteristics of the photographs that were taken by these amateurs. The first of them regards to the uniform and regular form. To Cárdenas and Rosa, this is related to lack of interest in the image and its aesthetic and formal qualities, design, the organization of formal elements, tonal contrast, iconography. The same lack of interest appears regarding techniques, focus, exposure, sharpness, quality of printed copies, etc. (CÁRDENAS; ROSAS, 2005, p. 25).

The second characteristic regards to choosing the topics and objects photographed, which comprise topics that are very restricted to the family environment: Chávez's brothers, wife, and only daughter are portrayed in a room, in a studio, in his house patio. Also concerning the personal life of the amateur photographer, photographs of his trips and travels around the country and the world were also found,

¹³“Sociedad Fotográfica Mexicana rose as a daughter of science: “because of its many points of contact and relationship with physics and chemistry”. It was founded by an important character in the Mexican history of photography: engineer Fernando Ferrari Pérez, who was its president for many years. Among its famous members were the Torres brothers and the Vallettos, who were studio photographers. They were in constant activity, as they gathered monthly in the building of Tacubaya archbishopric until the early new century, when lawyer Luis Requena took over after engineer Ferrari Pérez”.

besides parties and celebrations such as Mexico's Independence Centennial and a trip to Oaxaca, in which he recorded the railroad path between Tehuacán and Oaxaca. In one of the photographs about the Centennial celebrations, he has a very interesting example of "Chávez's pet peeves", who used to make remarks in his photographs:

En otra fotografía más, de la serie de las fiestas del Centenario, escribié: "1º Centenario del grito de Independencia La Plaza de la Constitución y la Catedral de México à las 10:45 minutos de la noche del 15 de Septiembre de 1910 Fotografía tomada desde los balcones del Palacio Nacional por Ezequiel A. Chavez". (CÁRDENAS; ROSAS, 2005, p. 27)¹⁴

For the researchers (who use sociologist Pierre Bordieu's reasoning", this restriction regarding the topics and the taking of photographs by this amateur in the early 20th century was directly related to the way photograph was understood at the time. People were conditioned to the "current practice" of a certain part of society, in which photography played the social role of domestic appreciation, in which families were simultaneously the subject and the object of pictures, and family events were turned into solemn and eternal situations. Such conditioning was also supposedly tied to the photographic industry and to the dissemination this industry promoted in regards to photographic practice through its advertisements, illustrated magazines, manuals, and specialized magazines, and especially through its learning methods for amateurs (CÁRDENAS; ROSAS, 2005, p. 27).

Los concursos de aficionados y de profesionales, los requisitos de publicación de las imágenes, las asociaciones de aficionados, primero y los foto-clubes después, complementan y consolidan el trabajo de la industria, y en este sentido forman parte de la industria fotográfica entendida en su sentido lato. Que algunos de ellos hayan rebasado los estrechos límites del aficionado, para alcanzar cualidades estrictamente fotográficas parece ser indubitable. El propio Requena pudiera estar entre ellos, como lo muestra algunas de sus fotografías publicadas en *El Mundo Ilustrado*. (CÁRDENAS; ROSAS, 2005, p. 27-28)¹⁵

¹⁴ "In another photograph of a series of pictures of the Centennial, he wrote: "1st centennial of the cry for independence at Plaza de la Constitución and Mexico's Cathedral, at 10:45 PM on September 15, 1910. Photograph taken from the balconies of Palácio Nacional by Ezequiel A. Chávez".

¹⁵ "The contests for amateurs and professionals, the requirements for publishing images, the amateur associations, first the photo clubs, after, complement and consolidate the work of the industry, and in this sense they are part of photographic industry in its broader sense. It seems beyond any doubts that some of them have narrowed the limits of amateur photographers, in order to reach strictly photographic

Claudia Negrete also highlights the importance of photographic industry in the practice of amateurs of the late 19th century and early 20th century:

La incursión eventual de aficionados, es decir, de personas no especializadas en el oficio, y que no vivían de la práctica cotidiana de la fotografía, se dio precisamente hacia finales de la octava década, y la permitieron factores de índole técnica: la introducción de las placas secas y de las cámaras de mano. (NEGRETE, 2005, p. 38)¹⁶

We notice there is a difference between the practice of photography at Sociedad Fotográfica de México and the one that was configured later at Club Fotográfico Mexicano. The interest in this practice and the purpose of the image it produced suffered a shift through which it went from the Sociedad's recording of everyday life (which we can associate with "Sunday amateurs", according to the distinction drawn by Mello in 1998) to the Club Fotográfico de México's intention of being a school of artistic photography. To researcher Olivier Debroise (2005), there was a direct connection between the two associations, which cause the Sociedad to be the direct predecessor of Club Fotográfico de México (CFM):

En 1904 el fotógrafo aficionado Luis Requena había creado una Asociación Fotográfica de Profesionales y Aficionados, cuya vocación era desarrollar el gusto por la fotografía, organizando excursiones para fotografiar paisajes, edificios y ruinas, primer antecedente del Club Fotográfico Mexicano (CFM), fundado durante la II Guerra Mundial, y convertido en institución formal en 1949. Cópia de asociaciones similares de Estados Unidos, el CFM fue, primero, una asociación de aficionados; sin embargo, ante la carencia en México de instituciones o de escuelas dedicadas a la fotografía, muy pronto se convirtió en la principal agrupación de fotógrafos, incluso profesionales. (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 108)¹⁷

qualities. Requena himself might have been among them, as shown by some of his photographs in *El Mundo Ilustrado*".

16 "The occasional joining of amateurs, that is, non-specialized people, in the trade, who made a living of the everyday practice of photography, precisely took place at the end of the 8th decade, and allowed for factors of technical nature: the introduction of dry plates and hand cameras".

17 "In 1914, amateur photographer Luis Requena created Asociación Fotográfica de Profesionales y Aficionados", whose purpose was to develop a taste for photography, by organizing excursions of photographing landscapes, buildings, and ruins, the first predecessor of Club Fotográfico Mexicano (CFM), which was founded during World War II and converted into a formal institution in 1949. A copy of similar associations in the United States, CFM was first an association of amateurs or a school dedicated

Pointing towards the aesthetic conformation that was developed by CFM, Debroise highlights the importance of publications on photography. According to the author, *Foto* magazine, which started circulating soon before the foundation of CFM, allegedly made way for the photographic style that was marked by “virtuosity”, which would become an important trace of CFM production (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 108).

Foto magazine had entered the market in the 1930s to replace *Helios* magazine, which was an important publication at the end of the 1920s, which had marked the ‘crisis’ portrait photographers were going through - according to Debroise, this probable took place due to the availability of cameras to the middle class, which was made evident by the space Kodak advertisement was increasingly gaining in the media. This caused a wide sector of society to start going to studios in order to have photographs taken (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 83). The relationships between the photographic industry, publications of specialized magazines, and the amateur practice are intertwined, made clear, and branched into diversified lines¹⁸. The first issue of *Helios* circulated in 1929, and it contained many advertisements, which meant the industry was doing fine, as was the case of American Photo Supply, La Rochester, Foto Mantel, Hugo Brehme, and Aurelio Loyo (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 84).

In the magazine management, Debroise highlighted the presence of very famous studio photographers, technicians, and specialists at the time. Rudolf Rüdiger and Hugo Brehme also appear as German translators, and Antonio Garduño¹⁹ appears as an Italian translator. The presence of translators was important, as most articles were technical and adapted from foreign publications. This first issue also announced of the creation of an Asociación de Fotógrafos de México which had Macario Gonzalez as president, and that a photography contest was going to be held and readers were invited to take part. The

to photography; however, it was soon converted into the first group of photographers, professionals included”.

¹⁸ In the case of *Helios*, such relationships becomes even more complex when, in its third issue, the advertisements of photographic studios disappear, and the magazine editorial focuses on the direct attack from a definite sector of the photographic industry (La Rochester, American Photo Supply, Schultz house, Mexican Agfa), which was characterized by the fact they belonged to or had relationships with Jewish businessmen. Magazine editorials became increasingly aggressive, and were only softened from 1931 on, when Antonio Garduño takes over management from Juan de La Peña. However, the antisemitic tone conveyed by De la Peña did not disappear completely. The magazine was published until 1936 (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 85-87).

¹⁹ In the year prior to the publication of *Helios*, he sent a Mexican groups of representatives to Sevilla Fair, whose winners were Antonio Garduño, Hugo Brehme, Roberto Turnbull, Livrado García, Ignacio Gómez Gallardo and Tina Modotti, Eva Gonzáles and Eva Mendiola, as well as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, who received an “honorary diploma” (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 84).

contest jurors included two members of Academia San Carlos²⁰, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, and Germán Gedovius. According to Debroise, it was common for photographers to be included as contest jurors (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 84).

This Asociación de Fotógrafos de México, according to a note from Debroise, was supposedly founded in 1926. Besides the already mentioned Sociedad Fotográfica de Profesionales y Aficionados, in 1920, Agustín Casasola, Ezequiel Álvarez Tostado, Ezequiel Carrasco, and Alberto Garduño, among others founded the Asociación Mexicana de Fotógrafos de Prensa. Before the foundation of Club Fotográfico de México, in the first half of the 20th century, professional or amateur photographer associations become common:

Nos falta espacio para tratar a fondo las incontables asociaciones, tanto de profesionales como de aficionados, que surgieron en la mitad del siglo XX tanto en la capital como en varias ciudades de provincia. Encontramos por casualidad, en la miscelánea de la Hemeroteca Nacional, los estatutos de la Sociedad Fotográfica de Monterrey, que atestiguan claramente el auge y la institucionalización de la práctica profesional en el conjunto del país. En ese mismo sentido, las investigaciones regionales emprendidas por José Antonio Rodríguez revelan la existencia de sociedades similares en Puebla y Guadalajara. Antes de la creación, en la posguerra inmediata, del Club Fotográfico de México, algunas asociaciones artísticas también crearon también sus “secciones de fotografía”, como fue el caso de la Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR) que la encargó a Manuel Álvarez Bravo y a Heirich Gutmann. En el caso, la historia de las diversas asociaciones fotográficas, así como la de sus filiaciones políticas y estéticas merecen un estudio aparte. (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 93)²¹

²⁰ Academia de San Carlos was founded in 1785 in Mexico city, and it was both the first artistic academy founded in Latin America and the only one established during the colony regime. It was even considered by Spain as a political error due to the success and independence accomplished by Academia de San Fernando, from Madrid, which was taken as an example for its organization. German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt described Academia de San Carlos as having a “vigorous and productive democracy”. Dawn Ades, in his book **Arte na América Latina** (Art in Latin America), states that the ideas the Mexican Academy favored and advertised “ended up in the political independence of Mexico”. Ades literally mentions a description of activities conducted in Frances Calderón de la Barca academy, based on Humboldt's account, highlighting its democratic nature: “He tells us that, every night, in those rooms brightly lit by Argand lamps, hundreds of young people gathered. Some of them practiced with plaster molds, others sketched live models, and some others copied furniture drawings (...) and there, all social classes, all colors and races mixed: native people sat beside young white men and the son of a very poor mechanic stood next a very rich gentleman. Education was free and was not limited to landscapes and figures; one of the main goals was to instill artists with a general taste for the elegance and beauty of form, and to foster the national industry”. Cf. ADES, Dawn. “As academias e a História da pintura” (The academies and painting history). In: ADES, Dawn. **Arte na América Latina. A era moderna** (The modern era), 1820 – 1980. Translated by Maria Thereza de Rezende Costa. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify Edições, 1997, p. 27 - 39.

²¹ “We do not have enough space to carefully deal with the countless associations of professional or amateur photographer associations which were founded in the mid-20th century both in the capital and in

2.2: Characteristics of the amateur photographer associations:

The fact that many professional and amateur photographer associations existed in Mexico led the publishing market to also write publications focusing on the two ways or practicing photography. José Antonio Rodríguez in his article “Revistas para aficionados y profesionales” mapped this field (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005 b, p. 39-40). The first publication that is known to be the first Mexican photography magazine was *El fotógrafo mexicano*, and its first issue was released in 1899. It was first published by the American Photo Supply and then, from 1939 on, by the Mexican Kodak, which, between 1928 and 1929 also published a leaflet dedicated to the Latin American market, *Apuntes fotográficos*. The 1960s also saw the following publications: *Helios, revista mensual fotográfica*, *Cámara - el primer magazine fotográfico mexicano*, *Foto - boletín mexicano de fotografía*, *Instantáneas, la revista del aficionado mexicano*, *El fotógrafo profesional*, and the publication of CFM, which had its first bulletin issue published in 1949, named *Boletín del Club Fotográfico de México*. In the early 1960s it had its name changed to *A. F. Arte Fotográfico*. Rodríguez highlights the role these publications played both in disseminating a thought on the practice of photography and its aesthetic conceptions and the thoughts of photographers themselves, which reinforces the importance of this source in the writing of other histories of photography:

Un tanto relegadas como fuentes primarias para la historia, las revistas para el aficionado son, sin embargo, una referencia básica de usos y costumbres; esto es, de prácticas y resoluciones que se dieron en proceso en el medio siglo XX mexicano. Sorprendentemente también en donde concurren creadores esenciales en nuestra fotografía, después de los mencionados, digamos, también Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Por eso, documentos necesarios para la elaboración de otras historias. (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005 b, p. 40)²²

several countryside cities. We found the statutes of Sociedade Fotográfica de Monterrey by chance in the first batch of miscellaneous records from Hemeroteca Nacional, which clearly show the summit and the institutionalization of this professional practice in the whole country. In this same sense, the regional investigations conducted by José Antonio Rodríguez reveal the existence of similar societies in Puebla and Guadalajara. Before the foundation of Club Fotográfico de México and immediately after the war, some artistic associations also created their “photography sections”, as was the case of Liga de Escritores e Artistas Revolucionários (LEAR), of which Manuel Álvarez bravo and Heirich Gutmann were in charge. In this case, the history of several photographic associations and their political and aesthetic affiliations deserve a separate study”.

²² “Being somewhat rejected as primary historical sources, the amateur magazines are, however, a basic reference of habits and customs; that is, of practices made and decisions taken in a process in mid-20th century in Mexico. They were also surprisingly where the essential creators of our photography

Club Fotográfico de México was founded during World War II, but became a formal institution only in 1949 (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 108). Its relationship with the photographic industry and trade was already made clear in the second issue of its bulletin, in February 1949, when the club moved its headquarters because the former address could not hold its increased number of members, and they needed space for holding exhibits, monthly meetings, and for a laboratory. The first meetings of CFM had been held on 15 Londres st., in which only 22 members had taken part. On March 1949, there were 160 (GUTIÉRREZ, 1949b):

Esperamos poder inaugurar nuestra casa en el curso del mes de marzo y no quiero dejar de mencionar la magnífica cooperación que en forma de donativos nos ha hecho la Kodak Mexicana Ltda., la American Photo Supply, la "Photo Regis", la Ansco, los señores Sanborn y otros muchos más comerciantes que desinteresadamente han cooperado con nosotros con equipo sin costo en la dotación de elementos a este club. También debemos mencionar que la aportación de los socios ha sido de gran ayuda, pues sin ella, no hubiésemos estado en aptitud de lograr este fin. (GUTIÉRREZ, 1949a)²³

Also in bulletin no. 2, on the section named "Ecos de la junta anterior", we were informed the headquarters was already at its new address²⁴:

Por idea e iniciativa de nuestro Presidente Juanito Gutiérrez y del Sr. Francisco Vives se logró conseguir ya el local del Club en la Avenida Insurgente nº 466 que reúne todas las condiciones que se necesitan para poner los diversos departamentos que requiere nuestro Club y en donde estará también la Secretaría. En forma espontánea la mayoría de los socios suscribieron cantidades en efectivo para poder hacer frente a todos los gastos que se necesitan hacer para condicionar el local debidamente. (MARTÍNEZ, 1949a,)²⁵

competed, including Manuel Álvarez Bravo. They are therefore documents required for us to create other histories".

23 "We hope we are able to open our house during the month of March, and I do not want to skip mentioning the magnificent cooperation in the form of donations Kodak Mexicana Ltda., American Photo Supply, "Photo Regis", Ansco, the Sanborn gentlemen, and many other businessmen who cooperated with us, with free equipment to this club. We must also mention the members' participation was of great help, as we would not be able to achieve our goal without it.

24 In 1950, they moved to a new headquarters again, on 80 San Juan de Letrán st. (EDITORIAL, n.4, 1950, p. 5).

25 "We have a new address for our Club on 466 Insurgentes st., because of our President Juanito Gutiérrez and Mr. Francisco Vives' intellectual and material contribution. The new address has all the conditions we

The close relationship between the club and photographic supply stores, which existed since its foundation and remained throughout the association's history, at some point needed to be clarified because of the role the club had as an education venue for photographic practice rather than business relationships. In the notice of the bulletin from November 1949, which was then signed by the club president, Juan Gutierrez, he insists on the association's autonomy in commercial relationships, on the freedom of speech bases it had been founded. The editorial's intention of highlighting the Club's autonomy in the photographic trade was to stress that, despite it having been founded by amateurs with help from certain business and photographic suppliers, this did not stop them from keeping relationships with other businessmen, nor did they consider being representatives of the products sold by the businesses that supported them:

Los fundadores de este Club que son los asociados y las casas distribuidoras de artículos fotográficos mostraron su espontánea y desinteresada cooperación, sin mayor mira que la de hacer un Centro de Aficionados a desarrollar el arte de la fotografía y sin el menor egoísmo y finalidad de interés comercial para el futuro. La autonomía es privilegio que se conquista a base de un desinterés absoluto, y el hecho de sentirse sin obligaciones o compromisos morales, es en realidad la labor de bien pensar y sensato sentir. (...) No contraer compromisos comerciales dentro de nuestra Institución es básico, puesto que de esa manera nunca se cerrarán las puertas para los elementos que componen la industria y comercio fotográfico, fuentes principales éstas de información y prosperidad en el Arte. (GUTIÉRREZ, 1949d)²⁶

The profile of its members is also clearly outlined in the bulletin's notice, in March 1949, and it follows what is expected from an association of this type: freelancers, businessmen, industrials, that is, "lo más granado de la sociedad". Some professionals were part of the club's member list. On the bulletin's first issue, of January 1949, we found the name of Gabriel Figueroa in the list named "Socios del Club Fotografico de

need to implement the several departments our club requires, and we will also have a reception. Most members spontaneously contributed with sums of money, so we could afford all costs to properly organize the place".

²⁶"The founders of this club, which are its members and photographic supply distributors, contributed with its foundation with no ulterior motives, with the sole purpose of supporting an amateur center to produce photographic art, without selfishness of future commercial purposes. Autonomy is a privilege that is attained based on absolute altruism and the fact one does not have moral obligations or commitments is actually sensible work. (...) Not engaging in business commitments is basic in our institution, as this way we will never close our doors to the elements that make up the industry and the photographic trade, which are the main sources of information and prosperity for art".

México”, who was classified as an honorary member (SOCIOS DEL CLUB FOTOGRÁFICO DE MÉXICO, 1949):

Ya tenemos dentro de los socios todas las actividades sociales representadas: ingenieros, doctores, banqueros, comerciantes, diplomáticos, abogados y en general lo más granado de la sociedad de México como profesionistas miembros de nuestro Club. (GUTIÉRREZ, 1949b)²⁷

1949 also saw the first movie sessions in the club, which were held on weekends. The idea was to open the club so its members, their families, and the general public could watch movies. In May 1949 we found the following in “Noticiero” section: “CINE: en breves días y por gentileza de nuestro consocio el Dr. Héctor Arana se iniciarán exhibiciones de cine sonoro todos los sábados desde la 6 p. m. y podrán concurrir las familias de los socios, con la gente menuda” (VISOR, n. 5, 1949, s/p). In July of the same year “Sección Cinematográfica” was added to the bulletin. It was signed by Héctor Aranas. Through this section, we were informed the club supposedly had a laboratory to make it easier for its members to play movies, conferences about topics related to cinematography, a library with topics on the subject, as well as quarterly contests in which its members could take part as long as they followed the rules established:

Para la satisfacción de los aficionados a la cinematografía se ha formado la sección especializada dentro del organismo de nuestro Club, sección que trabajará bajo el siguiente plan de acción: 1º - Se celebrarán concursos TRIMESTRALES, habrá cuatro categorías correspondientes a 8 mm blanco y negro y 8 mm en color. 16 mm blanco y negro y 16 mm en color. Tiempo de proyección máxima por película de 20 minutos, pudiendo presentar dos películas por concursante. El primero se celebrará el mes de septiembre próximo siendo el tema libre. El concurso será el sábado anterior a la junta reglamentaria del mes, a partir de las 16 horas, se elegirá un jurado que sea el que otorgue los premios y el día de la junta se proyectarán las películas premiadas. (ARANA, 1949, p. 6)²⁸

²⁷“We already have members of all social activities in our club: engineers, physicians, bankers, tradesmen, diplomats, lawyers, and the highest members of Mexican society”.

²⁸“For the satisfaction of the amateurs and cinematography, we implemented a specialized section in our club, which will operate under the following action plan: 1º - QUARTERLY contests will be held, with four categories corresponding to 8 mm in color, 16 mm in black and white, and 16 mm in color. Maximum projection time of 20 minutes, with each contestant being able to present two movies. The first will take place next September, with a free choice of topics. The contest will take place on the previous Saturday with the month's statutory jury. At 4 PM the juror that will give the awards will be selected, and the winning movies will be played on the evaluation day”.

It is important to highlight that the role of the “Sección Femenil” of CFM was to provide photography classes to its female members and allow them to use its laboratories. Intending on gathering a higher number of female members when Sección Femenil was created, they decided there were not going to be admission fees for the first twenty female members, and their monthly association fee was only going to be five pesos. However, applying for this specific section implied that activities such as classes, use of laboratories, and contests would be held separately from the rest of the members. If the female photographers wanted to compete for the “Salones Generales”, they could as long as they applied to “B category”, paying the same monthly fees the other members did:

La Directiva del Club Fotográfico de México, juzgando que el establecer una nueva sección dentro de sus actividades, que agrupara a las damas aficionadas a la fotografía, era muy interesante bajo muchos aspectos, en su sección regulamentaria del día 30 del mes próximo pasado acordó formar el Sector Femenil y nombró como Presidenta de esta Comisión a la entusiasta y dinámica socia señora Aurora Eugenia Latapi de Catañeda, quien contará con todo el apoyo y cooperación de la Directiva para el desempeño de su cometido. El grupo femenino contará con un horario especial, para que se les impartan cursos fotográficos y será dedicado un día especialmente a este Sector para el uso de los laboratorios. (...) Este grupo presentará sus trabajos en una sección especial compitiendo entre ellas mismas, pero sujeto este concurso a las bases fijadas para el resto de los socios. Cualquier dama en cuanto se considere con los arreglos suficientes para concursar en los Salones Generales, podrá hacerlo, ingresando en la Categoría “B”, sólo que en estos casos será considerada como socia regular, cubriendo las cuotas reglamentarias, pero conservando su derecho de asistir a los cursos que se impartan y laboratorios en las horas y días fijados para el Sector Femenil. (LADOR, 1950, p. 35)²⁹

²⁹“The management board of Club Fotográfico de México, while considering that the establishment of a new section within its activities, which gathers female amateur photographers, is interesting considering many aspects, in its statutory section of the 30th day of the previous month, agreed to create a Female Sector, and nominated as president of this commission the enthusiast and dynamic member Mrs. Aurora Eugenia Latapi de Castañeda, who will have the whole support and cooperation from the board of directors in order to perform her duties. The female group will have a special timetable, so they can have access to photography courses, and a special day will be dedicated to this sector, so its members can use the laboratory. (...) This group will present their activities in a special section, competing against themselves. However, this contest will also be subject to the rules that apply to the remaining members. Any dame, as long as they consider they fulfill the requirements to enter the General Halls, will be able to do so by applying to category B. In this case, however, they will be considered a regular member who pay their statutory fees and are entitled to attend the courses they teach and the laboratories at the times that were established for the Female Sector.

Section “Buenas Artes”, which was signed by Juan Mata, appeared first in the bulletin of June 1949, and played a role within the publication set, dealt with topics that included universal themes, such as how beauty could be defined in plastic arts, but mainly with the monthly contests that were held by the club. It was also in this section that we found the explicit purpose of the magazine, which was to help anybody who wanted to be updated on the photographic art. Mata makes it clear that the club and its activities had a pedagogical nature in regards to the composition of the photographic image, mainly through evaluations conducted by the jurors of the photographs that won the monthly contests with topics that were established by the club management and were published on the bulletin cover. Mata criticizes the fact that the comments on the successes and shortcomings of the club's production were restricted to the winning pictures, instead of comprising all pictures submitted, thus extending “esta labor de educación artística”:

Nuestra revista, viene a ayudar a los que de verdad quieren introducirse en el arte fotográfico. Mensualmente se reseñan las faltas y se marcan los aciertos de la fotografía premiada por el Jurado, aunque en mí entender debería hacerse también con todas las demás fotografías que no sean premiadas para hacer más extensa esta labor de educación artística. Esta labor que a primera vista, parece solamente destinada al autor de la fotografía, enseña también a los aficionados en general a no incurrir en los errores apuntados, y tienen un alto valor los que quieran saborear la contemplación de fotografías y educar su gusto artístico. Acostumbrados a que nos sean comunicados los descuidos y poniendo atención en la enseñanza, se llegará a seleccionar lo que más mérito artístico encierra, por lo que teniendo propio parecer, desaparecerán por completo los peligros de la influencia de críticas interesadas. (MATA, n. 6, 1949, s/p)³⁰

The contest evaluations were conducted during the monthly member meetings, as an open event to the people who wanted to watch the photographs presented being

³⁰ “Our magazine's purpose is to truly help those who want to be part of photographic art. Every month the positive and negative aspects of the winning photograph are highlighted. In my opinion, the same should be done to the remaining photographs, even the ones that had no awards, in order to extend this artistic education effort. This activity shows that, at first sight, it only seems to be destined to the author of the one photograph, but it also teaches amateurs in general to avoid the mistakes pointed out. It also has a high value to those who want to savor the contemplation of photographs and educate artistic taste. If we are used to being made aware of our mistakes and if we pay attention to what we are taught, we will be able to select the ones of highest artistic merit. This way people will no longer suffer the effects from the influence of self-interested criticism”.

judged. Recognized photographers in the industry were invited to be jurors, as seen in “Ecos de la reunión anterior”, which was written by Jorge Fernandez in October 1949. The month's honor guests had been Justino Fernández, Armando Salas Portugal, and Arno Brehme, Hugo Brehme's son:

Nuestra última reunión mensual del jueves 22 de septiembre, fue todo un éxito por todos conceptos: nuestros salones estaban invadidos de bellas damas, preciosas fotografías, y números invitados, entre ellos los de honor, que en esta ocasión fueron los señores Justino Fernández, Armando Salas Portugal y Arno Brehme, quienes gentilmente fungieron como jueces de la competencia de Blanco y Negro y Transparencias de color, apreciando una mejor calidad en las fotografías presentadas de acuerdo con nuestro tema obligado de “Textura”. (FERNANDEZ, 1949)³¹

Also in 1949, through an article by Francisco Vives, “Nuestro próximo salón”, the Club manifested the intention of expanding these meetings and exhibits of the works presented by its guests in its internal contests, in order to make them recognized in the whole country, and, soon, in the world. They had even thought about the best place to exhibit the works - the Palácio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts), which was more visible and had easy access - and about printing their catalogs, which should be printed by the Public Education Office:

Hay la intención de dar a conocer al público los trabajos del Club Fotográfico de México y nada mejor que un Salón en algún lugar público. El Palacio de Bellas Artes sería el lugar indicado por lo que se refiere a su accesibilidad, comodidad, amplitud, etc., etc., como tal prestigio que daría a nuestro Club, máxime si se consigue no solamente el que se nos facilite el lugar, sino que la Secretaría de Educación Pública nos imprimiera el Catálogo del Salón en número bastante liberal para enviarlo a otros clubes Nacionales y Extranjeros. (VIVES, , 1949)³²

³¹“Our last monthly meeting of Thursday, September 22, was successful in every aspect: our halls were full of beautiful ladies, precious photographs, and countless guests. Among the honor guests, this time, were Justino Fernández, Armando Salas Portugal, and Arno Brehme, who kindly accepted to be jurors in the Black and White and Color Transparencies competitions. They judged the quality of the photographs that were presented in the “Texture” topic.

³²“Our intention is to give public access to Club Fotográfico de México's works, and there is nothing better than a Hall in a public place. Palácio de Bellas Artes would be a good place for its easy access, comfort, size, etc., and it would give prestige to our Club. We can only attain that if the place is made available to us, and if the Public Education Office prints a high number of catalog copies, so these can be sent to other national and international clubs.

2.3: The mission of Club Fotográfico de México: folklorization processes of Mexico's image

Club Manuel Ampudia took over the president's office in February 1950. In his first bulletin editorial, he reinforces that holding an international meeting was one of the club's most important projects, the organization of Mexico's First International Convention (AMPUDIA, n. 2, 1950, s/p). CFM had already been part of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) since 1949, as we found in an article signed by Martínez, in 1949 (MARTÍNEZ, n.2,1949, s/p). Ampudia already considered that the photography that was practiced in the club in the 1950s was good enough to be exhibited in international events, to which PSA frequently invited the club to participate. Ampudia invited members to submit their work in these events, and this was a medium to advertise the country's natural beauty, which was one of the club amateurs' highest aspirations, according to Ampudia's statement:

La misión más importante del C.F. de M. es contribuir con nuestro grano de arena a la divulgación de las bellezas de nuestro país; grande organizaciones turísticas están empañadas en este esfuerzo, y nosotros podemos hacer muy seria labor sencillamente exhibiendo el producto de nuestra diversión. (AMPUDIA, n. 3, 1950, p. 13 and 20)³³

According to the articles that we found in the association's bulletin, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the sections on photographic techniques and equipment were managed by famous pictorialists such as Enrique Segarra, in articles such as "Consultas - ¿Cuales son las diferencias entre películas comunes, ortocromáticas y pancromáticas?" (BCFM, n. 5, 1949, p. 17-18), and José Turu, "Sección técnica - Los problemas de las exposición" (BCFM, n. 6, 1949). Pictorialists such as Segarra, Turu, Lopez Aguado, and Francisco Vives were considered to be the "scholars" of national photography:

Muchos factores la hicieron así: Fotografía de acción, un tema siempre nuevo; kodachromes maravillosos, subasta familiar animada por Manuel Ampudia, el crooner del ingenio, y para cerrar con broche de oro: el debut de "los Catedráticos", LOPEZ AGUADO, VIVES, SEGARRA, très sólidos pilares de la técnica fotográfica Nacional, quienes pusieron de relieve una vez más su bien conquistada fama, reconocida por propios y

³³"The most important mission of CFM is to contribute with our grain of sand to advertise our country's natural beauty; major tourist organizations are committed to this, and we can do good work by sensibly exhibiting the product of our fun".

extraños, por resolver con atingencia los problemas que les fueron planteados. (AGUNDIS, n. 6, 1949, p. 10)³⁴

They had a well-defined image policy. One of their ideologues, Nicholas Ház³⁵, mentioned - in a book published in 1952 by the club itself - that pictorialist photographers chose topics such as lyric and romantic fields and seas, beautiful flowers, old people, happy people, people with unique and exotic characteristics. He also pointed out that photographers were not supposed to take photographs of destruction, crime, garbage, poverty, or anything that related to documentary makers, who were specialized in portraying all things loathsome and scandalous. He mentioned photographers should see these pictures as ways to shame society and governments, a statement which strongly characterizes the government-biased, elitist stance of the club (RODRIGUEZ, 2002, p. 50-52).

Among the topics chosen by CFM we will highlight what, in our opinion, is the most important in the 1950s, in regards to the folklorization of popular characters, especially the ethnic groups in the country, because these topics strongly relate to government ideals, which reinforces the passage above. This topic, as well as the pictorial aesthetics that is associated with it, is important because it directly regards to the construction of a Mexican identity - the *Mexicanidad* - which had been pursued since the first year of the institutionalization of Mexican revolution, in the 1930s³⁶, and because

³⁴“Many factors turned it into this: action photography, an always novel subject; wonderful kodachrome, a family auction conducted by Manuel Ampudia, the ‘crooner del ingenio’, and to finish in style: the debut of the “scholars”, LOPEZ AGUADO, VIVES, SEGARRA, three of the cornerstones of Mexico's technical photography, who once again stood out because of their well-deserved fame among acquaintances and strangers, and because they promptly solved the problems we had”.

³⁵ This book by Nicholas Ház was organized from a course he gave to the members of CFM in 1951, with the same title: “Manejo de las imágenes” (Image management). The book was later published by the author in English, and translated from the English by CFM member Arturo Vives. Both Vives and Ház signed as representatives from P.S.A. The book was published in Spanish in the following year, 1952, by CFM itself. We were able to find one copy in José Antonio Rodríguez's personal file. Cf. HÁZ, Nicholas. **Manejo de las imágenes**. Translated by Arturo Vives. México: Club Fotográfico de México, 1952. In bulletin no. 80, we found one of Ház's articles that had been transcribed from *Correo Fotográfico Sudamericano*, divided in five parts, and named “Arte e composição” (Art and Composition). The last part of the article was published in April 1953, followed by a note of condolences due to the passing of Ház in that same year. The note informed us that Ház had been born in Hungary and lived many years in the United States, where he stood out in the club-going scene, not only because of his photographic production but also due to his technical knowledge.

³⁶ Right after the revolution, Mexico created the notion of nationalism; or, as stated by Colombian researcher Mariana Figarella (2002), a will for nationalist power that is connected with the unification and

governments discuss the most important topics in the current discussions throughout the years. Indigenous people (and their image construction), with their most varied cultural expressions by means of rituals, myths, dances, songs, languages, everyday objects, clothes, gestures, are then incorporated to this extensive project for rediscovery of Mexico, whose importance remained in the following decades.³⁷ For that reason, to Debroyse, it is important to insist in the close relationship between photography and anthropology between 1920 and 1950 (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 196). All the photographic production that resulted from this approximation (there are very wide variations) ranges from a glance that builds images, which is instilled with a solid knowledge on indigenous issues to the opinion of travelers who had not stayed long in the country:

(...) los intelectuales mexicanos, forjadores de la patria y de una “cultura de la Revolución Mexicana”, se lanzan con entusiasmo al descubrimiento de un territorio, sus mitos, sus leyendas, sus tradiciones, supuestamente enterradas y olvidadas, durante los periodos de opresión colonial, así como de la era porfiriana. Descubrir, entender y valorar a México, a la esencia de este país, significa, por tanto, investigar el “nuevo mundo” que surge de la lucha armada (...). Sin formación previa, los artistas se erigen, sobre la marcha, en antropólogos: Roberto Montenegro, el Doctor Atl y Miguel Coviarrubias coleccionan y exponen “artes populares”; Jean Charlot y Anita Brenner descubren ídolos detrás de los altares; Adolfo Best Maugard inventa un método de dibujo basado en los “siete elementos primarios” del arte mexicano; Frances Toor recopila

institutionalization of the modern capitalist state. The search for a Mexican identity, for *Mexicanidad*, becomes a greatly important element during this process of nationalization that was so concerned with homogenizing their national territory and culture. A great deal of the intellectuals at the time who were involved with this process understands they were living an important time in the search for *Mexicanidad*, as the movement (meant here as shifting, moving from a former to a new place) which had been brought by the revolution had enabled “true” Mexico, the buried Mexico, to resurface. According to Debroyse, the post-revolutionary, nationalist tone started being conveyed in 1923, with the newly-created Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores’ manifesto, when it stated the Mexican people’s art is their highest and healthiest spiritual manifestation and Mexico’s indigenous peoples’ tradition was the best of all (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 195).

³⁷ We will not be able to follow in detail the relationships between indigenist photography and the variations concerning the way public policies focusing on indigenous groups - which focused on educational and cultural proposals that were developed in the post-revolutionary period - were conducted. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that, until 1968, according to Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, the revolution remained as a legacy: “The revolution was not a real force anymore after Manuel Avila Camacho’s presidential term (1940-1946), but its historical prestige and the aura of its deep transformations kept lending legitimacy to the Mexican governments in the second half of the 20th century. This mythological and real shine from the recent past allowed the status quo, from Cárdenas onwards, which was however filled with glitches and injustices, to be presented to the country as a passing phenomenon, as the true Mexico was still to surface. This was a crucial ideological leap, and its history is the history of a revolutionary fact in a continuous present and in a future that was but a promise” (CAMÍN; MEYER, 2000, p. 211).

corridos y huapangos, y describe las danzas de Los viejitos y de Moros contra Cristianos; Salvador Novo y Xavier Villaurutia encuentran pintores coloniales y decimonónicos olvidados en las provincias. (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 195-196)³⁸

The Mexican culture nationalization process was directly related to the creation of a collective imagination of indigenous populations. However, this collective imagination should converge to the creation of a unique character, instead of reinforcing the diversity of Mexican ethnicities. According to Antonio Carlos Amador Gil, the search for homogenization, for the creation of a single national identity that could be imposed on the several ethnicities, languages, and cultures in the Mexican territory, found its ideal character in the mixed-race figure: “the post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism widely used the mixed-race archetype myth” (GIL, 2011, p. 341).

Based on José Antonio Rodríguez (2002), we can map some photography publications and exhibits from the second half of the 20th century, which show the existing tension in the attempt to create collective imaginations, in search for a *Mexicanidad*. According to Rodríguez, *México Indígena* exhibit took place at Palácio de Bellas Artes in 1946. It was conceived by Lucio Mendieta y Nuñez, the director of UNAM's Social Investigations Institute, the institution that was responsible for the related photographic catalog. The related exhibit was very successful and echoed the book that had been published some years before by Mendieta y Nuñez: *Valor económico y social de las razas indígenas de México* (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 12). In this book, its author stated it was not possible to call Mexico a nation, as there was a large number of indigenous people in its territory who did not identify themselves with the rest of the population of mixed-race people and creoles, who had European culture roots. They did not identify themselves with the current manifestation of Mexican culture or its ideological or

³⁸“(…) the Mexican intellectuals, who were the forgers of the country's sentiment and of a ‘culture of Mexican revolution’, enthusiastically venture into the discovery of a territory, its myths, its legends, its traditions, which were supposedly buried and forgotten during colonial oppression times, as in the Porphyrian age. To discover, understand, and praise Mexico, the essence of this country, therefore means to investigate the ‘new world’ that arises from gun battles (...). With no previous background, artists become anthropologists in the process: Roberto Montenegro, el Doctor Alt, and Miguel Covarrubias collect and exhibit ‘popular arts’; Jean Adolfo Best Maugard invents a drawing method based on the ‘seven primary elements’ of Mexican art; Frances Toor compiles corridos and Huapangos, and describes dances Los viejitos and Moro contra Cristianos; Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia find colonial and 19th century painters forgotten in the provinces.

sentimental units. This impossibility that was mentioned by Mendieta Y Nuñez was until then related to the diversity of indigenous peoples and their cultures. To Gil, these postures regarding indigenous populations, led to what the author called “racial bias”, a process that had its public dimension supported by government policies. It was necessary to aggregate all ethnicities in the unification process through mixing (GIL, 2011, p. 342). The groups that had not been ‘unified’ by the 1940s and 1950s started being seen as a problem to be solved:

Señalaba además que pueblos como los tarahumaras, los huicholes, los coras o los lacandones se encontraban fuera de todo concepto de nación porque éstos no tenían un pasado histórico común con que él entendía como “el resto de la población”, o sea los criollos y los mestizos. (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 12)³⁹

According to Mendieta y Nuñez, the indigenous populations were not even aware of what nationality meant, and that was a danger for the modern Mexican state. The press at the time described the event as a discovery by a more urban sector of society of another sector that comprised indigenous groups, who were presented as a revelation (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 11). The exhibit comprised a huge collection of photographs taken in 1939 and traveled through a great part of the national territory. It was organized by Raúl Estrada Díscua and Enrique Hernández Moronez. Rodríguez describes these photographs as inanimate, static, and illustrative representations of wax museum characters:

En ese libro Mendieta publicó diversas fotografías de su tema de “reflexión”: en una de ellas se apreciaba a un indígena maya representando la danza del El venado como salido de un museo de cera; en otra, un hombre tarahumara aparecía hincado cual flechador (teniendo por blanco un punto incierto en el cielo); y en otras más, los indígenas miraban de frente, con los brazos laxos, aprisionados en el rectángulo de la fotografía. Entonces, ¿que fue lo que vieron los espectadores de aquella muestra de 1946? (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 13)⁴⁰

³⁹“It was surprising that peoples such as the tarahumaras, Huicholes, coras, or lacandones were not included in the concept of nation because they did not have a shared historical past with what was understood as the ‘rest of the population’; that is, creoles and mixed-race individuals”.

⁴⁰“Mendieta published several photographs about his ‘reflection’ topic in his book: in one of them a maya indian could be seen representing El Venado dance, as if this had been taken from a wax museum; in another photograph, a tarahumara man appeared holding a bow (aiming at an uncertain spot in the sky);

In order to answer that question, Rodríguez points towards the conformation of exhibit *México indígena* with Mendieta y Nuñez's conception of a country occupied by "seres ajenos" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 15). At a time intellectuals were concerned about defining and conceptualizing what meant to be Mexican, hundreds of photographs "mostraron las esquematizaciones de los indígenas, que aparecían mirando de frente y de perfil (...); constreñidos de manera hierática dentro de um espacio vivencial que apenas somaba" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 15). Or also by displaying poverty, the exoticism in the place they inhabited, cut away from their jobs, their everyday duties, with their world ignored, used, if much, as a background for artificial postures. A few years later, *Etnografía de México* was published, and it followed the same line of thought to discuss the topic. This perspective only shifted in 1950, with the publication of *Folklore mexicano*, by Luis Márquez. According to Rodríguez, this publication pointed out "otros excesos" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 18).

Abandoning the idea of a faraway indigenous people who did not partake in their country's interests, Luis Márquez's indigenous people appeared through extremely theatrical characters representing the Mexican archetype. Son of a theater representative, Márquez started practicing photography in the workshops that were held in the 1920s by Mexico city's public education office. In 1933, he had his only experience with the movies, by releasing the movie *Janitzio*, which was filmed by Carlos Navarro, with Jack Draper in charge of the cinematography (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 208). As many intellectuals who started their careers in the 1920s and 1930s, Márquez's work was heavily influenced by the anthropological approach. Debroise highlights his trip to Chalma and the festivities he followed at that occasion, as the one that had sealed his fate:

A partir de la experiencia en Chalma, Luis Márquez decidió explorar fotográficamente el México (...). Hombre de teatro, coleccionista de trajes indígenas, Luis Márquez llevó los estereotipos, la teatralización de "lo mexicano" hasta las últimas posibilidades, a un grado de hiperestetización que sólo encontramos en las fotografías con referencias prehispánicas, de Annie Leibovitz para el Mundial de fútbol

and there were other pictures which showed indigenous people facing forward with their arms relaxed, imprisoned in a rectangle in the photograph. So what did museum goers seen in that exhibit in 1946?

de 1986, pero cuyos antecedentes podemos rastrear en cierta iconografía de “tipos populares” del siglo XIX. (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 208)⁴¹

To Rodríguez, in the case of Márquez, the idea was to re-compose a national image, as the reality did not correspond to what the photographer understood the Mexican people had to be: he looked for a scenic ideal. Márquez's imaginative way to compose his reality of the Mexican population is present in the blue eyes one of his tehuanas had, in the darkened skin of models in the capital so they would seem to be from Oaxaca. Also, it was not strange to him that in the pages of *Folklore Mexicano*, Emilo “El Indio” Fernandez appeared as characterized by his role in *Janitzion*, without readers being warned it was a fictional movie character (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 18-19). In an interview in which we talked about Mexico and Mexican people, Márquez states that Mexico was a photogenic country because of its ‘characters’ and landscape:

(...) en una entrevista de 1951 declaró que México era “un país absolutamente fotogénico (...) con la característica de sus tipos y sus paisajes que le dan la personalidad que tiene y que es única en el mundo (...). Por eso Márquez reconfiguraba y modelaba la cultura indígena en un adecuado espectáculo. Una visión nada intranscendente porque Márquez había inundado el mercado de imágenes fotográficas desde hacía tres décadas – haciendo gran competencia a Hugo Brehme en la estampa mexicanista – y lo seguía haciendo posteriormente. (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 20-21)⁴²

On this important issue, we found the club's stance in “Buenas Artes” section from June 1950. The section, which in its first publication year had been signed by Juan Mata, in 1950 starts being written by Tacho, who claimed the pictorialist aesthetics was the best artistic expression of photography, and that Mexico and Mexicans could be better discussed through it and through its range of topics than through the new trends,

⁴¹“After his experience in Chalma, Luis Márquez decided to explore Mexico through photography (...). As a theater man and collector of indigenous outfits, Luis Márquez took stereotypes and his theatrical ‘Mexican’ character to extremes, to a degree of hyper-aestheticization we can only find in the photographs with pre-Hispanic references by Anne Leibovitz for the World Cup Soccer 1986; more than his predecessors, we can find a certain iconography of ‘popular characters’ in the 19th century”.

⁴²“(...) in an interview, he said that Mexico was an ‘absolutely photogenic country (...) with the characteristics of its characters and landscapes which gives it its personality, which is unique in the world (...). That is why Márquez reconfigured and shaped the indigenous culture in a proper spectacle. That was a vision that was not intranscendent at all, because Márquez had flooded the photographic image market three decades ago - competing closely with Hugo Brehme in his Mexicanist print - which he went on doing later”.

“productos de la era moderna e hijas de la fán de lucimiento y que nada tiene que ver con la originalidade” (TACHO, 1950, p. 24):

Pueden criticarnos el querer seguir escuelas ya clasificadas y querer quitarle valor a nuestros éxitos en tendencias ya definidas. Pero lo que nunca nos podrán quitar es el gusto y el placer de redondear un triunfo en la esfera en que no cientos, sino miles de artistas se han movido. Podrán argumentar, en un deseo de patriotería mal entendida, que no hacemos labor “mexicanista”, sin fijarse que lo que nosotros plasmamos en nuestras placas también es México. Porque la más linda y bien vestida de nuestras mujeres, es tan mexicana como la mugrienta y desarrapada india de la que tan orgullosos estamos. Arte lo puede haber en el brillo de los diamantes de una reina, en la suavidad de los pétalos de una flor o en la redondez de un seno, como lo puede también haber en las cintas de cuero de un huarache. Hagamos Arte Mexicano, sí, pero hagamos aquello que podamos representar con orgullo en el extranjero. Captemos el olor a limpio de las faldas de nuestras tehuanas, la apacible quietud de los callejones de nuestros pueblos, el señorío de nuestros portalones provincianos, el brillo satinado de nuestros jarros de barro, la ondulante silueta de nuestras mujeres porteñas, la majestuosidad de nuestras sierras, la profundidad de nuestros valles... y cien mil cosas más de las que somos felices poseedores. Dejemos para otros, el tratar de hacer labor social con la cámara. Nosotros somos única e esencialmente artistas, amadores de lo bello. Desechemos credos, doctrinas, tendencias ajenas a nuestra manera de pensar, y unamos nuestras fuerzas para con nuestro trabajo, engrandecer y dar a conocer al mundo eso para nosotros tan querido y del que tan orgullosos estamos: MÉXICO. (TACHO, 1950, p. 24)⁴³

In November 1950, the topic of the monthly contest was exactly “Folklore Mexicano”. In the bulletin section that was reserved for the comments of monthly contest evaluations, “Ecos de la Reunión Anterior” does not provide us with many

⁴³“They may criticize us because we want to follow schools that have already been classified and steals us of the value of our successes in already defined trends. However, what they will never be able to take away from us is the pleasure of savoring a triumph at the level hundreds, nay, millions of artists graduated. They may argue, in a misunderstood with for patriotism, that we do not perform “Mexicanist” work, without being aware that what we shape in our molds is also Mexico. Because the most gorgeous of our women is as Mexican as the ragged Indian we are so proud of. Art can exist in the shine of a queen’s diamonds, in the softness of the petals of a flower, or in the roundness of a breast. It can also be in the leather strips of a huarache. Let us do Mexican art, yes, but let us do what we can proudly represent abroad. Let us capture the odor of cleanliness from the skirts of our tehuanas, the pleasant tranquility in the little streets of our pueblos, our majestic province passages, the satin-like shine of our clay jars, the curvy silhouettes of our port-dwelling women, the magnificence of our mountain chains, the depth of our valleys... and a hundred thousand other things we are happy to possess. Let us leave it to others to do social work with cameras. We are only and essentially artists, lovers of all things beautiful. Let us undo creeds, doctrines, trends which go against our way of thinking, and let us join efforts to let the world know, through our work, what is so dear to us and make us so proud: MEXICO”.

comments about the topic other than the contestant rankings: the notable thing about Mexican folklore was to lend visibility to the country's natural beauty and its "mujeres bellísimas y adornadas con sus vestidos de intenso colorido que da esse carácter muy mexicano a lo nuestro y que causa admiración en todo el mundo" (SOLÍS, 1950, p. 22). However, the whole bulletin, including its cover, is filled with the photographs that took part in the contest, and it was possible to notice the treatment the topic gained, the approximation to scenic and aesthetic aspects of the "museo de cera" José Antonio Rodríguez tells us about. In Rodríguez's book about photographer Ruth Lechuga, he discusses the indigenous folklorization topic, and highlights an excerpt from the description that was made in one of CFM's bulletins in 1949 - it was about an excursion to Teotihuacán - and it makes the images in 1950's bulletin very clear:

Una fiesta de color, indios danzantes con indumentarias y penachos policromos; acción, color, cromos, blanco y negro; oportunidades para todos (...). Los danzantes que habíamos contratado acababan de llegar y se estaban cambiando de ropa. Comenzó la acción. Escalinatas, cabezas de serpientes y el cielo azul como fondo teniendo como primer término a los supuestos descendientes de los toltecas con sus capas de hermosos colores, lanzas, brazaletes, penachos de hermosas y brillantes plumas... (TURU apud RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 51)⁴⁴

According to Rodríguez, the CFM's guidelines were very clear: "El asunto no dejaba lugar a dudas: o se seguían los esquemas dictados por el Club o se era harina de outro costal" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 52). "De otro costal", that is, opposite to this production, in the 1950s another approach for the topic arose, and it gathered photographers such as Lola Álvarez Bravo, Bernice Kolko, Nacho López, Gertude Duby Blom, Walter Reuter, Mariana Yampolsky, and Ruth D. Lechuga who, according to Rodríguez, was closer to a more humanist view of indigenous people (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 21 - 28). This different perspective was pointed out, for example, by Lola Álvarez Bravo:

⁴⁴ "A feast of colors, dancing Indians with multi-colored outfits and feathers; action, color, white, and black; opportunities for all (...). The dancers we had hired had just arrived and were changing clothes. The action has begun. Stairways, snake heads and the blue sky as the background, with the supposed descendants of Toltecs with their capes and beautiful colors, spears, bracelets, feathers, and beautiful, shiny feathers in the forefront.

Estoy segura que en muy poco tempo podrá la fotografía mexicana (...) distinguirse, tanto como ahora se distingue la pintura hecha en México. Por supuesto me refiero a la buena escuela de fotografía mexicana, que no quiere decir “burritos”, “petates”, ni ninguna especie de *Mexican curios*, sino a la obra de aquellos que han aprendido a ver y, por lo tanto, a expresar la fuerza de un país. (BRAVO apud RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 23-24)⁴⁵

This effort to “express the strength of a country” through photography went against, as we saw, a long tradition for representing indigenous people, which was in force since the 19th century, as an obstacle to the more humanistic view of this new group of photographers (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 24). Besides opposing to this photography tradition that had been repeated since the 19th century, this humanistic view also took a stand against the idea of a modern, industrial, urban, cosmopolitan Mexico that was defended by president Miguel Alemán⁴⁶ (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 27). This generation of photographers saw the indigenous world as a gathering place for integration and knowledge (RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 27). That idea of integration with the space of the other, of understanding this space as a privileged one in the construction of knowledge/self-knowledge on the other and on oneself through a relationship of respect is clear according to Nacho López:

Cuando la cámara es un enlace de amistad, de legítima intercomunicación, el fotógrafo asume una gran responsabilidad y un compromiso que implica una posición crítica y de análisis. Con un previo bagaje de sólida información, llegará a la comunidad indígena, y tímidamente, después de algún tiempo y pidiendo los permisos necesarios, usará su cámara. Sabrá hasta dónde es aceptado o rechazado por la familia y tendrá sumo cuidado en lo transgredir los límites de la más elemental educación. (LÓPEZ apud RODRÍGUEZ, 2002, p. 27)⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “I am certain that very shortly Mexican photography will be able to (...) distinguish itself, as much the painting in Mexico now distinguishes itself. Of course I mean the good school of Mexican photography, which does not mean “burritos”, “petates”, with no sorts of *Mexican curiosities*, but the work of those who learned to see, and therefore to express the strength of a country”.

⁴⁶ Miguel Alemán Valdés was Mexico's president from 1946 to 1952. His administration was characterized by heavy industrialization in Mexico. It is important to mention here the participation of the indigenous people in the country's modernization, which took place in a way that was different from the other countries in Latin America, as Brazil, for example. According to Gil, unlike other Latin American countries such as Brazil, which used immigrant workforce during its modernization process, in Mexico they resorted to the race mixing process, based on the perspective that indigenous people should be incorporated to society if they gave up their language and culture. In order to know more about the topic, please refer to Gil's article (GIL, 2011, p. 342-343).

⁴⁷ “When a camera is a tie of friendship and legitimate intercommunication, photographers take over a great responsibility and a commitment which implies a critical and analytical stance. With a background of

This generation of photographers breaks with the visual construction of a distant indigenous person, hieratic of the tradition of the 19th century that is related to an anthropology of the exoticism of “races”, an image that was produced for European consumption and submitted the ones portrayed to an image that was disconnected from a space, time, and culture. They tried to mingle in the culture they would later photograph, know, understand, thus producing a visual documentation in which the most varied Mexican ethnicities would appear active, at celebrations, in their usual routines, experiencing their culture, and involved by their space and time. These are images that produce meanings, which relate to deep experiences that see and cause us to see⁴⁸.

3 - Final considerations:

We tried to show how a topic such as amateur and photo club photography can provide us new ways to discuss the cultural, social, and political relationships of countries. In the case of Mexico, we saw how CFM, which was created under the most strict photo club-related rules, integrated, with the images and the discussions on the production of these images, the process for creating an collective imagination on mixed-race Mexicans,

solid information, they will arrive in indigenous communities and, in a shy manner at first will use their cameras, by asking permission as needed. They will know where they are accepted or rejected by families, and will be very careful not to trespass the limits of basic politeness”.

⁴⁸ The issue is not resolved in such a simple manner. It is undeniable there is a differentiation in the way this 1950s generation photographed indigenous groups, but this does not mean some authors sometimes do not consider it as a type of folklorization. For example, to Debroyse, Nacho López's photography was still a folkloric one. López photographed mainly the city, but he was in contact with the mixed people, because he worked for Mexico's National Indigenist Institute. In the prologue of his book, *Los pueblos de la bruma y el sol*, he wrote: “Pocas veces he logrado permanecer largo tempo en comunidades y pueblos. Por ello mi visión fotográfica se queda corta. Las imágenes de este libro son sólo una tímida aproximación al pueblo mixe que me permitió compartir algo de sus vivencias, siempre a distancia respetuosa. Obvio es que faltan muchos aspectos que aquí no se ilustran: señalar represiones y violencias que estos pueblos ha sufrido por defender sus tierras. Mis fotos son un mero registro y un deseo, despojados de todo folklorismo” (LÓPEZ apud DEBROISE, 2005, p. 214). To Debroyse, López was mistaken: “(...) justamente por ser distanciadas, respetuosas y tímidas, sus fotografías resultan, finalmente, folklóricas (entendidas en su concepción antropológica, y de ninguna manera denigrante). Son imágenes absolutamente correctas desde el punto de vista de una etnología” (DEBROISE, 2005, p. 214). Even stating López's photography had no intention of portraying individuals as submissive, to Debroyse it remained an anthropological, ethnographic look that was ultimately folkloric. We may notice, through this example, that the photography issue of indigenous groups is much more complicated, there remaining the need to carefully examine each photographer and their particular way to build an image, which is not our responsibility here. We just highlighted the complexity of the issue, which we discussed here in general terms, the relationship between this analysis and the photo club's space.

according to the government projects that aimed to think about the country's national identity.

If for a long time photo clubs and their production were understood by some of the researchers interested in the topic as a little part of the history of photography, which as it is destined to discussions strictly regarding to the club-related realm, did not reach a higher section of society, today, with the new forms for approach within a perspective of visual history, which sees photography as built by a speech/practice that, at the same time it is built, it helps think of the constitution of a space in the cultural field for this type of production/expression, in a comprehensive and participatory that is neither reflexive or correlative, which implies the understanding of a field of visualness in which images cannot be understood separately from their social contexts, in line with Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses states as “a misleading and sterile search for correlations between one artistic and one social level (reflex, linear or multi-linear causality, homologues, co-variations, etc) - which, in turn, always induces, in a variate scale, to exclude art from social, and therefore, historical aspects” (MENESES, 2003, p. 14).

Or also, according to Paulo Knauss on the study of images, enabling the understanding of the ‘social process as a dynamic one with multiple dimensions’, which opens space for “history to focus on the ways to produce meaning. His analysis is based on understanding the process for producing meaning as social processes” (KNAUSS, 2006, p. 100). To us, the importance of this type of approach is exactly not considering meanings as ready, but rather as cultural constructions that are often related to government projects, as in the case of *Mexicanidad*.

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