

***Civilized People in Uncivilized Places:
Rubber, Race, and Civilization during the Amazonian Rubber Boom***

A Thesis Submitted to the
College of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History

University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK

By

Jean L. Ruiz

© Copyright Jean L. Ruiz, May 2006. All rights reserved

Permission to Use

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5A5

Abstract

Imperial Europe's relationship with the tropical world was characterized by intrigue and fascination combined with a fear of difference. This combined intrigue and fear developed over time into a set of stereotypes and myths about the tropics, which by the 19th century had solidified into a powerful discourse historian David Arnold calls tropicality. As Europe's interaction with the tropical world increased and its need for tropical resources grew, tropicality became a powerful tool for legitimizing European interference in and exploitation of the tropics. Embedded in the language of science and the promise of progress, it reaffirmed European superiority and its necessary role as the bearer of civilization for the tropical world.

Perhaps the most powerful characteristic of tropicality was its inherent ambivalence. The Amazon basin has been a particularly important source for the creation and maintenance of these stereotypes about the tropical world. Reinvented by Alexander von Humboldt as an exotic paradise at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Amazon basin continued throughout the century to inspire commentary, exploration, and exploitation from abroad. As contact with the Amazon increased, ideas about the tropics began to change. What once was thought of as a pristine paradise became perceived as sinister, diseased, and savage. By the end of the nineteenth century, the tropical world, its people and nature, was considered to be an obstacle to civilization, and its very ability to become civilized began to be questioned.

Rubber, an increasingly important and lucrative imperial resource at the end of the nineteenth century, brought people from around the world to the Amazon basin. This resulted in the creation of a "contact zone" of different peoples, cultures, and ideas, which was important for the moulding and maintenance of tropical stereotypes and myths. This was especially the case in the Putumayo, a border zone between modern day Colombia and Peru, where the brutal treatment of workers and the promise of civilization clashed. Through an exploration of travel diaries, newspapers, parliamentary papers, and other works about the tropics and rubber, this thesis argues that the manner in which rubber and its environment were depicted legitimized its control and exploitation from the outside. Couched in the rhetoric of civilization, tropicality helped justify the exploitation of rubber, the environment in which it grew, and the peoples that lived there.

Acknowledgements

There are many people I would like to thank for their support, encouragement, and comments over the duration of this project. First, I am grateful to the University of Saskatchewan and the Department of History for financial support throughout my M. A. program. It made all the difference in my ability to pursue this degree. From the Department of History, I would like to thank Lawrence Kitzan for his thoughtful feedback. As well, many thanks to Geoff Cunfer and Douglas Thorpe (from the Dept. of English) for agreeing to take part in the defence process. Their questions and suggestions improved the final product. My supervisor, Jim Handy, deserves much credit for my academic formation at both the undergraduate and graduate level. He encouraged me to challenge myself and the norm, and not to be afraid to try something new. His influence on my life perspectives will carry on long after I graduate.

My fellow graduate students were the most important ingredient in the recipe for stress-relief and fun. Speaking of recipes, a big thanks to Rachel Hatcher, whose baking was the excuse for many much needed gatherings. To Jen Jozic, whose direct, to the point character was refreshing and honest. A special thanks to both Rachel and Jen for taking the time to edit the first drafts of my thesis (I am sure Prof. Handy thanks you too!). And, of course, to all the rest Jill, Karen, Tom, Darren, Jen H., Bonnie, Brendan, Kim....there are many more.

This entire undertaking would have been nearly impossible without many dear friends. Pam Downe, both friend and teacher, was always there offering solid advice and comfort. Bosom buddy and brilliant fellow Latin American historian, Julie Gibbings, has been a constant motivator and supporter both academically and emotionally. Her passion can inspire anyone. Lastly to Elizabeth Richert, who has been there since the beginning. Her unbelievable patience and inherent understanding of “how I am” are greatly valued. I know that not everyone has a Beth.

As a result of their constant love, support, and encouragement, my parents always made me believe that anything was possible. My brothers, Bill and Lloyd, are truly inspirational. They always listened keenly to my thesis ideas, helped me sort through “the plan,” and offered unconditional love. Their friendship means so much.

Lastly, to my husband, who was there throughout it all. Ernesto thank-you for *always* being by my side, encouraging me, and comforting me. Your unwavering belief that I can do anything is truly overwhelming but incredibly empowering. Together, we can do anything!

Dedication

For Mom, Dad, and Ernesto

Table of Contents

<i>PERMISSION TO USE</i>	I
<i>ABSTRACT</i>	II
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	III
<i>DEDICATION</i>	IV
<i>TABLE OF CONTENTS</i>	V
CHAPTER ONE	
REPRESENTING AMAZONIA THROUGH RUBBER:	
A HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION	1
TROPICALITY IN AMAZONIA	6
RUBBER IN AMAZONIA	8
THESIS OUTLINE AND SOME DISCUSSION ON WORD USAGE.....	18
CHAPTER 2	
EUROPEAN INSECURITY AND THE TROPICAL WORLD:	
ENVIRONMENT, RACE, AND DISEASE IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY	22
IN THE EYES OF NATURAL SCIENCE: HUMBOLDT AND DARWIN IN AMAZONIA.....	24
CIVILIZED PEOPLE IN UNCIVILIZED PLACES: EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION IN THE TROPICS	30
CHAPTER 3	
“THERE IS NOTHING LIKE RUBBER:”	
CIVILIZATION AND THE RHETORIC OF RUBBER:	41
CIVILIZING RUBBER: SCIENCE, EXTRACTION, AND “FOLKLORE” IN AMAZONIA	43
CIVILIZED SAVAGES AND AMAZONIAN WILD (GENTLE)MEN: CIVILIZATION AND RUBBER IN THE PUTUMAYO	54
CHAPTER FOUR	
ROGER CASEMENT’S BLUE BOOK:	
CIVILIZATION, RACE, AND RUBBER IN THE PUTUMAYO	61
ROGER CASEMENT: HIS LIFE AND TIMES	64
“BRITISH COLONIAL SUBJECTS AND NATIVE INDIANS:” CASEMENT’S PUTUMAYO REPORTS.....	68
TROPICAL SUBJECTS: THE FIRST REPORT	70
“MOULDED TO MUCH BETTER THINGS:” “WILD FOREST INDIANS” AND COMMERCIAL SAVAGES IN THE ST. PATRICK’S DAY REPORT.....	77
“EMANCIPATED ANALITY:” THE BIRTH OF THE BLACK DIARIES AND THE DEATH OF CASEMENT	85
CHAPTER FIVE	
“WHEN THE STREETS WILL BE PAVED WITH RUBBER:”	
CONCLUSIONS	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	93

Chapter One
Representing Amazonia through Rubber:
A Historical and Theoretical Introduction

The tropics as both a geographical and imagined terrain were a source of much imperial need and intrigue in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were an important source of resources and economic development, and a ready supply of labour. Furthermore, subjugating the tropics boosted a growing imperial ego, which solidified a faith in science as a tool for tropical agricultural development and disease control, as well as legitimized racial and environmental hierarchies. Finally, controlling the tropics became an important necessity in the moral conviction of the time based on presumptions of European superiority and natural position as rulers and administrators. It was not simply a necessity to control the tropics for European material need; it was an obligation to better the environment and conditions of the peoples who lived there.

As interest in and interaction with the tropics grew, a series of representations began to play a central role in the ways that people thought about these places. These ideas, based both in reality and imagination, developed into a chain of interacting discourses that played an important role in how Europeans envisioned and, more importantly, interacted with the tropics on economic, scientific, moral, and aesthetic levels. Historian David Arnold calls this phenomenon tropicality. The power of these discourses for interpreting the tropical world solidified in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the advent of natural history, human and race sciences, the professionalization of certain fields of study about the tropical milieu, such as tropical medicine and modern geography, and lastly with increasing, primarily British, imperial endeavors.¹

Culminating at the height of British imperialism, the Amazon rubber boom exemplifies much of this tropical representation. The rubber boom brought investment, get-rich-quick schemers, and science to the Amazon, increasing the world's interest in it.

¹ Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 15-17.

This thesis examines the idea of tropicality within the context of the Amazon rubber boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It looks at the ways in which notions of the tropics found in widely read travel diaries, and scientific and natural history writings on race and the environment at the time interpreted the tropics for both audiences outside of tropical zones and select peoples within tropical zones. Tropicality gave people an established way of describing the tropics and its peoples. However, as a discourse, it made it difficult to think and write about the tropics in any other way. Within the context of the rubber boom, the ambivalent nature of tropicality was at constant play in the ways that barons, tappers, overseers, and national and international peoples involved in the rubber boom saw and thought about the Amazon Basin. Moreover, tropicality justified its exploitation based on ideas of civilization and development at the time.

In order to further focus my study of the rubber boom and tropicality, I chose a particular area of notoriety during the rubber boom, the upper Putumayo River which today forms the border between Colombia and Peru. The Putumayo became infamous after the British company, the Peruvian Amazonian Company owned by Julio César Arana, was accused and investigated for human rights abuses in the area starting as early as 1907. The Putumayo scandal is interesting for a myriad of reasons, the most important for this research being the following three. First, it was located in a disputed frontier zone. The frontier is an important conceptual framework for the creation and maintenance of stereotypes about different places and races. It is at the frontier where the contrasting ideas about civilization and barbarism, Western and indigenous, and cultivated environments and wilderness interact and play out.² So, in the case of my research, the Putumayo not only represents a disputed border zone between two countries (arguably three countries) but also between two conceptual worlds, the savage and the civilized. The second reason the area is interesting is the Putumayo atrocities gained international recognition when Roger Casement, an Irish/British diplomat, among others, investigated and published his findings about the Putumayo in international presses. This

² For an interesting discussion on borders and stereotypes see Valerio-Holguín, "Primitive Borders: Cultural Identity and Ethnic Cleansing in the Dominican Republic," in *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America: Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture*, ed. Erik Camayd-Freixas and José Eduardo Gonzáles (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000), 75-88.

led to increasing public interest and knowledge about the area, continuing a tradition of writing about the tropics which began with nineteenth century scientific travel diaries. Lastly, because of the nature of the atrocities and the peoples involved, specifically the indigenous peoples of the area, there is a constant tension apparent in the paper trail left behind about how to deal with the situation morally. This paper trail illuminates many of the historical constructions about peoples in tropical places and their environments. Of particular interest for this research are ideas about civilization in the Amazon and tropic zones that were prominent at the time, both in the sense of whether so-called “civilized” societies are possible in tropical places and what happens to already “civilized” people when they venture into “uncivilized” places; and secondly, how tropical and foreign peoples engaged in this debate. How these ideas about civilization and environment show up in this paper trail about the Putumayo demonstrates the ambivalence and ambiguity of ideas of tropical environments and people, and also the way their control was legitimized.

Expanding on Arnold’s idea of tropicality, this thesis intends to elucidate the ways that ideas about the tropics, its environment and people, solidified during the nineteenth century and then continued to play an important part in tropical representation thereafter.³ Arnold bases his idea of tropicality on Edward Said’s Orientalism. Orientalism is the European discursive practice of representing the Orient. As Said explains in *Orientalism*:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. I have found it useful to employ Micheal Foucault’s notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even

³ For a thorough discussion of Tropicality see: David Arnold, "'Illusory Riches': Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 6-18, David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 141-68.

produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.⁴

Arnold reworks the concept of Orientalism to fit into a discussion on the tropics on two levels. First, he challenges the tendency in *Orientalism* to homogenize Orientalism's representation of the Orient, and the ways that it depicted the Orient as the "other" of European culture, claiming that, "Europe possessed more than one sense of "otherness."⁵ Second, Arnold examines the idea of discourse from an environmental perspective suggesting that the way the tropical environment was portrayed directly affected the people that lived there, as landscapes and their perceived characteristics, climate, disease, flora, and fauna, have always connoted not only morality but also ideas about civilization, culture, and exploitation.⁶

Arnold's discussion on tropicity is brief and limited; thus, it is difficult employ without making assumptions about or logical extensions of his idea. With this in mind and for the purpose of this thesis, the following discussion will outline how I have come to understand tropicity, and the ways that it will be applied in the discussion of environmental thought and the rubber boom in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is important to remember that although many of the following characteristics are examined by David Arnold, they are not all included in his discussion of the phenomenon.

First, and perhaps most importantly, following the example of Foucault's notion of the "archive," tropicity is not one all-encompassing discourse, but rather a heterogeneous, dynamic concept, which is in a constant relationship with other discourses.⁷ Medical texts, literature, diaries, court cases, and parliamentary papers written by doctors, workers, politicians, and lawyers, who were at one point in the tropics, make up the primary sources used in this thesis. Each of these derives its authority over the tropics by engaging in one way or another with tropicity. However, unlike *Orientalism*, where Said is too quick to downplay how much material reality goes

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 3.

⁵ Arnold, ""Illusory Riches": Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950," 7.

⁶ Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 141-42.

⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 405. For further discussion of Foucault's notion of discourse see Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," *Ideology & Consciousness* 3 (1978).

into the creation of a discourse, tropicality is a negotiation of the imagined and created with the physical reality of the place that it depicts. This is my second characteristic. Rather than primarily a relationship of text with text, as mainly seen in Orientalism,⁸ tropicality is the product of both what is known and written about the tropics, and what an author, painter, or photographer, sees and experiences in the tropics. Like Arnold, I believe that tropicality is a direct result of European interaction in the tropics. Therefore, as Europe's interaction with the tropics increased in the nineteenth century, certain realities about European life in the tropics came to the forefront of discussions of tropical places which were not as prominent in the previous centuries (for example disease, resource extraction, and race), and with this increased interaction, tropicality became more dynamic and changing.

Thirdly, I look at tropicality, along with Pratt, as a two way highway.⁹ Ideas about the tropics come as much from the tropics as from Europeans theorizing about them. Tropicality only exists because the tropics exist, and the tropics, the people and cultures there, play an important part in the enduring nature of the discourse that represents them. In many ways, tropical people used tropicality to further their own agendas and were able to actively accept or reject certain aspects of it. The more the actions and writings of the historical characters in this thesis were examined, the more it was realized that they were more aware of this discursive practice than had been previously thought. Nevertheless, there were restrictions. This leads into the fourth characteristic; engaging in tropicality can only be done on its own terms. This limits and controls legitimate representations and separates them from representations that are disregarded. Pratt's idea of "autoethnographic expression," which she explains as when "colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms," is similar and has provided further insight into the phenomenon.¹⁰ Thus, while some people were able to employ tropicality, others were not able to either because they lacked the language to do so or their agency was too limited.

⁸ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 338-39.

⁹ See "Part II: The Reinvention of América, 1800-1850" in Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 112-97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7. (Emphasis in the original)

Fifth, tropicality was inherently violent.¹¹ Despite the fact that tropicality was in a constant state of change, its rules and regulations were based in European knowledge systems, which were foreign to the places they described. Thus, tropicality imposed an order onto the tropics in ways that led to control, subjugation, and misrepresentation.

Tropicality in Amazonia¹²

Starting with the writings of adventurer and natural historian Alexander von Humboldt, who was in the upper South American cone, briefly Cuba, and Mexico from 1799-1804, a new way of imagining the tropics emerged, which influenced subsequent travellers, painters, scientists, and writers.¹³ Charles Darwin claimed when first entering tropical zones that he saw it through Humboldt's eyes: "as the force of impressions generally depends on preconceived ideas, I may add that all mine were taken from the vivid descriptions in the *Personal Narrative* of Humboldt."¹⁴ Thus, Darwin, despite the fact that he did not travel in the same areas as Humboldt, mediated what he saw through Humboldt's tropical descriptions. These essentially new representations of the Amazon basin solidified and exaggerated select perceptions of Amazonia, which painted it as innately more "natural" or closer to a state of nature than Europe. These images of pristine, untouched, nature that Humboldt is so famous for describing became an essential discourse, beginning the solidification of tropicality, which later writers, writing about the Amazon, would have to engage. It also would offer Europe both a moral critique and ego boost as writings about the Amazonian tropics were tied into reflections about non-tropical places and their state of civilization, progress, and morality. These critiques are especially seen through ideas of climate, race, and disease in the nineteenth century.

Constructions of tropical places have been ambivalent. Along side Humboldt's rich descriptions of a green paradise, there have always been images of tropical forests as disease ridden jungles, resembling hell more than heaven. The peoples who live there were seen either as living in balance with their environments, or horribly controlled by it, lacking the ability to exploit it to their advantage. These mixed images have been at

¹¹ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 386.

¹² In this thesis, I use Amazonia to mean the entire Amazon basin, including the river, its subsidiaries, and the general area around them. If I am referring to just the river, I use Amazon.

¹³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

¹⁴ Cited in Stepan, 15.

constant play throughout the modern history of representations of Amazonia and generally have gone through trends with certain epochs favouring one or the other image of the tropics. Mary Louise Pratt claims that after South America gained independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century, Northern Europe had to completely renegotiate its relationship to the continent, and that this renegotiation took form through the work of travellers, investors, and scientists who flocked to South America.¹⁵ These travellers, investors, and scientist were essential for further solidifying ideas about the tropics which informed the way that Europeans understood the tropics, and in many examples, how people in the tropics understood themselves. With increasing imperial interactions with the tropics in general, both in the Amazon through a sort of informal imperialism and abroad with Europe's increasing tropical territories, tropicity became more and more negative. As contact between races both on European soil and abroad increased, imperial ambitions failed, and increasing numbers of Europeans died from diseases abroad, a general insecurity about the role of Europeans in the tropics prevailed. This insecurity led to the further exaggeration of differences between the tropical and temperate world through the scientific legitimization of European superiority in theories of racial hierarchies, acclimatization, civilization, and nature. All of which reconfirmed and supported "necessary" imperial endeavors in the tropics, despite failures.

The Amazon Rubber Boom (roughly 1870-1920)¹⁶ encompasses many aspects of imperial Europe's fascination with the tropics. Not only did the importance and demand for rubber turn the world's attention to the region in the late nineteenth century, but it brought people from all over the world to the Amazon. The price for raw rubber increased so quickly that travellers, workers, foreign investors, and get-rich-quick schemers all came to the Amazon to make their fortune. Thus, the rubber boom

¹⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 112.

¹⁶ The exact dates of the rubber boom are debatable. Some authors only look at the 20th century, while others, such as Barbara Weinstein, claim that it started in the 1870s (69). For the purpose of this study the exact dates of the rubber boom are not important, and I will not spend space making a specific economic argument for the dates that I chose. This thesis uses the increased world interest in rubber, generally associated with the boom, as an avenue to explore tropicity and the ways that Amazonia and the outside world interacted. With this purpose in mind, the focus of this study is roughly from 1870-1920. However, considerable time is spent on setting up this era, and the last chapter focuses almost entirely on the twentieth century. By examining tropicity over time, I hope to show its malleability and dynamic nature, but also its persistence.

represents a meeting grounds of peoples and ideas from all over the world creating junctions between the tropical and temperate world.

Rubber in Amazonia

The Amazon has been a constant subject of Western imagination. Since the beginnings of European exploration there, it has been subject to glorifying tales, which tell the stories of golden kings living in golden cities, or blond, tall, and fearless warrior women, or peaceful, natural, and noble savages, or abundant fields of cinnamon and valued spices.¹⁷ Wrapped up in all these tales are promises of riches for the brave and strong who fend off the antagonist nature to claim their reward. This image of the Amazon as an untapped resource is a persistent metaphor and, certainly, the history of the Amazon has shown this to be partially true. Resource extraction in the Amazon Basin has been common and has been the reason for nearly all foreign interest in the area. Nevertheless, despite foreign successes and riches earned, resource extraction never made Amazonia rich.¹⁸ With all its promises of prosperity, the Amazon remains a poor area, where poverty and exploitation rather than gold and affluence are the tales that local peoples tell.

Historically coupled with the idea of the Amazon basin as naturally rich in resources has been the idea that it is also a homogenous entity characterized by a sparse

¹⁷ For a thorough discussion of the importance of myths, legends, and stereotypes for understanding the history of the Amazon see Candace Slater, *Entangled Edens, Visions of the Amazon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁸ For a discussion of the effects of the extraction industry in the Amazon see Stephen G. Bunker, *Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure of the Modern State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988). Bunker argues failure to develop value in labour rather than nature has led to a constant state of poverty in the Amazon, where only pockets of wealth exist. Western economic theories in which the domination of nature is seen as the key to production do not function in extraction economies, as the depletion of nature is not accounted for. Bunker resists the idea that the Amazon has gone through cycles, “conquest and exploration, the rubber boom, present-day mining, lumbering, and cattle ranching, and colonization projects,” claiming that these theories depict the Amazon as continually returning to the same static and primal point, thus ignoring the ways that humans have intervened and changed Amazonian nature, limiting succeeding economic possibilities. Also see Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983). Weinstein coinciding with Bunker resists the temptation to classify the Amazonian extractive economy into a traditional boom and bust cycle, and claims that each extractive resource had its unique characteristics. She suggests that rubber relations developed along older colonial patterns rather than along capitalist labour relations. Furthermore, that tappers and other internal actors resisted in interesting ways attempts by foreign interests and elites to change rubber into more efficient forms of extraction. Like Bunker, she sees the environment playing an integral role in economic theory about the Amazon and is essential for understanding why rubber did not in the long term benefit the Amazonian economy. Nevertheless, her analysis does not thoroughly explore the topic.

population, a unified and expansive emerald green forest canopy, and rich soils which could support much flora and fauna. These myths about Amazonia run counter to the historical reality of the place. The Amazon basin varies greatly between areas, from average rainfall, to the types of plants and animals, to annual temperatures.¹⁹ Soil in the Amazon, especially outside of the flood plains, after being cleared becomes sterile because of leaching, unable to retain nutrients.²⁰ Thus, agricultural endeavours in the area have characteristically failed after a couple of seasons. Furthermore, the myth of the Amazon being a pristine untouched area has recently been refuted as archeologists, anthropologists, and historians are now suggesting that the area supported a very large network of villages, cities, and trade networks before contact; accordingly, they suggest that humans have been essential actors in the creation and recreation of the Amazonian landscape.²¹ The history of rubber in the area taps into many of these myths, images, and ideas about Amazonia. Rubber was the late nineteenth century's equivalent to gold, reminiscent of the stories of El Dorado during the colonial era. Rubber brought people to the tropics in mass numbers, both as workers and investors solidifying a sort of informal, especially British, imperialism. It also, through the stories it told, encouraged people to think and conceptualize tropical places, especially in the wake of the bust in the rubber boom and the horrific events that unfolded in the Congo and the Putumayo. Rubber, like El Dorado, killed many people in the search for its riches. However, it also made some rich, thus cementing dreams of affluence in the Amazon.

The English word rubber, coined by Joseph Priestly, became popular after 1770 when the latex was sold on the streets of London to rub out pencil lead.²² However, despite the early knowledge of some of the useful properties of rubber, for example its water resistance, there remained one problem; natural rubber was hot and cold sensitive.

¹⁹ Michael Edward Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 4.

²⁰ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 7.

²¹ Bunker, *Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure of the Modern State*, 58-59. For further discussion on the ways that the Amazonian environment has been transformed historically by the peoples that live there see Hugh Raffles, *In Amazonia, a Natural History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²² John Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 271, Guido Pennano, *La Economía Del Caucho* (Iquitos, Peru: Centro de Estudios Teológicos de la Amazonía, 1988), 64, Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 8.

It became overly soft and malleable in the heat, and brittle and breakable in the cold.²³ Thus, it was not practical to market. This problem was solved in 1839 when Charles Goodyear accidentally combined sulphur and heat to rubber to create a substance that did not retain its temperature sensitive qualities, but remained impermeable.²⁴ Goodyear called this process vulcanization after the god of fire.²⁵ As a result of vulcanization, the demand for rubber rose astronomically. As environmental historian Warren Dean points out: “In 1830, Britain imported 211 kilograms of raw rubber; by 1857, it imported 10,000 kilograms; and by 1874, as rubber was coming to be applied to telegraph wiring, imports jumped to 58,710 kilograms.” The invention of the pneumatic tire, the bicycle craze in the nineteenth century, and later the automobile market also increased the demand for rubber.²⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Amazon, with the world’s largest supply of quality rubber, was booming. Manaus, a major rubber port up the Amazon river, became one of the wealthiest cities in the world, boasting an Opera House, a tram system, electricity, telephone, and many other European riches that the pre-rubber boom town could not imagine.²⁷ Rubber would become one of the more important imperial resource: “In advance of oil, rubber became the defining product of imperial economic strategy and over the next century irreversibly changed the tropical regions of the world.”²⁸ Britain’s only concern was how to bring the resource into its control.

There were many kinds of rubber trees in the Amazon Basin. However, not all trees were equally valuable. The two most important types of rubber trees were *Hevea* and *Castilloa*.²⁹ *Hevea* was more common on the flood plains and produced the highest

²³ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 273, Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 8.

²⁴ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 273.

²⁵ Warren Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 9, Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 273.

²⁶ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 273-74, Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 8-9.

²⁷ E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 289, E. Bradford Burns, "Manuas, 1910: Portrait of a Boom Town," *Journal of InterAmerican Studies* 7, no. 3 (1965).

²⁸ Angus Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents* (Dublin: ColourBooks Ltd., 2003), 69.

²⁹ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 23.

quality rubber. *Hevea* trees could only be tapped for six months a year due to flooding.³⁰ *Castilloa* trees, on the other hand, were found mostly outside of the flood regions, away from the river, and thus could be accessed all year round.³¹ Although each of these rubber trees were prominent during the rubber boom, they had many distinctive differences, the most important being the way that rubber was extracted from the tree. *Hevea* rubber was more common at the beginning of the boom and is generally the more recognized form of rubber extraction. *Hevea* trees could be tapped. Rubber workers would make paths, known as *estradas*, through the forest connecting one tree to the next. No rubber tree grows naturally in stands of other rubber trees, thus they are generally dispersed some distance apart throughout the forest.³² Each morning the *seringuero*,³³ a *Hevea* rubber tapper, would start by completing a round on the estrada, making small diagonal cuts in the bark of each rubber tree and placing a bucket underneath the slit to collect the latex. Then, he would return to camp to eat.³⁴ In the afternoon, he returned to the estrada to collect the fresh rubber latex.³⁵ After all of the rubber was collected that day, the *seringuero* was responsible for coagulating it by smoking it over a fire, and slowly pouring the rubber onto a stick. If a *Hevea* tree was properly tapped, it could be tapped daily and still live out its natural life. However, many *seringueros* were either greedy or unaware of proper tapping methods; thus numerous trees were killed due to ignorance or neglect. The life of a *seringuero* was generally solitary and risky. They were typically days away from any source of medical help, and disease and accident were common.

Extraction from the *Castilloa* was different. As Stanfield pointed out “whereas the *seringuero* was likened to a simple conservative farmer, the *cauchero* [person who collects *Castilloa* latex] reminded contemporary observers of courageous and footloose

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, 36.

³³ There are two spellings of *Seringuero* common in rubber literature. One is Spanish, *seringuero*, and the other Portuguese, *seringueiro*. Unless in direct quotations, I use the Spanish version.

³⁴ Although the large majority of rubber tappers were men, there were some women who tapped rubber. Families, also, tapped and processed rubber together, sharing the duties.

³⁵ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, 36-37, Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 24.

miners.”³⁶ Unlike a *Hevea* tree, a *Castilloa* tree cannot be tapped. In order to efficiently extract its latex it must be completely cut down, thus killing the tree in the process. As a result, caucheros lived remarkably different lives than seringueros. They lived more nomadically, wandering from tree to tree. Despite the fact that caucheros did not set up permanent homes while collecting rubber, they often worked in teams, as larger trees are almost impossible to bleed alone. Thus, the life of a cauchero was not as solitary as a seringueros’. Nevertheless, they were in greater risk of getting lost and were less familiar with their areas of the forest because they were always on the move. As well, if they fell sick, it was unlikely that anyone would bother to look for them because their location at any given moment was not known. Furthermore, caucheros were unable to grow gardens, as many seringueros did, to avoid buying expensive supplies and to prevent many diet born diseases. The following is an excerpt from the diary of John C. Yungjohann, who was an American in the Amazon basin from 1906-1916. Yungjohann extracted both *hevea* and *castilloa* latex. In this quotation, he explains the process of draining a *castilloa* tree, which he refers to as kautxuch.

Having bled the first tree he goes on to the next tree and so on for that day. If a man has a little push he can bleed from fifteen to eighteen trees in one day. The next day he comes back to the first tree and cuts it down, which will take him, according to the size of the tree, from one to three hours. Although there are kautxuck trees that would take from one to two days cutting them down, that is too much of a job for one man considering the ill health, so they are generally passed by, but a big tree like that would outpay three to four smaller ones. Immediately after the tree is cut down the man sets to work cleaning little spaces on the ground, or if possible under *kauazu* leaves. Having done this he cuts grooves into the bark in the same way he prepared the tree. While the sap is running into the holes, which will take about an hour he prepares another hole about four feet square and about six inches deep, he then collects the sap from the small holes into the big hole. Having done this soap water is made in a calabash shell or a bamboo, poured into the sap and stirred with the hand until it stiffens up about the same as rubber.³⁷

There was a chronic labour shortage during the rubber boom. Rubber trees were often found in areas where there was little contract labour available. Thus, the majority of rubber workers were migrants from other provinces, countries, or were coerced native

³⁶ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 24.

³⁷ John C. Yungjohann, *White Gold: The Diary of a Rubber Cutter in the Amazon 1906-1916*, ed. Ghilleen T. Prance (Oracle: Synergetic Press, Inc., 1989), 52-54.

labourers. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, rubber extraction never developed capitalist labour relations, but rather retained a specific trader/tapper reliance, which some have argued fit better the unique conditions of rubber extraction.³⁸ Nevertheless, labour relations during the rubber boom were exploitive and coercive, characterized by a network of co-dependant relationships. As a whole, this system was called the *aviamiento* system. In the *aviamiento* system, the *seringuero* or *cauchero* was the lowest in a chain of relationships that brought rubber to the export market. The series of relationships started with an *aviador*. An *aviador* would recruit workers by offering foodstuff, supplies, and, at times, guides and instruction for beginner collectors.³⁹ The *aviador* was essentially a middle man with links to the export houses. In the later years of the boom, there was often a series of *aviadores* along the river system, trading supplies in exchange for rubber or vice versa among themselves.⁴⁰ Supplies and food were given to the workers by the *aviador* on credit in exchange for the rubber that the workers would collect that season. The supplies and food given to workers were regularly over-priced with the intention of trapping them in debt. This ensured that rubber workers were not free to trade their rubber with whomever or leave rubber extraction all together.⁴¹ This debt-peonage system had various advantages for the *aviador*. It eliminated the need to monitor workers in the field. Due to the remote location of many rubber regions, often rubber gatherers were completely reliant on the one *aviador* that was in the region for their supplies. Consequentially, prices could be set high, which indebted the worker.⁴² Rubber gatherers also enjoyed some benefits of the *aviamiento* system. Workers had a high degree of personal freedom. They could organize their work day as they preferred, collecting as little or as much rubber as they wanted. However, many workers struggled intensely to get out of debt and found it near impossible. Others accepted their situations and lost hope of ever becoming debt-free.

The Putumayo Scandal exemplifies many of the internal conflicts of the rubber boom, such as labour shortage, debt-peonage, and the *aviamiento* system. As it was

³⁸ See Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*.

³⁹ William H. Fisher, *Rain Forest Exchange: Industry and Community on an Amazonian Frontier* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 31.

⁴⁰ Bunker, *Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure of the Modern State*, 67.

⁴¹ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*

widely publicized, it also formed one of the avenues that people learned and thought about the tropics, the rubber boom, and Amazonia. Certainly, the first wave of historiography after the rubber boom concerned itself almost entirely with labour relations, the influence of the boom on natives in the area, and on the *aviamiento* system as a system of abusive relationships between rubber barons and tappers.⁴³ Examples of this work can be seen on both the popular and academic front. Roger Casement's reports collectively published in *The Blue Book* and Walter Hardenburg's writing specifically about the Putumayo Scandal, as well as Algot Lange's popular diary *In the Amazon Jungle* and his academic writing, which describe rubber gathering outside of the Putumayo, were published in the aftermath of the 1910 peak in rubber prices.⁴⁴ All of this work dealt with the "negative" side of rubber. More recent examples of this trend in historiography are seen in Richard Collier's *The River that God Forgot* and Robin Furneaux's *The Amazon*.⁴⁵ It was not until recently that academics, rather than attempting to depict the horrors of the rubber boom, have turned to the internal dynamics of the boom asking questions such as: Why did extraction techniques not develop into more efficient plantation style extraction, as had happened with Asian rubber plantations? Or, why did the *aviamiento* system develop and survive as it did? Examples of this work are seen in Barbara Weinstein's *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, Warren Dean's *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, and the various works by Coomes and Barham.⁴⁶

⁴³ Oliver T. and Barham Coomes, Bradford L., "The Amazon Rubber Boom: Labor Control, Resistance, and Failed Plantation Development Revisited," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (1994): 236.

⁴⁴ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District. Miscelleneous no. 8. 1912, W. E. Hardenburg, "The Indians of the Putumayo, Upper Amazon," *Man* 10 (1910), W. E. Hardenburg, *The Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise: Travels in the Peruvian Amazon Region and an Account of the Atrocities Committed Upon Ther Indians Therein*, ed. C. Reginald Enock (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), Algot Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), Algot Lange, "The Rubber Workers of the Amazon," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 43, no. 1 (1911).

⁴⁵ Richard Collier, *The River That God Forgot, the Story of the Amazon Rubber Boom* (London: Collin Clear-Type Press, 1968), Robin Furneaux, *The Amazon: The Story of a Great River* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969).

⁴⁶ Bradford Barham and Oliver Coomes, "Wild Rubber: Industrial Organisation and the Microeconomics of Extraction During the Amazon Rubber Boom (1890-1920)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994), Bradford L. Barham and Oliver T. Coomes, "Reinterpreting the Amazon Rubber Boom: Investment, the State, and Dutch Disease," *Latin American Research Review* 29, no. 2 (1994), Coomes, "The Amazon Rubber Boom: Labor Control, Resistance, and Failed Plantation Development Revisited."

Michael Taussig also has dealt with the Putumayo situation.⁴⁷ His work is distinct and deals specifically with what he calls the “culture of terror” in the Putumayo during the scandal and again illuminates rubber in a negative light. Most recently, Michael Edward Stanfield in *Red Rubber: Bleeding Trees* combines many of the above themes with a thorough discussion on national (Peruvian, Colombian, and Ecuadorian) and international (British and the American) interactions, beliefs and involvement in the Putumayo region.⁴⁸

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Putumayo region was a disputed frontier zone between Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, although more prominently between the former two.⁴⁹ The secluded area of the Putumayo made it a difficult area to mandate and control. Moreover, the area offered little traditional economic promise. However, the price of rubber, even the lower grade rubber found in the region, brought the Putumayo region into national consciousness’ during the rubber boom.⁵⁰ The Putumayo, once an ignored and perceived national backwater, became an increasingly important piece of territory. After much bickering between Peru and Colombia, the two countries asked Pope Pius X to mediate. This resulted in a *modus vivendi* effective from July 6, 1906. Thereafter, 200,000 square miles was legally neither country’s territory.⁵¹ For Julio César Arana, mastermind of the Putumayo scandal, this stateless region offered an opportunity for advancement that the ruthless businessman had long awaited.

Arana first appeared in the Putumayo as a trader. He made his living by shipping and trading rubber and other goods in the area.⁵² By 1903, he had started the company Arana y Hermanos.⁵³ Once he got his footing in the area, Arana began to buy into it, slowly pushing out all of the competition. By 1905, he had gained control of almost

Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*.

⁴⁷ Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror--Space of Death, Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984), Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁴⁸ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*.

⁴⁹ Hardenburg, "The Indians of the Putumayo, Upper Amazon," 134.

⁵⁰ Furneaux, *The Amazon: The Story of a Great River*, 167.

⁵¹ Collier, *The River That God Forgot*, 59, Roger Sawyer, *Casement: The Flawed Hero* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 80.

⁵² Furneaux, *The Amazon: The Story of a Great River*, 168.

⁵³ Sawyer, *Casement: The Flawed Hero*, 79.

12,000 square miles of territory and was determined to drive all of the remaining rubber barons out of the area. He eventually did this with his own personal army of six hundred men.⁵⁴ Now in control of his own land, Arana could exploit it how he wished.

In 1904, Arana's company recruited around two hundred Barbadians to come to the Putumayo and act as overseers of the rubber extraction in the area.⁵⁵ In reality, their employment involved armed raids into the forest looking for native people, who were then forced into rubber collection. These British Barbadians were one of the reasons that the scandal made international news. It was their testimonies that would turn the world's attention to the area as well as help legitimize Britain's interference and interest in the area after the scandal was made known. The other reason that the British were involved was that Arana registered his company, renamed the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company,⁵⁶ in Britain and opened up some of the company to the public.⁵⁷ Therefore, it was the combined presence of British subjects in the Putumayo, and the fact that the company was officially British at the time that the scandal surfaced that made the Putumayo abuses a "British" issue.⁵⁸

The Putumayo scandal began in 1907 with the publication of articles in *La Sanción* and later in *La Felpa*, both Peruvian newspapers in Iquitos.⁵⁹ These articles, published by Benjamin Saldaña Rocca, accused the Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC) of enslaving and torturing the indigenous peoples in the Putumayo. Just after the articles were published, two American adventurers arrived in the area. Walter Ernest Hardenburg and W. B. Perkins had come from Colombia across the Andes, where they worked on the Cauca Valley railroad and were heading towards Manaus with plans to work on the

⁵⁴ Collier, *The River That God Forgot*, 53.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁶ Arana would later drop "rubber" from the company's name, presumably to avoid the negative connotations of wild rubber. Thus, from here on out, I will refer to the company as the Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC).

⁵⁷ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 309.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life* (Belfast: Belfast Press Ltd, 2002), 203.

⁵⁹ Sawyer, *Casement: The Flawed Hero*, 80, Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, xv. Although Sawyer translates *La Sanción* as "The Sensation," it more correctly translates as "The Sanction." In this case probably playing on the tradition of alloying or ignoring, thus approving, the common practice of debt-peonage or slavery among natives in the low lands of Peru. The newspaper later changed its name to *La Felpa*, in Dec. of 1907. *La felpa* is harder to translate, as there was most likely a colloquial meaning to the word in Iquitos. It directly translates to "plush," which makes little sense in the situation. Sawyer translates it to "A Drubbing," which makes more sense in the context, but still is not a reliable translation.

Madeira River railway project.⁶⁰ While on the Putumayo, Hardenburg and Perkins were assaulted by employees of the PAC. Their luggage was stolen, and they were beaten and detained on a steamship.⁶¹ Outraged about his treatment and other inhuman conditions in the Putumayo, upon his release Hardenburg stayed on at Iquitos in hopes of confronting Arana about the Putumayo. There he read Rocca's articles and became determined to do something about the situation. Hardenburg then went to London where he got the attention of the Anti-slavery Society in Britain and published an article about the Putumayo in *Truth* magazine.⁶² The publication of his article "The Devil's Paradise: A British Owned Congo" in September, 1909, created a stir, and soon the British Foreign Office began to talk to the company about the situation in the Putumayo. After much public and governmental pressure the PAC decided to send an inquiry to the Putumayo.⁶³ The Foreign Office elected a Consular Official to join the company's commission.⁶⁴

Roger Casement, later Sir Roger Casement, was a likely choice for the British Foreign Office to join the enquiry. Casement had led a similar enquiry into the conditions of rubber extraction in King Leopold's Congo and had developed a reputation for thoroughness and good work in the Foreign Office. Casement travelled to the Putumayo in July of 1910.⁶⁵ He conducted an investigation concerning the conduct of the company towards both the Barbadian peoples in the area and the natives of the region. He produced two reports, together known as the *Blue Book*, one about the Barbadians in the area and the other on the treatment of natives by the company. These reports were given to the Foreign Office on January 31 and March 17, 1911, respectively. They were published in July, 1912.⁶⁶

Casement's reports, along with Hardenburg's subsequent publication of his travel diary, *The Putumayo: The Devil's Paradise, Travels in the Peruvian Amazon Region and an Account of the Atrocities committed upon the Indians therein*, raised public awareness about the extraction of wild rubber and the tropical world. It also spawned further

⁶⁰ Collier, *The River That God Forgot*, 72.

⁶¹ For a more detailed bibliographical discussion on Hardenburg see *Ibid.* Hardenburg's own personal narrative of his experience in the Putumayo will be examined more closely in chapter three.

⁶² Furneaux, *The Amazon: The Story of a Great River*, 170.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, xxx.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

enquiries into the area by both the British and Peruvian governments. All enquiries into the Putumayo Scandal concluded more or less the same thing: wide scale slavery, torture, and murder were rampant in the region. Casement estimated that the native populations in the area dropped from between 40,000 and 50,000 to between 8,000 and 10,000 because of the abuses in the area.⁶⁷ Despite Casement's very specific list of criminals in the Putumayo and the issuing of 215 arrest warrants by an Iquitos judge, the majority of those accused of criminal behaviour in his enquiry were never punished.⁶⁸ The only real punishment dealt to the major players in the Putumayo Scandal was the same punishment that affected all of the rubber extraction regions in the Amazon, the collapse of rubber prices on the world market in 1910.

Amazonian rubber extraction was doomed to fail the day the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London employed Henry Wickham in 1875 to collect and transport hevea seeds from Brazil to London for later transportation to Asian plantations.⁶⁹ The 74,000 seeds that Wickham collected through much trial and error eventually developed into the rubber plantations that challenged Amazonia's rubber monopoly and in 1914 surpassed the rubber supplies coming from the Amazon Basin.⁷⁰ Asian plantation rubber production was more efficient and did not suffer from labour shortages as rubber extraction did in Amazonia. The British finally controlled the rubber industry. By 1922, Asian rubber plantations produced 93 percent of the world's rubber supply, and the British owned 75 percent of the plantations.⁷¹ Asian rubber left the people dependant on the rubber market in the Amazon Basin devastated. Falling rubber prices never recovered.

Thesis Outline and some Discussion on Word Usage

Including introduction and conclusion, this thesis is set-up in five chapters. The following chapter deals exclusively with the idea of tropicality in the nineteenth and early

⁶⁷ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District, 9.

⁶⁸ Furneaux, *The Amazon: The Story of a Great River*, 188.

⁶⁹ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 284.

⁷⁰ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, 41, Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 286.

⁷¹ Howard L. Karno, "Julio César Arana, Frontier Cacique in Peru," in *The Cacique: Oligarchical Politics and the System of Caciquismo in the Luso-Hispanic World*, ed. Robert Kern (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 95.

twentieth centuries. It follows the trends of tropicality from Humboldt, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to the end of the Rubber boom in roughly 1915, focusing specifically on the rubber boom era. It looks at ideas of civilization embodied in discussions of nature, climate, race, and disease in the tropics. The eighteenth century was a century of optimism in the abilities of man to adapt and prosper wherever. However, by the end of the nineteenth century this was no longer thought to be the case. The ability of Europeans to live and prosper in the tropics was in question. Furthermore, with the increasing knowledge of tropical disease and the discovery of germs and vectors (such as the mosquito in the case of Malaria and Yellow fever), the way that Europeans thought about the tropical environment changed. Natives once thought to be immune to certain tropical diseases began to be seen as the carriers of these diseases, increasing the assumed need for boundaries between natives and foreigners. Moreover, theories of racial degeneration and racial determinism were used increasingly to explain the reason that Europeans seemed to “drop like flies” in the tropics and further justified racial distancing and boundaries between the “so-called” civilized and non-civilized races. This chapter is intended to deepen the discussion of tropicality and situate it historically. Furthermore, it sets up the intellectual and popular thought on the tropics during and around the rubber boom.

Chapter three is a discussion of rubber, the rubber boom, and the Putumayo Scandal. Rubber in Amazonia had two sides. It was both perceived as a great civilizer in the area, opening up the basin to the modern world, and seen as something that was regressive and primitive, stagnating any possible economic growth in the area because it robbed labour from other more progressive industries. Rubber in Amazonia resisted scientific rationalization through cultivation. Thus, in order to collect rubber, rubber barons and especially rubber workers had to spend many months in the forest which increased both their familiarity and frustration with Amazonian nature. This attached rubber collection to “nature” in ways that other industries were not, leading to perceptions that rubber was “backwards.” Moreover, as the rubber boom progressed the realities of the *aviamiento* system, disease, and scandal became international news, increasing a negative image of rubber. The last section of this chapter focuses directly on the Putumayo scandal, Julio César Arana, and Walter Hardenburg. It examines how

the Putumayo scandal and the actors involved continued in interesting ways the tradition of tropical representation. This chapter uses travel diaries, academic writings published at the time, newspaper articles, and parliamentary papers about rubber and the Putumayo scandal in order to demonstrate the intersections among environment, civilization, rubber and tropicality in the area.

The fourth chapter deepens the discussion in the third and focuses specifically on the writings and life of Roger Casement. Casement is perhaps the best example of the ways that tropicality could be moulded. Casement, the person, embodied many of the imperial conundrums of the time. He was Irish yet British. He worked abroad spreading British notions of civilization and advancement, “freeing” the oppressed peoples of the world, while his own people remained under British rule. He was an icon of empire, even knighted for his work abroad; however, his person did not conform to the norms of the day, as he was gay and unmarried. Furthermore, in his later life, he would abandon his British loyalty to support Irish independence, resulting in his execution for high treason by the British courts. Casement, a learned man and a man that was in the tropics for over thirty years, offers an interesting example of the ways that tropicality informed representations of the tropical world. He represents the hybrid and fluid nature of identity, borders, and meaning. Both colonized and a colonizer, an icon and rebel, Roger Casement challenges and participates in tropicality as a product of empire. Chapter five concludes and highlights the main points of the thesis.

As this thesis is sensitive to word usage, there are a few issues and meanings that I would like to bring up from the start. Defining regions or origins of thought, such as tropics, British, European, and Western, are perhaps the most challenging, and some generalization is unavoidable. Nevertheless, I will try to clarify some of the more prominent issues. This thesis uses the term “tropics” when it is intended as both a conceptual and geographical place. When talking about a specific tropical region, this region will be identified. Part of the destructive nature of tropicality was its tendency towards homogenizing the tropical world; tropical discourses, for example tropical medicine, continue this tendency. Thus, it is less me than the texts that I am studying that deny the different tropical places their distinctive conditions and characteristics.

Tropicality was an European imperial tool. Thus, this thesis is constantly referring to European thought or tendency. European is not limited to the European continent. Rather, it is used to identify people engaging and continuing theories and philosophies from Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Europe. Therefore, it is possible for Americans or Latin Americans to be European in thought. Imperialism, in many senses, evades definition during this period. Robert Young has pointed out that “between 1840 and 1960 the word changed its meaning no less than twelve times.”⁷² This thesis uses imperialism in the more recent sense of the word; the economic and cultural domination of one place over another. This can, but does not have to, involve the acquisition of territory.⁷³

⁷² Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 25.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 26.

Chapter 2
European Insecurity and the Tropical World:
Environment, Race, and Disease in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

As was mentioned in the Introduction, ideas about tropical places have been mediated through a historically created and legitimized discourse which has both given people voice to describe the tropics, while at the same time limiting their options for doing so. Although the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were crucial for the solidification of this discourse, its historical roots stretch well beyond this time period. David Arnold calls this discourse tropicality. Arnold claims that since the fifteenth century European thought and theory about tropical zones discussed and portrayed tropical nature as the antithesis of temperate nature.¹ Thus, tropical places were brought into European thought on environment, race, and civilization in terms of their innate differences with temperate environment, race, and civilization. These “differences” should not to be placed into easy dichotomies, for example civilized/savage, but rather should be seen as a multifaceted field of inquiry in which Europeans attempted to explain the tropical world and thus indirectly their own world. Furthermore, through the act of explaining the tropics ascetically, morally, scientifically, and economically, Europe attempted to constitute its control over them. However, this control was always compromised by the peoples and realities of the tropics. This chapter discusses the idea of tropicality. It attempts to place the practice of tropicality into historical context and follow its trends during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The tropical world was a great cause of European excitement and commentary. It was also a source for many increasingly “necessary” resources within European societies, as in the case of rubber. The combined allure of and need for the tropical world within an imperial setting brought the physical and the conceptual tropics together in an especially lethal mixture for both European and native populations in the tropics. During the nineteenth century people, commerce, resources, and information, traversed the globe at

¹Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 143.

rates previously not imagined.² With increasing contacts with unfamiliar places, theories surrounding race and place became more rigid. Boundaries were constructed between the so-called “civilized” and “uncivilized” world that were not present in the eighteenth century.³ These boundaries and borders were naturalized and legitimized in the language of science, which was increasingly an important imperial authority,⁴ and shaped, reiterated, and amplified tropicity in ways which had important political and cultural repercussions.

Ideas of civilization and cultural superiority are an important component to the idea of tropicity. Ethnologist and sociologist Roger Bartra in *Wild Men in the Looking Glass* explored this idea in the context of the idea of wild men evident throughout European history.⁵ He claimed the idea of a barbaric wild man who lived on the outskirts of “civilized” society was an important component and counter ego for ideas of civilization throughout pre-modern and modern European history.⁶ He further claimed that once Europe made contact with the “New World,” the “old and hairy wild man waited on the sidelines” to be used to re-examine notions of civilization, imagining “New World” inhabitants based on old notions of wild men.⁷ Like the tropics, the wild man was both a threat to civilization and a strong critique of it. Bartra’s work helps illustrate the Eurocentric side of tropicity based on European myths that have little or nothing to do with the tropics. Furthermore, he elucidates the ways that discursive practices adapt and change to new situations. And lastly, Bartra’s wild man demonstrates an enduring link between humans, nature, and civilization.⁸ The idea that wild men live closer to nature and could interpret it, was widely transplanted onto “New World” natives and has had lasting consequences for ideas of tropical places and its people.

The combination of Europe’s fear and fascination with Bartra’s wild man is also seen in Europe’s insecure feelings towards the tropical world. Perhaps the most

² Thomas and Finn Nielson Eriksen, *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 16.

³ Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2001), 80-81.

⁴ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 157.

⁵ Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁶Ibid., 184.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

important characteristic of tropicality is its innate ambivalence. It encompasses positive images of pristine nature, Eden-like paradises, and plentiful abundance, while at the same time casting the tropical world as diseased, racially degenerate, and sinister. These intertwined, yet contrasting images of the tropics have been at play since contact between temperate and tropical places. However, despite the continuance of both negative and positive views of the tropics at any given time, these representations have gone through trends which have favoured one view of the tropics over another. These trends reflect the nature of the interactions between the tropical and temperate world. With increasing European expansion, by the beginning of the nineteenth century certain fields of interest became more prominent and became increasingly so throughout the nineteenth century. Science as a means for explaining and classifying the natural world became the legitimate language of inquiry. With increasing contact among different races, the beginnings of institutional anthropology and race sciences emerged. Lastly, within the imperial adventure, tropical disease and acclimatization became important to the colonial project.⁹ Lucile Brockway has claimed that it is impossible to separate science, commerce, and imperialism.¹⁰ She further asserted that the conquest of Africa was dependant on a ready supply of quinine to fight malaria. Quinine was “discovered” in and then taken from South America,¹¹ thus, exemplifying the interconnectedness between disease, science, and conquest. These emerging fields would become increasingly essential for representations of the tropics and the solidification of tropicality.

In the Eyes of Natural Science: Humboldt and Darwin in Amazonia

In the nineteenth century there was an interesting reverse in the way the tropical world was represented. The beginning of the nineteenth century marked the prominence of one stream of representations. This stream, distinguished by depictions of lush, abundant, visually pleasing nature, was largely the creation of Alexander von Humboldt, who was in the tropics from 1799-1804. Humboldt re-imagined the tropics as both innately more “natural” than Europe, and as a scarcely populated place. Moreover, he made the tropical regions of South America, which would soon open up and become

⁹ Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 16.

¹⁰ Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens* (New York: Academic Press, INC., 1979), 84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

more accessible for future scientists, investors, and adventure seekers after independence from Spain and Portugal, a place of scientific inquiry.¹² Thus, he coupled an imagined tropical aesthetic with its need for scientific “discovery.”¹³ As Pratt has pointed out, it is not that Humboldt’s representations of the South and Central American tropics were inconceivable, wrong, or even new. On the contrary, there was many “truths” in the ways that Humboldt depicted the tropics. However, they were selected representations which silenced other ways of “seeing” the tropics.¹⁴ For example, before Humboldt, Portuguese representations of Brazil’s tropical landscapes did not depict them with aesthetic pleasure, as Humboldt did, but rather with fear and frustration over the obstacle that they created for “useful” production.¹⁵ Humboldt’s tropical representations originate in Amazonia. Nevertheless, perhaps one of the more lethal characteristics of tropicality was that it generalized and homogenized perceptions of tropical places. Thus, Humboldt not only influenced subsequent travellers to Amazonia, but also to other tropical regions.

The following passage, from Humboldt’s *Personal Narratives of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* (1814), demonstrates much of the ground work that Humboldt laid for later travel writers and nineteenth century theorists writing about the tropics:

In the Old World, nations and the distinctions of their civilization form the principal points in the picture; in the New World, man and his productions almost disappear amidst the stupendous display of wild and gigantic nature. The human race in the New World presents only a few remnants of indigenous hordes, slightly advanced in civilization; or it exhibits merely the uniformity of manners and institutions transplanted by European colonists to foreign shores.¹⁶

A quick analysis of the above quotation will help further explain its significance, and the discursive trend that arose from Humboldt. First, it starts with a comparison with the “Old World.” As mentioned, perceptions about tropical places are almost exclusively depicted through a comparison with Europe. This comparison is either a critique or praise of the “Old World.” Secondly, the idea of “wild and gigantic nature” invents

¹² Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 146.

¹³ Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 36.

¹⁴ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 127.

¹⁵ Luciana L. Martins, "A Naturalist's Vision of the Tropics: Charles Darwin and the Brazilian Landscape," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 19-20.

¹⁶ Cited in Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 111.

South America as nature, furthermore, a nature that has the ability to control and miniaturize its human population.¹⁷ Thirdly, it remarks on civilization in the tropics, claiming that no civilization grows naturally out of the tropics, but rather any real manifestations of civilization must be brought into the tropics from an already civilized place through forms of colonialism. Lastly, the entire passage has a sense of timelessness represented by a static primitive nature. All of these themes are prominent in early nineteenth century representations of the tropics.

There are many features in Humboldt's representations that helped contribute to their durability. Perhaps the most important was that he published prolifically. Between 1805 and 1834, he published thirty "folios" and "quarto" volumes of work about his travels and nature.¹⁸ Humboldt was one of the first and certainly the most successful northern European scientist to write on South America.¹⁹ Furthermore, he successfully tapped into and manipulated existing ideas about primal nature and the Amazon. Depicting the South American tropics as fecund primal nature was not new; however, it was Humboldt who decided to emphasize and continue that representation of the tropics, while ignoring other existing ideas.²⁰ This made the tropics alluring and potentially very lucrative, in the form of untapped resources, for outside peoples. Lastly, Humboldt's vision of the world was all encompassing, attempting to unite an entire range of studies about the world, "geology, climatology, physics, natural history, and economics," in a thesis that explained the *cosmos* or the interconnectedness of the universe.²¹ Although this image of balance and unity was appealing at the time, it would in the later nineteenth century be turned on its head.

Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* identifies a series of ideas that she used to help explain Humboldt and European expansion, and the ways that they affected representations about the Americas. The first is the idea of the "contact zone." Pratt explains contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple

¹⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁸ Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 36.

¹⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 117-19.

²⁰ Ibid., 125-26.

²¹ Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*, trans. E. C. Otté (New York: Harper, 1859-1860), Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 132-37. *Kosmos* is the title of Humboldt's last book, which attempts this sort of universalist image of the world's natural system.

with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths.”²² It is in the contact zone where ideas about different places and people begin. The “contact zone” is as much conceptual as it is geographical. People outside of these zones are as responsible for the continuance of their representations as the people within them. It is also within the “contact zone” that natives to that region have the opportunity to engage in the way that they are represented. As mentioned in the introduction, Pratt calls this an “autoethnography or autoethnographic expression.”²³ An “autoethnographic expression” engages with the colonizers specifically on their terms, speaking in the colonizers’ language but on behalf of the colonized. This type of expression can be both a rejection of certain aspects of a representation and an acceptance of other aspects. However, depending on the circumstances, native ability to change their outward representation may be severely limited. Fernando Valerio-Holguín in “Primitive Borders” further demonstrates the importance of borders and contact zones for the creation and maintenance of stereotypes.²⁴ Valerio-Holguín claims Dominicans have engaged in European discourses of otherness (he calls this “primitivist discourse”) in order to portray Haitians as primitive. Furthermore, he claims the metaphorical and physical border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has been important for the creation of a national identity of separateness from Haitians. This identity of difference justified certain intervention and ethnic conflict (especially the massacre in 1937 of Haitian nationals).²⁵ Similarly, tropicality is radiated from and produced in contact and border zones (whether physically real or not) between European and tropical places. From contact zones, tropicality is internalized within institutions and produced en masse, as fact. However, as in Valerio-Holguín’s example, because this discourse is produced from identity conflicts in contact zones, it is innately insecure, and thus its legitimacy is contrived, as it stumbles clumsily to embed itself in already legitimate discourses.²⁶

²² Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ Valerio-Holguín, "Primitive Borders: Cultural Identity and Ethnic Cleansing in the Dominican Republic."

²⁵ See discussion on “floating borders” in *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Two more concepts suggested by Pratt that I find applicable are the idea of the “seeing man” and the “anti-conquest.” The two terms are in many ways intertwined. The “anti-conquest” refers to the way that people ideologically unattached to conquest are in fact still engaging in “rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era” however innocent they portray themselves.²⁷ This can be seen through the apparent neutrality and universality of science. The seeing man is the “protagonist” of the “anti-conquest.”²⁸ Humboldt is the ultimate “seeing-man,” interpreting, creating, and taking the tropical environment for himself and his audience. Although Humboldt is not connected to any larger South American colonial or imperial project, his work still aids and is embedded in these larger projects. These ideas are interesting and continue to show up in tropical representations throughout the imperial era, as the next section demonstrates.

Despite the importance of Pratt’s analysis, it does not take into account the innate European insecurity about tropical places, especially as its interactions with the tropics increased throughout the nineteenth century. Humboldt wrote in a time of optimism and security about Europe’s case for dominating the tropics and its ability to do so. However, as the nineteenth century progressed and the realities of the tropics came closer, the initial optimism became coupled with a sense of fear and insecurity. This insecurity is often seen in travel writers after Humboldt as they tried to negotiate what they were seeing with what they knew or had read about tropical places.²⁹

As mentioned, the nineteenth century is an interesting example of the different trends in tropicality and the ways that they can change over time. Subsequent travellers to the Amazon region engaged in and continued the ways in which Humboldt described the tropics, mainly as pristine, primal, and fecund nature. Different examples of this can be seen in the many natural historians and amateur scientists that flocked to South America after its independence from Spain. Among the most popular of these travellers are Henry Walter Bates, Alfred Wallace, and Richard Spruce, to name just a few.³⁰

²⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Martins, "A Naturalist's Vision of the Tropics: Charles Darwin and the Brazilian Landscape," 20.

³⁰ For a light history of scientific travellers in the Amazon in the mid-nineteenth century see “The Naturalists in the Amazon” in Peter Raby, *Bright Paradise: Victorian Scientific Travellers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 75.

These travellers combined commerce, imperialism, science, an aesthetic for nature, and even morality in their discussions of the tropics, while still engaging in and continuing Humboldtian images of the tropics.³¹ Even Charles Darwin claimed that his first impressions of the tropics were based on and informed by Humboldt,³² whom he declared he had “read and re-read as a youth.”³³ Nevertheless, Darwin would be an important catalyst for changing representations of nature both within and outside of the tropical world in the nineteenth century, as he would initiate a switch from pristine, untouched, balanced perceptions of nature to the idea of violent, competitive struggle that would show up later in Victorian writings about the tropics.

Darwin left Europe in 1831 on his first adventure to South America an indoctrinated romantic.³⁴ Unsure about his scientific abilities, yet eager for adventure, Darwin packed Humboldt’s writings to help him along the way. However, despite Humboldt’s noticeable influence on Darwin, what Darwin “saw” in South America was not the picturesque idea of nature within a fine equilibrium, but rather an endless struggle for survival based on violent competition and extinction. Although he would not publish his findings for twenty-one years after his return, the seeds of natural selection and evolution were planted in him on his South American voyage.³⁵ *The Origin of Species* was first published in 1859.

Darwin’s work emerged in an age when the amateur scientist was becoming obsolete and professionalism was taking over. These new professionals sought positivist rules and regulations that seemingly divorced themselves from their aesthetic, romantic, amateur past.³⁶ Added to this, increasing colonization attempts brought white settlers face to face with the frustrations of the tropical world. These frustrations encompassed diseases such as yellow fever, dysentery, and malaria.³⁷ In addition, the fertile abundance promised in the rhetoric about the tropical world was increasingly replaced with images of poverty, scarcity, “backwardness,” and racial degeneration. These new negative

³¹ Martins, "A Naturalist's Vision of the Tropics: Charles Darwin and the Brazilian Landscape," 19.

³² Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 15.

³³ Cited in Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁶ Arnold, "'Illusory Riches': Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950," 8, Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 130.

³⁷ Arnold, "'Illusory Riches': Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950," 9.

strands of tropicality would articulate debates around the possibility of civilization and European settlement in the tropics, as well as resource abundance. Late Victorian moral projects throughout the world, which sought to gain control of and define the civilizing process, combined with an increasing faith that science could “fix” and ready the tropics for white colonization, ensured that Europe, especially Britain, maintained its interest in tropical resources and peoples. Tropicality by the middle of the nineteenth century, as imperial endeavours rose, increasingly considered and incorporated the people of tropical places in ways that Humboldt did not.

The debates in the latter half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century focused on “civilization” in the tropics through the very intertwined issues of environment, race, and disease. The next section will examine these debates and representations of tropical places, and how they influenced European involvement in the tropics. All of them engage with and reflect tropicality.

***Civilized People in Uncivilized Places:
European Settlement and Resource Extraction in the Tropics***

The tropical milieu continued to attract commentary from abroad through the late Victorian period and early twentieth century. Despite the fact that increasing contact with tropical places made people more aware of the diversity of tropics, there still was an overwhelming tendency to homogenize the tropics. This section traces ideas about the tropical world in general within the contemporary context of the rubber boom in the Amazon, from 1870 to 1920.

Resources were at the heart of much of Europe’s involvement in the tropics. Thus, rhetoric about progress and civilization in the tropics was centered on the extraction of resources and attempts to get the native population to take part in this extraction, which, it was believed, would instill “civilized” values in the population and tame tropical nature. What is perhaps most interesting about this is that slavery and/or debt-peonage, which were both frequently employed for resource extraction in the tropics, were institutions which ensured that representations of the tropics stayed negative.³⁸ However, in order to control tropical resources and production, tropical

³⁸ Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 161.

peoples needed to be separated from the control over the means of production: their land and resources. This required that they be coerced into labour under European control through these same “so-called” barbaric labour relations which kept images of the tropics negative, mainly slavery and debt-peonage.³⁹ The process of extracting a surplus through the control of labour masqueraded as civilization, while tropical peoples’ resistance to it was taken as a form of barbarism. Thus, extractive labour was double sided. On one side, it was thought of as progressive and a stepping stone to civilization. On the other side, capitalist labour relations were seen as not being fully realized in the tropics, resulting in a corrupted form of labour which kept the tropics “primitive.” Without labour, controlling and profiting from the tropics was impossible; thus, debates around labour were essential for the legitimization of imperial tropical control.

In her article “Weapons of the Wild,” Nancy Lee Peluso suggested that “how a rain forest landscape and its inhabitants are described, depicted, and analysed constitutes a critical part of the politics of their control, and a way of allocating or denying access to the valuable resources they contain.”⁴⁰ Thus, how the resources of tropical places were represented in scientific, colonial, and popular text justified their control and legitimated their extraction. The rubber boom exemplifies this, as does the debate surrounding resources in the Putumayo. These debates were rarely about the unequal distribution of rubber wealth at a local level, native rights to land resources, or about whether natives should be left alone, but rather about the way that locality was treated in the process of using their labour and taking their resources. The cruelty in the case of the Putumayo was excessive and an insult to sensitive Victorian and post-Victorian morality. Had the workers been treated better and instilled less violently with capitalist work ethics and ideals, certainly the situation in the Putumayo would not have been an international concern. This is demonstrated through the writing of Roger Casement, who does criticize the greed of commercialism and its destructive forces in the Putumayo, but also emphasizes the need for “real” civilization in the area. As the following quotation shows,

³⁹ Pennano, *La Economía Del Caucho*, 41.

⁴⁰ Nancy Lee Peluso, “Weapons of the Wild: Strategic Uses of Violence and Wildness in the Rain Forests of Indonesian Borneo,” in *In Search of the Rain Forest*, ed. Candace Slater (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 236.

Casement believed Putumayo natives would willingly civilize, given the proper guidance; however, they could just as easily be corrupted or abused:

From the readiness with which the Indians abandoned these habits and customs at the teaching of the missionaries it is legitimate to suppose that the task of governing them from a civilized standpoint need not have been and need not to be, today a very difficult one.⁴¹

However, questions about “civilized” people in “uncivilized” places questioned the ability of Europeans to inhabit tropical places successfully. As knowledge of tropical diseases filtered through medical discourse on tropical places, Europeans became uneasy about their abilities to successfully exploit tropical resources and convert its wilderness into an ordered, controlled environment, as had been done in Ireland, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.⁴² Furthermore, the alleged laxity of morality in the tropics was attributed to racial degeneration and character assault by tropical climates. This brought concerns of racial degeneration to the forefront of the debate about non-tropical people in tropical places. As positive images of tropicality switched to negative ones, so too did ideas of acclimatization. While race in the eighteenth was often thought about as adaptable to environment over time, as the European world moved closer to tropical zones through colonization, and institutions like slavery were increasingly condemned, this began to change. Uneasiness about races and their “proper” places and insecurity about the case for white domination increased, resulting in stricter boundaries between the races.⁴³ Theories about racial acclimatization increasingly argued that it was impossible for races to acclimatize, and furthermore that there were natural hierarchies between the different races. As Nancy Stepan has claimed, the belief that each race had its place, and this was the only place where it could truly thrive became increasingly prevalent.⁴⁴ Removed from their native contexts all races would degenerate. These

⁴¹ Roger Casement, "Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities," in *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, ed. Angus Mitchell (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2003), 138.

⁴² Arnold, "'Illusory Riches': Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950," 13.

⁴³ Mark Harrison, "'the Tender Frame of Man': Disease, Climate, and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies, 1760-1860," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 1 (1996): 74.

⁴⁴ Nancy Stepan, "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places," in *Degeneration: The Darker Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 99.

theories were readily utilized to justify non-white labour in the tropics, as excessive work under the tropical sun was thought to quicken racial degradation in Europeans.

Ideas about acclimatization in the Late Victorian period were diverse and very much debated. However, there were two different streams of thought which dominated the debate in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The first centered around the idea of climate and its effects on people of an area as well as immigrants to non-native areas, and the second, centered around the growing field of tropical medicine along with the increasing knowledge of germs, vectors, and parasites. Although, new “objective” sciences formed the basis of both these discussions, the ideas that they portrayed were important in formulating myths, images, and stereotypes about tropical places in the minds of Europeans.

David Livingstone looks at ideas of acclimatization through what he calls ‘climate’s moral economy.’ Conversations at the time about acclimatization utilized scientific discourse which, as Livingstone claims, legitimized or naturalized moral attributions to climate. Thus, certain climates were seen as ideal for certain characteristics. For example, heat and humidity caused increased sensuality and emotions, as well as laziness, while colder climates were thought to cause increased mental stimulation, necessary for high civilization. Furthermore, this same discourse justified the extraction of resources based on the idea of a moral obligation to “civilize” tropical places through the construction of industry and modern labour ethics.⁴⁵ This combination of moral and economic attributions to different environments was at the heart of representing tropical places and peoples from an imperial perspective, which justified their control as well as their exploitation. The implications of ‘climate’s moral economy’ articulated ideas about race, morality, and civilization in the tropics.

Race and environment are interconnected in the discussion of acclimatization within the late Victorian period and early twentieth century. As Stepan and others have demonstrated, there was a switch in thinking in the nineteenth century from the dominance of a monogenic perspective on race (humans are descendants of one species)

⁴⁵ David N. Livingstone, "Climate's Moral Economy: Science, Race and Place in Post-Darwinian British and American Geography," in *Geography and Empire*, ed. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 136-37.

to one which was polygenic (different races evolved from separate species).⁴⁶ Thus, races were believed to be a product of their environment, and not necessarily connected hereditarily to each other. Furthermore, it was thought that although each race thrived within its own environment the best, there was an innate hierarchy. Certain races, just because of their nature, could not reach the same levels of high civilization as others. According to this classification, tropical races were viewed as a part of their environment, and because of the assumed ease through which food and living supplies could be obtained, tropical peoples lacked the strong characteristics possessed by northern races, who had to fight for survival and conquer their environment in order to survive.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the lack of mental stimulation in the tropics created lazy and emotional people, who did not like manual labour but were nonetheless the only people suitable to work in their environment. These ideas about tropical places continued well into the twentieth century as the following passage from Austin Miller's *Climatology*, first published in 1931, demonstrates:

The enervating monotonous climates of much of the tropical zone, together with the abundant and easily obtained food-supply, produce a lazy and indolent people, indisposed to labour for hire and therefore in the past subjected to coercion culminating in slavery.⁴⁸

A more metaphorical description of the same line of thought can be found in Ellsworth Huntington's comparison of races to fruit trees in the first chapter of his *Civilization and Climate*.⁴⁹ Here he argued that race was dependant on three things: first, on its inheritance; second, on the social institutions and influences in the area; and lastly, on climate.⁵⁰ "[C]limate," Huntington argued, "seems to be a necessary condition of great progress."

It is not the cause of civilization, for that lies infinitely deeper...It is merely one of several, just as an abundant supply of pure water is one of the primary conditions for health. Good water will not make people healthy, nor will a favourable climate cause a stupid and degenerate race to rise to a high level.

⁴⁶ Warwick Anderson, "Disease, Race, and Empire," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 1 (1996): 64, Stepan, "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places," 97.

⁴⁷ Livingstone, "Climate's Moral Economy: Science, Race and Place in Post-Darwinian British and American Geography," 139.

⁴⁸ Cited in *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁹ Ellsworth Huntington, *Civilization and Climate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Nevertheless, if the water is bad, people cannot retain their health and strength, and similarly when the climate becomes unfit, no race can apparently retain its energy and progressiveness.⁵¹

The above quotation also demonstrates the inherent belief that each separate race, regardless of the climate that it is native to, fits into a larger hierarchy where certain races were inherently superior to others, whatever the intellectual stimulation of the environment. White European races according to Huntington were the most superior. Although Huntington's theories were not universally accepted, few people doubted that climate had an impact on race.⁵² Interestingly, later in his book he concluded that although climate was an important factor in advanced civilization, once a society had reached advanced civilization it did not become the "slave" to climate. If the climate changed, as he claimed happened to certain historical civilizations, man could intervene and create the stimulus that climate once had. This idea is also important in the discussion of the tropics as there was a prominent belief that civilization could never naturally rise in the tropics, however, it possibly was attainable through stimulus from "civilized" places.

Slavery in the tropics was an important element in race theories of the time. It fit into discussions on tropical places in two ways. First, as mentioned, it furthered the negative image of the tropics by emphasizing the brutal and archaic nature of slavery in a world that was increasingly condemning the institution. Second, and on the flip side of the coin, slavery was often depicted as necessary in the tropics. Due to the heat and humidity in the tropics, its population was portrayed as lazy and not keen to work. Thus, in order to extract valuable tropical resources and to "stimulate" local progress, many theories of the time suggested that slavery was justified and morally sanctioned.⁵³ Furthermore, these ideas suggested that White people should not, or could not, labour in the tropics, making the use of native labour the only other option. Although C. Reginald Enock, editor and introducer of Walter Hardenburg's book on the Putumayo, did not sanction slavery, he did believe that it was nearly impossible for foreigners to work in the

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² David N. Livingstone, "Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene: The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32 (1999): 96.

⁵³ Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 160.

tropics. "No foreigner or imported race can perform the work of the Peruvian miner or rubber-gatherer," he argued:

Due to the peculiar conditions of climate – the great altitude in the one case and the humidity in the other – no European or Asiatic people could take the place of these people, whose work can only be accomplished by those who have paid Nature the homage of being born upon the soil and inured to its conditions throughout many generations.⁵⁴

In many cases tropical peoples were transferred from one tropical place to another, as in the case of the Barbadian over-seers in the Putumayo, because people from other tropical regions were thought to be better adapted to tropical climates and diseases. Another example of this can be seen with the use of American Black soldiers in the Philippines. Despite the fact that these Americans grew up in the United States, they were deemed more acclimatized to tropical places because of their perceived tropical bodies.⁵⁵

As mentioned, moral attribution to the tropical landscape was an important component of climate's moral economy. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the tropics were seen as places of moral degeneracy.⁵⁶ The tropics have long had a reputation of unrestrained sexuality. Although this was often used as a critique of European societies, as seen in ideas of the noble savage free from economic and materialistic preoccupations, by the time the rubber boom hit the Amazon these images had changed. Rather than an example of liberty, tropical sexuality was seen in the same light as its natural environment, as excessive. Many tropical people were seen as oversexed, and for European observers, this only proved further their assumed racial degeneracy.⁵⁷ Moreover, increased sensuality and emotions were considered female characteristic, thus feminizing the tropics, further adding to the idea that the tropics naturally should be dominated by a more masculine northern race.⁵⁸ Furthermore, tropical races were seen as unable to control their vices. They were perceived as doing everything in excess, drinking, swearing, having sex, gambling, and so on.

⁵⁴ Hardenburg, "The Indians of the Putumayo, Upper Amazon," 27.

⁵⁵ Warwick Anderson, "Immunities of Empire: Race, Disease, and the New Tropical Medicine, 1900-1920," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 1 (1996): 94.

⁵⁶ Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 154.

⁵⁷ Fredrick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America; Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 54-55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The tropics not only affected the morality of the people who lived there, but also the people who travelled there. The lax morality in the tropics was thought to increase the tendency towards European racial degeneration and decrease the chances of acclimatization.⁵⁹ Thus, Europeans travelling or living in the tropics had to take extra precaution not to indulge in immoral activity, such as drinking or sexual relationships with natives, in order to avoid the negative repercussions of the tropical climate.⁶⁰ This brings the discussion back to “civilized” people in “uncivilized” places. The imperial dilemma of the need for tropical resources and cultural domination, coupled with the challenges to European colonization of tropical places, increased European anxiety about its place in the world and, more specifically, in tropical places. This anxiety about tropical places, and European ability to inhabit it was not unwarranted; as Curtin has demonstrated, European mortality rates in the tropics were catastrophic.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Europe’s seeming inability to successfully colonize the tropics led to a series of stereotypes about the tropics that would persist well after mortality rates had been greatly reduced at the turn of the century and colonization in tropical places seemed more possible.⁶²

Disease was at the heart of this imperial dilemma. As mentioned, Lucile Brockway suggested the control of malaria was an important imperial conquest; without the discovery of quinine, the colonization of Africa would have been much more difficult. The presence of malaria in the tropical world made European expansionism “within reach, beyond grasp.”⁶³ However, there were many other diseases that plagued Europeans in tropical places as well. Small pox, yellow fever, typhoid, typhus, cholera, and dysentery, among others, were all challenges to Europeans in tropical places.⁶⁴ Thus, medical discourses became an important avenue for the articulation of ideas about tropical places and their environments.

⁵⁹ Livingstone, "Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene: The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate," 104.

⁶⁰ Livingstone, "Climate's Moral Economy: Science, Race and Place in Post-Darwinian British and American Geography," 149-50.

⁶¹ See Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁶² Stepan, "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places," 102.

⁶³ Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 132.

⁶⁴ Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century*, 12-13.

Algot Lange in his personal diary about his experience in the rubber town of Remate de Males, near the Peruvian and Brazilian border, nicely exemplifies the belief that the tropics corrupted foreigners or killed them through disease.⁶⁵ Remate de Males, as Lange translated, means the “culmination of evils.” The name of the town only helped to set up the background of his dark and exotic adventure. In the following passage Lange is talking with a border patrolman:

He invited me into his cabin and tried to explain that this river, and the town in particular, where we were going, was a most unhealthy and forbidding place, especially for a foreigner, but he added cheerfully that he knew of one white man, an Englishman, who had succeeded in living for several years on the Javary without being killed by the fever, but incidentally had drank himself to death.⁶⁶

The English doctor in the story perhaps had outwitted tropical disease but, not the environment. Thus, he gave into his vices ultimately to his own demise. Lange himself barely survived, as Frederick S. Dellenbaugh claimed in the introduction to Lange’s book: “He started in fine spirits: buoyant, strong, vigorous. When I saw him again in New York, a year or so later, on his return, he was an emaciated fever-wreck, placing one foot before the other only with much exertion and indeed barely able to hold himself erect.”⁶⁷

Disease, climate, and race were very much intertwined, even when increasing knowledge of germs took over previous more superstitious ideas about disease in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Earlier debates about acclimatization or “seasoning,” as it was frequently called, focused on local disease as something to which the native population was immune. Before the discovery of germs, parasites, and vectors, it was believed that local diseases were a product of the climate and did not affect native populations, as they had through generations become “seasoned.” Even if some acclimatization was possible, foreigners in the tropics could only become partially “seasoned,” and it was recommended that they take hiatuses to the highlands and send their children to school in

⁶⁵ Algot Lange was an American who was in the Peruvian Amazon starting in January of 1910 (which also represents the culmination of the rubber boom in the area). The village Remate de Males, according to Lange, was about a five day launch ride from Iquitos, the rubber capital of the region. His book and other articles on rubber are often included in the initial phase of rubber historiography.

⁶⁶ Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 6-7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, v.

⁶⁸ Anderson, "Disease, Race, and Empire," 64.

Europe to avoid the mental monotony of the tropical climate. Warwick Anderson suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century disease, race, and climate were still very much intertwined, although their contexts had changed. As knowledge of germs and parasites increased the emphasis on climatic contributions to disease decreased. It was no longer heat and humidity that caused diseases, but rather the germs and parasites that lived in these environments. Local races were no longer deemed as immune to tropical diseases but the carriers. For example, colonial doctors found malaria organisms in many natives, even those that were apparently healthy.⁶⁹ This painted local populations as threatening and something to be feared. As one Colonel in the Philippines remarked, although the local population may look clean, “they are not microscopically clean.”⁷⁰ Lange also further exemplifies this when he claimed, “the poor mistreated Indians seemed to have been literally saturated with germs...”⁷¹ However, despite the switch from disease caused by climate to disease caused by parasites and germs, and the fact that climatic theories were long forgotten within the European medical milieu, tropical medicine was the one field of medicine that retained an emphasis on place. As Arnold suggested, “the very idea of ‘tropical disease’ and ‘tropical medicine,’ always difficult to justify in purely epidemiological terms, since few diseases are in fact unique to the tropics, epitomized the way in which medical sciences in the imperial age gave its own endorsement to the idea of tropical otherness.”⁷²

In conclusion, climate, race, and disease, intertwined in discussion of civilization in the tropics, were at the center of European representations of the tropics. The colonial dilemma of wanting tropical resources as well as having the moral urge to “civilize” tropical places, combined with the increasing awareness of European mortality in the tropics furthered a fear about and fascination with tropical places which created a series of enduring stereotypes about these places. These stereotypes were legitimized through scientific discourses which directly influenced the way that Europeans interacted with tropical places. Moreover, they legitimized control of tropical areas and the extraction of their resources. Tropicality encompassed the body of scientific and popular

⁶⁹ Anderson, "Immunities of Empire: Race, Disease, and the New Tropical Medicine, 1900-1920," 109.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 110.

⁷¹ Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 90.

⁷² Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 152.

representations, tropes, theories, and ideas about tropical places, and was a powerful force in representing the ways that people thought and interacted with the tropics. Theories of acclimatization and race are a good example of the power of tropicality. These theories, based more in European fear of difference and need to dominate than on the reality of the places that they seemingly represented, created a powerful discourse that became increasingly impossible to ignore when representing tropical places.

The next chapter looks at these ideas specifically within the context of the rubber boom. It asks how rubber, at the time one of the most valuable tropical resources, helped strengthen and transmit ideas about tropical places and resource control. Rubber brought people from all over the globe to the South American Amazon basin; some people were investors, others were simply “get-rich-quick-schemers,” yet others were scientists and botanists. This amalgamation of different peoples made rubber regions into “contact zones,” where people constantly negotiated the necessity for rubber, the realities of rubber extraction, and the tropical environment. Inherent in these negotiations were individuals’ assertions of their right to tropical resources, labour, and territory based on ideas of conquering the tropical environment and making way for more advanced civilization. However as disease, labour shortage, and Amazonian nature increasingly complicated the rubber industry, the civilizing potentials of rubber were questioned.

Chapter 3
“There is nothing like Rubber:”¹
Civilization and the Rhetoric of Rubber:

The rubber boom in Amazonia encompassed many of the imperial dilemmas with the tropical world. In a “so-called” post-colonial setting, many colonial “hangovers” continued to determine the ways rubber was extracted, who controlled the industry, and who profited from it. Like many of the imperial conundrums of the time, the rhetoric of rubber was inconsistent, ambivalent, and very much followed the rich land/poor land representation of the tropical world. Rubber stood for progress. The Amazon housed the largest supply of natural rubber in the world and held a monopoly over the source for the majority of the rubber boom years. Thus, rubber increased interest in and profit to the area, supposedly implanting civilization in Amazonia during the process. However, rubber was also seen as resisting progress, or the imperial scientific definition of progress. The ways in which rubber was tapped and extracted never developed into scientifically efficient methods of production. In fact, the very nature of wild rubber made organized, plantation-style rubber production nearly impossible in the Amazon. Consequently, the faith that science could “fix” the tropical world began to wane. Rubber tappers and barons developed shady reputations for scandal, violence, and immorality. In these ways, the forest and the people involved in the industry continued to reinforce negative images of the tropics.

The Putumayo scandal is an interesting avenue to explore the effects of Western representations on the tropics. The scandal intertwines the control of natural resources, labour, and the tropical environment, all of which Arnold has suggested were the

¹ Motto of the International Rubber Exhibition held in London, 1911, quoted in *The Nation*, 1 July 1911. Interestingly enough, the article was titled “The Curse of Rubber.” Entire article reproduced in Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 432.

gateways for tropical control.² Furthermore, the Putumayo gained international recognition and, like the Congo, represented the darker side of tropical representation. Because of this international attention, an interesting paper trail was left behind which helps to elucidate the ways that people thought about tropical places and peoples. It, in many ways, represents a microcosm of the larger project surrounding the struggle to control and profit from tropical resources.

The major actors involved in the scandal engaged in established discourses about tropical places to justify their presence in the Putumayo. Thus, the ways that writings portrayed the Putumayo were essential for justifying the manner that outsiders interacted with the people and resources from the Putumayo region. The Putumayo scandal further demonstrates particular tensions about morality, race, and the civilizing project among local, national, and international actors. These tensions demonstrate the constant “mirror dance of colonial meaning making,” which Taussig, among others, has described as essential to understanding the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized even in a theoretically post-colonial South American world.³ This chapter will build on the concepts and ideas presented in the last chapter on tropicality through the specific examples of rubber, the rubber boom, and the Putumayo. The debates around rubber, a particularly important resource at the turn of the century, illuminate the ambivalence as well as the power of tropicality.

² Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, 162-63. Here Arnold suggests that Europeans sought to control the Tropics in three ways: access to resources, “non-white” labour, and the eventual medical advancements to cure or relieve tropical diseases.

³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 136, Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, 134. Taussig’s discussion centers around a “colonial mirroring of otherness,” which essentially reflects back on the colonizer his own “barbarity” and “wildness.” Although the idea that the colonial mirror reflects the savagery that the colonizer wants to civilize while at the same time displaying the barbaric actions of the colonizers, is an important notion, especially in the context of the Putumayo. I think that the idea of a “mirror dance” with multiple mirrors and representations rather than just one mirror, is perhaps a better metaphor for analyzing the ways that the Western/European and Tropical/Amazonian worlds interacted and represented each other. Moreover, I find that it is a useful way to conceptualize the idea of tropicality. Each new narrative about tropical places must engage with and reflect previous notions of the tropical world in order to be “legitimate” or “acceptable.” Thus, each portrayal is separate and intertwined. Each individual idea represents a mirror, which is incorporating and reflecting on to many other mirrors. See Pratt’s chapter on Humboldt in *Imperial Eyes* for further discussion.

Civilizing Rubber: Science, Extraction, and “Folklore” in Amazonia

Rubber had a dual identity, one of hope and one of despair. To many contemporaries, the advent of the rubber boom represented the transition from barbarism to civilization. To others, it signified a step backwards and represented primitive, non-scientific extraction techniques, uneducated workers, unsustainability, and anti-capitalistic or regressive working relationships. These dual images of civilization in the Amazon were at constant play around rubber in general and the Putumayo more specifically. Coupled with the debate about whether rubber was civilized or primitive was a critique of European society, which was an important component of tropicality. This critique was characterized by a regret over the “loss” of nature and morality through increasing materialism and industrialization. These critiques are abundant within rubber tappers’ diaries and other writing about rubber and the Putumayo scandal around the turn of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the most prominent debate present in the primary sources about rubber was whether or not the “backwaters” of Amazonia could be civilized and, if so, how. The general consensus at the turn of the century was that it was the responsibility of the “civilized” world to bring the light to the rest, and it was through this general consensus that civilizing discourses gained their power and legitimacy.

In 1856, Gustavo Schuch de Capanema, reflecting on Dutch cinchona plantations, suggested in a talk he gave to a learned society in Rio de Janeiro that Brazil should put effort into the cultivation of rubber, rather than relying on wild rubber.⁴ Most interesting was the reason he gave for switching from wild to cultivated rubber; as Warren Dean asserts, it was “to “civilize” the seringueiro through sedentary farming.”⁵ The rubber extraction methods then in use were too uncivilized to be worth promoting. As rubber prices began to climb, optimists saw rubber, combined with a ready supply of rational science, able geographers, and trained botanists, as a good opportunity for South American commercial development. The dream of taming the wild jungle into organized, efficient, and profitable plantations was at the front of these aspirations. It was thought

⁴ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

that only through the conquest of wilderness would the republics of South America ever raise their status and properly exploit their nature.

Theodore Roosevelt was in the Amazon Basin, in 1913. He originally travelled to South America to give lectures in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. His visit, however, soon extended into a joint venture between the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Brazilian Telegraphic Commission.⁶ This group of scientists, politicians, and Army Colonels went into Amazonia to discover the “descent of a river which flowed nobody knew whither” in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso.⁷ It was during this descent that Roosevelt met with rubber tappers. These men gave him the impression that rubber was an important civilizer since it opened up the Amazon Basin for further exploration and exploitation. Roosevelt praised rubber, claiming that:

Rubber dazzled them, as gold and diamonds have dazzled other men and driven them forth to wander through the wide waste spaces of the world. Searching for rubber they made highways of rivers the very existence of which was unknown to the governmental authorities, or to any map-makers. Whether they succeeded or failed, they everywhere left behind them settlers, who toiled, married, and brought up children. Settlement began; the conquest of the wilderness entered on its first stage.⁸

Rubber exposed Amazonia to the world, and, to Roosevelt and other rubber optimists, this was its most important asset. Roosevelt pointed to four themes in the above quotation, which are important for the view of “rubber as a civilizer.” Roosevelt saw Amazonia as it then existed as a “waste space.” Unable to see the ways that people had used and moulded the forest, he simply saw it as a misused place, an area of potential which was presently not being properly exploited. Second, he suggested that the value of rubber forced people to travel into the “unknown,” making these areas known to the government and other interest groups. Thirdly, these “new” places were then placed on a map, the ultimate modern scientific guide, which helped the “governmental authorities” interpret and exploit their own territory. Lastly, he viewed rubber as a colonizer. Rubber brought people to otherwise *empty* “wilderness,” who settled and stayed.

⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 9, Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, 163.

⁷ Roosevelt, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

All of the above themes were important and common concepts of civilization at the time. Roosevelt saw the Amazon forest as an obstacle, but one that could be overcome.⁹ Roosevelt prophesized:

This country and the adjacent regions, forming the high interior of western Brazil, will surely some day support a large industrial population; of which the advent would be hastened, although not necessarily in permanently better fashion, if Colonel Rondon's anticipations about the development of mining, especially gold mining, are realized. In any event the region will be a healthy home for a considerable agricultural and pastoral population. All of the swift streams with their numerous waterfalls, some of great volume height and volume, offer the chance for the upgrowth of a number of big manufacturing companies, knit by railroads to one another and to the Atlantic coast and the valleys of the Paraguay, Madera, and the Amazon, and feeding and being fed by dwellers in the rich, hot, alluvial lowlands that surrounded this elevated territory. The work that Colonel Rondon and his associates of the Telegraphic Commission has been to open this great virgin land to the knowledge of the world and to the service of their nation.¹⁰

Here civilization is painted as rationally designed, cultivated, interconnected, and profitable from a state perspective. Cultivation not wilderness equals progress, and such progress required a form of legibility only available through a process of scientific reorganization and simplification.¹¹ In this view, wild rubber offered Amazonia the gateway to real civilization through a stimulus for growth, exploration, and settlement. Once opened up to the scientific world, Amazonia would need to be further rationalized into dependable and accessible estates or make way for other agricultural endeavours. In fact, the Brazilian government readily subscribed to a cultivated image of the Amazon. In order to encourage settlement, the Brazilian government offered squatter rights to land holders, if they could show that they were properly using the land. Weinstein claims that Brazilians eagerly registered their crops but hesitated to register rubber trees, as "cultivated crops, not wild rubber trees served as proof of possession."¹²

Roosevelt's perceptions of Amazonia and rubber are intriguing, especially since they contradict much intellectual thought in the United States at the time which lamented

⁹ Ibid., 333.

¹⁰ Ibid., 217.

¹¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 22.

¹² Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 35.

the loss of their “wilderness” to increasing industrialization.¹³ Nevertheless, in his mind, the wilderness frontier in the Amazon was so vast that there was little threat of it becoming a scarcity. He compared the United States’ conquest of nature to the rubber men’s, claiming that the latter “are now playing the part played by our backwoodsmen when over a century and a quarter ago they began the conquest of the great basin of the Mississippi.”¹⁴ This comparison demonstrates a linear concept of history and the modern blue print of progress, which it was believed all developing nations must follow. It, furthermore, plays into the idea that the Amazon was thought of as archaic and timeless.

Roosevelt’s mission was successful from his perspective; the group of explorers were able to locate the origins of the said *River of Doubt*. He even claimed that the unknown river that they were exploring was already known to rubber men who had two different names for it: the Castanho and Aripuanan. The commission only ascertained that these rivers were in fact one river and in the spirit of imperialism renamed the river, Rio Roosevelt.¹⁵ The renaming of the river can be seen as an act of oversight, a disregard for the fact that the river was already known and named, and as an imperial signature, one which claimed to be bringing civilization to the “unknown.”¹⁶

Roosevelt’s fellow countryman, Algot Lange, who was in the Amazon basin just two years before Roosevelt, did not always agree that rubber opened up the Amazon to civilization, or that the area should be opened to capitalist progress. Lange, unlike Roosevelt, spent much time in the forest interacting both with rubber workers and living among native communities. Through these experiences, Lange arguably developed a much more knowledgeable relationship with the ways that people lived in and interacted with the forest. Whereas Roosevelt travelled with a convoy which had the specific goal of exploring ways to open up and exploit the Amazon, Lange travelled alone and his goals were less grandiose. Despite his original intentions “to study the rubber-worker at his labour, to find out the true length of the Itecoahy River, and to photograph everything

¹³ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995), 71.

¹⁴ Roosevelt, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, 333.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁶ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, 163.

worth while,” he perhaps only successfully completed his first goal.¹⁷ Lange, in many ways, failed to bring further knowledge to the imperial paradigm. Although he still engaged actively with it, he also problematized it, asking what the civilized world really had to offer Amazonia. As Lange pointed out:

At this morning hour in New York (Floresta is on the same meridian as New York), thousands of toilers are entering the hot subways and legions of workers are filing into their offices and stuffy shops to take their places at the huge machinery which keeps the world in motion. At the same hour a handful of rubber-workers are passing my house, returning from their first trip in the *estradas*, where they have been tapping the trees, and on their way to the huts and a frugal breakfast. Here in the wilds of Brazil there are no subways, no worry about the “market,” not indeed any thought for the morrow. Nature supplies the rubber tree, and the “boss” the tools to work them with; the philosophy of the rubber-worker goes no farther. A shirt, trousers, and a hat are all the dress that fashion requires, and often the worker even finds the shirt superfluous.¹⁸

Travel writing frequently critiqued the “civilized” world, while at the same time promoting it. While Lange may have wondered about the excesses of civilization, he certainly did not stop himself from also depicting the “negative-side” of savagery.

Cannibalism is a prominent theme in travel literature and a cornerstone of the civilizing mission. Essential for popular success, depictions of savage cannibals are a vital component in the Western narrative surrounding the fear and fascination with natives. The cannibal represented everything that Europe and civilization was not.¹⁹ Entering cannibal territory meant that an adventurer had truly crossed the threshold between civilization and barbarism and entered into a different world.²⁰ Cannibalism, however, was more a myth than a reality in the Amazon. It represented an accessible tradition which many “outsiders” used to justify their own brutalities in the tropics. During the rubber boom, the myth of violent, man eating natives was no less employed to the advantage of rubber barons and caucheros than it had previously been employed by the Spanish and Portuguese to justify the enslavement of natives.²¹

¹⁷ Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 105.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁹ Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, 105.

²⁰ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 53.

²¹ Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, 105.

Lange's "sojourn among cannibal Indians," however, resisted depicting the natives he met as violent and his discussion of cannibalism is limited; nevertheless, his lack of description only served to allow his reader to imagine what was taking place. Furthermore, the fact that he (or his publisher) chose to include the word "cannibal" in the title of his book when his description of it is limited to a few out of a total of 405 pages suggests that he knew the level of intrigue it would provoke. Nevertheless, Lange's experience was complicated. Lange went with some caucheros into the forest to look for and extract rubber; their food eventually fell short so they split up to increase their chances of survival. Eventually everyone in Lange's group died, leaving him alone in the forest. He was on the verge of death himself when a native group from the region found him, took him in, and nursed him back to health.²² He owed his life to these people; thus Lange admired their society and took part in its activities, including a war against Peruvian rubber workers. However, he could not totally embrace the society because of his adherence to civilized moral etiquette and the taboo of cannibalism:

Had it not happened, I should always have believed this little world out in the wild forest an ideal, pure, and morally clean community. But now I could only hasten to my hammock and simulate sleep, for I well know, from previous experience, that otherwise I would have to partake of a meal of human flesh!²³

The reliance on native peoples in the area for health and companionship seems to be a common theme in rubber tappers' journals. John C. Yungjohann, an American rubber tapper who was in the Amazon between 1906 and 1916, had a similar experience (apart from the cannibalism) with native peoples. In fact, he not only relied on them as teachers of survival tactics, but also depended on them for companionship. Yungjohann developed an enduring relationship with the natives, which proved to be mutually beneficial. He comments how, "whenever I was lonesome I went to stay a week or so with the Indians, doing everything to make good friends with them."²⁴ He also stated that while he helped the natives make candles from beeswax, they gave him advice about combating fevers. With this knowledge, he was able to collect rubber more efficiently.²⁵

²² Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 315.

²³ *Ibid.*, 346.

²⁴ Yungjohann, *White Gold: The Diary of a Rubber Cutter in the Amazon 1906-1916*, 48.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

These positive experiences deepened the critique of industrial civilization in the area. They also offered an alternative to the rumours and images, readily employed by rubber barons, which claimed that natives were hostile, violent, and barbaric, and needed to be either controlled or killed.²⁶

If rubber to some meant possibilities and opportunities, to others it meant stagnation or even a step backwards, which only robbed labour from more productive and progressive opportunities. As the rubber boom advanced, plantation attempts failed, mortality rates soared, disease flourished, and scandals erupted along the frontiers of the rubber world. Rubber had a sinister side. This was apparent from the beginning of the rubber boom in the Amazon. In 1864, a Brazilian provincial secretary and rancher expressed concern about the present working conditions of wild rubber extractors, claiming, “[r]ubber extraction is not fatal to the seringueiro alone; its pernicious effects, in its present state, fall upon all other branches of industry and upon the wealth and civilization of the interior of this province.”²⁷ In a similar vein thirty-six years later, the Brazilian Botanist João Barbosa Rodrigues expressed dismay at the “social costs” of rubber, and the damage it was doing to other agricultural ambitions associated with coffee, tobacco, indigo, and cotton.²⁸ He further claimed that where there were once abundant plantations, now there was only stagnation and neglect.²⁹ Moreover, hevea rubber, which is found on the flood plains, could only be tapped for six months a year because the rainy season flooded tapping areas. Apart from this being unproductive and inefficient, there were concerns that it promoted a lazy lifestyle during the rainy season. Thus, seringueiros developed reputations for drinking, gambling, and crime, all of which blackened the trade.³⁰ As Collier demonstrates, “day after day, the tappers lounged in their hammocks, smoking, dozing, dreaming of far-off freedom, their debts mounting still

²⁶ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 306.

²⁷ Cited in Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 37. In an interesting aside, present day representations of seringueiros by cattle ranchers continue to portray the same sorts of imagery, as tension between tappers, who rely on the forest, and ranchers, who need to cut the forest for pasture, persist.

²⁸ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*, 43.

higher.”³¹ “This isn’t production, it’s folklore!” declared the Brazilian poet Ruben Braga when reflecting on rubber extraction methods.³²

Despite so much concern and rhetoric surrounding the “backwards” nature of rubber, plantation rubber cultivation never developed in Amazonia. Today historiography offers three explanations for failed plantation development in Amazonia.³³ The first is based on ideas of imperialism and capital accumulation in the Amazon. Because of the way that rubber developed through the *aviamento* system, local abilities to retain capital and invest in plantations or other forms of development were greatly restrained. Furthermore, European powers took seeds from the Amazon and developed them elsewhere, eventually “stealing” the Amazonian position in the world market.³⁴ The second hypothesis is proposed in Dean’s *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*.³⁵ In this work, Dean suggested that plantation style rubber extraction failed because of the biological nature of rubber trees; they could not grow successfully in stands in Amazonia due to disease. In the wild, rubber trees are never found too close together; this acts as a natural defense against a certain type of leaf blight which attacks rubber trees. If planted too close, one tree would pass the disease on to the next. All plantation attempts in Amazonia, Dean suggested, eventually suffered from this disease. Dean further proposes that people in the Amazon knew about the leaf blight, which directly influenced their decisions as to whether or not to cultivate rubber. Asian plantation rubber grew more successfully at first because the specific leaf blight that attacked *hevea* rubber trees was not present in the area.³⁶ The third theory is Weinstein’s tapper/trader alliance which she outlined in *The Amazon Rubber Boom*.³⁷ Simply put, Weinstein suggested that plantation style extraction did not develop in the Amazon because people involved in rubber did not want it to. Seringueiros enjoyed a high level of personal freedom, while traders were able to control the exchange of rubber.³⁸ Coomes and Barnes work adds a last theory which

³¹ Collier, *The River That God Forgot*, 49.

³² Cited in Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*, 38.

³³ Coomes, "The Amazon Rubber Boom: Labor Control, Resistance, and Failed Plantation Development Revisited," 239.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*.

³⁶ *Ibid.* See specifically chapter 4, pp. 53-66.

³⁷ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

suggested that there was local retention of surplus during the rubber boom and that the system was efficient as it was.³⁹

Whatever the reason, to rubber boom contemporaries, outside of those who directly benefited from it, the fact that a rationalization of rubber cultivation never successfully occurred strengthened the view of Amazonia and its resources as archaic and primitive, which resisted modernization by their very nature. Certainly, many of the above theories are reflected in the journals of rubber tappers of the day. For example, Lange's study of rubber workers on the border of Peru and Brazil in Remate de Males testifies to the high level of independent spirit of *seringueiros* and a romantic view of living with nature. However, it also represents their reliance and intimate relationship to nature. In a period where it was increasingly believed that nature should be confined to parks for Sunday viewing or for the use of resources, living within nature and abiding by its rules was indeed considered "backwards" and primitive.

The *seringueiro* is free in his movements and in his mind, he is a quick and keen observer of nature, and an expert in knowledge of the cries and calls of the animals of the forest. He knows their habits and hiding places to perfection, and he could probably astonish the naturalist by informing him of many things he has observed that his brother scientist never has heard of.⁴⁰

Along with the difficulties with rationally cultivating rubber came pressing concerns about health, mortality, morality, and corruption within the rubber trade, all of which were issues that were increasingly pressing within the larger context of imperial interaction with the tropics and its failing civilizing mission. Colonel G. E. Church, in an article about opening up more efficient trade routes and consolidating borders due to the profitability of rubber pointed to the challenges facing the rubber industry, suggesting that:

Thus far, no trade in the world has been carried on under equal difficulties; and it has taxed the courage and endurance of those engaged in it to an almost incredible extent. It represents a continuous struggle, under conditions which every year

³⁹ Barham and Coomes, "Wild Rubber: Industrial Organisation and the Microeconomics of Extraction During the Amazon Rubber Boom (1890-1920)," 44.

⁴⁰ Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 197.

impose greater loss of health, life, and material than an active military campaign, and the human suffering is appalling.⁴¹

Here, Church touches upon many of the realities of rubber as an extractive resource, which must grow and be tapped in the wild. Also, it is difficult not to point out the reference to a “military campaign,” which conjures up images of war: man against nature. In the case of rubber, it seemed man was losing the battle; as one seringueiro stated, “each ton of rubber costs a human life.”⁴²

Perhaps the most prominent theme among the various rubber worker accounts was the presence and threat of disease. As with the mosquito-transported diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, many tropical diseases were misunderstood. Thus, treatments were often inaccurate or misguided. Disease among rubber workers was rampant, further deepening a perceived innate link between the tropical environments and disease. Conquering disease was an important component for controlling the tropical environment and the tremendous death rate among rubber tappers only reconfirmed that the tropics were neither easily conquered nor were they “advancing.” Yungjohann claimed: “Many a mother’s son has been lured into that profound wilderness to be kept under bondage, never to return to civilization, only to fall prey to that treacherous fever beri-beri.”⁴³

The above quotation not only exemplifies the persistence of disease, it also demonstrates the perceptions of the aviamiento system which indebted then trapped workers in cycles of debt. Despite Weinstein’s suggestion that this system suited the conditions present in Amazonia, to Latin American elite and other investors competing for local labour, this system was doomed to failure based on its pre-capitalist structure. “The question of debt is by no means an unimportant one to the rubber worker,” declared Lange when describing how a tapper became indebted:

When he gets employed as a worker on an estate, he is called “Brado,” which means that he is “wild” or unacquainted with the estate and its many estradas. He

⁴¹ G. E. Church, "The Acre Territory and the Caoutchouc Region of South-Western Amazonia," *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 5 (1904): 596-97. For another example of Church’s work see George Earl Church, *Aborigines of South America* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1912).

⁴² Cited in Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 44.

⁴³ Yungjohann, *White Gold: The Diary of a Rubber Cutter in the Amazon 1906-1916*, 7.

is, therefore, put in charge of a small Estrada, very likely one that nobody else wants, because it gives little or very poor milk. He will probably collect one pound of rubber milk a day and will undoubtedly consume in material and supplies about \$4 to \$5 a day, so that after three or four months he owes the boss \$400 to \$500. Very likely, for the rest of the year he will keep abreast of expenses, barely managing, by working from 4 in the morning to 6 at night, in all kinds of weather, to earn as much as he eats and uses. The next year he may have the misfortune to fall sick so that he cannot work for a half year; his debt will then have run up to about \$1,000. However, the manager keeps him as he know that the “Brado” will get well some day and work off his debt. If he dies, then his debt is put in the “loss” column, after the profit on the purchased merchandise has been subtracted.⁴⁴

As this quotation suggests, knowledge of one’s surroundings was important for successful rubber gathering. In an interesting twist, the rubber estates called people unfamiliar to their estradas “wild,” implying that they would not be “tame” until they were familiar with rubber gathering techniques and environments. This also implied that people became less “wild” not when they became civilized, but only after they were versed in the secrets of the Amazon and the intricacies of rubber tapper.

The Putumayo Scandal is a good example of much of the rhetoric of civilization and barbarism around rubber. As explored in chapter two, it is an example of imperial need for tropical control, resource extraction, morality, and race within the tropics. It also brings rubber baron stereotypes, and the aviamiento system and labour to the forefront of the discussion. Part of the reason that wild rubber had such a bad reputation stemmed from the perceived cruelty of rubber barons, and the non-capitalistic and inhumane (uncivilized) working conditions of rubber workers. However, rubber barons latched on to “Rooseveltian” discourses about rubber as a civilizer, making the case that they were the true pioneers of South America, clearing its wilderness and instilling civilized work ethics among the both the primitive and the poor.

⁴⁴ Lange, "The Rubber Workers of the Amazon," 35-36.

***Civilized Savages and Amazonian Wild (Gentle)men:
Civilization and Rubber in the Putumayo***

The Putumayo scandal horrified the world.⁴⁵ It had been less than ten years since Roger Casement started his investigation into rubber extraction in the Congo and now, once again, scandal surrounding wild rubber made international news.⁴⁶ The Putumayo scandal served to deepen an already negative side of rubber. However, it also shed light on conflicting ideas about civilization in Amazonia. The debate around the Putumayo was about a situation that had gone awry. It, presumably, had followed the right recipe for civilization, including foreign investment (British), organized labour, and resource exploitation. Yet, rather than alleviating the savagery and barbarism in the area, the recipe “back-fired” and the results were bitter. This section is about the mastermind behind the Putumayo scandal, Julio César Arana, and his main adversary W. E. Hardenburg, whose quest to stop the situation in the Putumayo brought it to British attention.

Hardenburg was an interesting character of passion and ambition. Outraged by the way that he was treated by the Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC), he seemingly went on a personal vendetta against Arana. This war, between Hardenburg and Arana, was a war of words based on ideas of civilization, which would later be carried on by Roger Casement and others investigating the scandal. Both Hardenburg and the PAC relied on civilizing discourses to justify their interference in the Putumayo. To Hardenburg, rubber meant oppression, corruption, murder, and immorality; rubber was simply more destructive than it was progressive. Hardenburg believed that the Putumayo was in need of civilization, just not the PAC’s version of it. Attempting to appeal to the British public’s values and morals, Hardenburg embedded his arguments in a version of the “white mans burden,” in which he reaffirmed the British right to interpose in the area on behalf of the oppressed.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, xvi.

⁴⁶ For a well written and documented popular history of the Congo Atrocities see Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner Books, 1998).

⁴⁷ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, 110, Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 128.

The PAC's version of civilization also engaged in imperialist discourses about civilization. Using the same rhetoric as Roosevelt, the PAC represented itself as a civilizer, following rubber into the vast wilderness, opening it up for the benefit of the nation, while breaking down the borders between barbarism and civilization. As the Putumayo was in a disputed frontier zone, the PAC was able to gain Peruvian government sympathies by claiming the area for Peru.⁴⁸ Arana continually played to the Peruvian government's insecurity in the area, thus fostering its support. Arana asserted that in the case of a violent border dispute with Colombia, that his men were, as Collier pointed out, "[p]eruvian patriots first, company employees second."⁴⁹ These two interacting arguments make the Putumayo an intriguing contact zone where ideas about the tropics, its environment, and peoples entangle and play out.

Arana, from a strong business family, arrived in the tributaries of the Amazon selling Panama hats just before the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ At this time, Colombia had a stronger presence in the area. Arana expanded his trade and partnered with the Colombians in the area. However, this partnership was short lived and by 1905, Arana had formed the company J. C. Arana y Hermanos (and Brothers) and had successfully bought out most of the Colombian presence in the area.⁵¹ Between 1904 and 1906, Arana contracted just under two hundred Barbadians to work in the area as overseers to his rubber production. Economic conditions in the Caribbean, growing population, and the seemingly larger wages offered on the mainland of South and Central America attracted workers to enter into labour contracts throughout the Americas, working on a variety of projects, from the Panama Canal to banana plantations in Central America to railways to rubber estates in South America.⁵²

Eager to secure the Putumayo region for himself, Arana looked for international support and found it in the investors of Britain. In 1907, the same year that Saldaña Rocca published his damning articles in Iquitos, Arana travelled to London and

⁴⁸ Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*, 309.

⁴⁹ Collier, *The River That God Forgot*, 63. Also see the *Report and Special Report from the Select Committee on the Putumayo, Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices*, 468.

⁵⁰ Karno, "Julio César Arana, Frontier Cacique in Peru," 90.

⁵¹ Pennano, *La Economía Del Caucho*, 163.

⁵² Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 120.

established the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company.⁵³ Starting in the 1890's, foreign interest in rubber increased and investors hoped, as stated by Stanfield, "to intensify rubber collection, and rationalize labour exchange relations, dispensing with the costly aviamiento system by paying cash directly to the collector for his rubber."⁵⁴ Although these attempts failed, the interest abroad did not diminish, and Arana, seeking to take advantage of this situation, was able to solicit a number of investors in London. The PAC was not alone in recognizing British interest in rubber; during the 1907 peak in rubber prices, a staggering seventy-seven rubber companies were established in London.⁵⁵ In 1908, Arana dropped the word "rubber" out of the name of the company, presumably because he sensed the negative connotations around rubber and the potential looming scandal around his company, which at that point was brewing in Iquitos. By the time that Casement's *Blue Book* was published, Arana controlled the entire Putumayo, including the transportation in and out of the region. He had offices established in Manaus and Iquitos, two major rubber towns, and was directly or indirectly involved in just about everything that happened in the province of Loreto.

Arana held a position of privilege in the Loreto and in Peru. A well-established *cacique*, Arana not only controlled provincial politics but had considerable influence nationally as well, including contacts in the national press *El Diario*.⁵⁶ Thus, Arana enjoyed the support of the Peruvian government and successfully tapped into his network of political allies to make sure that his company maintained a positive reputation nationally. Arana, playing on the insecurities of Peru's territorial claim in the area, joined with the government in lauding his company for their civilizing efforts in the Putumayo and the conversion of the area into an economically profitable zone for the country. Essential to the company's claim as a civilizer was the acceptance that the natives were in desperate need of civilizing. Thus, Arana, backed by the government, tapped into old myths about "backward savages," intentionally disseminating them well

⁵³ Pennano, *La Economía Del Caucho*, 163.

⁵⁴ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 121.

⁵⁵ Brain Inglis, *Roger Casement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), 183, Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 122.

⁵⁶ See Karno, "Julio César Arana, Frontier Cacique in Peru." After the publication of Casement's reports the newspaper would praise Arana for his company's civilizing influence in the area. The paper also announced that Arana would be Peru's representative for an international Conference on Rubber in London.

beyond Peruvian borders. These myths were propagated to legitimize Arana's control over the area and to substantiate the country's territorial claims.

The collaboration between the Peruvian government and Arana is perhaps best explored through the controversial diary of Eugenio Robuchon. Robuchon was a French explorer who was contracted by the Peruvian government to survey the Putumayo's rubber operations as well as document the native groups in the area.⁵⁷ Arana offered to pay the explorer's travel expenses.⁵⁸ Robuchon set out to the Putumayo never to return, disappearing in 1906. Robuchon's things were recovered, including his notes and diary, but his body was never found. Arana's lawyer, and friend of the President, edited the diary, and it was published in 1907.⁵⁹ The diary described the Putumayo filled with cannibal Indians ready to attack settlers. It also praised Arana's efforts to civilize the area. "Three enormous Indians painted in red," writes Robuchon mysteriously from the grave, "their mouths full of coca bulging their cheeks, advanced to greet us, hitting us on the back as a form of welcome."

Above us hung suspended from the roof four skulls. They were trophies from a recent battle between Nonuyas and their neighbors the Ekireas. Each skull corresponded to a victim of the cannibals. I couldn't but feel a swift emotion, to see us, so few in number, surrounded by those Indians, strong and muscley, who could split us into pieces in the twinkling of an eye from the moment that we arrived...

Sometimes you see dissected arms from which the meat has been stripped but the tendons left in place with the hand slightly bent. Tied to a wooden handle they serve as cooking spoons for the *cahuana*. In spite of all my attempts to obtain one of these kitchen utensils, I was not able. It is with great suspicion that the Huitotos guard their ornaments, their necklaces of teeth, of feathers, and so forth. The reason they hide them is to evade the desires of the whites who often seize them against the will of their owners, giving nothing in return.⁶⁰

The acceptance of these images, coupled with Arana's incredible regional and national support, forced Hardenburg to take his case against the PAC out of Iquitos to London.

⁵⁷ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 54.

⁵⁸ Karno, "Julio César Arana, Frontier Cacique in Peru," 90.

⁵⁹ See Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Select Committee on Putumayo. Report and Special Report from the Select Committee on Putumayo, Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1913, 461.

⁶⁰ Cited in Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, 104. Quotation from Robuchon, Engenio. *En el Putumayo y sus afluentes*. Lima, 1907.

Hardenburg, although compensated for the luggage which was stolen and the abuses that he experienced by the PAC while travelling down the Putumayo, was not satisfied. Still angry and determined to make Arana pay more severely for the abuses, he remained in Iquitos to investigate the crimes against the Putumayo natives that he had been told about while in the Putumayo region. Having heard about the articles published in *La Sanción* and *La Felpa*, he went in search of copies with little luck as Saldaña Rocca was no longer in Iquitos. Eventually, he met Saldaña Rocca's son and was able to obtain the transcripts, which he later took to London along with his own articles.⁶¹ These articles, which Hardenburg would later reproduce in his book, were the basis of his accusations against the PAC. The articles were clear, to the point, and transparent. They named the people involved in the alleged crimes and repeatedly condemned Arana. The abuses included violent floggings, intentional starvation, and murder. Often, the articles were testimony written by people who had been in the area, and almost all of them dealt with the treatment of natives in the area. In 1909, Hardenburg's articles were published in *Truth* magazine in London, beginning the British involvement in the scandal.

Like Casement, Hardenburg viewed the native peoples of the area as children, in need of a strong but moral paternal force in order to coax them into the civilized world. However, well aware of Arana's own use of civilizing rhetoric, he attempted to make a clear distinction between what he called the "civilizing company's" (a sarcastic reference to the PAC) version of civilization and his own ideas. Both Hardenburg and his editor, C. Reginald Enock, agreed that "the whole Amazon Valley, when it should be opened up, will prove to be one of the most valuable parts of the earth's surface."⁶² Hardenburg further asserted that reliable transportation would hasten this transition:

For in that way, this virgin region would have an outlet not only for rubber, ivory, &c., but also for the valuable agricultural staples, as coffee, cotton, *yuca*, sugarcane, and the thousand other products of the *tierra caliente*, which can be grown here. Besides, the opening of these means of communication would greatly facilitate immigration to this vast region, which is the most essential aid to its development.⁶³

⁶¹ Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 128.

⁶² Quotation by Enock in Hardenburg, *The Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise: Travels in the Peruvian Amazon Region and an Account of the Atrocities Committed Upon Ther Indians Therein*, 37.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 69.

The above quotation reveals Hardenburg's view of civilization in the Putumayo. It includes rationally planned and productive agricultural design. It also shows the tendency to believe that settlement from the outside, an idea to which Casement also subscribed, was the only way to "stimulate" proper civilization. However, this quotation further demonstrates the common agricultural misunderstanding of tropical regions and the tendency to homogenize the "*tierra caliente*". The Amazon never produced ivory, although it was readily exploited in other tropical countries where elephants actually lived. Furthermore, Hardenburg assumed that once stripped of the forest, the area would also be highly fertile. Nevertheless, Hardenburg, like Casement, pleaded for European interference in the area based on the premise that Europeans, in fact, encompassed a higher level of civilization and understood the possibilities of the area better than the inhabitants, and due to this, they had a moral obligation to do something about the circumstances of the area:

People of England! Just and generous people, always the advanced sentinels of Christianity and civilization! Consider these horrors! Put your selves in the place of the victims, and free these few remaining Indians from their cruel bondage and punish the authors of these crimes!⁶⁴

Arana's response to Hardenburg's allegations went little further than to accuse him of blackmail and of forging a bill.⁶⁵ However, he would become more aggressive as the allegations received more attention, even going as far as producing a film in 1914 with Silvano Santos. The film, featuring the PAC as the protagonist, touted the success of the company's civilizing efforts and conversion of the Putumayo into an economically productive zone.⁶⁶ "It was then that I heard for the first time," said Arana, recollecting his arrival in the Putumayo and further promoting himself as a civilizer:

That the Indians in the Igaraparaná and Caraparaná had resisted the establishment of civilization in their regions. They had resisted effectively for many years, practicing cannibalism and, once in a while, killing white colonizers. But from 1900 onwards, the Indians became more tractable, and a system of exchanging rubber extracted by the Indians in exchange for European goods developed

⁶⁴ Ibid., 214.

⁶⁵ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 211. Also see Arana's testimony for the select committee. Pennano also suggests that Hardenburg may have been under the pay of the Colombian government who had interest in tainting the Peruvian reputation internationally in order that their claim for the territory be looked upon more favourably. See Pennano, *La Economía Del Caucho*, 166.

⁶⁶ Casement, "Historical Background to the Putumayo Attrocities," 617.

between them and the referred trading posts. From then on my business grew gradually but slowly.⁶⁷

Julio César Arana represented rubber as a civilizer, civilizing not only the natives but the environment, transforming the jungles of Peru and its people into a market conscious place. Whether this is what happened in reality mattered little to the people in power in Peru who quashed his arrest order twice after the scandal made international news.⁶⁸ Arana knowingly engaged European discourses of civilization and successfully avoided conviction. He was almost deemed a national hero in his role in asserting Peruvian sovereignty and furthering its economic success.

Civilizing the tropics did not only imply its peoples but also its environment. An essential part of the civilizing mission both Arana and Hardenburg espoused centred around the conquest of “wilderness,” an important part of the civilizing discourse of the time. However, the contradiction around rubber, and perhaps the hole in the “civilizing” argument, was that rubber in Amazonia needed the “wilderness” in order to survive. At the time, it could not biologically survive without it.

The reports that Roger Casement wrote on the Putumayo further elucidate these two debates represented by Hardenburg and Arana about civilization and control in the Putumayo. The next chapter explores the contradictions around civilization and rubber more closely. It also examines Roger Casement, the man, and his interactions both with the physical tropics, and his use of ideas and theories about the tropics.

⁶⁷ Cited in Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 104.

⁶⁸ Karno, "Julio César Arana, Frontier Cacique in Peru," 93.

Chapter Four
Roger Casement's Blue Book:
Civilization, Race, and Rubber in the Putumayo

At the turn of the century, rubber was an important resource on the world market, and it promised riches and progress to those who could successfully control it. Unfortunately, due to the nature of rubber, the shortage of labour during the rubber boom, and the gross abuses within the extractive system in the rubber regions in South America and around the world, rubber rarely led to the prosperity promised by the optimists of the time. By the time the rubber boom had peaked, circa 1910, and the world prices for wild rubber began to fall, the European view of the tropics was becoming unfavourable. Interestingly, the peak in the rubber boom also represents an increasing international interest in race, eugenics, and degeneration.¹ Races in the tropics were scientifically analyzed within hierarchies which naturalized white European superiority. Racial intermixing, despite its ubiquitous presence in all colonized and contact zones, was seen as diluting the principal races, furthering a negative international image of tropical places where racial hybrids represented the majority of their population. Coupled with this, tropical nature continued to present challenges to the commercial world seen through the unstable supply of tropical goods, the persistence of disease, and the difficulty in creating efficient and economically productive spaces. The situation in the Putumayo amalgamates ideas about tropical places and rubber at the turn of the century. The Putumayo scandal marked the second time that rubber made international news in connection with gross human rights abuses, following closely on the heels of the allegations around rubber in the Congo. This negative image of rubber led many to believe that the rubber market crash was a blessing which symbolized the emergence of

¹ See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Nancy Lee Stepan, *"the Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

more civilized plantation style extraction in British controlled Asia, where labour, production, and export could be easily supervised and controlled.

Conflicting ideas about civilization were omnipresent in the Putumayo. As seen in the last chapter, the Peruvian Amazon Company and Julio César Arana attempted to manipulate images about tropical places in order to validate their control over the Putumayo. By appealing to the Peruvian government's insecurity in the border zone, the elite's fear of the native other, and the British threat to Peruvian sovereignty, Arana was able to foster support nationally. Arana engaged in European rhetoric about the tropics, ideas that were as much at home in Latin American capitals as in Europe itself, in order to create the impression that the situation in the Putumayo was not only a threat to settlers in the area attempting to open up the backwater of the nation but also that control of the Putumayo and the "savages" therein were essential for the construction of a Peruvian nation. The decision to send Arana, even after Casement's investigation, to the International Rubber Exhibition in London as the Peruvian representative, is perhaps the best example of the level of support he had at the national level.²

For a fleeting moment the Putumayo scandal highlighted Britain's informal empire in Latin America. With the publication of Sir Roger Casement's Putumayo *Blue Book* in 1912, Britain's interactions in Latin America were questioned at home. Casement's writings about the Putumayo bring together many of the images, ideas, and contradictions about European, specifically British, influence and control or attempted control in tropical places. Casement's writings engage in debates about environment, race, human rights, sovereignty, and empire at a particularly insecure moment in pre-World War I Europe. A well-travelled imperial servant, Casement's experiences in the tropical world were extensive, making him a good point of intersection between writings about the tropical world and experiences in the tropical world. Frequently in contact zones, Casement positioned himself both within the heart of empire, as a knighted British consul, and on the edges, as an Irishman and human rights activists on the very outskirts of the British formal and informal empire. He was also privately gay. Thus, he balanced the roles of the morally up-right British consul with that of a social outcast. These

² Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 183.

particular characteristics make him unique and his writing an invaluable expression of tropicality and its ambivalence.

This chapter is a discussion of Sir Roger Casement and his writings surrounding the Putumayo and rubber. It focuses on the two reports that Casement produced for the foreign office about the Putumayo, which were published in the government *Blue Book*, although a range of his writings and correspondence within this period will also be discussed. The first report concerns the Barbadian British subjects Arana brought to the Putumayo to work as overseers for the company's rubber production. The very idea that already "tropical" bodies were more suited for labour in different tropical regions testifies to the resonance of particular stereotypes of tropical places and races among Latin American elite. The first report is also an example of colonial subjects' agency, and how some colonized peoples were able to engage in the imperial discourses surrounding their tropical identity and mould their own representation and advance their own agendas. The second report is justified on the grounds that the PAC was a registered British company and deals with the treatment of native peoples in the area. It is a critique of imperial commerce and the "civilizing project." Nevertheless, the solutions Casement proposed were not intended to replace the system but rather "patch" it where it needed fixing. This report is longer and arguably more complex than the first. It testifies more directly to Casement's own beliefs about race and place. Writing in a era of international race conferences, Casement subscribed to many of the beliefs about the tropics that were prominent at the time. Comments made in letters about mixed races, for example, suggest that Casement believed in the inherent inequality of races and that intermixing between races would eventually produce a degenerate race. Yet, at the same time, Casement often compared the situation of the Putumayo natives to his own Irish people, and he spent much time and energy, outside of his imperial duties, on reform in both the Congo and Putumayo. In the end, Casement betrayed imperial Britain by taking the lessons he learned in the Putumayo and the Congo and applying them to Ireland. Together the reports represent a window into a complex man who was a hero and a traitor, a racist and a believer in the family of man, apparently straight and gay, sane and insane. Roger Casement's writings engage in representations of the tropical world

prominent at the turn of the century and were both a product of imperial insecurity and the reality of tropical places.

Roger Casement: His Life and Times

Roger David Casement was born in a suburb of Dublin on September 1, 1864.³ The son of a Catholic mother and a Protestant father, Casement's identity was multi-faceted from birth.⁴ Casement was raised Protestant and loyal to the British crown. Nevertheless, his mother had him secretly baptized Catholic at four,⁵ a faith he would publicly embrace before being hung for high treason,⁶ and although Irish grievances would not generally have been part of the Unionist curricula growing up, Casement was exposed to this history through the library of an uncle who was an aficionado for Irish history.⁷ This exposure was very influential to young Casement and would lead him to identify strongly with the Irish throughout his life, despite his eventual consular service for the British crown.

After Casement's schooling, he worked as a clerk for the Elder Dempster Company.⁸ The sedentary aspect did not appeal to Casement, who sought to follow his brothers' adventures into the colonial world. His brothers were both living in Australia, although one would end up in South Africa.⁹ After four years of working as a clerk, Casement was offered an opportunity to go to Africa on one of Dempster's ships heading for Boma, near the entrance to the Congo river.¹⁰ Casement eagerly accepted. This journey began a love affair with Africa, where he worked in various occupations for the next twenty years. It was during these years that Casement met Joseph Conrad. Although Conrad's opinion of Casement changed as Casement's reputation was challenged in the weeks leading up to his execution, upon first meeting him in Africa Conrad was impressed, and the two men spent the good part of three weeks together.

³ B. L. Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, xxvii.

⁶ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸ Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement*, 7, Séamas Ó Síocháin and Micheal O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary* (Dublin: University of Dublin Press, 2003), 8.

⁹ Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, 8, 26.

¹⁰ Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement*, 7.

Casement's descriptions of Africa were haunting to Conrad and further depressed his already gloomy impression of the "dark continent," which would surface almost ten years later in his novella, *Heart of Darkness*.¹¹ Conrad's famous character Kurtz is the anti-hero in the novella and is depicted reverting to savagery after too long in colonial Africa, an idea that would later also be suggested about Casement and his extensive time in the tropics. "He could tell you things!" Conrad declared in a letter written about Casement in 1903, "[t]hings I have tried to forget, things I never did know. He has had as many years of Africa as I had months-almost."¹²

Casement was first employed by the British government in 1892 in modern day Nigeria. He assisted in surveying land and worked in the customs department.¹³ He later held three consular positions in Africa: Lourenço Marques (Mozambique) in 1895 to 1897 and 1899 to 1900, St. Paul de Lorando (Angola) 1898 to 1899, and Boma (Congo) 1900-1903.¹⁴ It was during the latter posting that Casement and rubber became entangled, an entanglement that would deeply affect Casement, causing him to reflect and critique Ireland, the British empire, race, resources, and civilization.

In 1903, Casement received orders to investigate rumours of slavery, abuse, and wide-scale murder among rubber workers in the Congo Free State, the personal colony of King Leopold II of Belgium.¹⁵ Casement's investigations in the Congo make an interesting comparison to those he conducted in the Putumayo. They concern abuses around rubber, include thorough discussions of race and environment, and both the "so-called" masterminds of the scandals justified their interference in the area using the rhetoric of civilization, humanity, and progress. King Leopold was perhaps the champion of the two. He justified his interests in the Congo on the basis of ending the Arab slave trade.¹⁶ Nevertheless, he also created a series of organizations based on scientific and humanitarian claims which were in reality a guise for his own commercial interest in the

¹¹ Joseph Conrad, *Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness and the Secret Sharer* (New York: Signet Classic, 1983). The novella was completed in 1899.

¹² Cited in Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement*, 14.

¹³ Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, 8.

¹⁴ Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*, 75.

¹⁵ Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

area.¹⁷ Death estimates in the Congo during King Leopold's control are as high as ten million, making the Congo one of the most horrific and certainly the first huge humanitarian concern of the twentieth century. As well, the Congo was arguably an important event in the conscience of empire as the excesses of greed and commercialism became an important critique of the imperial projects around the world. As in the Putumayo, British interest in the area was two-fold. Having no official colonial connections to the area, the British interfered in the Congo based on the concern that British subjects from West Africa, used in the Congo for labour, were being abused.¹⁸ The British were also signatories of the General Act of Berlin (1885) which recognized the Free State and allotted King Leopold around one million square miles of territory. However, free trade between the signatories and the Free State was a condition of the agreement,¹⁹ and the British alleged that this agreement had been compromised by trade monopolies headed by Leopold.²⁰ It is also likely that the British had their own commercial interest in the area. In 1904, Casement published *Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo*.²¹ This report would earn Casement the Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George (CMG),²² and also would prepare and qualify him for his similar investigations into the Putumayo.

In the years following the Congo report, Casement began to reflect more seriously on his homeland and its historical situation, and became more sensitive to British control over Ireland.²³ Relating the Congo to Ireland, he claimed in a letter to Alice Stopford Green:

I knew that the Foreign Office would not understand the thing for I realised that I was looking at this tragedy with the eyes of another race of people once hunted themselves, whose hearts were based on affection as the root principle of contact

¹⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 75.

²¹ Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo*. (Cd.1933) LXII, 1904.

²² Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*, 75.

²³ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 109.

with their fellow men, and whose estimate of life was not of something eternally to be appraised at its market “price.”²⁴

Casement would later compare the people of Ireland to the natives of the Putumayo. Although still a unionist, Casement was becoming increasingly anti-British.

Over the next years of Casement’s life, he held a variety of consul positions which oscillated with periods of unemployment or leave from the foreign service. In 1906, he first went to South America to take up a posting at Santos in Brazil. Casement loathed Brazil, but nevertheless remained at postings in the country from then until the Putumayo investigation. “Heavens!” Casement wrote in a letter in 1910 concerning Latin Americans, “what loathsome people they are! A mixture of Jew and Nigger, and God knows what; altogether the nastiest human black pudding the world has yet cooked in her tropical stew pot.”²⁵ These comments, although perhaps made more out of frustration than hatred, shed light on Casement’s own ideas about race at the time. However, they also must be balanced with other comments about Latin Americans where his judgment is much less harsh. He had, in fact, in the past rigorously defended the reputation of a Jewish man and frequently made positive comments about the people he met in his Brazilian postings.²⁶ Nevertheless, Casement was a man of his times and thus offers both consensus and critique of ideas about tropical places. Brazil, a country with the majority of its population of a mixed race origin, was frequently used as an example by European intellectuals of the degenerate qualities caused by racial mixing.²⁷ According to Nancy Stepan, a long list of European writers “hammered home the thesis of negro inferiority, mulatto degeneration and tropical decay.”²⁸ In reaction to their country being used as the foremost example of racial degeneration theories, Brazilian elites were forced to reverse the degeneration thesis in national consciousness and claimed that racial mixing actually improved racial stocks. However, this was coupled with the “whitening thesis” which claimed that over generations Brazil could whiten its population by selective interracial

²⁴ Ibid., 125.

²⁵ Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*, 200.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 125.

²⁸ Ibid.

breeding thus giving the country the European precursor to civilization.²⁹ Casement was very much in touch with this stream of tropical representation, as the discussion of his reports will show.

When scandal around rubber extraction resurfaced, this time due to the efforts of Walter Ernest Hardenburg, Casement had been promoted to consul-general and held a post in Rio de Janeiro.³⁰ Casement received his orders and briefing on the Putumayo on July 21, 1910, while on leave in England.³¹ He was ordered to go with the commission that the PAC had named and elucidate the situation in the Putumayo. He was to determine whether or not British subjects were being mistreated and assist them if needed. He would also examine the company's books and evaluate its management. Casement investigated the allegations against the PAC in late 1910.³²

***“British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians:”
Casement’s Putumayo Reports***³³

In respect to this thesis, the usefulness of the reports is two-fold. On one side they are an expression of tropicity. They demonstrate European interaction and representation of the tropical world, its environment, resources, and races. On the other side, they are the extension of one man, who was caught in between the imperialist and the colonized, the oppressed and the oppressor, the freedom fighter and the imprisoned. Roger Casement’s unique place in the British colonial world makes him an irresistible historical character with much to say about the circumstances in which he lived. Roger Casement’s reports are both a critique of empire and a justification for it. They are an outlet for an emotionally oppressed man, a man who was increasingly unsure about empire and his role in it. This insecurity is not Casement’s alone, but rather that of the entire British imperial system that would soon find itself stretched too thin, only to slowly crumble over the twentieth century.

²⁹ See Stepan’s chapter in *Picturing the Tropics* entitled “Racial Transformations” pp. 120-148.

³⁰ Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*, 2002.

³¹ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 174.

³² Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 138.

³³ From the title of Casement’s official report for the Foreign Office, *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*.

The two reports were delivered to the Foreign Office Jan. 31 and March 17, 1911 and were published in July of the following. The reports are the result of a seven week investigation in the Putumayo and its affluents, the Igaraparaná and the Caraparaná, as well as some time spent in Iquitos, the Peruvian rubber capital and capital of the province of Loreto.³⁴ The reports draw upon three sources. Casement interviewed the Barbadian individuals who were brought to the area as overseers between 1903-1904. The substance of the first report is based on their stories. In addition, he also talked to other labourers contracted by the company during this time period. Second, Casement interviewed locals in the Putumayo and residents of Iquitos. Lastly, and perhaps the most important for the following analysis, were Casement's own personal observations and interpretation of the events.³⁵ There is little to suggest how Casement conducted his research. However, the following, written to describe how he approached his Congo investigation, shed light on how he would have also approached his inquiry in the Putumayo. "There are two ways of seeing the interior of the Congo State- either blindfolded or looking for the facts affecting the social condition of the natives underlying the veneer of the European officialdom which had imposed itself upon him," wrote Casement in a letter dated December of 1903:

I chose to look for the facts. I said: he who goes to a foreign country to see the people of it and form a just conclusion of their mode of life does not confine his investigations to museums, picture galleries and public buildings, or to the barracks and reviews of soldiers or State conducted enterprises: he goes also into the villages of the peoples, he speaks with the peasant and the shopkeeper and enters sometimes the dwellings of the very poor: he watches the growth of crops and how the fields are tilled and seeks from the country producer to understand how his agricultural industry rewards him. He does not confine himself, for all the information he desires, to the statistics published in official bulletins – or seek for the main springs of national economy in the routine statistics of Government offices. If he wants to see how a people lives and how they are affected by the laws they must obey and the taxes they must pay he goes, if he goes for truth, to the homes of the people themselves. This is what I have, *very inadequately, been striving to do on the Upper Congo during the last few months...*³⁶

³⁴ Taussig, "Culture of Terror," 474.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 476.

³⁶ Cited in Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, 13. (Emphasis in original.)

I quote the above not only to suggest Casement's methodology for fieldwork but also to point out his acute sensitivities to the circumstances of the peoples of the areas that he investigated. Although, as I will argue, the language of his research was couched in the rhetoric of civilization at the time, which legitimized tropical control, Casement was a complex man and one that truly felt for the oppressed people of the areas he researched. He understood that the commercial imperial methods of civilization only disarticulated the peoples being "civilized" from their land which, rather than resulting in the "so-called" sought-after civilization, resulted in the destruction of the culture and often the obliteration of the peoples in question. He would often refer to the gradual decrease in the Irish culture and language as another example of these policies at work. He even referred to the Irish as "white Indians."³⁷ Nevertheless, his solutions for the tropics were not the same as those he prescribed for his fellow Irishmen. The reasons for these differences, I believe, are not because he felt less compassion for the natives of the Putumayo or viewed them as less human than the Irish, but rather that they were simply not the same race. He believed that some races, in particular the "docile" and "obedient" ones, needed guidance and human intervention to progress, while others, such as the Irish race, were meant to be leaders. In his mind, it was acceptable to humanely control certain races, while another race would be considered oppressed under this same type of control. These examples elucidate more than just Casement's persona, but also the inconsistencies of scientific imperial rhetoric which, as Richard Drayton has claimed, took on the "responsibility of 'improving' exotic lands and people," while at the same time placing Britain high on the "ladder of Creation."³⁸

Tropical Subjects: The First Report

There are many overlaps in the two reports. Thus, for the purpose of clarity, I will divide my discussion of the reports thematically as Casement did. The first report is primarily a discussion of the abuses committed against the British Barbadians working in the Putumayo. It examines their mistreatment by the company, ranging from contract negligence to extreme forms of physical abuse. It also alludes to their own role in the

³⁷ Taussig, "Culture of Terror," 474.

³⁸ Richard Drayton, "Science, Medicine, and the British Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. V*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 265.

physical and psychological abuses against the Putumayo natives engaged in rubber collection, which the second report examines more directly. Casement used the stories of four Barbadians to demonstrate the PAC's treatment of their employees. Their stories "stand," claimed Casement, "for an indication of how in those remote regions the so-called commercial agent will often deal with a subordinate employé [sic] of his firm."³⁹ The first report demonstrates how certain peoples on the outskirts of empire were able to engage in its rhetoric and mould it for their own benefit. In this instance, the Barbadians in the Putumayo recognized the extent of their criminal actions and the volatility of their situation and the rubber supply. Seeing the opportunity to advance their lives, they took it; as guides and interpreters they were able to add their own twists to their image and role in the Putumayo.

Tropical labour was an imperial conundrum. Tropical races were often seen as lazy and unwilling to work. However, despite the Northern Europeans' capacity to work in their own environment, it was often recommended that they not work in the tropics as their constitution may not be able to withstand the tropical milieu, leading to racial, mental, and physical degeneration. Although these ideas may not have been believed by all white settlers in the tropics, they were actively asserted as the justification for the use of cruel labour relations such as slavery and/or debt-peonage in the tropics. As well, the situation in the Putumayo exemplifies the practice of utilizing migrant labourers from other parts of the tropical world for labour outside of their native lands. After the abolition of slavery, which is the most extreme example of this, taking contract labourers from one tropical region to another was common. The presence of the Barbadians in the Putumayo as overseers is an example of this. Concerning rubber, which was extractive and did not grow in the Amazon on easily managed plantations where labour could be monitored, *seringueros* and *caucheros* needed to bring in rubber on their own, without outside coercion. As many non-native *seringueros* already valued money and market goods, they would bring in rubber to the stations freely for monetary exchange, despite the corrupt nature of many of these exchanges. However, labour in the Putumayo was layered and complicated and had its roots in the disarticulation of the natives from control

³⁹ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 12-13.

over their land and subsistence in order to indoctrinate them into capitalist labour relations and the market economy. Within the rhetoric of civilization, this process was regarded as positive and progressive. Natives in the region did not value distant markets or monetary exchange. Thus, outside of original desires for small commercial goods such as fabrics and metals for weapons, pots, and jewelry, once attained, there was little motivation to keep bringing in rubber. Casement claimed the natives did not have any use for the money they received and that he “met numbers of Indian women who wore these coins strung round their necks as ornaments.”⁴⁰ Consequently, natives needed to be made to work not for their own immediate needs but for the benefit of the “civilized” in the area and a distant market. Not tempted by wages, their dependency and, thus, need for market supplies, had to be created and maintained.⁴¹ The system in the Putumayo was designed around the rhetoric of breaking down native complacency and introducing them to the “so-called” advances of the civilized world. Even native elderly were targeted and killed in order to erase the memory and traditional practices of exchange of the different indigenous communities in the Putumayo region.⁴² “The object of the ‘civilised’ intruders, in the first instance,” wrote Casement in his first report, “was not to annihilate the Indians, but to ‘conquistar,’ i.e., to subjugate them, and pit them to what was termed civilized, or at any rate profitable, occupation of their subduers.”⁴³ The dark-side of civilization in the Putumayo is a consistent theme in both reports.

Between 1904 and 1905, the PAC enlisted 196 Barbadians to come to the Putumayo for what the Barbadians believed to be a two year period for the purpose of general manual labour. The workers were to be provided with room and board as well as medical supplies. Their return ticket to Barbados would also be provided, if they wished to return after their contract was finished.⁴⁴ However, in the reality of the Putumayo,

⁴⁰ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 50.

⁴¹ Pennano, *La Economía Del Caucho*, 42.

⁴² Stanfield, *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*, 154. Also see Casements comments about the absence of old people in the Putumayo in his March 17th report, where he states: “Their old people, both men and women, respected for character and ability to wisely advise, had been marked from the first as dangerous, and in the early stages of the occupation were done to die. Their crime had been the giving of ‘bad advice.’”

⁴³ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

“general labour” translated into “guarding or coercing, or in actively maltreating, Indians to force them to work and bring in India-rubber.”⁴⁵ When they first arrived in the Putumayo, the Barbadian labourers were divided into groups and sent into the forest to bring in natives to work rubber, by any means necessary. Once natives were employed by the PAC, the Barbadians were also involved in their punishment, if they did not bring in enough rubber. The myths about violent and bloodthirsty natives which the PAC disseminated were an attempt to maintain the reputation of the company and soothe the conscience of the Barbadian men, who upon arrival in the Manaus began to hear the rumours. As Casement explained:

The Barbadian men on being brought into these regions found themselves face to face with quite unexpected conditions and duties. Already at Manaus [sic], on their way up the river, some of them had been warned by outsiders that in the countries to which they were going they would not be employed as labourers, but would be armed and used to force the Indians to work for their employers; they were further told that the Indians, being savages, would kill them. Several of them, taking alarm, had protested at Manaus [sic], and had even appealed to the British vice-consul to interfere so that they might be released from their engagement. This was not done. They were assured that their contracts, having been lawfully entered into in a British colony, would be faithfully observed in Peru, and that they must fulfil them. In some cases the men were not reassured and had to be taken on board the river steamer waiting to convey them to the Putumayo under police supervision.⁴⁶

Wide scale murder, and physical and mental abuse (with and without direct instruction of the PAC) were the end results of the Barbadians’ work in the Putumayo. “In this system of armed extortion,” wrote Casement, “which can only rightly be termed brigandage, the Barbados men were active agents.”⁴⁷ However, they themselves were also abused. Casement exemplifies these conditions through the stories of the four Barbadians still in the Putumayo during his investigation. Since one of the reasons that Casement was sent to the area was to ascertain whether or not British Subjects were in distress, the four examples mostly concern how the Barbadians were mistreated. Nevertheless, the role of the Barbadians in “hunting Indians in order to compel them to

⁴⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.

work rubber” was highlighted in all of the stories.⁴⁸ The following are excerpts from their stories:

This man was engaged in Barbados with the first detachment at the end of 1904...During his stay at Matanzas he was twice tied and cruelly flogged by Sanchez and Normand. The first occasion was soon after he reached Matanzas in the very early months of 1905. His wrists were fastened behind his back, and he was then tied up to a cross pole, the whole weight of the body hanging under the arms thus lashed together behind. In this posture he received fifty lashes applied with a twisted thong of tapir hide. This man was examined by me on the 2nd November, 1910, at Chorrera, and although the date of the flogging was considerably more than five years earlier, he bore the marks of it in several places, notably one broad scar extending across the ribs. The reason for this punishment was a very trifling one as he related it. All the men were short of food, the rations they received from Sanchez being wholly insufficient. They were often forced to steal food from the Indians, or to go out into the forest and the surrounding plantations and look for it and rob it. On the occasion in question he had nothing to eat, and was trying to buy a piece of cassava bread from an Indian girl. A Colombian employé [sic] interfered, a man named Muñoz, and they quarreled, whereupon Normand had Quintin tied up as described...⁴⁹

The second case was of a man named Augustus Walcott. He was born in Antigua, and came to Barbados in October 1904 with the first contingent... Walcott was accused by Normand of stealing the food from the girl. He protested that this was not true, stating that he could prove that he had bought it, but was not listened to. He was seized by Normand’s orders, his arms tied behind his back, and then suspended by these from a cross-pole. In this posture he was beaten with a machete by Sanchez. He was left hanging by the arms in this posture until he became unconscious. When released his arms were useless, and he was so ill that he had to be carried down in a hammock to La Chorrera. This man’s statement was confirmed by similar evidence given in other quarters.⁵⁰

There are various levels to analyze the Barbadians role in the Putumayo scandal. Their employment to do the “uncivilized” work of the civilizing process is telling and significant. Not only were their non-white bodies deemed better equipped for tropical labour, but also their “uncivilized” bodies deemed better adapted to the tasks that they were required to do. As well, it is likely that Arana and other company leaders were well aware of the perception that the black race was somehow inherently more violent and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

bloodthirsty than other races and thus would “naturally” be good at their assigned tasks in the Putumayo. This last characteristic was in fact the only quality that Arana was looking for when soliciting workers to the Putumayo. Even Casement, despite his defense of the Barbadians involved in the Putumayo scandal, in a historical background that he had intended to publish in the *Blue Book*, characterized black Africans as inherently violent, while the natives of the Putumayo were peaceful, violent only out of necessity:

The Indians of the forest, although savages in their surrounding, were not in fact savages as the word is understood, for example, say in Central Africa; and even where cannibalism exists today among South American Indians, these remote tribes have preserved a gentleness of mind and adaptability of temperament in singular contrast with the ruder temperament of the African. Although the Indian tribes in the great Amazon forest live in a perpetual state of warfare with one another, they were and are averse to bloodshed. The African savage, on the contrary, delights in bloodshed whether it be on the field of battle or in human sacrifice. To him half the purpose of killing lies in the act of killing. To adopt the Zulu phrase, when he goes to battle, he ‘sees red.’ He is not content with merely getting his adversary out of the way but he wishes to shed his blood, to hack his limbs and rejoice in a gory triumph. His weapons of offence and defence are fashioned to this end. They are blood-letting weapons. His huge spears with blades a foot long, his great battle axes and murderous curved knives for beheading are fashioned for slaughter. Not so the South American Indian. To take his enemies’ life was a necessity of his environment and therefore he had to possess arms to this end, but these arms are, if the word can be used, the most gentle engines of death. The silent blow-pipe with the tiny arrow only a few inches long, the small throwing spear that a woman or a boy can hurl and the noiseless bow and arrow. The blowpipe is perhaps the most efficient of these weapons. Where the African clove his adversary with a heavy axe or ripped him open with a spear the Indian took his enemies life noiselessly and with scarcely a drop of blood.⁵¹

Casement’s racial beliefs and his frequent comparisons between different races are an important window into his beliefs and concepts of justice, which I will explore further in a discussion of the second report. They are also an example of the ambivalence around constructions of the tropical world. While Arana represented natives as dangerous savages; Casement made them out to be harmless and child-like. The same can be said for Casement’s almost schizophrenic representations of the black race.

⁵¹ Casement, "Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities," 135-36. Although the rest of the article is different, this quotation is also found verbatim in Roger Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," *The Contemporary Review* 102 (1912): 320.

Nonetheless, Casement immediately sympathized with the Barbadians. In fact, it is evident from the beginning of Casement's reports that he thought Arana was the antagonist and that the Barbadians were simply caught in the cross fire. Casement testified to their civility and decency. "The Barbados men were not savages," wrote Casement, "[w]ith few exceptions they could read and write, some of them well. They were much more civilised than the great majority of those placed over them – they were certainly more humane."⁵² In the closing section of his second report Casement remarked:

Many of the Barbados men were aware that the crimes they charged themselves with were capital offences. They only pleaded that these crimes had been committed under the direct orders of superior agents of the company, whom they were required to obey, and that however guilty they might themselves be those who ordered these deeds and profited from them were far more guilty parties. In this contention I supported them, and pointed out that the first parties to be brought to justice must be those higher agents.⁵³

Perhaps Casement's lenience and sympathy towards the Barbadian workers was affected by his guide, Frederick Bishop, whom he met in Iquitos, and who accompanied Casement "everywhere during my subsequent journey."⁵⁴ Bishop acted as Casement's guide through the Putumayo territory as well as interpreter.⁵⁵ Thus, it is through Bishop that Casement experienced the Putumayo. Casement stated at the beginning of the report that of the 196 men originally contracted by the company only a handful remained in the Putumayo and "probably a dozen or more" decided to leave the Putumayo but stayed on in Iquitos.⁵⁶ This suggests that it was possible to leave the PAC, which the majority of the Barbadians had in fact done. However, it was Casement's conclusion that the ones that stayed on with the PAC in the Putumayo did so because they were forced to be there due to their extensive debts to the company. Although Casement admitted that the Barbadian men took part in the outrages committed against the natives – a fact that even the Barbadian men admitted – not only did he demonstrate mercy towards them but cleared

⁵² Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

them of their debts and personally accompanied them out of the Putumayo.⁵⁷ Whether prior to Casement investigation, the men remained in the Putumayo willingly or not, they were aware of Casement's influence and power. In an unstable market with volatile rubber prices and the situation in the Putumayo increasingly insecure, (if not because of the Putumayo's growing bad international reputation then because of the shrinking supply of rubber and labour), it was likely that many of the Barbadian men thought it was time to leave, and Casement was a means to an end.⁵⁸ In an example of subaltern agency the Barbadians engaged in the discourse of the rights of imperial subjects and not only were able to mould their own representation, but obtain their own objectives in so doing.

“Moulded to Much Better Things.”⁵⁹

“Wild Forest Indians” and Commercial Savages in the St. Patrick’s Day Report

Presented on St. Patrick's Day (March 17th), intentionally or unintentionally,⁶⁰ the second report has many of the same themes as the first, although it largely concerns the native inhabitants of the area. It is justified on the premise that the company was a registered British company and held public shares. It is also the largest and most thorough report that Casement ever presented to the Foreign Office.⁶¹ It is a historical overview of colonialism, rubber, and race relations in the area. It, furthermore, describes the various methods of torture and the entire, as Taussig refers to it, “culture of terror” which existed in the Putumayo.⁶² In this report, Casement critiques greed, commercialism, labour, and the overall civilizing paradigm and its effects on the native peoples in the area and the abuses that they underwent. In the second report, more so

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19. In the report Casement claimed that after he began to look over the accounts of the Barbadian men still in the company, the chief agent of the company “voluntarily offered to wipe out 25 per cent of all purchases made by the men...since the formation of the British company.” Casement suggested it was this action that freed the men to leave the Putumayo, which otherwise they could not have done. Thus, the majority of them left with Casement, although a few stayed on with the company.

⁵⁸ Señor Tizon, a principal agent, made it very clear in the March 17th report that it was harder and harder to maintain the quantity of rubber being exported from the Putumayo to Iquitos and that “[t]he rubber output had already fallen to some 400 tons of rubber per annum, with every prospect...of continued decrease.” Ibid., 51.

⁵⁹ Casement, "Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities," 138.

⁶⁰ Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 143. Mitchell postulated that the dating of the report was significant. He further claims that Casement “connected his life own life and work to the ancient Christian cosmography of Ireland.”

⁶¹ Ibid., 141.

⁶² See Taussig, "Culture of Terror.", Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*.

than in the first, Casement's own opinions about "proper" civilization and civilizing tactics are apparent. Similar to Hardenburg and other pessimists who viewed rubber as regressive, Casement saw rubber as instigating greed and commercial exploitation. To him, its claims as a civilizer were simply a justification for the excessive exploitation of the resources of rubber regions including both rubber and people. In this report, as in the first, the lines between civilization and barbarism are intentionally blurred and the reader is left wondering who the "savages" really are. It is obvious from reading this report that it was difficult for Casement to maintain the objective and unemotional language which characterized the first report. Nevertheless, despite his genuine concern for the people of the area, Casement's solutions were no less a form of control than the ones employed by the PAC. They still implied, although with significantly less violence, a system that would monitor and administer the essential "civilized" touch from outside in order to allow the tropical world to progress. For example, Casement spent much time investigating the possibility of missions in the area and asserted his belief in their civilizing effect in much correspondence concerning the Putumayo.

The second report starts by going over the history and geography of the area. It examines the natives, whom Casement termed "grown-up children," and their culture and historical presence in the area.⁶³ Casement used a number of travel diaries about the area as a source for his history on the area thereby engaging in a long tradition of travel writing about the tropics. As discussed in Chapter two, the Amazon has had a particularly rich tradition of travel writers who have helped solidify selective ideas about these places.⁶⁴ Casement, in many ways, continued this tradition. His representations included all of the important aspects of "good" travel writing: primitive, thoughtless, and innocent natives, exaggerations of nature, and, most importantly, cannibals. I hesitate here to group Casement's reports in the same category as nineteenth and twentieth century Amazonian travel writing, as the horrors that he helped alleviate cannot be ignored. However, like the scientific travel writers from Humboldt on, Casement presented his report in the language of science and thoroughly objective investigation. Furthermore, his reports include attempts at an ethnography of the area. Lastly, although

⁶³ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 11.

⁶⁴ See the introduction to Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*.

Casement did not want the commercial success that many travel writers sought, he did want the knowledge of the Putumayo situation to reach popular conscience, and in this, he was successful. The publication of his *Blue Book* caused a far greater and more immediate public stir than did his Congo investigations.⁶⁵

Essential for popular success, cannibalism was as frequent in travel writing as the authors could realistically or not so realistically incorporate it into their books. Although not as dramatic as Algot Lange's famous "sighting" of cannibalism around rubber,⁶⁶ Casement's descriptions of natives and cannibalism are sympathetic, like Lange's. However, unlike Lange, who emphasized the word "cannibal" in the title of his book, Casement tried to downplay the topic as much as possible. Well aware that cannibalism was one of the excuses employed by Arana as justification for his version of civilization, Casement's objective was to make the natives appear as hospitable and benevolent as possible. Even if they were cannibals, it was their ignorance and not their savagery that made them cannibals:

The wars of those clans one with another were never bloodthirsty, for I believe it is a fact that the Amazon Indian is averse to bloodshed, and is thoughtless rather than cruel. Prisoners taken in these wars may have been, and no doubt were, eaten, or in part eaten, for the Amazon cannibals do not seem to have killed to eat, as is the case with many primitive races, but to have sometimes, possibly frequently, in part eaten those they killed. More than one traveler in tropical South America records his impression that the victims were not terrified at the prospect of being eaten, and in some cases regarded it as an honourable end. Lieutenant Maw mentions the case of a girl on the Brazilian Amazon in 1827 who refused to escape, to become the slave of a Portuguese 'trader,' preferring to be eaten by her own kind.⁶⁷

He also quoted an interviewee saying the natives have "repugnance to eating white men, whom they hated too much."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 200.

⁶⁶ Lange, *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*, 346.

⁶⁷ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 26. Casement used Lieutenant Maw descriptions of the Amazon extensively in his reports. Casement describes Lieutenant Maw's as "an officer of the British Navy who crossed from the Pacific by way of the Amazon." He was in the Amazon in 1827.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

Casement's reasons for representing the natives as innocent and docile as possible, as well as his mild reaction to the crimes committed, provoked or unprovoked, by the Barbadian men can be explained by what he thought to be a greater risk to the entire civilizing project: the white man's role in the atrocities. The conditions, created by white men, that had evolved unchecked in the region were in need of explanation, and he would find that explanation in racial theories of the day. The situation with the Barbadian men and the natives could be explained through an examination of their constitution and the power of the PAC principal agents. The existence, however, of European descendants acting in such a way could only be explained by tropical degeneracy. Throughout his second report, Casement attempts to show the degenerate side of empire and commerce in the tropical world. However in so doing, he also brought to light his own racial biases and beliefs, and what he thought the future of the tropical world should look like. He was not against natives "vanish[ing] before the plow," as long as it was necessary that they did so because of a true war of races in which one race, in order to survive, had to destroy its "neighbors."⁶⁹

In North America the white settlers probably treated the Red Indian no whit better than the Spaniards in South America. The races of northern European blood – Dutch, English, Irish – who colonized the New England States were no more merciful to the aboriginal than the Spaniard or Portuguese in the Southern Continent. But there was, and is, difference. The Dutch, English, and other colonists went to the New World with wives and children determined to make it their home for all time. They were in the true sense colonists; they came to occupy the land and to till it. The presence of savage tribes in close proximity to their growing settlements was not possible. The savage was not a cultivator but a hunter and warrior. War of races in these circumstances was inevitable and as the white colonists triumphed cultivation and population succeeded the wilderness where the red man hunted the buffalo. The weaker race was either destroyed in the fight or vanished before the plow. Where the Red Indian and the buffalo roamed a great civilization, populous cities, the greatest railway system in the world, and a mighty nation have arisen.⁷⁰

In an article Casement wrote under a pen name for the *Manchester Guardian* entitled "How Came the Putumayo Horrors?," published in December 13, 1912, Casement reiterates the above feelings about just and unjust conquest, again saying that Arana was

⁶⁹ Casement, "Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities," 129.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

part of a tradition of Pizarro, Cortes, and the Black Legend, a tradition that did not want to settle but to exploit. He further justified North American colonization claiming that:

The aboriginal was attacked because his presence was incompatible with the settlement of the European cultivator; and in conflict of races, where soil itself was the prize, the buffalo hunter and the forest warrior vanished before the log cabin and the trapper. The crime of enslaving the conquered had no part of the conquest.⁷¹

Given that Casement's second report was published in the same year, it is not surprising that it follows along the same vein. He claimed within the first pages of his report that: "those that came in search of rubber had no intention of dwelling longer in the forest than accumulation of the wealth they hoped to amass necessitated. They wanted to get rich quickly, not to stay and civilize the Indian or make their home among them."⁷² The commercial greed and exploitation which underlined the rubber boom, to Casement, was unprogressive. Within the Putumayo, Casement attempted to show how this greed, unchecked, would eventually turn the white man into a savage worse than the one he exploited. The Putumayo, in this circumstance, is the end result of extreme greed, commercialism, and empire in the tropics. Casement attempted to demonstrate this in his reports by blurring the lines between the "civilized" and the "savage," showing that over time the white men in the Putumayo became morally degenerate. To further strengthen his argument and to justify his own solutions, Casement demonstrated that the situation in the Putumayo had long parted from the rational rules of the market. If the company's principal agents were thinking about the market and civilizing techniques, then the murder of thousands of labourers would have seemed senseless. Thus, the men were in fact unable to govern themselves rationally, exemplifying their tropical degeneracy. "His crimes were wanton acts of Savagery," Casement writes about the section chiefs (principal agents), "almost purposeless crimes, the outcome of a degraded and debased life."⁷³ He then continues:

This aspect of such continuous criminality is pointed to by those who, not having encountered the demoralization that attends the methods described, happily infrequent, assert that no man will deliberately kill the goose that lays the golden

⁷¹ Cited in Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 127.

⁷² Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44.

egg. This argument would have force if applied to a settled country or an estate it was designed to profitably develop. None of the freebooters on the Putumayo had any such limitations in his view, or care for the hereafter to restrain him. His first object was to get rubber, and the Indians would always last his time. He hunted, killed, and tortured to-day in order to terrify fresh victims for to-morrow. Just as the appetite comes in eating so each crime led on to fresh crimes, and many of the worst men on the Putumayo fell to comparing their battles and boasting of the numbers they had killed.⁷⁴

In a letter Casement wrote to Sir Edward Grey, his superior in the Foreign Office on May 15, 1911, almost two months after he had handed in his second report, Casement once again reiterated his point:

Where men – miscalled civilized – adopt such methods towards each other under the forms of their civilised life, it is not strange that when they come into contact with weak and primitive peoples whom they are bent on exploiting and when there is no strong law to restrain them their dealings should degenerate into those savage and terrible excesses that were found on the Putumayo.⁷⁵

Casement gave countless examples in his second report of these “terrible excesses.” However, I do not think that it is necessary to recount these excesses in detail here. The atrocities committed against the Putumayo natives were severe and included disembodiment, live burnings, floggings, sexual abuse, and hanging. There was also a psychological element to the abuses which Taussig focused on in “Culture of Terror.”⁷⁶

In Casement’s opinion, the situation in the Putumayo was the result of excess, a frequent attribution of the tropical environment, and the solution was to set up a system that would keep this sort of excess in check. The Putumayo situation only concerned the British because of the PAC and because of this, Casement did not want the company to liquidate after his reports were published. If it did, Casement feared that Britain would no longer be able to legitimately interfere in the region to insure reform. Thus, he fought for the board to implement changes rather than dismantle the entire company.⁷⁷ He, himself, attended board meetings to monitor the progress. Despite his strong critique of

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Reproduced in Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 311.

⁷⁶ See Taussig, "Culture of Terror.", Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*.

⁷⁷ Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 186.

empire and commercialism, Casement believed in the civilizing mission, even its commercial sides. He believed that it should have been relatively easy to “civilize” the Putumayo; it was, however, equally easy to corrupt it. Nevertheless, his way of “civilizing” was no less a disruption of native life and culture in the area than Arana’s; it was less physically and psychologically violent but no less controlling. “The tribes of the Putumayo,” wrote Casement, “in the hands of good men could be made into good men and women, useful and intelligent workers under honest administration.”⁷⁸ Further exemplifying this point, Casement claimed:

Were those in authority over them imbued with a sense of the public good and acting in its general interest instead of for their own personal profit, the character of the Amazon Indian affords the foundation of a very excellent national life. They could be moulded to much better things, and wisely governed would make the fertile region they inhabit a rich and populous country, but their adaptability, their ready submission and unquestioning obedience are weapons used only against themselves and to the impoverishment of their native places.⁷⁹

Casement believed in a just “war of races,” a derivative of the theory of survival of the fittest. The Putumayo, Casement reckoned, was just a few decades earlier uncolonized territory. A territory that should have been colonized by settlers, who either destroyed the natives in the region through justified war, or, preferably “moulded” them into individuals allied to a nation-state and incorporated into the market. This never took place in the Putumayo, according to Casement, as in more temperate regions such as North America or, even, select regions throughout the tropics because of the tropical nature of the Putumayo. Certainly the Putumayo embodied the worst of the “tropical” characteristics: heavily forested, hot climates, rainy seasons, and pests. If it was believed that it was impossible for Europeans to labour in such conditions without risking degeneracy, how then could settlers avoid using natives for labour? If it was then justified to use their labour, how would settlers, without coercion, solicit it? It seemed that the debate about civilization in the Putumayo had turned a full circle.

Casement’s solution to this problem in the Putumayo was a mission. He believed in a universal Christian humanity which although based on a racial hierarchy, was responsible, like parents are to their children, for the well being of other races. Casement

⁷⁸ Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 48.

⁷⁹ Casement, “Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities,” 138.

closed the *Manchester Guardian* article asking: “[h]as our Christian civilization itself no share of the blame?”

Has our modern commercialism, our latter-day company promoting – whose motto would seem to be that a director may pocket the proceeds without perceiving the process – no part in this enterprise of horror and shame? As Sir Roger Casement tells us, Arana “brought their wares (50,000 indian slaves) to market in London. Not, be it observed, to Madrid or to Lima, but to London. And they found Englishmen and English finance prepared without question to accept their Putumayo ‘estate’ and their numerous native ‘labourers’ at a glance – a glance at the annually increasing output of rubber. Nothing beyond that was needed. The rubber was there. How it was produced, out of what hell of human suffering, no one knew, no one asked, no one suspected – can it be no one cared?”⁸⁰

Casement’s proposed to start a Catholic mission. He believed a mission would symbolize “the true whiteman’s coming into the region”:⁸¹

No missions or missionaries would seem to have ever penetrated to the regions here in question. On the upper waters of the Putumayo itself religious instruction and Christian worship appear to have been established by Colombian settlers, but these civilizing influences had not journeyed sufficiently far down-stream to reach the Huitotos or their neighbors.⁸²

Casement spent much time advocating a mission in the Putumayo. He even claimed that it was for that reason that he brought two native boys from the Putumayo to England:

I think that a Mission on the Putumayo will be most effective to save the Indians & improve their lot and prevent crime than any other means we could take up. It was really with that hope in my mind I brought away the two Indian boys I have left in Barbados.

The best way to get people interested in the matter of this kind is to bring them into touch with the human beings you are pleading for. Everyone knows about African negroes, but no one scarcely has even seen a South American Indian. They are such gently, docile childish beings that your heart is won at the contact.⁸³

⁸⁰ Cited in Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 127.

⁸¹ Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 328.

⁸² Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*, 26-27.

⁸³ Letter to Louis Mallet, 2 March, 1911, reproduced in Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 114. Although the quotation claims the two native boys are in Barbados, they were brought to England and “displayed” during various gatherings.

Despite Casement's strong critique of empire and commerce, he readily engages in its language and is not wholly dismissive of either, just the way they unfolded in the tropical world. Casement's Putumayo reports are an interesting expression of tropicality in both accepting and refuting myths and stereotypes about tropical places. They firmly establish British right to interfere in the scandal and their superiority over the area, but they also reveal the debasement of empire in tropical places. Casement believed that races essentially occupied separate "places" for a reason, that they were inherently different, that certain characteristics which defined superiority or inferiority were more dominant in some races than in others, and that all races could degenerate as well as progress. He also seemed to have a disdain for "half-castes" and racial mixing. Nevertheless, he often related the Irish, his own people, to the people of the tropical world whose suffering he had helped alleviate. Furthermore, he was a practicing, non-repentant homosexual and as such he must have personally experienced what it was like not to be accepted in mainstream society. Casement's exact beliefs are hard to pinpoint, but what is certain is that he was an informed person of his time who spend many years of his life in the tropics, making his writing about the tropics an interesting point of intersection between the two: the intellect and the traveller.

"Emancipated Anality:"⁸⁴
The Birth of the Black Diaries and the Death of Casement

Casement was knighted in 1911 for his work for the Foreign Office. He accepted the honour, despite his faltering loyalty to the British imperial project. In the years leading up to his Putumayo investigation, Casement became increasingly anti-British. Bitter towards what he perceived as the imprisonment of his own people, Casement devoted more and more time to Irish independence. Nevertheless, he recognized that it was through the British that he was able to do his humanitarian work. In August of 1913, he officially retired from the Foreign Office with a pension and from then on devoted himself almost entirely to Irish independence.⁸⁵ In a letter he wrote to Alice Stoppard Green after receiving his knighthood, he directly addressed his personal

⁸⁴ See David Rudkin, "The Chameleon & the Kilt: The Complexities of Roger Casement," *Encounter* 41, no. 2 (1973): 74.

⁸⁵ Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, xxxviii.

duplicity, "...there are many in Ireland will think me a traitor – and when I think of that country, and of them, I feel I am."⁸⁶ Casement's work for Irish independence culminated in 1916 when he joined sides with the Germans and sought their help to defeat the British in Ireland. In April of 1916, Casement was arrested on the shore of Ireland after travelling in a German U-boat from Germany to attempt to postpone an up-rising against the British due to insufficient German aid, in the form of arms.⁸⁷ He was then taken to England to stand trial for treason.

Casement was hung for high treason on August 3, 1916.⁸⁸ He signed his last letter: "Ever defeated – Yet undefeated."⁸⁹ However, the controversies and conundrums surrounding his life did not die with the man. Perhaps the most debated aspect of Casement's life were his "so-called" Black Diaries. The Black Diaries are a series of personal diaries which Casement obsessively kept during his humanitarian endeavours in the Congo and the Putumayo. There are four diaries in total, the first coinciding with his Congo investigations in 1903 and the other three dealing with South America in 1910 and 1911. These diaries describe and catalogue Casement's sexual relations during these time periods. They are explicit and not repentant. They are the diaries of a man who was "in absolute sensual harmony with his own backside."⁹⁰ The diaries surfaced after he was taken to trial and were used to blacken Casement's name, ensure the death penalty, and deny the Irish a martyr. Almost immediately, the diaries were suggested to be forgeries doctored by the British for the aforementioned purpose, beginning an interesting historiography debating their authenticity, most prominently represented by William J. Maloney's *The Forged Casement Diaries* published in 1936.⁹¹ Two intertwined lines of discussion are interesting and particularly relevant to this thesis. The first surrounds the perception of Casement's dealing in the tropical world. Second are the arguments and pleas for clemency around Casement's execution, and what these say about public impressions of the tropics and its effects on the European constitution.

⁸⁶ Cited in Inglis, *Roger Casement*, 188.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁸⁸ Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*, 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁰ Rudkin, "The Chameleon & the Kilt: The Complexities of Roger Casement," 76.

⁹¹ William J. Maloney, *The Forged Casement Diaries* (Dublin & Cork: The Talbot Press Limited, 1936). For a recent discussion on the forgery issue see W. J. McCormack, *Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002).

The fact that Casement's first Black Diary coincides with his time in the Congo and the following three with his time in South America, did not go unnoticed. Friends and foes perceived Casement to have been affected by too many years abroad, and almost immediately, they began to suggest that Casement had gone "crazy" in tropics.⁹² How else could they explain how a respected and knighted man ended up siding with the enemy and, furthermore, was revealed to have been a practicing homosexual? The chapter titles of Maloney's book, "Story of Casement the Degenerate Diarist" and "Story of Casement the Madman," testify to these perceptions around Casement's death and trail.⁹³ Maloney's book is set up first to discuss these popular assumptions and then to refute them. It, nevertheless, is telling that the allegations of tropical degeneracy and madness were deemed "natural" and reasonable explanations of Casement's actions. Sexuality and degeneracy became inseparably intertwined in the nineteenth century and by the beginning of the twentieth century the connection was seen as a matter of fact.⁹⁴ Sexuality also is one of the corner stones of tropical representation, whether it be descriptions of titillating nudity, rumours of hyper-sexuality, or the more theoretical feminization of the tropical world, one that should be subordinated to the masculine north. Roger Casement, supposedly, had been seduced by tropical charms and after more than thirty years abroad had become a degenerate, not only a traitor but a homosexual and, without a doubt, mad.⁹⁵

In the end, Casement's life is strangely ironic. His Foreign Office reports on both the Putumayo and the Congo and many of his other life works depicted the degenerate

⁹² McCormack, *Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State*, 100-01.

⁹³ Maloney, *The Forged Casement Diaries*, 18 and 32.

⁹⁴ Sander L. Gilman, "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race to Theory," in *Degeneration: The Darker Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edwards Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 87.

⁹⁵ Although Casement's homosexuality was never mentioned in the trial that would find him guilty of treason, this side of him was disseminated publicly in the form of strategic rumours in order to curb any sympathies towards him, especially in light of his humanitarian actions, that may have arisen; see McCormack, *Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State*, 115. The court case does, however, list evidence of insanity and tropical degradation. See, for example, the petition for lenience in George H. Knott, ed., *Trial of Sir Roger Casement* (Toronto: Canada Law Book Company, Limited, 1917), 298. The petition listed three reasons why Casement should not be executed; the first concerned his mental health. It was stated that: "We should desire to point out that the prisoner had for many years been exposed to severe strain during his honourable career of public service[all in tropical places, except for a short stint in Lisbon], that he had endured several tropical fevers, and that he had experienced the worry of two investigations which were of a peculiarly nerve-trying character. For these reasons it appears to us that some allowance may be made in his case for an abnormal physical and mental state."

side of empire and commercialism in the tropics. Casement, engaging in the same rhetoric that would eventually also attack his own image, attempted to demonstrate Britain's commercial degeneracy in the tropics and its effects on tropical peoples left out of the conscience of empire. Yet, in the end, it was Casement who was labelled the degenerate, his own critique of empire used against him.

The Putumayo scandal and the writings of Roger Casement exemplify the ambivalence and cornerstones of tropicality, seen through the asserted control of tropical environments, races, and civilizing tactics. Casement's *Blue Book* and other writing were a double edged sword. They elucidated the abuses taking place around tropical resources and the dark side of "civilization," emphasizing native rights and giving imperial subjects agency in the process. However, they also reasserted imperial rhetoric of race and superiority, constituting the necessary control of the tropics from the outside. While Roger Casement was executed for a real reason, treason, his character became a victim of his own imperial diagnosis when he was accused of the very degeneracy he attempted to display in empire, exemplifying the reality and consequences of the potency of imperial discourses surrounding the tropical world.

Chapter Five
“When the Streets will be Paved with Rubber:”
Conclusions

Tropical places have always been the source of much myth and curiosity throughout imperial history. This fascination with the tropics manifested in a series of stereotypes that would over the centuries become a necessary way of describing and experiencing them. David Arnold claimed that these stereotypes and ideas about the tropics solidified into a discourse that he called tropicality, which had important repercussions in how Europe came to understand and interact with the tropical world. Tropicality both enabled and limited people’s ability to represent the tropics. As a result, the tropical world became as much an imagined terrain as a physical one. Tropicality, as a European creation, cemented European authority over the tropics by legitimizing its control over its peoples and environment. Theories of imperialism, nature, race, disease, resources, and civilization claimed European superiority and necessary domination over the tropics. Embedded in the language of science, the universal language of objectivity and rationality, tropicality was difficult to challenge and had lasting consequences in the tropical world.

Scientific travellers to the Amazon basin during the nineteenth century solidified a way of portraying Amazonia as nature and reinvented it as a scientific field of enquiry. Alexander von Humboldt, who travelled the tropics from 1799 to 1803, was perhaps the most influential. Humboldt produced many works about the tropics which later travellers would have to engage. Even Darwin claimed to have experienced the tropics first through the writings of Humboldt. Representation of the tropics, specifically Amazonian, went through trends. Although the tropics were always represented with some degree of ambivalence, generally one facet of tropicality was featured more prominently than another at any given time. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, ideas about

Amazonia were characterized by nature. They depicted the forests of South America as the second garden of Eden, plentiful, fecund, and rich. As the nineteenth century progressed and the realities of the tropical world became more and more an obstacle to European imperial ambitions, these essentially positive images of the tropics were turned on their heads. By the end of the nineteenth century, the tropics, no longer a tropical Eden, were depicted as excessive, diseased, and threatening.

Rubber was an important tropical resource at the beginning of the century, and the Amazon basin housed the world's largest supply of natural rubber. This brought people from all over the world to the Amazon, making Amazonia an important contact zone for the reiteration and dissemination of tropicality. As Arnold suggested, resources were a key avenue to tropical control. It was thought that the acquisition of resources through the control of tropical nature and labour would instil civilization and progress in the tropical world in the process. Thus, to some, the natural supply of rubber in the Amazon was seen as a blessing, one that promised prosperity and progress to the region. However, rubber, was unique. In Amazonia, it only grew in the wild, and, despite attempts, did not ever develop into efficient plantation style agriculture. This ensured that the image around rubber remained negative, representing "backwards" extraction techniques and corrupted labour relations. In this light, the Amazonian environment was deemed impossible to civilize. These two seemingly opposing images of rubber as civilized and as primitive demonstrate nicely the multi-faceted nature of tropicality.

The Putumayo scandal along the border of Peru and Colombia at the beginning of the twentieth century further deepens the discussion of tropicality and rubber. The depictions of the atrocities committed by the Peruvian Amazon Company brought Britain's informal empire home and into popular conscience for a fleeting moment. The scandal was the second time that rubber was associated with large scale human rights abuses, and this time it was around a British company. This reinforced the negative side of rubber, as well as highlighted the corrupted nature of British dealings in the tropics. However, the Putumayo scandal also demonstrated the ways in which people could knowingly engage in tropicality, and shape and mould it to their desired outcome. Because the scandal was widely publicized, it offered a wide variety of primary sources about rubber, the tropics, and civilization. Each of the major actors of the scandal

demonstrated the accessibility, fluidity, and power of tropicality. Arana, Casement, and Hardenburg all attempted to justify their interaction in the tropics through discourses of civilization, progress, and development; while the Barbadians recognized the value of accepting and employing Casement's diagnosis of the area to successfully avoid any legal repercussions for their actions.

Roger Casement adds an extra dimension to the discussion about the Putumayo and rubber. The well-travelled Casement was constantly negotiating ideas about the tropics with the realities of these places. A keen observer, Casement recognized the fallacy of the much of the imperial rhetoric applied to the Putumayo, but was nevertheless unable to divorce himself from it. Continuing along the same lines as Hardenburg, Casement's two reports about the Putumayo are an interesting avenue to explore ideas about civilization, race, and resources in the tropics and further help elucidate the ways that the tropical world was imagined at the turn of the century. Casement believed the Putumayo needed to be civilized. Casement's preferred method of civilization would have been colonization coupled with strong governmental authority in the area. However, the realities of Putumayo made settlement seem impossible. Thus, the only alternative was a mission, one which could instil the values of civilization on the natives without the requirement of a permanent settlement. Despite seemingly opposite intentions, Casement and Arana justified their natural control and necessary presence in the Putumayo by engaging in the same discourse.

Not only were Casement's writings about the tropics an example of tropicality, but his person and his life story were also riddled with ideas and images embodied in tropicality. Casement, in the last years of his life, abandoned imperial Britain to fight for Irish independence. Once caught, he was hung for high treason. Leading up to his trial and execution, a series of diaries in Casement's hand were found which contained explicit records of his homosexuality. These diaries coupled with Casement's drastic actions in the last years of his life were used as evidence that Casement, himself, suffered from the same malaise he diagnosed in empire in the tropical world, and was perceived as becoming over his years in the tropics a degenerate. Degeneration was a common component of the imagery surrounding the tropics and provided a scapegoat for those wanting to reap the benefits of the tropical world without having to reside or labour there.

In 1911, the same year that Roger Casement presented his Putumayo reports to the Foreign Office, London held a Exhibition on rubber at the Royal Agricultural Hall.¹ The *Morning Post* on June 19, published the following story about the future of rubber:

The Rubber Exhibition which is now being held at the Royal Agricultural Hall serves to draw attention to the wonderful progress which the rubber industry has made during the past few years. The tremendous 'boom' which recently took place will be fresh in everyone's memory, and the outburst of speculation was inspired by the knowledge that the demand for rubber was rapidly and steadily growing. In the past the supply has mainly been derived from the tapping of the wild plant in the great tropical forests of South America and the Congo, and the huge profits obtained in the trade led to the perpetration of the horrible atrocities which rendered the name of the Congo notorious all over the world. But a new era is opened by the starting of future plantations wherever a suitable soil and climate are found, so that in the near future the production is bound to be enormously extended. When a large and regular supply is available and when prices are low and stable, manufacturers will, it is believed, find many new uses to which they can put the raw material. There is even a prospect that the day may come when the streets will be paved with rubber, so that the noise and vibration of traffic which render life in modern towns so disagreeable will be almost banished.²

Asian rubber plantations not only crushed the Amazonian near monopoly of rubber, but also finally brought rubber under British control. Seen as a blessing to many, the new plantations proved to once again reassure a faith in science, European superiority, and their responsibility to "civilize" the tropics. Embodied in ideas of tropicality, these beliefs would continue to affect the ways Europe thought and interacted with the tropical world.

¹ Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 349.

² *Ibid.*

Bibliography

Government Publications

- Great Britain. Foreign Office [Roger Casement]. *Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District*. Miscelleneous no. 8. 1912.
- . Parliament. House of Commons. Select Committee on Putumayo. *Report and Special Report from the Select Committee on Putumayo, Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices*. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1913.

Newspapers

- Manchester Guardian*, 13 December 1912.
- The Morning Post*, 19 June, 1911.
- The Nation*, 1 July 1911.

Published Primary Sources

- Casement, Roger. "The Putumayo Indians." *The Contemporary Review* 102 (1912): 317-28.
- Casement, Roger. "Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities." In *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, edited by Angus Mitchell, 127-42. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2003.
- Church, G. E. "The Acre Territory and the Caoutchouc Region of South-Western Amazonia." *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 5 (1904): 596-613.
- Hardenburg, W. E. "The Indians of the Putumayo, Upper Amazon." *Man* 10 (1910): 134-38.
- . *The Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise: Travels in the Peruvian Amazon Region and an Account of the Atrocities Committed Upon Ther Indians Therein*. Edited by C. Reginald Enock. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912.
- Huntington, Ellsworth. *Civilization and Climate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915.
- Knott, George H., ed. *Trial of Sir Roger Casement*. Toronto: Canada Law Book Company, Limited, 1917.
- Lange, Algot. "The Rubber Workers of the Amazon." *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 43, no. 1 (1911): 33-36.
- . *In the Amazon Jungle: Adventures in Remote Parts of the Upper Amazon River, Including a Sojourn among Cannibal Indians*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.
- Maloney, William J. *The Forged Casement Diaries*. Dublin & Cork: The Talbot Press Limited, 1936.
- Roosevelt, Theodore. *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914.

Yungjohann, John C. *White Gold: The Diary of a Rubber Cutter in the Amazon 1906-1916*. Edited by Ghilleen T. Prance. Oracle: Synergetic Press, Inc., 1989.

Published Sources

- Anderson, Warwick. "'Where Every Prospect Pleases and Only Man Is Vile': Laboratory Medicine as Colonial Discourse." *Critical Quarterly* 18 (1992): 506-29.
- . "Disease, Race, and Empire." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 1 (1996): 62-67.
- . "Immunities of Empire: Race, Disease, and the New Tropical Medicine, 1900-1920." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 1 (1996): 94-118.
- Arnold, David. *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- . *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996.
- . "'Illusory Riches': Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 6-18.
- . *Science, Technology, and Medicine in Colonial India*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Barham, Bradford, and Oliver Coomes. "Wild Rubber: Industrial Organisation and the Microeconomics of Extraction During the Amazon Rubber Boom (1890-1920)." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994): 37-72.
- Barham, Bradford L., and Oliver T. Coomes. "Reinterpreting the Amazon Rubber Boom: Investment, the State, and Dutch Disease." *Latin American Research Review* 29, no. 2 (1994): 73-109.
- Bartra, Roger. *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*. Translated by Carl T. Berrisford. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Borges, Dain. "'Puffy, Ugly, Slothful and Inert': Degeneration in Brazilian Social Thought, 1880-1940." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, no. 2 (1993): 235-56.
- Brockway, Lucile H. *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens*. New York: Academic Press, INC., 1979.
- Bunker, Stephen G. *Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure of the Modern State*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Burns, E. Bradford. "Manuas, 1910: Portrait of a Boom Town." *Journal of InterAmerican Studies* 7, no. 3 (1965): 400-21.
- . *A History of Brazil*. 3rd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Cannadine, David. *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Church, George Earl. *Aborigines of South America*. London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1912.
- Clearly, David. "History of the Amazon: From Prehistory to the Nineteenth Century." *Latin American Research Review* 36, no. 2 (2001): 65-96.
- Coates, Austin. *The Commerce in Rubber: The First 250 Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

- Collier, Richard. *The River That God Forgot, the Story of the Amazon Rubber Boom*. London: Collin Clear-Type Press, 1968.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness and the Secret Sharer*. New York: Signet Classic, 1983.
- Coomes, Oliver T. and Barham, Bradford L. "The Amazon Rubber Boom: Labor Control, Resistance, and Failed Plantation Development Revisited." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (1994): 231-57.
- Cooper, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick. "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda." In *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, edited by William Cronon. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995.
- Crosby, Alfred W. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Curtins, Philip D. *The Image of Africa*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964.
- . *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Dean, Warren. *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber, a Study in Environmental History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Dominguez, Camilo and Augusto Gómez. *La Economía Extractiva En La Amazonía Colombiana 1850-1930*. Bogotá: Corporación Colombiana para la Amazonía Araracuara, 1990.
- Daunton, Martin, and Rick Halpern, eds. *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
- Drayton, Richard. "Science, Medicine, and the British Empire." In *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. V*, edited by Robin W. Winks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Driver, Felix and Brenda S. A. Yeoh. "Constructing the Tropics: Introduction." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 1-5.
- Dudgeon, Jeffrey. *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*. Belfast: Belfast Press Ltd, 2002.
- Eriksen, Thomas and Finn Nielson. *A History of Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press, 2001.
- Fisher, William H. *Rain Forest Exchange: Industry and Community on an Amazonian Frontier*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. "Politics and the Study of Discourse." *Ideology & Consciousness* 3 (1978): 7-26.
- Furneaux, Robin. *The Amazon: The Story of a Great River*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969.
- Garfield, Seth. "Recent Works on Amazonian Indians." *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 3-4 (2000): 755-66.
- Gilman, Sander L. "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race

- to a Race to Theory." In *Degeneration: The Darker Side of Progress*, edited by J. Edwards Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- González, Erik Camayd-Freixas and José Eduardo, ed. *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America: Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000.
- Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers [Roger Casement]. Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo. (Cd.1933) LXII, 1904.
- Harris, Marvin. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2001.
- Harrison, Mark. "The Tender Frame of Man": Disease, Climate, and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies, 1760-1860." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 1 (1996): 68-93.
- Hemming, John. *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. New York: Mariner Books, 1998.
- Humboldt, Alexander von. *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*. Translated by E. C. Otté. New York: Harper, 1859-1860.
- Inglis, Brain. *Roger Casement*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973.
- Karno, Howard L. "Julio César Arana, Frontier Cacique in Peru." In *The Cacique: Oligarchical Politics and the System of Caciquismo in the Luso-Hispanic World*, edited by Robert Kern, 89-98. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973.
- Keck, Margaret E. "Social Equity and Environmental Politics in Brazil: Lessons from the Rubber Tappers of Acre." *Comparative Politics* 27, no. 4 (1995): 409-24.
- Livingstone, David N. "Climate's Moral Economy: Science, Race and Place in Post-Darwinian British and American Geography." In *Geography and Empire*, edited by Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, 132-54. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994.
- . "Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene: The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate." *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32 (1999): 93-110.
- . "Tropical Hermeneutics: Fragments for a Historical Narrative, an Afterword." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 92-98.
- Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: British and French Orientalisms*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Martins, Luciana L. "A Naturalist's Vision of the Tropics: Charles Darwin and the Brazilian Landscape." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000): 19-33.
- McCormack, W. J. *Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002.
- McQuillan, Allan G. "Cabbages and Kings: The Ethics and Aesthetics of New Forestry." In *Environmental Ethics and Forestry: A Reader*, edited by Peter C. List. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

- Mitchell, Angus, ed. *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*. Dublin: ColourBooks Ltd., 2003.
- Murphy, Robert F., and Julian H. Steward. "Tappers and Trappers: Parallel Process in Acculturation." In *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 335-55, 1956.
- Peluso, Nancy Lee. "Weapons of the Wild: Strategic Uses of Violence and Wildness in the Rain Forests of Indonesian Borneo." In *In Search of the Rain Forest*, edited by Candace Slater, 204-45. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Pennano, Guido. *La Economía Del Caucho*. Iquitos, Peru: Centro de Estudios Teológicos de la Amazonía, 1988.
- Pick, Daniel. *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Pike, Fredrick B. *The United States and Latin America; Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Raby, Peter. *Bright Paradise: Victorian Scientific Travellers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Raffles, Hugh. *In Amazonia, a Natural History*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Ramos, Alcida Rita. *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Reid, B. L. *The Lives of Roger Casement*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Rudkin, David. "The Chameleon & the Kilt: The Complexities of Roger Casement." *Encounter* 41, no. 2 (1973): 70-77.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Sawyer, Roger. *Casement: The Flawed Hero*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Schmink, Marianne and Charles H. Wood, ed. *Frontier Expansion in Amazonia*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Singleton-Gates, Peter and Maurice Girodias, ed. *The Black Diaries*. Paris: Imprimerie Mazarine and Imprimerie Moderne du Lion, 1959.
- Síocháin, Séamas Ó, and Micheal O'Sullivan. *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*. Dublin: University of Dublin Press, 2003.
- Slater, Candace. *Entangled Edens, Visions of the Amazon*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- . "In Search of the Rain Forest." In *In Search of the Rain Forest*, edited by Candace Slater, 3-37. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Stanfield, Michael Edward. *Red Rubber Bleeding Trees: Violence, Slavery, and Empire in Northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998.

- Stepan, Nancy. "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places." In *Degeneration: The Darker Side of Progress*, edited by J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, 97-120. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- . *Picturing Tropical Nature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- . *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Taussig, Michael. "Culture of Terror--Space of Death, Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984): 467-97.
- . *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Valerio-Holguín. "Primitive Borders: Cultural Identity and Ethnic Cleansing in the Dominican Republic." In *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America: Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture*, edited by Erik Camayd-Freixas and José Eduardo Gonzáles, 75-88. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000.
- Vaughan, Megan. *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1991.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. "Images of Nature and Society in Amazonian Ethnology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 179-200.
- Webster, C. C., and W. J. Baukwill. *Rubber*. New York: Longman Scientific & Technical with John Wiley & Sons, 1989.
- Weinstein, Barbara. *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983.
- Wood, Marianne Schmink and Charles H. *Contested Frontiers in Amazonia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Worster, Donald. *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*. 2 ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.