

ROGER CASEMENT AND THE
PUTUMAYO ATROCITIES

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Javier Farje

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	Page I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	Page 2
GLOSSARY	Page 3
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	Pages 4-5
CHAPTER 2 THE PERUVIAN RUBBER ECONOMY AND JULIO CESAR ARANA	Pages 6-10
CHAPTER 3 THE DENUNCIATION OF THE ATROCITIES	Pages 11-15
CHAPTER 4 THE REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUTUMAYO	Pages 16-28
CHAPTER 5 VALCARCEL VERSUS REY DE CASTRO. TWO OPPOSING ACCOUNTS OF THE PUTUMAYO ATROCITIES	Pages 29-48
CHAPTER 6 THE REACTION OF COLOMBIA TO THE ATROCITIES	Pages 49-58
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS	Pages 59-63

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ABSTRACT

**ROGER CASEMENT AND THE
PUTUMAYO ATROCITIES**

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This dissertation deals with the campaign led by Roger Casement, the Irish Humanitarian, in the Peruvian region of the Putumayo, in the Amazon and his failure in protecting the Indians who lived and worked there. The production of rubber played a very important role in the economic development of the Peruvian Amazon at the beginning of the twentieth century. The rubber industry provoked the exploitation of the Indian communities that lived in the banks of the Putumayo River, in the northwest. Many of those Indians were hunted and tortured and their families killed. Julio Cesar Arana, the owner of the Peruvian Amazon Company, set up in Britain with four British directors but entirely owned by the former, became a symbol of such exploitation. His activities were noticed by a young American explorer, Walter Hardenburg, who travelled to the region and witnessed the maltreatment of the Indians. He took his denunciations to London. After they were published in a financial magazine, the Foreign Office decided to put pressure on the company to set up a commission of inquiry. The Foreign Office sent Roger Casement, its Consul general in Rio de Janeiro as its representative. Casement's Report confirmed the atrocities and gave way to the formation of House of Commons Select Committee. The Committee questioned Casement and Arana among other witnesses and concluded that the Peruvian entrepreneur was responsible for the atrocities. He reacted angrily and tried to accuse Casement of working for the Colombian Government. He bribed a Peruvian diplomat who produced a reply to the atrocities and mobilised public

opinion in the region against the Peruvian judges who tried to investigate the case. He also used the territorial dispute with Colombia to appear as a defender of Peruvian against the territorial ambitions of the Colombian government. Arana's tactics worked and nobody was punished for the crimes. Casement's trial for high treason for his alleged participation in the Irish Easter Rising and his execution seemed to vindicate Arana and the Peruvian government that never intended to investigate the atrocities. Casement's failure could be explained by the fact that Arana managed to get the Peruvian government on his side. He played the nationalist card as the man whose rubber plantations in the border with Colombia protected Peru from the territorial ambitions of its neighbours. This dissertation concludes that the big losers were the Putumayo Indians who never achieved justice.

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GLOSSARY

Bora. Indians from the Putumayo region in Peru.

Correrías. Hunting of Indians by the rubber companies, in order to enslave them into the extraction of rubber.

Cauchero. Rubber cutter.

Fabrico. A 75-day season of rubber extraction.

Huitoto. Indians from the Putumayo region in Peru.

Muchacho. Young Indian hired by the rubber companies to supervise slave labour.

Tara. Plant used in the Amazon to dye clothes.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Roger Casement was waiting to be tried in London for the charge of High Treason in 1916, he received a telegram dated in the Brazilian city of Manaus. It came from Mr. Julio Cesar Arana, the owner of the Peruvian Amazon Company Limited, then in liquidation. In his telegram, Arana asked Casement to “confess, if he had time, how he had acted disloyally and falsely in relation to the question of the Putumayo”¹. In a letter sent to his friend Richard Morten, Casement reacted with anger:

“Do you know I had a very outrageous telegram from Julio Arana just before the trial? Think of it! From Pará, asking me to confess my ‘crimes’ against him!”²

This was the last piece of confrontation between Roger Casement, the man who decided to take the cause of the Indians of the Peruvian Amazon region of the Putumayo and Julio Cesar Arana, the man who exploited them in the most brutal fashion, for commercial gains. This quarrel took place in the hummed atmosphere of the Peruvian rainforest as well as in the Gothic ambience of the House of Commons. The real losers of this battle were the Indians of the Putumayo.

This dissertation intends to explain the reasons why Roger Casement’s Putumayo campaign failed in saving the local indigenous population from exploitation, torture and death in one of the most tragic episodes in post-colonial Latin

¹ Letter sent by Julio Cesar Arana to the Peruvian President Augusto B. Leguia asking for land titles in the Amazon, 15th January 1921. Copy provided by Mr. Roger Rumrill to the author of this thesis. The original is lost.

² Montgomery Hyde, H. *Famous Trials 9: Roger Casement*. (Penguin, London 1964). P. 149.

America. This thesis is based in some crucial documents: the Report published by the House of Commons Select Committee on Putumayo, and the account of the atrocities written by Peruvian diplomat Carlos Rey de Castro and Judge Carlos A.Valcarcel, both published in Spanish and translated by the author of this work.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERUVIAN RUBBER ECONOMY AND JULIO CESAR ARANA

The Putumayo region is part of the Amazon Basin that covers parts of Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia, and played a crucial role in the Latin American export boom of the beginning of the twentieth century, until the collapse of the rubber prices in 1912³. Part of the Putumayo region belongs to Loreto, Peru's biggest department (state). Its capital is Iquitos.

The Peruvian Amazon region is a long way from the capital of the country, Lima. In fact, that communication almost was unnecessary in economic terms. The main trading activities between the Amazon region and the outside world took place with Europe. Both export and imports from and to the region were transported along the Amazon River towards the Atlantic Ocean and then directly to Europe. Most of transport was done by two British companies, the Iquitos Steamship Co. Ltd. and the Booth Steamship Co. Limited. Both merged some years later⁴. And the little communication that existed between Iquitos and Lima, happened via Panama or Barbados⁵. Overland communication was almost impossible, and still is. Because of this geographical situation, the economic and political development of the Amazon region was more or less autonomous in relation to the metropolis. In fact, the Amazon economy was a mirror of the way it developed in other parts of the Peru: The whole system depended almost exclusively on one product around which the whole economic process gyrated. It

³ Bakewell, Peter, *A History of Latin America*, Blackwell Publishers (London 1997) Chapter XVI. P. 411.

⁴ Bonilla, Heraclio, *Gran Bretaña y El Perú*. Volume V. *Los Mecanismos de un Control Económico*, P. 125.

⁵ Bonilla, Heraclio, *Gran Bretaña y El Perú*. Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Fondo del Libro del Banco Industrial del Perú. (Lima 1977). P. 125.

was the guano in the coastal regions, sugar in the Northern provinces and, in the case of the Amazon, it was rubber⁶.

The reports sent by the British Consuls in Iquitos to London between the last decade of the 19th Century and 1914, confirmed that the Amazon economy depended almost 100% on rubber⁷.

At the height of the rubber boom, prices rocketed. In his report corresponding to the year 1903, the British Consul in Iquitos, David Cazes, owner of the Iquitos Trading Company, one of the only three British commercial houses in the city, explained that, while the value of rubber exports in 1902 had been of £412,000, in the year 1903 this income was of £650,000, an increase of £238,000⁸. Britain traders did not have an important role in the regional economy. Apart from the three commercial houses and the steamship companies, in the year 1903, there were only 14 registered British citizens in Iquitos⁹. Their economic and political influence was minimal. However, the reports of the British Consuls in the most important cities of Peru give an idea of the current economic and political climate in Peru.

Some of the rubber entrepreneurs that dominated the regional economy had control over vast areas of rainforest. However, those who benefited the most were those who operated in the areas where the best rubber was produced. The *Hevea Benthamiana* and the *Hevea gnyanensis*, better known as *weak rubber* were considered by scientists as the most suitable latex for industrial purposes. These

⁶ Ibid. P. 124.

⁷ Ibid. P. 123.

⁸ Bonilla, Heraclio ed. *Gran Bretaña y el Perú, Informes de los Cónsules Británicos*, Vol. C. Annual Series 3134.

⁹ Santos Granery, Federico & Barclay, Frederica. *La Frontera Domesticada. Historia Económica y Social de Loreto, 1850-2000*. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial 2002 (Lima 2002). P. 107.

two kinds of rubber were mainly produced along the middle banks of the Putumayo River, in the border between Peru and Colombia¹⁰.

At the beginning of the twentieth century rubber constituted 30% of Peruvian exports.¹¹ In order to maintain a minimum presence in Iquitos, the state had a skeleton political representation and a charged a tax that, on export and imports¹².

Loreto had four social groups. The whites were a minority that controlled the local economy. The *mestizos*, who were descendants of Spaniards and Amazonian Indians, were mainly small farmers or rubber cutters. Then we have the Christened Indians, who lived mainly in religious missions. Finally we have the tribal Indians who were un-contacted communities. They had managed to escape from Spanish conquest and lived in scattered communities deep in the forest¹³. Both the *mestizos* and the Christened Indians became the main source of labour at the beginning of the rubber economy.¹⁴

As the rubber boom became a reality, more *mestizos* and Indians were recruited. While the *mestizos* moved to the rubber plantations voluntarily, many Indians were offered manufactured products in exchange for their labour. They became victims of bond labour.¹⁵ Because of the working conditions in the rubber plantations, the population of Christened Indians started to diminish. It was at this point when the recruitment or rather the hunting of tribal Indians started. They were called *correrias*, which consisted in armed parties of rubber employees hunting Indians in order to force them to work in the rubber plantations. The

¹⁰ Ibid. Pp. 44-46.

¹¹ Contreras, Carlos & Cueto, Marcos. *Historia del Perú Contemporáneo*. Segunda Edición. Universidad del Pacífico and Instituto de Estudios Peruanos. (Lima 2000). P. 201.

¹² Bonilla, Heraclio. *Gran Bretaña y el Perú*. P. 127.

¹³ Santos Granero, Federico & Barclay, Frederica. *La Frontera Domesticada*. Pp. 63-64.

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 64

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 67.

tribal Indians did not like to get orders, they lacked the labour discipline the Westerners required for the work and refused to establish a permanent relationship with the rubber cutters¹⁶. The system of bond debt also gave way to an effectual slave trade, as John Yungjohann, an Americans who worked in the rubber plantations as a cutter, describes in his diaries:

“They are kept slaves by the Peruvians and are bough and sold, whole families and single, according to how they come. The selling and buying is done in the following manner. If a man wants to buy an Indian, he goes to the seller and looks over the stock. If he finds what he wants, he will ask the seller how much the Indian owes him. If they agree to the price the buyer will pay the Indian’s debt and the Indian belongs to him, and compels the Indian to work to pay off the debt, until he in turn sells him the same way to the next one...”¹⁷

Julio Cesar Arana became a symbol of the system. Born in the Andean city of Rioja, the son of a Panama hat maker, he left school at the age of fourteenth. He became hat seller but soon got tired of what he believed was a tedious business. He moved to the Amazon, opened a convenience shop near the Huallaga River to provide for the rubber cutters that operated in the area. In 1890, he bought a rubber plot. Then, he realised that, in order to maximise his profits, he needed a labour that did not cost him the four hundred dollars that white workers charged him. He then decided to explore further north and found the Putumayo River, densely populated Putumayo by tribe Indians. By 1905, and after he made a deal with local Colombian *caucheros*, he owed a vast territory that included the camps of La Chorrera and El Encanto, the main rubber collection centres in the region.

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 71.

¹⁷ Prance, Ghillelan T. ed. *White Gold. The diary of a rubber cutter in the Amazon 1906-1916 by John C. Yungjohann*. (Synergetic Press, Arizona 1989). P. 50.

His brother Rafael and other partners decided to recruit cheap labour and criminals in order to consolidate their dominance of the Putumayo and to intensify his *correrías*. In 1904, he recruited two hundred Barbadians who were given the task to prevent Indian slaves from escaping¹⁸.

Arana chose the Putumayo region because he could act with total autonomy, due to the remoteness of the area¹⁹. Since it was a territory claimed by Colombia and Peru, and he could be seen by the government in Lima as a barrier against Colombian ambitions. Arana was a pragmatist. Four years after he started his company, he decided to found the Peruvian Amazon Company Limited in the country where most of the rubber ended up: Great Britain.

The main victims of Arana's practices were the two most important ethno-linguistic Indian communities in the region: the Huitotos and the Boras.

¹⁸ Davis, Wade. *El Río. Exploraciones y Descubrimientos en la Selva Amazónica*. Banco de la Republica/Ancora Editores (Bogota 2002). Pp. 281-283.

¹⁹ Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement*. (Penguin Books, Berkshire 2002) First published by Hooder and Stoughton, 1973 P. 172.

CHAPTER 3

THE DENUNCIATION OF THE ATROCITIES

In 1908, a young American explorer, Walter Hardenburg and his friend W. Perkins decided to travel to the Amazon. Upon their arrival to the Putumayo region, they saw a clash between Colombian *caucheros* and heavily armed Peruvian soldiers and employees of the Peruvian Amazon Company. They were arrested. After their release Hardenburg decided to stay until June 1909. During his stay in the Putumayo region, he witnessed the way the local Indians were treated²⁰. He wrote an account and since he knew that he could not challenge Arana in Iquitos, where he was a powerful figure and decided to take his denunciations to London²¹. Around the same time, two small local newspapers, La Felpa and La Sancion, owned by Benjamin Saldaña Roca²², a local Jewish socialist intellectual, published some accounts of the maltreatment of the Indians.

When he arrived to London, he was advised by the Anti-Slavery Aborigines Protection Society to contact a small financial magazine called *Truth*. The magazine published several articles related to the subject. British society was outraged at the fact that a British company was involved in act of slavery, torture and death. Immediately after the publication of Hardenburg articles, the Anti-Slavery Society put pressure on the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey who acted swiftly. In 1910, the Peruvian Amazon Company reluctantly decided to form it own inquiry commission. Sir Edward Grey appointed the British Consul General in Rio de Janeiro, Roger Casement, as its representative²³. Casement had

²⁰ Mitchell, Angus, editor. *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*. (Anaconda Editions., London 1997). P. 60.

²¹ Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement*. P. 175.

²² Sawyer, Roger. *Roger Casement. The Flawed Hero*. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1984). P. 80.

²³ Mitchell, Angus. *The Amazon Journal*. P. 60

successfully campaigned for the rights of the natives in the Congo, who were being exploited by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1905 and seemed to be the right choice for the job. The company's team was formed by Colonel Reginald Bertie, former officer from the Welsh Fusiliers; Loius Harding Barnes, a tropical agriculturist; Walter Fox, a botanist and Henry Gielgud, the youngest member of the commission and a man who had acted on behalf of the Peruvian Amazon Company the year before as an accountant. The commission left Southampton on 23 July 1910. They arrived to the Brazilian rubber port of Belem do Pará on 8th August. By the time they left Belem, Colonel Bertie was forced to abandon the mission because he got ill with dysentery. He eventually returned to London²⁴.

The group arrived in Iquitos on 31 August and soon after left for La Chorrera. Casement was perfectly aware of the limitation his mission had. He was supposed to investigate only

“...the charges preferred against British subjects employed by a British Company and to some extent the actions of that company itself in so far as responsibility for its actions affected British subjects”²⁵

In fact, Roger Casement's mission went beyond his Foreign Office briefing. It became an indictment against Julio Cesar Arana and his men. Casement saw great similarities between the atrocities in Congo and the ones committed by Arana in the Putumayo. On 5th October 1910 he wrote in his diary:

²⁴ Ibid. Pp. 62-63.

²⁵ Memorandum written by Roger Casement about his meeting with Sir Edward Grey. Quoted by Mitchell, Angus ed. *The Amazon Journal*. P. 61.

“It is the Congo question all over again, with the same kind of careless-minded or not logical minded defenders”. (...) The Putumayo Slavery is, indeed, as Hardenburg said, and as I laughed at when I read it a year ago in Truth, a bigger crime than that of the Congo”²⁶.

Roger Casement’s conclusions were published on 17th July 1911 as *The Blue Book on Infamies in the Putumayo*.

Roger Casement interviewed many Barbadian foremen. After he spoke to them, he found out that they were also being cheated by the company, who charged them abusive process for food²⁷.

During his interviews with the Barbadians, Casement managed to get a picture of the situation. In them, Casement learned that flogging was a widely used method to force Indians to extract the biggest amount of rubber. No member of the Peruvian Amazon Company contradicted those testimonies. On 24th September, Casement wrote

“(Juan Manuel) Tízón (the chief overseer of Arana’s company) was in a great embarrassment and later on confessed that he was prepared to accept the men’s charges ‘in the main’ – and did not wish to confront them with the men they accused”²⁸.

Later Tízón promised to put an end to the situation²⁹.

²⁶ Mitchell, Angus, ed. *The Amazon Journal*. Pp. 177, 193..

²⁷ Ibid P. 351.

²⁸ Ibid. P. 126.

²⁹ Ibid. P. 130.

Casement did not only relay on the testimonies of the Barbadians. He was aware, as he himself admitted in his diary, that he needed evidence that the atrocities really occurred. He interviewed Christened Indians who worked in the company, the *muchachos*. He was particularly outraged by the fact that the *muchachos* were used to kill their own people:

“...the muchachos armed and exercised in murdering their own unfortunate countrymen, or, rather, Boras Indians murdering Huitotos and vice versa for the pleasure, or supposed profit, of their masters, who in the end turn on these (from a variety of motives) and kill them. And this is called ‘civilising’ the wild savage Indians! ³⁰.

During his observations of the Indians he encountered in his journey, he reached the conclusion that the majority had flogging marks in their backs and buttocks³¹. Some of the Indians who boarded the boats where the commission travelled in La Chorrera, for instance, or the Indians who took part, naked, in local dances had flogging marks, as Casement noted³². He himself met sick Indian women whose predicament did not seem to be a priority for the company.

Roger Casement’s case against Arana was built on the basis of an investigation which included interviews with employees of the Peruvian Amazon Company, Barbadian guards, Christened Indians and his own observations. Later accusations that he only relayed on the Barbadians were easily dismissed by those who investigated the denunciations in the House of Commons. After he finished his mission, Casement concluded that he could not do more for the Indians of the Putumayo but to publish his report.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 136.

³¹ Ibid. P. 151

In 1911, Casement returned to Iquitos as Sir Roger Casement, a knighthood given to him as a result of his Putumayo campaign. It was a visit of despair because he believed that the perpetrators would remain unpunished due to the lack of interest by the Peruvian Government to investigate the atrocities.

Under pressure by Britain, the Peruvian government had reluctantly allowed the judiciary to appoint Judge Rómulo Paredes and Carlos A. Valcárcel to investigate the atrocities. Judge Paredes issued a thirteen hundred-page report detailing the abuses and order the arrest of several employees of the company. Only a few were arrested and later released. Some of the cruellest murderers managed to escape to Brazil. The Brazilian authorities tried to arrest them but, yet again, the remoteness of the region came to the aid of Arana's men³³. Later, Judge Valcárcel was sacked, reinstated and sacked again.

In 1913, Pablo Zumaeta, Arana's brother-in-law published a pamphlet attacking Paredes and Valcárcel. They were accused of conspiring to destroy Arana's company for their own benefit. And when Judge Valcárcel ordered Arana's arrest in 1913, his henchmen organised riots. Arana not only evaded prison. He became senator in 1920³⁴.

³² Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement*. P. 178.

³³ Gwynn, Dennis. *The Life and Death of Roger Casement*. (Newnes, (London 1930). Pp. 128-129.

³⁴ Santos Granero, Fernando & Barclay, Frederica. *La Frontera*. P. 192.

CHAPTER 4

THE REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUTUMAYO

Casement returned to Europe just before the British Consul in Iquitos, George Michell, issued his own report, confirming Casement's and Paredes' assessments. He did not believe Michell's report would make any difference, since the Consul had been accompanied by Arana's men. In the meantime, he subjected the Foreign Office to a bombardment of letter and memorandums related to the atrocities, despite his fragile health. In an article published in the *Contemporary Review* in the autumn of 1913, he wrote:

“Is it too late to hope that by means of the same humane and brotherly agency, something of the goodwill and kindness of Christian life may be imparted to the remote, friendless, and lot children of the forest?”³⁵.

In October 1912, Casement finally got some good news. His friend, the Liberal MP Charles Roberts informed him that he would be chairing a Select Committee set up to investigate the atrocities. Casement immediately put himself at the disposal of the Committee³⁶. The Report and Special report from the Select Committee on Putumayo with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices was published on 5th June 1913³⁷.

³⁵ Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement*. P. 206.

³⁶ Ibid. P. 207.

³⁷ The Report and Special report from the Select Committee on Putumayo with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices. House of Commons Papers 148. June 1913.

The description of the atrocities in the Part I of the Report (The Inquiry) includes

“...mainly the outrages committed upon Indians of the Putumayo; but there was also to be considered a series of attacks upon Colombian rubber gatherers, and ill-treatment of certain Barbadians being British subjects, who were employed in the Putumayo under contract as indentured labourers³⁸”.

Apart from interviews and testimonies from different people, including King’s Councillors representing British director of the Peruvian Amazon Company, as well as Julio César Arana himself, the Committee based its report on the Putumayo Blue Bluebook that include Roger Casement’s account, letters between the Colonial Office and the Peruvian Amazon Company and correspondence between the Colonial Office related to the immigration of Barbadians to the Putumayo region. The Committee concluded that the British director of the company

“cannot be held responsible for anything occurring before the date of formation of the Company in September 1907³⁹...”

The atrocities have been “admitted, established and confirmed” by the documents and reports at the disposal of the Committee. The Committee, in “The Confirmation of the Atrocities”, refers to the first allegations appearing in *Truth*, as well as *La Felpa* and *La Sanción*, reports from Roger Casement, the Peruvian Judge Rómulo Paredes and the company’s Commission.

Casement’s report was, in any case, the clearest about the responsibility of Arana and his men.

³⁸ Ibid. P. iv.

³⁹ Ibid. P. iv.

“As has already been shown, absolute power was put into the hands of men who recognised no responsibility save that of extorting rubber for their own benefit. Forced labour of the worst sort, that imposed by fear by private individuals for their own benefit, was the basis. The Indians were considered as possessing none of the ordinary rights of humanity; women in particular would be assigned to employees on arrival in a Section, and would often not be allowed to accompany them when removed to another port, even when desirous of so doing”⁴⁰.

The British director of the Peruvian Amazon Company were H. M. Read, then manager of the London Bank of Mexico; J. Russell Gubbins, a businessman who had lived in Peru for almost 40 years and who elected chairman of the board in 1910; Sir John Lister Kays. In fact, Kays joined at the invitation of a company which had underwritten some shares. He knew nothing about rubber, Peru or the Spanish language, and had no shares or financial interests. The last British director was T. F. Medina, whose father J. F. Medina had been one of the first Chairmen of the company.

The Committee concluded that the British directors of the Peruvian Amazon Company knew nothing about the crimes before the first accounts were published in *Truth*, although T. F. Medina had received copies of *La Felpa* and *La Sanción* in June and July 1903.⁴¹

The Committee reports also on the tension in the disputed border between Peru and Colombia. Indeed, the Committee emphasises the indifference with which the British citizens involved in the Putumayo events saw the problem. H. M.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. iv.

⁴¹ Reid, B. L. *The Lives of Roger Casement*. (Yale University Press, Massachusetts 1976). Pp. 101-102.

Read saw it as a “question between the Colombians and Peruvians, a thing we never entered into”. Despite of this lack of interest in the border dispute, J. C. Arana would accuse Roger Casement of trying to help Colombia in his territorial claims via his denunciations of the Putumayo atrocities, as we will see later in this dissertation.

The relationship between Colombia and Peru also appears in the final report. When Roger Casement was questioned by the Committee, his references to Colombia were related to the way Arana operated in the region. He did not take sides in relation to the territorial dispute between both countries. The Committee admitted that the relative lack of state authority with power to administer fast justice in the region was caused by the fact that, a great portion of the Putumayo district was in dispute with Colombia and that the judiciary in Iquitos, was incapable to do its job, due to the distance between the Amazon metropolis and the rubber camps. It took at least one week to ten days to travel between the two points.

Then, the Committee established the responsibility Julio César Arana and his Peruvian partners had in the atrocities. In the first instance, the report makes it clear that Arana could not be tried by British courts since he was not a British citizen. However, based on Casement’s report, the Committee concluded that Arana was responsible for the maltreatment of the Putumayo Indians. The report quotes from Mr. Justice Swinfen Eady, on a petition made by shareholders in the High Court, for the winding-up of the Peruvian Amazon Company.

“Señor Arana, with his three partners were jointly concerned in selling a business that had for years before the sale been concerned in collecting rubber in the atrocious manner (...) and it was the profits arising from that business and in part for the rubber so collected that were set out in the prospectus. In my opinion, it is quite impossible to acquit all the members of the firm of knowledge of the way in which the rubber was collected. Certainly, the atrocities must have been brought home to Pablo Zumaeta (J. C. Arana’s brother-in-law and partner. Note of the author) long before the time of the Company’s Commission, and if Arana personally was unaware of the extent to which these atrocities were being committed, he ought to have known and he ought to have ascertained”⁴².

Arana’s company defended itself by producing a book written by the French explorer and anthropologist Eugenio Robuchon. A copy of such publication was produced during the investigations of the Putumayo Committee. In 1904, the Arana brothers, on behalf of the Peruvian Government, asked Robuchon to write a book about the rubber region of the Putumayo. *En el Putumayo y sus Afluentes (In the Putumayo and its Tributaries)* was published in 1907 by the Peruvian Government, a year after Robuchon’s death. Robuchon died in mysterious circumstances in the rainforest. His book was heavily edited by Carlos Rey de Castro, a Peruvian diplomat who would play a crucial role in attacking all the denunciations of the Putumayo atrocities, as we will see in the next chapter. Rey de Castro maintained that Robuchon was eaten by cannibals. Other rumours, however, suggest that Robuchon was murdered by the company when the Frenchman started to pay attention to the way the company’s workforce was

⁴² The Report and Special Report. P. x

treated⁴³. Until now, Robuchon's death is a mystery. *En el Putumayo...* became Arana's manifesto to defend his presence in the region as a civilising force⁴⁴.

The Committee emphasized the fact that Rey de Castro omitted whole paragraphs from the original French manuscript. The Committee published one if the "forgotten" sections. In it, the author explains with clarity the reasons why the Putumayo Indians hated the rubber business:

"The Indians care nothing for the preservation of the rubber trees, and rather desire their destruction. Eager to recover their lost liberty and their independence of former days, they think that the whites that have come into their domain in quest of this valuable plant will go away when it had disappeared. With this idea they regard with favour the disappearance of the rubber trees which have been the cause of their reduction to slavery. Without ambition or knowledge of the value of goods, they give their labour for a few worthless beads, for an old gun, an axe or a 'machete'"⁴⁵.

Thus, the Committee established the responsibility the managers had in the maltreatment of the Indians. Further down, in the actual account of the inquiry, the Committee reiterates, in the toughest possible way, its belief that the managers cannot avoid their responsibility, because

"No condemnation is too strong for them".

The Committee quoted the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry in relation to its description of the indigenous ethno-linguistic peoples that inhabited the

⁴³ Mitchell, Angus. *The Amazon Journal*. Pp. 137-138.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 444.

⁴⁵ The Report and Special Report. P. xii.

Putumayo region. Of the many indigenous people who live in the region, the Boras and the Huitotos are the main groups. For one of the commissioners, Louise Barnes, the Boras and Huitotos

“...cannibals (as) they undoubtedly were⁴⁶”

They were

“far from being the bloodthirsty and ferocious savages they are often said to be”⁴⁷.

The Committee attacks Arana’s attempts to use cannibalism as a justification for the company’s “civilising” mission.

“Much stress is laid by the apologists for the Arana firm upon the traces if this sort of ritual cannibalism... (the Indians) abominable and inhuman oppression is a black stain upon civilization”⁴⁸.

Minutes of Evidence: the testimonies

Between 6 November 1912 and 30 April 1913, some witnesses appeared before the Committee. This dissertation will not mention every one of them. However, two witnesses, two were questioned in the House of Commons, are relevant for the purposes of this thesis: Roger Casement and of course Julio Cesar Arana. The Committee also questioned British Consuls in Iquitos David Cazes and George Michell, Samuel Parr and Walter Hardenburg. However, we will only deal with the testimonies of Roger Casement and Julio Cesar Arana.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. xxxi

⁴⁷ Ibid. P. xxxi

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. xxxi

Roger Casement appeared before the Committee on 13th November and 11th December 1912. Julio Cesar Arana did it between 8th and 10th April 1913. All the directors, except for T. F. Medina appeared before the Committee. The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society was not allowed to be represented because the Committee considered that it had only an

“...interest (...) of a general nature⁴⁹”

in the Putumayo events. The Committee also listened to testimonies from members of the commission of Inquiry, as well as from E. D. Morel, the Honorary Secretary of the Congo Reform Association, a journalist and campaigner who had helped his close friend Roger Casement to denounce King Leopold's regime in the Congo.

Roger Casement

For Casement, there was no doubt that Arana and his partners were criminally responsible. Casement refuted the company's defence that the accusations are an exaggeration

“The system that existed at the date I was in the Putumayo I have no hesitation in saying was a criminal system” (...) It did not grow up by chance or by error or by neglect: I think it was deliberately designed. The Peruvian directors were, in my opinion, quite cognisant of the state of things in the Putumayo. Mr. Julio Arana had visited the Putumayo in 1908: he had visited the Putumayo at earlier dates⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. iii

⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 13

Casement confirmed his original accusations, when he reiterated that parties or armed men were sent to hunt Indians “as if they were wild animals”. Those who were captured were flogged if they did not complete their quota of rubber and those who ran away were killed.

By the time Roger Casement appeared before the Committee, the conditions in the Putumayo had seemingly got better, as he himself admitted⁵¹.

Casement was adamant that the *correrías* or the hunting of the Indians as well as the system of slavery were schemes created and implemented by Arana’s company in the Putumayo.

“574. But it is a system which is more or less prevalent?—My opinion is that wherever you have wild Indians in that part of the world you would have that system or something like it. I have seen a great deal of evidence which is not in the Blue Book, which induces me to that conclusion, and statements made by Peruvians and Brazilians; in fact, it is the rule of the rifle where there is a wild Indian”⁵².

For Casement, the company did not have to worry about the product but about the people who would extract it:

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 58.

⁵² Ibid. P. 25.

“The rubber man goes out into an unknown with his rifle and associates, and he looks for Indians rather than for rubber. The rubber is always there: the forest is full of rubber trees, but they are valueless unless you can get labour: they are hunting for labour, and the labour is that of the wild Indians; they can conquer and subdue the Indian, who is a grown-up child”⁵³.

The consequences of the above mentioned policies were disastrous for the indigenous population:

“705. I see the Peruvian Consul General reported to his Government that in 1907, there were 50,000 Indians on the Putumayo?—That was Carlos Rey de Castro. 706. Since then it has been estimated by a very competent authority that there are only 7,000?—7,000 to 10,000 was the estimate. 707. Can you give us your opinion as to how the 40,000 have disappeared?—I put the figure at about 30,000. That was my opinion but I may be wrong, and it might be an excessive estimate on my part. It would on the exactitude of the larger estimate whether there were 40,000 or 50,000 a few years ago. I saw traces frequently of very large Indian settlements which have now entirely disappeared. Mr. Tizón more than once pointed out to me, walking for miles through the forest, where Indian habitations had formerly been but had gone. I do not think there was a great population, but there had been a much larger population which I think had been exterminated.

⁵³ Ibid. P. 25.

708. You think, do you, it was extermination and not emigration?—I think fight accounted for the loss of a great many of them; they had fled no doubt into Colombia to get away from this horrible system”. Casement’s description of the cruelty with which the Indians were treated is graphic and dramatic: “(...) many died of hunger and exposure in carrying the rubber down. Some of the people I saw on the way were at death’s door. I myself saw a woman who could not walk; I took the load of her back, threw it into the forest and kept a Barbadoes (sic) man to guard her for fear Normand (one of Arana’s cruellest henchmen. Note by the author) would flog her. The whole thing was abominably cruel”⁵⁴.

Casement believed that the labourers should be paid, and that there should be a civil administrative authority to oversee the way companies. He admitted that, due to the nature of the rubber industry, it was difficult to have some kind of Governmental authority in a faraway region, but he did not render this possibility as unachievable.

Julio Cesar Arana

Julio Cesar Arana’s appearance before the Committee was voluntary and was done with an interpreter. He acted defensively since the questioning was related to Roger Casement’s damning report. The Committee might have been set up to investigate the responsibility of the British directors of the Peruvian Amazon Company, but, due to the nature of the questioning, Arana must have felt that the nature of the investigation had more to do with him than anybody else. He was questioned by the Chairman of the Committee, Charles Roberts.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Pp. 30-31

“11568. The facts are admitted. What I want to get clear is this. There are two separate things: the facts, which took place, and your knowledge of them and the knowledge of the directors?—Until the return of the Commission I had not the knowledge of what had taken place, but it was only after I have got to know.

11569. I am not asking about the knowledge, I am asking whether you admit the fact of these atrocities. We want to get step by step?—I admit in the main; but at the same time there is a great deal of exaggeration in it”⁵⁵.

He did not admit company responsibility for the atrocities.

“11570. You say (...) that the atrocities were the result of individual criminal acts of the persons who were left in charge?—Employees of the company.

11571. Is that your statement?—Yes”⁵⁶.

He is forced to admit that the reports other than the Commission’s are accurate.

“11572. And do you agree that the facts of these atrocities have been established by the Reports of the Directors’ Commissions?—Yes.

11573. And by Sir Roger Casement’s Report?—Yes.

11574. And by the Report of Dr. Rómulo Paredes. That is not disputed by you?—No, only that I have to repeat that there is an exaggeration in the facts”⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 459

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 459

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 459

More than once, Arana denied that he had any knowledge of what was happening in his company.

Julio Cesar Arana tried to interdict Roger Casement's Report by not granting credibility to the testimonies he gathered during the course of his investigation, when questioned by Mr. Dickinson.

“11953. Have you read the statement of evidence on which Sir Roger Casement based his Report?—Those who gave the information to him would also give it in any other form—the Barbadians.

11954. What do you mean by this?—Mr. Casement had only taken the statement from Barbadians. He has not heard other persons, and as Mr. Casement was sent by the sanction of the King of England, he obtained from them any declaration. They lend themselves to give any kind of declaration. They appeared to him to be victims (Querían aparecer como víctimas los Barbadianos)⁵⁸.

Until the very end of his appearance before the Committee on 10th April 1913, Julio Cesar Arana denied that he ever knew about the atrocities, saying that he only found out when read about them in *Truth*.

⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 477.

CHAPTER 5

VALCÁRCEL VERSUS REY DE CASTRO. TWO OPPOSING ACCOUNTS OF THE PUTUMAYO ATROCITIES

Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel and diplomat Carlos Rey de Castro played a very important role in the way the Putumayo atrocities were explained, criticized in some instances and denied in other. Indeed, both served different purposes. The perception that both had of the Putumayo events, Britain and Roger Casement's involvement is makes a fascinating reading, since both tried to make sure that their accounts reflect accurately what really happened in the Putumayo rainforest. This chapter is based on Carlos Rey de Castro's "Open Letter"⁵⁹ and Carlos A. Valcárcel's book about his investigations⁶⁰.

Carlos Rey de Castro was the Peruvian Consul-General in Manaos, and received money from the Peruvian Rubber Company to defend its interests. The investigation Commission discovered that Rey de Castro (Rey de Castro) had received a loan of £4,600 from Arana's company⁶¹. Indeed, Roger Casement himself said to the House of Commons Committee that he believed these monies were a bribe from J. C. Arana⁶². Rey de Castro led the Peruvian police escort that accompanied Casement's commission to investigate the atrocities. Based on Casement's belief that the Peruvian diplomat was being paid by Arana, the

⁵⁹ Rey de Castro, Carlos. *Los Escándalos del Putumayo*. Carta Abierta dirigida a Mr. Geo B. Michell, Cónsul de S. M. B. Acompañada de diversos documentos, datos estadísticos y reproducciones fotográficas. Imprenta Viuda de Tasso (Barcelona 1913). [Rey de Castro, Carlos. [*The Scandals of the Putumayo*. Open letter directed to Mr. Geo B. Michell, Consul of His Britannic Majesty. Barcelona 1913.] Translations by the author of this dissertation.

⁶⁰ Valcárcel, Carlos A. *El Proceso del Putumayo y Sus Secretos Inauditos*. Imprenta Comercial de Horacio La Rosa & Co. (Lima 1915). [Valcárcel, Carlos A. *The Putumayo Process and its Monstrous Secrets*. Lima 1915]. Translations by the author of this dissertation.

⁶¹ Mitchell, Angus. *The Amazon Journal*. P. 444

⁶² The Report and Special report from the Select Committee on Putumayo with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices. House of Commons Papers 148. June 1913. P. 32.

Foreign Office concluded that Rey de Castro's mission was mainly to make sure that the Commission did not have access to the information it required⁶³.

But Rey de Castro's role was not limited to creating obstacles to the commission, as we have seen in his editing of Eugenio Robuchon's book about the Putumayo [see Chapter 3].

Judge Luis Valcárcel was appointed by the Superior Court of Lima in 1910 to lead a judicial commission of enquiry. During the time he spent in the region, Valcárcel was constantly harassed by Arana's people. Valcárcel ordered at some point the arrest of Julio César Arana. It did not happen.

At the beginning Casement did not trust Valcárcel. He believed that his appointment was an exercise in window dressing to keep Casement's commission appeased⁶⁴. Indeed, in an entry in his *Black Diaries* corresponding to Friday the 25th November 1910, Casement wrote: "...an Auto (has) been open & all was to be investigated! (David) Cazes (The British Consul in Iquitos) says the Judge from Lima is a fraud: that all is a sham!"⁶⁵. Although Casement, in his Monday 28th November entry recognised that Judge Valcárcel was "well spoken locally as honest", he goes back to his doubts in an entry corresponding to Thursday 1st December. According to a local military officer Valcárcel was "a man who could be bribed"⁶⁶ (underline by Casement).

In 1911, Judge Valcárcel worked together with Judge Rómulo Paredes. When the Judge Valcárcel returned to Iquitos in 1913, he ordered the arrest of Arana and Pablo Zumaeta, one of his brothers-in-law. Zumaeta was dully detained but

⁶³ Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement..* (Penguin Books London 2002) Pp. 204-205.

⁶⁴ Ibid .P. 182.

⁶⁵ Roger Sawyer, Ed. *Roger Casement's Diaries. 1910: The Black & The White*. Pimlico (London 1997). P. 118.

⁶⁶ Sawyer, Roger ed. *Roger Casement's Diaries*. Pp. 118, 119 & 121.

Arana was not⁶⁷. Zumaeta was later released. Valcárcel and Paredes were allies in their attempts to have those who were responsible for the atrocities arrested and punished.

Carlos Rey de Castro's Open Letter to George B. Michell

Rey de Castro's book has 202 pages, was published in Spain and is an ill-tempered effort to defend Arana's activities by denying the atrocities. In fact, Rey de Castro uses his "Open Letter" to attack Roger Casement and his report.

The language differs a great deal from what is expected from a diplomat. It starts with a letter sent from Paris on 6th September 1913 to Geo(rge). B. Michell, then British Consul in Para, Brazil. Michell had sent to London a report in 1913 that very much endorsed Casement's accusations after he made his own visit to the region⁶⁸. Michell had met Casement during the Irishman's adventures in the Stanley Falls, in The Congo. They met again later in Paris where Michell was Vice-Consul, just before his appointment as British Consul in Iquitos in 1911⁶⁹. He was a friend of Casement's and accompanied him in one of his expeditions.

"You thought that your report was going to go unnoticed and would never see the light of the day: that is why you dared to write with so much contrivance and falsity"...Your report has saddened me (...) because at the end, you are more or less an authentic example of a superior race, and your getting so low affects us all"⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Santos Granero, Federico & Barclay, Frederica. *La Frontera*. Pp. Pp. 160-161.

⁶⁸ Sawyer, Roger. *Roger Casement's Diaries*. P. 98-99.

⁶⁹ Reid, B. L. *The Lives of Roger Casement*. P. 128.

⁷⁰ Rey de Castro, Carlos. *Los Escándalos* P. 8.

writes Rey de Castro in the opening paragraphs of his book. Rey de Castro continues with a personal attack on Michell:

“(I feel) contempt because I never expected that, after the signs of affection you showed me, to such an extent that you read to me letters from your wife and children, and after you imposed on me a details of your intimate life, you later tried to darken my performance during that visit and even ridicule the hospitable and gentlemanly behaviour I had towards you”⁷¹.

Indeed the book reproduces a photo of Rey de Castro, Michell, J. C. Arana, Stuart Fuller, the American Consul and other guests travelling in the steamer *Liberal* during Michell’s journeys to the region⁷².

For Mitchell, according to Rey de Castro’s translation of the British diplomat’s account, the fact that the natives have high moral standards made the company look bad.

“You have wanted to make the responsibility that the Peruvians have (in this matter) graver, because of the crimes that your colleague Mr. Casement has accused us of committing: since the Indians are good, moral, tame, etc., the cruelty of those who tortures them and kills them is even worse”⁷³.

Rey de Castro accuses Casement of violating the conditions under which he was allowed to investigate. He says that on 2nd September 1910, the Prefectura (political authority that represents the national government at a provincial level) of Iquitos had issued a permission for Casement to investigate only the situation

⁷¹ Ibid. P. 8.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid P. 20.

of the British subjects that lived in the region, mainly Barbadian foremen hired by Arana to work with the Indian labour force⁷⁴. Casement does not mention such document in his 2nd September entry but he is clear about the attitude that the local authorities had in relation to his presence in Iquitos:

“Cazes (the British Consul in Iquitos) says the Prefect thinks me prejudiced and taking a partisan view – another Arana insinuation I presume”⁷⁵.

Casement does mention an article published in the local paper *El Oriente*, which was friendly towards Arana, in which a telegram from Lima informed that the national government would investigate⁷⁶.

It was also apparent that, if the Barbadians had been involved in the atrocities, Casement had to include the fate of the Indians who suffered at the hands of Arana’s men in his report.

Rey de Castro, like Arana and Judge Valcárcel himself, believed that the Barbadians were too ignorant to be a reliable source of information. He wonders why Casement did not question

“Mr. Samuel Paar (sic), the only educated, cultured and of white race person who lived at that time in the Putumayo”⁷⁷.

He is talking in fact about Samuel Parr, an English shopkeeper who worked for the Peruvian Rubber Company. In his book, Rey de Castro publishes a statement,

⁷⁴ Ibid. Pp. 53-54.

⁷⁵ Sawyer, Roger ed. *Roger Casement's Diaries*. P. 75.

⁷⁶ Ibid. P. 75.

⁷⁷ Rey de Castro. *Los Escándalos*. P. 55.

written in before a local Notary Public called Arnaldo Guichard. In his declaration, Parr says that

“I was in La Chorrera in September 1910, when Mr. Casement arrived to investigate the conditions under which the British subjects worked in The Putumayo. Although I am a British subject, Mr. Casement never asked me to give him an account of my observations, nor did he ask me if I had any complaints or demands”⁷⁸.

In the same statement, Parr declared that Casement only interrogated the Barbadians,

“Blacks from the West Indies, ignorant, submissive and people who, under Mr. Casement’s authority, and superior education, were completely dominated and could obediently answer the tendentious questions the Consul asked them...”⁷⁹”.

Rey de Castro’s assertion that Casement did not talk to Parr about the situation in the region is false. Casement met Samuel Parr in La Chorrera, before the latter moved to Ultimo Retiro, in the northern branch of Arana’s empire on 29th October 1910. When he went to the local shop to buy some things he heard from Parr an initial and timid account of the situation there:

⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 56.

⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 56.

“I got some things in the store to-day, the greatest trash imaginable. The trousers, I find, are made in La Chorrera! The slave women cut them out and sew them! Talk of sweating! This bangs Banagher! Young Parr in the store told me this when buying them”⁸⁰.

On 31st October, Parr felt confident enough to open up to Casement.

“After lunch, I went with Parr to the Rubber Store and got a load of 63 ½ kilos weighed – and not by any means the biggest load I have seen. Some of Normand’s Boras’ loads (Armando Normand, a corrupt and cruel employee of the company who was partly educated in Britain. The Boras are a local indigenous ethno-linguistic community. Note of the author) were a good bit bigger, but this is a pretty fair one. The rubber is coming in wearily – plodding along. Parr, in the Store, got confidential and let himself go. He said the whole thing was disgraceful – robbery and slavery – and that the people to-day well well-treated because we were here! Parr is only a young, decent-looking English boy of about 24 I should say – or less”⁸¹.

Later, almost at the end of his mission, Casement needed Parr’s help to discover the corrupt nature of Arana’s company and his employees. On his way back to Iquitos, on 23rd November 1910, Casement recalled:

⁸⁰ Mitchell, Angus, ed. *The Amazon Journal*. P. 328.

⁸¹ Ibid. P. 341.

“It must be borne in mind that nothing (underline by Casement) is paid for the rubber. I don’t for a moment believe that the goods paid to the Indians come to £1,000 per annum prime cost. Young Parr, the storekeeper in La Chorrera, thinks that 1/- to 1/6d. represents the true value of what was given to each Indian for a whole fabrica (a 75-day season of rubber extraction) in many sections, and I am inclined to agree with him”⁸².

Rey de Castro insists that Parr had nothing to fear because he made his statement after he left the company, before he travelled to England. However, such statement was made in Iquitos, where Arana’s influence was big. Rey de Castro says that Parr’s statement had the endorsement of the British Consul in Iquitos in 1912, D. Brown. But his statement was not made before Consul Brown but only before a local Public Notary. Furthermore, during his appearance before the Putumayo Select Committee, Parr was read Roger Casement’s account of his encounter with him at La Chorrera. Parr admitted that the meeting took place and that he said what he said about the situation of the Indians⁸³. In his statement before the committee, Parr said that he never saw killings or floggings but the results of the latter: mutilations, marks. He also admitted that he knew about the “looking for” runaway Indians, a term he prefers to the word “hunting”⁸⁴.

In any case, it is clear that there is a contradiction between Casement’s recollection of his conversations with Parr, Parr’s testimony before the Select Committee and the shopkeeper’s account before Guichard, when he talks about how the Indians

⁸² Ibid. P. 444.

⁸³ The Report and Special report from the Select Committee on Putumayo with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices. House of Commons Papers 148. June 1913. P. 337.

⁸⁴ The Report and Special report. P. 338 and 343.

“...were treated with the outmost consideration and all efforts were made to educate them and to make their lives more comfortable”⁸⁵.

Rey de Castro’s Open Letter tends to move aimlessly from the events in the Putumayo to random attacks on British integrity in general. We have seen how, in the initial paragraphs of his book, he refers the British “race” as superior. His astonishment at how “low” such race can get is clear.

For him, the difference between the efforts the Indians make and the non-native *caucheros* justifies better payment for the latter. In order to validate this assertion, Rey de Castro relays on a curious argument: the number of people who died in the British coal mines in the year 1912. According to his information, out of the 1,089,090 miners employed in the British coal mines, 1,276 died and 150,652 were injured.

“This means that fourteen per cent (*italics are his*) of the workers devoted to extract coal in your land have been victims, in a year, of accidents, that range from the loss of their lives to the loss of their limbs, etc.”

And he asks:

“Don’t you think that it would be macabre to wonder if those dead and injured miners should have achieved a fair compensation to match their efforts with their salaries?”⁸⁶

Rey de Castro questions Michell’s and Casement’s moral authority to criticise the Aranas.

⁸⁵ Rey de Castro, Carlos. *Los Escándalos*. P. 166.

⁸⁶ Ibid. P. 84.

“Anyone who reads your intransigent criticism, would imagine that in England, everything is marvellous, and that the people and government of the United Kingdom are a model for the rest of the world”⁸⁷.

After this he lists a series of events of 1913: attacks by the suffragists,

“(who are) prodigious not because of their never-ending repetitions but due to their never-ending impunity”. February, a bomb explodes in Lloyd George’s house in Walton Heat; another bomb explodes in Kew Gardens. March, a bomb blows in the post office at Devenport (sic); two train stations in Saunderland (sic) and Croxley-Green are burnt, there is fire in the hippodrome...⁸⁸.

He finishes this part of his attack with an invitation to Consul Michell to

“...go back to London or Dublin, to fight suffragists [*italics are Rey de Castro’s*] (...) you might be able to save your land from the ridiculous positions it is at the moment!”⁸⁹

Rey de Castro also attacks the report by attacking the British colonial system. In a chapter entitled “The English altruism”, the author says that

⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 86

⁸⁸ Ibid. Pp. 86-88.

⁸⁹ Ibid P. 90.

“You shout and gesticulate in England so the rubber tainted with the blood of the Putumayo does not get in your country and, in the meantime, you are ready to open, with cannons if this was necessary, the gates of China to keep on introducing the abominable opium, tainted with its own homicidal *tara*⁹⁰.”

Rey de Castro clearly refers to the opium trade caused by Britain’s full control of Chinese trade during almost all the second half of the 19th century. By the 1880s, opium was China’s main import, mainly from India. The collapse of China after the Sino-Chinese war (1894-5) marked the end of Britain’s domination of Chinese commerce⁹¹.

Rey de Castro ends with account with an attack to the Anti Slavery Society and Roger Casement. For Rey de Castro the main reason for the Society’s intervention was a desire for revenge because of the “contempt with which the British directors of the Peruvian Amazon Co. Ltd. treated it”. Rey de Castro accuses Casement of going to the Putumayo not only as a representative of the Foreign Office but also of the Anti-Slavery Society, something, he says, he kept quiet about⁹². He reprints an article published by the Portuguese daily *A Lucta* from Lisbon on 29th October 1912. In it, a journalist interviews a Colonel Wyllie “a friend of Portugal and our ultramarine administrative system”. Wyllie is described as a British colonial officer. The London Anti-Slavery Society had accused Portugal of promoting slavery in one of its African colonies: Sao Thome. For *A Lucta*, the Anti-Slavery Society campaign not a humanitarian one but “a pretext for political and commercial speculation”. According to Wyllie, the Anti-Slavery Society had been criticised by some of its members for worrying about Portugal while slavery persisted in British colonies.

⁹⁰ Ibid. P. 50.

⁹¹ James, Lawrence. *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*. (Abacus, London 2001, reprint). P. 241.

“In San Thome I could see that – after a detailed visit to all the plantations, after speaking to the labourers and after I saw the almost tender way they are treated, either at work or when they were ill – the famous indignation that certain newspapers and anti-slavery societies in London showed was only a will-o’-the-wisp to exploit the good faith of many people...”⁹³.

According to the interviewee, the instigator of the campaign against Portugal was Henry Wood Nevinson, a man who had been in the island for a bit more than a week. Such campaign, according to Wyllie, was used to attack William Cadbury, the chocolate maker, in whose cocoa producing plantations in Portuguese Africa slavery occurred. Nevinson’s campaign led to a boycott of Cadbury’s products. Wyllie insists that the campaign was a political plot by Nevinson’s Unionist Party in order to

“...destroy the Liberal Party, to which those English chocolate makers are affiliated, (they are) wealthy people with a great deal of influence⁹⁴”.

The reproduction of this particular article in Rey de Castro’s book seems to be deliberate. Henry Wood Nevinson was a distinguished journalist and campaigner. During the 1900s, he investigated slavery in Portuguese Africa and accused William Cadbury of allowing it in its plantations⁹⁵. Cadbury belonged to a tradition of rich Quakers with early concerns about what is called now corporate social responsibility. Both Cadbury brothers sued the papers that had published

⁹² Rey de Castro. *Los Escándalos*. P. 187.

⁹³ Ibid. Pp. 188-190.

⁹⁴ Ibid. P. 191.

⁹⁵ Reid, B. L. *The Lives of Roger Casement*. Yale University Press. (London 1976). P. 139.

the accusation⁹⁶. Both Nevinson and William Cadbury became loyal friends of Casement. Cadbury partly financed Casement's Amazon investigation⁹⁷.

"It is embarrassingly clear, based on this statement, that behind those philanthropic fits and that moralising intransigence pants the most repugnant thirst for gold, and, in order to quench it, they do not stop at anything, whether they are perfidious inventions or terrible calumnies!"⁹⁸

The final chapter in Rey de Castro's book is called "More about English Altruism". In it Rey de Castro refers to the behaviour of the British troops during the Boer War. For that purpose, the author quotes an article published by the Daily Telegraph from 17th October 1900.

"The Boers have to be informed that those who take up weapons will be killed by shooting. The fixing of a date since which an armed Boer will be treated as a rebel and executed will be beneficial". Pall Mall Gazette, 15th January 1901. We are pleased to believe that Lord Kitchener has issued an order under which (the British troops) must not take prisoners, no mercy for anyone"⁹⁹.

Rey de Castro uses quotes from Fouillé, a French philosopher.

"In Jamaica we have seen how the English organised the cruellest hunting of men when there was the slightest hint of a revolt"¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Mitchell, Angus ed. *The Amazon Journal*. P. 65.

⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 65.

⁹⁸ Rey de Castro. *Los Escándalos*. P. 193..

⁹⁹ Ibid. P. 194.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. P. 195

He also quotes Nietzsche, from his book *Jenseits Gut und Böse* (*Between Good and Evil*)

“The English needs the discipline that Christianity provides in order to be moral and humane. The English, sadder, more sensual, more selfish and more brutal than the German is also – because he is the most brutal of both – is also the most religious. He needs Christianity even more”¹⁰¹.

This explains, according to Rey de Castro Michell’s and Casement’s behaviour.

“Since they are aware of their people’s philosophy, they have understood that they needed, in order to fulfil their tenebrous plans, to make it big with their tales of horrible episodes.... Since they could not find that kind style in Latin countries, they modelled their stories in the history of impeccable England. That is why their consular reports speak about cutting bodies and killings for sport”¹⁰².

Roger Casement was knighted in 1911 for the Putumayo campaign. For Rey de Castro this is an award granted to Casement,

¹⁰¹ Ibid. P. 197.

¹⁰² Ibid. P. 195.

“...at the expense of Peru’s injured honour! (...) Mr. Casement had a laugh at everybody’s expense... (he) did what he did in order to fulfil two ambitions: aristocratic consecration and to save The Foreign Secretary Mr. (Edward) Grey from ridicule if the Putumayo crimes were not proven...”¹⁰³.

Judge Valcárcel’s account

Unlike Rey de Castro, Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel published his account in Peru. He dedicated his book (“these pages of horror”) to the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society in London, “to whose generous and charitable actions 10,000 aborigines in the Putumayo owe their lives”¹⁰⁴.

His book starts defensively. He complains about “violent attacks” during his investigations of the Putumayo atrocities and his suspension during seven months especially after he ordered the arrest of several directors from the Peruvian Amazon Company, including Julio Cesar Arana. The company had accused him of serving foreign interests, both British and Colombian which, as we know, had a territorial claim over an area in the Putumayo region¹⁰⁵.

“I have heard many people in Peru say that, as a matter of patriotism, one must not tell the truth about the Putumayo events; I believe however that it is precisely an act of patriotism to tell the truth about them”¹⁰⁶.

Arana always maintained that an attack to his interests was an attack against Peru’s territorial integrity. In his letter to President Augusto B. Leguia on 15

¹⁰³ Ibid. Pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁴ Valcárcel, Carlos A. *El Proceso*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Pp. I and II. Prologue.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. III

January 1921, Julio Cesar Arana, whose rubber company was in process of liquidation, accuses Casement of

“following the plan developed by General Reyes”¹⁰⁷.

General Rafael Reyes was president of Colombia at the time. There is no evidence that Roger Casement ever met General Reyes or any members of his government. However, in his letter to President Leguia, Arana calls Casement “an agent of Colombia in the Putumayo”, and accuses him of “disloyalty towards our country”¹⁰⁸.

In the introduction to his book, Judge Valcárcel says that Roger Casement’s reports were based mainly in his interviews with Barbadians employees of Arana’s company. For him, this affected the report’s validity. This is not correct. Valcárcel claims to have a more comprehensive account of the atrocities than Casement because the British diplomat only talked to people who spoke his language:

“as a foreign official, Mr. Casement has not heard, in Peruvian territory, any statements of individuals other than from his own nationality, which means that those reports could give the impression that (...there are) gaps and shortcomings”¹⁰⁹.

For Judge Valcárcel, the fact that the Barbadians that Casement questioned were “criminals” makes it easy for those responsible of the crimes easy to defend themselves. This criticism of Casement’s report seems to be an attempt to enhance his own. Valcárcel says that Casement

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Julio Cesar Arana to President Augusto B. Leguia, 15th January 1921. P. 40.

¹⁰⁸ Arana to Leguia. P. 42.

¹⁰⁹ Valcárcel, Carlos A. *El Proceso del Putumayo*. P. v

“did not act like a judge, and did not have all the resources a judge usually has at his disposal, therefore he could not prove many of the crimes he does not and could not talk about...”¹¹⁰.

Judge Valcárcel’s book starts with the history of the Putumayo process. He fixes the initial date as 1907, with information published in newspapers of Lima and Iquitos, that is *La Felpa* and *La Sanción* owned by Benjamín Saldaña Roca. Arana made sure that Saldaña was expelled from Iquitos and died in Lima four years later, in complete poverty¹¹¹. Saldana’s account is horrifying. Judge Valcárcel reproduces one of the articles published by Saldaña in his papers.

“Victor Macedo, the manager of La Chorrera one of those wretched assassins, usually lets his criminal instincts loose-reined; he enjoys burning and killing the peaceful inhabitants of the jungle. One of those acts of ferocity committed by those wretched enemies of human kind (...) took place during the carnival of 1903 (it would have been in February, and it was an abominable and horrible crime.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. P. v

¹¹¹ Mitchell, Angus. *The Amazon Journal*. P. 216.

Unfortunately, around 800 Ocaina Indians arrived in La Chorrera to hand over the products they had harvested (...) After they were weighed, the man who led them, Fidel Velarde, selected 25 of them, accusing them of laziness. This accusation made by Velarde was enough for Macedo and his accomplices to order that sacks dipped in gasoline were placed on the Indians like a tunic and they were set alight. The order was dully obeyed and one could see the dreadful image of those miserable (Indians) throwing sharp and doleful screams running towards the river to get in it hoping to save themselves, but all of them died”¹¹².

In the next paragraph, Valcárcel reproduces another article.

“Another case, that should be noticed by us and the whole universe is the Spartan valour displayed by Jose Inocente Fonseca towards the miserable Indian women who are his lovers and servants too. Approximately a year ago, Fonseca entered the quarters where many Indian women live, aged between 8 and 15 years old. He entered the bedroom and found that his daughter Juanita together with Laura, an Indian woman, had picked up a cigarette from the floor and was smoking it, escaping the supervision of Tránsito (the Indian woman in charge of the quarters). Tránsito’s negligence was enough for (Fonseca) to take out his gun and to shoot poor Tránsito five times. Naturally, Transito died”¹¹³.

Valcárcel sustains that there was some concern about the possibility that, with so many killing the region could be depopulated. Miguel Flores, was ordered by Victor Macedo

¹¹² Valcárcel, Carlos A. *El Proceso del Putumayo*. pp. 4-5.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 5

“...not to kill so many Indians in his orgies”¹¹⁴,

and that he can only do it if the Indians did not fulfil their quota of rubber.

“Because of that superior order Flores only killed 40 Indians in two months, but flogging and torture and mutilations continued. They cut fingers, arms, ears, legs, (the Indians) were castrated, and these are the deeds of one of the accused, employees of J. C. Arana and Brothers”¹¹⁵.

These are just two examples of the nature of Judge Valcárcel’s introduction to the issue. There are crude descriptions of rape, like the case of Bartolome Zumaeta, who kidnapped a married woman.

“...he took her by forced, despite her partner’s protestations and after he satisfied his carnal desires, he flogged her, chained her and dumped her in a rubber warehouse, where she died days later”¹¹⁶.

Ironically, at the end of his account, Judge Valcarcel defends Roger Casement’s mission by confirming Arana’s accusation that the British Consul only interviewed the Barbadian foremen. As far as he was concerned, this fact he did not interviewed Peruvians meant that Casement did not interfere in Peruvian affairs. He believed that England did nothing wrong in investigating the atrocities because such that kind of inquiries, related to slavery, are part of a Cooperation Treaty signed by Peru and the United Kingdom in October 1852¹¹⁷. And it continues:

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.5

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. P. 7

¹¹⁷ Ibid. P. 305.

“To say that a country’s sovereignty is undermined because another nation asks it to do something in favour of the victims of atrocious torture, it to admit that the former has no idea what sovereignty is about, it is to confess that it does not have sentiments of justice and humanity”¹¹⁸.

Judge Valcárcel believes that, thanks to England, the situation got better in the Putumayo region.

In his conclusion, Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel mentions Carlos Rey de Castro’s Open Letter and dismisses it as a shabby attempt to defend the indefensible. He believes that, apart from Roger Casement’s report, there are enough evidences to conclude that there was a systematic and ruthless campaign of hunting and slaving of the Putumayo Indians.

A great deal of Judge Valcárcel’s account is devoted to a long and sometimes tortuously legalistic description of the process. However, the value of his account lays in the fact that it is the most passionate and authentic account of the atrocities published by a Peruvian. He concludes:

“For men who have certain ideas about justice, and when their institutions reflect those ideas, violations like these cause immense moral suffering”¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. P. 307.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. P. 326.

CHAPTER 6

THE REACTION OF COLOMBIA TO THE ATROCITIES

Background

Julio Cesar Arana used the territorial dispute as an argument to defend his presence in the Putumayo, in so far as the Peruvian Government would see it as a barrier against Colombian ambitions. Any attempts to link the atrocities with the territorial dispute, was used by Arana's protectors to insist that the defence of the Putumayo Indians was a pretext to support Colombian claims over Peruvian land. In any case it was inevitable that Colombia would use the atrocities as an argument to ascertain its demands over parts of the Putumayo region. The Colombian Government did not disappoint Arana.

General Rafael Reyes was president of Colombia between 1904 and 1909. During his presidency, in 1906, Peru and Colombia established a *modus vivendi* in the Putumayo region. The Peruvian troops left the area and Colombia accepted Arana's operations in part of the territories claimed by the government of Bogotá. Both countries were hoping to discuss a final demarcation at a later date. In 1907, the first denunciations of the atrocities appeared in the Peruvian press, at a time when Colombia and Brazil, another country with territorial claims in the region, signed a *modus vivendi* treaty. Casement's investigations started in 1910 and Arana did not waste time to relate Colombia's claims to Casement's activities¹²⁰. Arana, whose actions were condemned by, among other, Pope Pius X, became the symbol of Amazonian entrepreneurial spirit. Arana and other Peruvian rubber companies had managed to consolidate their economic interests in the Putumayo

¹²⁰ Palacios, Marco and Safford, Frank. *Colombia. País Fragmentado, Sociedad Dividida*. Grupo Editorial Norma. (Bogotá 2002). Pp. 515-516.

region at the expense of Colombian companies¹²¹. This situation changed dramatically after the collapse of the South American rubber boom in 1914¹²². However, Arana's influence did not end with the collapse of the rubber boom. Arana consolidates his presence in the region with more *caucheros*.

In 1922, The Peruvian and Colombian Governments signed secretly the so-called Salomon-Lozano Treaty¹²³. The treaty was only ratified by the Peruvian Congress in 1927. In it, Peru gave Colombia the left bank of the Putumayo River, also known as the Leticia trapezium, thus making the latter an Amazonian country. The treaty enraged Arana and other entrepreneurs, who orchestrated an invasion of Leticia. Arana had reasons to be unhappy: a great deal of his company remained in Colombia.

In the early hours of 1st September 1932, Peruvian troops stationed in Iquitos and a group of civilians invaded Leticia, formed a “patriotic junta” and started a non-declared war against Colombia. The then Peruvian president, the dictator Colonel Luis M. Sánchez Cerro, approved the invasion. Sánchez Cerro had accused President Leguía, whom he deposed in a bloody coup in 1930, of betraying Peru by making concessions to Colombia in the Putumayo region and was very happy to endorse the invasion. But the dictator was assassinated and replaced by General Oscar R. Benavides, who did not want troubles with Colombia. The 1934 protocol recognised Colombia's claim over the left banks of the Putumayo River. Arana's influence had started to fade away.

¹²¹ Palacios, Marco and Safford, Frank. *Colombia*. P. 516.

¹²² Palacios, Marco and Safford, Frank. *Colombia*. P. 516.

¹²³ This episode of relations between Peru and Colombia are based on Contreras, Carlos & Cueto, Marcos. *Historia del Perú*, and Palacios, Marco and Safford, Frank. *Colombia, País Fragmentado, Sociedad Dividida*.

Colombia in London

On 19th June 1913, an advert was published in *The Times South American Supplement* by Carlos Larrabure y Correa, Head of the Peruvian Government's Information Bureau in Europe. It was an angry response to a letter sent by Mr. S. Restrepo, the Colombian Chargé d'Affaires in London, on 10th May 1913 to *The Times*. Mr. Restrepo's letter stated that

“The Select Committee appointed by the House of Commons has had, of course, nothing to do with the international dispute between Peru and Colombia. The Putumayo atrocities, on the other hand, are so closely bound up with the international status of the territory that any attempt to disassociate the two is futile. (...) No one who has read the evidence submitted to the Select Committee, as well as the report of Sir Roger Casement and the publication of Mr. Hardenburg (...) and also ‘The Putumayo Red Book’, which deals exclusively with every aspect of the case, can plead ignorance of the respective positions of the two Republics in the regions of the Putumayo or of the conditions obtaining on either side of the disputed frontier”.¹²⁴

In its reply, later published as a pamphlet, Larrabure y Correa, on behalf of the Peruvian Government, insisted that the denunciations of the atrocities were

¹²⁴ Thomson, Norman. *Colombia and Peru in the Putumayo Territory*. A Reply to the Defence of the Peruvian Government. N. Thomson & Co. (London 1914).

“...a pretext for the malicious and studiously calculated campaign of defamation recently begun against Peru. (...) In the mind of the Colombian Chargé d’Affaires the question of sovereignty over these districts is intimately connected with the cessation in the ill-treatment of the aborigines—ill-treatment for which it is desired to make the Peruvian authorities and the citizens of my country responsible—since, according to Mr. Restrepo, the Colombian sense of justice and humanity would render impossible the repetition of such acts...”¹²⁵

According to Larrabure’s letter, Roger Casement, the British Consul George Michell and Mr. Fuller, the American Consul confirmed that the Putumayo region was in the Peruvian side, when they visited the area to investigate the atrocities¹²⁶. Larrabure’s letter returns to the argument that there was a systematic campaign to blame Peruvian entrepreneurs of maltreating the Putumayo Indians. The Peruvian diplomat accuses Europe of ignorance in relation to the border dispute, by defending the *caucheros*.

“It is ignored, for instance, that the Putumayo region is formed by vast territories, even bigger than England and Ireland put together, covered by impenetrable forests and inhabited by wild tribes, most of which are ferocious and cannibals. The *caucheros* who exploit those regions have to live in perpetual apprehension and in a state of constant guard”¹²⁷.

¹²⁵ Larrabure y Correa, Carlos. *Perú y Colombia en el Putumayo*. Replica a una publicación aparecida con fecha 27 de Mayo último en el suplemento sudamericano de The Times de Londres. Imprenta Viuda de Luis Tasso. (Barcelona 1913). The author of this dissertation made the translation of this pamphlet.

¹²⁶ Ibid. P. 21.

¹²⁷ Ibid P. 27

Larrabure does what Rey de Castro did in his defence of Arana: attacks the countries that got involved in the denunciation and investigation of the atrocities by denouncing double standards.

”Have they forgotten, for their sins, the horrors caused by the Gold Rush in California? Do they not remember the hunting of Red Skin Indians by the conquerors of the American Far West, or the methods they put into practice in 1857 to put down the Sipahi insurrection in Delhi and Punjab, or the scandals related to the extraction of diamonds in South Africa? And when those crimes against humanity were committed, did anyone raised a voice of condemnation against the sovereign governments in those regions for not having stopped in time those massacres, against which, the exaggerated crimes in the Putumayo lose all relevance?”¹²⁸

Larrabure’s pamphlet starts with a letter that Arana must have sent to several people (“Manaos 9th July 1913, Mister_____”) in which he angrily rejects “six years of a tireless campaign of defamation against the rubber companies”. This is probably one of the few documents where Arana defends himself from Casement’s accusations. In his letter, Arana accuses members of the Putumayo “Sellect (sic) Committee” of behaving in a way that is

¹²⁸ Ibid. P. 28

“...opposed to the truth, logic and the alleged rectitude of English justice, and my silence about this would not only be inexcusable but criminal”¹²⁹.

The letter mentions Larrabure’s defence as a proof that the Putumayo belongs to Peru:

“(...) the head of the Peruvian information office in Europe has incontrovertibly proven, with his independent character, his remarkable patriotism and his vast cultural background that the areas where I funded my rubber companies belong to Peru”¹³⁰.

In his letter, the owner of the Peruvian Amazon Company argues that Casement’s visits to the Putumayo region and Iquitos

“violated the most elemental principles of international loyalty, they followed a plan designed beforehand to save the reputation of an English Officer, who was related to English magnates; to protect the interests of Truth magazine and to protect Mr. Grey’s self respect. Mr. Casement’s process relays only in the null and void statements made by some Barbadian Negroes who did not hold any responsibility whatsoever in the company and under circumstances that make such statements repudiable and almost criminal.”¹³¹.

¹²⁹ Ibid. P. 3.

¹³⁰ Ibid. P. 3.

¹³¹ Ibid. P. 5

The English officer mentioned by Arana must be Colonel Reginald Bertie, a member of the Commission of Inquiry who had to abandon the mission because he got ill with dysentery and was forced to return to London. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, whose “self-respect” Casement “protected” insisted in the investigation.

Arana rejects the accusations because, he insists, they have nothing to do with the welfare of the Putumayo Indians but with the interests of the Colombian government.

“Both the Foreign Office and Mr. Casement -specially the latter – have been influenced in a way that leaves no doubts, by official and unofficial Colombian agents, who have skilfully taken advantage of the English pride and the sickening fanaticism that some people in the United Kingdom practice, being the suffragists the perfect example (of this fanaticism)”¹³².

Arana also accuses Consuls Michell (British) and Fuller (USA) of not telling the truth during their visit to the Putumayo in 1912.

Although the Putumayo Select Committee did not deal with the dispute directly, as we have seen in the report, the reference of the territorial quarrel was enough for the Colombian Government to react. Indeed, the fact that the Colombian Government mentioned Roger Casement’s Report was enough for Julio Cesar Arana to accuse him of plotting with the Colombian authorities.

The Colombian Government used selected parts of the Putumayo Select Committee’s final Report to underline Peruvian attempts to establish a de facto

¹³² Ibid. P. 5

status of sovereignty in the Putumayo. The Colombian Governmental Defence of its position is based in J. C. Arana's admission that his decision to set up a British company was part of a plan to set up a delimitation of borders that would benefit Peru. Thus, the Colombian Government took advantage of the atrocities by using them to link the Putumayo events to the question of territorial ownership:

“In view of the admitted fact, it is impossible to separate the question of sovereignty from the methods adopted by J. C. Arana in carrying on the business of the company of which he was a director. Moreover, the Report of the Select Committee specifically points out that it was owing to the disputed ownership of this territory that the atrocities were made possible”¹³³.

Indeed, during his testimony before the Putumayo Select Committee, J. C. Arana admitted that was the case

“12250. Did you think it would be useful to have a company trading an English name in case of political complications between Colombia and Peru?—I admit now I would have considered it an advantage; but the principal advantage was, I mean, to retire from business as I had spent 20 or 30 years in the valley of the Amazon”.¹³⁴

In several parts of the *Colombia and Peru* document, the Colombian Government uses parts of the different accounts related to the Putumayo atrocities to insist

¹³³ Thomson, Norman. *Colombia and Peru*. P. 6

¹³⁴The Report and Special report from the Select Committee on Putumayo with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices. P. 498.

that it never invaded Peruvian territory, it was a victim of Arana's raids and that the territories were Arana operated were Colombian.

If Julio Cesar Arana manipulated the question of territorial sovereignty in order to consolidate his power base with governmental approval, the Colombian Government is not entirely innocent of such manipulation. In 1913, Norman Thomson, the author of the Colombia and Peru... document published his Putumayo Red Book¹³⁵. The book had Colombia's coat of arms in the cover. In it, the author claims that his book was a continuation of Casement's Blue Book. Indeed, Thomson insists that his book corrects things that the Blue Book "fails to accomplish"¹³⁶. Thomson uses selected paragraphs from the account made by Roger Casement, Hardenburg and the Putumayo Select Committee. Those paragraphs are directly related to raids made by Arana in the disputed territories. There are also legalistic arguments to justify Colombian territorial claims. Roger Casement suggested that the only solution for the Indians of the Putumayo "directly depended on their being given a two years' rest from rubber-gathering". For the author of the Red Book,

"...under Colombian jurisdiction the rubber-gathering industry in the Putumayo would be suspended and in this way the Indians given their freedom"¹³⁷.

The author does not say how the Colombian Government planned to implement such policies and, although the cover of the Red Book has a subtitle that reads "Containing proposals for the protection of the aborigines and the effective

¹³⁵ Thomson, Norman. *The Putumayo Red Book*. (N. Thomson & Co. London 1913).

¹³⁶ Ibid. Preface to the First Edition.

¹³⁷ Ibid. P. 144.

administration of the Putumayo regions under the international board”, not such proposals appeared in Thomson’s volume.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Julio Cesar Arana and his accomplices were never punished for their crimes. How did he get away with that despite the overwhelming evidence of his culpability? In the first instance, he took advantage of the geographical context in which he operated. As we have seen, the remoteness of the Putumayo region allowed him to operate without intrusion. It was also widely acknowledged that effective administration of justice was impossible. The presence of the state was limited to Iquitos. The economy in the Amazon, as it occurred in other parts of Peru, was not integrated into a national project. That relative independence from the urban centres allowed local entrepreneurs to have control over that economy. There was also a constant attempt to dismiss Casement's accusations by denying validity to his interviews with the Barbadians. This is a recurrent pattern, in the case of the company's defence.

In political terms, Peru was going through a transition period, from a militarist period, an era of domination by the military leaders that ended in 1985. The 1879 war against Chile that Peru lost had diminished the influence of the army, and the *civilismo*, a movement formed by landowners and the intellectual elites, started to assert its influence in the Peruvian political arena. They wanted a more internationally integrated society. At that time, Peru contracted its first foreign debt as a way to rebuild its post-war economy. Economists and sociologists replaced historians and artists as the intellectual elite.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Contreras, Carlos & Cueto, Marcos. *Historia del Perú*. P. 169.

It was around this time that Positivism and Social Darwinism started to influence Peruvian society. The need to civilize and educate the Indians, the lowest in the social range, became a fashionable idea, like in Argentina and Chile¹³⁹.

Arana could easily claim that his entrepreneurial adventures were part of this attempt. Indeed, he said before the Select Committee that the Indians were more civilized because of the company, having stopped their cannibalistic practices¹⁴⁰.

At a regional level, Arana could manipulate the political contradiction within Loreto society, which was divided in two political movements: *La Cueva* (The Cave) and *La Liga* (The League). Non-Amazonian people mainly formed *La Cueva*; they were public officials and professionals who did run the local government and judiciary. They represented what the members of *La Liga*, the upper and middle class *Loretanos* saw as the representatives of a state that did not understand local politics. Both Judge Romulo Peredes and Carlos A. Valcarcel belonged to *La Cueva*. The members of *La Liga* considered Julio Cesar Arana as a symbol of Amazonian entrepreneurial spirit. Consequently, when Justices Paredes and Valcarcel issued their reports with the respective arrest warrants, Arana's men could mobilize local public opinion against that¹⁴¹.

In the international context, Arana was able to manipulate the nationalist sentiments that the border dispute with Colombia entailed. He was perceived as a defender of Peruvian interests in the Putumayo region. Colombia's reaction to the atrocities suited Arana well. It is symptomatic that a letter Arana must have sent to several people was printed at the beginning of an official Peruvian document responding to Colombian territorial claims made in London at the time of the Select Committee investigation. Such nationalist sentiments permitted

¹³⁹ Ibid. P. 172.

¹⁴⁰ *The Report and Special report*, P. 489.

¹⁴¹ Santos Granero, Fernando & Barclay, Frederica. *La Frontera*. Pp. 193-194.

Arana to accuse Casement of acting on behalf of Colombia. As we have seen, Arana went as far as accusing Roger Casement of following plans designed by the Colombian president at the time of the atrocities in order to gain territories in the Putumayo. In a country that had lost land only thirty years earlier in the war against Chile, territorial concessions would have been seen as treason. At the end, pragmatism prevailed and, as we have seen, future governments gave Colombia part of the Putumayo region. By that time, the Amazon rubber had ended.

In addition, Arana did not hesitate to bribe a public official; such is the case of Carlos Rey de Castro, to defend his cause.

It is important to note that Great Britain did not have vital economic or political interests in the region. Moreover, unlike the Congo, the atrocities in the Putumayo had been committed by a company and not by a government. This situation imposed limits to any actions Great Britain could take. This is partly why it could not act as it did in the case of Leopold's Congo, where an international conference changed the colonial regime in that part of Africa. The pressure that the British government applied on the government of Lima to investigate and castigate the guilty was never strong enough. Furthermore, Roger Casement's arrest and his trial and execution for treason in 1916, only benefited Arana and the Peruvian government¹⁴². How can anyone trust a man who betrayed his country? In the letter, Arana sent to president Leguia in 1921, Arana points out that:

¹⁴² Sawyer, Roger. *Casement, the Flawed Hero*. P. 107.

“A prominent character in the campaign of defamation was Roger Casement, who would pay for a life of hypocrisy and disloyalty with the ultimate punishment: the gallows, after he was found guilty of the black crime of treason to the cause of England and the cause of humankind and the law”¹⁴³.

It is difficult to know whether things would have been different had Roger Casement been aware of these historical elements or if he never got involved in the Irish cause. At no time, in any case, he seemed to be aware of the importance of the regional political context or the border dispute with Colombia. Casement simply looked after the interests of the Indians, and had to fight against an astute man, whose power was immense.

After the Putumayo Report was issued, Casement was already concentrating his effort in the cause for which he would pay with his life¹⁴⁴. By that time, the rubber prices had collapsed. In 1914, the British had started selling cheaper rubber from its plantations in Southeast Asia¹⁴⁵, causing the end of the rubber boom.

Not a single director or employee of the Peruvian Amazon Company ever paid for the crimes committed against the Putumayo Indians. Casement later became the subject of endless speculations about his homosexual diaries and the Amazonian economy moved to new products, like wood, oil and, more recently, coca. Many Indians decided to isolate themselves once again to avoid any contact with Western civilization¹⁴⁶. It is difficult not to be tempted to use the word “failure” to describe the results of Casement’s campaign, because the working

¹⁴³ Arana Letter to President Leguia.

¹⁴⁴ Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement*. P. 394.

¹⁴⁵ Santos Granero, Fernando & Barclay, Frederica. *La Frontera*. P. 172.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Roger Rumrill, the most important specialist in the Peruvian Amazon. July 2003.

conditions improved in the rubber production centres, as Consul Michell reported, but slavery was still practiced long after the Putumayo Select Committee published its report. Many Indians had died, other had been tortured, many families were destroyed and their identity hurt. Three days after Casement was executed, some Putumayo Indians decided to take justice into their own hands. A rebellion took place in one of Arana's camps. Thirteen white employees died¹⁴⁷. Nevertheless, this futile rebellion did not change the nature of slavery in the region. In the letter he sent to his friend Richard Morten, just before his execution where he acknowledges Arana's telegram, he wrote:

"The poor Indians ... The whole world is a sorry place, Dick, but it is our fault, our fault. We reap what we sow, not altogether but we get our deserts – all except the Indians and such like. They get more than they deserved – they never sowed what 'civilization' gave them as the price of toil"¹⁴⁸.

This is probably a fitting summary for a tragedy that figures in the history of infamy.

¹⁴⁷ Inglis Brian. *Roger Casement*. P. 392

¹⁴⁸ Montgomery Hide, H. *Famous Trials*. P. 149.

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