

Genocide and Ethnocide in the Amazon Basin during the Rubber Boom (1880 to 1920)

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Abstract

The rubber boom was established between 1880 and 1920. Between those years, latex generated a true economic fever worldwide and the Amazon entered fully into international trade. The reason was that Carlos Goodyear managed to vulcanize this material in 1839 and from that moment on it found application for bicycle wheels, which meant a social revolution, especially in the United States of America and Europe. In a brief time, it was also applied to automobiles. It was a triumph that could satisfy the need of several industries that had been waiting for some time for some lucky inventor to discover the secrets of this material and guide its industrial and commercial application. On the other hand, the raw material, in its two species, was found in the Amazon, but the extraction of latex in its two versions was required: *Hevea brasiliensis*, and *Castilloa elastica*. Achieving this meant uncontrolled deforestation in Brazil, because the separation technique was to cut down each tree; but not so in Peru where each specimen was bled, leaving it where it was (Flores Marín, 1987). Likewise, the boom meant enslaving, deporting and murdering people from Amazonian societies. These last aspects are what will be evaluated here along with some proper names of rubber tappers, who were accused of murders, deportations, exterminations, etc.

Keywords

Genocide, Ethnocide, Amazon, Rubber, Rubber Tappers

1. Introduction

On one of my last visits to Iquitos (Peru), when passing in front of the window of a bookstore I saw, behind its glass, a book whose title deserved my attention: *The defense of the rubber workers* and its authors are: Carlos Rey de Castro et al. (2005). The four characters were directly related to the world of rubber, although

the first two more with diplomatic matters and those of international borders, which were undefined at that time (Junquera Rubio, 1995a: 109-125); while the other two, family related by being brothers-in-law, happen to be great enemies and eliminators of native societies settled in the Amazonian rivers.

I have dedicated a good part of my last 45 years to the study of the Amazon and its human, social, environmental, and cultural problems. The name of Julio César Arana is significant, who is accused of ordering the murder of numerous Witotos, who were settled on the Putumayo River, and its tributaries, and people of other Amazonian ethnic groups. Nobody denounced or accused him, so that he could be tried, before a court so that a judge could dictate a sentence against him (Casement, 1988).

One more detail before getting into the matter: the book is edited by the Center for Amazonian Theological Studies (CETA), whose managers are the Augustinian Missionaries, and for this opportunity they also had the collaboration of IWGIA¹. I point out this information so that no one is surprised by what is going to be narrated here and can make their pertinent assessment with neutrality. The publication includes an introduction by Andrew Gray, and a presentation provided by Alberto Chiriff, Peruvian anthropologist.

I add that on April 27, 2016, the newspaper *El Comercio of Lima*, inserted as a memory of anniversaries a note titled “*A day like today 100 years ago: Roger Casement*”, and which said like this: “*our readers will remember Roger Casement, who in 1910, as a commissioner from England, toured the Peruvian jungle in the Putumayo region, and then launched a vigorous campaign in Europe against the Peruvian Government and the rubber industrialists, whom he accused of the vilest cruelties of which they were victims indigenous. Not everything was false, but Casement grossly increased reprehensible facts. This individual sought to revolutionize Ireland, his birthplace, for the benefit of Germany. He has been captured red-handed and accused of high treason by the English*” (*El Comercio* April 27, 2016). It would be good to contrast this news with what Mario Vargas Llosa (2010) points out in his novel *El Sueño del Celta*.

The actions of the rubber tappers deserve disapproval and rejection, especially the ways in which they managed their social relations with the Aboriginal ethnic groups, residents of the Amazon basin since millennia before Francisco de Orellana descended its course to the Atlantic. This Spaniard was the first European to sail its waters, and observe its landscapes, which were unknown to outsiders until the years 1541 to 1542. The chronicle of Gaspar de Carvajal, responsible for narrating the adventures of that journey, has several versions and all of them have perfectly accurate comments by the learned Emiliano Jos (1942: 661-709, 1943a: 5-42, 1943b: 255-303, 1943c: 479-526).

My repudiation of the rubber collective comes from the actions they carried out against the aborigines, since they carried out “*numerous levies among the various native societies [...], since they were cheap when it came to paying them wages: they worked for free and were murdered when Their owners decided it.*

¹IWGIA is the acronym for International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.

These repugnant events have numerous documents that certify what happened, but many others disappeared to leave no trace” (Junquera Rubio, 1991: 38). The Amazon basin has never known so much bloodshed, plunder, and forced human displacement as it did during the rubber era.

On the other hand, I am aware that we are extremely far from knowing one hundred percent what happened. To date, the most that can be stated are approximations, because we lack relevant documentation, since whoever is the cause of severe damage against third parties tries not to leave evidence that could implicate them in something considered socially incorrect.

During the time of the Spanish colony, two trips were made after that of Francisco de Orellana. The first was led by Pedro de Ursúa, and Lope de Aguirre, who proved to be very violent, because the second murdered the first on January 1, 1561 (Jos, 1927). The third trip was done in reverse and was conducted by the Portuguese Texeira (Miranda, 2007).

When the Spanish Crown learned of the murder of Pedro de Ursúa, it prohibited navigation on the Amazon rivers for a century or so. Subsequently, the Great River of the Amazon, and its tributaries will be crossed by missionaries, Catholics, highlighting the Jesuits who left a lot of news and started a large bibliography, in addition to being excellent cartographers, a task in which excelled Samuel Fritz (Junquera Rubio, 2014: 7-20).

The Emancipation of Peru was achieved between 1821 and 1824. The events of those years are not the subject of this essay, except to consider that the countries that share the Amazon basin managed to become independent between those dates, but the first republican governments lacked real powers over that enormous region and ignored the resources there were, especially forestry, mining, and human resources. The only beneficiary was Brazil, which took advantage of the opportunity to expand its territory at the expense of its neighbors.

In 1839, Charles Goodyear accidentally discovered what we know as rubber vulcanization, which is a process of heating the raw material by mixing it with sulfur. This mixture hardens due to the heat but does not lose its elasticity. The discovery of rubber, first of vegetal origin and later of industrial origin, was a notable fact, which today has producing forests in America, Africa and Asia and very varied processing plants in numerous places in the world (Keong, 1973: 216-228; Wade, 1996; Ciullo & Hewitt, 1999; Tarkanian & Hosler, 2011: 469-486; Agbonkpolor et al, 2019).

Vulcanization will have many geographical, economic, social, etc. consequences in the Amazon River basin, but also and especially human ones. The first reason was that the Amazon forests had a remarkable and abundant wealth of trees from which rubber could be extracted and two stood out: *Hevea brasiliensis* and *Castilloa elastica*. The first species was more abundant in areas of Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, and the second was more present in areas of Putumayo, and northern areas of the Amazon River itself (Junquera Rubio, 1991: 28-29).

Vulcanization required the availability of raw materials, so that European, and North American industries could produce products to market. This need was, from an economic point of view, very profitable for many; because, from 1827 to 1870, exports increased at a more than significant rate since they went from about one billion pounds sterling to 6591 on the second date. This business attracted many people, wholesalers, and merchants, not only from nearby but also distant areas (Hemming, 1987: 273). The rubber boom allowed the Amazon basin to appear in the media around the world.

Rubber captivated numerous foreigners who also got involved in the business. At the beginning of the 20th century, the census population in the city of Iquitos amounted to 8896 individuals of Peruvian nationality, but to these were added 38 Germans, 74 Asians, 14 British, 80 Brazilians, 95 Spanish, 33 French, 52 Italians, 64 Portuguese, 14 Colombians, 24 Ecuadorians, 5 Americans, 36 Moroccans, and 4 Russians (Fuentes, 1908, I: 246; Rodríguez Achung, 1994: 20).

The foreign population in Iquitos, in its golden age, adding the amounts, amounted to 533 individuals, and all of them were businessmen or representatives of European, and North American firms focused on the exploitation of latex. They were there to conduct commercial transactions or to store their productions, which were mainly exported to Europe, and the United States of America, and they were very well related to the Peruvian businessmen who were dedicated to the rubber business, as they said in popular language. There is no data on the registration of passers-by at the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th century, but it must have been notable because the city had luxury hotels open such as El Palace, which today is property of the Peruvian State and intended for military units.

The rubber economy at the time had two aspects: 1) at the local level the profits were channeled by a few businessmen of few nationalities: Colombians, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, Bolivians, and Brazilians, who were the ones who managed to accumulate wealth; 2) as an element required by North American and European industry, trade took place very far from the primary centers of production; what's more, the big capital was foreign, mainly British. The impact of the rubber business on the local environment was extremely negative since many hectares of forest were cut down without any control, since conventional borders were either weak or did not yet exist (Junquera Rubio, 1995a: 109-125, 2022).

Although there were rubber tappers, such as the Aranas, who opened branches in London, and were main shareholders, decision-making was imposed by the British administration; furthermore, even when there were complaints of grievances against the natives, it was the British authorities who decided the type of investigation that should be carried out in the Putumayo River, sending Roger Casement to find out about the complaints presented by the North American citizen Walter Ernest Hardenburg (1912).

The rubber boom generated business, and made a few men rich, but it also produced blood, terror, murders, rapes of all kinds, etc., as will be explained below. First, I am going to express what I understand by the word genocide, which

is very commonly used in studies, daily press, television news, etc., as well as its relationship, in this case with other events. Ethnocide was also practiced (Junquera Rubio, 1995, 2020, 2023). I add that the Amazon Rainforest, from beginning to end, has been the subject of constant exploitation of its resources by strange people. If the extraction of rubber began in the 19th century, in 1970 the extraction of gold began, the most desirable metal, generating environmental degradation, and dead humans without any clarification. Then came oil and now metals like lithium (Junquera Rubio, 2024: 1-14).

The long-standing residents, the Aborigines, have suffered constant impacts since the rubber boom occurred. It is true that today they have improved their situation since they are recognized as citizens, but when an economic boom appears gold, valuable wood, oil, rubber, etc., governments collaborate more in favor of the extractors than in seeking forms of protection for his fellow citizens. The Amazonian tropical forest, and all the living beings it shelters have been, and are subject to exploitation. These situations of injustice are common to Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil. Some of them have been referred to and denounced from the academic field, but academics lack political, and economic power (Junquera Rubio, 1995, 2004, 2017a, 2022; Muniz Alves, et al., 2017).

The word genocide has been studied from law and laws and is considered an international crime, which is punishable by “*acts perpetrated with the intention of destroying, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group such as such*”². Now, for these to be considered genocide by judges, they must involve “*the killing and serious injury to the physical or mental integrity of the members of the group, intentional subjection of the group to conditions of existence that must lead to their physical destruction, total or partial, measures aimed at preventing births within the group, forcible transfer of children from the group to another group*”. International legislation is very similar and affects the Rome agreements and those of the United Nations of 1948.

Consequently, we must understand genocide as the carrying out of acts aimed at exterminating, totally or partially, an ethnic group and if this is so, I advance that the rubber tappers involved in this type of act committed it, and no defense needs to be made against them; on the contrary, current societies must be made aware and prevent events of this nature from ever happening again, neither in the Amazon basin nor in any other part of the world; Although, very regretfully, these events are still in force in various parts of the Globe.

Although crimes of genocide have occurred since millennia, it will be from the 1940s onwards that serious reflection on this ignominious, and irrational scourge began. The studies were initiated by a Polish-Jewish jurist, Rafael Lemkin, who had managed to flee the Nazi concentration camps, and found asylum in the United States of America. Because of having suffered firsthand the horrors of Nazism, he wrote, and published a book titled: *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*:

²Article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998-2002; Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1948.

Laws of Occupation—Analysis of Government—Proposals for Redress, which has been the object of many studies, and reflections (Lemkin, 1944).

People interested in these topics, genocide, ethnocide, social exclusion, xenophobia, and how they became fashionable, can read many scholars, but I recommend a current, and easily available one, written by Paul Boghossian, because it makes an excellent reflection on the birth, and the negative human drives of some considered superior over others classified as inferior (Boghossian, 2010: 69-80). Today's consolidated democracies make decisions so that this historical scourge can disappear for the last time. The situation of injustice will continue to develop if we have dictatorial governments, or rulers that we can describe as tyrants. The policy enacted in 1948 by the United Nations is not yet universal when it comes to Human Rights, which is why we must remain committed, and vigilant (Junquera Rubio, 2022).

2. Rubber and Death in the Amazon: A Singular But Negative Story

The extraction of rubber, at the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th, linked the Amazon to global trade and economy. These two activities became the most important, but everything was done at the cost of indiscriminately exploiting the Indigenous people, and the territories in which they were settled. The Aboriginal people knew the geography, and environment much better than outsiders. The rubber tappers displaced the villages from their places of settlement, and subjected their residents to slavery, using them as free labor in exchange for little food.

The first rubber agency in the Upper Amazon was inaugurated in the settlement of *La Chorrera*, located on the Caquetá River. The town called *El Encanto*, on the Putumayo River, will soon see the opening of two more branches. One of these was *Casa Arana*, which arose with the association of mixed capital of Peruvian and British origin, and operated on the river, and the other was *La Pedrera*, which operated from its settlement on the banks of the Mirití River, a tributary of the Caquetá. From here, others will be opened in other geographic, and jungle areas.

These commercial societies controlled vast territories and used indigenous labor for their work. The extractivist tasks, related to rubber production, were modified over time, and there were three stages: 1) at first they were carried out under conditions of slavery, 2) later the aborigines moved to a stage of semi-slavery, and 3) ending their working life and biological in the settlement itself, when the laborer was already useless for other more complicated tasks, and became a warehouse boy in the best of cases. This process had an extremely negative impact on the cultural, and social structures of numerous Amazonian ethnic groups, but it especially affected the Witoto, Yukuna, Matapi, Tanimuca, Shipibos, Piros, Machiguengas, Harakmbet, Huarayos, etc.

The displacements of entire populations are still visible. In the department of Madre de Dios (Peru) there reside Santarrosinos, who are descendants of those

who were forcibly taken by Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald, who was one of those who operated in this part of the country, and who achieved an excellent record in atrocities, and murders, but he is lucky enough to be less known than the Arana. This group was displaced from current territories belonging to Ecuador and Colombia to their current locations in southeastern Peru near the current border with Bolivia (Junquera Rubio, 2005).

These actions against Amazonian Aboriginal societies have had a very negative impact on the ethnicity of each group. The rubber tappers broke traditional life, ancestral customs, models of establishing family, and marriage ties, etc. I have discussed these topics, in a global and way, in several previous publications, especially in what we understand by the word ethnicity (Junquera Rubio, 1996: 197-228). The Amazonian groups have been mistreated by strange people who have overwhelmed the environment and have subjected the Aboriginal people to jobs for which they were not prepared (Wasserstrom & Bustamante, 2015).

The Amazon rivers knew in their entirety the presence of rubber tappers to tap the chosen trees. The first problem to solve was to detect the areas rich in *Hevea brasiliensis*, and there was no one better to make these discoveries than the Indigenous people who knew the territory, and some of its treasures, hidden even from Western extractivists. The second problem was to build settlements near rivers, and forests from which latex could be extracted. A third problem was moving production to market locations, and these locations were in the United States, and Europe. In the Amazon, villages appeared that became cities in a very short time, and this phenomenon was general in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia: Manaus, Leticia, Iquitos, Contamana, Pucallpa, Puerto Maldonado, Cobija, Riberalta, etc.

The rubber tappers were the discoverers of the Amazonian rivers, but they did not do it *gratia et amore*, but because the rubber business was very profitable. Profits could be achieved if the rubber balls, as they are known in popular language, left the region and for this a river transport system based on boats, and canoes was necessary to reach the storage posts. The transfer by sea was already a matter to be resolved by the buyers, but they could enter the cities that had appeared because of the rubber boom. Some rubber tappers had their own boats to sail the seas, and dock at river ports to carry out loading, and unloading operations.

The Aboriginal people acted forced in any of these tasks programmed from the top of the social pyramid established in the Amazon between 1880 and 1920. The rubber tappers were potentates during these years and counted in their favor that the Amazonian countries lacked defined conventional borders, so it was easy to take over territories that belonged to no one. Furthermore, if there is any defense to be made of this group, it cannot be other than what occurred as a result of their actions that, although terrible for human rights, made it possible, after the rubber boom, for governments to set their territorial limits, although we are still far from having fixed borders throughout South America, because the claims to territories between the various countries are constant. I have estab-

lished my position on border problems in the Amazon in several previous studies (Junquera Rubio, 1995a: 109-125, 2007: 1-24, 2023).

The Arana acted in the Putumayo River, but they also did so in its tributaries, and in the Caquetá basin. This family managed to gain control of a vast territory, over which no representative government of the Amazonian countries, the same ones that shared the tropical forest, had authority (Junquera Rubio, 1995a: 109-125). In this situation they were able to do and undo as they wanted, because there was no one with the capacity to stop their movements; furthermore, they had the support of the Peruvian army, because they had political influence in Lima, and in the Congress of the Republic, since Julio César Arana was a senator for the Department of Loreto in several legislatures in the governments of the late 19th century, and early 20th century; he even held the position of mayor in the city of Iquitos at the beginning of the 20th century (Junquera Rubio, 2005).

Peruvian soldiers entered this part of the world following the axis indicated on the map by the Ucayali River, which poured its waters into the Amazon. The Peruvian army could not enter through the Marañón River, because the passage of this river through the Andes was not yet discovered, as this information was obtained by Manuel Mesones Muro in 1902. In this year he found a path that has been known since then as *Abra de Porculla* or *Cuello de Tulte* (Mejía Baca, 1988; Tauro del Pino, 2001).

Being a rubber tapper does not mean being a friend of others dedicated to the same business unless it is convenient to establish a temporary company between the two, and it is convenient because profits demand it. In principle, we must think that rivalry was one of the incentives to act in that world of indecent, but very profitable business. The Amazonian rivers were colonized at the end of the 19th century, and beginning of the 20th century by nefarious characters who acted in several areas: Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald did it in the Ucayali River, and in the Peruvian Department of Madre de Dios; Bernardo Perdiz in Manu; the brothers Máximo, and Baldomero Rodríguez González, in the Iberia region; Mario Valdés González in the Madre de Dios; The Vaca Díez family operated mainly in the Bolivian rivers Beni, Mamoré, Madeira, etc.

Enmity and rivalry were always present, because each of the rubber tappers wanted to take over the entire business, but this was impossible. There were even times when they wished to segregate their territories from the nations to which they belonged. These attempts occurred in Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. The rubber tappers wanted to be presidents of their own states and tried to create autonomous republics. They failed, and the failure of these experiments must be attributed to the fact that the rise of the rubber business was already in decline when they tried to carry out these projects, but if they had had the possibility, perhaps they would have succeeded and established new conventional frontiers (Junquera Rubio, 2005: 23-39).

The rubber economy can be considered the product of a mixture of intense extractivist, and free markets; that is, the environment typical of economic libe-

ralism, which allowed a few to accumulate large capital, but did not create alternative commercial sectors, because everything was managed with an iron hand, and in one direction. This model could work this way because it did not have any state intervention; that is to say, the Amazon basin belonged to different countries, but they lacked real jurisdiction in those vast, and unknown regions, which today still have extensive unexplored areas, and indigenous human societies of which nothing is known.

This economic boom had international rather than national repercussions. This event occurred for two reasons: 1) because the latex was requested; 2) because of the crimes, and social abuses that impoverished the model, and which was then being presented as very appropriate for the economy, especially the state economy, and much more so the private economy. In this sense, the events that occurred in Putumayo, Ucayali, Madre de Dios, and other places capture a reality typical of a horror movie, but real, and not fictional. In these cases, human lives were eliminated, Amazonian societies were reduced to a minimum and many of them disappeared forever (Junquera Rubio, 1993: 145-151).

When the extractivist process was very advanced, it turned out that the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company* was created, based in London, and the firm was registered in the City on September 25, 1907. The initial share capital amounted to one million pounds sterling, a more than notable amount of money at that time. This society was a continuation of a previous one: *La Casa Arana*. From this moment on, violence against the native societies settled in the tropical forest increased (Pineda Camacho, 2002: 379-400).

The global boom in the rubber business attracted many people from the United States, and Europe. Among those who arrived in the Putumayo River region were two North American engineers, who came with the hope of finding work: Hardenburg and Perkins, who reached the basin traveling from Bogotá. In Alto Putumayo they met some Colombian rubber tappers, enemies of the Arana. These two professionals learned of some pitiful events in 1894, as they had news of deaths, people subjected to slavery, and forced labor, etc. The rubber man was arrogant, and he constantly demonstrated it. The two North American citizens recorded shameful facts as they narrated how a laborer, David Serrano, had to witness the rape of his wife by the rubber tapper Miguel Loayza. This attack was committed in the *El Encanto* hamlet (Gray, 2005: 18).

The two Americans went down the Putumayo River and had the bad luck to encounter the boat “*El Liberal*”, owned by Arana, and were taken prisoner, and taken to the aforementioned *El Encanto* hamlet. And during their stay in that place, they captured “*the mistreatment applied to the Indigenous people: signs of whipping, torture, chains, etc. These facts convinced Hardenburg that serious violations were being conducted against the natives by the rubber tappers, and their employees*” (Gray, 2005: 18).

The events observed by Hardenburg were like those occurring elsewhere in the Amazon rainforest. Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald decimated the Harakmbet (also Harakmbut) population in 1894, there are even testimonies of an armed

confrontation between the people of this character, and the Aboriginal people on the Manu River. The narration of these events is this: “*Fitzcarrald arrived about one turn from the river at four in the afternoon; he ordered the powerful troop of canoes and rafts, led by fifty rubber tappers, to sail very slowly, waiting for the agreed signal, while the bulk of the force went by land to surround the town. At five in the afternoon, a loud volley announced to Fitzcarrald that his men were attacking the capital of the Mashcos³. It was a surprise war, so violent and ferocious, that when the canoes arrived at the port the town was already in the hands of Fitzcarrald. The Mashcos, dislodged from their positions, fought bravely on the bank of the river trying to gain the opposite bank; but the rubber tappers attacked them by water and land, with such violence that the Manu River was covered with corpses*” (Álvarez, 1951: 138).

Zacarías Valdez, a rubber tapper who fought from a canoe, later confessed “*that you could not drink water in the river because it was strewn with corpses; of mashcos and rubber tappers, because the war was to the death. This happened in 1894*” (Valdez, 1944: 17; Álvarez, 1951: 138). I want to point out with this example that the entire Amazon jungle experienced this type of actions against the natives. At the same time, and observing Zacarías Valdez’s notification, violence did not arise in 1907, but had been imposed from the first moment the international rubber business began; that is, since 1880.

Currently, there is a policy that seeks to integrate those small human groups dispersed, and hidden in the Amazonian tropical forest, who are descendants of those who hid in refuge areas during the rubber era, and that the social media are revealing to us when someone detects them. Those who approach the white men, when they see them passing through the rivers in canoes, narrate in their language the violent images that have been communicated to them by their elders. This project is known as uncontacted societies, which aims to refer to these residual groups, which are still isolated (Junquera Rubio, 2022).

This situation is encouraged, and supported by violence, and this arose because the rubber tappers, in their selfishness, wanted to get money, and this was achieved by selling the collected rubber. The other side of the coin is the one that presents the negative aspect; that is to say: hiring people who are not paid a salary, because no legal institution of the state, be it Colombian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Bolivian or Brazilian, could reach that region. There is even more: the rubber tappers, as rich men with money, were highly respected outside the rubber-growing regions, to the point that they became legal representatives in the national parliaments, and thus managed to have influence, and became untouchable men.

More than 30 years ago I gave a lecture at an anthropology congress, held in Palma de Mallorca (Spain), which I titled: *Ethnocide: evaluation of this issue in the Amazonian peoples*, and which was later published (Junquera Rubio, 1993:

³The Mashcos are the Harakmbet (or Harakmbut), and the first name comes from the fact that they were described as savage, and violent. It is still surprising that this could be understood this way in the 20th century.

145-151). I argued then that the disappearance of many ethnic groups settled in the Amazonian tropical forest was a consequence of the rubber tappers socially denying the natives. They rejected them in every way except one: exploiting them to death, and this is not just exploitation, it is extermination, and therefore ethnocide and genocide.

Where does this attitude come from? Well, it derives from the criterion, false on the other hand, that some human groups believe they are superior to others. To this we must add that the powerful are citizens of a state, while the others do not exist; furthermore, government institutions are those that have the monopoly to “*legitimately use physical violence*” (Weber, 1980: 514). Having or not having citizenship is an important fact when evaluating events that have a lot to do with the Human Rights of people, as they were promulgated by the United Nations in 1948.

Many thinkers believe that primitive cultures, simple and pre-state societies, those that are often easily despised, are destined for extinction, because in the global world what is important is the economy, and not communities that are anchored centuries ago, since they represent a hindrance to continuing progress. These minority groups only have two paths: integrate or disappear. Faced with this, it must also be stated that there are ethnic groups, and residues of them that after more than 500 years of suffering are still present in the landscape. A clear example of this is presented by the Cunas of Panama, who do not seem to be disappearing despite the attacks that come from outside (Howe, 1986: 1-17).

It must be clear that the state does not want its national societies to disappear, not even if they are not integrated. The elimination comes from pressure groups that act against the Amazonian collectives, and the government in power closes its eyes to avoid seeing reality, because it is a passive spectator; what's more, in the case of the crimes of Putumayo, those of Manu, and many other places, which occurred in the rubber days, the administrations had a very vague idea of the conventional limits of each nation; for this reason, no one was reported. The complaints fell directly on the actors, and, the Peruvian governments, after 1907, did not try or condemn any rubber tappers; what's more, Julio Cesar Arana died in Lima in 1952, and was never summoned before a court.

Julio Cesar Arana was denounced in London, but the complaint was not made against him, but rather against his business company: the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company*; that is, it was done to an entity that was recognized, and established in the British capital, but nothing more. Those responsible for genocides, and ethnocides remained free. They defended themselves against the accusations that were published in the press, responding that they were lies, and that, if there was any crime, then that matter was the responsibility of previous rubber tappers, and that they had nothing to do with them.

The criminal activities of Casa Arana, and its associates came to the attention of the British Parliament, and its government thanks to the reports provided by the North American Hardenburg in 1909, after their efforts failed in Iquitos,

where everyone knew what was happening, but no one wanted to commit to denouncing it. In this Amazonian city he met with the North American consul, but he did not get anything favorable, and, in that situation, he traveled to London, where, after some time, he managed to contact a religious man named John Harris who was president of the Anti-Slavery Society, who showed interest in what was happening in the Putumayo River.

John Harris functioned as a good friend and introduced him to G. C. Paternoster, who controlled *The Truth* magazine, and in its pages his denunciations about Putumayo began, and later appeared in other publications, which were collected in a later publication. This task was initiated by a journalist Percy H. Fawcett, who denounced the Putumayo atrocities in the newspaper *The Times* on July 31, 1912, with the title: *The Rubber Traffic in Peru. A Widespread Evil*. The disclosures took the directors of the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company* by surprise, but the real control of the company was in the hands of Julio Cesar Arana, who owned 80% of the shares of this company.

As publications in *The Truth* progressed, the British directors of the society began to learn of the atrocities committed in Putumayo, but curiously, the commercial secretary of the Peruvian embassy in London urged them to denounce the newspaper, and reject its lies; what's more, they refused to meet with the agents of the Anti-Slavery Society. Faced with this rejection, John Harris went to his contacts in the British Parliament, who already had knowledge of the events in Putumayo, and suspicions, because Alarco, commissioner of Arana, had tried to bribe Horace Thoroughgood, journalist for the *Daily News* so that nothing would be published. further. The British Foreign Office wanted to have direct news and for this reason chose Roger Casement to do the research work in the territories of the rubber society in the Amazon.

And things happened as narrated below. Firstly, the Anti-Slavery Society requested that an investigative commission be created, and that request was made to the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company*, which delayed doing so, alleging that the Peruvian government was organizing another commission, which it was immediately revealed was a lie, and one more handling of the many of Julio Cesar Arana. Given the lack of arguments, they had to give in. In 1910, Roger Casement, then Consul General in Brazil, was chosen because a few years earlier he had been in the Congo evaluating the crimes of the Belgian king, Leopold; that is, he was chosen because of his experience; furthermore, he demonstrated it by providing his input on the societies he studied (Casement, 1912).

Already in the lands of Putumayo, the commission (there had previously been a merger of two previous commissions) began its tasks investigating whether the Barbadian⁴ contractors, who were subjects of the British Crown, had received ill treatment, and whether some of them had been murdered, etc.

⁴The word Barbadians refers to the Aboriginal people of Barbados, who had been hired by Casa Arana to conduct work. This hiring was conducted when the Indigenous workforce decreased because of mistreatment, which is why Aboriginal people died at a rate of three for every four people (Casement, 1988).

Curiously, when Roger Casement arrives at the area where he was to carry out the investigation, what he found was much more serious than he thought. When he landed in Iquitos, he was lucky enough to meet a native of Barbados, named Frederick Bishop, who provided him with a lot of information, and with them he was able to compose a report, and reflect part of *“the atrocities that had been committed against the indigenous people and others by workers of the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company”* (Gray, 2005: 22).

While the field investigation lasted, he was able to collect numerous reports, and once he had them ready, he sent them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the month of February 1911. The content of these documents represents one of the darkest pages in the history of the Amazon basin. A fact that caught his attention was the demographic decline, since he declared that of some 40,000 Ab-origines, he only counted 10,000, and that fact had occurred in less than ten years. That said, he adds: *“the method of extracting rubber by the Indigenous people was arbitrary, illegal and, in many cases, cruel in the extreme, and the direct cause of most of the depopulation that has come to our attention”* (Gray, 2005: 22).

Roger Casement includes in his report to the English Parliament the following: *“confirmation of some of the charges made arose during the voyage. Allow me to cite a fact of this type, which is not the only one. In the first days of September, before arriving at Putumayo, Mr. Frederick Bishop informed me of some of the things that he had seen conducted during the period of five and a half years in which he had served the Company, and his predecessors, the brothers Spider. I took this man as a guide, and interpreter and in this way, he accompanied me everywhere during my next journey. One of the crimes that he reported had been committed against a young Indigenous woman by order of Mr. Elías Martinengui, from whom he learned that he had resigned his position in the Company and had left for Lima”* (Casement, 1988: 40).

This story could be verified a few days later. Frederick Bishop informed the Commission of this, and many other facts. Curiously, the young woman in question still lived in a settlement accredited as Naimenes, and she was known to the Barbadian informant, because she was the one who had punished her with the whip, by order of the Martinengui (Casement, 1988: 40). It is still strange that Juan Tizón, a member of the Commission, never wanted to conclude the investigation, since having had the opportunity to question this indigenous woman, he refused to do so despite having been requested to do so by Roger Casement (1988: 40), and the reason was his relationship with the Arana brothers and their families.

He repeats that at the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th century, and this is what Roger Casement detects, there was no government authority in the Peruvian jungle. In the *Report* you can read: *“from the beginning to the end, I did not find any authority of the Peruvian Government, and I could not ask for any assistance except from the agents of the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company, who not only had under their control all the people and lives of*

the surrounding indigenous people, but it could also be said that they controlled all means of transportation, and the income and expenses of the region” (Casement, 1988: 41).

The absence of government power is one of the reasons that the rubber tappers were able to use to their advantage, because in their territories they were the feudal lords who had all the power and took advantage of it to function as they understood best for their economy. For this reason, the Amazonian societies did not raise any concern, because the only purpose was to exploit them ruthlessly. The lives of the Aboriginal people never caused nervousness in the rubber world; in fact, I am sure that if more reports like the one in Casement had been made, the same or similar crimes would certainly appear in other places that have not been investigated.

In this part of the world, and when he found himself just over a hundred years ago, it should not be surprising that Casement noted in his diary that the “*accused criminal was sitting at the table with us.*” This possibility could arise because “*there was no authority, administration or person nearby who could be reported, and that Iquitos was 1,200 miles away*” (Casement, 1988: 41).

One piece of information that the commissioner detected was that the employees of the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company*, to stay on the job, and retain their position, had to act like “*murderers, pirates and bandits*” (Casement, 1988: 42); otherwise, they would be left without work. This situation is understood as typical of an absence of state power, which is one more reason for the economic liberalism of those times.

In this type of investigation, those questioned try to hide everything they know; that is, they can be accused, but evidence must be found to show that the accusation is serious. In this sense, once the Arana brothers knew that a British commission was arriving, they tried to hide the elements they used to punish the Aboriginal people. While in the settlement of *Matanzas*, a place well named for what was happening there, someone secretly told them that the stocks were hidden under some palm branches.

The mission of these devices is to hold someone down so that they cannot escape. While they detected that they were well hidden, they also knew that this tool was used to restrain the indigenous people, and when they were immobilized, they were punished with the whip, and often even to death, but the number of deaths applying these inhumane methods was not detected (Casement, 1988: 42).

This instrument, as it was used in Putumayo, was intended for “*torture, illegality and extreme cruelty.*” It was applied equally to men, women and children and they could remain in that situation for days, weeks, months or until they died (Casement, 1988: 43). When someone was punished to suffer this method “*the arrival of death was considered a rest.*” When these devices are described, it turns out that they were manufactured in different types, thus “*the Western stocks had twenty-one holes for the legs, the Entre Ríos stocks had twenty-four*

holes for the legs with a large hole in the center for the neck in order to of introducing the victim's head" (Casement, 1988: 45).

Roger Casement was fortunate enough to be able to interview some British subjects, employees of the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company*, and they declared "*that they had known Indigenous women who had been publicly raped by the "rationalists"*⁵ *while they were confined in the stocks.*" He also measured the dimensions of the stocks, and the beams that joined them, and concluded that what he was investigating, and reviewing was worse than slavery (Casement, 1988: 45).

Another testimony collected by Casement, which is still significant for what I am considering here, states: "*entire families were imprisoned, father, mother and children; In many cases it was reported that parents died from starvation or flagellation, while their children held next to them looked on in despair at the agony of their dying parents*" (Casement, 1988: 46).

Stories like those already mentioned were collected in great quantity, and there are some that are shocking. Casement points out that the ship he was traveling on needed wood to feed the boiler and they decided to go to the settlement of Hindustan, and in this place he says he found "*an indigenous boy chained in this way: he had a chain almost 8 feet long, around the neck and waist and secured with a padlock at the ankle*" and the crime for which he was found like this "*was that of having tried to flee to Brazil*" (Casement, 1988: 46).

The demographic decline of the Amazonian populations in the rubber era has a negative explanation, but he has it. Such rapid descent cannot be attributed to natural death; furthermore, no documentary record reported the death of anyone for these reasons, which are the ones that affect many people in any society. In this case, the deaths due to violent causes were recorded long after they occurred, and if there had not been any confession or complaint, today we would know absolutely nothing about what happened, or a minimal part at most. Casement clearly describes the rubber tappers: "*they were professional murderers and torturers; as their crimes grew so did their fortunes*" (Casement, 1988: 49).

The rubber tappers did not hide to commit their crimes; even Roger Casement himself saw with his own eyes, during the time of his investigation, and detected that this group lived "*at the expense of the Indigenous people and delighted in shedding their blood*" (Casement, 1988: 51). Between the powerful of the moment, and the defenseless there were notable differences: the former had firearms, and used them, but the latter saw how their bows and arrows were prohibited. The helplessness of the natives was total.

The Report prepared by Roger Casement was presented to Edward Grey, of the British office of the Foreign Office. This delivery was made in January 1912.

⁵The word rational refers to the white man, to differentiate him from the irrational man considered savage. In view of the events that I have been narrating, the question must be asked of who is more and who is less civilized and in this case I side with the Amazonian aborigines because those of my culture left much to be desired.

The British informed the matter to the Peruvian government, then chaired by Augusto Bernardino Leguía and Salcedo, who was about to finish his first term, so all of Casement's work came to nothing. When the Peruvian authorities wanted to do something, it was impossible for them to make any decision. All they did was turn a blind eye and allow the accused, at least most of them, to flee abroad. False legends were even created that testified to the death of one of the accused, when he was living as an honest man far from the jungle.

Among the people who managed to escape, and settle in Europe is Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald, who was said to have drowned in the Urubamba River. Many fables were made of this death because the reality is that he managed to leave Iquitos, supported by the French rubber tapper Jules H. Toots⁶. I obtained these data in Puerto Maldonado, in the 1970s, and they were provided to me by Elena Rivero, daughter of Ernesto Rivero, Fitzcarrald's trusted man, who was always in the secret of the events. When his boss left for France, Ernesto left Iquitos with his family, and settled in Puerto Maldonado, where he took charge of the deceased's businesses (Junquera Rubio, 2005).

The Casement Report allowed the liquidation of the *Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company*, because when it was delivered to the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amazonian rubber was already becoming unprofitable. The reason was that a British man, Henry Wickham, managed to smuggle 70,000 seeds, which were taken to London, and the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and then planted in the British colonies with a tropical climate: Burma, Ceylon, Nigeria, etc. (Wickham, 1908; Jackson, 2008).

Julio Cesar Arana oversaw liquidating his company because he was the largest shareholder and had to take charge of a mortgage of 65,000 pounds sterling, which was in the name of Eleonora Zumaeta, his wife, and sister of Pablo Zumaeta, the brother-in-law, and partner of him. And so, the family entered the sweet life of Lima.

The vulcanization of rubber, and its industrial application generated migrations of strangers to the Amazon rainforest. This phenomenon occurred on the dates, and one of its negative aspects consisted of evicting the natives from their original places and committing all kinds of crimes against them. If this product generated happiness for many citizens of the United States and Europe, it caused extermination, extreme violence, slavery, rape, and death for the Aboriginal people. The horrors that erupted can be compared to Hitler's concentration camps during World War II, and Stalin's Gulags opened in Siberia. These images have generated many social rejections and feelings of disgust towards their executioners (Junquera Rubio 2017b, 2023: 91-112). These events are some of the dark chapters in Amazonian history and are very regrettable.

The rubber tappers also committed a crime against nature, since they were the ones who initiated the intensive extraction of tropical forest resources. This ac-

⁶Jules H. Toots commissioned the construction of the Iron House to the engineer Eiffel, the same man after whom the Tower of Paris is named. He wished that there were a completely iron house in Iquitos; it is still located in the city's Plaza de Armas and is one of its most emblematic buildings.

tion has not slowed down in the least; on the contrary, every day many forested hectares disappear to be converted into pasture areas, rice fields, and various crops that are supposed to have a market (Junquera Rubio 1995b). These facts continue to be championed as typical of a development championed by capitalism, and as an imprint of Western civilization.

Civilized men are in a hurry to impose modernization, which is associated with progress; however, it seems that many actions that are presented as positive quickly become extremely negative. In the end, the best and worst predator of Amazonian nature has been the white man, the European, the one who stood out since the 15th century as the bearer of the best messages, those that began with the colonization of America, and from Africa and later from Asia and Oceania. They were the owners of everything, and many of their negative aspects have been silenced, suppressed, or forgotten, and when appropriate all the cultural ingredients of the natives have been manipulated, classified as backward, and savage.

Roger Casement provided an excellent report because he was lucky enough to be an official witness in some of the rubber wars, because he fell short of all of them. The latex era meant the beginning of the colonization of the Amazon rainforest in its entirety. This negative fact also began with mistreatment of Aboriginal societies and some of them were typified by Casement. Rubber was an item for global consumption, but achieving it meant deaths, mutilations, slavery, murders, etc.

3. Roger Casement's Report: Some Further Interpretations

As is often the case in these cases, Roger Casement's Report has several commentators. They all aim to delve deeper into the story he describes, and how he does it. I am not going to refer to everyone I know, but rather I am going to make a small selection of the jobs that I understand to be most appropriate. I advance that I consider that his work on the Putumayo River is very good, and appropriate, because he denounced an unjust situation, as he had previously done in Congo, denouncing the atrocities that the subordinates of King Leopold of Belgium had committed. That said, I understand that, despite his goodness, it seems exaggerated to compare him with Bartolomé de las Casas, because all comparisons tend to be partial, and because the political moments are different (Harman, 2012: 2-3).

A first commentary on Casement's work is that of Richard Collier, entitled *The River that God Forgot* (Collier, 1968). The book has two editions, one North American, and one British. I have a copy of the one published in New York. The content, as it could not be otherwise, is presented with an extremely dramatic story. The North American Walter Hardenburg is like a kind of hero willing to confront everyone if global society finds out about the acts committed by the rubber tappers, and especially by Julio Cesar Arana who, on the other hand, is presented as if he It was about the devil himself, because only a diabolical being

can commit the most horrible crimes and feel no remorse.

The Putumayo atrocities were described in the following text: “*peaceful Indians were put to work collecting rubber without pay, without food, naked [...], their women were robbed, raped and murdered; [they] were whipped until their bones were exposed when they did not bring enough rubber or tried to escape, they were left to die with wounds oozing with maggots, and their bodies were used as food for the agents’ dogs, [...] the flogging of men, women, and children was the least of the tortures used; [they] were mutilated in the stocks, cut into pieces with machetes, crucified upside down, their limbs cut off, target shooting was practiced on them for fun, and [...] they were bathed in oil, and burned alive, both men, and women*” (Hardenburg, 1912: 28-29).

The English are also protagonists of his work, and he portrays them as extravagant, but magnanimous, especially the members of the Anti-Slavery Society, and those of the newspaper *Truth*. He introduces an aspect that does not appear, but does appear in his fictional account, such as the entity designated as the *Select Committee* that would have the function of judging Arana, and this never happened; even less so that the rubber tapper had to face Hardenburg before that court. It is true that he tried to judge him, but he always knew how to escape in time, because for that he paid spies who kept him informed. Julio Cesar Arana died in Lima in 1952, and never went before a court. In some way, this book wants to be a play, which is why his characters are parading around a stage when the author sees fit.

The second, much more general comment is due to John Tully with a title *The Devils Milk: A Social History of Rubber* (Tully, 2011). Firstly, this author focuses on the large cities that existed in the Amazon at the time of the rubber boom, highlighting Manaus and this nucleus, the most important, and populated at that time, it was said “*that it had so much rubber that it could cover the world*” (Santos, 1980: 24). These centers are where the great rubber barons resided because latex was not extracted there, but it was marketed. Those he first mentions are the two large consortiums of Bolivia: the Suárez brothers, and the Vaca Díaz brothers. These two families controlled the work of 10,000 paid workers, and nothing is said about the forcibly employed Aboriginal people (Tully, 2011: 66).

The Brazilian city of Manaus was in the center of the rubber lands, and was about 1500 km away from the Atlantic, and about ten kilometers from the confluence with the Negro River. Upstream, and about 1600 kilometers away was Iquitos. John Tully maintains that the rubber universe was sustained because very predatory foreign people came to the jungle, and local capitalists joined them to consolidate the business (Tully, 2011: 73).

Regarding the so-called Putumayo crimes, Tully attributes the greatest responsibility to Julio Cesar Arana, and calls him like everyone else does, as a criminal. He bases his opinions on Roger Casement, and the authors who are cited in this essay. He makes some mistakes such as confusing the *El Encanto* settlement with *El Encanto* (Tully, 2011: 91, 93). Regarding the attacks against the Wuitotos, and other Amazonian ethnic groups, he refers to the *Casement*

Report. I understand that his work, because it covers other regions of the world, wants to be a more informative study than a scientific one.

The third comment is due to Michael Taussig, and this focuses on the political aspects and how the descendants of the punished Aboriginal people narrate what terror is according to their criteria. And, in this sense, it is more than debatable that he indicates that the presence of panic was a consequence of the lack of labor, and that the Aboriginal people were forced to enter by degree or by force into the required work (Taussig, 1986: 53).

Likewise, he points out that Walter Hardenburg made some out-of-place statements, and that he exaggerates his arguments to attack Julio Cesar Arana; what's more, he suspects that the American was not in the settlements he mentions, and that what he reviews is news that was previously published in two newspapers: *La Sanción* and *La Felpa*. His positions regarding how he describes the torments that are applied to the natives are still debatable, which is very good on the other hand, and he concludes them by saying that the Wuitotos, and other Amazonian peoples, were dangerous, and also cannibals, but if the latter what happened was due to the hunger they had, and the fact that the rubber tappers encouraged them to eat meat from the murdered corpses. Cannibalism has been an accusation leveled against Native Americans from the beginning; that is, since the end of the 15th century, but I doubt that it could have been evaluated anywhere in the Amazon.

4. Conclusion

The title of this essay includes the possible relationship that may exist between genocide and ethnocide in the Amazon at the time of the rubber boom. The first thing to keep in mind is that rubber, and its business altered the daily life of native societies, and on many occasions drama, terror, and bloodshed emerged. The powerful, or those who feel that way, tend to despise the weak, because they always consider them to be of little value; furthermore, at that time the Amazonian aborigines lacked nationality and citizenship, because the conventional borders were not fixed, and the governments did not have the power to control their own territories and this reality has been the cause of subsequent wars (Junquera Rubio, 2005).

For some years now, claims raised by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) include that Aboriginal peoples are nations, and this is the same as recognizing that they have some power. Now, in most of the contributions related to these topics, native societies are considered as ethnic groups, and sometimes as ethnic groups in the sense expressed by Fredrik Barth (1969).

This problem has yet to be resolved, but the unknowns have already been identified; what's more, identity fluctuates in them, which is very intertwined in the processes of genocide, ethnocide, and ethnodevelopment, and the three would be very different depending on whether one is emphasized over the other two. Let us not forget that the power held by an Aboriginal society is quite dif-

ferent from the national power, which is held by the State government.

Regarding whether the rubber tappers can be accused of being genocidal and ethnocidal, everything indicates that this accusation should be maintained. Now, did they lack total absence of conscience? well, honestly no; what's more, in the case of Putumayo, the Arana brothers, and their relatives fought against people who were Colombians, and they did so to maintain limits that much later became conventional borders, but to achieve this they had to go to war. However, I believe that, apart from this, they did nothing positive for the tropical forest, and the societies residing there, which is why I believe that they cannot be defended, especially by institutions that advocate the opposite vision.

Previously, on August 9, 1907, Benjamín Saldaña Roca denounced the employees of the Arana company in Iquitos. The complaint indicated that horrible crimes were being committed against the Indigenous people of Putumayo: rape, torture, mutilations, and murders. In Lima, the news was published by the newspaper *La Prensa*, on December 30, 1907 (Valcárcel, 1915: 51). However, with the pretext that, due to the modus vivendi agreed upon the previous year, the Peruvian authorities did not have authority over the area between Putumayo and Caquetá, and consequently the complaint was filed (Valcárcel, 1915: 52).

Among a wide range of rubber lights and shadows, the reality is that abuses occurred, and there is no reason to defend them; quite the contrary, we must reject them, and remind our generations that this should neither be done nor supported. On the opposite side, a nation like Peru has the Arana who always defended the homeland, and sought to define it, while Fitzcarrald, together with the Vaca Díaz, attempted to make a considerable segregation of territory to turn it into the *Republic of Acre*. This does not exclude those years before he was considered a patriot.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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