



Volume 14(2) 2011

ISSN: 1393-8592

Irish Journal of Anthropology

The *Irish Journal of Anthropology* is the organ of the Anthropological Association of Ireland. As such, it aims to promote the discipline of anthropology on the island of Ireland, north and south. It seeks to provide coverage of Irish-related matters and of issues in general anthropology and to be of interest to anthropologists inside and outside academia, as well as to colleagues in a range of other disciplines, such as Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Development Studies, Ethnology and Folk Studies, Gaeilge, Irish Studies, and Sociology.

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The *Irish Journal of Anthropology* appears twice a year, in Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter.

Annual Subscriptions: Members: Waged – €30/£20; Student/Retired – €15/£10
(2011) Overseas (incl. P&P): €25/£17; Institutions: €80/£70

Orders, accompanied by payment, should be sent to *Irish Journal of Anthropology*, c/o Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth, Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland. Telephone: +353 1 708 3984; fax: +353 1 708 3570; e-mail: anthropology.office@nuim.ie

Members of the AAI receive the journal as part of their membership subscription. Information about membership can be found on the AAI web-site: www.anthropologyireland.org

Advertising Rates: Full Page: €100; Half Page: €60; Quarter Page: €40

Table of Contents

Editorial Note

Biographical Notes

Articles

5. Séamas Ó'Siocháin
'More power to the Indians': Roger Casement, the Putumayo, and indigenous rights
13. Juan Alvaro Echeverri
The Putumayo Indians and the Rubber Boom
19. Bryanna Hocking
Transforming the Stone: Reimagining Derry's Diamond War Memorial in the new 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland
26. Robert Power
45-51 Park Place: Transmitting Cordoba's medieval past in the Ground Zero present
33. Danielle Johnson
Saving Seed, Saving Ourselves: An investigation into the meaning of biodiversity at the Irish Seed Savers Association
39. Hilary Foye
Desperate Church wives: Experiencing conflict, negotiating gender and managing emotion in Christian community
46. Threase Finnegan
Creating reciprocal relationships within the mumming community
50. Ranmalie Jayawardana
Cultivating kinship: An exploration of creating feelings of relatedness through food production and consumption in northern Sri Lanka

Book Reviews

55. Liam D. Murphy. *Believing in Belfast: Charismatic Christianity after the Troubles*. (Roger Manktelow)
55. Abdullahi Osman El-Tom. *Darfur, JEM and the Khalil Ibrahim Story*. (Deborah Mills)
56. Gordon Ramsay. *Flutes, Drums and Loyal Sons: Music, Emotion and Identity in Ulster Marching Bands*. (Aoife Granville)
58. Marta Kempny. *Polish Migrants in Belfast: border crossing and identity construction*. (Mark Maguire)

Conference Reports

60. Anthropological Association of Ireland Conference 2011, University of Ulster, Belfast (Alex O'Connell)
60. Creativity and Innovation in a World of Movement Conference 2011, The Queen's University Belfast (Amit Desai)

Editorial Note (Fiona Larkan)

This Autumn/Winter 2011 issue of the Irish Journal of Anthropology includes the winning entry for the Anthropological Association of Ireland's Postgraduate Essay Prize. This prize is awarded annually to a postgraduate whose research strengthens the anthropological tradition in Ireland. Congratulations to Bryanna Hocking (see page 19) whose winning essay looks at 'post-conflict' efforts to re-imagine Derry's Diamond War Memorial (front cover picture) as a relevant civic space for all. Ranmalie Jayawardana and Threase Finnegan are holders of the best undergraduate thesis awards at The Queen's University Belfast, and NUI Maynooth respectively. In addition we are delighted to include papers drawn from an inter-disciplinary symposium held in March 2011 to commemorate the 101-year anniversary of Sir Roger Casement's Putumayo journey to investigate allegations of atrocities connected with the rubber production activities of the Peruvian Amazon Company. Séamas Ó Síocháin writes of Casement's commitment to what we would now call 'indigenous rights' while Juan Alvaro Echeverri depicts the legacy and memory of that period amongst today's Putumayo Indians.

Biographies

Séamas Ó Síocháin was Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth. His publications include *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary* (Lilliput Press, 2008) and *Social Thought and the Irish Question in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009).

Juan Alvaro Echeverri is a Colombian anthropologist who has worked in the Amazon region since the 1980s, mainly with the Witoto and other neighbouring indigenous groups of the Putumayo. He holds a Ph.D. degree from New School for Social Research in New York. Currently he teaches at the Amazon Campus of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Bryanna (Bree) Hocking is a PhD candidate in Irish Studies at Queen's University Belfast, where her research focuses on the politics of public art and space in Northern Ireland. A former staff writer for the Congressional newspaper Roll Call, Hocking holds a bachelor's from Georgetown and a master's from the University of Limerick, where she was a George Mitchell Scholar.

Robert Power, IRCHSS Scholar, John and Pat Hume Scholar, is an interdisciplinary PhD candidate supervised by the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Spanish, NUI Maynooth. His PhD research focuses on the performance and dissemination of a plural medieval religious heritage during a new festival in Frigiliana, Andalusia.

Danielle Johnson completed a Diploma in Fine Art at Central St Martins, London, in 2005, and an MA in Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews in 2009. She has subsequently moved to New Zealand, where she continues her own research into people/plant relationships and the social importance of gardening.

Hilary Foye is a PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests span issues of conflict, emotion, ritual and identity, particularly within Christianity. Her MA fieldwork was based in Northern Ireland and provides the foundation for her current project, entitled: 'Christianity, Conflict and Community: Expressions of Faith, Emotion and Personhood in the Contemporary Church.'

Threase Finnegan is a Masters student in Anthropology, at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Her interests within anthropology include Irish traditional music, mumming, changing traditions, reciprocity and the concept of identity. She is also an Irish traditional music teacher, and flute player in the Irish music group 'Anám'.

Ranmalie Jayawardana was born and attended school in Surrey before undertaking her bachelor's degree at Queen's University Belfast in Social Anthropology. She received an undergraduate scholarship from the School of History & Anthropology and the Anne Maguire Prize for her dissertation. She remains at Queen's studying for her Masters.

'More power to the Indians': Roger Casement, the Putumayo, and indigenous rights

Séamas Ó Síocháin*

Abstract: *Marking the centenary of Roger Casement's humanitarian investigations in the Putumayo region of the Upper Amazon, this article suggests that he not only recognized the abuses there as systemic but increasingly saw them as part of the wider features of exploitation which accompanied colonization and empire. His Putumayo work illustrated a long-term commitment on his part to what we would term today indigenous rights.*

Key Words: *Casement, Putumayo, Empire, Race, Indigenous Rights*

Casement in the Putumayo, 1910

On 22 September 1910, a little over one-hundred years ago, Roger Casement arrived at La Chorrera, the local headquarters of the Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC) on the River Igarapará in the Putumayo region of the Upper Amazon, to investigate allegations of atrocities perpetrated by PAC employees in connection with the collecting of wild rubber.¹ The main victims were the indigenous people of the area, used as a workforce by the company. Casement was representing the British Government and accompanying a company commission of investigation, also sent out from London. British involvement derived from two facts: that the PAC was registered in London and that many of its employees in the Putumayo came from the island of Barbados, a British colony.²

From then until he departed the area on 16 November, he carried out intensive interviews of Barbadian employees, visited other rubber stations, observed his surroundings closely, and reflected and wrote constantly. He acquired the detailed knowledge of what he needed to know about Barbadian involvement in the Putumayo and about the rubber system itself. The year 1911 was spent writing reports on the investigation (to become part of the official Blue Book), campaigning about the Putumayo, and in a second visit to Peru in the autumn in an attempt to add momentum to the campaign.

Early in 1912, Randall Davidson, the (Anglican) Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to Casement with the following words of praise:

I rejoice ... to think of the effect which has already been produced by your own competent and painstaking study of the question on the spot. I imagine that it is true to say that no one else now alive could have done quite what you have done.³

On the publication of the official Putumayo Blue Book (July 1912), *The Times* of London wrote: 'No one who reads Sir Roger Casement's Report can fail to wish it means and power to extend its civilizing influence. The existing system cries aloud to heaven' (quoted in Goodman, 2009:166). Casement himself greeted the publication of the Blue Book with more exuberant language: 'I've blown up the Devil's Paradise in Peru! ... Putumayo will be cleansed – altho' nothing can bring back the murdered tribes – poor souls.' His contribution was rewarded by the British government with a knighthood. But the affairs of the Putumayo were soon to be superseded in his life, as he was swept up in the turmoil that started with the Home Rule crisis in Ireland and ended with the Easter Rising of 1916. Between these came his sojourn in Germany during World War One and at the end, his capture, trial and execution by hanging in August 1916.

Casement and the Putumayo, 2010

One hundred years on, the centenary of Casement's Putumayo investigation was marked in Latin America by two major conferences, the first in Manaus, Brazil, and the second in Bogotá, Colombia.⁴ Apart from an *Irish Times* report on the Manaus conference, the only centenary publicity I am aware of in Ireland was a short piece in the Irish edition of the *Sunday Times* on 26 December 2010, when it carried a piece on Casement under the heading: 'Casement "was no humanitarian"'. The stimulus for the piece was the publication of an article on Casement and the Amazon in the *Irish Studies Review* written by Lesley Wylie, a lecturer in Latin American Studies at the University of Leicester.⁵ Summarizing her general thesis, Wylie writes:

This article will suggest that Casement's views on race and empire remained more or less consistent with British imperial ideology, at least with respect to non-Irish affairs, well after the Congo investigations were concluded. (316)

While there is much that is valuable and suggestive in Wylie's analysis and while it makes a limited acknowledgement (grudging almost) of Casement's humanitarianism, the thrust of her article is to suggest that behind the humanitarianism lay a basically unchanged imperial ideology, in other words that there is a major disjuncture between his feelings of sympathy and his formal imperialist and racist ideology. I suspect that a contributing factor to this interpretation is a reading of his personality. Wylie opens her article by referring to

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one of the commonly ascribed characterizations of his personality, his 'dividedness'; other terms she calls on are 'paradoxes', 'contradictions', his 'ambiguous middle line in the divisions of Irish life', his being 'marked by estrangement' (re Ireland). All seem designed to convey an impression of inconsistency, and they set the scene for her thesis – of the non-humanitarian humanitarian. In all of this one misses a balanced recognition of the broader dimension of his work.

Casement's Contribution Assessed

It is universally acknowledged that Roger Casement had a campaigning commitment to indigenous human rights, but there is more disagreement on whether he had a supporting theoretical framework. Two historians who have written perceptively about Casement have disagreed on the quality of his ideas. Andrew Porter has suggested that Casement failed to produce 'any sustained or ... mature reflection' on imperialism and that he was not a systematic thinker (quoted in O'Callaghan, 2005:56–7). Margaret O'Callaghan disagrees: 'Contrary to Porter's claim', she argues, Casement 'does have a theoretical model of colonial expansion ... He had, by any reckoning, probably made a greater contribution elsewhere than any other theorist of the evils of empire' (*ibid.*: 57–8).

I would place myself somewhere between Porter and O'Callaghan. From reading Bernard Porter's *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*, first published in 1968, one can identify two reasons why Casement's ideas are under-recognized. Firstly, Porter points out, most of the early critiques of empire he brings to light were totally unknown until the 1960s. And since, on the one hand, few of Casement's writings were published until much later than the 1960s (for example the two volumes edited by Angus Mitchell, 1997, 2003) and since, on the other hand, his ideas are scattered through his writings, his neglect as a critic of empire is understandable. Secondly, Porter points out that Africa was the predominant focus of early critiques, while India and Ireland (let alone Latin America) tended not to be included, a bias he acknowledges in his own book (Porter 2008: xvi). Hence, even though Casement's critique of Congo atrocities was known, because of the neglect of Latin America and of Ireland (especially given the importance of Ireland in Casement's world view), it is again no surprise that his contribution was neglected. With regard to the significance of Ireland to Casement, Margaret O'Callaghan is insightful when she writes that: 'the relationship between Casement's consular career, his mounting anti-imperialism, and his increasingly more self-conscious nationalism, is complicated and dialectical, not linear and sequential' (O'Callaghan: 49). He saw, for example, a direct parallel between the historical conquest of Ireland, especially the wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the colonial processes in Africa and South America – it's a theme that runs through his writing (*ibid.*: 48, 51).

Casement's phrase, 'more power to the Indians', in the title of the present article, illustrates this, resonating as it does with the colloquial use of English in Ireland.

In this context, I wish to present what I consider to be some patterned ideas of Casement moving from his regional experiences to wider level: (i) exploitation in the Congo and Putumayo as systemic; (ii) his growing recognition of exploitation in other parts of the world; (iii) a range of ideas he expressed on such topics as 'empire', 'capital', 'civilization' and 'land' (see also Ó Síocháin 2005).

Congo and Putumayo – Casement and the 'System'

Casement's African career ended with his Congo investigation of 1903 (published in 1904), which provided the necessary evidence to substantiate accusations of abuses being levelled against the Congo Free State regime. The Report, drawing on Casement's twenty-year experience in Africa, including in the Congo itself, outlined the nature of what he began to call the 'system'. In a letter to the Governor-General of the State, written at the end of his voyage of investigation, he wrote: 'I do not accuse an individual; I accuse a system'. Earlier, more emotionally, when his indignation boiled over during his stay in the Anglo-British India Rubber (ABIR) concession area, his Diary entry for 30 August reads: '16 men women & children tied up ... Infamous shameful system.'

The 'system' comprised a number of components:

- The State was directly involved in the economy – State officials were encouraged to increase rubber production and the greater the rubber output, the greater their commissions;
- vast tracts of land were parcelled out to private capital (the concessionaires), the State benefiting through what today we might call 'interlocking directorships';
- the economy was a siphon economy, with goods of very considerable value going out (rubber), but few trade goods coming in – and prominent in the list of imports being guns;
- the exploitation of local labour.

Casement's Report builds up a picture of the unrelenting oppression of the Congo State system on the local population (for details see Ó Síocháin and O'Sullivan 2003). And, of course, the Report documents the integral role of force in making this system operate: the armed punitive expeditions, the standard placement of 'forest guards' or sentries in native villages, the keeping of women and children as hostages to ensure the work compliance of husbands, the confiscation of canoes and other objects of value (e.g. brass rods/money), the fines on villages, the flogging and imprisonment, the shootings and beatings, the cutting off of hands.

When later he came to experience what he called the 'grim tragedy' of the Putumayo, rooted in 'this

wretched rush for "black gold"', it was, he felt, 'a bigger crime than that of the Congo, although committed on a far smaller stage and affecting only a few thousands of human beings, whereas the other affected millions'. It amounted to, he believed, an internal slave trade. Given the way in which he had come to recognize the systemic nature of Congo exploitation, it is not surprising that, though acknowledging the differences, he also came to describe Putumayo atrocities as systemic also. 'The system,' he wrote, 'I should attribute to the company; the individual crimes were frequently excesses of degenerate men who were employed in a responsible capacity'.

If we focus on labour exploitation, we can see that Casement has recognized the enormous amount of labour supplied by the indigenous population. At one point he listed the various tasks:

From building these huge houses (this one is fully 45 yards long and as strong as an old three-decker) clearing great tracts of forest, making plantations of yucca, mealy, sugar cane, &c. constructing roads and bridges at great labour, for these men to more easily get at them – to supplying them with 'wives', with food, with game from the chase, often with their own food just made for their own pressing wants, with labour to meet every conceivable form of demand. All this the Indians supply for absolutely no remuneration of any kind, this entirely in addition to the India rubber which is the keystone of the arch.

In Africa Casement had talked at times of the laziness of the people, but in the Putumayo his comments were on the constant work of the Indians and of the laziness of the overseers (an example of the trope reversals one finds in Casement, unacknowledged by Wylie). In exchange for their labour the Indians got little. From inventories he took of station stores, Casement concluded that virtually worthless items were given in payment for substantial loads of rubber. A tin bowl was given an Indian for an entire *fabrico* load – 70 to 80 kilos of rubber; the recipient threw it on the ground and left in disgust. He discovered, too, the degree to which the Barbadian employees were in debt to the Company.

And, as in the Congo, an integral part of the system was the use of force and great cruelty. There were the stocks (*cepo*), the routine floggings ('wealfare'), the shootings, cases of men being held under the water and half-drowned, the case of the burning of an old woman. Sexual depravity also: 'concubines everywhere', in Casement's words; women, too, could be raped while in the stocks. The Barbadian employees were used 'to help control the Indian population'. Casement stated that 'all the men still remaining at the time of my visit were employed in guarding or coercing or in actively maltreating Indians to force them to work and bring in india-rubber to the various sections'. 'There is fear

all round', he commented in the charged atmosphere of La Chorrera.

Beyond Congo and Putumayo

His experience of life in Latin America undoubtedly widened Casement's perspective on the incidence of oppression in the world; he became increasingly aware that it was not confined to the Congo and Putumayo but was close to being global. In 1911, for example, when struggling against the rubber regime in the Putumayo, he was becoming increasingly aware of similar patterns of exploitation elsewhere in Latin America. During his evidence in London to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Putumayo, he said: 'I believe there are very wrongful things taking place in that great forest in connection with getting rubber, and I would say wherever there are wild Indians the same methods are employed.' Elsewhere, exhorting his friend Edmond Morel, he wrote:

These slave pits of the earth – Congo, French Congo, Mexico, Peru, possibly Korea and Formosa under the Japanese, Angola with Sao Tomé under the Portuguese – these damnable sites of the slaver must be assailed ... Tackling Leopold in Africa has set in motion a big movement – it must be *a movement of human liberation all the world over* ... you must remember that the cause of human freedom is as wide as the world.

Given what was publicly recognized as a deep commitment to the case of the indigenous, it is not surprising that on 6 August 1913 Travers Buxton (acting for the Society) wrote, offering Casement a Vice-Presidency of the Anti-Slavery Society.

Dear Sir Roger, At the last meeting of our Committee it was unanimously resolved that you should be asked to accept the position of a Vice President of this society ... You have already done such notable service to the cause of freedom for native races that it seems only fitting that you should, if you will, be connected with our Society.

Casement politely hesitated but ultimately did not accept the offer. And subsequent events overtook any further involvement along these lines.⁶

Empire, Capital, Civilization, Land: Casement's Comparative Framework

In addition to his key concept of empire, Bernard Porter lists a number of other topics that 'usually attached themselves to (modern) imperialism' and about which there were varied opinions among critics of empire. He includes 'race, capitalism, modernization, "civilization"' in his list (Porter 2008: xxix). Scattered through Casement's writings we can find fairly

consistent patterned ideas concerning empire and these related topics.

Empire. One of his earliest formulations on empire is found in a letter to his English friend, Richard Morten, written at the beginning of 1905, i.e. after his African life but before he was posted to Latin America. The letter also reveals the strongly moral character of his thinking (it deals with three empires – Roman, Spanish, British):

If you would study history more attentively you would see this. Rome centralised the wealth of the ancient world in herself – Italy became a beautiful garden filled with the villas of the rich, maintained by the labour of millions of slaves. And Rome fell. Spain, in her pride, exploited the mines of the Indies by Carib slave labour ... and sent the wealth of Peru, Mexico and the Caribbean sea to Madrid. She had a monopoly of the gold of the world – but she did not know how to use it wisely – and Spain fell. Read Montesquieu's *Considerations sur the decline and fall of Rome* ... and you will ... find considerations in it which will make you tremble when you look at South Africa – and India.

His South American experiences deepened Casement's antipathy to Iberian colonization. He believed that the tragedy of the South American Indian was 'the greatest in the world today, and certainly it has been the greatest wrong for well nigh the last 400 years'. And: 'Iberian civilisation is not Latin civilisation – and the coming of the Spaniards and Portuguese to South America with the resultant destruction of all the Inca, Aztec, Mayan and other civilisations has been an unmitigated loss to the world'.

And with a different target he wrote in 1913: 'Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand are no parts really of an Empire – they are free peoples, learning the width and height and magnitude of freedom too – the Empire consists of Ireland, India, Egypt and the lands inhabited by the weak and exploitable people – and may England's grip on all those lands and peoples be palsied. May the whole "theory of Empire" be sent to jail.' The context here was that all of these other 'white' colonies had by this time got considerable local autonomy ('home rule'), while Ireland was denied any measure.

Capitalism. When a friend, Mitchell Innes, a British diplomat based in Washington, suggested the establishment of an organization to work for indigenous rights, Casement was interested, but, he wrote, the task facing an organization of the type suggested by Innes would be big: 'for it has to tackle an enormous thing. "Commercial interests" are practically modern Civilization itself. They make and remake Governments – and destroy peoples, just as they make war. They build battleships and incidentally sink liners too. "Commercial interests" represent profits – and all

men nearly are after profits. Show them profits – and they won't trouble about making (or breaking) the welfare of peoples.' And: 'Slavery is spreading – the steamboat and steam engines and modern armaments and the whole scheme of modern government are aiding it – with the stock gambling and share market as pillars of the scheme'. Elsewhere he commented that: '... Christianity owns schools and missions as well as Dreadnoughts and dividends'.

Civilization. As his career progressed, Casement began to put the term civilization, one of the three Cs (Christianity, Commerce, Civilization) in inverted commas (another reversed trope), as for example in a letter from 1904 to Alice Stopford Green. The following quote also illustrates O'Callaghan's point about a 'dialectical' process:

I think it must have been my insight into human suffering and into the ways of the spoiler and the ruffian who takes "civilisation" for his watchword when his object is the appropriation of the land and labour of others for his personal profit which the tale of English occupation in Ireland so continually illustrates that gave me the deep interest I felt in the lot of the Congo natives. Every argument by which King Leopold and his aiders seek to justify the merciless oppression of the central African today was stereotyped in the 'Laws' and measures of the past in this country. We had it all, even to "moral and material regeneration".

In the Putumayo, his phrase 'truly a civilising company' (applied to the Peruvian Amazon Company) was used with irony. Elsewhere he talked of an invasion of 'barbarism' (312). And, in typical language, wrote: 'The forest, with its wild creatures, is happier far than the "centres of civilisation" these Peruvian and Colombian miscreants have created and floated into a great London Company'.

Land. Another element was of crucial significance for him (not included by Porter) – the land. The following long extract from a letter he wrote in 1911 to Travers Buxton of the Anti-Slavery Society includes several of the above themes and shows the geographical span of Casement's thinking. In responding to a query from Buxton, Casement launched into a set of reflections:

The expropriation of the Indians and barefaced denial of all rights in land of the Indians is at the bottom of the whole system of slavery that undoubtedly exists in those regions. If the Indians were protected in their land ownership they would not be the easy prey they are today to the exploiter. It is the Leopold system in Africa – all over again – only it is the great original on which conception of 'State' ownership Leopold modelled his astute claims in Congo land ...

If you root the natives in the soil – African or Indian, Polynesian or whatever band of native he may be – you free him.

When the [white] Natal farmers ... some few years ago wanted cheap Zulu labour they got legislation against his ownership in the soil under way – they talked of 'breaking up the reserves' as well as taxing his huts. If a native owns land he can live by it and feed himself and wife and children and ultimately grow more than he and they need and so you get the root of all healthy commerce planted too – for he sells thereby his surplus. If you deny him ownership in the soil you render him a landless alien in his own country and drive him into the slave pen in the end – as you see Diaz has done in Mexico.

... the Irish Land War has been a reassertion of a people's right to live on and by their own soil the effect of which will ultimately travel far beyond the shores of Ireland.

Body slavery and individual ownership and tilling of the soil cannot go together – and if the Peruvians and Mexicans and other Iberian States in South and Central America could be forced or induced to recognise and register native claims to land, resting not on title deeds emanating from a politician but from the obvious long association of the claimant and his forbears with the soil in question then a healthy agricultural life would take the place of this abominable exploitation and concessionaire regime which we find systematically dogged by human slavery wherever it goes ...

It is of little permanent value fighting the slaver, if you don't go to the root of things and fight these claims to land ownership by States who are, rightly, merely the eyes and ears of the people. We can smash slavery today on the Putumayo perhaps – but it will arise again tomorrow – in a new form if you leave the Indian tribesman without legal recognition of his tribal right to live by and on the soil of his country.

Casement and 'Race'. Race is one those issues that Porter suggests is frequently found associated with discussions of 'empire'. And Wylie talks of Casement's 'adherence to contemporary discourse of race'. I want to approach the topic of Casement and 'race' indirectly, by suggesting that his life-long commitment to what we would today call indigenous rights points to a fundamentally non-racist mentality. But, to put it in the context of his day, I wish to draw attention to the

racist climate of the time, which underpinned the very exploitation which Casement opposed.

The Age of Racism. Writing of Africa, Peter Brantlinger suggests that the 'Myth of the Dark Continent' emerged between the abolition of the slave trade abolition and Scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century (1986: 185). He quotes Nancy Stepan as saying that, when the war against slavery was being won, the war against racism was being lost (*ibid.*: 187). By the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884, which marked the carve-up of Africa (and also the commencement of Casement's life in Africa), 'the British tended to see Africa as a center of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic "darkness" or barbarism, represented above all by slavery and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise' (*ibid.*: 194). And Bernard Porter tells us that the period between 1895 and 1914 showed the most virulent ... imperialism in both the ideological and popular spheres (Porter 2008: xxi). The anthropology of the time, too, was racist and evolutionary and, says Brantlinger, 'evolutionary thought seems almost calculated to legitimize imperialism' (Brantlinger 1986: 206, 203). By the end of the nineteenth century, eugenicists and social darwinists were offering 'scientific' justification for genocide and imperialism (*ibid.*: 205).

Darwin, for example, had personal experience of the horrors of extermination when, in Argentina in 1832 during the voyage of the *Beagle*, he came face-to-face with General Rosas in the middle of a drive to exterminate the indigenous population. Yet, when *The Descent of Man* was published in 1871, such destruction was described, in neutral language, as being inevitable: 'At some future period not very distant as measured in centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races.' (Darwin, quoted in Lindqvist 1998: 107). The dominant perspective was that of the inevitability of the disappearance of 'inferior races'. It is reflected in the 1898 comment made during a speech by Lord Salisbury, Casement's employer at one point, when he said: 'One can roughly divide the nations of the world into the living and the dying' (quoted in Lindqvist: 140).

On the question of race, it is not difficult to find comments by Casement that can be characterized as racist; easiest, perhaps, from his period in Brazil. One example from Pará, Brazil, will suffice: 'Only a fortnight after his arrival, he sent two broadsides to Lord Dufferin, stating his intention to resign shortly. The people and the cost of living were his main targets. The former were rude, uncouth and arrogant:

They are nearly all hideous cross-breeds – of Negro-Portuguese with, up here in the Amazon, a very large admixture of native Indian blood. Altogether the resulting human compost is the nastiest form of black-pudding you have ever sat down to. The native African is a decent, friendly,

courteous soul – the Indian, too, I dare say, is a hardy savage *chez lui* – but the ‘Brazilian’ is the most arrogant, insolent and pig-headed brute in the world I should think.’

But it is vital to assess such utterances in the context of the broad patterns of Casement’s ideas (above) and (below) of his life commitment to what we would today call ‘indigenous rights’.

Casement’s Commitment to the Indigenous. Casement was not unique in not sharing the dominant ideology, but by personality, by values and by historical circumstances, his support for indigenous rights developed into a life commitment. What comes across very strongly is that throughout his career Casement was possessed of a deep feeling for other humans, colonial subjects. This is attested by friends and observers as well as from his own words and actions.

Casement’s attitude as well as the dominant ideology of the time can be sensed in a comment made by a Niger colleague (addressing a new arrival):

We call old Roger the Black Man’s Friend; I don’t know that I personally agree entirely with his policy, it is what some people call pro-native, but he is a very good chap, and he can go anywhere amongst them.

We can, of course, document Casement’s commitment from his own words. His general attitude can be found in more measured tone in an observation he made in a letter he wrote from South Africa, during the Boer War, to Sir Martin Gosselin, a superior at the Foreign Office. He was writing about the ill-treatment of black British subjects from the West African colonies, who were working in the Congo:

I have written you a long letter, but I know that you are interested in the welfare of our native subjects residing there. The simplest way to secure their well being is, perhaps, to strive for that of all natives of the Congo. It is difficult to obtain a special recognition of and favourable treatment for one class of black men, when the whole practice of executive obligations towards natives is so wilfully wrong as it is upon the Congo today.

His humanity is clearly evident when one looks at concrete examples of his intervention in cases of cruelty. I am struck by the similarity between the earliest case I have found of his protesting brutality, in the Congo, and a late example from the Putumayo. The first dates to April 1887, when he was in his early twenties, the perpetrator being Lieutenant Francqui, Commissaire of the Cataract Region, whom Casement twice saw engaging in acts of brutality. When he complained to

the judicial authority at Boma, the Free State capital, he was informed that ‘I had no right of intervention on behalf of the people he had injured’.

One of them, who had been so cruelly flogged by this officer’s direction and under his eyes that he was literally cut to pieces, I had to have carried in my own hammock for over fifty miles when taking him to Boma to the State Doctor to have his wounds dressed and in order that I might lodge a complaint on his behalf ... I was laughed at for my pains ... Lieutenant Francqui was never punished.

The Putumayo example occurred during the return march through the forest, from Matanzas to Entre Rios. On the morning of 19 October (1910), Casement set off and his journey coincided with a *fabrico*, and a straggling line of Indians, taking loads of rubber down by Entre Rios to Puerto Peruano. On the road, he met an Andokes woman carrying a load of rubber, but in distress and unable to go any further. They stopped once more, took her load of rubber, gave her tea and helped her on:

The woman could hardly walk, and that task of getting her on was a very slow one. She fell several times, and I gave her my walking stick to help her trembling legs. She gave way constantly at the knees and fell. I cried a good deal, I must confess. I was thinking of Mrs. Green and Mrs. Morel if they had been and could have seen this piteous being – this gentle-voiced woman – a wife and mother – in such a state.

So, what of Casement and ‘race’? The topic, I believe, must be interpreted, on the one hand, in light of the ‘world view’ elements that I have outlined: the structural or systematic nature of Congo and Putumayo exploitation; the increasingly worldwide vision he had of parallel abuses; and the attitudes he expressed on empire and its associated features (capitalism, civilization, land). And, on the other hand, it must take into account his full commitment to the cause of the indigenous. In light of all of this, I find it difficult to accept the validity of Wylie’s characterizations.

Conclusion

In a short book published in 1992 to mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, the Irish writer Peadar Kirby draws attention to ‘certain similarities of historical experience between Ireland and all the countries of Latin America’, and goes on to suggest that: ‘In some ways, our history is closer to that of Latin America than is that of any other European country’ (1992: 10). First in his list of shared features is ‘a common experience of sustained and violent colonisation which **destroyed the native civilisations it encountered**’ (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

As well as causing psychic damage, conquest led to a similar sequence in economic life, from inherited economic dependence, through (in more recent times) experimentation with import substitution industrialization, and then an opening to multinational investment.

While Latin American countries may have been formally independent, Casement observed (if sketchily) the general impact on indigenous populations of empire, colonialism, and capitalism, as well as the specific horrors of places like the Putumayo. He saw the process of colonialism, of conquest, being played out still in his own day in the upper reaches of the Amazon. If the parallel histories of Latin America and Ireland involved, in Kirby’s terms, the destruction of the native civilizations encountered, Roger Casement’s major historical contribution was directed at one specific moment in the assault on indigenous peoples and cultures.

Ronald Niezen suggests that today indigenous identity is a near-global phenomenon (2003: 11). Its origins and its binding component lie, he suggests in ‘a common experience ... of illegitimate, meaningless, and dishonourable suffering’ (*ibid.*: 13, and cf. 86–93). Or, more elaborately: ‘The indigenous peoples’ movement has arisen out of the shared experiences of marginalized groups facing the negative impacts of resource extraction and economic modernization and ... the social convergence and homogenization that these ambitions tend to bring about’ (*ibid.*: 9). In two cases, the Congo and the Putumayo, Roger Casement brought about a heightened public awareness of the negative impact of resource extraction in the case of one commodity, rubber. He tried, more perhaps in the case of the Congo than of the Putumayo, to give a voice to the local population; but his voice and that of campaigning organizations (The Congo Reform Association, the Aborigine Protection Society) were still the dominant mediating ones. Today, indigenism has its own voice, being both a vibrant social movement and a participant in formal political processes. But today, too, it needs the support of agencies from the wider community, both at international level and at local level (Niezen, 2003; Van Cott 2005) just as it did in Casement’s day.

One hundred years on, it is our duty to try to rigorously assess the whole Putumayo episode, including the general impact of Casement’s intervention. There is plenty to criticise, yes; there are limitations and distortions to his thinking on the local culture and on the various spatial dimensions of the story (e.g. local-regional-national). An assessment should include wider issues: the impact the rapid emergence of plantation-grown rubber had in undermining the economy of wild rubber; the impact of the outbreak of World War One; an account of the continuing sufferings of the indigenous population of the area since Casement’s day. Included also should be those issues mentioned by Wylie, such as the story of the two youths he brought

to England to contribute to the Putumayo campaign, and his proposal for a Catholic mission to the area. And it should address the question of Casement’s ‘racism’ or otherwise.

In a regularly quoted passage, Joseph Conrad presents two images of Casement. One is the picture of the colonial-type figure striding into and out of the forest with his crook-handled stick, followed by his bull-dogs and servant; the other is the comparison he makes between Casement and Bartolomé de las Casas, an earlier defender of the indigenous inhabitants of Latin America. Given the ongoing linkage that today exists between indigenous and non-indigenous, and of Casement’s remarkable interventions a century ago, I believe the second of Conrad’s images is the more fitting today: ‘I have always thought some part of Las Casas’ soul had found refuge in his indomitable body’.

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Notes

- ¹ This is a shortened version of papers presented at (a) a conference in Bogotá from 26–29 October 2010: 'El Paraíso del Diablo – Roger Casement y el Informe del Putumayo un siglo después' / 'The Devil's Paradise – Roger Casement and the Putumayo Report a century later', and (b) a workshop held in the National University of Ireland Maynooth, Saturday 26 March 2011, entitled: 'Genocide 101: The Atrocities of the Amazon Rubber Boom, Roger Casement's Putumayo Journey, Contemporary Cultural Representations Thereof'.
- ² The PAC had London capital and a mostly-London-based Board of Directors. The driving force, though, was a local cacique, Julio Arana, hence the local name, Casa Arana.
- ³ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations draw on my 2008 biography of Casement; precise sources can be found there.
- ⁴ The Manaus conference, 'Rubber, the Amazon and the Atlantic World 1870–1913 – Roger Casement', was held on 23–24 August 2010. *The Irish Times* (4/9/10) carried a report, which also included comment on Mario Vargas Llosa's new novel on Casement. For the second conference see Note 1, above.
- ⁵ Lesley Wylie, 'Rare models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the ethnographic picturesque', *Irish Studies Review*, 18(3) 2010, 315–330.
- ⁶ This episode should throw light on the question of his acceptance of a knighthood, used against him during his trial. It seems reasonable to suggest that he disliked honours and that his acceptance of a knighthood only came after friends advised him that its rejection could damage his Putumayo work.

The Putumayo Indians and the Rubber Boom¹

Juan Alvaro Echeverri*

Abstract: *This article approaches the Putumayo Indians' memory of the Rubber Boom, in the voice of the Muinane group coming to grips with their painful memories of that violent past, and in the recent initiative of the Colombian government to declare the reconstructed headquarters of the Peruvian Amazon Company in La Chorrera as an 'Estate of Cultural Interest'. This memory is represented by Indians in the double image of the Basket of Darkness, which holds the memories of violence, and the Basket of Life, which holds the seeds of the future looking forward to the growing of new generations and leaving behind the dangerous memories of violence and sorcery of the past.*

Keywords: *Rubber Boom, Muinane Indians, Putumayo, Roger Casement, Casa Arana, Memory*

In the reports, narratives and testimonies of the Casa Arana period in the Putumayo region, Putumayo Indians speak with their bodies executed, mutilated, tortured, raped and exploited by rubber barons, as has been documented in horrifying detail by Casement, Valcárcel, Hardenburg, Saldaña Roca and many others. In all those tales, they are not actual subjects but objects of compassion, fear or observation; noble savages for Casement, treacherous and savage for Robuchon, cannibals to be civilised for Casa Arana, and objects of ethnographic description for Robuchon and Whiffen. In all of these cases Indians do not have voice but are the objects of disputes among Whites. I want to bring Indians' ways of dealing with memory to the foreground and move to the background the usual literature.

Indians nowadays refer to the memories of the rubber boom as belonging to what they call 'Basket of Darkness'. In contrast to that obscure basket of bad memories, they speak of a 'Basket of Life', where the seeds of the future are placed, looking forward to the growing of new generations and leaving behind the dangerous memories of violence and sorcery of the past. I explore below this powerful double image of Indians' memory and think it is fit to parallel Roger Casement's legacy. What does it reveal to the workings of memory and the representation of history? What is the truth to be sought in the past?

I begin by approaching the Putumayo Indians, in the voice of the Muinane group coming to grips with a painful memory and in face of new changes and challenges at the end of the twentieth Century.

The Muinane Indians Healing the Memory of the Rubber Boom

In May 1993, a group of Muinane people were getting ready to set off to visit their ancient territories. They are

the descendants of one of the peoples that were nearly exterminated by the Casa Arana and the Peruvian Amazon Company at the beginning of the twentieth century. The meagre remnants of their formerly numerous population had resettled further north, beyond the edge of what had been their ancestral lands, which remained nearly uninhabited for many decades.

The impact of the rubber industry and the Casa Arana regime on the Putumayo Indians was enormous. The total Indian population was reduced to perhaps less than a tenth between 1900 and 1930, and the surviving ones were forcefully resettled on the Putumayo River and further south. A few managed to escape north or to hide in the forest. Their social, political and ceremonial organization was severely shattered, and their territory was depopulated, as the forest regrew in what had been a densely populated region. In 1908, Thomas Whiffen (1915) calculated 46,000 as the total population of the Putumayo Indians and 2,000 as the population of the Muinane tribe. By 1993, the Muinane census did not reach 150; these were the descendants of the barely 20 Muinane men and women who managed to survive the Casa Arana regime (Echeverri 1997). These rough numbers just serve as an indication of the degree of the catastrophe these peoples endured.

In the 1980s, the Colombian government officially granted the indigenous groups of the region—Witoto, Bora, Muinane, Miraña, Ocaina, Nonuya and Andoque Indians, the descendants of the peoples who were Casa Arana's labour force—the legal property of the territories they now occupy as well as their ancestral lands in the hinterland. This huge expanse of land—about six million hectares—coincides with Julio Cesar Arana's rubber territories. This new Indian reserve was named *Resguardo Predio Putumayo*. The Muinane Council of Elders—formed by the chiefs of the four main clans—decided in the early 1990s that the re-appropriation of the ancestral territories was necessary to reassert their political autonomy, now formally recognised, and to work towards their social reconstruction.

The Muinane elders in 1993 were the children of those who had directly suffered the slavery and slaughter under the Casa Arana regime. They were born after the rubber boom had ceased and only the oldest ones had first-hand knowledge of the places where the ancient people used to live. They grew up looking away from those stories and those places, finding a way of life on the banks of the Caquetá River, trading timber and game with White people and sending their children to the Catholic boarding school. They grew old far from their land and from the horrifying stories their own parents told—and remained disturbingly connected to them.

The ancestral territory of the Muinane is located at the centre of the *Resguardo Predio Putumayo*. This territory was known to the elders in words and memories, but they had not returned to it since their childhood. In the 1990s times had changed. They had their territories legally titled and a new generation, for whom these stories were distant, had grown up after them. Their children were intelligent and able, had gone to school, and wanted to know. The banks of the Caquetá River, where they had lived for decades and where they had raised their children, was a foreign land where their ancestors used to go to get fish and stones, but not a place they used to live. The rocky outcrops which mark the Caquetá landscape are the lodges of mythological beings, carriers of evil powers. Further south is the 'Land of coolness', the area where the places of the *malocas* (longhouses) of their forbears rested abandoned, the land that had been deprecated and ravaged, and from where they had been expelled and exiled. It was their *territory*, a word in English (or Spanish or Portuguese) that barely translates the meaning of the Muinane concept: it is not just a tract of land that can be mapped or legally titled; this *territory* is the inscription of life and memory on the land—and this life and this memory had remained amputated since the times of Casa Arana, and the events Roger Casement and others denounced and publicised, but that for the Indians had remained unhealed.

The children of Casa Arana were now elders and they needed to recover that life and that memory they had been unwilling to face for decades. The necessary step was to revisit the territory and to face its memories. At that time, I did not fully grasp the meaning of the decision they took to go and visit the old places. They stated that *territory* was the basis of their education, their government, and their social and ritual organization, and that they needed to go there with their children to show them and retrieve the thread of their life.

And then they started off their journey to the ancient land. The group was formed by three elders of three of the surviving clans (Pineapple, Worm and Drum), and nine boys, three of each clan. They headed first to the ancestral territory of the Pineapple clan, and Chucho, its elder, led the group. On May 27th 1993, after five days of trekking into the uninhabited forest, they got to the Manioc creek, a small stream on the Cahuinari River basin, not far from where once stood the Casa Arana section of Matanzas, now covered by forest regrowth. It was in Matanzas where Roger Casement met the notorious Armando Normand: '... with a face truly the most repulsive I have ever seen, I think. It was perfectly devilish in its cruelty and evil. I felt as if I were being introduced to a serpent', wrote Casement in his journal (Casement 1997: 256). The Muinane remember Normand as 'Noroba'. Matanzas means literally 'slaughters' or 'massacres' and the atrocities that happened there were exhaustively documented in Judge Carlos Valcárcel's (2004: 259-

289) book and reported by Hardenburg (1912: 23), in Casement's journal (1997: 253-266) and by many others.

For the Muinane, the place of Matanzas is known as 'Hill of the Wild Cacao Tree'. There lived Chucho's granduncle, who had the name of Jeevadeka (Flower of Parrot Pineapple), a chief of the Pineapple clan of the Muinane. The Muinane tell that Jeevadeka died under the hands of Noroba, who hung him from a pole by his ear piercings.

The group camped a few hours away from the old, haunted site. At night, Chucho spoke and the youngsters recorded his speech on a tape recorder. In his speech, Chucho did not address his fellow elders or his sons and nephews; he addressed Jeevadeka. He spoke like this:

We have truly arrived to the place of the ordeals; we arrived to Manioc Creek, to the Hill of the Wild Cacao Creek [Matanzas]. Your grandchildren have arrived for you to meet them; you do not have to mistake them, as if they were other people. Do not be upset, stay calm. Here are your grandchildren. We know nothing about those who killed you, about those who did all those things to you. You are the ones who know. Now we are a new generation, and here are those who were born after me, and I am guiding them. We came here to heal these children. Here is our chief Jeevadeka. We know nothing of what happened to you. So it is. If we knew, we could speak about that. You came to end your life here. I am showing it to your grandchildren. I am heading them together with my brother. So then, do not take us for strangers. We came here to heal ourselves. This is what we are telling you. That is it.

The next day, by noon, they arrived at the place where Matanzas once stood, now covered with forest. There, Chucho spoke again:

Here, grandfather Jeevadeka, you lived and you are. We are your grandchildren and we have arrived. Up to this place we have reached and we are stepping on this spot. Are you there? We have arrived well, in good heart. Here we are; we are the bones of yours. We are coming back, your grandchildren that were born after you. We mourn and remember you, who are here. Then, for that reason, I myself Kigaibo [Sour Pineapple], your grandson, have arrived, together with people of the Drum clan and the Worm clan. We are with these, our young people, for you to meet, and we come in good manner. We come to seek the good words that you have: the word of life, the word of coolness, the word of nurturing. You ought to give us those words. We are cleaning up on top of you.

We thought we were alone, but we are not alone, you are here. That is why we came, we have reached to you. This is what I am telling you.

I was very struck when I helped Chucho's brother, Jorge, to transcribe and translate these recordings upon their return from their trip. Chucho's address to Jeevadeka begins by avoiding any reference to the violent events of the Casa Arana period: 'We know nothing about those who killed you, about those who did all those things to you', he says. Chucho seeks to heal, not to remember, as if invoking the violence of those days may attract danger. He rather focuses straight away to the young people in the party, and takes care that Jeevadeka's wandering spirit will not mistake them for other people. Chucho is well aware that nowadays they all look very much like the Peruvians and Creoles who enslaved and murdered their ancestors. They now wear clothes and boots, carry *machetes* and shotguns, eat salt and 'smell of onions', as they say.

Chucho's way of dealing with the past when addressing Jeevadeka in this point of the territory is profoundly historical precisely in the fact that he avoids remembering. Instead of looking *back* he looks *forward*; not to the dead but to the living—and he addresses Jeevadeka as if he were alive. He acknowledges the past of killings and slavery by avoiding its memory, and he acknowledges the changes that came about afterwards by stating that no matter what they may look like, they are Jeevadeka's grandchildren who come to pay a visit. Chucho's generation had been unable so far to deal with any of this. None of them felt able to go to the old places and cope with the rage, sorcery and powers that were left scattered, unbound and unsolved. They felt ashamed and powerless, unable to re-establish a connection they were painfully aware was necessary to rebuild their life—after so many years.

That power they lacked in shamanism and magical force to deal with the troubling past, they found again, in an unexpected way, in the new generation. These young people, their own children, gave them meaning and strength to face it. Even though these boys have gone to school, have learnt to read and write in Spanish, and do not resemble much those ancient Indians, they are *alive* and they want to know. Instead of reminding them of the crimes committed against their forebears and claiming revenge for them, he rather chooses to forget. He leaves aside the memory of the ordeals and focuses his discourse on what gives life.

And, paradoxically, it is the artefacts of writing that the young people have learnt from the White people that allows for the close of the circle of this operation of the memory. In contrast to the elders, who rely on the oral speech in the Muinane language as their way of recording and giving meaning to their journey, the young ones carry notebooks, pens and colour pencils to keep a written record of it. Their notebooks are written in Spanish, and in contrast to the speeches of their parents which deal with spirits

and masters of the places, the youngsters compose a quite pragmatic and down to earth journal, carefully annotating times, distances, location of places, animals hunted, meals eaten, and avoiding any reference to their parents' concerns. They happily trek through the forest with innocent eyes, filling their notebooks with their observations and, most notably, with colourful drawings of the places they visit. In their notebooks they make most succinct and uneventful notes of their elders' speech, as this one by Chucho's nephew about the night when he uttered the speech transcribed above: 'For dinner, we ate a woolly monkey we had hunted, and after the conversation of the elders we went to sleep', he writes.

In Matanzas they found the remains of a longhouse or *maloca* and many objects, both Indian and non-Indian: pots, tools, weaponry, glass, etc., in a place which the young people titled 'Matanzas' garbage dump'. Further ahead, they found two large holes, where rubber patrons used to burn the people that they had killed. They made drawings of the holes in their notebooks. They knew those places existed, where dead people were dumped and burnt; vegetation has not regrown on those holes, and they were still clearly noticeable.

The two modes of representation—spoken in Muinane by the elders, and written in Spanish by the young ones—are remarkably complementary. When I would ask any of the elders about their journey, he would right away ask for his son's notebook and would exhibit the colour drawings; with this in his hands, he would calmly and happily refer to the events of the trip. It is as if by being captured in writing and drawing, those dangerous facts would now be contained and manageable. On the other hand, the young ones could confidently devote these facts into writing and deftly design their drawings because they felt that any danger that could exist in their journey would be avoided and dodged by virtue of their elders' speech.

One of the reasons for the extreme precaution of these Indians to leave aside the memory of violence is because it was not only the violence of rubber barons against Indians, but also the violence amongst Indians themselves, which exacerbated a pre-existing condition of intertribal warfare.

We tend to represent the Indians as victims of the violent rubber barons. The dispute among Whites is whether those Indians were ferocious cannibals running in the forest who had to be subjected by any means to become an industrious and civilised labour force, as Casa Arana alleged, or whether they were noble and pacific people enslaved and abused by 'an association of vagabonds, the scum of Peru and Colombia', as Casement claimed in his journal (Goodman 2009: 111). In both cases, Indians are represented as a single, unified subject. But, how was it from an Indian perspective?

Certain Indian tribes, and clans and lineages within tribes, profited from the alliance with rubber

barons to wage warfare against other tribes and former enemies. Besides, young boys from several tribes were raised and trained to raid other groups and to act as executioners of the worst crimes. This exacerbation of internal warfare had more devastating and long-lasting effects than the violence of Whites against Indians. Whites or non-Indians would eventually leave the region, but the families and relatives of the murderers and the murdered would stay, and with those the memories of pending revenges.

This is one of the key reasons why a person like Chucho is quite circumspect about not bringing back the memory of those events, potentially very destructive for today's life. What these elders aim to do is the reconstruction of the social tissue that was torn apart.

This way of thinking, speaking and relating to memory is in no way a peculiarity of this group or of this elder. It is shared by all the descendants of the Putumayo Indians. What is at stake here is not the reconstruction of the truth of the events, or the demands of justice against the White people, but the reconstruction of society and the multiplication in the amounts of people. This implies both particular modes of memory and historical consciousness and the construction of new forms of collective identity.

The Basket of Darkness and the Basket of Life

What the literature calls 'The Putumayo Indians' encompasses three linguistic stocks and seven ethnolinguistic groups: the Witoto linguistic family (Witoto, Ocaina and Nonuya), the Bora linguistic family (Bora, Miraña and Muinane), plus a language isolate (Andoque). Although these peoples are linguistically differentiated, they share a number of cultural traits and a common social and ceremonial organization. Today, they designate themselves under the general name of 'People of the Centre'.

This ideology of one People linked by social and ritual exchanges constitutes the basis for a type of ceremonial and political discourse, which emphasises the common traits of the different groups, putting aside ethnic differences and past conflicts. This ceremonial discourse is called *rafue* in the Witoto language. *Rafue* belongs to what is called the Basket of Life. In this basket belongs the ethics of horticultural work, the raising of children, the production of food, the celebration of rituals. The most accomplished expression of this Basket is the Word of tobacco and coca, which the elders use to care for and to nurture human life. Mythological narratives and violent historical memories—including those of the rubber boom—do not have a place in this Basket.

In contrast with this ritual and public discourse of *rafue*, which is instrumental in the construction of the ideology of a unified moral community (People of the Centre), the conceptual guarding of ethnic differences is maintained in other modes of discourse. Ethnic difference brings about the memory of conflicts

from the past—rivalry among clans and tribes, sorcery, cannibalism—and implies dealing with differences in mythological conceptions (territory, hierarchy among tribes and clans).

Secret, ethnic discourse is closely linked to mythology. Mythology, for these groups, keeps the record of the events of cannibal, malignant, murderous, revengeful and raging beings who tried to destroy and pervert the true humanity. These stories are kept in what is called the Basket of Darkness. These stories do not belong to the public, common discourse of *rafue*, but are kept and maintained by each ethnic group and clan as a defence and source of sorcery and evil power. The stories and events of the rubber boom are but one more layer in this plentiful basket. These baskets of darkness should be kept sealed, because they represent the danger of war—they are, as these people say, their 'nuclear arsenals'.

These two Baskets thus represent a moral organization of collective memory, and configure a form of historical consciousness. The Basket of Life refers to their history precisely for the fact of refraining to remember anything from the past, but on the contrary asserting the maintenance and reproduction of life. The Basket of Darkness keeps secret the memories of dangerous past events. The terror of the rubber boom looms so dangerously that it fills to the rim that Basket. Those memories are not forgotten but kept sealed.

There is certainly an unresolved tension and an impending danger in this organization of memory, because there is always the risk that the contents of the Basket of Darkness may be deployed, undermining the collective project of a moral community. Separating what is secret (Basket of Darkness) from what is public (Basket of Life) has become a task in which the elders invest a remarkable amount of time and effort.

This allows us to better understand Chucho's address to Jeevadeka in the haunted site of Matanzas. In such a dangerous place, he is avoiding the content of the Basket of Darkness and he is pointing to the Basket of Life, through the use of two rhetorical devices: the request of the 'good words' from Jeevadeka—that is, the Word of tobacco and coca—and his explicit references to the new generation.

It is as if these two modes of memory move in opposite directions. Mythology and historiographical narratives of violence point in the direction of the past; *rafue*, the Word of tobacco and coca, points in the direction of the future. The memories of the events of the rubber boom are thus left in an apparent oblivion: discarded in the public discourse, secret in the private discourse; and there seems to be no way to represent them or to think about them. This unresolved tension is solved by the new generation, which functions like a mirror—a reflective space that allows them to face the past in an indirect way. This reflective space is configured paradoxically by purely foreign devices: writing, schooling, use of the Spanish language, state recognition, and so forth.

At a micro-sociological scale, we saw how for the group of Muinane elders journeying with their sons and nephews, their young boys' notebooks and drawings operated as a reflective space which allowed them to face the past. Now, we can perhaps also appreciate the same process in a larger sociological scale.

For these People of the Centre, the rubber boom has been a difficult issue to deal with—either in oblivion or in secret. But the scars left on the bodies and the territory need to be read and interpreted. These marks also can turn into mirrors that allow new modes of healing and representing the past. The actual site of the headquarters of Casa Arana in La Chorrera may play that role. This is a remarkable story, which like all things Arana, is made up of deceit and twisted turns.

The headquarters of Arana as a mirror of memory

In 1922, Colombia and Peru signed a border treaty, which ceded Colombia the territories north of the Putumayo River, where Casa Arana had been operating. Arana, and the people of Loreto, vehemently opposed the treaty, which was finally ratified by the two countries in 1927. But Arana was indeed a clever man; in fact, a year before the treaty was signed, Arana secured the legal title to his possessions in Putumayo and he ensured that under the terms of the treaty he would receive compensation in cash from Colombia.

Arana pretended to be paid £2,000,000, but the Colombian government found his amount extortionate. Finally, in 1939, the Banco Agrícola Hipotecario, a Colombian official bank, bought the rights of Arana in the Putumayo for US\$200,000, but only paid \$40,000 at that current time. In 1954, the Colombian government ordered the termination of the Banco Agrícola, and put the newly created Caja de Crédito Agrario Industrial y Minero (Caja Agraria) in charge of its liquidation. In 1984, Caja Agraria ratified the purchase made by Banco Agrícola back in 1939, and paid the heirs of Arana the remaining US\$160,000. In this manner Caja Agraria consolidated the full property of the old Arana possessions in Putumayo, which were called *Predio Putumayo* 'The Putumayo Estate' (Colombia 1989).

Putumayo Indians were totally unaware of all these moves until, in 1985, Caja Agraria decided to make use of its property and designed a huge plan of development for the Predio Putumayo, with the investment of two million dollars in an 800-hectare farm in La Chorrera. Caja Agraria erected its main premises on exactly the same spot where Casa Arana had stationed its headquarters and main rubber depot.² The news came as a shock: Caja Agraria claimed property of the whole Indian Territory on the basis of having purchased it from the heirs of the company that had tortured and enslaved the Indians! 'Those titles are stained with blood', claimed the priest of La Chorrera in numerous letters he sent to Colombian authorities. These Indians began a vehement protest against the

presence of the Caja Agraria and its claims of ownership of the region. The situation gained momentum and an agreement was reached in 1988, when the Colombian government proceeded to constitute the land as a *Resguardo* (Reserve) on April 23 of 1988, in favour of the indigenous groups of the region.

In 1993 the Presidency of Colombia acquired the old Casa Arana house from Caja Agraria to lodge a new Indian secondary school, and the Colombian First Lady travelled to Chorrera for its inauguration. *El Tiempo*, the largest Colombian newspaper, headlined the news: 'Between 1900 and 1910 violence prevailed in Casa Arana. About 40,000 Indians were murdered. Today, after eight decades, the house and its bad memories will become an epicenter of education. Last December 21st, the Indians [...] erased the ghost of that genocide'. ('De casa histórica a salón de clases' [From historic house to classroom], *El Tiempo*, Bogotá, 29 XII 1993)

That was the same year the Muinane set off to visit the old places of the rubber boom. And if the 'ghost' of that genocide has not actually been 'erased', it certainly provides a reflective space for the new generations to represent memory in new ways. It is remarkable that the notorious place, with its dungeons where Indians were kept chained, where dozens of Indians were burned in drunken feasts of horror, now becomes a place for the education of the new generation.

Furthermore, in May 2008, the Colombian Ministry of Culture declared the house as an 'Estate of Cultural Interest Nationally', and the Minister of Culture—Paula Moreno, a Black woman—travelled to La Chorrera to announce the news. On that visit, a 48 year-old Bora Indian commented: 'Casa Arana is like bereavement. The school covers that image we have of the past, and I want that [the government] support it because it gives us solace' ('La Casa Arana, de lugar de muerte a sitio para la cultura indígena' [The Casa Arana, from place of death to site for Indian culture], *El Tiempo*, Bogotá, 24 V 2008). Afterwards a respected female leader remarked: 'We have our hopes placed here. Even though Chorrera does not receive many visitors, we want to refurbish the rooms to function as a hotel in Casa Arana. This may be the opportunity for Chorrera to become a tourist site' (Ministerio de Cultura 2008).

The symbolic act had soothing and encouraging effects—mild ones in any case. For the Bora man, it is the education of children that brings solace, not the fact of the house being declared of 'cultural interest' for the nation. For the woman leader, it is the hope that the house will attract tourists, and with them income for the people; much needed income for raising and educating the children—the house is thought as a patrimony for the future, not a memory of the past.

Declaring the rebuilt premises of Casa Arana as an object of public cultural interest for the nation is still an opaque mirror. The well-intentioned or politically convenient reasons of the Ministry of Culture in that

declaration fall short of accomplishing a reappraisal of the events that building evokes—both for the Indians who suffered its direct impact and for the country, Colombia, that gave them its nationality and that was also accomplice and witness to those events.

Indians are still unable to deal with that. The bereavement is long-lasting. For Indian elders, like Chucho, that memory is not to be recalled in order to be able to live on, or is a source of evil power that should be kept in secrecy. The survivors of the catastrophe managed to rebuild a new society over the fragments and pieces of a former social order that was irretrievably lost. It is the philosophy of multiplication, the ethics of horticultural work and the Word of tobacco and coca which guides the moral agenda of this social project. Memory is thus subordinated to the imperative of life. Writing, schooling and the State provide an anchor that perhaps will allow new modes of memory in the younger generations. Even though we still do not hear voices from that generation that make sense of all that in new ways, those devices and institutions—utterly alien to the Indian world—do indeed provide a possibility of reflecting and seeing beyond the muted pain and raging revenge.

The rebuilt headquarters of Arana in La Chorrera now lodge the young men and women descendants of the Indians that saw that same house as a place of exactions and fear. That house-turned-school also holds a library where the books, reports and documents written about that time begin to pile up: translations of Hardenburg's book, of Casement's report, new editions of Valcárcel, and what has been written by Colombian and Peruvian historians. Among the various sources, the name of Roger Casement stands as symbolizing a turning point, as a torch of truth and justice in the middle of the blackest night. Those young boys and girls do not fully understand what it means that he was Irish or why he was hung. No matter his background or circumstances, the sheer truth is that his voyage up to Putumayo one hundred and one years ago did make a difference.

This opaque mirror can perhaps be polished and perfected to be able to shine in full. Like Chucho, I myself do not see, do not understand when looking straight back—I just feel fear, pain and rage. I need to look forward into this new generation, and it is to them we owe true truth and true justice. They are our actual true mirrors of memory.

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Notes

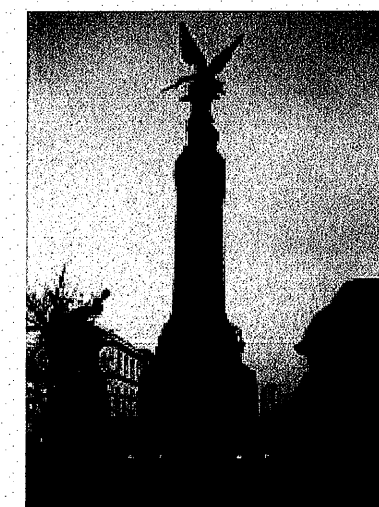
- ¹ This article is an edited version of 'To Heal or to Remember: Indian Memory of the Rubber Boom and Roger Casement's "Basket of Life"', published in *ABEI Journal* (São Paulo, Brazil), Number 12, November 2010, pp. 49-64.
- ² I wrote a piece (Echeverri 2009) about a set of photographs taken on the ruins of the ruins of Casa Arana in Chorrera in 1977.

Transforming the Stone: Reimagining Derry's Diamond War Memorial in the new 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland

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Abstract: This essay examines 'post-conflict' efforts to re-think Derry's Diamond War Memorial as a shared and relevant civic space for both the Protestant unionist and Catholic nationalist communities. Drawing in part on Pierre Nora's (1989) notion of lieux de mémoire, the memorial's past, present and future is explored as a series of conceptual shifts which are reflective of broader social and political trends toward accommodation in the construction of civic, communal and post-national Northern Irish identities. Particular attention is paid to two separate efforts, which have aimed to recast the sculpture, first unveiled in 1927, in more inclusive terms.

Keywords: monuments, public space, memory, history, civic identity, World War I, Northern Ireland



Attendees peruse poppy wreaths at the memorial on Remembrance Sunday

The monument sits in the heart of Derry's historic walled city – on the site of the former town hall – and just across the street from the grand and imposing Austin's, the oldest independent department store in the world. When I arrived there shortly after 10 a.m. that day, a crowd had already begun to gather. Military veterans, dressed in their Sunday best, proudly displayed medals on dark overcoats. The Police Service of Northern Ireland Officers sported red poppies – a symbol of remembrance for the dead – in their caps. The nattily attired head of the Londonderry branch of the Royal British Legion, David Davis, carried a large black umbrella as he strode about, overseeing the preparations

with a gimlet eye.

Roughly 30 minutes before 11 o'clock – the fateful hour when the Armistice between the Allies and Germany came into effect on November 11, 1918 – the William King Memorial Flute Band (which had marched from Londonderry's Waterside to the Cityside for the occasion) led a procession of military officers and veterans in full regalia into the square. They were followed by civic leaders and local councillors in robes, which included Colum Eastwood, the young nationalist mayor at the time. Much of the ceremony proceeded as it had more than 80 years previously, when the monument by British sculptor Vernon March, was first unveiled on June 23, 1927. Those assembled mouthed the words of the famous World War I hymn, 'The Supreme Sacrifice'. Bugles sounded 'Last Post'. Silence was observed. The notes of 'Reveille' echoed hauntingly across the hushed and shivering crowd. Wreaths were laid. Finally, with a concluding rendition of 'God Save the Queen', the procession fell back into order before slowly exiting the square by way of Bishop Street.

To an outsider looking in, the moment might have appeared the high watermark of civic unity and shared remembrance. As a marker of Protestant identity, the Diamond War Memorial and the memorialisation which takes place there can be viewed as an expression of Britishness, a way of solidifying and reaffirming ties with the United Kingdom and honouring the war dead, specifically the sacrifices of Ulster Protestants at the 1916 Battle of the Somme which play an important



The Irish and British flags side by side at a ceremony to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Messines

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