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Violence and Desire in the Tropics: Libidinal politics in the Putumayo writings of Roger Casement

By

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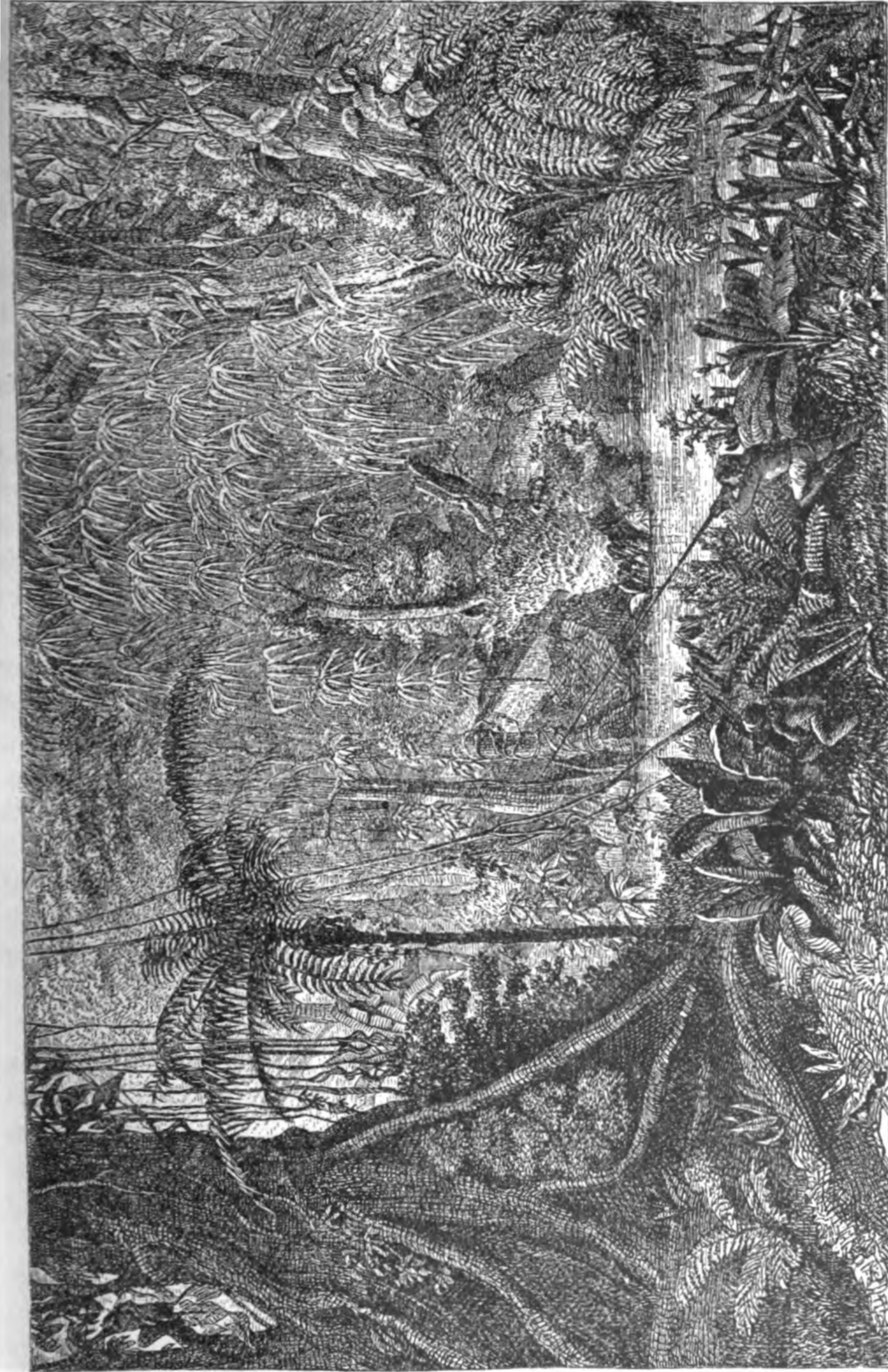

INTERIOR OF PRIMÆVAL FOREST ON THE AMAZONS

A remarkable illustration in Henry Walter Bates' popular 1863 memoir *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* depicts, according to the caption, a "primæval forest."[1] In this tropical scene a small stream, nearly lost in lush vegetation, separates the viewer from what appears to be an impenetrable wall of foliage. On the near bank, to the left, rises an enormous tree braced by monumental roots; and lost almost indiscernibly in the thick undergrowth sit two indigenous figures with blowguns, dwarfed even by the leaves among which they crouch. Bates' book, which captured the minds of its many British readers, was an account of his eleven years of travel in the Brazilian Amazon, replete with descriptions of tropical flora, fauna, and landscapes, as well as the appearances and customs of the indigenous Amazonians he encountered. While Bates marveled at the colorful birds and lush vegetation he had observed, at the same time he betrayed a certain ambivalence about the Amazon—individual species might be wondrous, but the forest as a whole inspired gloom, depression, and apprehension. To Bates, the Amazon could be both monotonous and destructive. Of a river passage to visit a family of the Passé tribe, he remembered with enthusiasm how "Slender air roots hung down in clusters, and looping sipós dangled from the lower branches; bunches of grass, *tillandsiae*, and ferns, sat in the forks of the larger boughs, and the trunks of trees near the water had adhering to them round dried masses of freshwater sponges." Yet in the same paragraph he recorded a mounting sense of dread in the midst of this lush vegetation: "When the paddlers rested for a time, the stillness and gloom of the place became almost painful: our voices waked dull echoes as we conversed, and the noise made by fishes occasionally whipping the surface of the water was quite startling."[2] As in the illustration of the rich "primæval forest," the tropical life of the Amazon was at once a source of

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[1] Henry Walter Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*, Everyman's Library (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910), 37.
[2] Bates, 298.

wonder and menace. The same animal and vegetable wealth that excited Bates' scientific imagination enfolded venomous pests, noxious miasmas, and the constant lurking threat of murderous Indians.

It was into this tropical forest that Roger Casement, then-British Consul-General in Rio de Janeiro, ventured in the summer of 1910. The British Foreign Office had detailed Casement to a public-private Commission of Inquiry in order to investigate reports of violent abuses against indigenous laborers and Barbadian overseers by agents of the British-registered Peruvian Amazon Company, previously the Arana Company, which worked to extract natural rubber along the banks of the Putumayo River in the Upper Amazon. This rubber, the natural latex of the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree, represented to extractors the immense natural riches of the tropical forest. Once hardened and processed into bales, this elastic material fetched high prices at Amazon trading cities such as Manaos, Brazil, which boomed on the forest rubber trade; when shipped out from the Atlantic seaport of Belém, the rubber was dispersed to factories in Europe and North America, where it became shoes, automobile and bicycle tires, and coatings for telegraph cables.[3] Yet the advanced products of this global industry relied on onerous and labor-intensive processes of natural extraction, underlying what Corey Ross has described as a "stark incongruity between industrial-scale demand and primitive methods of supply."[4] In the Putumayo, Peruvian and Colombian rubber traders worked to break this bottleneck by a strategy of forced labor, violently press-ganging local indigenous groups into tapping rubber trees. In order to meet the pace of global demand, rubber production therefore relied on an extractive

[3] John Loadman, *Tears of the Tree: The Story of Rubber—A Modern Marvel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 287–92.
[4] Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 103.

system characterized by murder, abduction, severe corporal punishment, sexual servitude, and environmental destruction.

During his three months in the region, Casement documented a violent regime of forced labor in which whole tribes of indigenous people were kidnapped and forced to collect natural latex from deep in the forest, on pain of flogging, imprisonment in stocks, torture, and death. Casement understood these forms of violence to be primarily economic in their aim; "To ninety-nine out of every hundred Indians flogged," he would write in his official report to the Foreign Office in 1911, "the lash was applied as an instrument of torture and of terror, not to correct or chastise for some wrong-doing, but to make the Indian bring in more rubber, or stand in salutary dread of the local agent."[5] Yet while systematic violence reached every indigenous worker in the Putumayo, its intensity and material forms varied. Casement estimated that between ninety and one hundred percent of all indigenous people he and his fellow Commissioners encountered in the Putumayo showed scars from flogging;[6] and while most rubber workers may have been victim to it at some point, the severity of flogging could range from "just a few strokes" for parents of children who had not collected sufficient rubber to the multiple reported cases of workers being flogged to death, succumbing to infections in the deep cuts inflicted on their buttocks, legs, and backs with tapir-hide whips.[7] The violent method of slave-raiding was similarly irregular. Rubber traders often abducted entire villages of indigenous people to force them into rubber collection, embarking on hostage-taking expeditions known locally as

[5] Roger Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District" (London: Foreign Office of Great Britain, 1912), 39.
[6] Roger Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," in *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, ed. Angus Mitchell (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1997), 109.
[7] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 37.

"*correrías*," or raids.[8] Despite the constant need for fresh labor, rubber traders demonstrated a marked indifference to indigenous life during these raids—the Barbadian overseer James Chase told Casement that on one raid Company agent Fernand Vasquez killed thirteen of an original eighteen indigenous prisoners, bragging that he had "left the road pretty" with corpses.[9] Aside from the regular violence designed to obtain and keep indigenous labor, Barbadian overseers reported many extremes of seemingly senseless brutality, including the violent rape of women, the shooting of bound prisoners for target-practice, and the burning alive of supposed transgressors.[10] Though rooted in the challenges of wild rubber extraction, violence in the Putumayo frequently escalated into extreme and apparently anti-economic forms that destroyed indigenous life and scandalized Casement and his peers.

This paper is in part an attempt to understand the reasons for these extremes of violence, which, though motivated by extractive capitalism, appear to exceed economic rationality in their perverse creativity and brutality. Casement and other contemporary observers remarked on the seeming wastefulness of rubber violence. Former Arana employee Urcenio Bucelli told the Peruvian judge Carlos Valcárcel, "These Indians bring in so much rubber and still they are killed,"[11] decrying the apparent incoherency between violence and production. In an introduction to former Arana employee Joseph Woodroffe's book on Putumayo Rubber, botanist Harold Hamel Smith wrote of the killing of indigenous workers, "The marvel is that such wanton

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[8] Camilo A. Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana: economía y poblamiento*, 1. ed. (Bogotá, Colombia: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2005), 104; Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 88–90; Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 22.

[9] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 73–75.

[10] Casement, 42, 66, 77.

[11] "Estos Indios traen tanto caucho y sin embargo se les mata." Carlos A. Valcárcel, *El Proceso Del Putumayo y Sus Secretos Inauditos* (Lima: Horacio La Rosa & Co., 1915), 31; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 32.

destruction of this, the most valuable of tropical 'products,' has been tolerated so long."[12] Casement himself recognized that "The present system is not merely slavery but extermination."[13] It is true that the killing of indigenous workers, whether through direct violence or starvation, was in one sense counter to the need for a large labor force in order to collect rubber from difficult-to-access and sparsely distributed trees. Yet if the extremes of rubber violence did not fulfill a direct economic function, I argue that these participated in the eradication of non-extractive forms of sociality and productivity among indigenous people. Rubber extraction relied on uprooting indigenous subjects from their own social and productive networks, defined primarily by relatively small and isolated patriarchal groups sustaining themselves through small-scale forest agriculture,[14] and refashioning these people into atomized working units who could be held individually responsible for collecting certain quotas of rubber. The most frequent practices of flogging and confining indigenous workers in the stocks worked through their material forms to support the capitalistic myths of debt and individual remuneration by which rubber agents justified forced labor. At the same time, a system of sexual servitude preying on indigenous women forcibly broke up pre-existing sexual and social relations, reorienting indigenous sexuality violently toward the desires of extractors. Even the most extreme expressions of violence, such as genital torture and burning captives alive, contributed to these broader violent regimes, destroying materially and symbolically indigenous workers' connection to pre-extractive social and productive forms. In this way rubber violence intervened at both the material and the ideological levels—through the obsessive and creative destruction of

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[12] Harold Hamel Smith, ed., "Introduction," in *The Rubber Industry of the Amazon and How Its Supremacy Can Be Maintained*, by Joseph F. Woodroffe (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1916), xiii; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 55.
[13] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 73.
[14] Augusto J. Gómez López, Hugo Armando. Sotomayor Tribín, and Ana Cristina Lesmes Patiño, *Enfermedades, epidemias y medicamentos: fragmentos para una historia epidemiológica y sociocultural*, Coleccíon CES (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2008), 26, 42.

indigenous bodies, rubber agents systematically eradicated forms of relation and production that did not support the extractive economy. Gross violence served to enforce physically and instill socially the totalizing logic of rubber extraction.

By describing rubber violence as fulfilling a social and symbolic as well as an economic function, I respond to the work of the Australian anthropologist and social theorist Michael Taussig, who explained the violence of the Putumayo regime as a response to the "epistemic murk" of extraction. The intensity of European mythology surrounding indigenous people and tropical environments, he argues, clashed with rubber traders' on-the-ground experience in the Amazon to produce "epistemic murk," a condition of vertiginous uncertainty in which neither "rational" European nor indigenous modes of knowledge could inform, explain, or predict the structures of colonial encounter.[15] Taussig cites the question of indigenous rebellion as subject to this murk. On the one hand, "rational" and racial ideas convinced rubber traders that no serious resistance could take place because of indigenous people's infantile qualities—as Casement insisted in private and public writings, indigenous people were supposed to be poorly armed, docile by nature, and fearful of bloodshed.[16] On the other, actual acts of indigenous resistance left several prominent rubber traders dead, including Company chief Julio César Arana's brother-in-law.[17] Faced with the ever-present yet ideologically irrational peril of indigenous resistance, rubber agents sank into "a colonially paranoid mythology in which dismemberment, cannibalism, and the exposure of body parts and skulls grinned wickedly."[18] Similarly, the simultaneous dread and uncertainty surrounding indigenous practices of cannibalism allowed it

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[15] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 97–123.
[16] Roger Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," *The Contemporary Review* 102 (July 1, 1912): 320–22; Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 26; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 101–4.
[17] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 101.
[18] Taussig, 100–104.

to become for rubber agents the prime emblem of savagery within the deathly tropical environment. In these spaces of epistemic uncertainty, in which agents could not rely on their accustomed criteria of truth and knowledge, violence became an ordering principle which could project their troubled sense of reality onto the forest space. In what Taussig calls a "mimesis" of the imagined tropical dangers, agents adopted extremes of violence in order to clarify and realize their projected ideas of tropical death.[19] Hence the Colombian trader Cristósomo Hernández ordered his enforcers to decapitate an entire group of Huitotos, including children and infants, because he heard that they practiced cannibalism—proving the charge to himself, in a sense, by meting out terroristic punishment.[20] To Taussig, the "space of death" that rubber agents both inhabited and realized was therefore a projection of fears and uncertainties instilled by the epistemic incompatibility between colonial ways of knowing and agents' actual experiences of extraction in the Putumayo.

The condition of epistemic murk and the realization of the space of death envision rubber violence as primarily libidinal: Taussig's model suggests that the "excesses" of torture and death in the Putumayo proceeded primarily from rubber agents' fears and desires as refracted through a troubled epistemic space. States of fear, confusion, and lust motivated and organized the spectacular tortures of the rubber regime. The Barbadian overseers whom Casement interviewed on his expedition observed Company agents such as José Inocente Fonseca and Armando Normand appearing to take pleasure in violence, laughing, for example, at the severed heads of their victims or shooting people for their own amusement when drinking.[21] This conception of terroristic mimesis—the outward projection and enactment of the very kinds of savagery that

[19] Taussig, 128–35.
[20] Taussig, 26–27.
[21] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 64; Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 36, 66.

rubber agents themselves feared from indigenous subjects—informs my own analysis of these extremes of violence. Though I do not focus on the question of epistemic murk, I am seeking to understand the ways in which the libidinal forces of fear and desire motivated acts of violence, and influenced the material forms these acts took. Taussig suggests a model by which to understand violence within the extractive space as an individual process of meaning-making. Yet despite being ensconced within a capitalistic zone of extraction, he understands these individual expressions of violence as divorced from economic logics. He critiques Casement's economic explanation for the Putumayo violence for reproducing the dominant capitalist-imperialist logic, "obscuring our understanding of the way business can transform terror from a means to an end in itself."[22] Taussig's epistemic approach may allow him to do away with the fallacious distinction between "rational" and "irrational" violence to which Casement and his peers were prey; yet in figuring the epistemic murk of rubber traders in the Putumayo as conceptually separable from the economic motors of extraction, this analysis forecloses the possibility of continuity between capitalistic rationality and the "excesses" of rubber violence. Diverging from Taussig, I aim to integrate economic and libidinal motivations for violence. Acts of terror, savagery, and cannibalism on the part of rubber agents, I argue, responded to and reinforced the ideological needs of rubber extraction even while they created meaning from individual libidinal forces.

Other studies of violent New World labor regimes, especially chattel slavery, offer alternative analytic paths to Taussig's. In his landmark study of the journals of the English slaveowner Thomas Thistlewood, who held a small plantation in Jamaica from 1766 until his death in 1786, Trevor Burnard emphasizes the practical, economic function of violence. He ascribes the extremes of violence against the enslaved primarily as a strategy of control, arguing

[22] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 53.

that "Whites acted brutally toward blacks because they knew only fierce, arbitrary, and instantaneous violence would keep blacks in check."[23] To Burnard, Thistlewood's sadism against his slaves was a strategy of control, keeping them working and staving off the possibility of rebellion by meeting transgression with extremes of violence and humiliation. Burnard suggests ways in which this violence was libidinal—Thistlewood frequently exploited enslaved women to gratify his sexual desire, and like his peers, harbored a constant fear of rebellion that motivated him to exercise violent control.[24] Yet unlike Taussig, he identifies the roots of violence in Jamaican social and racial structures. Violence against the enslaved, he writes, worked to entrench the racial division between Black and white, exercising simultaneously the African slave's extreme subordination and dehumanization and the white owner's power to pursue his own pleasure.[25] Invoking Primo Levi,[26] Burnard describes the Jamaican plantation as "a gray zone with moral rules peculiar to its own distorted social structure," a milieu in which violence braced a political and social structure founded on labor exploitation.[27] As such, Burnard sees plantation violence not only as a libidinal response to an epistemological problem, but also as a functional element in a society based on the economic and legal logic of slavery. Though the legal edifice of chattel slavery in the West Indies differed from the "lawless" conditions in which the Putumayo rubber violence took place—where Burnard argues that Thistlewood's violence acted as a social and ideological prop for the legal institution of slavery, Casement complained

[23] Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6.
[24] Burnard, 10, 26–29.
[25] Burnard, 32.
[26] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1988).
[27] Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*, 33–34.

that in the Putumayo, "the chief of each section knew no law but his own will."[28] Though it did not participate in a performance of legal subjection, rubber violence was both libidinally motivated and ideologically productive, enacting and reinforcing, as in Thistlewood's Jamaica, the ideological structures that girded economic production.

My analysis of rubber violence therefore focuses on the ways in which individual desires channeled through available social and political forms in order to produce the material shapes of violence. That is, any single rubber agent's fear of indigenous retaliation or desire for indigenous bodies took its outward shape through available narratives and practices that derived from capitalist and colonial dominance. Sexual exploitation is the prime example of this channeling: rubber traders who routinely kept indigenous women in sexual servitude, raped people who were confined in the stocks, or committed genital torture, acted on their own erotic desires; at the same time, the specific forms of violence they practiced contributed to extractive domination in the Putumayo by restricting indigenous sexuality to serving the extractive project. Thus forms of violence and exploitation that may have been libidinal in their individual motive—that is, proceeding from personal desires for sex or power—merged with the overarching ideological and material work of the extractive system. The first part of this paper focuses on the ways in which individual, libidinal desire was mediated through the ideological structure of the extractive zone, rendering forms of violence that, while extravagant and shocking, ultimately aligned with the economic logic of rubber. These acts of violence in a sense offer a privileged case by which to study the channeling of libidinal desire through capitalist-imperial ideology—they appear to

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[28] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 23. In his professional journal, Casement frequently referred to the "lawlessness" of the rubber regime

be obvious expressions of individual wrath, jealousy, covetousness, or lust on the part of the perpetrators, and as such flag clear interventions of desire in the material world of extraction.

Yet as I show in the second part, Casement's own private and public writings tell us that political expressions of desire also helped shape the more disciplined forms of colonialism that responded to the extractive regime of torture, rape, and murder. I explore the libidinal forces that drove more liberal, humanitarian approaches to rubber production through Casement's extensive public and private writings. Casement was already known as a strident voice for colonial reform before he arrived in the Putumayo in 1910. The Anglo-Irish diplomat, who had begun his career at the age of sixteen as a clerk with the Elder-Dempster shipping line, had traveled the upper Congo eight years before in his capacity as British Consul to the Congo Free State of Belgian King Leopold II.[29] The Congo Free State had harbored its own violent rubber extraction zone, characterized most notoriously by the practice of severing rubber workers' hands in punishment for a short quota.[30] Casement's official Foreign Office report on rubber extraction in the Congo fanned a humanitarian scandal in Britain and the United States, and consolidated his affiliation with anti-slavery reformists in London.[31] His extracurricular humanitarian work developed alongside his burgeoning sense of Irish nationalism, which several biographers suggest grew in part from a sense of affinity with the victimized Congolese.[32]

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[29] Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973); Séamas Ó Síocháin and Michael O'Sullivan, eds., *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003).

[30] Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 39–78, http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=696761&site=eds-live&scope=site.

[31] Kevin Grant, 39–78; Ó Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*.

[32] Séamas Ó Síocháin, "'More Power to the Indians': Roger Casement, the Putumayo, and Indigenous Rights," *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (2011): 5–12; Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries, with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life* (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002); Ó Síocháin and O'Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*; Angus Mitchell, ed., *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (Dublin, Ireland: The Lilliput Press, 1997),

Though he ultimately quit the Foreign Office and worked toward an independent Ireland, Casement's analysis of the Putumayo extraction was reformist rather than radical. He argued consistently for the dismissal of offending Peruvian Amazon Company operatives but the preservation of the Company itself, as a guard against a new wave of extractive competition in the Putumayo, and he believed firmly in the organizing influence of Christian missions.[33] But as with the violence of Company agents, Casement's individual desire took its outward form through the ideological channels available to him. His liberal, reformist, civilizing vision for the Putumayo, I argue, was in large part an expression of his erotic desire for indigenous male bodies. Throughout his time in the Putumayo, Casement recorded his admiration for young indigenous men in his private diary—a document that was to become explosive in 1916 when British authorities undermined sympathy for Casement by showing his supporters selective entries while he stood trial for his role in the Easter Rising. Though he did not record ever having intercourse while in the Amazon, Casement's homoerotic gaze shaped and delimited his observations of rubber violence, leaving him largely inattentive, for example, to the systemic sexual abuse of indigenous women. Casement's desire took political shape in his public writings as a masculine erotics of civilization, whereby he envisioned rubber violence as an injury primarily to the male sexual subject, and espoused reform as a civilizing consummation between the indigenous man and the "true whiteman," a racialized savior. As with the rubber violence itself, Casement's vision of civilization worked both at the ideological and material levels: he materialized the erotics of his public and private writings by enacting the eroticized "rescue" of

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http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=693173&site=eds-live&scope=site.

[33] Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, 88, 102, 108; Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 327–38; Roger Casement, "The Putumayo Report," in *The Black Diaries: An Account of Roger Casement's Life and Times with a Collection of His Diaries and Public Writings*, by Peter Singleton-Gates, ed. Maurice Girodias (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 226.

two Huitoto youths, Omarino and Arédomi, from the Putumayo. In bringing the youths with him to England with the aim of exciting humanitarian interest and giving them a "civilized" education,[34] Casement manifested his documented homoerotic desire in an act of rescue, sublimating desire in the ideological forms of a civilizing mission. Casement's vision of civilization, though vehemently opposed to the violence of the extractive zone, equally channeled his own libidinal desire through political forms.

Further, though Casement abhorred the brutality of Putumayo rubber extraction, his own vision of civilization and the Company agents' violence were ideologically continuous in their reliance on the dichotomy between savagery and civilization. I explain this continuity using the frame of tropicality, whose melding of wonder and danger, riches and death represented an ideological confusion between the civilized and the savage. Roger Casement brought a copy of Bates' *Naturalist on the River Amazons* on his Putumayo expedition, and in his own writings he emulated both Bates' enthusiasm for tropical nature and his occasional sense of dread at the gloom, danger, and disease of the forest.[35] This ambivalence illustrates the epistemic murk that Taussig identifies with extractive incursion into the Putumayo—rubber traders' acquisition of tropical riches was mired within the terror of tropical death, especially as embodied in the reverie of the violent, cannibalistic Indian. Rubber violence was, in Taussig's view, a reaction to this troubling ambivalence of meaning. In integrating this libidinal understanding to the economic field, I argue that the rape, torture, and murder of indigenous Putumayans was both an ideological and material solution to the frightening duality of the tropics; rubber agents

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[34] Lesley Wylie, "Rare Models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the Ethnographic Picturesque," *Irish Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (August 1, 2010): 315–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2010.493024.
[35] Roger Casement, "The 1910 Diary," in *The Black Diaries: An Account of Roger Casement's Life and Times with a Collection of His Diaries and Public Writings*, by Peter Singleton-Gates, ed. Maurice Girodias (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 224–43; Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 325; Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 82, 100.

eradicated all non-extractive forms of indigenous life, rooting out non-productive “savagery” in the cause of subordinating the tropical zone to industrial civilization. Casement, while decrying the traders’ violence, responded to the same ideological problem of the tropics. But rather than the forcible removal of the savage, he instead envisioned a positive, erotic inculcation of civilization. By their opposing politics, Casement and the rubber extractors both sought to resolve the problem of savagery and civilization in the tropics.

The economics of extraction in the Putumayo

As both Bates and Casement demonstrated, European travelers in tropical zones viewed these landscapes with a combination of excitement and dread that David Arnold has described as "tropicality."[36] On the one hand, Alexander von Humboldt initiated a discourse of vigorous tropical beauty in his accounts of his travels in Central and South America at the turn of the nineteenth century, construing this vivacity as a "harmoniously ordered whole" of nature which he designated "the Cosmos."[37] Humboldt's romantic view informed more than a century of lush representations that depicted the primitive and exotic flavor of the tropics through tropes such as the palm tree and the colorful macaw.[38] But this wealth of natural beauty also carried great hazard to the European observer. The depictions of bird-eating spiders or indigenous men crouched in ambush with blowguns in Bates' *Naturalist on the River Amazons*,[39] for example, stood in for more existential tropical dangers. The lushness of tropical nature was seen to mirror its violence—as Arnold writes, "where Humboldt found in the tropics evidence for an essentially harmonious Cosmos, Darwin discovered proof of a fiercely Malthusian struggle for survival."[40] Both tropical lushness and danger underwrote the supposed risk of racial degeneration for white people in the tropics; European "transplants" were in danger of moral laxity, sexual promiscuity, and reproductive dysfunction, not to mention virulent tropical diseases.[41] Indeed, the deterioration of European moral fiber was a function of tropical lushness in and of itself: tropical

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[36] Roger Casement, "The 1910 Diary," in *The Black Diaries: An Account of Roger Casement's Life and Times with a Collection of His Diaries and Public Writings*, by Peter Singleton-Gates, ed. Maurice Girodias (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 224–43; Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 325; Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 82, 100. In geographical terms, "The [tropical] region is located in the middle latitudes of the globe (between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, 23½ degrees north and south respectively) though tropical or sub-tropical conditions are often seen to prevail over a considerably larger area," 142.

[37] Arnold, 146.

[38] Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 19–21.

[39] Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*, 37, 87.

[40] Arnold, "Inventing Tropicality," 149.

[41] Arnold, 154–55.

environments supposedly offered indigenous people easy access to a great variety of different foodstuffs, deflating the need for industry and competition that European commentators saw as the essence of "civilization." Such moral-racial arguments paved the way for apologies for slavery—"naturally lazy" tropical dwellers would work only under coercion.[42] The tropics were an imagined space both of great opportunity for adventure and extraction and of immense hardship and danger to the European transplant.

The intertwined problems of tropical richness and indigenous "laziness" lay at the heart of wild rubber extraction. In the Upper Amazon, material realities and the European tropical imaginary conspired to form a highly unsettled, violent, and contested extractive zone. Peruvian rubber agents in the Putumayo developed a coercive system and ever-expanding extractive frontier in response to the dual material problems of sparse rubber and elusive labor. The naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, whose evolutionary theory of competitive selection influenced Darwin's *On the Order of Species*, wrote in his 1878 essay *Tropical Nature* that the Amazon landscape combined an awe-inspiring diversity of species with a frustrating sparsity of individual specimens—he observed considerable distances, for example, between different individual trees of the same species.[43] This was certainly the case for the natural rubber or *Hevea brasiliensis* stands of the Upper Amazon, which grew widely dispersed as an adaptation against South American leaf blight.[44] Rubber trees' dispersal, which safeguarded their health in the forest environment, made it difficult for traders to extract latex with any regularity or efficiency. Rather

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[42] Arnold, 158–60.
[43] Megan Raby, *American Tropics: The Caribbean Roots of Biodiversity Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 6–7. Raby presents Wallace as an early theorist of tropical environments whose observations and formulations have shaped the assumptions of modern tropical biology.
[44] Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, 104. The leaf blight (*Mycrocyclus ulei*) with which *Hevea* had co-evolved foiled numerous attempts to cultivate natural rubber crops in the Amazon, including Henry Ford's Brazilian plantation community of Fordlandia between 1920 and 1945. Ross posits that *Hevea* was only successfully planted once exported to Southeast Asia because it was able to fill new ecological niches in the absence of its prior competitive restraints.

than grow and tap *Hevea* in concentrated plots (as plantations in Ceylon and Malaya would later succeed in doing), Amazon extractors were obliged to travel considerable distances through the forest between trees, not only lengthening the extraction process but also forcing workers into long treks with heavy loads. Destructive tapping practices exacerbated the sparsity of rubber trees. The most common method of extracting latex from rubber trees was by cutting multiple gashes into the trunk to drain the sap;[45] these gashes exposed the trunks to invasive fungi and insects, commonly killing the trees in the process.[46] Camilo Domínguez estimates that by 1903 most rubber trees between the Ariari and Putumayo Rivers had been destroyed, a swathe approximately 200 kilometers wide.[47] The distribution and vulnerability of *Hevea* meant a long collection and transport process for each individual stand—and as such, extracting large volumes of latex on short schedules required a large amount of labor.

The problem for rubber traders was that the required labor was not forthcoming from indigenous populations in the Putumayo, who worked within smaller-scale economic systems geared toward subsistence.[48] Extracting rubber meant trekking into the forest, finding rubber trees, tapping them, collecting and drying the latex, working it into large, round bales or "*chorizos*" (sausages), and carrying these bales, which Casement reported to weigh as much as 70 kilos,[49] bodily through the forest back to rubber stations on the river.[50] Colombian and

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[45] Ross, 102.
[46] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 36–38. In forest extraction, a *Hevea* tree might be tapped once before it died; by contrast, *Hevea* trees in plantations could produce rubber for up to 30 years if tapped responsibly.
[47] Domínguez, 37.
[48] Major indigenous groups in the Putumayo included the Huitotos, Boras, Andokes, Muinanes, Recigaros, Ocainas, and Nonuyas. Because the sources often do not differentiate between these groups, and because often indigenous people of multiple ethnicities were forced to work rubber together, I refer mostly to "indigenous people" or "indigenous Putumayans." Where the specific ethnicity of an indigenous subject is known, I have specified. Casement, "The Putumayo Indians"; Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*; Camilo Domínguez and Augusto Gómez, *La economía extractiva en la Amazonia colombiana, 1850-1930* (Colombia: TROPENBOS, 1990); Gómez López, Sotomayor Tribín, and Lesmes Patiño, *Enfermedades, epidemias y medicamentos*.
[49] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 124.
[50] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 35–38. The labor involved in rubber extraction was similar to that required by the earlier Amazonian trade in *cinchona*, a tree bark used to make the important anti-malarial quinine. As in the

Peruvian traders relied on indigenous workers not only for the labor power this process required, but also for their knowledge of local environments. Indigenous workers were often familiar with the locations of nearby rubber trees or stands, or knew how to find them[51]—for example by following *Hevea* roots, which could be visible on the surface at a distance of tens of meters from the trunk.[52] Traders also depended on these local workers for food supplies and translation services.[53] But despite the traders' dependence on such labor and knowledge, indigenous groups had no motivation to work rubber at the industrial scale that traders required. Indigenous production centered on sylvan agriculture, in which different food crops were planted in a single, small plot, cleared from the forest by cutting and burning. There was little surplus, and few indigenous groups in the Putumayo practiced commerce at a significant level, trading primarily in medicinal plants among themselves.[54] Rubber agents' industrial-scale trade in raw materials represented a radical shift in productive mode in which indigenous groups were neither prepared nor willing to participate. Indigenous workers, though crucial to rubber traders' extractive projects, had no interest in engaging in a capitalist economy.

Traders resolved this dilemma—the need for large quantities of labor in an area where local populations had no economic interest in working—primarily through violent coercion. Rubber agents acquired indigenous labor-power through hostage-taking and slave-raiding, tactics that were known as *conquistas* (conquests) and *correrías* (raids).[55] On *conquistas*, armed agents

rubber trade, quina extractors used indigenous labor to collect and carry large weights of *cinchona* from the deep forest to riverine trading stations. As was to be the fate of Amazon rubber, the *cinchona* trade collapsed in 1884 due to competition from British and Dutch plantations in Ceylon and Java. See Domínguez, 81–103.

[51] Domínguez and Gómez, *La economía extractiva en la Amazonia colombiana, 1850-1930*, 8.

[52] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 34.

[53] Domínguez, 282.

[54] Gómez López, Sotomayor Tribín, and Lesmes Patiño, *Enfermedades, epidemias y medicamentos*, 26, 42.

[55] The rubber regime of the Putumayo closely resembled that of the Congo Free State in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: extractors addressed the sparse distribution of rubber plants (in the Congolese case typically the latex-producing Landolphia vine) and lack of available labor through slave raids and violent reprisals against recalcitrant workers. The use of flogging and bodily mutilation to enforce rubber quotas was common to both

and their enforcers entered indigenous groups' communal houses and distributed "gifts" of textiles, axes, machetes, and other industrial products. The agents construed these items as a pre-payment for rubber, which they then obliged the men of the community to collect while keeping the women and children under armed guard, usually forcing the women to cook for them while the men were away in the forest.[56] As demand for rubber intensified and *Hevea* became harder to find, these extortions escalated into full-scale slave raids. *Correrías* recycled the hostage tactics of the *conquista*, but with the aim of capturing indigenous groups wholesale and transporting them back to river stations in order to work rubber.[57] Manuel Espinosa, Colombian consul to Iquitos, wrote in 1896 that traders would set out "in bands, well armed, following the tracks of the poor savages until they found and ambushed them, murdering them villainously and stealing their women and children in order to sell them later, or let them die from hunger and misery."[58] In 1904 Edward Crichlow, a Barbadian overseer employed by the Arana Company, told Casement: "We had to make expeditions with guns to hunt Indians, like hunting wild beasts. … We all sit in the 'capitan's' house and send out the 'muchachos' [indigenous guards in the employ of the Company], who are armed, to call Indians. The 'capitan' is kept guarded, because if all the Indians do not come in he will be flogged."[59] Where *conquistas* maintained a fig-leaf of capitalist legitimacy by making "payments" in cheap industrial goods, *correrías* were outright

systems. Casement remarked in his professional Putumayo journal, "It is the Congo question over again, with the same kind of careless-minded or not logical minded defenders. A thing cannot be slavery, and, at the same time, be a voluntary contract." Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 88. On rubber extraction in the Congo Free State, see Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*; Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

[56] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 25–26.

[57] Augusto. Gómez, Ana Cristina. Lesmes, and Claudia. Rocha, *Caucherías y conflicto colombo-peruano: testimonios 1904-1934*, 1. ed. (Santafé de Bogotá: Disloque Editores, 1995), 51–60.

[58] Quoted in Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 104. "[Salir] en pandilla, bien armados, siguiendo las huellas de los pobres salvages hasta encontrarlos y sorprenderlos, asesinándolos villanamente y robándoles sus mujeres y sus hijos para venderlos después o dejarlos morir de hambre y de miseria"; all translations from Spanish are my own unless otherwise noted.

[59] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 90.

slave raids, aimed to press indigenous people en masse into rubber collection. Unable to draw indigenous workers commercially to the rubber trade, agents used armed force to acquire their labor-power.

Rubber extraction in the Amazon was a system of forced labor, maintained through regularized corporal violence. *Conquistas* and *correrías* enacted social as well as bodily violation—forcing indigenous people to work rubber meant alienating them from their pre-existing economic and environmental relations, removing them from local trade networks and leaving them unable to produce their own food.[60] Indigenous rubber workers faced additional physical danger, trekking long distances with heavy loads in states of poor health and malnourishment.[61] As Espinosa wrote, "if they fall sick [the overseers] leave them to die without the least care."[62] In these already grueling circumstances, traders retained their workers and maintained productivity through a violent quota system, enforced through flogging and confinement in the stocks, known locally as the *cepo*. Delivering an insufficient return of rubber for the quota period, as well as other offenses such as attempted escape from the rubber stations or refusal to perform auxiliary labor such as laundry and food cultivation, brought corporal punishment meted out in front of family members and fellow workers. Aside from punishing individual infractions, regularized violence worked to intimidate onlookers and discourage escape.[63] Physical punishment and confinement allowed rubber traders to maintain by force a large body of indigenous workers in a labor that left them physically exhausted and socially alienated.

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[60] Gómez López, Sotomayor Tribín, and Lesmes Patiño, *Enfermedades, epidemias y medicamentos*, 26–27, 37. Gómez et al. also stress the differences between indigenous forms of agriculture, which they argue were largely symbiotic with the forest environment, and destructive tapping practices.
[61] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 133–34.
[62] Quoted in Domínguez, 104.
[63] Domínguez, 137.

Rubber traders' intense cruelty to their indigenous laborers answered the global boom in rubber demand around the turn of the twentieth century. Systemic violence was at one level an on-the-ground solution to Ross' "stark incongruity between industrial-scale demand and primitive methods of supply."[64] Rubber as an industrial commodity grew in importance over the course of the nineteenth century: Charles Goodyear's invention of vulcanization in 1839 refined natural rubber, removing the brittle and sticky qualities of untreated natural latex; over the next decades vulcanized rubber came to be used in cushions, pool tables, elastic-sided boots, telegraph cables, dolls, and a myriad of other consumer and industrial products.[65] The pneumatic tire, invented in 1888 to coincide with the development of bicycles and automobiles, accelerated global demand for rubber.[66] As new technologies formed the world rubber market, they also opened the Amazon to extractors. Steam navigation of the Amazon opened the pace and volume of riverine commerce from the middle of the nineteenth century; in 1874 the Colombian trader in cinchona Rafael Reyes succeeded in linking the Putumayo to the lower Amazon by steamboat.[67] The newly navigable route allowed Peruvian and Colombian traders access to the Atlantic seaport in Pará, Brazil, and from there to the world market. As the French traveler E.F. André gushed, "From Cusco to the origins of the Orinoco, from the Bolivian to the Colombian mountains, travelers and merchants could thus traverse this river route without obstacle or interruption and set out for the Atlantic … converting the Amazon into one of the globe's primary centers of [commercial] traffic."[68] Yet before the first successful rubber plantations in

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[64] Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, 103.
[65] Loadman, *Tears of the Tree*, 287–92.
[66] Loadman, 298–303; Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, 103.
[67] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 90–91; Domínguez and Gómez, *La economía extractiva en la Amazonia colombiana, 1850-1930*, 44.
[68] E.F. André, "América Equinoccal," in *América Pintoresca*, vol. II (Calí: Carvajal, 1982), 771–73; Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 91–92. "De Cuzco a los orígenes del Orinoco, de las montañas de Bolivia a las de Colombia, viajeros y mercancías podrían, pues, pasar sin obstáculo ni interrupción por una corriente fluvial y dirigerse al Atlántico … y convirtiendo al Amazonas en uno de los primeros centros de navegación del globo."

the 1910s, the entire industry depended on wild rubber collection, primarily in the Amazon and central Africa.[69] The laborious and destructive process of wild collection represented a significant bottleneck in global rubber supply, one which extractors worked to break by a subsidy of violence. Slave raids and quota systems allowed traders to speed extraction cycles using an excess of labor-power, mitigating the "primitive methods of supply" on which the global rubber industry was founded.

Because it depleted the supply of both rubber and laborers, this highly destructive approach depended on the continuous expansion of the extractive frontier. Violent methods of control depleted the indigenous population of the Putumayo just as harmful extraction techniques destroyed stands of *Hevea* trees. Indigenous workers were murdered by rubber agents during raids, or in retaliation for non-compliance; they died from the effects of corporal punishment, or from the exhaustion of rubber work; they succumbed to contagions brought by rubber traders.[70] Indigenous groups who had not been captured, aware of the violence of the rubber trade, often retreated further from the extraction zones.[71] As a result, trees and indigenous bodies, both essential to extractive work, receded continually further from the rubber stations, which were typically situated on the network of rivers that fed the Putumayo. As materials and labor became increasingly scarce, agents and their enforcers encroached further into further into the forest.[72] The tremendous casualties and destruction of resources that rubber agents caused forced them constantly to shift and expand their zones of operation, pulling ever more acres of forest and indigenous groups into their orbit.[73] In addition to workers and trees, rubber extraction in the

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[69] Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, 103–6.
[70] Gómez López, Sotomayor Tribín, and Lesmes Patiño, *Enfermedades, epidemias y medicamentos*, 457–87.
[71] Domínguez and Gómez, *La economía extractiva en la Amazonia colombiana, 1850-1930*, 8.
[72] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 84–89, 128–31.
[73] Domínguez and Gómez, *La economía extractiva en la Amazonia colombiana, 1850-1930*, 8. The expanding rubber frontier fomented border conflicts between Peru and Colombia as Arana agents in search of *Hevea* and

Putumayo devoured vast expanses of territory as traders rushed to fulfill European and North American demand.

The violence and environmental destruction of the Putumayo rubber regime was in large part a direct response to global economic forces. Around the turn of the twentieth century, factories in Europe and the United States were treating and shaping rubber products on an industrial scale; steamships rushed the raw material to them from tropical extraction zones. Yet on the Putumayo River, the latex that fueled this economy still had to be collected by hand and transported by foot many kilometers through thick forest—Ross's "incongruity" between laborious collection and industrial production. Rubber traders' use of violence effectively allowed them to meet this demand through a territorial fix, expanding constantly to compensate for the absence of more efficient collection processes. The ubiquitous choice of violence in the Putumayo was a response to the material, botanical, and geographical limitations of the Amazon extractive zone, but also to the rapid timescale of rubber demand. Unlike the *Hevea* plantations already in development in the East Indies, whose seedlings could take up to seven years to mature,[74] Putumayo extractors worked to fulfill an immediate and growing demand, and as such freely expended the "resources"—natural and indigenous life—they did have at their disposal. The subsidy of violence allowed them to extract an elusive natural resource at an industrial scale.

Hence the regularized violence of the slave raid, flogging, and the stocks worked at the material level to overcome a shortage of labor-power. But to make them work rubber, agents had to take control not only of indigenous people's labor, but also their relations to production and to each other. Extractive violence, in its common forms as well as creative extremes such as

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workers encroached into Colombian-claimed territory—see Gómez, Lesmes, and Rocha, *Caucherías y conflicto colombo-peruano*.

[74] Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, 105.

dismembering and genital torture, served to reshape native groups into a population of rubber workers. As Taussig has observed, the *conquista*, the term reminiscent of the first wave of Iberian conquest in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was conceptually tied to the duty of civilizing native peoples. "Civilizing" here meant assimilating to civilization, that is to a global commercial system. Julio César Arana, head of the eponymous Company, told an accountant that "in undertakings like ours the capital is applied to and spent in conquering or more properly attracting to work and civilization the savage tribes, which, once this is attained … bring us the property of the very soil they dominated."[75] The Colombian traveler Joaquín Rocha framed yet more explicitly the continuity between commerce and civilization: "When a tribe of savages is encountered which nobody knew about or which has never had contact with whites, then it is said that they have been conquered by the person who manages to trade with them … Thus entering into the great and common labor of the whites, these Indians are brought into civilization."[76] Beyond the physical domination of indigenous groups, the victory of the *conquista* lay in the agent's success in engaging them within a capitalist system of trade.

The myth of "debt" against which Casement railed worked in parallel to veil the coercive basis of this feat of "civilization": the transfer of cheap industrial articles, recorded in Company ledgers as an "advance," allowed agents to claim that the rubber they received from their workers was the fulfillment of a free commercial exchange.[77] Of a dispute with Company Director H.L. Gielgud, a member of the Commission of Inquiry, Casement related: "When I contested to-day … that the arrangement as to 'paying' the Indians in advance after each fabrico was legitimate trading, or that it afforded any pretext in law or out of law for flogging an Indian subsequently

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[75] Quoted in Taussig, 23.
[76] Quoted in Taussig, 24. Translation Taussig's.
[77] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 64–67; Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 117–19.

who had taken these goods for not delivering the 'price' put upon them, he demurred. He did not defend the flogging, but he did uphold the 'contract'."[78] Here, the myth of the "advance" permitted Gielgud to disavow the practice of flogging while still maintaining that the Company's use of indigenous labor was legitimate. Such myths transmuted indigenous workers conceptually from their previous small-scale and communal modes of production into wage-laborers, permitting the Company to depict them within the norms of global capitalism rather than slavery. In the Company's books, they became sources of tradeable goods as well as individuals who could hold and work off debt—atomized workers who could legitimately be compensated, disciplined, and punished as laboring subjects.

Physical violence was the essential medium through which rubber agents propagated these myths. The forms of violence in themselves worked to reshape indigenous relations to production and labor, continuing the social destruction of the *correrías*. Beyond materially enforcing rubber work, the emblematic forms of regularized violence in Putumayo extraction—flogging and the stocks or *cepo*—divided indigenous bodies violently into individual and standardized units. The materiality of the *cepo*, typically a board with holes to confine multiple prisoners' legs, standardized by immobilizing multiple bodies in the same position, a painful visual and disciplinary reduction of the body to its laboring energy. Flogging was a standard "punishment" that acted on the individual body while marking, literally, the indigenous labor class as a whole. Domínguez describes the use of flogging on indigenous bodies as "indiscriminate"; men, women, children, and elders were all subject to whipping for trespasses such as under-delivery of rubber and refusing sexual advances.[79] Casement testified to the near-total ubiquity of flogging as evident from the scars on almost every indigenous Putumayan's

[78] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 88.
[79] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 132–37.

backs, thighs, or buttocks, estimating to his fellow Commissioners that between 90 and 100 per cent of all indigenous laborers they encountered bore flogging scars.[80] Indiscriminate flogging marked the dissolution of pre-existing indigenous social and political formations in favor of an undifferentiated and absolutely subservient laboring class. At the same time, it proceeded by a strictly individualistic logic. As the fabulous "debts" and strict quotas of the rubber regime were applied to the atomized individual, flogging was meted out primarily as an individual punishment. Even when indigenous family groups worked together to gather rubber, as was frequently the case, yields were weighed and punishments leveled according to each individual's quota.[81] The strict individualization of quota and punishment was most starkly instantiated in the practice of flogging mothers in retaliation for their children failing to meet rubber quotas—each worker, adult or child, had a certain yield to deliver, and failure to deliver that yield earned corporal chastisement, even if that chastisement was transferred to another body.[82] The physicality enforcement of these norms worked in concert with the legitimating myths to render indigenous people both in Company books and in their own relation to rubber work as laboring bodies, numerable, interchangeable, and expendable. This discursive and material practice of individuation effectively made indigenous bodies an exploitable and disposable resource, like manioc, fish, or *Hevea*.

Company agents' use of violence therefore served a distinct ideological and disciplinary function, essential to the economic project of rubber extraction both on the ground and in the world market. *Correrías* brought in a stream of indigenous people, while flogging and stockading transformed those people from members of communal networks to atomized working

[80] Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, 109.
[81] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 132–37.
[82] Casement, "The Putumayo Report," 262; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 40.

bodies. In this way forced labor, far from being a mere cost-saving measure for the Company, followed the perverse economic logic of the extractive zone. Yet sympathetic observers often expressed shock over the apparent waste and incoherency of this system. To many, the crushing violence against indigenous workers was short-sighted and uneconomical because it appeared not to be sustainable—Ursenio Bucelli, Harold Hamel Smith, and Casement all remarked on the apparent contradiction between the shortage of labor and the wanton killing of indigenous people.[83] For these commentators, the systematic murder of indigenous workers contravened the local economic logic of extraction, which called for more bodies to bring in more rubber, as well as the global industrial hunger for labor. As Taussig writes: "The horror occasioned by the Putumayo atrocities was in part due to the strange but pervasive fantasy that the tropics would breed forth an endless supply of wealth-creating colored labor, provided it was not choked off in its infancy by the unbusinesslike predilections of creole entrepreneurs."[84] While the regular abuses of flogging and stockading enforced indigenous labor at both the material and ideological levels, the creative extremes of violence leveled against workers seemed to contradict these strategies, and derive solely from the debased desires of rubber agents. The Barbadian overseers whom Casement questioned suggested that many of the worst abuses that agents committed were simply libidinal in their motive. Stanley Lewis described José Inocente Fonseca, then-chief of the Ultimo Retiro rubber station, laughing over the severed heads of slain workers, and declared, "I have seen Indians killed for sport, tied up to trees, and shot at by Fonseca and the others. After

[83] Valcárcel, *El Proceso Del Putumayo y Sus Secretos Inauditos*, 31; Hamel Smith, "Introduction," viii; Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 73; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 32, 55.
[84] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 55. It is worth noting that these contemporary critiques misunderstood the intended timescale of rubber extraction—as we have seen, the aim for rubber agents was not to build a sustainable industry but to extract as much rubber as possible in as short a time as possible, treating the human and natural "resources" of the Putumayo as expendable.

they were drinking they would sometimes do this."[85] Casement claimed continuity between agents' sexual desire and their enjoyment of killing, writing in his official report to the Foreign Office, "the gratification of this [sexual] appetite to excess went hand in hand with the murderous instinct which led these men to torture and kill the very parents and kinsmen of those they cohabited with."[86] Yet while the motives of these acts may have been libidinal, their material forms and ideological effects, like those of flogging and the *cepo*, supported the totalizing regime of rubber extraction. Even where torture and killing apparently worked against the direct economic needs of extraction, these terroristic acts appropriated all forms of indigenous life, especially sexuality and reproduction, to the extractive machine.

Practices of rape and sexual enslavement, for example, served both agents' libidinal and reproductive needs and the ideological processes that supported rubber extraction. Casement suggested that almost all Company employees kept indigenous women as concubines—he described with some opprobrium the "harems" that station chiefs kept, remarking sardonically that "It is reserved for Chiefs of Section and the higher agents of this commercial establishment to take their matrimony like their rubber, by a toll on the 'gross product' of the district,"[87] and that "I rarely saw an agent or 'racional' go a step from his door without being dutifully followed by the Indian girl or woman whom he called his 'wife.'"[88] These women performed sexual service as well as domestic labor—Casement mentions them cleaning the station houses as well as washing his own laundry[89]—and as such fulfilled the sexual and reproductive functions of the systems of "concubinage" that Ann Stoler identifies with early, masculine-centric forms of

[85] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 66.
[86] Casement, 44.
[87] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 81.
[88] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 46.
[89] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 87, 120.

colonialism.[90] Enslaved indigenous women therefore supported rubber extraction both through their domestic work and by serving as a supplemental form of sexual compensation for Company employees.

But beyond this quasi-economic function of concubinage, the violence with which agents enforced sexual and domestic servitude performed the social and epistemological function of neutralizing pre-existing indigenous relationships. Agents frequently took their "wives" by force: Casement witnessed Abelardo Agüero, chief of the Abisinia station, abduct a woman who did cleaning work at the local headquarters of La Chorrera and whom he "had taken a fancy to," bringing her "against her entreaties and in open tears" onto the Company steamer.[91] Agents had no scruples about kidnapping women already married to indigenous men. Casement's Barbadian servant and interpreter Frederick Bishop, himself a former Company employee, told him that José Inocente Fonseca "had coveted the wife of an Indian, and at length had annexed her"; Fonseca then "promised to restore the woman if the Indian brought in a certain quantity of rubber," which he continually inflated so the husband's yields were never sufficient to win back his wife. Eventually the indigenous man refused to work rubber, and was killed for it.[92] As Fonseca's abduction shows, the forcible taking of indigenous women not only fulfilled agents' desire for sexual gratification, but also reordered indigenous relationships toward the service of the rubber stations. In holding the indigenous man's wife hostage, Fonseca effectively denatured their original relationship in order to gain both a concubine and a rubber worker; hence a relationship that previously referred to pre-extractive, indigenous forms of sociality was severed

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[90] Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender and Morality in the Making of Race," in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 41–78.
[91] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 47.
[92] Casement, 47.

and reordered toward the needs of the agent. Whether by exploiting indigenous relationships or severing them completely, the system of concubinage appropriated indigenous social and sexual relations to rubber extraction.

Some of the most extreme acts of violence rubber agents committed in the Putumayo retaliated against indigenous women's supposed promiscuity. These acts, which often defied the economic logic of concubinage by murdering the offending woman, enforced spectacularly the extractors' claimed monopoly on indigenous sexuality. The Barbadian Westerman Leavine reported that at the station of Matanzas (literally "Massacres") in 1907, he witnessed chief Armando Normand "cut" a woman "to pieces" because she resisted concubinage, and have another woman wrapped in a Peruvian flag soaked in kerosene, burned alive, and then shot[93]—the flag emphasizing the symbolic dimension of this act of domination, figuring an act of brutality in the language of patriotism. The Barbadian overseer Siefert Greenidge accused another Barbadian, Cyril Atkins, of having threatened his wife with a rifle for supposedly having intercourse with a Colombian "half-caste," accidentally shooting an unrelated indigenous woman in the process.[94] Fonseca, in a murderous rehearsal of his earlier severing of an indigenous marriage, once "cut off a man's ears and then burnt his wife alive before his eyes."[95] And in one of the most horrifying accusations Casement heard, both Frederick Bishop and James Chase testified that Elias Martinengui, then-chief of Atenas, had one of his concubines flogged and then ordered "an Indian boy" to insert burning brands into her vagina, in retaliation for her being "sick with venereal disease."[96] Though they contravened the economic functions of reproductive and sexual subsidy that concubinage fulfilled, either by killing or sexually maiming the

[93] Casement, 99.
[94] Casement, 21, 70.
[95] Casement, 77.
[96] Casement, 58.

indigenous woman, rubber agents who murdered, tortured, and debilitated their sexual slaves punished non-extractive applications of sexuality. Indigenous women who maintained partnerships, sexual and otherwise, with indigenous men, as well as abducted women who supposedly had sex outside the relationship of concubinage, exercised their own sexualities outside the libidinal economy of the extractive regime. In punishing these forms of indigenous sexuality by extreme, creative, and symbolic methods, the agents performed spectacularly a prohibition on all forms of sexuality that did not serve the extractive system. Sexual violence against women—as well as the less frequent recorded cases against men, such as Fonseca's murder of an indigenous man by "smashing" his genitals with a club[97]—worked to eradicate all forms of indigenous sexuality that worked beyond the needs of extractors.[98]

These acts of sexual subjection supported agents' general ethos of eliminating all non-extractive forms of indigenous life, which often took expression through the violent suppression of resistance. Company agents maintained a well-documented terror of indigenous resistance, and punished severely any suggestion of rebellion or protest. Fernand Vasquez's vigorous hunt for the Boras chief Katenere, who had escaped rubber work, stolen rifles, and killed Bartolomé Zumaeta, brother-in-law to Company chief Julio César Arana, demonstrated agents' commitment not only to rooting out resistance, but also to destroying all forms of indigenous life outside the extractive regime. The Barbadian James Chase recounted to Casement that in June of 1910 Vasquez had led an expedition to find and kill Katenere, consisting of Chase, two other Peruvian agents, and eight indigenous "muchachos" or enforcers. Though the party found Katenere's

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[97] Casement, 77.

[98] As in Burnard's analysis of Thistlewood's physical and sexual violence against his slaves, rubber agents' sexual violence announced and maintained the exploiter's absolute power over their workers. The difference is that where violence in Jamaica supported a legal relation of ownership, violence in the "lawless" Putumayo supported the dominance of an economic and ideological extractive regime. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*.

dwellings and several of his family members, Katenere was absent; after a brief shoot-out with Boras rebels, they captured several of them, including Katenere's wife. On the return to the Morelia station, they encountered Katenere's six- or eight-year-old daughter, whom Vasquez ordered a "muchacho" to behead with a machete in front of the girl's mother, for "no reason … save that the child was crying."[99] As the march continued, Vasquez had two of the prisoners beheaded and three more shot for lagging behind due to hunger and exhaustion. It is in this way that he later bragged that he had "left the road pretty."[100] Only two of the Boras had fired upon Vasquez's expedition, and both were killed in the shootout;[101] the massacre of prisoners thus represented not only retaliation against indigenous resistance, but also the scourge of a group of Boras who had chosen to live apart from rubber extraction. Decapitating Katenere's daughter in front of the prisoners, including her own mother, was not only an expression of supreme power over the rebels' lives and families, but also graphically forbade any indigenous life to exist independent of the rubber system. The lesson for the captured Boras was that the life of a child who did not participate in extraction was better extinguished altogether and that the only possible indigenous future was in rubber collection. In the same vein, agents routinely killed workers for attempting to escape, even though this meant depriving themselves of able workers.[102] these killings worked to eliminate, materially as well as conceptually, the option of a non-extractive indigenous life.

This totalizing strategy was expressed most poignantly in the murder of indigenous elders. Rubber agents on *correrías* consistently killed the elders of indigenous communities, in

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[99] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 73–74.
[100] Casement, 75.
[101] Casement, 73.
[102] Casement, 56, 63.

part because they were not fit to work rubber, and in part because they were often accused of encouraging resistance to the rubber regime. Joseph Labadie told Casement that he had seen an old woman, herself not a rubber worker, shot at the station of Sur for being "a 'bad' woman."[103] Casement commented in his professional journal that she was shot "because she was a 'bad woman,' i.e. gave the younger people bad advice. Bad advice means not to work rubber."[104] Elders' offerings of "advice" reflected their role in indigenous groups as repositories of social and practical knowledge;[105] as such, their eradication represented not only the suppression of resistance to the rubber trade, but also the obliteration of much indigenous generational knowledge. Even when they themselves were not valuable to the rubber regime, indigenous elders fell victims to its violence as a way to cut off pre-extractive forms of indigenous life. Thus not only non-extractive expressions of sexuality, but also the existence of non-extractive forms of indigenous life in general, were punishable by death. Forms of excess violence worked at both the material level, ridding the Putumayo of indigenous resisters, as well as the political-ideological, putting on extravagant display the elimination of indigenous life-forms, and leaving indigenous people no possible life but through rubber extraction.

The excesses of violence that rubber agents committed against the indigenous populations of the Putumayo therefore served to support the extractive project ideologically, even when they appeared to undermine that project in direct economic terms. The regularized violence of slave raids, flogging, and the *cepo* worked materially to enforce and discipline indigenous labor, both forcing indigenous captives terroristically into collecting rubber and instilling bodily the individuating myths of debt and wage-labor that upheld and justified the

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[103] Casement, 62.
[104] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 125.
[105] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 101.

rubber regime. Extremities of murder and torture, though they often “wasted” valuable laborers through wanton violence, nevertheless participated in the social and ideological transformation of the Putumayo into an extractive space—in violently breaking pre-existing relations, especially the social and reproductive structures of indigenous communities, they converted the Putumayo tribes to a monofunctional population that worked only to support rubber extraction. Though they may have responded to the libidinal drives of fear and desire among Company agents, these “anti-economic” acts were extravagant social and disciplinary tools that secured a monocultural extractive zone. Individual libidinal forces therefore took their shape through the physical and social violence by which the Peruvian Amazon Company functioned. This regime of extreme violence reflected an annihilationist solution to the ideological problem of the tropics. In a space where the “civilized” politics of industrial capitalism intermingled vertiginously with the “savage” social and productive forms of indigenous Putumayans, extremes of violence worked to eradicate “savagery” altogether, leaving (in theory) an exclusively productive extractive space. Despite the appearance of irrationality in the extremes of rubber violence, these acts channeled the libidinal force of rubber traders through forms that supported a totalizing extractive zone in the Putumayo.

Omarino (left) and Aredomi, the two Huitoto youths Roger Casement brought back to Britain with him after his tour of the Putumayo in 1910. Portrait by Sir William Rothenstein, 1911; reproduced in Angus Mitchell, *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness* (2003).

Roger Casement, indigenous assimilation, and the transformation of tropical life

The Peruvian Amazon Company was not alone in confronting the problem of the tropics. Tropicality inhered a troubling enmeshment of civilization and savagery, those great polar discourses of European empire. The Amazon offered the raw materials for civilization, on the one hand—forest products like rubber and cinchona as well as theoretically "civilizable" native subjects—and the existential threat of savagery on the other. Most troublingly, the two elements were not ontologically separable: civilization took meaning only in opposition to the savage; natural and indigenous life could not be domesticated without first being radically strange and other. The tropics, and the Amazon in particular, were an irresoluble space of intertwined potential for civilized life and certainty of savage death. As well as being a practical solution to labor scarcity, rubber violence was a campaign to resolve this paradox by violently excising all economic and cultural elements of "savagery," breaking down indigenous productive and social forms to render a space governed only by the capitalistic logic of extraction. Agents worked systematically toward the destruction of human as well as natural life in the tropics, killing *Hevea* trees, leveling acres of forest to fuel steamboats,[106] and breaking down the social and biological bodies of indigenous people. Just as Arnold points to British colonial surgeons in India recommending the wholesale clearing of forests to avoid tropical contagions,[107] and Casement commented on agents' practice of clearing needlessly large spaces around their dwellings from vegetation, the Company figured the wide-scale removal of indigenous and natural life as both an economic and ideological approach to the problem of the tropics.

Such was the Peruvian Amazon Company strategy. But others, with Roger Casement in the fore, advocated an alternative strategy that would foster "civilized" modes of production

[106] Domínguez, *Amazonia colombiana*, 98–99.
[107] Arnold, "Inventing Tropicality," 153.

through the judicious management of tropical life. In his foreword to Woodroffe's book, the Viscount Bryce summed up the colonial spirit of this strategy:

> *[H]owever uncertain and unsatisfactory the Brazilian native labour may be, if Latin America is to be of permanent value as a producer of foodstuffs and raw materials to herself, to ourselves, and to others, steps must be taken at once, not only to stop the atrocious policy of cruelty and decimation which went on in the Putumayo region, but also to enable the number of natives to increase by the natural growth of population under proper conditions*.[108]

Still within the rubric of civilization, the aim here was to neutralize savagery by appropriating and remaking the tropical environment—including indigenous life—in a form amenable to commercial civilization. In contrast to the fervent timescale of rubber extraction, commentators such as Bryce imagined the development of tropical life within the longer timescale of sustained colonial production, indigenous labors representing "permanent value" rather than a disposable cost of extraction. In the absence of a British colonial mandate in the Amazon, Casement advocated the establishment of Christian missions as a means of bringing indigenous people (humanely, in his view) into the fold and practice of European civilization.

In his professional journal Casement wrote of planning to bring home a young indigenous boy as a specimen "to interest the Missions and the Anti-Slavery people in the fate of these poor people" (a project he ended up realizing, as we will see below).[109] In an ethnographic article on the Putumayo he praised the "kindly and affectionate influence" of Jesuit missionaries against the greed of traders, and wished that "something of the good-will and kindliness of Christian life may be imparted to the remote, friendless, and lost children of the forest,"[110] expressions that suggest his faith in Christian missions as a stabilizing factor in the long-term economic and

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[108] "Foreword on the Latin American Indian," in *The Rubber Industry of the Amazon and How Its Supremacy Can Be Maintained*, by Joseph F. Woodroffe (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1916), vi.
[109] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 104.
[110] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 328.

social transformation of "civilization." At the same time, he was relatively mum on practical alterations to productive modes in the Putumayo—he hoped in his professional journal that "possibly some of the wealthy people, who are also good people, may, possibly,—who knows?—it is a wild thought—take shares in the Company not to get rubber but to save Indians."[111] Casement advocated less for the overhaul of the extractive system itself than for the introduction of fair compensation for indigenous workers,[112] a solution that would keep them in thrall to rubber production by replacing forced labor with a capitalistic relation. Meanwhile, others such as Woodroffe envisioned the transition from wild extraction to plantation cultivation. In this mode, British planting and planning would transform the Putumayo from a wild jumble of tropical riches and dangers to a scientifically-controlled productive space that would eliminate the excesses and wastage of wild extraction.[113] In contrast to Company extractors, reformers like Casement and experts like Woodroffe imagined the solution to the life-death paradox to lie in the careful management of life and the expulsion of death from the tropics. Where rubber agents worked to eradicate savagery, their detractors hoped to instill civilization through economic, social, and scientific development.

Reformers imagined techno-colonial management as a more humane way of producing rubber—indeed, it could hardly have been less humane than the Peruvian Amazon Company's methods. But the ideology of colonial life-management was equally circumscribed within the epistemological nebulae of civilization and savagery. Though wreathed in the ideals of progress, efficiency, and civilization, a techno-colonial approach to the tropics was therefore no less

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[111] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 102.
[112] Casement, 81, 124.
[113] Woodroffe, *The Rubber Industry of the Amazon and How Its Supremacy Can Be Maintained*. Ross is forthright on why rubber planting succeeded in Southeast Asia but failed consistently in the Amazon: Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, 103–5.

libidinal in its motivations than the spectacular violence of extraction. Prominent imperial histories have addressed libidinal expressions of empire in different ways. Reimagining Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Ann Stoler has argued that imperial subjecthood consolidated through the interconstitutive discursive production of race and sexuality, and that forms of imperial administration in the Dutch East Indies followed and shaped this subject-formation.[114] Expanding Foucault's conception of desire, understood as a presocial "deus ex machina" shaped by social and disciplinary effects,[115] Stoler proposes a discursive edifice of race that managed subject-formation prior to the disciplining of sexuality. Though Stoler does not theorize a pre-discursive desire, her addition of race to the imperial "education of desire" understands desire, beyond the genital, to include drives toward social and political dominance.[116] Unlike Stoler, who demurs to foray into a pre-discursive psyche, Anne McClintock joins a psychoanalytic with a discursive-analytic approach to depict the ways in which "people's experiences of desire and rage, memory and power, community and revolt are inflected and mediated by the institutions through which they find their meaning—and which they, in turn, transform."[117] Despite differing in their theoretical approaches to the origins of desire, Stoler and McClintock jointly offer analytic tools by which desire can be described as channeling through and reorganizing the political world in which it lives. As with the extractive space of death, more disciplined forms of civilization and colonialism were libidinal in motivation. In the remainder of this essay, I examine the libidinal production of civilization through Casement's writing. The particular model of civilization that Casement espoused as a corrective to the Putumayo violence

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[114] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).
[115] Stoler, 168.
[116] Stoler, 190–92.
[117] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 15.

reorganized imperial ideas of civilization, nation, and gender in response to his own homoerotic desire. As guided by his desire, Casement's politics of civilization performed soft ideological violence, appropriating indigenous male sexuality while silencing women's sexual suffering and yoking Putumayans to a paternalistic, racially hierarchical capitalism.

While Casement's views aligned broadly with the mainstream of British humanitarian thought—he was a close collaborator of the activist Edmund Dene Morel, a firm believer in free-trade fixes for forced labor[118]—his papers from the Putumayo show that his politics took their form from the particularities of his own erotic desire. Casement kept two diaries while traveling in the Putumayo. The first consisted of detailed, longhand accounts of his interactions with Company officers and his fellow Commissioners, his efforts to secure testimony on the violence from the Company's Barbadian overseers, and his observations of rubber stations, work conditions, and the physical health of indigenous people.[119] The second, written in brusque shorthand, recorded his appreciations of nature, notes on his own physical health, and erotically explicit descriptions of his admiration for male bodies.[120] Casement seems to have written the first journal with a public or at least official audience in mind—it focuses at length on the details of his official business, and in 1913 he submitted it to Charles Roberts of the British Foreign Office to corroborate his official report of the expedition.[121] The second journal appears to have been meant for his own reference only, as it includes notes of personal news, records of private financial transactions, and erotic memories.[122] When read against the professional journal and

[118] Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, 39–78.
[119] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal."
[120] Casement, "The 1910 Diary."
[121] W.J. Mc Cormack, *Roger Casement In Death, or, Haunting the Free State* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002), 176.
[122] The authenticity of what I refer to here as Casement's personal diary was disputed for much of the twentieth century. American writer William Maloney's 1936 book *The Forged Casement Diaries* argued that British police had fabricated the diary in order to smear Casement as a homosexual and deflate public support for a reprieve when he was standing trial for treason in London in 1916. W.J. Mc Cormack writes that this so-called "Forgery Theory"

Casement's public writings on the Putumayo, including the Foreign Office report and his 1912 ethnographic article "The Putumayo Indians," these private notes allow us to place his sexual desire at the center of his thinking on civilization, nationalism, and race. Casement's homoerotic desire structured his evolving nationalist politics, which he worked out in the years after 1910 by reference to his experiences in the Putumayo. His erotic gaze led him to construe the Putumayo violence as acting primarily on male bodies; as such, he figured the "Indian" nation in itself as a male body, and imagined the racially structured act of civilization as an erotic consummation between white and indigenous men. Sexual desire therefore helped to shape Casement's colonial and national politics, suggesting the extent to which civilizational politics are libidinally motivated.

The effects of Casement's desires on his political consciousness are evident first in the structure of his private diary. Recording the events of each day, Casement noted observations, allegations, and evidence of atrocity alongside the prosaic details of life—bathing, the conditions of his quarters, how much he had won or lost at bridge. In these pages, thoughts sorrowful and dyspeptic, observations of horror and beauty, jostle together, mingling notably with homoerotic fantasies and memories. Far from being incidental to his other jottings, these irruptions of desire shaped the ways in which Casement perceived and understood the violent extractive structure around him. His descriptions of handsome masculine bodies, furtive views of erections, and frissons of erotic attraction, I argue, formed the foundation of a masculine erotics that structured

became popular because it allowed Casement to be admitted as an Irish national hero by denying his sexual interest in men. Perhaps the last remaining adherent to the Forgery Theory is Angus Mitchell, who has argued that discrepancies in the form and content of Casement's professional and personal diaries point to the invention of the latter. In my view, all of the discrepancies Mitchell notes are explained by Casement's different intended uses of the two diaries. William J. Maloney, *The Forged Casement Diaries* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1936); Mc Cormack, *Roger Casement In Death, or, Haunting the Free State*; Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*; Angus Mitchell, "Unframing the Black Diaries of Roger Casement," *ABEI Journal* 11, no. 0 (June 1, 2009): 183–202, https://doi.org/10.37389/abei.v11i0.3657.

Casement's gendered perception of the Putumayo atrocities, shaping both his private writings and his official report to the Foreign Office.

Casement's erotic desire structured the expression of affect in his private diary. In a generally abbreviative record of his daily observations, Casement's relatively infrequent expressions of overt emotion coincide with his admiration of and sympathy for male bodies. This affinity becomes clear in the way his sexual admiration disrupts collective descriptions of the victims of forced labor, singling out men or boys as the individual objects of Casement's sympathy. In his entry for October 27, 1910, for example, Casement appears to individuate subjects from a faceless group only when they attract his erotic attention: of his traverse between the stations of Entre Rios and Puerto Peruano, he wrote, "luggage by muchachos, one very fine lad, fair skin and nice face, about 19."[123] Casement records the "muchachos," armed Company enforcers, as a generalized, racialized collective—except for the one "very fine lad" whose attractive face calls for singular description. This pattern, by which Casement's attraction brought a man or boy forth from the faceless mass, also consistently structured Casement's affective responses, permitting him to observe the pain of individual victims of flogging and exhaustion. On October 25, he wrote, "4 boras (a young man, splendid type, a boy of 12 and two women) came down guarded by one armed footpad from Maturas—with 2 loads rubber." Of this group, Casement describes the women by their number and the "footpad" by his function, but takes specific interest in the young man and the boy. "The boy," he wrote, was "terribly flogged, all over his backside and thighs, enormous weals, a beautiful boy. The young man fine fellow, very light skin."[124] Casement perceived the young man as being singular for his attractiveness, and the boy for his beauty—a beauty that made the evidence of flogging on his body appear

[123] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 269.
[124] Casement, 267.

especially barbarous. In his personal diary, Casement's erotic attraction acted as the impetus and the condition for his recognition of individual suffering.

Because Casement limited his erotic attention in the diary to young men and boys, he effectively excluded women from his direct sympathies. In the entry quoted above, Casement describes the women only by their number—the same level of attention he pays to the loads of rubber the group bore.[125] Similarly, within the private diary, he recorded little affective response to his observations of women's sexual servitude. On September 20 he recorded seeing at Pescaria, a Company fishing station, "several women of Huitotos there in sexual servitude. A 'white man' from Lima with certainly two Huitota concubines, mothers of two, separate, boy children."[126] As with the group of rubber carriers, Casement numbers these women but offers no further description of them, and indeed the closest he comes to individuating them is by reference to the man who has enslaved them and their (male) children. His brusque attention to the plight of these Huitota women is especially jarring in contrast to his previous day's entry, in which he expressed poignant sympathy for a deer his steamboat crew had captured. He describes the animal as a "poor little chap" and muses, "I should like to save him and take him home to Ireland. He richly deserves his life."[127] In the diary, then, Casement devoted considerably more affective attention to a deer (gendered male) than to the indigenous women he observed in sexual servitude. His textual hierarchy of enumeration and individuation consistently brought the suffering of men and boys to the fore while sidelining the particularly gendered forms of exploitation under which women suffered in the Putumayo.

[125] Casement, 7.
[126] Casement, 243.
[127] Casement, 243.

Not limited to the pages of his personal diary, this gendered hierarchy of attention also structured his description of the Putumayo abuses in his Foreign Office report. Here, Casement reified indigenous men as the emblematic victims of forced labor while marginalizing the torture and sexual exploitation of women. Casement's eroticized focus on male victims in his private diary therefore underwrote his public, "official" understanding of extractive violence as acting primarily on male bodies. Casement devoted the weight of his report to the systematic use of flogging as the foundation of a terroristic forced labor regime in the Putumayo. As in his private diary, a textual regime of enumeration and individuation frames flogging as a masculine torture, with the brunt of its damage inscribed on the bodies of men and boys. As he never witnessed a flogging firsthand, Casement's primary evidence for the widespread use of the practice was in the scars that he saw on nearly all of the indigenous bodies he encountered. "All classes of the native population—young as well as old—women and children, youths and girls—caciques, or 'capitanes' and their wives—were marked, some only lightly, others with broad and often terrible scars."[128] Though he recognized that floggings were meted out regardless of sex, Casement focused individual attention on male, and especially young male, victims. As in the diary, he figured women as part of the collective victims of this torture, alongside children and elders; but his specific evidence of flogging, as well as his attempts to bring succor to the victims, were restricted to male bodies. "In more than one case," he wrote, "young men were brought to me with raw scars upon their hinder parts, with requests that I might give some healing lotion … I applied such healing medicines as I had with me to a dozen young men or boys who appealed for relief."[129] One explanation for this discrepancy is that Casement would have felt it improper to comment specifically on women's buttocks. But his application of lotion

[128] Casement, 246.
[129] Casement, 246–48.

to the wounds on young men's buttocks and thighs also echoes the eroticized attention evident in his diary—for him these wounds must have represented a sexual injury, and the process of treating them an act at once erotic and sorrowful. When Casement follows that he "was able, therefore, to inspect them closely, and many of the wounds were not yet healed,"[130] he further suggests the centrality of the erotic in his observation of and sympathy for wounded bodies. Casement therefore figured flogging—to him the starkest sign of labor abuse in the Putumayo—as a masculinized torture, its evidence most vividly present on the eroticized bodies of young men. In contrast to the excesses of violence he condemned, which worked to warp indigenous social and political relations to the extractive system, Casement's erotic gaze projected a sexual hierarchy onto indigenous life, ideologically assimilating the Putumayans he observed to a masculinist politics of civilization. Where rubber agents equalized and destroyed, Casement's private and public writings evaluated and stratified indigenous life in the Putumayo.

This stratification founded on erotic desire is further evident in Casement's treatment of systematic sexual violence in his report to the Foreign Office. While his erotic gaze foregrounded the bodily and sexual suffering of indigenous men in his private and public writings, Casement treated the sexual exploitation of women euphemistically and elliptically, suggesting that his humanitarian politics were both driven and delimited by his attraction to men. In the body of the Foreign Office report, for example, he described the act of vaginal torture that Bishop had witnessed simply as a "crime … against an Indian girl," but did not make the nature of the crime explicit; instead, he wrote, "It will be found referred to in a preliminary declaration of Bishop appended to this report, and is of too revolting a character to be dwelt on."[131] Casement's inclusion in the body of his report only of this evasive description of the "crime"

[130] Casement, 248.
[131] Casement, "The Putumayo Report," 270.

effectively acknowledged the event while suppressing its subjective (and, as we have seen, material and ideological) effects. In the appendix he allows us to glean the basic shape of the torture, but refuses specifics: he states only that brands were inserted "into her body," and leaves Bishop to suggest the sexual valence of this torture: "Bishop did not like to say where, but indicated with his hand."[132] At the textual level, Casement's decision to relegate the details of this incident to the appendix (as compared to his frequent, explicit descriptions of bodily violence against men in the body of his report) places sexual exploitation of women at the margin of the rubber regime. Casement later glosses this sleight-of-hand recognition cum suppression in explicit terms, writing of rape, "Of this class of crime … abundant evidence was forthcoming. I do not propose to deal further with misdeeds of this character."[133] Stating the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women—not just a crime but a "class of crime"—he in the same breath denies its centrality by eliding any description of its specifics. Where the pain of male victims of flogging is stark, visible, and embodied, the pain of the sexually exploited woman is, in the textual sense, imaginary. As such Casement did not overtly perceive the essential material and ideological role of sexual violence to the rubber regime.

Where women's exploited bodies do appear in the Report, they signify not the suffering of the women themselves but the decadence and excesses of the male Company agents. In describing an agent's "harem," Casement drew a damning contrast between the bodies of indigenous rubber-carries and those of the agents' "wives." When a company agent traveled between posts, he wrote, "while the half-starved Indians staggered under enormous baskets of rubber, a troop of pleasant-faced girls and women, decently clad in long chemises or 'cushmas'

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[132] Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," 58.
[133] Casement, "The Putumayo Report," 270.

of bright cotton prints, sleek, shining and well fed, waited upon the chief of section."[134] Cross-reference to his private diary amplifies Casement's disdain for these women: on September 21, he observed a "Woman sleek and fat—the concubine."[135] These pampered, feminized bodies—sleek, fat, pleasant, shining—serve as the decadent counterpoint to the emaciated, scourged, by-default masculine forms of the rubber-carriers. But though Casement betrays a misogynistic disdain for these "concubines," he sees them not as subjects but as avatars of the Company agents' own immorality. In Casement's argument that "The gratification of this appetite to excess went hand in hand with the murderous instinct which led these men to torture and kill the very parents and kinsmen of those they cohabited with,"[136] the exploited "wives" figured not as violated female subjects in and of themselves but as the signs of Company agents' moral degeneration, the "excess" that motivated both their physical torture of indigenous men and their sexual violence against indigenous women. Casement here suggested a teleology by which sexual exploitation of indigenous women led these agents to physical abuse of indigenous men; the primary victims of rape here are male, whether the degenerate rubber traders or the whipped indigenous men.

Casement thus constructed, across his private diaries and his official report to the Foreign Office, a masculine erotics of atrocity in the Putumayo. Sexual attraction to and identification with young male victims of forced labor structured his understanding of the Arana rubber regime: he took flogging to be its central abuse, a terroristic torture acting on the bodies and sexualities of indigenous men. This strictly homoerotic gaze by turns ignored and subordinated the experiences of indigenous women under the rubber regime. In consequence, Casement's

[134] Casement, 298.
[135] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 245.
[136] Casement, "The Putumayo Report," 290.

representations of rubber violence focused on the libidinal source of these excesses, with no interpretation of the ways in which sexual violence structured the extractive space. Ascribing these acts solely to an "appetite for excess," the deranged acts of men who had degenerated in the tropical environment, occluded the ways in which these tortures and violations formed a structural part of the edifice of capitalist extraction, excluding all non-extractive sexuality and reproduction. Casement's depictions of the Putumayo therefore obscured not only women's subjectivity and pain, but also the material and ideological function of sexual violence in a capitalist system. Subordinating the structure and function of sexual violence in the Putumayo allowed Casement to maintain an allegiance to "civilization" that did not confront the uses of violence, bracketing the abuses as perverse explosions of individual libido and preserving economic "rationality" as the basic criterion of civilization.

Parsing the boundaries of the rational to exclude violent rubber agents allowed Casement to develop an alternative model of civilization, rejecting extractive violence and embracing instead a rescue realized through the long-term colonial management of life. Building on his erotically-channeled understanding of rubber violence, Casement imagined this process of civilization as an erotic consummation between men. A year after Casement sent the Foreign Office his completed Putumayo Report he published an ethnographic essay, simply titled "The Putumayo Indian," in the pages of the *Contemporary Review*. Building on his observations and experiences in the upper Amazon, this ethnography elaborated a descriptive, timeless portrait of the indigenous peoples Casement had encountered in the course of his diplomatic travels. Though rubber extraction overshadowed the article, Casement avoided explicit reference to it, alluding, for example, to indigenous depopulation "brought about by means I will not discuss

here."[137] In once again sidestepping the structural functions of violence, Casement elaborated an ahistorical vision of the "Putumayo Indians," one which licensed him to extricate the act of civilization itself from the floggings, violations, and murders of the Putumayo regime. Rather than the violent eradication of savagery, then, Casement conceived of civilization as the paternalistic salvage of life from the savage tropics. In private, he imagined this rescue materially as an erotic consummation between what he thought of as "the true whiteman" and the lost indigenous soul.

This erotically consummated civilization arose in part from Casement's sexual admiration of indigenous bodies, but it also took its shape from a more ineffable desire for national belonging which was to shape his final years as an Irish separatist. His conceptions of racial hierarchy and purity, which structured his consummation of civilization, derived both from homoerotic desire and from a sentimental attachment to the Irish nation. On September 17, 1910, in the middle of an arduously slow steam passage up the Putumayo River, delayed by shallow channels, mists, and poor visibility, Casement jotted his somewhat acid thoughts on the boat's young Quechua pilot on a blotter page of his notebook:

> *The man who gives up his family, his nation, his language, is worse than the woman who abandons her virtue. What chastity is to her, the essentials to self-respect and self knowledge are to his manhood. … The young Quichua pilot on 'Liberal' is named Simon Pisango—a pure pure Indian name—but calls himself Simon Pizarro—because he wants to be 'civilised'. Just like the Irish O's and [illegible] dropping first their names or prefixes to shew their respectability and then their ancient tongue itself to be completely Anglicized. Simon Pisango still talks Quichua, but another [illegible—likely "generation"] of Pizarros will speak only Spanish! Men are conquered not by invasion but by themselves and their own turpitude.*[138]

This brief passage offers rich insight into Casement's developing politics. Most overtly, the pilot prompted him to comment on the degeneration of Irish culture, decrying what he sees as his

[137] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 320.
[138] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 241–43.

compatriots' willing anglicization. More broadly, this screed neatly glosses Casement's understanding of race and nationhood: it is the man's responsibility to maintain the cultural and familial vivacity of his nation (Casement might have said his race); the woman's role is only to maintain her own sexual temperance—a conservative chastity that Casement does not link to the nation as a whole. This gendered theory of nation echoes Casement's representation of rubber violence in the Putumayo Report: men are the essential victims of a degenerate rubber regime in the same way they are the quick of the nation, while women are marginal, taking no active role in the nation and experiencing no recognizable pain under the Arana company. As in his critiques of rubber agents as morally degenerate, Casement sited the strength and weakness of civilization in the acts of the individual—personal fortitude in maintaining tradition strengthened the nation, whereas moral weakness drained racial quality. Here Casement transmits his irritation at the anglicization of Ireland via moral argument, valorizing adherence to tradition and suggesting his own attachment to an idealized Irish patrimony.

The gendered division in this notion of nationalism reflects the imbalanced, eroticized attention to masculine roles and experiences in Casement's Foreign Office report. His particular masculinism is apparent in the ways in which these ideas diverge from the dominant gendered ideas of empire in his time. Casement's dynamic man and conservative woman conform to the dominant patriarchal divisions of the early twentieth century; this dichotomy maps loosely, for example, onto de Beauvoir's conception of transcendent man and immanent woman.[139] But what is unusual, here as in the official report, is Casement's marginalization of women even from the sphere of cultural reproduction, which he imagines as the quintessential role of the man. This inversion represents a significant departure from imperial ideologies of gender in 1910, which

[139] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

obsessed over the roles of women as the keepers of race and nation. In her classic article "Imperial Motherhood," Anna Davin defined the ideology of "maternalism" that structured reproduction in Britain in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Spurred by anxieties over infant mortality and racial degeneracy, especially in the military sphere, middle- and upper-class Britons took an administrative interest in the mothering techniques of working-class women. The development of studies and programs to support eugenic motherhood gave rise to a general ideology of maternalism, which glorified the mother as the biological and social guardian of the race.[140] Similarly, McClintock has argued that imperial nationalism is necessarily gendered, and that women signify the limits of the nation while men "are contiguous with each other and with the nation as a whole." Women thus take the central symbolic role in nationalist ideology, marking racial and sexual boundaries and transmitting the cultural and social character of the nation.[141] This signifying function of femininity is the symbolic corollary of Davin's maternalism, which placed women as the biological source of the race. In failing to identify women either with social or cultural reproduction, Casement therefore diverged fundamentally from the dominant maternalism and feminized nationalism of early twentieth-century Britain, suggesting his own lack of interest in the ideological forms and roles of femininity. His imagination of gender and nation made no association between women and child-rearing, but rather identified them with a conservative "virtue" and "chastity," a notably non-reproductive sexuality. In framing men instead of women as the symbolic keepers of the nation, Casement was swimming against a complex and deeply political ideology of gender; his attachment to Ireland as a masculine ideal was continuous with the homoerotic desire that shaped his perception in the Putumayo.

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[140] Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop*, no. 5 (Spring 1978): 9–65.
[141] McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, 354–55.

Though it was likely dashed off impulsively in a moment of vexation, Casement's conception of nation in his diary nevertheless offers an interpretive key to his eroticized nationalism in "The Putumayo Indians." In this article Casement grouped a range of indigenous peoples discursively together into a common race, represented by the Putumayo Indian. This ethnography advanced Casement's earlier inkling of nation defined by a masculinist allegiance to tradition. First, and crucially, "the Putumayo Indian" was male—the use of "he" to describe an unspecified person, though also a convention of writing at the time, here reflected Casement's gendered imaginary. Of the two Putumayo tribes he considered the most vigorous, the Boras and the Recigaros, he wrote, "They are fine specimens of manhood … straight and clean-limbed, with often very pleasing features, and are brave, intelligent, and capable."[142] No equivalent description of a Bora or Recigaro woman follows, so Casement's masculine, virile image stands in for the tribe as a whole. Second, quite unlike the "man who gives up his family, his nation, his language," he understood "the Putumayo Indian" as maintaining a profound, melancholic connection to the deep past. For Casement, the tragedy of the Putumayo Indian, what made him both noble and pathetic, was his deeper allegiance to ancestral memory than to his present surroundings. "Putumayan" culture, Casement claimed, had been handed down from time immemorial: "The music, songs, and dances of the forest Indians are not based on their life of to-day, but are drawn from some far-off ancient fount of inspiration."[143] The "masked men" who performed these songs were thus the masculine bearers of deep tradition. Casement's sympathetic (and fanciful) portrayal of indigenous Putumayans shows them, according to his own matrix of nationalism, as healthily masculine, adhering faithfully to their own ancestral traditions. Unlike the anglicized Irishman or the hispanicized Quechua, "the Putumayo Indian"

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[142] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 323.
[143] Casement, 324.

maintained his language and heritage in the face of cultural degeneration. Virile masculinity, admired erotically, was both a sign of and a condition for the dominance of the nation; the social and political encounter of "civilization" was a meeting between men.

For Casement, this meeting took place across the reaches of time, a masculine and trans-temporal encounter. In "The Putumayo Indians," he explained Putumayans' supposedly unhappy condition as the function of a disjunction between Putumayans' remembered past and their lived present. Casement presented indigenous Putumayans as a people lost in time, longing always for passage into a "civilized" era. He described them most strikingly as "not children of the forest, but children of elsewhere lost in the forest—babes in the wood, grown up, it is true, and finding the forest their only heritage and shelter, and remembering always that it was not their home"; they were "in an hereditary picnic [sic] rather than a settled occupation."[144] This imagination of a lost people serves in part to distinguish the Putumayans from their white torturers—when Casement wrote that the Indian's "mind is not that of a savage," he drew an implicit contrast with the white Arana agents, whose minds had degenerated to match their "savage" forest surroundings.[145] In this article he conceived of civilization as a rescue mission across a temporal divide. To Casement, the Putumayo Indians' alienation from their rightful time expressed itself in their longing to escape from their forest environment. "Had I lifted my finger and possessed the means to convey them away," he rhapsodized, "whole tribes would have fled with a shout of joy from the haunts they had dwelt in for unnumbered ages, to accompany the stranger white

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[144] Casement, 325–26.

[145] Here it is helpful to remember Johannes Fabian's thesis that colonial ethnography relied on the "denial of coevalness," by which the ethnographer rejected the contemporaneity of the ethnographic object, relegating them instead to an imaginary past. Casement's vision of the Putumayo Indian lost in time follows this ethnographic convention as well as imperial cultural understandings of what McClintock calls "anachronistic space," the narratively prehistoric space of the colonies. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.

man to that other world they had never seen, but, I verily believe, had never forgotten!"[146] Here Casement imagined himself as the force that could liberate the Putumayans from their temporal prison and allow them to fulfill the ancestral promises of civilization. In "The Putumayo Indian," this rescue is the act of civilization itself, a relation by which the benevolent white colonist guides lost peoples from their dark times to the happy telos of modernity. Racial difference figures in this reverie as a temporal difference to be overcome—or, in the case of rubber agents, exacerbated—by commitment to moral fidelity.

If Casement imagined the "Putumayo Indian" as a benighted child lost in time, the encounter could be fulfilled only by the "true whiteman," a racialized paternal figure who would sweep indigenous people into the light and freedom of civilization. This "true whiteman" was an avatar both of Casement's erotic gaze—a provider of sexual fulfillment—and of his political desires for a vindicated Irish nation. In his professional diary Casement identified Irishness with courage, steadfastness, and devotion to justice—the paragon of a masculine national virtue, a model to the oppressed peoples of the world. Frustrated with what he saw as reticence on the part of the other Commission members to recognize systemic abuses, he griped on October 5: "The world, I am beginning to think—that is the white man's world—is made up of two categories of men—compromisers and Irishmen … Thank God that I am an Irishman, that I am not afraid to 'assume', that I won't shirk the charge of 'exaggeration' … if these unhappy, these enormously outraged Indians of the Putumayo, find relief at last from their cruel burden, it shall be through the Irishmen of the earth."[147] This entry glosses Casement's understanding of national superiority marked by the fortitude to speak truth to power, a quality with which he identified, frequently taking his fellow Commissioners to task for their obtuseness, taking grim delight in being "the

[146] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 327.
[147] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 91.

enfant terrible of the Commission [sic]."[148] The Irishman's virtue—Casement's virtue—was specifically in rejecting the kind of doubt and equivocation he decried in his fellow Commissioners (all of them English).[149] The core of this "Irish" resolution was the will to help the oppressed peoples of the earth. But rather than racial solidarity, Casement here envisioned an Irish paternalism: the Irish would save indigenous Putumayans from their colonial oppressors. In this way he maintained an alternative hierarchy of nation, in which indigenous peoples would remain dependent on a superior Irish race. This conception of nationality replaced a dominant British political power with a superior Irish character, yet retained an imperial racial hierarchy, a sort of Irishman's burden. Here, as in his condemnation of rubber agents, Casement's project was not to undermine the idea of the civilizing mission, but to redefine that mission by reference to his own erotics and nationalism. In identifying Irishness with commitment to justice and humanity, he identified himself implicitly as the "true whiteman," the standard-bearer of civilization.

Casement applied Irishness as a moral standard throughout his time in the Putumayo, weighing the relative complicity of rubber agents and the heroism of indigenous resistance by reference to Irish heritage and struggles. The figure of Andrés O'Donnell, a Peruvian Company agent with supposed Irish ancestry, exemplified Casement's use of Irishness as moral metric. O'Donnell was chief of the Entre Rios rubber station during Casement's expedition, accused of having "ordered over 500 Indians to be killed" and orchestrated a regime of flogging over

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[148] Casement, 100.

[149] Casement seemed occupied especially with Irish honesty and outspokenness. In a more jocular mode, he recounted an exchange with a riverboat captain about some of the crew who had gotten drunk: "I told Reigada that the people who were not afraid to get drunk had conquered the world!—the English, Irish, Scotch, Teutons and Northerners generally, while the sober races had failed! The man who was not afraid 'to give himself away' had probably a temperament that made for greatness lacking in the more discreet man who feared in vino veritas." This formulation of a masculine forthrightness at the heart of national dominance is in poignant contrast to Casement's own position as a closeted homosexual. Casement, 253.

indigenous rubber.[150] Yet while Casement denounced other station chiefs in no uncertain terms as "bandits," "pirates," and "murderers,"[151] his attitude towards O'Donnell in his professional diary was considerably more ambivalent. On the one hand, he lamented of O'Donnell, "To think that a name so great should be dragged so low! That an Irish name of valour, truth, courage and high-mindedness should be borne by a Peruvian bandit."[152] He further questioned the man's Irish roots: "He says his grandfather went to Spain from Ireland, and father came from Spain to Peru. I doubt the grandfather. It is probably further back."[153] Casement in these passages appears eager to distance O'Donnell's complicity in violence from his apparent Irish identity, going so far as to question his account of his own heritage. On the other hand, Casement seemed willing to rehabilitate O'Donnell's reputation precisely because of his Irish name. Without denying the station chief's complicity, Casement consistently characterized him as the best of the worst: "How strange, with this man of Irish name, whose record in any civilised land would consign him a hundred times to the gallows, and yet here I like him actually. We all agree he is the best, and are prepared to forgive his crimes as being part of 'the System' he was engaged to administer."[154] Further, in a remark reminiscent of Casement's many judgments of character based on racial type, he wrote, "the superior appearances and address of O'Donnell certainly create a favourable impression after the recent horrors we have been living with."[155] Both halves of this ambivalence—the denial of O'Donnell's Irishness and the apology for the man's violence—suggest the importance to Casement of Irish heritage as a moral signifier.[156]

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[150] Casement, 114–15.
[151] Casement, 62, 79, 85.
[152] Casement, 99.
[153] Casement, 123.
[154] Casement, 155.
[155] Casement, 116.
[156] Casement's reference to an eternal Irishness reflects the nationalist propaganda tactic that Aidan Beatty characterizes as the creation of "a highly ideological, atemporal zone wherein all true Irish nationalist men exist together." As an example of this tactic Beatty cites the Irish-American republican Colin Quinn, who "recalled Roger

O'Donnell had betrayed his name by committing violence against indigenous Putumayans; at the same time, his name signaled his relative innocence within a brutal system. In these mentions Casement's identification with O'Donnell's supposed heritage appeared to conflict with his condemnation of the man's behavior, his affective attachment to Irishness shaping his perception of violence and guilt.

Further, where Casement commented on instances of indigenous rebellion against the rubber regime, he expressed his admiration and support for these actions by reference to Irish independence struggles. When O'Donnell showed the Commission a map marked with the locations of past indigenous raids and ambushes against rubber agents, Casement recounted: "I only said 'more power to the Indians'"—apparently a reference to the Irish expression "More power to your elbow"—"but as he is not an Irishman, in spite of his name, he did not follow."[157] Later, he praised the Boras leader Katenere: "Since [his escape] Katenere has been 'on his keeping' to the hills—as we said once in Ireland—and every effort to kill or capture him failed until this last actual attack of his own on the station of Abisinia itself."[158] The use of these Irish expressions to characterize indigenous anti-rubber action—"on his keeping" referred to Irish rebels hiding from English troops in remote hills—posited a spirit common to these two struggles, honoring Putumayan rebels by comparing them to their Irish counterparts. Within Casement's usage, this comparison also reified the Irish independence struggle as the rising *par excellence*, figuring Bora and other indigenous resistance as reflections of that essential conflict. This hierarchy of resistance reflects his conception of "the Irishmen of the earth" delivering

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Casement telling him, 'I am Wolfe Tone. I am the reincarnation of Wolfe Tone,'" a reference to the eighteenth-century Irish revolutionary. Aidan Beatty, *Masculinity and Power in Irish Nationalism, 1884-1938*, Genders and Sexualities in History (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 22, 45.

[157] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 116; Ó Síocháin, "'More Power to the Indians': Roger Casement, the Putumayo, and Indigenous Rights."

[158] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 172.

oppressed races from their bondage. In the pages of the professional diary, Casement conceived Irishness both as a moral North Star and as a global force for liberation, within an anti-Imperial, yet no less racial, hierarchy.

This moral and political valorization of the Irishman arose out of and supported Casement's almost eschatological image of the "true whiteman," the racial superior who would supplant the abusive South American "whitemen" then in control of the Amazon rubber trade. The final line of Casement's ethnographic article "The Putumayo Indians," which I quote above, is illustrative. Having written of indigenous Putumayans as a gentle, infantile race, Casement pondered: "Is it too late to hope that … something of the good-will and kindliness of Christian life may be imparted to the remote, friendless, and lost children of the forest still awaiting the true whiteman's coming into the region of the Putumayo?"[159] Like Casement's hope that simply replacing the worst offenders with new and humane Company directors would return the Putumayo to "civilization,"[160] here he imagines the "true whiteman" as the just leader who would replace the Peruvian and Colombian "whitemen" of the Putumayo rubber system. Although Casement elided mention of the rubber regime in his ethnography, his comments on race and whiteness in his professional diary outline a racial hierarchy in which "higher" races work genuinely to upraise the indigenous Putumayans, and the "white" rubber agents represent racial degeneration. Admiring what he saw as indigenous "modesty" when bathing, for example, Casement wrote, "Certainly these Indians are in every sense but one (that of brute and brutal force) incomparably higher in the human scale than any of the agents of the Peruvian Amazon

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[159] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 328.
[160] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 102.

Company I have met."[161] This despite frequent comments about their racial otherness[162]—indeed, the strange indigenous customs and habits that Casement recorded served both to locate them at a lower scale of civilization and to emphasize the rubber agents' brutality. These men are so cruel, implies the argument, that despite their outward whiteness they place even below indigenous Putumayans. Whiteness itself became for Casement a shifting signifier similar to "civilization," describing not so much an innate racial identity as a commitment to justice and humanity. As such, Casement often used the word "whiteman" in sarcastic quotation marks when describing a violent rubber agent,[163] while by the same token highlighting the "white" features of Putumayans. On October 18, he described a group of Boras as "big, fine-looking fellows, with broad faces, very pale skins, almost whitemen indeed, simply bronzed by the sun, and frank open air and manner."[164] Casement summarized this destabilized racial hierarchy in a description of Peruvian racial demography: "It is that 'blanco' type that pulls down the nation, the people with the skins of whiteness only, and certainly not the hearts of Indians. … Here a 'blanco' can mean only a scoundrel, and to the Indian a murderer."[165] Casement's Amazon writings unsettle race as an essentialist signifier and deploy it instead to critique the violence of rubber agents, displacing them from the top tier of "civilization." Without rejecting the concept

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[161] Casement, 105.
[162] Casement regarded Black employees of the company with a similar racist sympathy. He refers to the Barbadian overseers he encounters with alternating condescension and derision, but when considering the Barbadian Donal Francis' apology for taking bribes, writes, "the negro has a better heart and a better conscience than [the Company agents] have—and is a far better 'whiteman' at bottom." Inverting this rhetoric, Casement describes Jiménez, an agent accused of burning people alive, as "A burly young ruffian—looks 26 or so, sturdy, with that far-off touch of the nigger you see in some of these Peruvian lower-grade men." These phrases highlight the instability of Casement's racial rhetoric—Blackness could be for him a sign of evil and degeneracy, while whiteness was both an outward characteristic and an inward moral quality. Casement, 172, 95.
[163] Casement, 118, 172, 256.
[164] Casement, 134.
[165] Casement, 118.

of racial hierarchy, Casement subordinated it to the criterion of "civilization," which he defined by reference to a supposedly Irish love of freedom, justice, and humanity.

As the closing line of "The Putumayo Indians" suggests, Casement's conception of the Irishman cum "true whiteman" was central to a fantasy of rescue at the heart of his imagination of civilization. Against the rubber agents' elimination of all things savage, he imagined removing indigenous life from its supposedly savage environs, in this way confirming and augmenting the civilized nature of the Putumayo Indian. This fantasy of rescue is evident first in his appreciation of nature, one of the common themes of his personal diary. His choice to bring Bates' *Naturalist on the River Amazons* on his Putumayo expedition[166] signaled Casement's enthusiasm for tropical wildlife, and in many of his private entries he appears to emulate Bates' scientific eye, giving regular measurements, for example, of the depth of the surrounding riverbanks.[167] In true tropicalist form, however, Casement's enthusiasm for the details of the Amazon cohabited with a pronounced ennui over the tropical landscape as a whole, a sense he shared with both Bates and Alfred Russel Wallace.[168] He channeled this sense of gloom in "The Putumayo Indians" to evoke the temporal doldrums in which he imagined indigenous men living: "their surroundings depressing in the extreme—a morbid, dense, and gloomy forest, inhabited by wild beasts, serpents, and insects …"[169] As in the extractive space of death, Casement faced the civilizational problem of the simultaneously vivacious and murderous tropics; but unlike the rubber agents he despised, his own symbolic solution was to whisk tropical life away from the savage milieu. His lepidoptery is an illustrative point—Casement recorded catching butterflies on several occasions

[166] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 129; Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*.
[167] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 223–27, 261; Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*.
[168] Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*; Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 66–67.
[169] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 325.

in the Putumayo,[170] and sent many samples back to Britain and Ireland.[171] The careful preservation and exportation of these samples suggested a desire to excise the Amazon's beauty and life, leaving behind the imagined gloom of death. As with the captured deer, of whom he wrote, "I should like to save him and take him home to Ireland,"[172] Casement's admiration for nature channeled a love of beauty comparable to his desire for indigenous bodies, both of which he expressed through the fantasy of removal from a supposedly deathly tropical space.

Casement realized this fantasy of the "true whiteman's" rescue in his actual importation of two Huitoto youths to Britain. In late October, toward the end of his tour and in line with his plans to grab the attention of the humanitarian community, Casement selected Omarino, a "dear wee thing" of about six years old, and Arédomi, his young indigenous guide, to return with him to Pará by steamer, and from there to travel to Barbados and then Britain.[173] In keeping with contemporary ethnographic practice, writes Lesley Wylie, Casement's goal to "try and interest the Anti-Slavery people, etc. etc. and the Missions"[174] meant presenting the two Huitotos not as individuals but as representative racial types. Casement introduced Arédomi to his friend the sculptor Herbert Ward as a possible model for Ward's allegorical depiction of "America," thereby figuring Arédomi as the aesthetic sign of the Putumayo Indian.[175] The youths also sat for a portrait by the painter Sir William Rothenstein which celebrated their traditional clothing and delicate expressions as representations of tropical beauty while removing their figures visually

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[170] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 279; Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 78, 95, 100, 169.
[171] Angus Mitchell, *Roger Casement in Brazil: Rubber, the Amazon and the Atlantic World, 1884-1916,* ed. Laura P.Z. Izarra (São Paulo: Humanitas, 2010), 32–33; Angus Mitchell, ed., *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents* (Dublin: Colour Books, 2003), 601–2.
[172] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 243.
[173] Casement, 271; Wylie, "Rare Models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the Ethnographic Picturesque."
[174] Casement, "The Putumayo Journal," 102.
[175] Wylie, "Rare Models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the Ethnographic Picturesque," 319.

from the tropical setting itself.[176] Casement's "rescue" of Omarino and Arédomi rehearsed his removal of butterfly samples and his wish to bring the deer to Ireland, and concretized his dream, later expressed in "The Putumayo Indian," of effecting the "true whiteman's" transplantation of the neglected Putumayans from their savage environment to a realm of civilization. Omarino and Arédomi signified this rescue during their time in Britain—they had been pulled from the jungle and, in the civilized world of the metropole, were being refashioned in line with the perceptions of the white viewer. The voyage of Omarino and Arédomi was another attempt, simultaneously material and ideological, to salvage civilized life from the death of the tropics.

For Casement, this enlightened rescue was simultaneously a homoerotic consummation between the "savage" and the "civilized." The erotics of civilization are evident in "The Putumayo Indian" from Casement's consistent masculinization of his subjects; further, language such as "a shout of joy" and "the superior being who had come among them"[177] suggests the sly intrusion of sexuality into this chaste document. To see this consummation fully realized, however, we must return to the 1910 diary. Casement's sexual attraction to Arédomi in particular blended his fantasies of civilization with homoerotic desire. Casement recorded an apparently growing interest in Arédomi in the beginning of November, 1910. The first mention came on October 31: "A fine muchacho named Arédomi wants to come. Very fine lad—would like to take him. He followed like a dog all afternoon. Gave breeches to him. His beautiful coffee limbs were lovely."[178] Not only his admiration for Arédomi's body but also the double-entendres of "come" and "take" signal Casement's erotic interest, and associate his decision to evacuate Arédomi with sexual desire from the start. On the first and second of November Casement

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[176] Mitchell, *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 484–85; Wylie, "Rare Models: Roger Casement, the Amazon, and the Ethnographic Picturesque," 323.
[177] Casement, "The Putumayo Indians," 327.
[178] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 271.

recorded anxiety over not having seen Arédomi, and sent his man Bishop to seek him out. On the fourth he recorded his excitement at having bathed together in the river: "Told him to bathe too—and he stripped. No fono on. Carbolic soap —glorious limbs, a big one."[179] Casement's affection, though apparently one-sided, grew as Arédomi traveled with him; the passage away from the savage milieu and Casement's erotic desire unfolded in tandem. Casement's decision on November 13 "not to take Mrs. Arédomi home"[180] reflects the androcentrism that structured his observations of violence throughout the diary and report—apparently envious that "Arédomi and his wife together all the time now [sic],"[181] he literally excluded her from the evacuation, securing an exclusively masculine rescue. Casement imagined—and enacted—the evacuation as a ritual between men, a logistical expression of his homoerotic desire.

This desire, though it grew throughout their travels, was consummated fully only when Casement and Arédomi were on the point of leaving the Putumayo aboard the steamship *Liberal*. In the morning of November 17, Casement invited Arédomi to his cabin—"I showed him many pictures in Bates' Book and others, to his great delight. It got up I think—was thick anyhow."[182] Though Casement never recorded having intercourse with Arédomi, his admiration for the youth's erection joins his erotic desire with his desire to civilize the Putumayans as a racialized savior, as he would later intimate in the 1912 ethnography. Casement's correspondence of 1911 suggests that Arédomi spoke no English at the time of his evacuation from the Putumayo,[183] so the sexual response Casement records would have been to the illustrations in Bates' *Naturalist on the River Amazons*. These rich engravings, as Nancy Stepan has noted, exaggerated the

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[179] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 275. The "fono" was the bark loincloth commonly worn by indigenous men in the Putumayo—Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, 93.
[180] Casement, "The 1910 Diary," 283.
[181] Casement, 277.
[182] Casement, 287.
[183] Mitchell, *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*, 291.

danger and adventure of the Amazon forestscape, often depicting scenes of natural violence or of man's struggle against tropical fauna.[184] The Bates illustrations were a classic tropicalist depiction of the Amazon, emphasizing both the natural richness and the danger of the tropics. When included, indigenous people formed part of this landscape, as types to show the heights of palms or, in one remarkable illustration, blending into the foliage of the forest itself.[185] These illustrations would have shown Arédomi an image of himself and his Amazon home as imagined in a European tropicalist mode. There are many possible explanations for Casement's entry, and many questions about its veracity—Casement himself admitted that he was not sure about Arédomi's arousal, and in any case had no real insight into its cause. What remains relevant here is Casement's perception (or fantasy) of Arédomi's erection, and his understanding of its cause and meaning. At the risk of straying into a more literary mode of interpretation, I suggest that Casement's own arousal responded not only to genital sexuality but to his fantasy of racial rescue, as intensified by Bates' tropicalist depiction of the Amazon. In Casement's imaginary of civilization, showing Arédomi a European scientific perception of his own home sublimated the danger of the tropics (savagery, ignorance) in favor of the wondrous (pictorial art, scientific knowledge), thus lifting the youth from the space of death and joining his life with a civilized, colonial order. When read with Casement's fantasy of rescue and admiration for indigenous bodies, the act of sharing Bates' book with Arédomi represented the ideological consummation of his actual evacuation from the Putumayo. In this fleeting moment of sexuality, Casement consummated the "true whiteman's" civilization of the Putumayo Indian that he was to outline in his later ethnography, removing Arédomi discursively as well as physically from the tropical

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[184] Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 19–21; Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*, 78, 99, 321, 329, 363.
[185] Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*, 65, 291, 26.

space of death. Eros here formed the material channel for Casement to resolve the competing commitments of tropicality, civilization, and savagery.

Casement's libidinal drives, as recorded in his private writings, took their outward form in the racialized humanitarianism he espoused. His gendered perception of Putumayo rubber violence, his masculinist imaginary of nation and civilization, and his fantasy of a paternalistic act of Irish civilization all proceeded or took their forms from his erotic desire for young indigenous men. His Irish "true whiteman" was a sexual as well as racial position, consummating erotically the qualities of justice, forthrightness, and bravery that sustained civilization in Casement's imaginings. Like agents' elimination of savagery, Casement's rescue and refuge of tropical life, both animal and human, worked to resolve the contradiction between beauty and death that shaped the ideological commitments of rubber extraction. Though Casement abhorred the Putumayo rubber agents, his channeling of homoerotic desire through the forms of nationalism and civilization directly mirrored the libidinally-motivated forms of violence that supported rubber ideology. Both the aspirational development of civilization and the morbid elimination of savagery represented visions of a colonial mission. Casement's colonialist concept of civilization based on the management of life, no less than the spectacular violence of the extractive space of death, took its form by channeling libidinal desires through the available European ideological structures of tropicality, race, civilization, and savagery.

Conclusions

Rubber traders employed violence as both a material and ideological response to the problems of extraction in the Amazon. By contrast, Roger Casement advocated a humanitarian, "civilizing" approach to economic and cultural development in the region. Yet each of these

politics, different though they were in their approaches to violence and indigenous life, drew on the libidinal desires of individual subjects in their outward forms. The lust for violence of station chiefs such as José Inocente Fonseca and Armando Normand worked through the available material forms of flogging and sexual enslavement as well as cultural signals like Peruvian flags and genital torture, generating forms of violence that supported the project of rubber extraction both materially and ideologically. Casement's own erotic desire, meanwhile, took public form in a liberal, humanitarian politics, expressed both in the material act of rescue and the ideology of race and civilization. In examining the political forms of violence and rescue in the Putumayo, I have sought not only to integrate supposedly non-rational forces such as libido and violence to the projects of capital, extraction, and civilization, but also to suggest the ways in which politics can derive from individual desire. This analysis takes quotas, floggings, and rape, as well as the act of bringing young indigenous men to England, as the cultural-ideological forms that channeled individual desire into support for capitalism and empire. Though this is in some ways an orthodox Foucauldian story of political discipline, taking desire to be expressible only through discursive forms, I also mean to suggest ways in which libido guides the selection of those forms. While extraction and the civilizing project may have motivated Casement and the rubber agents' politics, it was their personal fears and desires that determined the specific shapes, violent or humanitarian, that those politics took. I therefore explore an autonomy of desire in imperial politics that Foucault's discursive models preclude. While acts of violence and rescue followed the dominant discursive forms of capital and empire, they also followed individuals' hopes, fears, and attractions.

Though I have tracked the political and material shapes of forces I term as libidinal, questions remain over the extent to which historical study can illuminate individual desires. I

have in many ways echoed the efforts of historians of emotion to identify the ways in which feeling, socially shaped and expressed, has channeled through the available political and epistemic structures in which it lives. I follow, for example, Barbara Rosenwein's conviction that "emotional communities" shape structures of feeling;[186] the fears on which rubber agents acted, though they referred to broader ideologies of savagery and tropicality, also developed contextually in response to the demands of extraction. In the same way, Casement's sensibilities formed along paths established in part by his own sexual desire, in part through the community of British humanitarians with which he socialized. Still, my focus here has not been on the historical and social formation of emotions, but on the capacity of political and economic structures to shape and appropriate forms of desire. The extractive structure of violence in the Putumayo did not derive from fear of indigenous people (as Taussig suggests), nor did Casement's vision of civilization simply echo his erotic dreams. Rather, these elusive fears and desires became appropriated to economic and political networks of power. Extraction harnessed rubber traders' fear and hatred to the dismantling of indigenous social and productive modes; the political-economic ideology of "civilization" gave expression to Casement's attraction to male bodies. Though I have followed Rosenwein's refusal to differentiate between textual expression of emotion and an underlying "true" emotion,[187] taking the sources themselves as the outward construction of emotion, this paper offers no theory of the ontological nature of a fear, desire, or hatred, seeing them instead as impulses describable only by their material and discursive effects. As such, the libidinal forces I identify as the motives for extractive violence and civilized rescue

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[186] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 27–34. On the historical formations of emotion, see also Peter N. Stearns and Carol Zisowitz Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1246-1423* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2003).
[187] Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 31–32.

are not conceptually divisible from their effects on discursive, social, and ideological fields. Continuing this study of libidinal politics in the Putumayo, as well as colonial power in general, would call for methods to analyze the pre-discursive formation of desire in concert with the political and social networks in which that desire forms, as Anne McClintock has worked to do.[188] Continuation of this project would aim to clarify the ontological status of a "desire" in aid of crystallizing the relations between emotional experience and political expression, and more broadly the interaction between "internal" and "external" formations of subjectivity.

One of the projects of this paper has been to question the bounds between "rational" political forms such as capitalism and "irrational" social forms such as fear, eros, and torture, suggesting ways in which the political can appropriate and feed upon the libidinal. Against the imperial dichotomy between savagery and civilization, which relied on the pretense of European rationality and "savage" emotionality, I have sought to examine the construction of ideologies of civilization based both on political and economic forms and on the libidinal drives of colonial agents. Although Casement identified the rubber atrocities with savagery, condemning the Peruvian Amazon Company agents for giving into their base appetites, his more humane politics equally derived from his own private desires. Casement's writings left us with uniquely valuable sources through which to explore these questions. Across his public and private writings, we can examine the libidinal structure of his personal and political life, and integrate an understanding of his homoerotic desire with his work as a diplomat, humanitarian, and nationalist.

[188] McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.

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